

LarryKleppinger_20200618_transcript

LIZ BRADBURY: So, there we go, and then I'm going to do that. Good. So, I need to say with this project, Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center and Trexler Library at Muhlenberg College, will collaborate on 40 Years of Public Health Experiences in the Lehigh Valley LGBT Community, collecting and curating local LGBT health experiences from HIV/AIDS to COVID-19. My name is Liz Bradbury and I'm here with Larry Kleppinger to talk about his experiences in the Lehigh Valley community during this time of COVID epidemic as part of the Lehigh Valley LGBT Community Archive. We're meeting on Zoom and today is June eighteenth, right? June eighteenth, twenty-twenty.

LARRY KLEPPINGER: Yep.

LB: So, I need to -- let's see. Thank you so much for being willing to share and speak with us today. I need to ask you [00:01:00] to state your full name and to spell it for me.

LK: My name is Larry Kleppinger. It's L-A-R-R-Y and that's K-L-E-P-P-I-N-G-E-R.

LB: Okay. And will you please share your birth date?

LK: Yes, June fifth, nineteen fifty-nine.

LB: Okay. So, now, this is the consent part. So, I just have

to ask you these questions. Do you consent to this interview today?

LK: I do.

LB: Okay. Do you consent to having this interview being transcribed, digitalized, and made publicly available online in searchable formats?

LK: I do.

LB: Do you consent to the LGBT archive using your interview for educational purposes in other formats including films, archives, articles, websites, presentations, and other formats?

LK: I absolutely do.

LB: (laughs) Great! Do you understand that you will have thirty days after the electronic delivery of the [00:02:00] transcript to review your interview and identify any parts you'd like to delete and/or withdraw from your interview from the project?

LK: Yes.

LB: Okay! So, we're all ready to go. The very first thing I always -- supposed to say, in the midst of this current public health crisis we're experiencing, we want to take this opportunity to look back and reflect, to capture the stories of those who lived through the worst of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in

the nineteen eighties and the nineteen nineties. This starts out with a question that says, "Do you remember the first time you became aware of the disease?" So, I'm going to tell you that and then you're going to just say -- go ahead and go. Say whatever you want.

LK: Are you ready? (laughs)

LB: Great, [whatever you want,?] yeah, yeah.

LK: The first time that I heard of AIDS was back, I believe, in nineteen eighty-one and it was through *The New York Times*. They had published a small article about the gay cancer.

LB: [I know?].

LK: And I saw [00:03:00] that and I was, like, "Wow, what's that?" I didn't know why they were calling it a gay cancer. I was, like, "Why is it gay?" And coming to find out that basically gay people were affected by it at that time, I guess. So, people started to talk about it. I worked in the Stonewall nightclub in Allentown at the time. And people were concerned but it wasn't, like, it wasn't a big thing until it actually did become a big thing.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And once it did, then it just took off. I mean, there was a lot of fear, there was a lot of stigma. And I never really

saw any of the ostracization that took place, which -- there was plenty of that later on, especially. But I noticed that people disappeared on us. They would just vanish. And people would be talking to one another and saying, "What happened to so-and-so?" You know? "Do you think they have the gay cancer?" And there was just rumor and speculation. So, [00:04:00] that's basically what transpired at the very beginning of that, yeah.

LB: When that happened and people were disappearing, did you figure out later what had happened? Were they just afraid or were they dying or sick or what do you think?

LK: I think that because of the symptoms that came along with developing AIDS, they didn't want to show themselves in public, whether it was Kaposi sarcoma, the wasting syndrome, all of that. It didn't really show up in Allentown at the Stonewall until probably around nineteen eighty-five or so. There were some people who actually were brave enough to admit that they had it and -- but even then, people were still, like, a little antsy because nobody really knew how this was still contracted at the time and they weren't sure. So, people were, like, "Mm," you know? In the gay community, it was definitely much more accepting, of course. But, yeah.

LB: Yeah. [00:05:00] You think that -- were you surrounded by

[people?] -- I mean, like, did anybody you know have it or
[some?] --

LK: Yes, yes. And after a while, it became quite a few that we knew because at a certain point, people were definitely [a little bit more,?] much more willing to admit it. In the very beginning, it was a secret because people would disappear. They'd -- or either ostracized by their families, we later found out, or they couldn't work for jobs anymore, that type of thing. There were some good friends, I guess, of some of them that took care of them. But it was definitely a difficult time at that time.

LB: Yeah.

LK: I remember there's -- a lot of that fear turned into anger because, basically, there was nothing being stated by our government on any level, really, about AIDS at the time. I mean, it was -- we were on our own. And I know that we had looked to ACT UP in New York, which was formed [00:06:00] later on in the eighties. And they were quite instrumental in giving everybody a voice and setting the tone and making inroads in all kinds of ways. And so, all the cities in the country, I guess, picked up on that and there was this movement, basically. And so, that was inspiring.

LB: Did you go to New York? Did you go to any of the ACT UP things?

LK: No, I actually never went to the ACT UP things. I had seen things on the news about them but I never went to them.

LB: Yeah.

LK: I didn't really participate in the activism. What we did in Allentown at a certain point, there was a stupid, silly bar wars thing going on between Candida's and the Stonewall at the time and we were just doing silly things back and forth, just as we were trying to have some fun with life. And so, at a certain point, we decided that we would turn this into a sporting event to finish this off so we wouldn't have to keep doing this back and forth thing. (laughter) And we decided [00:07:00] to do an AIDS benefit. And that was nineteen eighty-five that took place. We called it the Bar Olympics and it was crazy events that were -- and Laura and Georgeann, who owned Rainbow Mountain Resort in the Poconos, the gay resort, allowed us to be on their premises for that event and they put a buffet together. They didn't realize, though, the scope that we were thinking of as far as doing this.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And so, we promoted this only in-house, basically, in

Stonewall and Candida's. We sold over four hundred tickets at ten dollars apiece and then we had raffle tickets and we had businesses donate things for a raffle, that kind of thing. We sold t-shirts. So, there was this whole, like, collaborative effort between the two bars to put this together. That first event raised over six thousand dollars, I believe.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And then, we had to decide what we wanted to do with that, you know? Who we going to give this to? And we had come to discover that the AIDS services center at the time was serving a client roster -- I believe in [00:08:00] nineteen eighty-five, there were fifty-three cases that they were serving.

LB: Wow.

LK: Persons with AIDS at the time, in Allentown. And so, we decided to give them the money. And their annual budget at the time was ten-thousand dollars. So, the six-thousand dollars went quite a long way for them. So, that was really amazing.

LB: That was a separate organization, right? It wasn't -- because, [the ultimate?] --

LK: It was separate.

LB: (inaudible) [hospital?] but, yeah, right.

LK: Yeah, it was definitely separate. It was run by Ed Verba

at the time, and I think he was pretty grateful for that. And then, one of the community elders came to us, Larry Roth of Lawrence Roth's -- he had a hair salon.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And he also did theater productions and all -- he was involved in all kinds of things in life. What a spirit he was. He came to us and said, "You know, you guys did a really good thing here. You should create an organization to do fundraising." And I was, like, "We don't know anything about organizations for fundraising." And he said, "Don't worry, you'll learn." And he was right. So, he actually [00:09:00] helped to spearhead that effort. We arranged to have meetings every week with a group of people and we pulled more people in. There were people like [Micki?] Katz from the 13th Street Pub, Candida from Candida's, [Markie Cummings?], Billy [Lay?] from the Lay department store fortune, Larry Roth, Georgeann and Laura, Matthew [Stitzer?], Robin [Cook?]. I'm probably missing many other names at this point because it's been thirty-five years now. (laughter) And so, we actually formed this organization, which was an empowering event for us. I mean, it felt so good to be doing something for people. And one of the biggest, I think, achievements of that organization was not just

the growth through the years but the fact that we decided that fifty percent of our money that we brought in was going to be given to an emergency contingency fund that the board would vote on every week for people requesting money for rent, for food, for utilities, because they had no jobs, they couldn't work, [00:10:00] they couldn't get up to work.

LB: Yeah.

LK: So, we thought that that was a real important part of the work.

LB: Did you have people coming in and sort of outlining what their situations were or did they just -- did somebody bring, like, someone on the board bring it to you or --

LK: Somebody on the board would bring it to us. I think a lot of things came through the AIDS Services Center if I remember correctly, so -- and that was funneled through us, right straight through to us and we were -- and we bought air conditioners, things like that, things that people needed because they just didn't have any money.

LB: Yeah, yeah.

LK: Yeah.

