

Fall 11-14-2017

Rich, Penny

Bianca Sturchio

Johnna Ossie

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Recommended Citation

Sturchio, Bianca and Ossie, Johnna, "Rich, Penny" (2017). *Querying the Past: LGBTQ Maine Oral History Project Collection*. 26.
http://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/querying_ohproject/26

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<p>junior high schools, and high schools, and I even stayed and went to the University of Southern Maine in 1965, which took me 7 years to get my degree, because I was too busy partying.</p> <p>Johnna: What was your major in?</p> <p>Penny: My major was English. I don't think I had a minor. I majored in English because my two older brothers majored in English, and I had no idea what to do with myself after I finished high school. And I stayed in Portland, which has its pluses and its minuses. So the major was English but I really never used that major. Most of the jobs I've had—or I should say all the jobs I've had, have not really involved, uh, an English degree. That is what most people did back then, if they didn't know what they wanted to do they would major in English. As I said, both my brothers did.</p> <p>Bianca: Uhm, you mentioned in the paper that you wanted to talk about the process of coming out. Uhm, could you explain a little bit what that has been like for you?</p> <p>Penny: Yes, I'd be delighted to, and I did circle that on the info sheet back, uh, a couple months ago. My process of coming out might be similar to other people's process of coming out. Now, we've got to put this in perspective, and put it in context. I was born in a small town in Maine, which is a small state, and Portland is not like it is now. I was born in 1946. I'm also Jewish, so I was born into a, uh, conservative Jewish family. I had a traditional family: Mom, dad and two older brothers. When I came out, which I believe was 1966, uh, there were no groups, there was no support, it was actually probably—Stonewall was what year? Stonewall was either 67—I actually forgot, I'm sorry. So, I</p>	<p>University Of Southern Maine Partying</p> <p>English Major Brothers High school</p> <p>Coming out</p> <p>Hometown Portland, Maine Born in 1946 Jewish</p> <p>Family dynamics</p> <p>Social Support Stonewall</p>
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<p>came out pre-Stonewall, or right around Stonewall. This was the era when people were drinking, doing drugs, having sex, and everybody was in the closet. The local bar in Portland that I first went into, the first ever gay bar I ever went into was a bar called Roland's on Cumberland Avenue. On the corner of Cumberland Avenue and uhm, High Street [clears throat]. Uh, my parents did not know that I was gay, they supposedly had no idea. I lived at home I believe my first year of college, I commuted to the University of Southern Maine, which had a different name back then, and then I was introduced to the lifestyle that I wanted to be introduced to. I came out in Providence Town, Massachusetts was my first physical experience, sexual and/or physical experience with a woman. So I hid my, uh, lifestyle from my parents and lived at home for awhile, as I said before. And then I met somebody. I met a uh, very, very interesting woman who was a Passamaquoddy Native American, and we fell in love, and we lived together. And my parents still didn't know, and because I didn't want them to know, I didn't visit them very much, and they thought I wasn't visiting them very much, because I was— had a bad relationship with this woman--- they, they thought that she was influencing me, as far as me not going to see them, and that's not quite true. So, to make a long story short, uh, we broke up, I met somebody else, I lived with that woman for 5 years in Cape Elizabeth, I still had not come out to my parents, uh, but we broke up. And when we broke up, I was very, very, very, very upset, and I was crying a lot, and I asked my parents if I could come home and stay at home, and I moved out of the house that we were in in Cape Elizabeth, I left, moved in with my parents, and I was crying, and I was depressed, and</p>	<p>Drinking, drugs, sex Closeted Portland Gay bar Roland's High Street University of Southern Maine College Providence Town, Massachusetts First sexual experience Hid lifestyle Passamaquoddy Native American Fell in love Ended relationship Cape Elizabeth Moved in with parents</p>
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<p>I was miserable, and my mother said to me, “Oh, don’t worry Penny, you’ll be able to find another friend,” cause she, my mom, didn’t know I was a lesbian. She thought she was a close friend, which, she was a close friend, so I decided to come out to them. Uh, I said, “Mom, Dad, I need to tell you something, I need to talk to you tomorrow. So, we talked the next day and I told them I was a lesbian. My father was the brave guy, and said, “Oh, I knew all along, all those trips you were taking to Cape Cod, and you never mentioned any men, and I knew you were, I, I had a feeling you were probably gay.” My mother was hysterical. She cried and cried and cried and cried for days on end—days on end, uh, for a variety of reasons. One, she was embarrassed more than likely [clears throat], two [clears throat] back then there was no p-flag, there were no support groups, there might’ve been a p-flag, I don’t think there was, but there might have been a p-flag. Uh, she was embarrassed to have a daughter, probably who, probably who was a lesbian, she would never have grandchildren supposedly, she would cry that, “I’m never going to have grandchildren, it’s a dangerous lifestyle, how could you do this to me, how could you do this to us, what did we do, what did we do, what did we do?” Uhm, and I, again I had no, not a lot of support. So somehow, I found some books that had been written—very very early, early, early books to help parents understand why their child is gay. This is back uh, again, back in the 70’s prob—back in the 70’s, and I bought a couple books and gave them to my father, who was hys—very mad at me, and said I don’t need, I don’t need to read anything, I know all about it. So, he was being defensive, he was hurt himself, and he wouldn’t admit it. Very difficult—coming out in a small town, when you’re in a</p>	<p>Mother</p> <p>Coming out to parents</p> <p>Cape Cod</p> <p>Mother</p> <p>Embarrassed by lesbian daughter</p> <p>No social support</p> <p>Father</p> <p>Coming out</p>
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<p>minority religion. So, that's the story. My mother did eventually calm down, uh, my father eventually calmed down, and I, I moved on.</p>	<p>Religion</p>
<p>Bianca: What age were you when this was all happening?</p>	
<p>Penny: Well, I'm trying to remember that right now. I graduated in high school in 1965, so I would have been eighteen. Well, wait a minute, I was born in 1946. So, I graduated high school in 1965, I would have been eighteen probably. I would say, [counting years off to herself] I would say I was...relationship with Jane was in the 70's, so I must have been in my, uh, uh, twenties. Late twenties.</p>	<p>Eighteen Graduated high school</p> <p>Twenties</p>
<p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: Mid to late twenties. And that era was crazy. Crazy wild.</p>	
<p>Bianca: Did you have any sort of, like, supportive friends or family that knew of—</p>	<p>Social support</p>
<p>Penny: Yes, I did. That's a good question. I came out to my uncle, my uncle who I adored, and his wife. I came out to them, and actually, did I come out to him first? I might have come out to my uncle and his wife first. Because I knew he'd be very supportive, I just knew he would be. I'm not sure. I don't remember the sequence, so, we'll do the best we can with the sequence...Non-sequencing or sequencing. Uhm, yes, I had friends that I met in the bars, and I have...those friends were bar friends, they were drinking friends, they were sex friends, drug friends, uh, and then over a period of time, I met other gay people through work, through school, through parties, uh, there was no internet</p>	<p>Uncle Coming out</p> <p>Familial support Friends</p> <p>Bars Drinking, drugs Parties Friends, social support Social networks</p>

