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Title: LGBT Oral History: Lawrence Von Barann (Larry)

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Interviewee: Laurence Von Barann (Larry)
Interviewer: Barry Loveland
Videographer: Lana Molmsheimer
Date of Interview: August 2, 2014/August 29, 2014
Location of Interview: LGBT Center of Harrisburg
Transcriber: Andrew Dietz

Abstract for Interview 1

Lawrence von Barann was born on June 26, 1928 in Queens, New York to an American mother from New York City and an immigrant father from Germany. Lawrence spent the majority of his upbringing living in the Queens borough but left to live outside the city in Long Island about the time when he entered high school. Lawrence is an artist, primarily painting. He found his passion for art in middle school when he considered attending a specialized high school in the arts. Unable to make the daily commute to Manhattan Lawrence attended a local high school. Throughout his high school experience Lawrence was completely dedicated to his art. He had a teacher name Mr. Wickman that played a major role in developing Lawrence's talents but also increasing his exposure to the art world. Lawrence discusses his adventures to the galleries and museums in New York during weekend class trips. Upon completing high school, at the end of WWII, Lawrence decided to enroll in art school but given the difficulties of applying during the G.I. admittance guidelines it was difficult to find a complete course load. Lawrence however did get an opportunity with the Brooklyn Museum art program. It was there that he received his first assistant position to his woodwork and carving professor in his private studio. Lawrence recounts his years working in the studio as well as his own business ventures at this early stage in his life. He also discusses some of his experience of living a "double life" as a gay man in New York City.

Abstract for Interview 2 **Separate Date: August 29, 2014**

In this second interview with Lawrence von Barann he concludes his stories about living in New York and the events that eventually led to his move to central PA. Once he made the move to central PA, his business partner from New York got married so Larry was working independently. He started teaching at HACC (Harrisburg Area Community College) in fine arts courses. Larry also discusses the significant relationship he has had—including his life partner Bill as well as some others. He talks about his career evolved from not only working as an artist but becoming an advisor doing art appraisals and running a gallery. He discusses his never ending passion for the surrealist school is his own personal collection of famous works as well as encounters he has had with artists including Rothko, Pollock and Dalí throughout his life.

***There are two interviews for Larry von Barann. The Second begins on page 14.**

LV- Larry von Barann

BL-Barry Loveland

The first part of the interview explains the context of the interview process and consent confirmation.

BL: So let me start by asking you to state your full name.

LV: Laurence von Barann. Three parts.

BL: And it's small V-O-N, correct?

LV: Small V-O-N. Capital B. A-R-A-N-N.

BL: Good. Okay. When and where were you born?

LV: I was born in Queens County, New York City [New York], right on the borderline of Brooklyn in a very old neighborhood named Ridgewood. From there we moved—there was a (____???) trolley line that all the way to Jamaica out in Queens [New York]. Eventually—my mother who liked to move a great deal—something about moving was fun in those days. We moved from Ridgewood to Glendale and down the line. And now, sometimes you'd only move two blocks away but she was thrilled. It was a new apartment. I have been thinking about that lately—that's crazy to do that but, okay—you didn't have much furniture—you know, three people. So we moved. It was a big 25 dollars a month rent. No young people listening to this will ever believe that.

BL: What date were you born?

LV: The 26th of June, 1928. Just before the fall.

BL: Ah yes. So tell me something about your family. Your parents—what were their names and what kind of occupations did they have?

LV: My mother's name was Bertha and she was born in New York City as her mother before her. That side of the family, it's all American. My father was born in Berlin, Germany and came to the United States when he was in his teens, late teens, and worked himself—learned English—worked himself. Worked in what they called shirt-waist shops. My mother worked there and that's how he met her. She was at a sewing machine. He was one of the owners. They got together and I was the product eventually. So it is an interesting background to have.

BL: Do you have any sibling or are you the only child?

LV: I am the only child.

BL: Okay.

LV: They thought one was enough. [laughs] No, I think—you know, recently, I have thought that out too. Older. My mother was very outgoing. My father was very quiet. I think his fantasy was—since he now was working in New York City for the Ford Instrument Company—he wanted to live on the west side of town and it would be a short trip to work. We were in that period though when people wanted to get out of New York and you have Levittown [New York] being built in Long Island and things like that. So, mother predominated and I think daddy didn't—being Germanic—yes, you get married at a certain age. Yes, you have a wife. Yes, you have a child. I think that is the great loving background. Not that he wasn't a loving father. He was a nice father but not the typical American that goes out a plays baseball with you or anything. We went to museums, we went other places. But I knew in his heart of hearts that he wanted to be in Manhattan. I realize that as I was growing up and now more than ever I realize that. My mother wanted to be out there in the boondocks with the farms and the whole thing. So it was a strange beginning.

BL: So what was life like growing up in that household?

LV: The household itself was very friendly. We went on picnics. We went to the beach. We did... My father did like Broadway shows so we went to see musical comedies. I remember one in particular. I want to meet someone who knows show business. It was a huge variety show on Broadway called *Hell is a Poppin'* and I have never met anyone younger who even knows the word but I know it was very big in its day. I can still see my father laughing and practically falling out of his seat at the humor, some of which I now realize was gay humor [laughs], which is even funnier yet. There was a little man named Joe Messer—short, about five foot high and five foot round who was the gay community—comedian in the cast and he was hysterical. I've got to meet somebody who knows show business way back. I've wanted to find out what happened to Joe and what happened to *Hell is a Poppin'* and the whole thing. But no, it was a warm household—my mother cooked—overcooked on occasion. She had been taught by her mother, and so you started making fish like an hour before you served. You know it came out like cardboard and I grew up thinking all filet of fish looked and taste like cardboard [laughs] but otherwise she made (____???) dinners—chocolate puddings and pies and apples and, you know, all the usual things. We did most of the eating at home. Going to a restaurant was a very rare, rare occasion, and there were two. One was a Chinese. That stunned me. I didn't know the Chinese had a restaurant. And then there was a German American one where you got the German cooking. Those were the two that were within an easy distance of our house so that's where you went because we had no car. So you used the trolley or you walked. I walked and walked and walked, which was good for me, I realize now. But yes, I just thought it was normal you go out and you walk—miles you could walk. All the way to Ridgewood and to the department stores and you walked all the way back. Then I learned there was a trolley, eventually. Why didn't we do that? But, it was fun. I look back at it with fond memories. Okay, I say fond memories... The one bad memory was this was the time that Hitler was coming into power and being in a German-American neighborhood—I was too young to know but it was a problem. My father was a pacifist—he hated Hitler and the whole thing. We had a Zenith radio set, the big one. You had a funny dial you would [makes a cracking noise] and the dial would open up and there would be short wave. He would listen to Adolf Hitler on occasion and he would slam the machine shut. I'd ask him, "Who was that?" and "Why?" You know, I had a vague idea. He said, "A crazy man. We don't want to hear any of this." Two doors down from us

was a man who turned German American Bund who went out in full Nazi regalia to the Bund meetings in New York or upstate. That is all my father had to see and he was livid, you know. I grew to know the bad symbol. One day that same gentleman brought one of his nephews over from Germany—our age—my age. Every kid in the block wanted to kill him. The most arrogant, overbearing, bastard if there ever was one. So that was my introduction. Also the local newspaper which was the Journal American, which... Hearst. So you can imagine all of the stories. I was always a newspaper fan, even as a kid. The Daily News and the Journal American when my father came home. I would be on the floor reading, and I read all the stuff about Hitler and all that. I was getting some wild ideas, so I'd look throughout the neighborhood to spot who was a Nazi. I found a few in the basements. When you're a little kid you could do things like that. But, those were wild times.

RECORDING 2

BL: All right—we are back.

LV: Where did we leave off?

BL: Well, I think we left off—I think we were talking about the...

LV: I was living in Ridgewood....

BL: Yes.

LV: ...and then Glendale

BL: and the German neighborhood because...

LV: The German neighborhood. Yes.

BL: ...with the times of Hitler coming to power and everything, it was a difficult time

LV: After we moved there we were out on the island in Queens at the end of a bus line in farm territory because I remember as I kid, I could go half a block and be in the middle of a field of farmers. I had never had them as a vegetable—a white turnip like vegetable and we're kids were pulling them out the ground and eating them. That was a new experience for kids who came from the city but it was fun. But it was lonely, because I was one of the newcomers and way out and everybody was in closer to where the older neighborhood were and the school so I was the weirdo. Again, walking—endless blocks to get to work...school. My first clue about being an artist—I have to think back came from that school. When I was getting ready to be graduated there was a group of teachers and one male teacher and they were talking about their students and I heard my name come up. So I sat back, and I was far enough away. I was listening, and I heard them say “Well, he's really got talent. He should not just go to a regular high school. He should go to the high school with music and art.” I had never heard of such a place. There was a local high school that's where you went. And they were insisting on it. But nobody contacted my parents to tell them that. So I go home and I say, “I heard this group of people say I should go to

the high school of music and art.” And they look it up and say “Oh my God, it is on the West Side of Manhattan, way uptown. Do you know how long that would take to get there from here? You’d be on the subway day and night. You’d get no work...” My mother said, “No way. You’re not going to do this, you’re not going to do this. There is a high school locally and that is where you’ll go.” So that was my first clue about art but it was cut off. Then by the grace of whatever fates there are, I got into that local high school and, you know, I signed [up for] the usual. Math, English, or—I didn’t really care. But there was an art course and I got into that and there was a wonderful man named Frederick Wickman. I have never forgotten Fred and he had an art course. You weren’t drawing dumb little drawings. You weren’t talking about art history and the desks were laid out in rows. There was one desk in the middle, and he put me at that desk. I don’t know—it must have been intuition. And he said, “Now we are starting with a good artist—Picasso.” Now, we’ve never heard of Picasso. This was a whole—early days. This was 1946. So he starts up about cubism. Well I sat up like he had rung a bell. I went home and I did a boy reading a book with a lamp light as a cubist. I’m not kidding. I still have it. It’s salted away. And I was turned on. I couldn’t wait to get back to his class. And this is the way he did it—forget the past, we are talking about the future and the art in the time of which you live. Then he announce that he lived in Manhattan. He was a bachelor. He lived in Manhattan on 53rd between 3rd and 2nd which is the jazz club area. But he was in an apartment house and any student that wanted to meet in his lobby on Saturday morning at 10 o’clock he would give you a guided tour of museums and private art galleries. Well, I was there, baby, at 10 o’clock in the morning with a few others. And he did. He took us into the world famous galleries—the Matisse gallery. The greatest art people would come from Europe but we were in. I was never in building like that—you know the Renaissance style buildings the gilded elevators. You know, the charming gentlemen greeting you at the door. Well I was in seventh heaven. Forget the rest of the courses. I would go home and I would draw at night. At the end of the term I had a portfolio maybe that big [widely extends hands]. I was meeting some nice people in the class. Now, I didn’t know I was gay. I was at that stage in life yet and there were two girls in the class and I was attracted to them. But, not to the male female reason. The one was a short little girl named Irene. I remember their names to this day. Irene Haas. And Irene could draw. She could out draw me. She could draw like Arthur Rackham, with the books, and that was her subject matter. And I would watch her and I am in awe. The other—Now, the war was on, remember. The USO. The other was a young high school girl who looked 20. I mean full make up, spiked heels and she had long Grecian earrings that looked like a Greek wine jug and they fascinated me to hell. I kept looking at those earrings and she’d be talking about her date of the night before when she took a French sailor out. And she liked French sailors because they had white hats with little red pom poms. [BL laughs, off screen.] Well, no. I know. To you it’s... I was—she would stand next to me talking and I’d think “This is an angel. This is a vision for all time.” And her name was perfect. Nancy Valentine. I have always thought that I should write the script. No one would believe it, except there is a record of her on the West Coast, okay. So I had that going on my mind. At the same time, I’m a young man and I am noticing athletes and I thought—I began drawing them when I got home from imagination and putting them in Renaissance clothing and Irene would walk over and say, “Where did you get the models?” I said, “There’s no models. I am in the boys bathroom and they’d undress and you’d make a quick sketch.” [BL laughs, off screen.] She said, “Oh, Lucky you.” You know. That’s where I did the first modeling. And I would walk—I didn’t consciously try to think of the actual image but for some reason I liked the color brown. I was always dressed in brown and I got myself a huge block portfolio. Now, other people were

carrying books to school—well, I was carrying a big black portfolio and the jocks who, believe me, were not in my world, loved me for it. They always wanted to see what picture I was doing. “Hey, here he comes again.” You know. I had no trouble with anybody. Here was the weirdo with the portfolio. That was my background and those Saturday visits to all those great museums and the Morgan Library and the (____???) and the Met and the private galleries—the most extraordinary was before the museum—the Guggenheim was built. There was a small gallery on 53rd across from the Stork Club and I knew what the Stork Club was. It was in a Renaissance building and one Saturday morning Mr. Wickman says “We’re going to this museum of non-objective art. No subject matters.” He said, “And be prepared—the one that is going to guide you around is actually a princess from Europe.” So, we get there and the interior of the room—grey carpeting, grey carpet walls with little spark lights and the painting stood on the floor in huge silver frames. And they were all just pure color abstractions and Vivaldi was playing in the background. That is the first I heard of Vivaldi and I’m a music lover. I was floating through that gallery. And I got the catalogue and the artists had strange names like Scarlett and other names like that, who I learned later that they were the princess’s boyfriends—some of them. There was a man named Kandinsky and the others, they were all in there. She was the influence behind the building of the Guggenheim museum. She was also a friend [makes quotes in the air] of Mr. Guggenheim’s. I’m doing that [repeats quotes in the air], I don’t know. But, I would suspect she was a very good looking woman. So they eventually built the Guggenheim which is what the Museum of Non-objective art became. She was filling it with Kandinsky’s and other people were outraged so after it all got put together and it had its opening there was a very big collector in New York who couldn’t stand the fact that they weren’t showing impressionist paintings and that, so he gave them a collection—a private collection on the proviso that “you make a gallery in that damn museum and you put the impressionists in.” And it is still there to this day. They still have that extra corridor going through a room. I read about all this and I thought this was the funniest thing. I came home and said to my father, “I am a non-objective artist.” [LB laughs] My poor father looked at me like “What the hell is he talking about?” My mother was still cooking. She didn’t care. She didn’t have the background. So I said, “You know, you work with angles and.” So I did one. So said, “Why don’t we go to a gallery one day?” And he says “Alright, I’ll take you up on that.” So by then that museum was out so I said “There’s a place called the Museum of Modern Art. Let’s go.” So we go in and of course its cubism. It’s Picasso and I’m being a smart ass. “That’s a Picasso, Dad. That’s a Brock, Dad.” Dad is looking at me and I said, “My high school art teacher. This is where we learn these things.” So now we go out in the garden—in those days the garden was a chain linked fence, a reflecting pool with a few tables on pebbles, and you could order a glass of wine or tea. He sat there with me and I said, “This is my world.” He said, “Oh, okay.” And he said “Some of those things up there were very interesting.” He liked (____???) and other very far out pieces and I said, “I can’t stop thinking about it. It’s what I want to do.” So he had an early clue. He knew. And he didn’t say “Don’t do it.” He just said “wonderful, you’ve found something.” So again he went—Then I said, “From here we’re going to a Salvador Dali show.” And then we get up. And it was in one of those very French galleries. The rococo furniture, the gold walls, the whole thing, and it’s crowded. Of course, there’s Dali’s—some of his most famous paintings. And my father was looking—He went from non-objective to Dali. [laughs] But he was impressed by the audience in the thing and he said, “This is extraordinary!” And I said “Here’s another one that I like.” [Laughs] So I gave my father that tiny little introduction and he knew what the future was going to be like. So when I eventually—I wasn’t getting A marks in school, let’s face it. I graduated with a B, which I

thought was generous... But I had a portfolio this big [gestures] and one day my art instructor says, "Now that you're graduating, you're due at a meeting in New York at a special things going on. It's a—You'll like it when you get there." So I said good morning to my mother. "I've got to go to New York. It's the west side of town, and of course it's a great big formal building. It's the scholastic art awards and I win a bronze medal. Now, everyone is there with their families and when they announced my name there was this weak applause. My mother didn't know and my father didn't know. And I come out, "I won a bronze medal." Which I brought today in my thing [gestures].

