

Roland Labbe Transcript	Index
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:00:01] All right. So first off, this is November 18, 2022, and I'm conducting an interview with Roland Labbe at his home in Old Orchard Beach. I'm going to ask you a series of questions about your life and your businesses. You can refuse to answer any of them or just tell me you don't like that question and we'll move on. But first off, my name is Wendy Chapkis spelled w e n d y c h a p k i s. Can you please say and spell your name?</p>	<p>Date, location</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:00:30] My name is Roland Labbe, R o l a n d L a b b e.</p>	<p>Names</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:00:36] Great. So can we start at the beginning? I would like to know a little bit about your childhood. Tell me where you were born.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:00:43] Millinocket, Maine.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:00:44] Millinocket. Maine. A Mainer. And did you grow up in Millinocket?</p>	<p>Born in Millinocket</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:00:49] No. We left Millinocket when I was quite young, and then we went to Winterport. And from there we went - because my father worked in the woods; he was a lumberjack. So we traveled wherever the work would bring him - so we ended up in Topsham, living there for a few years. And then we went from there to Bath and we lived there on a big farm. We raised horses, working horses. We each had our own horse. My sisters and I had a lot of fun. A lot of fun. And from there, we moved to Lewiston.</p>	<p>Winterport</p> <p>Father was lumberjack</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:01:35] How old were you when you moved to Lewiston?</p>	<p>Bath</p> <p>Farm with horses</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:01:36] I was - I left school when I was 12, I think. Yeah, 12 or 13 I left school in Lewiston - we lived there for quite a few years. We lived on Lincoln Street. And it was it was interesting. We, you know, we lived on the fourth floor, cold flat. You know, my father didn't make much money. You know, I mean, I think we paid \$7 a week for rent.</p>	<p>Lewiston</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:02:17] Still, there must have been quite a contrast to working and living on a farm with horses.</p>	<p>Left school at age 12-13</p>

<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:02:21] So anyway, when we lived there, my mother finally got a divorce from my father after 25 or 30 years of hard times. And so I lived with her. But then I left Maine when I was 14 and I moved to Worcester, Mass.</p>	<p>Lincoln Street, Lewiston</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:02:48] At 14. Wow. Before we move on to you leaving Maine, can you just tell me a little bit about your siblings, how many of them you have?</p>	<p>Mother divorced father after 25 years</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:02:59] I had three sisters older, and three brothers younger. And now we only have three in the whole family. The three brothers all passed and of my three sisters, I have two left. So there's only three of us left.</p>	<p>Leaves Maine at age 14 for Worcester, MA</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:03:18] Okay, now we can go back to Worcester. So how did you end up in Worcester so young?</p>	<p>Siblings – 3 sisters, 3 brothers</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:03:22] I met a guy, I met a guy in Lewiston at a movie theater, and he brought me home. And we, of course, had sex and the whole bit. But he thought I was from the Navy base because at that time I always looked much older than my age cause I was able to work the shoe shops with my mother because I had false I.D., because I was only 14 years old. So we went from there and we we hit it off. We had a decent relationship. So we moved to Worcester, Mass. Always to Mass. I was very fortunate because of course there was a bar there that catered to gay people. So being that I looked older, I was able to get into the bar, no problem. Well, this woman by the name of Mabel, who was the voice to Woody Woodpecker, she put me under her wing. Thank God, cause if it wasn't for her, I don't know where I would have been, you know. But she brought me to California. She brought me to New York, brought me everywhere. See? Just thinking in part, it makes me...</p>	<p>2 sisters remain</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:04:37] So tell me, how old were you when you were going to California? In New York?</p>	<p>First relationship age 14</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:04:47] 15, 16. I started young.</p>	<p>Looked older</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:04:47] So you were no longer with the man in Worcester?</p>	<p>Moved to Worcester MA</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:04:49] Oh, I was. I went back. Because Walter Lens actually wanted me to stay in California and go to art school for him. I said, "Oh, no." Of course I was young. "No,</p>	<p>Gay bars</p>

<p>no, no. I got to get back to my lover." So anyway, I went back and of course, I stayed there, I would say probably six or seven years. I don't really quite remember, but it was a while. And then I broke up with him and moved back to Maine, stayed with my mother for a while. And meeting the people that I met, I was very fortunate because I don't want this in writing, though because...</p>	<p>Mabel</p> <p>Traveled to California and New York</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:05:34] Well don't say it then because it'll be recorded. We won't we won't say that on tape.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:05:38] Well, no. The people that I met through Mabel, you know, as I was fortunate ago, I met Johnny Mathis, and he always would send me albums, every time he had an album. All I can say, I was blessed. I was blessed with the people that I actually met in my early years. Blessed. And so anyway, from there I came back to Maine and there was a big article about "who is Johnny Mathis seeing in Maine?" Oh, yeah, it was me! [laughs] But anyway.</p>	<p>In NYC at age 15 or 16</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:06:18] Can I can I ask you - so your mother, did she know you were gay?</p>	<p>Walter Lens</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:06:22] Oh, my mother. When I came back to Maine, I went back to New York again to live because I wanted a better job than what they could offer here. So I, I was working in a wholesale store down in the village called - oh, my God. I don't remember the company name. It's awful how much you forget. Well, anyway, I worked for this company. And Alger Hiss - you remember Alger Hiss? Well, I worked, his desk was here and mine was here. Okay. I would say I worked there about six years and then, then I had gone to California seeing the nightclubs there. I had seen the ones in New York. I had, you know, and I'm going, you know what? I could do that in Maine. And I had the backing because the people in New York that I lived with, of course, were quite wealthy. And they said, "you want to start a bar, may go for it." So I said, Yeah, I do, you know. But of course, when I opened it, we could only sell beer, we couldn't sell liquor, and we couldn't have no dancing. But we had dancing anyway because we had this light that would put on if we did have a stranger come through the door. So we were all set up. We were all set up.</p>	<p>Moved back to Worcester to be with his lover</p> <p>Broke up after 6 or 7 years</p> <p>Moved back to Maine</p> <p>Johnny Mathis</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:07:53] So this is Roland's you're talking about. Okay. So before we get to that, though, can I just ask so just to finish out your your family piece here. Your mother, was</p>	