<p>then. I think I might've put—no, this was before putting ads in the, in the papers. Use to be some alternative papers in Portland where people would put their name in, or their [inaudible] saying they'd like to meet somebody, like OkCupid.com is now. So yes, I did have friends. Uh, a lot of those friends are dead from alcoholism—of the effects of alcoholism, and the effects of smoking. Smoking and alcoholism. Many, uh, gay men and lesbians older than myself, who are in their late 70's, uhm, have, they, they've passed away. And a lot of it is again cirrhosis of the liver, other effects of alcohol, the smoking combination with the drinking. Because that's what people did. And I'm sure if you talk to other people in my age group, not everybody was like me, drinking and partying and having crazy sex, but a lot of drugs. Not hard drugs—smoking a lot of pot. Uhm, my drug of choice was cocaine, when I—the cocaine epic—era was in. So, I did a lot of drugs, and I stayed out late at night, went partying, went to the bars constantly, constantly, constantly. But not everybody did that. But there were people like me that did that.</p> <p>Bianca: It seems like it was kind of normalized for the community—</p> <p>Penny: To do the, uh, to do all that, what I</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: Just told you?</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: Yes. Cause that's how people met each other, I how you met other gay people was in a bar, not—there was no, like, gay men's chorus, or the women's chorus. There was no, uhm, what's that group</p>	<p>Alternative papers Portland</p> <p>Okcupid.com Alcohol, alcoholism</p> <p>Smoking Gay men, lesbians Death Cirrhosis</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Drinking, partying Sex, drugs</p> <p>Cocaine</p> <p>Bar culture</p> <p>Community</p> <p>Gay people Bar culture</p> <p>Gay men's chorus. Women's chorus</p> <p>Meetup</p>
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<p>online that I remember of? Uhm, Meetup! There were no Meetups, no OkCupid.com's or computers. So, you would go to a bar and if you weren't a drinker, by the end [Penny laughs] you would become probably a drinker, maybe even an alcoholic. And then everybody smoked in the bars. Smoked, smoked, smoked, drink, drink, drink, lots of drug use, uh, amphetamines, speed, lot of pill popping, a lot of amyl nitrate. Uhm, so all that mis—mish-mash, all that soup, or all that stew, or that cauldron of toxins is in my body.</p>	<p>Okcupid.com Bars Alcohol Alcoholic, alcoholism Smoking Drinking Drugs, amphetamines, speed Pill popping Amyl nitrate Health</p>
<p>Bianca: Yeah</p>	
<p>Penny: And I actually still smoke...cigarettes—not as many as I use to. Drinking, very little—very little drinking. Uhm, but I've had fun. Fun, fun, fun, fun, fun. But then you have—you don't know when you're in your twenties what's going to happen to you later</p>	<p>Cigarettes Drinking Twenties</p>
<p>Bianca: Right</p>	
<p>Penny: On in life.</p>	
<p>Bianca: You think you're invincible</p>	<p>Twenties</p>
<p>Penny: Of course you do. I would hope that you...that would be nor—its normal. If there is a normal. So yes, I did have friends. I made friends, uhm, I was in the closet always, until—at work, excuse me, I was in the closet at work. Any job I had. I, was very careful about revealing myself to anybody, and vice versa. But that did happen. We'd eventually come out to each other at, at work. There'd be a little spark or a little gay-dar. And then I finally, at L.L. Bean, where I'm working now [Penny laughs] for posterity. Uh, I've been at L.L. Bean for thirty years, and over those thirty years I've made no bones about who I am.</p>	<p>Friends In the closet Work L.L. Bean, work, job, occupation Gay-dar Identity</p>

<p>Everybody knows. And its not a big deal.</p> <p>Bianca: Why did you feel like you had to conceal your identity...earlier on?</p> <p>Penny: Uh, back in the, uh, 60's, 70's, 80's, uh, I was afraid to come out at the jobs that I had. I had a job as a mental health aftercare worker. I had a job running my father's.... Uh, I had...other jobs that...I was scared that I'd be found out, and I'd be either fired, or people wouldn't like me, or...I wasn't one of the braver ones, let's just say that. I was not one of the braver people. Because there were people my age that did come out, way back, and some, some suffered, and some did not. And some paid the ultimate sacrifice, like Harvey Milk who told us all, "Come out, I gotta come out, you've all gotta come out." And there'd be mixed feelings of guilt. "I should come out, I shouldn't come out" blah, blah, blah. So, it was a—it was a struggle.</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: It's not so much a struggle any more.</p> <p>Johnna: Uhm, you mentioned Roland's as one of the—</p> <p>Penny: Roolands!!!</p> <p>Johnna: Do you want to tell us a little bit about</p> <p>Penny: Yes</p> <p>Johnna: Roland's</p> <p>Penny: Uhm, actually, let me just think for a second. Uhm, Roland's might not have been the first bar that I went to. Roland's</p>	<p>Conceal identity</p> <p>Sexual orientation Job, coming out Mental health</p> <p>Scared Harvey Milk</p> <p>Guilt</p> <p>Roland's, gay bar</p>
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<p>was started by a man, by—whose name was Roland</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: That was I believe the only, uh, kind of popular bar in Portland. And Roland's [Penny laughs] was a bar. So you'd walk in and there'd be a long bar, with many people drinking and partying and smoking, there was a big haze of smoke. Then you'd turn to the right and there'd be a big huge room...for dancing. And there'd be tables. And I'm curious if there's anybody else that you've interviewed has mentioned Roland's...</p> <p>Johnna: Uhm</p> <p>Penny: Or...we're not supposed to ask that question?</p> <p>Johnna: I'm not sure. I don't...</p> <p>Penny: Just curious</p> <p>Johnna: It's quite possible</p> <p>Penny: It'd be so much fun to hear</p> <p>Johnna: Actually, yes, in an interview I did yesterday.</p> <p>Penny: Okay. So, the bar, the dance part was a dance floor. And back in those days there was a lot of dirty dancing going on—lot of twerking and tweaking. But, it was also before Stonewall, I believe, again, I've got it in—my history is way off, my, my uh...I believe that it was because when the lights came on in the back room, you had to stop dancing immediately, and you had to put the tables together immediately, and sit down. Because that meant the police were coming in. And....because back in</p>	<p>Roland's Gay bar</p> <p>Bar culture</p> <p>Atmosphere Dancing</p> <p>Atmosphere</p> <p>Bar culture Dancing Stonewall</p> <p>Police</p>
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<p>those days same-sex people couldn't dance together</p>	<p>Same-sex relationships</p>
<p>Bianca: Wow!</p>	
<p>Penny: It was a crime.</p>	<p>Criminalization, crime</p>
<p>Johnna: Yeah</p>	
<p>Penny: I think they could pick you up, put you in jail. So, that didn't happen a lot. So...cause I think it was...it didn't happen a lot, but it did happened several times when I was there. And you'd stop, and you'd socialize and pretend that nothing was going on.</p>	<p>Jail</p> <p>Police</p>
<p>Johnna: Mhm</p>	<p>Avie's bar, gay bar</p>
<p>Penny: So...uhm...And then you asked—I mentioned Avies, which is fascinating. Uh, Avies...now, this could be a figment of my imagination, or it could be real and I haven't researched it, maybe we can research it together, maybe I—I'd go to City Hall and research it. Down in Bayside there was a corner bar on one of those little streets, right near Kennedy Park. Uhm, and I swear that I went in there once with somebody somehow, and I saw, back then the—the women, the lesbians who quote, "looked like men" were called bull dykes, or bull daggers, and I know there were three or four of those women sitting way in the back in that bar. A bull dyke, and I got really scared, because, I don't know, I don't think I was by myself, I was with somebody took me there. So I don't know whether we stayed and had a beer, but I—I got—I was scared.</p>	<p>Bayside, Portland</p> <p>Kennedy Park</p> <p>Lesbians</p> <p>Bull dykes, bull daggers</p> <p>Identity, appearance</p> <p>Lesbians</p> <p>Scared</p>
<p>Bianca: Why?</p>	<p>Scared</p>
<p>Penny: Because...the women...didn't look like women. They looked like men, like,</p>	<p>Identity, presentation, lesbians</p> <p>Women "looked like men"</p>

