

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

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**Title:** LGBT Oral History: Jude Sharp

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**Interviewee: Jude Sharp**

Interviewer: Barry Loveland

Date of Interview: August 22, 2016

Location of Interview: Home of Jude Sharp

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**Abstract:**

Jude Sharp was born in November of 1947 in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania and graduated from the Philadelphia High School for Girls. She then attended the Tyler College of Art and studied the art of making jewelry. When she was 21, Jude married her first husband and moved to Denver, Colorado, where she opened her first jewelry shop. Upon ending her relationship, Jude moved back to Lancaster where she met her first girlfriend. Jude has been working with jewelry for nearly 50 years since, and currently has her own business, J. A. Sharp Custom Jeweler. In this interview, Jude discusses the roles her relationships and artistic visions have played in her life. In her childhood, she and her family frequently moved from town to town as her father, a Methodist minister, was transferred to different churches. She speaks of a pervading feeling of ostracism that was assuaged when she came out as lesbian, finally being able to be true to herself. Jude marvels at the changes her community has seen, and laments at the continuing problems with drug and alcohol abuse that face many LGBT individuals today, relating to her own experience. She reflects upon her desire to put creativity to a good purpose and form relationships with others through the medium of crafting personalized jewelry. Additionally, Jude discusses how her own sexuality has played a role throughout the rise of her career.

**LM:** Alright. We're rolling.

**JS:** Rolling.

**BL:** Ok. My name is Barry Loveland, and I'm here with Lonna Malmsheimer, who is our videographer today, and we're here on behalf of the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project. Today is August 22, 2016, and we're here for an oral history interview with Jude Sharp. This interview is taking place at her home, and Jude, do we have your permission to record this interview today?

**JS:** You do.

**BL:** Great. We have a consent form for you to read over and sign at the end of the interview, and we'll take care of that later. So welcome today, I appreciate you taking your time to – to do the interview.

**JS:** Oh, you're very welcome, it's my pleasure.

**BL:** Great. So, why don't we start at the beginning. Where were you born?

**JS:** I was born in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

**BL:** Ok. How long did you spend there?

**JS:** Oh, well, my fa – parents left there I think when I was maybe about two years old so I don't really remember it. The first place I remember living was in Lima, Pennsylvania, which is in Delaware County, and then we moved to Upland, and then we moved to West Philadelphia, and then we moved to Easton, and we moved to Philadelphia, so... Yeah, we moved around a good bit.

**BL:** Was it for your father's occupation, or...

**JS:** Yeah, first...I'll wait till he gets moved [somebody in background moving around]. Yeah, my father [Rev. William A. Sharp] was a Methodist minister, and was a member of the Philadelphia conference and Methodist Church – there're preachers around pretty quickly. I think they had this idea that they couldn't get in to too much trouble if they left them in one church for too long. [laughs] Actually it was some of the people and their congregations wouldn't get too alive with one pastor so... Yeah, we moved – Oh, the longest I lived anywhere when I was growing up was five years, and you were moving a long distance like, we moved once from Philadelphia to Easton so, you didn't like, have friendships that you maintained over that amount of time. We just had – the friends we had were like, family friends that were like, my parents' friends.

**BL:** So how – what was your family life like - did you have brothers and sister, or...

**JS:** I have two younger sisters and I don't know what to say about them, my kid sisters. [laughs] Yeah, when you're little you don't get along with them too well and you're – when you're three of you, formed alliances here and there. Sometimes it was the two of them against me, sometimes it was me and the middle one against the little one, or me and the little one against the middle one. But in the end, now we're all real good friends.

**BL:** And your mother – was she occupied? What kind of an occupation or she work at home or?

**JS:** She was being the minister's wife, which is an occupation that one doesn't get paid for, but it's very demanding plus, you know, raising the three of us. And – now I was in – I think it might've been about fourth grade when my mother's father died, and shortly after that my grandmother had a stroke and then she recovered pretty well from that and then she came to live

with us, and she lived with us until – that would've been in the 50s sometime and she lived with us until like – she died in – you know, 20 years later. And she was a very integral part of our family, and you know, I always – very glad that I grew up in a family where my grandmother was, you know, part of our daily life, and she was – she was real cool. [laughs]

**BL:** And I should've asked you to – when were you born? What time, what year...

**JS:** I was born in November of 1947. So, been doing this for a while. [laughs]

**BL:** And, so, you moved around a lot so, was it difficult for you in terms of school, making friends and keeping friends, and that sort of thing?

