

**Patricia Sullivan**

**MARY FOLTZ:** My name is Mary Foltz, I'm here with Trish Sullivan in her home in Allentown. Today is July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019. We're here as a part of the LGBT Community Oral History Project and Trish has so graciously agreed to be the first person that we're interviewing for the oral history project. The project is sponsored by the Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center and we did receive funding from the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium for which we're also very grateful. So to begin I'm just going to ask Trish could you introduce yourself?

**PATRICIA SULLIVAN:** I'm Patricia Sullivan.

**MF:** Wonderful and I'm hoping that you, could you spell your name for us?

**PS:** P-A-T-R-I-C-I-A J. Sullivan S-U-L-L-I-V-A-N.

**MF:** What is your birthdate?

**PS:** January 28, 1945.

**MF:** And then I am just going to ask, before we started this interview you and I read a -- or talked about a consent form, and do you consent to this interview today?

**PS:** Yes.

**MF:** Fantastic. Well as I said, we're just so grateful that you're willing to sit here with us today and tell us a little bit about your life, and I thought we could start by just asking you to tell me a little bit about your childhood. Where are you from?

**PS:** Well I was born on a barrier island, the first barrier island off the coast of Florida, Amelia Island, Florida. And I lived there for a part of my childhood, and then I moved inland, but I was born on an island which was pretty great. Liz and I are fortunate enough to still have a place there which is nice.

**MF:** What was it like to grow up in Florida?

**PS:** Well Florida it's a mixed thing, it's a lot of old people and a lot of conservative people particularly in the northern part where I was from, I was right on the Georgia

Florida line and it was a very, very small town. And I have to say I grew up in the segregated South, I went to segregated schools all my life and I unfortunately witnessed lots of bad things, you know. And so when I was very young I decided that I had to get out of there and I decided very early that education was my way to do it. So I worked very hard to get a good education and be able to leave there and never go back except to visit. Because the politics is just very hard in Florida.

**MF:** Well I'm curious about that, I mean it sounds to me like you're talking about how your childhood was shaped by sort of seeing institutionalized racism or racism in the South.

**PS:** Well I have to -- maybe I should start by saying something about my parents, because my father was a World War I veteran, he served under King George. And he left the country as a fifteen-year-old to go join the Canadian Army before the United States got in the war, because he felt so strongly about what was happening to the country, and he lost his citizenship as a result of it. And he was gassed in the war, and he came back, and he obviously had very strong feelings about politics. He met my mother on the day she was born, he held her in his arms, and he told the

family, "I'm going to marry this person." And he did and he was with her for seventy-five years and she was Canadian, and they left Maine in Canada, he'd actually been born in Maine. They left Canada and came back to the United States during the depression and drove to Florida and stopped in the first town they came to in Florida and made a home for themselves.

And my family always had very diverse friends, I recall in my childhood we had a family that we were very close to that was from Persia which is currently Iran. We had several Jewish families that were friends and at least two of them had tattoos from concentration camps. And so my family was very, I wouldn't say they were progressive, but they were very oriented toward diversity. And when I was a kid they made a real point of trying to help me understand that the place we lived and the way we lived, we couldn't overlook the things that were happening there. Like you know if -- when I was young and it was segregated if a person of color came to your house they came to the back door, and they would take a hoe and tap on the steps, they wouldn't even come up the steps to the door. And yet my parents had black friends who would come to the back door and come in the house and I'd play with the kids. And my

mom would sit and sew and cook with the parent or the grandmother who was there for the day. But that wasn't something you did, so they were very brave about that, my father would go do business for black households, he was an electrical contractor and he would actually go into the community and do services for them. People wouldn't do that, they wouldn't let them use the bathroom, they wouldn't let them -- anything, you know. And so I was very fortunate to have a family that appreciated diversity and made me realize that I shouldn't fall into these habits of things that went on around me.

At one point I lived across the street from the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan and I learned very young not to just trust everything and everybody, because I sort of had my own personal "Scout" moment when I discovered that this person was the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan. It was very scary. So - And yet I didn't have those problems, I didn't experience those problems, I experienced bullying and things because I was different, I was an outsider, but I saw that happening, I saw all the injustice of that. And it made me want to leave there because I couldn't, I felt I couldn't live that way, I couldn't live in a place where you know there were such strong divisions between people.

And so I -- as soon as I graduated from high school I left, and I never went back, you know. But my parents were very, very amazing that way, so.

**MF:** What was your relationship like with your father, what was your relationship like with your mother?

**PS:** Well, my father didn't say much, he was a very quiet person, he was a very gentle person. He spent a lot of time reading to me. My whole life he read to me, he read me stories, he wrote poetry, he read me poetry. That was the biggest contact I had with him. My mom I was with almost all the time since my dad had been gassed in the war and when I was very young he got sick and they thought he had TB because there was TB all over. And they put him in a sanitarium for a year and isolated him, took him from us, my mom didn't have a job, we had no income because we only lived on my dad's salary. And so my mom took in children to take care of children to make a living and she tied tobacco at the farm where they raised tobacco. She would go at tobacco harvesting time, that was a very skilled chore to do that, you had to be very good to do it. And I used to help her take care of the kids, and so I spent a lot of time taking care of little kids. I could like take twins

and diaper both of them at the same time, and wash diapers and all those things you had to do back in that day. And then we discovered after he had been in the sanitarium for a year that he didn't have TB, it was the effects of the gassing during the war. And so we lost that whole period of our life where we had to readjust to all these things because he couldn't be with us. And then he came back, he always had a job doing something, you know, he would go into places, people would pay him with chickens or pay him with vegetables, or money. He didn't care whatever, he would do work for anybody that would pay him for things.

