

Elze, Diane 07/19/2019 Portland, ME

Wendy: This is July 19th, 2019 in Portland, Maine and my name is Wendy Chapkis, W-E-N-D-Y C-H-A-P-K-I-S and you are?

Diane: Diane Elze, D-I-A-N-E E-L-Z-E.

Wendy: Diane, as I, as you know from the consent form, you are welcome to stop this interview at any time. We will go for about an hour, ninety minutes or so, but if at any point you want to stop we'll just stop and if I ask a question you don't want to answer feel free to just move on to something you do want to talk about. So perhaps you just could give me some basic biographical information? First, where you were born? What year? And some of the places you may have lived before you moved to Maine?

Diane: Okay, I was born in Albany, New York, my father worked for the New York Telephone Company and so we moved a lot when I was a child. And so we lived in Newburg, we lived in Albany, Pokipsy, Newburg, and then we went up to Guilderland which is right between Albany and Schenectady and that's where I went to junior high school. Public junior high school, oh, and I was born in 1952. I turned sixty-seven this year [laughter]. Yay! And so what was important about my childhood... I went to catholic school up until I was in grade seven and then I went to public school. And what was important to me about catholic school, is I went to catholic school in Newburg, New York, in a very poor, italian neighborhood and there was also an African American neighborhood near my school. And I remember the African American children walking by the windows in my classroom and they were walking up to the public school and the nun would say, "oh there go the Pagan children." And even as a kid, I knew that was wrong. And I stopped believing in God and Santa Claus really early in my life because I figured that if there really was a God or a Santa Claus, there wouldn't be any poverty. Children would not be poor. And so, that landed on me. The racism, and I don't even know if I knew the word racism at the time. But, uh, that really landed on me. And I think the other thing I got from going to catholic school was, I was really focused on the Saints. And the Matre Dame. And Saints did works, though. They did good deeds for people and they risked their lives for people. Of course they died in horrible ways, but there was something about that that landed on me. I think I took that from the catholicism, despite the horrific nature of the Vatican and all of that. But you do good work, you know and you do good deeds. So, um, yeah, so, so what else? Yeah, so I went to, I was very interested in physical education, I wanted to be a physical education teacher, so despite my parents wanting me to go to a public university, I did everything I could, I worked and I got scholarships and I got some financial aid to go to Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts. And I quickly became disillusioned in physical education because at the time, that was in 1970, at the time I really wanted to work with small children, in ways that would really empower any kid around using their body in an athletic way. Because I've worked in summers in recreational programs with kids and I saw, well, that will be a tangent, well anyway, I just saw how some kids had no confidence, and were made fun of, and so I thought "ooh, how could we do this differently?" So anyway, I went to Springfield College, I became disillusioned because it seemed like they wanted to put out good athletes rather than people who had a really

strong teaching ethic. And so then of course I got involved in anti-war activity, and feminist consciousness raising, so I dropped out of PE, went into political science, and then dropped out of school.

Wendy: What year is this?

Diane: I dropped out of school in 1972, and I was living with a man, who was involved in the anti-war activity. And to make a long story very short, because I don't want to go into all the details around this, he and I moved to Maine in 1973. But then we separated...

Wendy: Can I just ask before...

Diane: Sure.

Wendy: Why Maine?

Diane: Because he was from Maine and he, he needed to leave Springfield. So, he said, I was very young, he said "do you want to go to Maine?" I said, "oh, sure!" [laughter]. So I went to Maine. Then, and I lived in Augusta, Waterville, I left for a while, I hitchhiked cross country, I went back to Maine, uh, and we separated and I went back to school at the University of Maine at Orono to finish my undergraduate degree. I landed there in 1975. And that's where I had been thinking, I came out the way that I had, the way that I later quit smoking. I thought about it every day for two years and then I just did it. And so when I went to the University of Maine at Orono, I immediately, I found out that there was a, an office of women's programs and services, and Linda Monco was the director. And I went to Linda's office and she remembers me saying, at one time, I don't think I remembered this, Linda told me this years later, um, she said I walked into her office and I said, "Hi I'm Diane Elze and I need to meet some women" and so Linda and I became close friends, and we did a lot of feminist work together. Uh, so while I was at Orono, I was at the university from 1975 to 1978. And so we started a women's center, Linda and I founded the Greater Bangor Rape Crisis Center, I don't know if it's still around, uh, because Linda was later working at Dial Help, the counseling center. So we started a rape crisis center and did some great work up there. Training police, training the state police, what else about Orono?

Wendy: Can I ask you one follow up question?

Diane: Yeah!

Wendy: So, you thought about coming out for two years, was it, what prompted that? Was it the womens' movement and all of the incitement to meet lovers?

Diane: Well it probably went back even further, I mean even as an adolescent I was attracted to girls. But I had no language for that, I did not, I did not even, I don't remember ever knowing the word lesbian. And I was attracted to girls, I had a, uh, I wouldn't call it a sexual relationship but I

had sexual activity with one of my friends during junior high, and I was what one might call a "tom boy" and, yeah. And so, I just struggled with it for years, and, but I had many relationships with men, and I had lots of sexual activity with men, so I think I was scared about it and I wasn't sure what to do about it and I didn't know at the time, well here I was, so this the crazy thing, here I was, at Springfield College, surrounded by lesbian physical education instructors, and it's like, it wasn't on my radar. And, and, and, it really, yeah, and they were all closeted from at least some of us, and it makes me wonder well where were they out? And probably some of them were in relationships with each other and uh, and I wasn't involved in athletics in Springfield, I went more into political activity. So, so, I missed all of the lesbians at Springfield College. It's really ridiculous [laughter].

Wendy: I was going to say, it's such a cliché to become the gym teacher.

Diane: I know, and they were lesbian gym teachers.

Wendy: So, back to Orono, so you were involved in mostly feminist activities?

