

DJ Landis

MARY FOLTZ: Well, good morning. My name is Mary Foltz, and I'm here with DJ to talk about her life and experiences in LGBT organizations in the Lehigh Valley. And this is a part of the Lehigh Valley LGBT Community Oral History Project. Our project has funding from the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium, and we are meeting on Zoom because we're in the middle of a pandemic. And today's date is June 12, 2020. So first I just, DJ, I want to say thank you so much for doing this interview with me today.

DONNA J LANDIS: You're welcome.

MF: And to start, could you please state your full name and spell it for me?

DL: My full name is Donna, D-O-N-N-A, J Landis, L-A-N-D-I-S. But everybody calls me DJ or Deej.

MF: Thank you. And will you please share your birth date?

DL: June 14, 1945. [00:01:00]

MF: Thank you. And so prior to starting this interview we had talked about consent. So I just want to check back in with you, do you consent to this interview today?

DL: Yes.

MF: And do you consent to having this interview transcribed, digitized, and made publicly available on online spaces?

DL: Sure, not a problem.

MF: And do you consent to the LGBT Archive using your interview for educational purposes in other formats, and that might be articles or websites or presentations, things like that?

DL: Sure.

MF: And do you understand that you will have 30 days after the electronic delivery of the transcript of this interview to identify parts that you want to delete or withdraw from the project?

DL: Yeah, I understand.

MF: Great. All right, well, let's go ahead and get started. And I'm going to start the interview by just asking you, could you [00:02:00] tell me a little bit about your childhood?

DL: Well, I grew up in the coal regions, Shamokin, Pennsylvania, and I'll be seventy-five years old on Sunday. And I was always a tomboy. My mother bought me dolls, but they stayed in the box. I didn't play with dolls. I wanted guns and all the boy's stuff, all the boy's toys. And I was just playing football, baseball, I did all that stuff, and

I had a lot of friends, and we just rode around. It was all the good stuff. I was never a little girl playing girl stuff.

MF: What was it like to grow up in Shamokin? What was that region like?

DL: It was a cult where -- it's different now [00:03:00] than it was back then. It was a nice town, friendly, and everybody knew everybody, and it was like you did something wrong and you didn't have to worry about your parents not finding out because somebody did. Everybody knew everybody, and your [Oma's?] going to get you, and you didn't have to worry about being safe because everybody watched out for everybody.

MF: Tell me a little bit about your family. Did your family work in coal mining in Shamokin?

DL: My father was in the service, and he worked for the government down in Middletown, Pennsylvania. He worked for the Army base down there, the military base. My mother didn't work. So he basically [00:04:00] [break in audio] And I was the only child. First though I guess I better tell you I was adopted. And I was adopted at four hours old. And my biological mother and my adopted mother were best friends. And my biological father and my adopted father were cousins. And that's how it was. And I am

actually related -- my aunt was married to a black man, and I have, like, 17 biracial cousins. And I love them dearly. And I am not a racist (laughs).

MF: Tell me a little bit about sort of that extended family [00:05:00] and your relationships with either your biological parents or your parents, parents who adopted you.

DL: We were friendly at first, and then -- my biological mother and my adopted mother, like I said, they were good friends, and they thought my adopted mother couldn't have children. So what happened is when my biological mother gave birth to me they adopted me, and then when my adopted mother ended up getting pregnant there was a little bit of a rift there. So then I didn't have contact for many, many years. And with my biological father, I did have contact with him. [00:06:00] But you know, back then when you were adopted it was always hush-hush, nobody talked about it. And that's wrong because you should, you know, talk about it because I actually grew up with a big chip on my shoulder because I only heard people talk about, when they think I wasn't paying attention, about it. And that's not good, you need to -- I think it's great now how they have open adoptions where you talk about it and all that. Because otherwise you're going to grow up like I did for

until I was in my twenties with a big chip on my shoulder.  
And I just never trusted people then.

MF: Could you say a little bit more like, why was there a chip on your shoulder? What were your feelings about being adopted? [00:07:00]

DL: I didn't understand. I didn't understand because I didn't know the story back then. Nobody talked about it. And when you hear that nobody -- your mother didn't want you, you know, people would say things and you didn't know why. And so you didn't -- you hurt, but I never would cry. I just kept everything inside. And it just hurt that, you know, you didn't know why you were adopted. And it's wrong. I really believe you should talk about it when you're growing up. Don't wait until you're in your teens and twenties to find out. Because I -- now, on my mother's side, I have, like, seven [00:08:00] or eight other siblings. And I only really bother with, know, two of them. And on my father's side I know the three of them, but we don't have no contact.

MF: Tell me a little bit about your relationships with your parents, the parents that you lived with, your adopted parents. What was it like growing up in that family? What were those familial relationships like?

DL: It was good. I mean, I was spoiled. I got everything I wanted. And -- but you didn't hear the words "love." You know, back then you didn't hear them words "love." But I was a spoiled brat. I mean, whatever [00:09:00] I wanted I got. I didn't have, you know -- they bought me my first car and everything. They were good to me, but it was rough growing up because when my adopted mother got pregnant and she lost the child, then she started drinking. And then I used to get beatings and everything. And you know, she would go out. Good thing she was a loud drunkard, when they would come home, her and her friends, because then they knew she was coming, and, like, she had already locked me in a room, so she would go out because my father worked, and the neighbors would let me out so I could, you know. And then when they hear her coming, they put me back in the room and lock me back in. But it was rough from the time I was, like, maybe eight [00:10:00] until I was about twelve years old, eleven or twelve years old.

MF: I'm curious about, you know, you describe yourself as being a tomboy. So you're kind of hurting in your family life, but it sounds like you had relationships in the community with neighbors. What was it like to be a tomboy in Shamokin when you were a young person?

DL: It was good. I started doing odd jobs at nine years old. We lived -- are you there? We lived across from a grocery store. I would come home from lunch break and deliver groceries for nickels and dimes, and I would save that because I figured my own money, nobody could tell me how to spend it. And if I wanted something I would just ask my mom because, like I said, I was spoiled. [00:11:00] But it was great. I had a lot of friends, and I was sort of like -- my girlfriends that couldn't protect herself, I was their protector. If they couldn't fight, I would fight for them. But I wasn't the type that would sit and play with dolls or play girly girls. That wasn't me.

