Transcript	Index
Jack Barrett: Okay. Alright, we'll be fine.	
Branden Pratt: Alright.	
Jack: So, we need to say the date and location. This is November 29th, 2018. It is just about two o'clock. We are at the Glickman Library, group study room three (3). My name is Jack Barrett, J-A-C-K, B-A-R-R-E-T-T.	Date, Location
Branden: My name is Branden Pratt, B-R-A-N-D-E-N, P-R-A-T-T.	
Jack: And Skip, can you do the same?	
Skip Brushaber: Yes, my name is Skip Brushaber and it is spelled S-K-I-P, B-R-U-S-H-A-B-E-R.	
Jack: What is your age and your preferred pronouns?	
Skip: I am seventy-one and "he" is my preferred pronoun.	Pronouns
Branden: Alright, let's see... when and where were you born?	
Skip: I was born in Buffalo, New York, January 9th, 1947.	Age, Birthplace, New York
Jack: We should also say that we can stop the interview at any time, you don't have to answer anything that you don't want to.	
Skip: Sure.	
Jack: So, what was it like growing up? How was your family life?	
Skip: If you looked up dysfunctional family in the dictionary, you would see a picture of my family. My family was very dysfunctional. My father was an alcoholic, my mother was mentally ill, and I knew from a very early age that I was gay. Probably, long before I knew what the word was. So, I-I always knew and I tried to keep it a secret. Going through school was very hard. I wasn't- I didn't have problems with other kids. I don't know if I was popular, but I certainly got along with other kids, but I always had that secret in the back of my mind. So, I lived in western New York 'til I was fifteen (15) and then we moved to Pennsylvania, so I finished school	Family, Early life Sobriety, Drinking Queerness Education New York Pennsylvania

in Pennsylvania. Went to college the first time in Pennsylvania. **Jack**: What were you studying?	
Skip: Secondary Ed, I was an English major, secondary education and that is part of my coming out story. I had a girlfriend in college, I was not out then, but I did have relationships with other guys. It was totally anonymous and quiet. I did have a girlfriend, and through the, I think, last two years of college. She was from the New York City area, I moved to New York City and I went down to visit her one weekend and I said, "what are we gonna do this weekend?" and she has a friend who's a professional actor and she said, "well we are gonna go see Joe in a play." And I said, "that's great." She said it was a gay themed play and I said, "I'm fine with that, no problem." Then I said, "What else are we gonna do?" and she said, "We are gonna go to a gay bar." I said, "we are gonna go to a gay bar?" and she just looked at me and smiled and said, "yes, it's time." So that's how I came out. So that was, 1971.	Career, Education Dating Queerness Coming out, New York Gay bars
So from there I lived in Pennsylvania for a while and I moved to rural, upstate New York, very upstate New York actually, and we lived on farm with my partner. And it was- I guess I was really out but it was a very conservative area. There were no gay bars in the area, nothing like that. So, it was pretty uneventful. You know, it was great living in the country, we were part of that back to the land movement where everybody said we gotta move back to the country to be sane, but we found that we went to the country and became really crazy. When the relationship broke up, we sold the farm and I moved up here to Maine in 1980.. and pretty much immersed myself in gay culture and gay nightlife in Portland (ME), which there was a lot of it in the 1980s. There was four (4) or five (5) gay bars in Portland (ME) in the 80s. All very busy and.. I don't know if you want me to jump right into things, like, my activism or not.	Pennsylvania, New York Queer community Maine Queer community Gay bars
Branden: I think soon we will jump into that.	
Skip: So, I worked here and lived here, I worked for a company / organization called "Little Brothers". I worked with kids that came out of the youth center, and then I worked in the Old Port in bars and restaurants. Then, in 1983 I decided to go back and went to nursing school and became a nurse. That was uh- yeah so I worked as a nurse and then I also became a social worker. I had been a social worker in New York working in public social work and then I did some social work here (Portland) besides nursing too. I been here ever since.	Career Career, Healthcare
Jack: What made you want to become a nurse?	

Skip: I think- my mother was a nurse and I think there was a care taking gene, you know? Just that kind of person, I have always- I taught school for a while, I was a social worker, it's always been human services and nursing was, and still is, a very good job. They always found a job, you always had good benefits. The pay in Maine wasn't always the best, there were states that were much better, but for many years- I just retired in 2012, I still do a few nursing visits with people at home and stuff. About fifteen (15) hours a week. It was a very rewarding career, and yeah I just think that I was a natural caregiver. You know, it's just who I am. And of course, at the time I became a nurse, just before that, pretty much any male who was a nurse was gay. There weren't too many, I used to feel sorry for the guys I worked with who were straight because everybody assumed that they were a nurse that they were gay. It was a safe place to be open about who you were. My feeling about being who I am and being open and being gay is that if somebody has a problem with me, that's their problem. It's not my problem, I don't take that on at all. So, when I worked at hospitals and different places, if somebody had a problem with me being openly gay, that was their problem. I wasn't with patients. Naturally, I think that's crossing a professional line.	Healthcare, Family Maine Retirement Queerness Queer acceptance
Jack: Was that a problem for you working in medicine during the AIDS crisis as a gay man?	
Skip: Yeah it was very hard, I'll tell you. When I was in nursing school it was 1983, I was doing clinical at Maine Med, and we had our first AIDS patient in Maine. We happened to be working on the floor where he was; he was in isolation. They would bring the tray, you know these people who bring in trays and they set you up for your meals, they would put the tray on the tray table and they would kind of push the tray table in to his room, so they wouldn't care if he couldn't reach it or whatever happened. I brought that to the attention of my instructor and she said, "well you know, that's hospital, you don't get into, that you're just a student here". So, one day I had seen enough and I went in and I pushed the tray up to his bed side and set him up. I could've been very close to getting kicked out of school because of it because she said that you're not here to do that, and I said the guy needs to eat and he needs to, you know... So that was the first person, he died I think pretty soon after that. He died at Maine Med. So, it was hard because I was dealing with it. I worked with what was called Osteopathic Hospital, It's now Brighton Medical Center and one of the doctors there was one of the AIDS specialists. On the whole floor there were a lot of guys with AIDS, it was really hard.	AIDS crisis, Queerness, Healthcare Maine Homophobia