<p>really, short, short, short hair</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: With crew cuts, plaid shirts. And back then there were men and women. There was no LGBT...that started later. So, there was no LGB...or trans men. I mean...Shane downstairs is a trans, have you met Shane?</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: [gasps] Crush! I have a crush on Shane...and Lexi. It's horrible, living up here [Penny laughs] Anyway. So back then there was no transmen, transwomen, intersex, there was [stammering] no binary sex, you were straight, you were gay, or you were bisexual.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: You could be bisexual, lesbian, gay...and there were butch women, and femme women. And kiki women—I think kiki was a in between butch and femme. So you were butch, or you were femme, or you were kiki. Now this didn't go on forever. Obviously, we—we've—beyond---we're beyond that now</p> <p>Bianca: Right</p> <p>Penny: And I...was femmie. And was very attracted to butch women. And maybe that's why those women at that bar scared me.</p> <p>Bianca: Was that your first exposure to someone with a different, like, identity presentation?</p> <p>Penny: Good question! Uh, no. When I first came out in Providence Town and I came</p>	<p>Hairstyle</p> <p>Clothing, physical appearance Binary. Trans, LGBT</p> <p>Crush</p> <p>Identity</p> <p>Trans, tranwoman, intersex</p> <p>Gender binary</p> <p>Sexual orientation, lesbian</p> <p>Femme, kiki</p> <p>Femme Scared</p> <p>Identity</p> <p>Providence Town</p>
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<p>home that summer, I was a counselor at a kid's camp. And I met a gay man, and I had never—I had never met a gay man. And he took me to—he introduced me to the bar culture.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhmmm</p> <p>Penny: He was from, uhm, Biddeford. Tall, thin guy. And he took me to bars in New Hampshire. There were bars in New Hampshire. And I believe he might've taken me to Roland's my first time. The bars in New Hampshire were in Portsmouth, there was one, excuse me, at the time, and you came to a door, and you'd knock on the door, ring the buzzer, excuse me, you'd ring a buzzer, and the person would come down a steep flight of stairs and look out at you, open the door and—and explain to you that they were coming to a gay bar—did they know that they were coming to a gay bar. And I'd say yes, we did. So that was my first exposure to butch-y women.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: Very butch-y women. Slicked back hair. And it's kinda come roundabout in an odd way though. Now, those women that I met, that I had crushes on, that I had girlfriends—those women would wear uhm, socks, in their crotch area—have you heard that?</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: They'd wear socks—its before all the, a lot of sex toys, or a lot of uh, adaptations, so there'd be socks in here [Penny motions to crotch area] and they'd be—you'd be dancing, and they'd rub up against you with a sock, and its like a hard-on, you get turned on...Strange.</p>	<p>Counselor, camp Gay man</p> <p>Biddeford, Maine New Hampshire</p> <p>Gay bars Roland's</p> <p>Bar culture Bar norms</p> <p>Atmosphere</p> <p>First exposure, butch women</p> <p>Butch women Lesbians, appearance</p> <p>Appearance</p>
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<p>[Johnna and I both start to laugh]</p> <p>Penny: There are other things to be used now.</p> <p>Johnna: Right</p> <p>Penny: Don't laugh!</p> <p>[Bianca and Johnna continue laughing]</p> <p>Penny: [Intentionally into the audio recorder] My interviewers are laughing at me, I want that noted</p> <p>[Everyone laughs]</p> <p>Penny: You're giggling. It's hard for them to imagine being turned on to by a woman, uh, who's got a sock. And they would bind their...these women that I went out with would bind their breasts.</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: big time...binding. And a lot of the women I went out with were called Stone Butch. I don't know if you know what a Stone Butch is? They would refuse to be touched, which is very challenging, very interesting. That's a whole other topic about why those women did not want to be touched. [Stammering] And then...yeah, I topic I'm not about to get into. So yes, I did meet butch women. But something happened at Aviies, I can't remember. Maybe, maybe it was the size of the women—I might have been size-ist at the time. Maybe they were big women and I thought they might, maybe I thought they were repulsive...looking? I don't know. Uh, It might have been dark—it was dark in the—it was dark, you know, couldn't see, who knows? I'm not sure</p>	<p>Appearance Breast binding</p> <p>Stone Butch Lesbians</p> <p>Aviies Size-ist, appearance Bar culture Gay bar</p>
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<p>Penny: twenty, thirty years ago. So, a sense of community, a sense of safety, uhm. Fun! Uh...rarely...I did go to straight bars, and I went to straight bars with friends who—I straight bars were not anti-gay. They would let you come in</p>	<p>Safety Bar culture Community, safety</p>
<p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: But no dancing, no making out or any of that kind of stuff. Unless you were at a sleazy, sleazy, sleazy bar. But it seemed that the lifestyle in the bars was, uh, what everybody went to. Friday night I was in the bar, Saturday night I was in the bar. Maybe in the afternoons there would be something going on. There'd be help, if you needed help, if you needed financial help you could get help—Roland was very generous. Uhm, then there was, there were lesbian bars. And that's where everybody, you could, you could act out if you needed to act out, if you needed to drink, if you needed to do drugs, if your life was difficult because you were in the closet, if you had a job that you hated and you couldn't come out [Penny clears her throat] if you had broken up with a partner, you couldn't really talk to your co-workers about it, but you could in a bar.</p>	<p>Bar norms Dancing gay lifestyle Roland Bar culture, activities Community Gay bar</p>
<p>Bianca: Right</p>	
<p>Penny: You couldn't talk to your co-workers and be like, "Oh, my girlfriend and I, we broke up," cause you'd always have to use a different pronoun, like, uhm, "Well what did you do this weekend, Penny?" "Oh, I went to the Cape with some friends." I didn't say that I went to P-Town [Portland] with my lesbian friends, or that I went to P-Town because there were gay people there. "So what did you do Penny?" [Stammering] You know, people knew</p>	<p>Concealing identity Pronoun use Friends</p>

<p>about—they must’ve known about me, some of the people. So yeah, a sense of safety, a sense of community, a sense of fun, uhm, and a sense of “Wow, there’s other people like me!”</p>	<p>Safety, community, fun Relatability, community</p>
<p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: Look there’s lesbians here, there’s femmie women, there’s butch-y women. Uhm there’s great music—was fabulous, you could move your body, you could dance, But you couldn’t really do that in a non-gay bar. It was hard to.</p>	<p>Lesbians, bar culture Femme, butch Music, dancing</p>
<p>[00:26:23.11]</p>	
<p>Bianca: Did you feel—still feel safe during the times where like, the police would show up?</p>	<p>Safety Police</p>
<p>Penny: Well, first of all, did I feel safe when—Yes.</p>	
<p>Bianca: And why?</p>	
<p>Penny: Well, first of all, the lights were on. It was very bright. I wasn’t particularly scared because there were so many other people in the same situation. Its not like I was alone</p>	<p>Atmosphere</p>
<p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: In the room by myself with a policeman. Its not like I was outside, uh, where people use to fight. The lesbians use to punch each other. Big time. Fight.</p>	<p>Police</p>
<p>Johnna: What were they fighting about?</p>	
<p>Penny: The butches were fighting over their girlfriends. I had a girlfriend whose passed away, whose name—I don’t want to</p>	<p>Bar culture, fighting</p>