**JS:** I don't know, at the time it didn't seem like it was because it was the only life I knew, and I can remember that it was always very exciting when dad would say that oh, we're – we got a new church, and we're going to such-and-such a place and, I mean, we didn't know anything about it and the interesting thing about that would be like, when we would move, you had to pack everything up into boxes 'cause you didn't take any of the furniture with you. So you would move in to a new place and you didn't have your own dresser, you had whatever was in the parsonage. So, you know, it was kind of different that way and then me and the church always felt like they were plants; special 'cause you were the – the minister's kids, you know. In school, I always felt like an outsider but I don't know whether that was because of me or because I was moving around I always sort of thought it was 'cause of me [laughs], you know, and I always just kind of didn't fit in too well. But some of that too with school, probably was being the preacher's kid. You're a little odd, you know. So, my middle sister I think was better at making friends than I was, you know, she was more of a – outgoing kind of a personality.

**BL:** Did you have any sense that you were different in terms of your sexuality at – during school, or...

**JS:** Well that's – that's interesting. When I think back to the earliest time I can remember having a sense of that was probably when I was in grade school, and I was watching a bunch of women playing softball and you know, I thought that was really, really cool, and I was always you know, a real tomboy and you know, they – they were talking to me like they sort of thought I was a little mini dyke, you know. But this was like, back in the – in the 50s and the early 60s and I didn't really even have a sense of what that – what all that was. Actually, it would've been in the 50s 'cause I was in junior high in the 60s. So, I didn't really have a sense of what all that was, and so – I would have to say I can't – I don't know. [laughs] I don't know 'cause I didn't come out until much later. I didn't come out until I was... I – what the heck, when would've it been... Maybe in my 20s sometime. I can remember it was in 1976 so there was a lot of spent time there when I was trying to fit in, but all of my close friends were always girls and you know, all the people I really liked were girls. I grew up in an all-girl family and so, I mean, I didn't even know how to relate to boys, you know, I really didn't. But I didn't even think anything about that either 'cause, you know, it's hard to find your way sometimes when you're a kid. [laughs] And...

**BL:** And did you – did you date boys at all, or...

**JS:** Yeah, I didn't, yeah, it felt awkward and I did what I was supposed to be doing but it just, you know, it was trying to fit in. I was trying to – to be where I thought I was supposed to be and... But yeah. I was even married once. [laughs]

**BL:** Oh, you were?

**JS:** Oh yeah. That didn't last very long but, I did.

**BL:** Ok. Well maybe we'll get...

**LM:** Pause for one more minute.

**BL:** Sure.

**LM:** Well, I think your mike is not working.

**JS:** Oh.

**BL:** Oh no.

**LM:** I thought I had changed the battery in this one, but it may have been that one.

**JS:** I don't know.

**BL:** I think it was that one that you've got your hands on now.

**JS:** I can't tell because she moved them around. They were, they were all moved around. They got shuffled, Barry. She was playing that shell game with them too, two shells. Now she's really into it.

**LM:** [whispered off camera] Come on.

[Interview interrupted, due to technological difficulties with sound]

**KM:** [cuts in] haven't missed anything.

**JS:** Oh that's good.

**KM:** His mic picks up everything. So it's not...

**JS:** You could just lay it in the middle of the table.

**KM:** Now, let's see...

**JS:** Speak! [unintelligible]

**BL:** Okay...how's that?

**KM:** Go again.

**BL:** Okay, how was that?

**KM:** That's fine.

**BL:** Hmm...do you think maybe like there was a connection issue or something there? That like maybe, it's like a short in the cable or the connection.

**JS:** I'm not gonna touch it yet because there's no battery in it. You took the battery out, didntcha?

**BL:** Yeah, it's right there.

[multiple people speaking at once]

**KM:** Batteries...I'm pretty sure. Maybe not. Yeah, you speak.

**JS:** Hello there.

**KM:** Louder.

**JS:** Hello there!

**KM:** Good!

**JS:** Haha!

**KM:** See, all we have to do is get you on.

**JS:** Huh, okay.

**KM:** Come on.

**JS:** Do you want a hammer?

[laughing]

**JS:** I have a number of them downstairs I even have a really big one if you get completely frustrated.

[laughing]

**LM:** Okay, I think we're ready to go again.

**BL:** Okay.

**LM:** And this has been rolling all along so whenever anybody transcribes it the embarrassment will be clear.

**BL:** Yes [laughs]

[laughing]

**BL:** Alright, sounds good.

**JS:** Whose embarrassment is that we're speaking about? Mine?

**BL:** Ok so, getting back to – once you – where did you graduate from high school?

**JS:** I graduated from high school in Philadelphia – Philadelphia High School for girls. I only got to go there for one year and I surely wish I could've gone there for the whole – actually that's a four year high school, I wish I could've gone there the whole time, but I didn't – it didn't work out that way, so... Yeah, it's funny that my younger sister's al – my younger sister's also a lesbian and my straight sister's in – in the middle and she's the one that got to go to girls' high for all four years but the two of us didn't, and I mean girls' high was a really great place [laughs]. It was so nice to be in a place where you weren't in competition with – with boys and where the focus of the energy and the schooling and everything was on girls and I really believe – I really believe that having schools segregated by sex until you get out of high school is a great idea. I think everybody would benefit from that, so... But that's not the way the education system's going, but I think that's a good...

