

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD M. LANDMAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Rick Landman, on March 9, 2021, with Shaun Illingworth. Emily, do you want to say your name?

Emily Gioberti: Emily Gioberti.

SI: Okay, and John William?

John William Mackler: John William Mackler.

SI: Thank you very much, Mr. Landman, for joining us. You have a little presentation to share with us first, but we usually begin by just saying where and when people are born, that way it gives us some context. Can you first tell us where and when you were born?

Richard Landman: I was born in New York City in 1952. That's actually part of the story of my life, when it started. I am a child of two German Jewish refugee Holocaust survivors. Within ten years before my birth, seventeen members of my family were murdered. Only my grandma and grandpa survived with their three children.

I grew up during the time period of separate but equal, when my block was a hundred percent Jewish, because we were the Jewish block. Jews, Irish and Italians, who were Catholic, could live together. Protestants were separate, and people of darker skin were separate. On my block, I was the only one whose father sounded like this here [said in a German accent]. My father had an accent, a German accent, when all of the other kids on the block, it was their grandparents who had a Yiddish accent [spoken with a Yiddish accent].

I didn't realize how different I was because everyone treated us quite normally. I didn't even know the word refugee. As a little kid, I called it refrigerator, because I once described to someone that my parents were refrigerators [laughter], and that stays with me for almost seventy years now.

I grew up in a little bubble. My grandparents lived in Washington Heights. My mother was in the Hillel Youth Group with a guy named Henry Kissinger. I used to play with his kids, David and Elizabeth. When he got divorced, I used to call his ex-wife Mrs. Fleischer. So, I grew up in this strange world. I didn't know it was strange at the time. [Editor's Note: Henry Kissinger served as National Security Advisor from 1969 to 1975 and Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977 under Presidents Nixon and Ford. He and his family immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1938 to escape persecution. He grew up in Washington Heights.]

Because of America's immigration policy at that time, although my grandfather was able to get out on a fluke under the quota, when he then applied to get his parents, his brothers and sisters, the spouses and children of the brothers and sisters, America said, "You have to wait your turn." The turn is based on a quota that was from the 1890s census, when we were going to make America like it was in 1890. As a result, I have these letters--I've turned over 1,500 artifacts to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington--where we were trying to get visas and paperwork for family reunification. Again, America, at that time, was in a very anti-immigrant philosophy and said, "It isn't so bad in Germany," even though my father and grandfather, the

one who got here in 1939 in January, were both Kristallnacht Jews who were in Dachau on November 9 or November 10 of 1938.

My father, as an unaccompanied teenager, gets out of Nazi Germany, out of Dachau, and on April 15th of '39, lives on the streets of London. He was too old for the *Kindertransport*, and then he had to wait until my grandfather got enough money and a job and affidavits and sponsorships. My father gets to America on Thanksgiving of 1939. When the war broke out, in order to get citizenship, he enlisted in the Army, and as the quirk of nature, although he wanted to be in the ski patrol, they sent him to North Africa, to Sicily, to Anzio, to Rome, to France, and then he is in the group that liberates his hometown of Augsburg, and then goes on to Munich and Dachau and is there on the day that they liberate the concentration camp that he was in.

The influence of being a child of Holocaust survivors and Jewish but from the philosophy more of the core of our religion than the rituals and traditions of our religion, this really colored my life, that when now--and I'll be seventy next year--I look back, I didn't realize how clearly it was, the influence of this on me.

The other big influence is that starting at around the age of seven, I knew that something was different about me, and that I was attracted to boys and not girls. In my Hebrew school class, the year that I'm going to get a bar mitzvah and was valedictorian of my Hebrew school, we're learning how boys and girls get married. Now, you can't tell because I'm sitting down, but at this stage in my life, I'm five foot one. At twelve, pretty much the ...

SI: Can you hear us? I think we got cut off. Hopefully, he comes back.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: You were describing the time of your bar mitzvah.

RL: We're back in my Hebrew school at Bellerose Jewish Center in 1965, around April, and we're learning how boys and girls get married Jewish-ly. There's a plastic cup next to the couples. The Hebrew school teacher comes to me and says, "There's no one shorter than you. You just watch the other couples, and whatever they do, you'll do the same thing." Not knowing that this is going to change my life, I basically--I didn't say it this way, but I will for the video--like, "Ooh, I don't want to marry a girl." I think the way I said it was, "Is there some *berachot*, or blessing, if two boys want to get married?" Whereupon, "*Oy, oy, oy*, never, never, never, out, out, in the hall." This is the first time ever I remember a teacher leaving the classroom alone and going out to the hallway to yell at me, and that Hebrew school is still in existence--well, they don't have many kids in it--but the synagogue is still in existence. I have gone back, periodically, over the years and stood in that hallway because it's painted the same colors. [laughter] They have no money. It really looks the same. I can remember him going, with such anger, "Never, never! I'm going to call your parents unless you say that you're joking!"

That year at my bar mitzvah, I was supposed to donate a Torah that my grandfather brought to America that survived the Holocaust. I was saying to myself, "Well, if this is such a big to-do, I'm going to go to a different synagogue. One day, there'll be a gay one," and I figure, with a

Torah, they'll let me get married. Instead of donating the Torah, we wrote a contract--and don't forget, I'm not even thirteen yet--that on ninety days' notice, I can take the Torah back and move to a different synagogue. Now, I did not tell my grandpa and my parents then why this was so important to me. By the way, on Gay Pride Shabbat, four years ahead of Stonewall, was my bar mitzvah. On June 26 of '65, I'm bar mitzvahed. I'm valedictorian of my Hebrew school. I'm president of my Hebrew school class, and people are talking about me that I'm a little bit ...

Then, I go to my summer camp, which was a Jewish summer camp. Again, all of this is at the time period where separate but equal is shifting, but Jewish kids went to Jewish summer camps; there were no Christians in my Jewish summer camp. My camp counselor, I told him that I had a crush on Wayne, who's still my friend, and he's a grandpa now, married with grandchildren. My counselor, who years later will become an MSW [Master of Social Work] social worker, said to me, "There's nothing wrong with your feelings, but don't tell anyone. They'll kick you out of camp." By the time I'm thirteen, I know that I am what we now call gay, actually we now call LGBT. At that time, I was still between the nasty word of queer and homosexual. Gay was just beginning to become a jargon sort of word. Now, I'm basically alone in my house. I don't remember what the hell I am, but I think I'm still LGBT. They don't take away your membership card, even if you're in quarantine for a year.

This was something that was very strong in my life. I was one of the few people who would research what was happening in the Nazi era for homosexuals because, again, those [are] my two parts. I knew I was gay, and I knew I was a German Jewish child of refugees. So, I knew who Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld was, and I knew what was going on because I lived in New York City. By the time I graduate [from high school], I'm sixteen, going to college at seventeen, and again, different era, kids, college was free. My brother went to Queens College for four years for free. I had a Regents scholarship, so I could go to the University of Buffalo for free. At the age of seventeen--because, again, my birthday's in June--I then go to the University of Buffalo--it was supposed to be the world's largest campus built [in] downtown Buffalo--because I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do for a career. [Editor's Note: Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) was a German physician who advocated for sexual minorities.]

I started the Gay Liberation Front at the University of Buffalo in January of 1970 because I knew what was going on with Stonewall and things like that. In my senior year of high school, I got a Westinghouse Scholarship to go to some school in the Bronx. It was called NYU at that time--for medical engineering--and the students were on strike. I went to one class. They made me dissect a frog, and I really didn't like it. My brother is the doctor. My mother was valedictorian of Columbia Dental Hygiene. I can't stand blood. So, I would use my subway pass, which was five cents, go to the Bronx, hang out with the kids who were like the hippies, eat lunch. You got a free lunch as part of this Westinghouse program. Then, after lunch, I would take the subway, and you had to go and switch anyway in the Village. So, I would go to Greenwich Village, and I would meet real homosexuals. Then, I would go home and, of course, never tell my parents any of this. As a result, I knew things at seventeen that other kids probably didn't.

Again, I start the Gay Liberation Front in 1970 in Buffalo. As a matter of fact, this week, Sunday, will be the fiftieth anniversary of the first March on Albany for Gay Rights. I took my little group, along with Mattachine and the Radical Lesbians, to Albany. That's where I met a

woman called Bella Abzug, who was talking about amending the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include, at that time, just the word sexual orientation. Even in my own head, gender identity, these things were developing, and I totally didn't really understand the differences. She, in 1974, introduced what we now call the Equality Act. Then, when she ran for mayor in '77, I was active in her campaign. She was one of my heroes, and I lived in her district. [Editor's Note: The March on Albany for Gay Rights took place on March 14, 1971.]

Now, it's becoming clear that even back then I know that I'm a gay, Jewish, son of German Jewish refugee Holocaust survivors. Again, the German Jewish experience was quite different. My family dealt with the rise of Nazism, the rise of propaganda, the slow removal of the civil rights that Jews obtained in 1870. It was quite different than the experience of second-generation Holocaust survivors whose parents were mostly Polish, Eastern European, who in 1933 didn't care at all about Hitler. Their horror started in 1939 to '45. Everyone in my family was dead by '42. So, their family came to America after the war. My family was here in 1939. We were part of the Washington Heights refugee group. They have a much more conservative social, cultural viewpoint. My father, at the end of the war, America used him because he was a wonderful translator. His German was better than his English. He kept in touch with some of the *Mischlings*, the half-Jews, who survived. He kept in touch with his hometown. He had the ability to forgive, face to face, the people who killed his family. I did not grow up with hatred. I grew up with, "You've got to accept and move on."

It comes to 1973, in April. Of course, I know these dates now, one, because I researched for my book, but with the computer, you can find out when was Passover of 1973. I came home for spring break. On that Friday of Passover, my mother had cut out a little clipping, and she said, "Ricky, remember when you said one day there'll be a gay synagogue? I said you were *meshuga* [crazy]. Well, there's a gay synagogue. Look. Get dressed and go to *shul*" [synagogue]. Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST) started in February 9th of 1973 with ten people in the mission house cellar of the Church of the Holy Apostles. By April of '73, they're in the daycare center space at the Church of the Holy Apostles. I am now one of the few people alive who can say I was there in 1973 because my mother sent me. When I came home, I said, "Mom, nothing but a bunch of old men. They're in their twenties and thirties." [laughter] Now that I'm approaching seventy, I am probably one of the longest running members of CBST.

That also started, again, adding that the world was changing. At that time, no Jewish group would even talk to anyone about CBST. Whether you're Reformed, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox, everyone ignored us, but we started from this little group of ten people. By the time I went there, I would say it was closer to twenty, twenty-five people in April, but I've been very active in CBST for the last forty-some-odd years. So, it's another piece of the puzzle.

As I predicted, I did take the Torah back from Queens and brought it to CBST, where it was for many years, until a closeted rabbi from Germany came one day to services. He was starting this progressive movement of German Jewish rabbis. He's now the dean of the Geiger College in Berlin that creates rabbis, but he told us about how he was about to be outed and how terrible it was and scary. I went up to him after services, and I said to Rabbi Homolka, "Keep this in the back of your mind. I have a two-hundred-year-old German Torah that survived the Holocaust. I

really think Grandpa would be happy if it went back to Germany to reinvigorate Judaism in Germany." Through a whole lot of quirks in history, for fifteen years now, it is back in Congregation Beth Shalom in Munich. [Editor's Note: Abraham Geiger Kolleg, or Abraham Geiger College, is a rabbinical seminary based at the University of Potsdam, with locations throughout Germany. Its current dean is Rabbi Walter Homolka. Beth Shalom is a Reformed synagogue in Munich, Germany.]