LB: So, did you have specific instances where you were talking to people that, like, you had to help them take care of somebody

or you knew somebody that was sick or anything like that?

LK: At that same time, there was one individual who had admitted that he had AIDS and [00:11:00] he was -- wonderful spirit, another wonderful spirit. And I know that Candida was instrumental in taking care of him. She hired him at the bar because I guess he couldn't work his other job anymore. And that allowed him to be able to work when he could. And she actually, I believe, had some in-house bar benefits for him for money, as well. And I didn't really get to take care of him. I spent time with him, a lot of time with him.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And the hardest part was when we had to say goodbye because I got the call and -- saying, "You should come over and say goodbye." And I hadn't done this before. And I walked into his bedroom and I sat down and I'm thinking to myself: what am I going to say? What do I say to him? And he couldn't speak, he couldn't move, and he was definitely -- he had the wasting and he was so thin. [00:12:00]

LB: Yeah.

LK: And I just looked him in the eye and I said, "I'm here." And I said, "Everybody's here to support you and it's okay to go. It's okay." And so, that's one of the closest things that

I got to with it. But over the years, we've met many people and there were people that were grateful for what we were doing. And we were just throwing parties and that's what we did, you know? And then, with the guidance of some other people that -- like, Joseph Simonetta was another person who actually helped us formulate the 501(c)(3) so that could actually be a non-profit. And the other thing that I loved about the organization was that it was completely volunteer. There were no paid positions.

LB: Sure.

LK: So, every dollar that came in went right back out to people that needed it.

LB: Yeah. When was that, when you were talking about people that were passing away? When was that in the [00:13:00] epidemic? Was it near the beginning or --

LK: I remember the second annual Bar Olympics that we did, that person I just described to you that I said goodbye to was at those games and we actually did a balloon release that year to symbolize the people that have left us.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And we let the balloons go, and that was before we knew that balloons were bad for the environment. (laughs)

LB: Yeah, I know, [right?].

LK: And so, I remember watching the balloons. I looked up and the sky was a bright blue and he looked up at the sky at the balloons, as well, and he looked at me and he said, "I might be a balloon next year."

LB: Wow.

LK: And I just --

LB: Yeah.

LK: -- that was -- and then, a couple other friends were there and they heard it and so we're all a mess. And it's just --

LB: (inaudible)

LK: -- okay, let's pull it together, we've got to pull this whole event off for today. So, let's just do this. And I think he died the next year. So, [00:14:00] that would have been nineteen eighty-seven that he passed away. But there were plenty of others that just, like I said, have disappeared.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Oh. Excuse me.

LB: When people -- you know, I was talking to a couple of other people because really, in those days, bars were so essential because there wasn't much else and -- because Le-Hi-Ho had become AIDS Services Center, so it was really not a social place anymore. And in the bars, I think, in some ways, because of

ostracization of family, they were replacing people's families.

LK: Oh, yeah, definitely. Most definitely.

LB: (inaudible) seeing, like, people were coming in and stuff?

LK: It was just an incredible experience to watch people rally and to join in that fight and to want to do things and to contribute money, to contribute prizes, and just time and energy, sit on committees, and all the work that it took.

[00:15:00] And believe me, I know, it was like having another full-time job. And I had actually worked with FACT for two years. They actually -- I was the president. And I had never done any of this before. I think second year, we raised over thirty-three thousand dollars and we had three events that year. There were two balls, two dinner balls that we did, which were pretty fantastic. And then, Billy Lay, I think, took it over the third year. And that year, I think he -- well, he had so many community connections, he brought in well over, I think, one-hundred thousand dollars that year. I was, like, oh, my God! This is amazing! Oh, my God!

LB: Yeah.

LK: So, it was definitely, like I said, empowering. It was a very positive thing amidst all the tragedy that we were going through at the same time. So, propelled us forward.

LB: I know there was a lot of funerals and you were talking about that on the phone, I think. And people have told me about it. [00:16:00] I haven't been able to talk to anybody directly about this, but about planting trees down in the park? Did you know about that, when people were planting trees? They planted the trees because they couldn't get -- people didn't want to have headstones because they didn't want the stigma or the relationship of people thinking that it was a negative thing. They didn't want to [deal with?] that, so -- [and there?] --

LK: And there were people who didn't want to have open caskets, either, because it was just they didn't want to -- they wanted to remember them as they were, not as they ended.

LB: Yeah, yeah.

LK: Yeah.

LB: What kind of stuff was the -- let me think what I'm going to say. You were living in the Lehigh Valley the whole time. Are you from here?

LK: I'm originally from Lehigh Valley, yes. I left the Lehigh Valley in nineteen ninety-two to come to Philadelphia. So, I was there, I actually was at the Stonewall from, like, nineteen seventy-eight [00:17:00] through nineteen ninety-two. So, I saw a lot in that whole time period.

LB: Yeah. So, do you think that there was a -- times that were frustrating because of education? Like, people just (inaudible) to take the extra steps to take care of themselves? Do you think people were afraid to be out, to be around other people or they changed their behaviors significantly? Did you see any of that?

LK: I think that people were talking about changing their sexual behaviors because once it was discovered what the main mode of transmission was, people would basically refrain from that behavior. And then, when people were told to use condoms, then condoms were a part of our lives and there were just things that we didn't do. And, I mean, yeah, absolutely, people did talk about it.

LB: Yeah, yeah. [00:18:00] Did you have anybody tell you that they had instances where they [were just falling through the gaps?] because people found out that they were HIV positive [or anything or things about?] --

LK: [I couldn't?] --

LB: -- [they?] -- or anything --

LK: There were families that shunned them. You know, if anybody did -- I think that most people tried to keep this a secret because of the reactions that they would get. I mean,

whether you were drinking out of a glass, you know? I mean, there was actually a little bit of fear in the very beginning, even in the bars, as far as drinking out of the same glasses, you know? Did you wash that good enough, you know? That kind of thing. So, there was all kinds of -- a greater fear that, because of a lack of knowledge, that people would just, you know, freak out about anything. So, it was definitely a tough time and -- until we found our footing.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Until we had more information. I was personally quite upset with the federal government, especially Ronald Reagan at that time, [00:19:00] because he didn't mention anything for at least the first six or seven years of his term. I think it was nineteen eighty-seven when he finally actually mentioned the word AIDS. So, that, there was a lot of anger at the time for that. And so, we just used all that fear and all that anger and channeled that into: let's just take care of people. Let's do what we can do for people. Let's do what we do best: throw some parties and make some money for people.

LB: Yeah, yeah.

LK: Yeah.

LB: Yeah. Did you know people that were -- I mean, I would

guess that people were coming in and saying, "What can we do?" I mean, [I was?] doing that in nineteen ninety-two or ninety-one, saying, [you know?], "What can we do?" and that kind of stuff.

LK: There were some key players in that. I mean, the board members, of course, really were invested as far as utilizing every contact that they had to pull in. And if they heard of anybody -- say, "What can I do?" they would immediately pull them in and say, "Hey, you can be on this committee, you can help us set up for this event, you could [00:20:00] sell tickets for this." There are all different kinds of (inaudible) people and it was just they all felt good to do that. They all wanted to do their part. So, it was an amazing outpouring from the community. And I always wondered, you know, jeez, if we can do this for AIDS, what else could we do on this planet? (laughter)

LB: (inaudible) Tell me who some of those people were and some, like, something that you remember about them.

LK: You mean, the people that actually volunteered?

LB: Yeah.

LK: It would be hard to really pick out just individuals because there were so many. Their willingness, their spirit, their joy, their energy, it was just inspiring to see all these

people coming together for a common cause. It just blew me away. And, you know, today, in twenty-twenty, to feel what we've been going [00:21:00] through for the last three or four months now and three-and-a-half years, you know, the spirit kind of feels a bit weakened at this point. And I draw on that experience, I carry that with me all the time. And those people all contributed to that. And that just - that will buoy you the rest of your life. It's amazing. But, yeah, I mean, they were just regular folks that would just help and do anything. They would pitch in and do anything.

LB: So, when people started FACT, did you think that -- was there some specific thing that made people -- it was the bar games that made people do that, right? Did you used to work --

LK: Yeah.

LB: -- at Rainbow Mountain when they had the Rainbow Mountain stuff? What did you do there, what were you involved in?

LK: No, I didn't work at Rainbow Mountain, I worked at the Stonewall. But --

LB: No, I mean --

LK: -- at Rainbow --

LB: -- for the Summer Games.

