

LandJane

MARY FOLTZ: All right. My name is Mary Foltz, and I'm here with Jane Land 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. Jane and I are meeting on Zoom because there's a pandemic going on, and today's date is May 29, 2020. So, Jane, just first, thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me today.

JANE LAND: Oh, sure.

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

JL: My name is two syllables long, so you have to listen carefully, it goes by fast. It's Jane Land. Last name is spelled L-A-N-D, and first name is J-A-N-E.

MF: Thank you. And can you please share your birthday?

[00:01:00]

JL: June 28, 1950.

MF: All right, so prior to starting this interview, you and I talked a little bit about consent for the interview, and I'll start by just asking you, do you consent to this interview today?

JL: Yes.

MF: Do you consent to having this interview being transcribed, digitized, and made available online in searchable formats?

JL: Yes.

MF: And do you consent to the LGBT archive using your interview for educational purposes in other formats including articles, websites, short films, presentations, or other formats that might become available?

JL: Yes.

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

JL: Yes, I understand.

MF: Okay, great. [00:02:00] Thank you, Jane. So to start our discussion today, I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your childhood?

JL: My childhood, it was a long time ago, -- I'll be seventy next month -- and I grew up in the country. My father was a chemist. He had a PhD in chemistry, and he worked for a large pharmaceutical company. And my mother had a library degree, a master's in library science, but she was a homemaker until I was in seventh grade. I have - I had only one other sibling, my sister, an older sister. She was six

years older. She passed away a few years back. So I grew up in the country, and [00:03:00] it was a great place to grow up, and I think it had a bearing on who I am. I spent a lot of time outdoors, playing outdoors, and my friends that I played with, my playmates, -- there weren't too many kids around -- they were all boys. The family on a lot adjacent to ours, -- we had three and a half acres, and it was rural, so everybody had some acreage -- there were four boys there so that's primarily who I played with. We didn't have a lot of toys, so we invented things all the time to play. So we -- and we traveled quite a distance to play. We had a creek that was maybe a mile away, and we would ride our bicycles into town [00:04:00] sometimes. But mostly, we played outside in -- at the creek and in the fields and in -- climbing trees, building treehouses, and building rafts for the creek to navigate on the creek and dams on the creek and catching crayfish and putting them in our pond that we would make. You know, I just, I can't think of all the ways in which we invented things, but we have very few props, very, very few toys, so we had to use our creativity a lot.

MF: So what part of the country did you grow up? Where was the closest small city to your country home?

JL: I grew up in Northern Bucks County, Pennsylvania, so I was between... [00:05:00] The closest town was a small town called Telford, which is actually in Montgomery County. And I lived just three houses from the borderline between Bucks and Montgomery counties. I went to Penridge High School and graduated from there in 1968.

MF: And culturally, what was it like in that area around Telford? What was the community spirit like? What kinds of values were promoted in that country community?

JL: I don't know. You know, I just know the immediate families that my parents socialized with or had a connection to, basically neighbors. You know, my parents were both educated, my father more than my mother even. My sister went on to get a master's also in biology. [00:06:00] And a lot of the people they socialized with were similar middle-class families that, you know, the father had an education, mother may or may not have had an education, often did but didn't use it. As far as political -- politically, you know I'm not really aware politics went -- things that were talked about.

MF: I'm curious about your relationship with your parents. You described their emphasis on higher education that they really believed in education. What was your relationship like with your parents when you were a child?

JL: My father had to -- he had a job with -- at that time, it was called Merck Sharp & Dohme, it later became Merck Incorporated. And his commute to work from our home was maybe like twenty-five, [00:07:00] 30 minutes. But at the time, I was eight years old, he took a job in -- had to take a job with the company in North Jersey, so he traveled. He commuted about three hours a day, so I didn't see much of my dad. And when he was around, he was -- he had a fleet of cars that he would use to get to and from work. When one would break down, he'd have to grab another one and leave it for the weekend when he could fix it. He was a very bright man and very self-sufficient. He didn't have a lot of time to talk or spend with me, but I do remember watching him do things a lot, watching him, you know, fix the cars and you know anything that broke in the house, that kind of thing. My mother - my mother was I think a depressed person and so I didn't have -- you know, she kept to herself a lot. So [00:08:00] I pretty much had to learn how to be self-sufficient early on.

MF: So you describe wonderful adventures as a child in the outdoors and making rafts on the river. And you describe a kind of self-sufficiency, a kind of self-knowledge earlier -- early on in your life. What kinds of things were you

interested in beyond the outdoors as you were going through middle and high school?

JL: Well, you know you had asked about -- just mentioned something about education and I... There was a lot of unspoken pressure I think to get a college degree. Everyone in the family was educated. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, and [00:09:00] I struggled with that. I really was not keen on going to college because I had no idea what I wanted to do. I actually -- I had, I have a lot of college credits, but I never got a degree in anything. (laughs) So I did start out by going to college after I graduated. I went to Bucks County Community College for a year and learned... I started -- I signed up for data processing. I had degrees in data processing, which was the old punch card system, ones and twos on the punch cards, and that was really boring to me. But as part of that, one of the courses I had signed up for at Bucks County Community College was accounting, and I learned that I liked accounting very much, [00:10:00] so I changed majors to accounting. But then after a year, I ended up getting married. This was during the Vietnam War. I married a man who then ended up getting drafted into the service, and we traveled. He was first stationed in Phoenixville and then we traveled to San Francisco. He was

-- when he was drafted, his -- after he finished basic training, he became -- he was assigned the career of a medic. And since it was during the war, medics was not a good occupation to be in. In times of war, they always try to take the medic and the radioman out of commission, so -- the enemy that is. So he signed up for more time and became kind of the equivalent of a *M*A*S*H* nurse, [00:11:00] a field hospital nurse, and... But that all -- the only reason I mentioned that because, obviously, that was a mistake I made in my life, getting married to a man. It took me a while to figure that out, but I mentioned it because I got the chance to travel a lot. So I lived out in California for a while and got to travel around the country.

MF: Well, I'm curious, how did -- did you -- how did you two meet, and how did that relationship develop during that really tumultuous time of the Vietnam War?

JL: He was the nephew of a high school professor, a high school teacher that I actually never had in high school. But he was -- Uncle John was a very -- a freethinker, and as it turned out, a closeted gay man. But he was a very dynamic teacher, [00:12:00] and he would hold these -- he would have get-togethers with his students where they would come to his house and talk about all kinds of ideas. Really a

very, very good teacher who would, you know, really expand your horizons, get you to thinking about different things in life. So after I got divorced from my husband, you know I started searching for -- thinking about going back to college. I did attend some college, some more college. I was in Minnesota with my sister-in-law who had gone there for her master's degree. I took some courses there, I came back to Muhlenberg, took some courses there. Eventually ended up living in Bethlehem and attending Moravian College, and I was getting a degree in social work. And then, [00:13:00] one semester before I was due to graduate with a bachelor's degree in social work, I realized that that was not what I wanted to do. I still hadn't figured out what I was going to be when I grew up, what I really wanted to do. And, you know, I just, so I turned to - I was talking with one of my psychology professors at Moravian, and you know when you asked me to do this oral history with you, I did spend some time thinking about, you know what were the people and the things that influenced my life the most. And that college professor, he was a psychology college professor, his name was Tony LoGiudice. And I was talking with him about so I was actually getting depressed thinking about spending the rest of my life being a social worker. It just -- social work is a fine profession, but it

just was not going to be my thing. [00:14:00] And he said, "Well, you know I can give you some -- a battery of tests, and they'll show what you have an aptitude for. I'll send them away, and they score them, and then when I get them back, get the results back, we can sit and talk about what you might do when it showed your strengths were." So we did that, and we met. He said, "Your mechanical ability is extremely high." I said, "Well, what would I do with that?" He said, "You could be -- well you could be like -- you could be like an electrician or a carpenter or an auto mechanic, something like that." I said, "Really?" and he said, "Yeah, you know this is a really high score in mechanical ability and ability to analyze things and investigate them, be able to apply logic to come up with answers," so I said, "All right." [00:15:00] Well, I'm not good at science, so I don't know how well I'd do at being an electrician, understanding the science of electricity. And at the time, it was 1975, and there was a recession going on and so the construction trade was really struggling. It was doing very poorly, so that was a -- that would be a really poor career choice because it'd be tough to make a living and so I chose mechanics. So my next step was where to go to school to become a mechanic, you know, how do I do that. But I quit Moravian one

