

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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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

APRIL 23, 2021

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins the second interview session with Rick Landman, on April 23, 2021, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for coming back. Today, I want to start with your time in New York Law School. You told us the story last time about how it became legalized or possible for openly gay folks to go to law school.

Rick Landman: The Court of Appeals of New York State said that it was no longer a crime, was no longer criminal, to be a homosexual. Therefore, the moral turpitude clause of the bar associations would allow now openly gay people. There wasn't a conflict that you were promoting criminality. That happened in the Buffalo Onofre case, I think, in 1980. In the '80s, it was then possible for me to go to law school. [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).]

SI: Well, tell me a little bit about getting into law school. What were your experiences there like? Was there a particular direction to what you were studying, or was it a standard curriculum for anyone in law school?

RL: I think I alluded to it last time. After my [third] master's degree was over and I finished Rutgers, I wasn't planning on going back to school at all. Then, in the 1980s--and because of the AIDS epidemic and because of everyone dying and me being depressed--I still didn't think of going to law school. My mother started calling up and finding out about law school, and she spoke with them. Then, it was because she took me on a walk and then said, "What's that building?" I had no idea. The agreement I made with my mom was I would try it for one semester. If I liked it, then I could continue. If I didn't like it, I didn't have to continue. The thing is, I was a bit older than everybody else. A matter of fact, one of the professors is exactly the same age as me. We're still friends, and he's still working. [laughter] I was a student, and I'm retired now for fifteen years, but anyway.

I took the ordinary, regular required classes for the first year as being a law school student. I did make *Law Review*. I didn't take it. My philosophy was, "This was slave labor, and I'm not being paid." [laughter] I needed to work while going to law school. I had to support my co-op and everything. So, I was doing real estate appraisals and getting paid, and that was enough. I didn't accept the honor of being in *Law Review*. I took all the basic courses, and the first year or so, there wasn't really all that much specialization in the curriculum or anything like that.

Comes the second and third year, I did focus on the things I was interested in at that time. I did get an independent study and went to the Department of City Planning, where I knew the general counsel, where I used to be the executive director of the agency below it. Lo and behold, "You want to work for free?" So, I did intern for the general counsel at City Planning one semester. I really liked the curriculum at New York Law School. I actually liked it better than the one at NYU. It was, for me, more pragmatic learning. It was more based on the type of things and the direction and perspectives that I was interested in.

They did have clinics, clinical education. Professor Grossman was my professor, and I interned with the Human Rights Commission. They gave me the first LGBT discrimination in housing case, and I also got an award that year from them, the American Jurisprudence Award, from the

clinic. Otherwise, I took real estate classes, land use classes, following up on the type of planning and real estate and construction type of work that I did beforehand when I was working.

I did not take any immigration or asylum classes. Being a professor and an alumni, you can audit classes for free. At the beginning of the Trump Administration, I started assisting LGBT former Soviet Union people. I went back and I took a four-credit immigration class, and then I took a two-credit seminar in asylum. I am going to probably try to take another class once COVID is over.

Mom has still not been vaccinated. I am hoping it's next week. I'm hoping today--when we're talking--to sort of maybe get a phone call if [the] Johnson & Johnson vaccine--which is New Brunswick--comes back online in New York. Then, the Visiting Nurse Service is supposed to come to my mom's house and give her a vaccine. I already have my vaccines. Once this is all over, I'm going to try to get back involved again with the volunteer legal work that I was doing. I will be honest, being in solitary confinement for over a year and being--I'm going to be seventy in May, I'm elderly--I really want a refresher, and also I want to know the changes in policies, directions, people's experiences dealing with the Biden Administration over the Trump Administration, so that I'll be able to assist people.

As I said, my law school career was sort of different. I did graduate cum laude, but I enjoyed it. [laughter] I was the same age as a lot of the professors; I wouldn't let anyone intimidate me. I remember one class; the textbooks were very expensive. They had these paperback cheating briefs, like summaries, and they had perforated pages. What the other students did was they would pull out the one page, and it had a loose-leaf three holes in it. They would put it inside their loose-leaf binder, so that the professor didn't know that they were actually reading from those cheat books as compared to the casebooks. With me, I just stood up. The professor said, "Where's your textbook?" I said, "I didn't buy it." It was like sixty dollars. I said, "I bought this for twenty dollars, and this class is not really something I'm all that interested in. I can summarize the case and tell you what it's like from this." As I said, I enjoyed going to law school. It didn't frighten me. It didn't get me upset. I wasn't worried about getting a job in a law firm. I did, though, apply to some of the fancy-schmancy law firms. I graduated; it was 1988. They still weren't ready for an openly gay activist kind of person. So, I then applied to the city for a high-level job in human resources, yes, in HRA. I did get accepted for that. I turned it down.

Then, I applied to NYU for a non-legal--I think I have it, hold on. I kept it. This was from the--I don't know if you can see--from *The New York Times* help wanted, and it was under attorney, under "A" for attorney, and then, "It's minimum five years real estate experience. An administrative, non-legal position at NYU to work with the vice president on real estate matters." I wasn't sure what the hell this was. They were looking for an attorney for a non-legal position, but it was at NYU and truth to be told, my lover, who was still alive at that time--he will die a year after, he died on December 29th of '89--was working at NYU. I thought, "Who knows? Maybe we would bump into each other. Maybe we could play tennis on the roof of Coles [Sports and Recreation Center] or something." I liked the idea of going to NYU. I took that job at NYU. My life has not really been all pre-planned. I'm sort of going with the flow. I'm sort of

learning. I mean, my book--let's see--is finished, and this is the galley they sent me. It's ready to go, except the ...

SI: Oh, great.

RL: ... The printer has been just not communicative for about a month now. I keep on saying, "All I need is the final PDF with the ISBN number and the price and everything, so I can upload it to get the copyright paperwork done," and then we could put it online and sell it. Where years ago, I would be calling every day and I would be going there in person, I figure it's going to happen when it's going to happen. That's how my life was. I never knew I was going to become an executive director of a city agency at the age of twenty-seven. I thought I wanted to be a teacher for learning disability kids. That was what my first master's in education was for and what my first student teaching and stuff was for, but because I was openly gay, the world said, "No," so I changed.

As I said, now, being in solitary confinement for a year, I've been doing so many Zooms around the world that I actually wrote to a friend in Germany, who's the dean of the rabbinical school in Berlin, and I said to him, "My gut feeling is that ..." where before I was turning down offers to travel to speak in Germany or to teach a class in Germany, I said, "Hey, I could do it from my living room." I think I'm not going to go and try to find another job. I don't want to work in politics for the city, although I'm right across the street from City Hall. One of my students was running for mayor, but he dropped out.

I think I will do what we're doing, except rather than me being interviewed, I'm going to try to put this together. I'll learn how to share a screen, [laughter] and I'll put together different little vignette type of stories of what it was like growing up as a child of two German Jewish refugees, also what the history was like. Most Americans, even most American Jews, even most American Jewish children of Holocaust survivors, really do not understand 1933 to 1939. The things that people learn about is after the war starts.

I heard a tape this week from a woman, non-Jewish, who was talking about the *Anschluss* in Austria in '38. She's a very conservative woman, pro-guns, pro-Trump, and she was saying how she had no idea what was happening to the Jews. She never heard about concentration camps. She never even questioned what happened to the Jews when they were all rounded [up] and either deported or left or fled. Then, I realized from hearing from her, she thought, again, that Nazism and the nasty parts of Nazism only started after 1938. She had no idea that Jews had full rights in 1933 and how being the minority that people didn't really care.