MF: What was school like for you in Shamokin?

DL: Oh, I liked school, and I didn't like school. I just -- I was a rebel, I guess. In high school or grade school -- I loved grade school, it was a block away. It was when I got in high school, I was a rebel. [00:12:00] I would bag school, and just typical stuff. I was a rebel, I guess, because at our school back then girls couldn't take shop, and I wanted shop. We had to take home ec. That was learn to cook and sew and clean and all this for your husband and your future. Ugh. I didn't want that. I wasn't to learn to work on my car and do other kind of jobs because I had

helped my dad put a motor in my car and all this. So I don't want home ec. I flunked home ec.

MF: So I'm curious about your rebellious spirit. When you bagged school you said "we did typical things." What were the typical things you do when you snuck off from school?

[00:13:00]

DL: Oh, we would go down to different places and go get hoagies and ride around and go different towns and just do all that stuff. Of course you couldn't stay around where you was at school so you wouldn't get caught. Or because you would get detention. I had so much detention just from rebelling at home ec because I wouldn't do the home ec stuff. I wanted shop because I couldn't understand. The boys could take home ec. Why couldn't the girls take shop? And we had to wear dresses to school even in the wintertime. No long pants, dresses. [00:14:00]

MF: What are some of your favorite memories from your youth?

DL: How my friends and I would, especially on Saturdays, do hiking. Pack a lunch and go hiking and just walk around different places and climb the coal banks. Believe it or not, we used to hop on a moving train and ride it for seven miles. Then walk back. On a Saturday, there'd be coupons -- they'd been on the Thursday paper up there, our Thursday



paper -- be all kind of coupons in there for grocery stores, and the store across the street from our house would pay you whatever the coupon was worth, ten cents, they give you have of it in cash. [00:15:00] So we would walk around the whole town and knock on doors and ask that we were poor, we couldn't afford the paper, could they give us the sports section with the coupon? And I happened to knock on a door that they recognized my voice. The husband didn't, but the wife said, "Donna Jean, is that you?" Because I would say "We're so poor." She said, "Does your mother know what you're doing?" Before I got home my mom found out. Boy, did I get it when I got home, saying I was poor. Yeah, my dad was at work, and we didn't have a job, and I needed the coupons to buy groceries. But we made, like, \$15, \$20 every day -- every weekend doing that until we got caught. But I had a good childhood, lot of fun. I never stayed in the house, but you knew [00:16:00] when to be home. You didn't have to be told. You knew when the night lights come on, get home.

MF: It sounds like you and your friends were kind of outdoorsy, you know, hopping on trains, going for hikes. Can you tell me a little bit about that region of Shamokin for people who don't know what that kind of natural

landscape is? What was it like to be out hiking in those areas? Did you have favorite spots to visit?

DL: We would go up the mountains. There was coal holes. You had to know where the coal holes were because, you know, sometimes I would help pick coal for people that couldn't afford to buy coal for their heat. So I would help pick coal for them. And you had to know the difference between coal and slate. Because slate wouldn't burn.

[00:17:00] And it was like, there was a lot of coal holes, lot of rocks. It's mountain area. It's nothing like it used to be. But it was beautiful. You just had to know where to walk, and all over.

MF: So describe what happens for you after you leave school. What is sort of the next step of your life after your adolescence?

DL: Okay, so after that, after I left school, I would hang out in the little town called Kulpmont, which was like, eight miles, six or eight miles -- four miles from Shamokin and in Mount Carmel [00:18:00] and party, drink, like teenager stuff. But our parties were different. We used to go up into the mountains -- coal holes, up in the coal mountains, and we would stay up there and have our weekend parties and not come down and cause trouble. And the cops knew we were up there, and they were okay with it, long as

we stayed up there and we didn't come down and cause any trouble or anything else. We would have a party, and it would last the weekend, and open the trunks of my car, and everybody had to put their keys in my car, my trunk. So you couldn't get down. You had to stay up there, not cause any trouble. And we built a pavilion that you would have, you know, you pay \$10, you drink all the weekend, you have food and everything else. And we would drive to -- [00:19:00] a bunch of us sometimes would go to Philadelphia because we had friends then that graduated and worked in Philly. At the time they worked at, used to be Bell Tel. I don't know what it was called, but and then from there we would meet there, go down there and spend a weekend and drive up to New York. There was plenty of parties. You know, you had to in-know to where the parties were. But that's how I got in to go the Village and the Stonewall.

MF: Tell me more about that. Were these parties -- were they coed parties? I mean, going to Stonewall, of course, you're with LGBT people when you go into New York to Stonewall. Tell me a little bit about the kind of makeup of your friends and were you associating with LGBT people in Shamokin, or [00:20:00] was that primarily in Philly and New York?

DL: No, that was in Shamokin. In Shamokin, in the town of Shamokin the gay bars would be after 2:00. And you couldn't go earlier until after 2:00 in the morning. And of course we were underage, but that was okay. They let you in. And there was other clubs that you could go, like it was up in Berwick. It was Berwick Hotel, when you were of age, but it was down in the basement. And the first gay bar I went to was called the Lark. And it was -- the dance floor was only about 12 by 12. That's how big it was. It was small. It was in the back room of a bar. And [00:21:00] there was another bar that we went outside of Sunbury, and you're dancing all, and I would say "No clinching, no clinching." And then the other bar, it was you would go Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday it was straight. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday it was gay. So everybody knew that the town knew which was which. So if you didn't want to be with the gays you didn't go. And there was a lot of the women that would come that they were straight, but they loved being around the gay people.

MF: When did you know you were gay, or when did you encounter gay community? You talked about the first gay bar that you went to, but when did you know you were a part of the gay [00:22:00] community?

DL: I guess I always -- I just was different. There was only one guy I truly, truly loved, but we couldn't be together because he was an Italian. And back then you had to be Italian to be with Italian. His wife was already picked out. But we remained friends. And I was married to a man. I got married at 19. I got divorced at 19. And I came out at 19. So that's -- I wasn't -- and him and I are friends now. We're better friends than we were married.

