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Title: LGBT Oral History: Mary Nancarrow

Date: February 24, 2015

Location: LGBT Oral History – Nancarrow, Mary – 084B

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Interviewee: Mary Nancarrow

Interviewer: Lonna Malmsheimer

Date of Interview: February 24, 2015

Location of Interview: Home of Lonna Malmsheimer

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Abstract:

Mary Nancarrow grew up in a suburb of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in the 1950s and 1960s with divorced parents and two siblings. After graduating from Shippensburg University, she became prominent in the women's movement and the LGBT movement in Central Pennsylvania, serving on the Governor's Council for Sexual Minorities and the Rural Gay Caucus. Mary was also heavily involved in the National Organization for Women [NOW] and was elected NOW Pennsylvania President, working to pass marital rape legislation, funding and campaigning for political races, and fundraising money for the NOW PAC. After her presidency, she helped to plan the National March for LGBT Rights in Washington D.C. and volunteered for the Harrisburg Gay and Lesbian Switchboard. Today, Mary lives in Harrisburg and sings in the Women's Chorus. In this interview, Mary discusses her childhood and early relationship to religion as well as her involvement with the anti-Vietnam War movement throughout high school and college. She also describes her contributions to Shippensburg Gays United, feminism within the gay rights movement, and the experience of coming out to her parents and friends. Mary concludes the interview by acknowledging the incredible extent to which the LGBT community has changed over her lifetime and expresses her hope to see ongoing growth in civil rights in the future.

LM: Okay, Mary. Why do you—this is—my name is Lonna Malmsheimer, and we are here on the 24th of March at my home and repeating an interview which is the second interview that Mary Nancarrow is giving to the project. I'm not going to explain the project to her, because she's been trained for the project and knows perfectly well what it's about. So, Mary, why don't you tell us a little about your family of origin, and especially the things about that that you did not do on the first one that you'd like to talk about.

MN: Okay. Sure, well, I grew up in a little suburb of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and my mom and dad divorced when I was about six. I had a brother, a twin brother, and a sister, who was about four and a half years older than I. And this was in the 50s and early 60s, and I saw my dad every week, even though they were divorced, but my mother was the custodial parent as we would say today, and I went to schools in Central Dauphin East High School and Junior High School. And I guess it was during my junior high school years that I was first starting to question the way things were. And question authority and religion and was starting to think for myself. So, my sister had gone into nursing school and graduated and then entered the Air Force. After working at the—the [Harrisburg] Polyclinic Hospital for a short time, and she soon went to Vietnam, so when I was in high school—still finishing up high school—she was in Vietnam, and when my—after—in my first year of college, my brother also was drafted, and instead of going into the army, he enlisted into the Air Force, and he went to Vietnam my second year of college. But

before that, I had started to question the war and—and also was very moved by the Civil Rights movement that was going on in the early 60s, so as early as I guess the ninth grade, I refused to stand and pledge allegiance to the flag. I don't think my parents ever knew that. But it was something that—where I really stood out in suburban junior high school and high school [laughs]. I just could not say honestly that there was liberty and justice for all—certainly not what I was seeing during the Civil Rights Movement. And I also was—although I was confirmed in the Catholic faith—was very shortly thereafter that I left the Catholic church, because I just couldn't square its beliefs with what I saw in the world and how it was treating people. I couldn't square the fact that there were moral sins and—for not going to Sunday mass, but that the church was not in the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement or the anti-war movement at that time, and it certainly—and not treated women well, as far as I could see in my childhood eyes. And, for example, you know, my mother had a stillborn child, and the church would not allow the baby to be buried in hallowed ground in the Catholic cemetery, because it had not yet been baptized, and so this was very painful for my mother and for our family. I saw historically the Inquisition and—and the Crusades, which I had—even if we were to apply modern values—I mean, if we didn't apply modern values, it was god awful for the Church. So, I was worried about the impact of churches and religion on society, and it didn't look too good [laughs] to me. So, I was questioning where—where do I belong? I ended up in the Lutheran church during my high school years. Became active and was a president of the Luther League for the Central Pennsylvania Synod and—where we led retreats and also were involved in social activities and bringing our congregations a little bit further to concerns that we young people had. But when I got to college—well, in high school and in college—I was reading everything I could about why we were in Vietnam and... the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was just bogus, I thought, from what I had read, and we shouldn't have been there. I was very worried about my sister and my brother, and I wanted them to come back in one piece. I couldn't abide all the death that was happening to young—thousands of guys in the war and the people of Vietnam. It troubled me so much that it affected my grades. It affected my ability to even concentrate on work there. I—I went to demonstrations in Washington and Harrisburg and other places to protest the war, and I even took conscientious objector counseling training at the Friends Meeting House—the Quakers in Harrisburg—which I didn't actually have to use, but I was also very affected by my friends who were trying to do everything they could not to be drafted. And you know, they were—even if they had—I mean, they had to take all their courses and—and—and so forth, but the war was dragging on, and people were still concerned that even with a college deferment, they might end up having to get drafted after graduating or... or somehow be involved in the war. So, one of the guys that I knew, he would be—he would run constantly, he would not eat much, and so that he would be skin and bones, so that when he would get called up—called in to get weighed, he would always be underweight. Okay? Another guy was—took hairbrushes to his arms and legs and back to—constantly—so that he would be—all his skin would be totally red and bleeding so that he could say he had this skin disease [laughs] so they wouldn't take him. So, it was very troubling when the bombing started in Cambodia, Laos, and of course North Vietnam where large numbers of civilians were being killed, and I remember we had vigils at Shippensburg [Pennsylvania], where I was going to school at the time. When we went to Marches on Washington against the War, we were tear gassed. We were at the Washington Monument after the March, just sitting down with thousands of other people from all walks of life and ages, and the National Park Service Police—mounted police—were gathering all around the base of the Washington Monument where we were just eating, drinking our water and so forth. And without