<p>she concerned when you left school and moved to Worcester or did she just you know think -</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:08:11] Nope she said "It's your life. Do whatever you can", you know?</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:08:15] And did she know that you were moving in with a man? And she was aware you were gay.</p>	<p>Moved back to NYC to get better job</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:08:17] Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Oh God, yeah. Oh absolutely.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:08:19] And that was no problem?</p>	<p>Alger Hiss</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:08:22] Nothing. Ever, ever, ever, nothing. And if anybody ever talked against me, man, she was down their throat. once.</p>	<p>NYC for 6 years</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:08:29] That was impressive in those years, I would say, especially then.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:08:31] Way back then, you better believe it, because even my sisters and my brother in law when I first opened Roland's Tavern, they'd come down and they would work the bar and and my sisters would wait on tables. So they were open to me being gay.</p>	<p>Backing from NYC friends to open bar in Portland, Maine</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:08:46] Were you the only gay child in the family?</p>	<p>Beer license only – no liquor, no dancing</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:08:49] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. So. But.</p>	<p>Alert system for cops</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:08:55] Okay, so you are in your twenties. You've moved back to Maine, you've got some money to start a bar. Did you know you wanted to do it in Portland? Was that-</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:09:07] Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely. Because that's where I had lived before I went to New York and I said, Portland needs a gay bar.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:09:16] How did you end up on the corner of Forest and Cumberland?</p>	<p>Supportive mother</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:09:18] Well, it was the only building I could find that was available, and it was a dump when I bought it, you know. But I got it for practically nothing, you know, and it</p>	

<p>was because it had been closed up for quite a few years. So I went in there and I started remodeling the inside and stuff made apartment on, as you're looking at it, on this side for myself, I took both floors over the park, the first and second floor. And on the other side I made two smaller apartments, three room apartment and another three room apartment on the third floor. So that kept me busy. But in the meantime - because I was talking to Danielle, I don't know if you know Danielle. She's a female impersonator and she's very well known in Portland now. I love her to death, but there again, like I told her, you're getting too old for this stuff, Danielle. You're 61 now. So, you know, but anyway, I went to a show last week that they put on. It was very good. But there's a lot of things that she knows that I didn't agree with, you know, I mean, because I said, I'll give you my opinion. I said, I like the show, but I said that I thought there was a lot of things you shouldn't have done in the show which took it away from the public, you know - because she used to perform for me whenever I was at the Phoenix.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:10:43] Oh. The Phoenix. Wow.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:10:46] Well she wasn't around at Roland's Tavern. She was around at the end of the Phoenix.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:10:51] So what do you mean that there were things that took away from the show when you just saw it?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:10:57] Well when we put on a show, we put on a show on the stage. Now what they're doing is they're walking in the crowds. So you miss 90% of the whole thing that you're supposed to be looking for. The mouth movement, that movements on the stage. You miss all of that. And I don't agree with it because that's only so they can collect the dollar bills out there. I said let them come up to the stage and put the money on the stage. I said, because you miss so much of the the whole performance, when they're out there in the crowd, you don't see them. They're gone, you know, all you hear is the music. And I said, that doesn't work. That's not that's not what you call a show. You know, the show is supposed to be on the stage where everybody can see it.</p>	<p>Mother knew he was gay</p> <p>Supportive mother</p> <p>Sisters and brother worked at Roland's Tavern</p> <p>Family supportive</p> <p>Portland needed a gay bar</p> <p>Location of Roland's Tavern</p>
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<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:11:47] So back to Roland's for a second. So you you remodel. What did it look like? Describe Roland's for somebody who has never seen it.</p>	<p>Condition of the building</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:11:56] Well, we had two separate rooms. And when you walked in, the bar was right there and the whole bar was right there. But there was another room because the bathrooms were in between those two rooms. And you go into the other room, there was a dance area and there was place for seating and everything. And like I said, so if somebody came in that we didn't know, we'd snap on the red light and everybody would clear the floor or bring a table out and put it out in the middle of the floor. We had it all set up.</p>	<p>Renovations</p> <p>Lived in apartment in the building</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:12:27] So people were not allowed...</p>	<p>Danielle 'female impersonator'</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:12:29] Well, you know, why? The city refused to give me a dance license. I thought, Well, the hell with you all. I dance anyway. You know, so I had to take that chance because that's what the people wanted. They wanted the dance. So I said, I'm going to give them what they want, you know? So.</p>	<p>Drag show</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:12:45] Yeah, I'm curious. So your relations with the city were not the best when you first tried to -</p>	<p>Performances at the Phoenix</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:12:49] Oh. Awful. But I had two people on the city council. Thank God they were on there. There was this heavysset Italian guy. I don't remember what his name was, but him and the gay person that was on the city council. Those two were the ones that, thank God, were on there because I would have never had a prayer.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:13:14] So was the gay person out as gay?</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:13:18] Well, kindo of. Everybody knew he was always in the park. So, you know, so everybody kind of knew that he was gay, but he never came out, you know, like a closet case is what they're called.</p>	<p>Critique of drag show</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:13:31] Interesting. So you had to really fight to get licenses.</p>	