It's like in today with COVID. People go, "Oh, one or two percent of people die. Who cares?" Jews were only one percent of the German population. Half, the nuclear part of my family, did survive, but half of the one percent, or 250,000 people, perished. I am a gay man, so that puts, again, LGBT between five--although, nowadays, it seems I've seen larger numbers than five percent, especially as more and more people say they're bisexual in the younger generations. Again, that's one minority, and then being Jewish was another minority. To me, each individual life matters, but minorities matter too, even if they're not the norm statistically. If they're not a large group of the population, their lives are just as important, and being a minority of a minority

of a minority, it impacts on me more. [Editor's Note: Austria was annexed by Hitler's Nazi Germany on March 12, 1938. It is known as the *Anschluss*, which means union in German.]

Now, I guess that was a bit of a digression from why I went [to law school], and the reason I went to New York Law School, it was cheap. I think it was seven thousand as compared to 27,000 at NYU. It was a stand-alone law school. It wasn't a part of a university. It's a five-minute run if you have to go to the bathroom or you left your papers at home. That's how close I am from Warren Street to Leonard Street in Tribeca. So, it was perfect.

SI: Now, being among the first openly gay students in the law school, were there any prejudices there still or any difficulties?

RL: Well, again, New York Law School had Arthur Leonard, who was a friend of mine from Congregation Beit Simchat Torah. His birthday is in January of '52; mine is in June '52. At that time, you couldn't use the word lesbian or gay in a legal incorporation in New York State. It was considered to be like a curse word. So, you couldn't have like the "f-ing" ice cream parlor. It was called the BAHRGNY, the Bar Association of Human Rights for Greater New York. He started it in his apartment, and then he started the legal notes [Lesbian/Gay Law Notes]. First, it was for all cases, he would check Westlaw and Nexis, whatever, to see anything that was homosexual, a word would pop up. Then, when the AIDS epidemic happened, he expanded it to HIV/AIDS cases, but he was the person who did that. [Editor's Note: Arthur Leonard is the Robert F. Wagner Professor of Labor and Employment Law at the NYU School of Law.]

As a result, New York Law School was open in feeling. I did not ever, in any of the classes, feel--from any of the professors. I did have a student from Cuba who thought I was the devil, wouldn't sit near me. [laughter] I still remember him, but, otherwise, I had absolutely no problem with the university as far as being openly gay. There weren't any classes dealing yet--Arthur then did create curriculum years later. In every class, whenever we had to do a term paper, it somehow, if I have a family law class, "Why can't I get married?" If it was in discrimination law, whatever it was, or criminal law. The Court of Appeals, the highest court in New York, declared that all of the anti-gay laws were non-enforceable. They were unconstitutional. That doesn't mean they weren't still in the penal law. If you were a police officer and you bought one of those black books, the penal law of New York, and it had all the different statutes and laws and stuff, it still had all of the bad laws for gay people. It just had a footnote next to it that would say, like, "Unenforceable." All of these things, back in the '80s, were still on the books.

Matter of fact, it was only this week, Cy Vance, the district attorney of Manhattan, has decided this week that he's throwing out all of the arrest and warrants and things for people who are mostly transgender sex workers for like loitering with the intent of committing a sexual act, are being thrown out all the way back into the '70s. When I went to school, it was still on the books. So, I would always rub these type of things in the professors' faces and keep on saying, like, "How do you think a gay person feels?" No politician was going to say, "I am going to repeal sodomy." Even though he will really want to get into the biblical concept of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah, it really does not have anything to do with homosexuality as much as not loving the stranger. Remember, Lot sent his two daughters out to appease the mob. Well, if there was a

mob of gay men, and you sent out your two daughters--besides that that's child abuse--I have no idea what the hell people would have done with his two daughters.

At that time, there were student groups called Outlaws and that type of stuff, and I did not start one. That's usually my *modus operandi*, but again, I was much older than everybody. I really didn't socialize that much. I went to law school classes, and that was about it. I worked. I still was active in the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights. We were still fighting to get a gay rights bill in New York City. I think it took like thirteen years until we finally did it around that time, and we were just about beginning the issue of domestic partnership. Again, it was Art Leonard. I was in CLGR, the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Art Leonard came to me--I still have the books, by the way, somewhere in my storage--a study was done in West Hollywood on the diversity of family, in that they did a study and they found out that, statistically speaking, America was not like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. Statistically speaking, the idea of a man and a woman and like one or two or three children was no longer the median type of family makeup. There were so many different types.

We started a task force. It was a family diversity task force based on those two volumes that Art Leonard brought to us, and then we copied--I think it was Madison, Wisconsin, and West Hollywood--some of the domestic partnership bills that they had. When I say this to younger kids, we cut and pasted but not with a computer with highlighting; we took scissors and scotch tape and we actually would take parts of all the other bills. Some of them, I think, were even approved by then. Again, I was just either a senior in law school or just graduated from law school, but I was part this task force that put together the first draft. I then brought it to my city council member Miriam Friedlander. She didn't understand it or want anything to do with it, but Art Leonard's people from BAHRGNY, from the Bar Association, went to Congressmember Carolyn Maloney, and she and her staff really started pushing on it. Then, I believe, [Mayor David] Dinkins first approved it as an executive order. [Editor's Note: On March 1, 1993, two executive orders by then Mayor David Dinkins went into effect, creating a New York City registry for unmarried couples (gay, lesbian and heterosexual) to register as domestic partners and extending certain new rights to city employees and city residents.]

Then, also, there was lawsuits. She's now my rabbi's wife, but at that time, Randi Weingarten was an attorney, and she took on the case with three couples. Connie and Ruth was one of them; they were teachers. Unfortunately, Connie is dead. Ruth is still alive. I just Facebooked her this week. There were like two or three couples. They were the litigants against the Board of Education or the city in order for a domestic partner to be able to get the healthcare benefits and things of their partner. [Editor's Note: In October 1993, Ruth Berman and Connie Kurtz, along with others, sued the New York City Board of Education for domestic partner benefits. Randi Weingarten then negotiated the first domestic partner benefits available to all New York City public employees. Weingarten is an attorney and union leader who served as the president of the United Federation of Teachers from 1998 to 2008. Since 2008, she has served as the president of the American Federation of Teachers. Her wife, Sharon Kleinbaum, is the rabbi of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah.]

The whole thing of domestic partnership--there was a vote--"Should we go straight for gay marriage, or should we go for this concept for domestic partnership?" I still remember the vote.

It was eleven to one. Ten people said, "Let's go for domestic partnership incrementally." One short little guy, whose background was from Bella Abzug and, "You just go for it," I was the one who said, "No, let's go for gay marriage right away." This was in the '80s. People said, "No, no, no, no."

Paula Ettelbrick, who later on became the attorney--also a member of my *shul* [synagogue], and so is her wife--was opposed to the concept of marriage because it was male dominated, and people just didn't like marriage. Then, later on, when Lambda Legal and Evan Wolfson and people who started marriage equality, Paula Ettelbrick was one of the attorneys fighting for same-sex marriage, when back in the '80s, people were sort of opposed to it. Originally, domestic partnership was good if you had a rent-stabilized apartment, and you wanted a piece of paper that when the landlord was going to evict you because your name is not on the lease, your partner's was, this was proof, or this was evidence, that a judge could consider under the *Braschi* decision, which was that in a rent-controlled apartment, you could have a non-traditional family. For a same-sex couple, who was legally a domestic partner but couldn't legally get married, this was a very strong piece of paper that, if the judge agreed, would reduce the need for proving the common necessities of life, like joint bank accounts, and joint insurance and life insurance, and all this other stuff. That was back in the '80s. We were trying just to help teachers, city workers, people in rent-stabilized apartments. [Editor's Note: *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Co.* was a 1989 New York Court of Appeals decision that allowed a same-sex partner to continue to live in an apartment that was originally leased to a partner that had just passed away.]

Then, marriage equality started growing to the point where then domestic partnerships really weren't all that significant. I know a lot of places, like universities and big businesses, would begin telling their workers, "We gave you tuition remission for your domestic partner. You're now given a year, go get married, because we're going to get rid of domestic partnership. If you want to be equal to a heterosexual couple, we're getting rid of domestic [partnership coverage]." Someone should sit down with me so that my brain can think about this and put it on a tape, because as the decades go by, it's really getting hard, off the top of my head, to really sequentially remember all of this stuff.