semester shy of getting my degree in social work and one year short of getting a minor I guess, you'd say, in accounting or a dual degree in accounting and enrolled in [00:16:00] Northampton County Community College. But before I did that, I went there, you know, I was going to enroll there because they had an auto mechanics training course. But this was 1975, and it was like, would they even let me in as a woman. So I talked to somebody in admissions, and somebody said, "Well, why don't you -- I'll give you the phone number for the fellow who runs that training program, and why don't you talk to him, see what he has to say whether he'd let you in or not?" So this fellow's name was George Gerstenberg, and I called him up. He just turned out to be a young fellow. He was not that far from my age, pretty close to the same age -- this was in 1975 -- and, you know, told him what I was interested in doing and why. You know, I told him that after I had taken [00:17:00] this test and learned that I had this -- realized that I had this ability. I thought back and, you know when I was going to Moravian, I worked my way through college cleaning houses, and along the way for some reason -- these were often households that had educated adults in them -- and the men were not very handy. And the women would ask me if I could fix things and actually really

insisted that I try to fix things; I don't know why. This one woman asked me one day if I could fix a lamp, and I said, "Well, yeah, I'm pretty sure I could fix a lamp because I'd watched my father do it." She said, "Well, here, take this, go and fix -- see if you can fix it and then bring it back." So the next week, I brought it back, and I made the repair, and it worked again. She said, "That's great. I have a mixer that doesn't work, you think you could fix my mixer?" And I said, "I don't know about that. [00:18:00] I have no idea about a mixer." She said, "Well, why don't you just take it home and try it, see what you can do with it? It's not working, so, you know, if you can't fix it, fine, but if you can, it's broken and I could use -- I'll pay you to fix this mixer." So I took it home, and I took it all apart, and that's something I realized that I used to do when I was a kid. My mother had a friend that had a son my same age, Doug was his name. And we would come -- he would come with his mother over to our house to visit, and we would squirrel ourselves away in my bedroom, and we would take things apart, so... (laughs) So it was just simply by taking it apart, it was -- had a bunch of, I don't know, hair and fuzz, dust stuck in it, and it just needed a good cleaning and lubrication again, and I put it back together, and it worked. So I talked to George

Gerstenberg and he was like -- I was really surprised. He was like, [00:19:00] "That would be terrific. It would be great to have a woman in the class." He said, "You'll be the only one," but he said, "I welcome it. I would -- I encourage you to try that. I think it would be wonderful." So because George thought it was wonderful, I got an opportunity. I'm not sure I would have gotten that opportunity if he hadn't thought it was wonderful back in 1975.

MF: This is a wonderful story that you're sharing now. I'm curious if you could just talk a little bit about why you felt compelled to explore social work and accounting prior to thinking, you know, about other things like mechanics like -- and auto mechanic courses in particular. And I guess what I'm trying to ask is like during that time period of the '70s, what seemed possible to you [00:20:00] as a woman laborer? And did you feel that there were specific careers like social work that were open to women and others that were closed? So I'm just sort of curious why you were -- you thought social work in the beginning even though you weren't really enjoying the classes. So could you talk a little bit about that, the logic that you had for the courses you were choosing prior to really finding this field that felt really compelling to you?

JL: Sure. Well, accounting was simply by accident. It was a course requirement that I was taking. It fulfilled some liberal arts requirement for a degree, and I just discovered that I really liked it. I really liked working with numbers. I'm not a mathematician, that's an entirely different thing than -- accounting was just basically arithmetic, but I really excelled at that. And it's funny that fellow Doug, [00:21:00] that boy that used to come over to play, we would often play bank. We would play banker in the -- in my room, and we would like do things with money, you know and it was funny. But to this day, I still do volunteer work as a bookkeeper for the church and have for several churches. I think the one thing -- so it wasn't really anything conscious there. It was just something I found I really had a knack for. One thing that I do realize is really instrumental in my childhood was my father never said you can't do this, you can't do that, a girl can't do this, a girl can't do that. He never ever said those things. And so in a silent way -- he was a pretty quiet guy, in a silent way, [00:22:00] he was very encouraging that there wasn't anything that I couldn't do that -- if I put my mind to it, which is pretty much what he had done with his life. He was an only child whose father had died when he was still in college and so, you

know he pretty much -- I imagine he'd been in the same kind of circumstance where, you know, he just had the confidence, and he just decided there wasn't anything he couldn't do. He was trained as a chemist, but you know he was busy teaching himself how to repair automobiles and all kinds of equipment. You know, the water pump died, he'd be hauling it out of the well and replacing that. Just anything that broke living in the country where there weren't many services or people who were trained in services, you know you had to do it on your own. You had to learn how to do it on your own, and that's pretty much what he did. So I think just being around that even though I remember as a kid, you know I'd ask -- as I got older, I'd ask if I could help because he was [00:23:00] basically working all the time. Whether it was going off to work for a paid -- for a salary or working around the house, he was just always incredibly busy. So I'd ask if I can help, and you know usually within sixty seconds or less of me then trying to do what he had told me I could -- I should do, he'd be impatient and take it away from me because he just didn't have the time. You know I realize that in retrospect. But I think that was a huge -- an influence on me that he, in his silence, never gave me the idea that there wasn't something I couldn't -- anything I couldn't

do. So when I went to college, I probably took -- I probably decided on a degree on social work for the same reason that virtually everyone who goes into social work and psychology goes into it [00:24:00] for, which is their chapter one or their childhood had some major dysfunction in it. And then you were -- you went on to college and enrolled in those two disciplines to try and figure out your chapter one. And so it helped me just figure it out some and -- but the thought of -- and I enjoyed the courses. Along the way, I had to do a service project in the community, and I ended up at Northampton County prison. There was a small women's detention center there, and it was a very small area. They kept them segregated from all the men because they thought that would be a huge problem, and they basically had nothing to do. They were in this tiny area and had nothing to do. So I started a program there. It wasn't hard to get them to... I thought it would be really difficult to get [00:25:00] the prison system to, you know, take any suggestion I had, but I think they were concerned about public opinion and the press. And they started -- I started a program there where I got some sewing machines donated, and the women had sewing machines. And they actually had some women guards I think who had some sewing ability who then helped them learn how

to sew as a career, as a, you know, way to make money when they would get out of prison. And so I enjoyed that part of social work, but it was not what I wanted to make a living out of, trying to help people figure out their own problems. I had enough trouble figuring out mine.

(laughs)

MF: Well, now, I'm curious about -- you said you were drawn to social work to figure out your chapter one. What did you figure out in the social work program about yourself or your family? [00:26:00]

JL: That, um -- My mother lost her mother when she was -- I think it was ten -- ten years old and so my mother -- you know, I figured out that my mother was stuck at that age. She had a trauma. There weren't many psychologists or psychiatrists back in those days. People didn't go for therapy particularly if you lived out in the country, so she pretty much was stuck at that age. And a lot of her life was tied to that, so she spent -- so I think she was a fairly depressed person and I didn't... I actually didn't see a lot of her growing up. She was -- she was a librarian as I had mentioned, and she spent a lot of time reading, [00:27:00] escaping. My father was a very -- a good man, but I think he was angry that his partner in life was not being much of a partner. So he had a pretty bad

temper. And my older sister, she was six years older, and six years older is like a lifetime at that age. And, she picked up -- you know I learned all this from social work and -- social work curriculum and my classes in social work and psychology that, you know, she picked up the dominant parent's behavior, so she had a very bad temper. So I spent my childhood trying to stay out of the reach of depressed and angry people (laughs) and a good part of my -- a good portion of my adult life too, so... [00:28:00]

MF: So you described finding this career in -- entering Northampton Community College. I'm curious, what was it like to be the only woman in that -- in the classes for mechanics at Northampton?

JL: Well, the first thing I did was -- I didn't tell my family what I was doing. I stopped going to Moravian College and enrolled at NCCC -- in Northampton County Community College, and in that program. And I took several -- I went to the classes for several months pretty much the first semester before I was in a situation where I had to admit to a family member that I was no longer going to Moravian College, (laughs) so... [00:29:00] And there were several family members -- and this is beyond my immediate family. I can remember my uncle in particular sending me -- as he lived in Illinois, him and my aunt, and my uncle sent me

this scathing letter about what a big mistake I was making not finishing my college degree in social work and that the idea of being a mechanic was a really bad idea, and that I should really reconsider what I was doing with my life. My father was like, "Okay, great, you know and what will you do with it when you're done?" I said, "Well, you know I hadn't gotten that far yet," and he said, "Well, if you want to go into business for yourself, let me know and I will help you." And my sister, who I had a terrible relationship with because she was [00:30:00] so angry also all the time -- she was -- had a very unhappy childhood. Because she had the same parents I had but also because she was -- she was very heavysset. She had extremely curly hair that she couldn't manage back in those days, -- the hairdressers weren't used to that -- and she also had terrible acne, so she -- I think those things were all factors in her life that made her a pretty unhappy and angry person. But I was surprised. She said to me when -- and she was the one I had to admit. She kind of pinned me down in a conversation long distance, and I had to admit to her that I wasn't going to Moravian anymore and told her what -- I had to admit to her what I was doing. I was scared that, uh-oh, now, I'm going to get in real trouble, and she surprised me. One of the few times in my life that

she supported me, and she said, "You know, I wish my husband could [00:31:00] go back and take something that he really enjoyed doing because he's not happy doing what he's doing." So you know I ended up really different from my family. You know, I didn't want to spend my life as an angry, depressed person. I didn't want to... you know, it wasn't a degree that mattered to me, it was that I found something that I had a passion for, and I found that I just loved mechanics. I just adored mechanics. I did well at school. I had so many credits that I didn't have to -- I transferred all my liberal arts credits and fulfilled all those -- that criteria and just was taking the automotive course and still working to support myself cleaning houses. And.. I never finished the auto mechanics course either. I did well, I [00:32:00] think I was maybe first in the class, I can't really remember. But I took enough courses that I got it, and I was confident that I could keep learning. And then I needed -- I decided that the money was running pretty thin, I didn't want to take out loans, and so I got a job as an auto mechanic and finished learning to be a mechanic by working in a garage.