<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:13:37] And at one time, because of the city refusing, I went over their head and went directly to the state and the state overruled the city. That's how I got my dancer's license. Know, I was always determined, you know. And then when I opened the Phoenix and we we had all those dance classes. I mean, hundreds and hundreds of people, we taught disco dancing. Well, of course, they wanted to be curious to see what was going on when the place was open. So that's how we mixed the gays and the straights in Portland. That's how that all started, right in Portland. You know, everybody knows it was me that started it.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:14:15] So Roland's was more of a bar with a small dance space and with the Phoenix more of a discotheque kind of thing.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:14:22] Total of discotheque. Yeah, but we had beautiful staging areas, so we could put on fantastic shows. I mean, I had. I had so many people. I had Gloria Gaynor there - "I will survive." I had her there. But every time we put on a show at the Phoenix -</p>	<p>Description of Roland's Tavern</p> <p>Bar</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:14:41] So you were saying you had people like Gloria Gaynor there, you had shows?</p>	<p>Dance area</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:14:45] But oh, my God, we had everything. We we we put on shows that were unbelievable. I mean, I played Charlie Chaplin. I played every part you could imagine. But no, we got good performers. I mean, then sometimes, like, when they had a concert over at the at the - what do you call it there, that what was it called? Not the Arcade. The big...</p>	<p>Red light to warn of cops</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:15:14] The State Theater?</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:15:15] No, not the State Theater. The big place where they had the ice skating.</p>	<p>City refused dance license</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:15:23] Oh, the, the Civic Center.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:15:27] There you go. The Civic Center. Well, Kiss was there, and when the Village People were there, they'd all come over to the Phoenix, all of them would come pile into the Phoenix. Cause that was the place to go. You know, so. Yeah, it was. It was a hopping place.</p>	

<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:15:42] But so describe the interior of the Phoenix a little bit. So if Roland's was a long, narrow bar with a room in the back. What did the Phoenix look like when you walked into it?</p>	<p>Awful relationship with City Council</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:15:50] Very open. Well, it was the church, so it was very open. Had these beautiful beams and it was gorgeous. It was gorgeous. And of course, I had all that beautiful room to work with. So I had lights and flashing and running lights everywhere and oh yeah, it was beautiful. But yeah, that's what brought the gays and the straights together.</p>	<p>Two supportive council members</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:16:15] Because people wanted to dance</p>	<p>Closeted gay person on City Council</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:16:16] Absolutely. They wanted they were coming for the dance classes and they wanted to see what was going on here at night. And I'm telling you, the only time I ever had a problem was there was a boxer that was popular in Portland at the time, a young black guy, and he tried to start trouble. And this was - listen to this one - this was after somebody had thrown a brick in my face and I had 22 fractures. I had two broken jaws. My eye was way down here. This is all plastic right here. All of this is all plastic.</p>	<p>State government overruled city and granted dance license</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:16:51] Well, this was when you were operating the Phoenix, and it happened then?</p>	<p>Phoenix and disco dancing</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:16:54] I was walking home from the Phoenix, cause Roland's Tavern was right there and I lived up over Roland's Tavern and I knew somebody was behind me, following me home from Phoenix. But when I turned around, all I got was this huge brick thrown right in my face. 22 fractures. Dr. LaBelle was the one that operated on me. He had to actually get pictures of me so he could put my face back back in shape again.</p>	<p>Mixed gay and straight</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:17:21] Okay. Yeah. Let's talk a little bit about that. So here you are. You're opening the first, with Roland's, the first gay bar in Maine, probably least in Portland.</p>	<p>Discotheque</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:17:32] Well not the first in Maine because Ogunquit had gay bars. [00:17:35][2.5]</p>	<p>Gloria Gaynor</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:17:36] Ogunquit had gay bars.</p>	



<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:17:38] Okay. So the first in Portland.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:17:40] The first in Portland.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:17:40] And it was not easy in terms of city council stuff, but it sounds like it might not have been easy in terms of the public response to it either.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:17:51] Oh, it was terrible. We had rocks thrown through the windows and we I mean, you name it, it happened to us, you know. And of course, I got smart and put that plex in so that the rocks would bounce off. And then the people sitting at the window would watch these cars and of course, they'd always yell and scream, you know, all the nasty names they could think of, but we just ignored it and waved to them, you know.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:18:16] Did people ever come into the bar to cause trouble?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:18:19] Oh, God, yeah. Many times. Many, many, many times. So there was one time when five guys came in and listen to this, they were all bartenders from other bars in Portland. I brought every one of them to court, every damn one of them to court anytime I had a problem. I always brought the people to court and I had never lost a case in court. Never.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:18:45] But I'm imagining it must have been challenging.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:18:47] The guy that put through the brick, he's still in jail. He's still in jail. He was the one, after he got out of jail, he raped a woman when the Maine Mall first opened. Remember the woman that got raped over there. He was the one that threw the brick in my face.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:19:05] So I'm imagining when people came in to cause trouble, in most bars, he would just pick up the phone and call the police. But I'm thinking probably the police were not....</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:19:19] We couldn't. We couldn't. At the first three years I was in court 90% of the time fighting, fighting, fighting for my rights. And it was rough. But then I finally went down and directly talked to the the chief of police and sat down</p>	<p>Put on shows</p> <p>Kiss</p> <p>Performers from Civic Center to the Phoenix</p> <p>Description of interior of the Phoenix</p>
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<p>with him and said, "Look, this has got to stop". I said, "we need help." I said, "You people should be helping us so we're not threatened all the time." Well, one time when when we had the problem, we we beat the shit out of the people. We threw them out on the street and we went out there. Unfortunately, it was about that time the police showed up and I had a bat in my hand. So who got arrested? I did,. [laughs]. But I fought it and won. I fought it and won.</p>	<p>Gays and straights</p> <p>Dance classes</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:20:11] So you had to really take the law into your own hands?</p>	<p>Incident with a boxer</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:20:15] Absolutely. Absolutely. And I never, ever gave in on anybody. You know, I always stood my ground. And if I had to go to court five times, I went to the court five times, you know, because I said, I've got to show them that I'm not going anywhere, you know. But I made up my mind to do something. That was it. And then when I made up my mind to even open up the Phoenix, I said, We need a disco here. So I brought in a disco. But yeah, it was. It was rough. It was very rough. I had five, four or five guys cornered me because I was doing some building in the side. So I had stuff piled up between the apartment building on this side, and my building, in the alleyway, and I could hear something going on down there and stuff. So I went down by mistake. I shouldn't have. They got me cornered down there in the alleyway and I took my ladder and used that as a ramming post as two of them held me like this. Five ribs. So I had my rough times. I had my rough times, but I got every one of the sons of bitches. I brought every one of them to court, and I won every every one of them. So I fought for the rights for the gays. I fought hard for that. And and I'll tell you, today I feel as though I did a hell of a job and it was well worth it. Well worth it. Yeah.</p>	<p>After brick in the face Broken jaws</p> <p>Description of brick attack</p> <p>22 fractures</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:21:56] You did. And we're grateful. But before we get into all the change that you made, let's just go back to those early years. Did you have a sign out front that said, well, you probably didn't say anything that was didn't have an indication it was a gay bar, did you?</p>	<p>Ogunquit</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:22:12] Oh, no, it was just Roland's Tavern. That's it. Roland's Tavern out on there. That was all there was. There was nothing gay about it. Nothing. And the beer signs in the window, just like any other bar. Had the same thing. No, no, no, nothing.</p>	