even saying, “You need to disperse,” they ran with their horse—on horseback—towards us to disperse the crowd, running into us, thousands of people. And of course, we ran. When you see a huge animal coming at you, you run and of course, they also did the tear gas. So we were running through the streets of Washington, trying to escape the tear gas. Even before the march—of course college students don’t have a dime to rub against each other, so we came down to American University to get the lay of the land as it were and to be trained for the march, and we ended up sleeping on the chapel floor of American University—AU. But the D.C. police were walking past us all night long, their squeaky leather boots is a sound I won’t forget. Past my ear. We were sleeping on the floor of the chapel, what were we going to do? [laughs] You know? What mayhem are we going to create that we needed police—

LM: They were inside?

MN: Oh yes, they were inside, you know, patrolling us as we slept on the floor of the chapel there. So anyway... the anti-war movement did certainly affect me—

LM: Can you tell me about when this was?

MN: This was in the early ‘70s. Early ‘70s. 69, 70, 71. So, anyway, I was also coming to—to consider who I was in the world and who I was as a person. And during the early 70s was when I was coming out to myself. I was in counseling, because I was having trouble in school, and I was just a troubled young person, [laughs] so I was in counseling. And I remember, the counselor had said to me when it came time to talk about being with my boyfriend or how I really felt about relationships and so forth, and I had disclosed that I was feeling drawn and attracted to women, and he said, “Well, I think that’s nothing more than mutual masturbation.” I was so struck by that, that he had no clue as to what loving meant or who one was—identity. He only saw things in sexual terms, not even intimacy—that I... I thought, “Hey, maybe I’m sick or something like that.” I soon rejected that whole proposition of being—

LM: He wasn’t much help, in other words.

MN: No, he was of no help. And as I was sorting through these feelings, and I just decided that I wasn’t sick. There wasn’t anything wrong with me, okay. So, come what may, I would have to deal with myself and be who I was, eventually. So, I got unengaged to the guy—to the very, very fine young man that I was engaged to and... came out to myself and... met my first lover and eventually came out to my family. On the day of the press conference in Harrisburg for—that—that Pennsylvania NOW [National Organization for Women] and other groups just forming—had called to call for non-discrimination against lesbians and gays. And it was conducted by a high school student, Rachel McLaughlin—I won’t forget her name—from Mechanicsburg. And I—who was a NOW member. And I thought, “Well, you know, if she can do it, I can do it,” you know. I was already 21 or 23 at the time—23. So, heck, I called my—I went to visit my mom and my father individually, separately, and said, “Well, Mom, I’m going to be on the news, and that’s why I have to—I’m telling you,” I said, “that I’m a lesbian.” Well, she freaked out. She was upset and angry. My father just cried, and he was—and I found out later that it’s just that they didn’t have any idea. They were worried about me, first of all. And they didn’t think I could be happy. And... it just didn’t fit their vision or their dreams for me that I came to realize all

parents have for their children. And we—over the next few years—reconciled all of that, and they became very supportive of me.

LM: Can we pause for one minute? You may want to get your paper. I'm going to come back a bit, because I can see better what's happening this way. And whenever I'm – uh uh uh. I am not seeing anything well. Okay. Okay, Mary. Now, you have to come out to your parents.

MN: Mhm, okay.

LM: Where do we go from there?

MN: Well, I became active in Shippensburg Gays United, which was just getting together. And—and my girlfriend's—wasn't the name I used at the time—girlfriend was a term that came into use about fifteen years ago, I think [laughs], but anyway a friend of my lovers was the president of Shippensburg Gays United, and her name was Lynn—and—Lynn Kesselring, and I remember that she and her high school sweetheart had been together, and—and they were going to school at Shippensburg, and—then her parents found out that they were still together after having been together in high school. So, they had Lynn abducted—abducted—forcibly taken to Philhaven which was a private mental illness facility in Dauphin County—Lebanon County, near Mount Gretna and said, “You must change our daughter.” To Philhaven's credit—and this was in '73, '72—said “We don't—we can't change your daughter.” Okay? So it was in that kind of environment that it was seen that if you really tried, you could change, or parents often thought this was a phase you were going through, or you were sick, even after the APA [American Psychological Association] came out with saying, “No, this is not a mental illness.” And we were also dealing at that time in the early 70s with the first of the ex-gay movement. Exodus was just coming into play and some of my friends, they said, “Oh well, you know, we don't have to go through all this turmoil and you know, what are we going to face when we're out, trying to get a job and so forth.” And... some of them also became born-again and were never heard from again, or they joined Exodus. I guess there were two people that I know of out of all the friends that I had. So, it's just to say that it wasn't easy to be in college even then to be out—and nobody was out, okay? This was not something that you ever told anybody who was not a very dear, close friend. And my dear friend Steve came out to me—one of the first people that he came out to—we were—we had gone up to the roof of our crappy student housing—three story building row home in Shippensburg, and we're looking out onto the mountains beyond and the traffic below and—going through Shippensburg—and he was—we were—had our feet over dangling over the edge, and he said, “I really have to—I really want to tell you something,” and he was shaking like a leaf, and he said “I'm gay.” And that was before anybody had gathered together or he knew about me or anything. And it took a lot of courage to even tell your closest friends that you were gay. We became lifelong friends, of course. Shippensburg—

LM: How did you respond to that?

