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An
Oral History Interview
with

Dorothy Frassmann

1997

Acknowledgments

Dorothy Frassmann is one of the most interesting and unique people I've ever met, and her importance to the history and sociology of the gay community is great. The candor with which she shares her life, the depth and range of her experience as well as her achievements make this oral history interview invaluable not only to gay people who may be trying to discover their identity, but to straight people trying to understand us. I want Dorothy to know how much I appreciate her reserving time for me so that I could complete this work. I also want to thank our friend Pat Fenton for introducing me to Dorothy and for helping me to understand that this record had to be preserved for the future.

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Las Vegas Gay Archives
Oral History Project Interview
with
Dorothy Frassmann

conducted by
Dennis McBride
September 21, 1997

This is Dennis McBride and I'm going to spend the day talking with my friend Dorothy Frassmann. We're in her house at 643 Avenue D in Boulder City, Nevada. It's a nice, cool, Sunday morning, September 21, 1997.

To start with, Dorothy, tell me when you were born and where you were born.

I was born in Brooklyn, New York, October 29, 1931. So there!

Two years after the stock market crash.

Absolutely. Yes. I'm sure my folks were scuttling around trying to make money.

Tell me about folks, your family.

My mother [Lillian Young] was born in Canada, Nova Scotia. My dad [Alfred Frassmann] was born in Heidelberg, Germany. He stowed away in a freighter to come over here.

Did he have any family here to meet him?

None. None.

She came from Canada when she was about 18 or 19 to the United States and met him. He was a [tailor], did a lot of sewing work and stuff like that. In Brooklyn. And she was a waitress.

Where was she a waitress at?

The only place I really remember [she worked]—because I went to Canada myself when I was quite young—is when I came back from Canada when I was 10 years old and she was working at Horn & Hardock in New York. One of the big places.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

I have a brother [Frank] that lives right now in South Dakota. He's a year and half older. I have no sisters and I have a half brother. I do not know where *he* is.

How long were you with your parents before you went to Canada?

I really don't remember my father too much. They were divorced when I was 5 and I went to Canada, just before they were divorced, to my mother's aunt, my great aunt [Polly Mason]. I really don't know much about him. He passed away when I [lived] in Los Angeles, but he passed during [a] time that I was with him. But I'd only seen him very few times that I can even remember.

Do you remember much about your very, very early childhood with them?

No. The only thing I really remember is an uncle that used to He wasn't a *real* uncle, he was sort of an "uncle." One of *those* kinds of uncles. I remember him taking care of me, but I was very small at the time. I really don't remember a lot about my early childhood except when I was in Canada. That I do remember.

Why were you sent to Canada?

Because my mother at that time, I believe, was having problems with Father, so to speak. Things weren't right. And she sent my brother and I [up] there to kind of get us out of the way. Simple as that, really.

Do you remember whether you were sad about going? Did you miss [your mom and dad]?

If I missed 'em it wouldn't have been for very long because where I was sent was an island, Eastern Points Island in Nova Scotia.¹ And as a child on an island like that it's like a paradise to you.

Tell me about the island.

Well, everybody did fish, they were fisher people, trapped lobsters. The children there learned to swim very early and they learned to swim by being thrown off a wharf into the water.

Did that happen to you?

Oh, absolutely! My Aunt Polly threw me off and my uncle was down there in the water, in the ocean to catch me. Simple as that! [laughs] And that's how they taught us how to swim. But the kids there all learned to row early. We all had access to boats. We could pretty much do what we wanted. And in the winter time we iced down different hills and sledged down 'em. And we had forts we built and snowball fights. It was really a very, very nice place for children. There was one school house which was, like, half a block from where I lived. Everything was pretty close. And the lady that taught, she actually lived with my Aunt Polly.

As a roomer? A boarder.

Yeah, as a roomer, boarder. She stayed with us. That didn't stop her from smackin' my hands with a razor strap every once in awhile. Which today they wouldn't do.

What was your uncle's name?

Harry Mason. Uncle Harry. He passed away and Aunt Polly's passed away.

Did they have a very large house?

It seemed to me at that time it was. They had a son, Edwin, and we all had our own private bedrooms. It was a two-story house, a pretty large house.

Is that the point at which you consider your childhood actually starting?

I would think so because I don't really remember before that.

Did you have a circle of friends [in Canada]?

Well, they were all boys except one. Only one little girl on my side of the island. That was all.²

One little girl on the island?

Actually there was *two* islands. They're both considered Eastern Points Island but there's a gut, what's called a gut [i. e. channel] of water that ran in between the islands. She lived on my side. She *was* the only girl child on my side of the island.

Were you as close with her as you were with the boys?

Well, aside from the fact that half the boys I used to beat up on [laughs] Yes, because she was the only girl. We just all sort of everybody ran around together.

Why did you beat up the boys?

Because I *could*. [laughs] Because when you're living like that and you're surrounded by boys—and there was quite a few boys, little boys, you know, my age, little older, little younger—they seemed to bring more boys on that island than girls for some reason! [laughs] You had to defend yourself because boys have this tendency to want to pick on girls. So if you can't beat up on the boys, they're gonna beat up on you.

Did they pick on you?

Absolutely.

How did they pick on you?

Oh, just the way boys do. They throw rocks at you and shoot BB guns at you. We had access to all these things. My *brother* even shot a BB gun at me. Yeah! Different things.

One time I remember I was in a boat and I was with my brother. It wasn't a row boat, it was a little motor boat and I was trying to do some spear fishing. I was about 8 or 9. And he very nicely pushed me overboard. [laughs] Right there in the middle of the gut. Yeah. So, there you are. Kids just picked on kids.

Well, having beat them up did you still stay friends with them?

Absolutely. *Had* to. It wasn't that we went around beatin' up each other all the time. We played together and had fun together.

What kind of games did you play and run around and do?

Well, we fished a lot. Kids fished a lot. There was a woman on the island that raised minks. On the back of the island. Way on the back of the island. We used to fish for her. We used to go out and fish for her and she'd give us a penny for every fish we caught to feed her minks with. And that was one of the main things that the kids did. Then we'd go through to the back of the island and look for wild strawberries. Lot of wild strawberries that grew there. And pick

strawberries. And there was all kinds of, like, black berries and all kinds of berries and stuff we'd go out and get. And as far as playing is concerned, we did a lot of swimming, we did a lot of spear fishing.

*What kind of spears?*³

When the tide goes down between the islands there'd be kind of like low mud banks out there and we'd take light boats and just kind of row. And you'd see these flat fish scootin' around in the mud in the water. They call 'em halibut here. That's what they looked like. And we'd spear them. And whatever other fish we could spear.

But we also used to fish. We did not have fishing poles, but we had string and we had hooks.

How do you fish with string and hook?

You roll up the string on a piece of wood and then just drop it over the [side of] boat. Simple. *[laughs]*

What did you use as bait?

Whatever we had. We used to use worms a lot. Pieces of fish an awful lot. You can fish with fish. Anchovies, for one.

Were these islands wooded?

The back of the islands were. They were fairly wooded. There were swamp areas. They used to grow some really wild flowers back on those islands and a lot of little bitty wild animals, like little foxes and stuff used to be back there. But the division between the back and the front [of the island] was where the houses were built. I remembered there was a swamp that they had built a road through and had laid down rocks and bridges on that you could [use] to walk across the swamp and get to the back of the island. And the back of the island was beach. part of it was beach and part of it was woods. And then a lot of ponds that would freeze over in the winter we'd ice skate on.⁴ Things like that, yeah. Part of the beach had whales on it, that'd been beached up there. I saw a dead walrus once.

It sounds like a beautiful childhood.

It was.

How long were you there?

Well, I was there for *that* period of time for about five years, a little over five, about *six* years, actually. Then I went back [to Canada] later on for vacation-type things.

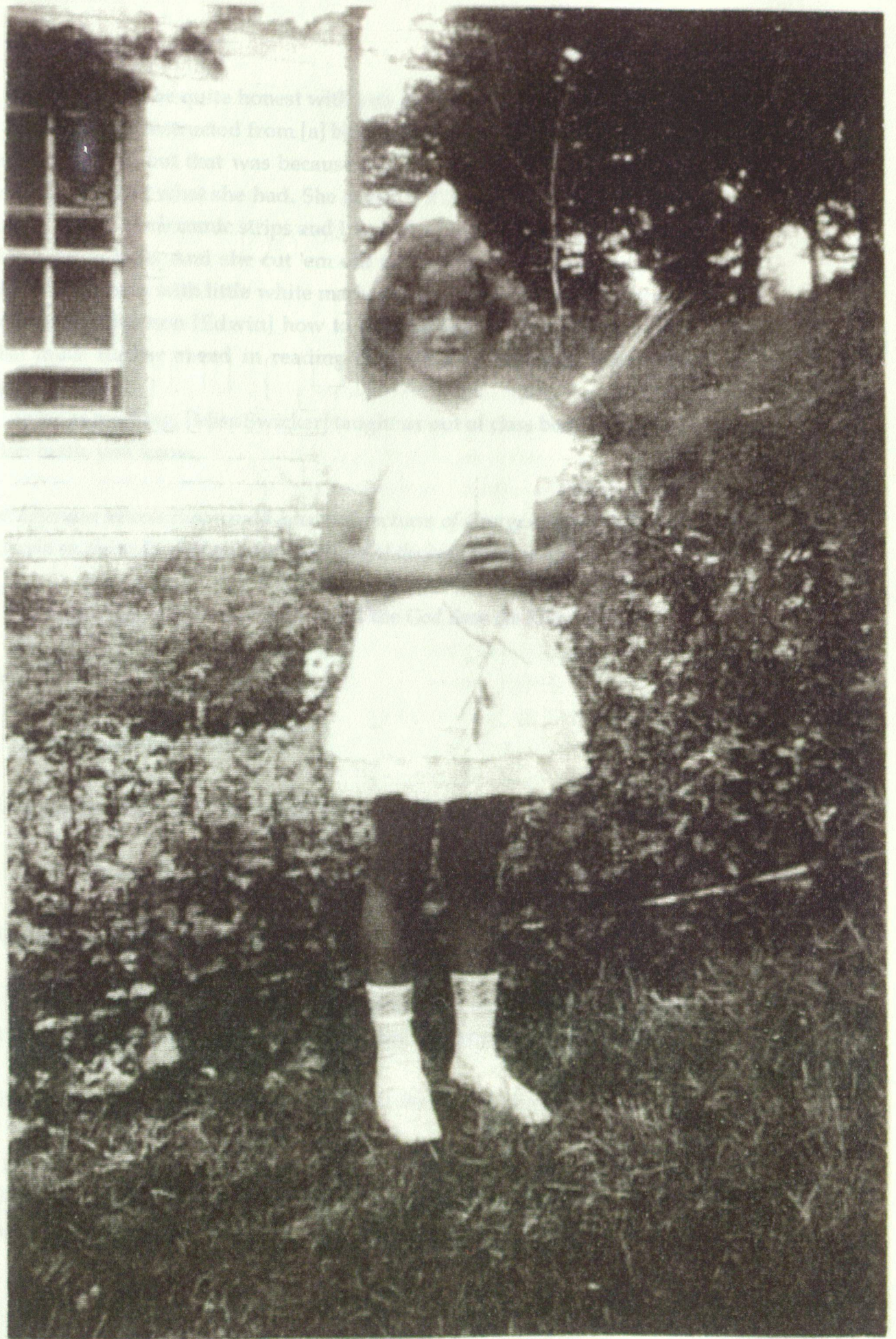
Tell me about the school. You mentioned the teacher lived with your aunt.

Yeah. Her name was Catherine Swicker. She was a young teacher. She taught all the grades. The school itself was a one-room school. Of course, we had outhouses, which was normal, and the old pot-bellied stove, believe it or not. And the old bell! [*laughs*] The bell that you shake to bring the kids into the class. And she taught *all* the classes.

Different grades?

All the different grades, uh-huh. At the same time. Like I would be maybe in the second grade or third grade or whatever, and somebody else who was a year or so older might be in a higher level of learning. But she taught 'em mostly through lesson plans from the government. And the only reason I happened to find that out at the end is because when I was out of my tenth grade I had a letter from people that lived on the island wanting to know if I'd be interested in coming back and teaching on the island. I only had ten grades of school which, of course, I wasn't interested in going back and doing that. But according to that [letter] they all taught according to lesson plans that the government issued. That's what they did on the island. One teacher for everybody. 'Course, there [only] fourteen kids. Five girls and nine boys is about what it amounted to.

Do you remember very much about the classes themselves: what you learned, what you read, how she taught?



No, I don't. To be quite honest with you, I really don't [remember] a lot of that. I know that she instructed from [a] blackboard. I know I could read by the time I went to school, but that was because [of] my Aunt Polly's teaching. Aunt Polly taught me out of what she had. She saved *L'il Abner* comic strips and she saved *Little Orphan Annie* comic strips and I would give my right arm to have those at this point in time. And she cut 'em out and pasted 'em into composition books, those black ones with little white marks on 'em. And she taught myself and my brother and her son [Edwin] how to read before we ever started school. I was that much further ahead in reading than most of the kids, yeah. Which was great.

As far as teaching, [Miss Swicker] taught us out of class books just like anything else: math, you know.

In American schools they would have had pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln on the walls. Did you have pictures of the king [George VI]?

The king. And every morning we did the *God Save the King* number.

Sang it?

And we saluted the Union Jack.

But you never took Canadian citizenship?

My mother was a Canadian. She took American citizenship.

How did your brother get along?

He got along well. My brother was extremely smart. Still is. He was a very bright young boy and grew up to be a very bright young man.

How long did you stay before you came back to the United States?

I came back when I was 10. The reason actually that I came back was because World War II had started. That was one of the reasons and another one [was that] I was getting a little bit incorrigible at that age.

Incorrigible?

I was pretty hard to handle. [laughs] My Aunt Polly found myself and my brother pretty hard to handle. Myself particularly because I was pretty brattish when I was young.

How were you brattish?

Well, I did a lot of lying. I'd take things, you know. Honest answer! If I told the truth nobody'd believe me because I lied so darned much. [laughs] I was a brat when I was a kid, when I was that age. And I was a very, very rough little girl. Like beating up on boys and things—it was a matter of self-defense. You do these things. You *become* a boy because you're *surrounded* by boys. Everybody's hair was cut the same: Aunt Polly stuck a bowl on everybody's head and along went the scissors.⁵ She cut everybody's hair on the island so we all looked the same. We all dressed the same. There was no difference.

And when World War II broke out—in fact, Pearl Harbor was bombed a couple of months after I got back to the States—just prior to that we used to see the American planes flying over the island heading for England. I don't think [my return to the U. S.] had anything to do with the government. I don't think they were sending the American kids back to the States or anything like that. But my mother in the meantime had got a divorce and she had her job and she had this apartment set up, so she sort of brought the kids back.

Was it difficult to readjust?

I hated New York. I really did. I think I went to P[ublic] S[chool] 53 or something like that and all I did was get in fights with everybody all the time. I hated that place. Played hooky. My brother played hooky.

What did you hate about it so?

I didn't like the people. I didn't like the kids—they were rougher than I could ever think of bein'. There was always street gangs. Always street gangs. There was the Smitty Girls and the Garfield Girls, the Smitty Boys and the Garfield

Boys. These kids went out using garbage can handles for brass knuckles and garbage can lids for shields, for God's sake. That's true. I saw a kid knifed on the library steps one night. Just a *kid*. Because he belonged to the wrong group of people.

Was he killed?

Not that I know of. He was knifed. That's all I do know. I was there with two other girls and we got out of there.

Were you ever involved with the gangs?

Yes. Well, after I got to New York I got involved in a fight with a girl and sounds rather strange. But I got in a fight with a girl and I was fortunate enough to end up on the top of the heap, so to speak. And after that I was asked to join [the] Smitty Girls. I didn't know the Smitty Girls from Bean Girls. I just knew I was new there and, "Sure. Great." Make new friends. Well, I found out what it was. They stole. It wasn't just purse-snatching, which is garbage stuff. But being not only the youngest member, I was the smallest. I was very small. I could get through warehouse windows and go through all kinds of little areas that a lot of people couldn't because I *was* quite small. I stayed with them because I *had* to almost all the time I was in New York.

You must have been about, what?

10, 11, 12.

That's awfully young.

Some of those girls were prostitutes. I wasn't. That's one thing I would *not* do.

Were you asked to do that?

Absolutely. Absolutely. But no, I didn't do that.

Where did these girls come from? By that I mean their backgrounds, their families.

Well, they probably had the same kind [of background] I did. My mother worked nights, she was gone all night. She'd come in sometime in the morning, two, three, four o'clock, whatever. And I'd come in before she did, barely. She'd leave in the afternoon. Frank and I both would do a lot of hooky playin'. He was caught one time behind a chair. This is my very genius brother—thank God he outgrew that! We didn't squeal on each other. But the backgrounds were the same. Loretta Barfitte was one of the girls' names and she came from a very nice family. And she was one of the captains of the Smitty Girls. Nobody could beat 'er. Nobody could whip 'er. Strength supremacy.

You said she was the captain. Were there other positions in the gang with names?

Yeah. Well, there was lieutenants. Just like you're in the service. And everything that you stole or got or shoplifted—which was one of the biggies, of course—was turned over to her. And she turned it over to whoever the devil was over her, and it eventually got to the people that really got the money which was the adults that had this thing all organized.

It was adults who essentially [ran] the kid gangs?

Sure, it was. Sure, it was. That essentially got the loot, so to speak. There were kids, yes, but [adults] were the primary leaders of these people. And nobody ever knew I never knew who they were. I knew who the lieutenants were and I knew who the captains were. My particular captain. I didn't know who anybody else's was.

You must have had meetings to plan things?

Yeah, we had meetings—in the Presbyterian church, in the basement. [laughs] That's where we had our meetings!

Did you have those meetings with the approval of the church? [laughs]

We had those meetings when the church was goin' on upstairs! Figure *that* one, Dennis. It was very interesting I haven't got too much faith in some of these things.

You think the church had something to do with [the gang]?

I don't know. I have no idea. I don't think so.

It's an interesting speculation.

Yeah, it is, isn't it?

I'm surprised about a girl gang because we're familiar mostly with boy gangs. I never heard of girl gangs before.

See, the difference now, I think, is the girls in the girl gangs belong to the boys. The girls back then did not belong to the boys. They were the same names. The Smitty Girls and the Smitty Boys were on the same side of town. You crossed my area, on the other side, then, you had the Garfield Girls and the Garfield Boys.

Where did those names come from?

I have no idea.

Did girl gangs and boy gangs ever fight [each other]?

Not a whole lot. Only if you crossed the wrong street.

And did the girl gangs and boy gangs do different kinds of things?

No, not really. Except *you* were on this side of Brooklyn and *they* were on that side of Brooklyn. You had Prospect Park and somebody else had, you know, whatever. That's sort of the way that worked. And a lot of times when you're young, like I was young—I didn't know a lot of what was goin' on, anyway. I just knew my own little circle which was the kids on my own street, and on my own street there was five or six girls belonged to [the gang]. On my *own* street!

We used to get in some tussles with each other. Just people actin' tough. Everybody's gotta be a little tougher than the other guy.

Can you tell me any particular instance when you robbed a warehouse or shoplifted something?

No, I couldn't tell ya particularly. There was quite a few times.

But you were never caught?

Never caught. Loretta was. I remember that she was caught with two or three other girls and I wasn't there when she was. I just knew that she was because that came down through the ... group.

And what happened?

The police stopped her. But it wasn't a warehouse they were doin', it was a home, a house. They broke into a house and they got caught by the people in the house. They went to reform school. Loretta was only 14. She was two or three years older than me. She was just a young girl, too.

How long did you stay with the gang?

Till I left and went to Texas. I had no alternative. Once you start [with a gang] you don't leave. Unless you just leave town.

Did you ever want to leave it before?

Absolutely. I was scared. I was petrified half the time. You couldn't leave. Once you were in you couldn't leave. That was part of your pledge. You had a pledge—and don't ask me what it was, Dennis. I don't remember. Something like, "I join this club *da-da-da-da-da* forevermore," so to speak. You know. You don't reveal your members' names, you don't do *this*, you don't do *that*.

Did you ever get to keep anything [you stole]?

Oh, they gave us money. You'd always get a few dollars here and a few dollars there.

Was that how you earned your spending money, then?

Most of it.

What did you do with your spending money?

Bought comic books. [laughs]

What kind?

Captain Marvel, Superman, Captain America and Bucky. Those were the big one's back then. *L'il Abner.* I was the best trader of comic books, my brother used to say, in New York. I'd go out with three comic books and come back with twenty! [laughs] Go out with five dimes and come back with sixty.

There would seem to be a lot more diversions going on in New York than there were on the islands.

Coney Island. We used to hang out at Coney Island a lot. Kids I knew on the block. I had a little friend of mine and she and I used to go taking off and go to Coney Island. And we used to crash through the lines all the time, you know. Get up front of everybody. Coney Island at the time was a wonderful place for kids. They'd give you a card and you'd pay 50¢ for the thing and it had, what, 20, 30 rides, maybe even more than that on it. But it would be a round circle thing and they'd punch it out with a little puncher. Everytime you'd go on a ride they'd punch out the number. And when we used [up] the numbers [for the rides] we really liked, then we'd stand at the gate as people went out and then we'd pick up the cards that they hadn't used. Then we'd go back and use up *their* cards! [laughs]. You could stay for days there if you wanted to. Coney Island was *there* then, it was a *thing*. They had the big roller coasters.

Did your brother belong to a gang?

No.

How did he manage to keep out of it?

I don't know. But Frank never did. Frank never had to do with anything except play hooky. And if he did [belong to a gang] I didn't know it. Let's put it that way. Frank wasn't a brave type of character. Frank wasn't the adventurous type of character. Maybe he was too smart. Not everybody belonged to [a gang], not everybody got into that type of thing. I was just one of these people that I'd get into anything! *[laughs]* Just happened that way.

How long were you back in New York before you went on to Texas?

My mother married my stepfather when I was 13, I believe.

You weren't in New York very long, then.

Three years. I think I was 13, Dennis.

Did your family move to Texas?

My mother married my stepfather. His name was Dwight and they called 'im Tex. Sampson. S-A-M-P-S-O-N. Mother married him. She had a choice between him and a flier from Australia. And I was in love with the flier from Australia and I was really ticked at her because she didn't marry 'im. He was gonna take us to Australia. Instead, she married this tall, lanky Texan who I did not like. *At all.* But anyway, to make a long story short, we moved to Texas because that's where he was from and because his mother and his father lived in Hubbard, Texas. And Mom and he was taking off and goin' places. So they deposited my brother and I with [Dwight's] parents, then they took off for Canada and just went. Mostly just traveling.

Why were they just traveling around like that?

Well, my stepfather'd been in the Merchant Marines. He come out of the Merchant Marines and he had quite a bit of money. They stayed at the Waldorf-

Astoria for their honeymoon. And he had, just like I said, been in the Merchant Marines and his idea was to take Mom traveling around because he had a lot of bucks on 'im. Quite a bit of money. And he was the biggest bullshitter in the world, you know. Good gambler. They traveled around and then they came to California.

Without you?

Yes, without either Frank or myself. They came out to Wilmington [California]. He went to work for Mad Man Muntz. Car dealership.

About what years were these that she married him and moved around?

Well, I was 13. '44, I think. Yeah, 1944, somewhere in there. Anyway, after they'd done their little traveling they went to California and that had to be In my eighth, ninth, and tenth grade I was in Hubbard, Texas.

Let's talk about Hubbard, Texas. These people they left you with

My stepfather's parents. Edna and Oscar Sampson. I think there was an uncle [named] Onsby.

Onsby?

Onsby, Oscar, and Edna. [laughs] That's who we were living with. The uncle was there, too.

