Transcription of Howard Solomon Interview.

Michelle Johnston and Richard Morin

Q & A	Coding/indexing
Richard Morin: Today is November 21st, 2016. We are in Bowdoinham Maine. My name is Richard Morin, R-i-c-h-a-r-d M-o-r-i-n	Intro's/Date/place
Michelle Johnston: My name is Michelle Johnston. M-i-c-h-e-l-l-e J-o-h-n-s-t-o-n, and today we are interviewing:	Intro's
Howard Solomon: And my name is Howard Solomon. H-o-w-a-r-d S-o-l-o-m-o-n	Intro's
Richard Morin: Um, Michelle and I are undergrad students at the University of Southern Maine. We are a part of the oral history project with the LGBT community. We are interviewing key members of the LGBT community assigned to us by Dr. Wendy Chapkis. This study is really important to us because we are very interested in obtaining information on LGBT people and their issues, accomplishments within their community. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, we have gained consent from our University to proceed with our research and now I am asking for your consent to be interviewed. All information and data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Would you like to participate Mr. Solomon?	Intro's about project
Howard Solomon: Yes indeed	Intro's about project
Richard Morin: Please carefully read the consent form and sign it, which you already have done.	Intro's about project
Howard Solomon: Mhm	Intro's about project
Richard Morin: Um, before we begin do you have any questions for myself or Michelle?	Intro's about project

Howard Solomon: No.	Intro's about project
Richard Morin: Um, you wanna go first or? Michelle Johnston: Sure, um so to start off we'd like to start with some biographical information is that fine?	
Howard Solomon: You bet.	Biographical info
Michelle Johnston: Alright, and what's your current age?	age
Howard Solomon: Seventy-four, I'll be seventy-five in June, next year.	age
Michelle Johnston: And what gender do you identify with?	gender
Howard Solomon: Male	gender
Michelle Johnston: Okay	gender
Richard Morin: What race and ethnicity do you identify with, Mr. Solomon?	race
Howard Solomon: Uh, I identify with White-Caucasian. White-Caucasian I would say, yes.	race
Richard Morin: Where is your hometown, place of birth, what was it like where you grew up? Um, do you call Bowdoinham home now, um how do you like living in a rural community?	Childhood/home
Howard Solomon: Okay, so to talk about home. I was born and raised in New Castle Pennsylvania which is about, which is in between uh, north-northwest of Pittsburg near Youngstown, Ohio. When I was a boy it was a town of about fifty-thousand people um and I identify that as , I identified that as my	Childhood/home; hometown in Pennsylvania home Bowdoinham since 1999

hometown for an awfully long time. Even though I left it right after high school to go to college and graduate school and everything else, I still, when people would say, "Where are you from?" That's what I would say. I still say that, and I identify my home as Bowdoinham. Which is I've lived in this town since 1999 and in terms of the main thing about being somebody from away ,um meaning that even if you were born you know across the river in New Hampshire and moved here at the age of five months you're still from away. Something shifted for me about a year and a half, two years ago where I really felt as if this were my home. It's always been comfortable enough but there was something that flipped or shifted for me where I really felt that yeah, this is my home. This is where, where I belong. This is where my roots are right now.	
Richard Morin: How do you like living in a rural community?	Current living situation; Bowdoinham
Howard Solomon: Well I, I, I like it very much. I don't think it's, I mean there's rural and theres rural. This is, you know we're, we're in the village, we have neighbors, uh the-the shopping and the big city of Brunswick is, you know, ten minutes away so, it's, I-I've lived in big cities and at those times that I lived there when I was younger at different times in my life, I was very very comfortable there. I'm very comfortable in this town. I like the scale, I like the fact that there are neighbors, that people recognize me, that I have the sense of being part of something that isn't anonymous so I enjoy it. I-I like it very much.	Current living situation; Bowdoinham rural life Brunswick 10 minutes away
Michelle Johnston: And how about religion. What religion were you brought up in, if you were?	religion

Howard Solomon: I was, yes I was indeed. I was brought up-brought up as a Jew, in the Jewish faith uh, and when I was a child my first memories of my father, when people say you know what did your dad and what did your mom and dad do, mom and uh this was, I was born in 1942. Dad was a Kosher butcher. He was the, one of two Kosher butchers in this town. And so, uh for a Jew, for-for that Jewish community keeping Kosher is absolutely, was absolutely essential so that-so the, the butcher was-was somewhere, a couple steps beneath the rabbi in terms of being somebody who was really central in the community. So that's what you know my first memories of Dad as-as a working man was that he was a butcher. His Kosher butcher shop. And we-we, my parents kept Kosher. Uh, I went to Hebrew school uh-um three days a week from the age of six to the age of thirteen. Went to Sunday school, I was bar mitzvah'd. Uh we all, you know the family kept Kosher until I was, I guess I was about fourteen or fifteen, and that ceased to be a practice that we, that we kept; although we still didn't have any pork in the house. My parents still did not, at that point ceased keeping Kosher, so-so being Jewish was-was very important to me and it was—and is still a real marker of who I am.	religion; Jewish Father: Kosher Butcher Family kept Kosher Hebrew School Bar Mitzvah Identity
Michelle Johnston: So do you still practice?	religion
Howard Solomon: No.	religion
Michelle Johnston: Okay.	