It sounds so rural doesn't it, (laughs) but that's the way it was. And he was very educated he -- not formally educated, neither of my parents went to, got to go to school, he was, my dad was - he was an Anne of Green Gables type kid. He was raised in a Catholic orphanage and they sold him to a family to run their store as a young boy. And so he got all his business experience running the store, and making change, and part of his education he memorized the dictionary from cover to cover, so he had an incredible vocabulary, and he was incredibly well-spoken, but had no formal education. And my mom was similar, she was self-educated, I was -- my one sister graduated from high

school, but I was the first one in our family to go to college. And, so. But I had a good relationship with the both of them, they were great parents, you know, they worked very hard and made do with everything, I never felt as a child that we didn't have anything, but I guess we really didn't, but you know they always made me feel like you know really special and everything we had was just what we needed and we made do with it, it was great. So no trauma there. (Laughs)

**MF:** What were your relationships like with siblings?

**PS:** Well, my two older sisters, one was twenty-four years older than I and the other was twenty-three years older or twenty-two years older than I. And between us there were four children that we lost, and the only reason I'm around is because they discovered clotting factor and vitamin K, and while my four siblings died because that medicine wasn't available, I didn't. And so there was, when I was born, my mother and my sister each had a child within three months of each other, so I was sort of raised with one of my nephews as like a sibling. But my sisters weren't at home when I was at home, so I was raised very much like an only child.



**MF:** So you had said earlier I couldn't wait to get out of this town, describe for me how did you do that, how did you get out of Florida, where did you go?

**PS:** Well, when I graduated from high school I went to a college in North Carolina, Montreat Anderson College, it's a Presbyterian college. And it basically it's a liberal arts college, but it trains people to be music educators and missionaries basically. And my parents wanted me to go there, I wanted to go to the University of Florida, they didn't want me to go there, they was afraid I'd party too much, and they wanted me to go to a little school where it would be controlling, and it would be very moral and upright and all of that. And it was a horrible experience. It was -- you had to go to church services and you, Billy Graham lived on campus, his wife's father was the president of the college and he and his wife lived on the mountain on the campus. And they would come to services at the college every week and bring all their kids, and you know Franklin Graham who is being such a ridiculous person now sort of shaming his father's history. Those kids would go to the nursery school and I didn't like to go to the church

services so I'd volunteer in the nursery school, and so I always say well you know I knew he was a bad kid because he would always say, "You can't tell me what to do my daddy's Billy Graham." And we just were so used to seeing the Grahams on campus, but it was religious school.

There were a lot of gay people there, but nobody was, nobody talked about it, no-one really knew they were gay. I mean I just, I'm assuming they were, I'm really clocking them because I don't know for sure, but seemed to me. But I wasn't really out then and although I knew I was different, and I knew I didn't fit in I just hadn't found a name for it yet. And the best thing I got out of that school was that when I wanted to transfer to the Medical College of Virginia, they let me transfer my old testament as history and my new testament as philosophy. And so I had all the credits to get into (laughs) into the program at the Medical College of Virginia, so it was wonderful and that was easy. It was a beautiful campus and I loved the area, I was president of hiking club and I played soccer and you know fun things like that, but it was every bit was a little bit too religious to me and most of the kids there came from missionary stations around the world where their parents were stationed and they sent them back there to go

to school. So they were all geared up to go save the heathens of the world and I was one of them. (Laughs)

And then I went to the Medical College of Virginia in physical therapy and that was a great program, one of the best programs at the time I went to it. And I think there were only about twenty-five physical therapy programs at that time, and I - when I graduated from there I went to -- on all my internships around and then I took a job in New York, just outside of New York City, up by WestPoint and I spent my whole working career at that hospital, it was a rehabilitation hospital run by the State of New York Health Department. That was a great job.

**MF:** I want to go back to when you talk about being at the first, your first college experience and feeling that you were different. I have a question about how were people at that college or people in your family, or just communities in which you sort of moved through -- how were they talking about lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or transgender people at that time?

**PS:** Well, when I was a kid and we would go visit family friends there were gay people there. I remember going to visit a family friend that rented an apartment to a gay man who was obviously a drag queen. And he would come in and out while we were there and everything, it was totally -- no-one paid any difference to him, it was just like he was just there, and no-one said anything about it. My sister, who was a lesbian, when she grew up her best friend, you know, was a lesbian, she was this real tall person who wore cowboy outfits all the time, they called her cowboy. And people talked about that, but they didn't use the words, but it was like nobody paid any attention. And then my mom told my dad she didn't want him to take me to work with him because she wanted me to be different, (laughs) because he -- my sister worked with him and became a licensed electrician and then she went into the marine corps and she was one of the first women marines that was an electrician. And I think my mom was concerned he was going to teach me all these tasks that would turn me into a dyke or something, but they never said that.

