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Title: LGBT Oral History: David Walker

Date: March 19, 2015

Location: LGBT Oral History – Walker, David - 121

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Interviewee: David Walker
Interviewer: Orli Segal
Date of Interview: March 19, 2015
Location of Interview: CSC Interview Room
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Abstract:
David Walker was born in 1946 in Lancaster County, where he grew up in a strict Presbyterian family and always knew that he was different. He studied to be a teacher at Lebanon Valley College when the school was more fundamentalist, but after encountering difficulty finding a teaching job, David started working in broadcasting at WITF, where he encountered a supportive creative community where he wasn't the only gay person, which he enjoyed greatly until his retirement in 2005. David has also worked with Open Stage of Harrisburg and Theatre Harrisburg doing sound design for performances, as well as with various musical groups, including working as the artistic director of the Harrisburg Gay Men's Chorus. In this interview, David discusses these experiences, as well as his family life, what it was like to be gay in Central Pennsylvania from the '60s to now, and his current work in the community, which includes activism in support of marriage equality and non-discrimination laws and volunteering at the LGBT Center. David currently lives in Hummelstown with Jack, his partner of 36 years.

OS: All righty. So are you okay to start the interview?

DW: Yeah, fine.

OS: All righty. So it is March 19, and we are interviewing David Walker, as a part of the LGBTQ Center's study combined with Dickinson [College]. So we're gonna begin with a few basic questions.

DW: Good.

OS: So if you'd just like to tell us about—I guess a brief overview of your life, whether it's family, your schooling—sort of a little synopsis of who you are…

DW: Okay.

OS: Yeah.

DW: At this point I'm 68, I was born in 1946. Grew up in the wilds of Eastern Lancaster County, near a town called Gap. I had a brother and sister. Spent about—close to 18 years in Gap—or actually, it was near Gap. Went to Lebanon Valley College, before it became a Methodist college—it was a very fundamentalist college. And then I got—[laughs] I got drafted as soon as I graduated, and they drummed me out of the physical, because there was a question on the [coughs]—excuse me—on the form that you filled out that said, "Do you have homosexual tendencies?" And, yes, I do. So that got me a 4-F, which was the permanent deferral—"We'll never talk to you again." But it also turned out that my father was somewhat of

a military guy, and—not career, but World War II was his favorite time in the world, you know, and he stayed in Reserves, and he knew what 4-F was. And ever after that, our—we just did not have a good relationship. But I was going to teach—could not find a job teaching, because I was the first of the postwar kids graduating from college, and it was the first time that schools actually could pick and choose who they wanted to have as—as teachers. My advisor told me to take all the English courses that I could and "Don't sweat the education courses—you know, you can take them in the summer, you can take them on Saturdays," that sort of thing. And the kids that got the jobs were the ones who also took the education courses while they were in college. [laughs] So I—I never got past an interview and got in broadcasting instead and spent about 40 years—a little in commercial broadcasting, mostly in public broadcasting—at a local station, which was WITF [public broadcast station for Central Pennsylvania], and left there in 2005. Did a couple of odd jobs and then just decided to retire, and after that was—got into volunteering.

OS: Great, and so how long have you been volunteering for now?

DW: Well, for the Center, I started last summer. Before that was a place called PANO, which is Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations, an umbrella group for nonprofits in Pennsylvania. With that I was doing a lot of envelope stuffing, and they have workshops and courses that they offer, so I also did a lot of collating and, you know, all that stuff, which is important because, you know, that frees up the staff's time—they don't have to do that, they can do what they like to do, and I found out that I was, you know, pretty efficient at that, so everybody was happy. They pulled a—what I consider to be a quickie, as far as firing a couple of people, and I just objected to it, and as a volunteer, you don't have to put up with that, so I left and shortly after that then came to the LGBT Center. There, I've—I started out with mailings and just having the place open. They were not able to have the place open during the daylight, and now there are three of us who can be there during the day. So the place is open, people come in, look at the gallery—we've started a video library, and we've always had a book library, but that's expanding now. And—so it's now open to the public, and it's because of the volunteers. You know, the staff is in the back. If you ring the doorbell, they can come up and answer the door. But mostly, the place was open during the evenings, and that was for programs, so if you came in to get a book, or—or a DVD, you would be interrupting that and probably feel somewhat intimidated by the whole thing. But now, it's just, you know—admittedly, it's during working hours, but it's still open, and you can come in. And we've done pretty well. We get between three and 10 people a day. So we're happy.

OS: And what's the reason that it, you know, couldn't be open during the day and only in the evening?