MF: How did the other students in Northampton respond to you as the only woman in that program? And then I'll continue

that, like how did male mechanics respond to you on your first jobs out of college?

JL: You know I don't remember anybody in the auto mechanics [00:33:00] class giving me a hard time you know because George wouldn't have allowed it. But I was busy learning. I wasn't -- I didn't really care what they were doing. (laughs) I was busy learning, and it was just -- I was like a vacuum cleaner, like you know I just sucked it all up, I just loved it. It was definitely my thing. I did well in classroom and well in the shop. Probably the question that you're asking should be asked of the guys that I went to school with. They probably -- My guess is that they weren't... They were a little intimidated by me, I would imagine, because we were all students, and it's one thing, you know, to have another male student -- if you're a male, have another male student by your side, and you're learning. But to have a woman [00:34:00] doing better than you were doing in school was probably hard for them. I know, I know for sure later on in life when I worked as a mechanic, that was one of the things that I recognized. If I did well as a mechanic and as being a female mechanic, it was really hard for men who weren't great at what they did to, you know, to work alongside a woman who did a better job at mechanics than they did. It was a problem, and I

realized that later on in my career, so... I first worked at a place in Bethlehem that might still be there. It was called Dave & Wayne's. You know what I did was when I decided that I'd had enough education and really couldn't afford anymore and needed to get a job, I just went door [00:35:00] to door to garages and asking for a job. Now, I don't believe anyone hired me because they thought that I could do the job at that time. I believe I was hired because it was a novelty, and they thought it would be fun and that -- probably that they could like... It would be fun to see me fail is what it would be. So at Dave & Wayne's, I did okay. I think the biggest problem I had was the male mechanics there would come over and want to talk, you know, want to chat, want to flirt. You know sometimes, it was great that they'd come over because I could learn from them, but the bosses did not like it. And so I was there [00:36:00] maybe three months, something like that, and I got fired because I wasn't getting enough work done. I wasn't getting enough work done because these guys kept coming over and (laughs) interrupting me from working on a customer's car. It was the only job in my life that I was ever fired from, and I was devastated. It was on Labor Day. It was right before Labor Day. It was probably on a Friday. I know it was on a Friday. It's probably the

Friday right before Labor Day weekend. Yeah, they came over to me in the morning and said, "We're going to let you go, so you can finish out your day, and we'll give a paycheck and then you can be on your way." So I thought about it for a few minutes, and I thought, well, I've still got half a day to go look for a new job. You know, I had to [00:37:00] support myself. I mean, I'm sure my family would've helped me if I asked them, but I didn't want. I wanted to be my own person. I felt if I was going to be in this career, and originally I felt, you know, they weren't going to approve of it, I needed to pay my own way. So after about half an hour, I went to Dave and Wayne, and I said, "If it's okay with you, I'll leave now," so they let me go. It's about eleven o'clock in the morning, and I did the same thing all over again. I started pounding the pavement, going to different garages looking for another job, and by the end of the day, I had another job in a garage. I'm sure it was for the same reason that I worked for Paul's Garage on -- in Fountain Hill on Broadway. I don't know if that's still there. I'm sure he's no longer in business because he was older than me but not by much. And I got a job there, I'm sure [00:38:00] for the same reason, and actually, he used to work -- he started out his career working for Dave & Wayne. I didn't know that at the

time. And so I'm sure I was hired there because I was going to be a novelty also. But Paul was -- he was owner of the garage, and he had a part-time mechanic working there, a young guy named Jeff, and I think that he was more -- a little bit more practical. I think he felt that he could take advantage of me pay-wise -- that he could, you know, use me to do a lot of work and pay me little and get away with it. So that's what happened. I worked my butt off for him. I was - I became really fast at what I did. He taught me things. I learned how to do valve jobs on engines really well, so... He liked the work I did on that and so I would do a lot of the [00:39:00] valve jobs, engine repair, upper half of the engine on a lot of vehicles. I would do other things too. I got my state inspection license while I was there, and I did a lot of tune-ups, that kind of thing, so... And you asked, how did men -- how did people feel about me being a woman working in this career. I remember at Paul's Garage, the customers that gave me the hardest time were women. They, you know- women play a part in discrimination also and stereotyping also. So for the women, a lot of them looked at me and were like, oh my God, I don't want a woman to work on my car, she doesn't know what she's doing. You know, I need my car fixed, I don't want it to be wrecked you know. And so

those were [00:40:00] my toughest customers were the women. Sometimes, Paul would tell them, "Well, we'll get your car fixed, and we'll call you." And then after the car was all fixed and working fine, then he would tell them that I had worked on it. He would do things like that. He wasn't terribly supportive of me, but he was in the sense that he gave me a job. You know, 1975 to give me -- to give a woman a job in the garage was - pretty big deal, so I have to give him credit.

MF: So at this point, you were divorced. What was happening in your social life during the -- that time in Bethlehem and then while you're moving into this new career?

JL: At that time, I got involved with NOW, became a member [00:41:00] of a chapter in Bethlehem. And, I was just a member but you know trying to get plugged into women's rights and find some support there, that kind of thing. So I belonged to that for a while, and eventually, there was another chapter in Allentown. I don't remember if it was called -- I think it was called Lehigh Valley rather than Allentown NOW. I'm pretty sure that's Lehigh Valley NOW, and that's where I met Dixie White who was an activist that I'm sure you probably know about. I know that, Liz Bradbury had talked to me about that connection and finding my name in some of Dixie's memorabilia once Dixie passed

away. So I learned the one thing that NOW was good for -- I've never been real big on [00:42:00] being a member of groups. I'm just kind of more of a solitary person who needs to do my own kind of thing. But what I got out of NOW was, you know a sense of connection and sisterhood and some support in that way. And also, I met a woman named Sharon who worked for PPL -- it used to be called Pennsylvania Power & Light -- and she said, "You ought to apply for a job at PPL." You know, I said, "Well, it's an electric company, what would I do for them?" She said, "Well they -- you could be a mechanic in the power plant." She said, "Or they have a garage where they repair their vehicles, you could, you know, work for the garage maybe." So I applied there. And you ask how men reacted to me working in this nontraditional [00:43:00] field for women, I'm the only person that I ever encountered at PPL who had to go through four interviews to get my job. And the job-- the job interviews were not about... Well, and first of all, they didn't just -- I didn't just put in an application, and they called me. I put in an application, and I didn't hear from them in several weeks, so I called their HR department, you know and they told me, "Yeah, we'll get to it, we still have your application, we'll get to it." So I called maybe two or three times and so after

maybe three times of calling them, they brought me in for an interview. And so the interviews were all about not my mechanical ability. Didn't ask me, how do you do [00:44:00] this, or how do you fix that, or what do you think would be wrong with the vehicle if this happened? Because some of the people who were interviewing me weren't just HR people. Most of the interviews -- I think maybe the first interview was probably the HR department, and the other three were people who were in admin in the garage, in the transportation department. And so they'd want to know things like, well, if you're out in the field working on equipment, construction vehicle equipment like bulldozers or digging trucks, whatever, and you have to go to the bathroom, what will you do? Those are the kinds of questions (laughs) they wanted to ask. Or what are you going to do when some guys swears in front of you? You know? I mean that's what those three interviews were all about. I remember only them asking me [00:45:00] one -- somewhat a mechanical thing, which was if you have to go out and fix a flat on a line truck, you know, how would you go about doing that? Because you're talking about a tire and a rim -- an 1120-tire with rim weighs more than I do. So you know I told them how I would use leverage and just like a guy would do. He's not going to pick up a 1020

(laughs) and throw it on to -- the studs on the wheel, so... So eventually, I got the job. I got the job in August of 1977, and I took the job with the stipulation that even though I wouldn't have been entitled to any kind of vacation after just joining the company, that I be given time off [00:46:00] to go to the International Women's Conference that was held in Texas in 1977. I'd been chosen as a delegate for that.

