

TIM BOUFFARD INTERVIEW 7/21/99

Madeleine Winter (MW): I'm here with Tim Bouffard, this is Madeleine Winter and it's July 21, 1999. Ok Tim, could you tell me just a little bit about your background?

Tim Bouffard (TB): I grew up in Rumford, Maine in the fifties and sixties. And ah, in a working class, middle class background. And ah, it's a hard drinking John Wayne type of town and I knew that I was gay from the get-go. And, I couldn't wait to get out of that town and I, I stayed steadfastly in the closet until I left. Ah, went to San Francisco about a year after I left town to come out. I was still too scared, came back and looked up two friends that I had. One I'd known through high school and I knew that she was a lesbian and I, I confided in her that I was gay. And ah, she didn't quite know what to do. She had a lot of lesbian friends who knew no gay men (laughter). So it, that was nice. But of course I wanted to meet some gay men and I lived in Portland, had a job making sails for sailboats there. And I think I heard about this gay group in the newspaper. I'm not quite sure if it was the newspaper. And ah, I went to a meeting that they were advertising and at this meeting ah, there was a group of people who turned out to be some very dear friends or to become some very dear friends over the next few years. And um, the more outspoken of this group was Stan Fortuna and he had these ah, dreams of forming a more politically active gay group. And his friends, ah he introduced me to his friends. And um, which was Steven his, his partner at the time, Steven Leo. Ah, Peter Prizer, Wendy Ashley, Susan Breeding, Richard Telow ah, I think that was pretty much the core group. Ah, Susan Henderson, no she came later though, a bit later. And that's, we started Maine Gay Task Force, but I can't, I'm not clear about the timeframe how soon after I met them did we start that group. It was, it wasn't that long after. And this was like 1973? Does that sound right?

MW: That's sounds about right, yeah.

TB: Yeah.

MW: Was Peter Prizer involved at that point? Do you know?

TB: Pretty much soon after yeah. If I remember correctly, yeah. Yeah. Okay.

MW: So you were part of forming the Task Force and I know that there was a lot of political actions that you ended up being part of, is that?

TB: Well I was—

MW: Or were you more involved with the newsletter ...

TB: Yeah, I was more involved with the newsletter. Um, I never was a mover or shaker, I was more in the background ah, for support. Um, it was mostly Stan and Steven and Wendy and Susan, those, those were the people who seemed to be not as shy about being public as I was. No, I was, I remember that there was one time where ah, one of the local stations wanted to do a brief interview with us for television. And ah, Susan, not Susan, Wendy was willing to be on television but none of the men were. And just out, I don't know what possessed me (laughter) I volunteered to be on TV and, the funny thing was (clears throat) um, I had just come out to my parents and I was still feeling kind of rambunctious because of that. I felt kind of very, still kind of the new rush of freedom from coming out to my parents. And I guess that spilled over and, and I was momentarily courageous (laughs). And so, we were briefly on TV and I sputtered some, no, I just remember I was not very eloquent. Wendy did a better job than I did, but I just remember coming home a few days afterwards my hometown and my, both my parents were just shocked that I could do that. And I remember my mother saying that she got a call from my elderly Aunt Mabel (laughs), *"Oh I saw Timmy on TV he was with some sort of task force, I don't know what it was about."* I don't know because she didn't have a clue, she was quite elderly. And um, yeah after that like I said I was mostly in the background. Like I, I was, I didn't have that much to contribute as far as innovative ideas of how to educate the public, what to do politically and, it, I was, it was a, very much an educating process for me. And I think that's the reason why I felt so ah, committed to it because it was something about being active and doing something ah, publicly in an extroverted way that also helped me resolve all the years of, of catholic guilt and growing up and I, a rural environment, and ... John, John Wayne was god and, and to somehow reconciling that within myself went hand in hand with, with being political. And ah, and knowing people like Stan and, and Wendy and Susan who really were the ones who educated me politically. Ah, and helped institute a whole, a whole new vocabulary within me. It ah, um, and it just helped resolve a lot of the ah, ancient bull shit that I grew up with and internalized. Ah, and I, and I think there's, and again this is Stan and Wendy and Susan that the ah, education that I got it ... politics and feminism and, and how it all

relates to, to homosexuality just years of therapy couldn't have done any better, you know. So I'll always be indebted to ah, to these people because of that.

MW: So you did a lot of the artwork for the newsletter?

TB: So ah, yeah I was, as we got more organized we started the Maine, Mainely Gay newsletter. Although initially it was Maine Gay Task Force newsletter and ah, and I just did you know, the title, illustrations, the front page illustrations and these little things here and there just to liven up the newspaper so it just wouldn't be pages of, of type. And ah, I really enjoyed that. And, the odds and ends here and there it was like, I just, I had some other graphic abilities so I, I used that.