**BL:** So once you graduated from high school, what did you do at that point?

**JS:** I went to art school. I went to Tyler College of Art. It's in Philadelphia. It's a part of Temple University, and that's where I got into making jewelry and I majored in jewelry at first – I thought that I wanted to be a schoolteacher and then I worked a summer, like at a camp, and I was, you know like an art teacher at this camp and I said, "Aw man, I don't think I can deal with children. They're like, really hard to work with," [laughs] and I also remember how when I was in Easton in just the regular public school – girls' high is all academic, so the art teacher in girls' high had respect and was treated nicely and all the girls who are art majors in girls' high, wanted to go to art school. Meanwhile, when I was in the regular public school in Easton, there were two of us who were serious art students who were in the art program and then there were lots of like, jocks who were just taking something so they could graduate, and they were like, into throwing paint and sticking clay on the ceiling and stuff and I thought, I didn't want to spend my career that way, so I thought maybe I could be a jeweler, [laughs] and make a living, so... That was actually how I got into it. I thought about it and said, "Well commercial art looks like that's really cutthroat and corporate," and I didn't think I'd fit in too well with that, so I decided I'd try to be a little crafty person. [laughs] Here I am. What is it, almost 50 years later, still doing it, making since like about 48. Somethin – yeah...

**BL:** Wow. That's great. So once you graduated from Tyler, what did you do at that point?

**JS:** I was fortunate enough to get jobs working for commercial jewelers. I worked for one in Bala Cynwyd and I worked there for about a year – was a retail store, and we were doing repair work and assembly, and then I got a job on Samson Street in Jewelers’ Row and I worked there – I think at that point I might’ve started working part-time and making jewelry at home – I – I’m not too clear about that but I was working for him and I learned a whole lot about the techniques of how to actually make a living at making jewelry, ‘cause when you graduate from art school, you know how to do all these kind of wild things and these interesting techniques that you maybe will use very, very infrequently. But when I worked in a trade shop then I learned how to you know, go about actually putting some of that stuff to use in a practical way, so... Then after that I moved out to Denver, Colorado, and that was – that was because – that was the period when I was married to David and moed, he wanted to move out there, so I mean, I was what – 21, or something so I said, “Ok, Let’s go out to Colorado,” and then when it was when I was out there that I opened my first store, and I had... I worked at the Denver Folklore Center, and that was a very interesting place to be. [laughs] And then I met a woman there, who had a custom selling shop and she couldn’t make a living at that, and so she proposed that we would share this little store that she rented, and she would work the store three days a week, and I would work the store three days a week, and the other three days a week we each worked at the Denver Folklore Center. So we sort of like, shadowed – mirrored each other, or shadowed each other. We hardly ever saw each other, but we were getting things done so that was how I got started, and... Then I broke up with David in a very volatile [laughs] termination in that relationship and then moved out to Park City, Utah, and I had a jewelry store out there for a while, for like, about three – three years I think it was, until living in a resort town in the mid-seventies was not really good for my health. It was a lot of fun. Then I moved back East and that’s when I met my first girlfriend.

**BL:** Oh. Ok.

**JS:** So yeah, it was actually in Pennsylvania. [laughs] Actually in Lancaster, so...

**BL:** So you moved back to Lancaster, when...

**JS:** Yeah, I had never lived in Lancaster before, I had no intention of living in Lancaster. I wanted to move to Maine. But what had happened is, in the amount of time I was out West moving around out there, my father got transferred from Swarthmore to Lancaster. And I had a big U-haul truck, and I brought it to their driveway, and I unloaded my stuff into their laundry room and garage, and I gave the truck back and I thought, “Well, I’ll be here for a little while, and then go up to Maine and find out where I wanna be, and then I’ll go up – you know, take everything up there,” so... I started making jewelry in the laundry room and this was the Spring of ’76, and I went around to– they had like, little craft shows that would be in strip malls. They’d be down in Conestoga at the Fire Company, and I started going to those and selling my jewelry and people really liked it, and I liked it and I started riding my bicycle around here, and I really liked that. It was really a lot of fun, so I never left. [laughs] I’ve gotten up to Maine several times for a visit, but I’m just stuck here in Lancaster and I’m real happy to be here, so... And also,



during that early period when I was first – you know, operating under my parents’ laundering room, and I mean, I was living in the parsonage. I met my girlfriend Pat and...at a craft fair in F and M [Franklin and Marshall College] – in the gym at F and M, and you know, we got involved and I was not about ready to move after that, so... That’s kind of all she wrote in that department. [laughs] And speaking of like, coming out and letting them know I was gay – my sister Cate [Sharp], the youngest one, had come out maybe like, three years earlier. She never was with a man. She like, knew what she was doing her whole time and she came back East after I told her and she was like, “Wow, all I can say is that it’s about time.” [laughs]