MF: So, what was that conference like when you went to Texas?

JL: That was pretty amazing. I was -- I was young though. I was twenty-seven at the time, I wish that I had -- and just newly plugged into NOW and women's rights, and I wish I had -- I could've appreciated it more because the women that attended that... I got in as a delegate. Dixie White said, "Why don't you apply for -- to be a delegate for this?" and I said, "Okay." So I did, and I wasn't picked, and this was a process that went on for, you know, several months, maybe a half a year or something like that.

[00:47:00] She said, "Well, try again, but this --" She said, "If you want to get in, you know, since you're not really plugged into the leadership, you're my friend and I'm a leader in NOW, but since you're not really plugged into the leadership or haven't had any -- an active role in leadership," she said "you have to find -- you have to be a

minority. Why don't you try being a specific minority, and maybe you can get in to fill a quota that way with the conference?" I said, "Well, what minority would that be? I'm a female and I'm white, you know, what minority would be --?" She said, "Well, you're a Quaker, so apply as a religious minority," and so that's what I did, and I got chosen because I was a Quaker, which is a not very well-known type of religion, so... And that's where I knew Tony LoGiudice from, my psychology professor. That's how I ended up at -- being a Quaker [00:48:00] was because he was also a Quaker and attended the Lehigh Valley Quaker meeting. So I went to the conference, and it was incredible. Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug, you know you name it, Gloria Steinem, they were all there. And it was all- the conference was to set -- it was run by parliamentary procedure and was to set what were the important things that women needed to pursue to become equal citizens in our country and in the world. It was really an international thing, and so... you know, I don't know; they picked out maybe 20 platforms of things that needed to be worked on from an Equal Rights Amendment to women having access to educa-- equal access to education, equal acce-- equal pay for jobs. [00:49:00] It was - it was pretty heavy stuff. (laughs)

MF: And did you bring back some of those platforms to the NOW organization in the Lehigh Valley? What were the major Lehigh Valley, the kind of platform issues for the NOW organization here?

JL: I did not. I ended up not being much of a NOW member. I'm trying to think of a way to say this. There was a lot of dissension about how things were going to be run, and I'm a doer and not so much a talker, and so... They got rather enmeshed in trying to figure out [00:50:00] who was in power and where the leadership was going and so I drifted away from there pretty quickly.

MF: So you are - it's 1977 or '78, around there, you got a great job at PPL. Are you dating at this time? Are you in the LGBT community at this time, and if so, what was that like?

JL: Dixie and her partner Carol were always on the lookout to find someone for me to match up with, and I did eventually. I'm trying to remember how we exactly met. Oh, I know. I was - So I was working at Dave & Wayne's, and for the moment, I can't remember exactly how I met Diane, but -- [00:51:00] or maybe it was actually another woman. But this woman had a house on Carlton Avenue in Bethlehem where she was -- and I got to know her and Diane, my first lover. And they had -- Annie had a room on the third floor of this

house that wasn't in use. It was actually the attic. I needed a cheaper place to live to meet my expenses and so I talked Annie into letting me make the attic a livable space and letting me live there. So I insulated it and did some other work to it and ended up living there, and [00:52:00] that's where I met Diane. She lived there also. She had rented another room. So there were four women living there, Annie, Diane, me, and a woman from -- who was a professor, a visiting professor at Lehigh University.

MF: So what was the community like? I mean that sounds great to have a house of four women in Bethlehem. What was the community like in the '70s, the LGBT community?

JL: 1977, it was pretty closeted. You had to worry about losing a job, not just losing a job but having... It was difficult to be out because you had to really worry about how you were going to make a living because it was not -- it was -- people were pretty ugly about it back then. [00:53:00] Diane and I ended up being partners, moved out of Anne's -- Annie's house and bought a home in Catasauqua. And, you know you just, you could go to Rosemary's bar in the Flatiron building in the east Allentown off Union -- very close to Union Boulevard, and that was it. And so you made -- you found each other. Your gaydar helped you find sisters and brothers out there in the community. You found

ways to manage to hint at things that, you know, you each would safely realize that you were both gay. And then you would see [00:54:00] each other at each other's homes, do those kinds of social events, and go to the bar and be able to dance and you know let loose there. And there were a couple of festivals around. There was a good one called Sister Fire down in Maryland every year, those kinds of things.

MF: Will you just - what was Rosemary's bar like? Will you describe what a night out at Rosemary's might look like?

JL: Rosemary's bar was a good location. It was on this little -- literally on this little triangle of land. It was pretty much the building, so, you know, you didn't have to -- the wonder of the bar didn't have to share the building with someone else. There wasn't a neighbor that could -- a neighboring business that could complain about a gay bar being there. And it was a great place where you could just go and be yourself. They have a DJ, [00:55:00] a number of DJs, really good DJs. You could go and dance and drink and just relax and be yourself. And Rosemary kept that bar going for a lot of years, and it's a pain in the butt to run a bar and she was just -- you know, a lot of times back then, the bar owners were really supportive of the community. They would have, you know, special events and

that kind of thing. It was like a home. Back in those days, Diane and I used to have -- on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, we would have open house at our house. Anybody -- any of the friends that we had, gay and lesbian friends [00:56:00] could come and visit and hang out at our house. We put out the invitation every year because a lot of gay people could not go home to their families with their significant other. Maybe they couldn't go home at all even by themselves. They had been ostracized by their family, they'd been abandoned, you know, turned away by their family, and they were not welcome. So it was always a place where people could come to be together and instead of being depressed about their family's treatment toward them, where they could feel good on a holiday.

MF: Good. I don't think we talked about -- how did you come into a lesbian identity? When did you start to get a sense of your sexual identity? Was it in the '70s, was it earlier? How did that happen for you? [00:57:00]

JL: I came out to myself in 1977. I realized that looking backward that I'd been in love with my camp counselor, (laughs) in love with a girl that I met at Girl Scout camp also, and you know just realized that, wow, you know, I'm not heterosexual, you know. Those relationships aren't working out. Even when I was going to mechanic school and

working at Dave & Wayne's and also working at Paul's Garage, I still dated men, but it wasn't, you know, it wasn't doing it for me. And I realized when I got involved with NOW and were around all these women that it was incredibly exciting because I realized that this is who I was, that I was a lesbian. [00:58:00]

MF: What was it like to live with Diane in Catasauqua together when you built that, that home together?

JL: Well, it was an existing home, and actually, we had lived also in -- we moved from the South Side of Bethlehem to a rowhome in Allentown that we owned with a third woman who was -- so the three of us on the house together. She was much older. She was from Quaker Meeting also. And so it's tough living, two people together, let alone with three or four. So first we lived together, four women and then it was three women and then we realized you just need to live with your significant other because it doesn't work out too good. So we ended moving to a townhouse in Catasauqua. And you had to be careful about what you were doing that, you know, you didn't offend the neighbors. [00:59:00] You know, so you had - It was still a fairly closeted situation, although the street we lived on in Catasauqua, we had just picked it as a house that we liked well enough and could afford, and it turned out, it was like lesbian

heaven there. We had two women, two gay women that -- oh, sorry, we had two lesbian couples that lived on that street. It was just a circle, you know a townhouse circle, two lesbian households and two gay men households on that street, and they were -- in this development, there were three circles. So there was - on the other circles, there were also gay people, so it turns out that there was a lot of gay people there. So we also had that support that even though we weren't being really out in the neighborhood, we had each other there you know, somebody we could [01:00:00] turn to or socialize with.

MF: Who knew that about Catasauqua? I've got to say like who knew?

JL: (laughs) Yeah. (laughter) Right, we didn't know. It was just an accident. Well, I don't think it was just an accident; I think it was meant to be.

MF: So you're living in Catasauqua, you're working at PPL, what -- how -- what changes in your life in the '80s are you -- how do you sort of enter into the '80s? What are the big things that are happening for you in those early years?