LK: Oh, (laughs) well, [00:22:00] it was actually quite a large

set of -- we needed all those volunteers for that because the -- I remember Larry Roth had gotten a band shell for the opening and closing ceremonies and we had to set up the different areas for the games. We actually, the very first game, we had actually had a softball game. And the lesbians were so much better at softball, (laughter) let me tell you. All I remember of that softball game, because I actually participated in the games for the Stonewall, was running into the woods when they were hitting the balls to go get the balls because they were just socking 'em out of the park. I was, like, oh, jeez all mighty, come on! But there was a drag relay race, there was a tug of war, there was an uphill race, there was pool volleyball. There was an inner tube relay race, which actually was kind of bar-themed because basically the one person had to sit in the inner tube, another person propelled them across the pool, and they had to drink their beer before they got out of the tube for the next person [00:23:00] to get in and do it. So, it was crazy, stupid, silly, funny events and -- but people were prepped for this only because of all -- like I said earlier, the stupid bar wars that we had going between the two bars earlier, the people, the customers actually got involved in that, you know? They were, like, "Oh, my God, what's going on? This is

great!" You know? I mean, they were enjoying the show. So, we thought, okay, let's take this show on the road. (laughs)

LB: Yeah, yeah.

LK: And we did. So, those were some of the games that we did and it was [a lot of fun?]. And then, of course, you had -- we had, like I said, four hundred people show up for the first event, which Rainbow Mountain was unprepared for. They thought it was just going to be us and a couple friends.

LB: Yeah!

LK: But it was four hundred people. And they had a buffet and then they ran out of food, so people were a little upset because there wasn't any food. But thankfully, they had a restaurant, so [people ordered?] -- restaurant and they realized it was for a good cause, so everybody left okay, I guess. So, it was definitely a Herculean task, though, to set that up.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And then, the second year, we got rained out and that was unfortunate because [00:24:00] we had pulled other bars in. I mean, we had 13th Street Pub, we had Candida's, Stonewall, we had Woody's from Philadelphia -- actually came out because I had a contact with them. But unfortunately, they couldn't participate and they couldn't make our rain date, so that was a shame.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And then, Rumors, there was Rumors and there were, like, oh, at least -- probably, like, eight bars at the time that participated in, like, the SummerGames. So, it was a lot of fun. It took forever to do it, though. (laughs) All the [events?].

LB: How was that, when you had the money? Did you just funnel that money directly into AIDS Services Center or what was it, A-- was that what it was?

LK: No, once -- the first year we did. I think we apportioned some money to the AIDS Services Center after that but it depended on what other things came up as far as what the board would appropriate. So, I don't have all the records and I don't remember everything that we did. But like I said, we still had the fifty percent that went to the emergency contingency fund. That was a [00:25:00] given and that was never changed.

LB: Right.

LK: And then, the other fifty percent went to various organizations. And then, later on, actually, there was a chapter that was developed in Bucks County, in New Hope.

LB: Right, yeah, was familiar with that, yeah.

LK: Yeah, so it was fascinating. And then, they actually went

off on their own, which was probably a bit better for them.

LB: Yeah. Were you involved with Le-Hi-Ho?

LK: I was not, no. The only thing that I, the only involvement that I really had with them was reading their publication, the *Lambda Valley Monthly* --

LB: Yeah, [I just?] --

LK: -- which I told you about. Yeah, I have to give you this copies.

LB: Great, that's good.

LK: Yeah, and that was one of the only sources of news that we had at the time, too.

LB: Yeah, yeah.

LK: So, local people would do, like, articles and editorials and Bobby Sweeney from *Candida's* would do -- actually, he was one of the editors, I believe, yeah.

LB: Who owned the Stonewall then?

LK: Back then, it was David Bischoff. And, [00:26:00] yeah, he was the sole owner at that time. And he was right behind us, which was -- he was actually a very supportive owner and I liked that about him because we actually had a victory party at the Stonewall when we won and we invited the other bars to come and we would buy cocktails for the other bar reps and things like

that. So, he was definitely onboard with all of that, which was great. Good man.

LB: You think that the bar itself was a great place where you could congregate and get people involved?

LK: The bar was a hub.

LB: [You must really?] (inaudible)

LK: That was the hub of --

LB: -- everything else, you know --

LK: Yeah.

LB: -- [with the?] bar

LK: It was definitely our island of freedom, first of all, and it was a hub of activity. It was our community activity place, yes. And everything pretty much happened from there, you know? Yeah, that was amazing.

LB: Yeah, when you were working with FACT, did you have [00:27:00] any outreach to, like, government officials or anything for information or to share information with them?

LK: That didn't happen in the beginning. That may have happened under the leadership of Billy Lay. But not in the beginning, no. We were just basically trying to get everything together, get -- because we were creating events as we were going along. So, I mean, the only event that we started out

with was the Bar Olympics and which turned into the Summer Games because I guess we weren't allowed to use their Olympics thing, term, whatever, [I was?] --

LB: Right, that's right, yeah.

LK: So, it was summer games at the third one. And so, I forgot where I was. (laughs) You have to excuse me. I just turned sixty-one. Memory's going.

LB: [We are old?].

LK: (laughs) Yeah, I don't believe there was that much government outreach in the very beginning, no. It was just a matter of putting events together. And then, there were people who actually volunteered their homes and they would do picnics and bingo and there -- so, people [00:28:00] from all over, just, you know, adding to the mix and just creating a larger pot of money for everybody, which was great.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Yeah.

LB: Who was the person who was running AIDS Services Center then? Who was the first -- was that Dixie White that was the first person that was the leadership at -- was she the first AIDS Services person?

LK: I don't recall her. I do know Ed Verba was there at the

time that we had -- [was from?] --

LB: [Ed Verba?]? Oh, okay, yeah.

LK: Yeah. Is he still around?

LB: Yeah, he is, yeah. He's on Facebook, so I see him now and then, sure.

LK: Okay. I didn't know he was still around. I don't know if he moved away.

LB: No, he's still around. because most of those people you mentioned, I know them. A couple of them I didn't know but then most of them are still in this area. It's good, because a lot of people aren't still around, so that's one of the things. I mean, people died, [00:29:00] was one of the things that was -- happened, too.

LK: Yeah (inaudible)

LB: Were you aware of things that were happening with -- we're talking to some people about medications that people had to take and how that influenced their lives and that they (inaudible) were aware of it and stuff.

LK: I heard a lot about side effects, whether it was diarrhea, constantly being tired. Like I said, most of the people that actually did admit to having AIDS were -- they put on one of their best faces. They were strong people. They were the

fighters. The ones [00:30:00] that disappeared, that's not to say that they weren't strong, they just disappeared. We didn't know what happened. So, yeah, the efficacy of the drug was not really that great because I think that Joe [Keppel?] found out that he had AIDS in, I think in eighty-five, probably eighty-four, eighty-five, and he died three years later. So, it wasn't like there was a long lifespan after that diagnosis.

LB: Who was Joe Keppel? He was part of the --

LK: He was the person I told you about earlier that Candida's hired and she actually did the bar benefits for. A lovely man. I actually have a picture of him still in my bedroom. A character and a half. Witty, funny, sarcastic. (laughs) But a lovely man.

LB: Yeah, yeah.

LK: Yeah, we carry them with us all around, all the time now at this point, yeah.

LB: It's true. [00:31:00] In terms of, you know, encouraging people, what kind of stuff did the bar do to encourage people to have safe sex? I mean, was there anything that -- I mean, I know that that happened because I was around. But I think there was a lot of (inaudible) information through (inaudible) people couldn't get any [of the pamphlets? Anywhere else?].

LK: There was definitely -- I know there was conversations about using condoms. Some bars would put out condoms and eventually that became a mainstay, actually, you know? Condoms were there, period. Use these, you know? And then, the large cities would put together kits, you know, with lubricant, the condom, instructions, you know, things like that. But there were educational materials. But people were definitely alerted to it.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Yeah, and so that was your information center, as well, the bar, yeah. It was your activity center, your fundraising center, your island [00:32:00] of freedom to have fun. It was an interesting time.

LB: Were you working there every day?

LK: I was.

LB: That was a regular thing, [your work there at the bar?]

LK: Yeah, pretty much. We were open six days a week at the time. We were closed on Sundays. So, yeah, I was there pretty much -- at least five days a week, yeah.

LB: So, talk about, like, how -- I mean, I would guess that things would -- like, how that was nuanced, the nuances of how that changed your life, I mean, just sort of the awareness of it

and stuff --

LK: What? The awareness of what?

LB: Just that this was happening and people you knew might have gotten it or things like that. I mean, how did that -- just sort of an open-ended question to let you talk about anything you want.