MW: Did you do any writing for the newsletter?

TB: Any what?

MW: Any writing for the newsletter at all?

TB: I don't think I did. I—I, I my writing is just too, I, I get into polemics and bull shit like that I think so it never came across very well. You can say even some of my political cartoons are just too rough. And, and I remember one, it was, along with my coming out it, it, a lot of anger came out too and that showed in some of my newsletter illustrations. And, and I can't even remember what this particular illustration was about but I remember it was just so caustic and unpleasant that they asked me to do another one (laughs) and they stuck the original one in the back of the newsletter. I, I wish I remembered, Stan probably remembers what it was about I can't remember.

MW: Well I know when I spoke with Susan she showed me some of your artwork including the Frederick The Great centerfold.

TB: Yeah, yeah. Because Frederick the Great was gay and that's something that at least at that time a lot of people didn't know. And so I just did this baroque drawing of Frederick the Great laying half naked on a chaise lounge (laughs).

MW: That's great. One of my favorite pieces of your artwork is the fairy Rhino. How did that come about, was that?

TB: Well at the time the rhinoceros was a ... symbol for gay power. And ah, I didn't get, quite get the connection except, you know, the rhinoceros is strong etc. So I, I stuck, I stuck some fairy wings on the rhinoceros just to make some sort of direct connection. Um, and created the banner for, for the group for the ah, the Gay Pride Day marches in Boston. And I was just so surprised I, I came to a Gay Pride march in Portland about, how many years ago was that? Five years ago?

MW: Was it?

TB: Four or five?

MW: Right after we moved in here, I think.

TB: Yeah and I just arrived on Congress Street and the, the parade had just started and I looked down the street and there was that banner 20 years later (laughs).

MW: It must have blown you away when you saw it (laughs).

TB: Yeah it was, it was just amazing.

MW: Yeah it's quite a piece of Maine history. People are really.

TB: Yeah, yeah.

MW: Well, I know another, well important kind of icon in the early days was Roland's.

TB: Oh god what a little dive.

MW: Yeah.

TB: Yeah and I remember Stan taking me there a couple times, the first time. Was it the first, I remember the first time I went in there. And they had all these precautions like certain lights would come on if policemen were in there and there were certain signals. So I guess the raids still happened in the early seventies. And ah, I, I just remember being fascinated at a, at the time of course because it was the first time I had been in a gay bar. It was the first time I had been in an environment where I would look around and know that everyone there was gay. And ah, but then again at the same time Roland's Tavern was such a dive. It was just so appropriate, it seemed so appropriate to all of the stereotypes that you have of a, of a gay bar being dark and kind of creepy.

MW: Yeah. What about the Phoenix did you ever go there?

TB: Yeah and that was at the beginning of the disco era. And ah, it was a pretty cool place. It was a church and I was like, you know I liked the irony. And um, it was really popular. And it was a mixed crowd that would go there but everybody knew that it was primarily a gay place. And then of course it got burned down.

MW: Right. Did you ever know Roland directly or?

TB: No, just casually, just casually. He was mostly interested in, in really good looking young boys. Right. And, and I don't know he ... I, I guess for his time and place it took a lot of bravery for him to open up what he did, open up in Portland, Maine. But um, as time went on the bar just, Roland's Tavern seemed to be just stuck in that time and place. And um, ah, we continued to go there kind of frequently but we always wished there was an alternative. So we, we did kind of start an alternative in Brunswick by starting a, a monthly dance I guess, I can't remember if it was monthly or what. And those were always a lot of fun. Ah, the environment was, I mean it was no high tech environment, at least it wasn't a dive. There was no alcohol and crap like that. It was just everybody there to, to dance and socialize and, and those were really good, really good scenes, a good alternative to Roland's Tavern. And um, and that, that went on for a, a good amount of time. But um, I don't know what, yeah I kind of af—in nine—seventy-six it was. When did I go to Franconia, in seventy-six? (clears throat) That, the Phoenix was going strong, the dances had sorta started to fizzle away. Ah, and that's, and I went to Franconia and that's when I kind of lost direct touch with Maine Gay Task Force. Um,

so whenever I left Franconia it was always Portland I went to, to visit. And always, to go to the Symposium.

MW: I saw a program from the third Symposium and saw that you did a couple of workshops there.

TB: Get out of here.

MW: Yeah.

TB: I did workshops?

MW: Yeah, your name was on them anyway, and gay male relationships was one I think.

TB: I might have, might have been, no I, I can't remember that.

MW: Yeah I wish I had the program here but I don't but your name was definitely on two of the workshops as a presenter.

TB: I can't remember myself. I can't imagine myself as being a spokesman for, for relationships. I hadn't even had a relationship.

MW: Maybe I'm remembering that wrong but I thought it was something about relationships.

TB: Myself I flattered myself at the time (laughter).