<p>say her name [inaudible] whose first name was Kicka K-I-C-K-A, because she would kick people, women, lesbians, while they were down and out. Because they were looking at her girlfriend. This is a different kind of bar than when you go to the high class bars. These were working-class bars. Because Portland then was a working-class city. It was nothing like it is now—not making any judgments, but right now, its not particularly a working-class city, nobody can afford to live here. But back then it was a working-class city...Fisherman. So yeah safety...and no I wasn't scared when the police would come in. That's a good question. You've got very good questions!</p> <p>Bianca: Awe, thanks!</p> <p>Penny: Did you think of these yourself, or--?</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah!</p> <p>Penny: Good.</p> <p>Bianca: And I'm just really curious to learn about your story.</p> <p>Penny: Well, it's quite the story. Besides Avies, which I might research, because I could go down to City Hall, actually, and look around to see on that corner...Ah, Roland's, there were also lesbian bars, other bars over the years, uhm. Uhhh. I New, of course, that's newer, uhm, then there was a country/western bar down off Marginal Way, uh, bars in Lewiston, bars in Augusta. We'd often times get a group of us to go. And back then there were no such things as D-D's—designated drivers. There were no designated drivers. You just drove drunk, period. That's what you did, you go to Augusta, you go with a group of your</p>	<p>Bar culture, fighting High class bar Low class bar</p> <p>Working-class</p> <p>Avies Gay bar</p> <p>Friends Bars Lewiston, Augusta Maine Designated drivers</p>
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<p>friends, you party like crazy, uh, you would drink, but usually we would go always out to eat afterwards, so, that would absorb some alcohol, and then we'd drive home. People were drunk, a lot. Alcohol. Drinking and driving [Penny laughs] Or from Lewiston.</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: Also there's a big, interesting, very interesting community down there, too. Was a very working-class community. Uh, again, a lot of those people are gone from illnesses that they acquired through the use of the alcohol and the drugs...and cigarette smoking, And the lifestyle, staying up all night, uh, snorting coke and being up all weekend long, all weekend smoking and drinking, not no cares in the world, no future, not...you know, you're just going to go on for ever, and ever, and ever.</p> <p>Johnna: Are some of them still living in Portland that are still alive?</p> <p>Penny: Yes, some of those people are still living in Portland. One owned a gay bar—a lesbian bar in Portland, she is still around, she's an ex of mine. Uhm, and also a woman who goes to a local bar here now—Blackstone's, lesbian, old friend of mine, old bar friend of mine, she's around. Most all my friends were not here back then, the friends that I have now, my little core group. Uhm, several women who were older than I have passed, that I, were here, locally, South Portland, Portland, Westbrook. Uhm, a lot of those women have moved away and/or have passed away, or gone back into the closet as they've gotten older. And that's why SAGE is so important...which is a group for older gays and lesbians, which I'm sure you've</p>	<p>Bar culture</p> <p>Alcohol</p> <p>Lewiston, Maine</p> <p>Working-class</p> <p>Gay lifestyle</p> <p>Cocaine, drinking, partying</p> <p>Friends</p> <p>Blackstone's</p> <p>Friends passed away</p> <p>Older gays/lesbians Lesbians back in closet, closeted SAGE</p>
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<p>heard about if you're talking to older people.</p> <p>Johnna: Yeah</p> <p>Bianca: Uhm. Just out of curiosity, now that a lot of the bars have closed, especially the gay bars, do you feel like it is a loss to the LGBT community?</p> <p>Penny: I'm one of those people who do, because I was, I came out in bar culture.</p> <p>Bianca: Right</p> <p>Penny: Not everybody that comes out, comes out in bar culture. Absolutely not. Uhm. I do think it is a loss, its different. The Equality Center is fabulous, SAGE is great, uhm, most of the gay bars are closed in Portland, I think except Blackstone's maybe?</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: Uhm, I loss in a sense that I loved to dance. Still, I love dancing! I'm a little bit older; I can't dance all night long. I did go to the costume ball—Did you go to the costume ball for Equality Maine?</p> <p>Bianca: I didn't, no</p> <p>Penny: I danced as best I could, but it was mostly house music slash electronic music, which I don't like particularly. So there are places for me to dance, there are places for gays and lesbians to dance. The younger gays and lesbians—LGBT folk can go to Asylum [note: now called Aura] or Port City Music Hall, and I can too, by the way. Or State Theatre, but any of the dance places in Portland. The problem is I'm not crazy about the music. So, I think if there was a gay/lesbian, or LGBTQ bar in</p>	<p>Bar culture Coming out</p> <p>Gay community, loss SAGE Gay bars Portland, Blackstone's</p> <p>Dancing</p> <p>Equality Maine</p> <p>Music Dancing</p> <p>Asylum/Aura Port City Music Hall State Theatre Portland</p> <p>Gay bar, LGBTQ</p>
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<p>Portland area that you'd get a wide range of ages that would go.</p> <p>Bianca: Right</p> <p>Penny: You'd get the older folks who would go early like three o'clock in the afternoon to five, have a drink, maybe a little dance. Then you'd get the younger group, would go in at 11. But, couple of things we've got against us: 1. People aren't drinking as much as they use to drink, and in order for a bar to survive, they have to sell alcohol. Unless maybe they could [stammering] charge a cover charge. So yeah, I loss for the community, gay bars, gay bookstores especially. Very few gay bookstores left in the country. The Peace De Resistance, or the end of the whole thing was the women's—Michigan Women's Music Festival is no longer. But, we've moved on to a different era, and I'm okay with it. I've joined SAGE, I go to some of the meet-ups, uhm, I still go out and party as best I can. If there's dancing going on somewhere I try to go, if there's lesbian tea dances in Ogunquit I go to if I can get somebody to come with me, couple of us will go down. I can't see very well at night to drive, so, I'll go with them. And a designated driver. And again my drinking—people who are my age don't drink like they use to—they can't. There is a loss, An—emotional loss, a sociological loss, a loss of an era that is coming to a close where we all quote supposedly all want to be accepted and be treated equally, which we do. I want to be accepted for who I am, I want to be treated equally, so we don't need to have little enclaves—but we really do still need to have little enclaves. Like I love going to SAGE to the movies once a month, I mean its nice to be with "my people" quote unquote.</p>	<p>Older LGBT+ Bar culture</p> <p>Gay community Gay bookstores</p> <p>Michigan Women's Music Festival</p> <p>Ogunquit</p> <p>Drinking, aging</p> <p>Gay community, loss</p> <p>Ideology, gay spaces Gay community</p> <p>SAGE</p> <p>Relatability, community</p>
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<p>Bianca: Right</p> <p>Penny: And especially if there's if there's old—I, I love being around older lesbians and gay men. And I love being around younger lesbians and gay men, cause I learn from youth. And yet, when I'm with my peers, they know what I'm talking about. They understand deeply what I'm talking about.</p> <p>[Bianca gets ready to ask another question] Penny: Go ahead</p> <p>Bianca: That kind of segways into my next question</p> <p>Penny: Yeah</p> <p>Bianca: Uhm, where do people go now that the bars are closed? Like, how do people get together?</p> <p>Penny: Where do people go?</p> <p>Bianca: Where do they spend time? Yeah</p> <p>Penny: Well, this is where they go. They go—they, gay people, the lesbians and gay men that I know belong, some of them belong to SAGE, and SAGE has events, once a month there's a dinner at Saint Luke's Church, Thursday nights, which I haven't been to in quite awhile. There are events, there is an exercise class, I call it [laughs] geriatric exercise class, with chair, on Monday night. There is a walking group now on Tuesday nights at the South Portland Rec Center. And I think that maybe people could socialize afterwards—after the exercise class or after the walking group. You could go out and have a cup of coffee or maybe have a beer. Uhm, there are people gather in each other's homes, they start, back, having house parties,</p>	<p>Aging, Older people Gay community Elderly</p> <p>Community, relatability</p> <p>Gay community</p> <p>SAGE Saint Luke's Church</p> <p>Geriatric exercise</p> <p>Walking group South Portland</p> <p>Exercise, fitness, walking, health</p> <p>House parties</p>
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<p>parties in your home. I just got an invitation to a cookie exchange that's in on December 6th that was started about 20 years ago, that, there will be mostly lesbians there. There is also the gay men's chorus, for men who sing. There's the women's chorus, lesbians and straight women, whoever, so, that would be a place that you would go to socialize and have fun. There's—used to be gay AA, I don't know if there's gay AA anymore, I don't go to AA anymore—I use to. Excuse me [clears throat]. Uhm, political work, big time. The gay community is very involved politically, so when there's an election coming up, there's a candidate running for something, I believe that they—we—gays, lesbians, LGBT community, is very, usually very active politically, and you meet, do stuff there in that realm. Uh, the other realm would be, as you get older, you don't need to have—I don't have the need to be going out constantly. So my needs are narrowing down. As we get older, your worldview narrows. You're not, "Oh I've gotta go here," "I've gotta go to this bar Saturday night," "I'm going to go to this party," I'm not out every night. Cause your world narrows to you, and your health—if you're not healthy, especially, or taking care of your health, exercising, I'm more interested in exercising, spending time doing that, and my friends. And my family. So it narrows down—so there's so much out there.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: Uhm, golf, tennis, bridge, mahjong, game nights, uh, there's a group of women who play golf, tennis, exercise, lot of exercise, physical activity going on. Some of the, uh, lesbians I know, uh, who are retired, travel. They have the means to travel. You can also go on Olivia Cruise—</p>	<p>Cookie exchange</p> <p>Gay men's chorus Women's chorus</p> <p>Gay AA</p> <p>Political activism</p> <p>Gay community</p> <p>Needs of gay community</p> <p>Gay lifestyle</p> <p>Aging, health, priorities</p> <p>Friends, family</p> <p>Community events</p>
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<p>cruises.</p> <p>Johnna: Have you been on a cruise?</p> <p>Penny: No. No I haven't, but I'd like to. But I don't know if I want—just putting some eye-drops in—</p> <p>Johnna: Okay</p> <p>Penny: I'd like to, I'd like to try sometime. Uhm, Oh! Walking groups...that type of thing. Outdoor groups. Okay, so that's that.</p> <p>Johnna: Uhm, I know you've already mentioned a couple nights at</p> <p>Penny: Yes</p> <p>Johnna: Roland's, and Avies, but I would love to hear about some significant experiences that you remember at those bars</p> <p>Penny [laughs]</p> <p>Johnna: A night that stands out,</p> <p>Penny: Oh, of course!</p> <p>Johnna: or a person that stands out</p> <p>Penny: Yes! I can—I do remember a person that stands out, and I can't—I'm not going to mention her name, cause this is for public use, whose still here in Portland, I think. And she was the highest, she was the sexiest femme I'd ever seen in my life. And she, we all, back in those days wore bras when we were dancing—wore bras. So, it was a big butch femme thing back then, and she would be the star of the bar. Whenever we'd go, she'd be dancing sexily with her black bra on, midriff and shorts or a little skirt. And all the butches would be</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Health</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Walking, outdoors Gay community</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Roland's, Avies</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Bar culture Portland Lesbian, appearance Butch, femme Dancing Style of dress, clothing, appearance</p>
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<p>lusting after her. So, of course, I was a little jealous. A lot of us other femmes that weren't quite so out there were jealous. She—she's a very interesting woman—fascinating—I can't talk about her. Uhm, I when I would get drunk, I drank too much. I might be, I might've been, uh, alcoholically inclined. I would drink 1 or 2 or 3 cutty sarks, which is scotch on the rocks. And I'd take my shirt off, uh, and [laughing] get up, get up on the, uh, tables and dance. So here—here I am, with a sport bra, you know, sport bra on, and my jeans, and a lot of us did that, that was a big thing then. So, I was outrageous many times. Uhm, what else at the bar? Oh! We had, uhm, a wonderful time at the bar—as a matter of fact the woman that owned, uhm, the woman that owned a gay bar in Portland, she's still around, the other woman—is, there's actually, there's 3 lesbians in Portland who I—who, I don't want to mention their names, who owned lesbian bars</p>	<p>Bar culture Drinking Alcoholic Cutty Sarks Dancing Clothing. appearance Bar culture Portland Women-owned bars</p>
<p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: Who are still alive. And I bump into them every so often.</p>	
<p>Johnna: Yeah, do you catch up?</p>	
<p>Penny: Yes, we catch up</p>	
<p>Johnna: And you chat it up?</p>	
<p>Penny: Yes we catch up. And unfortunately sometimes we catch up at funerals.</p>	<p>Funerals</p>
<p>Johnna: Yeah</p>	
<p>Penny: Yeah, that's sad. Uhm, Uh, either a funeral, or maybe we see each other at a store, I might bump into somebody at a store, uhm, and start chatting and talking</p>	<p>Gay community Socialization</p>