LK: Well, it pretty much galvanized me and many others, many others, to do something [00:33:00] about it and to be useful in this fight because no one was doing it for us, like I said. And I just -- it energized me. It gave me the energy that -- and, like I said, we used that fear and anger to fuel that so that we actually could spend that second job doing this benefit experience to pull it through. Because I sat on every committee, you know, because I wanted to know what was going on and what people were doing and I wanted to encourage people and I wanted to make sure that things were going in the right direction and that if anybody had any questions, I could find out answers for them if I didn't have the answers. So, it was definitely, you know, one of those types of things. But the remarkable thing is is all the core people that were involved at the time were of that same mindset. And that [00:34:00] energy was just incredible. I mean, to know that you could -- you

don't really have to say anything to anybody. You can count on them to do their part and to do everything that they need to do, whether it's pulling people in and beefing up other committees. And so, there was communication going on but you didn't have to do much of it because these people just were of a mindset, like, we're going to get this done. We've got this. And then, as you enjoyed the events that took place and you saw the funds coming in at each event, it was, like, that much more of a reward. So, it's, like, yeah, let's do more! Come on, we can do this. We've got this now. So, it was definitely exciting. I also had an eye on the cities, as well. Like, Philly was doing their own thing. I know that Woody's was doing a [Roll-AIDS?] benefit -- was a roller skating party, which was a lot of fun. And I'd never gone to it [00:35:00] but I had talked to them about it because he would come up to Allentown every year to visit us and -- because he had a college reunion at the time, once a year. So, we would talk to him about that and I saw the advertisements for that. And he would tell stories about what was going on down in Philly. And so, we would share stories. It was interesting to hear what was going on in the big city, as well, yeah.

LB: Did you --

LK: [So, we got, like?] --

LB: (inaudible)

LK: Go ahead, I'm sorry.

LB: Go on.

LK: I was just going to say we -- there were a lot of great mentors for me at the time. That was inspiring, as well. People that, you know, knew that I needed help in this area or whatev-- it was just such a concerted effort. It was -- I can't say anything other than inspiring.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Even to this day. I treasure that time.

LB: Yeah. So, [00:36:00] it was interesting when -- because I hadn't heard this before but I'm not surprised that when Billy Lay was involved that there was a different fundraising, you know, capability. And I [have?] that that also came out of Ardath Rodale being involved with David Rodale and [inaudible] Rodale. So, was he around then? Was he --

LK: Yes.

LB: (inaudible)

LK: Yeah, I believe so.

LB: Yeah.

LK: I believe so. But he was quite instrumental, though, in

pulling in all these community members, you know? Yeah, the straight community. And it was, like, yes, we've got some more help. Yay! And he just took it to another level. So, that was truly amazing to me and it was amazing to watch him in action, yeah.

LB: He's still around isn't he? Billy?

LK: He's actually in Florida now.

LB: Oh, okay.

LK: I saw him last year. I actually stopped down to visit him and he's doing well. He's retired; [00:37:00] he's amazing.

(laughs)

LB: So, when people were concerned about healthcare and circumstances like that, because I know that that must have been -- I had friends that couldn't get healthcare because they were HIV-positive. Like, a doctor wouldn't see them. Was FACT doing any kind of thing like that where they [would?] (inaudible) [for people?] or hooking up doctors? I mean, some of the doctors were really involved.

LK: We were helping to pay for doctor's visits but we didn't know anything about getting hooked up with doctors and things like that. That may have come later on, as well. Like I said, the first two years were pretty much the set-up years as far as

getting the events in place and adding to that one single event the first year, then we had three events the next year, and the next year was that many more. So, that's where the focus was in the very beginning. And then, there may have been more outreach as far as trying to hook people up with various [00:38:00] resources within the community. But I do know that we definitely helped pay medical bills. That was another thing -- from the emergency contingency fund, that people couldn't afford their prescriptions, you know, all different kinds of things. So, that's where a lot of that went, yeah.

LB: So, who was it that helped you set up the 501(c)(3), the not-for-profit thing? Did you say somebody helped?

LK: His name is Joseph Simonetta. He was actually living in New Hope at the time back in that day. And they called him the senator of New Hope because he was quite the impresario. He also was a lobbyist in Washington. Very, very smart man. And he saw the potential in what we were doing, so he wanted to help, as well. So, it was just -- all these gifts came [forward? Forth? From him?] and I was, like, oh, my God, this is kind of overwhelming, you know? And so, he was definitely a boost. [00:39:00] I remember him also describing to me about ACT UP. Because I remember at the time, there were some members

of the gay community -- were kind of turned off by ACT UP because they thought they were too aggressive. And, of course, the general public at large thought they were way too aggressive.

LB: Yeah.

LK: But he described it to me like this: he said, "You know what?" He said, "ACT UP is performing a vital mission. What they're doing is they are creating all this mayhem and noise and then people like me get to walk in the door with the politicians and say, 'We're not like that. But this is what we're looking to do.' And you bring in the reasonable voices. So, that way, you scare the bejesus out of them and you get them to do what you want, what should be done."

LB: Yeah.

LK: So, I loved that description. It was, like, God, he's good. (laughs)

LB: Yeah.

LK: Yeah.

LB: And he was out of New Hope? He was living --

LK: Yeah.

LB: (inaudible) yeah.

LK: Yeah, he still actually has a house in New Hope. He lives

in Philadelphia, as well. And I think he has a house in Florida. [00:40:00] He's done well with his lobbying. He's done very well. I've had many, many conversations over the years, I still see him here in Philly every once in a while. Yeah, great man.

LB: Well, so, let me think now. Oh, so, I was going to say -- so, I asked about that kind of stuff. So, when you were hearing about HIV and AIDS [and how?] -- before, I mean, people didn't know anything about it. Then, you started to hear about the gay cancer thing, because I certainly remembered that. Did you start to hear about, you know, famous people talking about it or, you know, the sort of breakthroughs, when Reagan finally said something about it, was that something that people were sharing and people talking about that? What do you think about that?

LK: Wow. I don't recall any famous people back at that time, back in the early to mid eighties or [00:41:00] even beyond that that were coming out. I don't recall that there were any because that would have been a career destroyer for them, let alone being gay. I mean, you saw what happened when Magic Johnson made his admission. I think that was in the nineties.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And that sent some shock waves through the nation, unfortunately. I don't know why. But, no, I don't know of any celebrities back then that were -- I think there was -- jeez, I don't actually even remember the celebrity support, except Elizabeth Taylor.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Yeah, she was one of the big advocates. But even she was later, I think.

LB: Yeah, she was (inaudible)

LK: It was later eighties?

LB: -- it related to Rock Hudson and that was later (inaudible) so, certainly that was true. What, let's see, what kind of -- [00:42:00] so, how do you see this, when you think about this stuff, it's really hard not to think about this in relation to what's happening now with the pandemic. And some of the things are very, very similar and some of the things are totally different, you know? Completely different. Do you have any insights on that? Have you thought about that and how that has a relationship and stuff?

LK: I would agree there's, like, a parallel there. And unfortunately, it seems that this administration doesn't seem to be taking this pandemic quite seriously enough. And yet, it's

not as deadly as AIDS was. I mean, with AIDS, it was pretty much a death sentence at that time, before they came up with cocktail therapy.

LB: Yeah.

LK: So, but I mean there's still -- I'd say it's a pretty high death rate with this, as well, and it's unfortunate that we don't have that leadership today, once again, which is -- [00:43:00] strikes me as odd that that parallel's there because we could probably be saving that many more lives if he was setting an example for people and wearing a mask and telling people to wear a mask as opposed to this macho bravado that he puts off. I don't quite understand that at all, you know? I think you're much more macho when you have information that you give to people and that you actually care about your people. And that was the same thing with Reagan, really. I mean, he -- there was nothing said, nothing done, really, on his behalf. So, there's definitely that parallel as far as the leadership goes. As far as the diseases, not exactly, no. But I'm also struck by the indifference by, seemingly, a large amount of people, by not wearing a mask and being considerate of others, and a lack of kindness, [00:44:00] a lack of consideration for others, especially for elderly, who are much more at risk.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And since we know that, though, I'm surprised once again -- I shouldn't be, I guess -- that this administration also can't say, "Okay, here's our national plan," which -- we need one, actually. We do need that kind of leadership.

LB: Right.

LK: "We're going to take care of the seniors. All the nursing homes and all the nursing care facilities, all the elderly, all the people with preexisting conditions, and all the people that are generally affected by COVID-19, we are going to take special care for them, okay? Young people, you definitely still need to wear masks. You're going to get it and some of you will die, as well." And, I mean, that message is not even out there because, I mean, how do you rate a person's life versus the economy? And they're saying you have to open the economy. I don't know.

