

Bob Wittman

MARY FOLTZ: -- when you're ready to go.

CAROL MOELLER: Okay, ready.

MF: My name is Mary Foltz. I'm here today with Bob Wittman to talk about his life and experiences in LGBT organizations in the Lehigh Valley as part of the Lehigh Valley LGBT Community Oral History Project. This project has funding from the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium. We're here in Bob and his partner Frank's home in Allentown, Pennsylvania, on August 8, 2019. Carol Moeller is our videographer today. Bob, I just want to thank you so much for your willingness to talk to us today. I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself by just stating your full name and then spelling it for us.

ROBERT HENRY WITTMAN JR.: My full name is Robert Henry Wittman Jr. My last name is -- confounds everybody, and I've spent my whole life correcting people and it is W-I-T-T-M-A-N. No relationship to the poet or the candy company.

MF: (laughs) Could you please share your birthdate with us?

RHW: I was born on May 15th in the year 1953.

MF: And prior to beginning this interview, you and I sat down, you read through a consent form, do you consent to this interview today?

RHW: Yes, I absolutely do.

MF: Right. To start our conversation today, I'm going to ask you to share a little bit about your childhood. Could you describe the early years of your life for me today?

RHW: Well, I was born in Allentown, grew up here. I really spent my whole life here. As a matter of fact, the only time I had not lived in Allentown is the two years I spent attending Syracuse University from which I graduated in 1975. Other than that, I've been here all -- my whole life. And I was born in Allentown Hospital. I grew up in the South Side of Allentown, and my jobs have always kept me here. I always thought maybe I'd escape and move to a place that might be very different from Allentown, that was always kind of an attraction to find that, maybe move to the big city, but jobs always took precedence -- that and

my relationship. But I had a very good childhood. You asked about my childhood; I had a wonderful childhood. It was a pretty normal childhood. I was part of the great, big baby boom generation. My parents bought an almost brand-new house on the South Side of Allentown that was built right after World War II. My parents were the World War II generation. They moved into a neighborhood with people exactly like them, all working-class moms and dads with young children. There must have been about twenty of us who were all around the same age, and my backyard was their backyard and vice versa. We just ran from property to property on the South Side of -- on the North side of South Mountain. So we had connection to the woods and the South Side Reservoir, Waldheim Park, eventually Mack Pool when they built it. So these were some of my landmarks of childhood.

My family's somewhat small. I have no siblings, my father had none, my mother had two, so the immediate family was pretty small, but we were very, very close growing up. And I attribute whatever happiness I've found in life to the fact that I had a very, very strong family. You know particularly, these days, and the life I've led since, I've met people who didn't come from that kind of background. In

fact, it seems it's hard to find people who have a childhood they can look back on and say, "Wow, it was really a good time." So I've really come to appreciate as an adult actually how really blessed I was. I had an aunt and uncle who had a summer home, a second home at Lake Wallenpaupack in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, and it was just a wonderful place to spend time, and I spent my whole childhood conniving ways to get there. My aunt was very generous with allowing me to be a guest frequently. She gave me a week every summer that was Bob's week to come to the lake and be with my cousins and enjoy the lake. But to tell you the truth, every carload that was or every car that was going from the Lehigh Valley to Lake Wallenpaupack, I was always hoping I might get a call, "Hey, does Bobby want to go along?" because that was a place I really did a lot of growing up. There were sailboats and water -- motorboats and waterskiing, and it was just really a terrific background I have.

CM: Okay, can we pause please? Sorry, I just have to check real quick. (inaudible) There's nothing going from the audio.

MF: Oh, I see.

CM: The mic to the... That's what was bothering me before. It wasn't quite right. But we can make up the audio you've done so far with the TASCAM mic or just the camera, I think.

MF: Yeah.

CM: Not to worry.

MF: Okay.

CM: Much better.

MF: Okay.

CM: Okay.

MF: All right.

CM: Okay.

MF: So I'm Mary Foltz. I'm back with Bob Wittman, and we've just been talking about his -- some of his childhood experiences. I'm going to ask Bob, could you tell us a

little bit more about what it was like to grow up in Allentown?

RHW: Very different than it's like growing up in Allentown today I suspect. There were three big, interesting department stores downtown, there were multiple movie theaters, there was some live theater. We still have some good restaurants, but it was a very different place. A little of the old business activities may be coming back with some of the new development but -- so it's beginning perhaps to look a little bit like it did in the old days. But anybody from my generation can remember things like Hess's department store on a sale day when people hundreds deep were waiting in front of the front doors when the store opened in the morning. I lived on the South Side of Allentown sort of distant from the downtown but as a young boy, I learned to ride the city's public buses, the transit system. It was nothing at all for me to hop on a bus and run into town on the middle of the day and catch a movie or meet friends and just run around the department stores, getting into not too much trouble but really using that as almost a playground too. I still dream about it. I know some people who have maybe come later and they're a little impatient with some of us who can't get over the Hess's days. I confess, I

still dream about it, you know it was really a marvelous, marvelous place.

We've been talking about a childhood growing up, and I guess I'm making it sound quite idyllic. And in its background and in its foundation, it certainly was, but I was a young man who was trying to grow up and trying to develop. And so there were also a lot of challenges that were in the foreground during my experience. One was the fact that, actually, I wasn't a very good student, and this was a terrible problem for me. I was surrounded by bright people. My cousins, I have mentioned earlier from the Lake Wallenpaupack, were my best friends, and they were very, very good in school, all straight-A students both of them, and I wasn't. I was going to be the first person in my family to go to college, and some of my grades by the time I got to high school suggested that that might not work out that way. On top of that, there was the Vietnam War, which began when I was a little, little boy, and I can remember asking my father at some point, "Dad, am I ever going to have to get sent over there?" And he said, "Oh, this will be over long before you're of draft age." Well guess what, it wasn't. Although by the time I did reach draft age, truthfully, they weren't drafting many American boys

anymore. They pretty much wound down the draft, and the next year, I got a very low draft number. But I didn't know that growing up and so a couple of things were working to really disturb my sense of well-being, and they were all interrelated. I mean there was Vietnam and kind of a consequence of not having good grades and not going to college was maybe going to Vietnam. So I felt I had to get good grades, so I would not have to go to Vietnam. So those two were definitely related to one another.

And then increasingly, it dawned on me that I was different in another way as well. I didn't really know what that was at the time. I thought I was the only person in the world who felt the way I did. And it's hard to imagine that you could feel so lonely and isolated given the world that we have today. But it was a very difficult thing for me to deal with, with being gay. I mean actually, I like the idea of being gay. I just found that the world had no idea what I was feeling, and there was no context for it. I mean it simply was not in the paper; it wasn't discussed. You might pick up a reference to gay people, to homos, to fags, that kind of thing in street conversation and family conversation but certainly not in any positive context. There were no role models. There was no media buzz about

it; there was just nothing. So it was my own feelings about friends I had and why wasn't I growing up and developing attraction for girls when they started to.