MN: Well, I just said—well, I don't know if I said I am too. I just said—I probably did. But I said, you know, “I love you, you're a great guy, you're a wonderful person, and I'm so proud to be a friend of yours, you know... you don't ever have to hide.” But that's what we had to deal with in hiding on the job, on—with our friends—our straight friends until we felt them out, and

sometimes this took years, okay? [laughs] So—and in our families. Everybody has a different story. And throughout my life I’ve been in the closet, out of the closet, back in under these circumstances, and out again publicly.

LM: So did your parents just accept things, and then go along?

MN: No, they had a hard time—they had a hard time with Char, getting to know her or accepting her as my partner. And so, we went to—I got them to go to PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays]—and I talked about this in my first interview, where I had talked with the pastor, the advisor to Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, PFLAG—locally—and to the president, Jackie Schulz, and I said, “Well, I’d like to kind of invite them.” And, so, we—I found out where they were going to be meeting and what they did at their meetings, so I called my mom up, and I said, “Well, you know, I’d like to—for you to be able to talk with other parents, you know, not me so much as people your own age and someone with your own questions and concerns, so PFLAG is meeting at here and there, and I’ll go with you.” And she said, “Well, is your father coming?” and I said, “Sure,” so I called my dad up, and I said, “I’d like for you to come to PFLAG.” “Is your mother going?” “Yes, of course.” [laughs] So—so, we went, and so after about 15 minutes of the meeting where they got to meet other parents and before the main part of the meeting which is for parents to talk about their kids and what questions or worries they have. I said, “I think I’ll—why don’t we—I’ll come by. I’ll pick you up, and we’ll go get a piece of pie at the restaurant down the street.” And so that started their going to PFLAG for quite a while—for about a year for my dad, and my mother became the secretary. She would go on speaking engagements with Jackie from time to time. The very first time that she spoke on television—though she wouldn’t allow them to show her face. The camera just showed her hands as she was speaking. As a parent—I realized that parents come out, too. Not only do they have to look at different dreams for their children and be assured of their happiness and that things are going to be okay, but they also have to deal with—“Well, do I tell Aunt Harriet, or do I tell Grandmother?” you know? “Am I in the closet too?” you know? Or “Do I allow my child to take the lead in—in talking about this with anyone?” So, parents come out, too.

LM: Yeah, they do.

MN: But Shippensburg Gays United was about providing support to other gays on campus—lesbians and gays on campus—and we also, Char (?) and I—we talked to Fred Hockersmith’s sexuality class, which was bizarre... but you know, they found it helpful. But the thing is—it was—what we tried to do is to say, “This is who we are not just who we make love with,” okay? “Or who we happen to—I mean, it is—it is about love, not just sexuality.” And we also did radio shows—talk shows—out in the countryside there were a few talk shows—I remember Fred Williams in York County—Southern York County. He said, “Well, yeah, come on over, and we’ll have this discussion on the air, and we’ll be open to the public to respond.” So, this was one of—some of the few first ways that lesbians and gays became visible, especially in rural areas.

LM: Mhm.

MN: So we got some very strange questions and some—some hate but not much. We found a lot of people who didn't have any idea of what being lesbian and gay was like.

LM: What kind of strange questions?

MN: Well, I wish I could remember [laughs].

LM: Well, you don't have to remember.

MN: Well, and mainly we were talking about the fact that, yeah, we can be fired without any legal recourse or not hired or thrown out of our apartments as I was—and Char and I were, because of our relationship, and there wasn't a darn thing we could do about it and this was wrong. We were trying to lay the groundwork for—for changing that. So, Shippensburg Gays United went on for a while after we graduated, but then there—I think there was a hiatus for many years after that. But Shippensburg Gays United was one of the groups that became part of the Rural Gay Caucus, and the Rural Gay Caucus came together from people all over the state—except for Philadelphia and Pittsburgh—who were trying to get additional representation on the Governor's Council for Sexual Minorities, which Governor Milton Shapp had created as a way to see what his administration could do for lesbian and gay people. He'd already given an executive order saying that state employees shall not be discriminated against on the job because of their sexual preference at that time—or orientation. And he created a Council for other—all the state agencies to attend—representatives of the state agencies plus community people to come to once a month to discuss these issues and solve problems. Only two people were community leaders from rural areas. There were like nine from Philly and seven from Pittsburgh, so the rural gay folk clamored for more—actually won that. And, so we became six. Sam Deetz was appointed from Northumberland, Pennsylvania. He found the—that within six months that he could not serve, so I was appointed by the Governor to take on one of those seats, and that was from like '75 on through, I believe, '85 that the Council was across administrations, across the—not only the second Shapp administration but the Thornburgh administrations.

LM: What sort of thing did they do?