DW: Because—well, I don't—because the staff—it's two people, and they really do have their work cut out for them, so—and they are completely at the other end of the building. So if they don't hear the doorbell, you don't get in. So, I am strategically placed [laughs] so I can—it's not even a matter of unlocking the door. The door is open. Come in.

OS: Sure. Okay. And so you said occupationally, you've basically just worked— not just, but have worked in the broadcasting field.

DW: Right. I've done a couple of years of commercial radio, and then in 1970 I got into the public broadcasting and stayed with that for—for about 35 years.

OS: Okay. And how did you make that switch from wanting to teach and then broadcasting all of a sudden?

DW: I finally mentally forgave my advisor several years ago when I was able to look back and see how much I've been able to do with my life, and realizing that maybe I wouldn't have been the best teacher anyway. And that's made me realize that I don't—I don't have a theology, but I also don't believe in coincidence. I think that things happen—beyond that I can't explain them. [laughs] But I do think that things happen, and getting into broadcasting, not teaching—is just been amazing. And it's also opened other possibilities to me. I have done a lot of music without any background at all. I just determined to do it and picked it up and was offered a church choir, just because I had given them a couple arrangements of songs that I had done, and I was a music director for about 20 years there. I started a chorus in Hummelstown, where I live, and eventually became the artistic director of the Gay Men's Chorus in Harrisburg with about two years of piano as my background, but I don't know that I would've been able to do that somewhere else. You know, the—the broadcasting got me up here, where all these other things started to happen.

OS: Okay. And just geographically—so you said you grew up in Lancaster County?

DW: Lancaster County.

OS: And then—how did you get to Hummelstown? You know, what kind of happened there?

DW: I spent a year in New Hampshire. Okay. The first radio station was 1968, after getting the 4-F. I was a commercial copywriter at a small station in Ephrata, which is still Lancaster County. My father had a friend from the Army, who was the general manager at the radio station in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Writing copy for Christmas drove me crazy, because they felt they had to sell just about every second in an hour, and this was before a lot of businesses got into advertising agencies, so I had to write all the Christmas—[laughs] the ho-ho-hos. The deal was that you would buy this advertising time. On Christmas, you would get these greetings, noncommercial, but they would be greetings—so-and-so wishing you the merriest of—you know. And then they would get another week worth of commercials, all of this from one copywriter. And we are talking about a half hour of commercials every hour, and at that point, there were mostly 60 seconds and not 30 seconds. Thank you, Jesus, but it was still a lot of, you know, writing, and it just exhausted me. So I quit, and then this guy in New Hampshire invited me up there. The—wound up having some unpleasantness involving him. And then I came back, and a friend told me about some part-time work at WITF, and so that's how I got out into this area.

OS: Great. Okay. So just jumping back and focusing more on, now, the intention of the interview—so you said that you—post-college, wrote—you got that 4-F. So when did you, you know, start aligning yourself with the LGBTQ community? Was that in college? Beforehand? How did you know to fill out that box on the form?

DW: I always knew. At least—I was different. But the family, oh boy. The—the Walkers were kind of like a *Dynasty* or a *Dallas* or—you know, one of those families. And I mean, they had scads of property. They got themselves involved with the Pennsylvania Railroad as it was evolving, so they got on the board of directors and got tons of money from that. They started banks and the feed mill, which, in an agricultural area, is a goldmine, because all the farmers come to you, and you supply them with feed, and they bring their grain to you, and all of that sort of thing. So the Walkers—Walker was a name, albeit in a small town. Nevertheless, it was a name, through my grandfather. At that point, the money ran out, and all the property was sold, and my father was left—and his brother were left to pretty much pick up the pieces. But the feed mill is what got me going—understanding that the male form was kind of interesting. [laughs] Because we would deliver feed, or pick up grain, whatever, from farms, and—the—a farmer who is in shape has a very neat body. And I kind of liked that. And sweaty was nice. And the Amish, of course, were always clothed, but non-Amish knew how to deal with the weather, and so that was always kind of nice. So that would have been probably junior high and senior high that I knew that was going on. I also think that—again, this is small town stuff, but because I was a Walker, I was not picked on as much as I might have been. I don't know. That's my theory. Because I wasn't—I wasn't really bullied a lot, not as I hear other people talk about it, not as I'm hearing today. It was—it was okay. I was weird, and people thought that was all right. You know—"That's Dave." And by senior year, there were friends that I was talking to about that. The summer of my graduation, between high school and—and college, I spent the summer in a summer theater, and [laughs] how typical, fell in love with the leading man. But that was essentially—the coming out was that summer. I had experimented before that. There were a couple of boys in school, and, you know—but that was the first affair of any length. And it kind of went into my freshman year, although he lived in New York, and I was in Annville [Pennsylvania]. But we were staying in touch with letters. And then one day I noticed that the letters had been played with. And that closet door really slammed with that. Lebanon Valley College, at that point, was run by a fundamentalist religion, the Evangelical United Brethren. Ultimately, they went bankrupt, and the Methodists bought them, I think, for the colleges, because the EUB's had—had Albright [College], they had Lebanon Valley, and several other colleges. So, you know—and to appease the EUB's, the Methodists became the United Methodists—that's where they got that name from. But in the mid-'60s, it was what we call a small Christian college for small Christians. And it was—it was just—it was horrible. I had—I won't say that I was alcoholic, but there was an awful lot of binge drinking going on while I was in school. I had a bar in the trunk of my car. "What do you want?" "What do you have?" That kind of thing. There were a couple of places in Lebanon that would welcome students, but we weren't carded, we could go in there. So a lot of college was in a haze, and by that point, marijuana was coming in. And so I was stoned forever. Actually, I stayed—I stopped drinking, but I stayed with marijuana, because I liked that better than the alcohol buzz. It was—it was just nicer [laughs], and you didn't get hungover. So I stayed with that into the '90s. And—but anyway, the—that's—that's what got me through that. And because my memory is going, I don't remember the question. I'm sorry. [laughs]