Howard Solomon: Which is very interesting, because I had a conversation like this about twenty years ago with some friends who were not Jewish and couldn't quite understand, well if you don't practice, if you don't belong to the synagogue, etcetera, etcetera, what does it mean to be a Jew? And I said, and of course this sounds even more relevant today given the election two weeks ago, is that for me to be a Jew includes, you know, that when the Nazi's come they'll know where to find me. In other words, in other words the-the identity of being a Jew is for me a marker of who I am; and even though I don't wear the label it's one of the first ways I identify if I'm in a place where I'm feeling any anti-semitism or I'm feeling that there's, that somebody is being beat up or taken advantage of my, my Jewish roots uh impel me to speak out against and act out against that because we have been. That's been the history of being Jewish for thousands of years, and so uh; and there was a time in my life um in the 1990's I had some, I had had some, I'd lost my partner, and I'd lost a lot of other friends—this was right at the worst of the AIDS epidemic. I also had, I had three um events that happened within four months for me. I was in a car wreck where the car was destroyed and I walked away without a scratch, I had a ruptured appendix, and three weeks later I had peritonitis which put me back in the hospital, and then I was at a men's retreat sitting under a tree during a, you know, a fire with another twenty or thirty guys and the uh limb of the tree broke and landed just about this far away from me, about three feet away; and so I started thinking, 'what the hell is this all about?" And I, I had a sabbatical and I took a, a year off to study and consider becoming a rabbi. And I did that, that was in Philadelphia and I went to Israel for about five months—four months, four months and uh decided not to pursue it uh, but it was an	religion; non-practicing Jew Jew as identity Jewish roots compel to speak out 1990's Lost partner to AIDS Series of unfortunate events Year long sabbatical Israel

important part of my life. And still is. And in apropos of the recent elections I'm very conscious of being a Jew in a small town where there aren't many Jews.	
Richard Morin: Want me to go? Alright. At what age did you become aware of your sexuality? Did you struggle with it, or were you comfortable with it from the start?	sexuality
Howard Solomon: Huh, I-I became aware when I was somewhere, eleven, twelve, thirteen that I was different from most the other boys around me. In the, in-in-in uh many of my closest friends were girls and I was aware at the age of eleven, twelve, thirteen, that my relationship with girls opposed to boys was different from the way my boyfriend-friends that were boys were responding so I was aware of some kind of difference. And um, and for me that was less about being, we didn't even have words then. Homosexual was, I had to look it up in the dictionary; an-and queer was a word that was really negative and faggot was a word but, I didn't hear those words. The words that-that I resonated to as being different was sissy. I was-I was-I was ill as a kid I had asthmatic bronchitis I was, had very bad eyes and so I couldn't engage in physical sports and much of the air- we were chatting before about colds and so on- I couldn't breathe for much, you know I really really had a difficult time and I was a really sick kid and so for me it was more about being a sissy. You know I wasn't involved in athletics an-and so when I went away to college I knew that I was different fro-from other young men my age. I dated when I had to. When there was a senior prom or a party where I needed to get a date, I found a woman friend who would go with me and-and through much of my college and	sexuality; childhood dating formal events lack of language for homosexual coming out

graduate school life and even my first years of teaching I still, I struggled with it and kept sort of- I had a couple women friends who I was very close with and much in love with who I-we-I kept waiting for magic to happen like somehow this is gonna flip and it's gonna change in terms of my relationship and so on and that never happened and that was when - now this is about 1969-70 where I realized that well yeah I am different and what does it mean to be? Queer was not a word, gay wasn't a word I mean not for me at least. What does it mean to be homosexual? So it was about being physiologically different, medically different? You know homosexual was like—you know mentally different? I mean there were people being arrested, they were either being arrested for being gay, for being homosexual or if their families are rich enough they would send them to a shrink and try to shrink them, or there were a lot of men at that period who-who were having electric shock to cure them of that disease. So it was a long, to sort of anticipate what I presume are some other questions there; I didn't come out to myself until about 1972-73 which is now that's thirty years after I was born. And I didn't come out to any other human being other than a shrink in New York City until I was about thirty-five years old.	
Richard Morin: Wow.	
Michelle Johnston: Soon after you admitted it to yourself, did you become active in the community?	Sexuality/activism
Howard Solomon: No I didn't, I was- first of all there was no community. I was living in Boston at the time and certainly there were communities but I had no idea how to enter into them. What the hell did that mean? I	Sexuality/activism; finding community

mean I-I had had, even from the simple point of view of having sexual relations with other men I had had none at all. I didn't even know how to meet somebody for-for sexual encounter. Whether it was casual sex or animus sex or want ads—I mean that was before um smart phones and all of that stuff. You know? And so, it was just, I mean the whole—and then the whole issue of the community I mean this was 1973-74. I'm already aware that there is this thing called uh gay liberation, you know, it's happening in New York, it's happening in Boston. I was living in Boston. I had no idea of how I could involve with that community and uh so getting-getting into a community, a community of of other gay people. When did that happen, I don't know, certainly by '76-'77-'78, I was out to my closest straight friends and was developing some friendships with gay men. Did I know any lesbians then? I knew a couple but they were, we were not that close; so it was slow in developing.	
Richard Morin: You already answered that one pretty much. Oh, um I remember watching, I watched, well me-Michelle and I actually watched two videos of yours uh-	Video/awards
Howard Solomon: Yeah	Video/awards
Richard Morin: -a biography, short one, and when you were accepting uh the Catalyst for Change Award.	Video/awards
Howard Solomon: Yup, yup.	Video/awards
Richard Morin: And I remember you saying um, your partner in the eighties had passed away from the AIDS epidemic-	AIDS epidemic; Lost partner to AIDS

Howard Solomon: Yes, yup.	AIDS epidemic
Richard Morin: So you have first hand experience with that um, how did the AIDS crisis of the eighties affect you, other than what we already know? Howard Solomon: What do you mean, "Other than what we already know,"?	AIDS epidemic; Lost partner to AIDS
Richard Morin: Well that your past partner had passed away.	AIDS epidemic; Lost partner to AIDS
Michelle Johnston: And you had just said a few of your friends as well.	AIDS epidemic; Lost partner to AIDS Lost friends to AIDS
Howard Solomon: Yeah, yeah well for— I think for a lot of gay men of my-of my generation, who were also as it were late coming out. This crazy combination, we were coming out in the seventies when there was this sexual liberation and sex, drugs, rock and roll. The big cities had these, you know, vibrant gay communities of bars and bathhouses and organizations and parades and all the rest of it, and there we were; and then on the other side we're hearing about this horrible thing coming out of San Francisco called, you know at first it was called G.R.I.D. The Gay Related Immune Deficiency and then it was, you know, of like—gay men seemed to be dying of this horrible disease; so on one hand theres this-this impulse, this desire, this ya know energy towards being out, public, being at home in your body, enjoying your body etcetera etcetera and on the other hand this horrible thing called AIDS and by this is I-I know being in Boston the first couple friends who I knew contracted AIDS, died of AIDS.	AIDS epidemic; GRID became AIDS Friends and acquaintances passing from AIDS Bars comparable to Nazi Germany