MN: Well, the governor's council became the Pennsylvania Council for Sexual Minorities. It was chaired by Tony Silvestri who was a professor at Penn State in '75. As I said, delegates from—or designees by the secretaries of all these state agencies came to hear what was going on. For example, the Pennsylvania State Police were in charge of vast expanses of Pennsylvania, providing protection to lesbians and gays out there in the countryside who were being harassed or... vandalized and so forth. The Department of Education was just, because of our efforts, were starting to think about how to provide a safe environment at school, which is where a lot of bullying was happening even then and beyond. Young people were committing suicide, and that's one of the reasons why I got involved and what the Rural Gay Caucus was first dealing with. All these groups were coming together on days that the task force or the Governor's Council—what became the Governor's Council. So after we got more rural representation, we said, "We gotta join forces at home," and deal with some of these issues and problems that are happening, people are getting into trouble out there, so they—Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton, Lehigh—that was Le Hi Ho—Reading, Burke's County, Susquehanna Valley Gays United,

Northumberland, Sunbury, Selinsburg, Williams—Selinsgrove, Williamsport, Shippensburg, Lancaster, York, Harrisburg, and Penn State... and Points West—individuals and groups—representatives would gather every month. It was in existence from like '75 through '82 and early '83, and the Rural Gay Caucus first was trying to—had—we'd gotten a call from a young man or had found out about a young man in Lewistown, a high school student, who was feeling so horrible about himself. Before we could even respond—or get back to him—get in touch with him, he had killed himself. So, we were saying, “We can't ever have this happen again.” And of course, it has. But it haunted us, you know, that someone would feel so terrible about themselves for being gay that they would take their lives and cut everything off and not have a future to find themselves. So, we were determined to stop suicide but also to stop people from being harassed and also to prevent discrimination. Part of that was our first Gay Lobby Day in '75, where—

LM: Now, this is the Gay—the Rural Gay Caucus or the Governor's—?

MN: The Pennsylvania—this is the Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus. So, getting back to the Governor's Council, though—DPW [Department of Public Welfare]'s representative, we would be talking to them, “Well, so and so was denied benefits, you know, what you can do about that?” Department of Health—there were—you know, you couldn't tell your doctor that you were a lesbian or gay, and yet, that fact has vast ramifications for your health. And the Department of Health had clinics and so forth when HIV came on the scene in '81 and '82—the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Governor's Council really teamed up to try to get services and clinic and testing and treatment—what little there was—for people who were testing positive. And so that was the—just dealing with HIV/AIDS—was what the Council was taking care of predominantly for the last four years of its existence. Anyway... and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission was also on the Council.

LM: Now, what was your relationship to that?

MN: Well, I had known a number of people who worked at the Commission—the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission was the anti-discrimination agency for the Commonwealth. And I'd known people in my work with lesbian and gay rights—we had also touched base with them—they were also NOW members. They were active in the women's movement. So... when they were on the Council, I got to know them more. The... executive director—Homer C. Floyd was pro-women's rights and pro—every kind of rights, disability, age, women as well as race—they were looking at expanding the breadth of the Human Relations Act against—and they had just passed amendments in the early '70s for women and for disability. So... women had come before—so anyway, Homer would in succeeding years—and the commissioners—would vote to support inclusion of sexual orientation and what became—became known as gender identity in the Human Relations Act. So, they didn't do that—the Commission didn't do that, of course. I mean—what I mean to say is that the legislature did—never did approve those inclusions in the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act.

LM: But you were lobbying them to get that to happen?

MN: Yes, yes.

LM: Well, how did legislature—how did they respond to your—?

MN: Okay. Not openly well. We—some folks, you know—in the 70s—let’s talk about the Rural Gay Caucus and the first Gay Lobby Day in ‘75. We trained everybody who came to Harrisburg, and pairs went to the Legislative Representatives. We were mostly talking about the anti-gay bills that had come into—were in committees for every session during the mid-to-late ‘70s.

LM: What kind of anti-gay legislation?

MN: The anti-gay bills were if you were lesbian or gay or accused of being such, you could not be a nurse, you could not work in day care, you could not teach, you could not be a doctor, could not be a youth group leader—nothing—because the stereo—the prejudice was that lesbians and gays were child molesters, okay? So, they were not going to have a gay person—a known gay person—in contact with children in any capacity. And these were in the right wing was creating these bills and putting them into committees, and we were trying to stop them from coming to the floor to be voted on, and also, we were starting—laying the groundwork for inclusion in anti-discrimination bills and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act. So, we took notes, and we collected those. We would be lobbying throughout the existence of the Rural Gay Caucus. We had two Gay Lobby Days. We had four state conferences starting in ‘78 in East Stroudsburg, and then we had one in Harrisburg, another in... Pittsburgh, and finally in ‘82 in Rainbow Mountain at—in Poconos. And in the Poconos in ‘82, we actually had—a delegation from Massachusetts had been fighting for inclusion in their non-discrimination bill—law—for the last ten years, and so, we learned a lot about how to deal with a legislature on that. So, the Rural Gay Caucus was also providing a lot of support for gay people out there, and I talked about that in the first interview. Because people would be getting arrested or... for... indecent exposure, and there was no such thing going on, even if—or they were being entrapped—this was the guys—and people were getting harassed and assaulted—gay bashed, even then, to a greater extent. So, we were trying to provide some support for them. We even went up to Bloomsburg where Sam Emeston was getting bullied and beaten up [laughs]. You know, to think about this—a bunch of about eight or 10 lesbians and gay folk going into his dormitory and making ourselves known, saying you know, “If you treat him badly or you even take a finger to him, you know, we’re going to come back, and you’ll have hell to pay,” [laughs] like who is going to pay attention to us? But—but we felt that we had to make a presence on the campus in his support. So anyway, we were cranking out our newsletters by mimeograph machine and talking to each other by phone and of course we just travel month—every month to a different location, so that that town or that city’s group could come and meet us and get inspired or empowered to do what they were doing—already doing locally. Every group had its own thing that they were doing, whether it was education in the libraries or schools or public on television or radio or social groups or writing letters to the editor and so forth. So, we would be involved in their actions or demonstrations, and they would be involved in our activities.

