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Interviewee: Lorraine Kujawa

Interviewer: Bill Burton

Date: October 28, 2015

Location: Provincetown, Massachusetts

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Abstract:

Lorraine Kujawa was one of the co-founders of the *Lavender Letter* in Harrisburg during the late seventies and eighties. The *Lavender Letter* was created to provide events for the lesbian community to attend in Pennsylvania. She started the newsletter in order to bring the lesbian community together by highlighting events available in Harrisburg, Lancaster, and other parts of Central Pennsylvania. Additionally in the interview, Lorraine Kujawa compares the differences in the communities of Provincetown, Massachusetts, where she currently lives, and Central Pennsylvania, where she grew up, towards the LGBT community.

BB: Ok. My name is Bill Burton and I am here with Loraine Ku—

LK: Kujawa. Yes.

BB: Kujawa?

LK: Kujawa.

BB: and Andrew Kinder who is our videographer. And we're here on behalf of LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project. Today's...Wednesday 28 of October, 2015. We're in an oral history with Lorraine. This interview is taking place in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Lorraine we have your permission to record this interview, right?

LK: That is correct!

BB: Okay. So Lorraine...I've lost my questions.

LK: are they the same questions that you...

BB: Ah...

LK: ...sent to me?

BB: Yes, but I had a few notes on them. Ok. Let's start talking about yourself first. Where were you born?

LK: I was born in Brooklyn, New York.

BB: Really?

LK: And we lived on Park Avenue, which was very different from Park Avenue of New York City, down near the navy yards. I was a block away from the Catholic school that I went to. And, my mother...and father...and my brother and I lived there for a while until my father left and—I stayed in New York until I was 15.

BB: You were the—where were you in.—you had a brother and sister, right?

LK: I have a brother.

BB: Older or younger?

LK: I am the younger sister. I had an older brother, who's now in New Jersey.

BB: Oh!

LK: So...

BB: So what's your mother and father do?

LK: My father...well those were the days when the mother stayed at home, he was a longshoreman on the docks. And after...my parents split up, then my mother did all kinds of jobs like cleaning jobs and whatever she could to put us together. So...we stayed there until we were 15--until I was 15.

BB: So your parents divorced.

LK: They divorced, yes.

BB: Well, that was rare back then wasn't it?

LK: It was rare, also, they didn't have...the fathers didn't have to pay for their children so my mother was on her own...back in those days, and so, she did as much work as she possible could to keep food in our mouths. And then when I was 15, I think she didn't want us living in the city. She was very protective, and so, she moved back to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania where my grandparents lived. And so, I moved to small-town America from Brooklyn, which was...an interesting change.

BB: So was that a culture shock?

LK: It was a culture shock.

BB: Did you want to go? Or...

LK: Well...of course not. I said, you know, where's the zoo? [Laughs] You know, it was a coal mining town and they didn't have any of those things. They did have a library which I used fairly often. And—stayed there till I graduated from high school, and went to college. I went to Bloomsburg, which is now Bloomsburg University. And took up—

BB: Where's—where's that?

LK: It is about an hour north of Wilkes-Barre. It's sort of half ways between Wilkes-Barre and Harrisburg. And...it's mostly farming area around that area. And...and I did notice that when I was in college, I don't know how far we're getting into this, but...of course naïve, but I noticed that there were certain people at the school that if it was whispered that they had...they thought they might be gay...and their room was...their parents were called and their room was emptied during the night. They were never seen again.

BB: Really?

LK: So that was always sort of in the back of my mind that was certainly not an acceptable...thing to admit to.

BB: Well, before we get into...jump into that, were you aware...when you were growing up-- what kind of environment did you grow up in? Was it conservative or was it liberal, what were your parents like?

LK: Ah...it was Catholic and she was strict, and I was a tomboy. And, I liked to play baseball, and I had a really good right arm. So I played with the boys. And...

BB: Did it bother your mother that you were a tomboy?

LK: Absolutely! Yeah, you know, she said...behave yourself, act like a lady, that kind of thing. But, I still roller skated down hills and...played on baseball diamonds. I was the little tomboy so...