<p>about the old days, and exchanging 25 phone numbers and never calling the person.</p> <p>Johnna: Mm</p> <p>Penny: Cause its ov—it’s over. I mean, it’s not a sad thing. But now I’m getting a little sad. So what’s the next question?</p> <p>Johnna: We can move on to a different topic</p> <p>Penny: You have any more questions?</p> <p>Johnna: We have a lot more questions!</p> <p>Penny: Oh, okay</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah. Uhm, so as I was looking through some of the archival work that already exists, I learned a lot about the Women’s Community Project</p> <p>Penny: Oh, yeah! What does that say? Did I give that to them? I think th—</p> <p>Johnna: You gave those boxes, yeah. It’s in your collection.</p> <p>Penny: Is it in my collection?</p> <p>Johnna:: Yup</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: I should go through that sometime, see what’s in there</p> <p>Johnna: There’s a lot in there.</p> <p>Penny: What’s in there?</p> <p>Johnna: Minutes</p>	<p>Socialization</p> <p>Women’s Community Project</p> <p>Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ collection</p>
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<p>Bianca: There's, yeah</p> <p>Penny: Minutes of meetings?</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah, there's minutes, newspaper-like news clippings</p> <p>Penny: Really?</p> <p>Bianca: Uhm, invites to I events. Uhm</p> <p>Penny: I think I was—I don't—I have down here that I started it. I don't know if I started it. Is it the same thing that I started? I think I did. I started the Lesbians Over 50 group, awhile back.</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: I'm 70 now, so that was 20 years ago. But the Women's Coffeehouse at Willis and West, Woodford's Church, is that the one? At the Church? Willis and West?</p> <p>Johnna: This one that we're talking about seemed like a Women's Community Center that provided resources to women.</p> <p>Penny: Oh, really?</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: Oh! Good! I'm glad to know I was involved with that—I'm sure, if I wrote that down.</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Johnna: We can skip that one if you don't—</p> <p>Penny: Well, no, no, I remember the Women's Coffeehouse, which I helped start, which was an organization at the</p>	<p>Lesbians Over 50 Group</p> <p>Women's Coffeehouse</p> <p>Female-centered space Resources</p>
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<p>Willis and West Church where we would meet, and have potlucks, and entertainment, speakers. And then I was involved in the group that brought, uhm, sorry—resource center? What does it say?</p> <p>Bianca: The Women’s Community Project</p> <p>Penny: Yeah</p> <p>Johnna: It seemed like, a sort-of trying to gather resources for women</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah, like a meeting space for women to organize, and talk about the social issues that were going on</p> <p>Penny, Oh yeah, that’s right! That, uhm, was the same I think as the Coffeehouse? I think so? Possibly?</p> <p>Johnna and Bianca: Okay</p> <p>Penny: Yeah</p> <p>Bianca: So could you talk a little bit about that—how that started?</p> <p>Penny: I don’t re—uh, well, of course I remember, does it say the year?</p> <p>Johnna: We don’t have it written down here</p> <p>Bianca: No</p> <p>Johnna: but I think it was sometime</p> <p>Penny: Must’ve been the...</p> <p>Johnna: in the 80’s</p> <p>Penny: I think it was the 80’s or 90’s</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	<p>Started Women’s Coffeehouse</p> <p>Community Socialization, support</p> <p>Resources</p> <p>Coffeehouse</p> <p>1980, 1990</p>
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<p>Penny: And, a group of us got together. And I've kind of forgotten, I'm sorry.</p> <p>Bianca: That's okay</p> <p>Penny: A group of us got together, and we started—there were meetings, and...I should've gone over the archives before you came. We had meetings and we decided we needed to do stuff together and help each other. We had some coffeehouse events at the Willis and West. And then, I think we had maybe a telephone tree, we had folk—women's names on, uh, typed on paper with, uh phone numbers. Was it through USM? No, USM was I. This was a I group. Uhm, and I remember going to lots of meetings, and I got disgusted with the meetings, because it was all consensus. Had to be consensus, so everybody had to agree. There couldn't be one person in charge.</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: You know? And I think things are still run that way now</p> <p>Bianca: And people—did people just have different ideas of what they wanted?</p> <p>Penny: Well, I'm trying to think, I know I went to those meetings constantly. And I think we—I think different women wanted different things—I'm not sure but there was a lot of dissention. There seemed to be a lot of dissention during those meetings.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: And I got tired of it, cause every—I just wanted the issue solved. But you had to go to every person had to speak, say what they wanted, and I—I kind of forgot</p>	<p>Women's Coffeehouse</p> <p>Meetings</p> <p>Women-centered space, different needs</p>
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<p>about that. I think the Coffeehouse was the same as the Community Project.</p>	
<p>Johnna: Okay. Do you want to talk a little bit more about the Coffeehouse then? You said you had potlucks, but what else went on there?</p>	<p>Coffeehouse</p>
<p>Penny: Uhh, we had speakers, so there'd be a potluck, then sometimes we'd have a dance [Penny laughs] afterwards, with recorded music.</p>	<p>Dances, music</p>
<p>Johnna: In the church?</p>	
<p>Penny: In the church. Yup. Yup, in the church. But this was no alcohol. There was no alcohol involved in these dances. Uh, so, and the lights were bright. So, it wasn't...women that...[Penny laughs] what women would do is they would drink before they got to the church, get a little buzz on, come in, do the little potluck dinner, and then we'd move all the tables with the bright lights, and somebody would set up one of these things— [gestures to home stereo system] what is that called? A uh, boom box, and play music</p>	<p>Church</p> <p>Sober space Buzz Bar culture</p> <p>Atmosphere</p>
<p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: It was fun. It was an alternative to the bars for those that didn't drink, they didn't, you know....it was an alternative to the bars. So dances we'd have, uh, we'd have, what else did we do? Uhm, we'd have somebody give a lecture on something, like, uhm, I'm trying to think wha the lec— somebody would come, a uh, speaker, rather, would come. Or we'd have a singer would come and sing, bring a guitar. So it was like, once a month at the church. And then I-then, I don't remember what happened, what that, that...that went away.</p>	<p>Bar alternative</p> <p>Women's Coffeehouse</p>