JL: Well, once I got a job with PPL in the garage, you start out as a handyman. In the garage it's basically you're a gofer, you run for parts, you jockey cars around. Pretty much that's what you're doing. You don't really get to do

any mechanical work. So I had gone, you know, from doing pretty much -- doing a lot of mechanical work at [01:01:00] Paul's Garage to being a gofer. But I did that for a couple of months, and it didn't take long until I got into the mechanics. They had a mechanics training program there, so... It was a four-year program where you worked and you also went to school. And so once I got started at being a mechanics, I had shift foreman whose name was Al Koch. And when I think back -- when you ask me to do this, I thought back to who were the people in my life that really made a difference, Al was another one. Just like Tony LoGiudice and George Gerstenberg, Al Koch, my shift foreman, right away let me inspect cars and trucks. The transportation department, PPL was responsible for all the equipment, you know, any -- everything up into cranes, all the equipment they owned or leased at the time and [01:02:00] did the repair work on. You know, Al recognized that I had my state inspection license, which usually if you went through PPL's training program, you didn't get a chance to sit for your exam and become a state inspection mechanic until year three of your training. He gave me the opportunity to do that right away. And he -- He was encouraging, but he was fair. He didn't treat me differently than the others. He treated me a little

differently in the sense that I remember very keenly one day he paired me with a guy named Jack, another mechanic there. And it was to do a routine maintenance, lubrication, change oil, that kind of thing on a line truck, a digging truck [01:03:00] that would dig holes to plant poles -- and to do the maintenance and also the state inspection on it, so you know pull wheels to look at brake lining and that kind of thing. Jack was not a very good mechanic. He hated working with me. He refused to speak to me the entire time that we did the work on this vehicle, so I ended up having to... All the parts of the vehicle that he checked over, since he wouldn't tell me what the condition was, I had to do the whole -- I had to do his part of the job also. And so when it was done, it had taken me twice as long as it should have taken two people to do that job because I -- he wouldn't talk to me. And I went to Al, and I said, you know, "This is what happened." I said, "Please don't put me with someone again." He said, "I understand, I won't, I won't do that to you again. You know I put you -- You're a junior mechanic with a state inspection license, I put you with someone [01:04:00] who was farther along in the program, but obviously, it was a problem, it made --" You know, he didn't say all this out loud, but this was the gist of the interaction we had that

this was an embarrassment to this man you know, plus he wasn't a very good mechanic, so you know he never did that again. So I did all my work on my own. Very rare that I worked with someone, extremely rare. So Al was really good about that, really supportive. He protected me in that way. Along the way -- when I worked on the garage, I would think of it this way. I looked at the men that I worked with, and there were the guys who were like, it's no problem that you're a female working on this job, and those became my friend, they're my friends and good friends. And about [01:05:00] a third of the mechanics, it was like, okay, so you're here now, that's fine, no big deal, but we didn't become close. And then the last third, they were the problem ones, they were the ones -- and you know it took me a long time to understand this. It took me a while to understand this, a couple of years, but I came to understand that those men that really hated working alongside a woman or working with a -- or having -- the idea of having a woman as a mechanic. Those men were ones that were not good mechanics, they were not confident in their skills, they didn't really understand mechanics very well, it was not really their thing. And those were the ones that were -- gave me the hard time, all the time. They were constantly threatened because... And I realized,

they might -- be in a situation where I do a much better job than they did and then what did that mean about them. And so [01:06:00] those were the ones that would sabotage my work where when I'd walk away from the vehicles and go to the restroom or whatever, come back, they'd had poured transmission fluid down the carburetor so that when you start it up, it would smoke like crazy. You know. They'd change the -- loosened the distributor and changed the timing on the engine so that the engine would backfire and wouldn't run, you know those kinds of things, so... But then, there were the guys who realized that I could be helpful because I have little hands and I could get in really tight spaces, where when you're working on the hydraulic systems of a line trucks, the digging trucks and the bucket trucks, that I could get in these very tight spaces to get fittings loosened or started again to get them threaded and all kinds of places that were little places, so... But the one thing I remember when I first became -- started to do mechanical work there, [01:07:00] a lot of the guys were upset with me, and finally after a couple of weeks, the union steward, the shop steward took me aside and said, "Look, you have to slow down. You're working way too fast, and you're making us look bad, so you need to slow down," (laughs) so I did. And, you know, I

have to say I always enjoyed working for a union. It made -- The union is real -- really instrumental in me being able to keep my job, you know. The union was a fair enough union. It had its problems just like everything does in life, but they were about keeping the union employees employed. And so, you know, there could be... Along [01:08:00] the way, I wanted a place to change my clothes and shower just like the guys did. You're filthy dirty, and you have to crawl into your vehicle and drive home. They didn't have a locker room for the women. The first thing they did was to take -- to -- in response to my request, the union stood behind me, but management was not about to build one woman a locker room, and so what they did was they changed my hours by half an hour. So I would use the men's locker room at the beginning of the shift and at the end of the shift. My shift was a half an hour different, so I could use the women's locker room. You know, the union made -- meant that I was going to get -- I was a mechanic trainee just like the other mechanic trainees; I got paid the same amount they did. So I really appreciated working for a union. [01:09:00] But I think that I was a pretty darn good mechanic. I'm not one to toot my horn, but I do think I was a pretty darn good mechanic, and that's what changes people over time. That's

what changes discrimination. So along the way occasionally, women would bid into the job of transportation handyman, and it was always a mixed blessing. It would be nice to have another woman there, but if they weren't putting out a thousand percent, then it was -- made my life harder. And along the way, the women that did come through, pretty much all of them were in the category that, you know, they weren't really mechanics. They didn't have the training or the inclination or the, yeah, aptitude for it. And over time, [01:10:00] it no longer became a problem for me because they did recognize that I was a good mechanic. And they'd say things like, "Oh well, you're different." But I had plenty of people from other departments, like the linemen would come in to drop off their vehicles, and they come up to me and say, "You know you're taking the job away from a man. You don't belong here. You're taking a job away from a man," and I'd say, "Well, who's going to support me, you know? I have to have a way to support me too. Why shouldn't I be able to have this job?" "Well, you should marry a man and then there would be -- and then that job would be there available for a man."

MF: Well, I mean, that has -- that kind of leads me to kind of wonder about what it was like to be a lesbian working at

PPL during that time period. I'm curious, was there homophobia in the workplace? What was it like to be [01:11:00] at PPL as a lesbian person?

JL: Yeah, that was really tough. I was - It was hard enough being a woman in a nontraditional job, and then to be lesbian on top of it was really hard. And so, I was -- The whole time I worked in the garage, I was closeted, I was not out but every -- you know, virtually everybody knew it. (laughs) Well, I don't know; it was kind of weird. The guys who gave me a hard time, they seem to know it, they seem to pick up on it. They guys who were my friends didn't exactly seem to pick up on it because actually several of those friends along the way expressed that they had a romantic interest in me in one form or another -- two of them did. We managed to weather through that and not go in that direction without me saying, you know, I am not interested in [01:12:00] relationship with a man other than a friend. And we managed to maintain our friendships. Eventually after I left the garage, I ended up in -- I was a mechanic for a number of years and then a job came along as the parts person. They called it the transportation material handler. And the fellow who was in that job, they needed to have a second person, and his name was Dave. He came to me and asked me, "Would you please apply for this

job?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, the pay is about the same, and I'm not a mechanic, and you know you're really good at what you do. And there's some men that are applying for the job -- going to apply for the job that I do not want to work with, so would you please apply for the job?" And at that time, I was getting really tired of [01:13:00] the guys who would sabotage my work and so I thought, you know, maybe -- it was about the same pay, maybe this would be a good idea. It broke my heart to stop being a mechanic but I... And it was a hard transition for me because I love what I did. I just was tired of the struggle every day coming and having to deal with some, some man (laughs) who just couldn't wrap his head around the idea that I would be -- as a woman, be working there. It was a blow to their ego and so there was a certain number of men who it was constantly -- they were out to get me, but like I had said before, not all of them. But I decided I would do that. And so I became material handler and really kind of became the parts [01:14:00] manager, even though that was not a title, that was not my title. Because the other fellow really wanted to just do the paperwork, you know, pay the bills for the parts, and this, that, and the other, and wanted me to be the one to find the parts for all the equipment we have. And so it turned

out, I ended up loving that job. I could use my mechanical background to do that with my job, and I could use my knack for accounting and my knack for problem solving. And I would find parts sometimes all over the world. I remember one time, I had to -- I ended up pursuing -- looking, and I would read the diagrams for all the vehicles, you know, and all the hydraulic plumbing and everything. We had a cable stringer that needed a part, and the cable stringers were used a lot in dock work, you know. You'd think, well, what do you need a [01:15:00] -- why would you go to...? I went to the manufacturer of this particular piece of equipment, and it was used for dock work, but it was also used to string electrical cable, heavy -- really heavy cable. I ended up talking to somebody in Italy to find this part. And I was equally as good at doing that job if not better because I was -- I got to operate by myself. I used my mechanical ability and also my problem-solving abilities, and I felt I was really appreciated by the management there. In fact, sometimes, one of the poor mechanics would ask me for a part, and I'd think, why in the world would you want that part, and I'd ask him. I'd say, "Well, what's the problem with the vehicle?" and they'd say, "Well, it's doing this or that or not doing this or that, and I want this part." So I'd say, "Okay," and then I'd

have [01:16:00] to go to the foreman and say, you know, "So-and-so wants me to order this part. This is what's wrong with it, I don't think this is the problem, I think he needs this other part instead." And the foreman would say, "Yup, you're right, go ahead and order it." So that didn't make me popular with that third group of mechanics who weren't competent at their job. But I was on a much more level playing field because I was the only game in town. They had to come to me for their part. So if you treat me too badly, you might not get the part you needed in the time you need it. (laughs)

