

# **LGBT History Project of the LGBT Center of Central PA**

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**Title:** LGBT Oral History: David Leas

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**Interviewee: David Leas**

Interviewer: Barry Loveland

Date: June 1, 2017

Place: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Transcriber: Liam Fuller

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**Abstract:** David Leas was born in 1955 in Columbia, Pennsylvania. He comes from a working class family and described the sense of independence he got from his first job as busboy for the Accomac Inn. This job led to a foray into the restaurant business, starting with opening the Railroad House in Marietta with his partner Marlon. David then went on to be an evening manager at Isaac's and then transitioned into a higher up management job within the restaurant. Due to his pull at Isaac's, he was able to convince the restaurant and other local restaurants to raise funds and collaborate with the Lancaster AIDS Project and SCAAN. David was also one of the original members of Gays United Lancaster and The Rural Gay Caucus, an organization formed in reaction to the urban focus of the Council of Sexual Minorities, formed by Governor Shapp. He also was one of the main driving forces behind the newsletter, *Gay Era*, often spearheading the publication of it. He remarks on how many of his friends, such as Bari Weaver, had to move due to the extreme harassment they faced for being openly gay. He then touches on the evolution of gay bars in the area and how he met his partner, Ben, who he has been living with in Elizabethtown for around twenty years.

**BL:** Okay [clears throat] my name is Barry Loveland and I'm here with David Leas. We are here for—on behalf of the—LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project. Today is June 1st, 2017 and I'm here to conduct an oral history with David. This interview is taking place at my home in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania]. David, do we have your permission to record the interview today?

**DL:** Yes.

**BL:** Okay, great, thank you. We also have a consent form that I'll have you read over and fill out and sign at the end of the interview and we have kind of a standard list of props and topics and so forth that we go through and then I also put together a list of supplemental questions based on what I know about your background so that I can hopefully target it on some of the areas that we want to make sure that we cover and then at the end of the interview, if there's anything that I missed that you feel, you know, is important that you think we need to bring then just do that at that time. And—so, first of all—state your name and spell your name for the transcriber.

**DL:** Okay, David Leas, L-E-A-S.

**BL:** Good, okay. So, let's start right at the beginning of when you when you were born and where you were born.

**DL:** Okay, I was born in 1955 in Columbia, Pennsylvania.

**BL:** Okay, good.

**DL:** Yeah, an old river town. I think most people in the area know where that is, so, except for people in Lancaster [Pennsylvania], county—though not quite sure if that's your county or not.

**BL:** They don't want to claim it really.

**DL:** Well, I would say there's, you know, people in Lancaster always are not quite sure where the border is, it's somewhere West of Wheatland [Pennsylvania].

**BL:** Alright, so, tell me about growing up—your life growing up, your parents, your family, and things like that.

**DL:** Well, I grew up in Columbia and my parents were working class, my mom worked in a sewing factory, my dad worked in a foundry. They were very young parents. My mom had—I'm the oldest of five—and my mom had me: she was 16, three kids before she was 21. So, I don't think they had an easy life, but they did what they could do, you know, as far as ... and, I'd like to say I usually—I hate to disappoint people, but I actually had a very nice childhood. Went to Catholic school, grade school in Columbia, and then went to Lancaster Catholic High. So ... which was an experience. I didn't particularly like high school, you know, sort of like that grade school thing where you're one of 35 and then you get dumped into high school, where there's now 11 of those groups of 35 and so, yeah...

**BL:** So, what was high school like for you, what—did you have any outside activities besides classes and stuff that you did or...

**DL:** No, I had my friends that I grew up with, you know, in the neighborhood, and we hung out together still even in high school. You know, we always sat at the same lunch table. When—and I think it's relevant—when I turned 16 and I was able to drive, I got—I was able to get a real job—and at that time there was a, well, it's still there, a restaurant called The Accomac Inn. Right above Wrightsville [Pennsylvania] and they had just opened and had an ad in the paper for busboys, and so I got my mom to drive me over because I was—I couldn't drive at night yet and I got the job.

And that probably was one of the—probably one of the monumental turning points in my life: getting to meet other people and, you know, also struggling with the issue of being a gay teenager and meeting other gay people and also, that type of restaurant. It was a French restaurant. The waiters wore tuxedos and bowties and—and the busboys wore white jackets and bowties, and so it was a whole new experience for me.

I saw a world that I did not even know existed; you know, people who ate like lamb chops and duck and things like that—you know what I mean. So, and I was just, to me, it was just this whole world that I wanted to know more about. And so I—that was a—that was also—the point that sort of steered me in, in the restaurant business. You know, because that's basically what I had done, up until seven years ago, when I left. So, that was a turning point and I've never—no, no regrets. The money was easy and I was good at it. The waiters fawned over me [both laugh],

you know. So, it was that point there and then, one ... With high school, I really did not want to be there, and I made an error. Well, there were several things that were happening when I was ... about that 16-17 period is when my parents were splitting up. So, there was a lot of turmoil and it was easy, it was an opportunity for me to take advantage of that chaos. So, I moved out of the house and lived with one of the managers and his wife and family. I decided in eleventh grade that I hated Catholic school, so I transferred in the middle of the year to public school, which was a major mistake. I didn't go to school. I took off every Monday, failed practically all of my classes. So then at the end of the—that, it's like, “now what do I do?” And so I went back to Catholic High, with my tail between my legs, and of course tuition then wasn't very expensive. It was like \$150, you know; now I think it's like \$5,000...

**BL:** Yeah...

**DL:** And, talked to department heads and they let me make up classes and then also continue forward with classes that I would normally have as a senior because I was in honors classes. They let me make up Trig and take Calc, you know, for senior year, so ... but I could not wait to get out of there. I was just so over that, but I knew I needed it to at least graduate from high school.

**BL:** Yeah, gotcha, great.

**DL:** So, yeah that was an experience.

**BL:** Well you mentioned that a sixteen year old gay boy ... Did, did you know at that point that you were gay or ...

**DL:** I knew that I was.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Yeah, wasn't necessarily sure that I would know that word or what to do about it, or I mean, there was no support group, other than people that I worked with who might also be that way, you know.

**BL:** [Laughs] Did you have any sense that they were or ... you were, or weren't sure at that point, or ...

**DL:** Wasn't that sure. I mean, you drink beer, you know, and it's two in the morning. And drinking beer in a car ... fool around—you know what I mean? [Both laugh] And then the next morning don't talk about it, you know?

**BL:** So you did have some experiences like that?

**DL:** Right, right.

**BL:** Yeah, yeah.

**DL:** And then another turning point was then when I got out of high school. I really wanted to get out of—I wanted to get out of town. So, I knew some people who I'd worked with who had moved to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. So, as an 18 year-old, I packed my bags and had never been on a plane before but—and off I went! You know what I mean, so, I was in St. Thomas for a year...

**BL:** Wow.

**DL:** And that was also a completely different experience. Met new people there. I was very, I think I can say this upfront: there was a very large Brazilian population because of the jewelry business and as a tall, skinny eighteen-year-old, blond boy, I was very popular. Let's put it that way [both laugh]. So, anyhow, that was my get out of dodge. And then, about a year later, it was like I had accomplished what it is that I felt like I needed to accomplish, and it was time to come home and reacquainted, you know, with friends. And I had one friend in particular ... Jeff had said, "Oh, I met these people, you know, at the—at the gay bar, The Tally Ho, and I want you to meet them." And I had never been in a gay bar before, but at 19 it wasn't that hard, getting in, you know [both laugh], with no ID.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** And that's when I started meeting other people like Bari Weaver and Sam Wilson and the beginning of what became Gays United Lancaster—you know. Oh ...

**BL:** So you were—you were 19 basically when you came out, sort of, officially, I guess.

**DL:** Yeah, 19 going on 35, at that point. [Laughs]

**BL:** Well good, good.

**DL:** Yeah...

**BL:** What do you remember about the Tally Ho. I mean, what was it like walking into a gay bar for the first time, seeing all these people.

**DL:** There was a certain level of nervousness which definitely dissipated within 15-20minutes—that to be in an environment with other people who were like me! So—and of course that was how you did—that's how you met other people, you know. Now it's much different, you have all—you have the internet—it's a completely different environment, so...