How old was the uncle?

They were all in their 60s at the time. My stepfather had a sister and she and her husband did a lot of traveling overseas because he sold ... whatever. I can't remember all that, Dennis. I wasn't really into these people at that time.

Did you like them?

No.

Why?

Because my step-grandfather was always comin' on at me. Always tryin' to *grab* me. As my stepfather did, also, which is pretty confidential. And my mother never knew that. I had a hard time with him.

Did he ever succeed in going all the way with you?

No, no. Damn close. I was afraid of him.

Did he hurt you?

No, never hurt me. Just *at* me. Anyway, that's actually after this time.

But I went to school in Hubbard, Texas. Had my first girlfriend in Hubbard, Texas.

You were what, 14, 15?

I was 13.

Tell me about your first girlfriend.

I met her in my eighth grade. She was a red-headed girl. The main thing I remember there was never any sexual things going on. But we used to stand behind her house on the porch necking all the time. Just smoochin' up a storm all the time. Her mother used to walk by us every once in awhile and she'd say, "You girls better be careful what you're doin' out there." Never said anything more! I never could quite figure that out.

What was the girl's name?

I don't remember her name. I know there was another girl there that I had the biggest crush in the world [on]. She was one of the cheerleaders. Her name was Barbara Blunt. I have a bible she gave me. She was not gay. Neither was I, then. I was in this little stage of wondering, "What the hell's the *matter* with me?"

What do you mean, "What the hell's the matter with me?" ?

Because I was liking girls more than I was liking boys. I was finding girls attractive.

You were old enough then to know there was a difference in the way you felt?

Absolutely. But like Barbara Jean [Blunt]. I had a big crush on her and I got to know her and her family, and *da-da-da-da-da*. And she, of course, hung out with the elite and I was this little person not really doin' anything, so to speak. She was a big shot in school. She was up there and I was in the eighth grade and I had this big crush on her. Never will forget that. She was a nice person. She was a nice girl. Ended up giving me a bible for my Christmas present one year. I still have it. It's pretty beat up. Not from *reading* [laughs] but from carryin' it around with me all these years.

Did you have the interest in these two girls going on at the same time?

No, actually, not. Barbara was after the first one. After I got more established there in school and stuff.

Did you meet this other girl, this first one, the red head, pretty quickly after you had started school?

Yeah, because she was in my class. She was in my eighth grade.

How long did the two of you stay together?

We weren't *to-gether*. She went out with boys, you know. How long were we neckin'? Probably a month or two. That was all. [laughs] On the back porch. I thought it was kind of weird, frankly.

What do you mean by weird?

Because I thought something was wrong with me. I thought somethin' was wrong with her, too, frankly, because she was neckin' with me. You know, you've got all these horrified things goin' in your head when you're that age. I really was not into anything like that when I was in New York. I don't remember *anything* like that when I was in New York. It was after I got to Texas.

But then you had told me about a girl you knew when you were 5.

That was a little girl on the island. We used to play with each other's My Uncle Harry made us a playhouse and it was a good-sized playhouse. You could go in there and lay down in it and throw a bed in the thing. We used to have a bed in there. We used to go lay down and play with each other's private parts, simple as that. Oh, yeah. We used to masturbate each other all the time.

And you were how old then?

Five, six years old. And we'd have climaxes. Oh, yes. Girls do have climaxes when they're 5 and 6 years old. Yes, they do. When you see children playing with themselves, particularly girls I think girls have climaxes way before boys would. Absolutely. Because boys haven't got that ability at that point. I had discovered that when I was taking care of somebody else's children. I had noticed this little girl—and she was just about that age, 5 or 6—she was playing with herself. I walked by and I could see the covers [on her bed] movin'. I stood there a minute and I watched and I knew exactly what she was doing, and I turned around and I walked away. I walked out of there because I felt that she needed her privacy regardless of her age.

Then I also realized, when thinking back on my own self, that it wasn't that rare for me to [masturbate at that age], or for this other little girl [on the island] to.

Did you stay in touch with your Aunt Polly and Uncle Harry?

I did for awhile. My brother did moreso than I.

At the time that you knew this girl and you were playing together in the playhouse—and you'd only know this in retrospect—did you have a sense of the meaning of what you were doing?

Not really. Just playing. I remember when I was in New York and we had basements. We had a basement underneath our house and there was a cellar that went down into it. They had some coal down in there, some coal stoves or something. I remember myself and another little girl and a couple of girls, we'd be down there with *little boys*. [laughs] It's all experimental, scared to death you're gonna get caught. [laughs]

But I also remember something else, Dennis. I remember a Presbyterian Sunday school teacher there who did his damndest to get me and get the other little girls that would hang out around that church.

In New York?

Yes. My mother finally stopped it.

How did she find out about it?

I told her. I told her.

How far was he able to go with you and the other little girls?

He used to try to go down on us.⁶

How old was he?

Thirties. He could have been 50, 30, 20 ... 'Cause I was 10.

How did you tell your mother something like that?

Because one of her boyfriends also tried [to molest me]. It's strange, but when you're a girl ... My mother's boyfriend would come back to the apartment after she had left to go to work. She followed him [one day]. Somewhere in her head she *knew* that guy was gonna come back to that apartment. I let him in. He said,

"I came back to get a drink of water." Or somethin', I don't remember. And I said, "Sure." I let him in and he started after me and my mother walked in the door. 'Course she screamed and yelled and pounced on 'im and run 'im out of the house. And then turned around and told me not to ever let anybody in there even if I knew 'em. Thinking I did not know what was goin' on. By that time I knew exactly what was going on.

So she didn't tell you, "Don't let him in because men do this kind of thing to girls."

The first time she mentioned sex to me I explained to *her* all about it. [laughs] It's as simple as that, Dennis. I knew all about it.

Had he tried that only once?

Yes! One time. And somehow or other my mother's sixth sense—[she] was on her way to work—flipped her right around and sent her right back to that apartment. It was very strange to me.

So you had that experience under your belt by the time the Presbyterian guy ...

Yeah. That was all in the same general area [of my age]. When I got to be 10 years old I had some sexual problems with guys—young guys, older guys—for some reason. I don't know why. I wasn't that cute when I was 10 years old. But that tenth, eleventh year in there We had an old guy when I was livin' in that apartment with my mother—he used to stand inside of his door and take his thing out, his penis out and shake it at us! Inside of a glass door. And myself and two or three girls'd be up in my apartment—we'd *wave* at 'im and carry on and laugh! [laughs] He'd stand inside that damned door wavin' that *stupid* thing at us—excuse the expression! [laughs]

So, you see, when you're that age, you run into a lot of this. I run into Uncle Billy in Canada. He was my Uncle Harry's ... brother. He might not have even been related. Everybody was Uncle and Aunt on that island. Most of the people were related some way or other. So you just do. You just run into these By the time you hit 10. [laughs] That was my age for it, anyway, moreso than anything I can remember.

So we're back in Hubbard, Texas with the first girlfriend. Would you now call that your first girlfriend in that sense?

I would say so. I would say that would be my first physical introduction without being into the sexual part of it. We used to kind of feel each other, play with each other's boobs. You know, things like that. I was old enough. I was a child no more, now.

How long did it last between you?

Just a couple months.

To what degree were you disturbed about what you understood to be the way you were different?

It bothered me because I used to have dates with boys and I resented very highly when they tried to touch me. Didn't like that too much. It wasn't that I didn't have feelings. I just didn't like it. Just sort of made me scringe up a little bit.

Because it was men?

Possibly so, but I'm not too sure at that time. I don't know how I would have reacted to a really physical relationship at that time. Because I got married not too long after that. I'd go out with boys every once in awhile, but not often. I wasn't a person to go out a lot. Plus the fact I was too young [in Hubbard, Texas] as far as my grandparents were concerned. I only went to school and came home. From town I lived a couple of miles. Used to ride bikes, my brother and I, to get home. So it was mostly school activities. Softball. I was captain of the softball team there. I was very much into sports and that was my main focus. Anything else just sort of happened along. My little crushes on girls—and I used to have crushes on different girls.

But boys—there was never that same sense?

I never had a crush on a boy.

But you went out with them ... why?

Once in a while. Just so I could go different places. Like people would go together, you know. Two or three couples are going someplace. And somebody would ask me and I'd just go out with everybody else. It wasn't a "Let's go out and hide in the reeds"-type thing. "Let's go on a picnic" or "Let's go horseback riding." We all had horses. I had a horse. An American saddle pony. A very nice horse. Bay.

What's the land like around Hubbard?

Dry. Pretty desolate. Quite flat. Hubbard, Texas is a small town, pretty small, about 15,000 or so. Or less. Hubbard, Texas was wiped out a number of years ago [when] a tornado went down the main street. Pretty well did a number on it. I saw it in the paper accidentally. Closest big town to it is Waco.

The cheerleader that you had the crush on. Were you close at all?

We weren't at all. Except to say hello. And good-bye. And I'd run into her at football games. I idolized this woman from afar! [laughs] She went out with the big quarterback of the football team.

You never felt safe enough to tell her how you felt?

I absolutely wouldn't tell anybody. Anybody would think you were a *queer*.

Which you were, of course.

Which I *was*, but I didn't know it. [laughs] I didn't even know what the word meant. That wasn't even around Hubbard, Texas. If there was anybody that was a gay or lesbian or whatever Male, female, whatever, nobody ever knew it.

That's what I find curious. You were what you were, but nobody ever talked about it. In spite of it's not being a subject of conversation, you had a deep-seated dread

Concern.

Concern. *That's what I find strange, because if it's not talked about one way or the other ...*

It was never heard of.

And never heard of. Yet still you were very concerned with what you felt. So that concern came from somewhere, from something.

Well, because the boys were out there kissing the girls and I wanted to kiss the girls, too. *That would be a concern!* [laughs] To a 13-year-old, or a 12-year-old.

Just because it was being different.

It was different. It was entirely not a social thing, that's for sure. I never *heard* of gay or lesbian when I was that age. Nowadays you go out there and talk to a 12-year-old, *they* know what it is. I never heard of anything like that. Not at all, I didn't hear of anything like that until after I was in the service. Did I hear of anything like that when I was in high school? Not at all. And I went to high school in California.

After the cheerleader, who was next?

There wasn't anybody. Oh, I take it back! There *was* another gal and it was my husband's sister. She used to play the piano and sing like an angel. Her two sisters were my age and she was a year younger. Her two sisters and I hung out a lot together. She and I hung out a little bit together. But she was gorgeous, she was a very pretty girl and I got a crush on her. But I never did anything about that except the little smoochy things. It was through her I met my husband.

How old were you then?

Fifteen.

And you met him.

Lewis Alton White. And only one in town in Hallibard, Texas. And I married about three weeks later, four weeks later.

You met 'im when you were only 15?

Yes. He was in the navy.

How old was he then?

He was 21, 20, right around there. You know, I really don't remember, Dennis, how old Lewis was. He could have been even 19. I just don't know.

That's quite a difference in age. It's only eight years, more or less, but the difference between 15 and 21 is great.

Yes, it is.

How did you meet him?

He was home. He had to be 20 or 21 because he got out of the service right after I met him. Or he was in the process of getting out at that time. He had to be in there at least three years, so he could have been around 20, 21. He was home and I was over there [with his sister].

Who made the first move?

He did. He asked me out. And I went out with him.

Why?

Because he was my best girlfriend's brother. The three of us—his two sisters and himself and I, we all [four] went out together and [the sisters] had two guys that they went out with.

Where'd you go?

We went to the one and only movie house in Hubbard, Texas. And I married him about three weeks later, four weeks later.

That's fast.

To get away from my stepfather. He was the reason. It had nothin' to do with anything else. Just to get away from my stepfather. [My parents] were back then and he and Mother were stayin' at my step-grandparents'.

Tell me some more detail about how far was your stepfather going with you. Was it a constant thing? Or a time-to-time thing?

Oh, he'd come up behind me and put his hands on my boobs and rub up his thing against my back end at the sink, you know. Things like that. Walk by and pat my ass. You know, just *stuff*. Anyway, I was very much afraid of him. He was a big drinker, a very big drinker.

Did he go at you when he was drunk?

It didn't matter. [He came at me] most of the time when he was drinking because that would give him the incentive, the initiative, the *guts*, whatever it was. And then another thing. My mother was sending my brother to his father and they were coming back to California. [My mother and stepfather] had come back to Hubbard, Texas and she was planning on sending my brother off to his father, which she did. She had also considered putting me in some sort of a home somewhere because my grandparents didn't want to take care of kids anymore.

A home?

I don't know what kind, Dennis. Something. Somewhere.

It just sounds like your mother didn't particularly want you around.

At that time, no. At that time in her life, Dennis It was a whole different time in *her* life, too. I can look back and see that. *He* didn't want us around.

And she wanted him.

And she wanted him. Simple as that. That's the way that worked.

Did you understand that then?

'Course not.

Anyway, I'm really trying to get this together in my head. My brother was sent to his father. Dad was living in [New] Jersey at that time. And I married Lewis. And they were at the wedding. My mother and stepfather. We interrupted a church service to get married. We made a phone call to a church. It was a Christian Science church. I didn't know what Christian Science was. [They said], "OK, come on over. We'll marry ya today." So I got married there with my mother and my stepfather standing up.

You were 15?

Yeah.

Was that legal?

Absolutely. In Texas. [laughs] Everything is legal in Texas!

Did you understand what you were getting into with marriage?

What do you understand? Lewis married me for one reason and he *told* me that. He couldn't get in my pants. He come out flat and told me that. That's true. I married him to get away from my stepfather, and he [Lewis] was the brother of three of my good friends. Which was fine. I was marrying into a family I knew.

It sounds like it was an amicable thing, anyway.

Right. And we were gonna stay with his mom and dad there, and three girls, for awhile, till we got our own place. And, of course, I couldn't stand being married very long.

That's what I was going to ask. A little while ago you said that you went out with boys [but] you hated to be touched [by them]. But then here you were in a physical relationship with a guy. How did you handle the first time that he wanted to have sex with you?

He wasn't the first man I'd had sex with.

Oh, he wasn't? Back up a little bit and tell me about that.

I was raped by a couple of sailors in Prospect Park when I was 11.

Eleven?

That was in New York. Well, I was just playin' out there and it was late. They didn't have curfews and those things in those days. And it was during the war and there was a lot of GI guys and sailor guys around. I was out roller skatin' and stuff and I got grabbed. That's all.

Two of them?

Two of 'em.

Did you ever tell your mother about that?

No.

Or go to a doctor or anything?

No. It just happened. Scared the living hell out of me, but I knew what was goin' on. That's really strange, too. When I was in Canada, when I went back on vacation This has nothing to do with [the rape]—my aunt had a friend there at the house that was pregnant. Now, I was 11 or 12 when I went back. Anyway, the girl's name was Lucy and Lucy came to visit my Aunt Polly and my brother and I were there visiting. And I said to Lucy, "God, Lucy, you're pregnant, aren't you?" In that order. And I got sent to my room by Aunt Polly.

Because you said the word?

Yeah! I said the word *pregnant*. [laughs] I could have gone into a description of how she got that way, but I didn't quite dare. That's how rigid they were in Canada.

And you had already by that time been raped by the sailors.

Yeah, so what's the big deal? What else is that thing good for? Get her pregnant, right? [laughs] But anyway.

Well, then, Lewis knew then, or found out that you weren't a virgin.

Oh, absolutely.

Did you tell him before or did he find it out?

No, and he was very ticked. I just told him I lost it riding horseback. I told him, I said, "Lewis, I ride the rodeos. You know that. I ride all the time."

And he was upset?

Oh, yeah.

Why?

Because he thought I should be a virgin when I was that age. Which he had a right to *think*. Girls weren't quite as promiscuous at that time as they are now. Or I should say they weren't as *openly* promiscuous as they are now! [laughs] Because they sure as the devil were not *not* doing things. But I think they were a little more afraid [then] than they are now. Now they got the pills and all this different stuff for birth control. And I never saw or heard of any girl when I was in Hubbard, Texas for that three years or so that was pregnant in high school or anything like that.

Did the two of you ever sit down and discuss what you expected from one another in this marriage?

No. It was more or less kind of a *game*. It was kind of a kid game. To me. He was a means to an end for me and we never talked as adults because I *wasn't* one to begin with. And neither was he, actually. It's really strange. After Lewis and I got a divorce, many years later, I got a letter from him when I was in the service. He wanted to re-marry. Which is really strange. I don't even know how he found me. He said, "I grew up. Things are different now." But it was never a matter of love for either one of us, though, see? That was the problem. He wasn't in love with me.

Did he know he wasn't in love with you?

I don't know if he knew or not. It wasn't love spoken between us. This I do know. This I do know. It just wasn't that.

What was it, then?

I don't know. He decided he wanted to marry me because he couldn't have me without it. And he was very close with his sisters and so was I. And I think it was just the thing for him to do. And I think his mother and his father wanted him to marry me because they liked me real well. Texas back then was a different place than it is now. People [we]re more subject to the parents. It was a *lot* different than it is now. [I'm] not sayin' they set up their marriages or anything like that, but they were influenced more, I think.

Socially stricter.

Socially stricter, yeah. I would say so.

How long did the two of you stay married?

I got married in June—believe it or not—and I got divorced in October the same year. I was divorced October the 24th, 1946.

In those very brief months, what kind of a life did the two of you have?

We drank a lot of beer. Ran into Waco a lot. Partied with his friends, his older friends. He didn't work at that time because he had been in the service and had just got out of the service. He run around with people his age. I ran around with the people he ran around with, simple as that.

Where did you live?

With his Mom. His mother and his dad. [And his] three sisters.

Did he have an income from the service?

Well, he was paid off by the service and he had money that he had saved from the service. And he was in the process of looking for a job *maybe*. Because he didn't really want to find a job yet. When I knew 'im he wasn't workin', and whatever he did I didn't know. You know. And I think that there wouldn't have been a skilled type of thing with Lewis. I think what it would have been, he would have went to work in the mill—there was a cotton gin there. Or he'd move to Waco and look for work there.

Was there any element of romance in your relationship?

No, I don't think so. I don't remember any element of romance at all. I remember I was very cold. It wasn't his fault that I was cold, but I was really very cold.

Sexually?

Yes. And he used to come in every once in awhile He had a good friend, a woman friend and a man friend—they were together. And [Lewis] used to come in with lipstick all over his face all the time and say, "Well, if you don't want me maybe *she'd* like to have me." You know. Things like that. He would say that to me when he'd come in with lipstick smeared all over his mouth. Big grin on his face, you know.

Like kids.

Like kids. That's exactly correct. Like kids. My stepfather and mother left and I wanted a divorce [from Lewis].

Where did they go?

They came back to California.

In the meantime your gay nature ...

It was [Lewis'] sister I had the crush on at this time. Remember that. His younger sister.

Could that have been an element in your decision to marry him?

Well, I was marryin' the family and they were the best friends I had then. And when Lewis decided to ask me to marry 'im, I figured, "Good. This is a chance for me to get out." I got away from my stepfather. I got away from the fact my mother was looking for someplace to put me. And she was delighted [when I married]. So was my step father.

What about the concept of having children? Did this cross your mind at that time?

Never thought about it. At that time I never thought about it. I wouldn't let [Lewis] do anything to me that I could get pregnant with.

You didn't have sex?

We had sex, but I made 'im pull it out everytime or wear a rubber. It generally was a rubber. I wouldn't let 'im near me without it because I didn't trust 'im.

Did he ever talk about wanting children?

No. That wasn't discussed at all with him. He was too young to want children himself. That wasn't an issue.

What was it, then, that drove you to ask for the divorce? I presume you asked for it.

Yes. We didn't love each other, that was obvious. I told 'im I wanted a divorce and I told 'im the reason I married 'im was to get away form my stepfather.

How did he take that?

Very angry. The same way some one would feel [when told], "I married you just to get in your pants." Except I didn't care. *He* cared.

He didn't see the irony in that?

No, 'course not. That's what I told him. I told 'im I wanted away from him and he said, "That's fine." He completely agreed. He said, "Maybe I'll find a *woman* next time." That's exactly what he said. I remember that.

And so I got a divorce in Hillsboro, Texas. Fact, his mother went with me. She drove because I didn't have a car or nothing'.

How did she feel? If you married him you were marrying the family, you divorced him you were divorcing the family.

I know, but she understood. She knew that we didn't love each other. She knew it wasn't going to work because we fought and screamed and hollered at each other. And she's living there. It wasn't just, "Hi, Honey, good-bye. I'm gettin' a divorce." We had some pretty good battles.

Did he ever strike you?

No.

Did you ever strike him?

No. Threw things. Never hit 'im, no.

So you were divorced at 15.

I was divorced and I actually stayed [with Lewis' family] for about, oh, a few weeks till I got a job. I had to get a job.

In Hubbard?

Um, hm. Because I was by myself then.

What did you do?

I got a job at the restaurant there washing dishes. They paid \$10 a week and gave me my meals. And I was goin' to school. That was another issue with Lewis and I. He wanted me to quit school and I wouldn't do it.

You were going to high school all through this?

Absolutely. I wouldn't quit school.

So I was workin' in the restaurant. I'd go in the morning early and wash dishes, go back at lunch time and wash the dishes and then go back in the evening. And they paid me \$10 a week. And I stayed [with Lewis' family] until I got enough money to get a room of my own, which I got up in an attic in a woman's house. That [room] was \$4 a week. [laughs] True story! I don't remember that lady's name. But I went out lookin' for a room to get out of Lewis' folks' house and this old gal rented me her attic up there. I hung my clothes up on the attic bars.

Was the attic finished?

Well, it was just an attic. I swept it out, she put a bed up there. It had rafters in it. Four bucks.

Hot!

Well, didn't matter. When you're young, didn't matter. My whole life was involved with school, anyway, just about.

Were you involved with any other men after Lewis?

No. I wasn't involved with any other men at all there. Or women, for that matter. I was having a hard enough time working and trying to get through school.

Did you go on through school?

I finished high school in California.

How did you get, then, from Texas to California?

Well, I stayed in Texas through my tenth grade, OK? Let's see. [pauses] After Lewis and I got our divorce, then I went to work in the restaurant washing dishes. I did that for a couple of months. Then I got promoted to waitress until some guy pinched my tit and I spilled a bowl of soup in his lap. And they demoted me back to dishwasher. And then some woman who was principal of the grade school there offered me a job in her home. I took care of her house and cleaned and stuff. In the meantime I went to my school. And then it seems that the law in Hubbard, Texas and my mother got together somehow or other and the law had me sent to California because I was a minor livin' by myself. I wasn't allowed to do that.

You could be married ...

But I couldn't live by myself. I was practically a juvenile delinquent.

Anyway, I sold my horse. I had to sell my horse. And went to Wilmington, California.

Where is Wilmington?

Near San Pedro. Very close to San Pedro, sittin' right there next door to each other. Went to school at Banning High School there in my eleventh year.

Were you living with your parents?

I was living with my mother and my stepfather in a trailer at that point. My stepfather was very much into heavy drinking, very much into trying to sell me off to his friends.

Sell you off?

Yeah. He used to try to sell me off to his friends. Now I was an old married woman, so he figured that would be a real easy thing, so to speak. But it wasn't. I used to hide under the trailer next door. Used to take off and sit in the theater and drink a lot of booze.

How did you get booze?

Through friends of mine who could buy booze. It was no problem. I had a friend named Velma and she was an usherette at the Granada Theatre in Wilmington and she'd let me in, kind of watch over me as I used to get drunker'n a lord. Sit there and drink whiskey. *[laughs]*

So I stayed there through my eleventh year, with a lot of help from some of my friends.

Did your stepfather ...