MF: So PPL today has an LGBT staff group. At that time, were -- did you know other people at PPL that were lesbian or gay, or was it mostly like people knew but didn't know or [01:17:00] was it --

JL: No, you knew, you knew who the gay people were there, you know. Your gaydar told you who they were. You gingerly approach them and then they acknowledge they were gay also. So in '95, they started cutting back on services, and they went through the transportation department. And because of the union, I was -- the fellow Dave who asked me to take that job as the parts person, you know, he was there first, so they cut back to one material handler in every garage, so I lost my job in 1995. I went up to the service center,

which was also on the same property and became a dispatcher for -- a power dispatcher for repairs of electrical -- you know sending people to repair electrical equipment for storms and that kind of thing. And that's when I became out. I was actually [01:18:00] outed by a lesbian up there who was not a very nice person and, you know, decided she would do that for me whether I liked it or not. But in retrospect, it turned out to be one of the best things in my life because I was just tired of trying to be closeted. And so that's when I got involved in -- shortly thereafter, another woman, a lesbian there -- PPL announced they were going to start diversity groups, and a woman activist there named Donna asked that there be a gay group and so that was begun. And I ended up writing the proposal for [01:19:00] lesbian and gay rights for employees. Because at that time, you know, if you were a heterosexual employee of PPL, you got all kinds of benefits for your family. And if you had -- you were in a gay relationship, because you couldn't be married, you couldn't get any of those benefits. So the biggest argument I made in the proposal I wrote for all kinds of benefits for gay and lesbians was, you know, you are -- it should be equal pay for equal work. And that's what you say you have here at this company, but it's not because all of the single people are subsidizing

the married couples because they get a huge advantage cost-wise of paying for the benefits for the rest of their family. Whereas [01:20:00] our lesbian or gay partner does not get those benefits and has to go out and buy them elsewhere. It took seven years. I think it was seven years... I'm not sure about the timing here whether it was -- it took -- I think it took seven years and maybe, nine, seven years for management to get the benefits. It was either five years and seven years or seven years and nine years. Management got the benefit first, employees that were gay and lesbian that were management, and then it took two more years to get the union to give us the benefits. And I still to this day cannot believe that the union stood behind us. (laughs) It wasn't easy to get them to stand behind us. It was actually from the larger [01:21:00] union leadership of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers who pretty much forced our local IBEW to give gays benefits. Prior to that time, if your significant other in life died -- and we had several of these situations. If that person died, you might not even get the time off to go to the funeral.

MF: Not all of our listeners, especially younger generations, will be familiar with the kinds of benefits that you were asking for. But what you've just described is like the

ability to attend a funeral, the ability to leave work to go to a hospital if a loved one is, you know, experiencing illness. I'm sure life insurance might have been something else. But could you describe a few of the benefits that you really identified in that white paper and that you really fought for [01:22:00] for those seven years for all gay and lesbian PPL employees to have access to those benefits? What were they? What did you really prioritize?

JL: Sure. So I mean, the first one - The first benefit we got was a single benefit and what was the right to go -- have the day off to go to the funeral of your partner. That was the first one. And you had to declare that you had a relationship, and you had to prove that you had that relationship by -- you know, now, this isn't something that anybody who was married had to do. They didn't have to turn in their marriage certificate in order to get benefits. They just had to say, "Hey, this is my wife or my husband, and these are my kids' names, and these are their birthdates," and that kind of thing. But the very first benefit we got was a funeral benefit and bereavement benefit. And that was that you could have from the time you're -- just like the straight people got, [01:23:00] from the time your partner died, if you had them registered as your partner, to the time that the funeral occurred, you

could have those days off and then you had to return to work the day after the funeral. And we had, I know in dispatch, there was someone who was in that case. Well, actually, in that department, it was called -- the fellow held the job of system operator, and his partner died. And because system operators are -- you must -- there aren't a lot of them, and they had to be on the job 24/7, and they did a lot of overtime just like the people in dispatching did, this fellow, they would not let him go because they didn't have a replacement. And so I can't imagine, I can't imagine how much -- how hard that must have been and how much that must have hurt. I was amazed that the fellow hadn't even -- [01:24:00] hadn't quit the company, but he weathered through it, you know. There was nothing for us, you know, when we started, nothing. When I say it took the seven and nine years, that was to get health insurance. So we're looking to get health insurance, you know and you couldn't be married at that time as a gay person. So you were looking to get that health insurance. I remember there was one woman in the -- our group there at PPL. The name of the group was called GLOW, Gays and Lesbians in the Workplace, and Tammy was her name. And she had -- She would call her her wife, even though they legally weren't married, and her wife had two children. Actually, the two

children were born by artificial insemination in the time that they were together. And so Tammy was a great poster child for our cause because we would occasionally be able to have a meeting with someone in higher management, and we would bring Tammy in to plead her case -- she was great. And Tammy worked as a power plant operator out in Central Pennsylvania, and she would come in. She was a tough broad, but she would tell them, you know, "It breaks my heart when my children are really sick, and I don't have health insurance for them. And, you know, I must try to take them to the hospital and get care for them, and I can't get care for them really very well because I don't have insurance, and my partner does not have insurance." And so, you know, eventually, the best that they were able to do was to get her partner and the children who were her biological children, she had carried them, on Medicaid. But still on Medicaid, the services were really poor. And so [01:26:00] she was one of the big factors that helped turn them around, but it was a lot of factors that -- a lot, a lot of work over seven years to try to get them to give health insurance. When you got health insurance, they made it clear that -- the legal department at PPL made it clear that if you left the company -- well, let me not even say left the company. If you retired and you're -- you

went on Medicare then because you're a retired employee, that your spouse would no longer -- if the spouse was younger, they would be kicked off of the PPL insurance policy because you weren't legally married. So actually, the rights that I fought for, for all those years, I never ended up using because my partner and now, my -- who's now my wife, Michele, was eight years younger, and she's self-employed. [01:27:00] So we were - We looked at that and said, "You know, I'm going to retire, you'll get bumped off. You have a preexisting health condition and you will end up not being able to be insured, so we're going to have to continue insu-- you know you're going to have to continue insuring yourself because I don't dare put you on this policy. Because, one, you'll be in your late fifties when I will retire, and trying to find you an insurance policy would be very difficult, that we could afford." It was already -- It was really already unaffordable, I mean, until I was able to get married -- till we were able to get married and then I could go back to PPL and say, "Okay, now even though I'm retired, you need to put my wife on your insurance policy." You know, that was in 2015, not very long ago. (laughs) [01:28:00] But by that time, Michele was paying twelve thousand dollars a year for health insurance as a self-employed person. So you know when you

say help younger people understand, this was huge. Also, I was able to get a life insurance policy for Michele when I was at PPL. That was huge because when you couldn't be married, you're talking about if one of you passes away, the other one has to pay fifteen percent inheritance tax on everything you have accumulated in your life together, and Michele and I have been together thirty-six years, and we maintained -- early on, we got life insurance policies against each other so that if one passed away, the other one would have the life insurance policy to pay the inheritance tax on everything we had built in life.

MF: So while you were working [01:29:00] with GLOW at PPL, were you aware of other LGBT organizations in the valley that were working on similar issues? Or did you have connections with other activist organizations in the valley?

JL: We did. Air Products was one we often -- that we were connected to, and we would often talk with, maybe meet with here and there. They were ahead of us in trying to get benefits, but in the end -- I'm not sure if they ever got benefits in the end. They were -- The people at Air Products were -- all the people we worked with were professional people, people with degrees, so they were considered management employees at Air Products. So I

think because of that, Air Products acknowledged them earlier than PPL acknowledged our [01:30:00] gay and lesbian workers. But I think because of maybe financial issues, the company was -- I'm not sure why that Air Products seemed to struggle. You would have thought they would get all the benefits before we did.

MF: Were outside of employee -- like industry-based LGBT organizations, were you aware of social or health-based LGBT organizations in the Lehigh Valley? Or were you involved with any other organizations outside of the -- outside of GLOW at PPL?