SI: I am curious, going back to your law school days, you mentioned that you worked on a housing discrimination case. How did that turn out, and can you talk a little bit more about that?

RL: Sure. It was an honor, first of all, that they gave me the first LGBT housing discrimination case. Up until that time, we were doing things like we were testers, similar to the Donald Trump--that was a federal Department of Justice investigation. They would pair me up with another person, and we would have similar resumes. The only thing is my skin would be paler than the other person's skin. We would both have that we have the same [credentials], a master's degree, making the same type of income. I would go to an apartment that was for rent, that I would see in the paper or something, and I would go and say like, "I'm interested in a one-bedroom." If they would say, "Oh, sure, we have three of them. Here, go look at 1F, 2C, and 4D," and if fifteen minutes later, someone else came and said the same thing, but their skin was darker, and they said, "Oh, we don't have anything available," we would have hearings and see if there was a probable--I don't even remember the words anymore--was it probable cause--for discrimination, or was there a non-discriminatory reason as to why we didn't get the apartment.

[Editor's Note: In 1973, the U.S. Justice Department sued Donald Trump, his father, Fred Trump, and Trump Management, alleging racial discrimination at Trump housing developments in New York. The lawsuit was based on evidence gathered by testers working for the New York City Human Rights Division.]

They paired me up for the first case, and I remember his name. I won't mention it for posterity's sake, because I bump into him later on in my life when I'm at NYU, but that's beside the point, and he never put two and two together. When I was in charge of the real estate at NYU, he had a property that he wanted NYU to buy or to lease, and I sat meeting after meeting with him and he kept on saying, "You look familiar." I kept on saying, no, didn't know him, but he was the first litigant. He owned a building that he wanted to go co-op in Brooklyn. He was an Orthodox Jewish man. He did not tell his super anything. His super put an ad in the paper that there was an apartment available. His super--or maybe the broker put it in--his super and a broker were working together because they wanted to sort of get the commission from the owner of the rental apartment house, but the rental of the apartment house was not really involved. A gay couple goes to look at the apartment that they saw advertised in the paper, the broker sent them to the building, the super showed them the apartment, and the super said, "Oh, the landlord's an Orthodox Jew. He'll probably never rent to two gay men. Go look someplace else."

They filed with the Human Rights Commission. It came to me and another law school student with me, and she was a woman. [laughter] I remember at one of our hearings, it was raining outside--it was pouring outside--and this man left his umbrella in the meeting room with us. She grabs the umbrella and goes running after him to ask if he wants his umbrella. Again, I'm Jewish, but this would have never even come across my mind. He said, "No, it's yours now." He wouldn't take the umbrella from her, so he went out in the rain. I did investigations, and lo and behold, he owns a building on Christopher Street, which is predominantly rented, at that time, to gay men. When we interviewed him and everything, he said, "Well, first of all, I'm warehousing those units," which, although morally reprehensible, was not illegal. "I want the building to go co-op. So, I don't want active people who could even give me trouble or start a tenant's association, whatever. I'd rather have empty apartments that I could sell once the building goes co-op, but I could care less what the sexual orientation was of those two people." I'm shortening the investigation. So, it ended up, I found a non-discriminatory reason that I considered to be valid, and I'm not famous as finding the first litigant guilty. We basically let him walk. As I said, then years later, I'm sitting face to face from him, and he doesn't remember me at all. [laughter] Anyway, so, that was that.

SI: You started at NYU in the late '80s, '88 or '89?

RL: I started working in the vice president for administration's office, which was under and next to the legal counsel. We were all in the same area, and the general counsel was actually higher than the vice president for administration, and they both came together from their previous jobs and they knew each other. I didn't have a title for a long time either. I worked under the vice president for administration dealing in all of the real estate matters. I also, as time went on, would do more and more legal work. The former general counsel at City Planning, Norman Marcus, was teaching at the Wagner School, not the law school, the urban planning school at NYU. He had a heart attack in the beginning of a semester. When they asked him, "Who do you

want to teach your class?" he recommended me, said I was a pain in the ass, because when we both worked for Mayor Koch, I would try to come up with creative ways to make money, and he kept on saying, "No. You can't change ..." he called it zoning for dollars. It was like a TV show, *Bowling for Dollars*. So, I would come up with this idea, "Oh, let's change the zoning, sell the land. We could make ten times more money for the budget." After working five years with Norman, I knew his philosophies. I knew what he wanted.

I agreed, pro bono, to take over a four-credit mandatory requirement for the urban planning master's students, and I did it the first semester then all by myself. He got out of the hospital and couldn't speak [said in a whisper], his voice was very [quiet]. The second semester, again, I did it pro bono. He would sit next to me and it was always his class, but he passed away that semester. Then, they asked me and I still did it pro bono a few more times until I retired, and then after I retired, I could use the money. [laughter] So, they paid me adjunct for that class. I did it for a few more semesters. As I said, now, when I look at my little students, one ran for mayor, one's brother married the president's daughter, a whole lot of interesting things from being a professor and looking at your little students.

That's when then New York Law School heard that I had retired at NYU, and they offered if I would teach a class there. I know this sounds ridiculous, especially for people out of New York City, but New York Law School is a five-minute fast walk from my house. NYU is a ten-to-fifteen-minute bicycle ride. [laughter] I'm getting old and lazy. I figured, "Eh, I'll take the New York Law School gig, and this way, especially if it's raining and stuff, it's a lot easier for me to get to than to go back up to NYU." So, I totally stopped everything at NYU and taught at New York Law School. Then, again, a long-term friend, who was really still working in land-use law, wanted to teach there, and he teaches the adjunct land-use law class.

That's when I then decided to pick a different not-for-profit thing to do every day. My biggest fear was what happened to me during COVID, [laughter] that I was going to have to stay at home and not know when I wake up in the morning what day of the week it is because there's really nothing to do. I defined it to my friends--I'm Jewish obviously--as Shabbas every day of the week. For years, from around 2007-ish until COVID, on Mondays, I got up, I had to put on a suit and a tie, and I went to housing court, which is even closer than New York Law School. [laughter] That is why I chose to volunteer in housing court, as compared to going someplace else, and I didn't want to be an administrative judge. I looked into that. I could've done that too, but that would've been every day and a job. I didn't want that. On Mondays, I would go to housing court, and I would work in their help center, which I'm planning on doing again once everything is finished and I get a refresher class on what the new laws are. Then, on Tuesday night, I was lead counsel in the group that Art Leonard started. It was called BAHRGNY. Now, it was called LeGal, which was like the Lesbian and Gay Bar Association. They had a walk-in clinic on Tuesday nights. I would volunteer, and I was the lead counsel there. Wednesdays, during the day, I went out to spend time with my mom and dad, take them to doctors, take them to restaurants, take them to stores, fix whatever we needed to do.

Then, about ten years ago, a friend of mine, from CBST, started RUSA, which was Russians Seeking Asylum. I actually volunteered to get them incorporated as a 501(c)(3), but instead, my synagogue, CBST, said we would just be an umbrella and they could use our space. They're a

separate entity, but there's no problem. Then, a friend of mine, Sebastian Maguire, an attorney, started volunteering--at that time, it was one day a month--helping the asylum seekers with their legal paperwork to either find a pro bono attorney or to do it themselves, filling out the I-589 form and the narrative. Then, I started volunteering with Sebastian, but that was one day a month and we had like two people a week, wasn't all that much. That was pre-Trump, and most of the people were from like Ukraine or from Moscow. We also had social programs with RUSA and my synagogue where we would team up just to be friends, nothing to do legally, where you'd go to a movie and take a walk, so that they had someone to help with their English, or I know one of my Russian friends got bit by a tick and had no healthcare, didn't know what the hell to do. I took pictures and sent it to my brother, the doctor, and we handled it sort of that way.

