

**Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project
Oral History Initiative**

**Interview with Larry Bly
March 1, 2016**

Interviewer: Meghan Kennedy (and Caroline Allison)

Interviewee: Larry Bly

Date: March 1, 2016

Total Duration: 34:52

Location: System 4 Advertising
322 Bullitt Avenue SE
Roanoke, Virginia 24013

Transcribed by: Brittany Piro and Emily Lyons

0:00 = about “Cookin’ Cheap” (c. 1981-2002) a nationally-syndicated television show produced in Roanoke

1:41 = childhood in Maurertown (Shenandoah County), Virginia (late 1940s – 1960s)

4:18 = service in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War (1968 – 1970)

8:17 = taking a job with WROV in Roanoke, Virginia (1971)

10:08 = lack of a social scene in Roanoke in the early 1970s

12:32 = background on his love of broadcasting; running a radio show; starting an advertising agency

17:06: about “Cookin’ Cheap,” and what made the show so successful

18:56 = founding Blue Ridge AIDS Support Services (BRASS) in the early 1990s

21:23 = on the possible return of “Cookin’ Cheap”

23:37 = involvement in organizing the first Pride in the Park festivals (1989-early 1990s)

25:59 = losing friends to AIDS

27:01 = story about visiting Roanoke as an 18-year-old (c. 1966), and seeing the Bullitt Avenue cruising scene

30:42 = the ‘Cook Sisters,’ a segment performed in drag on “Cookin’ Cheap”

00:00

MK: This is Meghan Kennedy. I’m interviewing Mr. Larry Bly. Mr. Bly, what was your favorite meal you have ever cooked on “Cookin’ Cheap”?¹

00:11

¹ An academic article has been published about “Cookin’ Cheap”: Greg M. Smith and Pamela Wilson, “Country Cookin’ and Cross-Dressin’: Television, Southern White Masculinities, and Hierarchies of Cultural Taste,” *Television and New Media* 5, no. 3 (August 2004): 175-196.

LB: *[Laughter]* Right out of the gate, you got me! *[Laughter]* I don't know. I cooked over 300 recipes in 25 years, I think it was on the air. Whether there is a favorite or not I don't know. It wasn't a desert I can tell you that because I'm not a dessert person. I don't do too much of that. I guess probably some Italian dishes we tried.

MK: Are there any recipes that to this day you've kept to yourself?

00:40

LB: Absolutely! We put out something called 'The Cookin' Cheap Cookbook.' In fact we put out three of them down through the years. But the last was especially a nice one. With sort of a semi-hard cover and a color photo on the front. I have that at home and there are five or six recipes that I know are in there, that if I'm always going to fix them, I'm always going to go to that book and get them.

MK: And what are those recipes?

1:06

LB: Well, there is a chicken parmesan recipe that is very simple but very elegant that I like an awful lot. It doesn't require a lot of fuss. You know the show is about fixing food that do not require a lot a fuss and simple recipes. There is a beer bread that I do occasionally from scratch that is very, very simple but quite lovely. And let's see, there might be, I'm trying to think of one or two [more] others that I might go to for that, but for right now that's all.

MK: Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood in Maryland?

1:41

LB: Well I was born in Baltimore Maryland but I did not live there but a year, because my parents divorced. The one thing they could agree on in their divorce was that I should be raised by somebody in the country and not be raised in Baltimore which was a very, very rough city, back in the day and some parts of it still are for that matter. So they trotted me out to Shenandoah County in Northern Virginia where my grandmother lived and the only thing they could agree on was that she should raise me *[Laughter]* but I don't think either of them wanted me. I'm not sure about that. But anyway, they took me out to my grandmother's house to be taken care of and she died of cancer a year later so my Aunt Tootsie took me on at that point, along with her younger sister who still had one more year to go in high school, their mother died, and my grandfather. So we were just this crazy family of you know aunts, uncles, nephews, and what have you. And so I grew up on a 300-acre farm, beef cattle farm near Winchester, and it was a beautiful life, a wonderful life and I was never... my folks would visit me but I never lived with them again after that. I literally grew up there. My folks gave me the opportunity to be adopted and I said "no, I don't think we need to do that." So I kept my name and was never officially adopted but they were my official guardians all through school and college.

