Oral History Interview: Lynn Jordan

Interviewee: Lynn Jordan

Interviewer: Mark Bowman

Date: February 23, 2012

Mark B. Hello, this is Mark Bowman, and I'm here with Lynn Jordan. This is February 23, 2012. We're at the Pacific School of Religion and we're having a conversation about Lynn and his life and ministry. If you wouldn't mind, Lynn, just sort of saying your name and spelling your name so that the transcriber's got that clearly.

Lynn J. Lynn, L-Y-N-N Jordan, J-O-R-D-A-N, which is actually a new creation, because my real name is Leonard. But it worked better, because I was doing drag, and so they gave me the name of Lynn. And it was also convenient because of the fact that there were concerns in 1970, because I was a state employee, and being part of a church, and being visible, that I could have lost my job, so the name stuck. And so for 42 years I've had this bipolar relationship where my family calls me Lenny, which makes my skin crawl, and I'm known as Lynn. No one else outside the city would know me but as Lynn.

Mark B. Good. You have such rich stories, so I'm looking forward to this conversation, Lynn. So if you want to go back and start with Leonard and talk about the early years – you've told me some of these stories, but just talk about where you were born and raised, and the environment.

Lynn J. I was born in mid-central Ohio. I grew up outside of Cleveland, about 20 miles. In 1944 is when I was born, two weeks before D-Day. And when I hear the word "tradition," you tend to think of that in, some like, the Jewish community, but I'm descended from some of the oldest families to settle in Ohio. In two years my forebearers will have been there 200 years.

So it's interesting that growing up in a small, rural community, as I did, that some of the first things that were imbued in you was this whole sense of family and history, and your place in history, and your lineage, and understanding how important it was for continuity. It was implied, it was implicit. It was also just evident, the fact that we were a very multigenerational family, living in very close proximity to one another.

And in a small town, if you went back far enough, we were probably all related, so that could explain some of the things that might be happening, because in the research that I've just started on my family, which I've now been able to go back 600 years, I've found that my family goes back to the first settlers in Massachusetts. We were first Puritan families.

So we see, generation after generation, this continuum, which has been interesting in my research, because while I thought I, myself, my life has been somewhat unique, I've found that even though it certainly diverged from the family traditions, there's a continuum that throughout the hundreds of years of history there have been founders of churches,

Universalist churches, founders of Congregational churches, pastors, ministers throughout that whole history, and so it apparently is part of my DNA. And it's only now that I'm near to my seventh decade that I understand that somehow it's something that's been passed. I just happened to queer it a little bit in terms of changing some of the dynamics of what it meant to be involved in community.

And in a small town like that, it's ironic that I was a loner. I was raised by women who, I understood very quickly, were the source of strength in those communities.

Mark B. The women were your mother and aunts, or…?

Lynn J. My mother, my grandmothers, my great-grandmothers. They were all there. We didn't have a name for those relationships back then. Now we would call them somewhat dysfunctional. Many of them are marriages within very small distances across the generations. So because I was living in small, small towns, it seems to magnify the fact how different I was, as opposed to being in a large urban setting where you would sort of get lost in the fact that I was somewhat unique.

We have an expression in the Midwest, "The nail that's not pounded down." It means that you're the one person that somehow can't be controlled. And that was, from my earliest recollections, that I was always the one that was singled out as being different, and not knowing what

"different" meant, other than the model that was being all around me was certainly not something I could relate to.

Mark B. Do you have a couple memories of what that differentness was like? What did that appear like?

Lynn J. I think the model, of course, would be the fact that as you went along, you were forced – you know, it was expected that those things that were associated with being male – sports – and there was a lot of pressure for me to go out and to play sports. Part of it is I'm not coordinated. Understand that at four years old, I spent a year in a hospital in an iron lung with polio. I have mobility issues all my life of balance and problems, but mostly respiratory.

And so part of it was I just was not one that had, A, any interest in sports, but I was never coordinated, and no one would have wanted me to be on their team. Because in grade schools they force you into trying sports. In high school they try and force you into sports. I resisted it, I refused, and eventually wound up going to the YMCA, as a young man, by myself, getting my accreditation in physical education, swimming at the YMCA because I wanted nothing to do with contact sports, physical sports, had no interest in it at all.

And certainly the whole idea of at some point I should be taking an interest in girls or women, and had no interest at all in that. Most of my identity was with things… For example, I applied to take home

economics in high school and was denied. They were horrified that I would even consider what was considered a woman's domain.

But I spent my summers with my grandparents, because my dad, who was in his mid 40s when I was born, and I had no real dialogue, we had no communication, because he was trying to figure out who I was, because I certainly…it didn't fit the image of what he had grown up with in terms of, you know.

Mark B. Did you have siblings?

Lynn J. I had one sister, three years younger. But I pretty much grew up around adults, and most of those adults were women who were my role models. And that's where I felt comfortable. That's where my sanctuary was. So I spent my summers living with my grandparents, because my grandmother didn't force me to do anything, other than the fact that I was able to do what I wanted to do, which was she taught me to cook, she taught me to clean house, all these domestic things that I really was interested in and fascinated with – home canning. I learned that.

By the time I was 14, I could take care of a house by myself. And my grandmother had a sense about me. She was a very astute German woman. And she said one time, because she had seven kids, and she had other generations in the house, so she was—

Mark B. Father's mother, mother's mother, this grandmother?

Lynn J. She had her husband's grandmother living with her for a while, her husband's mother.

Mark B. But she was related to you through your mom or through your dad?

Lynn J. Oh, my maternal. I don't know my father's side of the family at all. In Ohio, this was pretty much the lineage. So she had learned to be highly disciplined and highly organized, and so when you lived in that house, you lived and abided by her rules, and within the construction of the way that she was going to run the house.

And I realize now, at this age, that I've become my grandmother, which drives my roommates, actually, crazy, because I suddenly realized, yeah, because that's what she did. A lot of the things we did in the house were organizational drills. I mean, to the point where to this day I can close my eyes and I actually wrote this down for the family, describing room by room what was in the house and where it belonged at that time, because the house is still there, and some of my family still lives in the small town, and they're a few miles from the house.

So my identity was different in the sense that I didn't have ownership over this exclusive masculine identity; it was very fluid. And so it was kind of unique, also, because in school they looked at what they called aberrant behavior, partly because of the fact that I was also acting out, out of boredom.

And so I wound up being saddled with another label, which was "gifted." I went through special schools in high school, graduated with two years of college by the time I was in high school. So that in itself actually worked to my advantage, because it isolated me from a lot of the mainstream people in high school, which I didn't identify with to begin with.

So it was culture shock when I got drafted, because I lived within a small town, I had lived within the confines of a gifted student program. I lived in the confines of a very small family network and rarely ventured outside more than 50 miles from home until I was 19. But I certainly knew I was different, but had not really had any real outlet for that. There was just no way that I would have connected with other people who were gay.

Mark B. Before we go on to young adulthood, religion. What was the religion practice and traditions that you were raised with in your family and your community?

Lynn J. I grew up as a fifth generation Unitarian Universalist. Our family founded churches in North Olmsted, Ohio and in Leroy, now Westview Center [??]. Our family came from New England, came from Massachusetts and Vermont, and they brought with them the Unitarian and Universalist faiths, donated land, built churches. Pews were carved with the family lineage names in the pews.

But closer to home was the Baptist church, and so over time, I spent most of my time, and because of the Baptist church, I became a Youth for

Christ leader in the Baptist church. That worked well until the hormones kicked in at 13, and then they started getting personal, because they were going through the whole category of various sins, and they didn't want to talk about adultery, because God knows that was going on in the church, and that would have been personal, so they kept going more and more focusing on sodomy. And pretty much I got to understand, wait a minute, they're starting to talk about me, about the whole idea of having aberrant sexual behavior.

And then it was also this whole dichotomy of the separation of spirit and body, sexuality and spirituality, like there was a disconnect, like sex was made to make like it was unclean. And even at that early age I began to say this doesn't quite make sense. No one, to my satisfaction, was going to explain it to me, so I left the church at 16, partly because of the fact that I was hearing messages that didn't resonate with me at all. Just the imagery of the church, the whole vindictiveness of the divine individual I was struggling with.

And also, just the way the role of women in the church was still being reinforced and re-entrenched, and identifying and having myself as considered somewhere certainly not on the outer edges of the spectrum on masculinity, to find myself more centered in the middle, identifying with both, I just said the message the church is saying is not something that works for me, and I said I'm leaving. And until I started MCC in '70, I

really was ten years before I went back to the church, but even though there was a long history.

I mean, the church never left me, I left the church, and so there was a part of me that was continually searching for a definition of a church that would work for me. It was there. There was always that undercurrent, because there was always a strong desire that I… I had a sense of purpose, that there was something I had survived.

I had survived polio. I had survived the depression of being different, the isolation, and said that there had to be a purpose for all of this that I'm going through. I don't know what it is, but… There always was this undercurrent that I felt called to do something, but didn't know what it was. But somehow life is going to have to have a purpose, and that somehow I was going to have to be the answer to what that purpose was going to be.

But back then I was just struggling with the whole question of who am I, because there was no… Unlike today, there were no resources available for me to go online and say, okay. It was sort of like, okay, what do I do with this person? Well, this was answered when I got drafted.

Mark B. Before we go on to that, you've alluded to your sexual awakening. Are there some memories around how that broke open for you, how the attraction for men became clearer?

Lynn J. It began by accident, because I grew up along Lake Erie, and by accident I… I would bicycle. I was a long distance bicyclist for my health, and I found that I'd be standing there and I would notice that men would be looking at me. And some of these men had wedding rings on, which was interesting. So by the time I was 16, I was starting to have, you know, obviously these men were pedophiles, in hindsight. And I was 16, but I looked like I was 14, 13, whatever.

And so I became aware that some of these parks and places along the lake were cruising grounds, we would call them now, but they were pickup places. And so what I wound up is going places, usually not to their home, but going and having sex in places that were either a car or some places that were somewhat private. And so my first experience was that it was older men, I mean, considerably older – 20, 30, 40 years older sometimes. But it was not…it was a different feeling. It was just a way of…you know, an outlet for a lot of this, and so it's kind of ironic that I would have this sort of anonymous sex.

And so in some ways, when you have that kind of anonymous sex like that, and it's somewhat impersonal, it doesn't make the fact that you're gay, homosexual, feel very good, and so it was…it just left a very negative feeling, like is this what it's all about? Because I had not been at any point where I'd engaged in any kind of a mutual relationship where there was this kind of attraction and really caring for the other person.

So it's no wonder, at times, that when you hear these messages about the negative aspects of a homosexual relationship, it's reinforced when your only outlet is having anonymous sex, like that was impersonal, and it's with risk. And there were risks several times, because some of them tended on the edge of almost being violent, and having to find a way of trying to get out of a potentially very violent situation with the individual, because of the fact that they themselves were struggling with the fact that they were totally closeted and hiding within a marriage or whatever else.

So coming home, at times being bruised or things like that, and trying to hide the fact that sometimes it was, what we would call today, rough sex. You know, and tried to hide that from the family. And tried to, after that, come home and then go back into this environment, which increasingly, that, in itself, created distance.

I felt, as a child growing up, that I was sort of orbiting in a different world than the rest of the family. I didn't have any conversations with my dad, because there was nothing that we had in common that we could talk about. We had no points of relevance. [Sentences following deleted at request of interviewee.]

So it meant pretty much I'd come home from school, I would eat, I would go and lock myself in my room and study. And that's how I survived – my books, my classload. I had a heavy classload, so it just… What it

meant for me is that I learned very early how to set up boundaries, how to survive and hold onto this core and hold on.

Sure, I was taunted at school because of the fact that I was not perceived as masculine. I didn't have any socialization around women at all, other than adult women. When other men were manifesting early, this wanting to date, the women were simply friends, they were not a sexual object or things like that, and they were also those…so it was a different parameter.

Growing up I just basically learned how to keep to myself and keep things to myself and hold them within, because, one, there was a risk involved. There was no one I could talk to to say this is what's happening in my life, so all this stuff was simply put inside and it was layered, layer by layer and held onto. And so I wound up being pretty much a loner, an introvert.

At one point I was in therapy because I started to stutter, and that was simply a nervous manifestation of all the stuff, but they didn't understand it, so I had to go through speech therapy to stop stuttering. And in my case it was simply all this internalized stuff that I was holding onto. It was just coming out in stuttering. And yet the imprint is still there.

The small town environment is very much a part of me in terms of it was a very secure place to grow up at that time, in the '50s, even though it was the McCarthy era. Living in a small town, there were a lot of benefits in terms of a very strong family structure where I could move around to great aunts, great uncles, my grandparents, other aunts and uncles, and basically

be of some help to them. That's how I spent my summers, is that I farmed myself out to keep myself busy, and then when I wasn't, I would be at the library reading.