That was 1979-'80-'81 and that became the big reality in the gay community. It was—it was—*it was* the reality of the gay community. You'd go into a bar, you know you'd go in maybe once or twice a week, your standard bar, your neighborhood bar. You know you'd pop in, you'd see your friends, and then for a week or two you wouldn't see somebody and you wouldn't even have to ask what happened to 'em. They'd died. Or they had gone into the hospital. There were no-there were no cures for it. People would, you'd see them one week and they'd be gone an-and the metaphor that was used and that made sense to me and this is where we're back to sort of the Jewish identity thing, it was like being in Nazi Germany. You know you would see a Jew on the street corner or see somebody, some political activist in the bar and then they'd be gone. They would, you know, be disappeared as they say in Latin America you know. The gestapo or whatever they'd be gone, well AIDS was like that. I mean you would see friends in your neighborhood bar, you'd see friends in your street corner, you'd see 'em in the neighborhood. I was living in Back Bay of Boston which was a very active gay community at the time and uh, and people were just disappearing and uh it was horrible. It was horrible and uh, a whole generation of gay men perished during that period; and unless maybe you were living in a small, small town in some rural part of the country, or in-even a medium sized town where perhaps you were very closeted and so on. If you were living in a-any of the major cities in the United States as a gay person, uh that was a big reality. And so whatever organizing there was was about advocating for better healthcare, for less policing uh the women particularly, ya know our lesbian sisters they were the ones that really took up the banner for a lot of-lot of us. A lot of gay men, I mean a lot of them

were in denial, a lot of 'em were being affected by it and it was the women, I don't want to say marching it but, there would not have been any sort of success of the movement to get better medication and de-stigmatize it and so on and so forth had it of not been for lesbian activists; lesbian activists who really got involved in it. And that certainly I-I moved to, I moved to Maine with my partner. We were in Boston and we-we moved to-we were living in Kittery um when he was diagnosed with AIDS and um we subsequently moved to Grey and that's-he died in January of '89. Where I'm going with this is that the public um, a heck of a lot of the organizing and support of gay people an-and by '89 there were more and more straight people and women who were uh contracting AIDS/HIV a lot of that leadership was coming from activist women. Take no prisoners women.	
Richard Morin: Wow.	
Howard Solomon: Yeah, and that's an important story of what happened in-in Portland 1989-'90-'91. The AIDS project and so on, obviously there were men involved with it but a lot of the real energy behind it it was coming from activist women, lesbians were—a lot of lesbians but also straight women as well. Very important issue, and that was true in a lot of other towns as well. 'Cause the men, a lot of the men were just so exhausted, demoralized and a lot of men were still in denial oh you know, 'It's not gonna happen to me, it's not gonna happen to me.' But there were a lot of strong take no prisoners women who were very important in organizing the community and supporting gay men, and supporting people who had AIDS,	AIDS epidemic; Lesbian sisters take charge harsh reality

and pushing politicians, and demonstrating and um yeah.	
Richard Morin: Mind if I ask this next one?	
Michelle Johnston: Oh, go ahead.	
Richard Morin: Then I'll let you. Um, Michelle and I reviewed a couple videos on you and uh each one, the Charlie Howard exhibit came up. For me, I was nine years old when it happened— Howard Solomon: Yeah.	Charlie Howard exhibit
Richard Morin: —and I honestly, I don't remember it ever being on the news or anything, it probably was but I don't remember it—	Charlie Howard exhibit
Howard Solomon: Maybe not.	Charlie Howard exhibit
Richard Morin: —and I was, when I did some more reading on it and I did some research on the internet I was like, I couldn't even believe that that had happened up here, you know what I mean? Could you tell me—could you tell us more about your involvement? I know you did the traveling exhibition and stuff.	Charlie Howard exhibit
Howard Solomon: Well to-to go back, Charlie Howard was killed—thrown to his death on July 7th, 1984. I was still living in Boston. Maine was the end of the earth to me I mean, the thought of ever— visiting let alone uh you know spending time a little bit and so in 1986-'87 when Ron and I, my partner and I were talking about moving to Kittery. He had a job at a hospital in Portland, I was teaching in Boston so, Kittery was just sort of halfway for both of us. We were gonna live there for a while and figure out where then to move. I	Charlie Howard exhibit/activism Charlie Howard was murdered 1984 life in Boston moved to Maine with partner friends concerned with move Charlie's death became turning point

remember when saying to friends of mine in Boston, ya know, "We're thinking of moving to Maine." More than a few people said, "Don't move to Maine, they throw gay men off the bridges in Maine." That was from some of my gay friends but also some straight friends, I mean it was all—it was well enough known among people who were sort of, had an antenna for you know what was going on around; so Charlie Howard was-was an important figure to me even before I moved to Maine. Charlie Howard's death was-was one of the real turning points in the development of a public gay identity and public gay organizations in Maine. It was just a couple of months after his death that, the MLGPA, the Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance was started and that's the predecessor to Equality Maine; and that was the first long lasting statewide organization and among it's leadership were some very very strong women activists, lesbian activists and so, that was important. By the time when Ron died in '89, January '89 and I was debating whether to move back to Boston which made rational sense. I mean that's where my job was, that's where my long term friends and roots were, but I had uh within a few weeks after Ron died I realized that I was becoming very attached to the Quaker community in Portland where Ron and I had gone when we needed a congregation in a hurry. I was Jewish, he was Methodist, neither of those were real alternatives for us and we wandered into a Quaker meeting and just-everybody just embraced us so I felt that I had real roots here from the Quaker community. I also was involved with a group called Mainely Men which is a men's group for gay/straight men from all over the state as well as other parts of New England, and I made the decision to stay in Maine in the fall of 1989 and I wanted to get involved with you know, activism. I'm not	Maine Gay Lesbian Political Alliance (MGLAP) now Equality Maine Lost partner to AIDS 1989 Quaker religion workshops retired due to dreams 2004 traveling exhibit