MF: So when you say you [00:23:00] came out at 19, what do you mean by that? Do you mean that that's when you started going to the gay nights at the bars, or, you know, what do you mean by --

DL: Yup, yup. I started -- like I said, I got married in 1964, and I really came out, was 19, and I came out in '65. But I start going to the gay bars before that, but I wasn't sure I was gay. I thought I was, but I wasn't sure, because I liked this -- I had feelings for this girl, but I wasn't, you know, didn't act upon them or anything. I felt comfortable being around the gay people. And I wasn't sure about anything. I was just, felt comfortable being around them, but I didn't have gay feeling, you know, moved on them until I was 19 years old. [00:24:00]

MF: So I'm curious about some of the bars that you describe, like the Lark and other places. Could you

describe for me what was a night out -- what did that look like? What kind of music did they play? What were those bars like?

DL: Back then when you went out to the gay bars the butch type girls would be dressed more boyish, and their girlfriends would be -- you could tell the difference. They would be dressed up nicely and, you know, like if they were going on a date with a boy. But that's how they would be dressed, not like they're dressed today. You would know a butch from a femme. And [00:25:00] that's how you did it. And you went to the bars. You danced. You socialized and just like a couple.

MF: Was the gay community in Shamokin and those coal towns -- what was the size of that community? Was it a small, insular community, or what was the size of it?

DL: Very small, it was -- people knew but they didn't say nothing, to your face, anyway. They might have said something behind your back. But when I came out at 19 I never changed. It was like you accept me for who I am or you don't. It's your loss. That was my attitude. And I mean, I never had a problem with, you know, [00:26:00] housing. My jobs, they knew I was gay at my jobs, and I never had a problem. Fact, one of the jobs I worked for -- I was the first female foreman building RVs. And my two

bosses were from Wyoming, and they knew I was gay, and we had a couple other gay workers there. They wanted me to go to Wyoming with them, and I said no, I wasn't going to go out that way. But I was who I was. I was upfront. I was honest. I didn't pretend to go home to my boyfriend or husband or whatever. I just, I was me, accept me how I am. And that's how I am to the day. [00:27:00]

MF: So I have one more question about the bars. So I'm curious, you went into Stonewall in the late '60s. What was that like, to go into New York City with friends from Shamokin?

DL: We enjoyed it. It was wonderful. I mean, it was like wow, the Village, we loved the Village. You can go on up there. We would go every time we could come, we would go up. It was just unbelievable the difference between little towns where you had to wait to go to the bars and then go to New York where it was all open. But it was bad. The night the Stonewall was raided I was supposed to be there. But [00:28:00] my gay friends, the males, they couldn't change their own tires or nothing, so I had to do that. And that's why we didn't go. And I'm glad we didn't go.

MF: So I'm curious about that, like the openness that you see in New York City versus living in a small town, did you want to continue to live in that kind of small region, that

Shamokin region? Did you ever considering going to New York City, or did you really prefer the kind of small-town atmosphere?

DL: I really loved Philadelphia. And I loved it. I wanted to go to Philadelphia, and but then I was working. And I was accepted at [00:29:00] -- I don't know if you remember the Philadelphia Warriors Roller Derby? I was accepted to go to the school for Little Richard, but I couldn't afford to go to Philly and not work. So I had to decline, but that broke my heart. I wanted to be a Philadelphia Warrior.

MF: I'm actually not familiar with the Philadelphia roller derby. Could you tell me a little bit about what that was and what that league was?

DL: It was a sport, roller derby, like, they have the different teams all over from New York and Chicago and all that where they would skate against one another. And I loved it. [00:30:00] It was a rough game, but I loved it. It was popular back in the '60s and the -- well, not the '60s but the '70s and the '80s I guess it was. It was Buddy Atkinson, Little Richard, Judy Arnold. The older people would know it. You younger girls won't know it. They still have some now, but it's not like it was.

MF: So you're working up in the kind of Shamokin region. Can you tell me a little bit about the jobs that you held



during this time period? Is this the early '70s that we're talking about?

DL: Yeah. I tried sewing. Like I said, I hated home ec. I tried that. I quit the job. I worked one [00:31:00] day, and I didn't know. I sewed everything together. I didn't know that. I flunked that. But I worked building RVs, where we -- Pace Arrow, it was called. You get a chassis and then you built the camper on the chassis. All you got was a chassis and you had to build everything on the chassis. And it was a joke at first when they first came out because if you were in an accident you didn't call [the body a fender?] you called a carpenter because they were made out of wood. They were top heavy. You couldn't drive if it was real windy on an interstate. You better be afraid to top over.

MF: And how long did you work on building RVs? How long were you at that job? [00:32:00]

DL: I only worked there three years, and they laid me off. They were kind, because my mother had cancer, had facial cancer, so they left me collect unemployment to take care of her.

MF: Tell me a little bit more about taking care of your mother.

DL: She had had it in her face where soon as it would hit a different spot she would hemorrhage. And we took her to, I think it was called Saint Vincent's Hospital in New York. And there was nothing they could do. It was too far gone because she had it when she was a child at eight or nine years old, and then it came back. And that was in [00:33:00] '75 right after my father passed away. But between that, in '65 I moved to Allentown.

MF: So describe that a bit more for me. Were you living in Allentown and then driving back to care for your mother or --?

DL: No, I moved to Allentown, and in '65 I came out, separated from my husband in February. March I moved to Allentown. I had my divorce in April. And in May I met Sandy, the state hospital in 1965 in May. And her and I went together for almost three years. But by that time I was wild. Nobody was going to tell me anything. [00:34:00] I wasn't nice to her. I was really -- wasn't very nice. I was -- like I said, I had a chip on my shoulder. And it was I did what I want when I wanted to and nobody was going to tell me anything different. And then we split. I met a wrong person that was a mistake in my life. And then I moved back home, and my father died. He died of an aneurysm. And then he died in '74, and my mom had the

cancer in '75. And she died in '77. They only gave her six months, but she lived two years and two months.

MF: Well, I know Sandy is an important person in your life, so [00:35:00] could you tell me how you met her at state hospital? How did you two meet?