<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:22:31] So how did people know? Did you advertise?</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:22:34] No, no - I didn't have to advertise! [laughs] The first night I opened, we were packed. Everybody in in the state of Maine, practically knew that I was opening up a bar in Portland and I had given the date of when it was going to be open. We were mobbed, mobbed. I couldn't believe it. It was always busy, always busy up until - I took a lot of business away from it when I opened the Phoenix, you know.</p>	<p>Roland's was first gay bar in Portland</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:23:01] So it was word of mouth. People just told each other that the gay bar in Portland and.</p>	<p>Rocks through windows</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:23:05] Yeah.</p>	<p>Homophobic harassment from passing cars</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:23:06] Yeah. Did people come from other parts of the state to go to Roland's?</p>	<p>Homophobic harassment from passing cars</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:23:09] I used to have people come up from New York and because I had friends from New York and they would tell their friends, let's go to Maine, spend the weekend up there and we'll go to Roland's Bar and... Oh, yeah.</p>	<p>Homophobic harassment inside the bar</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:23:21] And I assume people from from other parts of Maine that didn't have gay bars probably came to Portland.</p>	<p>Took harassers to court and won</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:23:27] A lot of people from Lewiston, a lot of people from Augusta, a lot of people from Bangor would come down, spend the weekend down here just to come to the tavern. You know, it was wonderful. Well, like I said, my sisters and my brother in law's were very helpful because at that time, I couldn't afford to pay any money. You know, I had spent so much money getting the thing together and, you know, getting it open. And so they came down and helped me.</p>	<p>Brick attacker still in jail</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:23:55] So can you describe what the clientele was like? Say it, Rolland's, and then we'll talk about the Phoenix. Like who? What, what age group? Was it a mix or did you -</p>	<p>Rape of woman at Maine Mall</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:24:04] Oh, it was very mixed for old, the young. I mean, it was totally, totally mixed. And it was mixed</p>	

<p>straight, not straight, but women and men. We had a lot of lesbians and we had a lot of - what do you call guys.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:24:21] Gay men. So did they get along well, these two communities, the women and men?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:24:30] I had more problems with the lesbians than I did with the guys because the lesbians were always... One of them - her name was Big Dolly - she must have weighed about 400 pounds. And she had this little lover who was about four feet high or something, I mean. But anyway.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:24:50] What kind of trouble did they make?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:24:53] Well, nobody could look at her girlfriend without, you know, and then next thing you know, she's arguing with them and then all of a sudden she's fighting with them. Well, this one night, I said, that's enough. She come out front, she started putting her fist through my windows and smashing all my windows, the signs in my windows and stuff, and bang. And well, she broke one and I said, That's it, honey. I jumped on her back and I got her down on the fucking floor and I had her face - I'm telling you, I was like a midget compared to her, but I was able to get her off balance, and that's the only reason she went on the floor. So by the time the police came, I had her down on the floor quite a while. And the police, I said, I tell you, put handcuffs on her, I'm not letting her up at all because she'll beat the shit out of me [laughs]. So anyway, they said, All right, you can let her up, you can let her up. And I said, No, not until you put those handcuffs on. I said, Because she's, she's angry. But anyway, I barred her for - cause any trouble, immediately they know they're going to be barred for six months. It was no questions asked; you step out of line your barred automatically for six months and everybody knew it that went to the bar. I would put up with no bullshit.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:26:25] I understand that that caused some problems at the end that somebody actually took revenge on you saying you can't come in to Roland's by burning the building.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:26:35] That was, I think his name was Rick Lovely. He's the one that burnt Roland's Tavern because he was drunk. He was already drunk before he even got to the</p>	<p>Couldn't call police</p> <p>In court repeatedly</p> <p>Had to defend themselves</p> <p>Refused to be intimidated</p> <p>Attack by 4 or 5 guys outside Roland's</p> <p>5 broken ribs</p>
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<p>door. So, no, of course I'm not going to, I wouldn't even let him in at the Phoenix if they were already drunk. You know, I said, no, I don't need the hassle. So, of course, we didn't allow him in. Well he went downstairs in the bookstore and got some newspapers from them and burned the place down.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:27:10] That was in the 1980s?</p>	<p>Brought them to court</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:27:12] Yeah, I would say. Cause I opened in 1967. And it was... I'm so bad on years...</p>	<p>Fought for the rights of gays</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:27:24] It was 15 years or so that it operated so that would have been the early eighties. So the Roland and the Phoenix overlapped for for a few years.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:27:34] Right, right.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:27:36] So one of the things that I think is interesting is you opened Roland's Tavern before the Stonewall uprising. I mean, that's brave and really a different cultural moment than probably when the Phoenix opened which was just a few years later.</p>	<p>No obvious indication Roland's was a gay bar</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:27:51] Everybody always would say to me, you got some big ones. No, I don't. But yeah, I do. [laughs]</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:28:03] So by the time you opened the Phoenix had things shifted. Did you have, like, less trouble with the city council?</p>	<p>First night packed despite no advertising</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:28:09] Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely. By that time, they knew where they stood with me. Don't screw with me. Cause if you screw with me, I will be the winner at the end. That was my bottom thing. Every, the city council knew that. The police knew that. That I would always back up anybody that caused trouble, I made sure that they were taken care of. Hell, I even ran down the street after one. We had a house and there was a young, young man, a young boy, probably about 12, 13 years old. And this guy had a knife against his throat in my garage. And I was on my deck and I leaned over, I could hear and I leaned over and he's got a knife at this kid's throat making him go down on him. I said, "You rotten son of a bitch." I call the police before I went down. So by the time the police came, he had taken off. Well, I went right downstairs, and I went after him, no knives, you son of a bitch, you're going to get your dues. So anyway, we caught up with</p>	

him. The police and I caught up. We chased him down Cumberland Avenue and, you know, but we caught up with him. He got arrested and they asked me to be a witness to the whole thing. I said, absolutely, absolutely. I said, that kid never should have had that happen to him. Oh, I was pissed. I was so pissed.