BL: Oh, great.

LV: So I went home and I said, "You're doing something right kid, you know." You're on the subway—and I'm looking at my medal saying "It's not a gold but it's a medal. And I won it." You know, for the portfolio. So, then the problem is, what do you do with me? Hofstra was the college that—If there was a college, I liked Hofstra, out on Long Island. But I knew I wasn't going to make that. So I thought well, there's art schools. I'll go to an art school. Well, now it's 1946 and the G.I's were returning from the war. And part of the deal of the G.I's was to pay them \$25 dollars a week living expenses but they should enroll in schools and their tuition would be paid. Suddenly every school in New York, from shoe lace tying to hair dressing to whatever, had students. And they all had a little pin of an eagle, which the G.I's called "the ruptured duck." I'm not making this stuff up. [laughs] So I would go into an art school with my wild portfolio and they'd say, "You're just out of high school. We've got 10 – 12 G.I's who have been in the war." And this went on and on. Finally I heard of a place called the Art Students League up on 57th Street, dating back to the 1800's. So I walk in there and they said "Yeah, we've got an opening. We have a drawing class, would you like to (___???) in?" I had my father with me and he says "I'll pay the check—The whole thing and that..." It's only one thing. It's late in the afternoon so I would have to come and travel all over and you know, back, with the portfolio, the whole bit. And that was my first exposure to a model coming into the room. Now—we were seated at a huge—I can tell this, everyone is old enough. [BL laughs] It's a big table, and all the people are sitting around it, and they are all older than me. And they're advertising types, you know, with their little fancy sketch pads. And a beautiful girls sits next to me and I look at her. You two are maybe at the right age. It was Simone Simone, the actress. And she's very French darling. She's "here to make (___???) sketches." So I sit next to Simone and a model walks out. An older, lean women with a dress on, right. She looks around and says, "Oh! We have a newbie in the class." Me [pointing]. She walks over in front of me and throws off the dress, spreads her legs and says, "Here it is baby! Take a good look!" And I am now blushing. Simone is laughing and the men in the room are trying not to laugh. But I must have been beet red and she is standing hands on hip. I wasn't quick enough to come up with a remark and all I was fascinated with—she was wearing a gold cross around her neck and I thought "what does she do after the art students leave?" So she made her poses and I got used to it. I took that class for a while but then I looked for other openings in the school and finally I found one with the famous painter, Reginald Marsh, from the thirties. And I was told by everybody "This is the class you want to be in!" Well, the class—it was a sea of easels and you could barely see the model. Because he was a famous—the Reginald Marsh. So I said, "Okay, I'll go in that class because he's got the best models." Well I never saw so many muscled people in my life and to pose for Reginald—you had to Vaseline your body so when the spotlight hit every muscle would show. I thought what a

relief from that woman. [LB laughs] One of them I will never forget. He had huge a black model, a black man, bulging muscles. He came on with a little girl about this big [gestures]—a ballet dancer. She was in a white tutu. He's nude. He takes her up and holds her on his shoulders and held the pose. So Marsh says "Start drawing." And here's this little girl, you know, in the pose. And I thought "This was the world I wanted to be in. This was it, baby!" So I stayed in there as long as I could. I moved to his painting class where everybody was painting like Reginald Marsh except one young man next to me. A model would come up. He had a little canvas—he'd paint the perfect portrait then stand back take turpentine and wipe it out. And I'm going "No. [places hand on chest] That's beautiful." And I'd watch him again—He'd paint over it again. And, I mean, he wanted to be a professional portrait painter and this was the way. You don't wipe out paper—you do it on the canvas. So I took all of those lessons, meantime still going to the galleries, still drawing, still (___???) the whole thing, going back and forth to Long Island, entering art shows. And then one day we heard that that the Brooklyn Museum, in Brooklyn [NY] had an art school and they had openings. So my father says "Meet me at West 4th Street on the subway. I'm taking you to Brooklyn." So we went to Brooklyn and there is a big museum next to a big park and the whole thing is beautiful and I get in and they sign me up for a full course. Now I've got a painting instructor, a drawing instructor, a calligraphy instructor. I mean—I'm loaded. Luckily, the man who taught calligraphy was Arnold Bank. Again, he's dead but he was the most famous calligrapher in New York. He worked for Time Magazine. He worked for Life. He worked for everybody. But he was a walking Jewish historian. He'd be teaching lettering but he'd be talking art history, world history. I learned more from that one man than anyone else could I learn from about the world's history. He even invited me to his home one night, which was a big deal. With two other students—we went to have tea with Mrs. Bank and him. From there, I was turned on again—the surrealists were going strong. So was I. I entered my first competition there and got in with my work. The man I studied figure drawing with and painting was an excellent painter who was giving—I didn't know it then, but I had another course I was taking called "materials and techniques." Nobody teaches it anymore but that course—you learned how to—you bought pigment and you put it in the dish and you mixed it with oil. You had blank tubes. You learned how much pigment you really got that way compared to a commercial tube. You learned what canvas was and how it was made. Then you covered it with the correct surface and then you would treat it with a bad surface. It would go yellow. Again, I was startled out of my wits at what I was learning. Gesso was a word. Ancient Egyptians used it. I was using it. Wax encaustic..paint with wax. I was using that. Today no one teaches any of those things any longer. You do what you want. So, I'm glad that I got the last tail end of it. So that's what really began to lead me off. And while I was there a man came to teach—I studied engraving—and then a man came named Bernard Brussel-Smith. Again three—teaching wood engraving. I thought, "Oh, this is me." I go in his class and we did illustrations and Bernard is watching me night after night and after about a term he comes over and he says "How about—would you like to take a job?" And I said, "Why, are you offering me one?" He says, "Yeah, how would you like to work in my private studio as my private assistant. I have a young man now but he is leaving to go to Israel to a Kibbutz. I would like a new assistant. You would be good." And he says, "We could still do this class. I'll drive you in when I drive in as the teacher. Is that good for you?" So I took that course and I got into his studio and it was wonderful. Now I'm in a real art studio in Mid-Town Manhattan off 44th Street on 3rd Avenue. You know, the whole [___???]. And I am now learning wood engraving and a press. It came with great ease to me. It's like I was born to sit there with a knife and a block and cut. And then I

began collecting prints, you know. Now I had a salary. I could buy artwork. And so this is how my career began.

BL: So this was your first job, basically?

LV: The job worked out. I stayed with him for a long time. And I didn't mean to play one-upmanship with him once, but I cut my first abstract, figurative piece. A surreal woman. There was a competition in Washington. The Washington Print Makers. Pay two bucks, you send the print in. If you get in, you're in the Library of Congress in an exhibition. So I sent my print in and I don't tell Bernie—Brussel-Smith—Bernie. So when the announcement came "You're in the show." Oh my God! I rushed into work and said, "Bernie, look at this! I'm in the Library of Congress show." He says, "You're in the show? I'm not getting any mailing piece." I said, "But you've got a gallery. Don't they do this for you?" He goes, "Obviously, they didn't. But you got in the show." [Laughter] I thought—"Bernie, you hired me, you know. I'm the young genius you wanted. You got it." So, I got a ton of experience from him. How to handle clients, to do jobs as I did that cover of the magazine over there, and things. And then he had a little trade magazine. The gift and art buyer for all the gift shops in the United States. He says someone has to do the editorial section. The layout, the pictures, and so on. "You do it." I said "Okay," and I'm a layout artist and I'm doing that every month and I liked it. I liked doing the research and I liked doing the prints and I liked being about it. But after a while I began to realize that I had been there too many years. Bernie was getting a little tired of coming into work. I had begun to work as his assistant going to talk to clients and he said, "I've got a great house with my wife and child and a maid up in Westchester county. Come up for dinner." Mmmm... I'm worried about this. So, I come up to dinner and it's a beautiful house. Their maid was a great cook as well. The wife is a very big [____??] school teacher of French in Manhattan and their kid is a little baby, a boy, a little boy. I come up to dinner and it was wonderful and Bernie said, "How would you like to live here?" And I said, "No, not really." He said, "Why not?" I said, "Because I'd be with you 24 hours a day." [Laughs] I didn't know that it sounded like an insult but 24 hours a day! So he says, "Look—I've got the woods out there and a garden and you could have a studio and all that." I said, "No, Bernie. I am attached to my family. My mother is ill and my father and I—I don't really—I don't really want to be here 24 hours a day." [Laughter] So eventually I said, "I think we've come to the parting of the ways. It has been wonderful working with you." "I can give you a little more money." I said "No, it's not that. I think I've outgrown my usefulness to you and to myself. I don't know where I'm moving on to, but I have to move on."

BL: How many years did you work for him?

LV: Oh, I worked with him...I don't know...four or five years. And so I left and I had a portfolio. I—a friend of mine lived with me now. Not a gay relationship. A wonderful, young...oh..[places hands on head] Catholic boy who had to go to mass all the time. I'm not Catholic. But Irish on top of it. Irish-Catholic—Mother goes to church every morning. So, he wanted to get away from that. So, okay, things were getting bad—my father died and there I have a mother who is disabled. And I said "Why don't you move in with us. And you and I be partners in business. One of us can be here and one of us can be out. My mother things you're her son anyway." Her mind was going. She loved him. "Hey, I've got two sons." You know? And so he moved in with us and it was a great relationship and we did work which again, I

brought some of it. We put a portfolio together. We did the suits, the exquisite green portfolio with the prints, you know. Our own mailing pieces. We were hot stuff and suddenly people began giving us 500 dollars for a wooden engraving and 600. But then there would be those periods when nothing—But you send out more mailing pieces and I learned to do interviews. And then I'd meet the guy like “Hmm, you're not bad looking.” I thought “Oh, no, no, please. This is not what I'm here for. I'm here really for...you know.” And I didn't explain that to partner because I figured, he's straight [making quotations in the air], he's totally straight. And I thought—now on the side, I am living a gay life. I could go to Manhattan if I want in the evening and there are all those wonderful bars. Then I can come home and I am saintly Larry doing the wood engraving. And I, to this day—I approve of double lifestyles. It was a hell of a lot of fun. [Laughs] And I met people in New York on both levels, which was great. So I...

BL: When did you first get a sense that you were gay?

LV: Oh. First gay? Alright—when I was in high school. Someone had told me that my art instructor was gay. Mr. Wickman. And I didn't believe them. But then it turned out that the person who told me turned out to be a ballet dancer on Broadway and he's going with a girl that I know. Then he lets it be known that that's a wonderful front and he's really gay. And so he said “And I've been at parties with Mr. Wickman.” And I thought, okay, it's closing in. I had been to a gay bar and so it's a funny vignette but we might as well get it on film. My father drove a Plymouth and my mother liked to go to a nightclub out on the island that had dinner and then you had dancing and so on. Well, now we've got a ballet dancer who joined the party and she loved him. He was funny. He was delightful. So she'd planned this trip—we're going to go to the nightclub. So, we drive out there—my father doesn't dance well. He has her out in the dance floor as only a professional could do. We watched the thing, we had dinner and we are now in the car coming home and I am sitting in the back with the ballet dancer who now makes a move, but Daddy is in the front seat. And I can't say anything and he is going to town and he went all the way to town and of course [laughs]. And I thought, “You son of a bitch.” He was rolling with laughter. He said “Well, you've been holding off from me, so.” [makes grabbing gesture] So, I never told daddy and I never told mother. And he was a great friend and through him I met more Broadway tops and I learned where the dancers went after hours to dance so I did that and that introduce me to gay life. And I found it much to my liking. Not every place I went—some they were very snobbish and pretentious but the village had such a variety. You could find them. And then I found—I'll put this on film also—I found the place I liked best of all—the most notorious one in the village, the Mineshaft. The Mineshaft was strictly—it was what Berlin was after World War I. It was exactly like Berlin. But I will tell you one thing—nothing ever happened to you if you didn't want it to. Everyone was really a gentleman. But it was leather and it was motorcycles. It was wild. I loved every damn minute of it. It really was top of the line. And I loved the fact that when you came out there was a line of taxis willing to take you. [laughs] I just loved the leather scene. And some people said, “You don't go there? You don't go to the leather people?” And I said “They are really nice people. I have a nice time talking to them. Some of them are really executives you know, and other things in life.” And it was great.

BL: Do you remember about what year that was that you started going there?