a—I'm not real good at, well let me say what I'm good at. I-I saw my gift as a public activist in terms of public education of-of of doing workshops of telling people about history etcetera etcetera, and so an-and if I was gonna do that in Maine obviously I had to talk about Charlie Howard. So, long story short that's 1989-1990-1991, fast forward ten years 2001-2002, I had made the decision to uh retire from Tufts to take an early retirement because I was having dreams about being in a fatal car wreck commuting back and forth from Maine to Boston and after a third or fourth of those—always listen to your dreams—third or fourth of those dreams I went in to my dean and said, "I'm gonna take an early retirement," and I did that. And was involved as-as I was sort of separating from Tufts and I was involved with a lot of other people in-in starting the LGBT archive as USM, which in those days was just the LG, Lesbian Gay archive. And make a long story short, in 2002-2003 I became the first scholar in residence for the collection and that then was my, bread so to say, from orienting my teaching, and my activism, and my frame of mind towards Boston, and my students at Tufts to Maine. So I was teaching in the history department at USM but I was also, now I had my feet in the LG-LGBT collection at the Sampson Center and that then gave me the arena if you will or the-the launching pad for being much more involved with public education and doing workshops an-and then that was 2002ish and as a historian I'm always thinking about what are anniversaries and that was coming up on the 20th anniversary of Charlie's death, 2004. And so that's when a number of us said let's do, let's do a real focus of Charlie Howard's death twenty years later where have we come what yet has to be done and that's what we did. We did a two day public conference at USM, we	

had speakers from all over the place, lots of workshops. We put together that exhibition that toured all over the state, hundreds and hundreds of particularly young people, high school and junior high school kids, young people saw it and that was-it was 2004.	
Michelle Johnston: So you were a professor at Tufts and then you went to USM, right?	employment; Professor
Howard Solomon: Right, right.	employment
Howard Solomon: Sure, not right away. When I started, the long story, long story Michelle. That when I started teach—I was trained primarily to do early modern European history 16th, 17th, 18th century, particularly French history and my first full time teaching job was at New York University. And in those days, ninety-five percent of the courses that were taught in history at American universities were political history, national history, diplomatic history, military history. None of this gender stuff you know, very little on social history, right? Very little, I mean there was economic history but very little about social history. It was all about you know Kings and Queens and people on horseback and like that. And there were a handful of people who were beginning to teach what they-what we referred to in those days as history from below. You know, sort of looking at not the people on the horseback who are ya know telling everybody else where to go into battle but what's the life of the peasants, the women, the children, the poor, all the people who don't usually show up as the great heroes; and I started teaching a course at-at NYU in 1969 called, "Social Deviance in European History," 'cause that's what it was	Employment; Education History Professor "Social Deviance" class NYU 1969 Cautious of class title Taught about minorities Closeted Tufts 1971 Became dean 1978 Sabbatical Came out

called then. If you wanted to talk about women, the insane, children, sexual-sexual minorities let alone you know sexual behavior, it was subsumed under the sociological category of social deviance that's what, that's where I was then. So I was closeted but I also knew this stuff really attracted me. I mean fundamentally we all teach autobiographically, I mean ninety-nine percent, particularly successful teachers are teaching what, you know is a passion of theirs. They may not even know why but they know that, so I started teaching a course called "Social Deviance" where I talked about the history of witches, the history of women, the history of the insane, the history of the poor, the history of quote end quote social deviance-of sexual deviance; and then I taught a couple more courses on that but I was still closeted. I didn't talk about my own experience but, in retrospect I probably was revealing a hell of a lot about myself. When I came to Tufts in 1971, I was teaching more of those courses, I continued to teach it but still my primary identity and field was Europe-were straight history. European social history. In 19—I came to Tufts in '71 in '76, so in '78 uh I became dean of undergraduate studies and academic affairs. It was a new position at Tufts and I threw myself into it. I'd never done administration before, I'd loved it and it was during that period that I was really coming out to my friends and family and so on. Which I couldn't do during my day job, and uh to make a long story short sure after I—the deanship was from '78 to '81. I took a year sabbatical and during that time made the decision that when I came back to teach I was going to come out. Instead of calling this course "Social Deviance in European History," I started repackaging it and out of that grew a course on Lesbian Gay History and at that point

particularly when I came out I was much more, I very candid about my identity.	
Richard Morin: Did you get push back for that?	
Howard Solomon: Uh I would, no. Uh I was at a very privileged university, I had ten year. I had ten year in '72 which came with the freedom to do that. I had very supportive friends, I had, among my strongest supporters were members of the administration. I know there were some colleagues and some administrators who were not all that apt with it. That's what it was and that was part of the privilege of, of being at a place like that and uh, um I've been very lucky in every curve.	Employment; Professor Support from friends/colleagues
Richard Morin: Cool.	
Michelle Johnston: So, it was in the early '80's that you star- that you started incorporating that into your classes?	Employment; Professor
Howard Solomon: I started incorporating it into my courses as early as the early '70's--	Employment; Professor
Michelle Johnston: Okay.	
Howard Solomon: --but in terms of really doing it in a-in a explicit sort of way and you know in a way that I'm identifying myself as an out gay man, so therefore this is, there's a personal resonance to this that wasn't there otherwise. Um, and I'm-I should say a couple other things about that. The first time, the first several years that I taught the-the lesbian gay course in Tufts. Tufts is a very privileged place and even there however we couldn't call it lesbian gay history in the catalogue because the students were afraid to have that on their transcript.	Employment; Professor Cautious of class title
Michelle Johnston: Given the time period?	
Howard Solomon: Given the time period, exactly. 1985-'86-'87, and so you called it	Employment;