3:17

MK: Can you elaborate on your life living on a farm in Maurertown² Virginia?

² The recording says "Winchester" but Mr. Bly corrected us. The farm he grew up on was in Maurertown, Virginia which is close to but not in Winchester.

3:21

LB: Well it was a lot of work because farms are a lot of work. And so you were expected to work out in the barn and in the fields and what have you. For an only child like myself one of the reasons I think that I came around to the creative field was because I had to amuse myself so much, I was by myself so much of the time but it was a lovely place to grow up. We had 300 acres, probably 500 cows, [laughter] and the first thing you learned on a beef cattle farm was do not name the animals. [Laughter] It's a terrible thing but it's true. So yeah I of course lived there until I went into the army. I lived there through college and I lived there through.... well I went away for two years but I came back from the army, back to the house, briefly and then I moved away for good, you know?

4:18

MK: How did serving in the army during the Korean War impact your life?

4:23

LB: Well first of all, I didn't, I wasn't there during the Korean War. Because if I had been there during the Korean War I would've been seven years old. [Laughter] Hah, got ya! But to answer your question I was in Korea during the Vietnam War. That is very confusing to people it's not the first time... people have done articles on me saying "Mr. Bly served admirably during the Korean War" and I always go "noooo," I would've been the youngest soldier in the world! No, but anyway, I went in and I was very lucky. I got drafted in '68. And it was very stressful because it was almost a given that you were going to go to Vietnam and maybe get killed. So it was very stressful for all of us that age. But I lucked out, I ended up going to Fort Bragg, North Carolina for basic training. And when I got finished with basic training they had assigned all these people, "you're going to go to Fort Polk, Louisiana and you are going to go to Fort... da da da da da." And you knew these people would definitely end up in Vietnam and those people might... And when he got to the end of the list I'm standing there by myself and the guy says, "Who are you?" I said, "Private Bly" and he says "I don't have anything for you at all." And I went, "oh lucky me, everybody else knows where they're going and what they're doing." So anyway they came and got me an hour later and said "well actually you're not going anywhere. You're going to go to the other side of the base where you're going to be on the psychological operations division, PSYOPs." It was our job... We were photographers, radio announcers, and TV people, and newspaper journalists, and they just bunched us into this big company because we were a group of creative people and they didn't know what to do with us. So we had the Green Berets on one side of us, we had the 82nd Airborne Division on the other side, but we were this strange little company, of really fun people. I mean we were just, you know, we were the people that did all the writing and all the broadcasting, all that stuff. So my experience at Fort Bragg was really good and I had been there for a year. And the policy at the time was if—and if I get to wondering on too much, just stop me—if you had less than thirteen months left they would not send you overseas. Well, with eleven months left, they came in one day and said, "You are going overseas." And I said, "No way!" And he said, "You are the luckiest guy in the world, you are not going to Vietnam, you are going to go to Korea." And in Korea they got me on with the American Forces Korean Network and I was their network announcer.³ I always like to say that

³ The American Forces Korean Network is a branch of the United States Armed Forces Radio and Television Service, and began operations in South Korea in 1957.

I helped make Korea safe for ‘rock and roll.’ [*Laughter*] And that is what I did, so it was quite enjoyable thank you. It was like a real job, by the way.

7:15

MK: How did you become a part of the Army?

7:17

LB: What do mean part of the Army?

7:19

MK: Like, how did you get there, how did you come to serving in the army?

7:30

LB: Well, the draft board. That’s how. It’s not something I wanted to do but something that happened to you as a young male when you graduated from high school. Either you went directly into college or you found yourself trying to figure out, if you didn’t want to go, how you might get out of it [getting drafted]. [*Laughter*] Although I didn’t try to do that. So anyway, I got called by the draft board to have an Army physical and that starts the process, okay? And strangely enough that process started right here, two blocks from here.

8:15

Mk: What sparked your move to Roanoke Virginia in 1971?