So I had very little contact with anybody my age growing up. So it's kind of funny. I didn't know how to act around other men my own age because I had isolated myself from them, because of the fact that I just… Invariably, within a few minutes, the conversation would go into a place that I had no experience in talking about, whether it's sports, whether it be girls, whether it be you name it. So rather than put myself into those situations, I simply removed myself from them and removed myself from any situation where I felt that I would be in a situation that could threaten who I was.

Mark B. So a big change happened after you finished school and were drafted. Before you go on, did you have aspirations for what you wanted to do after high school? Were you thinking college? What were your hopes?

Lynn J. Actually, I graduated, at age 19, with a degree in chemical engineering, the youngest one to graduate through a manpower training program. And so it looked like my background was going to be chemical engineering. And the one problem was many of the places I wanted to apply, first of all, I didn't look 19, I looked like a teenager, which I still was, but I couldn't get in because I was so young. So they wanted me to go on to a graduate

program. So it was kind of ironic that I was one of the youngest ones to graduate at that time and with that degree, but couldn't apply it.

And so the struggle then became now what do I do. And this would have been '63, about the time that I was applying, and this also, at this time, in November, was when the whole call-up began after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy calling and enacting the draft. And I debated about, when I got the draft call, whether I should go to graduate school or not. And I thought, you know, I may never get out of this town. I don't know what this looks like, but I need to get out of here, and I saw it as a way of an escape.

But at the same time I realized this is going to be interesting, they're drafting someone who… And I had no idea what this was going to mean, because of the fact that I had no socialization around other men, especially… And so…and it was true, once I accepted the draft, but I refused to go in the Army, and they told me I had 30 days to pick another branch of service. I knew I'd be in trouble if they put me in the Navy, I wouldn't last. You put me on a ship with all those other men, I'm gone.

So I applied to the Air Force for pharmacy school, and they looked at my credentials and said we'd like to put you in for some testing. They didn't say what. So I spent two days of testing, and they came back and they said we'd like for you to apply to another career field because you scored

some of the highest scores we've ever had. So I held my breath and I said, okay, what is it?

So I began training as military intelligence branch of the CIA. Oh, god, what have I done? And I did well. I mean, I was sent to Texas, to various military schools, graduated at the top of my class both places, so they sent me to Germany to a NATO base. There were only six of us. The rest of the class went to horrible, horrible places. I wound up in Europe.

Mark B. And what year is this?

Lynn J. 1964. At the end of '64, after a year, I graduated with Russian language training and military intelligence to the Air Force security service, and was an intelligence operative in communication, meaning that you sat at a terminal – this was before computers – you sat at a terminal and waited for land-based intelligence to come in, and some of it was in Russian and some of it was in English. And we sat there at a teletype machine translating all that stuff and encrypting. As we were typing, it was being encrypted and being sent.

But anything significant, at that point we also were told we would have to alert, because this was the time of the U2 flyovers. They were still doing it, even though after the one Gary Powers crashed. And because of the heighth of the Cold War, we had intelligence sites that were camouflaged and hidden all along the West German border. We had undercover operatives, all of that working. What we were doing is that we were

looking at Russian military equipment – their May Day parades, looking to see if there was new equipment.

And so we would be getting photos coming in. We were getting intelligence in. Because this was also the time of the buildup of the Vietnam War, the very seeds of it, and Russia was supplying China with military equipment, but China was then supplying the equipment to Vietnam. So we were monitoring the trail and seeing if new equipment was being moved from one country to another.

And so on one side I saw some of the best of the United States, but also some of the worst in terms of some of the things that I learned that we had done, some of the counterintelligence operations that we had been involved in, which was never in our history books. Part of our training in supporting our operation was supposedly to understand why the United States did what it did in terms of undermining some of these governments which, if you read more, was just, in some ways, the government did it because they weren't doing the United States' bidding.

So over time, as I had more and more access to military intelligence and some of the material about some of the countries where they were operating and some of the undercover work that actually wound up having some of the leadership of those countries overthrown, it became a very difficult position. Even though on one hand we were the heighth of the Cold War, it was this whole image that our biggest threat was Russia.

But the other biggest threat, in the military, is when I really came out. And here I am, I have the highest level of security service clearance, I'm in Germany, I speak German because my family is German. I spent four years in German in school. And so initially, during the basic training, I had very restricted, very little – I very seldom left the base, though I did have a few sort of sexual exploits or things like that. But because we were under such tight scrutiny and all that, it was very difficult to do anything.

So after a year I was just like, this sexual tension was so built up that I found myself in Germany, and when they allowed us to go off base, started exploring, not knowing anything about German bars or German clubs. And so I got sort of the same story. I started out as being picked up, you know, German… And I was very concerned because…I was so concerned that this was going to be a trap, that somehow they were following me.

[*Part 2*.]

Mark B. You were just talking about being in Germany and getting into networks of men.

Lynn J. Right, because in the military, it was culture shock, when I first was in the basic training. And I never completed basic training because…the initial basic training, before they sent me to school, and I think it was because of the fact that it just seemed so asinine. I mean, I looked around and I thought that…my experience was that many of the people in charge of

basic training obviously had not crawled back down from the branches of the trees that they were swinging on. And so I just…I looked at them as like, you know, who are these idiots?

And so I learned that perhaps the most disarming thing you can do is to be a smart ass, because they don't know how to handle it. So humor has always been a thread played throughout my life, and even in the military, when I was stationed in Germany. But because I was so short – I'm only five-four – so that meant bringing up the rear gave a whole new… Even when I was in Europe, we had to do those horrible marches in formations, and I just said, you know, this sucks. I don't get it. I don't get why we have to go prancing around the parade field. And since I was going to be bringing up the rear, I said I'll give them an image of what bringing up the rear means.

And I had grown up, I had learned to walk in heels because I used to wear my grandmother's in her house when she wasn't home, and I felt very comfortable, so I learned how that if, when you…what it does is when you put the weight on the front of your feet, it causes your ass to swing back and forth, and it may be very sensuous for men. So that's one of the things I did, is I learned when I would march, I would march and my butt would be going back and forth, and it would drive him crazy. And I would make other smart ass remarks, and so eventually what they did is they cut short my military basic training and sent me right into military intelligence school because they didn't want anything to do with me.

They'd be in my face yelling at me, and I'd look at them and say…you know, just look at them. And one time, I don't know what made me do it, but I just said to one of the guys, I just said, "Did anybody tell you you have the prettiest eyes?" And it totally destroyed him. And they put me in KP, and I loved it, because the women running it were a bunch of bull dykes and we got along fine. And that was the start. When I went to Europe, I started networking with some of the women who were running the show with some of the women that were stationed on our bases.

But the problem was that in postwar Germany, where we were an occupying country, you also had to be very careful because of the fact that I had to carry a secret identity. I had been trained to say that I was a teacher. I carried passports. We were never allowed to wear uniforms off the base. We had a total fictitious identity that we had to manifest. Even the name on the passport I carried was altered. But it was coded so if anything happened, the military could read it and understand it, because there were codes on it. And I thought, okay, what am I going to do with this?

So I did meet a German on base and got to know him, and through him, he started taking me to the gay bar. And there were private clubs. Some of the private clubs, there were…you had to learn very quickly—

Mark B. Where was this in Germany?

Lynn J. I started out in Saarbrücken, which is right on the German-French border, and we started going to those private clubs. I was stationed in a town called Zweibrücken, which is not that far, probably ten, 15 miles away. Both towns totally leveled during the war. He understood that I would need to go, and so we would go to clubs that were private clubs, and the only way you could get in is if someone brought you, and then they got to know you.

The madams who ran the brothels were the safest places for gay bars, because you went in a door that was to the brothel, and like the old speakeasy, then you went through a partition, a door, into the gay clubs. And the madams made a great deal of money from both. And the madams were also…some of them were fairly secure because they had run brothels in France and a lot of their clients were the Nazis during the war, and they had to leave. And some of their clients and some of their girls wound up, these girls would up marrying some of these Nazi officers who then became officials in the German government, and so they knew a lot, and to shut them up they were given protection, which we found out later, a lot of them.

So I started going to private German clubs near the towns to start meeting people. And you could actually rent the rooms in the bordello for gay sex. She reserved a certain percent of the rooms for the people downstairs, American military and all of that, who otherwise… And so that was my first experience of actually meeting people, both Americans and Germans,

and having this kind of peer relationship of sexual encounter. And really a kind of ironic coming out experience in the military, but saddled with a heavy security clearance.

And partly the whole idea of somehow, that because you're a homosexual you're a security risk, and if you're caught somehow you're going to simply tell everything. The ironic thing is that some of the men were…the men were allowed to date German women. Some of those women were part of the Stasi in East Germany. No one thought anything about it. But we were the ones that were a security risk. And I was being followed after a while, and I was suspect, and I eventually lost my clearance.

And ironically, the only people that ever interrogated me was the United States government. I wound up several days where they tried to get me to talk, name names, and playing good cop and bad cop. But the difference is that I had gone through that training with the idea it was going to be East Germany or someone else putting me through this whole scenario, so I had to remind them I had been fully trained in interrogation procedures and what to expect, and that they were going to get nothing but name, rank and serial number out of me, and that basically they can go to hell because they can do what they want with me.

And it's just sort of like that was a point where almost – I call it claiming my power – where I realized that they can do what they… They said they would destroy my life, and I said no. You can do what you want in terms

of my career in the military, you drafted me, but you're not going to destroy my life because that's not something you can do. And I became…I went from a point where I just became very, very confrontational with them and telling them that you do what you want to do with me, but this is it.

And I think, whatever the reason, they transferred me to another base, a Naval base, and I began working on the base in an administrative position. And for reasons I don't understand, I was never given a dishonorable discharge. They could bring up things, but back then it was simply guilt by association. They didn't actually have to show you in a relationship. They could allude to the fact that you were seen in these various places and all that. But I reminded them that's fine, if guilt by association is all that you need, then you do what you need to do, but I'm not going to give you any information.

Because I had a great deal of information because of the fact that, based on my background in military intelligence and knowing that there was an operation going on focusing on weeding out subversives, which meant homosexuals, which is part of us, so… And as I met more and more Americans in the bars and we got into talking, I said we should create a network and share information. Never wrote anything down. But I had people that worked in various places in different bases who had access to privileged information, legal offices and stuff like that. Some even had advance notice that perhaps a bar was going to be raided.

So I was given information and I would travel to some of these places where I knew there were gay bars in these towns and warn the people that this is… I would actually talk to Americans and say do not talk and do not go into open bars because what will happen is the Germans will raid the bar, bring you out, and turn you over to the American military police.

So I started my own, with several others, an internal network of countering what I…you know, knowing what they were going to do and had done to me and telling them my experience in terms of my own interrogation, and what to expect and what they will promise, which is they will promise you everything, but what it'll have is a ripple effect that they will cast a wide net, and the best thing you can do is not to talk. Don't give them any information at all, because they're not… I said I hate to say it, but the military is not to be trusted, especially for us.

And so I traveled a lot, all over. And I went to a lot of gay bars increasingly, not only just to… Because at this point, after my interrogation, I didn't care. I didn't care what the military was going to do to me. I was going to go out, I was going to experience Europe, I was going to experience it on my own terms, I was going to meet people, and if they didn't like it, that's fine, because… You know, you drafted me, you can do what you want with me, but I'm so done with you in terms of you trying to continually, like you're a threat to me.

I slept my way across Europe, and I got information from various sources, including…and got to know people in the Armed Forces Radio & Television Network who had access and had ways of disseminating information. And so it would be interesting, under the Freedom of Information Act, because I'm sure they were trying to figure out, at times, how information got ahead of people. But I just decided, okay, I'll take the skills that I have in military intelligence gathering and I'll simply cover my ass and maybe in the process protect some other people, because I said, you know, two of us can play this game.

So there was both the anger about the military, but also the fact, the growing sense of, as I said, that I have power over my own life, and that no matter what these people say they can do to me, ultimately the only person that can have any power over my life is me in terms of what will or will not happen or things like that. And the one thing I brought out of the military was that kind of strength that it gave me, under difficult situations in Germany and all of that.

But I left the military with no respect for the military in terms of how it treated people, the double standards that I saw going on, and the destructive behavior that the military was doing, especially the way…granted, we were in Germany, but the way that they just treated the German people. And somehow I was supposed to…somehow I came away having a great deal of respect for the German people, which was something else that seemed to work against my advantage because of the

fact that I didn't, you know, I got to know them, I talked with them, I got to learn their stories about it was to survive the war.

Through some of the men that I dated, who eventually, in some cases, I actually asked to meet, if their family had survived, because I said I really need to know and understand what war is about, and the only way I'm going to find out about it, because I'm not going to find out about it, the truth, is to talk to these people and find out about the horror of war, which also left an indelible impression about the pacifism that I see in my life, because the stories were absolutely horrific. I got to go to places and see photographs that are still vivid in my mind, the horrific destruction that Germany… And they can say that Germany deserved it, but…

And why didn't the people rise up? Well, some did and any time they did, they were killed. But in listening to their stories, you can understand that whether you feel they deserved it or not, it was horrific for them to even survive, given the total destruction, especially in the areas where I was stationed, where virtually nothing was left standing. So part of it was a curiosity, also, that I began to have about, okay, German people, what was it like for you to go through the war.