LV: The late sixties—in the sixties, yes. And it was absolute fun. I even went to one across from the Mineshaft. There is a building closer to the river that’s an absolute triangle. And it [____???] they had a simple sign out there that said “hotel.” But the ground floor was an equally wild bar that had tunnels under the Hudson. I didn’t venture to those. I’m game but that was a bit much. But, what I loved was it was a big bar room with a high ceiling and they had the nude boys on acrobatics doing acts over the bar while you had your drink. Now, I’ve got to admit, that was an exotic thing for a boy from Long Island. And they were good. They were real athletes, you know? They were always doing these acts over your head. And I thought “I’ve found my world. It’s it. It’s great.” And then I’d walk out and—no fear at all—I’d walk from that neighborhood, clear across 14th Street to get the subway and when I think of it—You know, I am in the meat market area with the meat men—I’m with the whole thing. I never felt fear in my life in that neighborhood, wherever I went. Never for a moment did I ever feel fear. I did have this inner feeling, you’re a part of it. I am not a religious person. I do believe that there are other forces—something, I don’t know what you name it. And those forces guide you, like when I go places, I usually ended up—there would be something in surrealism. There’d be a book. There’d be prints. I’d go someplace and see an act that I had always thought about and there would be the actor at the next table or walking by. I would do these things. After a while, I just started to be, “Okay, you think about art all the time. You think about the theater and dancing. It’s bound to happen.” So I get into an elevator one day at Sotheby’s—it was Parke Bernet then—and there’s [Greta] Garbo standing and holding a little flower and the Garbo outfit, and I couldn’t help—I just stared. And she looked up and she smiled like “I know what you’re doing, and yes, it’s Garbo.” I get off the elevator and I thought “I’m going to faint.” And this happened a couple of times with people. Lauren Bacall died the other day. I used to go into a building with a gallery, and Lauren Bacall’s dentist was on the next floor. And I’d get in the elevator, and there would be Lauren Bacall, with that voice darling, you know. So, after a while I really do have this feeling—if you think in these terms, it happens. Now you get opportunities. You either take them or you don’t. You speak to someone, or you don’t. You get an invitation to go somewhere—if you refuse it, it’s your loss. But fate puts you in positions to meet people, to go places, to have experiences. And you—of course, I am a little old now but I am now more open to it than I ever was. I can now philosophize about it. Before it was always just happening and it’s how I eventually made an art collection. Being involved with engraving, and art and that, I began to go do book dealers. And gain, I met a very wonderful man, who again—I am younger and he’s older man. He had a feeling and began explaining the arts of the fine book industry. And then he one day said “Here’s a treat for you.” It was a great big Bible. And he said, “This is the equal to the world’s most famous Bible. It’s the next level down.” And I am turning these pages with white gloves and I am looking at the wood cuts. I am in awe. I am holding a book from the 1400s in my hand, or [____???] label. And so I bought a couple of things from him. Then I went to an auction and I bought a Rembrandt one night. Rembrandts in the 1950s had hit a low point. Prints had hit a low point. So I go to a night session with a friend of mine. And we’re in the second row and there’s man in front of me. And up comes a little etching called “The Star of the Epiphany.” And there was a group of children in a very dark etching and if you look close you could see a window and a star going by. The star of Epiphany and the children carry it. Well I fell in love with that little thing and my friend’s with me and he says, “You’re not going to buy that thing?” I said, “Well, let’s look and see.” Well, the prices started to go—25, 30 dollars for a Rembrandt. So here come the Star of Epiphany and my little hand goes up, right? And the guy says, “And you got it.” And I thought he was pointing to the man in front of me. He is pointing to me and I

thought I'd faint. They come down the aisle and they handed it to me. "Oh my God! I paid \$50 dollars for a Rembrandt." And my friend says, "That's weird." I said, "No, it's being in the right place here, you know." I didn't buy more that night—of course, you didn't have credit cards. See, if I had a credit card, baby, would have loaded up. Years later when I am living all the way out here in Pennsylvania, I needed a new roof. I needed a new roof. A Pennsylvania friend of mine said, "You're going to New York. I'd like to go with you. It would be fun." So I said, "Yeah, I am doing something I never wanted to do. I am going to go try to sell my Rembrandt." So I go to a world-known gallery. Now, the people—some of these people in this business are really stupid. They think you walk in and you don't know what you've got. "Oh I'm poor dumb, dumb. I don't know what I've got here." Of course I looked it up! I get into this guy and he is sitting behind the polished desk and he says, "Oh yeah, that's a nice little Rembrandt." And I said, "Look at the back." [Motions, as if he is stamping a paper.] It said the [____??], the prince of Lichtenstein, There were more stamps on the back of that damn print... everyone trading it and buying it." And I said, "It's really valuable." He said, "I'd give you a fast \$200 dollars." I said, "That's very kind of you but I am taking the print and I will go to somebody who knows the real value. And I think you do too but screw you." Now I got all the way uptown. My friend says "Why'd you do that?" I said "No, no, no." I said, "There's a private dealer uptown. A European. And he's got..." I walk in and his wife is there and he's there. She takes one look—I show it to her and she says, "You know you've got a very valuable Rembrandt." And I said, "Yes." She says, "My husband is out of the country at the moment but if you'll sign a form and keep it with me. He'll call you tomorrow and he'll make you an offer." He calls the next morning and he says, "I will give you \$4,000 dollars for the etching." So I go in to see him and I said... He said "Now I'll be honest with you, after I buy it from you, I am getting on a plane to Switzerland and selling it for \$8,000." He says, "but that's the way it goes." He says, "It's really worth \$8,000. I can't pay that but I have a collector who wants... This is a beautiful little etching and you need \$4,000 dollars, right?" I say, "Yeah, I need a roof." He says "We are both happy." So he goes off and I get a check in the mail for \$4,000 dollars. My friend says, "Holy shit. Why didn't you do that--buy a lot of them?" I said, "Because I didn't have the money! I bought one and now I miss it. It's out of my hands." So after that I went to other etching—other print sales and I got a very fine Salvador Dali. I got three Kurt Seligmanns. You don't hear as much about him, but a very important German who lived in New York at the time. I have got two of the Italian [Giorgio] de Chiricos. I've got all these things that kept falling into my interest and now I am smart enough. When I see them I've got that credit card baby and when someone says, "Oh, we've got this funny Italian thing here"—I was working at a gallery in—yeah it was in Pennsylvania—and the women says we are going to be doing this great big print sale. She says, "There's a lot of things here. Do you see something that you want, Larry? You know, you tell me." And I am looking at the de Chirico and I said, "That's an interesting little thing." She says, "I am thinking of asking \$80 dollars for it." I said, "You just sold it." I didn't say it's worth \$400 or \$500 or even maybe even \$4,000. I just said, "That's nice. Thank you." It's on my wall at home in the bedroom. So I now have got a large collection---I'm thinking I talked vaguely to them—I am good friends with people over at Lebanon Valley College and I like that room in the chapel. If you haven't been there, it's a lovely little gallery to visit. I said to the woman one day, "I know what the gallery business is like for you people. You have to pay for transportation when you rent a show. You have to have insurance. You have to have all sorts of things. It's expensive. I'd like to make you an offer. I have a very valuable collection of basically surrealist works or related and I would love to see them in a room like this. And Just call it 'One Man's Collection.' Don't even put my

name on it. Just say ‘One Man’s Collection.’ You insure it and I will transport it there and I will transport it back. Hell, I’ll help you hang it.” So, that is my ultimate goal to do that and let other people enjoy it. Then eventually Bill [????] will get it someday down the line and Bill can do with it what he wants. He can give some to the college. I like the little college. I never went there but I like it and they own my work. They just bought two of my works. Anybody who buys them is a friend. So that’s the story of what I do and how I got involved in the arts. It has never been dull since. You got another question?

BL: Yeah. Sure. [Laughter]

LV: Be brave. Ask! [Laughs]

BL: Well, as an artist—it sounds like you were influence by a lot of things because you were taken around to a lot of museums, a lot of galleries.

LV: Yes.

BL: You saw a lot of different works of different artists.

LV: Yes.

BL: Are there any in particular that stand out in your mind as being something that particularly influenced your work?

LV: I have looked at a great many. I go home, I think about them. I always get the catalogs. I’d say there is a couple things that influenced me. The first Dali and the first Matta paintings that I saw in slide form have remained with me ever since. That was Mr. Wickman showing a slideshow. The first one was a huge—I don’t know Dali’s title but it was huge human head sleeping and it trails off into space. It has got crutches holding the head up. A sleeping head with little tiny people walking around it. The second slide up was a great landscape with a great volcanic form with jewels and colors spewing out. Now thinking back, this was when I was at a certain age—you could make a sexual Freudian thing with that but neither one of those slides has ever left me. But yes, I go to see people’s work. I am wide open to looking at anyone’s work. Techniques interest me. Philosophically, I always go with surrealists, cubists, and even the Dada artists who were making protests. Why I make a protest. Those have had a great influence. Picasso’s *Guernica*, when it was in New York—I had to go any time in New York to see the *Guernica*. I could not believe the size, the power and then when the museum acquired *The Crying Woman*, the studies for it—that really freaked me out, ‘cause there was the *Guernica*, there was *the Crying Woman*. Then a book came out. Someone had photographed him while he was working on it. To see how he rubbed it out and changed it and scrubbed it over and you know—like I do as an artist—or anyone. It didn’t flow off of his fingertips. He felt deeply and he expressed until he got it right and that is what sticks in my mind. He as an image sticks in my mind because yeah he battered them out but if you turn his paintings around—unlike me who forgets to date them – he put the date of every day he worked on it and sometimes the back of a Picasso canvas is covered with dates. [Pounds the table.] He never stopped. He changed and changed. He was never quite sure and none of us are quite sure. I don’t start out cock sure with what I am doing. That is why people say, “Well could you write me an explanation?” “No.” I can

do it with the political ones but I can't tell you why I chose what I did to do it but yeah, some of them are obvious symbol. But when I do something that is really moving, I can't give you a reason why I did it. It's hit me. Bill and I take trips once in a while. We took a trip upstate to Sullivan County. It was getting near twilight and as we were driving along—he drives nice and slow—I look to my right and there was a barn set back from the road but it wasn't barn colored. It was jet black with an open door, with a dim light and a white cupola and behind it was a street lamp in the middle of the field. It didn't make sense. Then a couple of house that looked like they should be in a street but there were no streets. I couldn't forget that image so while he is driving I am sketching this town on a pad and writing notes. I came home and about a week later I started it. It's about this big. [Makes a rectangular shape with his hands.] Okay, I started painting that sucker and over and over and over until I got the damned thing right. I couldn't—someone said to me, “Why did it take you so long?” [Laughter] I said, “There was something about the barn. Why was it black? Why did it have this strange little light and the door open? Why is there a streetlight in the background?” I said “Look at the picture as a whole.” And I still have it at home. I still look at it on the wall and I still wonder why the damned streetlight and those red houses are in the background and I enjoy that. Last night, I watched a tv show by accident—magicians. Penn and Teller—I had magicians on. I thought “How wonderful. I never want to know how they do the trick.” I am the one person who says “I don't want to know how the many disappears in the box.” It's wonderful. He disappears and he comes walking down the aisle. I don't want to know that that's a trick. I have never—even from childhood I loved... There was a man named Cardini. He used to come out in early television. He would be an older man dressed in a beautiful white tie with tails, a top hat, and he would produce a deck of cards and another and another. He projects them out of his hat and behind his head and up his sleeve and the floor would be covered. And you'd think, “How could anyone keep pulling out of nowhere full decks of cards?” And that was it—Mr. Cardini that's all he worked with was cards. I still remember him. I still like him. I still do pictures with picture cards on occasion. So I... Yeah, I am influence by people. Sometimes I am influenced by artists who mean something to me but they don't influence my work particularly. Late one night after a movie, I bought a book [Antoine] Villard. Villard is this offbeat—one of the impressionist types from France. And I just looked at the prints and I said, “This is fascinating.” I read a little bit of the beginning of the book. He was man who lived all of his life with his sisters in an apartment in Paris. He wasn't married. He looked out the window and painted these scenes and he had such a feel for paint. I was told that when he went to dinner parties he would have a little pad down here [motions to his lap] and he would be making little sketches of the guests at the table. I had to read about him. I had to read the whole book. I read about what a loner he was, how beautiful his canvases were and then I walked into a New York gallery on 79th Street—I can remember the gallery--and there was one for sale. It was two people at a breakfast table—and he could create sunlight. We all work with cadmium yellows and whites but this picture looked lit by sunlight and he had played with the paint so carefully. And they were eating bread—I had to go to the man minding the gallery and I said, “How much is the Villard?” He says, “Oh, it's not a bad price, \$10,000.” I go, “Maybe in your gallery.” I said “Well, I am going to go home and think about.” Well, I wasn't lying. I went home and thought about it. And I still remember the painting, but I didn't have \$10,000 to buy it. Now it would be worth a hell of a lot more. But the man touched---

End of Recording 2

END OF INTERVIEW PART 1

BEGINNING OF TAPE 3

BL: Do I need to start over, or—

LM: Go. Yes.

BL: Start over. I'm Barry Loveland. I am an oral history interviewer with the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project, and I'm here with Lonna Malmshemer, who is our videographer. Today is August 29th, 2014, and we're interviewing Lawrence von Barann at the LGBT Center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

LM: Number two.

BL: And this is the second interview with Larry. And I just want to make sure again that I have your permission to record the interview today.

LV: Yes, you do.

BL: Great. Thank you. So the last interview that we had, we kind of left off that you were still in New York. I want to stay in New York just a little bit longer to talk about more of your LGBT life, your gay life, in New York and, sort of when, like, what year maybe approximately that you started going out more, getting into the LGBT bar scene, or whatever things that you were doing at that time.

LV: I would say that I become more active after high school, and I began to work. I would say maybe—two or three years after, I had little part-time jobs. I worked for R.H. Macy in the art department, selling art supplies. I worked for an advertising agency for a few weeks. Then I worked for an art service, which is a mini advertising agency, believe it or not, that do a lot of the work for the bigger companies. That was very interesting. I was mostly getting suppl—getting information for the artists who were working there. In those days, you had places in New York who rented pictures to you. They took them out of magazines, books, whatever, and they were your reference. So, I'd run down and say, "What have you got on the Arctic, you know, the Arctic? We're doing a thing on the North Star—blah blah blah." And they would supply you with pictures to take back in an envelope. And so I was doing that, and I learned a lot about that. Also the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue had a service like that that was very popular. I don't think any of that exists at the moment. I think that's all gone with the computers and everything. But it made life interesting. But gay life—no, at that point was way in the background of my mind. It was only on the edges. Because working there I'd rush home for dinner, you know, and it was out—you didn't feel like going out when you were out in the suburbs, going back to the city.

BL: Were you still living at home at that point?

LV: Oh yeah, I was still living at home.

BL: Yeah.