**BL:** [laughs] She knew.

**JS:** She said, “I just didn’t know how long it was gonna take you to get things figured out here,” you know, and for me personally when I first got involved with Pat I felt like I had such a huge weight lifted off of me, because it was like, I didn’t have to try to be something I wasn’t anymore. It was just like, “Oh my god, this is right, this has been right all along and it just took me all these years to figure it out,” and I – my other regret besides not going to girls’ high for all that long was when I – regret was that I didn’t realize, you know, right away but it can’t – it can’t change it. It’s just the way it is, but at the time that was what I felt. I felt like, “Oh my word, I sure wish I hadn’t wasted all my time you know, barking up the wrong tree, or you know, chasing after the wrong thing”, but that’s ok. [laughs]

**BL:** So how did your parents take – and the rest of your family take coming out?

**JD:** That was very interesting. Good you asked. My dad as we said was a Methodist minister, and he was very supportive by the time I came out, and then my sister Cate came out to him way before. And he wasn’t so cool with that. And he was into “what did we do wrong?” kind of a – a mode. There had been other things that had gone on in the family that – I mean, at the time [laughs] – at the time Cate came out, it was just the third thing that happened. Each of his other two daughters had really seriously acted out, so he was just like, “Oh no, what have I ever done wrong!” And I just said, “Nothing! It’s just the way she is, it’s just fine, there’s nothing wrong.” And so then when I came out, and I – you know, I remember telling him – we were riding in the car and I was in the backseat and my mom and dad were in the front seat and I told him and I expected you know, fireworks and all the stuff and he – he was very accepting of it. And to both of my parents’ credit, they never disowned us, never acted like they were going to never tried to get us to change who we were, never tried to get us to go to therapy or any of that, and even – it was a couple of years later, my dad wrote a paper and – ‘cause I mean, he belonged to a group of Methodist ministers who would get together and present papers, and it was his turn to write a paper and he wrote a paper about how it wasn’t like, in the scripture or anything against homosexuality, and – and he was refuting all – a lot of the scriptural references that were used by a lot of, you know, Evangelicals and religious people to say that, you know, it’s really against the Bible and everything like that so I really had to give him a lot of credit for that. You know, ‘cause a lot of people wouldn’t come around like that, and he did and he was very supportive and

he was very supportive of – of me and my relationships and just truly wanted his daughters to be happy, and so...

**BL:** How 'bout your mother?

**JS:** Oh, she was fine too. My grandmothers thou – Well, my grandmothers thought – the one who lived with us died I think before any of that ever happened so, yeah. My mom was good too. She was very supportive – my – I was with Sue, I don't know whether you've met her or not – she and I are the ones who opened Sharp Jewelers in '84. She works for me now, and we were a couple back when we opened Sharp jewelers, and my mother was very supportive of that but she – she died in '86 so, you know. My dad just died last year. He – he was 96 years. [laughs] Actually 95, would've been 96 in the Winter, so yeah...

**BL:** And in terms of your work in Lancaster, you – you said you had a series of locations, I guess, or different places?

**JS:** Yeah, when I first opened my very first store in Lancaster, it was in Lititz, and then I moved to California for a very short period of time. My girlfriend Pat wanted to move to California, see I got taken to Denver by David and to California by Pat and I will say to anybody who's young and who's listening to this, don't move anywhere unless you want to move there. [laughs]

**BL:** [laughs]

**JS:** If you wanna move there, fine. But if you're moving there 'cause somebody else wants to do it, don't do it. So anyway, I went out to California and I'm not a California girl. [laughs] And I came back to Pennsylvania and I've been here – moved back here in '79 and I have been here ever since.

**BL:** And your relationship with Pat was your first relationship?

**JS:** Yeah, she stayed – she actually moved to – from California to Colorado and I moved there with her. I stayed there for I think a week? [laughs] I thought – my feeling was, “Well, this relationship is going nowhere, I don't want to be in California, Colorado's halfway home,” so I went to Colorado and I was like, I didn't know when I would get back to Pennsylvania but I knew I would and then I – I think it was actually really two weeks and I just came out here and got involved with Sue and I just said, you know, called Pat and I said I'm calling Pat and I'm packing my stuff and was like “this is over,” and so then I've been here and – and for since. But I worked – when I came back to Pennsylvania in '79 I made prosthetics. I made artificial legs and I worked in orthotics, I made this big plastic like, hip-thing-body-things, and leg braces and I sewed the leather cuffs and all of that. I did that for five years, and I made jewelry in my dining room this time, I'm out of the laundry room. And then Sue and I – well Sue came in to some money, and we decided to open Sharp Jewelers and we opened Sharp Jewelers in the summer of 1984 in North Queen Street, 52 North Queen Street in Place Marie [shopping mall in

Lancasterer]. And Sharp Jewelers went until 2001 and then we sold that to Margie – I can't remember her last name – but anyway, she bought it. Sue went down to Maryland and worked in a bay sail, like a charter sailing company and I opened J. A. Sharp Custom Jeweler in the 300 block North Queen street and that's where I've been now for 15 years, so that's the story.