So the growing up was a mixture of these very good times and when I felt I had good, strong support and then also wondering what would happen if some of these other things didn't work out. Like little Bobby didn't grow up to want a family and a wife and children. What if little Bobby didn't grow up and wasn't able to go to college, what would he do then? So those were some of the challenges I faced growing up. The fact is, in time, they all worked themselves out pretty much. I didn't have the good grades to get into a good college, but what I did was I marshalled my brain resources, and I enrolled in the community college, Lehigh Carbon Community College. I spent two years there, I got an associate's degree, and I grew up enough academically that I was prepared to go on to a big, four-year college. I had a really good experience at "L-Tri-C", as we call it here in the Lehigh Valley, Lehigh Carbon Community College, LCCC. I got good grades; I made the dean's list. I joined an academic trip to the Soviet Union only a year or two after it opened up -- was opened up by Richard Nixon's --

President Nixon's trip there. I really had a good experience.

I might also say during all this period of time at the community college, I also had a girlfriend, a very nice young woman I met through a mutual friend who's my age. I actually stole her, and we had a good time dating during the years of my -- kind of the final months of high school and my -- the first two years of college while I was at the community college. She was a student at Moravian College, so we were basically two home living -- still-at-home-living college students, so we shared that in common, and I think really enjoyed each other's company. I will confess, it took me months to kiss her for the first time. I think she knew that that signaled something. However, once I did kiss her, I kissed her a lot, and I found I enjoyed it. But I also found I really liked her brother who was a year or two younger. And after we separated to go to on with our education -- me after two years at the community college. I graduated from there, and I transferred my credits to Syracuse University from which I graduated in 1975 with degrees in journalism and political science. My girlfriend also had decided for her own reasons to transfer from Moravian, and she went on to

Susquehanna University. In her case, I think it was mostly she wanted the experience of not being a home student, a student living at home and so she talked her parents into the transfer, so we're both transferring at the same time. After I was in Syracuse just a few weeks, she got a -- I received a letter that -- from her that said, "You know since we're not going to be seeing each other for months at a time now while we're both away from school, I hope you think it's okay if we date other people." And truthfully, I was very happy that she's made that suggestion because I was ready to start dating men.

I went to Syracuse, and I discovered even before I arrived in some of the materials that came to my house over the course of the summer, kind of pre-registration materials or pre-arrival materials, and there was list of campus organizations, There must have been a hundred of them, ski club and chess club, debating club, you name it. But there was also something called the Gay Freedom League. So that was really my first introduction to gay people -- not just the gay movement, but gay people.

So I was mighty intrigued about this, and after I got the letter from my girlfriend, I decided I wanted to try to

reach this organization. You know this is pre-computer days, so you did everything by mail, and the different campus organizations maybe had offices. This one actually did, and it also had an office address. So I sent a letter to the Gay Freedom League from my dorm room, and it was answered by the postal system. The letter came back to my dorm room from somebody who was sort of helping to coordinate the Gay Freedom League. I don't know that it had any one leader. It seemed to me it had sort of a collection of people that haphazardly ran this organization. So the man asked me if I would like to get together and talk, and that's exactly what I wanted to do. I think he gave me his telephone number, and I nervously placed a phone call to him, and we set a date to meet on campus. I wish I could remember the guy's name, but he was about as different from me as you could imagine. I mean I have short hair now -- I had short hair back in college then -- he had hair down to his waist. I mean this was the age when there still were hippies, and he would've easily been classified as a hippie. He was quite out, and of course, I'm very nervous about this whole project I'm embarking on. I think we met at the campus coffee shop. And we sat across from each other in a room crowded with other people, and he started saying, "Well, and there's nothing wrong with being gay and

if you're gay and" da, da, da, and he's very loud. I just felt like everybody in the room was looking at us. He discovered my discomfort and so we walked to an academic building, actually the school of music, which had a great, big auditorium. And you could almost always go in there and sit with your books and study and listen to students rehearsing on the organ or the piano upfront. So that's what we did, and that's where we had a really good talk. He also detected that he was quite different from me, and he said, "You know there's somebody new that has come in that is new to Syracuse also like you, and he's actually not a student. He works for the university, but he's just a year away from being a student. He's a year out of college himself, and he's gay. He's much more straightlaced, more like you. I think you'd enjoy knowing him." So sure enough, he followed through, even before I had a chance to react or anything, and before I know it, this guy is knocking on my dorm room door.

I was a little surprised at the forcefulness of this guy's entrée to me, but nonetheless, I came to appreciate it. His name was David. He had just been hired after giving up in graduate school at that point. He had been going to Columbia and left New York City because actually he was

gay, and he had been having trouble dealing with that and academia and so he decided to go jump-start his career. He had planned to go into like college development work and so he secured a job at Syracuse in the publications office. I guess his plan was he was going to take some graduate courses at Syracuse and so forth. It wasn't long before he enlisted me in a college project, a campus project, a school project to update, which they did every year, the campus handbook. I was still a student in my first year at the college, and now suddenly, I'm being offered the editorship of the college handbook. I've been doing some house cleaning here recently, and I came to discover I actually saved -- I didn't now, I threw them out a week ago, but I saved my pay stubs. I forgot I got a little stipend of about fourteen dollars a week for working on the college handbook. But one thing led to another. David and I became pretty close. The guy who introduced us turned out to be dead right. We did have a lot in common we discovered or at least in our outlook in life, in our hopes and dreams and that sort of thing. So he became really my first serious gay mentor.

Along about this time, now mind you, I'm, uh, a freshman, junior -- how does it go? Freshman, junior, sophomore,

senior, is that correct? So I was a sophomore I was in my third year of college, but my first year at Syracuse. That first year at Syracuse, I lived in a dorm with another roommate who, over the course of our months together, realized all of a sudden he was living with a gay man. He didn't quite know how he felt about that. I mean we've stayed in touch, and we're friends to this day, but at first, it was a little bit of a shock. And it happened around the end of the school season, and he said, "You know I think I'd rather find another roommate for next season." And truthfully, I was headed in that direction anyway, but very quickly, what developed is the acquaintance I've made, David suggested that the two of us can find an apartment together off campus. And that at that point appealed to me greatly, so we did that. It was quite fun, my first time doing this, it almost felt like a little gay couple finding an apartment and sign the lease and so forth. And so I came home from the summer looking forward to the coming year.