LV: Well, my mother was ill. She had cerebral strokes. My father was working a full-time job. He was a production manager for the ADT Company that makes all the production devices and had a very important position but was very busy. So some...I tried to stay around the house as much as possible. There are no other family members. There were none on my father's side because they were all in Germany, whoever they may have been. And on my mother's side there was only an aunt who was rather aloof, religious fanatic. She was not something that we particularly dealt with. And she lives in Jersey anyway. So it was mostly me. It was a very small family group, the three of us. And I began to be aware of the gay life, even when I worked at Macy's. There were other gay employees, believe it or not. And I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do about all that. I really wasn't. I was still growing into manhood if you want. And so after that, I really became very interested in wanting to be involved in theatre, and so my father worked with a lot of men who would work part-time for ADT and then would go off into other work. Well, one of those was a scenic designer or worked in that capacity and told my father about the United Scenic Workers of America, and that you had to take an examination for it, and they don't let anybody in particularly—I learned that was a euphemism. So, all right. He said, "Why don't you sign up for that? I'll pay the entrance fee," which was like 75 dollars. I signed up, and I turned out to be the youngest member of the group that was going to take the exam. Everybody was in their twenties or thirties, and I am the happy go lucky teenager, right, which worked in my favor, because it's a 20—it's almost a 12-hour test. You have a lunch break and so on, and you meet in a room on 42nd Street, and when I didn't know an answer to the question one of the other guys would go, [whispers and mimes showing an answer] "Hey!" And it was very nice of them to help, because I was like the kid brother, right? So I was doing that, and I was... There was a man who claimed to have been a designer, who was the monitor of the meeting...or the examination. And I remember my encounter with him was—one of the examples was the "Pick a play of your choosing that you have seen or you know about and draw a stage set for one of the acts"—and everyone going to town. I chose Truman Capote, *The Grass Harp*. That was big at the time. So I'm busy drawing this thing of a great big tree with the people up in the tree and the whole thing—I was very proud of myself and this guy comes walking down the aisle looking at it and he says, "Oh, that's extraordinary. Do you know how much that would cost to build?" I said, "I haven't the foggiest notion." And so I said "Besides, you didn't say we had to take cost into consideration. You just said, 'Make a drawing of a set.' This is mine." *Grass Harp*. Truman Capote. The whole thing. Well, he went away; the test ended. And about, oh, three weeks later we get a thing in the mail: "You passed. You got an 85." Okay, and that was a little over the passing mark of seventy-something. So my father said "This is wonderful." Of course, he was a union... He was eventually a union person. So I'm—and it said "Now you can go around to all the theatres in New York and apply for an apprentice job." So I get all dressed up and one of the first ones on my list was the Metropolitan Opera, since I liked the opera. It was off 42nd Street. I go with my little pass, my little approval, and I am dressed like this. [pulls at his blazer and dress shirt] Okay—mistake of all time, but I'm dressed like this and I go into the back door of the Met and I am suddenly on stage and people are rustling scenery around and I am thinking—you know, I got to the middle of the stage and I looked out at that sea of seats and I said "[Enrico] Caruso stood here. And [Beniamino] Gigli and all these incredible people and

here you are and you can't sing a note." So I finally got to an elevator and they tell me to go up in the flies [fly loft]. That was about five stories up. And I come out of the flies and here's the top of the scenery that eventually drops down, and there's a guy with a bucket and a giant brush, spattered overalls, and he's slopping the paint on. And he says, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I'm from the labor union and they want to know if you need an apprentice." He says, "Apprentice. No, I don't need one." And he says, "Why are you dressed like that? Look at how I'm dressed. You work with buckets of casein paint and big brushes." And now I'm looking crestfallen, and I said, "Well, usually when you go for a job, you dress up." So he says, "Not here, you dress down." So—and he was a very nice guy, Mr. Novak. And so he says, "You really want to work in this business?" And I said, "Well, I've been told the—you know, the salaries are phenomenal." I said, "My father works for"—whatever amount—"but one of his associates works for you people on occasion and gets 400 dollars a week," which at that time was stupendous. And I said, "I wouldn't mind 400 dollars a week." And he said, "Apprentices don't get 400 dollars." So I said, "Okay, you don't have an opening." He says, "No." And he says, "I could tell you other things but I won't. You'll find out as you go around." And he says, "But you look like you should be in advertising. I mean you got the part, you've got a portfolio of drawings. This is wonderful." And he said, "My son's in advertising. You'd like advertising." And he kept pushing that at me. And I said, "Well, I'll take your advice, but it was great being in the Met and great meeting you." And I went down out, and I had another one on the list, and I go to another one, and it's the same routine. "Oh gee, you're a nice guy, and we'd love to hire you, but when we are the only artists here we can't hire an apprentice. That's a union rule." Now I'm beginning to think, "Then why does the union accept my money if I can't get a job?" So by the third one, I was getting really fed up and that's where I met my first—shall we say "blooming queen"—of all time. Backstage I get to meet—he comes and he takes a look at me and he said, "Oh! A live one!" And I said—now I am scared silly, right, 'cause I've been warned. So, I said, "No, not a live one, I'm trying to be an apprentice." He says, "Oh, you can be an apprentice for me." I said, "No, no. I meant for the theatre." [laughter] Again—"No, we can't hire one unless there's two or more artists working." So I thought, "Well, that's a clever thing." They took all of our money—who passed, but we can't get a job. So I finally meet one of the fellows on the street, and I said, "How are you doing?" And he says, "I can't get anything." So, I went on another day doing this. I finally meet a man who's designing this set and he's actually sitting onstage with a drafting table and he was doing the most beautiful drawing of a southern plantation, and I'm drooling over this. And he was kind and nice, and he said, "You know, it's a very important play," and if my mind was working I could tell you who the actress was gonna be but it was a big, big name. And he said, "I can't hire you. Your portfolio is interesting, you look like you're very intelligent, but again, those union rules. I can't do it, but this is what I do." And he's explaining—he had architecture courses, blah, blah, blah. And I leave and I thought, "Well, at least he looked at my work. He liked it." So I go home and I tell my father this and he said, "This doesn't sound good. Try one more day." I try another day and nothing happened. He said, "We're going to a union meeting. I'm calling for the right to be present at a union meeting." So now we go to the union and here's these apprentice-types all sitting about, and the union boss types, right out of a movie. I mean, these are right out of a movie. And my father goes in with me and he says, "This is my son. He passed your test. He has been walking around Manhattan every day, enjoying seeing backstage, but there's some funny rules here. You're not hiring any apprentices." And so some of the young people sitting there, the actors, they say, "I told you!" [knocks on the table] You know, they're knocking the table. So I was asked to leave the room.

Now I can hear them arguing inside. The young people are criticizing the union bosses saying, “This is why ticket prices are going up! We’re turning young people away. Here’s a young man wants to work with us. That’ll bring other young people in. You people are keeping them out with your rules!” So they say, “You’ve got to stop this business of only the family members get a job.” So if Daddy worked, you work. You don’t have a daddy, you don’t work. Well, it went on, and finally I hear my father saying, “I want the money back. I’m not leaving ‘til I get that 75 bucks back. You people are doing something that I consider crooked.” And now I’m sitting out there: “Oh God, I’m embarrassed, Daddy’s yelling at people”—who never yells at home, but yelled at them. So, out he came with the 75 dollars and says, “You’re no longer an apprentice for this group. Forget it!” So, I went home, okay, and he says, “Try getting into art school.” Well, I told you the last time, the G.I.’s were back. G.I.’s had preference, but the art students leaked in. So I got in there, one afternoon class. So every day I’d dress up and have a big portfolio, I’d get out of the subway, I’d walk the whole length of 57th Street to the Art Associa—the Art Students League and it got to be such a routine that years later I learned that someone who worked on 57th street in an office would know it’s four o’clock when the strange young man in the brown outfit with the big portfolio went by [laughs]. And I enjoyed that. I enjoyed being finally in a class with people older than myself that could draw. I’m learning to draw. Everything is fine. So my father says, “Well, you need more than this.” So then we heard about the Brooklyn Museum, and he said, “I’ll meet you at West Fourth Street on the subway when I’m out of work. You come, we both go to Brooklyn [New York], we both go to the Brooklyn Museum.” So we went there and sure enough they said, “We’d be glad to have your son as a student. What classes do you want?” And I go, “Oh my god! I got a choice.” So I chose a drawing class with an artist I’d never heard of. And there was a painting class with Charles Side(ph), who was a pretty good painter at the time, and I knew him. And then Arnold Bank. And that was a magic name that I couldn’t get in at the other school, but Arnold Bank was the leading calligrapher in New York. He was legendary, and he was now going to teach also in Brooklyn. Wham! I got into his class. And then they said, “There’s a class in etching.” Fantastic. (_____??). Well-known. So I had this roster of classes I went to, and—every day, and I met the fellow that I eventually lived with who was straight, Irish-Catholic, [whispers] square. And he lived in Forrest Hills, so I’d go from my house on the subway, he’d be on the platform at Forrest Hills, we’d both then do the whole trip to Brooklyn, which was changing...incredible. But the museum was wonderful. It had one of the world’s greatest print departments, under a woman named Una Johnson. It had the museum itself. It had all these American Indian things. It had everything and I thought, “Hey, this is pretty good. You don’t have to go outside for reference material. It’s right here. It’s fine.” Everyone was friendly. And Arnold Bank was the walking encyclopedia. You were studying calligraphy, and I learned all the names of the types—the Italian hand and all this. But at the same time, being Jewish and a scholar, he threw world history at you. So I was learning about the Romans, the Greeks, all while I was doing lettering. And I worshipped him. He was fantastic. He had a medical condition where his eyes are sort of popped—I can’t remember what they called it, but it was...bald head, popped eyes, and he’d come at you looking very intense. And he, he was wonderful. I mean, that was an image I loved so. So between what I was learning from him and the etcher and the drawing and the painting, I had a full schedule, and I was really getting into it. I mean I was doing etchings, I was doing everything. Then finally another artist came to the school—Bernard Brussel-Smith. And he was teaching wood engraving. And I thought [knocks on table], “This is for Larry.” And I joined his class. And he was a guy with a beard and mustache, you know. Again, an outgoing Jewish gentleman. It was wonderful.

Besides—I didn't know he was Jewish. That's a funny story. But he was very unorthodox. So for years I worked with him and I thought he was not Jewish then my—his associate said, "You just wished him Happy Easter." And I said, "Yeah, why not?" He says, "He's Jewish." All these years I'd been with him and he's Jewish? I didn't know that. Bernie didn't mind. Well anyway, I began to work with him and he watched me doing illustrational problems. And then one day he came up to me, and he said, "How would you like a job?" And I said, "I'd love a job. My family would love if I had a job." So he says, "How would you like to work for me at my studio? I have one man who represents me. I work alone. I need an apprentice who can work the printing press. I'll teach you how. My current student is going to Israel to work on a kibbutz." That was big at that time—go over there, you know. So I said, "I'd love that." And he says, "You can keep on with this class, 'cause I'll be driving in to hold the class. You go from work with me in the car, and we drive and we have dinner on the way in." So, that was my routine. So now I'm working on 43rd Street, just off Second Avenue, or Third Avenue, in New York in a studio. Man, that was great for me right? So now I'm learning how to use the printing press. I'm learning how to engrave. I'm doing all this stuff. I'm going to the library and doing all this—eventually I even went to see clients. I got to be pretty good at this stuff. And I got to watch Brussel-Smith working, with the cigar and working. The combination was deadly. But anyway, that was my beginning of a professional life and away from home.

BL: What kind of time frame was that? Do you recall what years that was?

LV: How old was I?

BL: Well, yeah, what years was it? 1940s or '50s or '60s? [chuckles]

LV: I knew you would do this. All right, it must have been—'45, '46. Somewhere in there. The Korean War was going on.

BL: Okay, probably early '50s.

LV: '50s. Okay. And I remember the day I received a draft notice, and I said to Bernie, "I can't be here today. I've got to go to the draft house." And I said, "But don't worry." He says, "Why shouldn't I worry? You finally got a guy that can wood engrave, you can use the press, and you're gonna go in the Army." I said, "No, Larry's not going in the Army, believe me." So I get down to the draft board. I go through this examination thing, and I try to convince the psychiatrist I was gay. I thought that was my out. And I said to the psychiatrist, "I'm gay." He says, "You're the fiftieth one who told me you're gay. You're not gay. You're making that up." And I said, "No! I'll swear on a Bible, I'm gay!" He said, "No, you're not. No, I don't—I don't believe you. And besides," he said, "don't worry." And I didn't know what that meant. So I go on to the next doctor and this doctor looks at the list, and he looks at me, and he says, "Do you really want to be in the Army?" I said, "No, I don't want to be in the Army. I don't want to kill people. I don't even know the Koreans. I don't want to kill people." And he said, "You're worried though, right?" And I said, "Yeah." And he says, "You're not going to get in the Army." I said, "But look it says 90 percent." He says, "That's 90 percent disability. They don't want you. You got a funny-looking back." Well, by then, I was younger and I didn't know how bad the back was. So I said, "Oh, you're right. Yep." Good actor, I did the whole bit. And so finally, I

get past him and I'm now: "I've got a 90 percent disability." You get down to a big room, and here sits all these doctors from the local hospital with the bloody gowns—they do that to scare you, you know. They've just come from operating and I'm standing in front of one and there's a room full of men and this one says to me, "This can't be. 90 percent. No way. You look fine. Take your clothes off." Now I've been marching around without clothes before, but now I'm dressed, and I see everyone else is dressed. I'm going to be the only one in the room nude. So I thought if I were in show business, might be a big moment, but I'm not, so I said, "Okay." I took off the clothes. Now all the doctors crowd around and they say, "He's got a funny looking spine. The x-ray's really...you know." And he says, "He really is 4-F [not acceptable for military service under the Selective Service System]." And the guy says, "Well, look at this thing. He's got a curve." He says, "Do you have pain?" I said, "Oh, do I have pain. I work at a desk all the time, I can't walk too far, you know, I have to take elevators and stuff." And so they said, "Oh, I suppose we're gonna have to do it." Reject! [makes a stamping motion on the table] Gave me a dime and the rejection slip. I went down that stairs so fast I almost killed a naval officer coming up the stairs. And I got back to Bernie—my dime was for the subway—and he says, "Well?" I said, "A reject! I've got a terrible spine. Hooray!" [laughter] So I went working with him and that was the beginning of New York life. I was beginning to wean myself away from the house as it were. Even from my friend because he was working at another job. I was really beginning to feel myself as a man. I now had a craft I could do, and I did it very well, and I enjoyed it. And I got to visit advertising agencies, and in one case someone said—they always were stealing people from one another—"Why don't you bring your portfolio over to us?" It was a big agency that did the Whelan Drug Company. Whelan was a big, huge outfit. So I bring—I thought, "Oh, I'm not being disloyal to Bernie. I'm still working. I'll bring my portfolio over." So I did, and this young art director says, "You're just what we're looking for. You could be working in an agency like this." And I said—I said, "Make me an offer." So he says, "Well, leave your portfolio. I've got to show it to the head man." I come back the next day, and he says, "I'm sorry. I love your portfolio, other art directors do. The head man won't hire you." And I said, "Why not?" He says, "You didn't graduate from Pratt [Institute]." I said, "What difference does it make? I can do this. I'm working for Brussell-Smith." "No, he only hires Pratt people." I said, "That's prejudice." He said, "I'm sorry. It was nice meeting you. Lots of luck." So I go back with Brussell-Smith—I didn't tell him any of that adventure—and we were doing very well together. I was getting to do, like, the one piece I brought you, the Bonds Printing Company. That I did. Then he had a trade magazine for the gift and art industry and he let me do the layouts and the covers. So I designed all the covers and did the artwork. I did all the layouts inside with the photographs and story pages. So I was getting a hell of an education right on the spot, at which point he was getting edgy and maybe wanting to retire to the country where he could work from home, and not—and I—I could see where the trail was going. So he said to me one day, "Come up to my house for dinner." Westchester [New York], fantastic house, you know, the whole bit. A maid, you know, a cook. I have a lovely dinner. He's saying, "How do you like this place?" And I said, "It's nice. It's nice. You've got a big garden in the back with trees and everything." And he said, "My wife teaches at a big high school in New York. I'll introduce you. We have a son." I go back to work the next day, and I'm thinking, "Oh, there's something—something cooking." So he says, "Look, it's near Christmas. I can't take my son to a department store. I am letting you take my precious son." And I'm thinking, "Oh, I'm getting in deeper." So now I take the kid in a cab, and I do the whole bit, you know. And I bring him back safe and sound and Brussell-Smith says, "How would you move—like to move in with me? You