**BL:** Ok. And your relationship with Sue then – did it end at that point?

**JS:** It – we broke up as a couple, it would've been – it was shortly after my mom died. And then we worked together for a while and managed to patch up our grievances [laughs] and partly because we were in business together and I wasn't like you can just quit and go to another job, which was my first feeling as like, "Oh well I'm gonna – I'm gonna quit, and I'm gonna move," but that wasn't a possibility so I had to stay put and I think that was one of the most valuable experiences in my whole life because, I couldn't run away from myself anymore because I was forced to stay and deal with it and that's when I think I finally, you know, came to terms with things and started to grow up. [laughs] You know, you can't run around anymore. That's when you – I think that's a solution a lot of people have, "Well things aren't working so I'm gonna move somewhere else and it'll be fine," but whatever it is that isn't working usually is coming from here [points to chest] and you take it with you [laughs] and you get to the new place and after the novelty of the new place wears off, "Son of a gun! Here's the same thing again." So not going anywhere really helped and now Sue and I are good friends and so there you go.

**BL:** And did you have any other relationships after Sue, or?

**JS:** Oh yeah, yeah. I did.

**BL:** Could you talk about those.

**JS:** Say what? [leans in to hear better]

**BL:** Talk about those.

**JS:** Ok. When Sue and I first broke up, I was in a really bad way and it was also – like right after my mom died, so I was – I hit a bottom, a really bad bottom. And what I didn't tell you when I left Park City, Utah, I alluded to it. I was very much into partying and so, I was drinking too much and out there I was using drugs too much so when I came back East the drugs kind of faded away but the drinking didn't and then when Sue and I broke up and my mom died I got into a relationship just kind of to save myself from whatever it was, I don't know, my – myself, or something, but I grabbed on to the first person who wouldn't push me away. And so I was with her for a couple of years and then I got sober. And then that relationship couldn't survive my getting sober, so that ended, and then I was single for a while and then I was – dated a woman in my sobriety and she was also an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] and we did that for a while and then we just – we never lived together or anything and I was with another woman for a while, and then I had a relationship with a woman named Sylvia and we're the ones who opened

J. A. Sharp Custom Jeweler together. And she – she did not have a jewelry background, but she, you know, had a business background – an IT background – really good. And we opened J. A. Sharp together and we were together for 12 years and then I don't know what happened but she just kind of lost interest. So what can I say? So now it's me and the dog. [laughs] He doesn't lose interest. [laughs] And I've – I've gotten used to being single and I – it was very hard at first 'cause I didn't understand and I still don't understand what happened but it happened, and so I'm getting used to being single and it's ok. It really is, it's fine. It wasn't what I thought I'd be, but it's alright. [laughs]

**BL:** And in terms of your – your work, tell me more about I guess what you appreciate most about the ability to be a jewelry designer and to be creative and...?

**JS:** What is what I appreciate most. Again, it's hard to know, because it's like I – I always am creative or – I don't know, I don't actually think of myself as creative like a fine artist who has just got this crazy urge to just sort of make things out of thin air. I'm – and that's probably not how it is for them, but that's how I have it in my mind. I feel like I'm a craftsperson, and that I have to make things that work. I have to make things that have a function. I, you know, I mean when I was in school I did drawings. I have drawings that I've done on the walls and stuff like that but I don't do that anymore. It's like I – I wanna make something that has a purpose or – and if I'm not making jewelry, I'm like, doing other things like that, you know, puttering around. So, I feel like that's just something that I – that I need to do or that's who I am and that's, you know like, if I didn't make jewelry and I had – or I couldn't make jewelry and then needed to get another job I would have to do something where I was working with my hands, like I couldn't do what my middle sister does. She – she loves numbers, and she's like, an accountant and she's really, really good at that, but... You know, I could never do it, even if I can make numbers work I – I need to do something hands-on. So, I appreciate that. I think I appreciate being able to, you know, have my own store, take my dog to work. You know, it's got difficulties, I mean being your own boss is not – it gets romanticized. I mean, it's a lot of hard work, but again, I've been doing that for pretty much my whole career except for that interlude when I was making prosthetics. Again, I was making something. [laughs] That was fun, they were really functional. You know, I love – that was fun too 'cause the scale was so much bigger, you know, instead of making little tiny things I was making, you know, legs. And you know, that was – that was fun, but... You know, I like making things for people. What we do is things that are really special, that have a real lot of personal meaning. So, I'm a part of a process that is like, really personal for the customer. When they come in, they're getting married or they're getting – you know, a present for someone that they love or they have stones that have been their mother's or their grandmothers or something like that, and they wanna have 'em put in to something so, a lot of what we work with is stuff that has a – a lot of emotional meaning and that's – that's really satisfying to – to do that. And I think it is meaningful to the people too because they get to have a relationship with Andrea and me - they have a relationship with us and it's human to human, you know, and we've made friendships, you know, good friendships with people who just walked

into the store initially because they wanted something, you know, and you get to know each other, and you know, it's – it's a good human contact and the jewelry's made by a human being and not by, you know, a machine which is - I think that you get that human energy. It gets put into the piece of jewelry as well so, I like that a whole lot.