LM: And this is—you’re speaking of NOW, then?

MN: That was the Rural Gay Caucus.

LM: The Rural Gay Caucus.

MN: Speaking of NOW, NOW was a big help, because NOW was the premier organization for organizing and for taking action and for lobbying, and we learned a great deal from the chapter leaders, the presidents, and from the state leadership. We also used a lot of materials from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force. We worked with them on occasion on lobbying and organizing as—but the contributions of NOW cannot be underestimated, because we were all fighting for the same thing—to be allowed to do in our careers anything that we wanted to do, to have equality of rights, and to get out of those very restrictive gender roles that were our heritage at the time. Traditional gender roles meant that you couldn't do—you couldn't go further in your career, you couldn't be the CEO. There were a handful of women in the upper echelons of business and politics—all spheres of life—and women married or single had very few rights at the dawn of the modern women's movement. So, I was involved with NOW from the early '70s as well, and we geared the Rural Gay Caucus—we constructed it so as to avoid some of the problems that the big cities were having in the lesbian and gay rights movement. And that's because it's always fractured along gender lines. The men were not very appreciative of the women, and the women were always tangling with the chauvinistic attitudes of the men, so we instituted gender parity in the Rural Gay Caucus, so that we had co-chairs, one man and one woman. So, Ray from Lancaster—Ray Steckles from Lancaster and Ruth from Reading were the first co-chairs for the first year, and then I and Joe Burns became co-chairs thereafter, and then Gary Norton and I, and Roger Beatty and I were co-chairs. So, I was co-chair for the Caucus for about five years altogether... about that. But the women of the Rural Gay Caucus kept the men [air quotes] "straight" as it were [laughs] in terms of—okay? "You do not call me, 'honey,' you call me, you know, my name," you know, "What do you mean [laughs] you're not for women's equality?" You know, we—they became—the men of the Rural Gay Caucus—many of them became activists for the Equal Rights Amendment, for Reproductive Rights. They became card-carrying NOW members and active participants in their local chapters.

LM: So, you were educating them then?

MN: Yes, yes. So, it was a mutual thing, and today's lesbian/gay rights and trans movements are about inclusion, and so, we started that here. We didn't want to have any schisms or division.

LM: Well, I know that NOW had its problems in the early '70s in that respect, so it never came to your group?

MN: In the late '60s and very early '70s, National NOW had its problems accepting lesbian women, especially as leaders. However, they sorted that out in the first four to five years of NOW. NOW was organized in 1966 and—

LM: So, by the time you're involved, this isn't happening?

MN: Right, no. And in fact, Pennsylvania NOW's leadership were half lesbian half straight.

LM: Intentionally, or that just happened that way?

MN: That just happened, okay.

LM: Okay.

MN: And by the first national conference—convention—that I was a part of for—for NOW, and it was held in Philadelphia... it had reconciled. I mean there was no more division that I could see, and then NOW actively became involved in the—in seeking lesbian rights and had National Committees and National Actions for Lesbian Rights ever since. And I was involved in several workshops for lesbian rights, but I didn't have to be in NOW to do that, because NOW leadership all across the country was taking that on from the—from the mid-70s on to the present. And—but as a NOW member, I got around. I would go to be as—in the crowd in Congress while the hearings for the Equal Rights Amendment were going on, especially for the extension for ratification for the ERA. And... you know, was there at the Senate with Senator Ted Kennedy speaking on behalf of the extension who was—went to actions surrounding Sonia Johnson's ex-communication from the Mormon Church and her trial as a member of the Mormon church, because she had come out in support of the Equal Rights Amendment in Virginia, and the Church [air quotes] "fathers" had her in seclusion and only in herself—you know, it was kind of like Joan of Arc being bombarded by questions for hours and hours, but we were waiting outside in the dark with the TV cameras in support of her, and we would go in support of testimony in Congress and in Pennsylvania. We would take actions on the courthouse steps in Chambersburg [Pennsylvania] for heaven's sake for the Equal Rights Amendment. We organized ERA walk-a-thons and in fact, in Harrisburg NOW, which I was a member of when I moved back from Shippensburg to the Harrisburg area in '75. During the Thornburgh administration, Jenny Thornburgh—the first lady—walked with us during the Equal Rights Amendment Walk-a-thons, because she was a NOW member and a feminist and supporting the Equal Rights Amendment. We were certainly involved in the birth of the—feminists were involved with the birth of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, and we had a lot of domestic violence demonstrations and actions in the '70s and '80s. We were—and you know, and lesbian women were very much involved with feminism and vice-versa. We were writing articles in the *Harrisburg Area Women's News*, and *The Lavender Letter* would include all of the women's events. The—I'm trying to say what I can—NOW was very much involved with the Pennsylvania—with lobbying for lesbian rights in the legislature, and they were—they started it actually, before even the Rural Gay Caucus was born. And also—what I was about to say just slipped my mind.

LM: It's alright.

