

**Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project**  
**Oral History Initiative**  
**The QTPOC Project: Representation Matters**

**Interview with Larry Forrest**  
**March 15, 2018**

Interviewer: Princess Carter

Interviewee: Larry Forrest

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Location: Roanoke College Fintel Library, 220 High Street, Salem, Virginia

Transcribed by: Princess Carter

Duration: 50:08

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00:00

[checking sound levels ~ 7 sec.]

00:07

PC: This is Princess Carter. I'm here with Larry Forrest. Today is March 15, 2018 and we are sitting in the Roanoke College Library, Salem, Virginia. This is an interview for the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project Oral History Initiative.

So if you could just tell me your name, where you grew up and you know, a little bit about yourself.

00:32

LF: My name is Larry Forrest. I grew up in Bedford, Virginia. It's like 30 miles east of Roanoke, so it's rural country. On a farm. Mother, father. One brother and five sisters. Brother's ten years older than me, so like when I was 10, he was out of the house. Father was a farmer. Mother did odd jobs and things with a family member. Um, sisters went to college as we were growing up. So, it was a pretty... I thought we had it made, living out in the country, because I loved the farm, I loved the animals, and I loved being out in the country and running around. The fresh air and the animals and things.

All families have issues. So, with the good there was the bad. Such as the father. He had a drinking problem and things. So, sometimes he would like to fight things when he came home on weekends, so that wasn't nice. So, it was Monday through Friday there was joy and we would anticipate the weekends. But all in all, we never went hungry. We had food and shelter, so other than that, I thought it was pretty normal. Didn't say we had a lot of money, but in those days or at that time we all had the same things, so nobody looked at each other as being... having more than the other. We just didn't even think about that. Though I'm sure if I look back on it, I wonder how we did survive sometimes with that many people in the house and that type of income. Sometimes no income, I guess. But, we grew our own food. Had a garden. My grandmother had a huge garden and we had a small garden. My mother, she wasn't a garden person, so it didn't last that long. Cause as a child, she grew up, she had to do it. So, when she got married, she said "no, she wasn't gonna do that." So, we had garden food and my father, he was a farmer. He ran two major—I wouldn't say major—farms, but two farms. Cattle and wheat and corn he would grow and he would hire people out to help him collect and harvest when that came. Such as the hay and stuff, and so it was, that would come onto us. The beef and things, and we raised our own hogs, so we had pork and bacon and all that stuff when they... during the winter when the temperature arrive, we would slaughter them and had our own [food] that way.

So, went to... we all went to the same elementary school. I mean, I've got people I've went to school with from the first grade all up to senior because it was just two schools: one through seven, eight through twelve. So, I loved school and I excelled at it. Loved to read because living in rural you don't get to travel so much so reading, you can travel through your mind to far away places you may not see. Physically, that is. So I enjoyed that. I enjoyed... did a little drawing and a little painting. Learned how to develop pictures. I remember photography in the third grade and I remember we had this uh, aquarium. We took care of that, so it was a lot of, a lot of things I learned even though I was on a farm, that I was introduced to. One thing I wish I would have learned, if I did live in the city, I would have probably took dancing lessons. I liked to dance. I would have probably took classical ballet and a little bit of all of that, but maybe swimming too because we didn't have... there wasn't any swimming facilities around for us to swim so that's probably why I'm still afraid of water today [*laughs*]. Deep water, deep water.

04:25

PC: So, you said a little about your siblings. How was your relationship with your siblings? Are you close to your brother, close to your sisters?

04:34

LF: We had the same parents. Sometimes I just ask myself the same question [*laughs*]. We just had the same parents, depending on the situation. I would say we all got each other's back when it come to it. And sometime we all were on the same level of consciousness, but... but sometime... they have, I'm single. And they have spouses and families and children and grandchildren, so that takes a lot of their time, so...

05:03

PC: So, how was your relationship with your parents? Are you... I know you talked about your dad's drinking, are you still close with your dad?

05:10

LF: Both my parents are dead. My father died in [19]75, so I was in like eighth grade. That was in February, I had just got in the eighth grade. My mother died maybe, it would be eight years this October. Um..

05:26

PC: And did... sorry to cut you off.

05:28

LF: No, go ahead.

05:29

PC: Did you see any of that affect your relationship with your siblings? Like did you guys get closer or did it not affect anything at all?