And they would cleanse the house when I'd come over. They'd remove any of the pictures, because the only pictures they had of some of the family members who died in the war were those in German military uniforms with the Nazi emblems. So I had to learn. I had to stand back

and then not be judgmental, and say, you know, yeah, you can, on one hand…

Because the attitude was that the Americans were here, they were occupied, the Germans deserved what they get. And I was saying no, wait a minute, they may not. And so that was another very unpopular position to be in, is to be in a place of reconciliation with the people around me and to learn to respect them and the fact that there's more to the story than just what I'm hearing.

And I also spent a lot of time in Amsterdam, which was totally wide open. You only had to be 18 to be consensual with sex. So I made a lot of trips to Amsterdam over the years that I was there. I discovered Amsterdam. There was a freedom there that I didn't have in Germany. I could go to any club, I could go to any bar. And just the fact that…and especially in Amsterdam and Holland, that it was just a part of life, being gay. That, too, had a very influential aspect, at a time when I knew what going back to the States was going to be like.

So as we get closer thinking about what's it going to be like when I go back to the States, because I'm here, I've gone from a small town of 900 to traveling in Europe and I'm seeing all these things and having all these experiences. Some of us called ourselves WACS, the whores of the Air Corps, because we were just, you know. I got so well-known in Holland

with the bar owners that when they were in the peak holiday season they would simply put me up in rooms at their parents' home.

[Sentences following deleted at request of interviewee.]

But it was remarkable how that just…that was the way it was. And going into bars locally, and the private clubs, that's where I met Sergeant Troy Perry.

Mark B. Say more about that. I know from talking before that in your network with American service folks, you met a number of people who connected in life later.

Lynn J. Right. In Kaiserslautern, Germany, which is close to the Ramstein Air Base, where I was, and the Landstuhl Hospital, both of them still very operative, major bases both for our war in Iraq and Iran and Afghanistan, or whatever we…you know, they're still going. But the closest gay bars were in Kaiserslautern, and it took a long while to get into a private club. There were a lot of open bars.

But eventually I got into this very private club and began to meet other service personnel among the Americans, as well as government service employees who were the teachers, and other civilian personnel that were on the bases as well, and met Troy in 1965. Who knew? He was older. Because he was older, we began calling him Mother Superior. He was trying to corral a pretty wild bunch of young queens, and trying not to…

Because some of the spin-off from the gay bars, we would go to private parties, and we'd go there, and some of them were…well, for lack of a better word, would sort of go into orgies. But he was trying to corral our sexual energy, concerned that it would spill over and it would unravel everything. So there was an aspect of Troy right then which was…there was a threshold with Troy where it was great, but you didn't want to mess with the woman, because he had… He was a very strong personality, but incredibly funny.

But he had already had a partner, someone on base he was dating. I remember the first time he came in with the person he was dating, and obviously the person was strikingly handsome. He just said, "You can look at it. You can't touch it, because if you do, I'll remove your face." So he left in '66. His tenure in the Army was over with. And I didn't leave until '67.

But I just continued to evolve and continued to be active and engaged in going out and enjoying myself, traveling all over Europe. I couldn't go to communist countries, but I could certainly go to all the non-communist countries and just fully be in the moment, enjoying and not worrying what's going to happen to me. And not caring. Just I'm here and I'm going to enjoy it, I'm going to experience it, I may never experience this again.

And what's kind of ironic is that part of my job on the base was the orientation for new people coming on base. And I can remember having to sit through the Department of Defense movie on how to spot homosexuals on the base, just cringing because it was so bad and it was so stereotypical about what homosexuals are like. It was sort of like the great fear was that you had a commie under your bed and homo trying to get into it kind of mentality. It was still the spillover from the 1950s, and looking at that film and just thinking, oh my god, and looking around and thinking I know some of these poor chaps here are gay.

These DOD movies were so…talking about homosexual subversion and all that stuff, and the crap is still going on well into, you know, here it is '66, '67, and treating us as subversives, and what to do if you were approached by a homosexual, because they're out there recruiting. I wasn't recruiting. Hell, I was just sleeping around. No one recruited me, I just went out on my own. But it was just these myths and these lies and the distortions and all this stuff that I was just seeing through the movies and this pervasive attitude where you would have the queer or homosexual sweeps.

They'd go through a drug sweep and then they would focus on trying to rid the base of homosexuals. So the rule was that we never did anything on the base. We got off base. Everything was done in private. And developed a network of safe places. I developed a network of hotels which were basically, I knew were being used for other illicit activities,

and the cities may have been aware of it, but, you know. It was a very covert operation I learned to do in terms of meeting people, staying overnight with them, because I had the luxury of having my weekends to myself, so I'd be gone Friday and come back Sunday. I'd be gone from the base. I'd be somewhere.

But learning how to do it very covertly, but still having a good time, but concerned for, obviously, the person I was with, too, with what we'd do. But because I had no security clearance anymore, I was not…there was a lot less tension in terms of looking over my shoulder, and after a while I stopped looking over my shoulder. I just started going out.

And got very knowledgeable about where to go and where it was safe and passing that on to other people in the bars and saying, you know, introducing myself and talking to them and almost mentoring them, because I started asking are you new and explaining what the risks were and things like that. Because I just felt, you know, this was, you know… I said the military is not going to be your friend, you know, and if you're going to survive, and you may not, but I said, you know, keep it away, keep it away. What you're doing is fine, but if you bring it on base, you're in trouble.

Mark B. I also think it's fascinating that the military taught you how to operate covertly, which you only expanded on to use for your own self-interest in terms of your own life, so that's the irony of that.

Lynn J. The irony of it is they used this covertly to…and used this with my passports and things like that to go out. And, I mean, they knew that I…basically, the most that they knew, even after I lost my security clearance, was that I still kept a…I didn't tell them I was necessarily in the military. I simply said I was working on a military installation and let it go at that. And pretty much traveled.

I learned the rail system in Europe. I didn't drive, so I learned the rail system. I learned what I call the safe houses and places I could go where I knew it would be, you know, through the bars and talking to the owners of the bars who would make referrals, of places that would be secure that I wouldn't, you know. Because the ironic thing in Germany is the southern part of Germany still had…the Nazi laws on homosexuality were still on the books. So the southern part of Germany, Catholic, it was more enforced. The northern part of Germany was much more relaxed. And so Germany was the focus, but I spent, like I said, I went all over France and certainly Holland. I was in Switzerland, I was in Italy.

Mark B. What a rich experience for this boy from small town Ohio, right?

Lynn J. I slept my way across Europe. I didn't care.

Mark B. So that ends in 1967, right? So military service is over and you head back to the States.

Lynn J. Oh, yeah. And it's like once you've experienced that, the reality is you come home to a small town and you've totally changed. First of all, I didn't look the same. The first thing I did was I dyed my…my hair is blonde, but I blonded my hair. When I got discharged, there was a layover period of a few days, so I… And by that time, I was also wearing makeup, because I had picked that trick up in the bars, because I…I learned how to do makeup based on bar lighting, so you look better.

And so when I came home I was also quite thin, because in high school I weighed nearly 200 pounds. When I came home I was about 145. But also partly because of alcohol, and because I also had access to amphetamines and other things I was on. And so the look on my father's face was like, oh my god, what is this? And I had a mouth from the Merchant Marine, which I never swore before I left. [Sentences following deleted at request of interviewee.]

You know, all of a sudden the conversation that immediately gets in the house about…they're planning for my future, and I'm hearing, okay, what's this all about? You need to settle down, you need to get married, all this stuff. You're now 22 years old, 23 years old.

Mark B. Are you still going by Leonard? You're still Leonard at this point?

Lynn J. Yeah, I still am. Or Lenny, as my family would call me. And there's many, many spellings, even now, depending on which member of the family is writing me. And I just said oh, my God. Because you have to

understand the neighborhood where you were is that we had a lot of Eastern European women. And if you wanted to see what your life was like, go over and visit some of those women that the men were dating and see their mother and the six kids and who's running the house.

You know, it was like they were totally clueless that the person who left was not the person coming back until they began to see that I was no longer just going to be this submissive person living in the house who just would retreat to the back bedroom; I had a mouth, and I learned how to use my mouth a lot in Europe. And so there was a great deal of tension. And so I spent most of the few weeks I was home drinking, which surprised them, too, because I had picked up quite a habit of drinking.

And I don't know how I got out here, but this whole thing of Haight-Ashbury, the summer of love was resonating. We had heard about it in Europe. Come to San Francisco, wear flowers in your hair. And to this day I don't know how I got here. I just know sometime around Christmas I was drunk, I was high, I left. I left them a note saying I'm going to California for a while because I have to get out. I said this is not working. What you have…I know you're trying to work out what's going to happen with me and my future, but it's not…I have to define that.

So to this day I don't know how I got out here, whether I flew, bus. I didn't drive because I was too stoned. But I arrived in San Francisco in December of '67 and made a bee line for the Haight-Ashbury. You know,

went up there for a while. And was wandering around the city and thinking, wow. I fell in love with the city. And my intent originally was just to experience it for a few weeks and then go back and deal with the mess that I was going to have to deal with in my family.

Well, within ten days of my being there, I had a job. And ironically, that job was with the state of California, and I stayed with it for almost 35 years. So I had the job and I simply told them I'm not coming back. And started working, but again cautious, because I wasn't sure. It was a very conservative environment. When you worked for the state of California in 1968, which I started in January of '68, it was still a very sexist, old guard environment of old military, a glass ceiling where women were at a certain level and they were going no higher.

And you had all these, to me, very ultra conservative men who were the managers and supervisors and things like that, and I just said oh god, not again. I spent four years in the military, and it was almost like working in another military regime. And the longer I worked there, the less respect I had for them, because a lot of them were alcoholics and they were hitting on the women. And so what happened is at this point I figured, well…

Then they started criticizing what I was wearing, started saying I had to wear…you know, this was not, you know. I had a shirt and tie, but it was other things they were commenting about – my long hair. I had let my hair grow out and they didn't approve of long hair, and they didn't

approve of this. And basically, probably the first time that some of them got told where they could go and heard the "F" word thrown in their face because a lot of them were…they were very intimidating people and I just, I had no respect for them.

So I remember…and of course I worked predominantly…I started out in a clerical position in with a lot of other women because I was also…decided I would go to school at nights and get courses in business administration and start going to Golden Gate Business College. So it was a part-time job, which is all I needed, but I got in with basically the women's clerical pool and began to listen to them.

And they were in a difficult position. Some of them had been there for decades and had just resolved that this is the way it was going to be. But there was a younger generation of women who were feeling very, very frustrated by the attitude of the men. They weren't allowed to wear pants. Some departments were enforcing dress codes and some were not. There was a way that some of these women were treated, and because the men were being protected by the fact that…

So at some point I said you know you don't have to put up with this crap. None of us have to put up with it. And they said, what do you mean? I said, you know, stand up to them. Well, no, they'll fire us. I said, no, after about a year there, I said, you know what we can do – and there were also some gay men coming in and they were being hassled a little bit – so I

said we're going to do…this is '69. We went in and I said everybody that wants to, we're going to shut this place down. What do you mean? Everyone that's totally pissed by these pigs that are running this place, we're going into the personnel office and we're going to go sit on the floor and we're going to shut the place down. And that's what we did. And we kept going there until they started dealing with some of the issues.

I said, you know, claim… I just said, you know, I put up four years in the military and I'm not putting up with this crap and having these people in my face treating me the way they are treating me, much less that I'm who I am. But I said respect works both ways, and I'm not putting up with this. I said no, this is not working.

Mark B. Were there unions among government employees?

Lynn J. There were no unions.

Mark B. There were no unions at that point among government employees?

Lynn J. No unions, no affirmative action, no nothing. And so they said, well, you'll never get promoted. I said we'll see about that. And what happened is that over time, as the changes began, affirmative action, these old guys, the power they had, we began to erode their power, you know, this intimidation and stuff like that. I said, you know…

And one of the women supervisors there was also feeling threatened because she had basically, to hold onto her position, she was also

manifesting what she thought was the way to supervise, which was tight control, and she and I did a dance. And it wound up, you know, I was… I just wouldn't put up with it. I just, I don't…at this point you do what…you know, the same thing in the military. I'm not putting up with this crap.

Mark B. And that's returning to the theme of reclaiming your power, right, so that is consistent.

Lynn J. I said, you know, I'm doing my job, I'm doing it well, and if you…and I told them I'm doing it well, and if you want… And they said we'll have you fired for insubordination. I said, okay, we'll talk about that. So I went in and I filed a grievance against them. Filed grievances, one right after another. I said, you know, doing the job, but I said, you know, there's inequality across the board in terms of how some offices are enforcing this, some are not. There's not a consistent policy about how things are done.