Daniel Libeskind--who did the World Trade Center--I'm pointing here [because] you can see it out my window. I live in Lower Manhattan next to the World Trade Center. He's going to be the architect who's going to build the new synagogue for the liberal, LGBT-friendly congregation in Munich. There is an Orthodox synagogue that is built on the land of where the Reformed synagogue used to be, but they were not very friendly. Then, the cute little Ultra-Orthodox synagogue that my great grandparents went to would rather have rented it out for a dental clinic than let the liberal congregation use it. So, the liberal congregation members have to pay their taxes for the religious Orthodox synagogue and then pay rent to rent a storefront for the synagogue where my Torah is in.

Then, just another little total quirk---while I'm there--and I brought the Torah back to Munich, and it's in this space--I'm looking at this green velvet ark covering that was on the wall as an artifact. It wasn't on the ark. I turned over the corner of it to look at it, and it said, "In honor of my husband, Rabbi [Leo] Baerwald, Beth Hillel Congregation, Washington Heights, New York." I said, "Oh, my God, this Torah was behind that *parochet*, that ark cover, back when I was a little kid." It ends up, somehow, it got to a flea market in Berlin, and I believe a lesbian bought it and then gave it to her Jewish partner, who then gave it to the synagogue in Munich. A whole lot of little coincidences.

Now, I'll take you back to '73, and I graduate. The war ends. I don't need my draft deferment anymore. I got a bachelor's degree in sociology at the University of Buffalo, and I want to go into education (Ed.M.), teaching, learning disability kids. I got my master's in education. I did my student teaching at BOCES [Boards of Cooperative Educational Services]. I have accolades and degrees and everything up the kazoo. I also got a job offer to be the assistant director of a program dealing with children with learning disabilities, and the person says, "We're going to cut the funding if you take this job." Don't forget, up until '73, open homosexuals are mentally ill and criminals. They basically said, "Change your direction in life. As a homosexual, education is not for you."

I go and apply for a second master's degree, again, totally on scholarship. I've never so far paid for education up until that point. I get my second master's degree in civil engineering. I took a lot of classes in--I was sort of interested in urban studies, but it didn't exist at my school. Then, Wilfred Recker and Buzz Paaswell come to me, and they say, "You know, Malcolm Wilson is the new governor of New York because Rockefeller's become vice president. They're cutting back on the student-oriented colleges that we started unless they get accredited. You have a master's degree in education? Would you do the accreditation and curriculum development for a college of urban studies? We can't pay you much. We'll give you a stipend, and you could be the director." I was the youngest director of a college in the United States in 1974, but I didn't know much, really, about urban studies. I applied to like five or six schools from the highest,

highest, got accepted to every one of them. What do you expect? I have two master's degrees, I'm like twenty-something years old and I was a director of a college.

I didn't want to go to NYU. I didn't like the program. I didn't want to go to Columbia. I was afraid of the neighborhood. The next closest school was a place called Rutgers, in a place called New Jersey. I had seen it. I had smelled it because on Christopher Street you can smell the PATH train, but I really never went there. Then, I heard it used to be an Ivy League school, they built a new campus in a place called Piscataway for urban studies, and they're giving me a full scholarship, *oy!* I decided, "I'm going to get a Ph.D. at Rutgers." I find an apartment in a convenient apartment house full of elderly people at 19 Raritan Avenue, right across the bridge. [Editor's Note: Mr. Landman's telephone rings.] Hold on for a second.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RL: I'm living now in Raritan Avenue. I have a car, and I go not even across the bridge, I just go, and I turn on that street to the--I forget the name of it. They had a name for that campus on Piscataway, whatever, and I go to Lucy-something Hall. [Editor's Note: Lucy Stone Hall is a classroom and office building at what used to be Livingston College and now is Livingston Campus at Rutgers University in Piscataway.]

SI: Was it Livingston College then?

RL: No. Lucy Stone Hall? Lucy-something Hall.

SI: Lucy Stone Hall, yes.

RL: Okay. I meet a guy named Tony Nelessen, who was the design teacher. Now, he's the dean. We became friends. Don't forget, I'm older now than everybody else. I have two master's degrees. I go take the program, but it's a three-year Ph.D. program.

The next thing that's very important is right across the bridge on--there was something called Albany Street, and there was a gay bar named Manny's Den, next to Gino's Pizza. During the day, Manny's Den was just a liquor store, and then at night, when Gino's Pizza parking lot was empty, it would become the gay bar for New Brunswick. At first, I just start going there first as a patron. Again, I'm short, I'm young, no one believes how old I am, so I get proofed a lot, but then they get to know who I am. The owner of the bar is Dick Mack. His father was (Emmanuel) Manny Mack. His little kids were Peter and Randy, but they were little kids. His wife, at that time, was Paula, and he lived right down the street from me before you got to the bridge. We became friends, and I still have the t-shirt--they made me a t-shirt that said, "The Den" on the front, and on the back, it said, "Soda and beer only." I never was on the payroll, but if the place got crowded, he'd throw me the t-shirt and I would put it on and I could go behind the bar and sell beer and soda to people to help alleviate. As I said, we developed a friendship.

Now, here comes the other two pieces again, and I'm not a lawyer yet. I am only now going to get a Ph.D. supposedly in urban planning. Dick starts telling me stories about his father and that his bar actually took the state liquor authority of New Jersey all the way up to the [New Jersey]

Supreme Court. Now, at that time, I just knew it as stories, but when I decide to leave Rutgers in two years instead of the three, I got my third master's. I got a Master's in City and Regional Planning. Then, I get a job with the city, and I get a job as--I was the youngest executive director of a city agency. I was the executive director of the Division of Real Property, and then I got a good-paying job across from Trump Tower on 57th Street for a Brazilian construction company and made enough money that when the horrible period of my life, the AIDS epidemic, my partner dying, and everything, my mother, again, comes into the picture. [Editor's Note: In 1965, the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) suspended the liquor license of Manny's Den, also known as One Eleven Wines & Liquors, for permitting "apparent homosexuals" to congregate at the bar. Owners Richard Mack and his parents challenged the suspension and eventually joined as appellants with Val's Bar in Atlantic City and Murphy's Tavern in Newark, both of which had been disciplined by the ABC. In the decision *One Eleven Wines and Liquors, Inc., A New Jersey Corporation, v. Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control* 50 N.J. 329 (1967) 235 A.2d 12, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled unanimously that gay patrons had the right to gather in bars, thus legalizing gay bars in the state.]

By this time, we're in 1985. Homosexuality was decriminalized through the courts, thanks to a Buffalo Onofre decision back in 1980, that homosexuality was no longer a crime. Now, I could go to a law school, and the Bar Association couldn't say under their morals turpitude clause that I am promoting criminality. My mother goes and discusses with the dean and with the school about me. Then, she comes to my apartment, where we are right now, and she says, "Come on, we're going for a walk," because I was very depressed. I quit my job on 57th Street. People thought I had HIV because I was losing weight, but I didn't. I was just depressed. She takes me on a walk, where we end up four blocks from here on Worth Street, and she goes, "What's that building?" I said, "Don't know, it says New York Law School." I said, "Maybe it has something to do with NYU." She said, "No, it doesn't. It's an independent law school. It's older than NYU, and it has January admissions. You're going to call me a Jewish mother, but you're taking the LSATs in two weeks, and if you do halfway good, you're starting law school in January." I did very well, and I started law school that January. I am now a member of the bar since 1988. [Editor's Note: The case being referred to is the New York Court of Appeals decision in *People v. Onofre*, 51 N.Y.2d 476 (1980).]

Again, I didn't know this all the way back then, but I obviously did a lot of research on Manny's Den or 111 Albany Street. This is why I volunteered to do this. I want to really focus in on this part of LGBT history that very few people know. We all know about the mafia-controlled bars in Manhattan, and therefore, you don't go to court to rectify the situation that gay people couldn't congregate in an establishment with a liquor license because we were criminals and you can't congregate with other criminals. So, Manhattan had its own track, but in the last few days of June of 1969, you have the Stonewall Rebellion, Stonewall Riots, which everybody knows about, which created the Gay Liberation Front in Manhattan the next month, which I copied in Buffalo in January of '70.

All the way back in like 1962, in New Jersey, Manny's Den and a few others decided to fight through the court system. Now, another weird coincidence, I say to people, "What does Meth have to do with gay rights?" and it is such a trick question. The lawyer who took up the case, his name was Theodore Meth, M-E-T-H. Theodore Meth was the one that escalated the case all the

way up to the Supreme Court of New Jersey in 1967. They ruled, two years ahead of Stonewall, that a bar owner, in this case, a heterosexual Jewish guy, Emmanuel Mack and his son Dick, legally could invite people into the bar even if they were gay.

I actually have a website, Infotruer.com. It's hard to navigate because I created it in 1997, but I actually have a lot of these cases and stuff, that you can actually read the words where these people would say, "The two men looked at each other in their eyes longer than any normal heterosexual could stand," or, "They drank their glasses with their pinkies up." These were all of the techniques that the investigators would use to prove, "You've got homosexuals congregating in your bar, and therefore, we can take away your liquor license and close you down." So, Manny's Den was one of the, I think, it was three or four bars that got together in this lawsuit.

Now, pulling together a lot of these pieces. When I'm in Rutgers, well, the first thing is--if you can see this--I got beaten up. Now, this isn't the first time. Unfortunately, in Buffalo, I got beaten up in the equivalent of what our dorm was when the other students on the football team found out I was gay and everything. I got beaten up badly by about nine guys on the wrestling team for starting the Gay Liberation Front, where the police and the school basically said, "Boys will be boys. What do you expect? You started the Gay Liberation Front."

It was one of my professors who took me to her divorce attorney. She had married a closeted gay man, divorced him. It was that divorce attorney who got an order of protection against me for those nine people. The school did nothing. Now, I would sue for a million dollars. It happened inside the dormitory that I got gang beaten on the hallway of the ninth floor of Goodyear Hall. At Rutgers though, being five-foot-one, or five-foot-two maybe by that time, I was a good target for many beatings. This was not an unusual thing. I then get four guys in a white convertible Mustang who are yelling at two guys walking down Christopher Street on a Sunday morning and yelling, "Hey faggot," because they were holding hands. Like an idiot, because I'm already now a little bit older--it's around 1985, so I'm like thirty-five years old almost--I yell out, "Oh, grow up." I'm riding my bicycle, they stepped on the gas, rammed into my bicycle, I flipped over, I snapped my wrist, and my hand broke. I had blood coming down my face. They got out of the car, and I figured, "Oh, maybe their foot slipped on the gas," and then they kicked me, spit at me, called me names. Fag bashing was quite common at that time.