05:37

LF: It probably did to a degree I'm sure. Sometimes I felt like I was the only one taking up for my mom and there was so many others in the house. Why was this, why did it happen long... cause I'm number five out of seven so I'm sure it started way before I came along. At least abuse and things like that. And drinking or whatever.

Yea, kind of isolated sometimes. The good plus being in-between five sisters, I didn't really have to share anything. So I had... they had their... I had my room I could retreat to and close everything out if I wanted. They shared everything. So I can see why sometimes I could see myself feeling separate because I had that, not the luxury, but just you know retreating away, withdrawal. Just to be alone in a house full of plenty or many.

06:37

PC: So, you talked a little bit about your family. How does, how do you see your family shaping your sexuality and did you come out to your family? Was it something that wasn't spoken about?

06:49

LF: I did come out to my mom many years ago, but not spoken about. But I have other... there's plenty of gay people in my family, so... I mean my mom had two gay brothers and I had two gay uncles. I have gay cousins, gay nieces that are "out" that I know of, so it wasn't much spoken about really.

07:17

PC: And do you...

07:18

LF: But I guess... but it wasn't like any mean or dirty looks or bad things talked about either, so it was just like accepted and moved on, okay. But it was nothing ever discussed. I think if it maybe was discussed it might've... maybe they might of explained to all the other family members, just have a conversation about it. It exists, you know. In case if the younger people or something there, because they're gonna see the more openly now gay people out there expressing themselves and just have a conversation about it. Back then it wasn't talked about, even though it was obvious.

08:09

PC: So, do you think because you had so many gay people in your family that it allowed you to express yourself more in your family through your sexuality?

08:17

LF: I would say yea. Because I could... you know they weren't treated any different and I... so...

08:26

PC: You talked a little bit about school and you said you enjoyed school and you enjoyed reading. Can you give me a little more about your high school experience?

08:34

LF: High school...I had a very easy high school. I started in '75 and graduated in '79. No bullying, no hassle. The way I am now probably the way I was back then. I'm sure I was. I uh... hung with more females than males back then and if anything was said it was nothing said to my face. But I never experienced any...you know, never got into any fights, never got you know... any of the bad stuff that I've heard and read about.

09:10

PC: So, did you ever have like a coming out, where you said "this is me. This is who I am." Or was it just something that people knew about and like came up in casual conversation?

09:22

LF: Casual conversation. If someone probably asked I would tell. Other than that I didn't... I didn't reveal anything, if you wanted to know I figured you would ask and then I would tell but...

09:37

PC: Growing up in Roanoke, I know there was a lot of gay bars coming around in like the [19]70s, so did you attend gay bars?

09:48

LF: I went to my first gay bar I believe in the Fall of September [19]79, and that's the first time [I knew] any bars exist. You know what let me take that back. I graduated High School in '79 and I went to Chicago to visit my uncle. He lived in Chicago. He was gay and he had a partner, so I stayed with them. They took me to my first gay bar. And that's when I realized that there was a lifestyle. That men could live together and work together, have an apartment like everybody else. There was events and places they could attend just for them and not feel like being looked at or scorned. So that was my first one, but my first one in Roanoke was The Park and I didn't know about anything else. I didn't know it exist[ed] and someone took me there.

10:38

PC: So did you see a big difference between the gay scene in Roanoke versus the gay scene in Chicago?

10:45

LF: Well, yea in a way. Well to me... no, because they're both safe spaces to go. They had that in common, but as far as having to go to a, you know, each had different things they would carry. Some was leather bars only. So, whereas The Park everything went to one. You just saw bits and pieces, while up there [in Chicago] it was just exclusive. If you wasn't dressed right, you might not get in because you didn't fit the scene, or you might of went there knowing... you heard it was just a gay bar. Being from a small town, you know, everything come to one bar. You go to that bar and they would say "no, this is what this thing is about," and you might leave, so that's what I see different about it. But the bar fit everything in there, so it's like in a way you have all those different various aspects of gay, such as the drag queens and the leathers and maybe the butch queens and the lesbians. But back then, the women was just lesbian. There wasn't any change they wanted to go. They had drag kings. I guess that's what you call them. But that's not the true word. That's what they call them when they perform, but didn't see too many of them which is women dressing in men's clothing but not to the extent that it is now that you can't tell them apart.