I said I'm filing a grievance around how some of the way that these men are treated. Some of them are going and drinking their lunch and coming back and being totally obnoxious and abusive, and I said that's not acceptable. I'm not putting up… I said I had enough of that in the military. And little by little, in a very short time, with this new generation of us who were just not going to put up with it and it's…

And it's kind of funny, because we used to say if you looked up on the roof of the state building, it looked like we were electing the Pope because we'd go up there and there would be this blue haze. We'd go up there and get a little contact high from the grass and go down and deal with the issues we had downstairs. But they were not prepared for this new generation of us – the feminists, the gay activists, the others who were coming in the doors who were pretty much anti… I became almost anti-establishment, the term they used back then. I was just, you know. I will not be "you're less than." I am far more than what you think I am, and you're not going to make me less than.

The same applied when I started getting involved in the Society for Individual Rights when they were still raiding the bars. I'm fully aware of all the negative images and all that, but at some point I said, you know, you own that, I don't. That's your stuff. It's not who I am. And I was probably one of the youngest ones to go in and join Society for Individual Rights in late '68 because it was the first male-female sort of LGBT organization. Before that it had been Daughter of Bilitis and then the Mattachine Society. This was the follow-up on that. They did a lot of social activism that was very much influential.

It was the time when gay organizations couldn't advertise in the telephone book. You couldn't have a separate column for homophile, so they were suing the telephone company. And ironically, I have just purchased the transcripts of that lawsuit for my private collection. It was the time when

the Tavern Guild was starting to be active because of the police payoffs and the harassment and the raids of the bars and being in collusion with the ABC, the Alcohol and Beverage Control. So the Tavern Guild was starting up and was starting to file lawsuits against various organizations. So I was right there at sort of the beginnings pre-Stonewall in San Francisco.

The year before, the Compton Cafeteria riot had happened. And I wasn't aware of that riot until I actually started going to the cafeteria in '68 and began to learn about the history and how that was that. And pretty much, I would say, our Stonewall was in the Compton Cafeteria riots, well before Stonewall. And as a result of that, we had Elliott Blackstone, the police community relations person, working with the community, in '68 and '69, even when they were…

Because I was in a bar raid, probably one of the last ones I recall in the city, but we threw everything we could at them, anything that wasn't nailed down in that bar. They were grabbing people, putting them into police vans. We were throwing stools, we were throwing crap out the front door. I was small, and the bartender, who I was dating, grabbed me and threw me over the bar and threw me underneath the bar, because some people were trying to get out, and I just stayed behind the bar.

Mark B. Do you recall when and where that was?

Lynn J. It was somewhere downtown around Second Street. And it was a small hole-in-the-wall place. I had never experienced a bar raid.

Mark B. In 1969, probably?

Lynn J. ’68. They were still doing it. By ’69 they were not raiding the bars anymore, partly because of police community relations, the lawsuits from the Tavern Guild and various things that were starting to happen, but they were still doing a lot of police entrapment – the bath houses, the bushes, tea rooms, toilet sex and things like that. They were still doing a lot of that. And there was still some undercover work and there was still that tension.

Also people have to remember that this city was basically very Republican. This was not a Democratic city. It surprises people that under this…it may have had the veneer of being a city that’s very liberal, but it was a fairly conservative city at that time, and controlled by politicians that were fairly long-term politicians that were conservative.

And so you had these two dynamics coming into play. We were following on the heels of the feminist movement, the black civil rights movement, and so there was this bubbling of a…the gay liberation movement was starting. And there was increasingly, by 1970, a large influx, especially of gay men, coming into San Francisco. Like myself, some of them had been exposed to San Francisco if they had passed through in military service.

But by 1970 it was beginning to have this name as a very liberal city and a place to escape from the very homophobic environments of a lot of people, so there was an interesting dynamic happening where you had the older, predominantly gay and lesbian community, but gay men who felt very threatened by us because for them to survive after the War, in the '50s and the McCarthy era, it was about blending, it was about giving a different name to assimilation. And to us, we were saying that model is not working. They still don't like you and you're going nowhere, nothing is happening. Yeah, you're covering your butt, but that's not the life that we want. We want to be out, we want to be open.

And so there was a tension there between the groups, because they were concerned that we were going to unravel everything. And we're saying well, yeah, but all these things about "change is going to happen," we were just impatient. We were not going to… We said we're not willing to try and work within the system when it's not…because working within the system is not working, it's not working for us. And so this whole evolution of people started to come and started working in coalition with each other, to support each other.

And MCC, Metropolitan Community Church, didn't come out of a vacuum. It came out of all this tension that was going on in 1970. It was ripe for a gay liberation movement, and with a church in Los Angeles having started in October of '68. And so…

Mark B. You want to take a break?

Lynn J. I'm okay. I'm just thinking.

Mark B. You're okay? That's okay. You're at a transition point here, so I thought if you wanted to.

Lynn J. No, I'm just thinking that I would say that the church, by 1969, I was in a pretty…I was like a candle in the wind. I was working, holding a job, but I was also deeply addicted to drugs and had quite an alcohol problem. And it was almost like a self-destructive behavior, even though somehow, at that age, you think that you're invincible, totally invincible, you can be all things, do all things, and just go out there, stay up all night, and then take some drug and then go to work two hours later.

But after a while, riding this elevator of uppers and downers and other things began to take its toll. And so I had to leave the city and actually go and stay with some friends for a while where I knew I would not have access to all this, because I was getting into a very fast party crowd of people. And so I took a leave after a year and a half, gone for three months, and when I came back the reality is the choice was I could not go back with that group or I'd go right back into my habits.

I was fortunate that I had more of a tolerance, which is probably the worst thing that can happen for drugs and alcohol, than I had an addiction. But there's a threshold in that tolerance where you can literally overdose. And

I was probably reaching that threshold, where I built more and more of a tolerance. So I was able to go off the drugs fairly quickly without having a lot of any sense of wanting to go back on them. But when I came back to San Francisco in…when did I come back, '69? No, 1970. When I came back early '70, I had to self-isolate and remove myself from that group of people.

Mark B. Was that party crowd also the people in SIR, or those were two different groups?

Lynn J. Totally different groups of people.

Mark B. Those were different groups of people, okay.

Lynn J. Just the bar crowd.

Mark B. Just the bar crowd, okay.

Lynn J. Young bar crowd where we started drinking like on a Sunday morning and we'd be drinking screwdrivers and bloody Marys and we'd be out all day roaming bars, and then the bath houses and things like that, and be going back and forth all over the city, because that was what you did. And there were a lot of new bars opening up, new places to go, there were places to be seen. And it was just, you know, an intriguing time because things were starting to happen slowly, and we were feeling a little more…for us, you know, with all these new places opening up, it became…it was an adventure.

So by ’70, I came back, I isolated myself. I moved. And it was in that isolation I went back to work and began to say what now? And I read about…I picked up an *Advocate* and there were articles about Troy and the church.

Mark B. You obviously also recognized who that was right away, right?

Lynn J. I was shocked, because he had been doing prayer services towards the end of his military term of duty, but I just, I looked… So I contacted him and I think he was as shocked as I was. Because I had left him in Tallahassee, Florida, or somewhere in Florida. The last time I’d talked to him had been a couple years. And so he said I’m coming up to preach, and this was like in September of ’70, and he said I’m doing a spiritual renewal. And I’d seen it advertised for a couple months in *The Advocate*.

And so when I went in, you know, it was like whoa. Here was 800 people at California Hall, and it was like the largest group of gay and lesbian people I’d ever seen. And Troy and I, afterwards we went out with a group of people, and he was asking what had happened after I left the military. And he just said, “Oh honey,” he said, “You need this church and the church needs you.” And he just said you need to get involved. So I think Troy and I now, it’s over 45 years we’ve known each other.

But who would have known that my year and a half or so with Troy in the military would be a link that would go from…turned my life around from a place of self-destruction to self-affirmation, as I call it. And again this

whole process, which is a theme, one of the themes of life, for my life, is recreating myself. All through my history is the fact that you become the answer to your question about who am I. And there's no one answer, because you're constantly writing a new chapter about this. But I had no idea when I started that this would be where I would be 42 years later as one of the longest…you know, one of three of us that were from that founding year.

But what it meant was that there were people there who cared enough to give that tough love, to tell me when…that cared enough to say when I was doing things that were…I was acting out still some of my craziness, and people who would mentor me, and willing to create a supportive, constructive network of people around me to continue to challenge me in ways in which to say, you know, there are ways in which you can accept responsibility, and not only in the church, but accept responsibility for your life, to grow out of an experience of this responsibility and to grow into who you're supposed to be.

And it's been…there was no script for this church. No one knew. It's an ecumenical movement, so part of it was it was a situation where you basically were creating a whole new definition of a church. And there certainly was risk in some of the things that we were trying to do. But I certainly felt inadequate when they would ask me a certain thing.

I became…I had a minor in English, and I mentioned that, and they needed a publications director. I didn't know what the hell a publications director did. But they needed it, and I said, well, what do you do? Well, you put out a weekly newsletter. Okay. And so okay, we'll see how that is, and it went on three years, publication director. I didn't know what I was doing.

But I think a lot of this stuff was that we simply created it as we went along. And the feeling was it was not, you know, the caution was not to make it our turf or our territory, but that as we're doing it, I found, at least for myself, and that was always a problem, because for some that became…some areas of church became almost their territory. And I said no, if this is going to work, the best thing I can do is have people involved in this process so that it can continue, and I can, you know, if I want to go on. I don't own this.

Mark B. You mentioned that you were one of three people left from chartering.

Lynn J. Well, actually, only one left from chartering, and there's two of us that are left from September of '70. Frank Howell is the last—

Mark B. Frank Hall?

Lynn J. Howell, H-O-W-E-L-L. He started in January of '70 when it was just a prayer group in Howard Wells' apartment. And he was the publications person that I took over from.

Mark B. So Troy had asked Howard to come and start this group or Howard just sort of did it on his own?

Lynn J. He was going to Los Angeles. Howard was an engineer. He had no background in ministry. He and several other people were going to L.A., attending services at MCC Los Angeles. And eventually they got to thinking, by 1970, why don't we start our own church? So it started at 350 Turk at his apartment as a prayer group, and then from there it moved to the upper room of a bar which, the name, at the moment, I'm blanking on.

But by August of '70 they had outgrown the upper room, and by that time we had Austin Amerine and we had Alice Naumoff on staff and others, and they were growing to the point where they rented California Hall for the spiritual renewal, which seated eight, nine hundred people. And then from there they began renting meeting rooms, conference rooms, upstairs for our worship services. And so that's…the church started to really grow after the spiritual renewal. It was a fairly small group when I first started just before the spiritual renewal. I think we had 30 or 40 people. And it took off after that.

But it also took off because of the '70s and the fact that the church began to work in coalition with other groups for social justice and civil rights issues. No sense recreating the wheel if other people have…there's aspects of working. And I think that was what made a difference, is that

they used to say one by one they will pick you off, but together we're a force to be reckoned with. And so working in coalition was a model that worked. And it also provided the kind of visibility the church needed if it was to grow, was to have that be out there and have that visibility.

But we were also part of the…the word I use is we did recruit, but in a different way. To get the word out, we would leaflet the baths and the bars about our worship services. And one of them I remember that I used to pass out was "Bring a Trick to Church."

Mark B. Bring a what?

Lynn J. "Trick to church" was one of the things that we had on the leaflets, encouraging people to bring whomever. And, of course, the other thing is that we promoted was the chicken coop.

Mark B. And what was the chicken coop?

Lynn J. Our young people's group. Encouraging young people to come, that there was a place for them. And that was 23 years and younger. And, of course, having a chicken coop meant that the older foxes were trying to raid the henhouse, and I got that message, so I tended to lie about my age at times, just because I was attracted to older foxes.

So there were a lot of sort of politically incorrect things going on at the time, but you did what you did to try and promote. We went to various bar events. We started going out to the bars. We started having special

worship services to invite the leather community, the denim crowd, the drags, to make them feel like this is an affirming and welcoming church.

I think what it did for me was that instead of having your sexuality and your spirituality opposite polarities, it began to have this integration of both, the celebration of both, the integration into body of sexuality, and having both of them as gifts. Obviously, you need to use, you know, and make them in such a way that both are positive for you and positive in terms of the church and other things. There was no moral legislation, but it was just a different way of thinking about the whole aspect of what is sexuality, what is it about.

And that probably did more in also removing the distance that some of us seemed to have between spirit, divine and God, bringing it into an interpersonal relationship with ourselves that made a difference, instead of this growing up with somehow that this divine person up here, that nothing we ever did was ever going to be worthy of this person, this god figure up here. So it was that kind of changing the dynamics in terms of my relationship with the divine and understanding that we bring that experience into ourselves and then out into the community without promoting the church, but just the ideas, this awareness of how a positive relationship with the divine, how you define that.