**BL:** Good. Do you think being lesbian has any effect on your work in terms of – does it have any kind of effect on where you take your work or your creativity or your...?

**JS:** I don't know anymore. I know when I first started making jewelry in Lancaster, Sue and I was also when the pride festivals were first kind of coming into being and we went to pride festivals. We went to women's fest, and we went to the pride festival in Harrisburg, and we went to the pride festivals in Philadelphia and it really helped support the business 'cause when we first opened our storefront, we weren't necessarily making enough money to completely go by that, and were also it was a form of advertising, so it was very helpful in that regard. And for a while, it seemed like – Andrea said – 'cause she was a part – Andrea worked for me back in early 90s, and she would often work for other jewelers and now she's been working for me for like, the last 11 years. So she said, when she first came and started working for me again there didn't seem to be a very – as much of gay clientele there had been back in the 90s and it seems to have, I don't know, resurfaced and I really like it. I like dealing with, you know, gay customers 'cause you know, it's just a feeling of family. And when the – when gay marriages became legalized, it was like – I would get choked up – I mean, couples would come in who've been together for like, 30 years or more and they were – you know, sometimes I'd just be fixing rings that they've had that I made 25 years ago and I mean that kind of history with – with me and them, and the history of them together I mean – it's like every single time they came in I would get all choked up and I'm not like that kind of a girl. [laughs] You know, I don't choke up real easily but that – that will do it to me, you know. Or you know, there were a couple of guys who've been together for over 40 years and... And my sister Cate got married before it was legal nationwide. She and her partner came in and we went up to New York City and got married – and they got married in City Hall and I was the – the witness and my sister Lois [Rothenberger], she just lives outside of Philly and her older daughter wanted to come along so there were the three of us and my dad was in a – no physical condition to go, and he really wanted to go. He wanted to –he wanted to be a part of that and he – and he sent a – like, a wedding gift to 'em. But yeah, that was really cool. I've gotten completely off the tracks so, sorry. [laughs]

**BL:** No, no, that's quite good – quite alright.

**JS:** Oh ok. But I did want to say that when my sister's older daughter, Elise, went and Lois said, "You know, why do you want to go to this?" she says, "It's really important to me 'cause Cate and Eileen had been together for like, close to 40 years," at the – at the time they got married, and she said, "You know, and Eileen is – has always been in my life. She's always been a part of my life and now that they can get married it's really important, and I wanna go and be there for us." I thought that was really cool. [laughs]

**BL:** In addition to the pride festivals, did you have any involvement over the years at all in the LGBT community in terms of like, the organizations in Lancaster or like, ordinance?

**JS:** I've been like, a member of organizations and I like, advertised in publications and things like that but I tend to spend so much of my energy at the store that I don't, like, belong to other kinds of organizations where I'm like – go to meetings, and things like that, so... Yeah, but I mean like, when the first – the AIDS epidemic first started and they first were having the AIDS banquets and stuff like that, Sue and I were always donating and going to all of those. We were going to the – the FAB things and – and stuff – you know, things like that but as far as like, sitting down in meetings, not so much. [laughs]

**BL:** And do you recall some of the events that have happened in Lancaster that you think had some significance to the development of the community here in terms of like the passing of the Civil Rights Ordinance in – in the city, and the – then later on, there was a KKK demonstration...

**JS:** Oh I remember that! Oh my word that was something. I remember being there and watching them walk by and – cause we all went and stood on the sidewalks to make our presence. Yeah, that was – that was kind of scary. [laughs] Yeah, I mean, I don't know what your question was exactly but I do remember that. [laughs]

**BL:** Yeah I was – I was basically trying to get some sense of your recollections from that period of time of...

**JS:** Yeah...

**BL:** ...Of that affected city, and – and your...

**JS:** Yeah, I remember that, and it kind of coalesced a lot of us, you know, we – we were incensed, we came together. One of the things like, even my sister Cate who was living out in Colorado and then she and Eileen moved to New Haven, Connecticut for a while and whenever she'd come to Lancaster she would always say, you know, "I cannot believe how big the lesbian community is and how strong it is in Lancaster." Now, I was a lot younger then and going to potlucks and bars and everything, 'cause that was before I got sober, so I was more aware of the community. Now I'm – you know, I'm in a different stage of my life and I don't necessarily see that so much, but I mean I still have friends that go back to - you know, we get together at people's houses and things and we'd go back to being friends in the 70s so I mean, that's – that's pretty nice that way. So, I think the community – back then the community was kind of more visible to ourselves, I think, than it was to the public. You know, it's sort of like we were underground so much. [laughs] You know, nobody could say who they were. I – one woman I was dating was the vice principal at a – at a high school and you know, she would have to have dates to go to the proms 'cause she had to go to the proms and – and you know, all that sort of

stuff. 'Cause if you – if you were uncovered as being gay you would be out a job. Maybe dis - you know, they wouldn't call it disbarred but you'd be in a lot of serious trouble, you know.