12:07

PC: So um, you talked a little bit about the like the separation between the bars in Roanoke. Did you see a big drag community? A big lesbian community?

12:18

LF: It was a big drag community because, as I remember. In the bars it was like two different sets of drag queens because you had the black drag queens and the white drag queens. And most of the black [drag queens]... well, and two different poverty levels, too. If that's what you want to call it, because well you know most of the black drag queens were the ones who worked the street and prostituted themselves to make a living off of. And the ones who had jobs would just dress up to come to the bar and stay inside, and the other ones would just stay outside and they would come in maybe after 1 or 2 [am] after they...you know, after work or something. That was a difference, but when it comes down to performing, they all performed at the same level when it came to performing on stage. So that was a difference.

13:12

PC: Yea.

13:14

LF: And I never could understand you know, why if you were... I didn't have a problem if you wanted to dress up and that, but why dress up as a woman to be a prostitute? Didn't make sense

to me. But... but I guess it does if they was expressing themselves they would...they was able to do that. At least that was... What they had to do wasn't a good thing. I mean they had to survive. They there was never the... use that talent for something else, you know, besides that. Because there was a time when, if you've ever seen somebody get dressed because I have seen, it's quite a... I mean even when I watch RuPaul's Drag Race, I never seen it to that extent, but it's a process. It is a process.

14:06

PC: So, were you friends with any drag queens back then?

14:10

LF: Oh, yea. A lot of them. I knew... I think my first drag queen I saw was Carolyn Sue Wilson and I knew [Miss] Grace and I knew a lot of them that worked on the... down in the Market. Which is where they worked, the ones that... where you eat at now, but it's not getting a lot of business. That block right there is where the men would circle and pick them up and back then that was all... that was the only thing going on downtown, nothing else. There was no restaurants, there was no walk-in, at five o'clock it became that... the dark light, the red light district and people know—that's what it was known, [or] famous for, all around Virginia they was coming here for that. Some would come to you know... participate and pick em up and some would just come for the attraction, just ride around seeing, so...

15:05

PC: Um...sorry, I lost my train of thought, um did you...

15:13

LF: I knew a lot of drag queens.

15:14

PC: Yea.

15:16

LF: Knew a lot of them.

15:17

PC: Do you still come into contact with them today?

15:20

LF: Only... it's only two that I know left. A lot of em died, a lot of them died started dying in the [19]80s, '83, '88. I had a real good friend who grew up in the same town that I did, and he was... him and my sister behind me were in the same grade. He was going to Ferrum College and... he

discovered The Park and he wanted to be a drag queen. He became a drag queen. He was a prostitute and he... but he had in fact... back then, that's when the early ages of HIV and AIDS was out. He got infected and then got he got cancer and then when you do the chemo thing, you don't already have an immune system, it didn't work out very well. Back then it was the early stages so it was... yeah, I know a lot of... but today I know Carolyn's still around and like you said Grace and I think some more that I knew just from entertainment, you know you would walk up and tip em and seem em and say "hi" and everything, but the ones that I really knew—that you know we went together, partied together, rode around together and all of that—a lot of them are gone. A lot of them are gone.

16:34

PC: So are you seeing a difference between drag back then versus drag now?

16:41

LF: Yea, big difference. Especially when it comes to everything: the entertainment of it, how they perform, the look of it, the glamour of it. Because a lot of them... like the glamour of it is sort of different where people... I don't know. It's like... they were like stars. Some of them would come... I mean they came from South Carolina. All the way from Columbia just to perform here and Myrtle Beach and a lot of them came up just to come to this little bar here. So that, I mean...and a lot of girls won a lot of crowns, championship crowns: Miss America, Miss Gay America. It was a big pageant. A lot of them won the crown on that stage. So it's a famous bar. It's well known around. It's going through some changes now, but it's still open and it's a shame that it's sort of a rift in it. To me it is sad.

17:39

PC: So, have you seen the younger generation... I've heard that the drag queens coming up now they're a little more disrespectful to the older drag queens. Have you seen that first hand or...?

17:51

LF: No, I haven't seen it or heard it. That doesn't mean it ain't happen, but a lot of the older [queens] doesn't perform at The Park anymore. It seems like they have, once or twice a year, they have an event where they all perform and people...and you can buy a ticket and see them. And these were the former owners of the bar. They did it at the Jefferson Center, I do believe, a couple months ago. Upfront, it seems like when the ones... all the ones died out, there was no one to train because they would take the younger ones under their wing and show them how to, you know, the art and craft of it. So, I guess if I was a young one doing it on my own and there was no one to train me, I could see... Well, young people disrespect old people anyway [*laughs*]. They would disrespect their parents. So yea, I could see it happening because it's so easily acceptable.