**BL:** So, that would be around 1974, '73?

**DL:** That would've been—I graduated from high school in '73. So '74, 1975. Maybe 1975, approximately, so...

**BL:** Yeah, okay, so, at that point you said you started meeting some of the people that were starting to form these organizations or this organization?

**DL:** Right, well, the one fellow Bari Weaver was instrumental in forming Gays United Lancaster and so, you know, there was this—the talk about, you know, some type of organization or—not just political, but also social—that did not revolve around the bars and—and alcohol, in particular. So that was the beginning of the idea—I mean that was the idea. I remember the very first meeting that Bari had organized at his house in Lancaster. Matter of fact, I drove by yesterday, the house is gone.

**BL:** Oh...

**DL:** It's now a parking lot for a CVS.

**BL:** Oh jeez.

**DL:** I remember the very first meeting and the people that were there. And it was interesting, of course, you know, when you're starting anything from—from scratch. There's always the—the nitpicking over bylaws. You know what I mean; it's like you can go on forever and ever and ever about that.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** In forming the organization. I remember a fellow who was there, Jerry Brennan?

**BL:** Mhm.

**DL:** Oh, you know him?

**BL:** Yeah, from Harrisburg.

**DL:** He had come down—yeah he came down to that first meeting...

**BL:** Wow.

**DL:** Representing the switchboard and he was trying to convince us to not form our own organization [phone rings] but to be part of the Harrisburg group.

**BL:** Oh, oh, okay. [Phone rings, laughs] Sorry. Hold on a second.

**DL:** That's fine.

**BL:** [Speaking to phone] Hello? No, he's working today. Mmhm, bye. [Hangs up phone] Sorry.

**DL:** Oh, that's when you say he doesn't live here anymore.

**BL:** [chuckles] That's what I should've said.

**DL:** Rotten son of a bitch! He took off! [Both laugh] If you find him call me back. Telemarketers.

**BL:** Yeah, yeah.

**DL:** I've done that already, just go into a tirade.

**BL:** [laughs] So...

**DL:** So, yeah, of course at that meeting, yeah there were a lot of people who were like, "oh, we can't do this ... You know, it's too public ... You know, it'll never be. You know, it's too radical: la la la la." There's many more reasons not to do it than to actually do it and—you know how that goes...

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** You always have the naysayers and the, you know, people who did not want to be publicly associated but were willing to support it but...

**BL:** Quietly.

**DL:** Quietly. And that was the—the times, you know?

**BL:** Yeah. So, what did Bari do for a living, what was his...

**DL:** He cut hair.

**BL:** Okay, yeah.

**DL:** And he had his studio there in the house and then on the rear he had built an addition and had a—like a gall—a framing shop.

**BL:** Oh.

**DL:** Framing artwork and stuff. So, Bari was a real character.

**BL:** Yeah, tell me what you remember about him.

**DL:** Well...

**BL:** And it's B-A-R-I, right? That he spelled his name?

**DL:** Yeah, after he came out. Yeah, before that I think it was B-A-R-R-Y but then it became B-A-R-I.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** And so he—he cut hair, and the business there was his dad's, who had retired, and he took it over. And, as I understand, after he came out, of course, he lost a lot of that business, you know.

So, the additional end of the back, which eventually became the frame shop, he had originally built as his salon studio. But then moved back into a smaller space, which was his—basically his dad's barber shop, on the side of the house. I said he was a character. I remember he had this dune buggy that he would drive around in—especially in the winter. He had this big old fur coat on, you know, and he—with the scarf going in the wind and everything, and ... but he was very committed and very persistent about trying to make things happen.

So, except that was for the—the beginning days of Gays United at Lancaster, I felt as though I had found a home and not—like I said, not just for political activism as much as—as a social group, you know.

**BL:** And that that first meeting you, you described and about how many people came to that first meeting?

**DL:** About 25 people or so.

**BL:** Oh, that's pretty good.

**DL:** Yeah.

**BL:** And did they sustain a pretty good number of people over—over time or did they get...

**DL:** Yeah, mhm, yeah. And we would do things, you know, social things like have a dance, you know, at The Moose, you know, hall in Lancaster. I remember once we did one at the Union Hall at old Manor Street. Nothing complicated...

**BL:** Did you have any trouble? Did you have any trouble with finding places that would allow gay people?

**DL:** There was usually an in. There was usually someone knew somebody who knew somebody's brother, you know, who would let us have the space, you know. So ...

**BL:** Okay, yeah, okay ...

**DL:** Yeah, and there were fun times ...

**BL:** Mhm, so what, what besides the dances, do you remember that they did as social activities?

**DL:** Other social activities?

**BL:** Mhm.

**DL:** That was pretty much—pretty much it, you know, there was no like hiking, you know, no outings or anything...

**BL:** Right, did they do like potlucks or picnics?

**DL:** Yeah, mhm, yep, we would do those spaghetti dinners.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** You know, there was usually—that was going on and there were vegetarians back then too, no vegan, but there were vegetarians. They always had two versions of sauce and they—they were fun. They were fun ... they were fun!

**BL:** And as far as other kinds of activities that they did, of, besides social, did they— did they end up doing any other kinds of things?

**DL:** You mean, like political?

**BL:** Political or yeah...

**DL:** Yeah, I remember, well, then, and I know that other people have talked about this, you know, in ... You know, Governor Shapp had, at the time, had formed the Governor's Council for Sexual Minorities and ... I'm sure other people have talked about the history of that. And we sort of felt, at least in our Lancaster group, and with talking with other people in the state, that the membership of that council was very stacked with Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] and Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania]. And, I think Sam Deetz was on it, but he was like with Northumberland [Pennsylvania]. He might have been the only person, that I—that I remember that it was really stacked ...

As far as, urban city issues and that the rest of us, in the provinces, were sort of ... our issues were sort of being left out, and most of those issues had—that I felt at the time—had to do with isolation and not knowing each other, you know, that—that goes along with the territory of not being in a large, urban area.

So, through that, then we had—I don't know what I would call it, an alliance or whatever but we formed the—it was called the Rural Gay Caucus and what we were trying to do is be a funnel to feed info into the governor's council. So, we would have our monthly meetings around different places. Like Lebanon [Pennsylvania] would host, Lancaster would host, Reading [Pennsylvania] would host, State College [Pennsylvania] would host, and that was very interesting too, because then you got to meet other people from ...



**BL:** ... other places ...

**DL:** ... around the state. At one point we had a conference, up in the Poconos [Pennsylvania], at the Howard Johnson's, and that was pretty—that was pretty cool. I think it was about 200 people there and I got to meet a lot of people that, you know, are around now, Mary Nancarrow, she's not originally from Harrisburg, so I—I actually forget where she was from and where she was representing.

**BL:** I think she was in Shippensburg [Pennsylvania] then.

**DL:** Shippensburg, yeah.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Sam Deetz was from Northumberland [Pennsylvania] area, Tony Sylvester was from State College--

**BL:** State College.

**DL:** He's not out in Pittsburgh.

**BL:** Right...

**DL:** I wrote some other names down here too. Joe Burns, you know, from Reading, so that was sort of an interesting way. Of course, when you have meetings somewhere else, it's—it's called road trip—you know what I mean, and either you drive home or you sleep on someone's couch that night—you know what I mean, so...

**BL:** So, what do you remember—those meetings, were they—were they interesting, fun...?

**DL:** Yeah, it was mostly a sharing thing, who's doing what, you know and then, I remember once, oh, I can't remember what year it was ... Anita Bryant—was when that was going on and she was at, what was the name of it, it was in Reading...

**BL:** Bloomsburg [Pennsylvania] Fair.

**DL:** Oh yeah, she was at the Bloomsburg Fair, I remember that and then also she was at, a place in Reading.

**BL:** Oh, I haven't heard that story.

**DL:** It's not the Zembo Mosque, but it's one of those type of facilities and we had went up—there was about a dozen of us—to protest, standing on the sidewalk with our posters, which, was not fun because, people ... We were not appreciated. Let's put it that way.