could live at my house.” And I thought, “Right. 24 hours a day I would have to put up with Mr. Brussel-Smith and the gardening—‘cause he knew I liked gardening.” And I thought “No way, José. No way.” In the meantime, I was making myself a portfolio and my friend who was now working for another company—I said, “Why don’t we try freelancing [makes quotes in the air]?” And that’s how that started. Well, once I was off on my own [sighs]... If I went out with the portfolio, Joe would stay home with my mother. If he went out, I’d stay home. So we had two of us going out with the same portfolio, and we got jobs. And we got some good ones. And we did our own mailing pieces, of which I have one or two in there. And we found out that when we were sending them out, because they were hand-printed, all their art directors were in love. They were collecting our pieces and giving us little jobs to do. Then finally we get the Seagram’s Whiskey job. And my friend says, “You really think we can really handle a big illustration for Seagram’s Whiskey?” And I said, “As Brussel-Smith—Arnold Banks—said, ‘Take the job and find out how to do it after you get it.’” So we both struggled with that big wooden... I taught my friend to engrave exactly as I did. So when I got tired, he could sit down and pick up the tool and continue the lines. And that was clever on my part, and his. And so we engraved that one, and they loved it. They loved it. They asked what the roll was in the foreground. Someone said it was a knish, or something like that, a Jewish thing. And I said, “It’s anything you want it to be. It’s a roll. It’s the holiday season. And Jewish people eat and drink Seagram’s. So, you’re not going to screw me over.” So, anyway, we did that, and we got a few jobs that were very good. We had a huge one for—thinking of Harrisburg—the Civil War. There was a very well-known author who wrote books on the Civil War. [raps on table] His name is also escaping me, but anyway, he did things for a magazine that was very high-class and he had done—and wanted bands at the top—the Civil War. And so the editor called us, and said, “You’re a natural.” So we meet this incredible author. He’s thrilled to know we’re gonna do it. I showed him samples. We go home, and then, like so many—I’ve got to watch my language here—so many arts directors who are so inconsiderate about time—they wanted everything done [snaps] with speed. So I said to Joe, “We can’t do this. We can’t do a wood engraving this time. We’re gonna fake it. We’re gonna do a pen and ink.” And I said, “It’s such a short period—we’ll have to work overnight.” So we get a little bottle of caffeine pills—I’d heard about them—and we take the caffeine pills. We were starry-eyed and we did it. We did everything except one little tailpiece. And the next day I’m—my eyes won’t shut, you know. I drive a car in and find a parking spot on Park Avenue and go to the agency, and show it. The author comes in, “Magnificent. Oh, there’s this one—oh, there’s one little tailpiece...” And I said, “No! No little tailpiece! We can’t do another one. I’m going to die.” [laughs] So the guy said, “Well, you did such a superb job.” I said, “Just pay us. Just pay us. I can’t do that, so get somebody else to do a little tailpiece.” So I got home to Joe and I said, “We pulled it off. They didn’t know whether it was an engraving or a pen and ink drawing. Let it be.” So this is how we got involved, and we did work for agencies. We worked for all sorts of people. We would take any job that came along if it was interesting. We did—because Joe had an in with this publishing company that did crossword puzzles—Endless Crossword Puzzles—(____???) and everything. We knew the editor, so she gave us an assignment. “We want some clever new crossword covers.” So we did those, 50 dollars a shot, we knocked those things out, at which point I was beginning to go out on my own. That’s when I was beginning to venture into the gay world. I would go back, Joe could stay home with my mother. I would go into the city, and I discovered Third Avenue, and I discovered all these wonderful bars—hundreds of bars. Very elaborate ones, not-so-elaborate, and I went in one or two. I had to get my nerve up to

do that. And I found out that it was very pleasant. People were very friendly. I'm not a drinker so I would nurse a drink all night, you know. And I had a good time.

BL: Do you remember the names of any of the bars that you went to then? [chuckles]

LV: [thinks] It'll come back to me, I can't remember. I remember there was one on 53rd and Third—that's now a big office building, but it was there. There was some right down the block—some two blocks over. I don't even remember the names. But I just knew the routine. And Third Avenue is filled with gay people. You couldn't walk without bumping into it. So I learned about that. I spoke to some. I went home with one one night for pay. I paid him. He lived down the Village. I was scared silly getting in a cab, and I'm going off with a strange gentleman to a strange apartment. It was okay. It was fun. I liked him—nice guy. And we had a good time. I paid him his 10 bucks or whatever it was and I got back into a cab and came back uptown. And I was doing this but never telling Joe this 'cause I didn't want him to be scared silly about this stuff, and particularly, he was very attractive, and gay people made a play for him, and he couldn't stand that. So I thought, "Well, rather than get him upset—I'm not going to tell him he's living with a gay person, right?" And I had my little gay magazines. There was little ones. Physique Pictorial was a big one, and others, and I was buying those and reading about all this. And that was my venture into it. And I found—

BL: Was this about in the late '50s or...? 1950s? Yeah.

LV: It's the '50s, yeah. And then one night, I'm coming home from Manhattan, and I get out at the end of the subway, I get on the bus, I'm riding out to where I live, and there's very few passengers, but there's a nice-looking young man. And now I'm getting the feeling for recognizing people and I thought, "He's coming out my way and he's gay." So when he was getting off, I got off the bus. Now—I'm about 10 blocks from where I really live. So as he walked very slow I walked up next to him, and of course he was gay. So he says, "I don't have a place to go," and I said, "Neither do I." So we fooled around in someone's garden. And then I walked home from there. So I learned about gay life. And it was all really very, very instant in a way. And—but I enjoyed it and I didn't know where it was going to lead but I was very careful. I was—I've heard all the things about disease and all of this good stuff, you know, and—so I'm being very careful. Then, one of my friends living out there was a ballet dancer and I told you about him. So outside of our one adventure in the back of Daddy's car, I really didn't do much with him. But I now was a visitor to New York all the time, and the theatre and so on. And finally when—where we were living—that's when the rioting started all over the country. The black and white issue. And we were at the end of a bus line, which meant a lot of blacks were moving up our way, which was white territory. [motions to separate areas] This was black. And now they were coming up—but coming up to rob. Women couldn't go to a store without being robbed. Houses were broken into. Joe didn't go out on the lawn without a hunting knife on his belt because he was afraid something would happen. So I said, "We can't live this way." So I drew a circle on the map and said, "We gotta move. I don't—never did like my family's house anyway," and I said, "By now it's worth money, but if this continues the prices are going to go down." So he says, "I'm game. Wherever you want to go." So I drew the circle and I couldn't find anything in that circle, and I included part of Jersey that I could afford to buy. And I wanted a house. I didn't want an apartment. So we had moved another artist to Pennsylvania—he's dead

now but he was big wheel when he got here. He looked like Oscar Wilde and acted like Oscar Wilde.

BL: Is that Li [Charles “Li” Hidley]? Li Hidley, yeah.

LV: Yeah, Hidley. You’ve heard of him, I’m sure.

BL: Oh, and met him. Oh, yeah.

LV: Oh, you’ve met him? Oh, then you know what I’m saying. So we moved him down here into a terrible neighborhood, but he didn’t know he was going in there, and so I said, “Why don’t we visit Li—go down there.” Neither one of us know anything about Pennsylvania, except the little Amish stories you hear and see, you know? “Let’s go down there and explore it.” So we got on a bus—no, it was a car. We came down—an old Plymouth. And we hit it when this was depressed. The Harrisburg—

BL: You remember what year it was you came?

LV: ’50...before the flood.

BL: ’72—71. Maybe something...

LV: ’72.

BL: So ’71, maybe ’70 or ’71. Yeah.

LV: Something around there—and it looked depressed, but there were things for sale all over. The Army had given up the air base, so all of those families moved out. It was a depressed area, and I said to my friend—I said, “This is unreal.” Everywhere I look there are houses for sale. Now, I’m being a smart ass—I want a loft like New York. There are no lofts. There was one on State Street, but it’s long gone. So, anyway, Hidley puts us up for a weekend or so, and I meet other people locally, and finally I meet a realtor. And I said, “I’m looking for something different.” Now he’s used to houses. And I’m saying, “Have you got a disused church? Have you got a loft? Have you got anything?” Well, surprisingly, friends of ours in New York who’s an artist said, “No, Larry, there’s a firehouse for sale down there.” I said, “How do you know?” He says “Oh, I was going to buy it at one point and move myself from New York to there.” A big German guy named Ach(ph). Achim(ph). And so I said, “Herb, you’re amazing,” and he says, “I know that, but I—there’s that firehouse.” I come back down and now I know where to ask. So I said to a realtor, “I hear that a firehouse for sale.” He said, “You want a firehouse?” I said, “Well—yeah, possibly.” He says, “Let me show you Second Street.” They showed me Second Street, I’m looking at mansions, and they’re all in my price range. I’ve now got that—first time in my life, money from the house I’m selling. They’re offering me houses for less, and they’re bigger, and they’re glamorous. And then I see the green line on either side of the river and the realtor tells me that’s a floodplain. So I said, “No, no. No, no, no. We do not buy in floodplains. I know all about that. So—no!” So he says, “Well, the little firehouse is uphill.” I said, “Good. Drive me there.” So he drove Joe and I up, and as we’re going up—I knew the guy didn’t—I

have a New York accent, at that time probably more pronounced, and I knew this was annoying him, so I said, “Well, gee, this is interesting. We’re going uphill. If there ever were a flood, it means the whole of Harrisburg would be gone, and maybe New York would be flooded, and if New York was flooded there wouldn’t be any reason to live. We wouldn’t have to worry about a house.” And he got beet red. And he drives me into Overland and it was a day when the kids were all at school. It was quiet—there’s no children, no cars and there sits a little firehouse, and I immediately fall in love with it. It’s got the roll-up doors and all that crap. And I get inside, and I’m noticing solid stone foundation. Front wall of the building—22 feet—2 feet thick, concrete. Brick building—double layers. And I said, “This isn’t bad. It needs a lot of work, but it’s not bad.” So I said, “This is interesting.” And he quotes the price. And I thought I heard wrong, it was such a cheap price. But now I’ve got another local with me, a friend of Hidley’s named Abe Dewhurst(ph)—a real Dutchman. And he’s [making a nudging motion, mimics], “Don’t take the price. Don’t take the price. You’ve got to bargain. This is bargain territory.” And I said, “Abe—he’s offered it at such a cheap price.” I go back and I tell it to them, and I tell him, and he says, “They couldn’t sell you a brick and stone building for that price.” And I said, “Joe, it’s fantasy land down there. You can’t believe it.” So I’d been now looking with the realtor—too many adventures to tell you—but I met my first prejudice in Mechanicsburg. There was a house on a Mechanicsburg’s Main Street he showed me. Glorious. It had a l—it had a—had an attic they put a skylight in, and you got a loft. Brilliant. The owner lived right across the street, a woman. I go to the realtor, and I said—this is before the firehouse. I said, “I’d like to buy the house. I’ve just seen the house across the street.” He says, “Oh, that’s great. Well, I can—I’ll talk to the owner, she’s across the street, and you can arrange a bank loan.” I said, “No, no, Mr. Hotshot here, I’ll write a check.” He says, “For the house?” He could see his commission right there on the desk. I said, “Yeah. I’ll write a check for the whole thing. I don’t want any of these things, you know.” He goes across the street and comes back and he’s crestfallen. And he says, “She won’t sell to you.” I said, “I just offered you full price. I am willing to buy the house as it is. I’m not asking her to do anything. Why won’t she sell it to me?” He says, “You’re not going to believe this but you’re a New Yorker.” And I said, “What difference is—look, I’m white. A white New Yorker. German, you know?” He says, “No, no, you don’t understand. If you buy the house you’re going to turn it into an antique shop.” And I said, “No, I’m not. I’m an artist. I don’t want to own an antique shop. I don’t know what I’m going to be doing, but I’m not doing that.” And he says, “She won’t sell.” I said, “Well, I’ll be damned if I’ll rise the price. It’s the wrong end. It should be the other way around.” I said, “Tell her to go shove it someplace.” Then I finally get to this firehouse thing, and I get the people on the phone, and Abe is [makes a nudging motion] “Don’t, don’t.” So I said, “Yeah, you made a nice offer, but it’s a little high. I think I’ll halve it.” The guy says, “Sit by your phone! I’ll be back to you in about 10 minutes.” 10 minutes later the phone rings. “We accept.” And I look at Abe and he says [whispering], “Told you! I told you! I told you!” So now I’m stealing the property, right? And I said, “Who owns this?” So he said—the realtor says, “Two men run it as a silkscreen factory for the Hershey Corporation for the teams.” Now that’s what he knew. He didn’t know there was a third partner who had dropped dead that left a widow and children, all of which are all in on this deal. Now, if I tell you the price, you aren’t gonna believe me. I bought the whole property for 4,000 dollars. Now, you’ve got two men, a woman, and two children, and I’ve got nice lawyer on Front Street, and I tell him, “I wanna buy this, I have to go back to New York. Would you handle it?” So he’s handling it, and I get a call. “Mr. Von Barann, I hate to tell you, but there’s a woman involved now, and children. We have to take out a bond on the woman and separate one on each child and the whole