OS: That's okay. No, it was, you know, sort of when you realized that...yeah.

DW: Okay. Then—because I knew I had no problem answering that question—and there was, you know, some humiliating things that you had to do during the physical, because they did rip

you out of the room, which—everybody knew why you were being ripped out of the room [laughs]—and had to go back for a second physical that became, you know, the "bend over and, you know"—ah, God, it was awful. But I also think that it was—it was worth it, in that I—I was not—I never had a problem with soldiers—the war, the reason for Vietnam, the fact that we were still in Vietnam—I had gotten very aware of that during college, not for anything that Lebanon Valley did, but just as students. There was—before the internet, there was just this ability to communicate with other colleges, with students. And so there was awareness that was growing there. Had I been sent to Vietnam, I would have served. But I really objected to the whole thing. I could not become a conscientious objector because—because I was drafted immediately after graduating, and I hadn't done the paperwork in college. I was—I'm not bright enough that I could take time out from studying. I was studying or I was in class, you know. It was—it was just—that's the way it was. But—but as I say, I really shut down during college, and then I became aware enough again, having the problem with my father, and my mother understanding. I mean, she knew what a 4-F was, as well, but she was good with it. She was good with it back when I was in the summer theater. She liked Tom, you know. [laughs] Tom and I would be together a lot when we weren't rehearsing or we weren't doing a show. And a lot included going to my home. We—it was a farm that wasn't an active farm. But there was a huge amount of space on it, and we had a farm pond, and so during the summer, when we weren't rehearsing, we could go swimming. And she met Tom, she liked Tom, and—and there was never—I never felt that I had to come out to her. I felt that she knew what was going on. And— and even when—she died in '85, I met my partner in '78 and, at some point, decided that it was time for him to meet the family. Father had an excuse to be away, and she just loved Jack [Veasey]—she's fine, you know. I think that—I think that she would have been an excellent mother-in-law for Jack. His parents were good. And, weirdly enough, they were really upset with him when he came out, and were picking on him and all of that, and then I came along, and they were good with it. So, at least we got him through that. We've been together for 36 years. We will get married, we just—it's been only 36 years, we don't want to rush into it. [laughs] But we intend to get married. We have that. [points to ring on finger] We just—you know, we don't feel the rush—the need for rush into it. You need to keep me focused, I just go all over the place. I met Jack—he was an—he was the editor of the *Philadelphia Gay News,* and—from the mid-'70s to about 1980. And since he was editor, he could take out the—the personal ads for whatever size he wanted. [laughs] He was the editor. And he quoted a line from *Company*—the Stephen Sondheim musical *Company*. And I saw it and thought, "Well, you know, there's somebody who at least knows musicals." I have the Broadway gene. I have always had the Broadway gene. So I found it interesting that he could Sondheim and know what that was all about. And when I responded to him by letter, he said he felt the same way, that, "Ooh, he knows Sondheim." [laughs] So we started exchanging letters. He came up to—to visit for a weekend, and we're not sure when that was, as to the day. We know it was mid-September of '78. So, you know, it's 36 years, going on 37, that we've been together, and 35 years that we've been living together in the same house. When we moved here, we were the youngest couple on the block. We are now the oldest people on the block. But the nice part is is somebody does our sidewalk for us—so I'm happy with that.