**BL:** Yes.

**DL:** So.

**BL:** And did you—were all of you from Lancaster, that went up there to do that or from?

**DL:** Yeah, there were some people from Reading.

**BL:** Okay, from Reading too.

**DL:** And then we had our Lancaster—about a half a dozen of us from Lancaster.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** And Reading basically, so, it was sort of, basically, “So, she’s going to be there this Saturday, you want to go?” You know what I mean? It wasn’t a mass organization ...

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** ... that takes place, you know, months in advance. You know, just ... Yeah, those types of things, so.

**BL:** And, the—the group in Lebanon [Pennsylvania], do you remember what they were called, because I—I’ve been trying to find out more information about them.

**DL:** No, but a good person to—that to get a hold of, if you haven’t already, is Harry Long.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** I don’t know if you’ve talked to him at all.

**BL:** No, I don’t know him, so...

**DL:** He is from Lebanon and then he moved to Lancaster and he’s back in Lebanon again.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** And then with our newsletter, he was the editor for that.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** But I know he’s back in—he’s back in Lebanon and I see him on Facebook. I haven’t talked to him for maybe two or three years.

**BL:** If you see him and find a way to get in touch with him, if you could send me his, like, email or something that would help.

**DL:** Yeah, I will. And I’m trying to remember who the other people were. I remember we met at a fire hall, up on the second floor of a fire hall, that was organized and I forget what the names were. Could probably go through some old *Gay Eras* and find those names.

**BL:** Yeah, I’m gonna—I’m going to look for those.

**DL:** On the ma— on the masthead or submissions of articles or the calendar events, I know that the center has a pile of those.

**BL:** Yeah, I’ve got to go through some of those.

**DL:** They’re either at the center or they’re over in Carlisle [Pennsylvania] at Dickinson.

**BL:** Yeah, they’re at Dickinson now.

**DL:** I remember the one exhibit in Carlisle, I saw a whole pile of them.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Which brought—bought back memories ...

**BL:** Yes.

**DL:** ... of doing that, so.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** So, you know, in our newsletter—we had the newsletter in Lancaster for the—the Gays United Lancaster, and then it expanded to...

**BL:** To become the Gay ERA.

**DL:** Right, for this rural caucus thing.

**BL:** Whole region.

**DL:** I don't know how effective it was. I mean, it was fun doing it. Basically most of the content, I mean there was original content, but most of the content was lifted and credited to other papers, whether it was *Philly Gay News* or—what's the name of the one that was in Boston? But yeah.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** It was almost a *Reader's Digest* version.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** You know, what was going on ... But I do think it did serve some purpose, as far as having some editorial content and articles. I wrote a couple articles and, so—which I enjoyed doing. You know, I'm not—I don't consider myself a—an excellent writer. Matter of fact, I go back and look at some of it, that I wrote then, but, ... of course that was my age, too. It was like—I would—I could real—I could do much better now [laughs]. You know, as far as edit—editing is—is concerned.

**BL:** Who—whose idea was it to get the—to, to sort of expand that publication, do you remember?

**DL:** I'm not quite sure—I'm not quite sure if it was Bari or Harry Long or even mine, but I played a major part in the paper and keeping it going. I basically financed it, cause it did not make money and there was always a printing bill and always drama going around getting it printed because it was more than what we could just do. You know, the original newsletter was a mimeo—on a mimeograph machine, you know, you'll have to explain that, what a mimeograph machine is.

**BL:** Yes. [laughs]

**DL:** And there weren't photocopiers, as we know them now.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** So we always were looking for a printer, we had multiple printers, whether it was Sir Speedy, which was an arm and a leg. And then we had *The Columbia News*, which doesn't exist anymore, but it was a newspaper. They printed it once and then told us to go away, and then in Mechanicsburg [Pennsylvania], Fry Communications, *The Merchandiser*, they printed it three times and told us to go away, then we ...

**BL:** Did you get any sense from them why they wanted you to go away?

**DL:** They viewed it as pornographic.

**BL:** Oh, okay. [laughs]

**DL:** That broad term, pornographic.

**BL:** Uh-huh.

**DL:** You know, they didn't want their employees to have to look at this.

**BL:** Look at those ... yeah.

**DL:** Then, at one point, we had, one of the ministers from MCC [Metropolitan Community Church], in Harrisburg, who lived over in Lemoyne [Pennsylvania]. I can't remember his name. He lived above Ray's Music. I met him and he had a printing press, which someone had given him, and he was going to use it for MCC's newsletter. But it was a very complicated thing. There was a plate that needed to be made, and there was a plate-maker. And we figured it out once and printed an issue in his living room, but then we couldn't do that anymore because of the noise it made [mimics sounds of a printing press].

So then we had ... we took the ... I was living in Marietta [Pennsylvania] at the time. He, he basically said, "Take it, get it out of here." So, we took it down to Marietta and had it there and then we found someone to actually make plates for us in Lancaster. Dr. Berman—I remember him—but he did it, because his employees wouldn't. So he did it for us. And then we got Capp Printing in Lebanon. We finally hit the gold mine, I mean, after years of this bouncing around, they did their—the version of *The Merchandiser*—wherever it is in Lebanon County. One of the bar customers, David Capp was like, "My dad [David Calvin "Capp" Feldser] will do that." And so it was Capp Printing. So I would run all the layout sheets up there and they did it. But that was sort towards the end—I mean, the last year—because at that point, it was just a real financial drain. I didn't really want to do it anymore. I was—I was done with financing it. You know after—you know after a couple hundred dollars every month, you know, in printing bills.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And I did it probably longer than I should've, but I did it because I felt as though if I didn't do it, no one would do it and then I thought, "Well, then that's the way it will be and if someone wants to continue ..." I think Harry did one issue on his own and that was it, so. So, all things have a life cycle. And then they have a birth, you know, then they have the adolescence, they have the maturity, and then they die.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Like we all do, right? So, that I've since learned, to let things ... Sometimes it's time to let—to just—let things go, rather than a long, drawn out process.

**BL:** Well, I must say, going through some of them, they—they left a very great historical record because it ... You can go through there and see some of the organizations that were involved in the area at that point.

**DL:** Right, right.

**BL:** Some of the news articles from the local activities going on and calendar of events and things like that, really helps.

**DL:** Yeah, yeah, that helped us...

**BL:** --[that] kind of document what the community doing here.

**DL:** Yeah, so that was a good thing, yeah.

**BL:** Definitely a good thing.

**DL:** Yeah ...

**BL:** So even the ads, I mean, just to know what bars existed and what ...

**DL:** Right, right.

**BL:** You know, what businesses existed and so forth.

**DL:** Yeah. And then I said—later on with the Railroad House ... You know, Marlon and I had contacts. It was very easy for us to talk to other bar owners, mostly, into helping support it. You know, the guys, the Rose Rouge, there they were—what was their name? John and ... John and Larry—they were very supportive. Town Tavern over in York, yeah, so, that was...

**BL:** Yeah, tell me a little bit about your sort of occupational history. What—where you worked and what you did and so forth from ... you started at Accomac as your first...

**DL:** Right, I was a busboy and then I became a waiter, right, which was the big promo, because you needed to be—I think you still do, you need to be 18 to handle alcohol. I think that’s still the law. And I remember, one Saturday night one of the waiters called in sick and the owner—I mean, this story still comes up from a friend of mine, Chip: The owner came up to me and said, “David, are you 18?” And I knew exactly why he was asking, and I said, “Yes.” [Both laugh] So, he took me upstairs and got me a tuxedo and yada yada and then ... So I got to actually wait tables, which was more money, of course. Of course my friend Chip always brings it up, he’s the same—he was a busboy too. And he always brings it up, about ... because he was 18. And he always brings up how I lied and yada yada. I said, “Well, Chip, but he didn’t ask you.” [Laughs]

So, anyhow ... So, I did that, and at one point—because then when I went to St. Thomas, I just packed my white shirt and bow-tie and black pants and shoes—and after a month it was time to get a job. So that wasn’t—that was not hard to do. I started in the morning and was working that night, you know.

**BL:** In-in a rest—in a restaurant?

**DL:** In a restaurant, yeah, called The Lobster Pot. It was the other side of the island from town and then ... then I came back. My aunt had—of course I still worked at the Accomac, when I came back—and my aunt had opened a Mexican restaurant in Lancaster. So I helped her with that for a while.