**BL:** You mentioned about going out to bars when you – in your younger days, do you recall much about the bars in Lancaster in those days?

**JS:** [laughs] Sue and I lived about – what was it - two blocks away from the Sundown [Sundown Lounge] which was the infamous lesbian bar of Lancaster, and we went there all the time, 'cause I mean we could go – we – we didn't have to drive. [laughs] We would go there, you know, 'till last call and then kind of meander our little way on home and yeah. Oh boy, we would party there, and it was a – we had a lot of fun. We went there, we sometimes we went to the Tally-Ho, [Tally-Ho Tavern] but that was so close and it was, you know, women, so we went there more. We did go to the Tally-Ho sometime – and always liked going to drag shows, always think they're a lot of fun. [laughs.] You know, sometimes I think I need to do it again 'cause they are so much fun, you know, it's a... I always enjoyed going – when we were going to the pride festivals and had – as vendors, I – I really liked doing that and to this day, if I'm going to an art show, or something like that I'd rather be a vendor than be somebody in the crowd because when you're a vendor, you've got something to do and you can interact with people and they're gonna come up to you and interact with you and it's not that sort of like milling around thing but I – I just really enjoy doing those. We – they were hard work but they were also a lot of fun. [laughs] We had good times. [laughs]

**BL:** Good. Let's see – in terms of spending other...

**JS:** Good.

**BL:** ...organizational affiliations or anything like that - just professional organizations, or...?

**JS:** Well I belonged to the – the HRC, the Human Rights Commission. As far as you know, like gay things I belonged to the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]. What else, I don't...

**BL:** Ok.

**JS:** You know, I belonged to professional things but, you know, but I don't know what...

**BL:** Ok. What would you say are maybe some of the important events or turning points in your life?

**JS:** Well one that I talked about was that time that Sue and I broke up and I couldn't leave. The other one was getting sober. That was pretty serious turning point in my life. Yeah, that was – that was a real big deal, and I've been sober now since '88, so that's – that's a long time. Pretty soon I'll be sober as long as I drank. [laughs] So that's a – interesting thought. And you know, like, also at the time I got sober, there were a lot of my friends who also got sober and who're still sober and it was – it was pretty – it was very interesting time. I don't go to meetings

anymore but there were some really good gay AA meetings that I used to go to. I would even drive – we’d have a bunch of us would drive over to York, or there was you know, one at the Unitarian – not – not the Unitarian, the Quaker Church, had a gay meeting and yeah, we’d go to the... There’s a very – I guess there still is, there’s like a whole branch of the AA that’s, you know, gay people, and it’s – it’s fun, ‘cause you’ve got, you know, family being gay and you’ve got people who really understand, you know, my being sober and I – I do think, I don’t know how long it is now, but at the time I got sober I think there was a real serious problem in the gay community with drugs and alcohol, and again I think it’s ‘cause we had to – we pressed so much of ourselves that, you know, y – there’s only so much of that you can handle. You know, and you – you’ve gotta find an outlet and then also that was – back then that was the main place that you would meet people. You know, you’d meet people to party with, or you’d meet people to hook up with them, and that was – that was what the whole gay community was about for years before I even came on the scene, you know. So I think that’s all kind of intertwined.

**BL:** In terms of just the – the LGBT community in general, what – what changes do you think have you seen that have been significant in the development of LGBT rights, and community, and...

**JS:** Oh my goodness, it’s – it’s just absolutely amazing. [laughs] It’s mind-boggling, and I think it’s wonderful. I think it’s like – that people could be treated equally and – and that it’s – you know, sometimes not that big a deal who – who you love, or who you – who you need to be with. I think that’s - that’s really something I never thought I’d ever see, you know, when I first – I went to a big thing when the Human Rights Commission first got started and – Oh, I can’t even remember that... It was down in Philadelphia, and they were saying that their big push was going to be legalize gay marriage and I thought, “Oh what are you thinking, wh -” you know, that just seem like such a farfetched idea and why are you even bothering with that? You should aim for something else and it – you know, it’s not all that much longer, maybe 15 or 20 years, and it happened and it think that there has actually been a really major shift with younger people. I think that younger people who are straight don’t feel that being gay is all that big a deal. I don’t think that’s of course across the board, but I think that there is more of that than there ever had been because we’re – we are visible. And you know that thing about being visible was really important and come out – come out whoever you are really made a difference and I think going back to my own boss that helped a whole lot too. You know, being able to be my own boss and being visible in Lancaster, and you know, I mean like, I wasn’t flying a purple triangle outside of the store but people knew. You know, and I think that helped and I didn’t only have gay customers, I had a lot of straight customers and you know, I’ve been treated with respect for the most part. I’ve had a couple of incidents when not so much, but... So I think that “being visible” thing really helped and I think that’s made a huge – a huge difference. Thing I worry about now is that I really feel concerned for the – the trans [transgender] kids ‘cause I mean, it – with this whole thing going on about the restrooms it’s like, it doesn’t matter. They’ve got the choice between the frying pan and the fire. It doesn’t matter. It – both choices are wrong with the way