OS: Great. Okay, and before you mentioned that your mother was, you know—you felt like you never needed to come out to her. Your father had a fairly difficult time. How did the, I guess, rest of your family interpret your coming out? When did you tell them? And not only your family, but, you know, your friends, and the environment that you were in.

DW: [sighs] My brother was six years older than I was, so we never really had that much of a relationship. My sister was three years older, so we were a lot closer. She always kind of went along with David-being-weird, and I never felt that it was necessary to come out to her. Now, she's had a whole different life, because she became first interested and then married a man who wanted to be a preacher. And he did that for a little bit, but then just got to the point of being, like, a lay minister and just very active in various fundamentalist churches. And we were never quite sure how we could get along with her being—and it has become her being on that side, me being on this side, even though we're family. And so we were out of touch for—for many years. And she decided to move back to the area, back to Gap, and—from New York State, and we just started to kind of, you know, feel our way in and get in touch. And—and she has just been incredibly supportive. I don't get invited to family functions, but I understand that, and she is walking this really tough line, you know, and I understand that. And I honor that. I don't feel put out that I'm not invited for Christmas dinner, for Thanksgiving, for summer picnic, you know. That's okay, I don't mind. And one of the—one of the finest things that she ever said to me was—I don't know if you remember, there was a singer—there was a group called The Mamas & the Papas, and they dissolved, but the singer, Cass Elliot, continued a solo career until she died. And one of her songs was "Make Your Own Kind of Music." It was a hit. And my sister said that whenever she heard that, she thought of me—that you have to make your own kind of music, sing your own special song. And so I knew—and that was when we were separated, so I knew that getting back together would be a problem, but it wouldn't be a problem with the two of us. And even now, we're doing email and occasionally talking on the phone. I just—I want to make it as comfortable for her as I can. I was not talking to my father when he died a couple of years ago. I mean, I just got to that point. It was so unpleasant to visit with him. He was in a retirement home. He had remarried. And he would just launch into this diatribe—religious, my looks. [laughs] He could never quite understand that. But it—it just—we would fight. He would, I'm sure, understand why I got angry. I knew why he was angry. "Why do I have to spend an hour on the road each way, every Sunday, just to get pissed off? No." And so I said, "That's enough." And by that point, Becky and I—my sister and I were talking, and she understood it. She said—she said, "I don't know why, but he just cannot accept. So, fine." I did go to his funeral. But we were—as I say, we were not talking when he did die, and that's been a couple of years now. He died in his 90s. So—but as far as the—there is another story [laughs], and that is that—the unpleasantness I guess I might as well talk about. I was raped by the station manager. He got me drunk in his office one night. I was working the night shift—evening shift, and he came in one night, which was very unusual for him. Got me drunk in his office, and I blacked out, and came to in the men's room, in a stall, and I knew something had happened. I knew I had been raped. We had been very, very good friends until then. And the next day, nothing. He would not talk to me. There was just this divide, which everybody at the station noticed. But there's this 22-year-old guy, from out of state, who's coming in here—if I would say anything to anyone, they wouldn't believe me. And there was nothing that I could say. I couldn't call the police. It's 1969, I couldn't call the police. And I couldn't even talk to my family about it, because this guy was great friends with my mother and father—you know, they had been through the war together. And I kinda wonder how much in the closet this guy was, during the war, you know, with all the guys around. I've done a lot of reading on World War II, and I'm pretty amazed at some of that. But nevertheless, here is a problem for the gay boy, and he's—it was devastating, and it was devastating that I couldn't talk to anyone. I couldn't. I

don't think I could even have talked to a doctor. And at that point, you know, it was an analyst, and the family would not put up with an analyst. We didn't have money, but we still had our pride, you know. So my friend told me about a job on the crew at WITF, and so I got—got the job. Worked on the show right after the interview. [laughs] The guy asked me, "Can you stay for the day?" I said, "Sure." And I just—I really loved the people there, the atmosphere. It was very creative. All the other stations were doing news. If they needed a crew, it was a news crew, or they would shoot commercials, but that—you know, that was it. We were doing concerts. We would go out on the road and produce a concert, so that we could tape it, you know. We were all over the Eastern Coast doing that sort of thing. The Philadelphia Folk Festival was something that we did. And I knew that people could be fired for being gay, still can, but back then it was—you just kind of knew that that was the possibility, and I figured, "I need to say something to somebody before it would just become crushing to—to be kicked out of here." So I talked to my crew chief, and—and I told him that when the three dollar bill was going to be published, my picture would be on it. And he just started to laugh and laugh, and say, "I don't think so. I think you're gonna have to wait in line." [laughs] Well, it turned out he was gay, there were a couple of people on the crew who were gay—a couple more of the staffers were gay, and it didn't matter. And it was the first time that I was in that kind of a community, where it just—it didn't matter. And it didn't matter to anybody, from the president on down. And on the crew, you know, it was just totally odd and wonderful experience. And so after that, I just felt—"I never am going to hide this again, and if people need an explanation, they'll get an explanation." But that, I think—that was—that was the biggest coming out, I think—was with Jim. And ultimately, we wound up living together, not so much as a couple, but as roommates for maybe six or seven years. That was just a friendship that developed very nicely.