Oh, always. He was always after me. I used to go out with my mother to clean. She used to clean showers and stuff in different [trailer] courts there, and bathrooms. And I used to go with her. But he used to come home very, very drunk. *Very* drunk. And I'd just get out and leave. Now I was not as young as I used to be. And I'd just take off, just leave. And if he was home at night and she was gone doin' somethin', then I'd just not come home. I'd stay with Velma.

Anyway, I got through my eleventh year there. I had a crush on Velma. She was the only one. She was a red head, worked on the school magazine, which I, of course, went to work on 'cause she was there.

You have a thing for red heads!

I had a thing for red heads, it seems, yeah. *[laughs]* Later on it wasn't.

But we were just friends. There was nothing that went on physically between us. And there was nothing that I had anything to do with anybody physically at all during that time.

Had that aspect of your nature developed at all?

It hadn't developed anywhere after I left Texas, as far as I was concerned. I had other things I was involved with and I had crushes on girls, but I didn't pursue them. Again, it wasn't anything I'd ever *heard* of. Nobody ever heard of it. I had no girls pursuing *me*. [laughs] You know what I'm sayin'? I still had never heard of the word *queer*. I still had never heard of the word *gay* or *lesbian*. I didn't think about anything going on inside me although I still had *crushes*. I knew this was not right. I knew I was wrong in feeling this way. *Absolutely* wrong. I thought there was something wrong with me inside.

Did you think you were the only one?

In the *whole world!* Absolutely. Because nobody else was around me like that that I knew of.

Anyway, I finished my eleventh year [of school] there and then I left my mother and stepfather's trailer and got a job with Miriam Serfass which was the biggest turning point in my life.

Miriam Serfass?

A lady I went to work for in LA, Los Angeles.

What did she do?

She had two children and a husband.

Well, then, you were like a nanny?

Yeah. What happened was, I finally told the lady that lived next door to my mother about what was going on with my stepfather and why I was hiding under her trailer. She'd caught me at it. I talked to her about it. I told her I had to

get out of there and find work. I was readin' the paper and I saw an advertisement and it was At the time Baldwin Hills is where Miriam lived and that was a *very* exclusive place at that time. Dorsey High was a very exclusive school, too, at that time, a very nice school. At the time there were signs along Santa Monica Beach [which read], "No Niggers Allowed." You know, just as simple as that. And there weren't any Black people and what there were, were very few at Dorsey High at that time.

But anyway, I answered Miriam Serfass's advertisement. And she was looking for somebody to live in, take care of the children, the house. Just a regular live-in person. And a high school person. And so I went and I interviewed with her. I believe the lady that was living next door [to my mother and stepfather] was named Myrna or Marla, something like that, and I'm really not positive. But anyway, I went and I talked to Miriam and she interviewed with me and then she talked to this other lady [Myrna or Marla] and she hired me. So I went back home and just packed my stuff up and I left.

Was Miriam aware of the situation you were leaving?

I think maybe that her conversation—though she never told me—with Marla I think she was probably advised of it, though she never discussed with me the conversation she had with Marla at all. But she hired me [at] seven dollars a week, room and board, and that was pretty good, lemme tell ya. That was an allowance of seven a week. And my duties were to watch the kids when [Mr. and Mrs. Serfass] went out. George was workin' with an air conditioning place and eventually got his own business. Miriam was at home. She was not out working at that particular time, so she took care of her own kids during the day. I just was there to take care of 'em when they were not there or if they wanted to go somewhere. Help clean house, things like that. And go to school. So it wasn't exactly heavy-duty stuff. [Miriam] was quite young, in her twenties, and George Middle twenties, somewhere in there. I think she was maybe eight or nine years older than me, latter twenties. Very fun-loving people. I was allowed to have friends over anytime I wanted as long as it didn't interfere with anything [Mr. and Mrs. Serfass] did. Their favorite drink was a mint julep which they wouldn't allow me to have. I did have my own room, and I had things really very, very nice. She bought clothes for me. She was also pregnant, which is one of the other reasons she wanted a live-in person. I don't know if she was

pregnant at that particular time, though, Dennis. I think she might've gotten pregnant right after [I arrived], very shortly after. I just don't [remember]. But she taught me how to drive. They had their car and then they had an old Model T that was a real relic that was their pride and joy. But then they had their regular car. And since I graduated in June of '49, th[is all] had to be somewhere in that area, latter part of '48, '49. Anyway, that was my duties there.

You said it was turning point in your life.

It was extremely A *very* big turning point because these people are *still* in my life. George is dead. Miriam I saw this past year. Miriam, while I was in the service, would send me, all through it, cookies and cards. I still get cards and letters from her. I just got one not too long ago.

When I went to live with her I was drinking a good 60% of my life away. I was runnin' around constantly at night. I was playing around with bennies⁷ and different little things. Not really drugs. But a lot of smokin'. A lot of garbage. Stayin' out late. I wasn't into prostitution or sex stuff, nothing like that. It was just a lot of *drinking*. Mostly drinking. [Miriam] and her husband sort of took me right under their wing. Miriam Serfass and George changed my life around because they had the ability within themselves to understand a lot of things. You could talk to them. She is not a woman I ever was in love with or ever had a crush on, though I loved her dearly.

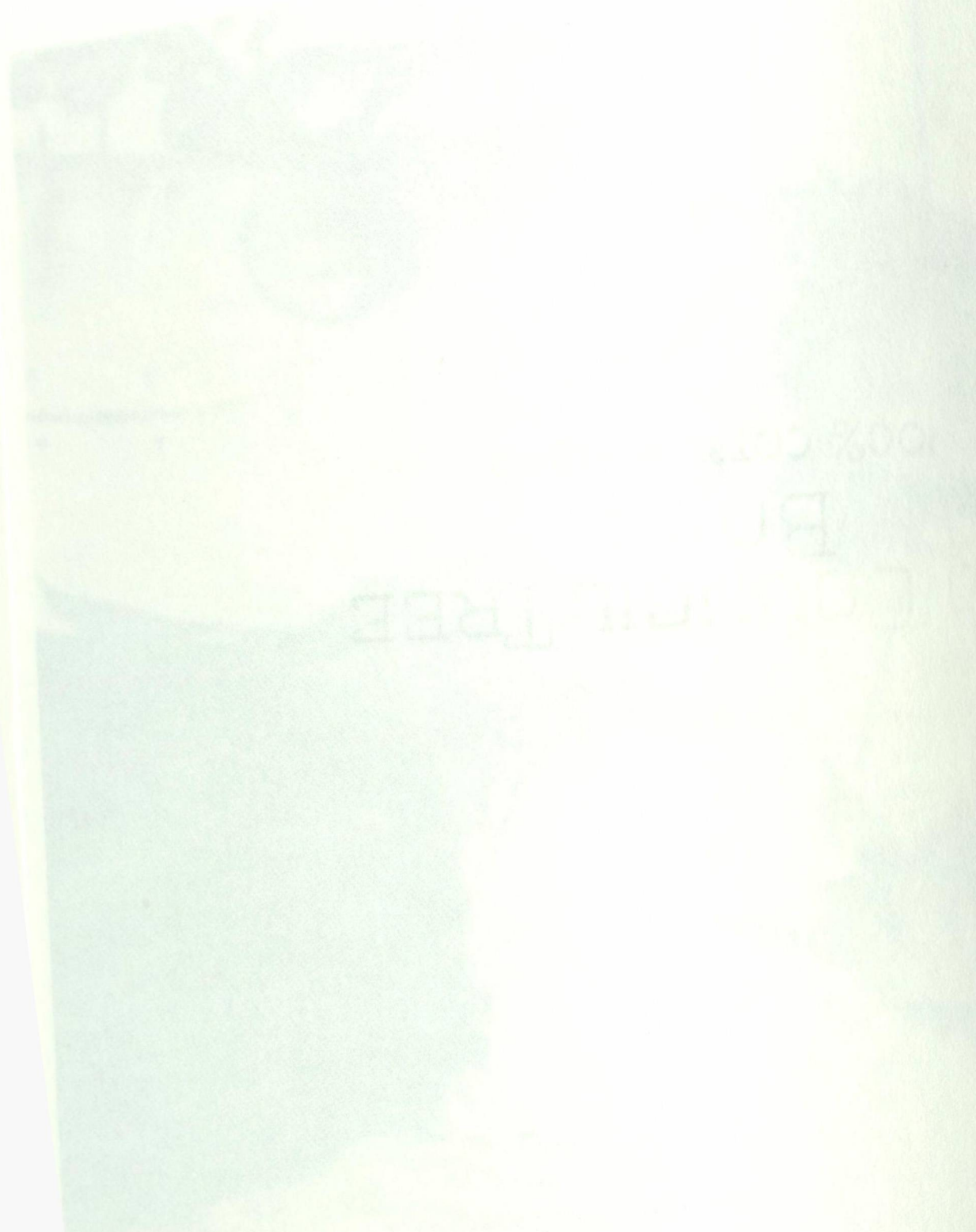
It sounds like they were actually your family.

They were my family, but they just started late. [*laughs*] They didn't start till I was 16 or 17, in there. My last year of school. But throughout all the years she supported me. Right up to this day, she still supports me. I have a letter that says, "If you ever need anything, I'm still here." Which I have also sent to her. She at one time, a few years back, said to me, wrote me a letter that she wondered if I'd go back to work for her and take care of her if she ever really became ill. And I said I would never go back to work for her, but I'd always take care of her if she ever became ill. There's a difference. [*laughs*]

But that's my [last] high school year.

Then you only stayed with them that short time?





l-r: Miriam Serfass, Dorothy Frassmann, ca. 1948-49

[photo courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]

I lived with them just through my twelfth year of school.

And then at that point?

What did I do? Well, at that point I decided I wanted to go in the service. Miriam wanted me to go to college. I was too independent to let anybody put me through college, which is what she and George offered to do and was probably one of the biggest mistakes in my life, I believe. But I didn't want to do that. I wanted to go into the service, so that's what I did.

Why?

Because I wanted to be independent. And to me I'd managed to graduate high school, and by manage it I mean *that*. I had to struggle very hard to get through high school, to finish it. I wasn't any great student. I was the ol' C student. D student. A few B's student. A's in things like athletic stuff. But I didn't want to continue on with school. I wanted to do something that I could make a livin' at without having to go out there and look for a job. And I figured the easiest and the best way—and I *was* attracted to the military—was to go in the army. That's what I wanted to do.

What was it about the military life that attracted you?

I think the fact that it was a regimented thing and I felt inside of myself I really wanted that. I wanted that really bad. Miriam and George had started me on a path that, rather than go down the path of the drinking and this and that, they sort of stuck my nose on the straight and narrow and said, "You stay there or you're fired." And it really got down to that at different times. You know, "You gotta straightin' up, Girl. These are my *kids* you're takin' care of." It wasn't like I turned into an angel the minute I hit their house. I *didn't* turn into an angel. But I had different options and different choices to make that were very difficult. And it was either lose them or lose myself [as I was]. If I lost 'em I *would* have lost myself. Service was always an attraction for me. The military. I like the sound of the word: *mil-i-tar-y*. You know. Simple as that. My father was in the military, my brother was in the service. Not at that time. My stepfather was in the Merchant

Marines, but that wouldn't have attracted me, anyway. That wasn't the reason for the attraction, but down the line my family has been pretty much in the military, right down to my nephews and stuff. I thought it was a good thing to do. The WACs [Womens Army Corps] hadn't been around that long.

That's the branch you went into?

Was the WACs, yeah. I think they more or less materialized out of World War II, if I'm not mistaken, and that is only because they needed women in the service to free the men to go over and get killed. Simple as that.

How did you approach joining the service, then?

Well, first thing I had to do is My mother and my stepfather had moved to Texas. They had left California and gone to Texas.

Again.

Again. And I had to have their permission [to join the service] because I had not reached 18 at that particular time. So I had to get their permission, which I did. I went home and they signed papers for it. And I actually enlisted in Waco, Texas. And I stayed there for a couple, three weeks till they shipped everybody off to Fort Lee, Virginia, where basic [training] was. That's where I *really* found my girlfriends! [laughs] Yeah, I think that's why I wanted to go into the service.

But you didn't realize that at first.

Didn't realize it at all. I didn't know. But it just seemed to me that that was a good place for me to go to. I had my first *real* girlfriend in the service.

First of all, I had a crush on my cadre, the cadre being the one that trains you. Which, of course, I got nowhere with. You don't mess with your cadre. The cadre can mess with *you* if they want, but you don't mess with them.

In fact, that brings in line a little story. We had one of our cadre—they were all acting cadre. They wore bands on their arm with sergeant stripes on them. They weren't actually sergeants. They were *acting* sergeants. And I had a friend there, her name was Ann Gluck. She was a very innocent little girl and I was very

protective of her because she was [innocent]. She was a little church member, little church-goer, one of these little girls that cried every night 'cause she was away from home. And we became friends. Not *sexual* friends, not *gay* friends, but friends. And I remember that when I was in basic for a couple of weeks and I heard her kept sayin', "No! No!" And her bunk was just across ... We were in this big barrack thing and her bunk was about two doors down from mine and across the way, so to speak. And Cline, who was one of our cadres, was trying to crawl into bed with her. And I got up out of bed and I hauled Cline off of her and I threw her down on the floor. The next day I told Harris about it, which was our other cadre member. Sergeant Harris told me, "Don't you ever mention this to anybody." And I said, "I won't. But I'm mentioning it you. You tell her to keep her ass away from that kid." Of course, now, I was 18 at this point. And I didn't know a whole heck of a lot myself. But I told her to keep away from that kid. And, of course, after that I got all the dirty details. There wasn't a dirty detail I didn't get after that. But [Cline] did not try that again. Did not attempt to because I had told Harris I would go to a higher officer if it was necessary.

After you arrived at Fort Lee and you were settling in to the routine and the life, up until that point your gay nature had just sort of lain dormant.

Yes, because I wasn't aware there were gay people around.

So at what point then did you suddenly realize that you weren't the only one?

Well, I became attracted to a girl who was actually in another platoon. We had met each other more or less through sports because we played sports kind of against each other, and different things. And I met her and we were kind of attracted to each other so we'd sneak off and try to get together. Which we couldn't, hardly. There wasn't a place that you could get to to get together, not for people that were just in the service. There was just no way you could. You gotta be back in your barracks at a certain time, up and off at a certain time. Your private time was limited to your own barracks just about. And you're not allowed to go out to a movie. You can't go anywhere, you can't do anything. Not as long as you're in eight weeks of basic training. That's what you're there for. But we managed to sneak off and kiss each other and we'd write each other

letters, you know, go through that sort of routine. This was the first time I had full-blown [gay] feelings and full-blown cooperation.

And it was mutual?

And it was mutual, yeah. And then I awakened to the fact that it was all around me. The reason that I awakened to this fact was very simple. A lot of the girls themselves around me in the barracks were having little crushes on each other. In my own personal barracks. I could tell that. And then I was also aware of what was going on when Cline was jumping up top of little Ann Gluck. I was aware of that. I knew what was going on *there* before I ever even met this other girl and had this little crush on her. But I knew exactly what was happening.

Was all of this a great revelation to you?

Yes! Because here I am surrounded by *me!* That's really the best way I can put it. Girls are gigglin' and havin' a good time in the shower. And it's a community shower. And I was seein' all this little innuendoes goin' on and things people are kind of sayin' to each other behind everybody else's back, thinking nobody else hears it or knows it. All of a sudden, like I say, it was an awakening for me.

Was it titillating and exciting?

Very, *very* titillating and exciting for me! 'Cause all of a sudden I'm beginning to feel sexual now. I want to know what to do. I want to know what's goin' on here, you know. But I've a little time yet before I find out. And I don't find out in basic. I do find out that there are other [gay] people. And while I was in basic they had what they called a bitch box there. This is nothing to do with the sexual end of it, but it has to do with going onward. They have what is known there as Leadership School. It's a *chosen* school. They choose so many people out of different companies to go to the school. Like so many out of my company was chosen and I was one of 'em. I was a 21st class in Leadership School at Fort Lee, Virginia. And there were seventeen of us that were chosen and we are chosen through different leadership qualities we showed during the course of our basic training. Now, I'm not too sure what leadership qualities I showed, frankly. Except one time there was thieving going on and we were confined to our

particular barracks. There were four barracks in the platoon. And I organized a little band and [we] went from one barrack to the next and played music and everybody sang. Different things I got 'em doin' because we weren't allowed, except for special things like that, to leave the barracks. *Quarantine* was the word. Because somebody was stealing and they were trying to find out who it was and what was going on. And on different occasions I started different things to do. I didn't volunteer for very much, but what was happening was—of course, you did not know this at the time, you had no idea this was going on—if they thought that you might qualify to go to leadership school, your name all of a sudden would come over the bitch box. "Frassmann, report for KP." Or, "You're gonna clean out Barracks No. 19." Or, "Frassmann, police the company." All of a sudden you find yourself being volunteered to do a lot of things.

The bitch box was a speaker?

A speaker. Yes, it's a speaker. And you were announced on that speaker to go places, to do things on the spur of the moment. "Frassmann, in full dress, be at the Company Commander. She wants to see you right away." And you've got five minutes. In five minutes you've got to be spic 'n' span, white gloves in your hands, and out the door and in her office.

It's like a subtle part of the training.

It's a subtle part of the training, that's exactly what it is. The way you're notified that you are going to Leadership School You're aware of it off in the distance somewhere. But as a basic trainee you're not saying, "Oh, I'd love to go to Leadership School. I'd love to go to some other school, to Military Intelligence School." After you finish basic. Because most of the people are headed to clerical schools or to clerical work or something on that order. Anyway, they post the assignments when you graduate, they post 'em on a bulletin board for your company and they have on there where you are assigned to. And I was assigned with sixteen other gals to Leadership School there at Fort Lee. That was a very great experience for me as far as training was concerned and discipline is concerned. When you were in Leadership School they would have where you had to teach classes, you had to teach basic instruction to other basic recruits. And the way they would do it would be you'd get your little announcement

through the speaker over at Leadership School: "Frassmann, report to Company C, *da-da-da-da-da*. On the double!" So you're out the door on the double and you're running because you're gonna teach class. *On the way there* some cadre member hands you a lesson plan. By the time you hit that barracks or that classroom or wherever it's gonna be held at—which could be a barracks—you have to know the lesson plan and be able to instruct it. So you've got probably a minute and a half, two minutes to read the thing on the run and instruct it when you get there. And at the back of the room there is at least a sergeant and another cadre member grading you. And you have four weeks of this type of instruction and four weeks of learning instruction, so you spend eight weeks, actually, in Leadership School also.

Is that in addition to basic training?

That's in addition to basic training.

Anyway, while you're there you have no way in the world of having any kind of love affair, and anybody you've had a crush on is off somewhere else. They've already been transferred out. So now you're starting from scratch and there's no way in the world you're going to have time [for love]. Leadership School gives you First of all, you have seven shirts. This'll give you an example. You have to have six hangin' at all times and one on your back. OK? Your shoes and your place has got to sparkle. Every morning you have a white glove inspection. Every morning before you leave you have a white glove inspection. That means the springs in your *bed* have got to be checked with a white glove, make sure they're clean. And this is true. This is the way they do it. I've seen 'em jump up to try to touch the top of vents, because you've got heater vents running. Or get up on a chair, take their glove and run over the top of these vents and make sure there was no dust or dirt. *Yes!* It's a tough one. [laughs]

Anyway, I graduated and then I went to Fort Sam Houston.

And where was Fort Sam Houston?

San Antonio, Texas. Back to Texas! Seems like Texas was my place to be.

That's where I met Rosemarie Kondra. She was my first physical relationship. She was at Medical Field Service School. And I was at Fort Sam. Now, they're all basically the same place. Fort Sam itself where I was stationed and working at has got like a quadrangle thing and real swans are in there and peacocks and there was an old deer called Smokie that used to GI the place of all the cigarette butts. And you worked out of there. I was working for Air Transportation. And [Rosemarie] was in Medical Field Service School which is a school. And I was playin' on a lot of sports. I always played basketball and softball and volleyball. The whole works. And I met her at one of the games. And we got together and this is where I had my first [gay] physical experience. Now I was a permanent party, now I could leave the place. There was only one problem—she was a student. [laughs] She could come down on a weekend and I could take her away on a weekend because she didn't have a bed check on weekends. But during the week, of course [she had bed check]. So I spent the first time with her in a motel.

How did you meet her to begin with?

At a softball game. She was one of the gals watching us at one of the softball games. I played softball. She approached me. She just come over to me and started talkin' about softball, said she really loved watching softball. You know how your eyes meet and you start getting this kind of sheepish grin on your face. She says, "I'm over in Medical Field Service School. Why don't you come and see me?"

I said, "How can I if you're a student over there?"

She says, "No, you can come over. Come on over to the barracks after." And she told me where she was at. "You can come over there and visit." But you can't spend the night and you can't do anything. You can go over to visit after four-thirty, five o'clock. I don't remember exactly but it was after that, during the evening, you could visit. So I started going over there, started hanging out over there seeing her. But she had a ten o'clock bed check. I didn't have bed check.

It seems to me at that time and in that place you didn't have a sense of fear about what you were.

She didn't have a sense of fear. I did. I had never spent the night with a girl before. So I didn't know what to do.

I meant a sense of fear that people were going to see you and know what you were up to and do something [to stop] it.

In the service—absolutely. They constantly ran investigations in the service.

Were you ever privy to one of these investigations?

Twice.

Before or after you met Rosemarie?

During the period of time, but mostly a little bit after.

What kind of investigations?

The investigation consists of really a kind of like a witch hunt. They pit friends against friends. The way it works is OK, I'm in sports, Dennis. I'm very high in sports, so I played all the sports. The sporting world in the service or in civilian life, so to speak, is very much filled with gay people. A lot of your women that are in sports are gay. And the same in the service. Not all, but quite a few. And the people that are involved with sports are the ones that are targeted pretty much by military intelligence. First of all, at that particular time in life, they wanted to kick anybody out of the service that's gay, which means they're gonna kick out a lot of people. OK? So they go on a witch hunt and they do it periodically. Every few months they come up questioning people. They actually have taken people out in the streets in cars and drive around and say, "Is this where you spent the night? Or can you take us there?" Because they threaten you. They threaten you with dishonorable discharge. They threaten you with anything they can to get you to say something against somebody else. It doesn't matter if they know that you're with somebody or not. It doesn't matter. Or if they know somebody is gay. If you have anything to do with sports, they're gonna target you. And I've had two lie detector tests. And I have had a friend of mine that was taken over to my mother's place to see if she [had been] in bed with me at my mother's place, which was a one-night stand I *did* have at my

mother's place. This [woman] was trying to save her [own] butt and was telling on me and got me involved. It's as simple as that.

Were you ever taken out and questioned about other people?

No, not outside. But inside.

I remember that I was questioned pertaining to a very good friend of mine who *wasn't* gay—which really frustrated me. Dodie Kunzleman. She was not gay but we were very close. We run around a lot together. She was a photographer in Special Services. And they wanted to spot her out because of me. So they were trying to prove she was gay because they knew darn well I was. They knew it because of my associations, they knew it because other people had gone before them and said so. They knew it because [Dodie and I] went out almost everywhere together. Not everywhere, but almost everywhere. When I was on my weekend binges she was off somewhere else, you know. But we still went out a lot of places together. And she was always there with the softball teams photographing stuff for the army paper or just for her own special pictures. So they tried to get me with her. Like their questioning was they'd come on quite easily: "You know Doris Kunzleman?"

I'd say, "Yes."

"Where did you have sex with Doris Kunzleman?" It wasn't *did* you have, it was always *where* did you have. This type of questioning that they put you through. And then they turn around ...

And they said, "See? You were *lying* there when you said you didn't have sex with her." Well, I *didn't* have sex with her, Dennis. It was like asking about my own mother. My friend. My heart went that [*motions a violent heart beat*] because I wasn't expecting it. Particularly against somebody that wasn't gay. Had it been somebody that *was* And I told 'em that.