JL: I was - On the individual level, I got involved with a community service group, a gay community service group called AIDS Outreach. I didn't have the time to try and dig out when I had [01:31:00] actually all the -- when I started volunteering for them, but I'm pretty sure it was somewhere around '92, '93 maybe that I volunteered to be a worker at AIDS Outreach. At that time, the AIDS epidemic had been going on for some time, and it was getting activists -- AIDS activists were getting their stories out more and more in the press. There was still a hugely negative sentiment around someone with AIDS. When I started with that group, what that group did was I was, what they called, an AIDS buddy. So they would pair a

volunteer to be a support person for someone who had AIDS that had come to AIDS Outreach for services. [01:32:00] And so as an AIDS buddy, you know I was there to be the cheerleader, you know, the person who would help when someone is really sick, get groceries, to be an advocate for services, which might be health services, you know, all kinds of things. And when I started, I volunteered for that job because I had read an article in the newspaper and I thought -- just it moved me to tears. I thought it's hard enough to die, let alone die without a single person in the world there to support you, to give you comfort, to touch you. People were just scared out of their minds by AIDS. And AIDS Outreach not only provided the buddy [01:33:00] program, but they educated the public that it's like, you're not going to get -- you're not going to get AIDS from this person who has AIDS by touching him. You're not going to get it unless you have a transfer of blood products or -- and that kind of thing. You just -- You are more of a danger to that person who has AIDS and a compromised immune system than they ever will be of you. If you're not having sex with them, you know, you're not swapping saliva or blood or semen -- I'm sorry to be graphic, but that is basically a blood product, semen -- and so you're not going to get AIDS, and you're not really

at risk at all. I mean, the first AIDS buddy I had when he was hospitalized -- every time he'd be hospitalized, they had him in a quarantine room. The people would -- or the nursing staff would come in and [01:34:00] when they absolutely had to. They pretty much avoid coming into the room. And they'd be -- They were scared to death of AIDS and not unlike the situation we're in right now with COVID-19. But I think in a lot of ways, it was even worse because there was the stigma of in our country it was, you don't have this disease unless you're gay on top of it. So you have this horrible disease, it also means you're gay and we don't -- society, for the most part, really ostracizes and does not like gay people at this time in history. And so, I couldn't imagine trying to live with AIDS or die with AIDS without a support system so that's why I got involved. It was hard back then.

MF: For how many people were you a buddy [01:35:00] during that time period in the early '90s?

JL: I worked for AIDS Outreach until the year 2000, and I had three AIDS buddies. I was an AIDS buddy for three clients over that time. The first one, his name was Brian. He didn't -- It was early on, and there was -- they didn't even have a combination drug regimen at that time, so he did not last long. So it was maybe a year that we were

together. The second person that I was an AIDS buddy for, his name was Nick, and I had him for a good number of years. By that time, they had combination drug therapies, but again, they weren't the greatest, and Nick was not [01:36:00] -- Nick was -- well I'll just say it. Nick had drug-use problems and so that being a drug user and having AIDS was pretty darn tough on someone's immune system. He lived for -- We were probably together for five years -- four years -- maybe four years, yeah, maybe like three to four years, I guess, until he passed away. And then the last person I had was a woman who was a heterosexual woman who had gotten AIDS from having sex partners -- male sex partners that had AIDS because -- probably because they were drug users. I think she dabbled some in it but not hugely in drugs. And she had four boys, and she was the last [01:37:00] client that I worked with.

MF: Did you -- in 2000... I guess my question is sort of like, did that organization, was that still -- organization still going strong into the early twenty-first century, or did the volunteer structure change in that, in AIDS Outreach as an organization?

JL: I can't really -- I looked on the internet this morning to see if AIDS Outreach still existed. It looks like it does still exist. I know they worked closely with the Lehigh

Valley Hospital to provide services for people who have AIDS. You know people are able to live decently, decently well with AIDS these days, so the picture has changed a lot, you know. I stopped being a volunteer for AIDS Outreach in the year 2000. The last woman, the woman [01:38:00] that I had, her name was Marie. The woman who ran AIDS Outreach is a wonderful person named Linda Lobach, and to this day, I think of Linda Lobach every couple of months probably because she had a great saying. She would tell the volunteers and all the people that work for her that "When you're dealing with people with AIDS, you know, AIDS is one thing, but there's a lot of other behavior that enters into working with another human being and trying to support them." And so she would say -- When there was a problem, she would say, "Take the AIDS out of it, and what are you left with? Is this reasonable or not reasonable?" (laughs) And so I still use that little bit of wisdom and logic to deal with a lot of things in life, take the whatever out of it, and what are you left with? Yeah, this is not reasonable behavior. (laughs) [01:39:00] So I parted ways in 2000 because the last client I had, Marie was... She ended up losing her four children because -- I often had to be the parent. These kids would go without food. I'd have to, you know I'd be -- I didn't have to,

but I wanted to try to help them. Eventually, somebody reported her to -- a neighbor, or someone she knew reported her to children and youth services, and they took her four kids away because she was... She had AIDS, but take the AIDS out of it, and you were left with someone who was doing drugs, drinking to excess at times, and basically hanging out at bars to find men, and leaving her kids unattended, [01:40:00] so... I thought that it was a good time to part ways. AIDS Outreach had been -- to me and my way of thinking, had been established for a very good reason, and that reason was getting lost. And it may have just been... I don't want to discourage AIDS Outreach -- [cat purrs] Hi, Spanky. This is my cat Spanky. (laughs) Say hi Spank. (laughs) Okay, Spanky, go play somewhere. I don't, by any means, want to disparage AIDS Outreach. It was a wonderful organization and did a lot of good work and probably still does a lot of good work. And it may just have been the client I had, but I thought I'd had enough. I needed to do something else. [01:41:00]

MF: Well, we're nearing the end of the interview, and there two sort of areas that I'd like to explore just a little bit further. I'm interested, you've mentioned a few times about being a Quaker in the '70s. I'm wondering if we could talk a little bit about your spirituality? So I'm

wondering if you could just discuss a little bit about your emergence into the Quaker church and maybe the evolution of your faith?

JL: Okay. Well, I started going to Quaker Meeting in the early '70s I guess. And I mentioned my psychology professor, Tony LoGiudice went there, and that's how I ended up attending a Quaker Meeting. You know, he said that I might like this place. [01:42:00] Maybe he recognized I was a lesbian -- that was years before I knew I was a lesbian -- I don't know. But maybe just because I was in a nontraditional -- looking to get into a nontraditional job or probably because, you know, Quaker Meeting was a place that, you know, allowed people to -- it was not dogmatic, a dogmatic type of religion. They encouraged people to be freethinkers. You could believe in God, or you could have eastern India -- East Indian background and religions. So you could be of any kind of faith and be accepted there. There were people who were agnostic or atheists. It was a hodgepodge of people that basically believed there is a spiritual light within each of us that [01:43:00] we can touch and nurture and share with each other. They were -- Quakers were early pioneers of endorsing domestic partnership relationships. Before there was marriage, there were certain states where you could go and be united

in the -- as a domestic partner with each other. So it turned out to be a good place for me.

MF: Did you maint- Are you still in the Quaker church, or was that your consistent faith community through your adult life?

JL: I will always be a Quaker at heart. They worship and they don't... We have [01:44:00] what's called an unprogrammed -- the one in Lehigh Valley was called an -- what we called an unprogrammed Meeting where there was no minister. You would sit in silence and meditate. When you felt that a strong urge to speak that you had been given a message from -- a spiritual type message to share with others, then you would stand and share that message. And I will always be -- When I say I'll always be a Quaker at heart, it is because that's the way I prefer to worship or to -- that's my spirituality that speaks to me. I'm not a member of Quaker Meeting any longer. There are no Quaker Meetings where I live now. The closest I could come is Unitarian Universalist Church, which again is very supportive of gay people. Any disenfranchised groups, both the Quakers and the Unitarian Universalists are -- champion [01:45:00] rights of the oppressed or the disenfranchised group. But it's very -- They worship very differently and so I will -- I like the people at the Unitarian Universalist Church. You

know, I share a lot of the same values with them, but their way of worshipping is entirely different. They have a minister and a programmed service, and so... That's not so much to my liking.

MF: It sounds to me like your faith -- the faith communities that you've been involved in, the Quakers and now the Unitarian Universalist, have been really affirming of both women and LGBT people. Like the MCCLV church in Bethlehem has been -- in Bethlehem and Allentown has been really supportive of LGBT people. Would you say that you ever struggled as an lesbian with [01:46:00] your faith? Or would you say that your faith always, sort of, confirmed the value of your identity, of your sexual identity?

JL: I didn't have a religious faith until I was a young adult and did a bunch of searching at different churches to try to find where I fit in. I did that for a good number of years. So it wasn't until maybe like 1972 -- I would have been twenty-two at the time, twenty-three, around there -- that I found Quaker Meeting. So it's probably to my advantage that I didn't have much of a religious upbringing because even not having a religious upbringing, I still struggle with -- that I was a gay person and that this was wrong in society's eyes. So, you know, there were some guilt but not as much as -- I certainly had a number of

friends who had been, say, [01:47:00] brought up in -- maybe the Catholic church was one of the hardest ones. If you were brought in the Catholic faith and you were going to be gay, you were doomed to struggle and struggle and struggle with what you had been taught was wrong to do and try to figure out how to come out and be a reasonably happy and well-functioning gay person.