At Rutgers, I don't know if it was a fag bashing. Two guys jumped me on the main campus where the library is [College Avenue Campus]. I don't remember the name of the streets. It wasn't in Piscataway, and it wasn't late at night. It's like eight o'clock or so at night, I think. It was still light out. So, at that time, there was a TV commercial, "If you're getting raped, don't yell, 'Rape!' yell, 'Fire!'" Here I am, on the ground, two guys trying to get my wallet and my watch. They really weren't beating me. They were robbing me. I got so confused. I yelled, "Help." Nothing happened. I yelled, "Rape," and there was a fraternity house across the street. That got their attention. They came out, and they stopped the fight. Then, the two guys ran, but then the police came. They caught them trying to climb over a brick fence because that area--this is before your urban renewal, where Johnson and Johnson and stuff is now. They caught them, and they arrested them. They did get convicted. Again, I wasn't a lawyer, but the techniques I used--you can't teach these things. So, I remember I did tell the police, "One of the guys was wearing Robin's egg blue pants." They put me on the stand for the assault and robbery.

So, the attorney on the other side says, "Can you describe the people?" I said, "Well, one of them was wearing Robin's egg blue pants, and a certain t-shirt, and a hat. I really never looked at them in the face. I can't really describe what they look like." He says, "If you could see his hat and describe it, how could you not tell me what he looked like?" So, I said, "Well, they were hitting me and beating me, and I fell down, and then, one of them, their hat fell off. So I picked it up, and I gave it back to him and then he hit me again." The jury noticed that the defendant started laughing before I gave the punchline because he remembered and knew, he was there, that this dumb kid that they're robbing was polite enough to give him back his hat because his hat fell down. That's the way the whole trial went, and they were both convicted. That's one thing I remember from New Jersey, from Rutgers.

Then, the other thing is, I then became Tony Nelessen's teaching assistant the second year. We did a plan for--I think it was called the Ninth Ward with the Urban League, Roy Epps, remember these names. It was, again, now after twenty years of working at NYU, being a professor for fourteen years, the students really think, "This is great," but nothing ever happened. Anyway, so, I began getting more involved in New Brunswick as the place where I was living. Now, another thing is, Tony Nelessen decided, over Christmastime, we would hang like three-and-a-half miles of little Christmas lights on all the buildings in downtown New Brunswick, hoping that the Johnson & Johnson people would go shopping and stay here a little bit longer instead of just getting on their trains and going to the suburbs. Again, Tony, Francois, Zebulon, Matthew, and Guillaume were his kids; I knew them as friends. I even babysat for the baby once or twice. They're all now six foot tall and older. Tony needed somebody who would be crazy enough to put on a holster and have a firetruck come. They would hook up me to this ladder and swing me from building to building as we crimp together and cut off the edges of all of these little twinkle lights and then use duct tape, and I duct-taped these lights to the perimeter of all the buildings. I was having fun, the firemen were cute, and as I said, on December 16, 1975, we made the cover of *The Home News* in New Brunswick.

Other things I did, I started--in my life, I'm always starting things, Gay Liberation Front--later on, I started the International Association of Lesbian and Gay Children of Holocaust Survivors. In my Hebrew school, I started the student body, so I got elected as the first president. I also started something called the Rutgers Association of Planning Students, with a newsletter called *What's Up*. This is still in existence. The student group at Rutgers is called RAPS, Rutgers Association [of Planning Students], I started it.

Now, it gets to phase two of Manny's Den. They give notice to Dick Mack, "Urban renewal through New Brunswick Tomorrow is going to be condemning, through eminent domain, the entire area on Albany Street to build the new Johnson & Johnson headquarters," and he's going to be losing his space. They'll give him fair compensation, but you can't fight it; you're out. On his own, he hired a broker, and he found another piece of property on [George Street]. This is the actual booklet that I put together for Dick Mack, and I went to a very, very world-renowned architect, who went to Harvard. He's now the dean of urban planning at Rutgers, my friend Tony Nelessen. Let's see, this is the rendering of a two-story building. I think it might have been Paterson Silks, yes. It used to say, "Mill-born and Paterson Silks." He bought that building. Tony Nelessen did the rendering. I did the floor plan. It was going to be a restaurant during the day and a gay bar restaurant at night, high class, very nice. Well, I won't mention names because

the human being who turned us down--how to put this delicately--I bumped into him in my gay synagogue years later, but he got together and they denied the transfer of the liquor license because they did not want a gay establishment to be on the main street of New Brunswick.

Dick Mack then bought another place out in Somerset and didn't call it Manny's Den, just called it The Den. [Editor's Note: After being evicted from its location on Albany Street, Manny's Den, or The Den, reopened on Hiram Street, and eventually, when the Hiram Market area was razed, The Den moved to Hamilton Street in Somerset.] By this time, Randy and Peter are grownups, so I think they ran it with Dick. He sold this building, so he wasn't economically at a loss. I did it for free, so it really didn't matter. I did this whole proposal with economics and to get funding and mortgages and all this other kind of stuff, but the person who turned it down is now working for a very, very well-known real estate company still, at least a few years ago, and I think it's a shame. I think, again, the bar that took the case to the Supreme Court could not even get a transfer of the liquor license from Albany to [George Street]. Then, New Brunswick no longer had the nightlife of either having a gay bar for the students or for the residents in the neighborhood. You would have to have a car and drive out to Somerset. Those were some of the things that I wanted to focus on.

Then, in my life, in general, I leave Rutgers after two years. I didn't go for a Ph.D. I had enough. It was 1977, so I'm at the old age of twenty-five, have three master's degrees, and I decided, "I'm going to move back to New York and get a job." Like most people, I moved back home to my own bedroom in my mom and dad's house in Queens. I go for interview after interview; everyone says, "You're overeducated and underexperienced, and you're openly gay. We don't want you." I end up taking a job with the city at the end of the Beame Administration. I had worked for Bella Abzug; she lost. Edward Koch won, but in December, before Edward Koch was sworn in, I got a job as a junior real estate appraiser, and the only thing--you needed a high school diploma. I had taken a class with the MAI Real Estate Appraisers to be able to put together this book. It was because of that one course that I took to try to make a gay bar that I got the job as a junior appraiser for the City of New York for fifteen thousand dollars a year. [Editor's Note: Abraham Beame was the Mayor of New York City from 1974 to 1977. He was succeeded by Ed Koch, who served as the Mayor of New York City from 1978 to 1989.]

Now, Koch comes into office, and he says, "By the way, all city workers, you're giving up one week's vacation and fifteen percent of your salary. We are in a fiscal crisis." This was during the Gerald Ford, "Drop Dead to New York City," where the Republicans said, "We don't like urban areas. We don't like the city." The city was--there were twenty thousand in-rem properties [in rem foreclosure process], where landlords walked away from their buildings. I started there as a junior appraiser. [Editor's Note: On October 29, 1975, President Gerald Ford delivered a speech denying a federal bailout to New York City. The next day, the *New York Daily News* ran the headline, "Ford to City: Drop Dead."]

The universe, which tends to give coincidences in my life, my car was stolen on the day before I was supposed to start working. I was supposed to be an appraiser which would drive out to the Bronx, take a look at a burnt-out building, put a price on it, and they were putting it up to auction. So, I go to my boss, and I say, "I can't do that; my car was stolen." So, he said, "Well, you're a very bright young guy. How about you be my assistant? You go to all the cockamamie

meetings that I don't like to go to." I had a boyfriend at City Planning, so I liked going to City Planning meetings. Then, I would do the appraisals, but instead of the little ones that I was supposed to do as a junior appraiser, the senior appraisers wanted to go play tennis. They would say to me, "Do you want to do this difficult appraisal, and I'll do the little appraisals because I could drive by, do it in five minutes. Off the windshield, I could tell how much, 'It's worth ten dollars; that's it,' and then I can go play tennis in the afternoon." So, I was really working my butt off, doing senior appraisers' [work], being the director's assistant, and going to all these meetings, when Mayor Koch asked someone to do an analysis of the agency. Then, the man does the analysis and says to the mayor, "Here is my proposal." The mayor likes it and says, "Now implement it. You're the new commissioner." He was twenty-nine. The youngest commissioner of--at that time it was the Department of General Services--comes and meets us all, and he tells us the story.

Well, I go home that night, and I write a term paper on how to change the Division of Real Property, and I put it all together. There's no security, so I can go the next morning and go through the building to the commissioner's office at like at seven-thirty in the morning when no one's there yet and leave it on his desk. Well, two days later, I don't even have a phone on my desk, I have to reach and get the phone from someone else's desk, and as I'm reaching and talking, one of the appraisers walked by with a cigar--you were able to smoke at work at that time--and sprinkles the ashes on my head and says something like, "Landman, stick your head up my ass and blow your nose." The man on the phone is the commissioner, and he says, "Will you please come to my office immediately?" So, I say to the secretary, who gave me the phone, "Will you please tell the boss that I have to go across to meet the commissioner?"

I meet the commissioner, and he's looking at my report. He says, "This is exactly what I was looking for. You're now the assistant commissioner." The union and everyone went so ballistic, and I was twenty-five years old. I didn't need a title. I didn't need an office. I didn't give a crap. We created the title executive director, so that the assistant commissioner could retire at his pay and everything.

Now, all the people are really nervous. Someone had wrote, "Fuck you, faggot," on my desk, which I tried to use Ajax, and I couldn't get off. At that time, they had these blotters. I bought a blotter with the thing, and I had it covering, "Fuck you, faggot," on my desk. Someone bought a dildo, a really big one. [laughter] I couldn't use such a thing. When I opened up the desk in the morning and I took it out, I said, "Well, thank you, but it's not my birthday. I appreciate whoever ..." The people there, homophobia was the rule, not the exception. Once [I] became the executive director, several people put in for transfers to go to Brooklyn. So, I could figure out who were those people who really didn't like me. I stayed at the city for five years.

SI: I am curious, were there any kind of job protections for openly gay city employees at the time?

RL: No and no. Again, we still don't have it nationally in this country. The Gay Rights Bill took thirteen years to get approved in New York City. Mayor Koch did write an executive order in 1978. It was in his first week of being mayor. There really was no mechanism, and, again, there were so few out people and I had enough with my life just dealing with things. No, I never

filed anything like that. [Editor's Note: In April 1986, Mayor Ed Koch signed the Gay Rights Bill, which was passed by the City Council to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in housing, employment and public accommodations.]

We had about twenty thousand in-rent buildings under our jurisdiction. I've got no budget. I've got no staff. So, it was then that they created HPD, Housing Preservation and Development. That time, I think Tony Gliedman was the commissioner. Lori Fierstein was my counterpart, like an executive director. We took all of the residential buildings and urban renewal land and vacant parcels in a residential zone and gave it to HPD, and we no longer had auctions. We had programs, like the temporary interim leasing program, which turned into a co-op. We had all of these sorts of programs. I kept the non-residential, schools, courthouses, police stations, industrial and commercial properties. By coincidence, the women's firehouse, which was under my portfolio while I was there, every time it came it up to the top to be sold at auction, it went down to the bottom again. Eleanor Cooper, who used to shovel the coal and became my friend, was a tenant at that time. The building on West 13th Street, the former Food and Maritime High School, was another one of my building projects that first went up for auction, and the Caring Community got a ten-year lease auction. They didn't follow their terms, it was cancelled, and then the borough president's office, Andy Stein, decides to use their local development corporation to purchase it by a corporation that was basically my synagogue. Irving Cooperberg was the president of my synagogue. Marcy Kahn was the lawyer who put together the paperwork. She's now a retired judge. She's still alive. Irving passed away. I quit my job at the city at that time. [Editor's Note: Mr. Landman's telephone rings.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RL: We were talking about HPD. I worked for Mayor Koch. Although I was just [an] executive director, the LGBT liaison, Herb Rickman, would frequently ask me if I could go to a meeting and get involved in certain things. Also, the police, I would go in squad cars if there was an LGBT demonstration or event as like a legal observer--except I'm not an attorney yet--if anything would be police brutality, I would be able to say yes or no. That was my years of working with the city.