"You're asking me about my best friend who's not gay." Well, I didn't even use the word *gay* then.

What word did you use?

I think the first time I run into the word *gay* was after I come to California [after the service]. I don't think the word *gay* was used at that time at all. There was a *fem*, there was a *fluff*, there was *queer*, whatever. I don't remember even

hearing the word *lesbian* for a long time. There probably was but I'm not bringing it up into my head.

In the interrogations, what word did they use?

Queer. That good word. That's what they used.

How did you answer a question like that about Doris?

When they were at me over Doris? I answered truthfully, because she *wasn't*.

And did they believe you?

No. The lie detector didn't believe me. The machine itself didn't believe me because my *concerns* were so. I was so concerned about her being involved in an investigation, that I was bringing her into, that she had no part of. And I told her about it.

"Don't worry about it," she says. "Don't worry about it."

So what did happen with it?

Well, there was nothing they could do with her because she wasn't gay. *But she turned gay later!* Yeah. She visited me when I was out in California after the service. She came out to California with her girlfriend. First time I knew she was [gay]. I got this letter from her one day. We had kept in contact, but not often. Christmas cards, you know. And she wrote and said she'd like to visit. That was '64, '65, somewhere around there. She wasn't gay [when we were in the service]. If she was she damned well kept it a good secret! [laughs] Nobody knew it about her.

When they conducted these witch hunts and investigations and they were finished and deciding who's to go and who's not to go, how was that handled?

First of all you can't prove somebody is gay unless somebody admits to it. There really isn't any way that that can be done in the service unless they come in and they find you in bed with somebody. Not *walk* in—they *crash* into rooms.

It's a constant always hassling you. It's a constant hassle. It wasn't just me. I had a couple of rounds at it, but it was other people, constantly calling them in. And then they'd sit on it for awhile and then pretty soon they'd start up again with the gals. I think when I was at Fort Sam—I was there a couple of years, anyway—there was two or three investigations. But they'd extend them for two or three months, then all of a sudden they'd disappear into the woodwork.

Then you never really knew one way or another.

You don't know at all. All of a sudden you get the message you're to report to the Military Intelligence building, Room 22, whatever. And you go and then all of a sudden you hear this stuff that you don't even know what they're talking about half the time. They actually *follow* you. They follow people, they leave the base and they go out and follow you. See where you're going.

You're kept in a constant state of turmoil.

All the time. All the time.

How did that affect your work?

The only thing that happened to me that was very positive ... I worked for a guy named Wiggins. His last name was Wiggins and he was a major. And I had a really great job. I was able to use it for the ball teams and stuff. I did a lot of manifest work for Kelly Air Force Base and Randolph Air Force Base [while I was] stationed in San Antonio, Texas. They used C-47s. So consequently, there was a Captain Joe Fry—he used to talk to me all the time on the phone and I'd get his manifest stuff ready for him—who would give our softball team a C-47 to fly different places to play softball. A wonderful guy. And Captain Wiggins would approve it and he was the one who had to approve it. And he and I got along really good. I babysat for him. His wife lived there in San Antonio. And I told him about what was going on. And he told me one time, he says, "I'll tell you what you do, Dorothy. You go in there the next time they call in there and you tell him that you're gonna call in a *civilian* lawyer, you're gonna call an *army* lawyer and next time they want to talk, you tell 'em to talk to them." Major

Wiggins at one time had belonged to the JA, the Judge Advocate Department. So the next time I went there that's exactly what I said.

"You guys have hassled me and hassled me enough. I've had it. Next time you want to talk to anybody"

One thing, Dennis, my mother and stepfather lived in San Antonio.

I told [the Military Intelligence officers], "My mother and stepfather live here in San Antonio, Texas. They told me to tell you that next time you can talk to their lawyer. And I'll also hire an army lawyer." I didn't tell 'em anything about Captain Wiggins. "But I just want you guys to get off my ass." I doubt if I used those words. I was probably too scared. [laughs] You know. "Leave me alone!" Never heard from 'em again. Because the one thing they didn't want then was publicity.

Why?

They were afraid it might get in the paper [that] they were hassling these women.

I should think, considering the times, they'd want the public to know they were kicking homosexuals out [of the army].

Not at that time, they didn't. They didn't. You gotta realize something else, too. The service at that time was a young service and they wanted women in the service at that time. They wanted young people in the service and if they put that kind of a stigma on it, parents wouldn't want their children going into that service. Mothers wouldn't want their daughters goin' into that service and meeting all these lesbians. If somebody came out and said, "Hey, 60% of the Women's Army Corps is lesbians!"—and I'm sure it was more than, Dennis, to be honest with you—you think there'd be anybody in there *except* the lesbians? Think about it. The lesbians would go twenty-fold, a hundred-fold into the service! Or the people that had any inclination that they might be. I didn't know where I got my idea to join the service.

So they wanted it both ways: they wanted to fill up the service but they didn't want gay people.

That's right. They didn't want particularly obvious gay people in. When I went in I had long hair down my back. When they got done with me, I had to have a haircut above my collar! Then I *looked* like a big dyke! *[laughs]*

Did you know anybody who was discharged for that?

Quite a few people, including *myself*. I had a general [discharge] under honorable.

For being gay?

Yeah.

Let's put that aside for a minute. I want to get back to Rosemarie.

She had had [gay] sexual experience. She was 18, 19, but she'd already been through it. She had the experience to teach me, which I did *not* have. But then I could at least learn to reciprocate because I knew nothing at all about it.

How did she take you to teach you?

She taught me to make love to her and what to do. Just like a lesson. I mean, you know how to *fondle*. I hadn't went down on anybody. Never even thought about doing anything like that, you know. She taught me how to make love to her in order to please her. As simple as that.

What kind of illumination did that bring into your life?

Oh, I thought it was terrific. The feeling! You know what the feeling was? The terrific feeling was bringing somebody *else* to that feeling, that climax feeling, and listening to the sounds and all that good stuff that goes with it. The joy, the pleasure they get. The pleasure they receive is what trips me off.

How long were you allowed to be together?

...let's see the finished...
...three months. It wasn't long...
...over there any more.

...did that situation arise?

K. The captain of the...
...a catcher for the Med...
...gay (shows her fingers)...
...ret Koadin. (The captain...
...ball games against...
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100% COTTON PAPER
BOND
B-BONNET TREE

Rosemarie Kondra, ca. 1950-51

[photo courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]

Oh, let's see. She finished Medical Field Service School Maybe three months, two, three months. It wasn't long. But then I got told by her captain I couldn't come over there anymore.

How did that situation arise?

OK. The captain at the Medical Field Service School played softball also. She was a catcher for the Medical Field Service School. And everyone thought she was gay [*snaps her fingers*]. OK? It was a well-known fact that I was coming over to see Kondra. [The captain] knew it. She'd seen me come and go. And we had softball games against Medical Field Service School, our army team did, against Medical Field. And [the captain] was a very *dirty* player. She used to always try to spike people when she run around the bases.

What's spike?

We used spikes then on our cleats. They weren't rubber cleats, they were [metal] spikes. And when I say spike she'd come in [i. e., slide into base] with the cleats up. So I said to [my team], "OK, gals, she's a catcher. She likes to get it, let's do it." So everybody that hit that catcher [did] it with spikes up and we nailed her a lot. Her ankles, ripped her clothes. You know—*accidental*. I've been a pitcher myself on third base with somebody comin' in at me [cleats up]. Anyway, she hated me. She got to where she just hated me because she knew I was tellin' 'em to do it because I'd nail her very verbally. She's a captain, I'm a PFC [private first class]. On the ballfield she's equal. *Off* the ball field, my ass is grass if I run into her! [*laughs*] So anyway, I was told to stay away from Medical Field Service School. Not by her directly, but by the Charge of Quarters over there. I went over to see Rosemarie one night and the CQ [Charge of Quarters] told me I wasn't allowed in. And I said, "Why not?"

She said, "Captain White said we weren't supposed to let you in here."

And I said, "I know the reason for *that*." I just turned around and I says, "OK." I called Rosemarie and told her, "I'm not allowed in."

She says yeah she was told. And she was told by the captain [that] she wasn't allowed to *see* me anymore. Well, they couldn't do that. [Captain White] could not do that. Still, Rosemarie had to answer to that captain and those people have a lot of power. And a lot of authority. I went over to see her one night. I

thought, "Screw this. I'm goin' over anyway." And Joan Snyder was on duty, who I met again in California [years later]. And Joan Snyder happened to be

Can I tell you a little bit about a gay bar in San Anton, because it fits in with this?

Yeah!

OK, there was a gay bar in San Antonio. It was called Swanee's. It was strictly off limits to any army personnel at all. Strictly. Well, there was a bunch of us that went over from the service and Rosemarie was with me. And we went over there and civilians were over there and some of Kelly Air Force Base's permanent party were over there. We were all there dancing and having a good time and all of a sudden I couldn't find Rosemarie. And somebody said, "Well, she's in the bathroom." I went over to the women's bathroom and I could hear banging on the door and struggling goin' on in there. So I let out, "Rosemarie, are you in there?"

She says, "Yes, this girl won't let me outta here!"

She finally got out and when that [other] girl came out—she was from the air force base, she wasn't a civilian—everybody just started jumpin' on everybody! We started gettin' in a fight. Now, I was back to back [with Joan Snyder]. Joan Snyder's told this story fifty thousand times—in fact, we've got a civilian picture back to back like this, dukes up, right? We were all fighting. I could feel something behind me and here's this gal behind me and she's whackin' people off that way and I'm whackin' people off [this way], and I turn around and I look. There she is, this girl, just hittin' people left and right and we're kind of back to back. Anyway, she looked at me and she says, "What are you?"

I says, "I'm army."

She says, "Oh, I'm at Medical Field Service School." Well, she wasn't a student. She was permanent party there.

I says, "Great! So's my girl!" And we kept fighting.

She says, "Better leave before the cops show." So out we go. *[slaps her hands]*

She went her way, I went my way.

OK, now we get back to the night that I decided to go over to Medical Field Service School. I said, "Well, screw Captain White, I'm goin' over there anyway."

Anyway, I go walkin' in and guess who's on duty? Joan Snyder! I says, "Joan, I want to see Kondra."

She says, "I can't let ya in to see her. You know that, Dorothy."

I says, "Sure ya can. I'll get outta here right away, OK?"

She says, "All right, I'll let ya know when they come in for bed check." Remember, Rosemarie was still under bed check.

So I went in there and Rosemarie was in the barrack—she had a little room-like thing. And I was sittin' on top of the bed talkin' to her. All of a sudden Joan lets out this yell, "*Frassmann! Get out of there! Captain White is comin' up the steps!*"

I went tearin' outta there and [Joan] threw me in a metal wall locker. She just grabbed me—"Get in there!"—and slammed the door on me. Turned around and went back to her desk just as Captain White walked in the door. And I heard [Joan] say, "All present and accounted for."

"Right."

And then Captain White made the bed check.

In the meantime, I was right in that Charge of Quarters' office! In an old metal wall locker. Anyway, they left, and Snyder grabs that door, jerks it open, and she says, "You get your ass outta here and I don't want to ever see you come back here again!" [*laughs*]

Was that the end of your relationship with Kondra?

No, because she could get away on weekends. But when she graduated, that was [the end]. She wrote me a few letters, I wrote her a few letters, but, you know, you're in the service and you're young.

Were you in love with her?

I thought I was. Oh, God, yes! I wailed and wept forever after she left. [*laughs*] So I thought I was, but you know how that goes. Sort of go on to another one after that, and that's just sort of the way that is. You know?

For awhile there wasn't any kind of a girlfriend. I was pretty busy, too. And you don't just fall in love, you know, all the time. And I was not the kind of person that kept falling in love one right after the other, either. It wasn't, "I'm gonna jump from here to here in two days." Type of thing.

The circumstances surrounding your leaving the service

Dodie.

What happened?

They threatened me with Dodie.

How do you mean threatened you?

Well, they told me that they wanted a confession from me that I was gay or they would put a full-fledged investigation on Dodie, on Doris Kunzleman. And that's when I talked to her about it. And she said, "Screw 'em. Let 'em do it." I told 'em I just wouldn't have it. And I asked 'em what they meant by a full-fledged investigation, and they said they'd be seeing her mother and seeing her father and, I mean ... 'Course, I was very young and I was very impressionable. And they would see all her friends and her neighbors and they'd track 'em way back to whenever. But they're gonna, you know, get her outta there. Because they *know* she's a lesbian—so to speak. So I signed it and I told her I had to.

What did the confession say? They typed it up for you?

Ohhh! It just said that You know, Dennis, it's hard for me to remember that. The only thing my discharge reads is general discharge under honorable conditions. It doesn't say anything about any reasons for it. The paperwork for my discharge is burnt down. Burnt down with the building [in], I think it's Kansas, where the military records are held? I lost copies of my discharge a long time ago and I tried to get them. And the reason I originally started is because I got a GI Bill, and the only thing I had to get it with was an old I still have my army ID thing. WA8400810 was my army ID number. You never forget that. It's like your social security number. And I was applying to get my GI [Bill loan] when I first wanted to buy a house in Lawndale [California]. Then I decided I wanted to use it. But I tried to get copies of my discharge and I couldn't do it. Burned down. The Federal Records Center.

How did your friends and the others around you react to your having signed [the confession]?

Most of my friends [signed], also. Two of 'em did right with me. One of 'em was a sergeant who worked in an office and she was *career*. And another one was another girl. Because they said that they're just tired of the damned hassle. They wanted out of there. So the three of us, we got out at the same time and did some traveling for a year together.

How did you explain to your parents why you were discharged?

I didn't have to. I never saw them. I never went by. Now, let me tell you somethin'. When I went and saw my mother before I went in the service, and very many times *after* when I approached her, she shook my hand. She didn't ask what I was doing there. She knew I was goin' in the service. But, you know, I'm saying we didn't have that [mother/daughter] relationship until I got old. Older. *Much* older.

How did you feel about leaving the service? You were so anxious to get in.

I was not anxious to get out. I had planned on making it [my life]. I really enjoyed the service. I enjoyed the people I worked with. I enjoyed a lot of things about it and there's a lot of things I didn't like about it. If this was gonna be the way I was gonna spend my service career, you know, going through things like this, then no. I didn't want it anymore. And they were very hard at that time. Like I told you, they *did* go to people's houses. They didn't go up and say, "Hey, Mom, your kid's a lesbian." Or, "Hey, Mom, your kid's gay."-type thing. But they did follow people around. They made a point of it. Or they'd take 'em out, and I knew they'd take 'em out because I had a friend Mickey. They took her out all over the place gettin' her to identify places where she had gone with girlfriends. They never did that to me. But they took her out to identify where my mother and my stepfather lived because they told me exactly, *exactly* right down to the corner. Of course, they had her address. But Mickey told me they took her there. She was the one who told me that they had taken her by.

"Is that where Frassmann lives?"

Where she has her rendezvous. *Sure*, I had 'em at my mother and stepfather's! [grimaces] And they were very nasty, very sarcastic. And their use of language wasn't too good.

How do you men that?

Oh, they ask you if you had sex with someone, they'd say, "Well did you suck so-and-so's pussy?" Stuff like this. Very ugly. Very ugly.

Was it women who conducted these witch hunts?

Men. Men. Never saw a woman. Just men. They probably didn't have any *un-*lesbian women in the Military Intelligence Department! [laughs]

You wonder whether any of those men themselves were gay.

You don't know, that's just it. But they played the very macho, tough role.

By the time you were out of the service, you were—how would they say it? A practicing lesbian.

I was pretty well practicing by that time. [But] I was still pretty naive, actually. In the service I actually only had one or two physical relationships. And the physical one I had with Kondra was the main one I had. While I was playing sports I had a few one-night stand type things. I had a relationship with a girl for about two days that lived in San Antonio, Texas. [laughs] I remember going up her stairs—she snuck me into her place because her mom and dad lived downstairs—and I remember climbing out her window the next morning to get out of there! [laughs] Because she didn't want anybody to know that anybody was there. Things like this.

So once out of the service you knew the life.

Once out of the service I knew there were other people in the life, too.

And Dorothy was turned loose on the world.

Dorothy was very happily turned loose on the world. And Dorothy had a lot of little crushes that were miserable things, too, when you think you're in love

and you're not. You know how that goes! I think straight life is the same, practically.

It is. It's the same. It's all the same.

When I got out of the service—myself and Bobbie and Another gal. Her last name was [Martha] Bozeman. I stayed at her house for a long time. We were just friends. Went out together. And we traveled around the states for awhile. We weren't traveling around looking for sexual adventures. We just decided to travel for awhile. And we worked at different places, job-hopped here and there, so to speak. And made money and lived off a lot of baloney sandwiches, saw the country a little bit.

Where did you go?

Most of the states. We did a United States trip. Almost a year. Pretty close to a year. Met wonderful people, too. People that helped us a lot, you know. Broke down, people came along to help. Just really nice things that happened. The main thing was just to get out. We were on our own, we were out of the service, we were free. We all three were glad to be [free] at that time, yes. We were right up to our necks with investigations. And all three of us had been through it.

We traveled around, then Bobbie went home. And I ended up at Lakeland, Florida, with Bozeman to stay. Because I really had no place to go. I wasn't going home to Ma in San Antonio. And my friends, most of 'em, were still in the service and when they got out they scattered all over the place. But I met a lot of nice people. I met a gal named Toni Rude in the service. And another gal named Shirley Knight who I kept in touch with, these people. Fact, I stayed at Toni's house later on in Wisconsin, down the line. So I kept in touch with a few people.

But I went to Lakeland, Florida with Bozeman because I'd never been there. So I stayed with her and her mom. And then I fell in love again!

I met this girl and she was a beauty. She really was. She was very, very pretty. I was in Florida actually, probably, a good year. I had a few little minor skirmishes. Oh, and while I was in Florida, in Lakeland, I went to a gay guy's place in Tampa. And they had drag shows on there at that time.

This was early 50s?

Yeah. Yeah, it's early 50s. I didn't even know [those girls were guys]. When I went to Florida I met this woman and she had a job in a gas station and she helped me get a job. She said, "I'm gonna take you into Tampa. We're gonna have a good time!" And she takes me to this place. And we went with a gay guy. Three of us went. We watched the floor show. Of course, I'd never seen a man in drag in my whole life, didn't even know what such a thing was! *[laughs]* You know, you don't run into that in the army. Anyway, I'm sittin' there at the table and I'm lookin' at this gorgeous, gorgeous creature, falling madly in love. Absolutely. And I got the rose thrown at me right in my lap by this gorgeous creature. Who later come down [and] took off his ... *her* wig and sat down with us because it happened to be *my* friend's friend! *[laughs]* That's why they took us. To me, I was all eyeballs because that was something new. I'd never seen anything like that.

Having known and finally realized about being a gay woman and there were other gay women ...

That's the first time I'd seen a gay *guy*.

Did you know about gay guys?

Well, I knew about gay guys after I got to Florida and I met this one gay guy through this friend of mine.

How did you know he was gay?

Because she told me. She told me that he was. You know, I'm still not relating the word *gay* back then, either. I wish I could come up with one [we used] besides *faggot* or *fairy*. Could be [we used] *fairy*. It might be. But it doesn't sound like a very generous term for someone to use for themselves. But, at *that* time, it doesn't matter.

Like Black people calling each other nigger.

Yeah. It doesn't matter. For want of a better word, it could have been.

But, yeah, I met this guy and he was the one that took us off to this place. Then I started knowing a few more. But there were a couple of gay gal bars in Florida now at that time. Well, let me say *mixed*. There were guys *and* gals. I don't remember a whole heck of a lot about 'em. They were pretty close to Tampa, out that way. They weren't in Lakeland itself, they were in Tampa and that's quite a way to jaunt off to. So I didn't get a chance to investigate 'em too much. But I met a couple of gals that worked there [that] were gay. I didn't hear anything about police raids there at that time. If there were, I wasn't aware of it because I didn't hang out at the bars. It was not my thing to do at that time. The reason was it was too far to go and I didn't have a car. [laughs] It's a simple as that! I had no way to get there. I'd have to go with somebody else.

What were you doing for a living then?

The first job I had [was at] a lithograph company. I was opaquing negatives. This guy taught me how to opaque negatives. Are you familiar with that?

No.

OK. Opaquing negatives. Negatives are black and white. Well, say you had a lot of commercial stuff, the black is white, little white specks in it. What you do is take black ink—but it's called opaque—with a brush and you go over the little white spots in the negatives and you make 'em black. So your picture doesn't turn out black with the little white spots in it—or *white* with little black spots because it's a negative, it's reverse. And I got a job doing that. That was my very first job. That was 75¢ an hour. That was good wages, kid! [laughs]

And during that same period of time—[opaquing negatives] wasn't quite good enough—I got another job working nights at the gas station. I pumped gas in Lakeland, too. Got held up there. These two guys come into the gas station I was working at and one cut the phone and the other shoved me against one of these big, tall things that was stacked up, you know, oil cans. They'd stack oil cans in a triangle? He shoved me up against that and grabbed money out of the cash drawer and took off. There was a car waiting for them. And the police came. I had went across the street and got the lady to call the police. The police came. They drove me around for hours. This [cop] had his hand on my knee, I might add. They were tryin' to figure out if it was an inside job or not. True story.

Bastard! That's all I can say, Dennis. I was never so furious in my life. They weren't doing anything [to catch the real robbers]. I think [the robbers] got twenty-three, twenty-four bucks. Lot of money, right? I was there about two or three months working nights before this happened. [Then] that was it, I was done. 'Cause I worked till after midnight.

How long did you stay in Lakeland?

I was in Lakeland, what, about two years, I guess. Quite awhile, actually. I liked Lakeland. It was a pretty town.

No long-term romances during that time?

I met a gal named, her name was Martha. She and I had our one long-term romance. In fact, I left Lakeland because of her. She was married. And we had an affair during her marriage. She became pregnant and she did not want her husband to have her child because he smacked her around quite a bit. Though he was quite wealthy. He had a lot of money. The reason I left Lakeland was because *she* wanted to leave Lakeland and get away from him. So that is what we did. We left Lakeland and went to Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

She was pregnant during this time?

[nods]

And the reason we went to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, which seems like a weird place to go, is because I knew somebody that lived in Eau Claire. And since I knew somebody who lived in Eau Claire, at least I would be going away from Florida to someplace where there was somebody I knew.

Were you in love with Martha?

Oh, absolutely. She was gorgeous. She was just a beautiful creature. She was lookin' for an escape. She thought she was in love. We had a nice relationship. Except she didn't want her baby brought up in a ... ⁸ She was really against it, really against it. After her baby was born, we couldn't afford her baby. She couldn't work. She got really sick. I was making like 80¢ an hour.

The two of you were living together?

We were living together in this squalid place in a little basement thing that had a couple of rats runnin' around in it. Scared the livin' hell out of me and her, too. And we had no money. I was makin' very little money. Those days you didn't make any money. And I was working for the Eau Claire Pressure Cooker [company]. A layoff came. I got laid off. [Martha] couldn't work. She wasn't working. So we decided it was best that she had her brother come and get her, which he did.

Did she have the baby while you were together?

She had the baby while we were together, yeah.

Tell me about that night or that day that she had the baby.

Well, she had the baby during the afternoon, actually. It was pretty close to evening. We had a little money saved, we had money saved for, like, the doctors. Of course, it didn't cost that much then, either. But she went to the hospital in Eau Claire and I was scared to death. I went with her. I was so afraid. I panicked.