Diane: Well then I also joined the Wilde Stein club. At some point I became president of the Wilde Stein club. And then I was also very much involved in the Maine Peace Action Committee. I think I've always been a multi-issue person. And, because they are all connected. And so all of that stuff was important and I was so involved in things that I remember there was at least one semester where I got all incompletes in all of my classes [laughter], uh, yeah, and so all of that was important. What do I remember about Wilde Stein...? Uh, I remember it was hard being gay or a lesbian at Orono. I remember us being very brave and tabling in the quad, I think we were in the quad, with other student organizations and people would come by and say really hateful things. And be threatening, and we just stood our ground and we did it. Uh...

Wendy: Do you remember who you worked with when you were at...

Diane: I remember John Frank was still there and, and I don't remember... Steve somebody was there, Paula somebody was there, there were, people would come... The thing about Wildestine was people would come to the meetings, I remember the meetings would always get quite a few people. And then we'd have dances at one of the religious organizations, I forget what the name of it was, but one of those centers where students go who are of a particular religious persuasion and we would have dances, and women would literally come out of the woods to go to those dances. There were- and I met a lot of lesbians who lived in the woods and in all of the towns around Bangor because Linda Monaco was connected with them and yeah, lesbians would come out of the woods to these dances. And...

Wendy: Were these "back to the land" folks, or?

Diane: A lot of them lived on land, yes. A lot of them lived on land. And I would remember this one couple who would come dressed to the nines, they were very hot.

Wendy: What did it mean to be dressed to the nines?

Diane: Rosa and Margaret.

Wendy: How did they dress?

Diane: Oh, like Rosa would dress up as very butch, very dapper, and Margaret was very femme and they were just gorgeous [laughter] I remember that. And what else? Oh, one of the brilliant things we did as the Wilde Stein club, and John was involved in this because I can remember John being at the table when we were planning this. At the time, it was the National Gay Task Force, and so the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. And the National Gay Task Force, we were on their mailing list. And they would send out these newsletters, and they, it was their idea, that a wonderful idea for college campuses was to have a Gay Blue Jeans Day, where you declare, ahead of time, that a particular day is gonna be Gay Blue Jeans Day and you encourage all of the gay and lesbian people and their straight allies to wear blue jeans that day in solidarity. So we thought "this is brilliant" so we in the dead of night, blanketed the campus, maybe a week ahead of time, blanketed the campus, all of the cafeterias, with fliers declaring that such and such a day was gonna be Gay Blue Jeans Day. Chaos ensued at the University of Maine at Orono. We heard stories that students were going out to laundromats. Because everybody wore blue jeans, nobody wore anything else in those days except blue jeans, that's why it was so brilliant. They were going out to laundromats trying to, you know, clean other clothes so they would have something else to wear. The student newspaper, I remember, was filled with letters maligning us, the editorial staff wrote a great editorial supporting it as a brilliant action. And it was interesting to see what faculty wore blue jeans and what faculty did not wear blue jeans. And I will always remember that, and I will name no names. So it was fabulous, and that was very fun. Oh and the other thing that was important, and I can't tell you how many years this went on, but it went on for many years, uh, the Maine Gay and Lesbian Symposium would happen annually and what I loved about that was that it would rotate between Bangor and Portland and then, Northern Lamdon Nord came into existence and so we started bringing it up to Aroostook County. They were on the rotation, and it was so wonderful to have it up there. I think it was at the University of Maine at Presque Isle, and it became an international symposium because all of these Canadian activists would come down. It was fabulous. And I think that on the symposiums, you know the men and women worked really well together, I mean that's my memory, not that we probably didn't hurt each others feelings at times and not that we never disagreed, but I think it was really an all out effort to pull off these symposiums. And we would bring speakers in, Carla Jane, Allen Young came, oh, Lucia I'm not going to remember her last name, who was the head of the National Gay Task Force at the time, we would bring in film makers. It was really a wonderful event. And that went on for many years and I think it went on, yeah, it went on for many years and I don't know when it stopped and it may have also been held at other places around the state also. There was something... Maybe it was held at Unity College one year, I forget when. That might have been after I had already left.

Wendy: Yeah it happened at Southern Maine Community College when I was here and also in other parts of the state.

Diane: Yeah, and as part of that in Portland, oh I had moved to Portland at this time, because I moved to Portland in 1978. Uh, we Gayside Story as part of the symposium that was held in Portland and that was a great, great event.

Wendy: Can you just say a little bit about Gayside Story?

Diane: Oh, I sure can! I am so proud of Gayside Story and again, it was such a team effort. I had always wanted to do a queer version of Gayside Story.

Wendy: Westside Story.

Diane: I mean, oh yes, a queer version of Westside Story. Oh, but I have to back up because, shout out to Susan Henderson and a shout out to the women in Bangor, Gayside Story was preceded by Oklahomo and Star Gays, Oklahomo was performed at the Symposium in Bangor one year and Susan Henderson, who loved everything Star Wars, wrote Star Gays. And that got performed here in Portland. And, and who was involved in Oklahomo? I sent information to the archives about Oklahomo, I think I still had the booklet, I may have had the script, uh, but it was a whole different group of folks who did Oklahomo. Nancy Gentile, Joann Monahan, Theresa Visinare, Beth Harriman, and I forget who else. And so, so that was a great event. I made an appearance. I and other members of Dyke Patrol made an appearance. Dyke Patrol was something we put together for a Halloween party at Phyllis Austins' house. Phyllis Austin who used to write for the Maine Times had a Halloween party, I was still in Bangor, oh and I was still a student. And, uh, I had this idea "oh, let's do dyke patrol!" so we dressed in army uniforms and we had a song "Onward we're marching, come the dyke patrol.." and I'm gonna forget the rest of it "da-da-ta-da-da" it was very catchy. So, we marched into Phyllis Austins Halloween party singing the dyke patrol song and she loved it, she talked about it I think for years. And so Dyke Patrol was given a role in Oklahomo, and I forget how it fit into the script but it did. [laughter] and, and then Star Gays was great, Susan of course played Darth Vader, and Kate McQueen played Skywalker, I played Solo, and we had C3PO we had an R2D2, I forget all of who was in it.