Of course, being open and being gay, I had friends that started becoming positive. An ex-partner that became positive. I don't know how many friends I lost, I lost quite a few friends. There are some people who got sick and who are still alive for whatever reason, medications or whatever happened. It was that tough balance between doing your job and what's going on in your personal life, so, it was not an easy time. I remember in 1983 or '84, I was down in Provincetown with a bunch of friends and we ran into this guy who was down there by himself and he was from Greenwich Village and I haven't been down to New York since AIDS had hit and I asked him "how is it?" and he said "let me put it this way. I spent most of my time going to memorial services and crossing people out of my address book". I will always remember so well because that's – I mean we were hit pretty hard here, but it was nothing like the big cities like New York, LA, San Francisco. It was a tough time.	AIDS crisis Deaths from AIDS Maine
Branden: Speaking of your medical history, do you have any knowledge or connection to a Dr. Michael Bach?	
Skip: I knew Michael, yes, I knew him when he was here. He was at Maine Med.	
Branden: Could you elaborate any connection or what you know of him?	
Skip: I knew him, I didn't have any close working relationship, but I knew him because he was a doctor for many friends of mine. I thought he was a very kind man. I thought he did a really good job. I have to be honest and just be up front, some of the doctors who dealt with AIDS patients were not the kindest or the most respectful people. I don't know why they got in to it, you know, I don't know why they became specialists. He, as far as anything I knew about him, any time I had any interaction with he was always very kind and respectful.	Healthcare Homophobia AIDS crisis
Jack: How did you become involved in the AIDS Project, or were you?	
Skip: Yeah. I was one of the founders of the AIDS Project. So it was about 1983 I believe, people started getting sick in Maine, maybe 1984 actually. Fred Berger had a book store on Pine Street called Our Books. There were certain, kind of fragmented groups, telephone calling group that were for those worried and needed to know where testing sites were and things like that, or just needed support. At Fred's book store, we used to just stop in and there was a bunch of us who just volunteered and he had written down	AIDS Project Maine Fred Berger Our Books Activism

people's needs, you know, like; this person needs a ride to their doctor, this person needs somebody to bring them dinner- so we would just do that and very informal you know, not very organized. The groups, there was the buddy group at Brunswick that helped assign buddies to, you know, to work or volunteer individually with people. So, the groups kind of got together and that's what formed the AIDS Project... I'm trying to think of where the first office was. We ended up in Monument Square, the office. I volunteered for a number of years and then I did the buddy training at Brunswick and got assigned, I had two people that I was assigned to. One ended up being long term until he passed away. It was an amazing organization. I just couldn't believe how people just stepped up. I mean, it was so emotional, it was so hard, and yet these people just gave themselves. I felt like I did, but some of the people- I mentioned Diane Elze, she was like a saint. This woman, she was the first social worker for the AIDS Project, so she had a case load on everybody. Basically, it was off of the AIDS Project.	Diane Elze, Healthcare
This is emotional to talk about. Diane would, as you know, many other people who developed HIV and AIDS were totally alienated from their families because of that and because all of a sudden their families found out that they were gay. So, they didn't have family support, a lot of them didn't even have friends. I mean I remember a number of people who came here to die because this is where they came from. So the AIDS Project kind of filled in that gap for people for support. Diane would be in touch with people and she would know when somebody was close to the end of life. She would actually, and this is very hard, but she would actually get up on the bed with the person and hold them in her arms as they passed. I don't know how she did that, I don't know where she found the strength to do that. She did it, often. To me, I always looked to her and now, I'm still in contact with Diane. She is in Buffalo and she teaches, I don't know if she's a part of this project if she is being interviewed or not, but she certainly should be, she is a forced to be reckoned with. She was so active in this community and was just, she was great. **Jack:** She donated a big collection of papers. **Skip:** Yeah… she was just, amazing. But there was other people too. There was all kinds of people who just did- but Diane always stands out in my mind because I just remember those days and how tirelessly and how unselfishly she worked with these people. I have to be honest, and I always say this, I have to say that during the AIDS crisis, knowing that other places were like Portland too, if it wasn't for lesbians and a lot of straight women we would not have the support we needed. They were a lot of the ones who were on the	Deaths from AIDS AIDS Project Women in queer activism

front lines. Sure there was a lot of gay men and we did a lot of things like fundraising and things like that, but a lot of the services, the direct service were a lot of times were women and lesbians and it was really amazing. So, I am always very grateful to them for that.	
Branden: For more involvement that you said you have been with, do you have anything that you can say about Our Paper?	Our Paper, AIDS Project
Skip: Oh sure, yeah, that was – oh gosh, and this happened – and it was amazing because the AIDS Project happened about the same time. A group of us got together at Fred's book store and it was – Fred's original bookstore was in the Old Port for a very short time, and we all met there and decided we were going to try to put out a monthly publication, with the target being the LGBTQ community- and supporters. So, we did it. We jumped in and we started this paper, it came out monthly, very successful. It was free, some businesses would allow us to put them on their free rack of newspapers, some of them would not. Sometimes it was big enough to be a two (2) section paper. We covered stories, my first story I wrote I think was a front page story about a woman named Diane Matthews, who was challenging the Air Force because they were discharging her as being a lesbian. So that was the first story I wrote, then there were many other people. There was Rosemary Denman who was a Methodist minister who was fired for being a lesbian. There was a number of - of course there was the AIDS crisis that was all going on, so it was… We wrote entertainment stuff, Diane Elze was involved and did a lot of interviews with people. Not only just local people, but national people. so we got started, it was just amazing how it just kind of snowballed and became- people in Boston were asking us to bring papers down to Boston to give out. Then we were hearing from people across the country that were getting their hands on this paper. It was like, wow… this is amazing. We lost our first publisher, I'm not sure who it was, if it was the Kennebec Journal… dropped us because we did a safe sex ad about, you know, practicing safe sex. They said, "we won't publish your paper anymore". It wasn't very- there wasn't anything pornographic about it, it was just about safe sex. So, we had to get another- we did get another publisher. That went on, about '83 and I probably stopped in the late 80s, so maybe '89 or so I stopped working on the paper, but it was… I think if I think back and being active in the community it was probably my proudest moment. Just being with these people, and that again was all voluntary time and we would do pasting and when we did pasting, I think it was Tuesday nights we did pasting, and we did it at Fred's book store and we did it on the floor and on any surface we could and we would stay up sometimes 'til two (2) in the morning to get it published the next day. We were	Fred Berger, Our Books Journalism Homophobia Queers in the military Mainstream press Homophobia Queer community Activism Our Books