And just looking at the whole experience of worship service, and what, you know. Which I sometimes found very troubling, because you had

these doctrines, you had these creeds, you had these various other things that just seemed so antiquated and so stifling, so fortunately, the church threw them out. There were no doctrines or creeds. That was one of the first things that we decided that was not necessary for the church. So that what you began is this distillation process of what is church.

And something I don't think any of them had done is that you create an evangelical movement of evangelical Christians and high church, low church, whatever, all these people coming together, and there was a tension there. But at the same time there was the thing that we needed to make this work if it was going to happen in terms of trying to bridge all these differences between liturgical and evangelical and looking for the common ground.

I think for me, being in that process, this pretty much shaped, too, is that when things are going on around you, all the problems associated with the church that's in trans…you know, it's been a work in progress. At least I've learned to hold onto the core, those things that we started with, you know, that are still central to my experience, which is prayer, communion, and just the whole community experience, hold onto those, not try to… There's a lot of stuff that goes on, especially in a young church like this, and try not to get so caught up in all of the politics of the church.

And also it was important that we began to define the difference between power and empowerment, because of the fact that it was very easy to find

yourself in positions of authority, and that then slowly would move into places of people wanting to define the church in terms of using that authority as power in order to enhance or increase or to have the church created in their own image.

And I saw too many of the negative aspects of the self-destructive aspects of what happens when people abuse the power in the church that I decided at some point, no, I'd rather stay and work behind the scenes and be integrated into the church, but it's not about power for me. If you want this job, take it. If there's something I'm doing and you want this job, fine. All I ask is let me help you work you initially in transit, but I don't own anything in this church, because I don't want that kind of relationship. It's not who I have been over the years.

So I'm probably not well-known, but I certainly know what's going on in the church, and have been, because of the fact that I've been both a participant and have been able to sit back and witness. And it's an interesting dynamic to be a witness pretty much the whole span of the LGBT movement and all the dynamics that have gone on in the life of the church itself, and to be able to say, okay, where do I have a sense that I'm being…a lot of people use the word call, but it was not a calling, but more of a curiosity. And at some point, even though I felt that I didn't necessarily…probably didn't know what skills I would be bringing to that, it was still, there was an interest that I needed to follow through.

Because the issue is if you…you have to move outside your comfort zone, and that is a constant dynamic I've struggled with over the years, is it's easy to get to a point in the life of the church where, okay, this is where I'm comfortable. And I remember Jim Sandmire saying that the greatest threat for the church was not from without, but from within, when we get to the point where we feel that we're comfortable and we don't want to change, and we become stagnant. He said that will self-destruct the church more than if we continually find ways in which to move outside the walls of the church. Things like that stay with you.

Mark B. So you never really felt a call to be a clergy? Did you deal with that some?

Lynn J. I did, but…well, let's put it this way. I slept with enough of the clergy over the years and got an inside view of what it was like that after a while I realized that was probably not going to work. Yeah, I…let's put it this way. I gave a whole new definition to "lay ministry" in the church.

Mark B. [*Laughs*.] Yes.

Lynn J. Because I'm what they call a collar queen. I was attracted, in some ways, to these…because there were a lot of healthy, good-looking young men coming through the denomination, so yeah, I was fairly active. I housed a lot of clergy coming into San Francisco, because I had large flats that I rented, so I ran my own B&B. But I got to know a lot of them, and I

respected them, but it was not where I wanted to be. I needed to be basically involved like Martha in the kitchen.

Mark B. You mentioned you were publications manager for a number of years. What other kinds of roles did you play in leadership at MCC San Francisco?

Lynn J. In 1973 the General Conference changed the rules on deacons, because it was getting a little confusing with the collars being worn in the church. Clergy had tab collars in white. Exhorters, which we call now clergy interns, had two black bars. Deacons wore…no, one black bar for exhorters and two bars for deacons.

Mark B. It sounds like the military, doesn't it?

Lynn J. Well, you know, and so you had all these people that had these fantasies about running around in clerical drag, and so it was getting confusing trying to figure out who the players were. So they changed the rules so deacons were no longer ordained, because we had a board of deacons and we had a board of directors. And you had the dynamics of tension between the two boards in terms of each of them wanting to be the administrative body of the church.

Mark B. So within the local church you had both a board of directors and a board of deacons?

Lynn J. Board of deacons, until August of ’73. After that they were elected. So in ’73 I turned over publications and I became one of the first elected deacons in the church, and I stayed in that role for over 20 years. So it was another challenge where the senior pastor at the time, Rev. Jim Sandmire, is the one who encouraged me to become involved in the diaconate, which was, again, a concept I was aware of, because in the Baptist church the deacons were the… We didn’t have a board of directors, we had a diaconate, and they were the administrative body of the church.

So it was an interesting experience because it was a way of us maintaining contact with the members, and it was divided up by zip codes. And so we had responsibility to meet with all of the congregants or members of the church that were within our particular zip code. And some of those zip codes were increasingly being concentrated in the Haight, Polk and Castro area, which were the predominantly gay areas, so some of the zip codes were actually divided because of the number of members that were being concentrated. So we would meet with them once a month as a gathering and then we would do follow-up home visits, checking in with them and all of that. And that was my primary responsibility over those years.

But we also could be involved in some of what they called lay chaplaincy work, was some of the work that I did, which was home hospital visits and things like that. We were trained, some of us. That was where we also wanted to go. And so when MCC San Francisco won the lawsuits to open

up the prisons, because before that we had basically a prison pen pal setup where we were writing to prisoners, but we were not…the federal government and the state government said we were not a church, and so we were not privy to going into the prisons, so the lawsuit said, okay, if we're not a church, then—

Mark B. The lawsuit came out of MCC San Francisco?

Lynn J. Yeah. The lawsuit stemming out of that where John Wahl, who just passed last year, was our attorney, and he sued the federal government, challenging them on the concept we were not a church with the statement if we're not a church, then define what is a church in terms of the eligibility for them. And the government did not want to go there. So we began in the mid to late '70s of having access to prisons and state mental hospitals.

And so my first experience at that time was we had a young woman named Teri Roderick who was on staff, and she became one of the first women clergy in our church. Because you had licensed clergy and then you had ordained clergy at that time; you had two classifications. So she became licensed clergy and she began to look at a work in San Luis Obispo, starting a church down there. And down there you had California Men's Colony and Atascadero State Hospital. So I and Teri were two of the first to go into Atascadero as a lesbian and queer going in and conducting worship.

I'd go down once a month, drive down once a month and meet her at Atascadero. And I had other people in the church with us going down, and we would hold worship services on Sundays at Atascadero State Hospital. And that was an interesting experience. I still remember the dress requirements. You couldn't wear denim because a lot of the people… but it was the idea of feeling almost trapped because you would see these doors closing behind you one by one or the other, and there were some wards where they were actually the severely mentally disabled.

But the people that we were dealing with and working with were primarily pedophiles, and not just homosexual pedophiles, but heterosexual. So the first thing was having this discussion before we went down there about not being judgmental, and going there to be a presence and being with them, and realizing that this is a problem of mental illness. And some of them had been… And it was an experience, because I had never really understood what some of the modalities had been for treatment of people.

And it was horrific, because I had never heard of electroshock treatment, I had never heard of lobotomies until I met people there who had experienced those. And those with lobotomies were basically plant life, and some of them were being sent to board and care homes because at that point they were not a danger to anybody, but they couldn't live independently. But I met a few of them, and that just… Because they were repeat sexual offenders, and that was one of the ways they did it.

And so it was, again, partly it was like, okay, I don't know what I'm getting into, but this feels like something I need. And it was a growing experience because it made me put into perspective how fortunate I was, in some ways, to be where, at the time, I was now and not where some of these people had been institutionalized. And some of them initially had simply gone for electroshock treatment or aversion therapy because the family had thought that this was a way of curing their homosexuality.

And unfortunately, what it led to was them becoming the sexual pervert that they had been called and getting into the situations where they didn't have mature relations, were not able to have mature relationships, unfortunately, and began going down the road of pedophilia. And some of them, unfortunately, also, because of whatever culture they were in, the '50s, the early '60s, went into marriage and were having these illicit relationships, unfortunately, with young adults. Not even adults, teenagers, and wound up being institutionalized for long periods of time.

So it put into perspective the kind of culture that was pervasive. I understood some of it, obviously, working in Society for Individual Rights, but just an understanding of the brutality that had been visited on some of my brothers, especially homosexual brothers. It was just…you know, it just seemed so barbaric that this was going on because, you know, it was just like, oh my god, they had no idea. And it just sort of reinforced even more why I need to be engaged in civil rights and civil justice, because, you know…

It was like every time we tried to do something and we'd get two steps forward, someone would try and unravel us and we'd be pulled back one step. But the realization is that we…after this I could not, I was not going to go in because, I mean, we're not that far removed from what they were doing. And it became evident later on that there were people out there that were…when we get into the '80s and talk about that, the institutionalization of things that came… The more that we came out and were present, the more we were perceived as a threat. And that's why they started burning our churches, trying to intimidate us. I think I'm going to break.

Mark B. Yeah, let's do.

[*Part 3*.]

Mark B. We're back here, Lynn. You were talking about MCC here in San Francisco back in the 1970s.

Lynn J. I think one of those defining moments, when they ask questions about what is a defining moment in the life of the church, I would certainly say 1973 because of the rash of arson fires that happened. First the Mother Church, then a church, I believe, in Tennessee. But certainly the horrific loss of life at the New Orleans MCC church. Another thing is I had been to that bar, I had been to that church the year before, so I had met the pastor, who lost his life, his partner, who lost his life.

And so it was just horrific, the images, because a few months after that I actually made a pilgrimage to the burned-out building and saw the images, the photographs and the destruction and stuff myself, and prayed at the building. And it just…the incredible grief that I experienced over this level of genocide was just something terrific. And then 'cause a month later they torched our church, a church that we'd been renting on Guerrero Street. They set fire to the steeple, which then flashed back and took the front third of the church out.

But what we learned from that is, at least in the context of our church, is that we – and the article that I wrote after the fire, because they asked me to comment on that in one of the weekly publications – was that they burned a church, yes, but that was a building they burned. As long as we gather together, wherever we gather, we are going to have church, and you have not destroyed that, you've only destroyed a building.

And a week later, 500 of us gathered at Mission United Presbyterian Church, where we would meet for five years, with a whole array of community leaders, including Dianne Feinstein, who was on the Board of Supervisors, which was a first, because politically, it could have been suicide to have that many people who were engaged in the life of the city – politicians, the sheriff and others – which, in the past, association with a queer group or a gay church could have affected their elections. They turned out and supported. It was another milestone, another symptom of the change in the community itself.

But it just simply meant that we knew that there were people out there that really hated us, and they were going to do whatever they could, and that we had to remain strong. And so when I teach some of the history at our membership classes, I wrote this to them, and I'll just read it. It said, "I will not own or wear your hate, your intolerance and your bigotry. You have no power over me because the power I have is that I want to live in a place of authenticity, and this is a sacred place that I own, that I hold where I…this is where I am and where I'm engaged in a process of becoming and creating change in my life and in my community. Where there is empowerment, there will be change, because we are the change." And I said, "The legacy of social justice that I'm claiming is that it becomes more than just my defining moments in history, because I have become part of those defining moments in that history of social justice."

Mark B. So it's kind of like that period after the fire was one of the strongest points of the history of MCC San Francisco, wasn't it?

Lynn J. Because of the fact that—

Mark B. People rallied around that.

Lynn J. —we were somewhat complacent. We were seeing change. And I think it was a wakeup call that this was the kind of thing that was going to go on, that we were going to continue to experience, that there was going to continue to be backlash, and that we're going to have to be aware of the fact that people out there are trying to unravel everything that we've done

or everything that we've achieved, that they're going to continue the myth, the lie, continue the stereotypes. They're going to use the Church, which makes it difficult, because here we are a church, and yet some of the reluctance of a lot of people to come to church is because of the messages they were hearing from the Church.

I said we just have, you know, it's a matter still of trying to find a way to hold on. Because I think the reality hit us that things seemed to be going so well, and now we've hit this bump in the road, and it's probably going to even…as we become more and more visible, there's going to be even more of these attacks, there's going to be more of this backlash, and that we're going to have to not only work in coalition stronger, but we're just going to have to not allow this to hold us back from where we feel we need to go. And just know that it's not going to be easy, that we're seeing what is going to happen to us.

Mark B. And Jim Sandmire is the pastor for this period, correct?

Lynn J. He started in October of '71 until March of '75, when he went to Los Angeles as the pastor of the Los Angeles church.

Mark B. How would you talk about the gifts that Jim brought? What did you see in him?

Lynn J. It's kind of ironic because here Jim is, he's a former Mormon elder, at a time when we had, the year before, a conversation about – and hearing it

now, it just was in the news, that Mormons are Christians. And that whole idea that people who came from a Mormon background, it would be necessary for them to be re-baptized in the faith in order for them to become a member of MCC, which became sort of a moot point after Jim became senior pastor.