Wendy: Fabulous.

Diane: Yeah, and that was a great, that was a great play. So, that I think, motivated me to do Gayside Story. And so, we had a meeting down at Tony Norton's house. At the bottom of Munjoy Hill, and we put out a call to people who might be interested in being a part of Gayside Story. And then there were, and again the archives, oh and Suzie put it up all on the archives, what a great piece of work she did. And so we spent months writing the script, some of us. We spent months practicing. Uh, Tony Norton was our director and Miles was our choreographer, Miles Wrightmyer. And, and, and, yeah, and the rest is history. And it was wonderful, and everybody was fabulous. Everybody was fabulous in it. So that was great fun.

Wendy: You were living in Portland at that time?

Diane: Yes, I moved to Portland in 1978, I couldn't get a job in Bangor after I graduated so I thought "ooh, I'll move to Portland" and, so this is a little personal story, I went to work, I got hired at Fairharbor Shelter, that was located in the YWCA, I always wanted to, I loved adolescents, I always wanted to work with adolescents. Oh I should also mention though, that when I was in Bangor, the other thing I did was, I was a volunteer for Spruce Run, the battered women's organization, and in addition to the rape crisis center work, and so I moved to Portland, I was hired by Olivia Rogers to work at Fairharbor Shelter. I loved it. I loved it, and it was a shelter that served girls who had run away from home, some of them had been living on the street, some of them had run away from foster care, and so it was a great job. I think I worked there from 1978 to 1981. And I started out as a Shelter Counselor and I ended as Assistant Director. What I learned after that Executive Director of the YWCA was gone, and after, and when Olivia, my supervisor who is, she directed three programs there. She directed, at the time, the shelter, I then wrote a grant with Mary Hondo, to get a program for teen parents. And that was another program we did that was fabulous. Oh and before that, Olivia wrote a grant to get a street program. So they had street outreach workers as part of that program, so there was three fabulous adolescent programs at the YWCA. So I went from being Shelter Counselor to Assistant Director and Olivia directed all three of those programs. So when she was leaving, the YWCA took off and pursue what was coming next for her, she told me that when she went to the executive director of the Y to tell her that she wanted to hire me to be a Shelter Counselor, the executive director said to Olivia, "you can not hire Diane Elze, she's a lesbian." She had I think found that out because at some point, I ran unsuccessfully for the Women's Lobby Board. And the executive director might have seen that. So Olivia, and again Olivia didn't tell me this until she was leaving, Olivia said to me, and Olivia hardly knew me, she only knew me from the interview, she said to the executive director, if I cannot hire Diane Elze because she's a lesbian, you are going to have my resignation this afternoon. I know, it was really something, to hear that. And, uh, and then though, the executive director of the Y, ultimately became one of my greatest champions, when we needed an Assistant Director, she said to Olivia "well what about Diane?" so, it all turned out fine. Uh, and, so let's see. So where am I now?

Wendy: 1981, so you said, 1978 to 1981 you were working at the Y. Were you also involved with local organizations?

Diane: Yes, what was I doing, what was I doing when I worked for the Y? I think I was trying to stay out of trouble because I worked for the Y. Another thing that happened, was, what do I remember about this? I ultimately had to stop going to the One-way.

Wendy: The One-way?

Diane: The One-way which was the bar.

Wendy: In Portland?

Diane: Yes, in Portland. Because our kids were going to the One-way. And, and then there was another thing that happened in my personal life which I won't go into. But I needed to not go to the bar. And uh.

Wendy: Can you just tell me where the bar was?

Diane: Oh, I'm gonna forget where the One-way was. What street is that? What street is it that runs from Congress past the Nickelodeon down to Commercial?

Wendy: Okay, I can find that, I'll figure that out.

Diane: Yeah, and Spring Street crosses it. Does Spring Street turn into Middle?

Wendy: Yeah.

Diane: So Spring turns into Middle, and I think it was the bottom of that street, yeah, and I'm forgetting the name of that street. How can I forget the name of that street? But I am. So it was there and I needed, so I needed to stop going to the One-way for several reasons. The other thing that I do regret, is that, and I love Olivia, and I think it was the time, this was late '70s early '80s, that she didn't want me to come out to kids. And, we had, though of course, we had a number of young lesbians come through. And, uh, yeah. And so, so that was a thing. And I was involved with the Portland Women's Community, it was an organization, we did a wonderful newsletter called the Common Scold, we called it the Common Scold, I got that idea from Ms. Magazine. There was a law, I think in Great Britain, that persecuted women, you couldn't be a scold, something like that. And, and, and you could be prosecuted if you were a scold with your husband. And I think, somewhere in the article it said common scold and I thought "ooh, what a wonderful name for a newsletter, the Common Scold." So I remember doing that, and what else? So let's see, maybe the best way for me to talk about the '80s. Let me think about my jobs and where I went in Portland. I worked for, you know, Fairharbor Shelter and I did not want to leave that job. But when Olivia left we hired a man as director that I could not work with. Uh, I did not trust him, I thought he was doing damage, and I thought he could, I thought he had bad boundaries with some of the kids. My opinion was not shared with other folks who worked with him and I went to the executive, the different executive director at the time and I expressed my concerns to the executive director of the Y. I think that they started to document and I forget how long it was, but ultimately he was forced to leave. And I remember getting a phone call asking me if I could come back. But by then I had moved onto a different job. And where did I work? I worked for the Advocate, for what was called the Advocates for the Developmentally Disabled in Augusta, it's now called, if it even exists it is now called something else. But we did a lot of advocacy on behalf of parents and special needs children with school systems. Uh, I worked for Ingham Volunteers, I worked for the AIDS Project for several years, and then my last job in Maine was at the Muskie Institute working on a project, uh, that involved doing substance abuse prevention with kids that were in the shelters in the state of Maine.

Wendy: Can I ask you to go back for just a second to the AIDS Project, so this is by the 1980s, AIDS is happening.