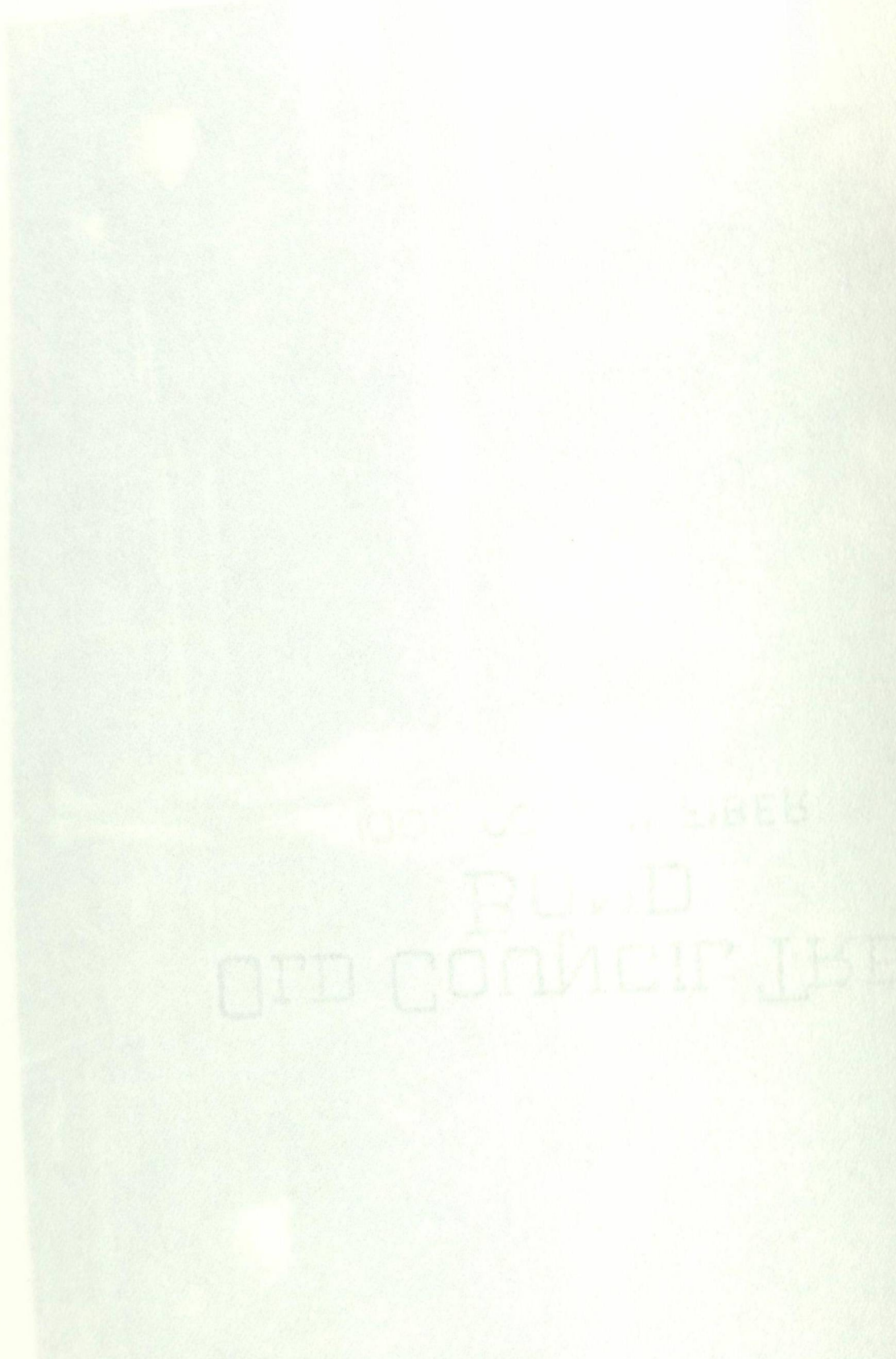
Afraid of what?

Afraid of her having a baby. She's gonna die! You know. What do you do? I'm a *father* now! [laughs] How would *you* feel? Just scared to death. And she was panicky. Her water actually broke in that apartment. It broke in the bed. She was layin' on the bed and all of a sudden her water broke. So it was a rush to the hospital and the baby was born there.

How did you explain your presence to the hospital staff?

I wasn't asked. There was nothin' to explain. No one asked. You paid cash. We checked in, paid cash, checked out. I don't think it was very much, three or four hundred dollars. It was nothing like [today].





Martha with baby Robin, ca. 1957

[photo courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]

Would you have been willing to raise the baby and have a family with [Martha]?

I'm sure I would have been. There was a lot of thoughts about whether we *could* or not because she couldn't work and I got laid off. I had no job. I got a job for awhile taking care of somebody's kids for twenty bucks a week. That don't support a woman and a baby and an apartment. Well, a big room. It wasn't even an apartment. It was a mess. And I liked her brother. I told her, "Maybe you just ought to get in touch with him because right now there's just no way." So he came and got her.

Did the brother know the circumstances of your relationship with Martha?

I don't know. I think so, though. I don't know if she ever told him. I liked him, I met him a couple of times. I didn't know him, so to speak. I'd [only] seen him. But I heard from her a little bit after that and then [she] sort of drifted off and I drifted off.

Did she have a boy or a girl?

She had a girl named Robin. Named her Robin.

Were you heart-broken to let her go?

Yeah. I was very upset. [sighs] I was very upset, but at that time there was no other decision to make. She couldn't bring her kid up in a rat-infested hole. You bet. And I couldn't get her out of it. I was helpless at that point. And I couldn't find any other work. She couldn't work. It just couldn't be. I couldn't help her.

Do you remember what year this was?

Probably '56, '57, I would think. Right around in there.

So Martha left. What did you do next?

Oh, I stayed in Eau Claire for awhile. I got a job there finally. I just got another job and then I had friends there. I had Toni [Rude] and she and I run around a lot together. I was always a very serious person, as you probably already are aware of. I was always very serious about everything. Everything was *traumatic* to me for one thing.

I found it interesting, you and Martha and the baby making a family then in the sense that a lot of gay people nowadays do and kind of take for granted because the life is open and free. But in those days ...

In those days it would be like Martha and I would pass each other off as sisters. We certainly would never pass each other off as lovers. That would be the only way we could ever live together. We couldn't live together. We certainly couldn't hold hands anywhere. That would be ridiculous. Like, nowadays, people go to the bars a lot, they find companionship and the younger people as they grow up, of course, are all out drinking and having a good time. And then as they get older they stop that. There's a certain point [in] life that all that is passed. Well, in Florida back in that day very few people went out to bars. Because if you went out to the bars there was generally somebody there gonna hassle ya.

How do you mean hassle?

I mean straight men can come into bars just as well as gay gals and gay guys. And since you're strictly in the minority, you're gonna get hassled. You're gonna get propositioned. Things are gonna ..., you know, that are insulting. And have [come up in my life]. One time some guy wanted to pay me to make love to his wife while he watched. Things like that'll come up because they think it's a real cutsie-type thing. So if you're gonna be with a woman you've got to be very well hidden with that woman. And in a case like with Martha, there's no way she and I would have hung out at any bars. First of all, there weren't any bars to hang out [in]. Second of all, there may be five of you or six of you out there, you're not gonna find Like the gay bars *per se* now are generally gay. That's what they are. They're gay bars. They're not straight bars, so to speak, with a few gay people in 'em.

That's what it was then?

That's what it was. Their basic business didn't come from gays.

How did you develop a circle of gay friends?

Because I knew the people I was with before I ever got there. When I got to Florida I went there with Bozeman. Well, Bozeman *was* from Lakeland, Florida. So she knew the people in Lakeland, Florida. And she had a couple of friends—just *two*—that I can remember that she had that were gay that she knew. She knew [them], before she went into the service. That was sort of the circle of [gay] friends, so to speak.

So there wasn't really any

No big circle of friends.

No social place to go and meet gay people?

Not a private place that you could actually not be harassed or hassled at. Or beat up on. Sometimes these guys like to slap girls around, just because they're too damned chicken to slap the *guys* around. Yeah. They'd get very ugly. They could say different things. You couldn't be out there.⁹ You [couldn't] be out there. There was no *place* to be out there then.

That's such a difference from now. Now there are organizations, there's groups, there's churches, there's everything.

Well, it goes along with the Bill of Rights and Women's Lib. It really does. It all works kind of together because women aren't going to be as back in the closet as they used to be. And men certainly aren't. And it took some pretty strong people to take the first meaningful steps. And that's helped it along.

People like you.





l-r: Dorothy Frassmann, Martha Bozeman, 1950s

[photo courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]

I don't know. We weren't hid. I can't say we deliberately hid ourselves. But there was no place to go. And you didn't go out and stand on the corner and say, "Hey, I'm gay!"

Which you could certainly do now.

Which you could do now and nobody's gonna do too much about it one way or the other. Though I do know that when I worked in different places, they definitely knew I *was* but they didn't really care. They just cared about my ability to work, and I happened to be a good [worker].

Was that as early as Eau Claire?

No, but it was as early as Rockford, Illinois.

Let's take Eau Claire, Wisconsin. I knew a gal from the service there, Toni Rude, who was my buddy in the army. And that was why I went [to Eau Claire]. She was gay and we had little sex things going on, but neither one of us loved each other. By any means. And through her, though, I met a number of gay people in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. And what they did is they'd hang out at each other's house every once in awhile. They'd have their parties, very private. Or the sleep-ins or -overs, very private. But there wasn't any goin' out to bars because there was no bar in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. That was just no place to carouse at. But there was a number of [gay] people there. I met some very, very nice kids there. And when I left there I went to, actually, Rockford, Illinois. And I knew some people in Rockford, also.

But Rockford I went to work for a company there, Barbara Coleman Company. I got a pretty good job, worked up to a fairly good job. I was there almost nine years.

What did they do?

They made everything. Electric door openers. They even made parts for guns. A lot of things. But I didn't go to work there first. I went to work for American Cabinet and Hardware. In fact, I woke up in their driveway. [laughs]

I had gone for a visit to Florida. I was going back to Eau Claire, Wisconsin when I pulled into this driveway. And it turned out to be American Cabinet and

Hardware, better known as Amrock. Made hinges. I kind of looked around, saw people going into this place and I was in the way and they were honking their horns. Happened to be a big factory sittin' there. I'd gotten in out of the rain, is why I pulled in. It really was just sheetin' down. I didn't know where I was. So I parked the car and decided to go in and get a job. Go apply for a job, see if I could get one. And that's exactly what I did. I went to American Cabinet and Hardware Company, applied for a job—and I got one!

Doing what?

Working on a big press. What this huge press did, you fed flat hinges down going through it and when it got to the bottom this thing would stamp 'em. It would stamp a decoration on 'em. Because American Cabinet and Hardware [made] decorative hinges for cabinets and different things. And that's what I did. And I worked there for a couple, three years. Really a very, very good job. I really enjoyed it. *[laughs]* I think it was a couple years.

You got an apartment?

Um, hm. And stayed there. And I [had been] headin' back to Eau Claire, Wisconsin to visit Toni again, and decided to stay [in Rockford, Illinois] instead. Because I had work there was no reason to go anywhere else.

And while I was working there I ran into this gal named Jo Johnson. I met some kids that played softball and I started playing some softball of my own. And Jo introduced me to her sister-in-law named June. Well, June was just divorced from her husband, which was Jo's brother, Dick, and June and I started going together, going out together, and sleeping together and *living* together. Simple as that. It's just about the way it worked. She was a very nice-looking girl. She knew all about gay though she wasn't at that time.

She knew all about?

Because her sister-in-law Jo was gay. Jo Johnson was gay. It just seemed to be. I became Jo's friend and I became her ex-sister-in-law's lover. Her new sister-in-law. Just sort of happened. June had two children, Dick, Jr. and Gloria. Another Gloria. I had two Glorias in my life, by the way, before my life ended. *Will* end!

[laughs] Anyway, we lived together for a couple of years, I guess. You lose track of time, Dennis. But she was my main lover and we did not have any bars, again, in Rockford, Illinois. Now, we *did* have the straight bars we frequented at different times. But again, you got hassled there. I'd been approached to sell dope, bennies, by some guys that said, "You play softball and you do this and you do that." 'Cause I was always coming in with our [softball team]. Now, of course, I've got a little backup with my stream of ballplayer friends, which made a lot of difference, too. When you're out by yourself or with one or two people it's one thing, but when you're out with ten or fifteen people and you all go out together, that's another thing.

Was your ball team gay?

Most of 'em. Just about all of 'em were gay. They were called the Rockford Royals. They were third in the state of Illinois. Good team. I played third base. I broke my leg on that team sliding into third base. [laughs] All these gals were gay and I just happened to get on the ball team, again, because I knew somebody from the service that was in Rockford and I looked them up. They were playin' ball and they asked me if I wanted to come and try out for the team, which I did and [then] became part of.

When you went out together as group to the straight bars was it pretty obvious you were gay?

I would think so. We didn't hold hands and we didn't kiss each other. We didn't do that. But after ball games we'd, you know, go hit a bar somewhere and have a few drinks. If possible. If we could, if there was somethin' around. If our coach would allow us to. Now, we were coached by a male. If we went out of town or anything like that we'd be goin' by bus. So a lot of times we really couldn't [go out together]. But, a lot of times we did. A number of times we did. Our home area was Cherry Valley, Illinois, which is close to Rockford, and that is where our home field was. And the people there were very generous to us. The fire station would open up their fire house where we could have car washes to make money. It was a very tiny little town. And the biggest thing they had going was their women's softball team, fast-pitch softball team. They really enjoyed it. But there wasn't then outward gayness at all. There was still a lot of home stuff. A lot

of these things are kind of repetitive but in those areas of times things were very much repetitive. That was in the late 50s. What you couldn't do in 1950 and 51 you *still* couldn't do in 1956 and '57.

How did you explain the relationship you had [with June]? You were living together, renting an apartment, I presume, somewhere.

June had a house. Her mother owned the house. Her mother lived behind us. There was never a question brought up [by] her mother. Never was that I know of. To her mother I was June's roommate. June had a roommate to help pay the bills. There was just nothing ever brought up because it wasn't even thought of by her parents. Now you're looking at *another* generation. So it just wasn't looked at. 'Course we had our friends, our gay friends that we run around with. June was bisexual for one thing. She had just come out from a marriage, she still liked guys. She also liked me. But she was still bisexual. How old were the children? They were 4, 3, 4, 5. Real small kids.

Not old enough to ask what was going on?

No. They were quite small. I've got pictures of them. Besides, they never saw anything. You've got to realize you don't do things around people at that time. Not even around yourself, practically. I mean, you have to be *really* alone. In Rockford, we would go out with *more* of us so I am sure it was more obvious. We didn't suffer as many remarks when you're out with a group that looks pretty tough as when you're out by yourself. It's as simple as that. We didn't make a point to go pick any fights or do anything like that. We'd just have a drink and get up and leave. But 90% of the time we didn't go to bars anyway. There still was no place to go. There really wasn't. Just mostly private.

And then a lot of that was kind of Oh, you'd have a picnic. A bunch would get together and go have a picnic. Because a lot of people didn't own homes in Rockford, Illinois. Everybody had small apartments, you know. June lived in Harrison which is right outside of Rockford.

Rockford sounds like a sizable town.

Rockford's a fairly sizable town. It's a factory town, an industry town. And June actually lived in Harrison, which is right outside almost on the border of Wisconsin there. I think Beloit is just a few miles up the road.

How long did you stay in Rockford with June?

Actually, June and I broke up.

Over what?

Oh, let's see. What did we break up over? Was I seeing another girl or was *she* seeing Marty? I started seeing another girl. I started seeing another girl and I introduced [June] to Marty. Marty was a dear friend of mine. He was a big guy, played sax[ophone]. June and I lived together for a year or so. I started seeing somebody else. I was cheating on [June]. We were fightin' a lot. And I introduced her to Marty and she started seeing Marty. Anyway, she ended up marrying Marty [and] I started going with another gal named Stella. Stella had four kids in South Dakota. She was divorced. Her husband didn't have custody but had the kids. But I started seeing Stella. I met her through another girl that I knew, Ann Guist. And Ann and a girl named Lavita and myself, we had this little band group. I played the guitar and Ann played another guitar and Lavita played a bass, and we had this little group together. That's how I met Stella. Stella had come down to visit Ann. She was just a friend. Anyway, I met Stell and I started seeing Stella, then Stella went to South Dakota—then she came back again. She and I got together. She was not gay, either. Seems that I'm running into all these women that are straight, and now that I'm an old *pro* ... ! [*laughs*]. I've had all these tiny little affairs in between, which I had a number of 'em. It'd be kind of foolish to mention every one of 'em. Stella and I went back to South Dakota and got her kids. Brought all four of 'em back. I rented an apartment and ended up with having four kids. They're out in California, now. All of 'em. All of 'em are.

But again, I don't think I had any kind of open highways, so to speak, in this gay life until after I got to California. But I did find out one thing: that people at that time—this was even before I met Stella in Rockford—it was when I was at Barbara Coleman's. I'd left American Cabinet and Hardware for a better job. I found out that people don't really care a whole heck of a lot if they're your employer, or your boss over you, what you do relationship-wise as long as you



Top: June Johnson, 1959

Bottom: Dick Johnson and Gloria Johnson, 1959

[photos courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]



put out the work and you're a good worker. They actually like you. I'm a very good worker. I always start at the bottom, I end up at the top no matter where I go or what I do. It seems to be that way in sports—I'm not bragging. This is a true story. It's called leadership. I had it in the service, I had it in my grade school—I was captain of the softball team when I was in my junior, senior years. I was president of an economic class and I knew nothing about economics. [laughs] You know, this type of thing just sort of followed me everywhere. Out of the seventeen people in Leadership School, I was one of the seven or six that graduated. The rest washed out. Anyway, so it happens all through my life right up to La Deau Manufacturing where I just left. This always has happened. So consequently I've been very fortunate. I really have been. And it didn't matter, like I said, to get to it—it didn't matter who I was or what I did with my social life. Anybody I've ever worked for has always known that I've been gay. Maybe not used the word, the word may be *queer* in their book, but they never really gave a darn, and I never really found till later that they knew. Now, I found out in Rockford, Illinois one time—and it shocked the living daylights out of me, surprised me, gave me a *new look* at myself and the perspective of it—these people really don't give a darn as long as you don't interfere with their lives. They really don't. As long as it's not somethin' you're puttin in their heads. When I left Barbara Coleman's they gave me a big party and stuff. My boss come over to me and said, "You know, Dorothy, I knew you always liked women. I *know* you don't like men. I know you've always liked women, but you know what? You're a hell of worker and I could care less what you're like." That's the way he put it to me. This man I worked for for a number of years there. I was at Barbara Coleman's for quite a while. And I took a look at him and I thought, "Wow!"

You had no idea he knew?

No. And some of the people that I worked with there. One of the gals, she and her husband that I worked with, had me over at their house for dinner during this same time because I was gonna be leaving. She told me basically the same thing, she and her husband. "You know, Dorothy, we've always known that you liked girls." When I'm *leaving* they tell me this!

It seems the straight people know it and you don't even realize. Sometimes they know it before you do!

That's right. That's exactly right and you figure they never even heard of such a thing and you're not going to expose yourself to them so they can abuse you.

But anyway, Stella and I got together. The last thing I really heard from June—I saw her after she got married—was she come over to Stella's and my place and threw all my shoes in the middle of the floor from a box [and said], "Here's your goddamned shoes!" And threw 'em all in the middle of the floor. She was great. She died. I have a letter. June died of cancer. And she died after she had three more children from Marty. And I was out in California at the time. She was in the hospital and she died three days later so the letter is quite meaningful to me. And I still have a letter from her asking me if I would come back and take care of her children for her after she died. I still have that. She said she had talked it over with her daughter and that Gloria had said it was a really good idea if I came back. Marty's mother was taking care of them at that time and spoiling them terribly. But [June] had breast cancer and it went really deeper. She said she didn't know how much time she had and she was on morphine at the time. I called back there and found that she had died two days later. I put it off for a couple of days. How could I answer that? What could I say? I had already left, I was in California, I was working out here. I had a different life. She [wrote], "I know this is gutsy of me" That's how she started her letter off. I still have it.

How long did you stay together?

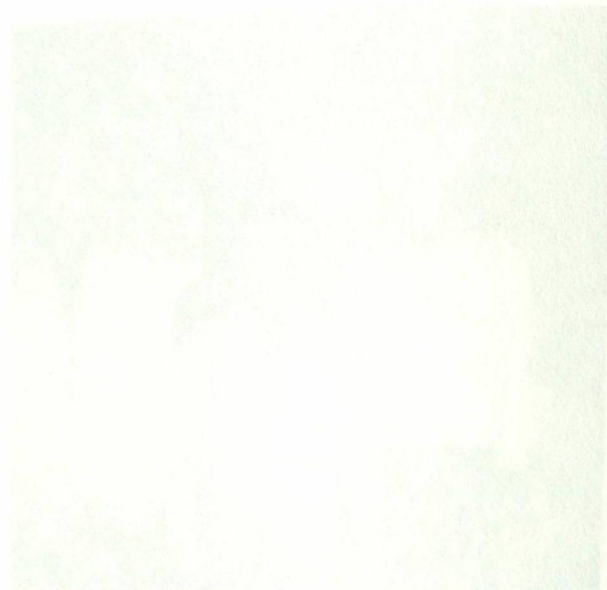
Probably about a year or two.

That's when I started living with Stella. We went back and got her kids, like I said, and we had an apartment in Rockford. The kids were good kids. They went to school and did the same things normal kids do, you know. But she and I fought. Oh God, we fought! Horrible. She threw my keys out windows, threatened me to hit her [so] I hit her. That kind of fight, It got really nasty. So I decided, 'The hell with this.' I left for California. I packed up my car and said, "I'm leavin'." My mother was sick and I decided I would visit her. She was in northern California. Cottonwood I think was the name of the town. Actually, Stella came with me but she was gonna go right back. She was gonna go on to Grants, New Mexico or something like that, so she actually rode out with me. I



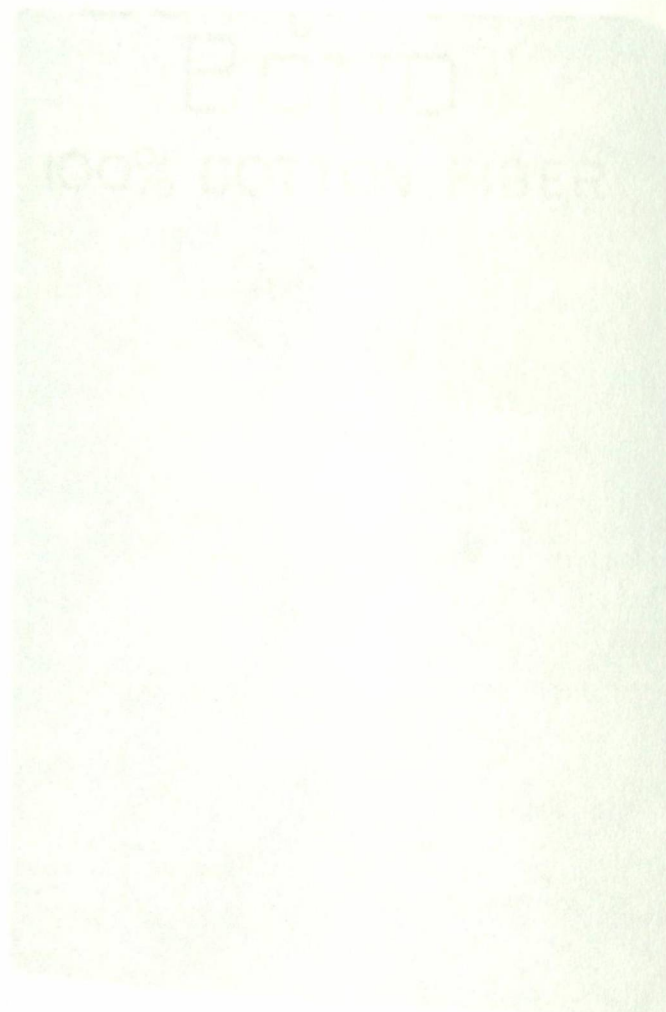
Top: 4-c Stells (bottom row) at the Dining and Tent, 1901
Bottom: 4-c Stells (top row) at the Dining and Tent, 1901





Top, l-r: Stella's children Tom, David, Diane, and Terry, 1961
Bottom, l-r: Stella, Dorothy Frassmann, ca. 1961

[photos courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]



had four bawling kids when I left there. But before I left I had already lived with Stella a couple of years, but I had also moved out before I left. Just packed out of the house and run out. I had actually got a room for awhile. I left all my furniture there [with Stella]. It was all my furniture. [laughs] Not that it matters. It was ours after I bought it. Her sister moved in with her to help her with the bills. But Stella was really upset. She said she was going to be out in California one of these days. And she was. She married some guy, made him bring her out to California and ended up in Culver City. I was in LA. Couple of years later here she is calling me! "I told you I was going to get out to California!" [she said].