And I recall people saying I was queer, I remember hearing that a lot from people, but it was difficult to put that into context, you know. And the friends that I had were all

sort of outsiders and we got along well, and I never heard anybody say anything about gay people at all. Let me think there was one instance, I was out having lunch with a friend when I was a teenager and we were at a little barbecue spot and we sat down at a table and there was a napkin on the table, and somebody had written something on it. And I remember her saying to me "Look at this," and I looked at it and I can't remember exactly what it said, and she says, "That's because they're lesbians, they wrote this on here." And it was I don't know if it was like, "less been" or, you know, something weird some little code-y thing like that or something. But I remember that person brought it to my attention and I'd never heard anyone use those words before, and this was like one of my best friends. But you know I never heard any talk about it when I was in college I never heard any talk about it. But like I said a college that was segregated when I was a sophomore they finally allowed a black woman from the community to come to classes, but she couldn't stay on campus. And my roommates and I said well she could be on our suite we gladly have her in our suite and they wouldn't let her stay. They would only let her come for day classes.

And it wasn't until I was in New York that I really started being out and knowing I was out and why I was out so to speak. I mean I - when people say to me when did you think you were gay and I always do this, (mimes a doctor holding a newly born baby by the feet and lightly spanking it to get the baby to get its first breath) because I just always had -- now that I know what it is I've always felt I was that way. But I didn't have the experience or the background to know what it was and then in physical therapy there were so many lesbians in the field. It was like being a coach, you know, everybody was a lesbian, you would go to conferences and it was like going to a pride fest, you know, it was great.

**MF:** Why were you drawn to physical therapy as a career path?

**PS:** Well it was because I took a -- when I was in college I took one of those placement tests and it said I should have been a like a park ranger or something like that and or a camp person or something like that. And I thought eh, and my "little" sister at college from the class behind me had had polio and she said to me, "You should be a physical therapist." And I had no idea what it was, but I went, and I looked at the catalogue and I matched my credits to it,

and I thought I can do this, and the government was giving scholarships to go because there were a lot of war injuries and they needed people to be physical therapists. And so I was able to get a scholarship and so it was all very mercenary I didn't even know what I was doing, but they took my philosophy and my history from bible class and I thought this is what I'll do, I'll do this because I knew I couldn't go home.

I knew if I couldn't take care of myself, you know, there wasn't a -- I wasn't in a situation where there was going to be a man in my life I could look to to say "Support me," and I couldn't go home to my family because they weren't able to support me, I actually was supporting them once I got a job. And so I thought I have to be able to support myself and I can do this in two years, I can get a scholarship, it's a great paying job and I actually liked it. I really loved working with the patients and I ultimately became an instructor and my job was to run the training programs in the hospital for all the students that came through from the colleges around the country and to train the clinicians how to deal with them and to work with them with patients. And I really loved that, that was one of the best parts of my career.

**MF:** So, after college you go to New York City and you accept this first job, can you talk a little bit about your career in New York City with some more detail?

**PS:** Well I wasn't actually in New York City, I was in Rockland County which is North and West of New York City, between West Point and New York City, it was about an hour drive. And that's where I was a physical therapist and then I became a clinical instructor and one point I was administrator and then I had been there close to twenty years and I applied to be the deputy director of the hospital which is like the second in command. And I got that position, it was a terrible position, and it was terrible because I'd been a clinician and people who are clinicians will tell you that when you get into administration it's really hard because they're only concerned about the bottom dollar and you're concerned about the patients, and that's really true. But I did that, it was sort of a career move, and the director of the hospital was never there so I ended up basically having to run the hospital, and I was on call twenty-four hours a day and it was a very very stressful job.



And then I had -- New York didn't have a non-discrimination policy yet, and I had a person on the staff who was creating problems for me by making people not want to deal with me because I was a lesbian. And he was doing this intentionally because he knew there were people that would be bothered by that. And I went to the director and asked the director to deal with it, and the director's response was, "Well the two of you have to get along and if you can't get along I'll just fire both of you." That was how he dealt with it. Well I couldn't go anywhere with my complaint because the person I had the complaint against was the personnel director and he was the head of the committee that reviewed discrimination complaints. So I was stuck, you know, so I thought I can't deal with it I'm going to -- you know I've got to get out of here. And I also had found out I had lupus and I - it was hard for me to do that job, it was very stressful because I would work all day and into the night and then on the weekends I would just be in bed because I was sick. And so I decided to leave the job, and that was when I met Liz -- I had met Liz and we talked about it and the director was going to leave and a new director was coming in. And so I was really happy about that, I liked the new director and I negotiated with her to work part time and train her and then I would leave.

And so while I was working part time I was moving here. (laughs)

**MF:** Well before we get to discussing your movement to the Lehigh Valley, I maybe have one more question about that - Rockland and your time in New York State which is what was your social life like? You have a career that's taking off, you're moving into administration, what was your life like after that work?

**PS:** Well like I said there were a lot of people in my circle who were lesbians, but they were so closeted it drove me crazy, because I - once I knew I was a lesbian I wasn't closeted, I was never closeted about it once I really knew. And I couldn't get over why they were being so closeted because everybody knew they were lesbians and it was so frustrating to me, but they were good friends and you know, and I put up with it. And we would go into New York and we would go to the bars and we would have parties, and you know our whole staff in our department was very very social, and did a lot of social things together.