thing. Do you know how complicated this is getting?” And I said, “That’s what I pay you the big bucks for. I don’t know from these things. You do it.” So finally, finally, my third visit down—I’m there, and there’s the two men, there’s the fat lady with the children, and we’re all signing papers, and I’m writing checks, and when we’re all through he says, “Do not ever come back to me again with buying a firehouse. I will throw you out the door.” [laughs] So—I’ve never seen the lawyer since. So now I had a firehouse, and we moved ourselves up, and I got here, and it was raining and snowing, and we move in with our possessions. And we did our own moving which was dumb, but we moved in. And then after I got here a little bit—to condense the story, Joe eventually gets married. He wasn’t gonna leave, he was going to help me work the house, he’s going to be this—no. We met a curator from the museum, a girl who looked exactly like Elizabeth Taylor. I mean he wasn’t fooling with crap. And I didn’t know—she went out with the two of us—threesomes. And I’m busy, you know, doing stuff. And I’ve got a job. I’m now teaching at HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College]. And she had made up her mind, I found out later, that she was going to marry one or the other. Women! You wonder why I have a funny feeling about some women. She had made up her mind—not the men. So anyway—Joe falls desperately in love, and she gets ill and has to go to a hospital in Cleveland [Ohio]. I supply the funds for him to go and the whole thing, and he announces that they are getting married. And she came from a prominent military family, so they were going to marry at the Army Post in the chapel. I said, “Good. Good for you. I’m thrilled.” And so I’m now seething inside, and I’m dying to tell something to Joe and scream at him, but it’s not his fault—I mean, it’s love, and the whole thing. And we’ve had a lot of time together, and we’ve been good partners. So finally—I get the announcement: they’re going to do that, and I’m to be the best man. Now, I felt that was rubbing it in, but Joe, in innocence, didn’t know. Okay, so now I’m over in the chapel, and it’s just before the wedding, and this little demon in my mind wouldn’t let go, so I said, “Before you go in to say the vows with her—I have something to tell you. You have been living with a gay man all these years” And his jaw dropped. And he says, “You’re making this up.” I said, “No. I’m gay as can possibly be and I have no desire for your body. I never did. Women do. I don’t. But I just wanted you to know. I won’t be alone. There’s a flock of us in Harrisburg.” He goes in and went through with the marriage. We go to a restaurant. The priest comes with us, and I am the best man making toasts, and that. He’s now whispered this to Shirley who is sitting, looking at me like she’s traumatized, and I am enjoying every moment of it. So they go off on honeymoon and now I’m living alone, right? But I’ve now got a job. Hidley introduced me to a schoolteacher—one of the staff at HACC. Edie Socolow. Did you ever meet her? You know Edie? Oh, ho ho! Okay. Well, Edie meets me and she’s watching me [makes drinking motion] during dinner, and she says, “You need employment?” And I said, “Yeah.” And she says, “How would you like to teach at a college level?” I say, “Yeah, Edie that would be fun.” And she says, “We have this art program at HACC that’s not very big. As a matter of fact, it’s two people.” And I said, “Oh, that’s not very big.” And she said, “Well, we’ve got things on the book that you would be ideal for.” She said “I’ll tell you what—I will introduce you to the head of the department.” What does he turn out to be? An ex-Jesuit priest. [laughs] I don’t make that up either but that would be good if you were doing a sitcom. So I meet this guy, and he’s really nice. A really nice guy. And he said, “And where did you study to be a teacher?” I say, “I didn’t study to be a teacher. Edie tells me you have got something called art in industry.” He says, “Yes.” And I said, “Commercial artist. [points at himself] I can teach.” “Oh!” And I said, “I am a fine artist. Can paint, draw, wood engrave, etch. You name it, Larry can do it.” And he says, “Oh—you might be what we’re looking for.” And I says, “I know damn well I’m what you’re

looking for.” Well, I know nothing about signing contracts. I know nothing about HACC’s reputation. I didn’t know how bad it was, okay? So he names a sum of money bigger than I’d ever earned before, and I said, “I’m your man.” And I don’t read all the fine print, and I’m signing this thing, and he says, “Welcome onboard, and your first job will be a life class.” So, I got a life class, and I got these clothed models, you know. And Edie said, “You can’t have nudes.” And I said, “Well, how do you teach a life class and anatomy if the person can’t take their shirt off or pants off or whatever?” And she said, “Well, then again, you’re new. Maybe you could do something.” So I said, “Yeah, I can do something. I’m gonna complain. I won’t teach the class unless you give me a nude model.” Well, obviously the word went out, “It’s a New Yorker. He’s hot. Give him what he wants.” So they come back, and they said, “Yeah, you can have your nude models, male or female, but you have to supply them. We’ll pay them \$10 an hour, but you get the names. We don’t—we don’t ask people to take their clothes off.” I said, “Fine.” And so the head of the department says, “Where are you getting nude bodies from?” And I said, “It’s simple.” I wrote a note to the Theatre Department, and I said, “Male and female actors: Would you like some extra money? 10 bucks an hour. Take your clothes off and pose for von Barann’s drawing class.” [whoosh] I got models who were willing to undress through no trouble at all. So I get the nude—and Edie said, “How did you do that!” I said, “Don’t ask. Just enjoy. Now you can have a nude model. Anybody else can have a nude...” So I’m teaching the drawing class and they finally said, “Well, we’d like to do this art and industry thing. Could you write up a proposal for an advertising class?” I said, “Right. I’ll write it up.” So I write it up, and they said, “Congratulations. You can now teach an advertising course.” So I said, “Well, I want this room. I want this. I want this stuff.” You know, I run it my way. And he said, “Well, you will write notes,” and I said, “No. I do not write notes. I don’t even write a teaching plan.” Oh, and his face is falling, and I said, “I’m going to run it like an advertising agency. I’m the head art director. You are the bullpen. I throw ideas out, you do it, or you get fired, okay—or you don’t pass the class.” Boy, it worked! Everyone loved it. And that’s—anyway, that was the way I began that. Then I began to teach more than one drawing class, and I taught a two-dimensional class, and before you know it—my days were filled. And I’m doing this stuff, then in the meantime Hidley introduces me to Maya Schock and the Doshi [the Doshi Gallery at the Susquehanna Art Museum]. Well, I get involved with Maya and the Doshi and that, and I begin to exhibit there. And I’m thrown by Maya, who’s saying, [mimics voice] “I’m the daughter of a Samurai! We kill people if they stand in our way!” And I thought, “This is a woman I can dig. This is really great.” And I found there was a feud between her, Carrie(ph), and the—the William Ris Gallery. William Ris had a rule: if you showed at the Doshi, you couldn’t show at the William Ris. So Maya says, “You show with William Ris, you don’t show with me!” And they stomped down on the other.(?) So I thought, “I’m in the middle of an insane war between the women.” So I said, “Fine—do whatever you want.” But Maya was from Philadelphia, so she was getting exciting artists, and I thought, “Now I’m really involved, so I’m barely able to work on the house,” so I get a friend of mine who worked and did sets for Allenberry [Playhouse], and he was a jack-of-all-trades, and I said, “I tell you what, I can’t pay you a lot, but while I’m at school, could you take the plaster off the walls, could you do other things for me, you know? And eventually I’ll try to get you a job there.” Which I did! So now I’m manipulating all this crap, and I’m thinking, “Hell, this is not dull being in this town.” And then I meet people like the mayor, and I’m meeting other valuable people—the goddesses of the town [laughs], Lois Grass. I’ve told you she said—[mimics] “Wow! Money (_____???)” She could be a bitch—give her a glass of whiskey, honey, and [cutting motion and sound]! Oh—I should—[covers mouth] You

may have to edit this. I forgot it was on camera! So anyway, I met all these people and they got me involved, because then I met the people at WITF [central Pennsylvania public broadcast network], Mike Greenwald, and those—and so when they had an auction, I was involved with that, and I became an auctioneer. And then I became an advisor on their panel, and then I became—whatever you want. Finally the mayor had—decides he’s going to have a conference of mayors from around the country, and since I had put on a huge show for WITF’s new building, the mayor said, “How about you do City Hall?” Whoopee! So I did City Hall. I filled it with artwork and sculpture and everything, and people were photographing it, and the mayor sends me notes, and I got one letter there, I got another—I got another fun thing, the mayor. So the mayor loved me, and everyone [laughs]—and I was now beginning to do all these cultural things in the activity around here, and I was enjoying it. I was getting myself in the paper, I was getting things. I got in the middle of arguments and fights, I got that in the paper, and I was enjoying the publicity. And then I met a great reporter named—[pauses, then to person offscreen] thank you—[to camera] Sandy Cullen, and she became my close friend who wrote articles about me, and she defended me when the Doshi was taken over, and—so life here became very active, and when Joe left, I needed some friends, so I discovered the Neptune [Lounge]. And there was Bortzfield(?), and there was Kelly the bartender, who welcomed me with open arms, and I thought, “I’ve got a whole new family!” And they heard I was an artist, so I did the trademark for the Neptune, and I did other things, and I suddenly had a whole new coterie of friends—some of whom I liked, some I didn’t, but you know, it was great. It was wonderful. So I had the gay world, I had the straight world, I had the whole thing going in one big pie. And at school I learned that some of the very straight instructors [pauses, chuckles] were not so straight. [clears throat] I will not mention names. And we had things going on. Then I learned a little bitchery of—“Oh, you don’t have a Ph.D. Hmm-hmm.” And I thought, “Oh, this is going to be fun.” So I thought, “I don’t need a Ph.D., I’m teaching special subjects, and I think most Ph.D.s are very boring,” but I didn’t say that to them. So I was doing my thing, and—finally we went through several administrations, and new people would come in, and nothing changed, I still had my classes, they were filled, and my students were going on to other schools, like in Washington. Some were going to the West Coast. One wanted to be an animator, so I let him do animation things, and he went off to Hollywood. And I had others, and I geared it personally. And I finally thought, “Well, this isn’t too bad, but I’m not doing enough work for myself, but I’m getting invitations,” so I quickly would hustle off work at two, hustle those out, get in a show. Then I became a judge for art shows. They started me off at Franklin and Marshall [College], and then I went from college to college to college, and I was being judge of art shows, and I’m meeting more instructors, more heads of schools—particularly liked the man from Franklin and Marshall, great guy named Sid Nedinas(ph), he’s dead now. But he was great. Then I’m friends with the museum here, and I was friends with Don Winters, who was the curator of fine art. He’s also dead now. But at the time, he came to me and said, “You know, I’m in a funny position by being the head of the—to the department of the museum. People keep coming to me for appraisals, and I’m not allowed to do it because I’m a state employee. But then again, you’re here—suppose you have a little card, and I give it out, and they go to you?” So now I’m not only teaching, I’ve got people calling up saying, “I’ve got this collection, and my insurance company wants me to have it appraised. And now going out, and I had a very simple way. I found that big ones—big galleries in New York—the big auction galleries, charge a fee, so I knew I could charge a fee, but I didn’t agree with what they were doing. New York had a really dirty act. They would charge the client a percentage of the evaluation they put on the price of the artwork, and I said,

“No! This is illegal, this is crazy. You don’t do that.” So I made a standard flat fee. I look at your artwork, this the flat fee you pay me. And I saw—I got into many private homes—I can never tell you where or what, but hell, there’s a lot of good artwork in this area, and some of it by pretty well-known people, past and present. And so—I was having the fun of meeting these people, walking in the house, and I know a lot of them didn’t think—“Well, he comes from HACC and the Doshi, what does he know?” But I walked in one on Hershey and I got in the house, and they were asking me to come over because they had a [Joan] Miró. They really had a Miró, a big one, and a glamorous 500 dollar frame, and—but as I walked into the living room, I’m faced—the Miró is here [gestures], I’m facing the fireplace, and on the fireplace is a Surrealist piece by André Masson—abstraction. And the first thing I do is I say, “Wow! The first house I’ve ever walked in in this area that had an André Masson!” And the woman goes, “My God, do you know what you’re looking at?” And I said, “Why did you hire me if you don’t think I know? That’s an André Masson, and there’s your Miró. You got good taste. You’ve got two hot people in your room.” And so—I’m lifelong friends with them, so I gave them a good evaluation. I went all over this area, I went upstate, I went out to Carlisle—all over the place. I then did the entire—[laughs] Don Winters, again, said, “I have a friend who works at Penn State [University], State College. He’s the curator of minerals—rocks and minerals.” [laughs] There is such a thing. “And he has a gigantic collection of paintings.” And I said, “Why?” And he said, “Well, people that did pictures of coal mines or factories, and that—he inherits them. And he’s got dozens of them. And they don’t have an appraisal. For that matter, they don’t really have an appraisal for things in other people’s office. How would you like to do Penn State?” [chuckles] So, I’m saying, “Okay, I’ll do Penn State.” So I said, “Bill, you are now my secretary. We’ll go up to Penn State, you wear a suit and tie, I wear a suit and tie, we do the whole thing, and we start in. And I know a professor up there, we’ll ask him if we can stay overnight—we’d been having a bit of a back-and-forth.” So I start, and I find this—and it’s right out of a movie, again. I go to the mineral building, which is the far side of the campus—it’s a huge building, I go in, I’m looking for the curator. It is crammed, I mean literally crammed, with rocks and stuff, and there’s a little pathway down the middle of the building, wide enough for a human being. And at the far end was the man at his desk. Surrounded by rocks! And I thought, “Okay, I’ve heard about things like this.” So I talked to him, he said, “Oh, yeah, we’ve got all these things that—I don’t know the value of any of them,” and I began to look then. Then I went out to the main room, I see it, and he had a sizeable, valuable collection. So I give him the appraisal, and I said, “If you ever de-appraise things, and you want to sell them, I will buy! I will scrape up the money to buy! You’ve got pictures of the river and steel mills that are fabulous. But who knows they’re in your building!” And he says, “Well, I don’t know, I suppose nobody.” So I said, “Okay.” Now I’m going around to the man who heads the weather department, you know the—Japanese. He at least was organized. Never go to an English professor. And I open the door and the floor of the office, which was huge, was covered with books with a little pathway. And there on the wall was a little painting of a steel mill, and I introduce myself, and he says, “Watch the books!” I’m saying, “Yes, I see you have bookshelves, why don’t you—“ I wanted to say, “Why don’t you use them?” Anyway, I look at the painting again. I write it all up, I measure it—he takes the measurements and all the (____??), and I leave there and I said, “These people are the crazy professors you hear about.” And finally I get to the head of the school, and by now I’m getting “Who cares who it is?” and the secretary says to me, “The President’s in. He’ll see you know.” So there’s the President of Penn State, and I get in the office and I introduce myself, and I said, “I’m the one doing an appraisal of your artwork, and he—and I was told you have a very nice