Then, under Trump, it started just totally snowballing, and also because of Putin. It ended up becoming a worldwide problem, where people from Honduras, Guatemala, Uganda, Iran, Colombia--and believe it or not, I thought Colombia had a "U," not an "O." [laughter] All the way until I'm like sixty-something years old, I've been spelling the country of Colombia wrong. I learned that from my asylum friend. Then, we were doing it one day a week, and it was Wednesday night. Since my mom is out in Queens, I have the option at Union Turnpike to take the "E" or the "F" train. Instead of the "E," which is normally what gets me home, I took the "F," which got me to my synagogue by seven o'clock, so that I was able to help out with the asylum clinic.

Once COVID started, everything changed, and mentally, I was lost. I know it sounds silly. You know, I taught Fortran in '74, I was a certified Wang operator in the '80s, but the solitary confinement, the fear, the anxiety, I just couldn't think straight anymore. The thought of dealing [with] this on Zoom--I mean, you saw it today. They sent me a URL and it wasn't totally underlined, so I couldn't click on it. Then, I tried copying it and putting it into Word, so that I could underline it, but then it didn't work. When you're by yourself and you have no one to help you to learn how to do these things, I just shut down. Now, that program is actually two days a week. They have grown so much. We became part of the New Sanctuary Coalition from over at Judson, and we now take all of the LGBT people. So, if someone comes to New Sanctuary Coalition, they will send that person to the CBST's clinic. That was Wednesday night.

Then, Thursday was just for me; it was just fun. The Church of the Holy Apostles, where my synagogue started in '73 and where we were on Friday nights from around 1999 to 2016, I got to know the people there. I liked the clergy. I liked the volunteers. I liked our guests. One day a week, on Thursdays, I just went for the fun and the free lunch that the volunteers got afterwards, and I was the head of beverages on Thursdays from around 2007 until COVID.

Then, Fridays, during the day, was my day to do things like shopping for food and stuff, and then Friday night, I would physically go to CBST for our Friday night services. We now--I'm so used to doing it--it's not Zoom. It's a different platform because Zoom is limited in how many people [it can have]. It's no longer on Facebook. It's still on Facebook for those who can't find us, but it's now launched off of the website for CBST. So, I've been going to Friday night services by myself from home. We are now going to go through a transition where one day a month, one Friday a month, the clergy will be together in the sanctuary with no congregation, no members.

We're going to try to figure out how to wean back being six feet apart and masked, with no singing and whatever. Eventually, we'll get back together.

That's how I organized my week. I no longer work, and as I said, because I'm old, I'm going to get Social Security and my NYU pension, and I have no mortgage on my house. My generation, we had it easier, for certain people in my generation, to be able to retire. That's what I'm looking forward to.

SI: I want to go back to some of the activism earlier in your life. First, you started what I guess was called the coalition.

RL: No, I didn't start it. I was a tail of the dog that was wagging.

SI: Okay.

RL: The people who were active were like Andy Humm, and Eleanor Cooper, Saul Fishman, Tom Smith. They were the active people. When it came towards the end of my law school days, I helped on Art Leonard's family domestic partnership, the task force for family diversity, or whatever we called ourselves. Of course, [I was] not that active on the Gay Rights Bill things because my lover at that time was not really happy with my being politically active. So, I was not that active with the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

SI: Okay, I was confusing the name. I meant the Gay Liberation Front at Buffalo.

RL: Right. The Gay Liberation Front in Manhattan, in New York, I had nothing to do with at all until years after it dissolved. Whenever they had like a 20th reunion or something or marching in the Pride Parade, being that I was younger, computer savvy, and lived in Manhattan, I would help them.

I went to Buffalo in September of 1969, right after Stonewall being in June, and the Gay Liberation Front started in around July. Several of the people are still alive, Martha Shelley and John Noble, Perry Brass, Mark Segal. So, the people who I still keep in touch with today, they were the people who started the Gay Liberation Front in New York.

In Buffalo, my first semester there was when all the riots started against Vietnam and local things in Buffalo. I was living in a campus-leased garden apartment development, and the people--not my four roommates, there were five of us in [an] apartment--the people who were in the same front door when you walked in and then you went up to two different apartments beat me up. So, I was able to go to housing and explain what happened. They gave me back the money that my parents paid for the dorm, and with that money, I went to this guy who I had a crush on, who I still speak to. [laughter] He got married, had two kids, grandkids, but we're still friends. He had a dormer in his two-story building that he was renting, and the dormer was maybe five-foot-eight height. I was the only one that could jump up and down. It was twenty-five dollars a month, and it was exactly across the street from, at that time, the only campus at Buffalo. The new one that everybody knows--it's not new anymore--the one that everybody knows out in Amherst, that didn't exist. That was supposed to be built [in] downtown Buffalo

with a subway connecting the two. Now, what they, I guess, call the old campus, I think, is a medical school. I moved in with them.

I was openly gay. I was political. I went next door--I think I told you this story though, didn't I? No. [I] don't remember. I went next door. There were five women living next door. One of them ended up being the future wife of the guy who I had a crush on. They called themselves like a woman's collective. They weren't really lesbians. I mean, some of them were totally straight, whatever. A woman named Madeline Davis, who's still alive, started Radical Lesbians. That group was already in existence by January of 1970. I used to hang out next door with Barbara, and Marsha, and Cindy, and Dana, and one other woman whose name I'm not remembering right now--Margot, I think. We would make candles together. We would make lasagna together. We would listen to music and do things that students did in the 1970s that soon we're going to be able to do in New York State next year, and in New Jersey too. Then, one day, I went there, and Madeline said, "This is for women only. We're reading a book." I forget which one it was, and I actually had read the book. [I] don't remember which one--Betty Friedan, anyway. So, I said, "Well, I'm a gay man. Can't I stay and participate?" She said, "Absolutely not! Get out of here! Go start your own group!" [laughter] So, I was sort of angry, but I said, "You know, not such a bad idea."

I went to the student association meeting, and again, I already was involved in the SA, the Student Association, from this one movement to--that's why my roommates next door, it's part of the reason they beat me up. They were on a football team that was intercollegiate, and we changed things to intramural. So, they didn't like me.

I forget exactly how or whatever, I just asked for an application to start a new group, and I wasn't a lawyer yet or any of these things. I filled out the forms, and I called it the Gay Men's Liberation Front. I copied GLF from New York. But if they were not going to let any men in their group, my original concept was to not let any women into my group. [laughter] I filled out the paperwork and everything, and then, it was a very strange meeting. I vaguely can remember it, that I needed someone to second my motion, and I did get someone to do that. They were all laughing; they thought it was a joke. Then, when I explained to them that I was gay and this was not a joke and it became really silent, it was like unanimous. Then, they came up to me and said, "You need members in your group. It can't just be you. You need a vice president, a secretary, and a treasurer."

I remember getting a table at Norton Union, which was the student union, and setting up a table, and I made--it was called oak tag--and I made a sign that said, "Gay Men's Liberation Front." I made a few mimeograph or rexograph, whatever, flyers of, "What is gay men's liberation?" and I had it on my table. I was waiting for people to join. As I said, the first person who came up and talked to me--I don't remember her last name, but I know her first name was Wendy--she said that she was not a lesbian; she was a gay woman. She didn't get along with the other group. [laughter] She wanted to join my group. Would I allow her to join my group? I said, "If you make a new sign." So, we bought oak tag, and then I became Gay Liberation Front, just like New York. Then, Benny Wohlman became vice president, and I think she became secretary or treasurer. I'm not sure if Michael Hamilton became an officer because he was a part-time non-

matriculating [student], but Michael Hamilton was there all the time too. That's how we got started.