<p>And I don't remember why it went away—no interest after awhile, people moved away. Uh, the people that were involved, the women that were involved with that that didn't want to do it anymore. We got tired, cause its usually the same people over, and over, and over that volunteered a lot for different things.</p> <p>Bianca: Right</p> <p>Penny: You'd get the same group of women that were very, very active, Diane Elze was very act—that was a diff—little different era. Uh, Lois Reckitt was active, again, a different—different time. So yeah, we had fun. Fun events. And it was mostly social. But I think the Women's Community Project, and the Women's Coffeehouse might've been interconnected.</p> <p>Bianca: Okay</p> <p>Penny: But we can go back and check that</p> <p>Johnna: Yeah, Sounds good. Uhm, so can you tell us a little bit about how you became involved with the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival?</p> <p>Penny: Mmm. Mhm. The Gay and Lesbian Film Festival only lasted 3 years. The first year I was not involved. The second year I got involved, and I believe I was involved the third year. And I would love to bring back—I would love to see a Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Portland. I don't have the energy right now. I think once I, if I decide to leave Beans [L.L.Bean] next spring, I will have more energy. It's a massive undertaking. Uhm. I got involved because I met a woman, friend of mine, who was screening the films. I said, "What are you doing?" and she said, "I'm involved in the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival," and I</p>	<p>Coffeehouse ended</p> <p>Volunteer work</p> <p>Women Community Lois Reckitt</p> <p>Socialization</p> <p>Gay and Lesbian Film Festival</p> <p>Portland</p> <p>L.L. Bean</p>
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<p>said, "Oh, what Gay and Lesbian Film Festival?" So she invited me over to her house to a couple screenings where she was screening films for the fledgling Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. Must have been the second year.</p> <p>Bianca: Mm</p> <p>Penny: Yeah, second year. Uhm, we had t-shirts printed, designs, and pins, and, uh, I'm trying to think where it was. It was at the movies on Exchange Street, which is no longer in existence</p> <p>Bianca: yup</p> <p>Penny: Did you know about that movie theatre?</p> <p>Bianca: I know where it is</p> <p>Penny: Is it the place down...down uh</p> <p>Bianca: It's across from where B.Good is now</p> <p>Penny: Well, it's across...yes, that's correct. Across the street.</p> <p>Bianca: Yup</p> <p>Penny: Uhm, and, this was amazing to see lesbians and gay men in movies. It was like, shocking. It was fabulous! Now there, I mean it was a, these were good movies. Some of them were documentaries.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: Some of them were fictional stories. Uhm, we did very well, people loved going to the Film Festival, uhm. And, we had brochures for the Film Festival I believe, and as I said, t-shirts. And I'm trying to</p>	<p>Socialization</p> <p>Friends</p> <p>Exchange Street</p> <p>Gays, lesbians in film</p>
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<p>think of what my role was. I screened some films, did some screening of films with other people. I'm sure I helped out at the door, I'm sure I helped out as an usher. Uhm. And I'm also a little bit involved, going to get more involved this year in the Maine Jewish Film Festival, screening films, you know, being an usher, taking tickets, all that kind of stuff.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: But it was a very, very terrific experience involved for everybody working on the Film Festival. And then I think what happened is the driving force behind that Film Festival were Penny and Ilene, and they got tired of doing it. They were like, the big force. And they must've got tired of doing it.</p> <p>Johnna: Right</p> <p>Penny: Or it got too expensive</p> <p>Johnna: What year was it that you were involved?</p> <p>Penny: Again, I know you're tell-asking me, uhm...</p> <p>Johnna: I think I read that it was 1992,</p> <p>Penny: Let me see if I wrote it down</p> <p>Johnna: Does that sound accurate?</p> <p>Penny: Yes, uh, yes, and it was just, there were 3 years of it, and I was involved with 2 years of it. Not the first one. Yes. I don't know my dates, I'm so sorry</p> <p>Bianca: It's okay</p> <p>Penny: Thank-you so much for helping.</p>	<p>Maine Jewish Film Festival Volunteer work</p> <p>Positive experience</p> <p>Volunteer work</p>
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<p>Johnna: Well, we looked through your box, so we—</p> <p>Penny: Good, they looked through the box of stuff that I completely forgot all about it</p> <p>Johnna [laughs]</p> <p>Penny: That's good</p> <p>Bianca: Was the Film Festival, while it lasted, was that integral at all to your sense of community? Or was that I from your community?</p> <p>Penny: Ahh, community, community, meaning uh...</p> <p>Bianca: Like the LGBT community?</p> <p>Penny: Yes, of course! You are with a group of LGBT people, you are working with them all the time</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: You're volunteering, calling everybody up, 92' was there cellphones in 92'?</p> <p>Johnna: I don't</p> <p>Bianca: I don't think so</p> <p>Penny: So you're calling everybody up on the phone, I think there were answering machines, I'm not sure</p> <p>Bianca: Or pagers</p> <p>Penny: Pagers. You had to get together, so meaning, you had a meeting and you would go out afterwards to get a beer, or, you know, you'd go to somebody's house. So it</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">LGBTQ+ Community Socialization</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Volunteer work</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Community organizing</p>
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<p>was [stammering] a very active, uh, activity</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: And then you'd get all these gay people coming from all over the place to go see these films. It was very community based. Everything that we do is community based. Because that was our—that was our community. Those were our—that was our family.</p> <p>Bianca: Right</p> <p>Penny: Uh, my family really were my friends. My blood family were my parents, two brothers, my uncles and aunts and cousins, those are my blood family. But the deep, everyday family were my friends, and community. Yeah, very much so. Uhm. And I'll never forget seeing my first gay film ever, which I thought was awful. Desert Hearts, was that it?</p> <p>Johnna: I've seen that one</p> <p>Penny: Was that the one with the—one with the very large breasts, I believe? Oh, that was Lianna, which I thought was horrible. No, Lianna I thought was horrible, Desert Hears I think was okay, or was that maybe horrible, too?</p> <p>Johnna: I think I enjoyed it myself, but I don't...</p> <p>Penny: Of course you did! These are archaic. So the first [unintelligible] And then there was Little Foxes, which was actually very good, but the lesbian always got shafted. She always ended up with a man in the old lesbian films, she always ended up with a man, or killed herself, very depressing. Same with Little Foxes, or any</p>	<p>Socialization Community</p> <p>Socialization Community Chosen family</p> <p>Community</p> <p>Chosen family</p> <p>Chosen family</p> <p>First gay film Desert Hearts (movie)</p> <p>Lianna {movie}</p>
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<p>of that stuff was the lesbians did not rule. They lost.</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: They lost to the man, and they ended up being married, or having a boyfriend, or leaving their girlfriend, or getting killed, or killing themselves</p> <p>Bianca: That's such a—</p> <p>Penny: so we had different films at the film festival. We didn't have those kinds of films.</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah. I was going to say, that's such a sad narrative, to place...</p> <p>Penny: Very. Very Sad. Like Radcliffe Hall, Well of Loneliness, all that kind of stuff, there were no role models, so people weren't happy about—they thought they were sick, they had a psych—they were sick, according to the psychiatric community we were mentally deranged.</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: You know, the whole Oscar Wilde thing, and Radcliffe Hall. And then things started to change. So the Film Festival was a, it refuted all those awful films and those awful novels where peo—women, lesbians are killed and committing suicide. So we had happy, more realistic stuff</p> <p>Bianca: Right</p> <p>[00:54:28.27]</p> <p>Johnna: Do you remember any of those films?</p> <p>Penny: Probably not, no. We could get the</p>	<p>Lesbians depicted in film</p> <p>Female disempowerment</p> <p>Lesbians depicted in film</p> <p>No role models</p> <p>Lesbians depicted in film Psychiatric condition</p> <p>Oscar Wilde Film Festival</p> <p>Lesbians depicted in film</p>
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<p>names of those, I'm sure. Uhm, No, I don't. 92'...too far.</p> <p>Johnna: That's okay</p> <p>Penny: I have a very, very bad memory, I'm sorry.</p> <p>Johnna: That's okay</p> <p>Bianca: Out of curiosity, who were some of your role models during that time, if you remember any?</p> <p>Penny: Role models?</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: Let's see!</p> <p>Bianca: People you looked up to!</p> <p>L</p> <p>Penny: Uh, you mean, that were alive?</p> <p>Bianca: Uhm, either/or</p> <p>Penny: Uh, well, one of my role...I was a big Gertrude Stein, I was a big Natalie Barney fan. These are all women who, who are deceased. [Penny laughs]. I read every word there was about Natalie Barney, all of her life stories, and her autobiography. And then, uhm, probably uhm, what's her name, the head of NOW [National Organization for Women] Kate Millett, uhm, what's her name with the long hair—Gloria Steinem, uhm I'm trying to think back to the 60's. I probably had no role model back in the 60's. Uhm, the head of like NOW, or the head of Planned Parenthood, uhm, the head of...Lois Reckitt I highly respected. She's still around. Actually, I think she's a state rep, or she ran for state rep. She use to be the head of,</p>	<p>Role models Natalie Barney</p> <p>NOW Kate Millett Gloria Steinem</p> <p>Lack of role models, social support</p> <p>Planned Parenthood Lois Reckitt</p>
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<p>uhm, the domestic violence program here in Portland. Diane Elze, I don't know if you've heard of her name, probably brought up, I admired her very much. Dale McCormick I admired very much. But this is later than the 60's. Way later than the 60's. Uhm. I think I was too preoccupied with myself to have women that I admired at the time back in the 60's and 70's. I think I was very self...preoccupied with what was going on around me. Family, work, apartment, finding a place to live.</p> <p>Bianca: Yep. Understandable.</p> <p>Penny: Yep</p> <p>Johnna: Yeah, that makes sense.</p> <p>[Unintelligible]</p> <p>Bianca: Sure, uhm. We also noticed that you wanted to talk a little bit about Pride—the Pride Parade in Portland?</p> <p>Penny: Oooh. Yes, again, my memory is poor.</p> <p>Bianca: That's okay</p> <p>Penny: Uhm [Penny laughs]. The Pride Parade and the Pride Day was started by a wonderful man named Michael Rosetti.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: R-O-S-S-E-T-T-I. He worked tirelessly, endlessly, by himself, basically to start the first Pride Parades when there were 10 people or 20 people. And I think he was in charge of the Pride festivities for 10 years or longer, and then he got really burnt out. He spent a lot of money, he spent a lot of time, he didn't have a lot of support, as much support as we do now. It</p>	<p>Diane Elze Dale McCormick</p> <p>Focused on self</p> <p>Family, work</p> <p>Portland Pride Michael Rosetti</p> <p>Michael Rosetti Beginnings of Pride</p>
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<p>wasn't as organized. Uhm, so I was active with him here and there in the early, some of the early Pride parades where they, you know, they start up in town and walk...walk around. But it wasn't, it was like, you know, not man-there weren't like a lot of floats or anything. It was just, uh, people holding signs and chanting</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: Uhm, 20, people, then it grew to 50 people, and then it grew and grew and grew. And as it got bigger and bigger, more people got involved. But it was never on the level that it has been the last 5 or 6 years. And then for a couple years, I don't think we—did we have—I don't know if we had Pride for a couple years. He took off and I think there might have been a Pride-less...I'm not sure, there might have been some Pride-less Junes here in Portland after he left. And it was a bad scene when he left and people were mad at him, and he didn't do anything bad. He was a good guy.</p> <p>Bianca: How did you first become involved? Like, how did you know about Pride?</p> <p>Penny: I think I knew about Pride...I don't remember the first...do you remember which Pride this was? Does it say? No.</p> <p>Johnna: I think it started in the late 80's</p> <p>Penny: 80's</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: Late 80's?</p> <p>Bianca: I want to say 87. 84 or 87?</p>	<p>Lack of social support</p> <p>Atmosphere Beginnings of Pride</p> <p>Small attendance Growing social support</p> <p>Michael left Pride</p>
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<p>Penny: Well, I believe that we had, uh, gay newspapers back then. That might've been when we had the gay bookstore, uh, right on Pine Street, right where, uh, Kayola's (sp?) use to be, that might be where the bookstore was, called Our Books. Again, my chronology's probably way off, I'm sorry about that. Anybody in the future listening to this, I apologize. Seriously. So, there was a gay bookstore, a man named Fred Berger started it. It was a wonderful, wonderful gathering spot also, for community. And there was a gay paper called Our Paper. Barb, you'll, well, Barb whose being interviewed Thursday, she was instrumental and worked on that. So probably through flyers, papers, and word of mouth I would imagine.</p>	<p>Gay newspapers</p> <p>Gay bookstores Kayla's</p> <p>Our Books</p> <p>Fred Berger</p> <p>LGBT+ Community, socialization Barb</p> <p>Socialization</p> <p>Word of mouth, communication</p>
<p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: Yup, word of mouth. If the bookstore was open then there'd be a flyer up on the bulletin board, and if Our Paper, one of the gay papers...that would be how. And/or word of mouth. Or bumping into somebody in the neighborhood.</p>	<p>Flyers/advertising</p>
<p>Bianca: What was that experience like for you, being involved with other people who were coming together for uh, like a collective, a collective belief or like, ideal that they believed in? Like the LGBT community coming together, what was that like for you?</p>	<p>Lived experience Pride</p>
<p>Penny: Mhm. I, uhm. I was never better in my element than when I was in a group. Uhm, I loved the people, most of the people I worked with or volunteered with, or volunteered for, were struggling just like me.</p>	<p>Group</p> <p>Community, belongingness</p> <p>Volunteer work</p> <p>Relatability, socialization</p>
<p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	