Diane: So now I remember, yes, see I'm having to think about ooh, what all happened in the '80s. Well we started the Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance in the early 80s. Charlie Howard had been killed, Dale and Ada Harrigan, was Ada's last name Harrigan, went to the democratic convention. And, and when Dale came back, there was a meeting. And we, a group of us founded the Maine Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance. And Our Paper, I worked on Our Paper. And that was a great newspaper for several years, it was a great newspaper. We did great coverage of lots of things in Maine. And, and then I went to work for the AIDS Project in 1987, ah, because I also worked for the Maine Association of Handicapped Persons on their newspaper for a period of time. And, and I worked there before I went to the AIDS Project, and uh, 'cause that was the year, oh, that was the year I founded Outright, with Charles Dwyer, Tom Haggardy, and Andre, I forget Andre's last name. But we started Outright in 1987.

Wendy: And that was a youth gay...

Diane: And that was for lesbian, gay, bisexual youth. Unfortunately trans youth were not on our radar, and I regret that. And uh, so what else was important about all of that? Oh, and we had, some other folks organize the first version of ACT UP in Portland and then another version came and I was no longer involved in that but I remember we did a couple of great hits! Oh and we also did something up in Augusta outside of the Department of Human Services. But, we zapped John Brennan when he was running for something. We zapped his campaign headquarters here because he wouldn't come out for the gay and lesbian civil rights spill. So we played bad cop and MLGPA played good cop. And what came out of that, was his campaign manager came to the next MLGPA meeting. And I will always remember Sive Neelan's eloquence at that meeting. I don't know if Sive remembers this, but I remember this. His campaign manager, and I might remember his name in a minute. He's been around for a long time, but, his campaign manager came to the MLGPA meeting all concerned. We zapped John Brennan's campaign headquarters, we got lots of great press coverage, oh, and John Presson was involved in that action to. And Sive looked at him, oh, maybe it was, no. Lost the name. Sive quotes him by name, and said "What about our lives?" "what about our lives? we show up for the issues facing Central America" and she mentions some of the other issues that John Brennan was concerned about, and she said "what about our lives?" and it was just the way she put it was so eloquent, it was so eloquent, and that was just a great action. And then I was working for the AIDS Project, apparently the board had quite a discussion about this because what's his name? Somebody on the board wanted me to be, I don't know, fired? Or, uh, called to task somehow. John backed me. John Preston backed me up. He was on the board at the time. Uh, there was an AIDS Walk here in Portland, Jasper Wyman had the nerve to come down and want to walk in it.

Wendy: Who was Jasper Wyman?

Diane: Oh, Jasper Wyman was the head of the Maine Christian Civic League. And we were on his mailing list, we had somebody in our organization who received their mail. I name that they wouldn't recognize. So we knew the vile things they said about people with AIDS in Maine to all of their membership. That it was "God's plan to kill the fags" or whatever. And so, we zapped him at that walk. We surrounded him, we went after him and I think, I don't know if I remember this correctly, I think he ultimately didn't finish the walk. I'm hoping that we were that effective but I could be wrong. But, I think he left.

Wendy: Why do you think he came at all? Why did he participate?

Diane: I think he wanted the publicity, maybe some good publicity, oh "aren't I a good guy for wanting to walk in the AIDS Walk?" or, who knows, or maybe he knew we would zap him. He was an opportunist, he was a liar, he was a manipulator. So who knows, one would really have to ask him. And, and at the time we were still trying to do the Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Spill. Uh, oh yeah, we were doing that all the time, we were doing that all the time too.

Wendy: Can I ask you another question about the AIDS Project?

Diane: Yeah, there's a book about the AIDS Project, the history, have you seen that?

Wendy: I have, yeah. One of the things that several people have mentioned to me about your involvement in the AIDS Project is you weren't just an organizer, you were doing front line work with people living with AIDS.

Diane: Oh yeah, I was a case manager with Toby Simon, it was a terrible time, Wendy. Oh my god, I mean everybody died. Nearly everybody died. It was not only my clients were dying, but my friends were dying, my political comrades were dying, here and all over the country. It was terrible, it was terrible. And, and there was a lot of drama unfortunately at the AIDS Project, also. And I think I left, why did I leave the AIDS Project? I think because I needed to. I will always remember going to see the movie down at the movies on Exchange Street, Long Time Companion. I went to see Long Time Companion, everybody in the movie theater is weeping and I'm sitting there dry-eyed. Oh, just another day. I was numb, numb, totally numb. And so I thought oooh, I need to do something else. And there had been a lot of change at the AIDS Project, one of the directors, executive directors had embezzled money, I believe. Bob Mitchell, and I don't think he was ever held accountable. I don't think he was ever held accountable. Um, Perry Southerland and Margaery Love came in at different times and did great work, um, but I left because this opportunity became available at the Muskie Institute and it would get me back doing work on behalf of adolescents. Oh and I was also doing training around the state, that's right. I was doing so, we did lots of stuff with Outright. I'm like skipping, I'm skipping important things [laughter]. So let me talk about Outright for a moment because we[00:43:18.08]really did such fabulous work around the state on behalf of gay lesbian bisexual youth. I wish we had been there for transgender youth, but we weren't. And, so we uh, we had a road show and we had several of the young people who were so brave who would speak in schools with us and so we spoke in different schools around the state, assemblies, Frank Brooks and I did training of

adolescent service providers around the state on the needs of gay lesbian bisexual youth and how to address their needs. And the Department of Human Services, their training institute hired us to do that. They paid us to do that. Also, shout out to Mary Ruchinkas at New Beginnings in Lewiston. New Beginnings is this multi-service youth organization, they do incredible work with young people in Lewiston. Mary wrote grants to have a team of people do HIV risk reduction training around the state to teach adolescent service providers how to do effective risk reduction work with adolescents around HIV. Uh, they were also doing amazing work at New Beginnings at that time to transform the organization into one that affirmed youth of all sexual orientations and identities. They went through this whole organizational transformation process. Shout out to Mary Ruchinkas, because it meant that in Lewiston, some people left the board. You know, they couldn't get behind it. So New Beginnings became a very LGBTQ, ultimately affirming, organization and also was totally behind adolescent sexual health and keeping kids safe sexually.