BB: So did you...did you date anyone in high school? Did you date...boys...or did you have any attraction to girls? Or how did you—were you aware of anything?

LK: I wasn't aware of anything in those days and they never even said the word gay. And I'd never even heard the word lesbian until I was out of college. So, you know, times changed. Really, immensely. It was...until I was graduating from college and for the summer I went to Girl Scouts camp that I realized that there was another way of living.

BB: What did you think about—you didn't date...did you have pressure about getting married...

LK: Well, you know, once in a while, but I wasn't really that interested and I hung out with my girlfriends. And I really just wasn't involved. It felt like, you know, a little bit on the outs of...the social life during college. You know, I wasn't into dressing up and...didn't feel quite a part of what was going on until I got out of school.

BB: Yeah, so...we'll come back. When you went to college, what was your major? [Water sounds in background]

LK: Oh I was in education, elementary education.

BB: So you wanted to become a teacher?

LK: Yeah, I wanted to become a teacher. Yes.

BB: Mmkay. And did you become a teacher?

LK: I did.

BB: Oh!

LK: I taught school for 32 years.

BB: Oh!

LK: Yeah, mmhm. I taught for Central Dauphin school system in Harrisburg in elementary school.

BB: Elementary school?

LK: Yes, mhm.

BB: What level?

LK: I taught fourth grade, fifth grade, one year in sixth grade, and one year third grade. Mostly, fourth and fifth.

BB: So...what about—you said you grew up Catholic...so did you remain, was that a strong—was it a significant factor in your life? Did you remain—stay an active Catholic?

LK: I was...on my first year teaching I would—during Lent I went to church every morning that was across the street from the school, and actually I was chastised by the principal of the school who said it's not a good example to see you going into church all the time. [Laughs] it was very unusual. But then I became disillusioned about the Catholic Church because it didn't seem to speak to the reality of...what was going on in the world, and...I sort of distanced myself away from the church, and stopped going to mass on Sundays.

BB: Is that later in your adult life?

LK: Um...I would say...I would say during my twenties I stopped going to church and probably in my thirties I found the Unitarian church, which I enjoyed very much. And that's only because I came up here to Provincetown for a week and went into the Unitarian church here. And once I went back to Harrisburg, I looked around to see if there was one that I liked in that area.

BB: Yeah. So...I want to jump back to what you said about when you were in college, about...about being gay. This was—this was a private university?

LK: It's a state university. State university.

BB: Any inkling that you were gay?

LK: Right, you disappeared.

BB: Lesbian or gay—gay man you would disappear. How could they do this to you? Was this the laws? Because there's no discrimination law, right?

LK: Well there were no discrimination laws...

BB: It was...

LK: It was when I taught one of the terms of teaching was that you could be fired for what was moral inturpitude.

BB: Right.

LK: Which of course covered a lot of things. But at school, you know, if your behavior was bad, I guess that they could just kick you out. And I don't know exactly the details of the situation, but it was really interesting because the Dean of Women, I'm sure, was gay.

BB: So when did you first become aware of this fact?

LK: It was always an underlying...you never spoke of it, but I knew there was something going on. You know, people just didn't talk about things like that in those days.

BB: But—was there an incident that happened that a male or female student that brought this to your attention? And did you suddenly realize yourself? I mean—how—that maybe you were gay.

LK: Well I...since there was no—there was a book published *The Love that Has No Name* and—and I think that was what I experienced—I didn't really understand what it was, but I knew it was—somehow it had to do with me, it applied to me. And—I just could not pinpoint that until I went to Girl Scout camp, and people were more open about it once I got to know them.

BB: Now this was after college?

LK: This was after college.

BB: As a counselor?

LK: As a counselor, yes.

BB: What other counselors were more open...?

LK: Yeah...so as we got to know each other as friends.

BB: So what happened?

LK: A—at...

BB: So what's your coming out? What happened...to you? How did you...

LK: Oh at camp, you mean?