But we used to go into New York City and at the time there weren't many bars, there was this horrible horrible bar,

I'm making everything sound so horrible, but it was a horrible place called The Duchess. And it was at the basement of this building and it did have a sign out front, but you know you went in and you thought do I really want to go in here and people would say, "Only drink the beer they don't wash the glasses." You know don't - you know and it wasn't much bigger than these two rooms, and the whole bar down one side it was dark and it was filled with every imaginable person you could imagine who could be a dyke you know was in there. And some of them were scary, particularly to people who were just coming out, and - but it was the only place to go, and you would go in there. And it was still in the days where you know they would do raids and you know they would tell you don't dance if you see the lights flash or if you see this thing happen don't -- separate yourself, you know, so that they won't bother you if the police come in and things like that. And they would tell you don't use your credit cards in these places because the FBI will track you and I mean they did, you know, they did that kind of thing, so. But you still went because it was the only place to go.

I used to love to go to drag shows and things like that, and there were other places. There was a place in Rockland

County where you could go to drag shows, but it was one of these bars that it was like one night they would have it and a lot of us would go there for that and just sit and drink and you know have something to eat and party. But there weren't bars like there are today in the city. It's a long time ago, it's before Stonewall.

**MF:** Did you have your first relation- your first sort of longer term relationship when you lived in Rockland County?

**PS:** Yes, I did, and I learned a lot from those relationships. I learned that I always seemed to be interested in the wrong type of person for me. And it took me three of those relationships to realize that it wasn't the other person it was that I was choosing the wrong person. And so at the end of the third one I was doing graduate school, this was my doctorate work at Columbia. And so I didn't want to be in a relationship, I wanted to get my work done and I knew I couldn't do both. So I said I'm not going to worry about it, I'm not going to worry about dating or anything like that I'm just going to wait. And then Liz came along and so I couldn't let that go by, and that was the perfect one.

**MF:** How did you meet Liz?

**PS:** I met her through mutual friends, one of my former partners and her former partner were doing a workshop together on a special technique that's used to treat children with cerebral palsy. And they were in this month long workshop and they got to know each other, and we all went out to dinner at a café and they introduced me to some other friends that knew Liz and then those friends decided we'd make a good couple and set us up to go into New York City to see a play and meet. And that's a really long story.

(Laughs)

**MF:** I'd love to hear it.

**PS:** Liz tells it much better than I, but we went into New York City for this play and the play was interesting, but Liz had seen it before, and she wasn't that interested in it and I hadn't seen it and I was enjoying it. And then at the intermission this woman comes up to her and it was one of her former students, and she takes off with her former student to talk, I tell the story this way, she says that's not the way it happened. She takes off with the student and I think well this is great, you know, here we're going to do this then she takes off with somebody, but it was

someone that she had known for years in her program she had taught them. And so she got to talk to them and then we left, and then we went to -- we were in the train station and we spent a lot time quizzing each other about relationships and what was good in a relationship and what wasn't and what our likes and dislikes were. And this went on for about two hours, and everything we were like really in agreement on because we had both been in situations where we'd been with people who were partially closeted, and we didn't like that. And, oh, there were all kinds of other things we talked about, I can't remember them all, it just went on, and on, and on. And so we find out we were very compatible and that was good, but you'll have to let Liz tell that story, she tells it so much better.

**MF:** I love your version too. Okay, so then what happened, you meet Liz and your--

**PS:** Well, I was trying to leave my job and I had -- I couldn't really retire because -- I could vest my retirement, but I couldn't actually retire for about five more years. So, we spent a lot of time deciding how we would live, whether we would live in my house in New York, or in her house in Allentown. And we talked about which would be the best to

rent as a rental property, we finally figured out the best thing would be to sell my house and buy rental properties here and so that's what we did, we sold my house and bought a couple of rental properties, in fact right across the street from your house (indicates the camera person). And we had those for about five years and while we were renting the properties we also started in the antiques business and sold antiques. And antiques is a really fun job because you learn about all kinds of things, but it's nothing anybody needs. So you know the -- but the great thing about the antiques business is the more you know the more money you make, because you have to be able to find things. You have to be able to find things cheap and sell them high. And so we actually loved it because it meant spending a lot of time researching things and collecting things.

So I left my job, I came here, we rented the buildings, we did the antiques, and then it wasn't enough for us because there was nothing about the community. And we had trouble meeting people and finding people in the gay community, and they hadn't had a pride fest then. And so finally they did, there was a pride fest and so just said well we'll go to it. We went to the pride fest and we're thinking look there are all these groups we can volunteer with one, what'll we

do, we need to do something. So, we found this political group which was a voters information group, and we really liked it because we really believed in getting people to vote and vote for the right reasons and so on and getting them information. So we volunteered to be a part of that organization and that we would do mailings for them. We would stuff envelopes and seal them and address them and do all that because we didn't have computers. And it grew until we were running the organization, and the first organization we were involved with we didn't -- we had some philosophical differences with the person who was running it.