LB: Yeah.

LK: You know? And I think that back in the eighties, you know, there was also some argument, oh, you know, do we have enough money for AIDS? You know, there's always a budgetary concern. And I was, like, [00:45:00] how do you sleep at night making that statement? How do you sleep at night, not wanting to take care of people. I don't understand that. That's foreign to me.

LB: Did you have other people in your family around you that were, you know, straight people, whether they were family or other people that you knew that just, like, that were becoming aware of AIDS and you were educating them or you would talk to them about it or something like that, like (inaudible)

LK: Well, actually, no. At that time, I -- because there was the other stigma of just being gay, itself. And some families just didn't react well with that. And that's not to say that my family disowned me or anything. But some were religious, so I knew where they stood. And so, there was not a close bond there at that time. I stayed away because I knew that they were not really [00:46:00] all that accepting. And it's funny because over time, you see various things that do change. I know that my one sister who is very religious, it turned out that her son is gay. And so, that, she did a one-eighty on that. I was, like, wow! And I figured that she would and I thought her husband would have more of a hard time with it. But he actually -- they're both advocates now for gay people and for their son and I'm so proud of them. In fact, I actually worry about them because they're in an area that is very conservative and they're very outspoken. And I said, "You have to be careful." I said, "There are people who will hurt you for what you say." And I

said, "I know this for a fact. I've seen it for decades. So, please, listen to me." I am concerned about her. But I applaud her vim and energy and want to support that son every which way. So, there are positives that come out of it. But that's one of the things [00:47:00] that I was fighting back then. So, no, there was no real exchange with my family because there was also some ignorance. Yeah, in fact, a fair amount of ignorance. And some of those people just can't be reached. You can try.

(laughs) Facebook's also a teller of that. (laughs)

LB: Yeah.

LK: That'll tell you a lot about your family. (laughter) So, yeah, so, I -- no, I -- it wasn't really that I shared a whole of information with them. That was more for our community.

LB: Yeah, it's interesting. So, when Le-Hi-Ho was producing this newspaper and had information in it, you were talking about reading that stuff, were they talking about HIV during that time in that newspaper or --

LK: There were articles on it, yes, and then there was also -- I mean, it was pretty much a lot of different things. They also would report on the Summer Games, you know, how much money was brought in, the events and all that. [00:48:00] There were all the bar advertisements in there, of course. There was a gossip

column, which was run by Rob St. Mary, another character (laughter) who also we lost -- yes, we lost him, as well, I think in the nineties.

LB: Yeah.

LK: He was more of a long-term survivor. But, yeah, he wrote the gossip column and it was funny as hell. He went under the surname, the pseudonym of Myrna Louise. (laughter) So, yeah, so there were a lot of different things in there. But there were some AIDS articles but it wasn't like, you know, any kind of medical go-to. You know, like, this is what you got to do. There were just, yeah, things that were happening, basically, whether it was governmentally or not governmentally and statewide and things like that.

LB: Did people have a sense of where they could get any kind of medical help? I mean, could they go -- hospitals were letting people in? because you're really -- I've been talking to different people [00:49:00] and they were sort of at different times of the epidemic. So, like, I was talking to Dave Moyer and he was later in this thing and then he was involved in some of the testing and some of the stuff. But I was also talking to a couple people and you're really talking about right at the beginning, when they didn't know anything and things, like, they

wouldn't -- like you were saying, that, you know, is this glass clean enough or could you go into the hospital room? My Trisha's -- is a very good friend whose brother was -- so, at the very beginning, [yeah, then?], and he was in New York and they wouldn't bring the food into his room. They'd leave the tray out on the sidewalk, you know, out in the hallway.

LK: Yeah.

LB: And did you see any of that kind of stuff here where --

LK: I, no, I never had the chance to visit anybody in the hospital. Like I said, a lot of those people just disappeared. So, there was no information really given, I mean, to know what the resources were. And I would imagine [00:50:00] they went to a doctor and they were perhaps referred to somebody who was much more up on AIDS in the very beginning. And I don't know that there were that many. So, yeah, that was probably a bare bones kind of time for gay people that had AIDS because -- I can't imagine that. I mean, just the fear that you had this, alone, knowing that it's a death sentence, and then having to just climb through everything, every obstacle, every obstacle to get the things that you need, you know, whether it's basic medical care, money, housing, support, I can't imagine. But no, I didn't get to see any of that. I heard stories, once again,

because, I mean, people would come -- the Stonewall was more of a regional bar, so people come in from Reading, they would come in from Scranton, Wilkes-Barre area, from Philadelphia. So, it was really like a whole melting pot of just southeast Pennsylvania. [00:51:00] And so, when you'd talk to different people, you would hear some of these stories. But I never got to see it firsthand, unfortunately. But I heard about it.

LB: Yeah.

LK: But, yeah, I know at the Stonewall, I remember there were some straight people coming in and we put up with nothing. (laughs) It's, like, you will come in here and you will behave properly, you will not insult anybody, you will not bring up anything as far as, you know, AIDS and -- there were two guys, actually, they called us butt pirates, which was an odd phrase. And they were basically ejected from the club, you know? We didn't put up with -- we brooked no disrespect whatsoever from anybody. That was our safe place. This is our last safe place. You're not going to take that from us.

LB: Right, right. I remember that sign in the lobby that said, you know, "This is a gay establishment. If you don't like it, don't come in." I liked it. I remember Steve Black saying he didn't like that that [00:52:00] sign was there and I thought it

was great. (laughs) [Made me feel comfortable?].

LK: Yeah, it was crazy back then. I mean, there was actually -- somebody shot something through our door. It was a wooden door in the very beginning, when I first started there. And that actually pierced the door -- I don't know if it was, like, a pellet gun, but it actually came through the door and it hit various customers. Some got hit in the neck. And it came back, actually, pretty far in the club. And that's why we actually put, like, a metal coating over the doors at that point because, like, this is ridiculous. So, yeah, there was all kinds of crazy things happening back then.

LB: Yeah.

LK: We had to hire off-duty police officers to protect us. That was a whole 'nother added expense to -- so people would feel safe, because people were getting beat up in the back parking lot. Yeah, that was the other thing: the religion, the religious right was -- that was another thing that fueled our anger. I mean, telling us way back then that this was [00:53:00] God's cure against homosexuals, you know? I was, like, whoa, whoa, the vitriol, the hate, the lack of empathy, that didn't seem very religious to me. So, that, basically, that -- disintegrate any respect I had for religion at that

point. I'm spiritual but I'm not religious.

LB: Did you have -- were there instances where people directly -- brought that kind of information to the bar? You know (inaudible) made letters to the editor --

LK: Yeah.

LB: (inaudible)

LK: No, we had a pretty secure team at the front door. If there was anything, I was never even aware of it, you know? And I actually worked at the back bar at the Stonewall and then later on, I was deejaying. So, I was more towards the back. So, anything that went on, I found about at the end of the night. And most things were not even worth commenting about because they had everything under control at that front door. [00:54:00] That was like Fort Knox. And that was Markie Cummings and Barry Eastwood. They were amazing together. (laughs) Nothing got by them. Nothing, yeah.

LB: They were the bouncers?

LK: Markie actually was the person -- took the money at the door and Barry was the bouncer. But they were extremely protective, observant, and they could spot trouble in a heartbeat. I know that one person actually came in and for some reason, she wasn't letting them in. I forget what it was. And

the person said, "You're prejudiced, that's why you're not letting me in." And she said, "I'm prejudiced against assholes." So, that's where that stood. He didn't get in. (laughs) But I've just -- my heart breaks still to this day for all those people that, A, disappeared and never really had a chance to live their lives or to enjoy the life [00:55:00] or to enjoy those islands of freedom. And I fantasize sometimes what it'd be like today to have more -- those people around, if they were still around. Because my age group was pretty much decimated, you know, which made dating really hard. (laughs) But I do fantasize about that every once in a while, thinking about that. I think there was -- actually, in one of the movies, where somebody had that fantasy scene towards the end of the movie where everybody was alive again. And that was powerful.