**Wendy Chapkis:** [00:29:56] So I'm guessing that one of the shifts is you get a working relationship with the Council, you get a working relationship with the police. People who are homophobic know not to cause trouble because you're going to go after them. I'm wondering about the changes that are happening in the gay community while this is going on. So initially with Roland's, people are probably pretty afraid to be recognized as gay or to be outed.

**Roland Labbe:** [00:30:21] So there were a lot of of course, a lot of them had hang-ups because they had their families to worry about. They had to, you know, where they work, they had to worry about that. Me in the position that I was in. I didn't have to worry about that, you know? I mean, hey, I opened up a gay bar, so yeah, I'm gay, you know? [laughs] But with them, a lot of them, you know, would kind of, like, sneak in. You know, they didn't want to be seen going into the bar and stuff and they'd run across the street, up the stairs and into the bar quickly. But you can't blame them back then, because back then you would have been criticized and put down and you know, so and of course, they didn't want to go through all of that.

**Wendy Chapkis:** [00:31:10] You could lose your job. There was no anti-discrimination protections.

**Roland Labbe:** [00:31:13] There you go. You could have lost your job. So many, so many circumstances that a lot of them had to think about. You know that, because by that time, they knew it was an openly gay bar, not a straight bar, a gay bar, you know.

**Wendy Chapkis:** [00:31:33] So it was already brave for them to go there, even if they were running across the street.

**Roland Labbe:** [00:31:38] Absolutely. Absolutely.

People traveled long distances to go to Roland's

Sisters and brother in laws helped at the bar

Clientele mixed old and young; lesbians and gay men

More problems with the lesbians

<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:31:40] But I'm guessing within a few years with the Stonewall.</p>	<p>Big Dolly</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:31:43] It calmed down a lot. I mean, a lot of people just would walk nonchalantly to the bar and they'd walk in and oh, yeah, it all changed - after about three years, after I had really sat down with the police, the the city council and the whole bit. I said, "Let me ask you something. Wouldn't you prefer that they were here at one place, then down in the park or in a rest area or in in a restroom or something? Isn't it better that they're over here having fun?" "Yeah. Yeah, you're right, Mr. Labbe. You're right". I said, "yeah, I know I'm right."</p>	<p>Jealousy leading to fights</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:32:20] And also, of course, the younger generation, I mean, as is often the case...</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:32:26] Seen many younger generations there. [laughs] Many.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:32:32] So I'm thinking specifically in this moment of the kind of Gay Liberation young people like the early seventies who are post-Stonewall, demanding gay rights, Gay is Good, all of that, must have been quite a contrast for some of your bar patrons, too.</p>	<p>Police</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:32:52] I think when I started doing the Phoenix, I think that's what changed the whole atmosphere in Portland against the gays. Now, all of a sudden, the gays were popular to be with. You know, you had to have a gay person in your crowd because it was popular. But I think a lot of that started right at the Phoenix.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:33:20] Did you ever get any did you ever feel any tension between the sort of gay liberationist and the people who were like, we can't risk being, you know, an out gay person; It's too dangerous? Or did they kind of coexist?</p>	<p>Barred from the bar if causing trouble</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:33:35] And no, they coexist. No I never, I never - because most people there, at the beginning, it was rough for a lot of them because they wanted to come, but they didn't dare. And all this stuff, you know. But. I would talk to them and try to relieve their anxiety and say, "if this is what you want, then this is what you should do." You know, it's like, "this is now your life. Do you want to be scared and frightened the rest of your life because you're gay? No, you don't want that. Neither do I. I don't think anybody wants that." So I would talk</p>	<p>Rick Lovely – arson</p>

<p>to them and finally they'd settle down and be comfortable, you know?</p>	<p>Drunk and refused entry</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:34:33] Did you do activist things like have benefits or give out gay newspapers or anything in the bar?.</p>	<p>Burned down Roland's Tavern in 1980s</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:34:46] Well, we had the the one that Stan Fortuna was involved with.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:34:52] The Village Voice I think it was?</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:34:58] And maybe Our Paper, the Portland paper that was created?</p>	<p>Opened in 1967</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:35:05] Did you ever do any benefits in the bar that were for political purposes?</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:35:10] Oh, yeah, a lot of them. We raised money for all different organizations. Anyone that was came about, we always raised money for it. Always did.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:35:21] Can you think of any of the causes that you were raising money for?</p>	<p>Before Stonewall</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:35:24] One for AIDS especially. [00:35:25][0.7]</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:35:28] I wanted to ask you about AIDS. So when you opened -</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:35:31] Oh, that wasn't during my time. That was after I was out. But I still raised money for it.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:35:39] I worked for Positive Action over in New Hampshire, counseling AIDS patients for almost four years, you know, for for them. And then I stopped that after four years, cause it was way too much traveling for me.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:35:54] How was it that you were doing it in New Hampshire instead of Maine?</p>	<p>Improved relations with City Council</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:35:56] Well, because I had raised money there, too, because I had friends in New Hampshire. So I was</p>	<p>And Police</p>