MW: So you, no you weren't around then for the first Symposium?

TB: The first yeah.

MW: You were?

TB: But, but ah, I don't think I had much to do with.

MW: Did you attend?

TB: Yeah.

MW: What was the atmosphere like there? There was a lot of controversy.

TB: Yeah but it was fun and joyous and a lot of people showed up and, I can't remember very much specifically. I just remember being kind of high from it all and, and the fact that it was happening and it was successful.

MW: Yeah that's had a lot of longevity.

TB: What year was that?

MW: Seventy-four.

TB: Gee I can't even remember who were speakers and who were lead people and workshops. After a quarter of a century it gets kind of hazy (laughter).

MW: We have all that information. So, after you left Portland and went to Franconia then you came back and lived with it quite a bit and then what happened when you left Franconia? You went to art school?

TB: Yeah that's when I went to San Francisco. But I have to say that when I went to Franconia I took a lot of what I had learned in the previous four or five years from the working with Maine Gay Task Force and being friends with Stan and Steven and Wendy and everybody else. Because I, when I went to Franconia I was, I was out and loud about it. And ah, I would not have been able to be that without having been involved with Maine Gay Task Force and knowing these people. And ah, that was really rewarding and especially meeting people there who want, of course Naomi turned out to be a lifelong friend.

MW: Yes, she always cites you as being responsible for her coming out. (laughter)

TB: That was so much fun that year. Yeah, it certainly was.

MW: Yeah, have you got any stories?

TB: I, it's, it would—well yeah about Naomi it was, I, nothing specific it was just in, looking back at it, ever since that year in looking back at the changes that Naomi went, went through. Um, and to think that I actually had a hand in that (laughter). I mean it, it just, you know, I feel proud about it and good about it. I mean it would have happened one way or another but I was just, I was just glad to, to be a part of her coming out process. And ah, and I, and in forming, forming a group there too as, as unformed as it was and as messy as it was. Ah, little by little as the year went on you know, one person would come out or, not as loud and obnoxious as I was. It was not just the individuals coming out, to different extents and in different ways. And ah, and, it was just good to see happen, hap—see it happen that way rather than it being, having to find out clandestinely, oh this person is gay. Did you hear that person is gay and, and it just, that, that just kind of perpetuates the, the shame or guilt that, that was especially prevalent in those days. Of course it's still going on now but.

MW: Right, it just seems like from my own experience it just seems like it just takes one person who's really solidly out and vocal to make other people that they can you know, be recognized.

TB: Yeah, yeah. So that was just a catalyst. That, I'm not an organizer like I said about Maine Gay Task Force, I was always in the background. So I didn't know quite what to do with it except kind of be loud about it and started a group and the group was mostly a social group. It was not, we didn't do anything political um...

MW: Did the group have a name?

TB: I can't, I don't think so. No, we would just meet in individuals' rooms and shoot the shit. And then the year after that is when I went to San Francisco and by then of course it was a hell of a lot easier to... I was already out so it was easier to be in San Francisco. And ah, I stayed there for five years, went to school there for a few years but, I'd, I found out that San Francisco, even though they did have its groups it, it was such an exclusionary city. Um, my impression was either you had an upper middle class presentation of yourself or you were some member of some kind of um, organization that I could not really relate to. I, there were ah, witch

organizations ah, they, I thought were really interesting and fascinated me but I didn't feel like I could relate to it so, that didn't really ultimately appeal to me. Um, Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence which they, they were important because they, they just challenged everybody's facts about religion and gender and ah, just to see a whole group of them roller skating down the street with their habits flowing in the wind was just revolutionary in itself, beards flowing (laughs). So, ultimately I felt kind of ah, excluded from San Francisco because it was just not a scene that I could get into. And then of course ah, by I, I left April of eighty-three and most of that was because of my ah, alienation but also AIDS was really scaring that city. And ah, and it was really frightening to see that city go from ah ... the, the gay parts of that city go from feeling very celebratory and, and happy and, seeing just thousands of gay people come into a, an environment from rural areas and elsewhere around the country. And have people just all of a sudden discover that there were thousands and thousands of gay people all ah, gathered together in one concentrated area. But that just didn't hold for me and ah, so I came back. And ah, sometimes I, I regret it but when I really take off my rose colored glasses and look at San Francisco I realized that there was nothing there for me.

MW: When you say came back, where did you come back to?

TB: Oh, I inherited a little piece of property from my father (clears throat) and I stayed there until, until the fall of eighty-three and got into retail in J.C. Penney and, a terrible experience over the years. Um, I never really got re-involved with any political, gay political acts like others. Ah, and—turn it off.

[At this point, Tim broke down and cried and said "and then everyone started to die..." Tim also died on February 1, 2000 and is buried in the catholic cemetery in Rumford, Maine.]