My action really sent alarms to my family at home. They were a little surprised that I was move-- well first of all, wanted to move out of the dorm, and secondly, that I was moving in with someone who was not really a student but an employee. My father amazingly, who was a well-connected

guy, went to the trouble of doing some background checks on David and managed to find out that he was gay and presented this to me that he had found this out and asked me if I was. So that brought everything to the fore. I, over the summer, have been trying to think of ways to tell them, and in fact, I kind of gave him maybe a reason to look into his past because I had broached the idea to everybody, my parents and to David, to maybe make a visit to Allentown over the summer, you know, "Come visit, stay overnight." It never happened, and we never even had gotten close enough to even talking about a date. But in the meanwhile, my father made this discovery and decided -- you know, it seemed at the time that he didn't really want to be very nice about this. Nonetheless, what was he going to do? I was going back to school in a few weeks, the lease was already signed, this was going to be my friend. I assured him that he was a man of enormous decency. And I guess they gave me the benefit of the doubt, and the year unfolded as I intended it should. Eventually, they met David, they took him out to dinner, they... You know he made some lovely pictures of us in the backyard of the building we lived that still are around in frames on coffee tables at home. But what they really didn't realize, what David was giving me. David worked for the university, and it turns out,

David worked for a gay man, and that gay man reported directly to the chancellor. So all of a sudden, I had this perfect opportunity to be around, seeing their homes, socialize with some really rather accomplished gay people. This wasn't the hippie that took me into the loft of the music school for a private chat. This wasn't a guy who walked me through the cemetery and wanted to make love to me, I guess, amidst the tombstones. This was a guy who, you know, met his friends for cocktails and brunch on Sunday mornings and sat there together with his friends. And they read the *New York Times* and talked about big things, big topics, big things in the news, big things going on, on campus, campus politics, campus business for that matter. So I wound up having a really interesting, unique, and I think a really beneficial time at Syracuse just because of the way that all worked out. So why don't we end it there?
(break in video)

MF: This is Mary Foltz, and I'm back with Bob Wittman. He has just finished discussing his experiences at Syracuse University. And so I wanted to ask a question that kind of goes back a little bit about when you described coming out to your parents. Could you say a little bit more about how they responded when they found out that you were gay and

living with another gay man while you were attending Syracuse University?

RHW: Well, their reaction to me and their -- the way they dealt with me and responded to me being gay has definitely evolved. I think they were just as uninformed about it really as I was, less so, clearly. So none of us really had any framework to discuss it or much context to put it in. I can remember saying things I would never say now, but I'd say things like, "Why don't you just view this like I have a drug addiction and it is part of me and it's something you have to deal with?" I imagine I used that negative concept in trying to reach them, so that's why I say none of us really had the words, the language because it wasn't discussed. I mean nobody did. Families weren't talking about this in these day-- in those days.

My father in many ways was my best friend, but he was a difficult man. He was a Marine. He was a little insecure about his own fabric as a person, his own composition. Not the sexuality I don't think, although maybe sometimes my mother speculated about how confident he was. I always thought my mother was kind of the more sympathetic of the two, but in a way I found I couldn't really discuss with

her. It hurt her. It hurt her feelings, you know something -- she might likely cry. My father on the other hand would run sort of hot and cold on it. He could be my best friend about it or a real obstacle to me trying to deal with it. I mean, at one point, he'd say, "You know I was in the Marines, and when I was in the Marines, it seemed to me everybody in the Navy was gay. Maybe you should join the Navy." And other times, we'd talk about things, and he would let me get very candid, and he could be very sympathetic and then other times, it was just... I don't know, it was just something he couldn't deal with. He was quite proud of the family tree and family traditions. He became a bit of an amateur genealogist, and suddenly, the family tree stopped with his son, so it would seem, and so it did as a matter of fact but... With him it was -- it never really resolved itself to a place where I'd say I was comfortable with it and he was comfortable with it.

When I was a young man, he developed cancer. He was a heavy, heavy smoker and so this was maybe not a surprise. He eventually died of lung cancer, but he had lymphoma in the mouth and that from cigarette smoking. So he was dead by the time he was fifty-nine, and I was probably, at that point, how old would I have been? I guess I was in my

thirties. I had already met Frank, my partner. We haven't talked about yet today, but I think we probably will. But while we're on this story, suffice to say that Frank came into my life, and I met him through the newspaper. He became a work colleague of mine as well as my lover and partner and eventually my husband. And my father really liked Frank. My father loved history, and Frank's background is in history. He's a historian by academic training and by profession. All of the work he did for the newspaper we worked for, for the *Morning Call*, were feature articles about local history. So this gave my father always something to talk to Frank about, and he loved Frank for that. So Frank really helped break down, I guess, some of the mystery of what it was like to be gay. They did tell me after I introduced Frank to my parents that I came walking through the door -- walking in the backyard I guess it was with Frank at my side, and I was apparently just beaming. I don't think they quite fully understood until that moment that this was somebody I really cared about. He wasn't just a friend I wanted them to meet. So he really did help bring a lot of clarity to my relationship. My father passed on, sad that that was, and then it was just my mother and me. And gradually over the years, she became completely accepting of it.

In 2013 when we decided, for a lot of practical reasons mostly, that it made sense for Frank and I to get married. We did, and we asked my mother to be our witness. We did it in New York City in the marriage license hall of the city clerk's office. And my mom bought us both carnations for our lapels, and we said the vows, and she was very excited to be a part of all that. So that's why I say it really did evolve. But this all began at Syracuse, and I didn't know where it was going to go when I left Syracuse and returned home after I graduated.

Actually, my plan was never to return to Allentown. I was a journalist, it was the era of Watergate, all of that had unfolded really while I was in college. There was the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* and that's where every young kid graduating from college with a journalism degree wanted to end up. So I was eager to get out into the world, and I didn't really think Allentown was going to be a good stepping-stone. I had worked at the Allentown *Morning Call* really since the time I was in high school. I got a job, a part-time job there. And when I was a college student, I discovered that the *Morning Call* had an opening in the news department for what, in those days, they used

to call a copyboy. It was just really kind of an office boy. Before you had computers, you had real paper that stories were written on, on typewriters, and those pieces of paper had to be carried physically to an editor who edited. After he was done editing that piece of paper, it had to go upstairs to the composing room to be set into type so that paper had to move around, and copyboys provided that motion.