8:17

LB: In ‘71 I had just gotten back from the Army and I went back home for about three or four months. I went back to my radio job that I had before I went in the Army. I was a Disc Jockey. And I decided, you know, if I land here I’m just liable to never leave here. Because I loved the farm and I loved my folks. I had a wonderful family. I’ve got to force myself out again and it wasn’t like I hadn’t been gone for two years. So I thought, if I stay here, it’s not a good thing, I need to move on to something else. So I went to Detroit, Michigan. I moved to Detroit, Michigan where I worked for a big radio station up there for about four months. I hated Detroit, Michigan. Detroit had just had riots, they burned half the city down, it was a nasty place it was just really edgy. A little too edgy for this country boy. So, I started putting out what are called ‘airchecks’ to different radio stations: a couple up in Washington, because I kind of grew up outside of D.C.; one here to (station) WROV; and one to a station in Charlotte, North Carolina. And all of them responded positively and so I thought that I was going to go to Charlotte, North Carolina, but the job didn’t come open until fall. And I didn’t want to stay in Detroit until fall. So, I had a friend who worked for WROV, and he said “Well why don’t you come work for us. It’s a really great radio station. You’d be shocked at how good this little radio station is in Roanoke, Virginia.” And he says, “I don’t think you will mind Roanoke too bad.” So I said, “Okay I’ll do that.” So that is how I ended up moving here. And I never made it to Charlotte, North Carolina. [*Laughter*] I’m still here.

10:03

MK: How would you describe your social life when you first moved to Roanoke in the early ‘70s?

10:08

LB: My social life was nonexistent. Even though I was in radio. I wasn't yet in TV, I would not get into TV for three or four more years, so strictly radio. Then my business partner and I, Marty Hall and I, also at that time started the ad agency on the side, to see if we could make that eventually be what we do for a living. So, when I first moved here in '71 I didn't really, even though I made fabulous money in Detroit, I didn't make fabulous money in Roanoke. *[Laughter]* And so I didn't have a social life. We had a cabin on Back Creek, a very beautiful place that is still there. And so, I worked seven till midnight. I got off at midnight, there was nothing open in Roanoke, except maybe a truck stop down on [Route] 220. So, I would just come home and I wasn't much of a partying person. I had no social life and then eventually, social life started to happen. I started meeting through my business partner, Marty Hall, because he had worked here for many years, he knew a lot of people. So, he started introducing me to people who would eventually, some would eventually become some of my long-term friends in this town. And then I started getting invited to parties and social events. But, I still didn't go out to bars. I didn't do that. Not initially.

11:35

MK: How has your personal life changed since the early 1970s?

11:38

LB: I've gotten old. *[Laughter]* Not much I don't think. I really don't think so, of course I've been very successful in all my pursuits. I've been very lucky. I've been very successful and so I live comfortably. Not ostentatiously but comfortably and I think I have a good life; and I'm still working at this ad agency, even though I don't really need to any more, just to sort of give me a place to go to everyday. I like having my desk and my phone and my studio. We still record stuff here. And Lindy and I handle some accounts and so yeah, we stay busy. So my life is changed in that I'm now doing this not because I have to but because I still very much enjoy what I've done all these years.

12:29

MK: What has sparked your interest in broadcasting at such an early age?

12:32

LB: You know that is an interesting question. My folks could never figure it out. Years ago the Advertising Federation of the Roanoke Valley gave me the 'Silver Medal Award' which is given every couple of years, not necessarily every year. For excellence in the field, it could be broadcasting, it could be advertising. So it's given by your peers, it's voted on by your peers. And it's a lovely thing to have and they gave me one in 1989 and they did a thirty-minute program of my life, it was like "This is your Life," it was amazing. Some of my folks told the story about how when I was a kid, I would take like pan lids and I would spin them and sing songs. So, I think I thought I was a Disc Jockey, even though I didn't know what a Disc Jockey was and I was always fascinated with the radio. And my Aunt Tootsie who raised me, who was just a big radio fan and she was oddly enough listened to rock music all the time which was strange. *[Laughter]* I mean we grew up in the country and if you went to the barn you listened to country music. But not in my Aunt Tootsie's kitchen you didn't listen to country music. Plus,

when I was a kid, at night there was a bunch of 50,000 watt radio stations that you could listen to that would only come in after dark, because after the sun goes down it radiates differently. I grew up very early on listening to WABC in New York which was a great rock station. WLS Chicago, WKBW Buffalo, I mean all these stations just came barreling in and I mean these Disc Jockeys were just funny and wonderful, the music was very exciting. So I sort of got that at a very early age even though I was on a farm so I think I was influenced to do that. And somehow I just grew this voice one day. [*Laughter*] I have no training, it just happened.