19:05

PC: So, you talked about safe spaces and there being safe space in Chicago, safe space in Roanoke. Can you go into a little more detail about that?

19:14

LF: What do you mean safe spaces?

19:17

PC: Like how, do you feel Roanoke was a safe space for you? And how do you feel Chicago was a safe space for you? Compare the two and...

19:27

LF: Just being around people of my type. Other gay people and knowing that there was... that I wasn't the only one like that, and there was a lifestyle and that it was okay to be that way. It was freeing in a way. It really helped me a lot because it was like... like I would leave one type of environment, the working environment, which I still do today, leave that and come up here just have my gay lifestyle, to party—not that I partied a lot—but just hang out with friends and things and more freeing and less stressful and not have to worry about being, you know...not that I did, but you didn't feel judged, you felt like it was a very safe environment. I felt safe. If I wanted to do anything nobody would say anything to it, and that really uh...you know you can think it but when you do it is a different thing.

20:21

PC: So, you've never come into contact with anyone who you felt was judging you or had something negative to say about your sexuality?

20:31

LF: Let me think, probably have. How did I deal with it? Not in the gay... not at the bar or nothing like that, I would say. Maybe as we was waiting in line, cars would drive by because like I said they [the johns] would drive from all the way downtown Salem Avenue. Not only would [be] going around the market—the Meat Market, what we called it back in the day—but all the way up Salem Avenue past The Park, and slurs and words would be coming out and things. But other than that, like I said, if it was, it wasn't said in front of my face or enough to challenge or provoke or, you know, anything came from it, that I can remember. But, off the top of my head, I don't remember any bad thing like that.

21:24

PC: Did you happen to see any racial divide between the gay community in Roanoke?

21:31

LF: Um... I guess... do you mean the whole gay community or not just drag queens or anything?

21:44

PC: Um, either/or.

21:45

LF: Well, probably... like I said when I started going in [19]79, everybody was going to the same place. Now before then, I'm sure it was... I do know... I'm pretty sure if they couldn't go into The Park, they probably went up on Henry Street because even though they were gay it was a... their color worked for them. I'll just make it plain. So, they was more acceptable up there, to go in and hang out or just go in for a drink, maybe not so much as to party and dance, but they would go there. But as far as I been going to The Park, everybody could go in. So, it was open to all. Now for other bars... there were other bars that we couldn't get into... maybe was the Trade Winds or something like that. I've heard stories. I'm just now hearing stories about that, but I went in Trade Winds myself so... '79, '80, after '79 at least but someone took me in there and I don't think we stayed long. We just walked in and looked around. Maybe ordered a drink or something. There was another one, The Last Straw, I've been in there and they were... I was there. That was maybe a white male bar only, but that's the only two that I know of that we may have had trouble. Black gays... you would just walk in there, but most of the places... those two places are where I did go with someone and they was white.

23:26

PC: Did you feel a closer connection to other queer people of color or was it all LGBTQ+ people that you felt a connection to in Roanoke?

23:37

LF: Probably... people of color. At the bar it was both at that scene, because I would see them then, but I came up, but if I wasn't at the bar, my friends were mainly people of color.

23:54

PC: Since there was a gay scene in Roanoke did you... how was dating in the...?

24:05

LF: It was [*laughing*]...for me the dates would happen in Roanoke, and I would go back into the country so it was... At the bar was a big place to meet people, one of the places to meet people if you came to the bar... where you could actually see what they look like and all that. There was other places if you wanted to go... I don't know if you would call it dating, but just to meet people, which was... there was a... just like the drag queens had a block to get picked up, the guys had one, too. Down there past the library, I don't know if you knew that or not. It was the street right beside the library, they closed it up, between the library and I think it's the Health

Department now. There used to be a street all the way down and that was the 'Butch Block' [Butchers Block?] where guys got picked up, so that was there. The male hustlers... we would just go there just to hang out. It was a place to hang out. Not that you wanted to get picked up, but just to look and see what was to be seen or looked... they had that there. And then the adult bookstore if they wanted that was another place they would meet. But these were more guys who weren't... well, everybody went there, but mainly [those] who was not out of the closet. The "down low," they would call them back then, maybe even bisexual. They would meet there, but that was strictly for sex, mainly. But if you wanted to meet someone, you know, The Park was the place if you really wanted to meet a partner or somebody and you know that kind of way and go on and start a relationship. The other two, was just mainly for cruising, and I mean something could come from it if you wanted to, if you was at the Butch Block, but the adult bookstore was mainly for sex, in my opinion. Still is.