painting on the wall here.” So I look at there’s this painting, it’s of a streamlined train, pure 1930s—it’s fabulous, and it’s not in good condition. And I can’t stop myself—“How dare you let this get this way?” And I’m talking to the President, and his secretary’s drawing back, and I said, “This is a crime! This is a valuable American painting, a valuable era! It’s in bad shape, you’ve got to get help for it.” And he backs off and says, “Oh yeah, we’ll—I’ll have my secretary look into this.” And then Bill says to me later, “That was the President you were yelling at.” And I said, “I don’t care, the painting was wronged!” So we go out and I got this whole thing, and I did the whole appraisal—I type it up, you know, and they—they loved me. The geniuses here who appraise everything. So now they hear about me at other colleges, so Franklin and Marshall calls me over and says, “We have some paintings,” and they have a mansion—the founder of Franklin and Marshall, there’s a mansion—you would know about this, I suppose. “And we have this terribly valuable painting over the fireplace of a Long Island scene”—boring thing of weeds and water, but the name was a big deal. So I go over and they guide me to the mansion, and I walk in the room, and there is this painting over a fireplace that they obviously constantly use. There is soot all over the fireplace, and there sits the painting. And I—I just said, “How dare you do this.” And again, the person who was told to bring me over—I said, “Will you please tell them”—I’m screaming about this—“you’re wrecking that painting! It’s worth X number of dollars. The fumes come up, the soot comes up, and you’ve got it there.” “Well, it’s a place of honor.” I said, “No, it’s dishonor! You’re wrecking it! You can’t leave it there! That’s my note.” And I wrote a note about it, come out, they say, “We’ll show you the next building.” So now I go in another building, and there’s a valuable painting over a radiator! And I said, “You’ve done it again! You can’t put an oil painting over a ra—you know, two inches from a radiator! The heat comes up, it dries the canvas out. It’s canvas! It’ll rot! The stretch…” And I give another speech. Finally, the third one was—they take me to the lunchroom, student lunchroom, and there’s a huge, huge canvas on the wall, only it’s not a canvas, it’s one of those beautiful hand-done silks of George Washington on a horse, the flags, the whole bit. It’s pure silk, and it’s hanging on a wall with the sunlight pouring in on it. And again, I’m blowing my stack. So I write all this up, and I said, “Please give this personally to your head, Mr. Sid Nedinas(ph), and tell him my opinion! All three are in life danger.” And I submitted my bill, okay. Well, I don’t know if they took my advice or not. Most people never do. So anyway, it’s now a year later, and I get a call, it’s a Mr. Sid Nedinas(ph) on the phone. He says, “I’m the head of Franklin and Marshall. We have a slight problem. We use a big double garage across from the college as a storage room.” And immediately I’m going, [puts hand to head] “I’m afraid to hear what’s happened.” So he said, “Well, we have steam heat that comes from big tubes. The tubes running through there broke, and the steam has been pouring out for a day, and all of our paintings are stored there.” [chuckles] So I said, “Mr. Sid Nedinas(ph), you’re not making this up, are you?” and he said, “No.” And so a friend of mine was working there as—in the Art Department, so I telephoned her, and she said, “Oh, yes, they really need you there.” And now, this is mid-August, and I go in. The people there are from the insurance company, and we’re all in our jackets and ties, and I go in and it’s a steam bath. And I said, “Okay, guys, we’ll tie our shirts and ties off, we’re gonna be drowning.” And he said, “Look at this place. I mean, God, look it, you ever seen anything like it?” And I said, “No, I hope I never do again.” So I’m looking through this, and we—hundreds of paintings. And you take the measurements, you gotta write the condition, you know—and we’re doing this, and I finally got to a point where I couldn’t breathe, and I said, “You know, this is crazy.” I said, “They are sick for doing this. Why don’t we have a new system? This one can be saved, this one is a total loss. An easier way, instead of my saying ‘It’s worth [mumbles]’—once

it's damaged, it's not worth what a—you know." So the two guys said, "Oh, thank you, that's—let's do it that way, sir." And I'm older, so I'm 'sir.' Now out comes a big painting of a woman, and the paint is peeling off, and it's one of Andrew Wyeth's aunts. She paints. The whole Wyeth clan paints because of his name. And the paint is peeling off! And this—there's nothing—and I put down, "Destroyed." And I have—I do my paperwork, and I submit my bill, and my friend calls up: [gasps, mimics] "Do you know what you did? Do you know what you did? You said that a Wyeth painting was destroyed! It can't be destroyed. It's Andrew Wyeth's work!" I said, "No, no, it's his aunt, and it's peeling. The paint is literally peeling." And she says, "I've been—I'm the one they're telling to take it to a restorer." And I said, "Lots of luck." So she put it in the back of her van, and by the time she got to Philly, more paint had bounced off, and she said—to me later, she said, "They restored it," and I said, "No, they didn't, they repainted it! That's not called restoration, when big hunks are gone! That's not a restoration, and I won't put a heavy price on it. What's ever there now, you people got." So Mr. Sid Nedinas(ph) heard the story, and he—he could laugh about it, and then I'm saying to Hara(ph) and to him, "Why—I'm in a garage, and you're showing me tables full of rare Haviland china? Anyone coming in bumps the table—[makes a noise and a falling gesture] goes the—the china!" So I said, "You gotta do something about it." So they—hopefully they have. I lost track of it. So in the meantime—yep?

BL: Can we take one break?

LM: Can we take a little break?

END OF TAPE 3

BEGINNING OF TAPE 4

BL: They don't have, like, a—you know. Okay?

LM: I think so.

BL: Well, let's give it a shot.

LM: It's certainly not power.

Other: Okay. Oh, it was the battery?

LM: And it's—I thought it might be, but I don't think it is. I think it's fine.

Other: Okay.

LV: Well, anyway. We—

LM: Certainly, sounds good.

BL: So let's—let's—let's try going back to how you met Hidley. How you met Hidley, and...

LV: I saw Hidley first at the Artist Assoc—Art Students League. I didn't meet him, I—oh, we're not doing yet? [pauses for camera adjustment noises]

LM: Go.

LV: Now we are. All right. I saw Li first at the Art Students League. And—he was well-known there, as you can imagine. He could never just walk down the stairs without an introduction. And so—but I never spoke to him. And it was quite a while—I would run into him on my Saturdays meandering through the galleries. There would be—Oscar Wilde, you know, playing his role, and finally one day we moved both on Third Avenue, and I was going to a movie that played retro films, and there he came, so we smiled and finally said hello officially. Didn't speak again until years later, when I was up in Maine, and the little fishing village where we went, and he and I—has one street, one dirt, and there was one little restaurant, and—so you've gotta meet people eventually. So one day, I'm walking down that road, and he's coming the other way, and I said, "It's time we stopped and said hello to one another," and—'cause he was staying there also. And that's how we officially met. And then, of course, when I was back in the city, I ran into him again, and then we started going out to dinner once in a while, we went out to the movies, we went to the theatre—that was always a trial, because if he didn't approve of it, he would stalk out in the middle of an act, or a ballet, or something, and I would be left sitting there like, "Everyone's looking at me, and he's just stamped out of the theatre." So—we had fun, though. We had—I enjoyed his company, up to a point. But then, it got to be almost a topping game, you know—I would do something that would annoy him deliberately, and—but he was a fountain of information about actors and actresses and plays and past performances and so on, and so I enjoyed his company. And we both pretty much liked the same artists, and we went to galleries, and once in a while, we might disagree violently but not. And then when I—he said (____???) bringing him down here is what led Joe and I to consider moving here. Not where he lived on the hill—even I was smart enough for that one, but to find something. And I didn't care if it was in Harrisburg or surrounding territory. I wish I had known more about the surrounding territory.

LM: I have to stop you again for a minute.

END OF TAPE 4

BEGINNING OF TAPE 5

LV: He introduced me to Maya Schock, and I was interested—I was interested because of her background, and we had both competed in an art show at some point, and I knew the name. I'd say Li was—he was a good friend, but a strange friendship that we had. Very strange friendship that we had. [chuckles] And from that and my involvement with the people at the Neptune—the people at the Neptune, a lot of them formed a group that played volleyball down here in town. And I had never indulged in sports, I was very self-conscious, so once I saw them play on City Island, and I thought, "You've got—your life is so different. Why don't you try to join them and play volleyball?" So I did a little bit of it, and I wasn't totally stupid at it, you know, and that was fine. And when they played up here—that's where I saw Bill for the first time. Bill was playing volleyball—really playing volleyball, and I kept watching him. The hell with the volleyball, I was watching him. And I was trying to find out who he was, you know. This is a lot of flirting

going on during a volleyball game. So finally—I don't know whether this happened before or after, but once I was—Ed Beals(?), who was a person who had a little restaurant on Second Street, and we'd go there for Sundays, and I was sitting at a table with another gay young man, and Bill was sitting at another table across the way with somebody, and the guy—the fellow I was with said, “Who do you like in the room?” And I said, “That one,” and I pointed to Bill, and he said, “Oh, you've got good taste.” And I said, “Yes, why would I waste my time, you know.” So I said, “No, that's the one I'm getting involved with.” He said, “How can you say that?” And I said, “I don't know, I just feel it's gonna happen.” So at that point, Bill had noticed me at the games, and I went one night to the Neptune, and—as you remember, it was a very tight, horseshoe-shaped bar, and you were standing against the wall, and as I walked in, I saw him standing against the wall on the right side in a sheepskin coat and a big cowboy hat—a denim cowboy hat, no less. And as I came slowly down toward the back of the room, I was just about to pass him. We looked at one another, he put the cowboy hat on my head, and so I walked by, and that was our official talking to one another for the first time. And we hit it off from there. And at that time, Bill was driving a very cute little dump truck, a yellow—a red, red truck, a little red truck, and so it was fun to travel around with him in the truck and steam the windows up on occasion. So we both realized we liked one another, and we both got along very well together, so at one point, I asked him if he would come to the house and do some private posing. [laughs] Cover move—right? And he did, and that was enjoyable, and one thing led to another, and we've been a team ever since.

BL: Do you remember what year it was that you first met?

LV: Oh, I know he's gonna do this again. [laughs] What—what year was it? I...

Bill: That we met?

LV: It's gotta be in the '50s, mid-'50s somewhere. '50s, '60s?

BL: '70s?

Bill: '70s. No, '79.

BL: '79.

LV: Oh, was it '70s already, all right. [pause] Yeah, you, '70s.

Bill: It was '79.

LV: Oh, okay. All right. Yeah, but in between, I had known a lot of people—also, one of my favorite things to do was—in the old days, you did have gay newspapers, two or three different ones you could pick up at the bar, and they had a classified. I loved writing letters to unknown numbers. That was my big turn-on. And I would get some of the strangest letters back. Some were legitimate, you know—[mimics] “Glad you liked my letter, let's get together some—“ or the one who would type seven pages of his fantasies. This is was a bit much for me, but I really liked it, and I did meet some people that way. And I enjoyed the encounters, and it was very

nice. Trouble was most people were from California, Louisiana, Florida, you know—upstate New York. This wasn't a big help, because I wasn't about to drive that far. But I did finally meet one man from Maryland. Now, that was close, and he wrote a very—very intriguing letter to me. And we're still friends to this day, and I've visited him over the years. We were gonna make a twice-a-year type thing—it never got to be quite that, because there were so many other things happening in between, and I was with Mr. Wonderful here—Bill. We both were into S and M activities, and he was very charming—he worked for the government in the Health Department, was quite a whiz on the computer—'whiz' isn't the word, he had a room with nothing but computers, you know, he could learn anything—and we just enjoyed one another's company back and forth. There was very little sex involved, it was—we'd have dinner, always he would treat me to an elegant dinner somewhere, and a little aperitif before you go to bed, you know, and so on. It was a unique arrangement, and he was so very formal—glasses on a chain around his neck, you know. Always talking about his British friends, because he was always going to London, and he was going to Paris, and he was going to Rome, all for the government. Lucky him! And so every time he would move, I would have a new address, but he was always in the Baltimore area, and unfortunately my life got more hectic, so did his, and finally—it was just a couple years ago, after I had my problems and everything, he said, "I'm moving again from a lovely ap—condominium to one further out in an exclusive gated community, and I'm buying that committee—I'm retiring, I'm buying that condominium, and I'm buying one in Fort Myers, Florida. And I thought, "Two condominiums are better than one." And he said, "Yes, a lot of my relatives have condominiums in Fort Myers, and it would be wonderful—why don't you plan on coming down to Fort Myers?" And I said to Bill, "Would you really mind? And I will fly there." So we made all these arrangements—Bill even helped me get the plane tickets, I had my luggage packed—we go down to the airport, and I got my seating arranged for the plane and everything, and we come home to get the luggage for the next—it was about two days later we were gonna go, and it turns out there's an emergency call from my friend. He's in the hospital. He's in Fort Myers, but he's quite ill. He can't meet me at the plane, and it wouldn't be convenient for me to come down 'cause we're—we were gonna go to the Ringling Museum for my benefit. We were gonna to go that island where all the seashells are because I'm a seashell nut—and so I never got to do it. So I said to Bill, "Oh, Jesus, I've got that—all this stuff packed, I've even sent a carton down of things I knew you couldn't get on the plane," and I said, "This is terrible." So I contact him and said, "Don't—don't worry about it, we'll make it another time," and so on, and he sent back, and he said, "I'm paying you back your airfare. It's not fair that you paid to get tickets, and I know they won't refund, so I'm sending you the 200-and-some-odd dollar refund." And so I thought, "I came that close to seeing those damn seashells [chuckles] on that island! And being with him again, that would have been the nice thing." So, since then—I've never done it again because my back keeps getting worse, and I thought, "Oh God, I could get on a bus, probably, and he could meet me when he's in Maryland, but I don't know how convenient that is, and I don't know how active I could be." I know he would put up with me, but I don't know if I wanna put up the trouble. I want to have such good memories. So we—I send cards, he sends computer messages, which—I could care less, I don't like computers, but anyway, that was one episode through the newspapers that really paid off, and it was very nice, and the little sex we had was nice, and the other S and M games were very nice, mutual back-and-forth. And I still think of him very fondly. And I'd never met another companion like that. I've gotten one letter from somebody in Syracuse, New York, who almost matches the same description, but I'm not going to drive to Syracuse. It's now too late in the game to play that. So, that's what—I enjoyed the—

the letter-writing immensely, and the photographs we exchanged. It meant a lot to me. And I resent the fact that they don't do that, and everyone's on the computer. I will not get on the computer. Who wants to say outlandish things on a computer that anyone can read? No, no, no! This foolish, I'm not. You know? I don't send funny photographs over the computer. I'll send you one in the mail, but I won't do it on the computer. I'm sort of a—I'm very upset about the government, I'm upset about privacy. Privacy is my thing, and I don't want the government or anyone doing this to me, and I can get quite hot under the collar. A few drinks, and I can be real hot under the collar, and I won't put up with it. I won't put up with it for a moment. That's not the way an American should have to live, and you shouldn't have to be afraid to say something that's going to be held against you, you know—no. This is not the way to live. And my friend in Maryland understands that I'm quite sure. Maybe he would be dangerous on the computer, I don't know, but I won't. So that's the way that developed.

BL: So did you have any other sort of long-term relationships, other than Bill?