14:32

MK: How do you feel being described as a ‘wacky radio guy’?

14:35

LB: Well, I like being described as a ‘wacky radio guy.’ Because back in the day when we were on the air, it was our job not only to inform you but it was our job also to make you laugh and make you... Especially getting up in the morning. I was a morning man for a couple of years and while I hated getting up at five to do that job I’m told I made it a little easier for other people to get up and go to their work. So, I like being a wacky guy, you know? Because we really did some outrageous things on the air that made people laugh and we gave away thousands of dollars’ worth of prizes, it was great fun, it really was.

15:13

MK: Can you tell us a little bit about what you talked about on your radio show?

15:19

LB: Well, it wasn’t a talk radio show, it was a music radio show. So mostly was just what we call one liners and jokes and stuff like that. And no, I can’t remember any of them and you should be grateful that I can’t. They probably weren’t that funny now that I think about it.

15:36

MK: What made you switch from broadcasting and being on radio, TV, to starting up your own advertising agency?

15:42

LB: Well, it kind of happened as I mentioned a while ago, that it all kind of happened at the same time. I knew that I loved radio, it was and is my first love, but I also knew that in order to make more and more money on radio I had to keep moving to bigger and bigger cities and I’m not much of a vagabond. I just wanted to kind of settle in and have a life. So, my business partner Marty Hall and I—he was also a radio guy, so he understood what my feelings were—and he says, “If we can just start this ad agency eventually it will be our livelihood and then you don’t have to do the broadcasting,” and it worked out that way. But with so many other things in my life, I never stopped doing any of it. So I continued doing weekends on the air for years up until about ten years ago. Other than that I did a public radio show for a big band swing show for about three years; that was a few years back. And then of course the TV shows. But I did all of them simultaneously. I was a very busy man in the ‘80s. I spent a lot of time running from studio to studio, from microphone to microphone, and I was really busy but I loved it. It was a labor of love.

17:00

MK: How has your experience as host of America's longest running cooking show?

17:04

LB: How was my experience? Was that the question?

17:05

MK: Yes.

17:06

LB: Well it was always fun. Laban and I could be having a little argument, and we didn't do that very often, or we could be having very big arguments, as we were preparing to go on the air and when they gave us the ten second count down we went on and it wasn't fake, we just immediately started liking each other again and laughing and always making each other laugh even when we were angry with each other. So it was always [a] pleasure, it was a lot of fun. So, it was never one of those jobs that got to be a chore.

17:40

MK: In your opinion, what made the show successful?

17:44

LB: The show worked on a whole bunch of different levels. If you have ever seen it. Have you ever seen it?

17:50

MK: [Sound indicating the answer no]

17:51

LB: You can go on YouTube. It's all over the place. The show worked on a lot of different levels. It was two guys. It had a lot of things going on. Kids liked the show because they thought we were like 'Laurel and Hardy.' Adults liked it because it was just a funny show, it was very funny. I don't know, it was not scripted. We were just two funny guys. He made me laugh. I made him laugh. And there was all these college kids liked it, because they would get together on campus, and it was because I guess they thought it was funny for a lot of different reasons. Straights and gays for different reasons liked it because there was maybe this little underlying thing that once in a while we would get [A growl-like noise] a little bitchy with each other on the air, you know? And that tickled everybody. So it was successful because it worked on so many levels. Old people liked it because they just embraced us, they just thought we were wonderful.

18:54

MK: What is your favorite project that you have been a part of?