Eventually, I used that copyboy position to become a summer intern who wrote stories, kind of acted like a reporter and... So by the time I went away to Syracuse, I actually had -- to work on a journalism degree, I actually had real-life experience going out and covering a municipal meeting, like maybe the Coplay Borough Council or Upper Saucon Township Zoning Board. I mean it these were tiny, little meetings in the meeting hall sometimes so rural, they were hard to find. But nonetheless, it was real journalism. You know the stuff got printed in the newspaper the next day. So, obviously, I had to quit the *Call* to go to Syracuse. I couldn't continue to work there part time at nights and on weekends and summertime when I had to be four hours away and then in central New York attending classes. But I left in good terms, and fortunately, they arranged a

summer internship between my junior and senior years. And then after I graduated, they still didn't know if they had an opening for me. They said, "Come back and be a summer intern yet again, and we'll see what happens by the fall." Fortunately, by the fall, they had an opening and sort of, in a way, the rest is history.

I remained there for most of the rest of my career. I certainly didn't intend to. I thought I was just going back there briefly. For a few years, I'll work there. It was going to be a good job. As I was graduating from college, I applied to a lot of places, and after I was working for the *Morning Call* for about a year, I got a call from UPI, United Press International, the wire service. It's now out of business. I mean it's a good idea I didn't link my career to its vessel but um... So I thought I might not -- no, I didn't think I might. My goal was always to not stay at the *Morning Call*. Although I liked the place, it was my hometown newspaper, I'd made friends there, my plan always had been to move on. My friend David that I mentioned who was so much of a mentor to me in college, the man who worked for the university and with whom I later enjoyed an apartment the final year of my time at Syracuse wound up in

California, eventually in San Francisco, exactly where a gay person wanted to be at that time.

So for a long time, a few years anyway, I thought I was going to end up working for San -- in California working for a newspaper. I did a lot of job hunting out there. Being gay helped actually. As it turns out, David had made a really good friend of the man who was no less than publisher of the *Sacramento Bee* and a couple of other papers in like Fresno -- they're all named Bee -- and guess what, he was gay. So David arranged for me to have an interview with the publisher of the *Sacramento Bee*. In San Francisco -- no, not in San Francisco, that's where he lived. So he took me out to dinner, we had wine. I mean how -- who gets to have an opportunity like this? And I probably, had I continued to press him and press that opportunity, I probably could've wound up working in Sacramento later that year or the next. But in the meanwhile, I'd met Frank, and that really kind of put the brakes on stuff. Actually, it was Frank who recommended that I take the train to San Francisco to kind of what turned out to be that last trip I made job hunting and then when I had the dinner with C. K. McClatchy, publisher of the *Sacramento Bee*. He said, "You had gone by airplane so

often, why don't you take the train?" and it turned out to be a wonderful experience. Unfortunately, I should've taken him along, then it would really have been a good experience. I did it alone.

I had worked for the *Morning Call* after I graduated from college for about eight years before Frank arrived. And, um, his arrival was part of an effort that the publisher of the *Morning Call*, at the time, was making to really change and transform the newspaper. The *Morning Call* in those days was owned by a family. Now, it's owned by -- actually, I think it's owned by a hedge fund, but eventually it became owned by the Times-Mirror Corporation of California, the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*. And later, they sold, and it was purchased by the Chicago Tribune organization. But when I started there and when Frank joined the newspaper, it was still owned by a local family. They lived in the Parkway, they drove to work, they ate at the Pennsylvania restaurant, and it was a very folksy operation. The publisher, an older man, Donald Miller, Donald P. Miller, a real patriarch of both the newspaper, and his family had decided early on that his son would take over the news business, and the son was quite interested in doing so. He spent his academic career preparing for it,

and his father fixed him up with some good training jobs at other places to sort of groom him to be publisher. And when Donald Miller got to be, I don't know, up in his sixties or seventy or something like that, he decided it was time for his son Eddie to take over and so he began giving more and more responsibility to Eddie.

First, he gave him a position as executive editor, and eventually, he sort of said -- the publisher said he would step back and let his son Edward become -- the title he chose for himself -- editor and publisher. So it was during that period that Frank and a whole lot of other people were hired by the son. And he really wanted to transform the paper and make it something more than just a small, little, local, hometown newspaper. He wanted it to win awards, and he wanted it to have a top-notch staff, and he wanted it to have a national reputation. So he hired a lot of people including Frank. The problem was he spent a lot of money real quickly, and his father just didn't understand the program that the son was embarking on. And they had immediate and ongoing conflicts over the budget and over priorities and just how to run a newspaper. Eddie was not in an enviable position, that's for sure. I mean, his father (laughs) was an interesting man. I'm glad he wasn't

my father even if he would've afforded me all the opportunities that Don Miller was able to afford his children. They didn't get along, and eventually Eddie quit.

And as things were becoming unraveled, this sort of experiment of bringing in a whole lot of outsiders to beef up the paper and add some real editorial muscle to the staff was petering out. The young people he brought in, many of them said, "Wow, you know, this isn't going to work out in the long run, maybe we shouldn't be sticking around here as long as we thought." And so the *Morning Call* became during that period a real springboard for people to jump on for a year and jump out and go off to a place like maybe the *Philadelphia Inquirer* or the *Washington Post*, *New York Times* maybe, big-city newspapers. Those of us who watched this all come in and watched all these people leave, we gave the -- this crowd of newcomers who didn't stick around too long, gave them the epithet, the boat people. This was kind of a springboard off of what was happening in current events at the time. There were a whole lot of people trying to escape Cuba and were taking life rafts and leaky boats and unlicensed vessels just to be dumped near American shore, and they'd wade to shore and then... It was during the Carter administration, and they became known as the

boat people. So we cynically called our colleagues the boat people who were sort of shipped in and came in and made a whole lot of noise and did some flashy things and then, boom, all of a sudden, they were gone.

Well, Frank was one of the last people that Eddie hired before he came in one morning with a screwdriver and took his -- unscrewed the nameplate from his door and threw it on his father's desk and said, "I quit." Frank was actually hired not to be a reporter but to be a researcher. He came from a background of working in the state archive for the state of Missouri. He had trained for that in his -- in college. He had a degree in history and so he was good at looking at records and find his -- finding his way through piles of research. So he was going to be a researcher, and Ed Miller, the son of the publisher, eventually the publisher, had figured out he was going to put a team of people together that would be an investigative team. There was going to be kind of a permanent editor and so permanent copywriters. The reporters would move in and out as projects changed, and Frank would be a permanent researcher assigned to this unit. Well, it never got off the ground.