all working full time and all, but it was so important. It was… I have to say for, of course maybe it was my age, I wasn't that young but I was young in the '80s but Portland was vibrant for the LGBTQ community in the 1980s. I think even, I hear Portland is nationally known for being this very gay friendly city, but I have to tell you, in the 1980s it just seemed like something was always happening. I don't know if people have told you about Symposium, which used to happen and I think it went every other year. It was in USM (University of Southern Maine) in Portland, and then it was at, I think it was the University of Maine Presque Isle every other year. It was, probably, we got four to five hundred (400-500) people there from all over the state. It was workshops, talks, you know, lectures by people, all LGBTQ stuff and of course there was social stuff, there was a dance at night. It was just amazing, it was an amazing thing. I think it went on for about five (5) years that that happened. I think what happened was that it takes a lot of work to organize that every year and I think people just kind of got burned out from doing it. It was amazing, it was just unbelievable. One year at Symposium they did a play, they did a musical. I wasn't in it, but a lot of my friends were, Diane Elze had a lead, they did Gay Side Stories, they did Westside Stories the musical but all the parts switched gender and it was terrific, it was great. And I think the archive has that on tape, I think there is a tape of that showing in the archives. It is worth seeing as it is not professional at all, but it's a lot of fun and they did just a great job so… So anyways, that was Our Paper. It was an amazing, amazing group of people. **Jack:** Have you been interesting in journalism before getting involved in that? **Skip:** I have always been a writer, not necessarily journalism, but I always written since high school through college. I didn't really start getting anything published until about thirty (30) years ago. I had a couple of short stories published, I had some poetry published, I even had a piece of erotica published. But yeah, I was always writing, it wasn't journalism, but it was always writing so it was kind of a natural fit for me. **Jack:** Was some of the interest in starting Our Paper- did that come from dissatisfaction of how the AIDS crisis was being covered? **Skip:** The AIDS crisis and LGBTQ life in general. I'll give you an example. The first Gay Pride march in Portland was, I think, in 1984, not exactly sure. Anywhere from thirty (30) to fifty (50) people in the parade. People tossed rocks at us, beer cans at us, they screamed at us, there was no police presence at all, the article in the	Maine Queer community Queer art Career Journalism Activism Homophobia Mainstream press

Portland Press Herald basically ridiculed the whole thing. Always the Portland Press Herald, the parade grew every year to what it is now, it's huge now. The Portland Press Herald always said, well there would be like five thousand (5,000) people, and the paper would say a crowd about eight hundred (800) people witnessed the Gay Pride. There was always that minimizing, of course that came later. It was always that way. And I think that we were always… that we were treated, I think the press and the mainstream press, with exception of things like the New York times, really treated us like freaks and were in a negative light, always. I think that's why we started Our Paper, because it really- it was that idea of presenting the positive. 1980s and most people still think now that we are all child molesters, you know, and that's the way they think we shouldn't have rights… And that's the other thing of course, we had no civil rights in the 1980s so I think that was an important part of our paper too, presenting that argument. It was the AIDS crisis too, the way the mainstream press did not cover the AIDS crisis as it was actually happening, except like New York Times and a couple other big papers.	Activism Homophobia AIDS crisis
Branden: How did you feel about the whole protection for equality and pushing for that in the community? Did you have any involvement in that?	Activism
Skip: Yeah, from the beginning I was in. I always talk about myself as being not so much a leader in groups or I want to manage things. I like to describe myself a worker bee, so I like to do the scut work. So I did phone calls, I did some canvassing. From every time that we did it, you know, it would start off with Portland because Portland started off with the civil rights for the city and of course it took us a long time to even get that and then on a statewide level. It was so important. It was so important because of the idea of that everybody deserves equality and civil rights, but for me it was for my personal self-esteem also, so I could feel good about who I was. It was hard when you grew up in a time when I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s when you hear the things that you are called, and at one time I think that probably we were one of the most hated minorities and you hear all those things and you actually can't help but start to believe it. So, then when I came out and I became genuinely who I was, it was very important to me to hold on to that self-esteem. So, that is why I think I worked pretty hard at civil rights because it was so important... I am married, I married my husband in 2013 and we have been together for thirteen (13) years. Marriage to me was not so important in the beginning, it was more… I used to look at Maine as a very rural state and there used to be a group in northern Maine called Northern Lamden Nord (?) which was an LGBTQ group, and	Maine Queerness Homophobia Maine