BB: Yeah!

LK: Well, I met somebody...

BB: What was your awakening? So to speak.

LK: Ah! [Laughs] Well I met somebody that ...was...more knowledgeable than I was, and then I got involved with that person. And, that was my coming out, and that led to getting to know other people.

BB: And how old were you at the time?

LK: Oh, 22. 21—22.

BB: So you were out of college?

LK: I was out of college, yes. And—and I think that’s a long time to be silent about who you are and...I see that as one of the hardest things for gay people to face is that silence of not speaking about their actual lives and that followed me through to teaching too because, of course, I could never tell anyone I was working with that I was a gay person.

BB: Right.

LK: Um...because then I could be fired. But—but that’s over with now because you’re in Provincetown.

BB: Right. [Laughs] So is this like in the sixties or what time period was this?

LK: Ah—this was in the sixties.

BB: So...um...you graduated from college and you went right into teaching?

LK: Yes.

BB: You got a teaching job right away. So you were you were young...a young teacher

LK: Right.

BB: In rosy—what was you’re—when was your teaching job? In what city? Or what town?

LK: Ah—in Marysville, which is across the river from Harrisburg. I taught there one year.

BB: How big is it? A little town?

LK: Marysville? It was a tiny, tiny town. I didn’t have a car.

BB: Oh!

LK: So I could walk from my house to the school, which was...two blocks away. And then, I got a job at Central Dauphin, which was in Harrisburg, which was of course a bigger city.

BB: Yeah.

LK: So...

BB: And were you involved with anybody at that time? Another woman or...?

LK: Um...it was...I was involved...for part of that time and at the same time I was still dating men, and I even joined a dating service to—to

BB: Really?!

LK: because you were supposed to get married. [BB laughs] And—[clears throat] I went about, you know, looking for someone and, you know, nothing clicked. And, I said well maybe I'll—I'll go out with a flamboyant...young—hip—hippie type, and I did that with the long—the guy with the long hair. Or I'd go out with a professional when I did that, that didn't work. [Clears throat] I tried all these...different types of men that...certainly something would click but...it took me until I was 29, and I said, “what am I doing,” ah—I much prefer to be with my women friends than to be married.

BB: Right.

LK: And there was a song about...

BB: So you weren't conflicted. You were just thinking—were you conflicted or did you just feel that society pressure that maybe you should get married?

LK: Well, yes because that was just what you were supposed to do, you know, do the right thing. Um...and I said, you know, this is not for me. I could just see myself married, and finish washing the dishes, and drying my hands, take the car keys, and get in the car and go off to California. You know, I would never—it would never last. So, I made—I made that decision then—what I really wanted to do then was meet more women. And so, I went to a convention they were having at the community college for the National Organization for Women....

BB: Yeah. NOW?

LK: NOW. And went to one of the workshops that was ‘The Women Alone’ and I go, “well that would be a good one”. And, I struck up a conversation with people who were giving the workshop and they invited me over to their house to read *The New York Times* on Sunday, and there was a whole gaggle of women there, and then we stayed for dinner. And, before you know it, I was in my own little group.

BB: Yeah.

LK: So...in Harrisburg. So I began to...

BB: So, now did you ever go to any of the bars?

LK: I went to the D-Gem and you would have to take a nap in the afternoon because nothing happened 'til eleven o'clock at night, and so, on a Friday or Saturday night you would...go out at eleven and stay 'til 2. And go up the river, there was a Howard Johnson up there, and then maybe we would go for breakfast.

BB: Now—this was—this was the late sixties or early seventies?

LK: Yeah. Yes. Aha.

BB: Trying to get my time periods right, so.

LK: Yes. [Door shuts]

BB: And did you find—was that main—mainly a women's bar?

LK: It was. Yes. It was mainly a women's bar where some men came, but it was mainly a women's bar at the time.

BB: And that's like the only one in Harrisburg?

LK: That was the only one that I knew of in Harrisburg. Yeah.

BB: And was that a very...um...did you find it socially fulfilling? If you'd go to the bar, would you like it...or did you...?