MF: That certainly was the case for me being raised Catholic; it was a little bit of a challenge. Okay. So since we're nearing the end of the interview, I'm wondering if you could share the Michele story? Like how did you meet Michele, if you could talk a little bit about this primary partnership in your life?

JL: Well, it's pretty bizarre. (laughs)The woman -- Before Michele, before I met Michele, I had [01:48:00] two other lovers. The first one was Diane, and the second one was Janice. And Janice was with me a couple of years and maybe four I guess it was, and she had two children. We all lived together, and Janice had been a straight woman and then she decided that being a gay woman was what she wanted. And she did that for four years and then decided she wanted to be straight again. So she left me and I had the house still in Catasauqua, the town house. I could make it financially on my own, but I had other, a couple of

loans because I had made some renovations to the house. I think I had a car loan out, and I was really strapped for cash, so I needed to find a roommate fast. So I asked my friend Dixie White. You know, this was one of the people I said, "I'm looking for a housemate that's going to be probably somebody who's a lesbian or [01:49:00] possibly a gay man, but somebody, you know, that wouldn't be offended living with me, and I need to find somebody fast." So Dixie had gone to -- she put out the word to a couple of people. And this one day, she went to the dentist, and the dentist, hygienist, or maybe it was the office manager was a gay woman, a lesbian, and she said, "I have this friend who's looking for a housemate." And so, this woman whose name was Gay (laughs) took down my name and my phone number and said, "I'll keep that in mind." And so as I recall, I think I have these details right -- Michele might confirm it when you speak to her -- but Michele was a patient I believe and [01:50:00] came in to the dentist's office and so Gay told her. And Michele had just lost her lover who had gone and run off with some woman, other woman and so Michele needed a place to stay. And so this woman, Gay who was a total stranger to me and not very well known at all to Michele ended up putting us together. And Michele contacted me. She came over to look at the house, and I

was pretty traumatized at having been left and I was pretty scared of... I just wanted a roommate to help me pay the expenses and so I -- and so Michele had -- she smoked and while she was there, I asked her if I could get her something to drink. It was during the day, oh probably late afternoon, and I didn't expect her to say she wanted some type of alcoholic drink, but she asked for an alcoholic drink. And [01:51:00] so I was like, oh, I was a little scared, she wanted alcohol and she smokes, and I told her. I said, you know, "No one smokes in this house. I will not allow you to smoke, you'd have to smoke outside." And, you know, she was nervous, had a couple of drinks and so I wasn't sure about that. And so she said, "Well, let me think about it." And she called me back sometime later and said, "I have decided that I don't want to become your roommate," she said, "but I would like to date you." (laughs) So that's how we met.

MF: Well, what did you say? What did you say when she said that?

JL: So we started dating. You know it was tough because we both struggled financially because neither one of us ended up with a roommate. We did that for about six months and then she moved into the house with me. (laughs) [01:52:00]

MF: That's a great story. (laughter) So how -- If you reflect back on your relationship because you get -- been together decades, how would you describe your relationship with Michele?

JL: Well, Michele is a psychologist by profession, so.. But you take the psychologist out of it, as Linda Lobach would say, and you're just left with a person where you have to learn how to negotiate a lifetime together. Do we fight? Sure, we fight at times over the years. It's gotten to be less and less and less, but you know we both needed to grow, and we grew together. And so we have a pretty solid relationship at this point. And [01:53:00] we are a team. We've been together longer than any of her siblings and their relationships. Let me think here a minute. All of Michele's siblings are divorced and have remarried or -- let's see, are they all remarried now? Yup, they're all remarried. They've been divorced at least once if not twice. And so occasionally when they were going through the hard times in their relationships, they would ask us, "Well, what's the -- what's your secret to staying together all these years?" And we'd say one word, "Commitment." You want to make a relationship work, you have to be committed to the relationship. When you're having a hard time, you don't get to run away. You have to stick it out

and work it through, and it is no magic bullet, you know. You're not going to be madly in love with each other like you were [01:54:00] at the first for the rest of your life. It's going to be a different kind of love that grows very deep because through thick and thin, you stick together, which builds trust, which is an issue for a lot of gay relationships. And you are there for each other and don't break that trust, and you'll get through it, whatever it is.

MF: What did marriage equality mean for you and Michele?

JL: Oh my God, it was huge. It was huge, just huge, and I'm surprised. We were so shocked that we got the right to get married in Pennsylvania, the state of Pennsylvania. It was 2014, May of 2014 when they passed that, and my brother-in-law who lived in Texas -- my sister had passed at that -- by that time -- my brother-in-law who never speaks to me called me. [01:55:00] He's an extremely quiet guy, extremely quiet -- called me and said, "I just heard this on the news." He was the one who told me that it had been passed in Pennsylvania. Later that day, I got -- the phone rang, and I picked it up and it was -- I didn't understand what I was listening to at first, but it was a conference call with the gay... I can't even remember at the moment which gay group it was, but they were having a

conference call, the lawyers that had fought for these rights and talking about, you know what had happened, what had transpired, and what it meant. And so when I say it was huge, we've always been married whether we could be legally married or not. We've always been married in our minds, in our hearts. But it meant that we no longer had to maintain huge insurance policies to try and help pay for [01:56:00] -- you know if one of us would pass away, the other one would inherit it. We didn't have to have these really complicated legal documents. We didn't have to... We could be married, and Michele could be on my insurance policy at the company I used to -- that I retired from. I mean that was the biggest one. You know, what did it mean to have marriage equality? Health insurance. (laughs) That's what it meant, health insurance and the right to inherit without having to pay tax. That's it in a nutshell. You no longer had to produce documents, if one of us was in the hospital, that said we had the right to see each other or to make decisions if someone was in poor health, and we were in that situation a number of times. Doctors that would fight with us, get out of here, you don't have a right to be here, huge.

MF: Did you have a ceremony together when you got married, or what was your marriage [01:57:00] like?

JL: We got married at the Unitarian Universalist Church that we belong in -- belong to here in Athens, in the area, Athens and Sheshequin. And we -- Good friends of ours from the church, Katie and Chris were the first couple in the county to go to the courthouse and apply for a marriage license. Michele had to think about it a day or two, what it might mean to be out as a psychologist in business for herself. And she thought about it for two days and said, "That's it, I'm not going to live in the closet, we're doing this." We became the third couple to apply. And interestingly, the second couple to apply in our county was from New York State where they already had marriage, the ability to get marriage -- be married for a couple of years, [01:58:00] but the county that they lived in in New York State were very close to the border. The clerk there that would issue the marriage license was very homophobic and gave them a very hard time and so they came to Pennsylvania to get their license. So Katie and Chris were the first and Michele and I were the third applicants, and our minister was just finishing up a sabbatical from the church. She came back in June -- I think as of June the first and Katie and Chris and Michele and I were all married at the same day in the same ceremony. We wanted to do it quickly because we were afraid that the state of Pennsylvania would

withdraw. The legislation would be overturned, and we would no longer have the right, or it would become a legal issue. So we wanted to get married quickly, so it would at least make it tougher for them to [01:59:00] divorce -- to divorce us, so to say, so... And our anniversary is coming up June the fourth, and Katie and Chris and Michele and I still join together every year on -- if not that day, the closest day that we can to it to celebrate that we were all married on the same day.

MF: Oh, that's just wonderful. Well, we are well over 90 minutes, so... I have more that I'd love to talk about, but I feel like I really need to end the interview. But before we do that, Jane, I just want to ask, is there anything that we really -- that we missed today that you really felt you wanted to share in this interview?

JL: Not that I can think of. You know, I will share one story, and I don't know why this just popped in my head. But when I retired from PPL [02:00:00] by that time, I had -- it was a good company to work for, good benefits and good pay, so I kept taking jobs that were there. I always considered the garage my home. That's really who I am, really where I spent the most time, but I moved on to other jobs. But when I retired, I had not worked in the garage. I retired in 2012; I had not worked in the garage since 1995. When I

retired, it was the guys in the garage who threw me a party, and that meant the world to me.

MF: Well, it's clear that they agreed, too, that you really were a star in that garage, and they felt really connected to you.

JL: Even the ones that gave me a problem when I worked there, after I was forced to be out, you know, I go back and visit periodically, they all become my friends. [02:01:00] And so we all stay in touch till this day.

MF: Thank you for sharing that story. I guess if -- The way that I'll end our interview is simply by saying, Jane, it's just really been an honor, a real privilege to hear your story today. Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and to talk about your life.

JL: Well, thank you for inviting me, Mary. I'm a pretty low-key person. At first I really didn't know if I wanted to do something like this, but I thought, oh, let me be out of character a little bit and do it. So I hope it works out for you, what you needed. Thank you for the opportunity.

MF: Thank you so much.

END OF AUDIO FILE