<p>raising money in New Hampshire and I was raising money in Maine. So I kept busy.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:36:07] So Roland's, then the Phoenix, they both burned down under tragic circumstances.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:36:18] Very tragic. Very tragic. In fact, the Phoenix, that that fireman got burnt to death or whatever, at the Phoenix, he got caught in the stairwell or something. And you know what was so funny? Oh, my God. I almost died. His name was. Joe Caballero the cop. My doorman name was Joe Caballero. So when they told me, the person that got burnt in there. Joe, what the hell was he going in there? I thought it was my doorman. So I said, What the hell was he doing? He has no keys to that place. How in the hell would he have gotten in there? You know. Did he start the fire, you know? So come to find out, it was the fireman that got killed. That was awful. That was awful. And a year later, that kid burnt Roland's Tavern down. That we wouldn't allow in. And the one that threw the brick in my face was one we didn't allow into the Phoenix.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:37:36] So was that it for you with bars like you were just done? Okay.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:37:40] When I got out, when the Phoenix and the Roland's Tavern I said, that's it for me. I went into the restaurant business where it was not so stressful.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:37:50] So talk a little bit about that. So I read or heard an interview with you on WMPG where you were talking about opening your first two restaurants, as far as I could tell. One was going to be in - or maybe they weren't your first two - but one was going to be in Bar Harbor and one was going to be in Old Orchard Beach.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:38:07] And I opened up both of them.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:38:09] Yeah. And the one in Bar Harbor, I closed up very quickly because I was losing my shirt up there and I just couldn't make it go out there because the restrictions on oh, god, it was it was ridiculous. So I finally I just said, the hell with this. I'm losing too much money at this place. So I gave up that one and kept the one in Old Orchard. And that's the one I turned over to my niece.</p>	<p>Tried to stop sexual assault on 12 year old boy</p> <p>Police</p> <p>Customers' fears of exposure as gay</p> <p>He was always out</p> <p>Customers rushing across the street into the bar</p>
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<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:38:38] That one is still running?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:38:39] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We've had it 12 years now.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:38:43] So was there any concern in those years when you were starting the restaurants that you were somebody who had who was publicly gay, you had run gay businesses. But now I'm assuming the restaurants weren't gay restaurants.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:38:56] Oh, God, no. But I had gay people going there, you know what I mean? Even even when I had had this place going, I had a lot of gay people coming down to eat here at the restaurant here because they knew I owned it, you know? So any restaurant I owned except for the one in Bar Harbor, they were all very successful, you know, because I had the High Point restaurant over here. I had the Subway Stop over here on Route One here, and I had the High Point restaurant and I had David's Sub Shop that was over here. I had the Bellboy restaurant and I had the Big S in Auburn. [laughs]</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:39:44] And so this is still pretty early; we're talking probably the late eighties, maybe now?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:39:55] Mid-eighties.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:39:55] Mid-eighties. Okay. So you're opening these restaurants at a time when the AIDS epidemic is just really becoming an issue.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:40:03] Beginning. Boy, did I lose a lot of people. Oh, my god. It was unbelievable. A lot of friends. Yeah, those were rough years. I lost a lot of good people. A lot of good people. [crying]</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:40:33] I know. How did you all get through it? Did you do a lot of frontline helping your friends, or was it just so fast that people died?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:40:51] Because I felt so helpless. Yeah. Those were rough years. [crying]</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:41:16] And in the midst of -</p>	<p>Serious consequences for being identified as gay</p> <p>Change in culture after Stonewall</p> <p>Improved relations with police and council</p>
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<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:41:17] You got to remember: I had friends, lots of friends in New York. I had lots of friends in Boston, Massachusetts, New Hampshire. Horrible, horrible, horrible. The death. The pain, just the pain that they would go through before they died. It was horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible.</p>	<p>Gay Liberation</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:41:50] And it of course, it also led to a resurgence of homophobia with people like "those people are dangerous."</p>	<p>The Phoenix</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:41:56] That's when everything changed, right? You can't be around a gay person, you know, which was sickening. But that's what was happening.</p>	<p>Gays popular to be with</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:42:10] And it was such a radical shift from that, as you were just saying about the Phoenix, like it needed to have a gay person in your your world or you wanted to go to the gay bar. And then suddenly it's like, oh, those people are dangerous.</p>	<p>Gays popular to be with</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:42:23] It was like a slap in the face. Really bad. Really, really bad. Those were some of the worst years. And boy, I counseled a lot of them. Oh.</p>	<p>Gays popular to be with</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:42:36] You did a lot of counseling during the AIDS epidemic?</p>	<p>Gays popular to be with</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:42:41] Wayne Cookson and I did counseling together, and he passed away with AIDS. But we used to travel all through New Hampshire way the hell up just, you know, to sit down with people and...</p>	<p>Customer anxieties</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:42:59] Were you worried that people wouldn't come to your restaurants because they knew there were, that you were gay, or that other people might have AIDS?</p>	<p>Customer anxieties</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:43:08] No, because when I've had my restaurants, I've always had a very, very good relationship with the community. I had the High Point Restaurant in Biddeford, it was a big restaurant, and I had everybody, all the locals, coming there and all the business people. And I even had George Bush, yeah George Bush, come up before he was president, ate at my restaurant in Biddeford, him and his wife. But I lost my shirt because they shut off the whole area so</p>	<p>Stan Fortuna</p>