Eddie quit right after Frank arrived, and suddenly, a whole bunch of new people were running the newsroom. And eventually, they came to Frank and said, "What do you do here?" By then, I guess I had met him. I was not one who liked necessarily the -- some of the drama that had attended -- you know, Ed Miller's attempts to transform the newsroom. Some of us who were there all along and hoping for these things felt a little bit left out. So some of it was personal, but some of it was just, wow, there's so much noise and so much coming and going, I just need to do my job, and I was focused in that way. So one day -- the story I like to tell -- I was sitting at my desk. I had some downtime. Another reporter was sitting literally on my desk, the corner of my desk, the two of us were talking. And suddenly, out of the periphery of my eye, I see this little guy walk across the newsroom carrying a great, big stack of books. And I said to Joyce, the other reporter, I said, "Now, who the hell is that?" And she said, "Well, that's Frank, that's Frank Whelan, you don't know Frank? He's been here about a month, Eddie hired him, he's going to be a researcher," and explained this whole thing. I said, "Well, I don't know. No, I haven't met him," and that was that. And I didn't want to meet him. But then one day, I'm sitting at my desk, early one morning just reading the

paper waiting for the workday to begin in earnest, and I look up, and there's this guy, Frank, who's pointed out to me a few weeks before, standing in front of me. "Hello, I'm Frank Whelan, I work here at the *Morning Call*" and then he proceeds to say, "I see you've done some articles on an organization called Le-Hi-Ho. I would like to get to know some of those people." The way he said it, I knew exactly what he was saying, I'm gay. And I took a gulp, and I said, "Oh, you would? Let's go have some coffee." So we walked down to the company cafeteria, and we had coffee. We had dinner that night, and we kind of have been together ever since. There you go, a good place to end.

(break in video)

MF: This is Mary Foltz. I'm back with Bob Wittman, and he has just described for us meeting who would become his partner Frank at the *Morning Call* offices. And he has also just described how Frank really knew about Bob from a series of articles and knowing that Bob was publishing about an organization called Le-Hi-Ho. Bob, I'd like to ask you about your coverage as a reporter of LGBT organizations like Le-Hi-Ho. How did that come to be a focus of your journalism or how involved were you on reporting on LGBT issues at the *Morning Call*?

RHW: Well, I was a general assignment reporter, which meant that I covered a lot of municipal governments. Oh, God, I received almost just everyday a different assignment to do a different thing. However, you could do or you could suggest -- editors encourage you to suggest special projects, special stories that you wanted to work on, something you've heard about in the community and thought important to give it some coverage. I was pretty closeted at this point at the *Morning Call*. I mentioned that Frank figured it out, but when I first started working there eight years before I met him, I was extremely nervous about it, about anybody finding out. I avoided the subjects and really tried to hide it. You know I'm human, and you want to be friends with people, and you don't want to keep everything away from everybody, at least I didn't, so I mean I did tell some of the reporters. There was another reporter, big, actually African American, utterly heterosexual, lover of women to the end of the day, I wound up being friends with and told him that I was gay. And it was John Clark who suggested, "Why don't we do a story on gay people in the Lehigh Valley?" And I guess my reaction was like, "Really, you mean there's more than one, there's

more than me?" But I guess I knew that there were others. I knew about Le-Hi-Ho. I'd been to a few Le-Hi-Ho meetings.

So we suggested it to the editors, and they said, "Yeah, go ahead, do it." You know, looking back on it, it was really poorly done compared to things that I did later, but this is what Frank found. I think it was probably like three to four stories. They were all very, very short. There was none of the kind of in-depth -- you know finding a person and creating a story of that person to tell a larger story. That's what we really should have done, but we didn't. It was kind of superficial reporting. Nonetheless, nonetheless, that is absolutely the first local reporting that was ever done on the gay community. There may have been references to homosexuals being arrested or even -- maybe even political activism in other communities in New York City, places like that, so these have been wire stories but a local story, no. One of the other reporters, an old guy, awfully nice guy, but he sort of heard this, what John and I were working on. In fact, he asked us and said, "So what are you two guys working on?" We told him, "We're working on a story on the local gay community." He kind of, hmm, sniffed and, "Well," he said, "I guess

Allentown has always had its queers," and walked away, so... But that's the story Frank found.

In subsequent years as gay people and the gay movement and then eventually AIDS became more and more a topic of people's conversations and more a topic of legislation, it therefore became more of a topic of local news. So, you know, a lot of that reporting fell to me just because one, two, three, four, who's available here today. But in time, as I came out more and more and editors understood that I was actually a resource on this subject, then it came to develop that I was actually assigned stories because I was gay. And I liked that. I mean, I was proud of that.

The *Morning Call*, my editors were looking to me as somebody that they could trust, that here's somebody who understands the community. He's got some connections, he can get the interviews, he can get the information. So to that extent, I did wind up doing an awful lot of reporting especially on the gay community, on gay events and so forth. At the same time, I was being a little subversive. Reporters are not supposed to dabble in... Actually, reporters are not supposed to have private lives period. That's the way some editors and some editors that I worked for viewed the way

things should be. I always had a little trouble with that. For one thing, I'm a restless guy and I'm impatient, and one of the reasons I got into the news business is because I wanted to change the world. And it was during the time of Watergate that I was going to college and so there was -- imbued throughout journalism was this idea that a good news story could effect change, so... But I wanted to take it a step further in terms of gay people. I just felt that they had been so underrepresented in the news in the past that I wanted to make sure that kind of the movement move forward. And if I could do anything as a journalist, I wasn't going to stand in the way.

So I did a lot of things that my editors would have not approved of had they known. I just did it very quietly. I mean I was reporting on in some cases, but in other cases, I've befriended gay people, some people who wanted to be active. I mean some of these were Le-Hi-Ho. But that actually was not -- although it was the Lehigh Valley's first and really one of the nation's first and longest enduring gay organizations, it wasn't actually politically, politically active. I mean the very fact that it existed was political you might say. But it didn't try to get certain candidates elected and other candidates defeated.

You know, it just didn't work in that way. The people who were involved in Le-Hi-Ho weren't involved in it because they were political people. However, other people came along later who did want to get involved in politics, who did want to see Allentown and the other local communities pass human rights ordinance that contained language about protections for gay people, equal treatment for gay people. And those people, of course, I wound up knowing as a newspaper reporter in part because they were people that we're reporting on and the things they wanted to do and accomplish, but at the same time, I gave assistance to. So I really blurred lines, but my bosses never really knew it, and the people that I was reporting on respected me more for it. So for that reason, I never thought it was a problem.

Actually, I had a thirty-year running debate with my editors about how involved a reporter could be. I always maintained that I could be as political as I wanted just so long everybody knew where I was coming from. So what difference does it make if Bob Wittman is a liberal Democrat reporting on a conservative Republican mayor for instance? As long as the conservative Republican mayor knows that Bob Wittman is a liberal Democrat, but he's

going to give the Republican mayor a fair shot on everything he tells him, which I did. So to me it was -- I didn't really see myself as violating ethics policies in the way I behaved. I knew exactly how far I could push this and how far not to. And only a few times did I ever say, "Hmm, I probably went a little farther than I should, but hopefully, nobody will find out."