Then, I applied for eight hundred dollars, which I got. I applied for a room. I had to share it with another group, but since I liked staying downstairs a lot anyway, I would do homework and stuff on that table. I had my own little office right in the student union. When I officially went upstairs, we made a library. So, I went down to the Oscar Wilde bookstore on Christopher Street. My dad picked me up from the airport. We went there, and I bought a whole boxful of books. Then, we brought it back to Buffalo, and you were able to take out books that were gay-themed and lesbian-themed, like ninety to ten percent, from our library. Then, I started a dance or two. I went down to the gay bar on Hibachi Street and put flyers on people's windshields and stuff.

Then, March of 1971, we sort of made up with the Mattachine Society--that was Jim Zeiss who was there--because they had cars and we were students and we wanted to go to the first March on Albany for Gay Rights on March 14 of '71. So, they put us in the backseat of cars in empty seats. My group, the Gay Liberation Front, did go to the March on Albany, and we were still in existence in '73. That's when I was really badly beaten, after the dance that night in the end of April-ish of '73.

Then, when I graduated with my BA, I'm not a hundred percent sure, I think I turned over the baton to other people, and then I got my next two master's in Buffalo. I do not remember being that active anymore. I considered myself an adult, grown up, graduate student. So, I didn't really deal with the undergraduates, and so someone else took over for the group. I left in '75 to go to Rutgers, and I was in Rutgers from '75 to '77. Then, [I] moved into Manhattan and took the job as a junior appraiser at the Division of Real Property, and got promoted several times, and then became the youngest executive director of the Division of Real Property probably of the city at that time.

SI: Now, you also became the director of the Urban ...

RL: College of Urban Studies.

SI: Yes, at Buffalo. What did that entail?

RL: Okay, I think I talked about this last time, so if I'm repeating it just edit it out.

SI: You mentioned it, but you did not say much about it.

RL: Again, you have to remember, in 1969, around the whole country, students were rioting not only against Vietnam and the draft, that was the number one thing, in Buffalo, we had something called Project Themis, which was dealing with the military and underwater things. We also had racial issues in Buffalo. The students were all rioting in 1969, that first semester. Then, the second semester--the anniversary is actually coming up very soon--Kent State, when, in the beginning of May, we had a very similar thing. I can still remember a green station wagon, with rifles sticking out, riding around the campus and shooting, that there were bullet holes around the

door frame of Norton Union, the student union. That was also the same day or weekend, whatever, that Kent State, and then, all of a sudden, the student movement sort of dissolved. [Editor's Note: On May 4, 1970, members of the Ohio National Guard fired upon a group of anti-Vietnam War demonstrators and bystanders at Kent State University, killing four students and wounding nine. This occurred during the national student strike to protest the expansion of the Vietnam War to Cambodia.]

Before that happened, at the University of Buffalo--it's a state university--the administration allowed the creation of what they called the "colleges." These were student initiated and run colleges, where mostly graduate students would be teachers, instructors. We had one that was like Rachel Carson and C.P. Snow. College "Z" was the law school. College "F"--you could figure that one out. We had the Tolstoy College. We had College "A." So, there were all of these colleges where you could take a class.

My favorite one was "Communicative Creativity." I am still in touch with the professor of that class, where they took a hundred UB undergraduates, upper, like junior or seniors, and a hundred kids who either were deaf, blind, cerebral palsy, autistic, and your curriculum, for four credits, was that student. The woman who was in charge was getting her Ed.D. from the education division that was part of the university under Robert Harnack, who was the teaching assistant to John Dewey. We had a very pragmatic, hands-on, learning-by-doing kind of concept, and she would develop a curriculum for each one of the students based upon who your matched-up younger person was. You would have dinner with their family. I had a deaf person. [Editor's Note: Mr. Landman's telephone rings.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about how you were in this program, you were paired with somebody.

RL: "Communicative Creativity."

SI: Yes.

RL: In my senior year, I was doing that. That was part of College "A," and that's where I started getting the idea that I wanted to work with BOCES [Boards of Cooperative Educational Services] and become a learning disabilities teacher. Then, Nixon, in May of '73, ends the draft. So, I graduate and don't know what I should do for my master's degree, if I want one, but the Rockefeller who was our governor becomes the vice president. Rockefeller was a more progressive Republican. Under Rockefeller, the "Colleges" were okay. Malcolm Wilson becomes the next governor of New York State and says, "If the 'Colleges' do not get accredited, they disappear." I graduate in May of '73. [Editor's Note: Nelson Rockefeller was the governor of New York from 1959 to 1973. In 1974, he was then appointed to be vice president under President Gerald Ford after President Richard Nixon resigned from office. Malcolm Wilson assumed the governorship of New York after Rockefeller resigned. He served in the position from 1973 to 1974.]

This professor also brought me to her divorce attorney when I got beaten up by nine guys on the wrestling team. We got to know each other as friends. I wanted to become her teaching assistant. You get a little bit of money. The president of the university calls me in and says, "Do you know that you're gay?" or some stupid type of [comment], and I go, "Of course." He goes, "Well, what if parents complain that you're gay and you're the assistant director? So, you either drop away, or we're not going to fund the program."

I then went into civil engineering for my second master's, but because I had my first master's in curriculum development, when Malcolm Wilson came in, two professors came to me, Wilfred Recker, Buzz Paaswell, and someone else--could've even been Kunstler--and said, "Can you develop a college of urban studies?" I said, "You know, that's actually what I'm interested in, but the university doesn't have one. That's why I'm in civil engineering, taking classes in new town development and in all this other type of stuff. I'd love to do it." I put together the curriculum, and I went to Albany and made a presentation, and we got accredited. We were a legal college under SUNY at Buffalo, as the College of Urban Studies. I still have all the paperwork and the brochure. I actually did the graphics for the brochure, for the calendar, for all of this stuff that we had because we had no money. What they paid me per semester was something like two thousand dollars maybe, but I was a director.

One of my co-instructors--who I'm still friendly with, and a matter of fact, emailed me this morning--was the biological son, for real, of Sophia Petrillo from *The Golden Girls*. Estelle Getty is really Mrs. Gettleman. Mrs. Gettleman's son was in the program with me in the Civil Engineering or Socio-Engineering Department, and he also taught a class at the College of Urban Studies.

My thesis was on community-based education--that's the John Dewey thing--but using something called a computer. I called it like "Computer-Assisted Education Based on Community Development," and it tied into new town and new city development because that's the program that I was in. I even went to Sweden to Fältöversten or something and looked at what Europe was doing with all this stuff. I taught one semester, one class, in what my thesis was about.

Then, that's when I applied, I thought, for a Ph.D. I originally got accepted--I got accepted everywhere--for a Ph.D. at Rutgers. When I went to Rutgers, the first year of the Ph.D. program is the same as the master's program. Then, the second year, the man is now the dean, although I think he's retiring, he became a friend of mine [Tony Nelessen]. Again, I'm a little bit older than everybody by now, when I go to school. He was an architect with Gruen, I think, whatever, from Boston. He went to Harvard. I took more architectural urban design classes, and I was his teaching assistant. We did Manalapan. We did the Ninth Ward of New Brunswick. One I was the student, and one I was the teaching assistant. That's how then after my second year, I think, I had to just take a test. I didn't do a thesis at Rutgers. You need a dissertation for your Ph.D. I think for an MCRP, which is what I have, a master's of city and regional planning, out at Lucy Stone Hall in Piscataway, you just had to pass a test. So, I took a test; I passed it. I got my third master's from Rutgers, and that's when I thought I was finished with education, wasn't going to go to school anymore, and I graduated and I left.

I moved back home with my mom and dad, as I went looking for jobs, couldn't find one. Looked and looked and looked, no one wanted me, and then I got this junior appraiser job right across the street and started working for the city in January. I got hired in December of '77, and I started work in January of '78.

SI: When you were at Rutgers, were you involved in any student groups, any of the LGBT groups as they were then?