Wendy: So can I ask, it sounds like within a decade or so there have been a sea change in attitudes around, I mean if you were getting shouted down in the quad at Orono in the late 70s and then by the, you know, late 80s organizations are taking on outreach to youth of all sexual orientations, there's attempts to get a Maine Civil Rights Act passed that covers LGBT people, can you talk a little about, was it in fact a sea change or was it really just the minute change that's in retrospect...

Diane: Yeah, let me say more about that. There was, so, shout out to the National Organization for Women and the Maine Gay Task Force that was based in Portland. They had a newsletter, the Maine Gay Task Force newsletter. They had been working on a civil rights bill in the 70s. Then when MLGPA came on the scene in the 80s, MLGPA became a big player in that. And there was a lot that happened all at once. So what all happened at once? Charlie Howard was murdered, MLGPA came on the scene and did brilliant work. Northern Lamdon Nord was doing work in Aroostook County, the Maine Gay Lesbian Symposium kept going. At some point before Outright organized, there was this committee in Maine called the Committee on Gay and Lesbian Youth. And it was people from around the state and who got together to meet who were concerned about gay and lesbian youth. And who was involved in that? Oh, David, the history teacher at, was it Marrannacook? I'm going to say more about Marrannacook later, but Dale McCormick was invited to speak at a school and a big hubbub ensued and was she then disinvited? So that got a lot of news, I forget if she ultimately spoke or not, but that got a lot of play around the state. And I wish I could remember if that school is Marrannacook, I'm going to say more about Marrannacook in a moment. But then HIV hit, and all the families that were affected by HIV, and the AIDS service organizations organizing around the state, and the straight mothers who came into that effort, and, so, so, all of that was happening all at once and what I love about Maine is I think we were fearless. MLGPA was fearless, Dale was a brilliant strategist, and we were fearless, and then this committee was fearless. Doing education among teachers, service providers. Then, you know, it is time we get a gay and lesbian youth organization. So it made sense for me to do that because I loved working with adolescents. And Charles was interested, and John Presume was supportive and Lucky Hollander, she embraced us. Lucky Hollander was the head of the Cumberland County Child Abuse and

Neglect Council. We asked to be a part of the adolescent service providers network, and she said yes. Ohhh, trying to get place to meet, Outright. So the first place we met was in the dance studio on Brackett Street in what used to be that neighborhood community center before it became whatever it is now. We met in the dance studio. One kid came. And it was classic. We put a notice, we put notices around where we thought kids might be and we put a notice on the door. And it was classic, we were out standing outside and I see this young person walking back and forth, walking back and forth. And so I think finally I said "oh, are you looking for the meeting?" You know, one kid. Well it mushroomed after that. So I forget how many times we met in the dance studio. Then, I had been on the board of the YWCA, the YWCA had all of these adolescent programs. I asked the Y- I forget who the director was at the time. I asked the YWCA if we could meet at the YWCA, it would be a really safe place to meet, kids could come in, they wouldn't be identifying themselves as gay or lesbian by walking into the YWCA, they could be walking in for recreational program. They said no. Shame on the Y. Shame shame shame. The Preble Street Resource Center, Gerry Marks, he let us meet in the basement of the Preble Street Resource Center. And we met there, it was the little church building on Cumberland Avenue, and Cumberland and Preble? Yeah I think so, on that, it was that corner, I don't even know if that building is there. I know the Preble Street Resource Center has changed.

Wendy: I think it's a daycare.

Diane: Ahhh, so we met there for a very long time and I left Maine in 92. And so Cathy Kidman took over and at that time we were still meeting at the Preble Street Resource Center. And Frank Brooks had been involved also, I grabbed him when he finished MSW school. So what else about Outright? So yeah we went all over the state, and Marranacook, bless them, bless them, bless them. They asked us to come and do a series of dialogues with kids and teachers. They were having this day, I think it was a diversity day, I think. So we were part of that program, so all hell broke loose with the Maine Christian Civic League. And it was fabulous because more kids in the State of Maine found out about Outright because the Maine Christian Civic League made a big stink about us coming to Maranacook High School and it hit all of the newspapers for days, for days! Thank you Jasper Wyman. Our attendance, I think I have a memory of our attendance increasing. Kids would travel two hours to come to our meetings, so, I get a call, I remember getting a call from somebody at Maranacook and they said "Diane, we're wondering, you know the Maine Christian Civic League is raising a lot of ruckus, and we are wondering how you would feel about the Maine Christian Civic League participating in the panel," something like that. And I said no, we won't come. Because there is no alternative viewpoint when we are talking about kids' lives. We are talking about protecting children's safety, we are talking about preventing adolescent substance abuse, we are talking about promoting adolescent mental health, we are not debating homosexuality, we are talking about what kids need, these kids who exist. So there is no alternative viewpoint. I think they may have expected me to say that. And they had us come and not only did they have us come for the whole day and do all of these dialogues with kids and teachers but they had us stay the evening and do a panel for everybody in the community who wanted to come. The place was packed with parents. And these kids were brilliant. And bless Maranacook for doing that. And I think we

stayed overnight, we must have stayed overnight somewhere and then came back the next day. But it was wonderful, and there, I think I remember only one or two people in the audience who seemed to be Maine Christian Civic League, uh, there was no disruption, they asked something that got easily answered and the kids got a standing ovation, it was just fabulous. So yeah, bless Marrannacook, uh.

Wendy: This was in the mid 80s?