MN: Yeah. Of course, we were also involved with clinics—protection and vigils and making sure that the anti-s were not bombarding these young women who were coming to clinics... for either abortion counseling or for birth control. You know, when I was a college student, birth control wasn't even available to single women, okay? I mean—I was one of the first single women to get birth control [laughs] in Shippensburg with my doctor who was not pleased, not pleased, but anyway. It's a different story. So, Pennsylvania NOW and the Harrisburg area NOW—all the local chapters—came out to support us with the Harrisburg Human Relations Ordinance with city council, and by that time, we were—we had taken up NOW's cue to... engage with all the Unions—a lot of them were headquartered in Harrisburg. The... we tried to

organize with people of color and also with the feminists in the religious community, those that we knew would be supportive, okay? So that we had a lot of community support and bodies in chairs at those city council meetings and hearings on the bill. And I worked with Michael Bowles who was the director of the Harrisburg Human Relations Commission in making sure that everything was included correctly in the Bill, including transgender. So that you know we would—all these groups would be speaking in support. And of course, we organized all of the Gay folk in the area to come out, who could come out to this, because this was in 1982 and '83, and unanimous vote in favor of the ordinance as a result.

LM: That's an accomplishment.

MN: And this was, you know, a lot of people: Dignity leadership and NOW and the Rural Gay Caucus and the Switchboard and, you know, there were eight of us leaders who would meet with the individual city council members and with the leader on the council who would then meet individually.

LM: So that was passed when?

MN: June of '83.

LM: Do you know if it was ever enforced?

MN: Oh yes, of course. I know that they did have about—I guess about a half dozen complaints over the years—and still, it took a lot of guts for somebody to file a discrimination complaint in the '80s, and it would be—it was investigated. Now, in recent years, they have disbanded the Human Relations Commission. The law is still on the books, but there isn't a person to investigate the complaint, but if there were a complaint, I presume that they would find a way to have it investigated. Excuse me. But then I ran for Pennsylvania NOW president, and—

LM: So, you made that decision how?

MN: In '83. I was asked by one of the national NOW board members or the regional—a former Pennsylvania NOW president from Williamsport, Gloria Sackman Reed. And by this time, I had already been an activist for the ERA in Florida. I wasn't a full-fledged missionary who quit their jobs and worked for the Equal Rights Amendment in Oklahoma or Florida or some of the other states for a year at a time, but I did take a month off work and was I in Jacksonville, Florida, and Tallahassee and got trained by Gloria who was the Florida coordinator for the ERA, and so she asked me to run, and I decided to do so, and so, a lot of the people who I had worked with on Lesbian and Gay rights and NOW—and local chapters—although I never had chapter leadership, they came to Pittsburgh and voted for me, so—

LM: So, you became NOW president?

MN: Yeah.

LM: And what did you—

MN: Pennsylvania NOW president. So, at that time we had between—well during the height of the Equal Rights Amendment, up to through ‘81, ‘82 when it went down—was not approved by this 35th state. We had 10,000 members, and while I was president from ‘84 through—throughout ‘84 and ‘85, we had about 9,000 plus members in about 28 chapters statewide, and so, I was going out—I had campaigned in all those chapters—well, most of them, and built a slate of other officers from all those other areas—had some very talented people. And so, we were—we went to work on January first of ‘84. We worked on the campaign for Mondale-Ferraro. We had a PAC [Political Action Committee] that we raised money for—a Political Action Committee, and we were supporting 20 some women candidates—both parties, and we even fielded—we hired two campaign advisors and placed them in campaigns for women legislators to be elected, and we did phone banks for not only these campaigns but also for issues like... we were working on lobbying for the Marital Rape bill, and I’ll talk about that in a second. We were looking at taking on the insurance industry for equal insurance rates and coverage. We were always working for reproductive rights and for funding for PCADV [Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence], the domestic violence and the rape coalitions. And I was working—I was getting out a newspaper every month for Pennsylvania—it was called *Pennsylvania NOW Times*. It was very labor-intensive. We had state board meetings out in either in Breezewood—most of the time in Breezewood, because people would have to drive from either side of the state—or in Harrisburg every month. And those were weekend-long meetings to advance our agenda and—and making sure the chapters were okay, trying to build membership, and raise money. Pennsylvania NOW was one of the few states that had a paid President, but that didn’t mean that we were always paid, so [laughs]

LM: What do you mean?

MN: Well, that portion of membership dues that was coming back into the state would only cover so much so you had to raise money for the organization and for my salary, so—and sometimes we didn’t make it, so... anyway, so we were also working—we were working for equal pay, and we were trying to get the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission to come out for comparable worth which meant that... okay so that jobs didn’t have to be identical, but say the liquor store clerk and the office secretary—who had much more responsibility, by the way—could be paid equally, okay? Not so that they—they didn’t have to have identical job duties but that classification or classes of jobs that were—had the same level of education and training and responsibility and—could be paid equally. Comparable worth never did—never passed by the state of Pennsylvania although we had a bill, nor was it—nor did the Commission come out in support of it, mainly because we had a Republican governor at the time. Be that as it may, we were also fighting for marital rape legislation and—I talked about this to your class—this was where—it was still not prosecuted—that is rape by a boyfriend or husband—no D.A. was taking these cases, because it was not seen as rape. It was more or less environment of the man is entitled to sex with his girlfriend or his wife and that harkened back to women as property. And so untold numbers of victims could not have any justice or protection by the police, so anyway Carol Cody was a young—was a NOW member from Northeast Philadelphia who had been raped by her alcoholic husband, and she was, of course, physically abused and emotionally abused throughout their marriage, and she was raped in front of her children, so she led the fight in 1983 and—‘83 to get a bill introduced—or to try to get a bill introduced in the