DL: She was my boss. I went to work on WD, which was a unit down there, and she was my boss. And when I tell the story she'll say "What the hell are you talking about? I'm still your boss." So but we split for almost 30 years, and we're back together now. In February we were together 26 years. Like I said, when Sandy and I split I met this woman, and I just believed everything she told me because at that time I was still not trusting people. And I still had the chip on my shoulder and everything. And [00:36:00] in between time I ran in -- Sandy and I, we met in between. And I asked Sandy to take me back, and she laughed. When Sandy's nervous she laughs. So I thought "Oh well." And then I -- the first person I ever had any relationship was a married woman in Shamokin. And she used me. And oh well, you learn from the heart -- you know, you learn from that. But out of that relationship she had, and I loved the children. And I loved her, until after a while, but she had grandchildren, and I loved the grandchildren, everything, but you know, when she passed it was like I had to pay a 15

percent [00:37:00] inheritance tax and everything. And we were together like 20 years. So it wasn't that I would go to the bars and hook up with different people at the bars. I never did that. I was like, I always had somebody in my life.

MF: So the relationship after Sandy, the one that was 20 years, can you tell me a little bit about how you met each other, how that relationship started?

DL: She was my neighbor. She was neighbor, and it just happened one night that she kissed me, and I thought "Oh, this is pretty nice." But it was rough because she was married, and she was still with her husband. And it was like, "Ugh, I can't do this." So then that's [00:38:00] before I came down to Allentown and meet Sandy. That was before I met Sandy. And then after Sandy and I split I was with this girl for a couple years, and I was like, "Nah, I don't want someone that's going to run around on me and cheat on me." So then I ended up back with the first person I ever had kissed.

MF: And did she move to Allentown to be with you, or did you sort of move back to --

DL: That's when I moved back to Shamokin. But she did help take care -- and that's one of the reasons I stuck. She

helped take care of my mom with me. She was there with me to help take care of my mom.

MF: Did the two of you live together with her children in Shamokin?

DL: Yes.

MF: So can you describe [00:39:00] a little bit what that was like, to be a same-sex couple living together in Shamokin?

DL: It wasn't too bad. I guess it was harder on the oldest child because his friends used to make fun of him. And I was friends with her husband too. So it was like, you know, we were all friends. When he got sick I helped take care of him. I would go up and make sure he got all his medicines and everything, and it was, you know, we all got along. Like I said, it's like I'm who I am, you accept me, and that's how it is. She didn't bash the husband, and he didn't bash the wife. You know, it was like, we just talked, you know. [00:40:00] If he needed something to drive, I would drive him and his girlfriend places, and, you know, he had a girlfriend, and he just drank a lot.

MF: You describe after your partner passed having these sort of property taxes, and a lot of younger people won't understand why. So I'm wondering if you could explain a little bit about pre-marriage equality what it was like for

gay people to own property together or to, you know, to live together and then have that relationship not be recognized by the state or the government. So could you describe a little bit about what that was like to kind of live together [00:41:00] and own property together, et cetera?

DL: It was like you were strangers living together even though you were couples. It wasn't recognized as a couple. You were just like strangers living together even though you had property and it was in both names. You had to pay like that, when she passed we owned the house, and I had to pay 15 percent income tax, inheritance tax on half the property because both our names was on it. But we weren't recognized as a couple. And so everything was 15 percent, and even to today, if you're not legally married in Pennsylvania or any state you have to pay 15 percent [00:42:00] tax. It's not like you get away with it. If you're married you only pay nothing, really, or six percent. But back then it was, you know, being legally married wasn't up until what, about few years ago? I don't remember. I remember fighting for legal marriage with Trish and all of them. But back then it was rough. You had every -- you filed income tax. You had to file it separately. You

couldn't file jointly. Even though you supported them you couldn't claim them.

MF: What are some of your favorite memories from that partnership, that 20 years together? [00:43:00]

DL: I would say the birth of the first grandchild. That was -- he was -- I love him dearly. He was my favorite. I have to say, he was my favorite. But there was, you know, the proms, the weddings, the graduations, typical all -- like, if you were a married couple, the typical thing of what goes on with their kids. Their dates, their broken hearts and just the typical things of what a married couple would do if they had children, the ups and downs, the fighting. But it was -- I can't say it was bad. It was good times, a lot of good times. [00:44:00]

MF: You're really talking about the beauty of that extended family, the children and the grandchildren. Could you talk a bit about how her extended family and how your extended family accepted you, or didn't accept you, as really a marriage relationship? How did your families respond to your relationship?

DL: It was okay. I didn't have a problem. The kids called me Aunt. And everybody accepted -- like I said, when you're in Shamokin it was like everybody was family anyway. My aunt, you called my aunt Aunt. I called her family Aunt or

Uncle, [00:45:00] and it was accepted. It was everybody knew everybody. Like I said, it was like everybody knew everybody, so it was like you're aunt or uncle to everybody almost.

MF: So during this 20-year period are you working at this time, or what is happening?

DL: Yeah.

MF: Tell me a little bit about where you were working and what kinds of jobs you had.

DL: Well, I was working at Pace Arrow, and then that -- like I said, my mother got cancer. Then after that I went to work at, I can't remember the name of it, but it was a fabric place, and I was what they called an assorter. And it was in a sewing factory, but I didn't sew. We got material from a plant [00:46:00] or from wherever it came from, and we assorted it into bundles, and it went to the sewers. And I had a partner, and they all knew I was gay too. I mean, like I said, Shamokin was a small town. And you know, all the towns up there, you know people from working around, and basically I didn't have -- like, I never had a problem because I was up front with people. I was honest. They knew who I was. I wasn't pretending to be -- I think when you pretend to be something you're not and you lie about it people tend to rather be, in my opinion



anyway, rather you being honest and be up front about something than "Oh, I'm going home to my boyfriend or my husband" and that's not true. And I mean, [00:47:00] I was, like I said, a rebel. I have tattoos. I have, like, maybe 10 of them. I got them when I was, you know, when my mom said "Don't dare," and that was, oh, don't say that to me. But I got them. I had a woman's name tattooed on my arm. So you know, what am I doing?

MF: You early talked about the kind of butch-femme emphasis in the bar culture, and I'm wondering, how did you feel about kind of butch-femme in the bar culture or in the larger sort of gay community?

DL: How do I feel about it?

MF: Yeah, were you a part of butch-femme culture, or were you sort of outside of that?