I used to look at those rural people and I used to think how isolated they must be, you know, especially if they are out. So, I always thought basic civil rights more than I thought about marriage and when marriage passed of course I was elated, you know, but it wasn't the big thing for me. The big thing was basic human and civil rights.	Gay marriage
Jack: I was reading an article you wrote, it was right after the re-election of Reagan-	
Skip: yes.	
Jack: and there was a real frustration, not quite a pessimism, but like an understanding that things are going to get worse, there are going to be new challenges. What was it like to live through that moment?	Activism, Stonewall
Skip: It was just so hard because it was that time when, as things escalated and started moving on, you know, you had Stonewall and you had other things happening and you had people starting to be out and open about who they were and it felt like it was going really fast. Then, all of a sudden Reagan is elected, and the conservative take over, and especially the evangelicals that were his friends, it was just a really tough time. But, we are doing it again, we are in a really tough time too now so. It was, I think because there was so much elation and enthusiasm for what was happening for LGBTQ people, and to have that facing that wall again, and that's what it felt like. It felt like a wall, you know, all of a sudden they are going, no. Of course, when Reagan did not even say the word "AIDS" until a second term of office and he and his wife had personal friends who had died of it and he didn't even mention it. I remember hearing on press conference one time where he joked about it and he says "well I don't have AIDS, do you?" and it was like, really? You know, it's… so it was a really tough time, yeah, it was a very tough time… I think that time period when he was president was what set the foundation for what's happening now. You know, it was this wonderful eight (8) years when we had Obama where things were, you know, and he even said the word "gay" you know? So, yeah, it was a tough time.	Reagan, National politics Homophobia AIDS crisis Homophobia Trump, National politics Queer acceptance Education Pennsylvania, New Jersey Stonewall, New York
Jack: Let's talk about some more national events. So, were you living in New York during the Stonewall riots?	
Skip: I was actually live in- I was actually in my last year of college in Pennsylvania, but I happened to be in New Jersey at the shore visiting some friends that weekend. I wasn't out yet, because, that	

came probably, two years later. I remember being at the beach, and I remember Judy Garland died a couple days before. I was a big fan, I was part of that generation and she was an icon. But I couldn't talk to anybody about it because all my friends in New Jersey were straight you know, I wasn't out. Then I heard about the first night of the riots and I wasn't that far, I was in Ocean City, which is not that far from New York. I thought, gee, I think I want to go to New York. I talked to one of my friends and said, "I think I want to take a bus up to New York", he said, "what are you going to New York for?" and I said "I want to see what is going on in Greenwich Village". He said, "you don't want to go up there, there's just a bunch of, ya know, fags" and I still wasn't out to anybody yet. So I was there and I almost, probably would have gone the second night, but then being by yourself and going to New York, and not knowing what was going on because again, the papers did not cover it for what historically happened after years we finally found out what really happened. I had been to New York and had been to a gay bar before Stonewall and I remember talking to a guy beside me, and I wasn't trying to pick him up or anything, I was just having a chit-chat sitting beside somebody at the bar. He said, "don't get too involved in a conversation with me" and I said, "what's going on"? He said, "If the police come in and we are talking to each other, they can arrest us for soliciting." I just couldn't believe it, but if you were caught talking to somebody sitting beside you in a gay bar, they could arrest you for soliciting.	Homophobia Gay bars Oppression by police
Branden: Since we are on the topic of gay bars-	Gay bars
Skip: yep.	
Branden: how did they impact you throughout your life and coming out? Like, interaction with the gay bars.	Queer community
Skip: Yeah… Well, I think gay bars, were at least to me, were like you walk in and I remember the first couple times where one was in New York and Pittsburgh, I was in a gay bar in Pittsburg because my parents lived near Pittsburgh at the time. I remember walking in and feeling, "oh my god, this is unbelievable". These people are being exactly, you know, having a good time, they're being open, they're positive, and it was just, I compared it going to Oz you know? This is it, and you could just let down your guard and it was just unbelievable you know? At one time, I believe for me, it was the only social outlet for gay people. Gay bars were the only place, I'm sure there were other organizations and stuff, but early on it was the only place you could go, you know, besides being in someone else's home or something like that where people have a party or	Queerness The loss of queer spaces Cycles

something. It was great, and Portland gay bars were… I just have to say I had a great time. The Underground was a great dance club, great dance floor. There was a bar where Blyth and Burrows is now, a bar called Cycles, which was sort of a neighborhood kind of bar. It was great, it was really kind of low key. Then on spring street was, I don't know what it was originally called, but it became – I think it was called the Sportsmans – it became Somewhere and Somewhere Else, is what it was called, on Spring Street. Then of course, there was Blackstone's. Blackstone's came a little later. There was a women's bar called Sisters on Danforth Street too. They had great music at Sisters. I used to go there a lot because they had the best live music. It was great, it was a great time, unfortunately it also contributed to a lot of, kind of just not really healthy behaviors as far as alcohol goes and drugs… but, you know, that was part of it.	Drinking
Branden: Cycles is one of those bars we have not really heard much about, even not at all-	Cycles
Skip: Oh really?	
Branden: Even Wendy has not even heard of the name, so we were really curious, could you describe to us what it was like at Cycles?	Gay bars, Maine
Skip: Well Cycles was like I said, it was very low key. It was just you walked in, there was a bar, a few tables, in the nice weather they had a back patio where you could sit out and it was walled so it was legal to drink out there too and it was like, how could I- it was a very friendly place. There was no facade, there was no, you know there is one thing I have to say about a lot of the bars, there was a lot of, but this was just like a normal neighborhood bar, you know? It's what it felt like. It had pretty regular clientele and I would always stop there when I was going to the Underground, I would stop at Cycles first before I went to the Underground because in those days you never appeared at the Underground until 11:30 at night. You didn't want to go in there too early… it was just, yeah I don't know how else to describe it. It was just… yeah. Just very low key, very friendly, I never remember being any trouble there, people getting into anything like that. It wasn't open a long time I don't think. Maybe four (4) or five (5) years.	Drinking, sobriety Queer community, Gay bars
Jack: What is it like to see all of these bars disappear now?	The loss of queer spaces
Skip: Well I am going to be honest, I don't mind breaking my anonymity, I've been sober since 1989 so I don't go to bars, so… I kind of feel bad for the dance clubs because they were such a great, free kind of thing and I don't think there are any dance clubs any	