And then I met my, who would become my partner, Marlon, in Marietta. And then we opened the Railroad House in Marietta. So that was ‘70—1977-’78 until ... About ‘85-’86 is when I left because we had split up but we were still trying to be business partners and that was not working. It was not a very good—it was not a very good part of my life, you know, and then I got—I always wanted a bakery, so I hooked up with a girl—a woman who I went to high school with and had a bakery in Columbia, did catering on the side. That did not—that only lasted a year. I say, remember Carla, from *Cheers*?

**BL:** Yes. [Laughs]

**DL:** That was my business partner. So, the last month did not—when we were splitting up—didn’t go well.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** You know what I mean? It’d be like ... we had an employee. It was like, okay, you know: “Can you tell Anita bla bla bla bla ....” You know what I mean? This is what’s happening: we have this catering going on and yada yda, and then she would turn to the employee and say, “Can you tell David to go fuck himself?” You know what I mean. So it was just like “Aw man, I’m out of here.” You know what I mean?

And then—then I got the job at Isaac’s. So, that would’ve been 1987. Evening manager at the downtown—the original downtown Isaac’s, the evening weekend manager and at that point there were only three. That one, the one up in Ephrata [Pennsylvania] and one out in Indiana, PA.

**BL:** Wow.

**DL:** So—then I was at Isaac’s for 21 years, 22 years—up until seven years ago.

**BL:** And you rose up to the—to become like a...?

**DL:** I was a vice-president.

**BL:** A vice-president, yeah...

**DL:** Of operations, I was pretty high on the food chain.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And it was very good. I mean, I left. It was—it was time, you know. I left because well: A) I knew it was time, and also I could. I was still young enough. I wanted to do something else, and at the time I was in a financial position that I could. So, it was like six months of negotiating how that was all going to work, you know ... and how my position, you know, would take it over and—I sort of smile now. It’s a—my job got divided into three jobs, which might be why I wasn’t having fun anymore—you know what I mean?

**BL:** Yeah, yeah.

**DL:** You know what I mean.

**BL:** Yes.

**DL:** So, it could’ve just kept—it just kept growing, you know. So I started when there were three restaurants when I left there were 23 and 700 employees, which means I had 700 bosses, so. But, I have no regrets, Isaac’s was very good to me, as far as a career was concerned, socially, financially, you know, so, no regrets, whatsoever. And I made good friends—still—still have good friends there, so ... And who knows, I might be washing dishes there some day. Some of the younger employees ... it was like always the—you know, the—who wanted to have their own restaurants. And I always encourage that, because I really didn’t really ever view it as a—a threat thing or anything. It was actually an encouragement, you know, because that’s part of—that’s part of the business.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And paths always re-cross, you know, each other.

**BL:** And then after that?

**DL:** Now I do concrete: Concrete counter tops, decorative concrete. A friend of mine, Barb Sunderland, had started the business.

**BL:** Oh yeah, I know her.

**DL:** Remember Barbie? Yeah, she was involved with the switchboard and stuff—had started it. We've been friends for years and then when I left Isaac's, she knew I was available so she would call and said, "David, can you help me?" And so, I would go and help her out, on an as needed basis, just as a friend would help another friend. And then she was looking for a business partner, to move the business forward, so we worked together for a good six months to see what that would be like because good friends don't always equal good business partners. And so we decided to proceed and form a—form a partner—a new partnership and recapitalized the business or—to take it to that next level, the additional capital was needed for equipment and expanding the space so, not a bad gig.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** It is funny though because it's just her and I. And occasionally we have some employees who come in, you know, on an as needed basis. I have a nephew who I just call. But, when we have clients come in and—or they look around, they look at Barb and I ... because I do not have the physique of someone who works with concrete. So, they look at me and then they look at Barb, who's a woman, and they're like, "Uhh..."

**BL:** "Can you guys do this?"

**DL:** "Do you have—how many employees do you have here?" You know what I mean, "who else?" It's like, "No, it's just us." You know, but really in that business it's really about leverage, it's not necessarily about ...

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Lifting dead weight, it's like ...

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** So, between the crane and forklift and things that you just need to flip things over, you don't really need to lug it and a dead weight, you know. We invented the wheel a long time ago, you know what I mean? So, as far as transport ... so ... so I'm enjoying it.

**BL:** Good. Talk to me a little about your religious affiliation growing up. Or do—did you have any particular religious background or ...

**DL:** Well, I grew up Catholic, I was raised Catholic, went to 12 years of Catholic school. And my coming of age during that ecumenical period where I felt if I looked back ... I'd say that was a more liberal period than what we have—than what we've had recently...don't know what Pope Francis is actually going to do, but it was a, a little more—it was a more liberal period. I'm not a practicing Catholic, but I still ... I think that I have those values and, like with anything, with any type of doctrine, when you start questioning one thing, it's the slippery slope. You know what I



mean? It's like, "That doesn't quite make—make sense." You know, so I always heard like ... Well, I don't ... I mean once you start some—you know, when you think the resurrection is a big leap, you know what I mean? And then last night there was something on TV I was watching. It was a comedian or something—or it was sitcom—and they were talking about the Bible and that you just sort of look at it and you just skip over it. And you just like sign off on it the same way you do an Apple agreement. [Laughs] "Okay, I agree." You know what I mean? Well you don't read—you don't get too much into the details.

**BL:** Fine print.

**DL:** Right, yeah, like an Apple agreement—I thought that was pretty funny.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** So, I considered myself a spiritual ... like a spiritual person. But I am not, I'm not a practicing Catholic and wouldn't even necessarily go so far as to say, "I'm a devout Christian." You know?

**BL:** How about your, your parents and stuff? Were they pretty devout Catholics or were they...?

**DL:** My Dad's side of the family was Catholic. German/Polish Catholic, and my mom's side of the family was Plain ... they were Brethren, because I remember great aunts and uncles who wore prayer caps. So there was always sort of that element, but my mother was the one who made sure that we got to church every Sunday and to go to school ... Because there's always those family dynamics, you know: that my Dad's side, the Catholic side of the family, there was always beer. There—there was like always—always beer, and always arguing and always someone's fighting about something. My mom's side of the family was completely opposite. There was no alcohol, no one ever was fighting. You know what I mean? Everyone got along. It was a large farm family and my mom was one of thirteen and...

**BL:** Did you end up coming out to your parents at some point in your coming out process?

**DL:** Yeah, right after high school.

**BL:** Oh, did you?

**DL:** Yeah.

**BL:** Yeah. How did they take that?

**DL:** The usual. The mother's, "What did I do wrong?" The, you know, "You were the first-born. Did I coddle you too much?" And, I mean, we know the ... Whole books have been written about this. You know what I mean? So, my parents had split up, so my dad ... We really didn't have a whole lot of conversations about it. But I don't think he really—in the later years, there was never...

**BL:** --Never an issue.

**DL:** No. I was his dependable son, you know what I mean. I was the one who took him to the doctor appointments and, if I said I was going to be there at 1:00, I was there at ten of one because I knew he'd be standing there waiting. You know what I mean, that thing. He's since passed away. But, there wasn't big—it was very easy.

**BL:** How about your siblings, did they accept it pretty well or did you have any problems with them?

**DL:** Yeah, my brother, the one who's a year younger, he—he had some, some difficulty, but nothing major. My sister who's two years younger, there was no issue whatsoever. I mean she worked for me at The Railroad House, you know, so she already knew. And she worked at the Accomac, too, as a busgirl. So she already knew gay people and that whole environment so, I—you know, in retrospect, I had a very easy time coming out. And I don't know how much of that was my—my own confidence or whether just, I was damn lucky and all the stars were aligned, you know, to make that happen. So it wasn't ... Once I came out though, I didn't ... there was no—there was no looking back, you know what I mean?

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Forward: *that* thing. It wasn't—it wasn't that hard for me. And, so you know, over the years, you know, I sometimes have those ... You know, when I meet other people who are struggling and trying to be supportive, I don't quite ... I'm maybe not always as understanding and as supportive as maybe I should be because to me it's like [snaps] get on get on with it—I mean “you are who you are.”