things are being set up right now and I just really feel concerned for them, you know, and I – I can't imagine myself what it would feel like to be a – a kid in school and being so clear about who I wanted to be since I myself didn't even figure that out until I was in my 20s, so I mean I personally can't relate to it but, you know, that's – that's one area I really feel concerned about. I mean, just – I mean, before you came over, there was a thing about the ruling in – I think it was Texas – where they overturned – yeah, [laughs] they overturned the – the judgement on that. And, I mean, that's when I realized that these poor kids can't win.

**BL:** You me – you mentioned a couple of incidents that may not have been so great, do you – did you face any kind of situations where people...

**JS:** Oh, I had people who didn't want to do business with me. I did have one jeweler in town and he didn't say it to me but he did say it to someone in the community and the word got back to me – and when I say community I don't – I don't mean gay community I mean in the Lancaster community – and he – he said, he didn't even understand why people would come and by jeweler from – from Sharp Jewelers when it's, you know, it's run by these – these lesbians, you know, and yeah. Just stupid things like that, you know, and I'm – that was the one that really stuck in my mind. Then the other thing too was when I first got into the jewelry business back in the – '69-'70 when I graduated from college, I was one of two women who worked on Samson street, it – at the bench. The only thing that women did in the jewelry business back then was string pearls and the work for platers. And they – women were not in – at bench jobs, and I went around trying to get a job and one guy told me straight to my face that he didn't hire girls because they – they would get pregnant and then – and then it would all have been a waste so he wouldn't even hire them. She I mean they – people can't really say that kind of thing anymore. They may not hire people for those reasons but you don't know. But back then they could say whatever kind of awful thing they wanted to right to your face, so... [laughs]

**BL:** Ok. Lana, can you think of any other questions that – that you have?

**LM:** Not really. It went truly pretty.

**BL:** Good. Alright, well thank you so much Jude.

**JS:** You're very welcome.

**BL:** Appreciate your time, and great stories.

**JS:** Thank you. I don't think we even have to beep out anything.

**BL:** No. [laughs]

**JS:** [laughs] Great!

**BL:** Thank you.

**LM:** You alright?

**JS:** Got a little dry mouth, but not too bad. [gesturing to microphone] Can I take this off now – Oh, one time – this microphone reminded me – I was in downtown Lancaster [unintelligible: microphone briefly muffled] square, with my other dog – the guy before this one [points off-screen] and...

**LM:** [referring to microphone] Don't take that off.

**JS:** What?

**LM:** Well, just...

**BL:** Keep talking.

**JS:** Oh, oh ok. Ok, well I was down in center square, and it was right before New Year's. It was like, between Christmas and New Year's, and somebody from WGAL [Greater Area of Lancaster: Television channel] came around and she had one of those big microphones that looks like an ice-cream cone, and my dog, Buddy, was sitting right next to them and she asked me if I had any New Year's resolutions, and I said, "No, I don't have any New Year's resolutions but my dog does," 'cause he got sprayed by a skunk and he's not going to get sprayed by skunks anymore but, the funny part was, she had this microphone, he was sitting right next to me, and she put the microphone out like that [mimics holding a microphone out] for me to talk into it, and he goes [mimics biting] and tries to bite it, so she pulls it way back. And so then she sticks it back in and he goes [mimics biting] and tries to bi – [laughs] tries to bite it. And they did put it on the TV but they never put that thing on there with him trying to bite the microphone and I thought the really should've run that 'cause it was hysterical. He was like, "Oh, is that for me? I would like some of that, please." [laughs] Ah, he was a good boy. [gestures to paper] So am I the narrator here?

**BL:** Yes, you are.

**JS:** Narrator. Alright. So you called me Jude. Do you want my Jude name or my legal name?

**BL:** Why don't we do both. Yeah, I was going to ask you about that, 'cause that's kind of an unusual name.

**JS:** We got – oh, the regular – the regular name, too. [laughs] J. A. Sharp stands for Judith A. Sharp. What's my signature – that's what my signature is. [Looks off-screen to dog] He's Quincy E. Sharp. His middle name is Elliot. I didn't give him that name. That was his litter name. Alright let's see – today is August 22. [Unknown crashing sound in background] Now you've done it. If it doesn't work the next time, I can't help you. [laughs]