And our friend Steve Black, who was a part of the group, was just a political mastermind, just an incredible person said let's start our own organization and we'll call it PA-GALA and we'll provide the voter information, and we'll do it right, because this other organization was giving good information but they just weren't doing it in the right way, according to us. So we did this, and Steve ran it with Liz, and we continued to do the mailings and interviewed candidates for office, everything from school board right through to senator. And we made up a scale and we created a booklet which are in the archives, that would



tell you how - facts to place your vote on, how they voted on pieces of legislation.

We interviewed then and we'd ask them questions and I remember interviewing Frank Concannon who was a city council candidate here and he said, I was asking him about gay issues, and he says, "No-one's ever told me they were a lesbian before." And he was so supportive, and you know, and he worked with us, he helped us do a lot of legislative work and he was -- but he said, "No-one's ever talked to us about this before." Because people were so afraid to and we didn't have that risk, we didn't have jobs to worry about, we didn't have family who weren't supportive so we could be out there. And so we took the risk because we could do it and Steve was just an amazing person, I'm so sorry he's not around to be doing this stuff now, because he knew every legislative district. He knew the addresses, he knew the people who were in them, he could negotiate with those people, he was just an absolute mastermind, and we learned so much from him. And we ran that organization and it created tremendous change because it made people vote, it let us get in legislators and city council people that - and mayors that supported our rights and would deal with our legislation and that had never happened before and it's

a real loss to our community that we don't have an organization like that now that does that. Because people don't know who to vote for and they don't realize the value of voting in the primary election and voting for school board and those positions, and how it influences our community. So we did that and then at a later point - oh, we produced the newspaper and I would do the mailings for that, a lot of us wrote articles for the newspaper but mainly I took care of all the paperwork surrounding it and Liz published the newspaper.

And then we moved from that into the center, you know we met Adrian -- he was actually on our board, we met him first as a student, he came to Liz to ask Liz to help him deal with an issue at the college, and she was so impressed with him and so she asked him to be on the board. And then he said "You know what I really want is to have a community center," and we were at the stage where, you know, we couldn't do this forever and we needed someone with that kind of energy and expertise to come in, and it was time to pass it off to a younger person so to speak and he was just the perfect person and we said, "This is great." And so then we started on that journey to change one organization into another and he did a great job with that.

**MF:** I want to go back to PA-GALA for a minute and just talk a little bit more about what that organization accomplished or what your sort of mission for that organization was. You focused on the voter guides as sort of a central mission for that organization.

**PS:** Yes, it was a political organization and you know it was - we provided information and we tried to change laws and educate people with respect to things like that. Like one of the things we did was the anti-discrimination laws we worked on all of those, we did the one in Allentown, and you know we had that terrible court fight over that. Because Liz had to sue to get the -- she would have to explain this, but we were trying to get the anti-discrimination laws and there was a referendum against us and we had to sue to fight the referendum. And we have the suit, it's in the archives too, it's piles of information and we had to go around and - oh, oh, I apologize, but it just says "movie recording has been stopped automatically." I wanted to go back a minute and just say something else about Steve Black.

Steve, he was a lawyer, but he didn't really practice law, he ran his family's diner in Pen Argyl. And so we would go up to the diner and after the diner would close we'd sit in the booths and we'd process all these forms and do mailings sitting in the booths in the diner, all the computers were set up there, it was a very interesting system. And Steve didn't have a good mailing list we didn't think, and we found out he had this bag of papers that were like people's addresses and everything. So we met this woman here who was a lesbian and she worked, I don't know if she worked with a finance company or a cellular phone company or something, but she was really great with computers and she took that bag and she made a computerized mailing list for him and that was one of the things that really changed things early on because we had a computerized list. Then, her name was Joan Todaro, she was - she just did it like overnight she said, "Just give it to me."

And then when we wanted to do the voter's guide, the voter's guide was very complicated and it used a very special program called Quark, I don't know if you're familiar with it, but it's a publishing program and I don't think people use it anymore. But, we sent out the word that we needed some help and Steve sometimes didn't look at

these things when they came through and I was going through the mail and I found this letter from someone who said she could help us with that. And she just lives, she's our neighbor, she just lives down the street here over on Eighth Street. And she works for a publishing company and that's all she does every day is publish books, and she created the book that allowed us to send out the book for the voters' guide. And that's what I mean about people who do one thing, but it has such impact, but no-one even knows they've done it and they're sort of in the background. And Gail did that for us, and she would come over here every voter's guide and we would sit and we'd plug in all this information and it came out in a really nice booklet and very hard to do, very hard to do. But when we wanted to pass the ordinance there was a referendum against it and they collected signatures.

And there was a fanatic in town who worked at Muhlenberg College, and he actually -- his name was Frank McVeigh and he's no longer with us, but when he was at the college he said such outrageous things in his classes, he was a, not a psychiatrist, a psychologist, he taught psychology. And he said such outrageous things in his classes and students complained about him so much that they took him out of the

classroom, and they couldn't fire him because he was tenured, so they just sat him in an office. And they hired Patty Kline to go in and replace him, and she taught gender studies, you know, she taught really good stuff, and he was just awful. Well he disliked gay people so much that he went around, and he collected thousands of signatures, but he lied to people. He would go in their yard and he would look at their cars and he would see they had a sticker for the environment or conservation or something and he would go in and he'd say, "This is a petition--" and he would say it was about that and he would get them to sign it. And they did, and we had a city councilperson, Hershman, who would go around and take these petitions to churches and at the churches they had nights where they did bingo sign-up sheets. And he'd walk around, and he'd say, "This is a bingo sign-up sheet, do you want to sign up?" And they would sign up, or it was a food giveaway thing and they would sign up.