DL: I guess I was part of it. I [00:48:00] always dressed that way, so it was nothing new to me. My hair's longer now than it has been in years, because I can't get a haircut, but it was -- I didn't wear femme clothes. In fact, when I worked -- and this is funny, but it's a true story. When I was building RVs my niece was getting -- she always says she was my niece, was getting married, and I said I had to go get a dress for the wedding. And my boss said to me, "If you're going to get a dress I want a picture of it, and

I'll pay you for working." So I went. I didn't get the dress, but I put my partner's dress on, made her take the picture, and I showed it to my boss, and I got paid for the day. I didn't own dresses. [00:49:00] I still don't own dresses. The last dress I wore was I think in '63 or '62 when my cousin got married.

MF: So did you have relationships with other butch women? And if so, did you talk a little bit about being butch or what it was like to be butch during that time period?

DL: Yeah, there was a lot of us that was there. We all dressed the same. And you just knew. And I'm proud of myself, I can always -- and I guess that's one thing that they knew. I never crossed the line of a friend. If a friend was involved with somebody I wouldn't -- I guess you would say "put the make on them." I never did that to a friend. [00:50:00] A friend's a friend. I would never cross that line.

MF: So I'm curious about (break in audio). I'm curious about your tattoos because you brought them up. You said you have a woman's name tattooed on your arm. You've got 10 tattoos.

DL: Yeah.

MF: Tell me a little bit about your tattoos.

DL: Well, our neighbor's son was doing tattoos, and he needed people to practice on. So I said sure. My mom said "Don't you dare." Wrong thing to say to me, "don't." And I got it. It's a big thing with flowers and double hearts and a blue bird and all that. I have a black [00:51:00] rose. I have an eagle tattoo. I have a dream catcher tattoo on my other shoulder. On my back I have a yin-yang. On the other side I have a Pegasus on the other with the rainbow. On my leg, Sandy's son gives tattoos out in Minnesota, but this was in California. When Sandy and I had our holy union, Mark and Michelle came, that's his wife, but he's remarried now. I have a cherub on my leg with double hearts. The cherub represents the grandchildren, and the double hearts is Sandy and I. I've got Hot Stuff Devil, so. And then I've just got the last tattoo I got from Mark was a ribbon because Sandy had lung cancer. [00:52:00] And I have it white with her name on it and my color as a caretaker and the date when she had her lung cancer. So that's my tattoos.

MF: They look beautiful. The one on your shoulder looks amazing, but I could see that one a little bit more. Oh, that's so cool. So you describe -- this partner had an untimely death from the 20-year relationship. What happened

at that period? You know, tell me a little bit about what happened around that time?

DL: Well, she had breathing problems. You know, we all smoked back then. Everybody smoked. And she had asthma. And [00:53:00] she had it for many, many, many years. And like I said, we grew up on that street, so I know her for, you know, from when her firstborn -- and it just was getting worse and worse and worse. And her oldest son and I took her to Hershey Medical. And he gave her only six months to live because her lungs -- her one lung collapsed. But she didn't know it. She didn't want to know. So, you know, we didn't tell her. And a few months later she was rushed to the hospital, and this doctor came in and told her -- she asked did she have cancer? He said "No, but you're dying anyway." So she just gave up. So she died November 11, I think it was, in '93. [00:54:00] And she made me promise to call Sandy and tell Sandy because she said, "You always loved Sandy. You never gave up. You never stopped loving Sandy. You would never let anybody say anything bad about Sandy." So I called Sandy, and I was just happy that we were going to be friends for the way I treated her. Because I was nasty to Sandy. Like I said, the chip on my shoulder wasn't good. And -- because Sandy has two boys. But anyway, I called Sandy, and she invited me down for around

Christmas time. I came down. And I thought we would just be friends, but we ended up getting back together. And I love her dearly. She's the best thing to happen to me. And we talk now, which we didn't before, because, you know, we were both 19 years old, and I come from a small town [00:55:00] in Shamokin into a big city, and nobody was telling me what to do. I regret how I treated her. I regret that every day of my life.

MF: So when you came down from Shamokin to Allentown to visit Sandy, tell me a little bit about, like, how you got back together. How did you make that transition from friends or potential friendship back to partners?

DL: Well, we always stayed in contact, but my former partner used to talk more to Sandy than I did. Sandy and I would say "Hi, how are you?" "Okay," "Yeah, me too," blah, blah, blah. But her, my former partner and Sandy would talk more than I. And we would even come down and visit. Because see, I had -- people from Shamokin moved down here, and that's when I moved to Allentown, I stayed with people from Shamokin that was family friend from family, like my grandfather lived with them, you know. And so I lived with them [00:56:00] when I came down here until I got my apartment across the street from them. And then when Mag passed, I come down. I called Sandy, and she invited me

down. And it was a little strange at first, but then I kept coming down. She invited me down, and we got back together.

MF: So when you got back together did you move to Allentown then, or where were you living at that time?

DL: I still had my home in Shamokin, but I would come down every couple weeks, and I knew I was going to move. I didn't know where I was going to move. This is before Sandy and I got back. I knew I was leaving Shamokin. I just couldn't handle Shamokin anymore. Because there was [00:57:00] -- some of my former partner's children and I didn't get along after, you know, because I felt they could have done more than they did for their mother instead of just stop in five minutes and say "Hi, how are you?" And I felt they could have come, because it was like 24/7 I was there. I could have needed a break. When you take care of somebody you could use a break. But I didn't get that. I mean, I went to the store, and I had to be back, pay bills and everything, and be back in a half an hour. And it was like, they said "Oh, I should have done more." I said "Yeah, you should have done more. You could have done more." And it was like I paid for everything. The only thing they paid for [00:58:00] is their own flowers. But I paid for everything. And the one thought I should just turn over the house to them. And I didn't. I sold it. And I gave

the oldest grandson a nice amount of money. A thousand dollars I gave him. But then you have to realize -- I only sold the house for 20,000. It was a house, a storefront and an apartment. Down here I could have got like \$150,000. I just wanted out of Shamokin. I didn't care. I just was at the point where it was getting nasty. So I just wanted out away from all the trouble. It was like, I don't need any more problems. It's, [00:59:00] you know, you can all be on your own now. You're not young children. You're all married. You all have children. You can be on your own. And, you know, because I didn't sign the house over to the one, it was a big upset. And it's -- I just felt I could not live in Shamokin and be happy. So I knew I was going -- this was in November I knew. And I just knew I was getting out of Shamokin one way or another. And I just had to get out. And then I stayed with friends. And I came back and forth to Allentown with friends, and then in March I moved down here, March of '94. And I just went back and forth until I sold the house. I mean, anything I needed done I had to pay for up there. They didn't [01:00:00] help. Everything I needed done it was I had to go up, cut the grass, trim the hedges. Nobody did it for nothing. It was always about money.