more in Portland since the Underground closed. I think probably what it is, is that they are not necessary anymore. People can be much more out about it. There are much more ways to social and to socialize with other people. There is a lot of groups now, I mean, there are a lot of social groups and for people who went to bars to hook up, you got the internet now. You use your phone, you don't have to go to a bar, so it's like their time is gone. It's a lot, like I kind of mourn the loss of gay culture too because there was a culture that existed. There was a kind of language that existed that people don't use anymore because some people find it offensive. I used to go to a bar in Rochester, New York and there was this guy who was the bartender and who looked like an action figure. I mean, he was just muscle, but he had a very high voice. Every guy that would walk in and he would say, "hi Mary, what would you have". He called everybody Mary. And this guy walked in one day and he was kind of grumpy I think and he walked in and he sat at the bar and he says "what'll you have Mary?" and he said," don't you call me Mary". He didn't miss a beat and he said, "okay Nancy, what'll have?" it was just, you know- but that kind of stuff is gone, you know, that kind of- and I remember people who used to, and I'm a big movie buff, so, there used to be this language that gay men used to talk to each other that just, you talked to each other with lines from movies. Somebody would throw out a Betty Davis line from one of her movies and somebody would throw out some Joan [unsure of last name] and somebody threw out Judy Garland. You were talking, but you weren't, you were just feeding each other movie lines. It was great, it was fun, but then you know that happens with assimilation. That happened to a lot of minority groups that got assimilated. We lose our culture. I think there is much more of a division in the gay community itself because when I first started going to gay bars, there weren't leather bars, drag bars, everybody went to the same bars. You would see a drag queen, a leather guy, you know, a cowboy, whatever you would see. They were all- now it's just, we are marginalized from each other, you know? Drag queen are treated like over here and leather guys treated over here, you got the preppy guys in the middle. I don't know, it's just, I think we were much more inclusive in the early days. We had to be because we were all being, you know, basically attacked. **Branden:** To follow up on gay bars closing, and kind of losing the spaces for the community- **Skip:** yep. **Branden:** do you feel that there should be specific places, like not so much gay bars, but locations for the community? Or do you think	Queerness Queer community Queer spaces Homophobia

they should just keep melding with normal culture as it is now? **Skip:** Oh I definitely think there should be, there definitely should be an area for people. I think, I still call them a safe zone because I still feel people feel very unsafe. There is still a lot of violence towards LGBTQ people. There is still a lot of hatred, I think, and especially for younger people there has to be a safe zone where people, especially when they are coming out and stuff. Now I know, I'm amazed, I have a nineteen (19) year old daughter and she came out as Bi when she was twelve (12). She has gay friends who cross dress and she has transgender friends. And that is so amazing for me to come out of where I came out of, where you had to keep everything hidden and you were afraid and it was all secrets. But I still think there needs to be some safe areas for people, I still think that there needs to be some community. SAGE is a group for seniors, for gay LGBTQ seniors and they have monthly dinners, and I think that's really important. I really do. Like I said, I was a nurse for many years, so I know that people are openly gay when they reach that time where they have to go into assisted living or a nursing home it is still very tough for them. It is still very tough for them to go in to a nursing home because they can be treated very badly. Like, people ignore them or don't want to have anything to do with them. I even heard of staff doing very strange- being very unpleasant to people who are openly gay, lesbian, or transgender or bi. I knew a transgender person who was in a nursing home, well I didn't know her, but I heard about her from somebody else and I started going to see her and she had no visitors. She was very isolated and she has since passed. Anyways, I kind of got off the topic, but I really do think there needs to be areas where people can go to have support and be safe. I also think there needs to be a places where people can go learn about gay culture, you know, or LGBTQ culture. It's, you know, I think places and here where you can take a class and talk about LGBTQ culture but it is not always available to everybody. I don't think any secondary schools or any high schools are doing any courses in LGBTQ history or… and that is the other thing, I am so surprised at the amount of people that do not know about our history and the struggle. I'm not just saying our struggle from my generation, I'm saying the people that came before us. You know, how much, how many chances they took and things they did to make it better for other people. So, yeah, I think there needs to be a space for that kind of stuff. **Jack:** I want to talk about a few more national events. I want to talk about Sylvia Rivera. You marked down that you wanted to discuss her.	SAGE, Queer spaces Healthcare, Career Homophobia Stonewall, Transgender Activism Gay bars Women in queer activism

Skip: Yes, both Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson… Stonewall, most people don't realize that they were basically the two people that started the riots. They were both in the bar, they were both transgender. At that time they were just called crossdressers, they weren't considered transgender. They weren't remember until many years later as the people who actually fought back. If it wasn't for the transgender people and the cross dressers to actual drag queens, fight back against the police at Stonewall that would never happened. Both of them really died tragically. Marsha P. Johnson suffered with mental illness for many years and they don't really know what happened to her. They think she was murdered, but the police never investigated. They found her body floating in the East River, I think, in New York and they never so… she's, they're both those forgotten heroes, heroines. Sylvia Rivera ended up being homeless and ill. She lived in a shack in New York she built out of found material and basically forgotten by the gay community and it really is important. Especially for transgender people to know that the two people who started the Stonewall riots were transgender. I think that's, you know, really important. I think that tends to happen, if you think in terms of that time period, people weren't accepting drag queens, or gay men, or lesbians. Transgender people weren't even talked about at that time, except for the few like Christine Jorgensen who was the first American to have surgery, reassignment surgery. So, you know, they got really forgotten in the history, and finally people got talking about it. There is a couple good films and documentaries about both of them and it's really important. **Branden:** For other national names, you also mentioned Audre Lorde and Martin Duberman. **Skip:** Yep. Audre Lorde was a poet, an activist, a wonderful poet. I just loved her writing. She was very progressive politically and wrote some wonderful things. Both poetry and prose about how we need to work together and accept each other, and really care about each other. I just- I had a bumper sticker for many years I have to think what it said… I can't remember, anyways, it was something, it was a quote from Audre Lorde. Martin Duberman taught at N.Y.U. and I believe Columbia. Started the first LGBTQ history and cultural studies. He is still active, I think he is in his mid to late eighties now. Has written some wonderful books. He wrote, what I consider, the seminal book about Stonewall, really a wonderful, wonderful historical book. He has written many books about the gay struggle and he is really an amazing guy. Of course, he came out before Stonewall, he was pretty amazing in his bravery and he is an amazing man, he really is. He also started a number of scholarship programs for people who	Homophobia, Police Homelessness Queer history Queer art, Activism Women in queer activism Education Stonewall AIDS Crisis, Activism