26:10

PC: So, can you tell me a little about the history of LGBTQ+ issues in Roanoke or where you're from in the rural setting?

26:24

LF: I guess it's nonexistent in the rural setting. I mean, as far as somewhat... they would leave and come back to our city or something like that, our town. They would leave that and congregate out. I mean they would probably live and work as a person. They probably expressed themselves through their personality and things but there's nothing to hang out for them. Unless you had something at your house, but mainly I just work there and come out to communicate with more gay people basically. It's nonexistent. Mine is and I don't see any... if it is, it's underground. It don't exist.

27:27

PC: So, what do you think of the issues that LGBTQ+ youth are facing today?

27:35

LF: I don't really understand why, if it's so much more accepted than it was in my period, that you know when they come out it's not as bashful or hateful. I'm sure it is, but to me it's a more open environment. It would be easier to come out today than it would when I was...in '75 when I was just starting a teenager, so that's...I don't understand that, but so I guess it tells me it is more accepting but yet the danger is still there. So that doesn't make sense to me. Issues they're facing? Well it seems like it's branching out in such different categories, you know, LGBTQ... and I think it's a few more letters down the line that I don't know what they stand for so it's... it really... the definition of "gay," it's not just two of the same sex sleeping together anymore because it's kind of more personality. I mean with all those LGBTQ... it's like it's... it's sort of like a person, whatever they are feeling, they can release it and be it would fit in there and they

can live a whole life in a way because living a life two different ways is not whole even though it's in one body, if that makes sense.

29:22

PC: And do you think that's better or worse than how it was when you were growing up?

29:30

LF: I'd say it's better. But it's still dangerous. But it's with all this information, I can't understand... there was no information, there was no service, there was nothing. Like I didn't even know there was a word for me, "gay." It was all those other negative words. Names they would call you that exist. Not that I was called that... probably was, but like I said not to my face. There was a gay lifestyle and now it's... so they shouldn't. I don't understand. There's so much information. But, I guess I do understand. I guess it's the way... like if I was a gay teenager in this [day]... and they came out to their family, I guess their beliefs and what they believe in and how they were raised, they might stick to that conviction, religion, and the way they were raised, instead of being in fear of being more open and dangerous and, you know, adventurous. They stick to the norm because their parents stuck to the norm. And maybe they're afraid of that getting out. Someone in the family... have a family member like that... here. I guess it could be anywhere. I can't say rural. It even exists in the cities, too. I mean I'm sure if someone who lived in the city, rich, could still experience the same thing. You know, because they might want their kids to be a certain way or take up their business or something and they might not accept the gay lifestyle because it doesn't look right in the family tradition. They want to keep the family tradition.

31:19

PC: And I know this... speaking of tradition, and keeping the family face, is something you see a lot especially in the black church. Have you seen that in your experience?

31:33

LF: Yes, that's another, what is it, "don't ask, don't tell." [laughs] I do go to church. I don't go a whole lot, but I guess I've seen more, you know... it's more accepting if they're doing the musical part and things like that, but you know it was upsetting if you did talk and condemn people for their sexuality when they did a sermon about that. But you had... it's pretty obvious you have gay people in your church, but it's like you accept them because they're in the church but then again you got to stick to tradition and teach what it says and bash them. So it does... you compliment them and then you just say "pow," you stamp them right back down so it's confusing. That was confusing.

32:38

PC: And do you think that reflects upon the black community itself and their attitudes that people of color have towards homosexuals?

32:48

LF: I would say yeah, because they... people love the norm so much. In a community setting now sometimes, they want to keep their home, their business in the home, and keep that safe and they don't like that getting out of their home. So they might be more accepting of you being gay but not saying about it, staying in the closet and all of that, and that way they don't have to tell the community. So they might accept you that way you are, but being "out" where others can see you and they can hear someone say something or point a finger at them it's probably...