That was when I met my boyfriend. We moved in together, and we became lovers. Again, at that time, marriage was not a concept, but there was a group called the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, CLGR. Eleanor Cooper was one of the main people of it. So was Andy Humm, Saul Fishman, Tom Smith. So, I was part of that also. They were also involved in trying to find an LGBT community center. We first tried on Christopher Street. I was a public member of Community Board 2 at the time. Openly gay people couldn't be full members. They said, "Just take it off your application that you're a member of CBST and that you're in CLGR and Gay Independent Democrats and all of these things, and you could be on the board as a full member." I said, "No, I'm openly gay." The first openly gay member of a community board was Don Clay in 1979. This is 1977. I'm on the community board.

Then comes the AIDS epidemic. I'm living with someone at the time, and in the beginning years, I thought I was basically immune because I was in a monogamous relationship, until I found out I was not in a monogamous relationship. Then, this was at a time where it wasn't that I

was possessive and immature and emotionally attached. This was life and death. 140 out of four hundred men died at CBST [Congregation Beit Simchat Torah] from HIV/AIDS. We broke up. Then, he became HIV positive and jumped off the Park Lane Hotel and killed himself. Twenty-five years to the day that he died, I lit a candle that day; my father would die. They both died on December 29th, twenty-five years apart. As I said, my life is full of coincidences.

[During] COVID, I was the Zoom speaker on PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and resiliency. [laughter] My thing was growing up as a child where my family was murdered, we had to deal with that. Then, dealing with the AIDS epidemic. Then, I live a thousand feet from the World Trade Center. On 9/11, at nine o'clock in the morning, on the 88th floor of One World Trade Center, I had a meeting with the Port Authority to discuss a project that I was working at, at NYU. As fate would have it, Freddy Ferrer was in a run-off for mayor, and on that Monday, I called them up at around three o'clock to say to them, "I'm going to go vote in the run-off on Tuesday morning on Chambers Street, and if there's a long line, I don't want to hold up your meeting. Let's move the meeting to Friday at nine o'clock." Whereupon the two people that I had the meeting with, they cancelled everyone else, but they decided not to go to work on time because they had nothing from nine to ten. One of them helped his daughter to move. The other one was smoking a cigarette in New Jersey to get on to the PATH train and didn't want to put out his cigarette right away. He smoked his entire cigarette because he figured he didn't have to get into work at nine; he can get into work at any time. When he got on the PATH train, it went a little bit and stopped, and then it backed in. His was the first train that didn't move to go into the World Trade Center because of 9/11. Every year, on 9/11, I call these two guys up, because in a strange way, we all saved each other's lives because I did not go into the building. I was voting when the first plane came over, and then I rode my bicycle up to NYU and watched as the second plane went into the building. Now, I'm bringing you up to around 9/11.

Around 1990, several Brooklyn gay and lesbian children of Holocaust survivors came to me that they're being kicked out and they're being ridiculed in the second-generation groups. Similar to women's liberation and Gay Liberation Front, we called it different things, whether they were rap sessions or consciousness-raising groups, we started having that the second-generation Holocaust survivors would get in a circle of like ten people, and you would talk about your experience. If someone said they were gay or lesbian, [they would hear in response], "You're doing what Hitler couldn't do. You're ending your family. You're not having kids. You're sick. You're against the Bible. You're against the Torah. This is no good. Get the hell out of here." As tends to be in my life, I started a group. I ended up having thirty-five people in New York, but then they invented something called the internet. So, I created a website. I ended up having, I think, 150 members in eleven countries of children [of survivors], all LGBT, all Jewish, except for one. One guy from France wrote he doesn't know why his father was in a concentration camp. His mother won't tell him--maybe, but I don't know--and as a result, can he join the group? I changed the bylaws; you didn't have to be Jewish. We were 149 Jewish children.

By the way, also, out of starting that group, there was a man called Sir Ian McKellen, and he started a Stonewall group in a place called London. There's a University of London, and in 1994, they had a conference on what happened to the LGBT community--except I don't think it was called that at the time--probably what happened to the homosexual community during the Third Reich. A guy named Jack Gilbert heard of my group, was a part of my group, and invited

me--all expenses paid, first-class on Virgin Airlines, beautiful hotel room, and my use of a taxi driver--to join the week conference that they had at this university. Well, someone there made a mistake, and they were introducing me as the person who started the International Association of Children of Lesbian and Gay Holocaust Survivors. Think about it for a second. Max and Morris, in Auschwitz, were not holding hands and [falling] in love and had children. So, I don't know what to do. [Editor's Note: Sir Ian McKellen is an English actor who began his career in the 1960s and publically said he was gay in 1988. He has starred in many films, including *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the *X-Men* films.]

This was a very intellectual, academic discussion [with] people [with] Ph.Ds., exploring how many people were arrested under Paragraph 175? How many went to prison? How many went to concentration camps? How many were tortured? How many were killed? I don't think it was a whole week. I think it was a weekend. It was a whole conference of very moribund, depressing things. That's my introduction to come up onto the stage. So, I go, "Oy vey." I go, "I hope you people don't really think that my parents were gay Holocaust survivors. My parents were Jewish Holocaust survivors. I'm the gay one. It's Gay Children of Holocaust Survivors." So, I did my whole routine with ba-dum-bumps, and I was the fresh air in between two days of very difficult times. The BBC was covering this. It was some radio show, I think it was radio. I don't know if the young kids know what radio is, but it's like television where everyone puts stop video, but they remember to not mute themselves. I go to this show. They pick three people who were the speakers, two of the academics and me. I was on the BBC show doing ba-dum-bump after ba-dum-bump. [Editor's Note: Paragraph 175 was a German sodomy law that was in effect from 1871 to 1994 that criminalized homosexuality. It was intensified during the Nazi era.]

Some of the stuff, although humorous--my lover was six-foot-two, *GQ* model, Harvard graduate, and gorgeous. Scott called himself a WASP, but at the funeral, I found out that he was actually born Roman Catholic.

I had a few conferences for second-generation LGBT kids, and at one of them, Scott said to me, "You know, the partners should have a get-together too." So, Scott was there, and other lesbians had their lovers (we didn't have wives and husbands); we had significant others or domestic partners and stuff. I did help to draft the first domestic partnership law with CLGR when that started in the '80s. So, they had a group of lovers of children of Holocaust survivors. One of the things that he came up with was he said, "You know, I told them about your nightstand drawer." So, I said, "Oh?" He says, "You're not the only one." So, I said, "What do you mean?" Here's the backstory. When we were dating--and again, this was sort of pre-AIDS--people wanted not condoms as much as lubrication or a certain little bottle that people would put under their nose to get an enhanced feeling. Most people kept those type of things in their nightstand next to their bed. When Scott reached over and opened my nightstand drawer, expecting to find paraphernalia, he found German Marks, Swiss Francs--this was before the EU--all of this money, my passport, and certain documents. He looked at me, and he goes, "Why do you have this here?" I said, "Opa used to tell me you always leave an escape box next to your bed. In case you have to flee in the middle of your night, you have your passport and money." He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I never thought about any of these things. It's just since I'm like five years old, these things have been engrained in my head." When Scott came back from his

group with the other partners, he said, "Do you know one has a cigar box under her bed, and when I said, 'What's in the cigar box?' she said, 'That's my escape box. It has my passport and money.'" Scott didn't even have a passport, let alone escape money. That's what I talked about on the BBC that were like ba-dum-bumps because some of this stuff was sort of funny on how we didn't realize how different we are.

Then, later on, after I bring the Torah back to Munich in 2005--which is also interesting--I stood in front of my great grandparents' house in Munich, and I didn't know that I spoke German. I knew I understood it because *Opa* never spoke English. The night before was my birthday. The day before Shavuot was my birthday that year. They took me out for dinner, and they gave me what was called a *Radlermass*. *Mass* means liter, and it was huge. I thought it was a pitcher for everyone else to drink from. It was a liter, for me to drink, of beer and, they said, lemonade. It was mostly beer with this much lemonade. So, I'm sitting there first waiting for glasses, and then when there's no glasses, they said, "Why don't you drink?" I said, "No glasses." They said, "This is your glass." By ten o'clock, my brain, something is happening. I think it's called getting drunk. I would hear what they would say and answer in English. When the newspaper reporters all met me at the airport and would come to my hotel, they would speak to me in German, I would answer in English, and they'd go, "You're crazy. I have to go get an interpreter now, or I have to get subtitles. Will you please speak in German?" I would say to them, as they were yelling at me in German, I'd go, "Sorry, I don't speak German."

Well, that night, all of a sudden at ten o'clock, German comes out of my mouth, and they all go, "*Du kannst Deutsch*" [you speak German]. So, I said, "Oh, my God, I can speak German." The next morning, when I had all these written English speeches that I went over five times to make sure they were all perfect, they said, "Throw them away. Just speak from your heart," and I'd say, "Please, I don't know from masculine, feminine, and neuter from my friends, let alone that I should know that if it's *der becher*, *das glas*, and *die tasse*," what is the cup, the cup, and the cup. They said, "We don't care. We will get from your heart what you're trying to say."

I stood in front of this building at think it's 20 or 22 Ickstattstraße, which is now the heart of the gay community, where all the Orthodox Jews lived in Munich; they all died. The next group that moved in after the late 1940s was the LGBT community. There's a rainbow flag right next door to where my grandparents lived. I just spoke to them from my heart in German, and I said, "You don't know me, but you know my father, Little Heinz." I said, "Good news and bad news. Of your five children, one survived. Joseph, my grandfather, got to America, and so did Heinz, *und* Irma, *und* Johanna, my two aunts. My father Heinz married a girl from Nurnburg. It's the Nurnberger's father who brought this Torah back, but I want it donated on both sides of my family since you lived in Munich from 1900 to about 1942 when he died ..." Then, both he and my great grandmother, Sofie, died in Theresienstadt in the summer of '42. I have no children. My parents had two boys.

At CBST, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, my synagogue, I renamed myself. My Hebrew name is Mordechai Sophia. Everyone thought it's because I know Estelle Gettleman, or Estelle Getty, from *The Golden Girls*, Sophia, but it's really because Sofie Landmann, my great grandmother, has no one named after her. I've included her as part of my Hebrew name, which is hysterical when I go to Orthodox communities, and they give me an *aliyah*, a chance to step up

and read from the Torah. The guy goes to me first, "*Ya'amode*." I did this in Germany too, because "*Wie heisst du?*" [What's your name?]. So, I said, "Mordechai Sophia Ben-Chaim," and he goes, "Mordechai *Sophia?* Ben-Chaim." So, that's because my father, as I said--and I know I'm bouncing around--stayed in touch with the German community of Augsburg. We actually had two reunions in the '80s for about 180 Jewish Augsburgers from around the world. Right after the war, because my father was stationed in Salzburg, he would go back to Augsburg for the rededication of that synagogue that he was bar mitzvahed in. [Editor's Note: Estelle Gettleman, also known as Estelle Getty, was an American actress who lived from 1923 to 2008. She starred in *The Golden Girls* in the role of Sophia Petrillo.]