Diane: It would've been, maybe, so Outright organized in '87, it could have been like '88, '89, possibly. There is probably something in the archives about that. So what else about Outright is there anything else? Oh! And we had a conference here, now the Maine Committee on Gay and Lesbian Youth organized a conference. Joni Foster, who worked for the Department of Education and did a whole lot of HIV-AIDS work related to the department of education. She was involved in that committee. So we had a conference here in Portland that got put together and, I don't know how Charles and I did this, but the young people, we are not drama teachers, but we had the young people do skits! And somehow we pulled that off and they were fabulous. The young people were fabulous and they did skits around what it was like to be gay, lesbian, bisexual youth. And, so they performed it at the conference, it was fabulous. And who did we bring? Brian McNott came to be a speaker, Bob, what was Bob's last name from Canada? Bob Tremble? He worked for a queer youth organization in Toronto. They did wonderful work, and he came down to be a speaker at that conference. And there is probably some information in the archives about that conference, but that was a great thing. And yeah, we had very brave young people who were still in high school who would go around and speak with us. And we did a lot of assemblies at that time. And really the only stink that I can remember, was the one that the Maine Christian Civic League tried to create at Marrannacook because that's in I think their territory "their territory is up there", uh, the AIDS Project, anything else about the AIDS Project...?

Wendy: One of the things that, someone, I can't remember which interview it was that I did, talked about you being known as somebody who climbed into bed with people who were dying. Who were sick and dying, and held them.

Diane: Oh.... I might have done that. Skip, it's interesting I was having breakfast with Skip, yeah, and he remember, he said "you know Diane, you told, you said to me once, nobody should ever die alone." Now I don't remember saying that to Skip, but Skip said I took that to heart, and I've never forgotten that. And I said to him, you know, it's so interesting that you say that, that you told me that, because I had the same attitude, the same thought around my father dying. My father died in 2006, and it was a year, well less than a year after I moved to Buffalo so I was closer, and my father and I had a very contentious relationship and there was a period of time where I would not visit my parents because I could not stand it. And the older he got, the more of a control monster he became. And I realized, so, when my father was actively dying, he was a week in a hospice bed in a hospital someplace in Albany. And all of the siblings, there is four of us, we all gathered, there's a little interesting story that goes with this, so I'll tell this, we all gathered and we, and I realized several things that week. That my mother and all of the kids, we

functioned as a well oiled machine together. And we all had our job and did it with good spirit. And so, because I could, I said I'm going to stay overnight with Dad in the hospital because I don't want him to die alone. And my sister had her job, and my brother had his job, he would bring my mother home. So everybody had their job, and we really worked well together around my father dying. And then of course, the hospital room was filled with people all of the time. The grandchildren, the cousins, the uncles, and all of that, aunts. And, and, I saw that his grandchildren loved him. And it really, it really brought in my view of my father. He was a very wonderful grandfather. My nieces would go up to him, they would rub his arm, and they would talk to him, it was very sweet. And so I could be there with him, and I had no anger, no resentment, no bitterness, I was just, all of those years of therapy helped. And so it was great, you know, and so then the day came. It was the day before St. Patrick's Day and I knew that my father was going to die that night, I just knew, because he had this little burst the day before, this little burst of energy somehow, he was mostly unconscious the whole week. So I said to my mother, you know, "mom, I think that dad is going to die tonight, do you want to be here" and she thought about it and she said "no, no I don't think so" and uh, so she went home. Well I'm in the room that night, with, and we had been playing Irish music, all week too. Because my father loved Irish music and he was part Irish. And uh, and so they wheel a younger man into the room [laughter] how does this happen? He is supposed to be in a hospice bed, a hospice room, my father. And so they wheel a younger man into the room who is supposed to have another procedure, and so I guess there was a shortage of rooms or something, and so then they say to me, "you're not" what I remember is "you're not going to be able to stay here tonight because the hospital has a regulation that a woman can't stay in a room with two men if they are not her family" or whatever, it was crazy, it was stupid. So I just looked at her, I remained very calm, and I said "well, you have two choices. You can call the police and have them drag me out of here, because I'm very certain my father is going to die tonight and I don't want him to be alone, or tell the hospital administration that I am transgender. Tell them that I have a gender expression of a woman, but I have the gender identity of a man so I am really a man." And she looked at me and she said "we'll figure out something." So, she, so later they wheel us, my father, into the room across the hall. It was stupid, why couldn't they have wheeled the other man into the room accross the hall? Who knows, so anyway, but it all worked out well, and yes my father did die that night. So yeah, Skip had that memory and I don't ever remember saying that to him, but I remember thinking that around my father dying. And I probably did get into bed with clients who were friends. Um, yeah.

Wendy: Can you talk a little bit more about what life was like just being a young dyke, about town, and you talked about going to, I forget the name of the bar you mentioned, but you, uh....

Diane: Oh, well there was the One-way, the Phoenix, we would come down from Bangor when I lived in Bangor we would come down to go to the Phoenix. I forget when that disappeared, I forget when the One-way disappeared. I remember going to the Underground, Randy Toothacher owned it. I remember John Presson taking us into Cycles. Oh I do want to talk about the Harbormasters. And what other bars? I remember Entrenue, I remember somewhere, I remember going to the bar in Boston, uh, what was that called? The women's bar in Boston? And Kate McQueen and I, when I was in Orono we brought Rita May, Rita Mae Brown and

Charlotte Bunch up to speak at Orono and that was fabulous and I'll always remember, that was just a very sweet moment, going to the bar in Boston and Rita May comes out of this room, and there she is and she sees me and goes "Oh, Diane!" and she gives me a kiss in front of all of my friends [laughter] that was lovely. I should've remembered the name of that bar. But we would go there from time to time, and that was fun. And we brought Kay Gardener to Orono and that was, oh, Kay Gardener, we brought her to Orono and that created a fury. She was so lesbian affirming, out there as a lesbian, there was all kinds of controversy around it, I think they never wanted to give us any money ever again after that. And I don't remember all of the details, but they were, there was such homophobia. Such homophobia. And lesbophobia.

Wendy: So you mentioned a whole bunch of bars, did different people go to the different bars?

Diane: No I'm not going to remember when we...

Wendy: No I don't mean individuals but just was it different crowds?