study LGBTQ studies. He's always been one of those people I hold in really high esteem. **Jack:** Let's talk about the AIDS Quilt, what was that like? That was a very interesting project. **Skip:** It was a wonderful project, yeah. They brought it, they didn't bring all of it, but they brought a large portion of it here in, oh gosh, I'm going to say 1987 or 1988 and they had it at the Expo building at Park Avenue and it covered the whole floor. Not only did it cover the whole floor, but the seats were pushed back. I think they had bleachers, they covered where the bleachers were so it was pretty impressive. I volunteered because we had kind of a ceremony how you would unfold the squares, it was done in a certain way, and then there was white cloth walkways between the squares so you didn't have to step on the big panels. It was very moving because it was done totally in silence when we unfolded the panels. When you started looking at them and you personalized them, there was one that I remember and it was so, this person who had passed, his square was all his flannel shirts. They used that as patches and sewed them all together. There were just things that all meant something to people and it was just really- I did not get down to Washington D.C. the last time when they had the whole quilt, which covered the mall. The whole mall, from the Capitol Building to the Lincoln Memorial. That's how big it is now, I think it takes eight (8) to ten (10) tractor trailer trucks to move them. I don't know where it is stored, I'm not sure, but that's how big it is now. **Jack:** It really helped enter AIDS in to the national conversation. **Skip:** It did, because each square is so reflective of the person that it's for that, it personalizes it. You may not know that person, but I did see a couple I knew that were in the Quilt. It personalized it. It made it a real thing, and then to see it get bigger, and bigger, and bigger it was just, you know, amazing, just amazing… I had four (4) friends who I was very close to, especially one summer we did everything together, there was four (4) of us and the other three (3) all got diagnosed. One was my ex-partner, we weren't partners at the time we hung out together but we remained good friends after we were partners, and my other two friends. Two of them were there the first night they brought the Quilt to Maine and I had not seen one of them in a very long and he, except to hear his voice I wouldn't have known him because he looked so debilitated by the disease, and we had been very good friends. It hadn't been that long of a period since I saw him because I saw him after he was diagnosed and I used to go and visit him and stuff, but he went very quickly. I don't	AIDS Quilt, Maine Deaths from AIDS Dating AIDS quilt

think he lasted more than a year and a half after he was diagnosed and he was very sick when he was. But that, he was there that night and I will remember that because he was still his same personality. He had this infectious laugh and stuff and he was still that person, but he was, he didn't look the same at all, he was very sick.	
Branden: Kind of to pull back a little bit, to the earlier years in your life-	
Skip: yeah.	
Branden: You mentioned things like food insecurity, and homelessness, and like race and class. Can you elaborate on what you meant by those when you wrote them down?	Race
Skip: From a very early age, I'm from the '40s, and I grew up in the '50s and 60s, so for especially race and class, I was around in the time where there was still Jim Crow in the south and it was still, there were people that had to use separate bathrooms, couldn't use the same drinking fountain, that kind of thing, and that was going on when I was a young teenager and then it kind of exploded. I couldn't figure out what motivated racism, as a young person, I didn't understand it because to be honest, I was always into black music. I was in to Motown and I didn't have a problem being around African American people. So, the racism early on in my life I didn't understand it, I didn't understand why people were separate.	Class Homelessness
Classism, well we are seeing it today with the one percent (1%) and well, people want to keep people poor and it is so important to people and I think it is basic human rights. It's the basic human right to have a roof over your head, have enough food to eat, to have medical care, I think that is every person's human right. That came to me very early too and it's funny because more so my father was a very conservative person politically so he and I from a very early age locked heads. He was totally the opposite and you pull yourself up by your bootstraps if you're poor, you want to be poor… and of course I worked in social work too so I worked with people who were really struggling and… so yeah, those were really important things.	Career, Healthcare Maine Career, Healthcare
Food insecurity has come later to me, it is very important, especially in Maine we have one (1) in four (4) children in Maine that go to bed hungry. Senior citizens struggle for food all the time. I was a visiting nurse before I retired and I would often go to senior citizen's homes and listen to them talk about how they either chose to buy medication or buy food that week. That's what they had to do and people think yeah you can go get food stamps, well EBT not food stamps, covered with your Medicare- but it doesn't cover	Activism, Retirement Race Class