legislature, and my predecessor was—started that effort. Now in '83, when the bill was first introduced, there were catcalls and flying airplanes across the floor of the general assembly, okay? Because these idiot men—male legislators—could not conceive that there could be rape by—in a marriage or in a relationship, okay. So, we met continually with the judiciary committees in both houses and particularly in the Senate, which was Republican controlled, and lobbied individual legislators—senators and reps, especially those on the Committees and in leadership for their Caucuses. At this time, in the early '80s, we still had law and order Republicans and moderate Republicans who would join with Democrats in bipartisan legislation, and that's how the Pennsylvania Coalition against Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Centers to be funded, but—and of course, Pennsylvania had its own ERA in the state constitution, anyway, I digress. So anyway... we had, you know, lobbied these guys—they were mostly all guys—there were a couple women—but they finally saw from our personal stories that—and they touched their own families. I mean, one of the senators had a daughter who had been in an abusive relationship—marriage, and so that was never known or disclosed, but he confided to me that that was why he was going to vote for it, and it finally passed on the last night of the session in '84 or '85—3 o'clock in the morning. Most of the legislators were drunk, the senators...

LM: You were there?

MN: Yes, of course, we were there during the vote in the gallery. And they didn't really want to do it—they were angry about having to vote for this, but we had finally prevailed upon the leadership to bring it forward, and they voted for it. So, the penalties for marital rape were still less than if a stranger raped you, but it was on the books, and I had hoped that it was corrected later. So those were kind of some of the things that we were working on in NOW, but it was an experience that... was overwhelming and so... binding with sisters from all over the state and... part of me is still with the women's movement, so.

LM: You're not literally anymore?

MN: Well, I—you know, I was burnt out after this, Lonna. And I just want to—

LM: Well, you told me—

MN: I just went into a cave for about a year afterwards.

LM: Well, wait, a year?

MN: And then NOW said—I was helping out with some national marches for reproductive rights—I was, you know, volunteering, and then the National said, "Well, would you go to California and to these meetings for—because there's a group of people getting together to do a national march for lesbian/gay rights in Washington next year." This was in '86. So in '86, I went to West Hollywood and met with some amazing people from all over the country to plan—

LM: You were representing NOW?

MN: I was representing NOW to plan the National March. And this was one of the first national marches. And there I met Cleave Jones, who was just beginning the NAMES Project in San Francisco, and this was where a quilt was made by survivors and loved ones of people who had died of AIDS. And—his own lover had died, and he had found this way to deal with his grief. Well, of course, the committee said, “Yes, we want this to happen, we want the quilt. We want everybody to be making these quilts, and we will put it out the length of the Mall in Washington,” you know? And that came to pass. There was also a group who wanted to have a wedding ceremony—a mass wedding ceremony at the National March. That passed with some discussion, you know, some people were not into marriage and couldn’t see it or understand it—I admit to being one of those people, but I was so glad that it prevailed, because that was very big, meaningful part of the National March on Washington. And the speakers that were lined up and—just the thought of having people from all over the country converge on Washington. There were—I regret not having done a lot more organizing in Pennsylvania, but the word did get out, and a lot of people came from Pennsylvania in 1987 to the March, and it was everything that one could ever want it to be. I had been in marches before for women—women’s rights, but this was very, very meaningful and moving and, of course, with the quilt, these huge panels to celebrate the life of each person were laid out as far as the eye could see between the Washington Monument and the—yeah, the Washington Monument all the way along the mall down to the—

LM: To the Capitol building?

MN: Capitol, right. And as wide as from all, you know, along Independence Avenue, and first of all, it was overwhelming and startling to see how many thousands of panels there were even then and to visibly note how many people had died, and there were volunteers dressed in white spaced every few—about every hundred yards or so, and there were lots of Kleenex boxes, and they were absolutely necessary, because there wasn’t one person who wasn’t just weeping at the loss and the grief and—you know, I was not involved with—with the—with ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] or the AIDS movement, but... the decades of loss are just overwhelming to us everywhere. So, I—I went on to, in terms of gay activism, I tried to be of help with the Lancaster—their first ordinance effort in the 90s. Again, Lancaster NOW was taking the lead on that and working with gay groups and individuals to try to get the city, which was Democratic in the sea—in the middle of Lancaster County which was Republicans. It was very similar to Dauphin County and Harrisburg. And that first effort failed, and—but the second one succeeded. But it was behind the scenes, because in the late ‘80s and ‘90s, I was pretty much back in the closet again, because I was [dog enters frame]

LM: [laughs] She’s sympathizing.

MN: Oh yes, I know. I was kind of back in the closet, because I met my long-term partner, C.D., when I was working as NOW president. I met her from Lancaster, and she taught at Millersville [University] and wasn’t out, so I was kind of taking a break, because of being burnt out and also didn’t really want to jeopardize her job at Millersville.

LM: So you left activism, at least for a period of time?

MN: Yeah, except from behind the scenes things like meeting with city council members and the Lancaster County Commission Director and so forth and... you know, I had been a volunteer in a lot of different gay organizations in the '70s and '80s, and I was kind of burnt out. I was also in the '70s, I was also—and the '80s, early '80s—I was a volunteer with the Harrisburg Gay and Lesbian Switchboard, so that was really—

LM: Tell me about that.