She *loved* it. We got to California and we come from where it was snowing. Snowing like crazy. We got out here and threw off our jackets. Lot of difference.

You came to Cottonwood to take care of your mother, then?

Not to take care of her [but] to see her. She had had a bronchial tube removed and she was pretty sick for awhile. And it was a destination. Plus, again, I knew people in California, so that helped. Some friends I had had in the service. Some friends I knew from Rockford that had moved out here. And also, when I went out here, I sort of went from It was really weird, strange thing, coming from a part of the world where they don't have anything into a part of the world that the Candle was here.

The Candle?

The Candle. Virginia Ganis's gay bar. Full operation. The Star Room. You don't know those places?

No, I don't.

God! Yeah, Virginia Ganis had the Candle. It was going when I got there. I don't know how long it was going before I got there.

In LA?

Yeah. Inglewood area rather than Los Angeles. This was November 1962.

Did you have a job when you came to southern California?

No. I went out and I visited my mother. I saw her and then I decided, "Well, I'm gonna go back to Rockford." My job was there, my friends were still there—my job was still open. I took a leave of absence at Barbara Coleman's. I took a three-month leave of absence. Just in case. And I actually come out the old Route 66. [laughs] Anyway, I went out and saw [my mother], visited her and my stepfather, stayed a few days and then I was going to head back toward Rockford. I headed out twice. Twice I turned around and I came back. I thought, "I don't really want to leave here." Anyway, I headed out [again], got to Pasadena and there was a sign on the side of the road, "Help Wanted." That was the Endevco Corporation in Pasadena. So I stopped in and I applied for a job there. And the hardest question I had to answer was my address. I didn't have one. I said, "I don't have an address. All my stuff is in my car!" [laughs] I said, "I'm trying to get a job so I can get a place to live." And that was really cheap: a dollar and something an hour wages. And that wasn't that long ago. That was 1963 I believe. Well, it was a long time ago. Anyway, I got the job. The woman said, "I'm gonna hire you in spite of yourself not having a place to live and just see for the heck of it if you show up tomorrow." Well, I had worked at Barbara Coleman for years, eight or nine years so I was there awhile. Seven years. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I was there through three different women so I was there for awhile.

I knew a gal that lived in California. The first place that I went and lived was the Sunset Hotel on Sunset Boulevard because I didn't know where to go. And I called this gal, Patty her name was. Patty Murray. She lived in Los Angeles. So I went and looked her up and she said, "Why don't you just stay here at the hotel for awhile till you get a chance to get settled." So I stayed at the hotel, went to work. Found my way *back*, which was amazing! Went into work.

[Patty] introduced me to a gal named Jo Whittaker in 1963. And she asked, "Do you still play softball?"

Well, when I come out here I had my leg in a brace because I had broke my leg in Rockford, Illinois sliding into third base in one of our softball games. And I said, "No, I don't play anymore." She said she knew somebody that was looking for a coach. I said, "That might interest me." God, I'd played service ball, played school ball, played after-service ball. "But I don't know. I've never coached in my life."

She said, "Well, she's really lookin' for one." She told me where the practice was because she was playing on the team, or trying out for it. It was a new team just getting together, a whole new thing. And they were gonna play for the city rec [Los Angeles Recreation Department]. She picked me up and I went over with her to the ball field and she introduced me to this Jo Whittaker. She told 'em I played ball and *da-da-da-da-da*. And Jo asked if I'd be interested in coaching.

I said, "I don't know. I've never coached."

And she said, "Oh, don't feel bad. I've never managed!" And there was a whole bunch of new kids out there and she said, "Well, there they are. They're all yours." Just like that!

I looked at her and said, "What do you mean they're all mine?"

"Well, you're hired!" [laughs]

"What's the pay?"

She said, "You've got to be kidding!" [laughs]

It was like Leadership School. "Here's your lesson plan."

Yeah, here's your lesson plan! [laughs] I says, "Well, let's give it a whirl."

And now I'm looking at Jo Whittaker and a whole ball field full of lesbians. Jo was gay and all these friends of hers out there and all these people that she knows and all these kids trying out for the team. Every *one* of 'em gay.

And not anything like where you came from.

Nothing like where I came from! I was just totally amazed. My ball team that I played for [in Rockford] had gay people on it, you know. But this was just *different*. The whole *feeling* was different. The way they talked to each other, you know.

How was it different?

It was *open*. It wasn't like, "I gotta watch the guy sittin' over here in the park lookin' at me." [It was more like], "Hey, Sweetie! What are ya doin' over there? Pick up that ball!" A different language entirely. Or *honey*. They'd use the word *honey*. I was in shock!

You had to get used to it.

I had to get used to it *very much*. I didn't say anything. I was very much reserved. I always have been [reserved] toward people. Always had been until I had a little chance to know them.

Anyway, they had the practice and I went out there and hit the balls around what I could because I still was [in a leg brace]. And Jo did a lot of hitting. I did a lot of the instructing: "Hit *there*, Jo. Hit *there*, Jo." We went through the routines that I went through when I was in softball, like my coach did. Anyway, when it was all over they sort of got together and Jo had called 'em [over] and introduced me—she called me Tex. We'd got talking and I said I was in the service in Texas.

"So where'd you come from?" [she asked].

I said, "Well, I came here from Rockford, Illinois."

"Well, we'll call ya Tex." Started calling me Tex because I was in the service in Texas. I hated Texas. Not *hated* hated [but] it wasn't my favorite place to live.

Anyway, they're gettin' together and they say, "Let's go to the Candle."

"What's a candle, Jo?"

She said, "Well, just follow us. We'll take you there. " Took me to this *gay* bar. And I met Virginia Ganis. Virginia Ganis is one of the "Oh! Ha! Ha! *Wonderful!*" wide, open people. Still is. She's older now, quite a bit older. She's been honored by the court¹⁰ many, many times for her works. Gorgeous lady. Got this wide-open bar where all these gals hung out at. And she had a back patio where she had pool tables and dancing could be back there and ping pong tables she had back there. Served food. Chicken was her big thing. She had a menu. That place was *full of women!*

Were you nervous?

I wasn't so nervous as I was, "Uhhh!" [*mugs*] My mouth was wide open! I couldn't believe this. All these gals and no straights were in there. No straights at all. And it was right on ... Aviation Boulevard? It's hard for me to remember where it was. It's no longer there [and] it's been a lot of years ago. Things like that pop into your head.

But she had the Candle, I guess, for awhile, as far as I know. And all of a sudden these kids, these gals are all hangin' out there, right? And I discover

there's another one around. The Star Room it's called. And this one is up in El Segundo. I hadn't been around long enough to hear of all this and all of a sudden there's *two* gay bars around full of women and Jo said, "We'll take you to the Star Room one of these days."

And I says, "Great!"

[Virginia Ganis] bought all the girls that come in from the ball field a drink. I mean, not a *drink*, she gave everybody a beer, is what she did. Set 'em up with pitchers. Gave 'em all pitchers, you know, and she's hugging everybody. I get introduced to her and Jo says, "This is our new coach!" 'Course, I get a big hug and a kiss and I'm turning [red], my face is bloodshot. I did that then. I don't anymore. And I found out that's the sponsor. Jo said, "This is our sponsor. She's gonna sponsor us." So here we have a gay bar sponsor. *Terrific!*

But anyway, we started playing. We played in a slow-pitch league and a fast-pitch league. We played both because [Virginia Ganis] was sponsoring both and they had enough players for them.

What was the name of the team?

The Little Angels. [*laughs*] The Little Angels. Can you believe that? They had good ball players. Really good players. We took first place in the city. We took it away from a team that had it for three years in a row. Did *really* well.

And I went to the Star Room. Found the Star Room. They took me to the Star Room. Now, I still had this brace on my leg. And I had been in a cast for months. Then I went from a cast to a special orthopedic shoe and a brace. I'd go and ask girls to dance and nobody'd turn me down. They all felt sorry for this poor little girl that'd had *polio!* [*laughs*] I laughed!

"What happened? Did ya have polio?"

And I'd say, "Uh, huh." [*laughs*] I just really whooped it up, had a really great time, got drunk. God, we drank *so* much!

But I also found out somethin' else. It wasn't quite as free as what it looked like.

Oh?

It *was* free in the aspect that, "Yeah, here we are, a bunch of girls in a bar." And here we are, we're not being harassed by anybody except a few stragglers that may come in and there's too many [girls] so they're not gonna harass you.

But there was *flashlights* on the dance floor.

What does that mean?

That meant there was somebody on the dance floor that flashed the couples dancing together.

Why?

Because you couldn't dance unless you were at least a foot apart. Could not get close together. You were not *allowed* to get close together.

Not allowed? Who says?

The bar owners did. At that time you weren't supposed to wear [more than] three pieces of clothing that were men's. If you had anything else over that you could be arrested for it.

This was law on the books?

You bet it was. They'd pick you up for it. The Criminal Investigation Department, the city's ... whatever the devil it was called.

Like the Vice Squad?

Yeah. They'd come in the bars and bust the bars. That's what they would do. They'd come in and they'd check IDs. And they would come in and see if they could catch somebody doin' something. 'Cause they could bust you for immoral whatever-the-heck it is. Oh, *no!*

The Star Room was the first place I really noticed. I didn't notice it at the Candle at first because we were there after ball practice, went out to the Candle at night. Yeah, the gals that worked for the bar—the waitresses or somebody did it as a job—stood there and flashed the dance floor while you were dancing to make sure that none of the couples were together.

How can you dance I mean in those days [early 1960s] people didn't dance far apart like they did later.

Come here, Honey! Let me show you! [she demonstrates dancing far apart] Not rubbing boobs, Honey. So they flashed the flashlights.

What did they say to you if they caught you dancing close together?

"Get off the dance floor."

Would they throw you out of the bar?

If you continued it, sure. They'd 86 you.

Now, what would be the result to the bar if two people were caught dancing close together?

They [the vice squad] could harass the bar, close 'em down. The ABC could come in and give 'em really a bad time.

ABC?

Alcohol and Beverage Control. They'd come in and hassle the heck out of those people.

Over their liquor license?

*Over the liquor licenses because you're having an immoral Remember, this was *not* a legal thing.*

It's not a legal thing?

Being homosexual is neither legal nor illegal, is it? It's not on the books as being legal, is it?

Particular sex acts are or aren't [legal] but not actually being gay or not.

Right. Exactly. There ya are. But at that time, in the early 1960s, girls weren't supposed to dance together. Boys weren't supposed to dance close together. I never did see a boys' bar when I was there. I only saw girls' bars at that time. 'Course, I wasn't into boys' bars, either. I could care less about the boys' bars, you know.

But yeah, the flashlight was very prevalent.

Did you get flashed?

Oh, absolutely! When I was dancing? Of course. The whole floor got flashed. And if anybody was dancing particularly closely, the flashlight'd just stay right on ya. And if you didn't break apart whoever was holdin' [the flashlight] would say, "Get off the dance floor." Ninety percent of 'em knew your name. They'd call your name: "Hey, get off the dance floor!" Or "Break it up! It's our license. We're the ones who can lose our license." And they pounded that into you, that they could lose their license. They could get hassled right out of there. And it's very easy to close a bar down. It's the easiest thing in the world to close a bar down because there's so many infractions you *can* find whether you find 'em or not. And close the bar down.

Were you ever in one of the bars when it was raided?

I was never in one when it was raided. But I was managing a bar when I learned some of the regulations that I was supposed to guide it by, so to speak. And I had the ABC talk to me, but they never bothered me personally or particularly. As far as being raided, no. As far as seeing the guys come in the bar and walk around and sit down at different ends of the bar These [vice squad or ABC] guys'd come in and sit a couple of 'em here and a couple of 'em there and just sit there and look around. I saw a lot of that. Trying to find something wrong, trying to catch girls kissing. They'd give you a bad time if you did that stuff, then, Dennis. It was not allowed. *It was not allowed!*

I just find it incredible that both sides would agree that, "Well, we're gonna watch you." and "We're gonna let you watch us and we're not going to complain about it."

Um, hm. Strange, isn't it?

Strange from the perspective of 1997. At the time I can understand that there was no consciousness [of gay revolt].

That's thirty-four years ago. That's a long time ago.

And a girl could not [wear] three articles of men's clothing, so to speak.¹¹

What constitutes men's clothing?

Oh, a tie, men's pants, men's shirts, men's jacket.

I guess it's hard to tell the difference nowadays.

Well, nowadays all the fly fronts are in the front! [laughs] I mean, you can go out any way you want to now. [laughs] Unisex come up after that, years later. Unisex clothing.

This was to prevent people essentially from going in drag in public?

Maybe so. I don't know. I really don't know what it was to prevent. It makes no sense. Because those people who are out there trying to bust people and throw 'em in jail for wearing the wrong clothing, for God's sakes, would have been better off going out there and arresting these guys robbing banks. It just made no sense.

I don't think I ever went out to a bar that there wouldn't be a vice cop come in some time or other. *Some* time or other they'd be in there. And they didn't seem to bother Virginia Ganis. They didn't seem to bother the Candle very much. And I think the reason they didn't bother the Candle a whole lot is because Virginia knew 'em all and paid 'em. I'm pretty sure. Because she'd say to us, "Girls, don't worry about the cops around here. They like me." I don't doubt they did like her because she was a beauty. I don't mean a beautiful woman—she was attractive, a nice-lookin' woman, real nice lookin'. But I mean happy-go-lucky, always willin' to help people.

Like a mother.

Yeah, like a big mother. She also had a big crush on *me*. Oh, for awhile she did. Yes, she did! She was very open about everything. She was an open person, *period*. And I used to come in and she'd give me this big *extra* hug and extra kiss and she'd say, "When are you gonna ask me out?" And I didn't even think about askin' this woman out. She's twenty years my senior here just about [*laughs*]. And I'd answer, "Oh, I dunno. You want to go out for dinner sometime, Virginia?"

"Oh, yes, Tex, I'd love to go out for dinner."

So I was just thinkin' about goin' out for dinner. I wasn't thinkin' about some hot *date*! And I *was* still naive. Gotta realize, I didn't do that much in the army. I wasn't naive, but with her, with this particular person who I admired and who was like a mother figure to us all, you know.

See if you can do this. Can you remember what the Candle looked like?

Well, it was [built] out of wood.

It was a separate building?

It was a separate building. And it didn't have any buildings very close to it, either. It wasn't hemmed in like next door [to anything]. It wasn't two-story or nothin' like that. It was made out of wood. It almost looked like your typical home moreso than a bar, your typical old fashioned-looking bar. The name of [the bar] right smack in front. No big neon sign. There was no [*big*] sign on it at all. It wasn't big inside, it wasn't huge inside. How can I describe the size of it? It's really difficult for me to do that.

On the inside. You walked in the door [and] right dead ahead of ya you'd se the bar. Now, the bar is *long*. It's a long bar. And it comes over to the right at an angle, stretches around the corner. And on the left it makes another little corner, like an L in two different directions. And then at the very top of the L to the left there's a bunch of chairs and tables and things, and also around the middle of the room and down toward the other end of it there are chairs and tables. And then the normal, general signs of beer and whatever on the walls and the menu of what she's serving that day stuck up right there in the center. And the biggest thing she generally served was "Virginia!" [*laughs*]

Virginia?

The main menu. "Virginia" in big letters! That was her.

And, let's see. I think the jukebox as you walked in the door was to the left of it, if I remember correctly. An old jukebox. Didn't have those CDs on it then, either. Played all the good old songs, right? And there was a pool table in the bar and I think it was to the right. But there was a back patio to this bar and you'd go out the left-hand side as you walked in. There was a door that took you to the [patio] exit. You'd go out there and ... you'd have water fights out there. [Virginia] had hoses out there. Water fights. And table tennis because everybody liked table tennis. And she had two or three of those tables out there. And out there she had a pool table. And also [at] the back of the bar, she had an *apartment* back there. She lived right there. She lived at the bar.

Was that back patio fenced?

Yes. It was all fenced in.

High fence?

No, it was the kind of fence you couldn't really see through. She had a lot of vegetation and hedges there. It was fenced in, *per se*, by hedges. Call it that.

Was there ever any live music there?

No. It was too small.

Was it brightly lit inside or dark?

It was dark in the evening. It wasn't *dark* dark, though. During the daytime it was brightly lit, fairly brightly lit. It wasn't much different from the bars you walk into now. In the evening it was cool light, and in the daytime it was a little harsher light.

Can you describe the Star Room?

Yeah. The Star Room, when you walked in the front door, it had a *big long* bar straight on down. Boom! OK? On the right as you walked in was like a big entrance and the whole thing on the inside of that was a dance floor and little tables on both sides. When you walked in this big bar, long bar, there's little tables down at that end. No tables up toward where the entrance is. That's just the bar. It's strictly a bar, beer, liquor. Virginia Ganis's was wine and beer. The Candle was beer and wine and the Star Room was liquor. Difference.

[*Was the Star Room*] a more elegant kind of place, if you could use that word?

A little bit more.

Food at the Star Room?

No. Potato chips, *da-da-da-da-da*.

There's something else you gotta think about. At that bar [the Star Room's bar] they couldn't serve booze.

Why?

They could take the booze *away* from the bar and serve it to the tables.

But not at the bar itself?

Not at the bar itself.

Why?

Because it was against the law for a *woman* to serve liquor.

No!

Yessiree. You bet it was! [*laughs*] You bet it was. When I managed the Hofbrau I was on their management thing. I had to go to the ABC and get fingerprinted and mugged [mug shot photographs] and I was put down as a manager at the

Hofbrau. And this guy named Al and another guy named Ray were the two ABC guys that used to come in there. And Ray came in one day and he says to me, "If I ask your waitress there to serve me, will she serve me?" Her name was Toni.

And I says, "Ask her and find out." He was sittin' at the bar.

He says, "Naw, Dorothy, I won't do that to ya. She just *might*." 'Cause he'd bust me. I had to set up on a table outside the bar—this was a beer and wine bar—I had to set up wine and stuff outside and the waitress could take it from there and serve the people sittin' around.

So there were no stools at the bar?

There were stools all *over* that bar, but you couldn't [serve liquor] there. Or, they could get served from one of those tables and bring it up and *sit* at the bar.

That makes absolutely no sense!

You damn right it didn't. It used to infuriate me. No sense whatsoever. Because if they were sittin' there at that bar and the ABC walked in, what proof did you have that you didn't *serve* at that bar? I don't know how long [that law] lasted, but it didn't last too long [after I got to Los Angeles]. I'm not too sure that law was in Florida also.¹²

The life in southern California—how long did it take you to settle into the life?

About two days! [laughs] Didn't take me very long, I'll grant you. Because everything was so easy then. I met a lot of gay friends then, a lot of open gay friends. They didn't go out paradin' down the street in the early 60s, but they had a place to go.

What about organizations? You had the bars now and the softball teams—what about [gay] organizations?

We weren't really involved in gay organizations.

Were there any that you knew of?

Not that I knew of at that time. But, God! There's fifty million of 'em there now! But as far as the life itself was concerned people didn't go out and push anything in anybody's faces, either.

But you did have places to go.

That was the whole difference [for me] right there. We didn't go out and demonstrate our sexual activities out in the middle of the park but people were gettin' *bolder*. Getting *bolder*.

How were they getting bolder?

Well they manifested the new boldness a lot by going out together, being together. Not worryin' so much about someone seein' 'em or getting panicky about it. The younger people were coming out more bravely. You know, "Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke!" type of thing. But *still*, people were afraid [for] their jobs. That was the biggest fright most people had was for their jobs, their security, which is normal. Girls that were livin' with girls didn't want anybody to really realize they were livin' with girls if they had a job. They were still scared inside themselves.

Do you think the new openness, or the beginning of it, was a California thing or the times?

If I went back to Rockford, Illinois right now I don't think [gay people] would be open there. I don't *think* so. [laughs] I don't know, Dennis. It would be quite a thing to go back to Rockford and see how people are living now. Do they have gay bars there? I'm sure they must have in Florida. But I'll tell you one thing—they don't have 'em in Las Vegas. That's because people are so afraid of losing their jobs. That's something that really amazes me. There's so many gay people there.¹³

Las Vegas is a whole case by itself.

Yes, it is. Because it's full of entertainers.

And still closeted.

And they're still closeted. They think people's not gonna come see them or pay money because they're who they are. That's one of the things that's amazed me ever since I've ever come here. I can go into LA and everything's fairly ... whatever. And come into Las Vegas where everything's *supposed* to be whatever, and it's backward. It's still backward. Still has the flashlights, yeah.

Let's talk some more about the softball team. Did you take it on to great victory?

I coached the Little Angels for a couple, three years actually. But you know, it could be very well that that is probably one of the first directed gay organizations—the soft ball league, which I started. You know, as far as organization, yeah. Facilitated with the city and all this sort of stuff.

So the team, when you got to California, that team was brand new?

The team was brand new and they played for the city. We entered the city league which presented us with trophies at the end of our first place winning about an inch and a half high. Which infuriated me. And inch and half high. I thought it was pretty cheap.

But what happened, what I found after I got [to Los Angeles] and when I really got involved with meeting more people and knowing more people, [was] that there was not just the Star Room and there was not just the Candle. There was Joani Presents. Joani [Valore] used to play drummer in some very well-known group. I've got a book [about] her [published] when she retired. And there was the Jazz World and there was Scotty's out on the Santa Monica beach. I'm lookin' at all these bars. Not just one or two bars around here. There's a number of bars that I'm finally finding, so to speak. And all these little bars that are out there—and there were approximately eight or nine of 'em, maybe eight—most of 'em had soft ball teams. And most of 'em, what they did was they would go out and they'd practice. They didn't play anything. They weren't in any leagues. They'd maybe take their team over A would take their team over to B once in awhile and they'd play each other. Or else they'd have an inter-bar thing and they'd play each other. But nothing *happened*. They weren't *organized*.



Top, l-r: Dorothy Frassmann; Joani Valore; Bobby Keene, 1960s



Bottom: Little Angels softball team [Virginia Ganis center, in light blouse; Dorothy Frassmann to her right with trophy], 1961

[photos courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]

Anyway, I took a really good look at that and I thought, "Hey! There are eight or nine gay ball teams coming out of these gay bars and they're not playing anywhere." Because I expected to see more than the Candle [team] in the city leagues as far as a place to play is concerned. And so I took it upon myself to go out and meet these people, meet these owners, get out and talk to them. And I did. I went out and I talked to them. I said, "Why aren't you guys playin' on any leagues?"

"Well, there isn't any league."