RL: I did start, I'm the founder--and I actually found the paperwork from our first newsletter--of RAPS, but that was the Rutgers Association of Planning Students. Now, I'm a charter member of the AICP. The first year, they changed their name from the American Institute of [Certified] Planners [to] the American Planning Association. You had to take a test, a licensing sort of test, and I took it and passed it. As a result, I was a chartered member of the American Planning Association. I did planning stuff.

Now, gay stuff--again, I am older than everybody else. I'm a graduate student. I would've thought it was beneath me to date an undergraduate probably. I hung out instead--my LGBT life at Rutgers was Manny's Den. What's really funny, I met a young person, and I actually did go to the bar that I like to go to in Manhattan last week, and I did see him, where I still wore two masks and did not go inside. He's doing like a study or something on LGBT stuff, but to him, this is all history. [laughter] So, he loves when I tell him stories about, "This was just what I was doing." He knows some of these people who I knew. They're his Facebook friends. I was really quite pleasantly surprised when I put in a friend request for someone I used to see at Manny's Den in the '70s, and they still remembered me. That was really my social life.

Also, I had a car. I went to New Hope, Pennsylvania, which is near Lambertville. I went to Atlantic City. On New York Street, if I remember, in Atlantic City, there was a gay bar. Oh, do I remember any of the names of these places? No. I would go to Manhattan. On the weekends, I would be able to go in a car and go someplace to socialize, and on weekdays, I could go to Manny's Den. Or if I didn't feel like driving for an hour--it was like an hour drive to go to these places--I could go to Manny's Den on a regular weekend also.

I don't remember being active in Rutgers. I did keep in touch with the Buffalo [alliance]. It was called the LG--it wasn't LGBT--Lesbian and Gay, I think, Alliance, they called themselves, and I did give money. I called it a founder's scholarship, and whoever would become and run for president--it wasn't tax deductible or anything--I just gave money because the New York State Legislature was trying to pass laws that the State University of New York system could not fund any gay student groups or whatever. I tried to start a lesbian and gay alumni association, where I expected that like if everyone gave fifty dollars and as the years would grow, I thought that would be a funding source. It didn't work, and thank God the legislature never passed any of those draconian type of things. Just as, at NYU, when I started teaching there, the administration had nothing to do with any of the student organizations, but then the university created an office of LGBT student affairs under the vice president for student affairs, who I still speak to; she's still alive. I think Buffalo now has the same sort of thing because I made [an] MP4 last year for the 50th anniversary and I sent it to somebody, but nothing ever happened because of COVID.

It's done, and they all said, "Next year, maybe, we'll just call the 51st the 50th." They do have an office with paid people, but they're busy doing other things.

SI: I am jumping around a little bit, but going back to Buffalo, would you have much interaction with groups at other colleges, like Cornell or Columbia?

RL: For the March on Albany in '71, we did have coordinated efforts, but again, there is no internet. There's tie lines on telephones that we basically used, but I know that all of the New York State organizations, that did include other colleges who had a group, and that's on my website. I actually found, at one point in time, a piece of paper--so I retyped it up--of all of the groups, and there were several colleges. Now, the ones who were the really big ones were like Columbia and NYU and stuff like that. To be honest, the only real interaction that I would've had is on holidays, like spring break or Christmastime, I would come home to visit my parents. If it was after '72, I had a car because sometimes I flew, sometimes I drove for eight hours; I mean, I was young. I would go to The Firehouse on Wooster Street. So, that was a place where people from Columbia or NYU [would go]. Originally, I think, [it] started through the Gay Liberation Front, but it was actually then the Gay Activists Alliance. I think it was the GAA Firehouse. Again, I would socialize but basically trying to find a boyfriend. I think even at Buff State there eventually was an LGBT group too that we sort of maybe communicated with but very unofficial. We're talking about the '70s. To tell you the truth, most people couldn't tell you the difference between Buff State and UB. [laughter] When I went to school, it was a confusing sort of situation. [Editor's Note: From 1971 to 1974, the Gay Activists Alliance, or GAA, was headquartered in a former firehouse located at 99 Wooster Street in SoHo. The State University of New York College at Buffalo, or Buff State, is a public college located in Buffalo, New York.]

SI: What about working with other groups that were maybe more social-justice oriented, like Students for a Democratic Society or any of the African American student groups? Was there any kind of interaction?

RL: Okay, in Manhattan, yes. In Manhattan, the GLF was involved with the Black Panthers and SDS, and SDS was big in Columbia and Mark Rudd and all that stuff. I went to Buffalo. [laughter] We were considered, at one time, the Berkeley of the East. I think someone once called us that, but then, that was Madison, Wisconsin. Then, I think, we became the armpit of the East or something when it snowed so much. No, to tell you the truth, all of that happens in my life much later, in other words, when I was the New York representative for the March on Washington in '79. Again, we had no internet. We had no Facebook or nothing. We had Damron's gay bar directory. I think then the unions, DC 37 [of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)], the ACLU, even, eventually, the Anti-Defamation League and certain Jewish groups, years after my synagogue, kept on growing and expanding, so they did create things like the Human Rights Campaign in Washington, the National Gay Task Force, but now, again, you're talking about the late '70s. The National Gay Task Force didn't want the first March on Washington. They didn't think that a grassroots group could even do this. We didn't know political timing. We didn't know the politicians. We were going to get everyone upset, et cetera, et cetera. That was their job. They were the ones who

were sort of reaching out. [Editor's Note: On October 14, 1979, the first National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights occurred.]

As I said, by 1977, I'm back to being a New Yorker. That's when the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights was pushing for the Gay Rights Bill. I also did get involved with them when they were looking for a community center. I, indirectly, behind the circle, behind the block, had a little bit to do with when the city sold the former Food and Maritime High School building on West 13th Street to a local developing corporation from Andy Steins' borough presidency's office and created the community center with Irving Cooperberg and Marcy Kahn and these people on the board. Then, again, there was a lot of outreach because the community center had all of these other different organizations that were reaching out to other organizations. Then came the HIV/AIDS epidemic at that time. Again, there was more interactions between ACT UP and other political groups. I was part of the earlier days of the Gay Independent Democrats, which became Gay and Lesbian Independent Democrats, which split off to the Stonewall Democrats. I was the NDC delegate, the New Democratic Coalition. There, again, we were trying to reach out to politicians, to the city council people, to the Democratic Party. Ken Sherrill, who's a friend of mine, ran for district leader, and we were trying to move into politics. Eventually, Tom Duane becomes city council person and then, eventually, all the way up to the Senate. Now, we have many New York City openly LGBT people who are in our politics. [Editor's Note: Kenneth Sherrill served as the Democratic district leader of New York's 69th Assembly District from 1977 to 1985 and was New York's first openly gay elected official. Thomas Duane served in the New York City Council from 1992 to 1998 and the New York State Senate from 1999 to 2012. He was the first openly gay person to serve in the New York State Senate.]

All the way back in Buffalo, as I said, we reached out to Mattachine. Radical Lesbians, as I said, I don't really know how much we really even dealt with them. Again, I thought we were like the world's biggest organization. In retrospect, we were a student group. I didn't call myself, or our group, the Gay Liberation Front of UB. We called ourself the Gay Liberation Front of Western New York, but we were ninety-nine percent from UB.

SI: I just read an article on the group that started at Cornell, and one of the things that caught my attention was that a lot of the students then did not want to have their names listed on rolls and things like that as being openly gay because they were worried how it would affect either their careers or their personal safety. They would have what we call straight allies now. You would still have to have a certain number of students in order to get funding for this organization. Do you remember any kind of problem like that, that you had to deal with?