LK: The music was nice, but I am not a big drinker. And...it's a—it was just one aspect of life, but um...

BB: Did they allow dancing?

LK: Oh yeah!

BB: Or was it just drinking?

LK: there was dancing. Yeah. Yeah. Disco. Mhm. Yeah. So...I would usually go on Saturday nights. Mhm.

BB: And...did you meet anybody there? Did you have...did you develop any relationships out of that?

LK: No! Not really. No. no. then you would—sometimes you would go with somebody and...you'd talk to people there, but you really don't make connections at a bar very well. So, which is the next step getting into the *Lavender Letter*.

BB: Yeah. So how did the *Lavender Letter* come about?

LK: Well, I had broken up with someone and I had gone some place with this other person who had just broken up with someone. We said, you know, once you do that, you cut off that group of friends and there is nobody. You don't know anybody.

BB: How big was the lesbian community in Harrisburg, at the time in the late seventies/sixties—seventies?

LK: Well...it's all scattered and...you had little groups of friends that would get together maybe five or six of us that would know each other.

BB: So, it was kind of a cliquish community.

LK: It's—it was a cliquish community.

BB: Was it the same way for men too?

LK: I—I don't know because they had more bars and they have a different lifestyle.

BB: Yeah.

LK: And—and so, what I found was that you were totally isolated and...I said well there must be other places to go or things to do...for gay women in this area, but we just don't know about it—they. And so, I connected with five of my friends, you know, Mary-Anne Carol and Cindy Mitzel, and a couple other people. Somebody from the sports group—group, somebody from the bar group, somebody in a political action group.

BB: Right.

LK: And we all got together at my house, and decided that we should put together a newsletter and call it the *Lavender Letter*. And so, we collected \$20 amongst all of us, and...

BB: Kind of seed money?

LK: Yes! Get all the information by next Thursday, and so they called in the information by Thursday and we had one page. And we printed 100 copies for \$20. And we just went to the bar and handed them out. And then any event that was in there we made sure we went to it, and we would hand out the *Lavender Letter*, and people started sending us money. And...then they also started sending us information about events that were going on.

BB: Right.

LK: And when we were...print—printing if there wasn't a local event that was going on we would make one up.

BB: Really? For example?

LK: We would say, "Pot luck at such and such a house. Call this number". And then, we would make sure that we were there so that it would at least be three of us. Or picnic at Knoebel's Park and we would have balloons hanging up, lavender balloons just hanging out around the area that we would meet that day. And so, it started out as three or four people and it ended up maybe fifteen to twenty.

BB: Oh so people just showed up because...

LK: They'd just show up!

BB: What a great idea! [Laughs]

LK: And then, you know, someone said, "Oh I always wanted to have this kind of group", and I say, "Well put it in the letter." You know, so they'd put it in the letter and after a while we didn't have to make anything up anymore because people would start having their own activities.

BB: So did people give you their names for a mailing list or how did—that could be...

LK: Then they would give us a name for a mailing list and it would be in a plain envelope. We would send it to them with no return address on it. And...

BB: 'Cuz...ah I went to—I would expect that some of them were married...or...I don't know, or they didn't want people to know. Closeted.

LK: People were very—very paranoid, but...when they did give us their address...we would send it in a plain envelope and...hopefully no one got in trouble with it.

BB: So how big was your mailing list then?

LK: Oh! It was over hundred. And then would hand—we would hand it out at different events that started to happen in the area. There were a lot of music festivals and...gay pride things started to happen.

BB: So, at your largest, how big was your distribution? You think you were printing how many?

LK: Oh, 500! Yeah. I think we were about 500.

BB: That's pretty impressive!

LK: Yeah! It's—it grew. It did grow. We had a dance at Lakeside Lutheran. No one else would rent us the space. They would say oh sure you can have the space at such and such date, and then we would have to tell them that it was going to be an all-women thing and there were gay people, and they would say, “Oh no we don't rent to gay people”.

BB: Ah!