So for instance, the Allentown -- so a group of people had been interested, including some people early, early on in Le-Hi-Ho had been interested in adding equal protection language to the city's human relations ordinance dealing with gay and lesbian people. But Allentown City Council was just always, always, always really, really intransigent, until a young woman arrived on the scene here in Lehigh Valley, by the name of Liz Bradbury and her partner Trish Sullivan. Liz was not a person who was going to sit back and let things take their course. She really wanted to take things in hand and push the envelope. Liz was a little naïve at first, but, boy, she was a quick learner, and I was one of her teachers. For instance, she thought it would just be an easy thing. It sounded logical to her. If you made a logical argument to logical people, they should see the logic and pass logical legislation. But Liz, this is

emotional, it's not just logical. And so her idea that "Well, why don't we just go and propose this to city council in the right way, the proper way and in a becoming way?" and I said, "No, I think you need to do more. You need to get people on your side before you take that step, you know get the lawyers on your side, get the doctors on your side, get other organizations on your side, get neighborhood groups on your side." And you know what, she did that. She spent two years, three years, I don't know how many years doing exactly that. She published her own community newspaper for the gay community and right down the center of it on page one, was a growing list of organizations that supported Allentown -- the passage of Allentown -- of a human relations or human rights ordinance in Allentown. She's one step further. She enlisted an acquaintance, another woman, a lesbian to run for Allentown city council, and she won.

She organized the, you know, local gay community, made sure people are registered to vote and got them to vote, made sure they voted on election day, and they elected Gail Hoover to be Allentown's first openly gay city councilwoman, city council person period. So now, they had at least one guaranteed vote on city council, so now it's a

matter of persuading, what is it, six more I guess. Right now, Allentown City Council I think is completely Democrat, and I bet a human rights ordinance like this wouldn't have too much trouble passing. But in those days, the Democrats and the Republicans serving on city council were pretty even, evenly numbered. And even among the Democrats, these were pretty conservative people. But she began working on them kind of one by one, take -- meeting with them, going out for coffee, going out for breakfast, and that kind of thing. She finally got the council president. He's just passed away last week, David Howells, a former Allentown policeman. That's what his career was. Only in retirement did he get involved in politics. She convinced him. I thought it was a hard sell, but she convinced him. There's another guy in city council, David Bausch, never been married, always has a German exchange student living in the home, has a million-dollar, literally a million-dollar toy collection, antique collection in his house, rumored, always whispered about that "David Bausch must be gay." But believe it or not, he absolutely did not support the ordinance, so we knew that there was some uphill battles -- there was going to be opposition, there was going to be some support.

So there are couple of key people right in the middle: One was a Republican by the name of Tom Burke, a bright guy, actually from Massachusetts, a retired Proctor & Gamble engineer whose big passion in life is golf. And that's really mostly what he cares about, but he does care about good government and good legislation. And he is one of these people that Liz was hoping everybody was, and that is somebody who could listen to a logical argument and make a logical conclusion and then embed that in legislation. So here's an instance when Frank and I probably stepped a little bit beyond the line of what we should've done as reporters. But we knew Tom was sort of sitting on the fence on this issue. We invited him here to our house for a beer or coffee or something, kind of in the after-work time, time period. We sat outside on the back porch on a summer afternoon, and for a couple of hours talked Tom into voting, voting for it. I mean, he did leave here committed to doing it, and all during the open debate, nobody knew how Tom was going to vote until he voted. But in the end when it came time to vote, Tom voted yes. And it pushed it right over the edge. They only needed his vote, on more vote, he gave it, and there it happened. So it was pretty cool. You know that involves human or the human rights ordinance and kind of direct politics.

And actually, I was the guy doing a lot of the reporting of the city hall debate while all this was going on. But another episode that happened during that time was the AIDS crisis was breaking. I can remember picking Frank up in his apartment before we were living together on a Saturday morning, I think it was, and we were about to head off to make a day trip to Philadelphia. This was among the first months of my relationship with Frank. We weren't even really calling, I'm pretty sure, that we were even lovers. We were just two men who worked together, and he was new to Pennsylvania, and I was enjoying taking -- spending weekends, taking him places and acting as tour guide. He got in the car that morning though all upset, and there's been a story in the *New York Times* about something they're calling a gay cancer. It's killing men in San Francisco and New York, and nobody has any idea why. So there was a wake-up call. But sometime later, you know, as we're watching this news unfold on two coasts, I got a call from an acquaintance, a gay man whom I knew slightly through like Le-Hi-Ho. And he said to me, "Would you be interested as a newspaper reporter doing an interview on a story with a local man who has AIDS?"

Now you see, nobody knew that AIDS was anywhere but in New York and San Francisco. I mean, I'm sure people knew that there was evidence that it was elsewhere. But in people's minds, I'm pretty sure nobody thought it was really here or gave it much thought at all that it was something that the local community would be someday dealing with. But I, of course, was immediately interested in learning about this. I said, "Yeah, I'd love to." So it was arranged. They said, "The only condition is going to be that he wants to be anonymous," and I said, "Oh, it shouldn't be a problem. We do this a lot. The newspaper grants anonymity to people a lot when there's good reason and this is -- I'm pretty sure we can explain to editors that there's a good reason." In this case, the reason the man wanted to be anonymous is that he and his partner owned a sandwich shop on Hamilton Street, in the business district. And they were very worried because it was still a crazy, crazy time. Nobody knew, really knew what AIDS was. You know they... At this point, I don't think they even had the name HIV, had yet come into existence. They only knew there was this cluster of symptoms that people got, and they didn't know why. So there's an awful lot of fear. People may not realize it today, but I mean there were politicians, state legislators talking about maybe quarantine -- creating quarantine camps

and the like the way they did for epidemics in previous centuries.

So any rate, they owned a sandwich shop, their health care was all tied into their business that they had set up for themselves, and they really didn't want to upset any applecarts. So that was their reason for wanting to be anonymous not really because they were timid or didn't want to be activists. They both turned out to be very much activists. So I agreed to the condition. I did the interview. My newspaper realized they had a good story and an important story, and they played it on the top of page one on the Sunday paper, which in those days, had a very, very impressive circulation. And it's the largest circulation of *The Morning Call's* newspapers on Sunday. I did the interview, I wrote the story, I turned it in.