33:30

PC: And do you think that has an effect on...

33:31

LF: The kids?

33:32

PC: Yeah.

33:33

LF: Yeah, oh definitely, because it's mixed messages. It's mixed messages, I would say. In one way it's like, you know, you're telling them they can fly as high as they want to but there's a rope around your ankles for them to yank it back down when something... if what's exposed they don't want exposed. If that makes sense.

34:00

PC: So it seems to be all about appearances.

34:04

LF: Yeah, I would say yeah. I would say yeah. In the rural. I don't know, I'm speaking for the rural. Hush-hush. And that sometimes to me that's... to me I think people can shine as bright as they can but it's like a dimmer bulb. Your light is on but it's dim. It's not as bright as it can be because the tradition and that... the face, you know you can turn it up, but they're working the switch. They're making sure they keep you dim so because if you get as bright as you can it'll expose not only yourself but them too, and they might not be ready to walk with you in that light that non judgmentally because that's their issue themselves. Who knows what trigger that might be for them, you being gay, because they'll think it's something... what did I do for him to turn out that way? Maybe they might have issues where something happened to them as a child and they suppressed it and never dealt with it. This was the way it came out. Them having a child and

they might be gay themselves and couldn't express it and wasn't allowed to. I did have a friend that happened... I didn't know it created him to have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], you know because he was gay but his father couldn't accept it. You know, just the abuse. The verbal thing mainly. He couldn't understand... he couldn't take that he had a gay son. He really did a work on him. And that was like... I always thought PTSD was like war things, you know. I didn't know it could be just somebody constantly... years and years and years. He didn't stop it. At one point made him run away or he didn't run away but he left and lost all contact meaning when they tried to contact him, I guess he changed his number or email or whatever, and then by the time he did reach out it was too late. He had stomach cancer. That was only way they got back together as a family because he got sick. If he hadn't got sick I don't think he would've... if he was still alive he probably would've still been avoiding them today. So that was sad.

37:01

PC: So, again, lost my train of thought, sorry. Well, going back to the youth, do you see a big generational gap between the youth of today and the older generation?

37:21

LF: Oh God yeah. But I was just thinking about that this morning. They're doing the same thing we did with different issues and with different level of consciousness. Each generation has their own things to deal with when it comes to society, so if I look at it that way I have more in common. It's not a difference, it's just different problems and different things that they are dealing with. That makes it much easier for me now, but before I was like "I don't understand it... I don't have nothing in common with them. I don't understand." And now I know a person saying it, so it is. But it takes... if you could remember when you were a young person. I think that would help, but we forget... when we see how they perform and how they act it's no different than what I did. I was doing the same and we forget. And I don't know how to fix that, except through dialogue and conversation maybe. Group settings or something if someone has a forum of old gays and young ones and we can find out. I don't know. It's a common ground. I wonder if they want to make common ground. The understanding of each other, understanding of a community to be united or something like that.

39:04

PC: What effects do you think this generational gap have on both the older generation and the younger generation?

39:10

LF: The effects? It's probably the culture. Whether or not they will be able to burn as bright as they can, but the two of them they are not working for the same goal. The common goal, which is to have the Southwest Virginia, this area, gay community, you know... to be represented and be a powerful force. If a light.. nobody can see that we're doing good things and the community

working together. So, it's sort of like keeping in the keep sort of thing. It's two separate things. They won't burn as bright. Together they can be one and I don't know how to bring them together. Like I said to a forum or dialogue, but a lot of the older generation has gotten to the point where they're kind of withdrawn. They stay in themselves. They don't go out as much to participate, except for certain things like they had at The Jefferson [Center]. But I guess they're just at the age where they just want to not deal with it, you know. They been there and done that. So they can't be surprised how the youth do... because at least they are keeping it going. And they are not getting ideas on how to do it they come with their own. This is the way we're gonna do it and they reach out to their own level. Their own age area. Maybe from one community to another. "Well, how did y'all tackle this or we have no idea because there is no one here to show us how it used to be done." That works with all things. The older drag queen couldn't show the younger drag how to be more professional or hone their task. You can do anything, but when you're doing it brand new and someone who has been doing it for years can kind of watch you and put a new twist and maybe develop it into a fine tune like a guitar. That's all I can say. You're a guitar, but you can't tune it yourself. Only if someone played it and walked it before and knows how to tune it.