LK: And so, Lakeside Lutheran was the only place that we could rent for a dance. So we had about 150 people that came to that. So.

BB: All women. That's...

LK: All women. All women. Yeah.

BB: Now in comparison, if you had 150 that came to that dance, a night at the—what is it called, D-Gem how many women at that bar would be dancing on a Saturday night?

LK: It would depend how big the D-Gem was. I never...

BB: Did you guess how many women would be there? Seventy? One hundred?

LK: Seventy-five? One hundred? Yeah.

BB: I mean, that's pretty incredible!

LK: Yeah. Yeah! It started getting around, and also, Lancaster started having something too. They would have a monthly pot luck and there were twelve women who had large houses—volunteer their houses for a different month during the year. And if you wanted to go to the Lancaster pot luck you would have to meet with somebody, a friend of mine, whose name I'm not free to give, would meet them somewhere to check them out rather than having people just...come out without knowing whether they were gay or not. She would check them out and then give them the address, and they had ah—fifty to sixty people come to their potlucks every once a month. And so, we would include that in the letter too, the contact person for the...Lancaster potluck.

BB: That. So what type—what period of time did the Lancaster potlucks occur?

LK: I would say in the 70s. 70s to the 80s.

BB: And so, if you wanted to go to that potluck you would have to contact this person and they were going—

LK: Yes. They would have to meet you.

BB: And say, yes, you can come.

LK: Right.

BB: It was more just checking to make sure you were gay and not...

LK: Right. Right. Because you don't want strangers just, you know, pick up a copy of the *Lavender Letter* somewhere and say, "Oh, let's..."

BB: Someone to harass.

LK: Right. Yeah. A lot of paranoia.

BB: Someone kind of need of Anita Bryant type. [Laughs]

LK: Yes.

BB: That's interesting. And then—so basically the letter contained different events that were happening that people can be or...

LK: Ah—yeah it would have all the events listed for the month. It would have a contact number. And people didn't put their last names in, so there were still some paranoia in that. Um...and anywhere from oh...sewing groups, restaurants groups, there could be a group that would be a group that would meet at different restaurants once a month, a potluck in the Harrisburg area, the Lancaster potluck, a game night. And we used to do a—once a year a cultural evening. And since I had a big house you would have to bring some—something to contribute to the culture of the evening. And, we would have a turkey and—people would bring food. Then you would have to read a poem or play the violin, whatever it is, dance, or whatever...

BB: Oh, how wonderful!

LK: to contribute to the cultural evening. Oh, we did a play...one of our people wrote plays...Roe Rubusto. She lives in Texas now, so I think I'm free to say her name. [Laughs]

BB: Yeah. [Laughs]

LK: Ah she wrote some wonderful plays—we would practice them and—put them on at our house in front of the fireplace to an audience of about twenty. And then, there was a place called Altland's Ranch which was another gay bar off of the woods somewhere.

BB: Yeah.

LK: We had a week where we put the plays on all week there...

BB: Yeah.

LK: and that was a much larger crowd.

BB: So...how long did you publish the *Lavender Letter*? How long was it in publication?

LK: Ah—I did it for—it was in publication for twenty years.

BB: Wow!

LK: And I did it for—now I can't think of it, I think it was fifteen of those years.

BB: So from the late sixties...all the way to

LK: To—to—not the late sixties. I didn't start this until the...

BB and LK: seventies.

LK: Yeah. Um...until the eighties.

BB: Probably the seventies and eighties?

LK: Yeah. Seventies and eighties. Yes, mhm.

BB: Until someone else took over?

LK: And someone else—the person who was printing it for us...took it over and gave it to someone else to—to two other women. I don't—feel free say who they are, but...that it continued—when I gave it over, I said that you must promise that if you are tired of doing this to hand it off to somebody else. And, that's what she did do, but the last two people that did it were in the age of computers...

BB: Right.

LK: So, you know, there was less need for a written copy when you could go online. I'm not sure what they are doing now. So.

BB: Do you still have copies of the *Lavender Letter*? Did you turn it over?

LK: The last—last December I turned over my collection.