OS: Okay, and you've mentioned how your LGBT—your—I guess your identity, or sexual orientation, has affected your family life, a little bit of your social life. But I was wondering about the effects and influence on other aspects of your life—like, political, religious, cultural. So how your—does that question make sense or…? Yeah?

DW: Yeah. Around 1980, 1979, there was an organization in Lebanon, of all places—it was called LEGAL (?). And it started off as "Let's Explore Gay" something—I can't remember the rest of it. I remember that LEGAL did stand for something. And it was a social group of maybe 10, 11 of us getting together in a straight couple's apartment. They started it, because they had a friend who didn't know how to contact other people. So Jack was still in Philadelphia. So on Sundays, which was their meeting day, rather than heading for Harrisburg area, I would go to Lebanon and enjoy these meetings. That went on for about a year, and until—until the Men's Chorus, I think that's probably the most organized LGBT organization that I was with. It was interesting, because it was first names. You kind of felt like you were sneaking into these people's apartment. But then when you got there—we had parties, and we talked, and all of that. It was—it was a very—it was a fun group, and it just kind of dissolved. But that it was in Lebanon always just made me happy. And I knew what was going on in Harrisburg. Harrisburg had a couple of bars, and that was, I guess, pretty much my LGBT experience in Harrisburg in the '70s, and then Jack came along, and we just kind of bowed out of that scene. I was busy with television and then radio. And that increasingly took up my time. He was doing a lot of freelance editing work. He is a poet, so he would also do a lot of poetry writing and got himself to the point where he could do some readings. People would ask him to do readings. And that

kind of filled our time. I turned 50. And I had been active in theater in college—high school, and college, and both the college—what they would do. But Lebanon also had a community theater, and it was kind of fueled by college kids who couldn't find any kind of theater that they liked on campus, so they would go into Lebanon and do that. And it was a lot of fun. And I found that television was taking the place of being in theater, so that was fine. But I decided around 50, that, "If I'm getting back to theater, I've got to do it now." So I wrote to Theatre Harrisburg and to Open Stage of Harrisburg, said, "I can volunteer to move sets, whatever you have." On the same day, both of them called me and asked, since I was in radio, "Do you think you could do sound?" I could try it, sure. And over the course of that first year, I became a sound designer for both theaters and wound up doing sound design for nearly 100 plays and musicals. And—and that—what is said about theater as being an accepting and, you know, big church, it is true. It is—it's your talent. It's what you contribute, more than who you go to bed with. And I just—again, it was—it was like the old days at ITF. It was just wonderful. And it was very free, very exciting creatively. As a sound director, you know, you work with the director to find out what sound effects he wants. You push the buttons when they're supposed to happen. And I met two very, very close friends through that, because I would design it and was not that much of a sound engineer, and found these guys, one after the other, who were sound engineers. So we would work in collaboration. Always spoke the same language: "I need something here that's going to sound like…," and he would do it, you know. And he would do it, and that was wonderful. And with the second guy, he was working at JPL, which is a big production house in Harrisburg, and he was working as a sound engineer there. He hated doing live shows, and I loved doing live shows. He liked the studio, where you could have three takes, you know, four takes, and I loved flying by the seat of your pants. So we got along very well that way. And that—I think that fueled the need, the acceptance, and the feelings. Religion—religion went out the window during college. And it's become even more anti- as we've gone along. Just, you know, in the Christian church terms, I have run out of cheeks to turn. You know, I have no more patience. I find it encouraging—just recently, the Presbyterians said that they will now accept LGBT people without question. They will perform weddings if the minister is—goes along with it, but the congregations are saying that it's okay, and that's good. I grew up Presbyterian, I'm happy to hear it. It's not enough to get me back. I need apologies.

OS: All right. Okay. And so—you've mentioned a lot about, you know, what life was like, sort of, out here, and there's a lot of research on what was happening during the '60s and '70s in the big cities, but, you know, what was it like to be in more of a rural setting during the liberation movement? What sort of movements were happening here? How did you interpret that?