41:39

PC: So you think that it's important that we strive to bring these two groups together?

41:43

LF: Yea, at least I think so. It wouldn't hurt. Because then it gets lost and they... you have to come up on your own, and that's what you have and you can't complain then because you didn't participate and say well... if you don't participate in what the other group come up with, that's what it is. So that's all that they had to work on. That's all they had to present because no one showed them how to... how to do it. So it is a lot. It is a lot. I guess that's the way it is with any... the world itself, I guess.

42:31

PC: And how do you think a project like this brings the younger generation and the older generation together by... through the telling of histories?

42:40

LF: It shows the young how we had to live as a gay person versus how they are now. We couldn't walk down the street holding hands or kiss in public or none of that and we had to sneak around and do everything we wanted... sometimes we wouldn't even be in groups together because it was dangerous to be in groups, you know, a bunch of us. As far as being out and especially by yourself, I'm sure, but just being in groups being hassled and stuff. So, that's why I say they have it easier to express themselves. Their personality, the way they dress, the way they walk, but back then we did not have that freedom to... So, that aspect we did not have the

freedom but maybe mentally that's still the same because you still can have the freedom but still be afraid. Like we talked about earlier, being gay, coming out in a way. Even though you aren't looking the part, it's still some danger in being openly gay depending on where you at, where you live that, where you shop at. And I think...

44:18

PC: And how...

44:18

LF: Like you said, getting together maybe... getting together or just reading or knowing other people's stories because I would love to see some young people's stories and hear what they have to say because in my mind you have it made, but then they can show me how they don't have it made. Show me how you don't have it made, when I think you had it made. Being a man and having a dress on in the daytime and not being heckled and all of that.

45:02

PC: So how do you see the future of the Roanoke Valley and its gay community?

45:06

LF: It looks like it's separate right now. Two different parts. Maybe it's more than two parts. You have maybe the bar scene and you have The Park scene, that crowd, and then you may have a crowd that's more... The other crowd, what can I say they are? The ones who don't go to The Park but still maybe doing more work in the community instead of just doing the bar and partying-side of the gay because that's what I think a lot of gays... that's what they do. That's how they participate and contribute to the gay side by just having a good time. Whereas others are doing things such as this project and maybe social issues of gay. Not that the party scene don't care about those issues. It's kind of separate and that to me... it's two different type of gay communities and that's what it is. That side who support the Pride and the other one they are starting... they're not starting their own thing but in my opinion it's that side of the gay and it's like a divide to me. I'll put it that way. In the future? Well, what can I say? The divide has been going on, that I know of, at least two years. Maybe three. But they both still seem to be...they're still here and they're still thriving. So that means that even though there's a divide, they are both living and thriving. It's not dead so that's a good thing and maybe they both can grow from that. Even though maybe two different types of divide, but as long as they're thriving I guess that's healthy but maybe they can work together is all I can say. Do you think there is a divide in the community? Personally?

47:34

PC: Well, personally, I'm not very active in either part of the community, but...

47:40

LF: Well, from what you've heard? What stories have been told? Do more people think it's separated or do they think it's one big unit?

47:53

PC: I've heard from... these interviews, I've heard a lot of people talk about the divide, so I definitely...

47:59

LF: And we're all concerned? Is it a concern? Well, I think, like I said, it's still thriving, so I think it may... I think it'll be better. I think it's going to get to the point where it may die out. The thought of it. They might forget why even the divide or the slash happened. Come to common ground, but it may split up like they do in the major cities. Where they have white gay pride and the black gay pride or this gay pride and another gay pride, so that can happen, too. In a way that would show that we are maybe a strong community in a way. To support two big events in that way. So, that's positive. So, I think either way they go, it might be positive. As long as one don't die or die off. Living in a town with this amount of people, you would think it would be one. *[laughs]* This ain't Miami or New York. It happens in those bigger cities, but in a smaller community, it divides. You have only a handful trying to survive. Instead of two hands, you only have one. And that's the sad part. But what can I say? I'm not writing the script... *[laughs]* the way I want. So you just have to look for the silver lining.

49:54

PC: Well, I would like to thank you for coming out and telling your story.

49:58

LF: You're welcome. I hope I did something and contributed something to your project that you can use.

50:06

PC: Thank you.

50:07

LF: You're welcome.

[END]