In 1985, they totally renovated the building. We went back in '85, because there were no Jews living there, and rededicated the synagogue. Then, as the Russians came from the former Soviet Union, they went to Augsburg because there's this one-thousand-seat, gorgeous synagogue there. They were, again, Russian speaking and mostly Orthodox. My father gave the fiftieth and sixtieth anniversary of Kristallnacht speeches. He was supposed to give the speech; he had a nosebleed. So, he asked me to go to synagogue that day instead of him. It was 1989 or something, so I'm much younger. They didn't know that I was my father's son, but when they found out that I was my father's son, they, of course, gave me an *aliyah*. I had to get all of these honors and everything, and that's when Mordechai Sophia went up and got his *aliyah*.

Another interesting part of history, again, that nobody knows about--but it's not New Brunswick history--there were no more Jews left in any of these places. My father was able to say who was a little Nazi and who was a big Nazi. The Americans, as part of the de-Nazification, would not allow a big Nazi. My father was able to make that decision. My grandfather, Joseph, was the president to the Jewish community. That's what basically got him out of Dachau right away and saved his life, because he had to sign over the deeds to the Jewish property, like the sports plots, the synagogue, et cetera. So, my father chose a Christian--his name was Robert Bachner, who was married to a *Mischling*, Gerda Bachner, who was half Jewish, and they both survived. Right after 1945, the head of the Jewish community of Augsburg was a Catholic because there was nobody else. As I said, my father kept in touch with all these people. There are books written about my father. Dachau wrote a book, *Namen statt Numen, Names Instead of Numbers*, and one of the chapters is about my father. [Editor's Note: *Names Instead of Numbers: Remembrance Book for the Prisoners of Dachau Concentration Camp* is a remembrance book for the prisoners of the Dachau concentration camp that was published in 2011 by the Dachauer Forum.]

I have been dealing--especially during the COVID time--trying to archive more and more stuff, that I have to first get rid of all the stuff from my mother's and father's families. Then, they said to me, "When did you start the International Association of Lesbian and Gay Children of Holocaust Survivors?" I said, "1990." "Do you still have your paperwork?" So, I go, "It's actually in that drawer right down there." "Can we have those? That's history. That's the first LGBT Jewish and Holocaust [group]." When I'm finished giving all of this stuff away from my parents--and as you can see, even this desk was my grandfather's. Unfortunately, if I tried to bring home men, the minute they open the door, they feel they're in a museum, it ruins everything. "Can we touch this?" and I go, "Yes." I have this samovar over there that my great grandfather carried with him from Galicia to Munich in 1900. Everything around here has some sort of meaning to me, which, actually, during this last year of COVID was very comforting.

Thank God I'm retired. For the last few years, I've been doing a lot of volunteer work. I put in over two thousand hours in housing court as a volunteer lawyer. My synagogue has started an asylum clinic. I was volunteering there every Wednesday. I would volunteer at Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, where our synagogue started, on Thursdays. I was lead council at the LGBT law clinic on Tuesdays. But once COVID started, the homecare attendants for my mom wouldn't let me come because I could possibly be bringing the virus. So, I actually have isolated myself since March 13th, except for going out for food or taking a walk or riding a bicycle. I am hoping that any week now I can get--and my mom--the Johnson & Johnson shot, and then, two weeks after that, we should be able to have the [visits], but the homecare attendants keep on switching anyway, so I have no idea what the next problem will be.

Taking care of your mom in the mid-nineties is a full-time occupation, but she took care of me for seventeen years. As I said, she sent me to CBST. She sent me to law school. When Scott died and I was very depressed, she read about these gay cruises with RSVP, and she told me about them. My mom knew, not verbally, but I've been thinking about this a lot. When I was very young, like seven and eight, and I was going to day camp before I went to sleep away camp at nine, I was very uncomfortable changing into bathing suits in front of all the other guys. My mother brought this up with the counselor, and I remember I would not change with the other kids my age. The counselor would bring me into the dressing room area for the counselors, and I was able to change into my bathing suit in a little closed-off area. As I said, I think maybe being such a tiny--I mean, nowadays, they would use the word twink. When I went to college, I was 115 pounds and five foot two and looked like I was twelve. Now, thank God, I'm almost seventy, and if I color my hair, I look even younger. My mom basically knew even before I told her, and she was always very protective of me because besides being this little twink, I also had the biggest mouth. I was a lawyer-defender from the time [I was young]. In my Jewish summer camp, I unionized the waiters, and we threatened to go on strike on visitor's day unless we got our demands met.

My grandfather, the one who brought the Torah here, he kicked a guy named Julius Streicher, who started the *Sturmer* newspaper. He was the [Steve] Bannon of the Hitler era. Again, Grandpa lived in Nuremburg. So, he kicked Julius Streicher in the tuchus and then ran away. So, on March 23, 1933, Julius Streicher helped put together the list of mostly political figures, like Christian Democrats, Communists, Socialists, whoever were going to be arrested and sent to Dachau. March 23 was the day they opened Dachau. My *opa* was on the list, but he was tipped off. As he saw the Brownshirts, the *Sturmabteilung*, the SA, coming down the street, he ran to the train station and took the first train to France. When the Gestapo, later that day, came and rang the doorbell, my grandmother honestly could say, "I don't know where he is." Then, on May 6, my six-year-old mother and my grandmother went to Strasburg and stayed there until they saw what was happening on Kristallnacht, and they were lucky enough to have family reunification. [Editor's Note: Julius Streicher was a Nazi Party member and member of the Reichstag who founded the anti-Semitic newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, in 1923.]

My grandmother had an uncle who owned a restaurant on the land that NYU--where I worked for twenty years--would buy and build the Leonard Stern Business School. Leonard Stern's parents and my grandmother's cousin in Giessen had the same governess, and I got my vaccine

shot in the building now where Ye Olde Chophouse used to be in at 111 Broadway. So, I also felt comfort in going there and saying, "Oh, my great grandfather's brother used to work in the basement of this building in the restaurant," and now NYU has their faculty practice there, that I was getting my Pfizer shot. I didn't get the Johnson & Johnson one, but nothing against New Brunswick. All right, maybe at this point in time now I'll stop and ask if you have any questions.

SI: Yes, let me open it up to the students. I have a lot of follow ups, but I thought maybe we would go to twelve today and then maybe have a follow up sometime in the future. I really want the students to get a chance to ask some of their questions. Go ahead.

RL: You have to unmute yourself.

JWM: I just wanted to make sure I was not going to talk over Emily. Obviously, you talked a lot about both your identity as a Jewish man and as a gay man, and I myself am both as well. I just kind of wanted to ask, do you personally feel that those two identities are kind of intertwined as well? Yes, you are gay, and, yes, you are Jewish, but there is kind of a separate category of the middle of the Venn diagram, if that makes sense.

RL: Well, people have suggested Ph.D. dissertations on this. Why were there so many children of Holocaust survivors at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah? I don't know what the direct correlation is, if it's causational or not, but I do know that that feeling of being a secret Jew was very similar to growing up in America in the '50s and '60s of being a closeted, secret gay person, and that there were a lot of similarities of hatreds. When someone hates a Jew, they usually hate a gay person, except under Trump because of this evangelical, "I love Orthodox Jews because they love Israel, because Armageddon's going to come, and then everyone's going to be dead except for the evangelicals." I mean, this is a very strange era that we're in right now. Otherwise, I have been able always to unify being Jewish as a victim and being gay as a victim. Although what most people your age don't realize, when I would go back to Germany--and by the way, I'm a German citizen. After donating the Torah, I actually applied, and it was very simple. As a child of Holocaust survivors, I became a German citizen since 2007. I just lost my train of thought. The similarities, becoming a German--oh, victim.

Germans, after World War II, considered themselves to be victims. They would say to me, "You Americans bombed my city at night! You killed my uncle Fritz, you Americans, in the war. We were just good, dutiful Germans listening to the racial theories that we were brought up with, which came from America." When Hitler started taking away the rights of Jews, Jews didn't have those rights in America anyway. The whole racial theory stuff of whites versus colored is Aryan versus everyone else. In reality, we are all shades from light to middle to dark brown. There are no white people. There are no black people. Racial theories are all constructs that were created to have one group be in charge and everyone else be on the bottom. There were so many analogies that I had a heads up. That's why I said that German Jewish children saw the rise of Hitler differently, and we were freaking out from the day Trump took office.

My synagogue--which I've mention maybe fifty times now--Rabbi Kleinbaum, who has been my rabbi since 1992 there, she came on when we had so many people dying (AIDS), and no one

would bury us. We had to buy three hundred cemetery plots out in New Jersey. I'm in row thirteen on the aisle because no one wanted row thirteen. She, the day after Trump did the Muslim Ban, called up the imam at NYU's Islamic Center and said, "What can we do?" She said, "You know, we're going to stand in front of your Islamic Center every Friday and wish you *jumma mubarak*." The first week, we came with roses, and we handed it to everyone. I'm just going to walk away for a second, hold on. Where is it? [Editor's Note: Rick Landman gets up and looks through his belongings.] Here. I'm back. We all made signs that we held up. Again, these things should be archived. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Rick Landman holds up a sign.] My sign said, "CBST welcomes and stands with our Muslim friends," with the rainbow flag, and on the back, it said, "If only the Germans would have stood by their Jewish neighbors." Again, tying together to me that if in 1933 Christians would have stood in front of a synagogue and said, "This is absurd what you're doing." I was there with my synagogue every week until COVID, and we wished them a *jumma mubarak*. [Editor's Note: *Jumma mubarak* is a traditional Muslim greeting used on Fridays. On January 27, 2017, seven days after taking office, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13769, commonly called the Muslim Ban. The order banned immigration from select Muslim-majority nations in the Middle East. Much of the order was blocked in the courts, and it was fully revoked by President Joe Biden in 2021.]

When Pittsburgh had the shooting at Tree of Life, they came and stood in front of our synagogue, and then we started to do programs together. We would cook during iftar, during Ramadan, their only meal of the day. Then, we would rent the Javits Center for up to five thousand people for the High Holidays. Our Muslim friends would be the ushers, so that we could just be part of the service. They would do the ushering for five thousand people in the huge Javits Center. [Editor's Note: On October 27, 2018, eleven members of Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania were killed by a lone gunman.]