I said, "Sure there's a league. It's a city league." And here are the teams: some of 'em are out in the [San Fernando] Valley, some are out toward Culver City. They were scattered. They're not just [in] Los Angeles, now. There's maybe only one team—*mine*—coming out of LA. The rest, couple or three of 'em, are in the Valley 'cause that's where the bars are. In the Valley. Except for the Star Room and the Candle and Scotty's in Santa Monica.¹⁴

So I went around and talked to all the owners and I said, "Would you be interested in havin' a league with the gay bars? An organized league." At first they wanted to know what the advantages and disadvantages were. They could see *money*. Fact, the last one that came in was Joani Presents. I think it was [the] year after that she came in. But she didn't have a ball team at the time. I just went to the ones that had ball teams, organized ball teams, or unorganized ball teams. And so Bobby Keene, I knew her because these are people I had met. Her father was an umpire. So I talked to Bobby and I talked to some other people and I got a meeting going. And I called in people that could help and bar owners. Had a meeting at the Candle, of course. We laid out more or less plans of how to set up the league. And, of course, at the time I didn't know the *city* had to be involved. I just sort of left that out because everybody had practice fields. So my idea was—we'll just take [four] teams and make it easy—A, B, C, and D. OK? A sets up a practice field, B sets up a practice field, C and D. [enumerates on her fingers] Each one once a week to practice. And it's the Valley here they've set it up at. This one goes and plays that one, this one plays that one, this one goes over and plays that one. So we played practice fields, what's the big deal? We'll play each other, but it'll be a league. There will be umpires, the sponsors will provide the balls, will provide the *da-da-da-da-das*. Sponsors also have to give the visiting team and their own team a free drink after the game, and we will all meet at the [bar]. The people that are there to watch the game and the ball players, the place to be—if they *wanna* be, nobody can force 'em—will be the home team's bar. You know?

[We] play at your place, then you supply the drinks. But everybody will go to your bar and you'll get the business. That's how I worked that.

Did you have a name for the league?

The Gay Women's Independent Softball Association. That was never spelled out in writing!

Never publicized?

The *G* turned into *Girls*. I finally had to publicize it because I had to put it out to the city and I had to change it to *Girls* for the city. But not to *us*! Oh, God yes, Dennis!

Anyway, what happens when we started playing it wasn't four [teams], we're talkin' about, like seven or eight teams playin' in seven or eight different fields. I've got the umpire, chief, Mr. Keene who *was* an umpire and chief. We've got three or four other national umpires working with us that are gay. Some of the gals knew umpires. Keene knew some umpires.

Women or men?

Women *and* men both. They had to have two at each game so we could get these games goin'. We have four or five games goin' a week now. Couple of 'em Sunday, couple of 'em Saturday, so this thing is gettin' [laughs]

Anyway, to make a long story short, I'm at work, right? And the season's about almost half over. Well into over half over and we're still playin' in practice fields, because I didn't know about this. It didn't dawn on me. But I get a call from a lady named Maryann Russell. And she's head of the Los Angeles Recreation Department. And the recreation department for LA takes in the whole Valley. Los Angeles County Recreational Department. She calls me up and she says, "I hear you have ball teams runnin' around all over my ball fields."

And I said, "I don't understand what you're talkin' about."

She says, "Well, don't you have a league going? Aren't you president of a league?"

Where she got my name, I have never to this day ever known. Somebody reported it. And somebody who knew what they were doing, so it had to be a

mad umpire or somebody who knew what they were doing to call the city and report this, that knew that I wasn't supposed to be there because *I* didn't know I wasn't supposed to be there. You follow me? [Someone] that knew the rules and regulations. And she said, "Well, don't you know you have to have a license to [use] ball fields out there? You've got to get a license from the city. You've got to be *cleared* on these fields. You can't just take ball teams and"

I said, "But they're practice fields."

She said, "In order to have a league running, which you have gotten, you have got to have all these fields cleared or I can stop your league now by just tellin' all the fields and places that you can't have a practice." Because in order to get a practice Here's how that works. You go to the place that you're playin' ball out of, like, say, you had a ball field here, whatever it is, you go to that little department on that ball field and you set up a practice for next Tuesday. You pay your \$15 or \$8 or whatever it is to use that field. That pays for the lights, say, [if] it's night. Otherwise there isn't really a charge on it. And you can usually take the bases out and use 'em if you don't have any. So that's an individual thing. That city gets their money in for this field and for that field for somebody puttin' in a practice. Doesn't show there's any league going there. And I'm not trying to hide a league. There's no such thing as set practice fields and I've got a league goin' on paper. In the meantime this whole thing is scheduled for the year, for the whole season. And it's very competitive. They are playin' against each other for trophies, they are playin' against each other for *big* trophies. It's very competitive and they're really into it. So I go down to the city and I take the schedule with me and [Russell] says something about kickin' these teams all off these fields.

I said, "You can't *do* that!" And I'm in instant panic, OK? I'm president of this thing, I'm running this thing. I don't know what the hell I'm doing, obviously. I'm gonna get 'em kicked off here. So I told her, I says, "Can I come down and see ya?"

She said, "Yes. Bring your schedule." So I took the schedule down to see Russell. And she sat down with me with that schedule and cleared every damned field for the whole rest of that season for me. And she said, "Next year, if you're gonna have another league you better bring that schedule in to me and we'll sit down and work it over." And it cost a couple of hundred and some odd dollars to clear those fields. We had to pay registration fees. We had to pay these fees for each one of these teams. Well, *I* paid it. I paid it out of my pocket. I figured I

screwed up, I'll pay it. And the next year that's exactly what I did. I went down and saw [Russell] with schedule in hand before we ever started, got [all the fields] cleared.

Was she really upset with you or was she ...

She was concerned. I went down and explained to her that I had no idea [how all this worked]. First of all I wasn't supposed to set up a league to begin with. I could submit a schedule and have the city set it up. When she told me that I said, "Look, all I did was all your work for you." That's what I told her. I says, "I set it up, we had people to schedule this, everything's running beautiful." And it was. It was really runnin' smooth. I explained to her what had happened. I told her, I said, "All these people had teams and nobody was entering anything. And it's all fast pitch teams." And at that time I had *two* leagues running. I had a fast pitch and I had a slow pitch.

And they were all sponsored by the gay bars?

And they were all sponsored by the gay bars. And that was a problem, too,.

Did [Russell] have to know who the sponsors were?

She didn't ask. On my schedule it showed up, "Sponsored by" On the very head sheet of it was the name of the team and "Sponsored by" Just so everybody knew where to go. I didn't think of taking [that sponsor sheet] off and she saw that. On recreation department things they *did*—they don't now—frown on any bar sponsoring any team.

Not necessarily gay, just any?

Yes. It doesn't bother now, but at that time it did. Because actually I've read something on that in the city recreation department's rules and regulations. They didn't want any alcoholic beverage-type things. So that would include bars. When I saw that I thought [Russell]'ll either shine it on or she'll say something. But she never said anything. She shined it on.

You know, when you have all those women all together from different bars and different places playin' soft ball, mingling together, that's where you have your *real* affairs goin' on. And your real cheating [in relationships] goin' on. And your real behind-the-door kissin' and smoochin' goin' on. There was a lot of it, you bet there was. I was doing some of it, but not much.

Did you find somebody when you came to Los Angeles?

When I came to Los Angeles, after I got started with this soft ball stuff, I made one pact with myself, and that is I would not date or go out with or do anything with anybody on any of the ball teams. As long as I was involved with running it or coaching it.

And so did you honor your self-pact?

I did. I started going out with a girl that lived in Palm Springs! *[laughs]* From LA I'd drive to Palm Springs to see this girl for awhile. Just for a little while. Didn't last long. It was too far. She was at one of our games one time and we just kind of got together one night and off we went.

Were all the spectators gay?

Pretty much so, yeah. Remember, we were holding these games in city parks so a lot of the guys and stuff, we'd be playing these ball games, anybody that was in the park would come over and watch 'em. Didn't have to be gay. Could be, you know, Joe Doe and his kids could go up in the bleachers and watch em. We got a lot of interest. And the guys that run the recreation department fields there, *they* weren't gay. The personnel wasn't gay.

Did [being a gay league] ever become an issue at any time?

The only thing that ever became an issue—and it became an issue strictly because I was called in on it—[was when] I got called one night because two girls were neckin' in the parking lot of one of the parks. They were sitting in a car in the parking lot smooching and I got called in on that one night. I was home and

the park was fifty million miles away, of course: Penmar, up by Santa Monica. I told 'em, "Go tell 'em to stop it." That's what I told 'em.

Then I got called on marijuana being smoked in the stands. I got a number of calls on that. These people were goin' in there and sitting and smoking grass in the stands in a public park with a bunch of people around, straights and gays and kids and *da-da-da-da-da*. So I had a meeting over that one and I knew the team's people who it was. Actually I knew what I was working with—people that drank, people from bars, people that smoked grass. One of the original rules and regulations of [my] league was that the ball teams were responsible for their fans. Their fans. They were responsible for the actions of their fans. They had to control it. As president of that league I had to go out and control it. And that wasn't any big deal, either. I just went up in the stands and [said], "OK, you're the hell outta here or the ball team forfeits the game. Your choice." And I'd call the captain of the ball team right there. And their sponsor who was always at the game. Twice I went through this trip and I finally kicked out one team right out of the league right in the middle of the year, the season. I just dropped 'em from the roster.

Do you remember which bar was sponsoring them?

It was called Brothers, believe it or not. It was a girls' bar [but] it was called Brothers. They were a lot into drugs, into grass and stuff, but I didn't know it, of course, until later. And they were doin' a bunch of numbers all the time in the stands and I got a couple of calls on it and I talked to 'em once about it. And finally I just scratched their name from the schedule. I called the sponsor and said, "Your team doesn't have to show up for the next game because all [their] games have been canceled." And that was it.

The hardest time I had was with that particular team. I went to the ball field and I did tell them, their fans, right then and there. See, when you have fans, one group's on one side and the other team's fans [are] on the other side. You know who you're talking to. I went out, I stopped the game and I called the sponsor, she was there, and I called the captain of the team over and I said, "You got a choice there." This was the second time. I said, "You tell those gals to either knock off the grass and the beer up in those stands or you guys are out of here. You're forfeitin' the game."

Did they pay attention to you?

You bet they did. They paid attention real fast because it was [so] competitive. It had nothing with me being macho. It had to do with they knew I'd do it. In the realm of the soft ball league I was known as very square, very fair, and *Don't Mess With Me*. Because if I said somethin' I meant it and that was the way it was gonna be. No ifs, no buts, no anything. That was it. And that was it with the sponsors, too. You see, I had a lot of trouble with sponsors. You know what sponsors are: bar sponsors always think they're the big shots. They can get away with anything. I had trouble with that.

How did you have trouble with that?

I can give you a good example. Sandy. Sandy owned the Hialeah [bar]. The Hialeah was number one team at the time. Which didn't matter. Number one or number ten, it wouldn't have made much difference. Puzz [Sandy's spouse], who happened to be a very good friend of mine, too—I liked Puzz very much—she got sick and went in the hospital. She was also their coach. Sandy called me the day of the game and she said that I'd have to cancel the game.

I said, "Why do I have to cancel the game, Sandy?"

She said, "Well, Puzz had to go to the hospital."

I says, "What has that got to do with the game?"

She said, "Well, my team can't play without their coach."

"Why not? You mean to tell me you don't have but one coach? You don't have a back-up? That anybody on your team can't go out there? Well, Sandy, your choice. You play the game [or] you forfeit the game. But that's it. I'm not cancelin' the game. The team's gonna be there, the umpires will be there. If your team is not there, you forfeit." She called me a motherfucker sonovabitch. I says, "OK, Sandy, it's *still* your choice." I said good-bye and hung up the phone.

Her team was there and they won the ball game. [Puzz] was her girlfriend, too. They lived together. But that wasn't it. She was so sure her team would lose without Puzz. And I was so correct in what I did. She didn't want to risk losing.

How long were you president of the league?

About six years, I guess. Five, six years. I quit. I just got fed up, quit. Bobby Keene was vice president and she took it then.

Would that have been late '60s, latter '70s by then?

Yep.

Did the league grow?

It lasted about three years [after I left]. Bobby kept it for a couple of years, and then Terry Reynolds kept it, took it after Bobby did. But then it sort of faded off into the distance. Everybody lost interest, kind of.

Has there been anything like that since that you're aware of?

No. There isn't anything like it and there's never been anything like that since. Sandy gave me a book one time, kind of a softball book, and she signed it, "A legend in her own time." It was really kind of trippy.

There was a lot of money they made from that. I remember when Joani Presents came in[to the league], and Joani was the bar that had the bands and had the groups that came in and entertainment. It was a very high class bar. And when she decided to come in[to the league] she was gonna sponsor the Schleppers, which was Bobby's team. Bobby was coaching the team. Joani [Valore] named it the Schleppers. The team came from the Candle. It was the Candle's second team. Except Virginia [Ganis] only wanted one. So [Joani Valore] took what she called the Schleppers. Before she did Bobby had gone out and asked her to [sponsor] her team. [Joani] called me up and she wanted me to come out and talk to her. And to find out what good it would be to her to sponsor the team. So I told Bobby, I said, "Come on. You might as well go with me to make this all first hand and not second hand."

I told [Joani] exactly how I felt about it. I said, "Then it's up to you to make your decision." I said, "Number one, the teams practice. And when the teams practice they're gonna be at your bar, if they feel like it. They'll come in the bar and have a few drinks with you. That happens a couple, three times a week. At least twice. Teams practice twice a week anyway. In the meantime, you're getting new people because there're gonna be people joining the team which

you've never seen before. And these new people are gonna bring other new people in which you've never seen before, who will bring in *more* new people that you've never seen before. That's your first step in makin' money." I said, "Then you're gonna be playing. You're gonna be playin' on a league. Every home game You put up a drink to both [the home and visiting] teams. But for that drink what you're gonna get is two ball teams in here drinking their guts out because they're gonna be hotter 'n' hell from playin'. Their girlfriends are gonna be with 'em. Their friends from the stands are gonna be with them, and now you're gonna meet a whole bunch *more* new people. Some of 'em's gonna come out and visit your bar because they've never been here before. Now you figure [it] out, Joani. You're a business woman."

Sold!

It's the truth, though. I saw it in action the year before.

Was Joani happy finally?

Oh, yeah. She took the team. There was no question then. No question, because it was the truth. And that is the way it did work. Because these people that Say you lived in Los Angeles and never really went out to the Valley because you don't really know the bars or anybody there. But it wasn't that far. Eighteen miles, whatever. Now, pretty soon, you've been there a few times, you [say], "Hey, let's go out and see so-and-so for a change. Let's go over the hill." And it works that way, both directions.

Tell me about Joani. What was Joani's last name?

Joani Valore.

What were you doing for a living at this time in LA?

First I went to work for Endevco. When I first came to California. And after that they moved out of Pasadena. Don't ask me where they went.

Did you stay with them?

Yeah, I stayed with 'em about three years, four years. Then I got a job at Philco Aeronutronics. I quit Endevco before they left [Pasadena] because I wanted to get closer to home. It was just too darn far out. Anyway, I went to work for Philco and I was there, God, I don't know. They shut down. Before, they were working on an obsolete missile. When I went in there I hired in as a rover,¹⁵ sort of, on an electronic line. I was there three months and they made me [the] lead over that line, which was very nice of them. And they put me nights for awhile to train other people for line for nights. And they were getting ready to shut down everything within a few months¹⁶ and I went to work at Circuit Board Drilling Service, Incorporated. I was there about nineteen years. That was a long time. Now that brings [us] up to about eight years ago, at least work wise.

In the meantime, in the 60s, you were talking about you can't dance close and you can't wear men's clothes, and it wasn't as free ...

As it looked. Well, as it looked to a newly born Babe.

When did it start to change that you noticed?

Well, you know it's hard to really put a finger on it, Dennis. Let me put it this way. The more people that I knew and the more involved I was, like with larger groups of people, I didn't notice that it wasn't free.

You got used to it.

Yeah. Different places that we would go to, like the Star Room, for one, we'd, you know, be a little nervous with this flashlight bit. But then we were out with such groups like softball and like Joani's and like different places that we never thought anymore about it. In other words, we didn't think about the vice squad or the vice cop. We didn't think about stuff like that. So the change that was coming was coming already. And it was coming in the people's minds that were younger, starting to grow, the younger people playing softball [for instance]. Hell, they were up there smoking marijuana in the stands. You know. They're not exactly too concerned about anything or anybody. The people that fraternized the bars, as far as they were concerned, they weren't looking for vice [squad] in there or anybody to pick them up [arrest them]. So I think the change

started then, started back then when these people started coming out together. Something organized. I really do. Started for *me* then because I never thought about anything anymore. Once we got that soft ball league started and we all chummed out The only time we ever went out was with people that we knew from the ball teams. And generally went out after practices and generally went out after games. Once in awhile, maybe on a weekend night, then we'd go out. Shit, if we were playin' Saturday we'd be out Saturday night anyway. We did a lot of going out, actually, a lot of going out. But it just seemed the change crept up on you.

You didn't even notice it.

You didn't really notice. Because you're surrounded by change. That's really the best way [to say it]. You can maybe try to pinpoint it: "Well, was there a certain year?" Or a certain time. I would peg the 70s. I think the 80's were pretty promiscuous.

When did you start managing the bar?

God. I was working for Endevco, actually, at the time. I started managing the Hofbrau. In fact I quit Endevco not just to get closer to [home], but because I was working at Endevco from, like, seven to three-thirty and I was working at the bar from five till almost two in the morning, and so I had a choice to make. It was either work at the bar or continue at Endevco. And I couldn't continue to do both of them.

The Hofbrau was the name of it.

Where was it?

It was located on El Segundo Boulevard. I guess it was Los Angeles. It wasn't down far enough to be El Segundo, though it could have been. It was owned by a guy named Al Bacon. He hired me. I was in his bar one night and he sat down by me. We just got to talking. And he asked me if I would be interested in doing part-time bartending. And I said I never did part-time bartending. He said, "Well, just on weekends. Every once in awhile for a few hours."

And I said, "Well, that might be OK." Little extra money wouldn't hurt anything. So I went to work for 'im as a part-time bartender on weekends. And he had a manager, a woman manager in there and he ended up firing her. Now, the woman manager in there worked from, oh, probably three o'clock, five o'clock, whatever time they went in, till two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning. By the time you clean up and get out of there it's three o'clock. 'Cause one thing, he had a broasting machine.¹⁷ He served food. Broasted chicken, potatoes and stuff. So, anyway, he wanted me to work there, for one reason, I was runnin' a soft ball team.

Was this a gay bar?

Well, it was after that, that's for sure!

The first girl he had in there, that was working, she was gay, and he was wanting to *turn* it gay. And it wasn't completely. There was still stragglers from the straight side of life still coming in there. But he wanted the gay community in there. Anyway, he knew who I was but I didn't know that he knew who I was at the time. He knew I had a soft ball team. And what he talked to me about after he talked to me about hiring [me], coming to work for him part-time, he asked me if I would be interested—this was a week or so after I actually went to work there—if I'd be interested in a *full* time job there. And I said, Well, no, I had a job. And he said he was planning to let the other girl go and that he could give me full time work and I said, "Well, make me your offer."

He told me, he said he would give me 50% of whatever was made at the bar plus salary.

And I said, "How would I know that I would get 50%?"

And he said, "Because *you* could pay *me*." *Why did he want it to become a gay bar?*

So I figured, well, that sounds like a fair enough deal. But he guaranteed me so much and I don't remember exactly what it was. A hundred and a quarter, a hundred and fifty a week which was pretty good money then. It was fine. I was still making tips, I was working behind the bar and he was going to guarantee me half of whatever after the bills plus salary. And as it worked out he took me down to the ABC and I was fingerprinted and my picture taken and I was put on as a manager which means he had somebody on [the license] that could actually, legally be in charge, because it was against the law not to have a manager or an owner in the bar at all times. And I don't think there's any change [in that law],

frankly. And he needed somebody that could be there anyway, so I gave Endevco notice and I went to work for Al.

Al had live groups [in the bar]. And he had some good live groups in there, some really nice ones that played some nice music. Well, after I went in there full time I brought my ball team in there for that season and he sponsored the ball team. Which is what he wanted, of course, because that's more money. And I also happened to know skaters. I don't know how many people around here have ever heard of the Thunderbirds. They were professional roller derby skaters. Ever hear about 'em? Ever hear of the roller derby?

Yeah, I remember the roller derby quite well, but I don't remember the names of the teams.

T-Birds, Thunderbirds. And I happened to know a number of the gals. They started hanging out at the Hofbrau because I was in there now.

Gay women?

Gay women. And their friends.

That's a question I've asked before and never really got an answer to. You have a bar, say it's a straight bar. How does it become a gay bar?

By numbers. I can give you even a better example of that when I get to the next bar I went to after [the Hofbrau].

Why did Al want the gay community in there? Why did he want it to become a gay bar?

Because he liked the idea better than having straight guys. He was having a lot of trouble with straights in there drinking, bringing in their own booze. He thought he'd have more control over women.

Was he gay?

No, definitely not. He had a wife which he didn't hang around much with, but I met her and she was a pretty nice lady. She really was. I think they were sort of

separated. But to answer your question. I had another bar after I had left the Hofbrau and went to work at Circuit Board Drilling Service that deliberately came to *me*. He got my name from somewhere, somebody else that he knew and he called me on the phone. At the time I was president of the ball league. He called me to go to work for 'im and asked me to deliberately bring in the ball leagues. He wanted the softball leagues, he wanted the gay community, and I did go in to work for him. I'm trying to remember the name of that bar. It was also located pretty much in that area. The Hi Dolly. The name of it was the Hi Dolly. And it was a huge bar. It had a huge pool room, four big pool tables in it. It had a big stage, a really large stage. That sounds like Ed Sullivan: "*Reallllly large!*" [*laughs*] Anyway. And it had a very large dance floor. Big bar area, lots of seating area. It looked like a big barn almost except it was very nicely done inside. Had a lot of tables, lot of bar space. It took two bartenders easily to serve. First thing I did was hire somebody to help me. But he called me, he wanted me to talk to 'im. I went down and I talked to him.

He said, "I'll tell ya why I want you here. Janet told me about you, that you'd worked at the Hofbrau. I want [my] bar changed. I want to change to a gay bar. And what I understand is that you know the people to do it."

I told 'im I could do it, I could work. And I said, "Aside from that I can't guarantee anything." But of course I had the bar packed the first weekend I was in there. It was almost standing room only. Because I just called all the ball teams and I told 'em. 'Course, they all weren't there every week, but they were there a lot. The kids come in a lot. And it was such a big, beautiful place. And his music was so elegant, really nice music, big band-type music but could play everything. He didn't have [just] two or three people he had six to eight people on stage.

That's a lot of money.

Yes, it was a lot of money. And he also had entertainment, singers, you know, different things that come in. Then he'd run talent shows. Fact, I sang and played my guitar in one of 'em and got three encores. That's when I *could!* Everybody had a great time with that. In fact, I didn't have *my* guitar. Somebody said something to somebody in the band that I could play guitar and so the band called me up. I was working and the band called me up. "Hey, come up here." And everybody, of course, gave me the *claps*—so to speak. [*laughs*] So I went up and I played a couple of songs, guy gave me his guitar. I had a good time.

Where did you learn to play the guitar?

When I was in Canada. Started learning from my cousin Edwin. I can't read music. I wish I had learned something like that. But then I got arthritis now so it don't matter. I have a hard time playing, holding the strings down.