DW: The '70s were just amazing from a gay standpoint. In Harrisburg, I mean. It was—first, it was finding out that you're not the only one, that there are a lot of other people who are like you, and that then became more of a bar scene and—and sex, and—and I—I was brought up strict, you know, Presbyterian, and it didn't bother me, because that was a way of connecting with other people. What—what was so horrible—what was so wrong for, you know, up to that point, suddenly became something that you could share with someone. You know, you shared yourself. I did not go as far as other people did. I did not have a lot of affairs. I did not have a lot of—of just one-night stands. But I did have some, and it was fine. The—the main cruising area was State Street, in front of the Capitol, because it—and it still is wide enough, that it was two lanes. So you could drive up one side, cruise, and see who was there, and turn around at the Capitol and

go back down to the river, and turn around and come back for another look. And it became known as the merry-go-round, which I—you know, I assume it's still—even though the street has changed somewhat, I assume it would still be pretty much the same. Plus, you had the alleys going off to the end, and that was kind of exciting, too. That was—was pretty much it. We would occasionally go to Philadelphia to see shows and—and just be blown away by the gay scene in Philadelphia by that point. It just became really, really interesting. And then came the '80s, which just threw a scare into everybody. By that point, again, Jack and I were together. Still, we were both—had been very—fairly active sexually up to then. And when AIDS first started happening, nobody knew how long the development period was—you know, how long was it going to be before you found out. Any kind of blemish on your body sent you into panic. A couple of people have said that we probably kept each other from getting sick, just because we were—not monogamous, we both agreed that it was going to be an open relationship, but we still didn't play around that much. We were together, and I think that that probably did get us away from—from a lot of involvement. It didn't get us sick, and—and it was still disastrous. Just horrible. But that was—that's part of the gay scene, too. And what was worse around here was church reaction. Guys could not get funerals. There wasn't a whole lot of—of problem with undertakers; they could deal with it. But churches couldn't, just couldn't, so there were a lot of funerals in funeral homes. A lot of families would not show up for the funeral. So it was the family of choice that would be there to—to say goodbye. It—it was not a good time. It is said that that which does not kill you makes you stronger, but I think it just made me angrier. And I have become a very angry old man. I am preparing for a fight this fall because, supposedly, the anti-discrimination laws in Pennsylvania will come up for discussion, possibly even a vote, in both Houses, and I am already getting—girding up my loins, because I am definitely fighting for that. I was active, but not really an activist, in the point leading up to marriage ruling in—in Pennsylvania. But that did take—that went on for a long time. Lot of letters to the editor, lot of Valentine's Day—there were demonstrations that would take part in. I—so I—it was not that big a part of my life. But it was—I didn't ignore it, you know. In Harrisburg itself, I think—the community—I can't think of what I want to say. The—there was a telephone hotline that you could call for information of—on bars, and that—ultimately, it became what doctor you could see for testing, before that became a lot more open, what doctor you could see, who would at least take you to examine you. You could call the hotline for that kind of information, as well. I—I always financially supported it. I did not get into it, because some of the people just put me off, and it felt like it was going to be a problem, a personality problem, so I just stayed away from that and didn't really get involved in that, until about—what was it—2004, and the Gay Men's Chorus was looking for an artistic director. And because I had been doing that for many number of years by that point, I thought, "That's something I could do." And so they thought it was something I could do, as well. So for about eight years, I was their music director, and it was just a lot of fun. It was fun being with the guys, but it was also fun making music. And I like the sound of the men's chorus—I like any chorus. My previous experience had been with women and men in the same chorus, but just to have a men's chorus was really very interesting, to get the sound that I wanted, and they were very eager to go along with it, you know. So I—I think that was probably my major contribution to—to anything LGBT in Central PA—was the years with the Men's Chorus.

OS: And throughout—you know, from the days of that 4-F up until now, has there been a specific person or organization that was sort of, like, your guiding force or your comfort throughout, you know, this entire journey, so to speak?

DW: At the station, it was the people there. There were a couple of people that I could just talk to. There was a straight guy who was a little bit younger than I, who was so secure with himself that we became best friends. We spent forever with each other, for most of the decade. And he would listen to me if I was having problems, as I would listen to him, so that was—that was very good. And my partner Jack and I kind of, you know, just sound off to each other, and that works out well. I had been going to a Unitarian church, but that didn't work out, so I'm kind of not involved with that. But they were very gay, pro—pro-LGBT. And so there was not much of a problem with that either. I've—actually I've been very lucky. Especially—the LGBT Center has an Aging with Pride lunch, which I can make. I'm bus-dependent, so after 5 o'clock there's nothing I can do, but there is a lunch gathering once a month. And just to hear other people's stories—I just realize how—how lucky I've been. It's been a charmed life.