things like uh, I don't know what the heck we called it. Uh, "Sexuality and History," or something. Even that was pretty gutsy 'cause a lot of people were saying why aren't you taking a real sociology course or a history course and why are you taking a --and the first time we called it "Lesbian-Gay History" it was in a seminar. There were nine students in it, seven were identified as lesbian-gay and two were not. By the third year I was teaching it in 1992-'93 it had shifted that I was having sixty-fifty, sixty, seventy percent of the kid-students were straight identified. And I'll never forget the very first when it really struck me of how things were beginning to shift and also the privilege of being at a place where students could take the risk to teach the--to take those kind of courses. It was about 1992-'93, at first they were going around why they're in this class, blah-blah-blah and there was a-there was an African American woman who said "I'm in this class," boom-boom-boom you know, "I'm straight. I'm straight identified and the reason I'm here is that -mymy lesbian-gay friends have been there for me and I have to know about their history if I'm gonna be a strong advocate," and-and what's the word I'm looking for, "colleague of theirs." And that really, and that was, I also saw that at USM. Tremendously so as well. You know a lot of students were in that course 'cause they want to do a lot of activist, a lot of other people who identified as minorities in various ways were in that class to find out more about this piece of the puzzle.	Professor Started class mostly LGBT identified Later mostly straight identified Students wanted to be advocates for friends
Richard Morin: Um, you were involved in the Matlovich Society--	
Howard Solomon: Yes.	
Richard Morin: --could you tell your role in this	
Howard Solomon: Sure, Leonard Matlovich was a member of the U.S. Air Force who uh, came out as a gay man in the 1970's. He was	Social associations; AIDS epidemic

kicked out of the Air Force um, as he said he was um, and he was decorated. He was a decorated member of the Air Force and he was decorated for killing two men and kicked out for loving one; and that made Time Mag- the cover of Time Magazine. And Leonard died in '86 or '87, I didn't know him I mean he was never in Maine as far as I know. But in 1989 shortly after my partner Ron died, Ron died in January '89. In March or April of '89 I wrote a little otbed piece for the monthly gay newspaper in Maine. On why we need to know our history, otherwise, ya know if you don't know your history you can't do anything in terms of activism it's just crazy not to. And I read this piece and a man named Ron Clinton who was uh a um he'd, had been head of anesthesiology at Mercy Hospital and who self- a gay man who had recently been diagnosed with AIDS. He was having a similar-similar conversation with some young gay friends of his where he realized they didn't know shit about gay history and they didn't know who the hell Leonard Matlovich was. So he and a couple of other people wanted to form an organization where at least once every couple of weeks there would be public forums for gay people and straight people and others on elements of gay history and you know gay politics and things we need to know to-to be alive and- he read the piece and he called me and he and I met and uh that's how I got involved in the organization. I was among the first several board members, uh after he, Ron passed away in '93, either '92 or '93. After he died Lois Reckett and I, Lois was one of Ron's closest friends and she was also a cofounder with Ron. She and I then became co-chairs of the organization through I think until about 1998, '97, '98 maybe. Something like that. And uh, that was a very important organization. We met uh, twice a month, the first couple of meetings there were like eight or ten in a room sort of being careful not to	Matlovich AirForce man Writer for gay newspaper (Maine) Lack of knowledge of gay history Board member Meetings twice a week Safe space Meetings stopped late 1990's/early 2000's

make a whole lot of noise outside to be seen as a bunch of gay people going in this secret meeting. You know even though it wasn't secret at all; but every meeting it doubled in size until about two months in there were eighty to one hundred people showing up twice a week and so it got so big we started having meetings at the Portland Public Library. So it was like the first big, not the first big but you know this public institution called the Portland Public Library twice a month opening its auditorium to fifty-eighty people many of whom, most of whom were gay or gay of--LGBTQ identified and their-and their allies. We had people travelling an hour and a half, two hours from far distant parts of Maine just to be in a room, that wasn't a bar, ya know so it wasn't about getting drunk and all the rest. It was about being in a safe space where-where other gay people and our allies were talking about gay history, gay legal issues, gay art, gay politics, uh gay health, uh I mentioned health issues and so on and I was very proud of um, the Matlovich Society. It continued up through the late nineties. It was a place for people to meet, to have conversations about important issues before there was an internet; and then as the internet developed by the late nineties early you know 2000's, 2003 or four there was no longer in a sense quite the need for that organization and so it uh- it went out of , went out of business. Uh, which is okay, a lot of people were sad, I was sad about it too but, organizations are organisms and they live they-they flourish and when it's time for them, when they no longer have reason to exist they die and that's okay.	
Michelle Johnston: And earlier you said that you were involved in Mainely Men which wasn't just gay like it's just all of--	Social associations; Mainely Men
Howard Solomon: Well that's right, it was I mean one of the other pieces of this puzzle I'm sort of figuring out why and how does uh	Social associations; Mainely Men

I mean just to use the word gay instead of LGBTQ in terms of the male movement of-of-of gay men and bisexual men. In the 1980's across the country there was the emergence of the men's movement and there were gatherings of men often times lead by queer men but not always and not exclusively of men trying to, saying what the hell does it mean to be male? In you know, in the mid-late 1980's, what does it mean to be fathers and sons? As it means to be partners of-of-of, of wives an-and perhaps partners, and so there were a number of centers for the men's movement all over the country. Obviously places like New York, Chicago and San Francisco, and the second or third oldest long lasting men's group in the United States was founded in Maine in the mid 1980's called Mainely Men; and this was a gathering, Maine is a curious place, Mainely men was a gathering of a hundred men twice a year. On Memorial Day weekend and Columbus Day weekend. Uh that, at a camp up in Cobbosseecontee Lake, pilgrim-pilgrim, this is my interview! You stay out of this! At Pilgrim Lodge and it would be three days in, on Memorial Day weekend and then in October and I tried to get into it the, uh about a year or so after Ron died and I couldn't 'cause in those days there was no internet. You didn't register online, you have to send a card to register it and if you weren't among the first hundred that got in the mailbox you- so anyways I went to Mainely Men and there were a hundred men there of whom I would say maybe thirty were gay identified and that, identified themselves as gay, another fifteen-twenty perhaps bi and/or thinking about, and then a lot of straight men and that organization um, was one of my roots for-for a number of years and still today a couple of my closest friends in Maine were men that I met there. And it's Maine I mean, the history and there's our-our	Men's movement 1980's Twice a year for three days Archives at USM