Well, first of all, Jim brought this…he was very, very learned, very gifted. But what he brought was a gregariousness. He actually went out and started meeting people and started being really actively engaged in the life of the community, not just LGBT events. But he put a face and a name on the church, certainly. But he was out there in the community networking with other community groups.

And he started this concept of Zion families, which is a very interesting Mormon concept, where you gather a group of people together in the church, and even though the church is collectively maybe your community and family, but to have an even more cohesive group of people that you wanted to have a family. And I was part of the Zion family with Jim and Jack Hubbs and others. It was a novel concept and didn't really take off, but there was one group that continued until now most of the members have passed.

But he was also very much into training. Very important for people in the church in positions of responsibility to have the tools that they needed to work and to grow the church. So there was a whole section of the church,

of our training as deacons, called personal growth through personal responsibility. And so there was a lot of training on what the expectations were for you, and what it meant for you to take on positions that had a measure of responsibility, and how it allowed you to grow personally and build on that, as you start with a particular level of responsibility, you build on that and you grow. You grow yourself as an individual, but you help grow the church.

And that's probably one of the most influential things that's ever happened to me because it's stayed with me and it's been sort of the core of what I do, is the fact that, okay, I may not have the answers, I may not feel adequate to the task, but the worst fear is not so much failure, but not, perhaps, availing myself of the opportunity to actually engage in something that could challenge me. And so part of it was just his encouragement, especially with me, where I was somewhat, at times, a little reticent to want to go into something, because I was concerned that I was not the one that probably would bring the best skill set into it.

And he would constantly encourage me to go into it, and he would support me. It was like having…it was having a relationship, almost a parental relationship that I never had, where someone was there to simply encourage me and support me in the things that I was doing. It was never…there was never any…it was not… There's a difference between critique and criticism, and I was very open to that, the idea of sitting down and talking about what's working and what's not working. And he was

very open to that and understanding of the fact that he was constantly encouraging us. He encouraged me to get involved in the prison ministry.

And it was that one-on-one mentoring, and he was 15 years older than I was, but that peer support or mentoring, and being a teacher. It was so important in terms of my relationship with the church, but also how I interacted. And it spilled over into my work as I began to get promoted and take increasingly more areas of responsibility, as I got more and more of a sense that I was in charge of my life, that I had ownership over it, and I had the church as a support group to support me in these things.

And also just providing some of the disciplines that I needed in my life so that I didn't go off on these wild tangents, where then I would have to explain later, okay, now, you know, that certainly was not probably something that was the most positive thing I should do in my life. I have an inane curiosity about things, but sometimes the curiosity would get me into trouble.

Mark B. So Jim goes to MCCLA in '75 and then Jim Mitulski is the next?

Lynn J. No, actually we had John Barbone. He only lasted ten months. And partly because Jim was so much larger than life, and John was simply not really, at that point really should not have been the person coming in. There were a lot of personal issues that he was dealing with that he should have dealt with before he came in. He went on to Kansas City, where he was pastor for like 25 years.

So it wound up after that we had a series of pastors that would come in, short-term, that would fill in the blanks and to pick up…try and bring the church… Because we'd have these peaks and valleys. Jim left, the attendance plummeted, and then you'd bring a pastor in to try and build it up, and then he'd leave and…

Part of it was the structure you had at the church at that time, which was you had the pastor at the top of the pyramid, the food chain and it went down, the exhorters, deacons, and the board of directors. So at some point you had to start changing the model and make, instead of this pyramid, you needed to create a model of a church that was community-based, where it was looking at a circular aspect, like the links of a chain, where if one leaves, the church is not going to implode. And that's what Jim Mitulski, when he came in in '86, brought into the church, was changing the model, which was already in change right now.

But the problem in the church was that you'd get discord, you'd get disharmony, you'd get people dissatisfied, people leaving, and you'd be riding these peaks and valleys. You'd have a mountaintop experience and then you'd plummet to the valley. And after Barbone we had Rev. Charles Larson. He was there for a couple years. He had actually been on staff and was very young. And after the problem with Barbone which, in some ways, almost split the church, he had to focus on rebuilding the church.

He moved on and then we got into Jim Dykes. And he came in around ’81. That’s where he had then brought on Janie Spahr, who was, at that time, our minister. But he was probably the most difficult man I’ve ever had to work with. Oh, man. He personified where I am the senior pastor and everything… And he also didn’t really want to have the deacons…really, he had a distrust of the deacons.

And so being the inquisitive person that I am, after they brought him in as pastor, I barreled down to Long Beach to find out and dug enough that I figured out what was going on. And it was basically he left the church there because of the deacons, and whatever went on down there. I’m not going to elaborate. I know what went on down there, but he blamed the deacons, in part, for him having to leave the church. But to Jim’s credit, it was him that, within a few months, made it pertinent that we had to own our own building and buy our own church.

Mark B. You’re talking about Jim Mitulski?

Lynn J. Jim Dykes.

Mark B. Oh, Jim Dykes. Oh, okay.

Lynn J. Yeah, Jim Dykes. And so my partner at that time was on the board of directors, and they found the Voice of Pentecost church which, in the history, I think people are called at different times in the life of the church without knowing what that means, but I think that there is something out

there that occurs, that is a divine influence that said who would have known, in ’79, it would have been so critical for us to have our own building, because so much of what happens in the rest has all been played out in that building.

Mark B. So you have been in that same building since…?

Lynn J. June of ’79. Other than when we left briefly when the building was closed in June of 2006, for a structural…and we moved back in December of 2008. But yeah, it’s been a community center. And it was there, in ’81, within years after we moved in that we had the Cuban refugee crisis come about, where the resettlement process was going on where the Mariel boatlift was taking place in 1980, where Castro was throwing out all of the undesirables out of the prisons and they were coming to Florida, they were coming to Chaffee, I think, is it Alabama or Arkansas? I’m not sure. Two locations.

But those that self-proclaimed that they were homosexual, all the various organizations that were trying to work to resettle them, and a lot of them were church-based organizations, didn’t want anything to do with the self-proclaimed homosexuals that were being put out of the prisons. And so the State Department contacted the denomination because they were aware of our lawsuit on the prisons, and asked if we could set up resettlement facilities in our churches throughout Chicago, New York, San Francisco and other locations and send some of these self-proclaimed Cuban

homosexuals into our churches and work with the community to try and get them resettled.

And that's what we did from 1980 to '81. We were one of the churches that brought them in, got them connected with the city college with English as a second language, trying to get them housing and some job skills and various things like that to try and integrate them into the community.

Mark B. About how many came into San Francisco, roughly?

Lynn J. I would say certainly at least four or five dozen, 40 or 50, maybe more. I have some of the files at home. There were problems with some of them. Some of them obviously were a criminal element, and we had some repercussions from some of that, but it was a very short-term program. It only lasted about a year. We brought Rev. Bob Falls on. I was volunteer working in the office, doing administrative work during that period of time.

Mark B. So you provided housing for these people?

Lynn J. Yeah, we had people…we worked with the city, we worked with…we had people in the community who volunteered to house these people. We were sending them down and also networking with various city organizations, trying to network with them to get them employment. Networking with, like I said, the city college, because some of them didn't

have English skills, and getting them into a program where they could start to learn English. Getting them connected with health benefits through the San Francisco General and other city-funded services and things like that. But not creating them ourselves, but trying to network with all these other things. And that's what Rev. Bob Falls was doing during that period of time.

And there were various scripts that we had, which I have at home in our archives, that they had in English and Spanish that we used in meeting with them. It certainly was challenging because of the fact that it was set up so very quickly, and it was all being co-facilitated out of Los Angeles.

Mark B. So it happened in about how many different MCC congregations were involved?

Lynn J. At least a half a dozen, and probably more. But I'm aware of us, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and a couple others, predominantly in the larger urban cities that would have the resources. It was not the smaller, so it would have to be the major cities that were involved, where there was an MCC capable of networking with city services to try and integrate these Cuban refugees into… And obviously cities that had LGBT…were friendly to, had large LGBT communities, let's put it that way.

Mark B. What's your reflection on how…what was the effect of that? How did MCC San Francisco…was it a positive experience for the congregation and grew through that? You mentioned it being challenging.

Lynn J. It was a positive experience, but I think it was not well known. It's just something that happened, but it didn't get… There were some articles, and I've got a collection of articles on that, but it was like a blip on the radar, and quickly, after it was over with, it just…it was over with and very quickly it was changing because there was not much reflection on it, because within a year, AIDS hit.

Mark B. I was going to say that's what happened, right.

Lynn J. Pretty much that became the focus for that year, people involved and engaged and working. But there was another avenue happening with bringing Janie on, is that increasingly there were more and more women coming into the church, and so there needed to be women's programming, and there needed to be a dialogue with women.

Mark B. About how long was Janie there?

Lynn J. About two years.

Mark B. And her role was specifically around women's outreach?

Lynn J. Well, it was also she was on staff, obviously, preaching on Sundays and all that. But the idea was that they needed to have a woman on staff who would, as more and more women were coming in, and also have a language that was…and continue the progress of having a language that was welcoming and affirming, and continue this whole conversation on inclusive language, which we started in the '70s, but it was, the church

was predominantly men in the ‘70s. But by the ‘80s, we started seeing an increasing number of women becoming involved in the life of the church, and so they needed to not only have a conversation among themselves, but they needed someone there who could engage in that.

And again, the dynamics of having women coming into the church just a precursor before AIDS, because it was these women who would ultimately, at a time where men’s and women’s community, it was LGBT community, but lesbians and gay men were pretty much separate. You might have a few lesbian friends, but ours was a bar culture. There were a few bars for them, but theirs was a different culture and it operated different, so there was not much cross-pollination. As opposed to Europe, where I was so totally used to having men and women in the bars together, here it was totally different.

So there wasn’t a lot of dialogue between the men’s and women’s community until the late ‘70s. And certainly as they became involved in our church and became more involved in the community, it’s ironic that the women became caretakers in the long run, and very, very involved in the AIDS ministry of our church.

Mark B. So AIDS becomes sort of the story of most of the ‘80s. There’s so much there, I don’t know what reflections you want to offer about that and how that affected the life of the congregation, the larger community, and your life.

Lynn J. It probably had and has had the most profound effect on my life, and when you realize that we lost over 500 members of our church, and basically it means that I lost nearly all of my peer support group, and that you can't replace that. It's not something you can go out and recreate, because these are people, relationships that were built over ten, 20 years.

And no one was prepared for the level of loss and grief that was going to be experienced as the crescendo of AIDS began to increase, especially by 1985, where we were losing staff, we were losing deacons, and more and more people were infected. And so when Jim Mitulski became senior pastor in May of '86, after a year of having lay personnel running the church, within months he was confronted by this escalating number of deaths that were happening. And there was nothing being done at that point in the church to provide the kind of emotional support that was necessary for the increased number of deaths that we were experiencing, that were being reported in the BAR [Bay Area Reporter].

And so it was Jim that began initiating a lot of the groups over time. He pretty much modeled what it meant for a church to provide self-care for those with AIDS. And remembering that at that time, from time of diagnosis of AIDS until death was anywhere from six to 14 months, on average. So what it meant for most of us is there was this whole dynamic of HIV positive, HIV negative, and that operative dynamic.

But all of us were the worried well. We wondered, because of the fact that this virus had been out there well before the pandemic, we wondered, many of us who had not come down with the disease wondered when the shoe was going to drop for us, because we had been engaged, obviously, in what they termed as unhealthy sexual practices. But the only evident processes were that there was an epidemic of hepatitis and venereal disease in the '70s, and always wondering if that had compromised our immune systems, because most of us were card-carrying members of the health clinic, because we had repeated bouts of venereal disease.

I had hepatitis. My partner had hepatitis, probably from the whole sexual practice of unbridled, unrestricted sexual practice with multiple partners. So we were just sitting there feeling like we were sitting there with a time bomb waiting to go off in our own life, and not having any experience about the fact that here we are in our 30s and our 40s and we're dealing with issues of mortality. And it's playing…also it starts playing on some of the old tapes that we heard about death, and sin and death, and all these other issues about hell, and all these things that we thought that we had gotten through.

And all of a sudden they have a nasty habit of percolating, as you began to look at your mortality, and where am I going. And some of that stuff just started coming up again. So you were having to deal and talk about death and the fact that the experience is defined, the message was out there this is God's punishment. So there were so many negative messages out there

at the time with people who were dealing with a death sentence, and so the church was caught up in having to create a positive message of affirmation.

We didn't have, as Troy called it, we didn't have a God of disease. It was not something of punishment. It was not because of our wicked lifestyle and all that. But a lot of people came into the church needing to hear a new message because that was the message they had, was the one they were hearing, still hearing from their churches, and they needed to hear a new message because they knew that for them the theme became living on borrowed time. And I think irregardless of our HIV status, we were all living on borrowed time, and we all had AIDS, irrespective of HIV positive or negative. It was so much a part of our life, because you could be with someone and they'd be gone six months later.