MF: So you moved to Allentown in March of, I think you said 1994. Tell me a little bit about the neighborhood that you lived in Allentown. Like, what was it like to move to Allentown in the 1990s?

DL: Where we're at now, we're in the same house. We're in the same house, Sandy's house, and neighborhood's fine. They all know, and we get along. Actually, Sandy works at the state hospital forty-one and a half years. And her parents love me. [01:01:00] And actually in 2001 I changed my name to Landis. That's Sandy's name. My name was Golda. When I met Liz and Trish I was Golda, my married name. And in 2001 when I changed my name Sandy's parents, her mom especially really loved it, that I became a Landis. And we're still in the same house, twenty-six years still in the same house. And the neighbors, I have no problem with them. I watch every -- I know everything that's going on in the neighborhood. I watch. I know new cars and old cars and what belongs here and doesn't belong here.

MF: So it sounds like you moved [01:02:00] -- did you move in with Sandy, or did you -- when you moved back to Allentown in March, did the two of you moved in together then?

DL: Sandy already had this house. Sandy already bought the house. She moved here. She's living here now in June will



be twenty-seven years. So she had the house six months before I came down. I taught Sandy how to drive.

MF: Tell me that story. How'd you teach her to drive?

DL: We got in trouble because I taught her how to drive on state property. But I thought it was safe. That's better than out on the road. But I taught her how to drive, and she, and yeah, but we got in trouble for it.

MF: How did you get in trouble?

DL: Because of her driving on the state property without a [01:03:00] license (laughs).

MF: So when you moved to Allentown, you move in with Sandy in March, tell me a little bit about what else was happening in your life in 1994 in Allentown.

DL: Well, I was trying to sell my property up there. I mean, what I did, I rented it to sell for a year. I went to my very first pride fest. The year before I heard about it. I read about it on TV. But I went to my first pride fest. I called Liz and Trish. And I called Mickey Katz. I don't know if you know Mickey Katz. And I talked to them. And I started volunteering. [01:04:00] I went over, and I met Liz and Trish. And I started volunteering. I just thought it was wonderful that they had something like that for gay people. And I volunteered for our pride fest. I went to

Harrisburg's for their pride fest. And I went to Philly for their pride fest and worked them.

MF: What did it feel like for you to be at that first pride festival in Allentown?

DL: It was wonderful. And it, you know, all this and, you know, no problems. It was different back, you know. This was wonderful. They had something for gay people that I never knew they had. Well, the very first gay pride down here was in '93, I think they started it. And then I ended up going being on the pride board for a couple years.

[01:05:00] But it was wonderful. I just totally enjoyed it.

MF: When you volunteered at the different pride festivals, what did you do? Were you setting up booths? What was your volunteering --

DL: Well, in Philadelphia I worked the beer booth because Allentown didn't have a beer booth. And it was funny. The second time we did that -- I did that for a couple years. Sandy went with me, and it was I was doing the beer, and she thought "Oh, I couldn't handle it." She couldn't. So she did the vodka, the Absolut vodka. And when it first opened, she said "Oh, I can handle this, only one." She gave them the first vodka, and she turned around, and she said "Where the hell did they all come from?" But yeah, we did work the booths. We went and helped. We did the same

thing in Harrisburg. In Harrisburg I got them to come up [01:06:00] and help up here on Pride with us, and then in return I went down and helped with them. And I helped with Philly.

MF: Tell me a little bit about the Pride board. What was it like to be on that board? How did the board operate? What was it like to try and set up the pride festival here?

DL: Back when I was on it was different than what it is now. It was like you send out, get in touch with vendors, and I was helping with the setting up, marking off the field where the booths would go and all this. And then I would stay overnight and sit overnight so they wouldn't vandalize the vending places until we set up. And then we would work it, work the booths, and do that. And like, back then we didn't charge [01:07:00] to get in. And then we -- I was part of the very first parade with them, Hamilton Street into Pride. You didn't realize how expensive it was for the police to block off the streets for to have the parade come down the streets. That was, I think, the only parade that we had. We had music and everything else. It was great. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Like I said, ours never had alcohol. And I'm not sure if I like the idea of, you know, charging people, but you know, [01:08:00] that's only my opinion. I'm not sure what -- then we had the

protestors. Then I was a silent witness for the protestors. And we had it down in Harrisburg. Yeah. It was rough at first.

MF: Tell me a little bit about, so you say it was rough at first. Tell me why. How many protestors came out? What was happening with the protesting of Pride?

DL: The screaming and the yelling, and you know, it was like why couldn't you just let us be instead of protesting? We're not hurting nobody. You know, and God doesn't say nothing about us. You know, it's you [01:09:00] love who you love. It doesn't matter what sex you are or what race you are. Love is love. I'm sure, you know, God didn't put us on this earth to say "You have to love this person. You have to love that person." The main thing is He don't want us to hate. And to me the protestors was just about hate.

MF: Were there a lot of protestors at the first Pride?

DL: No, actually that wasn't our first Pride. I guess it was couple years later that the protestors came. And the first ones maybe if they were there they were across the street. You didn't even have any, you know -- it was when that, I guess it's what was his name, [01:10:00] Philips or something like that. He started the big mouth stuff. The others one were just, you know, so-so. They were against

it, but you didn't have it until he came with his big mouth.

MF: What was it like to be a silent witness? Can you tell me what that is and what it felt like to be a silent witness?

DL: What it was is you just stood there, and you kept your mouth shut. And that was hard for me. And you just didn't let them get to the people that was walking in to the Pride Fest. You stood there and just stood there quietly, and no matter what they said to you, you ignored them. But you blocked them from [01:11:00] getting people, you know, getting in the other gay people's face. You were like a bridge between them. I don't know if they still have them or not.