The young man that I interviewed for the story who had AIDS used -- chose his own made-up name, and that was Brad Edwards. So that's how it ran in the paper, Brad Edwards along with many follow-ups that came in days or not days but months and years later. I turned the story in; my editor read it. I knew where it was running, but late in the game, my editor called me from across the room from his

desk. I picked it up, and he said, "I don't mind that I don't know who your subject is that you interviewed, but I understand that you don't actually even know who Brad Edwards really is." He said, "I want you to know." He said, "You don't need to tell me, and we're certainly not going to publish it but I -- so I do want you to know who it is." So I said, "Well, okay," and I called up the subject. His name was Brian?, and I called up Brian. I didn't know who he was, I called up Brad (laughs) and said, "Brad, I'm afraid there's a problem. My editor thinks I need to know who you are. He doesn't need to know, we're not going to publish it." He said, "Well, you actually already know me. My name is Brian Foley," and of course immediately, I connected him with the sandwich shop and some of the other gay organizations that were beginning to blossom at that time. Brian became one of my very best friends. That's one of the only times in the news business that somebody became truly a personal friend, not just a good working acquaintance, somebody you'd bump into, maybe even go and have drinks with. I mean this was the guy that became my skiing partner, you know my -- or frequent dinner partner. One early or one weekend when there was snow falling and forecast of huge amounts, he came over with slippers and spent a couple of days and just got snowed in with us. Just

a wonderful, wonderful friendship developed out of that story completely unintended. (break in video)

MF: This is Mary Foltz, and I'm back with Bob Wittman. He was just telling us a little bit about his work with the *Morning Call* and some of the pieces that he has written that were focused on the LGBT community in the valley. Bob, I think this is a good segue to talk about your work with organizations like Le-Hi-Ho. So perhaps you could tell me, how did you get involved with Le-Hi-Ho, and what were the aims and goals of Le-Hi-Ho when you were involved with that organization?

RHW: When I graduated from college and came back to the Lehigh Valley, the -- if you wanted to experience gay life, I mean go look for gay life, you had basically two options: You could go to a gay bar, and there weren't many of those, two or three, or you could go to Le-Hi-Ho. Le-Hi-Ho used to kind of bill itself, or least many of us thought of it, as the alternative to the bars. Le-Hi-Ho, people who would say, "Well, what's Le-Hi-Ho?" Well, it's an alternative to the bars. It met once a month on a Sunday afternoon at the Unitarian Church then located in Fountain Hill at the end of a shady, tree-lined lane. I attended a few of the

meetings after I graduated from college and I was living here alone and looking for that gay life, but I didn't find much that really attracted me. I'm trying to remember what some of the programs were that they had every week -- every month. When they had the Sunday afternoon event, there was usually a program speaker. The only one I do remember and remember myself being a little furious at even attending is -- was -- it was a kind of a macramé demonstration, how to do macramé. Everybody in those days were making macramé wall hangings and things like. Well, I couldn't have been -- could have cared less about macramé, and it seemed to me a rather stereotypical thing for a bunch of gay men to be doing on a Sunday afternoon and I just... Frankly, I didn't go back. The macramé event I think sealed it for me.

Le-Hi-Ho was started by -- I think it had some greater purposes than macramé, believe me -- Ron Seeds, the guy who started it did so at the height of the Vietnam War. I was talking about it earlier how it affected me and my outlook on life growing up. Ron was looking at it really as a standpoint of a gay person, what do gay people do. So he really created Le-Hi-Ho to provide information -- what your options are if you're a gay person and you're about to be inducted into the United States Military, the US Army. By

the time I became involved with Le-Hi-Ho, the war was pretty much over, and draft resistance was a thing of the past and so Le-Hi-Ho had kind of become just, I think, really largely a social organization. There was certainly no political aspect to it. They didn't bring in political speakers. There was no... Maybe they brought voting materials or I should say voter registration materials to meetings. They might have gone that far, but otherwise, it was not political at all.

When Frank came to town, as I mentioned in our previous discussion a few minutes ago, he mentioned to me that he was interested in getting to meet some of those people. So I'm pretty sure we went to the following meeting the very next meeting that would've occurred that -- whatever month that was when he came out to me at work. And you know what, he discovered that it was kind of the same thing like I warned him. However, not long after that, we got a notice through the mail. Le-Hi-Ho put out a regular monthly newsletter, as I recall, and maybe even some meeting announcements in between times, I'm not sure. But at any rate, we heard about a speaker that Le-Hi-Ho was bringing to the Lehigh Valley an old activist, a female, a lesbian I think from The Mattachine Society days by the name of

Barbara Gittings. They knew that this would be kind of a special, special event bringing in a speaker like this, so they secured a hall at Muhlenberg College instead of the hard-to-find Unitarian Church at the end of the tree-lined lane in Fountain Hill. And Frank and I attended, and to our surprise, to our amazement, it seemed like a whole new Le-Hi-Ho was taking over. The man who stood in front of the audience that day and introduced Barbara Gittings, introduced himself as the new president of Le-Hi-Ho, and he had identified himself as Clint Miller. He was standing there in a sharp, three-piece suit, and I was just completely blown away. Frank and I came back and said, "Wow, what a difference. You know, maybe this organization is really going somewhere." I'm not sure what would've happened next, but what did happen next is we bumped into Clint and of all places the ACME. And we all decided right then and there that we should be friends and so we did. And after that, Le-Hi-Ho and my friendship with Clint and some of the people that now were occupying Le-Hi-Ho kind of merged into just one.

Le-Hi-Ho still didn't quite know what to do with itself, what it should be. Clint Miller and some other I'll mention... Clint is still alive, quite vigorously so, but

two other people I'll mention who have passed away were Paul and Paul, Paul Kendall and Paul Reeder, two college professors near retirement age by the time we got to know them and then did retire. This and a couple of women, Susan Schellenberg and her partner eventually Catherine Ziel and a few other men, I could go on and on, but formed kind of a core of friendship and commitment to Le-Hi-Ho. As I started to say, we still didn't really do too much as an organization. We still didn't really get involved in politics, none of us. As a newspaper reporter, I was probably -- or I should say I was -- probably had more interest in politics than anybody but as a newspaper reporter, I was the one who was in the least position to be able to really act on getting -- pushing Le-Hi-Ho in the direction of politics, so. But, what -- one of the things it did do though is it left itself open and receptive to the aspirations of other people to create organizations and create community. So somebody came to us and wanted to form a local chapter of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and Le-Hi-Ho decided that it would be a really great idea to help them. We didn't want to become the local chapter of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, but we figured the Lehigh Valley was plenty big enough to support Le-Hi-Ho and that group, and so why not?