**BL:** Wasn't a big deal for you.

**DL:** “Why are you tormenting yourself? You want to be unhappy?” You know what I mean? Yada, yada ... You know it's like that basic, “Just stop it!”--you know what I mean? “Type thing.” So...

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** You know, people who are—specially people who are older, like in their thirties or forties, it's like, “Oh my god, how old are you?” You know what I mean? “And you're still worried about what your parents think?” You know, “You're a grown up here!” You know, but I don't under—I don't their life, their baggage.

**BL:** Everybody—yeah, everybody follows a different path.

**DL:** Everyone has baggage.

**BL:** Yeah, yeah.

**DL:** You know.

**BL:** Let's see, and I mean, you were never married to a woman, obviously?

**DL:** No.

**BL:** And military service, I guess you didn't go into the military, right?

**DL:** No.

**BL:** Getting back to organizational affiliations, did you get ... Besides Gay United Lancaster, did you get involved with any other gay groups in Lancaster or the area or ...

**DL:** No.

**BL:** The AIDS organization or anything like that?

**DL:** Oh, I was in ... I first got involved with Lancaster AIDS Project, mostly because of the—with the Isaac's connection, with the restaurant downtown. Phil, the owner of Isaac's had rented space to Lancaster AIDS Project, so they were up in the—up on the second floor of the building in what used to be, what was part of the Isaac's office space. But it was a storage room, so that was—that was their first offices.

**BL:** First office.

**DL:** And then later they had moved down onto the first floor into their own space at the back of the hallway of the building there, if you're familiar with that building at all.

**BL:** Somewhat, yeah, I think I've been in there for ...

**DL:** Yeah, I first got involved with fundraising. I had seen that other—in other areas, like in Philadelphia, or whatever they did, what did they call it? "Dine Out For Life," or whatever. I was talking to one of the managers and I was like, "Well, we could do that." You know what I mean? So—so, I did organize the first Dine Out in Lancaster and I've figured that—well, because I was a restaurant person ... So if I—I knew other restaurant people—and our first year we had eight restaurants and it was like pulling teeth! You know to make this happen.

**BL:** Did they—did the restaurant owners feel a little hesitant because it was an AIDS organization?

**DL:** Some did and then some totally embraced it because they had employ- employees who had died of AIDS.

**BL:** Okay, yeah...

**DL:** You know, so I guess I said we had eight restaurants that first year and did it on a Wednesday night, in September. I—I was insistent upon that because September is like one of the slowest restaurant months of the—of the twelve months, and Wednesday night is a weeknight and restaurants would donate 20%, you know, of the food portion, so, to me it was an easy sell to restaurants. It's like, "It's a Wednesday night, what do you have to lose?" and people say, "Well 20%." I said, "I'd rather have 80% of something than 100% of nothing" [Both laugh] Right?

**BL:** That's a good way to sell it.

**DL:** Right. It's not rocket science, you know what I mean?

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** So, it—it grew from there and then the next year was easier. You start developing formulas, you know, of how it works and then with Lancaster AIDS Project, of course there was always ... every year seemed to be a different director of development, you know, and I firmly believe that in order for that to work as a fundraiser that it really needed to be community and volunteer driven, not organizational driven. So, my approach was always that we as a group are doing this to benefit the Lancaster AIDS Project. And yes, the Lancaster AIDS Project can offer some technical assistance, but it really was not, it could not—it should—could not *and* should not be staff-driven, because there would be no consistency from year to year and staff has other things to do—I just ... more effective. But I think one of the magic things that we did then was that we had the restaurant captains and it was individuals who would adopt a restaurant that night and their—basically their job was to ...

**BL:** Fill it.

**DL:** Fill it. And—and recruiting captains I, with other committee people I was like, "Well in—well-connected is much better than well-intentioned." You know what I mean? And of course some of the captains were a little difficult, but you—you have to stroke egos in order for that to work. So, we did it a couple years in Lancaster and then when Lancaster AIDS Project became AIDS Community Alliance ... Oh no, then SCAAN, in Harrisburg, was doing their fundraiser, which was the same type of an event.

**BL:** Yes, right, remember those.

**DL:** Then when AIDS Community Alliance was formed, which was basically folding in. I think the void that was left when SCAAN folded or dissolved—then it encompassed also the Harrisburg area. So, that was the next step and there were some paperwork left from the SCAAN event, I forget what it was called, no I know...

**BL:** Dining À La Carte or something like that.

**DL:** Correct.

**BL:** Yeah...

**DL:** Correct, correct. Because I remember it had to do with the name, Caring À La Carte.

**BL:** Yeah, Caring À La Carte.

**DL:** Yeah, so I remember that first—that year—that first year was combined because people knew it as two different events, it's like that whole thing of like okay, you know, the—"The Fourth Annual Dine Out" and then the byline "Caring À La Carte" you know what I mean type thing.

**BL:** Yeah, that's right, yeah.

**DL:** And so then it expanded then to Harrisburg. Then the group over in York were doing their Dine Out event on the same night. Same Wednesday, you know in September and it was like, I didn't view it as a competition thing so much as, we met with them.

**BL:** Piled on.

**DL:** We just needed to combine this, you know, where the money goes is—is the easy part, right, we should not be having different pieces of printed collateral, and promotion and I also felt as though it was easier to go to the media to get sponsorship because now it wasn't a Lancaster event, it wasn't a Harrisburg event, it wasn't a York event, it was a—a...

**BL:** Central PA, yeah.

**DL:** Right, so it's—it's an easier sell when you're going to WGAL or to—well WGAL, always was the sponsor, because they were always very supportive. Kim Lemon was always very supportive. So, yeah, that was Matthew's...

**BL:** What was the group in—in York's? Do you remember their name, because I don't recall what the AIDS group was there.

**DL:** It was sort of a consortium between Planned Parenthood.

**BL:** Okay, yeah.

**DL:** There was a name for it between Planned Parenthood, WellSpan, and there was a third organization...

**BL:** Might be the hospice, the York House Hospice?

**DL:** Yeah, a branch of that.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** And they sort of provided services as a—as a consortium.

**BL:** A consortium, okay.

**DL:** I think Planned Parenthood did educational part and WellSpan, of course, did direct service. I would have to look it up, what it was.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** But, it was—so we did it for 15 years.

**BL:** You want me to pause that?

**DL:** Yeah, if you could.

**BL:** Okay.

[Recording stop. Starts again]

**DL:** Hanging out with managing volunteers, you know, and as a volunteer myself, I know- I know that, well, I'm a—I—I know. I believe that there has to be an effective—you have to be very effective in managing volunteers. Managing volunteers by giving them a pile of paper and some envelopes and say, "Fold these and lick them" is probably the biggest waste of volunteer time and that will only last so long, you know.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** Yeah, not very effective, so, maybe my next thing I'll go into the non-profit world.

**BL:** Yeah [laughs]. You—you weren't involved with the switchboard down there in Lancaster, were you, at any point?

**DL:** No, we sort of ran a little switchboard, but this is back in the GUL days.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** Gays United of Lancaster days. I remember sitting on a Wednesday night answering the phone.

**BL:** Oh, so you did do some of that?

**DL:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, which, it hardly ever rang, basically it was "Where's the gay bars?"

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** You know, "I'm from out of town, where are the gay bars?"

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And of course that, as you know, with the Harrisburg's—well that whole thing is completely obsolete, now, with the internet and, you know ...

**BL:** Right. Served its purpose at the time but, yeah, definitely obsolete now.

**DL:** Right.

**BL:** And the, I know there was a men's dinner group in Lancaster too, like a...

**DL:** Yeah, men's potluck.

**BL:** Men's potluck.

**DL:** Yeah, I was not involved in that.

**BL:** Not involved in that, okay.

**DL:** I don't know who, though—I think probably that would've been, maybe Mark Stoner.

**BL:** I know Tony Iacona was involved with that heavily.

**DL:** Right, right, he was involved with that, yeah, yeah.

**BL:** Yeah, I've got to interview him sometime really soon.

**DL:** That was after Gays United Lancaster days.

**BL:** Okay, let's see, okay, maybe, I'm going to go to my more detailed list. And you already talked about how Gays United Lancaster created and that Bari Weaver was the founder [under breath] your memories of Bari. Did we say what year that was, it was '74?