everything. It doesn't cover all medications and a lot of people don't qualify for the EBT cards and stuff. That is a later thing that came to me and so I became very active in working in a food pantry and I'm on the board of a food pantry in Westbrook (ME). I guess to put it in a nutshell, from a very early age, maybe it has to do with knowing that I was a minority, even though I had a roof over my head and having all these things. But, knowing I was a minority I think I identified with other minorities. I think I identified with people who were struggling, who were poor. In the system I think I identified with people of other races who were struggling and that's because I knew I was a minority before I was out. So, I think that's why early on I caught on to that whole issue, or those issues, I don't want to lump them into one (1) issue because they are very individual.	Homelessness Healthcare Reagan, National politics
Branden: One of the things you mentioned was homelessness, were you yourself homeless?	
Skip: No, I never been homeless, but I have known through my work- I worked in detox in two (2) hospitals and in rehab and a lot of the people who come through the program were homeless. I always- we talked about Reagan earlier and I remember how homelessness just exploded during those years in the 1980s. I remember in New York after the first years Reagan was in office, walking through the Port Authority in New York and it was just lined with people sleeping on cardboard on the concrete. They had just put cardboard down to sleep on and it just, I couldn't believe this was happening, that this was happening in this country. Of course now it is probably even worse, Portland is just now, the homeless population is just unbelievable. Because I had been a social worker and because I had been nursing, I knew a large percentage of people in the United States are one (1) or two (2) paychecks away from being homeless. So, it really struck for it happen so easily. I talked to people who all of sudden go, "I can't afford to pay my rent I'm going to be evicted" and people lose jobs, they get sick, and… yeah, it's amazing…	Career, Healthcare Class Reagan Class
Branden: Would you say you found more people, not necessarily during the Reagan years too, the community experiencing homelessness? Like you said, it kind of boomed at that time for a lot of homelessness.	
Skip: As far as I could see yeah it really boomed then. Just, you know, they talk about the Reagan years and you hear a talk a conservative talk about the Reagan years and you here just what a great time it was. Everybody had money, you know. Well, if you had money to begin with you had more money, if you played the	

stock market. But if you didn't have money to begin with, you weren't living high off the hog during the Reagan years. I think the homelessness just exploded, it just seemed all of a sudden there were people everywhere living on the streets. I don't remember it before that, maybe I was naïve, but I don't remember seeing people living on the streets. People living in cardboard boxes, people wrapped in quilts in doorways. To me, it seemed all of a sudden they were there.	Solidarity
Jack: Speaking of Reagan, I noticed an interesting pattern where I was reading one of your articles and it talked about the Reagan Doctrine's effect on Central America, and I noticed a different publication that started around the same time in San Francisco in the 80s which was also focused on Latin America. What was that connection? Was it part of being politically involved or was there some kind of connection between the gay community and…	Reagan, Trump
Skip: That's a good question, I think for the most part, for me, it was for the part of being politically active and politically aware. We have a history in this country of exploiting Latin America, I mean, talk about the 19th century and talk about the Banana Republics and what we did, and we are still doing it you know? Then we wonder why we got these people coming that want sanctuary. We cause all this disruption in these countries and we side with these horrible governments… yeah, now that you bring that up it just feels that today just is a continuation of Reagan's policies in Central and South America. It just, it's exactly the same. We've always- I spent some time in Mexico and I found it to be the most wonderful country and I just loved it and I loved the people. It was so warm and accepting. It was the opposite of how we portrayed Hispanics in this country. Like, how Trump says they are coming to rob us and rape us. I just, I had a whole different feeling after spending time there. Also, I was kind of surprised, I was there in the '80s and how open they were to LGBTQ issues. I thought that there would be a much more macho thing. Maybe because I was in the Yucatan, but there was a lot of "out" people and just total acceptance of things that I was kind of shocked in Mexico and Latin America especially. But, to answer your question, being more politically active, that is probably why I wrote that. It's funny you bring these up and I go "gee I don't remember that article".	National politics Queer acceptance Our Books, Fred Berger Our Paper, Activism
Jack: I just want some clarification on some of the Our Paper and AIDS Project stuff. How did you meet all these people again?	Queer spaces
Skip: Actually, I have to say honestly I met all these people and got involved with Our Paper because of Fred's book store, Our Books	AIDS Project

on Pine Street. Like I said, he was in the Old Port for a short time of course before he moved to Pine Street. And I lived around the corner of West and Pine in a little house so when I walked in town, I had a car but I didn't use it, but so I would walk to Fred's book store and it was like this community thing. It had these comfortable chairs and people would stop in and it felt like, you know, and we talked about community and a community space. Fred's book store was definitely a community space. It was where people met and talked about political things and talked about civil rights. So, it was both for me, the AIDS Project and other groups that did the AIDS Project also, but for me that's where it became both Our Paper and the AIDS Project. It came from being exposed there and organizing. I think Fred had the idea of Our Paper and had a poster or something saying we were having a meeting of doing a monthly periodical and got a great turnout. There was a good size collective. We made decisions as a collective and which at times it was difficult. As close as Diane Elze and I were, there were times we were at opposite ends of where we wanted things to go and people would roll their eyes and say this will be a long night. So yeah, that was Fred's book store.	Diane Elze The loss of queer spaces
Jack: It's hard to not look back at Our Paper and having these physical spaces where we could come and meet each other and we look at how individualized we are now, just how hard it is now to meet people physically. A lot of that stuff has moved to the internet now.	Queer spaces
Skip: Yeah, I think and I kind of bemoan that loss because Fred's book store of course was a regular book store, he had gay themed books and stuff, no porn or anything. Just straight up book store and it was, I talked about safe space earlier, and I remember coming in there like people who didn't live in Portland, who probably found out through Our Paper, who would just come and hang out there because it was a safe, comfortable space. Like I said it was on my route, I lived two (2) blocks away so I was there all the time. If I was walking down town I would stop in and say hi and walking home I would stop in and say hi. It's just the way it was. Now there is the new community center, I haven't been there yet, but Monument Square isn't there a new… I don't know, I shouldn't say, I don't know much about it.	Maine, Queer community
Branden: Did you meet people like David Becker, Fred Wolfe, and Frank Brooks through Fred's book store or?	Activism Journalism
Skip: No… all three (3) of those people I met just through different groups, I met them later. Frank Brooks, well I knew Frank in the	Class