RL: Definitely, it took a profile in courage to come out, but that was when people were saying, "Out of the closet and into the streets," and that one of the strongest political acts one can do is come out. Yes, you did put your career on the line. Your family was embarrassed perhaps. Your neighbors would give your parents a little bit of grief. When I went to Albany, I got my picture on the front page of, at that time, a better newspaper, but *The New York Post*. Also, even to this day, I have people who I remember had a different name. [laughter] So, some people had a nickname that they used because they didn't want people to know their real name. It wasn't the norm. I'd say most of the people whose names that I knew were their real names, but there were some. It's very similar to my Russian friends today, the asylum seekers. Every one of them has

more than one name; on Facebook, it has nothing to do with what their real name is. So, yes, there was some of that. As far as allies, the only thing I could think of from allies is we had a few sensitive professors or administrators. Of course, years later, I find out they weren't so sensitive as much as bisexual or closeted. Back at that point in time, if I needed a faculty member or so, there were certain faculty members who I knew would be helpful. As I said, funding, I got the money from the student association and from the dances, and we really didn't have that much overhead. That's all I remember.

SI: Well, I have a few final questions that pertain to Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, which you have seen pretty much its entire history over the course of your life. Tell me a little bit about what it was like in those first ten years you were with the synagogue.

RL: April 20, 1973 happens to be my grandma and my father's cousin's birthday. It happens to be Adolf Hitler's birthday. It was the Friday of the Passover of that year, which you can Google and find out because I didn't remember the date until I Googled and found out. It was spring break. My mother, by '73, we had many discussions of what I was going to do with this Torah that my grandfather brought to America, and I had been saying for years, "One day there'll be a gay synagogue, and I'll bring it there." Not the original *The Village Voice* ad of February 9 of '73, but in March, sometime, another newspaper wrote something, and my mother cut out a little paragraph that had an address on Ninth Avenue. I was there on April 20 of '73, and I still actually have some recollections. I remember I sat in a tiny little daycare center chair. I remember feeling, "I'm much younger than everybody," and that was it. I went that one time. Then, I went back to school in '73, so I'm in Buffalo. So, I didn't really think about CBST [in] '74, '75, '76. Then comes I graduate from Rutgers, and I moved to West 11th Street. I think it goes West 11th, [Bank Street], Bethune, and West Beth, which is West Street and Bethune Street--was the complex that CBST moved into when they left the Church of the Holy Apostles in '74.

I went back and started getting involved. Somewhere in this house is the check that I paid for my membership. It was twenty-five dollars a year at that time. I only became a member again [in] '77, '78 and '79. During those three years, I do participate, go to services. A lot of this was for social purposes. We did not have services on Saturday morning. Who the hell gets up on Saturday morning when you're in your twenties and thirties? We had them on Friday night, but it started at eight-thirty in the evening, regardless of when the sun went down. Why? We were ninety percent male, in the heart of the West Village, and it was not uncommon that once services were over that you went out for dinner or drinks and then went to an after-hours club or something of the sort. You made an evening of your Friday night, and CBST was the launching point. You would go to CBST. Maybe you'd find a group of friends or a new friend. Then, what happened, now, it's no longer like twenty, thirty people. Now, you've got like a hundred, 150 people who are members of CBST. I knew Michael Levine, who was the president, because he was the executive director at City Planning, when I was the executive director at the Division of Real Property. We were all in the same building. So, I knew Michael Levine from work, and I knew him from CBST. Again, all of these hats get mixed up.

I worked for Bella Abzug to run for mayor in '77. Ron Alheim was one of the people working in that campaign that I knew. It was through Ron Alheim, who's dead now also, who fixed me up

with the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights people. I also had the hats on from the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, and a lot of these people were all the same people; we just put on different hats. So, I told the people we wanted to have a March on Washington. Everyone kept on saying, "Wrong time. No, no, no." So, they said, "If you can have a grassroots organization, where you actually meet and do it democratically and vote, then maybe it makes sense." They needed a place where you could have two hundred people show up. So, I asked Michael Levine to put it before the board of CBST, to allow me to--and by the way, this is the first time I'm actually ever saying this, and it's being recorded, I didn't even put this in my book, the details--if we could have on a Sunday morning the space that the synagogue rented at Bethune Street. I told them I'd clean up, and everything would be fine. Then, I told the people at the March on Washington, which was like Steve Ault, Betty Santoro, Eleanor Cooper, the people who eventually got elected to be the positions that they were doing the work anyway beforehand, that, "I think we have a place at CBST," to have this meeting where we were going to vote on things, like who were the national coordinators and who were the four New York State representatives. I think a lot of the other things, gender equality and gender parity and what our platform [was] and who were the speakers, I think that happened a little bit later at the meeting in Philadelphia or the meeting in Houston, Texas. I don't remember exactly what happened at which one of the meetings. My job was to find a space and to make sure only Kosher food was inside the space.

I was working for the City of New York. I had a salary. These two young kids from Gay Youth, one of whom is still a Facebook friend, called me a middle-aged businessman and said I should fund everything. I did give a loan to the movement. I think it was a two-thousand-dollar loan; I think I got eight hundred dollars back. The rest we just wrote off to posterity. I just bought seltzer and Entenmann's chocolate-covered donuts--they're Kosher--and I brought them to the place. I put up flyers. Again, we didn't have the internet, no Facebook. I put up flyers on lampposts with a piece of masking tape. I put up things. I walked to all the gay bars. The male bars I had no problem. I would just walk in, put a flyer up on the bulletin board next to the bathroom, or leave a bunch of flyers on a table that they had. I remember the problem going into the Duchess, and they wouldn't let me in. Finally, I found a woman outside, and she took them inside. That is how we advertised that we were going to have this meeting on a Sunday morning on Bethune Street at CBST.

Well, that Friday, I get a phone call from a man who's no longer alive. I won't even mention his name. He was definitely on the board. He might have even been the president or whatever we were calling people. There might have been a switchover between one or another. All I know is he called me up and said he had a telephone board meeting, they revoted the resolution that I proposed, and they now have rejected it. I am not allowed to use the space that Sunday. Why? "We're going to lose our tax-exempt status if we have a political event." Well, I thought of people like Martin Luther King and his church. It wasn't partisan. This wasn't Democrat or Republican. This wasn't Percy Sutton versus Herman Badillo or anything. I already put up all of the flyers. I don't know how to cancel this thing. [laughter] I have the key to open the door. I know the code to turn off the security system. I already bought the doughnuts. [laughter] So, I [thought], "Ah, forget about it. We're going to do it." [Editor's Note: In 1977, a number of politicians vied for the Democratic nomination for Mayor of New York City, including Percy

Sutton and Herman Badillo. Later, Sutton and other influential Black politicians in New York did not support Herman Badillo during his bid to become Mayor of New York in 1985.]

I showed up early that day, opened up the door; a lot of people showed up, thank God. They ate all the doughnuts and the seltzers. There really wasn't that much to clean up when it was finished. I cleaned everything up. I locked up the place, but he found out two things, number one, that we held the event, which got him this angry, and that although there were like nine people running, the women decided they were going to use gender parity as compared to gender equality. It had to be at least two women of the four New York representatives. They wanted all four, and under gender parity, it could be all four are women. It had to be at least two. There was this big push to have four women representing New York, but I bought the doughnuts. [laughter] I bought the seltzer. When they counted up the votes, I won. I don't know if I was first, but I was one of the four. He was so angry that, one, I held the event, and that I am now the representative of New York, not him. So, he calls me up that Monday and yells at me and threatens me and says so many angry, nasty things, that I said to him, "You know, I'm not coming back to CBST. Goodbye." I did not come back to CBST in 1980, '81, '82, '83, '84, '85, '86, '87, and '88.

At the same sort of time, I fell in love with two people in '79-'80ish. They were both lovers in the closet, both of them, in Harvard. They both worked at different agencies in the same building. That's how I met them. I fell in love with one of them first, but he felt he could do a lot better. Then, the other one, I fell in love with him, and he fell in love with me. We sort of then moved in together, and we were lovers. I then was occupied; I didn't have as much spare time. He wasn't Jewish, so not going to CBST didn't bother him at all. In retrospect, when I look back, that was the nicest, loving-est part of my life for just a few years. We would, every night, go out for a dinner. He was also an alcoholic, which I didn't really know at the time. We would go out for drinks, or we'd go out for dinner with drinks, or we'd go home with drinks. We would go on vacations. Both of us were working. We both had money. We both left our jobs at the city at that building, and serendipitously, I got a job at 5 East 57th Street. He got one at 24 West 57th Street. So, it was very convenient. After work, we could go to dinner in the theatre district. We could go to a movie. We could go to a play. It was very nice.