He was so bad, and he was so stupid about this that he actually on a bunch of the petitions accidentally signed his own name with his signature pen, which was a blue ball-- a blue fountain pen, very easily to pick up. And we searched, we went through all of those, well now this was

before we had cell phones. And so we turned the downstairs over there and the upstairs over there into a center to deal with this. And every day from early morning until after midnight those rooms were filled with people with computers and phone books taking the names of everybody who had signed one of these. And then we sent out a letter to them, because it was public record we could get their signature, we sent out a letter to them with a postpaid envelope in it saying, "Did you know that this is what is about, and did you really mean to sign it? And if you did would you be willing to take your name off?" And we got -- there was an attorney in Philadelphia named Dan Anders who had been a clerk for one of the judges here. And he worked for the major, major firm there and they paid him to be our lawyer, the firm gave him his salary so he could come here and work with us and fight that referendum. And he figured out that we could put a piece of paper in that envelope that was a legal declaration that you could take your name off. So we, you know, all of our friends came over and we had some friends that were really computer literate and their families came over and they would look up things and they would sit here with phones and call the people and say can we come over and get you to take your signature off of this, sign one of these and then we would send people out.

And we did that, and we waited for these cards to come back and Liz and Steve went to the post office and the first day Steve comes out of the post office carrying a box like this and there were hundreds of retractions, and that was the first day.

So then we started going to people's homes and getting them to sign off and we'd call them up and the stories we heard were unbelievable like I went to a person who lives behind the Jewish community center, or he did then, and he was a World War II veteran and he said the person who shared the foxhole with him was gay and he would never discriminate against gay people because that person saved his life. And there was this family Liz went to see this really, really Catholic family with like ten kids and this woman was just so upset that she had been hoodwinked into signing this. And you know she was going on and on about it and took her name off, people were just appalled that they had been lied to. And then we had to go to the city and present this data and so we called a press conference and we'd go to the city and the city thought we were going to bring in a little stack of things and we brought in this huge stack of papers.



Well they couldn't not listen to us, but here's the funny thing, they didn't have a way of dealing with it, and so what they had to do was cross file those people with the petitions and they didn't know how to do it. But we'd already done it and so they had to use our records because they had no system to determine who those people were and we were able to pull the things where Hershman signed more than one thing and we, in our archives, we have a list of everybody who collected those petitions, and you know. So every time there would be an election and we wanted to -- somebody was going to run we would cross file the list to see if they were one of the people who filed petitions against us so we could tell people not to vote for them. Information is good, really good, but we were sued, and so Dan wrote the case and it was in Liz's name because they had to have somebody against these far right people who were doing this. And he threatened them with subpoenas, and they withdrew, so we won.

But that was really exciting, the other exciting was that the anti-discrimination law that contained the information about the transgender community, the gender identity part of it and the definition of gender identity was written in

our solarium by -- okay now why can't I think of her name, she's the head of the transgender equality group.

**MF:** Corrine?

**PS:** No, in Washington. Starts with an M, I'm going to say Myra, anyway really she's been there a long time and she came here, and she wrote it - wrote the definition and now the laws that Liz and Steve wrote and that you know Adrian has been involved in, and now they all have all the proper terminology. And ours was the first one and it's used all over the country now when people want to look at the terminology for what should be included they use that as the model.

**MF:** For a city.

**PS:** Mara Keisling, Mara Keisling.

**MF:** So that's a model for a civic or a county or a statewide--

**PS:** Right, the thing is that each one of them have different stipulations to how they're done, because like we're a third class city and it's a different sized city it's - the

terminology has to be a little bit different, but the definitions stay the same. And so all those were, you know, great models for people around the country, it's pretty cool.

**MF:** So it sounds like this organization, so you - I mean you're putting together the voting guide, you're working on anti-discrimination legislation at the city and at the county level?

**PS:** Yes.

**MF:** You're interviewing local politicians that will go in the voting guide, but also just keeping track of even how they're voting.

**PS:** Right.

**MF:** There's also a piece here that I think I want to ask a question about which is you're building political community through the organization, could you talk a little bit about that?

**PS:** Well, that was what was so great about PA-GALA and that's why I say it's so sad we don't have it anymore, because we would send out those voter guides and we encouraged people to become super voters which means they voted in the general and the primary election every year, because those are the people that elected officials listened to, they know they vote. So, when you write a letter to your senator or your representative they give it to their staff, and they look in their file and see if you vote. If you don't vote they don't necessarily pay attention to it. But if you're a super voter not only will they write you a letter sometimes they call you because they know you're going to pay attention.