MF: Can you tell me -- you said at one point it was that the parade was so expensive because you had to block off the streets. When you were on the board, how were you funding the pride festivals? Did you have donors? How did you raise that money to make that happen for the --

DL: Well, you know, when you were sold a spot, depending on the space you bought, you rented it, you paid for it, and that's how we got money. And then we had different, you know, depending on your size of the spot you wanted [01:12:00] and where you wanted it costs the money. And

that's how you made money. And you know, you sold stuff, but I don't know if we had sponsors or not. We might have. I think we had a lot of donations. Like we put the fliers out. They were donated by different people. And people that -- like a flier, people rented space to put in the, you know, paid for an ad to put in the advertising.

MF: So you're working on the Pride board in Allentown. What other LGBT organizations were [01:13:00] you involved with in Allentown during this period of the '90s?

DL: There was one called Kindred Spirits, [GLOR?], and with Liz and Trish it was a different name back then. It was PA-Gala. And I can't think of the other ones, but it was different, quite a few. I tried to help with every one I could.

MF: Yeah, Liz and Trish describe you as, like, a volunteer all over the valley, that you were just sort of like, just helping in any way you can. I'm not familiar with Kindred Spirit. Could you talk a little bit about what that was and how you worked with that organization? [01:14:00]

DL: It was like a get-together. You would meet if you had to talk. Most of them was like, didn't have a partner at the time, but I did. And it was like we meet at -- we used to meet at Unitarian church at Center City in Bethlehem at Center Street and talk, say, about like -- it was like

socializing, gathering to talk about your feelings and what happened and all this. And then we would leave there, we'd meet for about an hour or so, and then we would go to Diamondz or something before the charge, get in. We would go there and just drink, dance, shoot pool. [01:15:00] We would meet every -- I think it was a Friday. I believe it was a Friday. And the other, GLOR was male and females. Kindred Spirit was mostly all female. GLOR was a mixture. It was, I think it cost you like \$10 a year to join. And it was like different people had something at their house every weekend. Somebody else had something or every month somebody would have something. And it was like you get together, potlucks, and stuff like that. And it was like maybe go hiking. They get together to go hiking or down to [01:16:00] Longwood Gardens, who wanted to go, or go golfing or something like that but in a group. And I don't know if it's still going on or not, but it sort of phased out after a few years. I guess we all got older. I know at first they used to think I made Sandy up because she was always working. But she worked second shift at the state hospital, you know. But it was funny. So we had a event at our house, and then at first they said I paid her, somebody to do it, until at last a couple came later, stayed later,

and then they realized I had to ask her where stuff was because she knew and I didn't know. But yeah, it was funny.

MF: Were you involved with any religious organizations during this time period like MCCLV?

DL: Yes.

MF: Tell me about [01:17:00] --

DL: I belonged to M--

MF: Tell me about your involvement with MCCLV.

DL: I went there. I was at a birthday party, and this friend of mine was there, and she was leaving to go to church. It was at Sunday night at 6:00 or [for first six?]. And I said "Can I come with you?" She said sure. And I went. They were in -- sharing a church, Unitarian church in Bethlehem. And I enjoyed it. And that's the first I went to church down here with MCC. I was a member. I belonged there 17 years. I was on the board. I was on the property board for six years. And I helped move with the church and all of that. There's where I fell. We moved from Ford Street. Was it Ford Street? [01:18:00] From Merchant Square. We were at Merchant Square on Vultee Street. We moved from there to Ford Street in Allentown. And I was working at the church, and I fell 15 feet and broke my leg. But yeah, I belonged to MCC for 17 years. And now I belong to St. Mark's, Lutheran church.



MF: And when you first started going to MCCLV, could you describe how it felt to be a part of a church community that's primarily LGBT?

DL: I thought it was wonderful. It was really, really nice. I thought it was great. And lot of the people that I knew [01:19:00] from Kindred Spirits and that went there. But yeah, I was on their board for six boards. I was property chair for six years. I really enjoyed MCC. But then, you know, time comes where you move on.

MF: Can you describe why you decided to move on and a little bit about that kind of religious journey to a different church?

DL: Oh, how can I say it nicely? I just felt maybe different. I felt differently about things that the church -- [01:20:00] I just felt I know who I am. I know who I was since I'm 19 years old. And it's not all about just the gays. There's other people, just because they're not gay, that don't mean that you can't be friends with. And it's just time to move on. I just felt it wasn't the same as I was first in love with the church. Things, personalities changed. People changed. And speaking, I just felt when I -- you know, you ask me a question, I'm going to speak my mind. [01:21:00] And you don't like it, and friendships

change. I'm trying to be very polite and not say nothing but being honest. And it felt time for a change.

MF: So how did you find your new church? And what has that experience been like for you?

DL: Well, friends of ours that went to MCC, she was a secretary at St. Mark's. And they got tickets for Elvis impersonator, and they know I liked Elvis. And she called me up and said come and meet them. You know, come. So we went there, and there was people there that Sandy worked with at the hospital and kept saying "Join, come join this -- [01:22:00] called Sharing Life. You'll love it." So we ran into -- so we did. Sandy went, and I went in November. So we seen the Elvis impersonator. So we went to the Sharing Life, and what that is is it's people from the church that have this -- to deal with mentally ill. And the nurses and all that from the state hospital where Sandy worked started this. And what it is is different patients from the -- they don't call them patients now, they're clients -- started this where once a month the beginning of the month they had crafts. So many people come for crafts. On the third Wednesday of the month they come, we give them something to eat, and we have bingo or [01:23:00] a dance or something like that. And we enjoyed that. And the people was so accepting of Sandy and I being gay that they were so

wonderful. And I said to Sandy, "Eh." This was in November, and I said that February was our anniversary. I said "Let's go to church. I'd like to see this church." Because the church was beautiful. And we went in, and the people were so accepting. It was like -- it was great. And I remember the sermon. The pastor said "We're here for the people, not for the church." And I said, "I like that." So then we went a couple times, and then we missed for two weeks because we went on vacation. And when we came back everybody said "Oh my God, you're here. You're here. We [01:24:00] thought you didn't like us and that you weren't coming back." So we are now members of the church. I'm on the church counsel. I love the church, and I love their outreach. We do a pantry, open-door pantry. Twice a month we give people food that's in our zip code because there's so many we can't do it all. Because ours is a food pantry where they pick what they want, except for now with this virus going on they tell us what they want and we fill the bag. Because we give them meat, sometimes eggs, milk, cheese. So it's not like where we fill a bag and just hand it to them. They pick what they want. I just love their outreaches, and I love the church and the people. It's the people. They love you for who you are. [01:25:00]

MF: You really have so many stories about volunteering or being on leadership, both in LGBT organizations but in your church organizations, both at MCCLV and now with your Lutheran congregation. Could you tell me a little bit about why volunteering and taking on leadership roles in community organizations has been important in your life?