LB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, in fact, doing any kind of -- because of that, I mean, you know, sometimes, when I think through our Pride festivals or stuff like that -- I mean, MCC has always been there -- it's been around almost as long as FACT, Metropolitan Community Church, you know? There was a link, I think, through the Pride festival there where people [00:56:00] had some kind of spiritual support and (inaudible)

were you seeing any kind of outreach? I mean, I remember way back in, well, it was, like, nineteen ninety-three when we were trying to [insert? Pass?] laws and stuff. And there were a couple of ministers that were working with us, directly working with us. And that was really good because it was hard to -- I feel the same way as you do. It's hard to be enthusiastic about religion and people using it to [say negative things you?] -- not really getting anything on the other side, so -- but I think there's a big variety of people that used to go to the Stonewall. I think one of the things that would frustrate me in (inaudible) years of when I went to bars when I was younger -- that there were people that were so closeted -- that they could've really helped but they were really just there to hang out and then [00:57:00] leave, who weren't there for the community. And --

LK: Yeah, and that's another reason why a lot of people disappeared, though, too, because they were closeted. They did not want that to be known. They didn't want anybody to know. And that's quite the statement, you know, when you have to hide your life.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And actually, for me, it's always been a matter of: it's

none of your business what I do in my bedroom and you shouldn't be concerned about it. And why are you so concerned about it, you know? So, it is what it is. Or it was what it was and it still is what it is to some degree today.

LB: Well (inaudible)

LK: It's definitely better.

LB: Yeah.

LK: We have a lot of work to do, still.

LB: True. It's true.

LK: Lot of work to do still.

LB: So, in terms of seeing sort of parallels to the -- I mean, one of the things about COVID, the big difference about COVID-19 compared to [00:58:00] HIV/AIDS is that, although lots of people had HIV and lots of people were getting it, particularly when people didn't know how you got it, COVID is -- you know, you can just walk by somebody and get it, so it's a totally different circumstance and situation. And I think that the other big glaring difference is what you were saying about, you know, the president not saying anything about it for seven years, whereas because this is affecting straight people, COVID's --

LK: Yes.

LB: -- straight people, they're [allied?] all over the place.

And even if the president isn't saying stuff about it, everybody else is. They're talking about it every -- constantly. The similar--

LK: I believe that that's -- [you?] -- that was one of the beliefs of the government at that time. It was, like, oh, it's just affecting the gays, you know? So, you know, let's just make them go away. I really believe that because I -- to me, it's just inexcusable [00:59:00] that for seven years and with the mounting toll of deaths that you do nothing, you say nothing. You could have used that bully pulpit to educate people. You could have used that to save lives. To me, that's just inexcusable. I still haven't forgiven Ronald Reagan for that. And I know you're not supposed to speak ill of the dead but I intensely dislike that man, bordering on hate. And I don't like to hate.

LB: Yeah. Makes you angry that you have to feel [like that?].

LK: That wells right back up. It doesn't go away.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And I've come to terms with it but it's still there and it's still kind of fresh. And so, it's amazing. And I can draw on that to motivate myself to do things once in a while, you know? But, yeah, that was -- and once again, though, it's --

that parallel makes me a little crazy and it definitely reminds me and brings that feeling back where we have a leader who's not really doing what he should be doing, although there has been some response. [01:00:00] But also, the fear.

LB: Right.

LK: People, there was definitely a fear out there. There still is, to a large degree. I mean, you have some people going around, you know, "Give my liberty back," all that kind of crap, whatever. The reality is that there is still a lot of fear out there in the population. So, they're pretty much where we were back in the eighties. So, that's another kind of parallel.

Kind of.

LB: Yeah, yeah. The interesting thing was that when we were dealing with HIV/AIDS, we were in the middle of the epidemic, people our age, because we're about the same age, is -- a little older than -- but the big similarity or interesting thing is we are the same group of people. We Baby Boomers who are moving into senior citizen land and who are at higher risk for COVID are the ones that were fighting the HIV/AIDS (inaudible)

LK: Interesting.

LB: -- we were kids.

LK: Yeah. [01:01:00]

LB: We were twenty-three --

LK: Yeah, that's right.

LB: -- and it's a big difference about life then.

LK: Yeah, yeah. It's weird to kind of be under attack again, though. It's, like, wow, okay, here we go. That's kind of weird. Not quite the same, though, but still --

LB: Yeah, it feels different, yeah. One of the things that we had during the AIDS epidemic, we found, is these chosen families that came to help people who were HIV-positive, that came to help people who were alone, who came to help people that had been ostracized. The bad thing is that people presume that these chosen families are something that will continue to take care of us into our eighties. The reality is, we were the age of the people that we were taking care of, yeah. When lesbians were taking care of their gay male friends, [01:02:00] when I was doing that, I was twenty-five and they were twenty-five.

LK: Yeah.

LB: Now I'm sixty-three and they're sixty-three.

LK: Sixty-one here, yeah. Yeah, I get you.

LB: And when we get to be eighty, we can't go, well, our chosen family -- we're all going to be eighty! And it's a --

LK: Yeah.

LB: -- that, in a way, we did such a great job coming together, helping each other during the AIDS epidemic and --

LK: Yeah.

LB: -- the presumption is we can all do it in our eighties and we can't.

LK: No.

LB: It's not the same.

LK: No, it's not, you know? And, you know, as we get older and we lose the people that are still with us, thankfully, but we lose them now and so you do lose your chosen family. So, you are much more alone now. It's, like, oh, okay. Now what do I do next? I just remember going to too many funerals, though.

LB: Yeah. [01:03:00]

LK: Yeah.

LB: What was that --

LK: Hmm?

LB: Was it usually the same place?

LK: No, it was different places, it was different towns. But, yeah, lot of funerals. In fact, there were two on the same day and I was, like, oh, my God, how am I going to make both? They were both at the same time, too, so it was, like, impossible to make both, which was really bad, you know? And I worked with

both guys but their families had set things up and we tried to, like, tell them, "Look, we want to be there for both of them," you know? So, how horrible it is to have to make a choice, you know? It's, like, jeez all mighty! Not only did we lose them, now we can't get together for the funeral. Or one of them.

That was a mess.

LB: Yeah, yeah.

LK: Interesting, though, because, like, some families just -- it was very small representation of family and it was much more chosen family, [01:04:00] though the chosen families were the ones that were there to actually support them and to be there to memorialize them.

LB: Yeah. Did you see, through FACT, family members that were coming forward to help with FACT?

LK: No, not in the beginning. That, I think that was an eventuality. There was definitely -- I think there was more of that, but not in the beginning, no. That was more just people that we knew and people that volunteered from the bars, friends of people that worked in the bars, friends of people that were helping us. It was a whole community effort on that. But, no, it wasn't -- I didn't see a lot of family members reaching out. I think eventually they did. But, like I said, that was all way

back in the beginning when everything was still so stigmatized, so heavily stigmatized that people were definitely ostracized from their families or the families couldn't [01:05:00] be bothered with them. It was, like, "I don't want to catch that," you know? I don't know how you do that. I don't know how you sleep at night. Because I -- you know, Joe [Keppel?] was one of the first people that I actually got to make sure that he got his hugs and kisses and that he felt that love because a lot of them felt like they couldn't be touched anymore.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And people didn't want to touch them. So, I don't know how people do that.

LB: Yeah. Had you actually found information that it was okay? I mean, was it pretty clear to everybody that it was okay to touch people and be around people and, you know, stuff--

LK: Yeah, I think so. But at, you know, with Joe, I didn't care. I didn't [01:06:00] care. I loved him and I didn't want him to feel like he was being shunned. And I know that some people were shunning him. And I didn't want him to have any more of that than he had to, you know? And so, I know that Candida was there for him. I know that [Cathy Kaiser?] was there for him. She used to work at Candida's, she -- another

character, whoa. And she actually took him into her home and he stayed there with her. And, yeah, and I remember I stayed overnight there a couple times and, yeah, those people needed love just like everybody else, especially then, at that time. Oh, my God. They had enough to deal with.

LB: Yeah, yeah. Did [01:07:00] you have, like, a routine to see people like that if you, you know, [call 'em up?] and --

LK: I'm sorry?

LB: Did you have a routine where you [had?] people that you were calling and checking on and stuff like that? Or was that something that people just shared with each other [and?] -- to go and see these people?

LK: Oh, yeah. I mean, definitely. I mean, there had to be a comfort level, I think, for the persons that had AIDS for that. But, I mean, Joe was definitely in that whole thing. (laughs) And Katie would call me and say, "Hey, you know, let's do something with Joe," whatever, and I'm, "Sure, okay. I'm not doing anything. Let's go." So, it was just one of those types of things where it was just a family kind of thing, yeah. And that chosen family, wow, that got me through life. All of those people. I mean, whether it was just an acquaintance with a great conversation or the core group of friends that I still

carry with me today, [01:08:00] amazing, amazing people. But they're my -- they were my chosen family because, like I said, I left my family because I knew that most of them would not understand what I was about. And I was not about to subject myself to that, no.