So we wanted all our people to be super voters and we started this push to make them that way. And so what we would do is just before the election we would call them up, "Did you get your voter's guide? Are you going to vote tomorrow?" And they started expecting us to do that, and then they would go vote, and then they would call us. And today we still get people calling us and saying, "Who do we vote for? There's no voter's guide, tell us who should we vote for?" And it's very hard because of course we only know the people in our own area, we aren't necessarily able

to help people in some of the smaller elections because we don't know anymore. But it really built a big political community, and then when we were working with somebody at some point and they took out the -- it was a candidate for mayor or for some big office, and there's a list you can buy on a disk and you can plug it in the computer and it shows you the voting record of everybody that's registered to vote, not how they voted but did they vote in these elections, and politicians take those and they use them to build their voters. And we were sitting down with this person and we looked at it and for our area every time we went down the list there was somebody we knew that was a voter - a super voter that was gay, and we could find them. And Steve always used to say he had a system, he called it, find a gay or something like that. And he would take the phone book, or the voters records and he could go through it and he could say these people live at the same address, they voted in every single election for how many years they are the same sex, they're about the same age, gay and track them down. You know and he was able to do that, we built more lists figuring those things out, because you had to find people and then you'd give them information and then they would get involved. And people really valued that information, they wanted to, they -- it's not that people

don't want to vote, they're afraid they're going to vote for the wrong thing, and you have to educate them.

**MF:** Before PA-GALA there were a few other organization like Le-Hi-Ho--

**PS:** Right.

**MF:** --but how do you think PA-GALA really changed what LGBT organizations were doing in the valley?

**PS:** Well Le-Hi-Ho, those were organizations were a lot further back in time. I think when we were doing PA-GALA it was a Gay Men's Chorus and F.A.C.T. and Pride and there was ACCO which was a women's group, but it had a large lesbian group that participated in it, but it was a women's choral group, and there were a few other groups. But the thing we changed was getting people politically active and getting the laws changed, that was what our goal was to make fair laws. We did the photo project too which was to help people understand about marriage and the laws related to marriage and everything, and that was an interesting project because those people were so brave. Because when we did that we thought okay so we -- let's see if we can get fifty people,

we can name at least twenty-five couples that would probably do it because they're our friends. But let's see if we can get fifty people and this was when there were no laws protecting anybody and you had parents, you had people who wrote right in that photograph "I'm a parent, I work at this kind of job." I mean they put all this personal information out there on that and people just started coming to the door to do it. And it just grew and grew and every one of those people put themselves at risk to do it and they were so willing to do it because they were -- part of it was educating them about why it was important to do it. And we displayed that in the state capital, it was pretty cool to have it in the state capital.

**MF:** Just to give some context to people that photo project that you started was prior to -- it was about sort of moving up to marriage equality.

**PS:** Right.

**MF:** I was actually in that -- you took our photo and that was an incredibly powerful experience to have those photos put in the state legislature, so you had to look at all of these couples that were denied the right to marry.

**PS:** You know, and people would be critical and say "Well why do you have someone up there that says they've only been together two months?" Well so what? People have short relationships, we had people in there who divorced or remarried, and the saddest part were the people who died without getting their rights, you know, that was the really hard part and we had to use that to educate people too. Because that's part of life, but it was a very important project, this just popped into our head we have to do this, let's do this, let's put a face on it. And then other people around the country started doing it, but they did it differently, like she had this thing about -- make people stand and put their heads together and it makes them smile, and it did. And you look in those pictures and more people particularly non-LGBTQ people would say, "Everybody looks so happy." And it's because of the way she took the picture and she did it intentionally, and we would go around and give lectures about marriage equality and show those. And people in the audience would say, "What are you doing that we're not doing because our relationships aren't that good?" Because we would give the statistics of how long people stayed together and people assumed that gay men didn't stay together very long, they just made the



assumption and the statistics didn't show that at all, it showed there were some very very long relationships among men in the community, they're different, it was a wonderful project.

**MF:** And that was a PA-GALA project or that was the organization that put together the photo project?

**PS:** It was PA-GALA. [correction: PA Diversity Network]

**MF:** I want to ask a little bit about the publication you put together, but maybe - so I wanna ask about the publication you put together but I'm curious about how PA-GALA came to an end, because you describe sort of sadness that it isn't here anymore.

**PS:** Well, it's kind of sad -- it was that we had been doing this for a long time, we'd been doing it with Steve and Steve was very hard to work with, I mean he was a genius and I loved the work that Steve did, but I did not have a good relationship with him, I could not work well with him at all. Liz could work with him very well, but he just was difficult to work with and I finally reached the point I just couldn't do things the way he wanted them done and he

wasn't -- I didn't feel he recognized the efforts that were going into all of this. And he was sort of tired of doing it and so we decided, we gave them about a year's notice, and we said you know we're not going to be able to continue to do this because it was just getting too hard to coordinate things. And we didn't want to stop but we just, we just couldn't do it anymore. And we thought he would do something else with it, but he didn't, and then we sort of went off on our own with PA Diversity which was not a political organization, it was an educational organization and that's really where our background is in education. And he just -- other things were happening in his life and it just ended, you know, he wasn't able to do it alone, but he wasn't able to work with the people who had worked with him to do it. And it was very sad because I have such admiration for what he did and what a great politician he was in terms of managing this stuff, and he -- so much of this progress in our community is growth from what he did. You know he just can't be left out of that equation, it was just too important and it was tough. You know here he was this guy who went to law school, he was bright, he was successful, but he was one of those people who had a family that didn't accept him, and it played really hard on his life. And it was very sad to stop doing it and it was very

sad to lose him from the community because he would still be doing great things if he were here.