OS: And so even though you—you've said you've been very lucky, which it appears to be that way—what do you think were the biggest challenges or hurdles you had to overcome, and also what do you think looking at yourself and the entire LGBT community, what kind of challenges remain now? So—past and present.

DW: I think that—that just being part of the evolution through the '70s and '80s has—has—becoming aware of that as you're going along, and then being able to look back on it with appreciation, has been very valuable, and it's helped me put things in perspective along the way. After—after the relationship and the partnership with Jack came along, and it was—it just became a given that we were going to be together forever, or whatever, that just kind of put things to rest as well. The problem has always been outside passing judgment. We had it when I was in college, we had it—we still have it. What we don't have as much now is the firing—is the discrimination, the refusal of service, but it's still happening. I go to a website called "Joe My God" [joemygod.blogspot.com], which is kind of a news—news blog, and I get involved with that, but it also keeps me pretty informed with what's going on. And it's really crushing to find out that there are still some things going on in Pennsylvania that one would have hoped would have been taken care of by the judges' ruling—that, "Okay, so you can get married, so you're like everybody else," and, it—you know, it just doesn't happen. So again, that's what I'm looking to in the fall, but just not having it in me to back down if I'm challenged. And—and, oddly enough, television helped me with that, in producing, because if I was given a project, then, from the other side, I could not take "no" for an answer, and so I had to find ways of getting things done. And the same with—"I don't feel I have to justify my life to you, and this is why." And we've gotten into some fair fights about that, but—but I feel like I'm doing good with that. And just as—as now with volunteering at the Center, I feel like I'm doing some good with that. I'm helping the community, and I like to help. So that's—that's kind of how the whole decade's thing has—has been. And—and now, books are being written about that, and I can read them and say, "Yeah, you know, even here, you know, in the boonies, that was going on." Or there will be anthologies with people writing about what it was like to grow up in the middle states—you know, the flyover states, and in another city, or, you know, that kind of thing. And I can just—I understand that there's something about us—there's something about the tribe that we all

understand. A lot of people on the outside, if you will, get it, too, but, you know, we—it's like any tribe. There is a connection there, and—and I like that. I would not like to be an exclusively gay society any more than I like being in a straight society. I like the interaction. But there is an understanding, there is a comfort level that I can feel. And—and there is always going to be a separation of young and old, and when I was young I felt that way about old people, and now I'm old, and I can see it in young people. And it was, "Get off of my porch." [laughs] But there's—there seems to be opportunities, also, to be able to tell younger people about what it was like, you know: "Actually, you're not as bad off. You don't have to hide quite as much. It's getting a little easier for you." And yes, there are—I don't know that there's more suicide going on now. That seems to have cooled a bit—it's still there, especially with young people, and I hate to see that. But with my generation it was because of the pressure, of the bullying, of the fights, and not being able to take it, and I understand that. But there was more going on than just that, and I want younger people to know that. And I want there to be this course that all young gay people have to take [laughs] so that they can see what it was like. There—ah, there was a marvelous book, *The Gay Metropolis*—New York City from World War II to the mid-'90s, and that would just be textbook if I were teaching a course; that would be textbook, because although it deals with New York City, it also kind of gets out, explains the whole thing, and I think would be a very understandable history, for—for younger people. But there are opportunities. Like, "Joe My God" has some younger readers, you know, and I'll pop off with a comment about something, and they—"I didn't know that." You know, so—so I—the generations continue, and I like that, and I can appreciate the differences, and I also like to see that, you know, from time to time there's a coming together. And that's—that's good.

OS: Great. And so you mentioned the challenges and the idea of community, but, what has been, you know, over the course of—since the '60s or '70s up until now, the biggest amount of change and progress that you've seen, whether it's socially, politically, religiously?

DW: It—it's social, and—and it—it is marriage equality. I think that that—there's so much now that revolves around that. I was amazed—in Pennsylvania, it was a judge's decision, and nothing more was done about it. I was expecting a fight, and it didn't happen. That's not to say that things are—are great, but you couldn't even dream about that in the '70s, even in the '80s into the '90s. It was kind of nice, you know—people would joke about Jack and me, and we would joke. And then it just started happening and—and the snowball of it. There—there have been times when I've just welled up, because I can't believe it. It's—it's just—there is this thing about becoming human, about being perceived as not second-class citizen. And then also getting the Alabama things, about—and Oklahoma and so forth, about—about all of the Jim Crow kind of things that they are bringing back now, because we are not acceptable. It feels like they need to be better than somebody, and so it's gonna be us. And so that's still making me aware of the social injustices. But the progress that's been made has just been mind-boggling. And if we—if we can finally get the four words added to the anti-discrimination, that would be so, so wonderful. It'll be a fight. And—and we'll—we'll get to it.