DL: Well actually, they asked me to become one of the leaders. They asked me. I was just a member over a year, and they called and asked me to be on their board. And I was honored. I said "I'm not even a member only a little over a year and you're asking me to be on your board." I was honored that they asked, you know. [01:26:00] So that's how it is. They asked me. And I'm honored. And I told them right from the beginning my mouth sometimes got me in trouble. And they were happy. Because I speak my mind, and that's where it got me in trouble at MCC. You ask me a question and I'm going to answer it, and if I feel something's wrong, I'm going to speak my mind, and that's what happened.

MF: I'm wondering if we could talk a little bit about just kind of to turn back to you and Sandy, did you have a commitment ceremony or, you know, something prior to the passage of marriage equality? [01:27:00]

DL: Yes, we had a holy union back in 1998 at the Unitarian church where we had that. My family from Delaware all came. They all love Sandy. And it's like you can't accept Sandy. And before my biological mother died, we mend the fences, and, you know, I said "This is my partner, and if you can't accept her you're history. You're not as important to me as she is." And that's how it is. They can't accept Sandy then we're history. And in 2001 we had, in Connecticut, we had a civil union. We can't get legally married in Pennsylvania because I would lose my benefits. That's why we -- not legally [01:28:00] married in Pennsylvania or we would be. Because I'm a fixed, very low, like, I only get \$1,000 to live on. And my medicine, because I have COPD, two of my inhalers are over \$1,000.

MF: Can you describe the civil union ceremony for me? What was that like?

DL: Well, our holy union at the Unitarian, both Sandy's sons walked her down the aisle. And the pastor, I forget her name, but we have her pictures and everything, she married us. But it was great seeing her walking down the aisle with both her sons there. And her one son calls me [01:29:00] Mom Number Two. But he's more laid back. The older son is -- he lived in California, so you can tell how

laid back he is compared to the other son, but we get along good.

MF: So now in your seventies, how would you describe your relationship with Sandy now that you've been together for so many years and you're in your seventies, you're kind of in this, like, really beautiful part of your relationship because you've been together so long. Describe that for me.

DL: I still love her with all my heart. And we talk, which we never did in the beginning back in the '60s. We didn't talk. We talk. [01:30:00] We're honest with one another.

And like, she'll say "How are --" like if I'm not feeling good, I'll say "I'm good." She'll say "Honest?" And if I'm not feeling -- I won't say "honest" unless I mean it. But we talk. We don't just do something. No matter what it is we talk about, give each other's opinion on everything. We trust one another. We don't hang in bars. We're home, basically homebodies. We like to travel. But with this going on we're not planning no vacations. We already canceled our vacations for this year. But next year we're planning to drive to Minnesota to see her oldest son Mark. Michael lives down [01:31:00] in Phoenixville, but with this going on we don't go to see him either. But it's still wonderful. We talk. We don't leave the house without kissing each other goodbye and saying we love each other.

We never go to bed without kissing and saying goodnight and love each other. We never do that. And it's great. We laugh. We watch TV. We read. Right now I'm working on a puzzle, and she'll help me pick out pieces. But it's wonderful because we don't -- we might disagree. We still say thank you, please. We treat each other with respect.

MF: Well, we're getting close to the end of the interview. So I want to ask just maybe one or two more questions.

[01:32:00] In your seventies, as you look back on your experiences and really the kind of LGBT movements from the '69 and Stonewall, you know, through the present, how do you think things have changed for LGBT people? What have you sort of witnessed across your life?

DL: Well, I don't remember the movie, but they showed a movie at the [Nac Ac?] one time. And I was there helping one of the groups out. And the younger people that was younger than me were in there that didn't come out as early as I came out. And when they came out, and they kept thanking me. And it's like, for what, you know? I don't consider myself a hero or warrior or nothing else.

[01:33:00] I'm just me, plain old me. And it's a lot different. Now I see people walking hand in hand, you know, couples, and I think wow, what a difference, what a difference. They didn't realize what it was like to go to a

bar after 2:00 in the morning to be with yourself and friends. And I got a nickname called Bobbie because I was, like I said, I was butchy, and this drag queen thought I was a guy. And I told him no. He said from now on you're Bobbie to me. And so I did a couple drag shows at the church, and I went by Bobbie. But it's so different. And they don't realize how lucky [01:34:00] they are that they can walk down the street hand in hand and not get bashed or beat up or anything because a lot of that was going on. We fought for a lot of this. I remember so many years standing on Hamilton Street fighting for gay marriage in the freezing cold. But most of the people, I can only say I think only twice I ever had something thrown at me during that time. Most of the people past and honked their horns. But there was other places where there was bashing, like with Matthew Shepard and a couple others. You know, the movement back then was very different. You had to be really close and, you know, different now. They're lucky. Things has changed, and they're [01:35:00] lucky to have it changed. Some people lost their jobs. Some people lost their homes. Some families put them out. My family stuck by me. Sandy's family stuck by her. But we were lucky. But some wasn't as lucky.



MF: Have we missed anything today in this interview that you really wanted to share today in our conversation? Is there something that you'd like to share that we haven't addressed yet?

DL: I would just say not to be ashamed of who you are or who you love. Love is love, no matter what color, what race, or who it is. Love is love. [01:36:00] And don't be ashamed of who you love. And don't hide who you love.

MF: Thank you so much, DJ. It's just been such a pleasure talking with you today.

DL: You're quite welcome.

END OF AUDIO FILE