18:56

LB: A project for... [Pause and noise of papers rustling as Mr. Bly looks through notes] I did make a couple of notes here, in case I had to talk about it. I think one of, it wasn't my favorite

project, but it was the longest lasting project that I had... it was starting to help to establish the Blue Ridge AIDS Support Services or BRASS, through the Council of Community Services. I have done a lot of *gratis* work, the agency has, and I have personally served on a lot of boards and volunteered a lot of time to the Rescue Mission and in various places. But I was called upon, in I guess the early '90s, and I can't remember what year it was, I just know it was after I had lost about fifteen friends to AIDS. I was called upon by the Council of Community Services to help create something, and they weren't really kind of sure what it was. It turned out to be BRASS, Blue Ridge AIDS Support Services. And what it was is we assisted people with AIDS and HIV-positive [people] to get housing, pay utilities, and apply for various programs including the 'Ryan White Fund,' which to this day is a very big fund to help people out.⁴ Essentially, we were a clearing house for people living with AIDS to find resources to survive if they were having a tough time. And I was the president of BRASS for probably, I think two years. And then I served on the board, I think for fifteen, until we finally went out of business. Gratefully. [Laughter] And not for the right reasons. We went out of business because essentially the state of Virginia was in a better position to administrate some of these programs than a volunteer organization was. So, one day they said well you know the state has come to us and said, "You can be a part of us or we can be a part of you. But frankly, we would like you to be a part of us." I looked at the board and said, "Why would we do that? They don't need us." So we essentially voted ourselves out of existence. But a lot of these programs are still there. But anyway, to get back to the point of your question. That was not one of the more fun things I ever did but it was certainly one of the longer lasting and probably accomplished more than a lot of anything else that I ever did.

21:17

MK: What are your plans for the future of 'Cookin' Cheap'?

21:23

LB: There are no plans for the future of 'Cookin' Cheap.' Having said that, that is not entirely true. [Laughter] Nothing is ever black and white with me. I'm all shades of grey. I did... I had this gentleman in Charlottesville, David Dillehunt, I think is his name, strange last name, who contacted me three years ago, it was a big family show. He grew up watching the show with his mother who was a big fan of the show. And he says, "I run a production house and I think I'd like to convince you to go back in front of the cameras again and see if we can bring this show back." And I said, "David, it's been off the air for fifteen years, I'm not, you know, I'm not getting any younger. I'm not sure I want to do this. I did it for twenty-five years. That's a long time in TV!" It took him three years of coming to Roanoke to convince me to do this. So, last fall I packed up all the pots and pans and food and everything and got myself a hotel room in Charlottesville and they found a house with a nice kitchen and hired a camera crew. And we got another person, whose name I cannot remember, from outside of D.C. to be my co-host and we sort of clicked. I don't know whether we clicked as well as Laban and I did. But anyways, we actually did a pilot last fall. He is taking this pilot and talking to syndicators right now to see if there is any interest. So, your question actually is more fortuitous than you thought, perhaps.

⁴ The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1990. It provides federal funding to those suffering from AIDS who cannot afford to pay for medical care.

Well my personal plan is, I would just like to let it die. I put in twenty-five years, it was a lot of fun [*laughter*] but that is in my past.

23:15

MK: What is your involvement in the LGBTQ community?

23:17

LB: None what so ever. Having said that... Gosh, do I ever give a straight answer to anything? I don't think I ever do. That is not entirely true. Before it was the LG-BG-T... What is it?

23:36

MK: LGBTQ

23:37

LB: I can never remember. Now they've added three more [letters] of the alphabet. Before there was that, I helped to organize along with some friends here in town, the first Pride in the Park which was held at Wasena Park the first two or three years, and the first gay pride parade in Roanoke. I had already participated in some of the first ones in Washington D.C. which was terrible for me. Because my partner at the time says, "Oh we've got to do this!" He was all, he still is... I mean he is a friend now... but he's still out there working everything that comes along. He says, "We've got to make this march!" and I said, "Are you kidding? It will be covered by local TV and my family will be watching the local TV. I don't think I want to do this." But we did anyway. [*Laughter*] So anyway, in answer to your question, even before the organization per se came around I was in on sort of the vanguard of trying to help organize some things like that here in town and, in fact, worked in some of those projects for three or four years. And then they got to be big and other people took them over gladly and they did them better than we did them. So, but that's the answer I guess.