Before Trump, I did not have any openly Muslim friends. One of them followed me to the subway, and then I said, "You following me to the subway?" He goes, "I have to ask you a question." I said, "What?" "What gay bar do you go to?" I said, "You're Muslim; you don't drink alcohol." "That's not why I want to go to the bar." I said, "You're gay?" He said, "Look, please, when I'm at the mosque, don't tell anyone I'm gay, and when I go to the bar, don't tell anyone I'm Muslim." I had one birthday before COVID, since Trump, and it's very good inviting them to your birthday party. They don't drink alcohol. [laughter] It's a very cheap group of people to invite for parties. I've also joined a group called Scriptural Reasoning, which has Christians, Muslims, and Jews. We pick a segment of each one of our scriptures, and once a month--now we do it by Zoom--we have like fifty people from all over the world, and we discuss the similarities and the differences between the three religions.

The bottom line, to answer your question, is, yes, there are feelings that I get of both. Also, most people don't know history. Most Americans don't know their own history. What I'm hoping comes out of the Biden Administration, it's not culture cancelling; it's learning that you can hold two things in your hand, good and bad. My grandmother called the Statue of Liberty *De Eiserner Goy*, the "Iron Christian," when they passed the Statue of Liberty. They were very happy that America was taking them in, but they were very anxious and nervous that America was preventing the rest of their family to come with them and that they would all die.

At the same time, I am a proud American, and I'm happy that they let my grandparents and their children into America, but on every Yom HaShoah or Kristallnacht, whenever we have to light candles, I have a list of seventeen people, the siblings of my grandfather, the spouses of those siblings, the children, except about three or four that got on the *Kindertransport* and came to America. Then, I only found this out last year because I'm trying to bring a lot of these artifacts back to Germany instead of where they said my grandpa stole them. I say, "He rescued them," but I am trying to bring them back now to Germany. [Editor's Note: Yom HaShoah is Holocaust Remembrance Day.]

In Augsburg, where my father is from, it's now the second and third generation of museum people. My father's Army uniform and lederhosen are in a glass cabinet. He was the first American to liberate Augsburg. You got your clothing back when you were released from Dachau in 1939 and '40, so he took it to America. My father used to wear them when he was cutting the grass in Queens, but those lederhosen are now in a museum in Germany. When they know me, they keep on doing research on my family. So, I got an email, "Your *tante* Minna--my father's Aunt Minna--worked as a slave laborer in a balloon factory before being deported to Auschwitz to her death." My father's been dead now for six years. Again, children of Holocaust survivors, children of everything, alcoholics, a murder victim, in your mind, you make up stories if no one tells you what it was, and then you have to rectify. I could envision my *tante* Minna, the whole family left. She was the only one there in that apartment. I didn't realize that they took her out of the apartment and put her in a *judenhaus*, and a Nazi family took over the apartment. I figured, "Oh, it's not so bad. She's working in a balloon factory." I thought it was like Santa Claus with the elves, and that she was making little balloons. [Editor's Note: *Judenhaus* was a term used in Nazi Germany to refer to a building that Jews were forced to live in.]

Then, I remember Augsburg was where the zeppelin and the *Hindenburg* used to land because my father used to say he would go to the roof--he would look in the in the Augsburger newspaper--there would be a chart of when the zeppelins, the dirigibles, are landing, and the kids would go onto the roof to watch this. These things were huge. I write back, "When you say the word, 'Balloon,' is that your translation of the word dirigible?" or even blimp. But blimp wouldn't work because she worked in the metal. She was like Rosie the Riveter in Nazi Germany as a slave laborer, building these dirigibles, until Hitler decided, "This is it. We're now in 1942. I thought Germany would be *judenfrei*, would be gone of all Jews by now. I don't care if they're laborers, kill them." Most people don't understand, the concentration camp system was really a plantation, a free labor system, like what America had in our country. The people who were running the concentration camps would take the strong, able-bodied people, and those would be given out for free for the local corporations to use. If they died and you killed them, what's the difference. My grandfather's sister's husband and child were in the Riga labor camp but never [were] transferred to a concentration camp because both of them died as laborers.

Another type of analogy in my mind, I have marched with Black Lives Matter groups because my synagogue had a convention of Jews of darker skin, of all different types of people, people who converted, people who were from North Africa or from Yemen. When the Dutch had New Amsterdam, Suriname, and different places, the laws of your color were based on your master, and the religion was based on your master. There is a woman who did a Ph.D., which is

fascinating, about a woman who marries Montefiore in London and comes back to New York, at that time New York City, and is the bell of the ball of the Jewish community of New York City. She is originally born in New Amsterdam to a Jewish father and a slave African mother, who then goes to Suriname and legally becomes Jewish and white, moves to London as a white Jew, and marries Mr. Montefiore, who moves back to, at that time, New York City, and is the bell of the ball. So, these things that people have made constructs over, dealing with religion, dealing with skin color, and dealing with making things binary that, in reality, are not. Skin color is not binary. It is not white and black. It is not white and colored. The only white people I know are kabuki dancers. The only black people I know have black face on. Everyone else is a shade of brown, but we have been treated differently because of minute changes between beige and brown.

To me, I grew up hating German racial theories and how absurd they were and seeing the analogy to America because most people don't understand German. I was able to listen to Adolf Hitler rant and rave and understood what he was saying. He was so proud that Roosevelt had to call up the troops when, I think, eight people of darker skin got jobs as bus drivers in Philadelphia, instead of bus cleaners. As a result, the war effort was being stopped because people couldn't get from Philadelphia to New York to get on to the ships. So, Roosevelt had to call out the troops, and Hitler would say, "These are the intelligent Americans who are realizing that people of darker skin are inferior races. They shouldn't be in parks. They shouldn't drink from your water fountain," all of these things. [Editor's Note: This is referring to the Philadelphia transit strike of August 1944.]

Later on, when my father and mother and I went back to Germany in '85, it was a very psychologically difficult time for my father. We were walking by the local park. We went to all the different towns and cemeteries that still existed from our family. I remember wanting to sit down, and there was a sign. It looked like a terrier dog with a red circle and a line through it. So, I sat down on the bench. My father comes over, "Ricky, get up. You cannot sit there." I looked at him, and I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Jews are under dogs. If the sign said, 'No dogs are allowed,' then no Jews are allowed." These things are still in his head.

We were on our way to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and we stopped by a beer hall. It was Oktoberfest time, and people were at these big tables and benches singing German songs. My father said, "Ricky, I cannot take this." So, we had to leave. Then, I am an American born in New York City. We're in Nuremburg in a hotel. I had to pee. So, I said, "Where's the bathroom?" My father looked at the sign, and he said, "That way." So, there was a handwritten sign in German Fraktur, the script of old German, saying, "*Zu den toiletten*." "To the toilets." In my American mind, looking at this handwritten sign, the "Z" looked like a "J". I thought it said, "*Juden Toiletten*," or, "Jewish Toilets." [laughter] I said, "Daddy, they know that we're here. They just put up this sign for us." [laughter]

There were just so many similarities to my feeling of victimization, oppression, having to be secret, and also, besides being beaten so many times, not being able to have certain jobs because I'm openly gay. The day--it was February 26, 1971--I'm getting ready for the first March on Albany for Gay Rights, and I have to tell my parents I might get in the newspaper, which I did, standing on the Capitol with--we didn't use this; we used this, the bent wrist. That was our

symbol of oppression for the first March on Albany for Gay Rights. I told my father and all that, "I'm going," and that I have a boyfriend now. It's not academic; it's real. It's not a phase anymore. I started the Gay Liberation Front--that they knew about--but I am now really gay, gay, gay. I had sex with a guy. First, my father goes, "Do we know the person?" I said, "Well, his name is Sam Goldsmith." "Jewish?" I said, "Yes." He goes, "*Bubbe*, not so bad, he's Jewish, and what does he do?" I said, "You're going to love this dad. He's pre-med." "Jewish and a doctor, not so bad!"

Then, they're talking a little bit more, and my father goes, "Let me tell you a story. When I was your age, if I saw a group of boys across the street, I would walk across and not go near them. I was afraid that they would beat me up. When I came home, I said to my mother, 'What the hell did the Jews do? What did we do? Everyone hates us. The teacher says we're no good. The priest says we're no good. The Fuhrer says we're no good. Everyone says we're no good. What did the Jews do?' My mother told me this, 'Heinz, the Jews did nothing wrong. The whole world is wrong, but your life will be harder. But you have to love yourself, even though you're Jewish.' So, Ricky, I am telling you the whole world is wrong, the teachers, the police, everything. There is nothing wrong [with you]. You are the same Ricky that you always have been. Your mother and I love you, but your life will be harder, and you have to love yourself for who you are.'" [Editor's Note: Mr. Landman's telephone rings.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RL: Because my parents were so supportive of me at seventeen and eighteen, I had the guts. Everyone talks about, "Oh, revolutionaries, Paul Revere, whatever, and they're seventeen years old." Yes, it is the younger people. It is the next generation. Black Lives Matter, I did walk with my *shul*. By the way, also, we are the only synagogue that has a convening for LGBT and trans Jews. We're having our trans Shabbat, I think, in another week or two, where we have about fifty Jewish trans people, and no allies are allowed, except for one--they have like one event for allies of the trans community. We also have an Ultra-Orthodox rabbi, Mike Moskowitz from Lakewood, who is a rabbi on staff now for at least two years at CBST. He was a rabbi of two congregations and at Columbia. They all fired him because he refused to bring his son up as a girl.

He went down--I don't know if this was Texas or Washington--my rabbi met him at one of these T'ruah Jewish rabbi social *tikkun olam* events, and they got arrested together and they were both in the same police wagon. My rabbi's a woman. She's a lesbian, who's married to Randi Weingarten, who's the president of the [American Federation of Teachers]. She looked at this Ultra-Orthodox rabbi. So, they were talking and they were davening. Then, he said, "You know, I'm unemployed now. I work in a deli." My rabbi said, "This is ridiculous. He's one of the most knowledgeable, loving people." She called up, put together money for funding for a fellowship or something, and then he started doing podcasts on Jewish *halakhic* Talmudic trans writings. He does, also, a psalms program every morning, and he deals with people who have trans children who are transitioning. Again, I was a valedictorian of my Hebrew school, but this type of stuff--I'm five foot one--goes right over my head. I can listen and I know the verb from this, the *shorashim*, this one is similar to this one over here. I look at all this stuff as interesting, but it doesn't ring true to me. But to him, it does, and to people like him, he can explain why the

word of God or *shekhinah* could be female and all this other type of stuff, and he writes about this. [Editor's Note: T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, or T'ruah, is a nonprofit organization of rabbis to advance human rights. *Tikkun olam* is a concept in Judaism that is defined by any activity that improves the world. In Hebrew, the word means repair of the world. *Halakha*, or *halakhic*, is the body of Jewish laws that are found in the written and oral Torah. *Shorashim* is the Hebrew word for roots, and in the Hebrew language, it is used to refer to the roots of nouns and verbs. *Shekhinah* is the Hebrew word for presence, and it is used to describe the presence of God in the world.]

Again, that's why I'm saying, my synagogue has become a major part--we're helping people get vaccines. We have an asylum clinic twice a week. We stood in front of the mosque. We had to buy our own cemetery. When I look back on the seventy years of my life, Jewish and gay, because of my synagogue, also unified things. Then, it was through my synagogue that I started the Children of Holocaust Survivors Group because there were so many of us who were going there. So, I think that answered your question. Next. [laughter]

EG: All right, I will ask my question. I think this will be a good way to wrap things up. Speaking on the activist work of today, could you please speak on your work with the Sheepshead Bay Holocaust Memorial?