**DL:** About '70—I'm going to say '75...

**BL:** Five, okay, we talked about...

**DL:** Late '74-'75.

**BL:** Okay. Do you why it disbanded?

**DL:** I don't know because I sort of backed out in the 80's- early 80's, and I think it just sort of drifted off. And then when Bari died, that, obviously, that was the end because he was the driving force, yeah.

**BL:** You don't remember what year that was though?

**DL:** No.

**BL:** Okay, sometime in the 80's, though?

**DL:** Yeah.

**BL:** Yeah, okay.

**DL:** Been pre—would've been pre '85 or '86, early 80's.

**BL:** Okay. Who else was involved in the newspaper? I think you mentioned Harry Long was the editor, right?

**DL:** Right, and then Bill Horne, from Lancaster. You should look him up.

**BL:** Oh, I don't know him either. Okay.

**DL:** His drag name was Tina Louise and he's still around, because I just saw him—his name in the paper the other day.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Some altercation—a couple months ago—about an altercation with the bus system. He was—lived—in the city but he worked out on Sentinel Road and it was in the summer and it was very hot. And the bus ... it was going to be like an hour or so for the bus—it ran from Lancaster to Columbia, Marietta and then back—and what I read in the paper was there was a thing where, for his bus, for back in Lancaster—into Lancaster, to get on, it was like going to be another hour and a half, because of the bus schedule. So, he got on the bus, because it was air-conditioned, to go in the other direction, and then he got to the end and then came back, and there was a big to-do with the fact that he didn't pay the double fare, or whatever. This was the front page of Lancaster newspaper.

**BL:** Oh god. [Laughs]

**DL:** And it was all said and done, they dropped whatever charges against him and community people offered to pay his fare and all that kind of stuff. So, that's the last time I saw him in the paper, but Bill Horne would be the person.

**BL:** Do you remember what his particular responsibilities was with the—with the newspaper, was it...

**DL:** He helped collate and stuff like that.

**BL:** Just, yeah.



**DL:** There was a fellow, Ray Stickles, and I forget originally where he was from before he came to Lancaster but—I think Northumberland also, that area—but he has since passed away. There was a fellow, Sam Wilson. He was involved with the paper and with Gays United Lancaster. He moved off to New York. He came back ... he has since died. He was a real good friend of mine. I still miss him a lot. So, jerk [both snort]. They were the primary people, you know, a lot of people came and went, you know. They'd be involved for a couple months and then drift off or come back.

**BL:** Drift off.

**DL:** But they were the primary. Like I said, we look at the masthead, and that would be the easy way to get—jog my memory of people. And then of course then there—we people, you know—the contributors, you know, from around this—they would send in their stuff from this individual organizations. But Harry was the—Harry and I were the primary.

**BL:** Do you remember about how much distribution your paper had or, I guess, points or its high point or whatever?

**DL:** One point, when we printed a couple hundred copies and then another point we—we'd be printing, the most was a thousand.

**BL:** That's pretty big.

**DL:** And they would go out to the, I mean, we were selling it for fifty cents, you know what I mean.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And it would go out to the organizations and maybe the money came back ...

**BL:** And maybe it didn't [laughs].

**DL:** You know what I mean [unintelligible muttering] One, the newsstand there in Harrisburg, Second Street News is where ... I think the building's still there ...

**BL:** City News or something.

**DL:** City News, yeah, they had it.

**BL:** Yeah, yep.

**DL:** And of course the dirty bookstores all had it, but again it was like all we got back were ripped off mastheads and your—and your \$4.50, you know what I mean.

**BL:** Yep.

**DL:** And the bars. Most of the bars would sell them, on an honor system.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Out the cigarette machine.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** With the rack and the little cup where you put your money in.

**BL:** Cup, yeah.

**DL:** Your fifty cents.

**BL:** Right, and, we talked a little about the difficulties in like getting it printed and stuff. Were there any other issues that you faced with harassment or discrimination or problems with the paper?

**DL:** No. It was mostly getting it printed and the distribution issues and the whole—and that it was a volunteer driven thing, you know what I mean.

**BL:** Yeah, yeah. So you talked just briefly about your experience with the Railroad House, you'd—you'd met your person, Marlon, that was going to become your partner for a while, and tell me about the experience with the Railroad House because that was certainly a landmark bar, I think in the area, that a lot of people remember for going down on Sunday nights particularly, so...

**DL:** Yeah, yeah, well I was in my 20's, so that was a different era. And also, you know, we lived in Marietta, I mean Marietta was a little town, 2,800 people. Four blocks wide, two miles long and it has its history, being a river town, but I thought what we were doing there was sort of a—I wouldn't it an experiment, but, like I said, we were also members of the community. I mean, Marlon and I, you know, we'd go- council meeting was Tuesday night, the first Tuesday of—night of the month. We went to every single council meeting, whether anything was happening or not because we were members of the community, and we had a business there. So, I think we became sort of the—we became the face of the gay community in Marietta.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** I mean, any business it's not that—it's not easy. You know you, you're there until two in the morning and you get people to leave and then it's three, four in the morning and you sleep until noon, you know, a completely different lifestyle. We were closed Mondays and Tuesdays, not a whole lot happening on Mondays and Tuesdays, you know what I mean? People don't have big parties Monday nights, you know. I was 35 before I went to my first New Year's Eve party, you know what I mean? Because I was always working.

**BL:** Working, yeah.

**DL:** So, you know, the Railroad House has since changed hands a couple times and every time it comes up for sale, everyone—you know, people say, “Oh, David why don’t you go do that over again?” and I was like, “No. A) I’m now 62, you know what I mean? I’m not in my 20’s.” And also the Trump driving laws are completely different, you know, than what they were then. You know what I mean? So, everyone basically had to drive, a half an hour.

**BL:** Yes, right.

**DL:** And we tried to market the Railroad House that way, that we were basically in the middle, you know, the half-hour. Half-hour from Harrisburg, York, and Lancaster, sort of the center of that—center of that triangle, and that worked. I mean, it made—it made it work and, of course, Sunday night was our big night.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And, we struggled with the bar. I mean, we had the restaurant there, but the bar was a real struggle with the beginning and that—it just happened. One Memorial Day weekend and it just caught us off-guard. We were packed, I mean, you know when someone’s ordering a—I can’t even name the drink, but whatever it was they’re handing you a glass with a lime in the bottom of it, and that drink did not have a lime. They were just picking up a glass because we were out of glasses, you know what I mean type thing?

**BL:** Out of glasses, yeah.

**DL:** So, just completely overwhelmed. But that was a good problem to solve. And then, with solving that problem and then we had the patio—open patio and oh yeah, it was a big thing.

**BL:** Describe the bar a bit so that we have some record of that. I remember it being down in the basement.

**DL:** Down in the basement, in the lower level. And the—and then the restaurant was on the first floor, and then there was hotel rooms and stuff.

**BL:** Right, right.

**DL:** So, the building was built about 1820, and it had a very color—colorful history. To start with, originally it was built for the river traffic and then the canal came through, which is where the railroad tracks are now. And then when the railroad came through, the front part of the building served as the first station/waiting room until the station was built across the street and its history sort of reflects what was happening in Marietta. You know, Marietta was a big industrial town, it was a river town. Like I said, two miles long, four blocks wide: it was lumber, it was coal, it was iron ore, foundries, lots of bars, you know, everything that goes along with a river town and then it went—the town went through its economic downturn, you know. I—like I said, I grew up in Columbia, three miles away and I had not even stepped foot in Marietta until I

was 19. There was no reason to go to Marietta. In the 1960's, I'd say Marietta could have been considered one of the worst slums of Lancaster County...had no dial telephone, an inadequate sewage system, there were still railroad tracks, on Front street—in the street. And the Railroad House, itself, the building itself was abandoned, I think in the late 40's, early 50's, inside empty. My understanding talking to the townspeople, it was one of the last buildings to be abandoned on Front Street because people moved in. They moved out of their houses and moved there, it was like the last refuge.