BB: To the archives?

LK: Yes, to Dickinson. Yeah.

BB: So, I'm gonna go down with Barry and look, and go through the archives and look for the—the book and stuff like that. The photographs, and stuff like that would appear. So, that's fascinating! That's fascinating, especially because...that could only happen in a rural...I guess in Harrisburg or Lancaster I can't see that kind of thing happening in an urban area, but then you have a constituency maybe in a small, little way, you know, but that it—that is incredible...incredible story! Were you involved in any other...lesbian, gay, LGBT organizations politically, or was that mainly your big—that's a pretty big thrust....Political organizations?

LK: I got into organized events...you know, I came from a pretty naïve background of...living in Wilkes-Barre wasn't a hotbed of activity. So, it wasn't something that I was used to, but I got involved through these friends that I met at the *NOW* (National Organization for Women) conference with the Harrisburg Area Women's News, it was...a women's...straight and gay women's newsletter that came out—now I can't remember if it was once a week or once a month—but the person who headed that group...HAWN [Harrisburg Area Women's News] [cellphone notification sounds] the person got a job with NARAL in Washington and needed to give the editorship over to somebody else, and so, I was there and they asked me to take that over. And so, I was the editor of—HAWN for four years. And then, when I finished with that, that's when I began to get the idea of having the newsletter just for gay people, which is ...at the time it was...really...a difficult thing to do because you're becoming more public, and I was a teacher...

BB: Right.

LK: and I had to balance that off, and so, during the day I was teaching school and then at night I was publishing this newsletter, going out to bars and things. [laughs]

BB: Yeah, so. So I asked you about...coming out...how did it affect your work, did you ever come out at work ever?

LK: No! [smiles]

BB: So you never did?

LK: No! It was too big a risk.

BB: So they never knew...?

LK: Never knew! Except my...when I was retiring. At my retirement dinner, I brought Elaine with me and we had been together for ten years. And I introduced her as my partner of ten years, and I saw a lot of faces contort and—but you know, what could they do to me then? [laughs] I was retired. Yeah, so.

BB: Right. They just didn't. They had no idea?!

LK: I—I don't know.

BB: Did they think you lived alone? What did they know about you?

LK: Well—yeah they said you lived alone. And yeah, they knew I lived alone and tried to fix me up with some fellow or...some other teacher.

BB: So you and Elaine didn't live together?

LK: Oh! Yeah they thought I lived alone. They thought I lived alone.

BB: Oh. So you're pretty private at work.

LK: Yes! Yes. Yes, aha. So.

BB: Did—did you ever come out to your mother or your father or brother?

LK: No.

BB: Never?

LK: Well, my father had passed away when I was in college. But, my mother knew Elaine and she used to always say, "You know, you're friends now, but she'll meet some guy and she'll drop you like a hot potato." And I used to say, "Oh, okay". [LK and BB laughs] She had—she had no idea and it was a different age, and I didn't really feel that I need to burden that with her and try to explain it, so. I never said anything to her.

BB: and your brother?

LK: My brother...I think—well I think he must know by now. I don't remember if I said in the wedding invitation or not. I sent wedding invitations to my two cousins because we—when we moved to Massachusetts they had been deciding on gay marriage and we had no idea. And, we moved here in 2003 and then everyone was saying "We passed it! They passed it! They passed it!" And I said, "Passed what?" And they said, "Gay marriage!" And I said, "We better do this before they change their mind, and so within two months we put out the invitations and invited

people from Pennsylvania—think that no one would show for that—and inviting our friends from here. We ended up with fifty people and we just had moved here, so we were really thrilled, and we got married at the Unitarian church here in town.

BB: So did we! We got married right when they announced—we got married in the Vineyard and we had fifty people [tapping sounds] in this whole thing

LK: Great! Yeah! Hey! Why not?

BB: Why not?

LK: and my cousin didn't come because she had to go to some meeting or something, and when I showed her the pictures she said, "Oh you got dressed up for it?" They didn't—people didn't take it seriously I think, so.