RL: Oh, okay. Actually, a different lesson. Sometimes, things take thirty or forty years to get done. When I started in 1990 the group, I worked for the city for five years before that. That was in the early '80s. I knew the staff landscape architect who created the New York City Holocaust Memorial Park in Sheepshead Bay dedicated to all of the victims of the Holocaust. It is not a cemetery, it is not privately owned, and it's not Jewish. It is a publicly-owned city park. The original landscape architect who designed it had ten stones out of about 240 that were specifically geared for the non-Jewish victims of the Nazi era, but the Ultra and the Orthodox Jews of that community refused to have any of those stones inscribed. So, he and I, as a friendship, decided, "I'm going to get them done." Every year, my group would apply to have five of the stones--we didn't do children, and we didn't do some of the more obscure ones--but the five major groups [were] homosexuals, Jehovah Witness, Sinti or Roma or Gypsy, Communist, disabled. So, they kept on saying, "No and no," and every year, "No and no." That was 1990.

So, 2007-ish, I retire from NYU. I'm teaching a land use law class, where one of the people running for mayor was one of my students, and one of the Kushners was my student. Land use law became my specialty. So, I decided what they're doing is they're hiding behind a community group, preventing me from fulfilling the goal of a city park. I started beginning to put the threats down that it's time for a lawsuit. I said, "My students would love this. We'll do this as a student project." I think I was no longer at NYU. I think by that time I'm at New York Law School. Then, Bloomberg, the mayor, wants to run again for his third or fourth or whatever term it was and wanted to speak at CBST. So, I explained, "I stand in front of the door at CBST every Friday for decades welcoming everyone. If you come, I am going to make a flyer and stand in the front of the doors handing out the flyer that you are siding with the group that's preventing a stone to memorialize and tell the history of what happened to the homosexual community during the Third Reich."

Two days later--it might be a pure coincidence, I have no idea--I got a phone call, and again, City Hall, right out the window. "Can you come to City Hall sometime? We want to speak to you." I said, "Well, I've got to pee and comb my hair; I can be there in five minutes." So, I said, "Why?" and they said, "Well, we're going to set up a blue-ribbon panel, and if the blue-ribbon panel agrees with you, then the mayor will give you a permit to do it." Of course, the blue-ribbon panel, with members of the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, who I knew, people from the Jewish Museum in Battery Park City, who I knew, all these people said, "Of course, it's ridiculous. How can you teach the history of the Holocaust if you're not going to mention what happened from 1933 to 1938?" There were other groups that were also victims and targets, had different stories, at different levels, but all together, you learn how the Holocaust happened.

Then, I get the permit. Now, there's no more funding. The project finished twenty years ago. Then, I start calling up to find out how much it will be. No inscriber of tombstones will talk to me because they all know about me. I've had death threats. I've had people run for city council on the platform that they would prevent me from ever doing this. So, I had to find a Christian tombstone inscriber who was willing to do it for free if I gave him advertisement on my website page.

In the early morning on a Sunday, wearing a yarmulke, or a kippah, with caution tape around the park, I had the inscribers come and do the inscribing. If the curious neighbors would stop by, I would use a little bit Brooklyn Jewish and say, "Well, we're cleaning up for the holidays. We're making it gorgeous for the holidays," and they'd walk away. It took weeks until anyone ever knew that I did this, and to this day, the City of New York has not acknowledged it. I came this close pre-COVID that they were going to give me a proclamation.

On my own, I made an unveiling. I went and I brought our Chambers Street shower curtains and put a shower curtain each over the five stones a year after they were inscribed. I invited a member from each one of the five groups, and we did our own quiet unveiling but not official. I am hoping after COVID--and whoever the next mayor is--to have the first official acknowledgement that in [the] United States of America, there is a public, outdoor, stone memorial telling the story of what happened to the homosexual community during the Nazi era. To answer your question, it's a different thing; I'm just trying to say how many years you might have to persevere. It's not just on Mars.

On my Facebook page, I read from the *Megillat Esther*--two weeks ago for Purim--that my grandfather rescued from Germany. My goal--which, again, has taken twenty, thirty years--is to have a museum in the town of Uffenheim. That was *judenfrei* in 1937 and proud of it, kicked out every Jew. They're the ones who called my grandfather a thief. They called him *der Dieb*, and that he stole this Judaica that he took with him to America. I want them to make a permanent Jewish exhibit, which I will give them many artifacts, in honor of my grandfather.

Now, the universe is rather strange. A woman priest in Chelsea, across the street sort of near where the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen is, lives in Uffenheim. She was the temporary priest in Chelsea of the German Lutheran Evangelical Church. She and I have become friends over the

years. She is now back in Germany and getting me in contact with those young staffers who don't have the same hatreds and fear of Jews, and I think it's going to happen, but it's taken over twenty years.

I'll even be more adamant. You're in your early twenties, right? Yes. I was in my late teens. They called us hippies. They called us a lot of names. At UB, they called us the New York City Jews who were invading Buffalo. I got beaten there twice badly, and they hated me. To this day, the UB Alumni Association, I started the Gay Liberation Front at a college in their school, and I refuse to talk to them or send them a nickel. Rutgers, I send a little each year. I don't have much until next year when I get my pension from TIAA-CREF. I'm in these awkward years, pre-pension and not working. Buffalo, they were really nasty and horrible to me, but we were saying all the same things that you're saying now. There's nothing new; granted, well, gender identity, sexual orientation, that, in 1969 and '70, I didn't know. I put on red nail polish. Actually, I put it on when I went to the draft board, but that's a different story. My draft number was eight. That meant the first day I would have to go to Vietnam. I was tremendously flamboyant, but this is before *M*A*S*H*, by the way, before the character of Klinger. Again, I thought I could only find gay men if I dressed up as what people stereotypically thought was what we were calling, at that time, a drag queen or transvestite. [Editor's Note: Actor Jamie Farr played the role of Maxwell Q. Klinger in the *M*A*S*H* television series.]

Again, yes, Magnus Hirschfeld started his institute and did the first surgery in 1919 and had a much deeper understanding of sexuality and the non-binary-ness of sexual orientation. Again, we didn't even have the word gender identity in 1969. Besides from that, everything else, we were talking about minimum wage. We called it Earth Day; you call it climate change. We called it the oppression of the grape pickers and the farm workers with Cesar Chavez; you call it income inequality. We were talking about legalizing pot. You call it reality of 2021. I mean, that was another thing. I remember distinctly sitting on the floor in UB--at the student union where the candy kiosk person was--having a very virulent debate [about] which would come first, gay rights or the legalization of pot. It might end up that it's happening in the same year because if the Equality Act finally gets approved federally, and I think, hopefully, federally, they will back off on these pot laws. Again, it's happening fifty years later.

I'll even take you back. Remember I talked about how Germans think they're victims, and the southern Confederacy think they're victims, "The North came and burned Atlanta and killed my great, great, great grandpa. He was a good honest Confederate soldier." We're coming up in two weeks to a Jewish holiday. It's called Passover. Can you imagine speaking to the pharaoh, and he says, "Those goddamn Israelites. They killed all my chariot drivers. They ruined every chariot. They sent ten plagues. They killed my son. The Egyptians, we're the victims. We're the victims. It's those Israelites that destroyed our way of living." So, I think every generation gets a choice growing up. You could be a kid that's going to side with the billionaire bully pharaoh who wants to spend money on chariots, and who hates the other foreign neighbors, and hates the other groups that are different within their borders. Or you can emulate this non-verbal ditsy community activist, with a pass that he actually manslaughtered and killed somebody--his name was Moses--who basically was a radical, free-thinking person against the Egyptians. Then, there's a third character, if you know the Bible or anything, a guy named Korah. He's in The Ten Commandments as--what's Robinson, the actor. I forget his first two initials. [Editor's Note:

Korah is a biblical figure in the time of Moses. Korah was played by Ramsay Hill in the 1956 film *The Ten Commandments*. Edward G. Robinson played Dathan in *The Ten Commandments*.]

SI: Edward G. Robinson.

RL: Edward G. Robinson. He plays Korah, who is the third character that you could emulate, the Jew who sides with the pharaoh. There were two Jews, Schoeps and Naumann, in Germany who started Jews for Hitler. He thought Hitler was going to help the economy. He was going to help the trains run on time. He didn't like those Eastern European Orthodox Jews that were living in Germany that weren't assimilating. Most people don't know about that. In America now, we have these people called the Log Cabin Republicans. We have Orthodox Jews for Trump. Every generation, I think you've got to pick and choose who you're going to side with. It tends to be that the younger people look ahead at their life, and they say, "I want to live the next sixty years, seventy years, in a world where we actually love thy neighbor, love the stranger, help the poor, help the sick. Let's live in a world where we actually spend our money on healthcare, housing." [Editor's Note: Max Naumann was a German Jew who founded the League of National German Jews. Hans-Joachim Schoeps was a German Jew who founded the German Vanguard, which called for Jews to assimilate to German culture.]

Don't forget, when I was your age, I bought this co-op at seventy thousand dollars, which was like a year or two income. It is now seven figures, and I was twenty-seven years old. No twenty-seven-year-old is buying their co-op in Tribeca, a thousand square-foot unit, for seventy thousand dollars. My father got a GI mortgage at zero and bought his house in Queens for \$12,999. Again, it was only for people with light skin. People with darker skin were not allowed to move into the suburbs. I'm just saying that is what I am hoping the next generation should always look at.

Something strange happens when you get older but not to everyone. I can remember these old professors in their forties, with gray hair--more than I have, but I definitely need a touch-up--who had long hippie hair, and they were the professors. They would say to us, "You know, there's a demonstration against Vietnam tomorrow. No tests are being given in my class, and if you don't show up, I'm not taking attendance." I thought those guys were really cool, and I said, "When I get older, that's the type of adult I'm going to be."

Now, the arc of history works this way. When I was your age, there was maybe two percent of my parents' generation that really believed in equality for sexual orientation and gender identity. Everyone was part of Nixon's silent majority, everyone thought that everyone was sick and criminal, and you did not want to be proud that your child was LGBT. Then, I think it became the next generation wasn't as bad, and now, my generation is considered elderly. I still think, even in my generation, we're about a third. A third of the people in the Baby Boomers do not believe the bull crap of Trump and the current Republican ideology, and each year, it's getting, I think, better. More and more people are moving towards the notion that if you are religious, you should believe that everybody is created in the image of God, whatever your God is. My God, by the way, does not have a large penis. I don't know if the penis is circumcised or not. I don't have that image of God at all; neither does my synagogue. We made our own prayer books decades ago where God is not male or female. We've also included the "handmaidens," I never

understood this, but the other wives that weren't Rebecca and Rachel but who gave birth to the other tribes of Israel. We mentioned Zilpah and Bilhah and all of these other people.