**BL:** Oh.

**DL:** So, I think it was in 1965... I think 1965, is when the whole block went up for share-sale and it sold for \$30,000, the whole block. And then a guy, Armer McCain, bought the Railroad House. He only had it for a year, because there were some witch issues, with the witch who lived next door, Annabelle, who is mentioned in that book, *The Hex Murders in York*. And then two guys, John Devitry and Frank Westenhoefer, bought it, and they opened it. And John Devitry was a—an architect in Lancaster—you probably heard the Devitry name around, there was lots of them—and Frank Westenhoefer. And they opened it as, sort of this rock and roll, psychedelic, discotheque place, and this ... I had never been there because I wasn't old enough to go there, so it'd been like the late 60's-early 70's. They had bands there, there was no alcohol, lots of drugs, you know. The building still didn't have running water, except for that one section that was added on, where the bathrooms were, that was the only running water in the place. I have pictures of—Jane Fonda was there, speaking against the war. She was supposed to speak in—at Long's Park in Lancaster, but it got cancelled last minute and, I guess they took her up there.

**BL:** Wow.

**DL:** Somehow, it sucks that that history—anyhow, then John Devitry sold his half to Frank Westenhoefer, like six months before Hurricane Agnes. And there was six feet of water on the first floor, the front part of the building. The floors had collapsed. So, Frank had it by himself and he just couldn't. He got it reopened but just could not make it work again, you know, when you're out of commission like that.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And then that's when Marlon had bought it.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** And he just loved the building. It was all about the building. And then the business came about later, as a way of how to get this building to pay for itself. So, I'm going to backtrack. Frank Westenhoefer, at one of the events, Suzanne Westenhoefer, the comedian-

**BL:** Oh, yeah, yep, yes.

**DL:** And I know she's from Columbia because she went to school with my sister. I said to her, I said, "Suzanne," and I was—introduced myself to her and she goes, "oh, you guys at Railroad

House, you know what I mean ... yada yada ... I use you in one of my stand-up routines: how the hippies—the hippies moved out and the queers moved in.” And I said, “So what really,”—and I said, “Frank Westenhoefer,” I said, “What relationship with him?” and she goes “Oh, that’s my dad.” [laughing] Because it’s Central Pennsylvania, there is no six degrees of separation, there’s only three, you know.

**BL:** Yeah, yeah.

**DL:** When you go and connect the dots and Kevin Bacon’s in there somewhere.

**BL:** Yep. [Laughing]

**DL:** So, that’s where I was going with the—with the Westenhoefer thing, yeah.

**BL:** That’s interesting yeah.

**DL:** So, oh. So, yeah, so, we opened The Railroad House—The Railroad House opens in September, 1976, but the bar part of it didn’t really happen until probably ’79 or ’80. First, we had like a coffee house, folk music downstairs. That did not work, you know what I mean, it was just—it wasn’t working.

**BL:** And I remember the, the dancefloor was metal, right?

**DL:** Yeah, yeah.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And, we got that idea because, years ago, down in Atlantic City, there was a bar called The Chester, on York Avenue, which was the big gay—and they had a stainless steel dancefloor. So, that’s where we got—the first dancefloor was wood painted red, but being down in the lower level against the basement, it proceeded to warp promptly. So, I took that up and then put down a concrete pad and then put down the sheets of stainless steel, put up the lights, but, it was, you—you were there, right?

**BL:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**DL:** Yeah, and it was hot in the summertime-

**BL:** Yes.

**DL:** Because their air-conditioning was so inadequate.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** And then, you know, you’re on the underbelly of the building, so, all the pipes are sweating and dripping and everyone complained how hot it was and how crowded it was, but all that did was encourage the young guys to take their shirts off, which only encouraged people to complain

how hot it was, but they wouldn't leave, you know what I mean, because it's like the people would like bitch me out and I'd be like, you know, "Well then leave," you know, they're like, "No," and I'd be like, "Of course you're not leaving," you know what I mean?

**BL:** No [sarcastically].

**DL:** Oh well, yeah, that was a fun period.

**BL:** So, that was a fun bar.

**DL:** It was a fun period, and, you mark it down and say that was then, you know, that's part of the history.

**BL:** What do you, besides the Tally Ho and obviously the Railroad House, what do you remember about sort of the evolution of the bar scene in Lancaster, did you go ...

**DL:** Well, there was a place that had opened called The Fiddler. It was down at the Stephen's House. Course that was a big ... that went in contention with some of the old Tally Ho fans—with this new ... There was going to be this competition. For they were a block away from each other. And, of course people went back and forth between the two and, it, to me, never, even as a twenty year-old. Because I couldn't—I still wasn't of age yet when Fiddler was there, because I think I got carded, like a month before I turned 21. It—it, to me it didn't make sense why anyone would view it as competition, you know—maybe I was just a little too smart for my age. To me it became—it was all the more reason to go out.

**BL:** Yeah, you have two places to go now.

**DL:** Right, I mean ...

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** You don't open a shoe store in the middle of nowhere because there's no shoe stores. You open a shoe store where all the other shoe stores are, because people are buying shoes.

**BL:** Yes.

**DL:** You know, the car dealers know that.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Shoe stores know that, you know what I mean? Why can't gay bars, that just—work the same way, in Harrisburg, you know?

**BL:** They're all together.

**DL:** Yeah, that—that's what makes it work, you know what I mean, versus being miles away from each other.

**BL:** Right.

**DL:** Yeah, so The Fiddler was a little different, you know what I mean? They always had drag shows and the old Stephen's House, yeah. I forget that what that guy's name was, Bud or something like that. Huh, of course you know the Tally Ho's still there, but, you know, dynamics change too because it's now 2017. So, I think a lot of the bars now downtown, I don't want to use the word mixed, but it's not that big of a deal anymore.

**BL:** Right, more people go like wherever they want to go with their friends and...

**DL:** Yeah, I mean you go to the Belvedere Bar and it's a mixed, it's not a gay bar, but it's definitely not a redneck stop.

**BL:** Right, gay people go.

**DL:** Yep, gay people go there or ...

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** Characters or any of those type of places, you know. So, it's a different—different times, different environment.

**BL:** And it was—there was an earlier bar. I think also called the Village Tavern or the ... What was it?

**DL:** That was way before my time, but I heard people talking about it, The Village.

**BL:** Okay, The Village, yeah.

**DL:** The Old Village-

**BL:** And it was like a basement bar below a straight bar, or something.

**DL:** Yes, and where it was—is ... I forget what the name of the hotel is now, but it's the Brunswick Hotel—I forgot what they call it now. The Lancaster Hotel was the Old Brunswick, the old building and it was down there, but, that was before me.

**BL:** Before you.

**DL:** That would've been probably, 50's-60 and it was called The Village or something or another. Now there's the Village across the street, which is the big nightclub, bands and dancing, but the—yeah, so...

**BL:** Okay, that was before your time.

**DL:** Before my time, no fun. Talk to someone who's in their 80's probably.

**BL:** Yeah, let's see. Talked about those things I think already. Yeah, I think we talked about ... Did we cover all that? Were there important events or turning points in your life that we may have not covered or that you want to emphasize, you know, were important to you? Well, we didn't talk at all about how your relationship with Ben ... either so.

**DL:** With Ben, I was just going to say that.

**BL:** Yeah, when did you meet Ben and...

**DL:** Well, we had once met at the Railroad House. He came in through a mutual friend. That's the first time I actually met him. But, then—wait, well, we officially refer to meeting in Allentown. We had ... he was living there. He, at the time, worked for Rodale Press, you know, the organic gardening, retail sales... And this friend, Ken, had said, "Oh, when you go ..." — when we were opening an Isaac's in Allentown. So, I was going up there, to open it, and he goes, "Oh, when you go to Allentown, look up my friend Benny." And I was single at the time, and I was not interested in meeting anyone from Allentown, because I just viewed it as a work thing. So, I didn't look him up, but Ben looked me up, because he knew, I was, you know, from the Railroad House. So, that, living in a glass house, type thing. So, I remember he came in for lunch one day, and I was like "Eh, okay," and I can tell you exactly what he ordered and then, I offered him dessert, I said, "Let me buy you dessert." He said, "No, no, no, I don't want dessert" and I was like, "Ay, well, he's a creep," you know what I mean, I'm offering to buy him dessert, he doesn't want dessert.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** You know what I mean? That type thing. So, then, he called me a couple times, to go out on a date and I kept making up excuses. So, finally I thought, "I need to"—I refer to it as, he was stalking me, he refers to it as he was persistent. So, anyhow, I agreed to go out with him because I figured if I don't, then I'm never going to get rid of this guy. So, our first date we went over to Bethlehem, to Music Fest, which was the big thing there. We ate turkey drumsticks, concert by Buffy Sainte-Marie. Then, we went down to the ... you know, all the venues are called plotzes, they're German for "place."