MN: Well, that—the Switchboard was Barry Loveland came to be coordinator for—for many years. It was set up, I think around—gosh, '72? By Marilyn Hewitt and Chuck McKee in Harrisburg, because nobody could connect with each other. There were some—a handful of gay bars, but no one knew how to find other lesbians and gay men. You know, there were some potlucks, and there were some small gatherings of friends and so forth but—and there was Dignity for Catholics—Gay Catholics—and Integrity for Episcopalians, and so forth. But nobody—there was no central place for somebody to call to find out what was going on, and there was also nowhere to call if—for that young person out there in Sunbury or wherever to just talk to another gay person to just know that they weren't criminals or—or mentally ill or perverts, okay, so that if you were having these feelings for someone of the same sex, that you weren't weird. But even though you were terribly alone and isolated. So, we provided that peer connection to—to people.

LM: How did you get into—did they call you?

MN: Yeah, there was a central number that was publicized in the phone book and in the bars or word of mouth, and people would call in—young people, older people.

LM: So, is that what you were doing? Answering?

MN: Yeah, I was just a volunteer on the phone a night a week every other month or something like that.

LM: So an evening, how many calls would you get?

MN: Maybe two, okay? But hey, that was important—it was important just to be there.

LM: Busyness wasn't the deal.

MN: Really, really. So, in the '90s—well, I also talked in my last interview about Claudia and Rebecca on Appalachian Trail that was in 1988—

LM: I'm sorry Mary, hold just a minute [coughs].

MN: So, I won't go back into that. We're taking a break?

LM: For a minute.

MN: Let me take a drink of water.

LM: I think that's what I need, too.

MN: Yes, here. [hands Lonna a waterbottle] This is not sugared, it's just couple vitamins in there. Oh my goodness [clears throat]. All those old NOW conferences where I was sleeping on the floor [laughs]. You know, those hotels that hosted those NOW conferences and lesbian/gay rights conferences—they never made any money, because everybody would just—

LM: No, no, none of the activists in the last years had any money.

MN: Right, that's right. Oh my.

LM: Well, it's been nearly an hour and a half now.

MN: Oh, I'm sorry.

LM: No, I didn't mean—why are you sorry, it's been a great interview.

MN: Well, well, and—but the next thing I got involved with was the women's chorus, I think, so.

LM: Maybe we have to do that in another interview.

MN: No, no, no

LM: No? [laughs]

MN: No. I think we probably done the historical bit, and we're coming into this century, so...

LM: Well, we are, it's true. Do you have something that you would like to talk about that we have not talked about in either interview?

MN: Oh—well, for the—I've just been astounded as to how much change there's been. In the coming out movement of the early '80s—sorry the late '80s, early '90s, especially since Ellen DeGeneres—it's been a world of change. It's something that I never thought I would see in my lifetime.

LM: Like what?

MN: Well, that people can come out. Not only well-known people, but your friends and neighbors... students. And that you know, people can hold hands and sometimes—and most of the time, not get beaten up. And that there's starting to become a glimmer of recognition that it's about identity, not sexuality per se. It's part of who I am, and it's a part of loving. People can—should be able to love freely whom they will. I think that although I would not have been among

the leaders for marriage equality, I am so happy that there is coming—that marriage equality is coming into being, because—

LM: Bit of surprise for Pennsylvania.

MN: Yes, truly a surprise for Pennsylvania, and such great happiness can result for today's couples and for future couples, and it's so sorrowful to know that wasn't there for the people who went before us. However, I think that lesbian and gay people and trans people will make the difference—will make the next quantum leap for equality for all human beings. And I say that, partly as a feminist, because when I was most active as a feminist, there wasn't heterosexual marriage equality. There was unequal marriage. The man always had much more power than the woman in norms and values and societal expectations as well as in law, so now I believe that lesbian and gay couples will be the place where marriage truly becomes an equal institution for both partners. Economically, emotionally—

LM: That's an interesting point of view, I think.

MN: And—so, I'm hopeful for that, and I believe that with vigilance, we will have nondiscrimination laws across the country. I may not be able to see it, but I'm ever more hopeful that I can. And that's not to say that there won't be discrimination, it's just going to be that there will be a legal way to address it. And once something is codified in law, it reduces the incidents of the discrimination, of the harassment, simply because... enough people get caught and paying to redress the situation, the less it will occur. So, those things I have hope for—those are two things that I have a lot of hope for, and—and I also have hope for young people feeling better about themselves, so I'm hopeful that we won't be seeing the numbers of people—kids who commit suicide—

LM: Mhm, and it's still happening isn't it?

MN: It is still happening, it is still happening, and, you know, I just hope that they can get over the hill, over the hump of that overwhelming... depression and... despair to the other side or hang in there long enough to see the bright day. ...I can't think of anything else I have to say except that—

LM: Just now, you will –

MN: —that I am, you know, a shameless promotor for the women's chorus.

LM: Okay [laughs].

MN: And that we have the opportunity to become engaged in all areas of life now, and I'm—I'm looking forward to it.

LM: [laughs] There you go. So, do we have permission to use the material you've given us?

MN: Yes.

LM: Excellent.

MN: And I pity the poor transcriber—I may have to transcribe this.

LM: Oh no, you won't have to transcribe this. Well, I think we're done for today at least.