uh, our, the Mainely Men archives are at, are in uh the Sampson collection at USM.	
Richard Morin: Cool.	
Howard Solomon: Yeah, yeah it's very cool.	
Richard Morin: We'll have to talk more about this after	
Howard Solomon: Yeah, well it's very cool.	
Richard Morin: So, with the recent uh election--	Politics
Howard Solomon: Oh that.	Politics
Richard Morin: --yeah that unfortunate election. You indicated to us that you're very much into political activism um, how has it been important to you and do you think there will be some important shifts in policy uh about the issues that you care about under the Trump presidency?	Politics
Howard Solomon: Yeah, that's a great question. Um, understand what my activism is about, I-I I do not have, uh courage uh or the energy to do what so many lesbians and gay--so many queer people in Maine have done over the years and I stand in-in awe of the energy of people. Lois Reckitt, hm. Lois Reckitt, oh God, Lois, Dale, Betsy, uh so many people, Betsy, uh I shouldn't have started because there's just so many name's I'm gonna leave people out. I know my gift is as, as a historian and as a Jew is to bear witness. Is to remember and tell stories and impell other people to tell stories and um, you know I-I ask myself and I remember this as a kid. Some of my first memories, I can remember in 1945, this is when I was three years old. I'm going with my parents to a VJ Day uh parade, in other words Victory in Japan Day parade. The troops were coming down in 1945 and being scared shitless of hearing all the motorcycles, they were probably police motorcycles I was a little kid three years old. Vroom vroom, but I	Politics; Lesbian activists Bear witness Historian/tell stories Childhood memories Concentration camp survivors Bear witness Muslim registrar

remember that was the war. Ya know it was something about the way, and by the time I was eight or nine years old we had in our synagogue, we had survivors of the camps who had come over, just like Syrian refugees are trying to find home in other parts of Europe. There were hundreds of thousands of Jews and other displaced people who were either living in the camps and/or in the displaced persons camp after World War Two. Hundreds of thousands of them came to the United States. Churches, particularly Jewish populated synagogues adopted as many families as they could and I'll never forget being five years old and being in the synagogue and seeing the door open and this family come in. It was a father and mother and two little kids and they were, you could just tell there was an, I mean I was only old enough to get it but there was like an aura like these were people who had been through hell. They were magical they were scary, and they all had tattoos on their arms; and um, and I-and I often wondered what would it be like to be and eight year old kid, a ten year old kid, a twelve year old kid, in a- in a European town as your relatives are being carted off and your neighbors are not doing anything. You know? And that's one of the things that frightens me about the current situation. Where there's now been license given to our darkest, darkest urges for people to say and do the things that perhaps out of politeness or out of a sense of the-the-the the greater sense of our-our media and our political organizations and our education had been silenced for a long period. That stuff is coming out again; and and one of the things that I did last week I don't know whether you saw it but there had been a lot of calls on Facebook and others that it is quite likely that one of the first things the new president is going to do is to I mean, always listen to a bully. The first thing a bully says, don't wait for the second or third thing, listen to the first

thing he says or she says; and the first thing he said was about doing a um a registry of Muslims. Well we know where that went in the Nazi period, and there was a, it's been on Facebook and elsewhere, I and some people you know including some of your teachers at USM, have publicly stated that when there is--if not when, if there is a registry created for Muslims to register we will register a Muslims. It's about bearing witness and it's also, if every person who felt as strongly about these issues as I and some other people you know were to do that instead of if there were forty million Americans who signed up as Muslims, it would be very difficult perhaps even impossible for the government to create such a registry. It ain't much but I'm thinking, you know as this came across my Facebook screen it seemed like it-it's about bearing witness. Um, it's about uh you know there-there's a, I'm involved with the art center here in town, the Merrymeeting Art Center and I have a collection of World War One Posters that we're showing down there right now and in three weeks I'm giving them to USM. They'll be at USM forever and they're really fabulous you know World War One's you know Uncle Sam needs you and all these pictures and, looking at them now-it's one thing to look at them one hundred years later post World War One but to look at them right now, right after this election where, what does it mean to be a real American? What does it mean to wrap yourself in red, white, and blue? What does it mean to um fight a good war? You know, what does it mean to be patriotic and all of that, so I'm giving a gallery talk on the exhibition next week or this Sunday and I'm gonna-I'm gonna talk about the poses but I'm also gonna make reference to what we're doing today. You know, it-it's, that's what I can do as bearing witness and when we were chatting before about teaching and do I miss it? No, and I'm feeling much more of a	Means of being American Activism Encourage history

compulsion today than I did two weeks ago to get back into it somehow; because if we have to tell these, we have to, we have been here before and it is not a pretty picture. So, we'll have to find ways to you know, the what can I say? That's what we all need to do. It's also a way of remaining strong and-and positive because if you, if you just mourn or be angry it doesn't do anything you kind of —for me it's about bearing witness. It's about, it's about being public in these-in these ways that I can be. I mean I'm not real good at long distance-long term political organizing or, I don't have the courage that a lot of people do to actually confront you know, other, you know political figures in somewhat face to face; but I can, I think I can uh, I can encourage people by talking about history and being a historian. You know part of the reason we're in this-this mess today is because no-very fewer and fewer people know what the hell American history is about; and it is in the interest of the new regime to make us even more ignorant of our history. The more ignorant of our history the more successful this regime will be. It's what happens with, with tutelary regimes. They get the journalists, and the ministers, and the preachers, and the poets, and the historians.	
Richard Morin: Sounds so much like Nazi, Germany.	Politics; History
Howard Solomon: I, the um, making analogies is very easy because analogies explain the way you see things it doesn't explain how things are gonna turn out so, analogies are always very-very juicy but they're also very dangerous if you blip about them. So I really resisted making the analogy that you just made over this-over this period of the last few years last couple of years; but I've been seeing elements of it. As to you it	Politics; History Comparison to Nazi Germany Analogies