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** So, the one was called October Plotz, that was the big polka band and beer tent, I called it Clunkenplotz. But it was about ten—must've held 4,000-3,000 people. So, we run in there, got our pitcher of beer, the polka band's playing, we're sitting on our folding chairs, and it was August and this storm comes and you can just feel, because the whole tent is moving, oh, up and down, the winds blowing and the polka band's playing and down comes the rain, it was a slight incline towards the creeks so all the water is just like flowing through the tent and we have our



feet up on the rungs on the folding chair and paper cups are all flowing—everything’s just flowing and the polka band’s just going on and on and on and then, in front of us were like these young college guys, with their pitcher of beer, and then, the band starts playing “The Chicken Dance.” These college guys, everyone hops up and everyone’s on this—on the dance thing, dancing. Ben and I looked at the—to the college guys and Ben and I are like, “Okay!” So, that was our first dance, we did “The Chicken Dance” at Music Fest, so—so anyhow so that was that. And then, you know, I was still living in Marietta and then, Ben was talking about going to law school. So, I thought, “Oh, okay, maybe he’s not a loser,” you know, I’m just kidding ...

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** ...when I say that. So, we talked about what it’d be like and I went with him down to Temple, to look there, but I didn’t want to go to Pitts—Philadelphia, because I still had a job, and so then we went to Dickinson, looked at Dickinson. So, we agreed we would live somewhere halfway between Lancaster and Carlisle. We ended up in Mechanicsburg even though I kept reminding him that Middletown [Pennsylvania] is called Middletown for a reason, because it was halfway between Lancaster and Carlisle, you know what I mean, so, we ended out there, for ten years. So, from that first date, within a year we had bought a house. He started school; he went to school three years full-time. I never saw someone study so hard, worked so hard for school. Being an older student, you know, so, that was it. And then he got the job in Harrisburg and he wasn’t quite sure whether he liked it or not and then, when he became partner at the law firm, I was like “Now we’re moving.” You know, because there’s no work where we were going to go. So, now we’ve been in Elizabethtown now for almost 20 years. We’re there because it’s the halfway point between Lancaster and Harrisburg.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** So—but, Ben was a—we’re ... one of the best things that ever happened to me. He keeps me grounded. I’m not as impatient and not as hot-headed as I used to be, you know, so ... I do—I appreciate that about him, and I’m sure I have—have some things to offer him too.

**BL:** Yeah, I’m sure. [Laughing]

**DL:** I joke about it, but that first house we bought, it needed to be painted and I was thinking about painting it and I go out and he said, “Are you sure? Are you sure?” You know, yada, yada ... I said, yeah, I said: “I—I painted, you know what I mean: The Railroad House! You know what I mean, huh? I painted everyday—every, you know, always painting something.”

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** And he goes, “Oh, I have to admit to you,” you know, he goes, “I have never had a paintbrush in my hand, in my entire life.” And I looked at him, I was like, “Really?” You know what I mean, “Shouldn’t we have discussed this a long time ago?” You know what I mean? But

he did that summer. His first summer off of school, he scraped and sanded and scraped and sanded, because I kept saying, “The paint job is only as good as the prep.” And I tease him, I said “Now, you’re an apprentice, you have to scrape and sand for three years before you’re allowed to paint.” [Both laughing]

But, it was interesting too, you know, because that was—that was—because then most of our friends, we, as a couple, were in the Harrisburg area. And then moving back to Elizabethtown, we—we thought that “now we can ...”—it would be a good opportunity to reconnect with our Lancaster friends. Because he’s originally from Lancaster county also. But, we found ourselves, after about a year, really struggling because we realized we needed to make an effort. Because now we were now a half an hour away, yeah, to not only reconnect with Lancaster friends but to maintain our Harrisburg friends. I was going to say the advantage of being in—in Elizabethtown is “we’re half an hour away from everything.” And the disadvantage is “we’re a half an hour away ...” you know what I mean? So, it wasn’t as easy as, say, “hey, do you, you know ...” —call and say, “Hey, do you want to stop by, you know, when you’re done with work?” You know what I mean? It was...

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** This is now a major commitment for someone to come to our house, you know what I mean? So ... But, it all worked out, you know, and we found the house in Elizabethtown, which we really like ... yeah. Lots of stories, everything has a story. Ben wasn’t real thrilled about going to Elizabethtown because, at the time, it was right after that whole thing with the school board.

**BL:** Oh, right.

**DL:** When the fundamentalists took over and passed the resolution defining a family as one man and one woman who are married, because they were trying to control the curriculum, and then—and I’m from Western Lancaster county. So, I know how easily that happens because everyone was taking a nap and then when they woke up and realized what had just happened, everyone got—they all got voted out the next year. But I remember standing in the front yard and Ben was saying, “Are you sure? Are you sure? Are you sure?” I said, “Well, look, first off, look at the neighborhood Ben. It’s a dead-end street.” You know what I mean, and I said “And look,” you know, “at the houses around us.” I said, “I don’t think any of these people care whether we’re gay or not. They only care that we keep the grass mowed.” You know? And then, so, we bought it, and then, between the offer being accepted and actually having settlement, we went to the house to take some pictures and stuff. And the woman we bought the house from was there and we were talking to her downstairs, the lower level. And there was some stenciling on the wall, because I was just like, “I’m getting rid of that because that looks like these pots of poppies, which I had seen.” It was like, “that is someone’s bicentennial stenciling—neo-colonial stenciling and I’m getting rid of that.” And so, it came up that I was from Marietta and she said,

“Oh, well the guy who did that stenciling was from Marietta,” and Ben and I just looked at each other and I knew exactly where it was going ... And I walked over, and I looked—and the signature was Kenneth Fortney 1976—and that’s the guy who introduced us to each other!

**BL:** Aww-

**DL:** The one who said, “When you go to Allentown, look up my friend.” So, for Ben, that—it was all ... That was a sign that this was meant to be so—and I was like, “Oh, now I can’t get rid of it.” I got rid of two other repeats but I kept the one repeat that has his initial on it ... So, now I’m really babbling.

**BL:** No, that’s a—that’s a neat story.

**DL:** Okay, what time—are we running—where are we on time? I didn’t bring my watch, look over here, okay, oh, and, 10:34.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** You said 11 right?

**BL:** Yeah, any other special turning points or events in your life that were significant that you want to highlight?

**DL:** No. I said, early childhood, that I pretty much I consider normal, you know what I mean? That period, you know, and, parents, they had an apartment. I remember they bought the first house when I was seven years old. That was like moving into a mansion. Even though I go back to—my brother lives there now and go in there now, it’s like, it’s just a little row-house, but as a 7 years old, it was a mansion and I remember when my parents bought their first car. We didn’t have a car, you know, you walked or borrowed one of my grandparents’ cars, you know what I mean, type of thing.

**BL:** Yeah.

**DL:** That was a different era, you know, one every corner grocery store or something. You just walked, so. I’m oldest of five. Us three older ones are all a year apart and then there was a ten year gap. So I have two younger brothers and I still have contact. I mean, I have contact with them because they’re my brothers, but I didn’t really grow up with them, you know, Doug was born when I was in eighth grade and Cory was born when I was in tenth grade. So, when they were little, I was already out of the house, you know what I mean, type thing. So, I don’t have that same type of relationship, us—us—us older three, we’re like the Three Musketeers, always together. My sister always joked that my brother and I always dragged her along because if we got in trouble she was involved. She was an accomplice. She couldn’t tell. And I was like “Yeah, yep, that’s exactly why we dragged you along with us.” Spent a lot of time on the river, fishing and stuff like that.

**BL:** Anything else you can think of that we missed?

**DL:** No.

**BL:** Okay.

**DL:** That was fun.

**BL:** Yeah. It was a great interview.