It was like you couldn't take people…it was like suddenly…you couldn't take people for granted. You had to keep in touch with them. And if you hadn't seen them in a few months, you might not recognize them, the disease could so ravage them. You'd see these people that were coming in in wheelchairs, some of them carrying IV poles, people coming in on walkers. And all of a sudden, you know, it was just…a community based on image, and all of a sudden it was like this is so cruel because we were so young and so vibrant, and look what…this disease is just totally devastating and giving us a whole new image of the community.

So it had a pronounced effect, because I have been living with the disease since 1986, and I've never required any treatment. I don't know why. So the fact that once I got my diagnosis, but the fact that I've never req…somehow sent a different message. I thought I'd be dead in a year. I've never had any need for treatment, any modalities at all. And there are a few of us that just… So that, in itself, was like, oh my god. There's stuff that I need to do. There's stuff I need to do.

Because even in my own mind, every time I would get sick, I'd get run down, I would feel like oh, God, I'm going to get nailed. This is going to be the chance, with my weakened immune system, that the virus is going to find an opportunity, and I'm toast, I'm gone. So it was not only…it was, you know, living in the moment was very important, and still living in the moment. But what I've learned is that I had to create the moments in which I live, and not just live in that one moment, but… So the last 25 plus years have been creating those moments in which I've lived, and being more than those moments.

But it's also been…it's really had a strong push and drive on creating that sense of purpose, that I have survived. I don't like the word "survivor." I've always said I am more than my survival. I need to be more than that. To be so restricted on just focusing on the fact that I'm a survivor, I had to move beyond that. And I've told them even in the church not to use the word around, you know, long-term survivor, or I'm the longest surviving member of the church because of all that it brings into me.

It's just…it's a word I have a real problem owning, even though certainly it… But it certainly influenced everything I did, because I've taken nothing for granted. Whatever I've done, it's just another answer to why have I survived, and what is my purpose.

Mark B. Want to give some examples? In terms of thinking of your purpose for the last 25 years, what are some ways you've channeled your gifts, your energies?

Lynn J. I was basically a lay chaplain, doing home and hospice and hospital visits. But what it meant is that by the time I was in my late 50s, I had so layered and I had so…I had held everything within. I had basically emotionally shut down. That was how some of us survived. I just simply didn't have a way, I didn't think, effectively of outletting. And there is a blank in my life of one week where I walked out of the office and I don't remember anything, other than winding up in a hospital. I had a complete breakdown and couldn't go back to work. And during those few months—

Mark B. This is right after your diagnosis?

Lynn J. This actually happened in 2000.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Lynn J. Three years. But we were still…and what triggered it is that we were still…I was doing memorial services for the people that died at work, and

we were still having people dying even in 2000. And one memorial service was probably one of the persons I'd been with for 30 years. And that, apparently was the, they say, the catalyst. They thought I had a heart attack, so I was in cardiac intensive care. And I thought I'd had a heart attack. I had no idea about the concept of the mind-body disconnect and the fact that my body was trying to tell me something and I wasn't listening. I wound up in three months of psychotherapy to get in touch with all my feelings and emotions, just so I could go back to work.

And I went back to work and I kept hearing a voice say, "It's not over. There's something you need to do." But the job was so strenuous that I couldn't even keep…after that I couldn't stay on the job and I retired early. I was only in my late 50s. After that experience, I finally listened to the inner voice which said that this job is not working. With all these things that had been going on in my life, I need to be a new creation, I need to find something where… And I don't know what it is. I'm going to retire and I'm just going to leave it open.

And within three months I began working, and at the same time the church was saying we need to be more than the church living with AIDS. So they started the church foundation and we began simply a supper program, a meal program. It started out as bag lunches and then grew into an actual meal, and then a needle exchange program where we provided bag lunches. And I went to the church after three months and just started

volunteering in the office. And they said, well, would you consider going down the hall.

And I did not have a comfort level with the people in the homeless community. Ironically, they were somewhat invisible. And so I just…they needed help, so I started going down the hall. And I could cook, I could prep, I could do all that stuff. And within two years, I was one of the facilitators of the program. I had grown from feeling totally uncomfortable and not knowing what I was doing and what I could contribute.

And that was actually a healing process, to again, that whole process of recreating yourself and saying, okay, I have to be more than my grief, and I had to deal with my emotions and own the fact that things were not going to be the same. I had to claim my grief and then I had to move on. But I had to do it in a way where I could find another way where I could be engaged in the community, because I said, my God, I got through this. I mean, I got through an emotional breakdown, now what?

And again, it's this whole thing of being called to rise. It's sort of the whole theme, again, with the church, when we used the theme in 1974 on a float of the phoenix rising from the ashes. And sort of in some way that whole concept of losing three partners to AIDS and being called to rise. [Sentences following deleted at request of interviewee.]

It's like one of the things that I heard that fits is that the best thing we can do at times is to be out in the world and be engaged working toward having a sense of completion, whatever that completion is. We don't know what that is. I'm just working so that when it's there, it's there. And I have a lot of regrets, but one of them is not going to be not being out there within whatever physical or mental limitations I have, of somehow being active and engaged. Because it's partly selfish, it's partly because of the fact that I realize that I have a tendency, I could very easily, with all that I have, to self-isolate. And so it's this constant push to move out and be out, because I know how easily, especially as we get older, it is to isolate.

And so it's a constant challenge, as things like in the church as I tamp down that…is to look out there and say, okay, what is out there that perhaps I can be engaged in and be challenged. Because I think we really, as we get older, we really need to keep our self, our mind alert. We need to find ways in which we continue to be finding a sense of contribution, especially in the gay community where the tendency is, as I reach 70, that there's almost like there's this invisibility that comes with aging for some men.

So I tell people that for some of us, they would not want us in the convalescent homes because we would be the biggest piece of work they ever saw. Because we've come so far and we've come so long and we've done so much that we're not going to take anybody's crap. Because

we've…they talk, you know, that old adage about the stereotype of the limp wrist, and I said they're probably strong because the strongest wrist we'll see because we've had to hold on for so long.

One thing builds on another issue is a program I'm continuing. We have a variation on that program, when we lost our kitchen facilities at the church, in other locations. I continue to co-facilitate a program where we make 200 bag lunches and we have five clients. We provide bag lunches for people in need. And I have a core of about 12 volunteers that are fluid, that flow in and out. We work up at St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church doing that work. It's not the numbers that we do. The fact is that it's out there, we're doing something. And if everybody was doing something, we could continue to make a difference.

And I just finished training on the Episcopal elder care program with Open House and just been assigned a client, which means that I go out and visit with this gay senior twice a month and we talk during the week. I'm not there to fix things with him in his life, I'm not there to take over his life. I don't provide any of the medical services they need. It's simply I am a forum where he can talk, and I can support him in the things and let him know that I can't change these things, but maybe there are things, in the course of talking, that we can find that…or you need to be the answer to some of your questions.

It's also important to make sure that they're plugged into their appropriate services, so I will talk with the elder care services or Open House and say these are things… For example, if they have vision care problems, it's obvious their glasses aren't working, what can we do to get them into getting glasses? I'm concerned about the fact that he needs to have his medications better organized. I'm seeing that there's things that we might be able to do and what are your recommendations? And then we go out for walks and we let them talk. It's not my agenda, it's not an agenda, it's just letting them talk.

Letting them know that it's not…we don't have a model for what it means for LGBT aging, because a lot of us are estranged from our families, and so I relate to that. I don't have family connections. We don't have a family support group. And we're not really connected, in many ways, because we live alone. Increasingly we're having a large population, probably one of the highest percentages of seniors in the city are LGBT in terms of living alone. And when the situation changes with me, I'll probably be one of those seniors living alone. So there's a lot of things that are parallels. And I've been blessed with reasonably good health, as opposed to some of our clients, so at this point…

So I would say okay, there's a lot of things we have in common in terms of the concerns we have, so maybe there's… I can't change the whole community, but maybe for one person I can make a change in how they get up in the morning and how they view the world, and the fact that for

them maybe it won't be such a lonely place, and maybe, if the place they're living in is not satisfactory, over time they will get enough strength to say I really need to move, and then I'll work with them in that move, as I'm doing with this particular client. He realizes he needs to move, but like a lot of places, the income he has, even with being subsidized, is such that it would be very difficult.

So what we do is we work with Open House and the other organizations to try and see if we can effect some kind of…work with him to move. He's willing to move. Last week I had the place inspected by the Housing Authority and it was not satisfactory, so being the bitch that I am, I wrote a letter to the Housing Authority telling them what I thought of their inspection. And I said my next conversation will probably be with Open House, with a member of the Board of Supervisors, because this is not…because we needed that inspection to be background to try and get him into other housing, and it was a farce. So this whole process of slogging along.

And I'm doing a better job of boundaries. I mean, I have boundaries. One of the things I've learned over the years is that you have to protect that core. But I don't always do a very good job of it, and sometimes I have a habit of overextending myself. But the last few years I've been much better at that, and I'm learning to say no, especially as I get older. Because I realize as I get older I need to be careful that I maintain balance,

because I'm not doing anybody any good if I don't have a reserve of inner strength.

Especially now, because there's so many challenges that Metropolitan Community Church is experiencing in terms of trying to define who it is as a church, because it's been so long social justice and civil rights active, and it doesn't seem to be resonating. And especially in these bubbles in urban centers where some…and in my almost 45 years in the city, it's just incredible change. And so much is taken for granted, and the church is no longer seen as relevant in people's lives. And that's not just MCC, but in churches around the world, especially our outreach in Europe is very... because it's just not relevant. The messages that they're still trying to hold onto are not resonating.

And so it's a really difficult time in terms of deciding what's going to happen to MCC itself. Are we going to need to merge with another denomination? And what does that mean in terms of losing identity and the fact that the message of the churches are very important for some of the people coming in? I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen. But I realize that for a while I was so fixated on, quote, "saving" the church, and I realize now it's not so much about saving the church, but simply going where the church needs to go, whatever that is.

It's just…it's part of this whole process that, if the one thing the church has taught me is, is to be open to change, across the decades. I mean, as

much as I resist and I don't like change in some ways, because we look, in some ways, for the church to be sort of this island of calm, and it's a myth. There's so much going around, changes happening. And I won't resist certain change. I will not get into the impersonalization of Facebook. I still value one-on-one relationships, and so I know that I'm an outmoded model in terms of interpersonal relationships. Especially I think when I see my previous generations of my family, who, the world around them was spinning around them and changing, but that small town, no. They didn't want change to happen, and yet they just sat there isolated and bitter and alone, a lot of them.

Mark B. Touch a little bit about this becoming historian and archivist. That's become another purpose for you, kind of being historian and archivist for MCC San Francisco. How did that come about and how has that played out?

Lynn J. It's kind of ironic, yeah. Thanks for bringing that up. That started on the 35th anniversary of the MCC. I think none of us thought about keeping things about our history, especially news bulletins, flyers, pamphlets, ephemera, whatever. So when we had the 35th anniversary, and Rev. Penny Nixon was saying we should have some kind of display of our history, but she said I don't think we have anything. I said I don't think so. I said I have three years of church bulletins, and hello, that's it. And she said there's got to be more. I said, well, we'll see. She said could you put together some kind of display of our history?

And so I started trolling the library, and it wasn't finding anything on MCC. So I came in in overalls, and I said, Penny, it's not mice, you're going to hear me crawling around the church. And I literally went through every cupboard, every cubbyhole I could find. I asked permission to go into the drawers of the pastors' offices, the staff offices, and I began dragging boxes and boxes of stuff home to go through it. And I was surprised as much stuff as I was slowly finding. It was still surviving.

And then in about September of 2005 I called some friends and said I need your help because one of you is a graphic artist and I said we're going to put together panels on history. And they're saying what history, what are you talking about? I said, well, I put together files on what I've been able to retrieve from the church, and I think we need to tell our story. We need to have it visual. The written is fine, but people are going to go right by. I said my idea is to do it by decades – the '70s, the '80s, the '90s, 2000. But also, I said, think about some other things. And they said certainly AIDS.

And so we began working together to start going through and copying all this stuff. I burned out two printers because I was scanning material, because I said we can't lose the original source documents unless we have multiple copies. And we began doing these like a quilt, began using the model of the quilt, and thinking we'll do a collage, and we'll start looking at the '70s and say what does that tell in terms of our history? And it was like the concept of being the nomadic tribe moving from building to building over the years.

And so one of the panels shows all…we went around and photographed all the surviving locations where we worshiped, and we made a path showing the timelines, where they went. Another was showing our social justice, civil rights history by showing what we did in the '70s. In the '80s we began putting the face of AIDS. Probably the most difficult thing was putting the faces of people up there we lost and talking about all the support groups that we had – the HIV positive support groups, the grief support groups, the HIV negative groups, the caregiver groups, all these things, all the flyers. Flyers on the people that…the number of memorial services that we were having, which was up to five a week. And those were probably some of the hardest for Dennis Edelman, Marc Minardi and myself.