24:55

MK: Can you tell us a little more about that?

24:57

LB: About what?

25:00

MK: About the things you have started here and that people have taken over?

25:05

LB: Well, of course BRASS was one of them, Blue Ridge AIDS Support Services. The Pride in the Park parade. I'm trying to think if there is anything else. No, nothing comes to mind right off the bat. I'm sure after you leave I'll think of something and I'm sorry about that. I wish I were a little better prepared.

25:26

MK: Explain how you feel about being a role model to not only the LGBT community but to the Roanoke Valley as a whole.

25:32

LB: Am I a role model? Oh my gosh. *[Laughter]* Oh I suppose it's an honor. I suppose it is. Because I've worked on so many levels and so many different things so, yeah. It's an honorable thing, it is.

25:52

MK: Is there anything else in your life that has impacted you that we did not already touch on that you would like to share with us?

25:59

LB: Well, yeah, I think that I touched on it ever so briefly, that impacted me mightily was when I started losing friends in the later '80s early '90s to something that we did not know what it was called AIDS. That was a very scary time. And I lost about fifteen friends in about two or three years. Which was a pretty terrible thing. And then I would go on to lose friends for another fifteen years.

26:31 – 26:54

[Removed from transcript at the request of Mr. Bly]

26:54

MK: That is all we have.

26:55

LB: That's it?

26:57

MK: Yeah

26:57

LB: That's the best you can do?

26:58

CA [Caroline Allison]: Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

27:00

LB: Yeah, I'm going to tell you a funny story.

27:01

MK: Okay, yeah.

27:01

LB: Can I tell you a funny story? Because I didn't know. I made some notes so I wouldn't forget. See, I have very little history here because I didn't grow up here but I was on my way in here this morning and I went "oh my gosh. I forgot to put down this very funny story about my first time in Roanoke, Virginia, in fact my first two times in Roanoke, Virginia." I was probably eighteen

years old when I first came here for an Army physical at the Carlton Terrace Building, which they tore down a few years ago, over on Jefferson Street right beside Carillion the big hospital just across the street from here. Anyway, we came down on the Greyhound bus—it was like cattle, they would load all of us guys up in Woodstock and then they would stop and have several stops on the way down so we had a bus load of people who were going to be going to their Army physical. And for some reason even up in the valley we didn't go into D.C. or Baltimore we came here to Roanoke, this was the regional area to have our Army physical. So the first night they put us up in the Patrick Henry Hotel which is now just the Patrick Henry, this is a funny story. So they put us, the Army must have gotten one heck of a deal from Patrick Henry... they put us on the top floor which had nothing. Two beds, a table, and a telephone. There was no television, there was no radio, there was nothing. I mean it was just this bare room. Because we were going to go in early the next morning for our Army physicals. So, you know we were all nervous because we might be sent to Vietnam and killed. And so I couldn't sleep. So, I opened up the window of the Patrick Henry Hotel on the top floor. Well you can do things back in those days and they didn't have any safety stuff like they do today. And I was sitting up there and it was one o'clock in the morning, which was late for me. And I'm looking down on Bullitt Avenue, which is right in front of this building but it used to go all the way across before they put the interstate in. But if you go on the other side of the interstate, Bullitt Avenue is still there, right in front of the Patrick Henry. So [it was there at] Bullitt and Jefferson. So I'm sitting up there and I'm just a country boy, dumb as a post, and I'm looking down on and I'm going "what are all of these people doing out here at this time, why aren't they in bed? Why don't they go to bed? What are they doing?" And there are people racing up and down, you know, there was a parking garage next to it, racing in and out of the parking garage and all this nonsense. I didn't know until many years later—and it happened again two years later when I came down for another physical, that time they put me in the Army—but what I didn't know until many years later after I moved to Roanoke and got to know people that grew up here was that was the gay cruising block! I didn't know what all this craziness was down below me, I thought, "What?" I guess people were picking people up or getting to know people and I didn't even know what that was. It had to be explained to me, but I thought that was very funny. My first two times in Roanoke that's what I saw. [Laughter] But I'm trying to think if there is anything else that I would like to impart to you. Just give me a second. [Laughter]

30:09

MK: Okay

30:10

LB: But I did think about that. Did we go into the bars? All the Bars? Has anybody told you about how many bars we had here?