OS: And you've mentioned a lot of different, you know, monumental moments that took place in your life, but there—was there one specific event or turning point in your life that has sort of shaped who you are, both with your LGBTQ identity or just as a person? It's a big question, so you don't need to…

DW: Yeah, there are probably a couple. First of all, I think—I can't—I can't downplay being hired by ITF enough. That just—that—that changed things, so I think that was probably the first really major turnaround for me—encouragement, feeling human, and all of that—yeah, that—that would be—definitely be the first one. I think the other one is—is living with somebody committed, living in a committed relationship. It does change you, you know. You—you have to think about him, and he has to think about you and what you're doing together. And that has a big, big influence on my life, I think. As far as community goes, I've just kind of—have been doing a back and forth. You know, I can get into the community. I can get into the straight world. It's—I don't know. So I think that the biggest impact on that probably was with the Gay Men's Chorus and finally becoming artistic director there, just because then we were playing mostly to a gay audience. It allowed me twice to go to an international festival and meet other gay musicians, and—and literally from around the world. One was in Miami Beach, and more recently in Denver. And there were just thousands of gay singers and conductors and—and other musicians. And—and you just kind of got—again, you got this picture of not just being in Harrisburg, trying to crank out the concerts [laughs], trying to make a difference, but being able to see what was going on in—in different communities, different countries. What they could do, what they couldn't do. And that—that made a really big impression on me. Yeah.

OS: So we're coming in a little over an hour right now. But…

DW: I'm not good at soundbites, I should have told you that. [laughs]

OS: No, that's okay. But, you know, is there anything you missed, or you would really want to put on record or let us know? Whether it's your hopes for the future, or anything else about, like, you, or…

DW: Well, there's gonna be a wedding, we just don't know when—that's the personal. Farther out, for Pennsylvania, I want equality. Nothing more, nothing less. I just—I want to be a full person. I pay my taxes, treat me like that. Then it goes national. What's the Supreme Court going to say in June? How will that affect the rest of the country? What kind of crap are we going to have to put up with people who still can't accept that there are lots of different people in this world? [laughs] I really do feel that there are people who think they have to be better than somebody, you know, that there is this class of people that "I'm better than," and it's difficult for them to—to be accepting. And that's the change that I want to see. It probably has to come in as law. Civil rights—African American civil rights had to be done by law, although there was a lot of marching and such going up to that, which I was a part of. But once it's law, it kind of changes minds, and you have power behind the law to enforce it. So that's—that's the big hope.

OS: Great. And because this is, as you know, a project for the LGBTQ Center—or LGBT Center—and here, do you have any materials you'd want to donate to the project?

DW: Actually, I don't.

OS: Okay.

DW: Because every once in a while I go on a cleaning binge [laughs] and just—stuff just goes. I think my contribution has been—a lot of the DVDs that are in the Center's library are mine, were mine, and I've donated them, so that they are now available for other people to see. And—and the wish would be that people would understand about queer cinema and start looking at it, you know. A lot of people know it exists. A lot of people understand that it's not porn, that it',s you know, our stories. And that just needs to be more ingrained in our minds, because we now have the resources that you can go and see—see these stories.

OS: Sure. And do you know any other people you think would be useful to contact for interviewing that would want to speak?

DW: Well, you've got Paul [Foltz], right on! [laughs]

OS: And there—we have about, I think, 90 participants, so if you know anyone…

DW: I think that if—I would hope that you've already had Joe Burns, who is an activist forever, and he's a marvelous man, he would be a good interview. But you may already have him. He—and Jack is not native, so I don't know if you want—if you're looking for native only. He's been here since 1980, though, so that's 35 years. So he—his information is my information, same phone number. And that's Jack Veasey—V as in Victor, E-A-S-E-Y.

OS: Okay, and the last thing, or question that we have is: are you comfortable with us using all of this information for the Archives, for our research? You have the option to have us omit any pieces. But you're…comfortable.

DW: Absolutely, absolutely. No, no.

OS: Okay, great! Well, thank you so much.

DW: Thank you, I appreciate it.

OS: This concludes it, and we'll, of course, be in touch, and if I have any follow-up questions, I—email's the best way to reach you?

DW: Yeah, yeah.

OS: Great. Thank you again. This was so informative and really a pleasure to listen to.

DW: Thank you. Thank you.