Actually, the two Pauls I just mentioned, Paul Kendall as he was retiring as a geology professor from Kutztown University, decided to give himself a retirement project, and he pretty much single-handedly with the backing of Le-Hi-Ho, organized and opened a gay community center at Eighth and Hamilton. The Bradbury-Sullivan Center is a latter-day version of that. Sadly, it's not a descendant of it. The community center didn't become the gay -- the Bradbury-Sullivan Center. But for a few, brief glorious years, the Lambda Center at Eighth and Hamilton Street flourished. I'm trying to think what other organizations were founded, and I'm struggling a little bit to do so, but I think there were a couple of others. I think PFLAG may have had a foot -- been given a boost up by Le-Hi-Ho, but certainly, the Lambda or the Lambda Center as the gay community center back in -- I guess this would have been the 1980s and early 1990s.

One thing that the Lambda Center did give birth to and hence, Le-Hi-Ho also gave birth to was the AIDS Services Center. I'm not sure if that still exists as a freestanding entity. I think in its latest iterations, it sort of fell into the fold of Saint Luke's Hospital, which is a good

thing. But it began right in the living room of the apartment where Frank and I lived. Frank was on the board of the Lambda Center. Although I was deeply interested in its activities, I felt as a newspaper reporter -- not that Frank wasn't a newspaper reporter -- but as a newspaper reporter reporting on the community, reporting on politics, reporting on gay affairs that maybe I shouldn't be on the board of the Lambda Center. But Frank didn't feel that restriction. He didn't really report on the gay community the way I did and so he served on the community center board from the time it was created. The community center only lasted a couple of years, and I'm about to tell you why and how it went out of business.

Soon after or around the time that the Lambda Center was forming, so was AIDS becoming a real thing here. In fact, the story I mentioned a few minutes ago involving the anonymous Brad Edwards, who eventually emerged as Brian Foley, that happened exactly contemporaneous to the operation of the center. I can even remember when that -- the night that that story appeared, there was a big event at the center, and I can remember sitting in the midst of a big crowd of people, everybody looking at me and saying, "Who is it? Who is Brad Edwards really?" Because the story

said Brad Edwards is a made-up name. And, of course, I didn't say. Brad Edwards, Brian Foley was not in the room that night. There were other nights he was in the room, that room, however, interestingly. So after AIDS, after the story about Brian and then there were some other examples of AIDS fronting the newspaper began starting to pay attention to it, began asking doctors if they have cases, and began reporting statistics to see if -- to see what -- to report on what was going on. And then a prominent young man by the name of David Rodale died. David was the son of Ardath and Bob Rodale of Rodale Press. He was a gay man who was interested in theater and might have had a wonderful career doing that, but AIDS caught up to him and killed him very early on in the epidemic. Of course, his parents were stricken, and his mother was approached by the Lambda Center about perhaps making a contribution, and she was kind of intrigued. She knew about her son, of course, that he was gay, she loved her son. At the same time, being gay killed him so, I think she viewed it and so it wasn't an easy sell. She finally did give some money. It wasn't a small amount either. It might have been like ten thousand dollars. For that organization, it was a ton. In fact, it was probably more money than anybody had ever given them.

But she specified that the only thing she wanted it to be used for was AIDS.

Well, Lambda Center already had kind of an AIDS committee. I think they called it the AIDS Services Committee. But now suddenly, the AIDS Services Committee had money. In fact, the AIDS Services Committee had more money than the rest of the Lambda Center, and it became the classic story of the tail wagging the dog. I mean, eventually, the people who were running the AIDS Services Center formed a revolt, literally said, "We've got the money, we've got the interest, we've got the crisis, we've got the agenda. We think we should take over the center." So they did, and not taking over the center but transforming the Lambda Center into the AIDS Services Center. We were quite upset about it, Frank and I personally, Le-Hi-Ho as an organization. We remember Lambda Center needing to move out of their space in a great big rush all in one evening. These other folks were playing for keeps, and they wanted the space, they wanted our stuff out of there. There were several hundred books that formed the library and several cartons of information that formed an archive that needed to go somewhere in a hurry. Frank and I had just bought this house. It was sitting here rather empty at that point, and

was only a few blocks away from the Lambda Center. So all that stuff was rushed here in a few cars with not much thinking, and here the stuff remained for many, many years after.

To tell you the truth, that is kind of the end of my gay activism when the Lambda Center disappeared and became the -- you know it's -- what was left of it became the AIDS Services Center. After that, Le-Hi-Ho just kind of settled into what-do-we-do-next frame of mind, and they never really answered that question. More and more, the events, our meetings turned out to be just really rather intimate, personal meetings, dinners at each other's homes. We'd discuss a little business, we'd make note of how much was in the checking account, and we would kind of lament that Eighth -- that Le-Hi-Ho's role had been usurped by the course of events. And that's the way it kind of just petered out over the years. Eventually, the money that was in the checking account was withdrawn, and I'm trying to remember where we gave it. We had a meeting. I'm pretty sure it was just dinner at somebody's house. We sat around over wine and said, "Well who should we give these several hundred dollars to?" We made a good choice at the time, and

everything came to -- you know it just kind of drifted and drifted apart.

So there's lots and lots and lots more I could talk about, about being gay and growing up in a very changing time. But I've enjoyed what we have talked about today, and I'm hoping it's -- people who stumble across this in years to come will find it interesting.

MF: I know they will. It has been such a pleasure to talk with you today, but let me just have two final questions quickly. I'm just wondering if -- do you know any people in the region that you really think we should have a part at -- have -- invite to be a part of this project or to give an oral history rather?

RHW: Well, I think you've already acquainted yourself with some of the people connected with the Bradbury-Sullivan Center. And so some of those people like Liz and Trish date back to some of the years I'm talking about and so they certainly would. Many of us are getting old, and memories are becoming sketchy, and our voices are beginning to crack and dissemble on us. But the Clint Miller I mentioned is still a guy. He's in his eighties, but he's still -- he's

working, and he's out and about every day, and he might be able to share some memories. Ron Seeds and his partner are up in Connecticut now, so they're a little removed but are still around and kicking. And I think still have good memories, good enough to be doing what we're doing here today, so they would certainly, certainly be two. I wish that Paul and Paul were alive because they would be terrific to talk to, but they are -- but they both have passed away. I'm drawing a blank.

MF: Well, those are great, great names for us to follow up on. And I think I'll go ahead and close our time together simply by saying, it has been such a pleasure to hear some of your stories today. I have learned a lot both about reportage in our region and also Le-Hi-Ho and certainly activist organizations here. But I also love the stories about your childhood and going to Syracuse University, so I just want to say thank you. Thank you so much for being with us today.

RHW: You're very welcome.

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