Our Paper days but Frank just lived in our neighborhood and just called it the gay ghetto from the west end. It was West Street and Cushman street, there was a lot of gay people that lived there. That's how I knew Frank.	
David moved up from Boston and I don't know why it was, it was interest you bring David up, he was probably one of the best friends I ever had. It was almost instantaneous friendship, we were very politically alike and he was very active. He worked for the Haymarket which was the group in Boston and he also worked on, there was two (2) gay papers in Boston. There was Bay Windows and he worked on the other one. David was a wonderful person, he came from a wealthy family, his family was the Pillsbury family.	Healthcare
You know, Pillsbury the dough and they sold that company to one of the big general foods, he was very well off. Very down to earth, just a great guy. He gave almost all his money away to political causes. He was one time known at being at like the top ten (10) or fifteen (15) people who supported LGBTQ groups in the country. He lived here in Portland in West End. He was just an amazing guy. He was just… yeah… he passed away in 2010, he had never been in a hospital and he never been really sick, he went in with back pain, they diagnosed him with kidney cancer and he was gone in four (4) months. I was his medical power of attorney so I was there for a lot of it.	Religion Diane Elze Healthcare
Fred Wolfe, he was another amazing person. He was the Municipal Bishop of Maine. Came out at age sixty-two (62) as a gay man after he retired of being the Bishop of Maine and we became friends. He was a wonderful man, a wonderful, spiritual, a very strong, not a religious sense, but a spiritual sense. He died and passed away in 1998 or 1999 I believe. He, was a very special guy.	
Frank Brooks of course, I don't know if you have interviewed Frank or not but he has been a part of the gay community forever. He was one of the founders, with Diane Elze, of Outright, which dealt with LGBTQ youth and organization. He teaches at University of New England and he is a very good friend of Wendy's and he is. He is a therapist and does a lot of therapy with LGBTQ clients, especially those who are struggling and he has done a lot with younger clients. He is just an amazing guy I am very lucky to have these people in my life and just been role models.	Queer history Homophobia, Maine
Jack: How do you feel now? Looking at your life and looking back at the history of the LGBTQ struggle, what do you think about it now?	Women in queer activism
Skip: Well, I am glad I was a part of it. I think for a lot of this I wouldn't consider myself a brave person and I don't know where I got that courage to be open. You know, talking about that gay pride	Education

march in Portland and people were throwing rocks and beer cans at us. There was thirty (30) to fifty (50) of us, I don't remember how many exactly but there was not that many, you know, I look back on it and have to appreciate the people that came before me. Like Harry Hay, I don't know if you know Harry Hay, but there were people who were really out there and they had very little support. They were very brave and started the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, they were really brave people. When I think of the gay struggle, I think of what my life has been, but also the people that came before me. I wrote a dissertation in college when I was in Vermont college, I went back when I was fifty (50) to get another degree and a master's degree, I wrote a paper on a final document, about the struggle of LGBTQ people and in Germany throughout World War One (1) and World War (2) and of course it was about the persecution and stuff but it was also about how people in this country were openly gay and served in the armed services. You weren't supposed to be drafted or join if you were openly gay but they needed people so they ignored stuff and it was amazing to read about the history of these people and how brave they were and what was taken away from them. When the U.S. figured out they were going to win the war they started dishonorably discharging all these people that had served bravely. So, when I think about the struggle and gay rights, I like to think back to the people that came before me because I think they set, and I think as all people do in a struggle, you set the groundwork for the people that come next. So I hope that my generation has set the groundwork for the people that come next because there is still a struggle. **Jack:** What do you think the new issues are? **Skip:** Well, with the administration that we have right now, I think that it could go, everything that we work for and have, it could disappear very quickly. I think especially our vice president who is very anti LGBTQ, I think he would like nothing more than to strip away our rights and put us back in the closet. Just with what happened with them saying that LGBTQ kids can no longer be a part of the 4-H club and the guy who was the head of the 4-H club said "no you can't do that" and they fired him. Why would people attack children who are doing a wonderful thing? 4-H for rural kids is a wonderful organization and to tell a certain segment of those kids that you are not worthy of being part of this because of who you are is frightening because they are just waiting. I think they would love to put marriage up to the supreme court again and I think they would like to challenge that again. Roe vs Wade we know they are going to challenge that. I think everything that, I think we can't be complacent. We can't take anything for granted. Oh yeah we are	Queers in the military Trump Trump, National politics Homophobia Activism Women in queer activism Queer acceptance

all acceptable when in all reality it can turn around. I mean, look what happened in Germany, people in Germany there was a big gay culture, very open especially in the 1920s and then they started putting people in camps. Sending them to the gas chambers. That is not beyond happening, I am sure the Germans thought this can't happen here and just-	Our Paper, Journalism
Jack: it can happen quickly.	
Skip: it can happen quickly. It happened, you figure, Hitler took over in 1930 and by the '40s it was pretty bad.	
Jack: I guess we are ending soon, is there anything else you want to talk about?	
Skip: Nah, thanks for the opportunity and the questions were great.	
Jack: It was great.	
Skip: It helped me think about things that I haven't thought about for a while. I should probably go up to the archives and look through the papers because you were mentioning articles and I was going "gee, I don't remember that article".	
Jack: Everything is online too.	
Skip: Oh it is online? Oh god that's great. I would have to go online, I mean, I remember the big stories like Diane Matthews and Rosemary Denman and those people, but the other things that I wrote I don't always remember	Our Paper, AIDS Project Activism
Jack: Yeah, they got, I don't think all the issues, but they have a lot [referring to Our Paper].	
Skip: I think Frank Brooks told me because he's come up to the archive a lot and of course he is a good friend of Wendy's too. I think he said there are all the issues of Our Paper. I'm not sure because there are a lot of them. It is quite a stack, so… but as I said, just one thing I want to close with, for me, if I look back on my life, being part of Our Paper and the AIDS Project, they were two of the proudest things I have ever been part of. I am proud of it because of the other people that were involved also because they were amazing people and they just did amazing things. Thanks for the opportunity for me to talk about it.	
Branden: Absolutely.	

Jack: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you very much.	