looks like something I saw in 1932 Germany or that looks like this that and the other, or hearing something on the news and saying my God that sounds like something from the Joseph Gobles playbook. And about five months ago, probably April or May, I'm looking out the window it's a beautiful spring day in Maine, and I'm hearing a news story about something, some other lie that's just been told and people are believing it. And I-I got this-this-this just wave over me, I'm looking out the window and saying you know what, it's a beautiful day I mean the birds are singing and the, everything's turning green and it's a beautiful day, you know what, this is probably what it looked like in a bavarian town in 1932. In April or May, life goes on it's all good and it's all good and in the distance the drums are drumming and the people are being disappeared. Etcetera, etcetera and that's when it really hit me, oh shit. Maybe these analogies have some you know, so there's a lot with analogies here, and um theres a lot of analogies not only to the Nazi period but also to Silvio Berlusconi who was the um, the multigazillionare, uh media um baron, who was uh premier of Italy for five years. Lots of analogies, so the analogies are very frank.	
Richard Morin: Um, we had uh discovered that you lived in France for some time-	Previous living location; France
Howard Solomon: Yeah.	Previous living location; France
Richard Morin: -um and we also discovered that social theorist Michael-	Social Theorists
Michelle Johnston: Michel.	Social Theorists
Howard Solomon: Michel, Michel Foucault	Social Theorists; French
Michelle Johnston: It's French.	Social Theorists; French name

Richard Morin: -that's right, Michel Foucault um was a big um-	Social Theorists
Howard Solomon: Yeah.	Social Theorists
Richard Morin: -favorite philosopher of yours?	Social Theorists
Howard Solomon: He was uh, uh Foucault was—do you know anything about him at all other than..?	Social Theorists; Michel Foucault
Michelle Johnston: I know he was a social theorist	Social Theorists; Michel Foucault
Howard Solomon: Yes, yup. There's a couple terrific, afterward that I'll give you the link, there's a couple terrific uh like Michel Foucault in five minutes or less videos they're just fabulous, really. I'll give you the links later. Um Foucault is a French social theorist, philosopher slash historian. Who died in 1984, died of AIDS. Who in the late 1950's, 1960's, published a couple really important books on, for what of a better term the history of madness in western culture, and the history of clinical medicine, and the history of the prison. Some of these were later than the mid-sixties but by the time I went to Europe in '67, '68, to work on my-my doctoral thesis, which was about the treatment of the poor in 17th century Paris, his work was beginning to filter into American academic circles. So I, and I was in Paris, so I-I was able to read his stuff, I was to talk to to other-with other people who uh were really engaged with what he was doing and reading his stuff in French, and fortunately they translated some of his stuff into English which really didn't help that much 'cause it was still very difficult and complicated to read. Is it just, it opened my mind to thinking about history in terms different from what we were all taught as American students, graduate students of history. Foucault demands that you always ask the question who is not in the room. First question, you know if you're talking about	Social Theorists; Michel Foucault Died of AIDS 1984 Author Historian doctoral thesis in Europe 1967/1968 "Who's not in the room?" Childhood education

the history of, the history of France. Who's not represented in those histories? If you're talking about American history who's not represented? Well for a hell of a long time, blacks got you know, black folks got a page and a half, and Italian folks got one page and Jew's got three and so on and so forth. When I was in grade school we'd do American history and in the Spring if there were a couple of days left over from our snow days and the class was ya know largely Eastern Europe, the children of Eastern European immigrants, we-we'd talk a little bit about anything that wasn't white Protestant you know; and so it really wasn't part of history. An-and what Foucault says, you always ask one-one of the first questions you always ask is who's not represented here and why. Um in whose interest is any uh activity done when you say you know uh, events are happening and who are the actors, Foucault always asked the question, "To whose benefit?" Who is benefitting from those activities? It may not be the same people who are doing the acting. He also asked questions about topics which previously were considered unchanging and just like the fish in the water, such a part of the life that he, she, it, couldn't see it as anything different so Foucault was one of the first people to seriously ask the question, "What has been the history of sexuality?" and-and uh what has been the history of madness. In his book on the history of madness he points out that uh the insane in the sixteenth and seventeenth century had a different role to play in that culture then they did in the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth century when they were increasingly as it were turned over to medical people for a cure and what's that all about? Why is it that the same generation that created the modern prison system in the 1760's-'70's and '80's, also created the modern education system, the modern factory system and the modern clinical system. That is to say in a medieval	Modern education Modern factory Modern clinic Medieval ways Modern prison

hospital if you were sick you were thrown into a room with fifteen-twenty other people of whom might have had different diseases or so on but when you were cured whatever that meant, you were treated, they treated you as a whole person. You were sat down in the center and everybody in the village or the family would be around you when you died, your-your death was witnessed, participated in by all the family members. With clinical medicine it's quite the difference. You are case number 684 you see a doctor who specializes in nothing but your elbow, right? You've gotta go to a clinic, you see all the elbow people this way, and all the people with heart attacks this way, and all the people with trauma this way; and so it's what-what happens with the development of clinical medicine in the 1760-'70 and '80's it was quite similar what's happening to the creation of the modern prison system, which also instead of taking people out of the dungeon where men, women, children, everybody sort of thrown in willy nilly and they're-they're still in the social universe where they're all held together. The modern prison system created in the 1770's-'80's and '90's is increasingly about putting people into individual cells. Making them invisible to everybody else except to 24/7, 365, the guards who can see through the prison bars, right. The modern prison at least the prisons that were developed in the 1760's and '70's up until fairly recently, the inmate can't look out but 24/7 365 he's under the gaze. G-A-Z-E, the gaze. The eye of the state and it isn't just the eye of that guard or those guards, it's he's being seen all the time. Now that's also true of the modern education system that's developed in the 1760's and '70's and '80's. French Revolution 1790's, 17- early 1800 to this present day, the French education that's developed created the system of parts, each one of them in a particular place just like the clinic,just like the prison,	GAZE Foucault questioned everything