**MF:** So while you're getting involved in PA-GALA you also are at some point starting one of, to my mind, one of the most important publications in the Lehigh Valley that focused on--

**PS:** Oh the Valley Gay Press?

**MF:** Yes, so could you talk a little bit about the origin of that and what your mission was?

**PS:** Well Liz wanted to do a newspaper, Liz always wanted to do a newspaper and with her art background she could create it on -- and we started it at the time of the anti-discrimination law work. And we started it because there was going to be this referendum and we had to get information out. So our first paper was one page and it was all about that, and then it just grew. And then she started getting other people to write for it, to write little columns just that were part of the community, and we found that there were a lot of organizations in the community and they weren't talking to each other.

And so for example F.A.C.T. would hold their major event on the same night that the Gay Men's Chorus was holding their major event, and there was no reason for that to happen. And we thought there should be a calendar, so we created a calendar and we did this out of our pocket, I mean PA-GALA didn't pay for it, we did it out of our pocket, and we sent it out to everybody. And we would tell every group you can give us information and we'll put it in, because we wanted people to get the information. And it worked, it worked. There were still a few conflicts but pretty much people could look at the calendar and say if they really were serious about it and say "Okay we're not going to plan," and they got to know when people's regular times were for galas and things like that, not conflict with them. And those were the two big reasons for doing it was to get information out. And it also advertised and we did it, we got a grant and we also provided in Berks County, so we did a lot of work in Berks County to get them started with - you know, and now they have a center and they have a pride fest and they didn't have that before.

**MF:** So you're doing PA-GALA and the newsletter, newspaper everything at the same time, but they seemed to be a part

of a larger political vision that you, Liz, and then others in that network had which was at least what I'm hearing from you getting information out on politicians, the kinds of legislation you were interested in passing and supporting. But also highlighting other organizations in the area that were doing the good work.

**PS:** Right.

**MF:** How did you do all of that and your antique business?

**PS:** Oh well we worked all the time (laughs) doing that. The paper took Liz about two weeks to produce, two solid weeks and then there was the mailing of it. I did the mailing and you know we at the time -- one of the nice things in our lives is we had opportunity to be nanas to four wonderful children of gay couples and two of them stayed here a lot, and so we would get the kids to sit with us and we'd say, "Let's see how fast we can do this. See who can do this fastest." (Laughs) And so the kids would stuff envelopes with us, and we would take them to rallies and Liz would carry them on her shoulders, she said, "You might have to tell these kids that they need to know this for their resumes, that they went to all these rights rallies." And

then we'd come home and watch it on the news, but we got volunteers to come in and help us. And it was really important to do that.

**MF:** How long did the newspaper last and when did it - was it the internet that sort of changed your desire to publish it or how did it close?

**PS:** Well we created the center, we changed from PA Diversity to the Center and we transferred our 501C3 to the Center and Adrian chose not to continue that as part of the Center that they would provide information other ways. And Liz couldn't -- it was a full time job I think she was ready to stop with it, and it was sort of like the voter's guide we really hoped someone would do it but many people tried to start gay periodicals during that time and nobody was as successful, because they always tried to do something really glossy and expensive and they couldn't maintain it. And we just did it, we did it low cost, and it wasn't as fancy looking, but it got the information out and that to us was the important thing not that it had a glossy cover. But she couldn't do that and do her other work too.

**MF:** You've mentioned the PA Diversity -- is it network on the end? How did that come to be, your participation in PA Diversity?

**PS:** Well when we left the voters organization we created that, we had to write a 501C and create a new organization for us to run, because we didn't want a political organization, the rules are different for them. We wanted an educational organization and so Robert Roush who was in the community and had been one of the people who developed the Gay Men's Chorus wrote the 501C3 for us and we just created a new organization. And we did the Valley Gay Press under that, that was the main thing that was under it and then we did other, we still did education about -- we still did things that had to do with laws and ordinances, but we did it from an educational point of view rather than a political point of view.

**MF:** Well we're right at about an hour and twenty minutes so I think this might be a good place to stop for today. But as a way to close I want to ask you is there anyone off the top of your head that you think we really need to interview for this oral history project?

**PS:** I mean the main people I know are the people that are your list. Do you have Dixie White?

**MF:** Yes.

**PS:** I know she would really love to be interviewed and she is one of the really old timers in terms of being around way before we were. And she was also the head of AIDS Services at one point I think, I don't know exactly what her title was, but she was involved with the AIDS Services Center. And I don't know, I'd talk to Liz about that and I think she gave you names, I can't think of anybody right off the top of my head.

**MF:** If you think of anyone you can email me. Well I think I just want to sort of end by saying thank you so much, you know, for being with Carol Moeller who did our camera work today, and with me, again my name is Mary Foltz, both Carol and I are on the LGBT Oral History Project for the Lehigh Valley and are really excited you volunteered to be our first interview. Thank you so much Trish.

**PS:** Thank you for letting me do this.



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