Again, Rabbi Kleinbaum will say this, there are many atheist and agnostic Jewish people, but we believe in the essence of Judaism. We are of a history of thousands of years of being treated as the other. So, it says thirty-six times, "Remember, you were slaves in Egypt. Be kind and love the stranger." Thirty-six times. It's like, "Duh, don't be the type of immigrant, of 2021, who hates all immigrants--and they have to be legal--and doesn't even understand that immigration law was created in 1888 to exclude Chinese and in 1924 to exclude Catholics and Jews." They don't know from nothing. They think that they came on Plymouth Rock and that America is only for Protestant Puritans. Hopefully, more and more people are learning this, are going to choose that each individual person has to be cherished and loved and helped, and you have to let that individual person explore and discover who he, she, or they is. That's what I believe religion should do.

I was so active in CBST, but don't really follow--I don't put on tefillin. My mezuzah doesn't have a piece of parchment on the inside. You really can't tell, but I know. I don't believe in the rituals and traditions. I believe in the core essence, and I find that I get along wonderfully with my friends at the Church of the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen. I even gave their--I call it a *drash*--their sermon or homily on Christmas week a few years ago as, "Why does a Jewish boy come to our church twice a week?" because our synagogue rented their sanctuary on Friday night for Shabbas; they didn't use it. They could use the sixty thousand bucks we gave them. Then, I came every Thursday; I was in charge of beverages at the soup kitchen. So, I get along very well with progressive-thinking Christians. I lived with one for years. I get [along] very well with progressive Muslims, and what people don't realize--at least in New York--I can't speak about Iran and Iraq and Saudi Arabia, I've never been there, but in New York, there are women imams. There are LGB--and I don't know about T--I know there's lesbian and gay imams. There are pro-Jewish imams.

The hatred that we're supposed to have towards the foreigner, towards the other--it has taking me years--and hopefully, my second book is going to focus on the lessons that I learned since 9/11. My first book, which, hopefully, is coming out this year, called the *Book of Rick: Part One*, goes from 1952 until 2000, and it tells, basically, the story that I just gave you right now. Hopefully, it's funny and it's interesting, and hopefully, people will read it. Any other questions? [Editor's Note: *The Book of Rick: Part One: Living with Contradictions* is a book by Rick Landman that was published in 2021.]

SI: Well, I have a lot of follow-up questions. Maybe we can do another session down the road. Do you guys have any other questions to add on to this session?

RL: I guess not. They're not unmuting. I'll give you one question, and then we'll call it quits.

SI: Okay.

RL: What's one of your questions that you want a follow up on?

SI: Me or them?

RL: Go on. No, they have no questions. They're tired.

SI: I was curious about your father, going way back. He had this very traumatic experience coming out of Germany. Then, he winds up in the Army and winds up in some of the hotspots of World War II in Europe. Did he talk about that growing up?

RL: Again, very similar to almost all Holocaust [survivors]--no one talked about anything in the '50s. In the '60s, it was blank euphemisms. When I asked, "How come no relatives are coming to my bar mitzvah? I'm valedictorian. I own my own Torah. [I'm] president of the Hebrew school." I had my bar mitzvah in the backyard with like five friends, and that was about it, and five refugee couples. My father said, "Ricky, let me show you a photograph," and I have the photograph here. "This would have been your family. They didn't get out. They would have loved to come to your bar mitzvah." I thought, "They didn't come out. They're living in Israel. They're living in Germany." I don't know; they didn't come out. That was one of the reasons I came out right away. [laughter] I came out pretty close to the next year or so.

I'll give you one more story for them to listen. November 9th was Kristallnacht. November 9th of '65 was the big blackout of the Northeast of America. Looking back, my father was stuck in Manhattan and couldn't get home. If we knew about Kristallnacht in '65, we would've said something, but we didn't. My mother and I did not know my father was in Dachau or my grandfather was in Dachau, did not know what Kristallnacht was.

Then, a few years later, before going to Buffalo, between '65 and '69, I'm walking down 7th Avenue and 29th Street, which by the way, CBST is 7th Avenue and 30th Street. My father had a fur business on 29th Street, and I would go down on the weekends to help him with picking up fur coats or delivering. That day, at lunch time, we would go to a place called Dumont's, and then, on the way back, we're on 7th Avenue; I can still image it in my [head]. My father goes, "Ricky, hurry up," and he starts running and he touches a tall man on the shoulder. I catch up, and then my father says to the man, "Excuse me, I don't want to upset you. Were you in Dachau on the day after Kristallnacht?" The guy looks at my father, and he says, "Yes." Then, they go into German, but I can understand it, basically saying, "Do you remember the little boy they put up against the wall to be shot, but they didn't shoot him right away? So, he starts walking backwards off the wall, and a tall man grabs him and pulls him behind on this long line of Jews. It was a different SS man who was interrogating that area," as compared to where my father was in the beginning, so didn't notice that he was taken out to be shot. The man looks at my father and says, "Were you the little boy?" My father goes, "Yes, and you were the tall man. I always wanted to say, 'Thank you,' but you couldn't talk and then I didn't see you. So I just want to say thank you." Then, they walk away. I'm crying now. I was crying, totally, going, "What the hell just happened? You were in Dachau? Why don't you take his name and number and talk?" He goes, "Ricky, he does not want to remember that night, I don't want to remember that night, and we're not going to talk about it." We didn't for quite some time.

Well, the first one was my grandmother. She lived until ninety-six, and I would babysit for her. If my parents--my brother lives in California--had to go to California to visit for the week, I

would stay with Grandma. So, I got all the stories, from World War I and World War II, from Grandma.

Then, my father lived until almost ninety-five. He got dementia in his ninety-third year. He played tennis and drove a car at ninety-three, and good tennis. When I wouldn't let him drive the car, I said, "Well, I'll drive you if you want to play tennis. I'll play with you." He goes, "You stink." I was always the sissy. I never was good in sports. He goes, "I want to play a real tennis game." So, my father was active, but then his cognitive skills and his short-term memory left and hallucinations started coming. So, the only thing we could talk about comfortably was his childhood and the war. That's when he would tell me all of the stories and details. He also was interviewed by [an] author who wrote a book about him, but the book never got published. The book author had an agent who was very nasty to me. He said, "I'm going to sue you. You can't write anything about your father." Now, that man, the author, is in the twilight of his life, so I don't know what's going to ever happen. The book was copyrighted but never published, but he gave permission for the book to be given to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. He was only interested in war stuff, but my father was in the group with Audie Murphy. It's the blue and white diagonally striped in a square. So, they did go through North Africa. [Editor's Note: The insignia being described is that of the U.S. Army's Third Infantry Division. Audie Murphy was a decorated World War II veteran who went on to a career as an actor. He served in the Third Infantry Division.]

SI: Was it the Third Infantry Division?

RL: Again, I would have to look it up. I don't know. It's on my website.

SI: Okay.

RL: He went through North Africa trying to get on the ski patrol, but it was a desert. Then, he got his citizenship; the first time the ship was torpedoed, so he didn't get it. It was in Tunisia that he got his citizenship. So, he's finally an American. He then gets to Sicily and then through Italy to Anzio, where a third of his group died. He would tell me, "We're breaking out of the beachhead." A third of his little unit died. Then, they got up through Rome, and then into France, and then into Germany, and then down towards Munich, where the day before Munich, they stopped by Augsburg. So, he asked if he could have a jeep to go into Augsburg, I'd say, two or three days earlier.

He and another guy rode into Augsburg by themselves, and there's photographs on my website. There's pictures where he stood in front of his old apartment house and took a picture. People would see these two American soldiers with rifles, and they would open the windows and take out white flags and start flying. He would yell out in perfect Augsburgian accent German, "*Nein, nein*, not today. We're here just visiting. You'll be liberated in a day or two." They now declare him as the first American soldier to enter Augsburg during the liberation, although, it was two [days earlier].

That was the time that he got to his house; no one remembered the Landmans. He went to the landlord of his father's fur business in Augsburg, and of course, when his wife answered the

door, she was very frightened. There's an American soldier who is holding a rifle. Then, when he knew her name and said like, "Hello, Frau so and so. Do you remember me?" She looked, and she goes, "Oh my God, little Heinz!" So, he says, "Yes, what happened to my family?" So, she said, "Unfortunately, everybody was deported on a certain date, and your aunt, Minna, gave me this suitcase, and she said, 'If anyone ever comes back to give it to them.'" So, they open the suitcase, and it's all the photographs of my father's cousin. She went out on the *Kindertransport*. She was living then in Washington Heights with the family. So, he said, "I can't carry the suitcase; I'm in the middle of a war, but someone will come and pick it up." That was 1945.

By '47, he married my mother, and already in '46, my mother's father--the little one that kicked Julius Streicher and brought back the Torah--was going back and forth to Germany trying to find Judaica and bring it to America. So, he picked up the suitcase, and brought it to America, and gave the letters that my father's cousin's mother couldn't mail, but she would write a letter to her daughter and put it in the suitcase.

It's all of these type of things that are in my first book. My first book is my family background and the starting of LGBT history as I remember it. The sad thing is, I am considered now one of the few LGBT activists from the '60s and '70s because most of the people were older than me, so they died of this thing called old age, or so many of them became HIV positive and died of AIDS. Even the women, though, to tell you the truth, I'm thinking back of Betty Santoro, Eleanor Cooper, so many of the women are gone too. I think part of me being the child of survivors is that I am a survivor. I stayed in this apartment, and any time I felt antsy, I would think of Anne Frank and go, "You know something? I can make noise. I can go to the bathroom. I can do whatever I want. I can walk up and down the stairwell," which I did all last March and April for exercise. I wouldn't even go out of the building. I said, "I can't die now. Not only do I have to take care of my mother, but I have all of these stories and I have all of these artifacts."

I have tons paper and photographs. That's the samovar that my grandfather carried from Galicia. Can you see the *Jude*? That's from my grandfather; that's an actual *Jude* from Germany. [Editor's Note: *Jude* (plural *Juden*) means Jew in German. Rick Landman shows a yellow Star of David with "*Jude*" that Jewish people were ordered to wear on their clothing in Nazi Germany and in Nazi-occupied areas of Europe so that they would be identified. Mr. Landman next shows a framed photograph of a piece of material with Hebrew writing.] That was on a parochet, in Germany, that the Torah was wrapped around. When I was twelve, I was gay and fastidious. I took a cuticle scissor, and I unstitched its sewing from it, and then I had it framed. The actual material is now in the Jewish Museum in Manhattan. When I die, I want to give it back to them if they can find someone to sew it back on.

This is a photograph that I found in the garbage of the Astor Hotel of the 20th anniversary dinner of the Jewish Welfare Board of 1937. So, these people were probably talking about the possibility of trying to save people like my family. I'm just saying, my house has so many things--that was a pillow that my grandmother made. On the top, there is a slogan that my grandfather calligraphed as [an] engagement present to my grandmother. Then, that's the four flags of me, the Israeli, the Gay, the American, and the German.

If you ever want to follow up with questions, you can always do that. I did cover the main thing, which was Manny's Den in New Brunswick. That was what I really was hoping that the students at Rutgers should be proud of, that in New Brunswick, it was that gay bar that two years ahead of Stonewall went all the way up to New Jersey Supreme Court, and they decided in the right way. Infotruer.com. I-N-F-O-T-R-U-E, and I did that name twenty years before *InfoWars* and all that other crap. You can go there, and you can find almost everything that I talked about.

SI: All right.

RL: Okay.

SI: Thank you very much. We appreciate all your time today, and we will reach out for a follow up probably in a few weeks.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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