Diane: Yeah, no I mean groups, see I think Cycles was the leather bar, I don't remember, I think everybody went to the Phoenix, I think everybody went to the One-way. I think everyone went to the Underground, men and women. Was there a bar on Spring Street that was mostly women at the time? Entrenue was that mostly women at the time? And then, after I left Maine I think there was a bar someplace else that was a women's bar primarily on one of those side streets off of Spring Street near the convention center.

Wendy: Sisters? Is that...

Diane: Yes, was that primarily a women's bar? Yeah.

Wendy: So you wanted to talk about Harbormasters?

Diane: Oh, so, one of, this was a real growth point for me, I think, in terms of widening my lens. The Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance, I think we were, yes, I think we were around at that time. I think the Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance, the Gay People's Alliance at USM and Phil Gatro was still involved with that I believe, we participated with Harbormasters. What am I going to remember about this? We participated with the Harbormasters on putting on what was called the Octoberfest. We brought Pat Coliphia to USM, she stayed at my house with her hunny and I remember my feminist friends were very upset. A lot of my friends were very upset about this.

Wendy: Because Pat, now Patrick Coliphia was an SM Dyke?

Diane: Yeah, yeah, it was the SM stuff that was really hot at the time. This was probably in the early 80s. Mid 80s, right after MLGPA was organized I think. Or maybe, or it could've been, there's information in our paper about Octoberfest there is information in the archives about Octoberfest, actually it might have been the Gay Peoples Alliance and other folks and those of

us who had been involved in the Maine Gay Lesbian Symposium Organizing. Maybe MLGPA came later but then MLGPA, we would then go to the Harbormasters dinners. They would hold these big dinners and we would go after we created this relationship, so maybe MLGPA was involved in helping to organize Harbormasters, I forget. But anyway, it was a great event because it really brought the politico's together with the leather organization and that had not been done before. And so friendships developed, relationships developed. I remember John Preston walking around Portland with his hunny at the time, this was before I knew him, and I am thinking, "what a scary guy" [laughter], and I remember John at one point saying that about me, how he was so scared of me. You know, I don't know why. But anyway, and so, um, and I had been reading John's writing he would write for Bay Windows, and I knew that, and he was very supportive of the youth organization, so you know overtime these friendships developed and so MLGPA would go to the Harbormasters dinner, the Harbormasters would come to the MLGPA dinner and then everybody starting getting sick and dying and that was awful. And so, and thank heavens those relationships were there also during that time. Thank heavens we had those relationships. Because a number of the Harbormasters were my clients when I worked at the AIDS Project. So it was a great, and I think, I think what has always been important to me, and I think it still is, is, because I do this in my racial justice work, what about this do I need to understand? What about this, what am I thinking and feeling about this and why? And what do I need to learn from this? And, and, and I think I've always also been a cheerleader for coalition building. And so why wouldn't we not want to have the Harbormasters as part of our coalition? They can lobby their legislators. You know, they can give money. And so, so I am glad we developed that relationship and, and, there were a lot of women who I think were upset and they were upset that Coliphia came, and I interviewed Pat Coliphia for our paper that was really interesting for me, so, I think it broadened my view, I think it made me a more compassionate person. yeah, I think that's important, trying to bridge those divides.

Wendy: Well we've covered everything you said you wanted to talk about, is there anything that after having told your very rich history of activism in the state of Maine is there anything else that you want to...?

Diane: I don't know, I'm trying to think if I've left out anything that might be really important or if I've left out any people that might be really important. Or if I've left out any people that might be really important. But probably other people talked about those folks, and the archives has lots of information from lots of people. Oh, Maine Lesbian Feminists! Maine Lesbian Feminists, has anybody talked about MLF? Oh my gosh. So, it was ACT, one of the Portland symposiums, I think it was in 1976 that a group of lesbians got together and we founded Maine Lesbian Feminists, and Wendy it was fabulous. Because we would meet all over the state on a monthly basis, I was still a student at Orono because I got into trouble for using student government envelopes to do an MLF mailing. I was the vice president of the student government, and so, so, so, yeah I got into trouble once for that maybe twice. But, we would meet all over the state at different women's homes, I would hitchhike to these meetings because I had no car. So I would hitchhike everywhere. And if I couldn't get a ride, and if, and we met in the woods, we met in towns, we met in Waterville, Bangor, Bar Harbor, we met out in, outside of Augusta, we met in Portland we met then in all the little towns all over, and yeah we literally met in the woods. And

that organization stayed around for a number of years. We had a newsletter, women from all over the state were involved. Uh, and it was great. And we had a policy, so we had, so we had several controversies in MLF of course, one was around child care. And so there were some of us, and I think we ended up landing on this, though not everybody was happy, that women who did not have children would be the ones who would do childcare at the meetings. That became I think one of our policies. And then, MLF meetings when all of these women started going into recovery, they became alcohol free I think. And a lot of women were upset about that. And I think they stayed alcohol free, I don't remember. But we had a newsletter, we had committees, it was a great social thing for women to come together, for lesbians to come together like that. And there were lesbians all over this state living on land and they would come to these MLF meetings, so that was great. and Nan Stone was involved, Nan Stone was also very involved with doing AIDS work up in the Belfast area, who was also very involved in MLGPA, uh, Nan died a few years ago from ovarian cancer. Yeah, I was able to see her a couple of times. I was living in Buffalo and I was able to come and see her a couple of times before she died. And uh, yeah so MLF, that was important. What else? Who knows, I'm probably not remembering a lot of things. So let me see the list? I don't know what else....

Wendy: It sounds like you have kept friendships from that period, that you still...