LV: Close friendships, but not a relationship like Bill's. No, Bill was the one and only. I know that sounds dull, but it's the one and only. I really love him that much, and I loved him, and when I make a commitment I usually stick with the commitment. And we have our moments when we argue, don't we? [laughs] Yes, we do argue, but that's normal in any relationship. And Bill's very flexible, I've taught Bill to paint. And what kills me is when he finally understood the principles and my house wasn't as crowded as it is now, he decides he wants to do it big, so we take a giant canvas, and he paints a big picture. And we have a friend who's a wealthy woman who has other friends, and she sees Bill's painting and said, "I could sell that for you." And son of a bitch, if he doesn't sell it for 500 dollars—the first canvas. And I'm thinking, "Whoa, Larry, aren't you lucky! Mr. Wonderful just sold his painting!" And he does another one and she buys it, and I'm sitting there with mine, and no one's buying anything! And I'm thinking, "Something is wrong with this equation," you know, but I'm pleased for him. Now the problem is to try to get him to do it again, you know, but—how many, two successes in a row? And they were very good paintings, by the way, and he has another one that I'm trying to frame for him if he ever will do something to help me with it—I mean, he's thick as mud. I'm saying that on camera and for his benefit. But we've had a good life together. And when things have happened to his family—the passing of his father, the passing of his mother, the passing of one brother—I was there for all of that, so I know what that's like. And that makes you closer, when you survive things like that. We—my family is buried out on Long Island, his is buried in Hershey, so whenever Bill goes over to his grave, I go along with him, and Bill keeps it immaculate with his flowers and—we did something slightly illegal. His brother died—his brother was a genius mentally who also got corrupted by his slightly older brother and became a drug addict to such a degree he wrecked his brain, and he was calling the government and accusing them of spying on him and all sorts of crazy stuff. Eventually it got so bad, he was in the hospital, and Dick finally died in the hospital. So we had the cremation ceremony, and standing in the aisles for a long time as a unit. So I finally said to Bill, "This is not right, this is not right for Dick. It's not right for you. Go to your mother's grave, no one's around—dig a hole when you plant the flowers, put the container with his ashes in the grave, and that will be closure for you—mother, father, and son will be together." And Bill did that, and we do always remember him when we go there. The other brother that did the dirty work—Bill won't even talk to him, they never talked again. He still lives in Hershey. It's part of his family, but he won't... I have no relatives to do this stuff

with, which is fine, so it's just Bill and I, and... I didn't require a lot of other activity. I'm not—I wasn't one of gallivanting around with endless people, endless things. I was quite satisfied. I really am satisfied doing that with Bill—fixing the house, if it ever gets fixed. God knows it doesn't get fixed. I work on it, I work on it in bits and pieces, and I know what I want it to be, but it never quite gets there. But one of the things I do, I do collect other artists' work, primarily artists of the Surrealist school. And as I said earlier, I think that I—I don't have a religious belief, but I do believe that fate or something puts you where you can obtain what you want, if it's reasonable, and I always end up someplace where there's a Surrealist piece that I can manage to get hold of for my price range, or by accident, or whatever. And I have about 30 now, so I think 30 prove there's something working for me. Or I find books, or I find other things, you know? Some impossible places, all having to do with the same subject. So I have a vast library, and I have about 30 Surrealist works, including [Salvador] Dalí, including Masson, including all the big—Max Ernst. I've got them all. I got a lot of them in my bedroom, so when I wake up in the morning, there are my buddies on the wall. I've met a couple of the artists—I met—I met Dalí on a couple of occasions in New York. I liked him. I mean, the showman of all time, but I like him, and the nicest image I had was—I was walking down Fifth Avenue one day going to the Museum of Modern Art, and Dalí was coming this way, and there was a woman with a little child next to me. And as we got even, Dalí went down on one knee, holding his cane, to shake the little boy's hand. The wife was just—[holds head in hands] she was going bananas, practically, and I just stood there for a second watching it, and I thought, "Now, the world doesn't expect Dalí to do things like this," but there he was with a little boy, and this was sweet. And then—another famous artist—there was a German artist who emigrated from Nazi Germany, at the time, Kurt Seligmann, again a Surrealist—Gothic in style, very... Came to United States, wrote a great book on magic, which I haven't been able to locate, but I want to, and he never got the big publicity that he should have. I think it was because he was just too shy. He wasn't a pusher, like Dalí was a pusher and so on, but he was in big shows. The finest galleries had his work. And it was wintertime, and it was Hidley and I, and there was a gallery called the Ruth White Gallery, this White Gallery, and he was having a show, and it was listed as—oh, the last weekend of the show or something. It was snowing outside, and Hidley said, "We've got to see Seligman's work." And so—and he did lots of etchings, and that. So we got up to the gallery, and there was Mr. Seligmann, wearing a heavy overcoat, and a scarf and a hat, and I met him, and while Hidley was busy with Ruth White, I walked in another room where he had his etchings, and I said, "You know, I've admired you all these years, and it's a great honor to finally meet you." And he said, "Oh, yes, that's nice," and all, and I picked an etching that had a little rip in the top, and he said, "Oh, that can go at a very nominal sum." And I said, "No, I want that, and I'll repair the rip." It was called *The Abyss*, and it was a beautiful etching. And then there was another etching, and I bought that one—it was *One-on-One*. He never liked to pull proofs. I don't blame him, but he would do an etching and he would hate to pull the proof—in this case, he pulled one proof in red ink and never pulled the rest of the edition. So I pulled that one—that was *One-on-One*. Hidley bought a couple, we both said something else to him, and we left, and about a month later he—he took a shotgun and put it in his mouth and ended it. He had cancer. And to this day, he left his home as an art center in High Tor, New Jersey—it's up on the Jersey side. And to this day, you can tune in the—your computer, and get the High Tory Arts Center—[corrects self] High Tor Art Center, and it's a place where people can go, older people who—and learn how to be an etcher or an artist, and he left everything to them. And I thought that was beautiful. I met him, and that made my life. And it happened many times, the theme of

modern art, the man who painted the plaque and the... [taps on table] The big colored squares, one over another.

Bill: Lichten—no. Well, Leonard Baskin, you met...

LV: No. It was a famous artist who painted—

Other: [Mark] Rothko?

Bill: Oh—she said Rothko?

Other: Rothko?

LV: Try again?

Other: Rothko?

LV: Rothko! And that was just before Rothko died. And I didn't know that, but we—we were walking through again, and he comes around the corner, and I said, "Rothko!" And he says, "Yes! I am!" You know. [chuckles] And we shook hands, and there was another (_____???) And he talks, and we said, "Oh, we came to see your show." It was his last show—we didn't know that—but it was his last show, and he'd reverted to black, white, and grey. And so I said, "Oh, this is interesting that you're doing this sort of thing," I said, and we had a nice little conversation, and then he dies. And so—yeah, but I have those memories that I was in the right spot to at least meet them. They were real people—[Jackson] Pollock, the same. Pollock's height. He was a very—I've read his biography. He was a very disturbed man. Very disturbed man, uptight. But near the end of his life, if you went to see his show on a Saturday, the floor was covered with young people. They were all sitting there like they're worshipping. On the day I went, there was Pollock standing with his back against the wall, just looking at this sea of people, and there was his canvases, near the end of his life, in black and white. It was something about—when the artist is reaching his—near death, the color is gone, and they were—now he had heads that you could see inside the skeins. If you look close, there were human heads. And then it was shortly after that he died in the accident, and I thought, "Oh my god, again, it's just before the end." He painted in black and white. Very moody man, I didn't talk to that one. I saw him. You didn't disturb him. But I'd read enough about him to let him alone. Don't—don't do anything. So being in the city and seeing these people and actually talking to them or seeing them on the street—that meant a lot to me. I'm part of a real world of real people. They're not names in a book. They heard—they laugh, they're sad. They're incredible people. And I would not change my life from that. I would not change my life from being gay. I see nothing wrong with it. I think it's been an enriching life. At HACC—I had good times at HACC as a teacher, I enjoyed the students immensely. I did not enjoy a lot of my fellow teachers—or mostly the snobbishness of some of them. Not all of them. And I also did not like what happened at the end of the career. They got rid of whoever was the head—I can't remember his name—he left, and they did a search for a new person. For the sake of this tape, I won't mention who they hired, but they hired a man from out of state who claimed to be married with two children, and he claimed to come from New England. The eventual truth was he was gay, he came from Jersey—after he

signed the contracts the woman and two children disappeared, and his lover appeared, who he called his cousin. It wasn't his cousin. He came in, he was dictatorial, he bought a house right next to the bar on Third—on...

BL: Strawberry, or...

LV: It was the Strawberry then.

BL: Strawberry then, yeah.

LV: He bought that house, he forced the—well, it was beginning to be known that he was gay. There were—you could feel that on the campus. He was also dictatorial. And the first thing that he did wrong was he decided to have a housewarming party, in height—invite all the people from the bar, and the instructors of HACC, including my secretary and other people. And they were outraged—I didn't get the invitation. But they—the next day, she was livid that she was exposed to people—"flaming queens" from the bar, and so on. Now, okay, she was an older woman, I can understand that, but it was a dirty trick on his part. Very dirty trick. And the next big move he made was—he was going to show the Board of Directors of the—of the college how much money he could save them. Now, this is where, if I had read my contract, I would have known. Everyone had the same contract. So what he did was he called every English professor, or he had someone do it, and give them a choice: "If you take, as of tomorrow morning, an early retirement, or I fire you." So, whole English Department was decimated overnight. And of course they all took early retirement, but they were screaming about it. And I—the Doshi was then actually on Cameron Street in an office building, and the phone rang, and I picked it up, and it was one of the men who—in my department—and said, "I hate to do this to you, Larry, but the Director of the school has told me to tell you you're fired. Pick up your things tomorrow morning. You're out." That's when I learned the contracts we had signed gave the head of the school the right to fire anyone any day of the week—he didn't have to have a reason. The reason being, of course, if you wiped everyone out, you had to replace the English professors with people out of school at minimum wage. You do it to the art people—you have to get a whole new Art Department, and you can do it at minimum wage. Well—I invented new dirty words to say on the telephone to the man at the other end. Now, I know it wasn't his fault—he said, "Oh, I've got four sons ready for college," and I said, "I know it's not you," but I named the head of the school and I said, "This is what I think of him." I called his secretary because his—sometime previously, I had made an appointment to see him, and the woman gets on the phone and I said, "I'd like to keep my appointment with the President." "Oh no, there's no such appointment here. There's nothing on the books about you being to see the President, and he doesn't want to see anybody anyway." I said, "I know, I'm sure he doesn't. But I want to see him." He was actually afraid of someone shooting him, I'm sure. And so I said, "Okay, I'll clean out." So I cleaned out my stuff—the young lady who taught pottery-making, she was cleaning out, she was in tears—and it was going on. It was a terrible thing. And just before this happened, the full-time professors had taken a vote—they took votes once in a while in hopes of getting a raise—[scoffs] fat chance that was. Bill and I are now on City Island one Sunday walking around, and surprisingly, the profe—the head of the school turns up with his lover. And they're in a car and we're—we're walking by to our car, and the president of the school sees me and says, "Good morning!" And I wasn't going to acknowledge him, but I did, and he walked to our

car. He was interested in Bill. Not me, Bill. And he's eyeing Bill up and down, and I said, "You do know there's a meeting being held today of the professors?" And he said, "Yes, someone told me that." And I said, "I wouldn't be too high-horse if I were you." "Well—they're locals." I said, "No, don't be snobs about locals. They're full professors. They're intelligent men, and they know what they're doing. They're unhappy with you and the whole thing. And you might think of what—what could be going on behind—you know." So I get in the car, we start to drive away, and Bill goes out the window [holds up middle finger] like that to him, and he saw it. Well, need I say, he wasn't happy. [chuckles] Bill didn't care, Bill was going to go back and punch him. And I said, "No, we don't do that." I said, "This—there's something happening, and it's bad enough I'm getting fired," you know, the whole thing. So I—someone said, "Are you gonna go back and be helpful and say that to anybody," and I said, "No. I'm never setting foot on campus again." I said, "This is a terrible thing that's happened." Now we go to a Christmas party, and the guy who was a lousy instructor, he's—he was the only other full-time employee outside of Socolow at the time, and he was teaching pottery-making, without knowing anything about it, and he was teaching how to mix glazes. His background was working for the General Lec—the General Electric Corporation and mixing paints, so they hired him to be a pottery expert. Well, naturally, they fired him. We were at a Christmas party, his daughter turns up, and she—sees me and she goes into hysterics: [mimics] "Larry, you've gotta save my father's job!" And I said, "You're a screwball! I can't save your job, I've been fired. They've all been fired, including your father! And your father's a son of a bitch to begin with!" [mimics] "You can't say that!" And I said, "Forget I said that." What she didn't know was, Daddy taught photography at the time. He also had a thing, and my students would be—they liked me, so they would tell me stories they wouldn't tell anybody else. So this one girl was talking to me one day, and she says, "You know that guy?" And I'm not saying his name, again. "You know the guy who teaches the pottery thing? We all know how to get an A-plus." I says, "Well—you do pottery?" She says, "No, no. You take off your brassiere, you have a dress that's open, and [motions] you lean over the desk while he's putting your mark down so your breasts are showing." She said, "Guaranteed to get an A every time." [others laugh] And she said, "You know, those trips we take to the woods? Did you ever think of what he might do with a camera? Some of us were asked to undress!" [motions taking a photo] Now, he was married to a nurse and had a daughter and another daughter too, and I thought, "Oh my god, there's more lechery going on here than even I knew about." So I said, "I can't save your father. I can't save myself. I don't even want to see your father again. I now know more than I ever wanted to know, and I hated him to begin with. Okay?" So I said, "Okay, this is it. I'm now out of a job, but I now can run the Doshi if I want," and that paid a small salary, so I eventually got to where Maya had died, other people didn't want the job, so I took over the job to run the Doshi full-time, instead of being an advisor. I was now the actual head of the thing, so I was in there every day, five days a week or six days a week, running that organization and trying to upgrade it, trying to have the jury chose, talking to artists, talking to people, talking to the newspapers. I mean, it was a full-time job for very little money, but I didn't want to see it fail. And then we got to be pretty good! I began concentrating on outside, and we had a board of directors, and after that experience, never again in my life will I ever work for anybody with a board of directors. Either I am the sole kingpin and I make the decisions, or we do not have an organization. Now, that sounds dictatorial, but you go through sweat when you have a lot of lamebrains around you, one of them being very gay; one woman who won't admit she's a lesbian, but she's a lesbian—now she lives with—as one. The gay number was an arrogant man who didn't like the arts to begin with, and they were ganging up, and I didn't know

it at the time, so we were getting out-of-towners, we were making sales to out of the country, we had famous people sign, like—one of the women’s sculptors of our time who is very well-known, she’s one of the guests who have been to the Doshi. I didn’t even know her. And we’ve got all this going, and that’s when the gay number—oh, we had two gay numbers. We had the man who was on the board of the museum, he’s just retired a couple months ago. [someone speaks offscreen, LV points] Oh, you worked for him. Okay.

END OF TAPE 5

Tape 6 is another copy of Tape 3.

Tape 7 is another copy of Tape 4.

Tape 8 is another copy of Tape 5.