BB: So...so in looking back what do you think the—what were the important events or the turning points in your life—if you could summarize?

LK: Well, I think...going to Girl Scout camp. I think, let's see...running the *Lavender Letter*—it definitely. I have a list them, and now I can't think of them. Definitely moving to Provincetown made a huge difference in my life. Certainly meeting Elaine, my partner of twenty-eight years, and being here...changed tremendously because here, you're treated just like any other human being and you have...nothing to be afraid of. You know, you're not going to worry about someone finding out, or calling you names, or not speaking to you, it's truly another world living here.

BB: Yes. I think—you moved here—oh, you said 2003.

LK: Right.

BB: From Harrisburg?

LK: Yeah, right.

BB: And...would you contrast when you say...the environment in Harrisburg with living there and—I mean Provincetown is unique in itself—but is it—cuz' I find it a big difference when I'm reading these stories about people living in Harrisburg and Lancaster, you know, Philadelphia is a little bit different because it has anti-discrimination laws and I didn't really notice any difference, but when I read what people lived like...without any anti-discrimination laws in Lancaster and in Harrisburg—I think Harrisburg just passed one—you know, I feel like I was living kind of in La La Land in Massachusetts for the past thirty years.

LK: It is. Yeah.

BB: Because in Boston...there was no threat of being a victim, there was no threat of losing my job, but that existed in Harrisburg, can you ?

LK: Oh sure.

BB: I mean, can you comment on that? I mean that difference?

LK: Well I think...

BB: In your environment in Lancaster and Harrisburg...?

LK: Well, even when we have friends visit from Pennsylvania it takes a while for them to open up because they are used to being closed. And I think, what a shame—what a loss of potential of—I want to go back to when I went to Girl Scout camp. There were woman there that were—would be socially unacceptable anywhere else. The way they dressed. The way they acted. A little tough, maybe, but out there in the woods with all these other girls that they were in charge of, suddenly they were heroes. They—they knew how to build something out of nothing. They took this little island and they had these teenage girls build an entire little town in the island. And they were like waste deep in water building a damn, and the girls worshiped them. And yet, when they went back to their jobs in the city, they were like the rejects. Human potential is totally lost when you are not allowed to be open and be yourself.

BB: That's what people were saying.

LK: And I see that here in this town, people are just so open and they are allowed to be themselves and they have tremendous amount of creativity from it, so. That's where I see the difference.

BB: Right.

LK: And I wish it on the rest of the United States.

BB: I know! Um...um...so...that's is probably the biggest thing that—I think that—that you would say—I mean you're living here now, but if you were still living back in—in Harrisburg...that would probably be the thing that would probably be needed to change or work on, right? That aspect. I mean, Pennsylvania, has marriage equality okay, that was only because of the Supreme Court decision...okay...

LK: Right!

BB: not because of anything the state, but...that would probably still be the next big hurdle of what you're talking about with the—the gay and lesbian community has to work on.

LK: If I were living in Harrisburg today, I would probably have a clique of friends that would come over for holidays or put on plays or, you know, do what I was doing before, but it still wouldn't be the same as...just being a regular person anywhere else. I mean...I still couldn't go to a restaurant and sit there and hold hands without being, you know, having coffee spilled on me or something, or people staring at you or whispering...they just make you feel uncomfortable, whereas here that's just so normal.

BB: What made you pick Provincetown?

LK: Well, I went with friends from Harrisburg. There was a group of us that—they would come by in a van at eleven o'clock at night and we would all pile in and drive all night, and get here in time for breakfast, and would stay here a week. And I thought, "What a wonderful place it would be because it's so beautiful" But I thought, you know, "there was no way I could ever live here because I have a job and, you know, it was just too much". And so, when Elaine and I got together we would come every summer for a week or two, and—when I—when I retired, and both our parents were gone, we said, "well there's nothing keeping us," and so we went and retired and moved here. So.

BB: So.

LK: Here we are.

BB: So. I think...and you and Elaine have only been together for twenty years, right?

LK: Right.