Diane: Well I was in Maine for so long, all of my old friends are here. Though now I've been gone longer than I've lived here, I've been gone for 27 years. Oh you know, another thing that should be mentioned I think, this was a great piece of work that MLGPA did. We did, and I don't know, and I think, I forget which of these came first. MLGPA worked on a hate crime bill. We had a coalition of organizations to work on that, and BJ Broder got gay bashed here in Portland. And so, I may have been the president of MLGPA at the time and I went to the Portland Police Department and suggested that we have a Hate Crimes Task Force here in Portland because it wasn't only BJ, we had refugees and immigrants who were being targeted, small populations at that time, we had African American people, we had Jewish people, so ooh, let's have a coalition. So we did, and Mark Dion was the point person for that and we had conversations, important conversations with police officers. Uh, we did some training. And the police officers were clueless about how we carry systemic oppression from police in our bones [laughter] you know. So that was a great piece of work and then we did the hate crimes bill in Augusta and I forget if it passed that first time or not. But what was great, was the coalition on the hate crimes bill agreed ahead of time that if the legislature wanted to take sexual orientation out of the bill, we would kill the bill. So that was a great strategy. But I don't remember what happened. It would be in Our Paper. So I don't know, I think that might be it, oh my gosh.

Wendy: Well you know we can always do a follow up interview next time you're in Portland if there is other things when we send you the transcript from this one. Uh, can you, just, you know, you've seen a lot of change in the state of Maine around these issues. Is there anything that you want to leave to younger people who are hearing this oral history or who are themselves starting to get involved in various kinds of political activism?

Diane: Oh, yeah. Well, show up and do what you can. And I think that gay lesbian bisexual transgender nonbinary genderqueer and questioning youth still need tremendous support. It so varies, their situation so so vary by geographical region. Even, thank heavens there is wonderful resources on the internet that young people can connect with, thank heavens there is still queer youth organizations in different parts of the state, there is still a need for that kind of activism and outreach to youth because there are many queer youth still suffering. They are still suffering. And I imagine that Maine high schools, I know that they had civil rights teams at a particular time and those still might be in existence. I would hope that a lot of the high schools around the state have gay straight alliances or diversity clubs whatever they might call it. And those are really important for young people, you know, research shows that those kinds of, even if young people don't join them, it still changes the climate of the school. So those kinds of organizations are important. But I also think that there, there are so many issues that young people are involved in. You know, environmental issues, they're leading the way on that. They are leading the charge. So any of those issues, racial justice, economic justice, environmental justice, it's all needed and we all can't do everything, you know. So I would just encourage young people to stay active, get active and demand that adults support you. Demand that they support you.

Wendy: Alright, well thank you so much.

Diane: Well thank you!

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Wendy: So, an addendum to the Diane Elze.

Diane: An addendum, yes an addendum to the Diane Elze interview because Erica Rand reminded me of these things. I will still working at the AIDS Project I believe and we thought we needed some women street performance theater. And so, I forget, Toby Simon was involved, Martha McClusky who is now a law professor at the University of Buffalo, and there were some other women involved and I forget whose idea it was but we called ourselves the Hags. We got these very haggly looking masks that were really grotesque, and with long stringy hair, and we had bloody tampons in our hair and we carried douche bags filled with water with red food coloring. and so we went to, there was a big AIDS action in Kennebunkport because the Bush's were there. And people from all over the East Coast came. I think Irvishy was there, there were lots of folks, lots of ACT UP people were there, and so the Hags put in a performance. So I remember that, then there was, I'm not going to remember the action in Monument Square but there was an action in Monument Square and the Hags showed up and it had something to do with HIV and AIDS. Oh, Louis Sullivan came to Portland to speak who was the evil director of Health and Human Services in the "we're not going to do anything about AIDS days" and so we put in, so we and a lot of other people demonstrated outside of this talk. And I remember Mark Dion, nobody knew who the Hags were, nobody knew who the Hags were, but I remember Mark Dion in the police lineup in riot gear yelling out "Hey Diane, I know it's you because you walk like a dancer" [laughter] but of course I didn't acknowledge, I didn't acknowledge that it was me. Um, but he suspected. So, and I forget if we did any other actions. I don't know, it was fun. It was a little performance drama. But the other thing was, and I forget to mention this, you know there was a very strong feminist community in Portland. There was a feminist spiritual community, there was the feminist community we did the Common Scold, whatever year it was that the ERA went down totally, Gina Kelley, who was living in Portland at the time had the brilliant idea of organizing a women's congress. And we had this amazing women's congress in Monument Square, there were, we must have gotten a permit because the place was filled with chairs. All of us came dressed as a woman in history. I went as Hester Prynne, I had a scarlet A, um, I made a sash that had a scarlet A on it and women came, oh, in all kinds, it was fabulous it was so fabulous, and we signed a new declaration of independence, that, uh, perhaps declaring our independence from the patriarchy. There were speeches, I remember Nicole Dontramont made a speech, she went as anonymous. The writer, anonymous. Uh, and Martha Lenny made a speech. Martha Lenny went at Sojourner Truth. I made a speech, lots of people made speeches, short speeches. And it was very fabulous. And then, several of us, we had planned this ahead of time, went to the we were going to do the federal court house, but folks convinced us to do the county courthouse. We took, we, there were maybe seven of us who surrounded the flagpole and we were taking the flag down because we thought the flag should be at half-mast because the ERA went down. And I don't think Portland had seen anything like this in a long time. And talk about white privilege [laughter] they arrested us, but they treated us like queens in the jail, really. I think. Nicole decided, nicole decided that she would go limp. So they dragged Nicole into the patty wagon or whatever, and the rest of us, so yeah we all got arrested, maybe we were there for two hours. We weren't charged, they didn't charge us, or they dropped

the charges. They were very nice to us, you know, white privilege in Portland, Maine. Uh, but the congress was amazing. And I still have, I gave a copy of the tape to the archives. The archives should have a cassette tape because I think we taped all of the speeches, and I might still have, I think I might have had two copies. And I might still have a copy of that. So the archives has that tape. But Gina Kelly, it was brilliant, it was brilliant, what a brilliant idea. And it was very powerful, a very powerful way to say goodbye to the Equal Rights Amendment [laughter] and there was one, oh, there was one other thing I was thinking of but it left, my brain. So yeah the hags, the ERA action, there were probably others, but thank you Erica, [laughter] for reminding me of that.