Marc and Dennis came to the church right at the beginning of the AIDS crisis from New York. They'd been seeing it happen and they got right in the middle of it. But we needed to tell that story. We needed to talk about what the church did. The famous sermon, "We are the body of Christ and we have AIDS." "We are the church with AIDS." Those were some of the labels that we began to own, and so we used those as themes.

We began to look at the '90s and the transition from that, and protease inhibitors, and looking into the Metropolitan Community Foundation, the panel about our foundation programs, the outreach, the Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy where we had people going there and reading to the people at the school. And began to simply…and then having table

displays, some of the things we couldn't put on the panels. These were foam core panels of some of the things.

And she would just check in with me and say how are you doing? And I said, well, we're running into a time crunch because we have so much material. And she was looking, what do you mean? I said, you'll see. In 2005 I filled eight tables and did 12 panels of stuff that we had managed…and I had others crawling around looking for stuff. And then we had people donating things. And after that it was like, okay, now what do we do?

After the November of 2005 35th anniversary which, I mean, Penny walked into the Universalist Unitarian Church and she had not seen any of this, and she just froze. I think everybody froze because they had no idea that any of this stuff still existed. She was in tears. I think we were all in tears, because when we put it all together, because we had been working on pieces of it, it was just like here it is, 35 years. Here's your history. And I think it was so important, because so many people in the church didn't have a sense of our history, have a sense of the journey, and a sense of this is where we've been, this is where we've gone, this is our story.

And afterwards it was like now what are we going to do with this stuff? And I said, good question. And we stored it in the church for a while and then, when we had seismic and structural problems in June of 2006, I removed all of it to my home except for the panels, and even the panels for

a while, and kept it there. And it didn't stop, because when we closed the building and people moved out, I was still roaming around that building.

But it was the most eerie…in 2008, when I was allowed to go roaming back, I instructed them that, when Rev. Lea became our pastor and the building was full of stuff, I said nothing leaves this building unless it goes through me. I said we're going through every box, every drawer that survives, because, I said, I'm convinced there is more stuff in here.

It was the hardest thing to go back in that building alone, because it is so full of people in spirit. There is an intensity, when you're alone in that building, that I cannot explain, except for those of us who have basically grown up in that building. There's such an intense presence. No matter how I've told them that it's time to move on, they don't listen. I mean, there are things that, in the process, I would say we had this, I wonder what happened to it? I said, oh God, it's gone, somebody stole it, I know it.

We had a quilt, a spiral quilt, and someone had created an elaborate spiral and had begun stitching all the names of those people who died of AIDS. And I said, oh god. During the 35th anniversary I tore that church apart. I could not find it. And I was saying, oh god, some way it got tossed, because periodically we'd do housecleanings in the church. And there are places in the church where there is an intensity where, even now, if I'm alone, I can sense.

I walked in one day into a room that I cleaned, and I swear there was a box sitting there and the quilt was sitting in the box. And only three of us had keys to the building at that time. And periodically there would be a box sitting in the…I'd walk into the sanctuary and I'd be drawn to a box, and there would be stuff. I had no idea, and I would just say, okay. Okay, we are busy, aren't we? And they would say, what are you talking about? I said things are happening.

We had garage sale stuff that was stored there that never got dispersed, and I'm sitting there alone in the sanctuary and going through stuff, and all of a sudden I hear a music box, and I totally freak. And it kept playing, and I had no idea what started it. And I said what is this all about? And it dawned on me that one of the people in the building was my late partner. He was the first building manager, Richard O'Dell…and I were married in the church in 1978, not…there at Mission United Presbyterian Church. He went on the board. Was there on the board that purchased the building and he became the first building manager. I said, okay. And it dawned on me he had…his thing was he had a collection of music boxes, and he was trying to get my attention, and I just went *aghghgh*! I said, okay, Richard, I hear you're…so you're one of them here.

So there are people who were caretakers of that building that I continued to build over the archives, I continued to find people that had things, like the Rev. Kitt Cherry, who's been very instrumental. We had a real gap, and I found her on her blog, Jesus in Love, and we began to correspond.

She's like my younger sister. I love her dearly. And she said, well, I have all this stuff. So we began a program of her copying videos, copying and sending me documents, because we had a gap on women's programming, and she had all that stuff from the '80s and '90s. And other people contributing.

I now have 14 large bins of archives. I have stuff from various worship services stored there. The important thing is that after that, I began getting calls from various people, the Pacific School of Religion, Graduate Theological Union, saying I'm working on something, do you think you have something here that I could use? And some were focusing on AIDS, and they said we know you went through it. I said it's probably something that I should talk about now.

And so I began mentoring some of these seminary students. They would come over and they would go through the stuff and we would talk. And it was a healing process, especially as they wanted to know about the AIDS years. And I had a very difficult time talking about it. But as we began going through the documents and they began to research, and when I began to talk about it, it's been a very healing process, and especially to see the work that these seminarians have done, the dissertations that I have, made possible by the fact that we had created this archives, and that they had access.

And now I've lived to a point where there's a generation of seminary students and others who have really taken an interest in various aspects of MCC history, and we have gaps, but there's a sufficient amount of history where we can tell the story and they can incorporate that into the work that they're doing, and it's been totally rewarding. And it spawned off my also interest, because I—

Mark B. I was going to just ask you to talk about that because you're also doing your own collecting in terms of larger LGBT history.

Lynn J. Right. But what started that, my own collecting, is that Rev. Terri Echelbarger asked me, during the intensives for some of the MCC clergy, and they'd go up to Pacific School of Religion here, like in the summer, and they get this six week intensive. They wanted us to talk to the clergy there, the clergy interns that are about to be ordained, or some of them who are being transferred and some others about the history.

So I spend a day, Jack Hubbs and I, up there talking to them about the history of MCC and some of the things that this church will not have prepared you for. I said in hindsight they may be funny, but I'm sure that the clergy were not prepared for dealing with some of the situations that came up in the life of the church. But what's interesting is that they kept thinking that MCC sort of happened, it just surfaced in a vacuum, as I've said before, and I said no, there's a rich history, 30, 40 years of history that preceded this that we built on.

But I wasn't that knowledgeable. So after those first sessions, I went home and I started reading, and then I began realizing, you know, maybe there's stuff out there that I can start collecting. So I began collecting stuff from Daughter of Bilitis, the Mattachine Society, realizing it's in the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society, but some of that is not all that accessible. And then I began building on that stuff, and I collected every magazine I could that had anything in the '50s and '60s that talked about homosexuals or homophiles, and all the other language, anything. I would web research and look for periodicals that said "pervert," "invert," all the names that we were given, and I built up a substantial collection.

Then I began to focus on AIDS itself, and thinking there's a lot in our stuff, but what about…we were networking with so many other groups, what's out there. And I have built up…I have four drawers full of AIDS ephemera, going back to the first '80, '81 that I managed to collect and put into binders that talks about when it was ARC, when it didn't really…they were struggling to give it a name. And also the wide range of leaflets that I'm surprised have survived that I've purchased that reflect all the different community events that were going on to raise money to support San Francisco General, support the various organizations like Shanti and others that began to rise up and began to change their definition. As AIDS hit, Shanti got a new mission.

So it's a legacy gift, not only the church archives, but all these other things which have been a tool for me to understand about when I was so

enmeshed in what was just going on in the church and was aware of our networking, but to realize the amount of material. The fact that ACT UP started in our church. I have a collection of stuff on ACT UP, how important that was. I even have materials that are in Braille that were from the federal government, what is it, the Health Department, that I've collected. And so I continue that search. I continue to be looking for materials, not so much about the church, but just building this continuum that we had about social justice, LGBT, collecting materials.

I've got materials on Glide, which was very instrumental in the Council of Churches in the '60s, which was on the forefront of LGBT civil rights, and collecting that, because that certainly models a lot of who MCC would become later on, and become part of in terms of seeing, for the first time, that there were all these…back then there were welcoming and affirming churches that were struggling with their own denominations to be opened up and be more inclusive, and the challenges they were experiencing in networking with Cecil Williams and some of the others, and trying to set up support groups and things like that for members of the community.

So it's been a real awakening to me to see who I stand in the shoes of in terms of all that preceded me, and that it's been, you know, this whole…a part of this incredible journey that I've been on, and the fact that I've been allowed to be on it for 45 years.

Mark B. It's a rich story. I'm very grateful to you for sharing this, just the ways that you have recreated yourself in all these contexts, and really been a significant presence in LGBT religious circles. You've talked a long time. Anything you left out? Anything else you think of you want to sort of just mention?

Lynn J. I just think what you're doing is so important. I think what's important is that these oral histories… We did, for the 35th anniversary, I'm going to have our…we did videotapes on some of our elders in the MCC, some of them who are no longer with us, and I have about 12 of those videos that need to be digitized. But these stories we need to tell because we're going to be losing that. I mean, so many of the generation that preceded me is gone. And we came in, sure, in the '70s, early '70s, but so many of them that held the ground that we walked on for us, to make it possible…

Mark B. They're gone.

Lynn J. They're gone. And so I think it's just important that we continue to gather these stories. Some of them, when I talk to some of the people in the church in their 20s and 30s, they can't believe some of the things that have gone on within my lifetime, that I've experienced.

Mark B. Yes, there is a rich history. There's a very rich history.

Lynn J. That they're not experiencing. I mean, theirs is a different world, too, because they're experiencing a whole different situation. They're just

trying to hold onto jobs, they're trying to survive. And just because of the fact that it's… You know, people say would I like to go back and do it and be young again. I said no. This is what…it is what it is, and the fact is that this has been… The fact that I've been allowed to experience and participate in this unique journey, whatever happens tomorrow, it's been this incredible journey of not only being a witness and a participant, and not realizing it, when you were in the middle of it, that you're actually creating history.

Mark B. Creating history.

Lynn J. Yeah. At that time we were just mad, we were pissed. We were out there at the barricades and we weren't thinking history, we were just saying, you know, no. When they tried to quarantine us with the LaRouche [initiative], no, you're not going to quarantine us. When you had the Briggs Initiative – no. No, no, no. We were not going to put up with you trying to fire teachers because they're gay and lesbian. You can keep your crap in Florida, Anita. We aren't going to go here. But we had to do the Bay Area Coalition Against the Briggs Initiative and become involved in that.

[DELETE: <u>But I think sometimes, by then, which was fortunate,</u>] that I think they underestimated, sometimes, the power of the community. And just to see the fact that first the best we could hope for was to have people in the government doing our bidding, and then eventually we're saying,

well, why aren't we there? Why aren't we in this process? And to see you have a Board of Supervisors with two or three gay men and a bisexual, and everybody's open. You've got various positions and they're all open and affirming. I mean, when I came here, that would have been not possible.

Mark B. But we're only where we are today because of all that's happened, and decades leading up to that.

Lynn J. Yeah, and the fact that people have been allowed to become their authentic selves and not hold back part of who they are out of fear of exclusion or fear of losing their jobs. I mean, it's still going on. I mean, we live in a bubble, and I'm sure that…I've no doubt. But I just look at all the…I mean, gay marriage is nothing new. We've been talking about it at MCC as long as we have, and have had rites of holy union or marriage and things like that.

But to see where it's come to this point, it's just… What has happened in the 45 years I've been here is… It's just unbelievable that this much has happened in my lifetime when, when we started, we thought it was going to take several lifetimes to see all this happen.

Mark B. There are now gays openly in the military, right?

Lynn J. Yeah. To see that happening, but just… To see the fact that the positive influence that it has, and the fact that you're seeing… The new dimension

is, of course, a whole new vision of what… What we're struggling with is what is assimilation going to mean, as it is for any group, where you move out of a neighborhood, a ghetto, whatever you want to call it, when you move out of the Castro. And more and more people are looking at assimilation. The next conversation is going to be over what does that mean and what are the ramifications?

And I think for a lot of us my age, we have concerns about it, because we're worried about who's going to get left out and who's going to be included in terms of this assimilation. What are we going to lose and what are we going to gain? That's part of the conversation that needs to come, at a time when myself and several others are increasingly engaged, more and more, in various community activity and events. But assimilation for us has a different meaning than what we're experiencing now. Obviously they're out. They're bringing all of who they are into the process of assimilation. But when we see that happen with other ethnicities, there is a shift in cultural identity.

And so for some of us, we still want to be identified as being queer, but some of the others, they're like, no, we want to move on. That's just one aspect. But for some of us, no. It's too much of who we are. It's too much of what we brought with us over the decades to say we're anything but queer, gay, a homophile, whatever. We own it, we've lived it, and we're not going to give it up just because you want to move on to another

definition. That's all well and good, but this is a definition that I own, and that's—

Mark B. And that's who you are.

Lynn J. That's who I am.

Mark B. Yeah, yeah, good. Thank you so much for your time, Lynn. Thanks for the preparation work you did to make this interview so rich. We should go get some lunch, right?

Lynn J. Yeah. I didn't mean to talk your leg off.

[*End of recording.*]