As I said, in the early '80s, when the AIDS epidemic started, I felt very secure. I had a lover, and we were living together. Yes, all of a sudden, people started getting sick around us and dying. As I said, at CBST, I think it was 180 out of 400 men died. I knew the people because, don't forget, the people from the synagogue, you'll see them in a bar. You'll see them on Fire Island. You'll see them at work. I didn't really go into CBST. Then, he killed himself on December 29th of 1989. The next week, I wanted to say Kaddish [prayer] for Scott, even though he wasn't Jewish. I couldn't go into my parents' synagogue because those people--again, this is the 1980s--would never understand. If I stood up and said Kaddish, they would've thought my parents died. I said, "All right, I'll go back to services at CBST." I go back, and I remember Jerry--I sat next to him; I knew him from back then. When it came for the Kaddish and I stood up, I started to cry. When I sat down, he patted me on my leg and said, "Everything will be okay," and a lot of people knew. Again, the president, Michael Levine, knew Scott. They worked in the same agency. They all knew Scott. They all knew me. At that time, I didn't know Scott was HIV

positive and why he killed himself; that came later. Everyone was very nice to me. They hugged me afterwards. They said, "Why don't you come back again?" So, that was it.

Since then, I came back almost every week, and I made a whole lot of friends. Then, at that time, we had no rabbi. The rabbi came in '92. So, they had committee structures. You could join into a committee, or you could do what I always did, start something new. Because I was a child of Holocaust survivors, and in 1990, the second-generation groups were not being very kind to LG--well, we didn't even have LGBT yet. The Lesbian and Gay Children of Holocaust Survivors, I started that group, so that we did things on Yom HaShoah and Kristallnacht. I was the chair of the events committee and the Salute to Israel Parade committee, when they refused to allow us to march in the Salute to Israel Parade. Then, we got a rabbi who took over, and then we started hiring staff. We had a premises trust fund. We had enough money, at first, to rent the Church of Holy Apostle Sanctuary on Friday nights. Then, we started a fundraising campaign, and we raised millions of dollars to be able to renovate two floors and a mezzanine on West 30th Street, where we presently are at. I was also on the board of directors of the synagogue in the late 1990s. Also, I did their websites. I was their webmaster for a while.

I've been very involved, not from an Orthodox religious point of view. My great grandfather was an Orthodox Hasidic scholar. The more I studied, the more I compared the different scriptures from Christianity, Islam and Judaism, the more I learned, the less dogmatic I became, especially being gay. I would read the stories of David and Jonathan quite differently, especially in Hebrew, compared to what other people--especially Christians, who have a whole extra section that Saint Bartholomew, hundreds or a thousand years later to make sure it doesn't sound too gay. As a result, I believe very much so that all religions have central cores that are quite similar. Jesus was Jewish, and his philosophies and teachings were very similar to the same cores that I have as a Jew. I'm glad we don't have animal sacrifices. I don't think I would've been very happy with the temple and the high priests and the techniques that they were praying with. I liked that thirty-six times it says in the Jewish Bible to remember when you were enslaved and to be good and kind to the stranger. That's why I help in the asylum clinics, and that's how come I'm glad that America took my father and my mother into this country. "Love thy neighbors as thyself," that's a biggie in Christianity and Judaism and Islam; they have the same sort of things but in a different way. Since they came last, they're able to combine everything in a different sort of way.

When my father passed away, I didn't tell anybody in the synagogue. I had no rabbi there. The same is probably going to happen when my mom passes. I will deal with my brother and the family, and we will have our small burial. Hopefully, COVID is gone. It'll be long off into the future. We don't have to do a Zoom. I talked to my mother. She's goes, like, "What's going to happen when I die?" I'm like, "Oh, Mom, no one knows. You can pick whichever stories you want, but really, nobody knows, but everyone else was able to do it. We'll be able to do it too when it happens." I said, "You don't have to worry. I'll take care of you. My problem is what's going to happen with me?" Matter of fact, I am right now in the process of trying to figure out how to put in my funeral pre-paid plan, a tombstone. It isn't simple. I went to my funeral people, they said, "Call up the cemetery." I called up the cemetery, they said, "Here are the names of three tombstone makers; they know what our regulations are." I'm at that point now, to

call up the tombstone makers, but they're going to tell me, "You don't pay for it now. You've got to go to your funeral director and put it into your pre-payment plan." The circle goes on.

I consider myself very Jewish. I'm a child of two Holocaust survivors. My family has been Jewish for a thousand years probably because the Christians would not intermingle with Jews in Europe. We were in Germany. Intermarriage was not such a big thing to do. I no longer consider the rituals and the tradition stuff as most important. I consider the core values to be what's important. Dressing up as if it's Warsaw in the 1880s doesn't do a thing for me. All of these, the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Thirty-Nine Laws that you can't do on Shabbas, based upon building the tabernacle, the *mishkan*, in the desert where all of these things come from, I thought, "It's very interesting." I studied it. I actually memorized it. I knew you can't thresh, you can't reap, you can't sew, you can't separate. I did all of this stuff, but I don't think it made me a better person. I think working at the Holy Apostle Soup Kitchen, helping asylum seekers to fill out their forms, [did]. I think, to me, this is repairing the world, and to me, being politically on the right side of history is something that I consider to be a Jewish trait. To my co-religionists in Brooklyn, who are Trump supporters, who had such a harsh death rate because of COVID--because in the beginning, they felt God was going to take care of them, [and] Trump said, "It's just like the flu. The Democrats are turning this into a hoax"--I disagree with them. To my former Soviet Union Jewish people--where I, in '65, was at Queens College when Bobby Kennedy was speaking at a free Soviet Jewry demonstration rally--who think socialism is Stalin--or other people think socialism is Hitler--for some reason, they forget that socialism was also Roosevelt, but they politically love Trump because they think that the other people are socialists or queers. In Brooklyn, there's a big problem with Jews in Sheepshead Bay, Brighton Beach, those areas; they protested against when I tried to do the memorial for what happened to the homosexual community in the Third Reich. There's still an animus; Putin is fanning the fires in Russia, thanks to the Orthodox Church there.

When you put all these things together, I'm a unique type of Jew. I'm a gay Jew. I'm also a legal German Jew because I'm a German citizen. When you put all these strange pieces together, you get to see the world in a different way, and your culture, I have a very German-Jewish culture from before the Second World War. So, where my father would say things like, "*Pünktlichkeit, genau ichkeit, and gemütlichkeit*." That's what a Bavarian was supposed to be, on time, *pünktlichkeit, genau ichkeit*, you do it exactly right, and *gemütlichkeit*, you're very gregarious. I would joke with people, "The German in me makes me be fifteen minutes early. The gay in me makes me be fifteen minutes late. So, you put them together, I try to be on time." That's sort of who I am.

SI: That is probably a good point to stop today. I really appreciate all your time and all the follow-up questions. *The Book of Rick* is coming out. I will just say that for people who read this or view it later. You can get more information on Mr. Landman's website. There will be a part two. [Editor's Note: Rick Landman is the author of *The Book of Rick: Part One: Living with Contradictions*. His website can be found at <http://infotruer.com/>]

RL: Yes, and if I live long enough, possibly a part three.

SI: All right, thank you very much, and I will be in touch when we have the transcript ready for your review.

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

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 9/30/2021
Reviewed by Zach Batista 1/25/2022
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 3/15/2022
Reviewed by Rick Landman 3/18/2022