Penny: Big time struggles, all sorts of struggles, mainly about being in the closet, not being able to be who you are, not being able to dress the way you want, hiding from your family. So everybody, a lot of people were under the same pressure. Uh, so when you got together to organize something, a Pride organ—you know Pride organization, or a bookstore, it was—you made a step. You were making one little step forward. Gay bookstore, then from there a gay paper, and then the Pride blossomed, and then maybe a new gay restaurant in town, or a new gay bar in town. So steps and steps. And we became more visible; we became more comfortable as the times changed. So I was always, not always hap—I was always very involved in what was happening. I was on the scene. I wasn't maybe the head of the program, but I was one of the participants in the program. I might not have been the boss, I might not have originated the program but I was actively involved in the program—and proud. Uhm, politically, mm, I'm not the most political person in the world. Like, lately I have not done much. I voted correctly, I worked—I work as a election clerk for the last 10 years, I do work on people's campaigns. If it's an issue that affects my gay brothers or my sisters, I will work on it, sign petitions. I have gone to some marches, although I've missed a couple of marches. I've missed a couple of dyke dances and dyke marches. Did you go this year?

Johnna: I did go

Bianca: I wasn't able to attend

Penny: Yeah, I wasn't able to attend. So, uhm, I felt empowered when I was doing that kind of stuff when I was helping out, with the bookstore, with the paper, with

Closeted
 Relatable struggles
 Individuality, self-expression, freedom
 Community

Pride

Visibility
 LGBTQ+ community is more visible

Political activism

Campaigning
 Chosen family

Dyke dances

Empowered
 Helping out, Volunteer work

<p>the Pride march, or with this—I felt like I was empowering myself, I felt like I was helping my community to experience normal stuff, like other people experienced. A dance, a bookstore, where we could be ourselves, and read about ourselves.</p> <p>Bianca: Are you involved in anything</p> <p>Penny: Now?</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah, along those lines currently?</p> <p>Penny: You know the last cou—it’s a good question. The last couple years I’ve been dealing with a severe obsessive compulsive disorder that I have, that I was in treatment for at McClain Hospital this summer for six weeks. And I’ve been so preoccupied with this, that I haven’t been living my life very well the last couple years, four or five years. When I say living my life, I’ve been very preoccupied with myself. Too preoccupied. So, I’ve been involved, but not really involved. So right now, my involvement is, I’m trying to be...exercise a lot. And be physically active a lot, walking, exercising. I haven’t been involved politically very much. I will probably be a volunteer for the Maine Jewish Film Festival, which is coming up. By the way, we always have a gay film, a gay related, or gay themed film in the Maine Jewish Film Festival that’s picked out.</p> <p>Johnna: Awesome</p> <p>Bianca: That is awesome.</p> <p>Penny: It’s great. We always let the gay community know. Flyers and stuff, and social media. So my involvement’s been not very much lately. Uhm, working, I work</p>	<p>Empowerment Community</p> <p>Dance, gay bookstore Individuality, self-expression, identity Visibility</p> <p>Mental health condition/OCD Treatment at McClain Hospital</p> <p>Preoccupied with self</p> <p>Exercise, physical activity Volunteer work</p> <p>Maine Jewish Film Festival Gay film</p> <p>Gay community</p>
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<p>very hard. I was working two jobs, for about 6 years I worked two jobs. So, I worked at L.L. Bean for 40 hours a week, and then I worked at a theater, a movie theater 2 nights a week. And. I'm not sure if I've worked—I think I've worked on someone's campaign in the last 4 or 5 years. I probably worked on some campaigns making phone calls. I think for Hilary Clinton, excuse me, for Hilary Clinton I made phone calls. Uhm. A bunch of phone calls. So if there's that kind of thing that comes up, I've done that, but I haven't put myself out there, I haven't pushed myself. Uh, I'm actually thinking of volunteering right now. I need to volunteer and give back to my community rather than be so focused on my own ailments.</p> <p>Bianca: Well, sometimes you have to be your own priority.</p> <p>Penny: Well, it's been about 5 years now and I'm getting bored...with my own priority, which is me.</p> <p>Johnna: Yeah. What sort of volunteer work do you think you want to do?</p> <p>Penny: I was thinking of calling. I have really bad vision at night, so I don't drive. Well, I can drive to Shop N Save tonight, I can drive to Planet Fitness at night. But I don't like to drive at night. So I'm looking for a volunteer position that would be in the neighborhood, and I was thinking of the Ronald McDonald house, which is right around the corner</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: On Brackett Street.</p> <p>Johnna: Yeah, that's a good place</p>	<p>Work, occupation L.L. Bean / 40hrs week</p> <p>Political activism Campaigning</p> <p>Hilary Clinton</p> <p>Volunteer work Community involvement Health</p> <p>Volunteer work Ronald McDonald House</p>
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<p>Penny: I've got it written down in my things-to-do. List of things-to-do. Or some other place in the West End that could use some help in the evening. Not a second job, just for me to get out of myself and do a little help, do a little something.</p> <p>Bianca: It always feels good to give back, I think.</p> <p>Johnna: So you mentioned earlier the Lesbians Over 50 group?</p> <p>Penny: Oh yeah</p> <p>Johnna: Could you talk about that?</p> <p>Penny: Yes. Uh, Lesbians Over 50 group. Or was that 40? No, it was 50. I was dating a woman in North Hampton, Massachusetts. Uhm, actually she lived outside of Northampton in East Longview, Massachusetts. And she had a big motorcycle, and she'd come up and see me. Or I'd go down and see her. I drove by myself during the day. So, we dated for awhile. And one of the big things in Northampton is that they had all these groups: over 50, over 40, over 60, over 70. I said, "Wow!" So, we broke up, she and I broke up, I came back here, and I put an ad in, I'm trying to think when I put the ad in. I put an ad in uh, a paper, probably Casco Bay Weekly. And uh, the first meet—oh I'm trying to think was it over 40 or 50? It was over 50 I'm pretty sure. Uhm, no it wasn't. It was over 40, I take that back, that's not right [Looks at info sheet where she wrote "Lesbians Over 50 group"]. It was over 40, because right after I started the group, and we'd met here a couple times, and we met at other people's houses, other women's houses, uh, I met somebody! And I dropped out of the group that I started. I think Cathy [unintelligible] took it over. I met a</p>	<p>Volunteer work Community involvement</p> <p>Lesbians Over 50 Group North Hampton, Massachusetts</p> <p>Romantic relationship</p> <p>Northampton, Massachusetts</p> <p>Romantic relationship ended</p> <p>Newspaper advertisement Casco Bay Weekly</p> <p>Socialization, meeting, community</p> <p>Romantic relationship</p>
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<p>go out dancing. They would never want to go out and like, have a drink and go dancing somewhere. And they only wanted to do like, reading groups. And I love to read, I read constantly, but I can't read on time. I can't read if somebody's saying, "We need to have that book read in a month."</p>	<p>Dancing Drinking Reading groups</p>
<p>Bianca: Yeah</p>	
<p>Penny: So I didn't join, I'm not a book club person. So, it was over 40 I'm sure. I met Robbie, dropped out of that group. Then there was an [Penny laughs] then I went to the over 60's group, and they're still going strong.</p>	<p>Book club Age-oriented groups</p>
<p>Johnna: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: Book club, they have a discussion group once a month. Uh, they have a book club, they have a game night, which I don't go to cause its at night. I don't go to the book group, and I don't go to the discussion group because I don't like the topics. They're just not topics I'm interested in talking about over and over and over. The same topics, like older lesbians and sex, geriatric sex, uh, your final days, death, what death means to you, uhm, what it means to have fun. Uh, those are all good topics, but, I guess, because of my ailment in the last couple years I haven't been interested in going</p>	<p>Book club Discussion topics Health condition, OCD</p>
<p>Johnna: Mhm</p>	
<p>Penny: As topics</p>	
<p>Bianca: Why was it important for you to start the Women Over 40 group?</p>	
<p>Penny: Pardon?</p>	
<p>Bianca: Why was it important for you</p>	