LB: Yeah. Life was rough.

LK: [Yeah, I?] -- (laughter) it was, truly, you know? And so, I can only imagine how all those -- the persons with AIDS felt at that time. I can only imagine how difficult a time that was for them to -- I mean, we were stressing out, to have no idea about resources and to have to actually talk to strangers to get information and reveal yourself. I mean, I -- Joe was pretty good-natured about it, though. He was a tough cookie. (laughs) Later on, when I was at Woody's -- (laughs) I lost [01:09:00] about five or six people there while I was there but they'd already lost, like, nineteen people. We'd gone to see the AIDS quilt in Washington for the last time, when it was on full display.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And that was overwhelming. And we got to see the -- Woody's quilt with all the names of all the Woody's employees that had passed. And I went by a number of the quilts and there

was one panel that struck me. And there was, like, a butterfly on it and there was a sun and the words were sewn on it, "Not a day goes by." And that just hit me, the feeling, because it was so true that not a day went by that you wouldn't think about these people, that you didn't -- they made you smile, they made you cry, made you mad. But not a day that went by that you wouldn't think about them. So, that [01:10:00] panel, particularly, struck me hard. And I treasure that memory, too.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Yeah.

LB: Was that in the March on Washington or just when they had the AIDS quilt there? Do you remember when that was?

LK: It was just when they had the AIDS quilt and I -- it was the last time they were having the whole thing in its entirety on display.

LB: Yeah.

LK: So, we had organized a bus trip from Woody's to go down and see it. That was the early nineties. And, yeah, that was powerful.

LB: Yeah.

LK: That was powerful because you imagined that each one of those panels was a person. And so, that just filled the entire

-- I think it was on the Mall.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And it was incredible. It was an incredible sight.

Overwhelming.

LB: Yeah. Well, I know that FACT brought the quilt to Lehigh Valley several times [01:11:00] as [a program?]. It was part of the Summer Games and other events, too. But, yeah, seeing the whole thing, I think that was nineteen ninety-three when that -- when it was there, when I was there for that.

LK: Yeah, that's after I had left.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Right after.

LB: Yeah.

LK: I was just so glad to see that organization continue on, though, and to this day, you know?

LB: Yeah.

LK: And kudos to the people that are still there today: Carl Mancino, Brian Marx, just that whole cast. I mean, they've been fighting the good fight for a long time. And I told them, when -- I was living in Allentown once again from two thousand, two thousand thirteen and actually asked me to be part of the board members again. And I said, "No, I don't really have the time to

do that," I said, "but what you do need to do is get some younger blood in -- (laughter) we need to recruit some new people because you guys need a break, first of all. And secondly, we got to get the next generation going here and show them what [01:12:00] to do." So, I don't know if they took [the pep talk?] but -- so, that what was where they needed to be --

LB: It's hard. I think it's hard. They've had some younger people but I think it's hard to do.

LK: Well, it's because everything's changed, too, you know? I mean, you have the medications now, you know? It's one pill a day. And so, I guess that makes a whole difference in life for people. But there are still people who need help. I don't know exactly what those numbers are but -- yeah.

LB: Yeah. Are you familiar with -- I was talking to somebody else about PrEP. Are you familiar with PrEP? You know?

LK: Crap?

LB: PrEP. PrEP (inaudible) (laughter)

LK: Okay.

LB: (inaudible)

LK: I have a hearing aid, too. (laughter)

LB: No, I was talking about -- I was talking to Dave Moyer about PrEP and [said?] (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) ask him

what he thought about how that was going to help people, the [pill?] --

LK: I just wish there was more [01:13:00] education about that because there are people that are afraid of that or were afraid of that because they didn't know the efficacy of it.

LB: Yeah.

LK: And also, the cost, does your -- can you afford it, will your prescription plan cover it? So, healthcare in this country still, to this day, is still a major issue.

LB: Yeah.

LK: I think that Obama had the right idea with Obamacare but he didn't get everything that he wanted in that bill, you know? He had (inaudible) the pharmaceutical industry, the lawyers, the healthcare lobby. So, we lost out on a lot of things as far as -- eventually, it's going to have to go single payer. There's no way that we can afford to keep going in this direction for that. So, yeah, that's paramount at this point, you know, as far as the healthcare end of that. But PrEP, yeah, I mean, I even have my own doubts about it and it wasn't -- you know, you can actually Google things but -- anymore, who knows what's real and what's not any-- [01:14:00] so, we've been thrown into a whole different dimension, it seems. I'm, like, what is going

on anymore as far as information goes? It used to be you look things up, there's your information, that's the way it is.

Well, not necessarily anymore, you know? So, I think there's a lot of people out there that had doubts about it and some still do. And then, we come up with, then -- I think PrEP has been -- or Truvada. Truvada is the one that was canceled because --

LB: Truvada's the company that produces PrEP.

LK: -- bone problems. They had bone problems.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Something like that. So, you hear about that and then they're -- they've developed other drugs for it, so there's other PrEP drugs, so that's great. But I still think there needs -- there's no real education about that. If this government was truly serious about eradicating AIDs like President Trump has said he wants to do --

LB: Yeah.

LK: -- well, then you would have this massive educational campaign and stop being such prudes in high school because, to me, knowledge is power. [01:15:00] That gives you the power to make the great decisions in your life -- and actually good decisions so that you can live. I'm appalled that we don't have more of an effort in that direction as far as prevention.

LB: Right, yeah.

LK: I mean, you have the information, so -- and you have the medication. So, what are you doing? Back in the eighties, we didn't have education in the very beginning. We had nothing to go on. We had rumor, innuendo, fear, that's it, you know? So, just don't have sex. Okay, all right. That's all we had to deal with. At least now, you have the permission -- get the information out there, dammit!

LB: Yeah, yeah.

LK: I think in your larger cities, you have definitely good resources for that. But even that, I mean, they [01:16:00] -- that should be supplemented with a national campaign to actually -- you could eradicate [this?]. I mean, you see the effort that we're putting into a vaccine for COVID-19, hello.

LB: Right.

LK: We still don't have a vaccine for AIDS.

LB: Right, yeah, yeah.

LK: Do you wonder sometimes that maybe that's because they don't want to have a cure for it? I don't know. Call me old-fashioned, call me suspicious, call me a conspiracy theorist, which I try not to be, because I can't stand that. But I, you know, when it comes to gays, we seem to have been on

the lowest part of the totem pole along with minorities. And so, therefore, there's a lot less care given our way, a lot less though given our way. It's true. So, I don't trust them.

(laughs) [01:17:00] Still.

LB: Well, you go through, you know, an epidemic like HIV/AIDS where you have the kinds of information that was kept from our community for seven or eight years and still (inaudible)

[ways?], it's hard not to be suspicious [that every?]

(inaudible)

LK: Yeah.

LB: Yeah.

LK: Yeah, which, you know, I mean, in the current environment, also, not to get off the topic, but -- I mean, but with minorities -- I mean, with black people, you know, I can understand their mistrust of the system, completely. So, I identify with that and I'm sure that that's magnified probably tenfold for them. I mean, God! But, yeah, education would be definitely a place to start to try and put your money where your mouth is.

LB: Well, we're coming to the -- almost to the end but we still have some -- several minutes [01:18:00] and the concept of this archived thing is [to support?] people to ultimately look back

at this -- you know, twenty, thirty years from now, people can look at this and say, you know, some of [the things you're?] saying, people will never imagine that that was the way things were. And so, I was wondering if you had any other things that you might want to be sure that are covered that you sort of think, like, people wouldn't believe that this actually happened or that this is still happening. But then, things happened that -- you look back and you think I can't believe that happened.

LK: The thing that immediately comes to mind is just the violence against gays and whether that was because they were afraid of AIDS or they were afraid of us or they -- which, a lot of that is fear but also, I think, closet cases will act out in anger because they feel something inside and then -- but society's saying that's not [01:19:00] okay. So, they will lash out because they have that anger and conflict inside themselves. So, they have to try and get -- let some of that out. So, they would take it out on the gays. I was amazed at the amount of violence. You know, just senseless violence and the fact that it would take two, three, four, five guys to beat up one guy. That just -- what? Why? It was also senseless, you know?

LB: Yeah.