just like the automated the-the-the uh mass production system in modern industry. Where as recently as thirty years ago the French Minister of Education could look at the clock on his wall and tell you at that moment what every student in France was studying, at that moment. In other words it was so regularized it almost turned into like, I mean what's the thin line is I'm describing this very very quickly between the kind of regularization in the modern prison system and the regularization of the modern education system and the regularization of the modern factory system and the regularization of the modern clinic system, it's-it's changing the whole definition of what the human being is. And Foucault, getting back to your question, Foucault is really the first person who asked those questions in such a comprehensive way. He wasn't simply a historian, in fact he was trained primarily as a phil-philosopher, and so he-he-he developed this-this approach which demanded really thinking in different ways about these institutions and um that's-that's why all of my courses were, he was the most important, his insights were the most important to me in terms of how I taught. All the way through.	
Richard Morin: Woah.	Social Theorists;
Howard Solomon: I mean today, a lot of our notions of intersectionality, you know that course. It's one of those hip courses, one of the hip terms the last five-ten years	Social Theorists; New language
Michelle Johnston: Right.	Social Theorists
Howard Solomon: That's a term that in many ways, I don't think he used it, but it certainly is the kind of word that kind of understanding, that he was among the first to really put right in the middle of the table and um, and it's interesting as I didn't realize at the time when I was first reading his stuff. But as he became more and more out as a gay man, that was also paralleling my coming out as a gay man and it made perfect sense on	Social Theorists; Michel Foucault Parallel lives Pivot the center

why his approach resonated for me so much, so personally you know? He was asking questions that were sort of queer ya know. Where do these definitions come from you know, how did things develop this way where do people who are different fit and what role do they play. Instead of saying I'm always at the margins. Oh you know if we've got a couple days left at the end of the semester we'll talk about which is the insane, women, children, Jews, poor people. You put them right at the center. You flip the marginality piece and the central piece. And if you do that then you see American history totally different for example, if you put black people, or women, or rural poor people as the center instead of the politicians and everything else, then you sort of use that as the reference then you see the whole picture differently.	
Richard Morin: We've got like, we're cutting it close for time. Do you wanna ask him?	
Michelle Johnston: Oh! And you lived in New York during Stonewall?	Stonewall
Howard Solomon: Yup.	Stonewall
Michelle Johnston: Were-like were you there, what was like living there as it was happening?	Stonewall
Howard Solomon: Right, it's sort of-it's sort of tricky. It's like uh New Englanders who trace their-their family back to the Mayflower. You know if everybody who said they had relatives on the Mayflower, it would have been the size of the, of what the, the Titanic or something. Ya know 600,000 so every gay man of a certain age claims to have been at Stonewall the night that it happened. Um one of the reasons I remember that night, I was teaching at NYU at the time and that uh- June 27 is my birthday and Stonewall uh happened on the night of June 27, the early morning of June 28, 1969. I was teaching at	Stonewall; Closeted Dinner Saw cars, was not there Birthday

NYU, I was teaching a night course in Greenwich Village, we were out it was about 9:30-10:00 I'd met a dear friend of mine. We went to dinner, had some drinks and so on, it was about midnight. We were coming out, we were in the uh, not far from NYU and we were-it was a warm sticky night, June night and we were seeing a lot and hearing a lot of police cars and so on. And we sort of wandered in the direction of the-the subway station, it was right on the edge it was about three blocks where the Stonewall was and that was my, I was aware that something was happening and I didn't know what the hell it was until the next day when I read the New York Times that this gay bar had been, ya know, had been the center of it and I was still terribly closeted at the time. The dear friend I was with, she and I were-were-were very close, had dated for several years as a matter of fact. Uh it was subsequently herself uh, well she's now been married to her partner, her lesbian partner for twenty five years. Both of us somehow knew that that was what that was all about so, I wasn't there but I was certainly-I was on the edges of it and the fact that it happened on my birthday always I saw as something of an element in terms of you know the, how important coming out is. You know it was in many ways a birthday for a lot of gay men and women, who identify-for any of us who have you know some identity that's really central to who we are, the point at which we, we identify that and become public with it really is sort of like a reborn moment and day of birth so, that date June 27 has been- you know it's my birthday but it's also Stonewalls. It has a real resonance for it.	
Michelle Johnston: Are there any other subjects that you want to touch on 'cause we're getting close.	
Howard Solomon: Not, I'm sure there'll be some later. There always are.	

Michelle Johnston: Yeah.	
Richard Morin: Would you like someone else, because I know Wendy is continuing this project so if you want somebody else next semester to come out and interview more about stuff she—	Future; Interview
Howard Solomon: Maybe-maybe maybe so, let's see how this, what this sounds like you know and where this fits in with what you folks and Wendy are all doing in the course and if it makes sense sure then I would be happy to do that.	Future; Interview
Richard Morin: Awesome.	
Howard Solomon: See if the, if the stories change at all.	
Richard Morin: Um, one question.	
Howard Solomon: Yeah.	
Richard Morin: Well, two actually.	
Howard Solomon: Two.	
Richard Morin: And they're pretty short so, do you have any children?	Offspring
Howard Solomon: No.	
Richard Morin: The other question is Wendy asked us to see if we could take a picture of you.	
Howard Solomon: Sure.	
Richard Morin: Okay.	
Michelle Johnston: Fantastic.	
Howard Solomon: Sure.	
Richard Morin: Do you wanna use my phone or yours, does it matter?	
Michelle Johnston: We could also do it after. Howard Solomon: Do it now, do it now. Let's do it now. This is as good as it gets.	