<p>Penny: Oh</p> <p>Bianca: to start the Women Over 40 group?</p> <p>Penny: I started that group because I wanted to meet other women in my age group. Cause most of my friends are younger than I am. Can we turn this off so I can get some water?</p> <p>Johnna: Sure, we can pause it</p> <p>Penny: Or shall we just continue it on?</p> <p>Johnna: We can pause it</p> <p>Penny: Thank you</p> <p>Johnna: Go right ahead, you're all set</p> <p>[Bianca and Johnna fail to successfully pause the audio recorder]</p> <p>Penny: Oh! Its almost 90 minutes! Most of my friends—Sonya. What's your name?</p> <p>Bianca: My name?</p> <p>Penny: Yeah</p> <p>Bianca: Bianca</p> <p>Penny: I mean Bianca. Most of my friends, Bianca and Johnna, are younger than I am.</p> <p>Johnna: Right</p> <p>Penny: So, I wanted to meet women in my own age group, so that we could all—I could relate, we could all relate together. Same reason I joined SAGE.</p> <p>Bianca: What is SAGE?</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Community Lesbians Aging Older LGBTQ+</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Friends</p> <p>Social interaction, relatability, community</p>
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<p>Penny: SAGE is actually—it use to be, SAGE was called Seniors Active in a Gay Environment—that’s the original name when it was founded in New York City. That’s not what it stands for anymore. I forgot what it stands for now. So SAGE is for older gays and lesbians, if you consider, you know 50 and up, 55 and up. There are some people [Penny turns on the lights] We need more light! There are some people who like to be around older people, older gays and lesbians. Uh, so I, got a sense of community with elders, people who know what you’re going through physically, your ailments, your arthritis, what it means to lose a partner of 30 years and you’re in your 70’s or 80’s.</p> <p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: Uhm, ailments that you get when you’re older, a sense of history. When I am with some of the folks, uh, we might talk about the old days. You know, we might talk about what it was like to be gay back in the 50’s, 60’s, 70’s, that era. Uhm, I hope you get to interview some men and women who are in their 80’s. It’d be wonderful, cause there are several older gay—older than myself, 80’s, 90’s.</p> <p>Bianca: I bet it’d be really interesting. They’d have such rich stories!</p> <p>Penny: Very rich stories, extremely rich. Uhm, That was even a stricter era, an era when you, you just could not be out. You’d get killed. You could get killed. Murdered. As you know your gay history, I’m sure you both do, about several people that we know that have been murdered. That’s how Equality Maine started...that’s how Maine, uhm, Maine Gay and Lesbian Alliance it was called, M-L-G-P-A</p>	<p>SAGE Older LGBTQ+</p> <p>Elders Community</p> <p>Learning, relatability, social interaction</p> <p>History Relatability, community</p> <p>Identity Repercussions for being gay</p> <p>Murder Equality Maine</p> <p>Maine Gay and Lesbian Alliance</p>
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<p>Johnna: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: And it was after Charlie Howard was thrown off the bridge in Bangor</p> <p>Bianca: Yup</p> <p>Penny: Dale McCormick started that, and Diane Elze, I believe Barb had something to do with it. Three or four people started it. Our equal rights, our rights organization was started because of that, because of Charlie.</p> <p>Johnna: Uhm. We already talked about the Coffeehouse, so I think, just the last one, maybe that one now?</p> <p>Penny: [Penny reads the info sheet and talks aloud] Okay. Love, romance, sex and pleasure. That's always a fun topic!</p> <p>Johnna: Feel uh</p> <p>Penny: Did anybody circle that topic?</p> <p>Bianca: I'm sure</p> <p>Johnna: Some people did, yeah</p> <p>Penny: They want to talk about love, romance, sex and pleasure? Well, let me tell you, we had many [Penny laughs] much sex! All unprotected. No dental dams, lots of sex toys during the sex toy era. I don't know if sex toys are being used? Lots of sex toys. Dildos, double-headed dildos, triple-headed dildos, black dildos, white dildos, see-through dildos, leather strapping, things to put on your mouth. Lots of S&M-y, lots of faux S&M.</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p> <p>Penny: Not S&M, the Robert Mapplethorpe</p>	<p>Charlie Howard Bangor</p> <p>Barb Equal rights Charlie Howard</p> <p>Love/sex/pleasure</p> <p>Sexual practices</p>
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<p>S&M, or the dungeon S&M, but, some of us lesbians were doing some experimenting...with candles, wax melted on your skin, sensation, you put an ice cube...its kind---very sexy, actually. Uh, sex on cocaine was fabulous [Penny laughs]. So, lots of hot sex, this was pre-everything. It's pre...not bad, it's pre-AIDS, pre-don't smoke, smoking wasn't an issue, drinking wasn't an issue, drugs were not an issue. So, people were crazy, people were wild, they were uninhibited. And that came from the strict 1950's, where everybody was uptight, uptight. So, we overreacted a little bit in the 60's.</p> <p>Bianca: Overcompensated [laughing]</p> <p>Penny: We overcompensated, rather, in the 60's and 70's. So it was fun. I had fun.</p> <p>Johnna: Sounds like it!</p> <p>Bianca: [Laughing] Yeah. Uhm, is there anything else that came up during the interview that you want to talk more about briefly?</p> <p>Penny: Hm</p> <p>Bianca: Or just anything you want to say?</p> <p>Penny: Well, I'd like to thank you for coming over.</p> <p>Johnna: Thank you so much!</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah! Thank you for sharing!</p> <p>Penny: Number one. Thank you very much for sharing your energy and your time. Uhm. I'm thrilled that you're interviewing some of us older folks</p> <p>Bianca: Mhm</p>	<p>S&M</p> <p>Sexual practices</p> <p>Pre-AIDS</p> <p>Drinking</p> <p>Drugs</p> <p>Bar culture</p> <p>Older LGBTQ+</p>
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<p>Penny: Older folks tend to be forgotten, and especially older women. Not necessarily lesbians, but older women tend to be absolutely forgotten completely, uhm, they're almost invisible in society. Not the older men! But the older women are! Therefore, it could go to say that maybe older lesbians are invisible in society, too. So, it's a nice chance for me to shine a little bit. It's a nice chance for me to help out future generations of LGBTQ folk, and non-LGBTQ folk. It's my hometown, and the archives are in my hometown, so that's very nice. Uhm, I would, I will say right now that I was quite surprised that marriage—gay marriage passed. I never, none of us, this age group, ever thought that would pass in our lifetime ever. And I think maybe people younger than me never thought...it wouldn't pass</p> <p>Bianca: Yeah!</p> <p>Penny: So I'm thrilled about that. I'm thrilled about the progress, we have a ways to go with the Trans community issues, uh, bullying issues, kids that look different in school, whether they're size-wise, or, uh, color of their skin-wise. So we have more work to do, still. But we're getting there, slow but sure. Uhm, no, I just want to say goodbye, and hello to all the people that might listen to this someday.</p> <p>Johnna: Awesome</p> <p>Penny: And I might not be here! And it's interesting, it's odd.</p> <p>Johnna: Yeah</p> <p>Penny: It's cool. And you did a great job, both of you.</p>	<p>Older LGBTQ+ forgotten</p> <p>Older women</p> <p>Gay marriage</p> <p>Social progress Social issues: bullying, size-ism</p>
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Johnna: Thank you so much, Penny!