<p>nobody else could come to the restaurant. But I didn't care because they invited me into their home.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:43:58] Okay, so I want to go back just a little bit to your personal life. It sounds like you had, a very early in your life, a serious relationship.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:44:11] I've said to many people, if they could only do a quarter of what I've been able to accomplish and what I've been able to see and what I've been able to do, I've said they would have a full life even if they only had a quarter for being able to do or see. I mean, I've been all through Europe, I've been through, you know, traveled Europe everywhere and. Yeah.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:44:33] So and you're very close to your, or you were throughout your life, it seems like, very close to your family, your mother, and your siblings.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:44:39] I'm very close to my whole family. In fact, my niece in the summertime stays here to, for the restaurant that I gave her - I said, "it's all yours." "What do you mean, it's all mine?" I said, "you said you always wanted a restaurant" I said, "Here it is, open to you." Because by that time I had had it when it came to any type of business, you know. But of course, I helped her out. I would go and get the supplies because I knew everybody in Portland and I knew, you know, on the waterfront so I could get the seafood cheaper and all that stuff. So I did help. But the last two years, nothing. I mean, I don't do nothing other than take care of the house.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:45:21] You deserve a little rest, it seems.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:45:23] Well, you know, I enjoy my home and I do a lot. I like here, I took a swamp, right here, if you want to get up and look at it. I made a garden out here.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:45:36] I'll walk around after were done. I want to look at it.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:45:39] I mean it keeps me busy.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:45:44] But can I ask you? So your family was supportive throughout. What do you account - how come?</p>	<p>Political benefits in the bar</p> <p>AIDS</p> <p>Positive Action NH AIDS counseling</p>
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<p>I mean, during the period you were coming out, most families were quite hostile to their gay kids.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:45:56] I think they knew when I was very young that I was gay. I think my mother kind of knew, you know, because I don't think she was very surprised when they did tell her, you know.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:46:10] How old were you when you knew?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:46:15] I would say about nine. Yeah, eight or nine. I knew because I knew I was attracted to men, you know.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:46:26] Did you did you know people who were gay? Did you already have a name for it or you didn't know anyone else who was gay?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:46:32] Not back then. No, but I knew I was attracted to men and I hadn't had no reason to think anything one way or the other about it. You know what I mean? So it was back then it wasn't discussed, it wasn't talked about or anything like that. But yeah, it was it was different. It was different. But fortunately, I was so fortunate when I went to New York. That was that's what made my whole my whole future, really, basically, you know.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:47:08] Because of the people you met there.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:47:09] Absolutely. Absolutely. And put me right under their wing. You know, they they they made sure that I was taken care of.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:47:21] So it sounds like not only did you have a supportive and loving family that really pitched in, but you had very good friends.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:47:29] Absolutely. I still have friends today from 50 years ago that we sit and play cards right here in my dining room. In fact, we played this past Saturday night. And those, Paul and Sharon, who live in Yarmouth, their daughter, who is now 52, still cuts my hair. And she's been cutting my hair since I said she was. I think, 20? she's been cutting my hair, comes to my house and cuts my hair once a month. In</p>	<p>Phoenix burns down</p> <p>Fireman Joe Caballero killed</p> <p>Brick in the face</p> <p>After two bars burned down because a restaurant owner</p> <p>Restaurants in Bar Harbor &amp; Old Orchard Beach</p> <p>Closed Bar Harbor</p>
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<p>fact, she's cutting it this Sunday. But anyway, like Don Sproul, the same thing. I've known Don Sproul way back when I first opened Roland's Tavern because he rented one of my apartments. Well, he passed away about four years ago or five years ago, and each thing in my living room or in my house is a certain person that I was very close to, that I have a certain item of theirs. Like one wall is Wayne Cookson's wall and the other one is Don Sproul's wall and another one is Paul's wall. You know, people that have passed, that they leave me things in their wills, you know, like I had that Salvador Dali on the wall that that Wayne Cookson left me. I have Don Sproul's flag up over there, you know, so I mean, I have something from most all my friends that have passed. They've all left me something. So it's in my home somewhere.</p>	<p>Old Orchard Beach restaurant turned over to his niece</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:49:11] So you talked about that early relationship you had when you were 14 for whatever it was, six years or something. Did you have other major long term relationships?</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:49:20] I had I had a lot of relationships, but they weren't long. Well, I don't consider long term. I mean, most of them were like three to maybe six years. But my reason, and I always said, is because I was always so busy, I didn't have time for a relationship. At times I had two or three businesses going. I had Chrissy's Pizza, I had Roland's Tavern, I had the Phoenix going all at the same time, you know. So I'm traveling up there, up to Lewiston early in the morning and coming back and, you know, doing Roland's Tavern. And my mother was opening Roland's Tavern for me every day. My mother, can you imagine my mother opening Roland's Tavern every day for the gay community.</p>	<p>Gay and straight people ate in his restaurants</p> <p>High Point Restaurant Subway Stop Route 1 David's Sub Shop Bellboy restaurant Big S in Auburn</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:50:07] I wish I could have met your mother.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:50:08] Oh, she was the love of my life.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:50:14] So now that you're in your eighties, what what is it that gives you the most pleasure? Is it the garden?</p>	<p>Mid-1980s</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:50:20] Working in my garden, working in my yard, keeping this house up. And, you know, because Linda, forget it. She's not a housekeeper. [laughs] For sure. Love her to death. But boy she's not a housekeeper. I said,</p>	

<p>one day, Let me ask you something. Since I've been back from my vacation all over Europe and stuff. I said, When was the last time you picked up the vacuum cleaner and vacuumed this house? Why don't you say never [laughs] She said, Oh, you're right.</p>	<p>AIDS epidemic</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:51:07] This is your niece.</p>	<p>Loss of lots of good friends</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:51:09] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah.</p>	
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:51:13] So looking back, you have 55 years from when Roland's Tavern opened to now. What do you think are some of the most significant changes for the gay community, for, you know, what it was like to be gay 55 years ago and and now.</p>	<p>Felt helpless Rough years</p>
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:51:33] The change is, I believe that the gay community is so open now and is so accepted now, which it should always have been. But we've had our ups and downs. You know, we've had our times when it was not too good to be gay. Then other times it was the best to be gay. So you take your choices, you kind of ride with the flow. But these days to me is so changed because I mean, you can go into a straight bar and be gay and everybody knows you're gay, but it doesn't bother anybody, especially in Portland, especially in Portland. Like I always said, I had a lot to do with that, you know.</p>	<p>Loss of friends in NYC, Boston, NH  Pain and death</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:52:22] You did. But I still think there's a loss to not having gay bars. I mean, it's wonderful to be able to go into any bar, but I mean -</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:52:28] This is why I support Blackstones so much, because it's the only gay bar left in Portland. And that's what I told Danielle. I said, I will always support Blackstones because it is the only gay bar in Portland. I said, Why wouldn't I? You know? So now they want to make me Grand Marshal this coming year.</p>	<p>Negative change in attitude toward gay people</p>
<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:52:50] As well you should be! Grand Marshal of the pride parade - that is a an honor you are well deserving of.</p>	
<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:52:57] Well, I was so I was so honored when they presented me that Icon Award two years ago. Oh, my God. It blew my mind - I said, oh, they still remember me.</p>	<p>Slap in the face</p>