BB: So...how did you meet Elaine?

LK: She—I—I had a Halloween party and what I would do was since I had this big house on Third Street...I would invite people to...bring their friends to a Halloween party. And they would come all dressed up and I had like 60 or 70 people came to the house and I didn't know who they were—

BB: Yeah! [LK and BB laughs]

LK: and she came along with a friend of mine. And, the two of them had been together for about eight years and I was always friends with both of them. And then they broke up and she had asked me to dinner and we went out to dinner and we've been having dinner ever since.

BB: Wow!

LK: So.

BB: Congratulations! So did we miss anything else? Anything else you want to talk about?

LK: Ah—well

BB: that you think is important...

LK: Um...while I was here, I would meet with a friend—a friend of mine who is in her 90s would have a writing group every Wednesday. We would read and write poetry, so we'd produce the book and this is the book called *Coffee at Hilde's* [*Coffee at Hilde's: Four Provincetown Poets*]. And there are four of us, there was a retired scientist, Hilde [Hilde Oleson], a retired English teacher, and myself.

BB: How wonderful!?

LK: And I wanted to ...share that poem with you that I have marked there. There was a time—

BB: What, *The Gift* or...?

LK: There was the other side—

BB: Oh, there was a time?

LK: *There was a time.*

BB: There was a time.

LK: There was a time.

BB: [BB reads aloud] *There was a time I carved a heart on a tree in Pennsylvania using the knife from our picnic basket. You. Watching me in distress, whispered, "Don't put our names in the heart." So fearful they would come upon us finding our out-crop of love, too foreign to accept. And like some Taliban sect would rise up stones to put our eyes—put out our eyes. Your eyes blue and frightened implored me to leave the heart empty. Having no armor for fears I relented, and returned the knife to its place inside the basket. We both leaned against the marred tree, shoulders touching. The best we could do in a hostile world. In silence, we ate our tuna on rye in a sense that collected like smooth stones on a beach, we children are sixty plus years gathered together away from being strange. And all we can remember are the old days never quite get over the silence of an empty heart. Wow!*

LK: That says it to me.

BB: That beautiful! That describes...so much of what I have been reading in these oral histories.

LK: Mhm. Mhm.

BB: about...being able to, you know, stay in the closet and can't come out—the fear of—oh I need a copy of this.

LK: I'll—I'll give you the book. You can have it.

BB: Oh this is—this has got to go in the book that we're writing.

LK: Oh, okay. Great. Mhm.

BB: It really has—we have to get a reprint. [Both laugh] we have to get a permission slip for you to reprint this.

LK: Okay. That is fine.

BB: Oh that's beautiful! Oh! Well thank you, that's wonderful!

LK: Oh, you're welcome!

BB: So...well I think this tell the other that we should contact for the interview. I think you and Barry could talk about that, right?

LK: Oh well the other two people I could think of were Mary Nancarrow and I can't imagine that –

BB: No we've already talked to Mary Nancarrow.

LK: Yes, and Cindy Mitzel.

BB: I don't think [flips papers] I don't think I've seen her transcript yet. I'm not sure if she's—should be interviewed...

LK: She's in York.

BB: Oh okay.

LK: She lives in York. She's done a lot of work with, like City Council and schools. She comes and speaks with them.

BB: Oh.

LK: She's more of an extrovert than I am.

BB: Mmkay. So. Well this has been...terrific! I mean—

LK: Okay. Great. Great.

BB: I feel like there's so much more! I love the stuff about the *Lavender Letter*, that's really...an incredible story!

LK: Well, thank you. But it was quite an interesting journey.

BB: It was! So. Well if anything else, thank you so much for spending the time—

LK: Oh well thank you very much for coming all the way up here!

BB: It was well worth it, so...

LK: Good.

BB: Well, alright. Thank you.

LK: I hope you...have some place planned for lunch---oh you know your way around.

BB: I know my way around.

LK: Yes.

BB: It's good to be back in Provincetown.

LK: Yes.

BB: Well, okay. Thanks Andrew.

Audio Ends .