LK: And I like things like this because I think that people do

need to have that time capsule, look back and say, oh, can you believe this? Oh, my, I don't believe this at all! Because I know that -- I had spoken to one of my coworkers who has now left us all. So, he was eighty-three when he passed a couple years ago. And he had told me a story back in the day in Philadelphia in, like, the fifties and what it was like to be gay then. And at one of the bars here, I'm not sure if it was Raffles or if it was Drury Lane, but [01:20:00] they had a system where, if the police were coming into bust them or to check on them, you know, they had -- the front door man had, like, a light switch and he would flip the light switch in the bar. And so, the lesbians were dancing with the lesbians, the gays with the gays. They would switch and dance with each other, man and woman, so that when the cops came in, everything looked okay. So, it blows my mind to have that story told to me about the fifties, so I can only imagine thirty years from now what it would be like for someone to hear about the '80s and how we survived the disease and how we were treated in the beginning with this disease. Yeah, I think this is really important.

LB: Yeah, it's good to get this information. I think it's very important and I really, really --

LK: Yeah.

LB: (inaudible) [off of this?]. And [01:21:00] I love that we're talking about the work that FACT did because what an organization to rise to the occasion. Because a lot of places didn't [have that. I mean?], we can look around at other towns around the Lehigh Valley and they didn't do that. There wasn't any organization like that in Reading, there wasn't organizations like that in Scranton. So, you know, and those are big cities, good size cities, too. So, it really happened, I think, in the Lehigh Valley.

LK: Liz, it gives me chills to this day thinking about it because it just seemed like magic to me. It was an experience, like I said, that I will always treasure, I will cherish, I will never forget. I carry it with me and it propels me forward. Those people propel me forward. They were an inspiration.

LB: Right.

LK: So, yeah, I mean, we were very lucky to have that. And it was just the right timing of it, just seems, I guess, that sometimes it happens. And we had the right mix of people and then there were others that just glommed onto [01:22:00] that and added to that critical mass. That just made the whole thing just explode out, work. It was truly an amazing time, though. Frightening time, amazing time. And we actually tried to take

that fear and turn it into something else because that's what it was really about, I think, for us because we were tired of this. No one was doing anything, no one was taking care of us, no one was saying anything, there was no information. Okay, let's just take care of our own, then. The hell with it. And that inspiration came from, like we talked earlier, the group ACT UP. And I forget the Philly groups that were back then. I think there was an ACT UP chapter in Philly but there were other groups. So, yeah, yeah, that was an amazing feat, I think, for that to take place at that time.

LB: Do you think [all?] --

LK: And all -- go ahead.

LB: -- sometimes, I think when there is nobody doing anything, there's a whole statistic that shows, like, that if nobody does anything, [01:23:00] then somebody will come forward [but people are going?] -- if there had been some, like, [even straight?] half-assed organization, then maybe other people wouldn't have come out to take care of ourselves and --

LK: Yeah, yeah, maybe.

LB: -- but, yeah, you know?

LK: I just get thrilled thinking about that it all started with something really silly. (laughs) I mean, just a silly little

rivalry between two bars that turned into this whole thing. I'm -- wow.

LB: What were some other things that were happening between the bars?

LK: Oh, my God. Well --

LB: The silly things?

LK: -- for example, one night, the Candida's crew raided the Stonewall. The front doors burst open and I was behind the bar and Rob St. Mary was there. And he's looking at me and all of a sudden, [yeah?], boom-boom-boom-boom-boom, all these water balloons. And they go -- and they're traveling out the back door and they're gone! (laughter) And all the customers are laughing at us because we got pummeled with water balloons. And I'm, like, soaking wet. I'm, like, those sons of -- hmm.

(laughter) [01:24:00] So, we would plot the next thing, you know? So, they also, one night, came and stole our door person, while he was working. They lured him outside, someone grabbed him, threw him in the back of a station wagon, took him to Candida's. And they called us and the doorman, his name was Dana, and he said, "I feel like Patty Hearst! I feel like Patty Hearst! Get me out of here!" (laughter) So, we had to go over and sign surrender conditions to get our doorman back. And

actually, the whole thing -- actually, the very beginning of it was we stole a mascot. We stole their parrot. The parrot was Candida's mascot and we had the moose [home?], which -- we had this giant moose. So, we stole their parrot and they stole our moose. (laughter) So, that's how the whole thing really basically started. But we ended it all, though. We wanted to make sure that they were, like, sufficiently taken [00:25:00] care of. So, the final event was: I have to get two getaway cars and five people dressed in face paint and fatigues. And so, the two getaway cars would arrive at Candida's, out would come two innocent civilians, they'd go in and order a cocktail with canned farts tucked down their pants. (laughter) Two other people went to the back door with twenty pounds of rice. The five silly stringers, five came in the front door spraying silly string and screaming. The two innocent civilians went to the back door, opened that, let the twenty pounds of rice in. We would start throwing the rice around. They'd take the canned farts out and spray that. The place stank, it was a mess, and the bartender was Pat Gibson and she had her -- [came out of the?] bar. She was just -- (laughter) so, it was a mess. So, Dina actually called me. She said, "Okay. We got to do something." She -- "have rice on my pool table, you got rice in

my cocktails. I had to make all new cocktails for my customers." She said, "We need to do" -- and that's when we started the Summer Games, [01:26:00] the Bar Olympics, yeah.

LB: Great alternative to that, too, because you could see that escalating to the point where maybe it would be problematic. So, it's really so smart that you moved into something like the Summer Games and --

LK: Yeah.

LB: -- [then it ended up?] really helping people for years --

LK: Yeah.

LB: -- and years, still, thirty -- more than thirty years later. What a success, (laughter) that silliness can grow to that level. It's pretty great.

LK: Yeah, yeah. If you want any more of the stories, call me, I'll tell you the rest of them, because there were a lot.

(laughter) because it was a tit-for-tat and it had to be bigger and better. (laughs)

LB: I think I remember Dina saying something about people stealing the "Candida" record out of the jukebox.

LK: Yes! We tied up her bartender and we actually left her tied up, with the business open. I mean, we did things that I can't believe -- to say that we did, you know? But we tied her

up, we made her give us the key to the jukebox, we stole -- and I had gone to all the stores in the Lehigh Valley and bought out every copy of "Candida." (laughter) [01:27:00] Little did I know that Candida was an egomaniac and she had twenty copies upstairs. (laughter)

LB: Ah!

LK: Oh, my God. And then, my other favorite thing was she had put Candida stickers on all of our glassware at the Stonewall. Someone had snuck in, someone let them in. All of our glasses had Candida stickers on them. (laughter) So, I called the staff and I said, "Okay, help me." We gingerly peeled off all the labels, put them on a piece of paper that said -- on the back, it said, "Good for one free drink at Candida's." (laughter) Well, they started taking them over and redeeming them. (laughter) That was one of the best ones. Dina liked that one. (laughs) Yeah.

LB: Oh, man. And FACT's been going on for thirty-five years and she's a city councilwoman now.

LK: Yes. (laughs) Oh, I got more stories about her. Woof! (laughs)

LB: Right, [01:28:00] I've known her for a long time.

LK: (laughs) You should ask her about when she got escorted

home by the police one night because they actually had come to the Stonewall to raid us, more of the silly stuff. And so, there was, like, a water battle ensued inside the Stonewall. There was, like, an inch of water all over the place. It was a mess. And so, I remember, the last thing I remember is all of us on top of her station wagon and she's pulling away. There's, like, ten of us on top of her station wagon. (laughter) She drives us up to Chuck [Woodbury?], the manager's house, where they had shaving creamed his windows, all right? And we get off at that corner. And so, they're laughing and they have a bullhorn and the whole nine yards. And so, they drive up the street and all of a sudden, wham, surrounded by all the police.

LB: Oh!

LK: And we're down on the corner going -- (laughs) so, the police knew Dina and they said, "Dina, do you have a bullhorn?" And she said, "Yes." And [Denny Cara?] in the backseat said, "No." So, [01:29:00] he said, "Were you using the bullhorn?" And Dina said, "Yes." And he said, "What were you saying [to me?]? Were you saying fire?" She said, "No." He said, "What did you say, Candida?" She said, "Rub-a-dub-dub, three queens in a tub." (laughter) Now the other officers had moseyed over and they heard this and they started to, like, snicker.

(laughter) And he said, "Dina, don't you think it's time you take this party home?" This is, like, three, four o'clock in the morning. (laughter) And she goes, "Yes, officer." And they actually escorted her home.

LB: Oh, my.

LK: Another one of the greats. So, yeah, so there's wonderful stories in that. She loves to tell those stories. She's good at -- she's a good raconteur, yeah.

LB: Yeah. (laughter) Well, this has been terrific, Larry. I'm really glad to -- and I love to end on a big laugh, bunch of big laughs. (laughter) That was terrific. So, I really appreciate you talking to me. Thank you so much for doing that. And --

LK: Well, thank you.

END OF AUDIO FILE