30:17

CA: Yes.

MK: Yes.

30:19

LB: Oh my gosh. A real long list of them. And supposedly The Trade Winds was supposedly the first one in the state. I find that a little hard to believe but, anyway. I think that's pretty much, I can't think of anything else that I wanted to tell you. I'm surprised that you didn't ask me about the 'Cook Sisters.' Do you know about the 'Cook Sisters'?

30:41

MK: No.

30:42

LB: Well, let me tell you this. The 'Cook Sisters' was a part of 'Cookin' Cheap' and it was Laban and me in drag. And it wasn't pretty, I can tell you that. It was old women, funny drag. Okay? But here is how it came about. The TV station came to us and said—we put the show on the air and it was an immediate hit—and about three or four years later somebody at the station came down and said to Laban and me and said, "Well you know this is public TV and at one time was called educational TV and while your show is very funny it doesn't impart anything other than humor. A lot of kids watch and a lot of people, don't you think... Could you come up with a segment? Or maybe you could give some tips or something. You know? Household tips, cooking tips, what have you." And we said, "That sounds kind of dull and dry to us." And they said, "Well you know? We think you need to get something a little educational on your show instead of just doing it for laughs." So Laban and I got together one evening and we came up with the idea of the 'Cook Sisters.' We said, "What if we have these two old biddies in really bad drag and they give cooking tips or cleaning tips?" But they do it for laughs, as we did everything else, because we thought to just stop and do that would kill the forward motion of the show, you know? So we came up with the 'Cook Sisters' and two wonderful outfits and well they just become an immediate hit. I thought well, "we'll [just] do this for a year. I don't want to appear on TV in a dress for very long." Because I'm running an ad agency. Well the 'Cook Sisters' just took off. People loved them, they thought they were funny, they were named 'Tootsie Cook' after my Aunt Tootsie who raised me, and 'Sister Cook' after Laban's Aunt Sister. That was her name, Aunt Sister. So anyway, they become a huge hit and the TV station just had a fit. The management came to us and said, "This really wasn't quite what we had in mind." And we said, "Well, this is what you got. You either go with that or we're not going to do this." So, then they become so popular we couldn't get rid of them. So they stayed for the show, for the entire rest of the run. It was the only part of the show, by the way, that was pre-taped because obviously we couldn't jump into an outfit on the air. The show was done in real time beginning to end just like this interview is. No stops. No edits. Twenty-seven minutes, from the time they pointed the finger and gave us the ten-second countdown. The only way we could do the 'Cook Sisters' was to pre-record it. We would do an entire season's worth in one sitting. We would do it sometimes on my back deck, sometimes we did it at someone's home. And we did all thirteen for the, or twenty-six, for the twenty-six series. And so we would just call one (segment) and they would just bring it up. But it was the only part of the show that was ever taped. But yeah, to this day, and I'll tell you a very funny story: One day I'm sitting at the Waffle House on Franklin Road reading the newspaper, and some big burly truck driver comes in and sits down beside me and I could see he was sort of looking at me in the corner of his eye. And I thought, "Oh boy, this ought to be really interesting." And he said, "Are you the guy on that cooking show?" and I said, "Yeah." and he said, "Gee your hilarious. I've just got to tell you those dag gon Cook Sisters are the funniest thing!" Something you wouldn't expect to hear from a truck driver. But, you know,

it just had this universal [*Laughter*] universal appeal, I guess. So that's how they came to be, because if you didn't have that on there someone would ask you about that, okay?

34:35

MK: Thank you.

CA: Yes, thank you so much.

34:38

LB: Well, you all were just too much fun. Such a pleasure. I hope that I didn't disappoint you.

34:44

Shutting down the recording device.

34:52

END