<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:53:11] We do. We do remember you. And appreciate you.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:53:15] Oh, yeah - [Roland gets up and gets the framed poster that was given to him by Blackstones two years ago when he received the Icon Award; the poster features a drawing of Roland's Tavern and is signed by multiple people]. I know we got more of that, but I just keep bringing in different things that I see. And I think Stan Fortuna is on here somewhere.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:53:27] Oh, this is wonderful. Oh, my God. Susie Bock will be so happy to get this for the Special Collections. That is wonderful.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:53:36] Isn't that something? And Doug Kroger is the one that did this.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:53:37] That drew the drawing of the Roland's Tavern.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:53:40] Drew the picture and everything.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:53:43] Wow. Oh, that's great.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:53:44] Yeah. And that was done in 1984. Yeah. By Doug Kroger. So that you can take with you when you leave.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:53:55] I will. Thank you.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:53:56] But I told Danielle, because I had told her, Danielle, that I'd give it to her. So I asked her when I was at the show the other night, I said, would you minds? Absolutely not, she said, Go for it! You know.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:54:10] Wonderful. Susie may send you some forms to sign that, you know, to indicate that I didn't walk off with it, you know, under my arm without you knowing or something.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:54:19] So to the end this, is there some part of your life or some some issue that I didn't ask you about that you'd like to make sure we we talk about for a little bit.</p>	<p>Worst years</p> <p>Wayne Cookson and AIDS counseling in NH</p> <p>Good relations with the community</p> <p>George Bush</p> <p>Very full life</p> <p>Traveled to Europe</p>
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<p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:54:34] Oh, my God. There's so many things I could mention.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:54:37] Oh, please do. I'm not in any hurry. If you have anything you'd like to share.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:54:44] No, I. My whole thing is is, the bottom line is I never, ever gave up. That was my bottom, that was always my thing. I never, ever gave up on whatever the situation might have been. Good, bad or indifferent. I would never give up on it. I always had to see it through. And I think that saved me a lot of heartaches. Relationships? I was way too busy to have a relationship, had short ones here and there. I think the longest one would have been six years, but a lot of two or three year ones, you know, not a lot. I'm not - it sounds like I'm a street whore or something. But I'm not. Anytime I had a relationship, that was it. You know, I wasn't one that screwed around. I didn't have time. I didn't have time to screw around. And I wouldn't have anyway. That's not me. I'm not. I'm not one to be seen in a rest area. I'm not one to be seen in a bathroom somewhere. I'm not one to be seen, you know, where you're not supposed to be.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:56:02] Not your style.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:56:05] Not at all. Not at all.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:56:08] So when future generations listen to this interview with you, is there some message you would like to give to them so that - what do you want younger people to know going forward?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:56:24] Well, I told them that the one night they presented me with the Icon Award, we've come a long way. But I say I'm going to tell you all right now, we have a hell of a long ways to go. And I said it's going to be sometimes it's going to be good, and then other times it's going to be bad. And it's the bad stuff that you have to work on. You know, and I mean, I just gave a quick little speech and I said, yes, we've come a long way, but we have a long ways to go yet. And I says, I'll be gone by the time, you know, by the time everything is done and where it should be, where it should be. And where it should be is total acceptance. Total acceptance throughout the whole world.</p>	<p>Close extended family</p> <p>Gave niece the OOB restaurant</p> <p>Enjoys home and garden</p> <p>Family knew he was gay</p>
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<p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:57:18] May it be so.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:57:21] Yeah.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:57:23] Well, thank you so much. Oh sorry go ahead.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:57:23] Because we're not - you know, you know, what bothers me is the fact that most people in the gay community are so likable and so lovable. Why - I couldn't understand why you would want to turn somebody away like that. You know, like parents that refuse to accept their children because they're gay. That's a crime. That's a sinful crime. That always bothered me when people were coming to me to say, My parents won't even allow me in their house or anything because I'm gay. I said, that's pathetic. That is so pathetic. That's called very narrow minded, very, very, extremely narrow minded that you can't sit down and accept your own child.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:58:14] It's also so disturbing to me that there are people out there that are so filled with anger that they will pick any community that is targeted and throw a brick in their face. You never did anything to that person.</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> [00:58:33] Absolutely not. And it wasn't me that told him not to come in; but he knew me and he was going to get me. And then after he threw the brick right there on Cumberland Avenue, right in front of where Roland's Tavern was, he's running down the street: "I got Roland! I got Roland! I got Roland!" Ran all the way up Forest Avenue, hollering, to the top of his lungs, "I got Roland! I got Roland!" Well, the son of a bitch, I got him too.</p> <p><b>Wendy Chapkis:</b> [00:58:33] I think I'll stop it there unless you have anything else you want to say?</p> <p><b>Roland Labbe:</b> Don't wind me up! [laughs]</p>	<p>He knew he was gay at age 8 or 9</p> <p>Didn't know other gay people</p> <p>Wasn't discussed</p> <p>Knew he was different</p> <p>NYC friends took care of him</p> <p>Friends from 50 years ago still play cards in his home</p>
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	<p>Don Sproul</p> <p>Wayne Cookson</p> <p>Mementos from dear dead friends</p> <p>Don Sproul</p> <p>A number of short relationships 3-6 years</p> <p>No time for long-term relationships</p> <p>Mother working Roland's</p>
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Pleasure in his garden  
and his home

Gay community so  
open now and  
accepted

Changing times

Gays welcome in  
straight bars in  
Portland

	<p>Support Blackstones Only gay bar left</p> <p>Grand Marshall Pride Portland</p> <p>Received Icon Award at Blackstones 2 years ago</p> <p>Framed poster with drawing of Roland's Tavern</p> <p>Stan Fortuna</p> <p>Artist Doug Kroger</p>
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Doug Kroger 1984

Danielle

Never gave up

	<p>Too busy for relationships</p> <p>Monogamous</p> <p>Not into public sex</p> <p>Icon Award speech</p> <p>Progress but long way to go</p> <p>Goal is total acceptance throughout the world</p>
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Parents rejecting their  
gay children

Brick in the face on  
Cumberland Ave.