But, yeah, Harry Coon wanted to turn [Hi Dolly] gay and it turned gay. He was a pretty good guy, he really was. He took me to Vegas one time. He had this Cadillac, this green Cadillac and so he decided he was gonna take me to Vegas and what happened was I had cancer of the uterus. And I had to go to the hospital, of course, had it removed and I came out and I was in the recuperating period of this time and so [Harry] decided that he was gonna take me to Vegas. I'd been there once or twice before, so that was his trip. All expenses paid! He's takin' his manager here to Vegas. And he showed me a great time. We stayed for three days, couple, three days. Separate rooms. He arranged for everything.

How long did you manage bar for [Harry Coon]?

Oh, not too long. I think it was less than a year, maybe. Right around in that area because Harry started bringing in some pretty tough people. Guys'd start hanging out in there. [They'd] sit around the bar after hours and they'd drink. They'd pull their bottles out. But they were rough guys. They were rough-looking guys and I didn't like the way it was there. Then the people started getting rough that were coming in there.

Were they still gay people?

Yeah, they were gay people but the nationalities changed. A lot of the people that started coming in were knife carriers, gun carriers. And Harry, who was supposed to be there—particularly [on] the weekends, I was just working weekends ... [He was] supposed to be there [but] on Saturday night or Sunday nights he would not show up. He'd never be there. I'd be there by myself and a knife fight would bust out on the floor or someplace. Or somebody'd shoot off a gun in the parking lot. It started getting very, very bad. So one night I just closed it down and walked out of there. [Harry] didn't show up in time to open it and I didn't open it. He didn't show up that whole night. As far as I know, [the bar]

never got opened. That was the end of it. I saw him the next day and I told him that was the end of it. In all honesty—and this is maybe very racist of me, but it's not meant that way, it's exactly what happened—Watts came down into the Hi Dolly. It's as simple as that. That's exactly what happened. Watts came down into the Dolly fully loaded with guns and knives. *[laughs]* So that was the end of that one. It became a topless bar!

Did you tend anymore bars after that?

No. That was the end of my bartending days. I didn't have to be doing that anyway because I had a job, you know, where I was working eight to ten hours a day on already and I needed my weekends. So I really didn't need to be [tending bar]. Where was I working at then Circuit Board Drilling, I guess. I was at Circuit Board Drilling nineteen years and I was at this last company [La Deau Manufacturing] eight [years]. We're talking about twenty-seven, twenty-eight years ago.

But apparently people like that [the straight bar owners] certainly didn't care about the gay bit. They saw it was a money maker.

I'd like to talk in more detail about Joani Presents. That's a bar name that's come to me from other people I've spoken with who have been in LA or are from LA. Where was Joani Presents?

It was located in the Valley. It was located on Lankershim Boulevard. Very close to Victory [Boulevard], corner of Lankershim and Victory. I think it was maybe a couple doors up from [the corner], that way. North. I can't tell you where east and west and north and south is in LA from here. It's rather difficult. It was a nice bar. It was a pretty good sized bar. It wasn't huge. She had two pool tables. It was made more to be a glamorous type bar.

What does that mean? A glamorous type bar?

She had very nice paintings on the wall instead of beer signs all over. Her décor was more sophisticated. She tried to keep it more sophisticated in that respect. Even her tables weren't just ugly tables, black chairs. They'd be nice little lounge-looking chairs. They were at one time. She tried to keep the different

atmosphere. She did not want it to be a *bar*. Her typical word for everything was *saloons*. But [Joani Presents] was as far from an old western saloon as I've ever seen. Saloon for me is a little small bar with a long bar with stools and sawdust on the floor, right? Which [Joani Presents] definitely was not. She tried to keep it a little ritzy, a little high class.

What kind of entertainment did she have?

Everything she had was sort of pointed toward her playing the drums with. Or she did a lot of solo stuff. But she would have different singers that would not be familiar to me, so to speak. Particularly *name* people, except some that might have been from the [gay] community, like Beverly Shaw. She was hangin' around all the time. Fact, she and I had a little run-in at Joani's one time. I used to go there quite a bit. It was a little way from me, but I used to go there quite a bit. I knew a lot of people that went in there. And [Joani] asked me one time if I was rich or did I just have a good job because I spent a lot of money in there. I told her I was not rich but I *did* have a good job. Them days you spend twenty bucks you could buy twenty drinks just about. So anyway I was sitting at the bar one night and this woman comes walking up to me. She says, "You're on my bar stool."

I says, "What do you mean I'm on your bar stool?"

"Well, that's my seat," she says just like that to me.

I said, "Well, can you prove that to me?"

And she says, "Well, everytime I come in here I sit there."

I says, "Well, who the hell are you?"

She says, "My name is Beverly Shaw and that is *my seat!*"

"Well, Bev, you're just gonna have to move down one." You know! She meant nothing to me, though. I didn't know who she was when she said her name. But I wouldn't relinquish my seat. I could've said, "Well, I'm Dorothy Frassmann, I'm president of the soft ball league [Joani's] makin' money at."

After that I'd see Bev a lot of times and we kind of laugh over it. I'd run into her at the Hialeah, run into her at the Star Room, a number of places after that. The last place we saw her was at Nancy's [Kesterson] Club 22. I believe she's passed away now. I think she died.

Club 22. Describe Club 22.

Club 22 was probably the last major gay bar in North Hollywood. I'm sure some of the others will deny it. It's a pretty big bar. As you know it was Cheryl [Gobel's] sister's bar. She owned it. And it closed, oh, last year, I guess. It was open a long time. First time I saw the building itself in the '60s it was called the Hat and Cane, it was a boys' bar. And on the mirror it had a hat and a cane. And they had little shows that guys put on in there. And after [that] it was called the Big Horn. In fact, my partner in the trophy business bought it at one time. And then a lady who owns another bar out there right now, the Oxwood, she had it at one time, though I don't think she owned it. I think she ran it for somebody. Yeah, it went from the Hat and Cane to the Big Horn and then to the Club 22 after Nancy got it. And it had entertainment,. Nancy always had something going on there. It had a nice sized patio. It's got a stage, a place for groups, which she's had. It's got a large bar runs down the right side. As you walk in there's tables kind of in the center and around the side except where you walk. And there was a pool room off to the left but it got demolished by the [Northridge] earthquake there, unfortunately.¹⁸ In fact a lot of her bar got pretty well *shifted*, so to speak. Hurt her [business] really bad, really did. And she's got another room where people can sit. It was pretty nice, but right now it's rubble. It's no longer there.

Tell me the relationships you had when you got to Los Angeles. What was the longest and most serious you had in southern California?

Longest and most serious relationship was probably with Cheryl [Gobel]. Let me see now. I've had so many relationships in California I met Janie Williams. She and I bought a house in Lawndale. She had a little daughter named Terri who is now in her 20s. Janie and I were together for a couple of years, maybe. That was about it.

Now, Judi Gilbert was the first person I lived with in California. When I first came here I met Judi. I saw her at the Candle. I was sittin' with the ball teams and I kind of noticed she was lookin' at me. True story. I had a hard time with people looking at me. I really did. I never thought I *should* be looked at. It was after a basketball game, it wasn't softball. So I went up to the bar to get a drink and a gal named Wrangler and another one named Jerry were up at the bar and they

both had been lookin' at [Judi] because she was *cute*. Just *adorable!* And they asked me if I noticed her. I said, "Yeah, I see her."

And Wrangler says, "Let's make a wager. Let's see who she's gonna dance with." So we made a wager between us, five bucks or something. Whoever she danced with got the pay off.

And I said, "OK. I'm game." I was alone. I wasn't with anybody. I said, "I'll even be a sport. I'll let you guys go ask her first." Because I already knew that she'd been looking at *me*. [*laughs*] She'd been eyeballin' the daylight out of me. And she was at our basketball game that night. And we had come to the basketball game and she had followed that team [over to the bar], I know darn well she did. Anyway, she kept eyeballin' me. And so Wrangler—she was a bartender there—asked her [to dance]. [Judi] turned her down. Jerry asked her, turned her down. I went and asked her and I collected ten bucks! [*laughs*] But she was the first gal actually I lived with.

Judi and I didn't get along too well at all, but after she and I broke up ... I left her in Texas, is what I did. Yeah. She wouldn't talk to me all the way there. So I decided, "The heck with this." That's no way to spend a vacation, so I left her in Texas and I came back, packed my clothes out of our house, *her* house, and moved into an apartment. Then I started going out again. I don't remember who I met at that point in time, I really don't. God, that was so long ago. It was different girls I dated. I didn't really start living with anybody. I lived with a gal for a few months, just a place to stay for awhile. That wasn't any big serious deal. You have to live with roommates every once in awhile. Not every one is a big love affair in your life.

Then Janie [Williams] and I lived together. She had a little daughter and she was losing her apartment, losing her home, and I [had] met her at the Star Room a long time before. Then I run into her again and I asked her if she wanted to share an apartment with me. That's how we got together. We ended up buying a house.

She had the child with her all the time?

Yeah. Terri was in diapers. [Janie] deliberately had the baby. She wanted a child. She planned on having it. So she went out and found the type of coloring and everything she wanted and had the child.

You mean the type of person, the man, she wanted?

[nods]

Well, that's what—one, two, three, four relationships you've had with women who had children. Martha and Stella and June and Janie.

June had two [children]. Stella had four children. Martha, June, Janie, Stella.

In lesbian relationships that seems more likely than with two guys because guys don't have babies.

Um, hm. And women go out deliberately and have them sometimes. [Janie] did. She wanted a child so she went out and had a child.

How close were you and Janie?

Terri and I were very close. Janie and I were very close until Janie got into drugs. Janie got into drugs, Janie and I became *unclose*. She used to go out and smoke and stuff like that and I wasn't really into drugs. I never was into drugs. You know, I've smoked a little grass in my life but not something I'm going to go out and do all the time. And she started running with some people that were very much into it. And she started taking Terri with her. Pretty soon it was just no good and we were fighting all the time, so she left. Her stepfather, so to speak, was out of his house for awhile so she went over and house sat for 'im. And we put the house [in Lawndale] up for sale. We owned the house we were living in. Which was hard on Terri because she had her friends next door.

How old was she then?

She'd just started school. Five or six. Six maybe.

Did she understand the relationship between you [and her mother]?

She does now.

How does she feel about it now?

She could care less. She always cared about me. I was very close to Terri. But I saw her just before I came here. In fact, she and her boyfriend were over to visit me. She's a grown-up beautiful girl, cute as she can be.

You have a lot of surrogate children.

I seem to have, yeah. Four here, one, three, two here. [laughs] I think I counted seven.

* * *

When did you meet Pat Fenton?

1978, I believe.

What were the circumstances?

I had just come back from Hawaii and I went to a bar called the Oxwood. Pat was bartending.

The Oxwood was a gay bar?

It was a gay bar [but] Pat was not gay. She had been working over in another bar, and Tuck, who owned the bar, brought her into this particular bar. So, anyway, I met her there and she was bartending and I started flirting with her because she was very attractive to me. She kind of flirted back, teasing. She knew who she was talking to and she was teasing back. She told me I would be trouble, which I was, of course. And I told her I'd be back to see her, you know, in a few days if she was working. And the next night I popped back in again. So I started seeing Pat. Oh, I started flirting with her and one thing led to another. And at the time I had just broken up with Janie [Williams]. And I was also interested in getting an apartment, too. But not at that particular time. A little

later down the line, I believe, that I was looking for an apartment. Janie and I were having problems. I believe we had broken up at that particular time, though I believe that [Allyn St. John] was still with Pat. Or he was coming there to visit her. I was gettin' rid of the house in Lawndale and lookin' for a place to live and [Pat] found a place to live in the same apartment complex.

That was Los Feliz Lanai?

Yes. Los Feliz Boulevard. Though we had actually sort of started a little affair going before then, before Los Feliz. Anyway, we started getting quite serious. We started liking each other—I liked Pat a lot. She was a good person. I could see that. A little weird for me, but a good person. I didn't see all the weirdness yet. And she knows that I think she's a little weird because I told her so many times. But she's not. When I first met her she used to throw all these big words at me, which I never knew what she was talking about. So I told her, I says, "You gotta knock it off and start gettin' down where we can talk."

The attitude bit?

Yeah, the attitude bit. And the impressing bit. But you can't impress somebody who don't know what you're talkin' about. It's very difficult so it doesn't do much good, does it? But Pat and I got along in a lot of ways. She had a lot of weaknesses in her. I tend to draw toward weakness. A person is weak, I draw toward them. If a person needs help, I will go in that direction. I've done that a number of times. This is something that a lot of us are embodied in. We have these things in us. And with Pat Maybe it was her weakness that she was attracted to *me* because she needed somebody. That's part of her weakness right there. She was mixed up with some guy [Allyn St. John] that was treatin' her like crap at the time, Mr. Allyn St. John. In fact, I didn't know it was the guy that she was goin' with when I was down at the Oxwood one night and I'd beat 'im in a game of pool. [Pat] says to me, "Do you know who that was you were playin' pool with?"

And I said, "No."

"Well, that's Allyn St. John." She used to call me before I moved to Los Feliz when I was in Lawndale babysitting my house and cry because Allyn had done some darn thing. Sometimes I'd go rushin' out there and let her cry on my

shoulder. This type of thing. Anyway, she had a tendency to help people in *her* way that generally ended up hurting her. Getting close to people that hurt her. Her god child is one of 'em. She was always there for her god child, was always taking things over, doing things, spending Christmas, giving presents.

Who was her god child?

She has a god child that lives pretty close to LA there. Like when her god child's sister got married they didn't invite Pat. Pat was very hurt by that. This was not too long ago, Dennis. It seemed like everything sort of grew away from her. And these are people she knew for *years*. She knew them for many years through Scientology and different things. Just like her brother [Richard Fenton], and her Mom [Virginia "Teddy" Fenton]. Has nothing to do with her sister [Donna Fenton] who she used to be very close to. She's loaned things to people—forget it, they're gone. She's done things for people with no thank you. Some of the people she got closest to while I knew her, I told her personally to get rid of because they were people who were taking her for everything and giving her nothing. Whether it was materially or as far as just plain caring. It was all like one way. And Pat's a very easy person to take [advantage of]. And she probably isn't as easy now, but she still is to a point. She really is.

Anyway, we never lived together. I had got the apartment very close to her and the reason that apartment came up is because I had a trophy business in the Valley. It was a sideline, you know, an extra thing with a friend of mine. I wanted to get a place between the Valley and Torrance, which is where I worked. We were looking for a place and an apartment came up vacant [in the Los Feliz Lanai]. So I moved in and that's how I ended up in 1978 living on Los Feliz Boulevard. Long time. And Pat and I could get along to a point. I hurt her tremendously because our physical relationship was not compatible. It just wasn't.

What kind of relationship did you expect to have or did you hope to have [with Pat Fenton]?

Her physical feelings were not something I could provide her with. What *she* needed I couldn't give. What *I* needed she couldn't give. So the physical part Kind of down the tubes. And then, of course, I went off elsewhere. I went

looking elsewhere, though through many letters and many tears which I got from her Then she started dating and she got many tears from *me*. We still maintained that we still loved each other as we still do today, though now the love is elevated to a higher place, as far as I'm concerned. Now we love each other with a love that can't be broken up by either sex, other friendships, other relationships, because we don't have to worry about that anymore. There isn't anything [like that] there.

The two of you bought this house together [643 Avenue D in Boulder City] ten years after you met?

Yes.

What was the idea behind that?

The idea behind it was that there would be a place for either one of us or both of us to retire to as we got older. We bought it with the purpose of being able to afford wherever it is that we were living. And the house, when it came up for sale, the price was right, we had the money. The payments on the house itself would be low enough where either one of us could afford it either on Social Security or if there was any other little partial income with it. Or if we rented out one of the rooms—it's a three-bedroom house. So it would give us security without having to rent something from somebody else [and allow us] to be able to afford it because you can't afford a place, like a three-bedroom house, for five hundred-and-some dollars a month. You just can't.

The reason that I asked about Pat—we discussed it briefly, but for the sake of the tape—is because I felt that, just from listening to you today, Pat is one of the two people that's had the greatest impact on your life. That if you hadn't walked into the Oxwood that night ...

I wouldn't be in Boulder City today. That's true. That's very true. It's just like we sort of followed each other's pathway, too. First of all, when I met Pat she wasn't working except in the bar.¹⁹ Her mom was sending her money and I was feeding her. In all honesty. She made a big joke out of it. I used to tell her what a lazy little *bum* she was. Finally she went out to work for the Musician's Union, I

think, was the first one, and then sort of graduated to the Screen Actor's Guild. She got herself to a place—and I know how easy this can be. You get to a place where you're not workin', pretty soon you get very lazy. And I was getting to the place I was resenting very much a lot that had to do with our relationship. I was goin' out very early in the morning everyday, working ten hours a day, coming home and cooking. Fixin' dinner and having her over to eat. More or less taking care of her which was OK at *first*. Then when I took a really good look at the picture I thought, "Well, Pat, you've got to get your butt out there and get to work. This is not good." Which it wasn't. She was in that place where she wasn't helpin' herself. If she'd been helpin' herself layin' around then I could have cared. But she wasn't. She wasn't helping herself at all. She was turning into a mummified object as far as I was personally concerned. She had no get up and go.

Do you feel she's been a bigger influence on your life in the end here than you have been on hers?

I think so because she would have eventually ended up [in Boulder City] regardless of knowing me. I would not have ended up here without knowing her.

You sound real sure that she would have ended up here after all.

Because of her mother. She would have had to end up here taking care of Teddy. Sooner or later.

The others [Teddy's other children] have just abandoned Teddy more or less. That's my opinion.

Well, it's *my* opinion, too. Kind of looks like that. And that's *very* unfortunate.

You've not only been very close to Pat but you've grown very close to her mother, Teddy.

Well, I've seen and I've become aware of, through knowing Pat and by coming to Boulder City for all these years, of a lot of good things that [Teddy] has done



Top, l-r: Virginia "Teddy" Fenton, Dorothy Frassmann, 1970s

Bottom, l-r: Patricia Fenton, Dorothy Fenton, 1978

[photos courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]

here. And the things she's contributed. Money. Time. God, Pat and I have both run around selling raffle tickets for her. Were involved in Penny Power.²⁰ Been involved in different things that were in Boulder City because of her, because of her particular influence. Like the [Boulder City/Hoover Dam] museum. God, we sold tickets all over the place for that museum at one time. But that's like kind of a time past. Now that [Teddy's] sick, she can't jump up and get around the way she did. She's like many [who have] been a large contributor to many, many worthy causes like the [Boulder City] hospital, St. Jude's [Ranch for Children], you name it. They can't continue on doing the physical thing, they can't be there physically, they cannot be seen physically, so eventually [around] the town itself as it grows, no longer is the name Teddy Fenton known to all these people that are now newly coming in. Some, yeah, only because it's been passed on, she's got her name on some plaques and different things like that. But the town itself grows, the town itself moves on and as the town moves on the names diminish.

Do you think that Teddy is aware that this is happening?

I think she *is* aware of it. I think she's aware of it and I think it hurts her very much. It isn't a matter of *appreciation*. While [Teddy was doing] things they were appreciated. While things were being done they *were* cared about. And now you've got another generation coming along here now that's looking for *other* people to be generous, *other* people to contribute [and] that's not physically looking upon Teddy. And, of course, she's now being hurt by it herself because she cannot give up what she used to be and what she used to do. I'm sure if she was physically capable she'd be down there on the street corner right now sellin' raffle tickets to somethin'. Absolutely. She feels that she should put into this town because it's given her so much. It's given her a livelihood. Well, she better think on *that* one, too. *She's* the one who worked her ass off for that livelihood. *She's* the one that did the floor scrubbing, not the town. *She's* the one who made the beds, not the town. *She's* the one who raised that house down there [663 Avenue D], not the town. You know. I can see where she could feel a little indebted to ... , feel gracious about being in a town she feels has been generous to her, but I'm still waiting for the town to give to *her*.

I wouldn't hold my breath.

I wouldn't hold my breath, either. So I think that she's misplacing some of her gratitude. I really do. By saying that she owes so much to the town. I think the town owes her a whole *hell* of a lot.

I hear her say [she owes Boulder City a lot] and I don't understand it.

I don't understand it, either, Dennis, because I don't see where she owes anything to the town.

Maybe it comes from the way she was raised and her life with her husband[s], to have that insecurity and sense of inferiority pounded and pounded into you. Anything that is better than that you're gonna feel you owe to. And she doesn't owe.

No, she doesn't.

But I think that's where it comes from.

But she also has enough ego—which is what drives all of us. All the good deeds that are done are done with egos. The Reflections Center.²¹ That's a *big* ego. But it's there and it's there because of her ego. It has nothing to do with anything else, really. It's a matter of wanting to be recognized *after*, wanting to be still here *after*, wanting to be still part of *after*.

That sure motivates a lot of what I do. [laughs]

Of course, it does. That's just it. I always felt that if a person didn't have an ego then nothing in the world would ever get accomplished. And people have the *audacity* to say, "Well, you've got all this ego." When they look at somebody because they've accomplished something and the person happens to appreciate the fact that they *did* accomplish this. I feel very grateful that I was able to start a gay softball league in Los Angeles and in the Valley. It had never been done, will never probably be done [again] till somebody gets off their laurels and do[es] it. And bring a gay sport community together. I feel very good about that. And if that means I had a lot of ego, you *bet* I did! Or I couldn't have done it.

What kind of role do you and Teddy play now in one another's lives?

Teddy and I love each other and we've loved each other for a long, long time. Through whatever little things that have come in between us—mainly this house and the basement, I might add.²² Teddy and I are a lot alike for one thing. One person's stubbornness versus another person's stubbornness. One person feeling what is right, or what is right for *them* versus what another person feels they would like to have done. Which might not be right for the other person. I think that her relationship and mine right now is very good. I don't think it's as good as when she was making slaves out of Pat and I, though she'll never admit it. We were diggin' in her yards, diggin' up and hauling stones. [laughs] Actually, willing slaves at the time, but we've got pictures to prove it. [laughs] I even got a picture of [Teddy] holding a stick over my head. One of my favorite pictures.

Maybe more truth in that picture than either one intended.

Yeah. One of my very favorite ones. But I think that we're pretty close now. I don't go down and see her a lot. It's so hard for me to see her like that [i. e. debilitated].²³ It drives me nuts. It really does. Cheryl goes down. She takes stuff down to her. And I go down every once in awhile and sit and talk to Teddy, but it really drives me nuts to see her like that. That may sound kind of strange, but it does. It affects me very much.

No, no. I know how she used to be, too, and I don't like to see her down like that. I know it frustrates her.

You bet it does. You bet it does. You have a mind that wants to move and your body can't. And that's too bad. I think Teddy [and I] right now are at a fairly good time in our relationship. At least there's no yuckiness between us. We're both fairly normal adults now, if you want to put it that way, and acting pretty nice toward each other. And I don't think it's gonna change. I hope not. She has also shown a lot of signs of inwardly and outwardly changing herself, personally. She's giving more, she's giving more than I've ever seen her give of herself.

Knowing Teddy like we do, that's saying a great deal.

Um, hm. I feel more warmth from her that's sincere than warmth I used to feel sometimes that wasn't [sincere].

* * *

I'd like to talk, before we wrap it up, about your current relationship with Cheryl Gobel. How did you meet Cheryl?

I met Cheryl at her sister's bar, the Club 22. She was working there with Nancy [Kesterson] off and on. I used to see her come in and out and in and out and in and out. And we got to talking one night. I invited herWhat was it? Oh, yeah! Something like they didn't have a bath tub and she wanted to take a bath, so I invited her over to my place. "You can come over to my place and take a bath anytime you want!" And she took me up on it! [laughs]

Were you surprised?

Yeah, kind of surprised. I was surprised by the fact that she *did*, then I was surprised to find out later she couldn't hardly wait to get there. That's what she told me, anyway. [laughs]

Very flattering.

It was, actually. I invited her over for the bath and she did come for the bath, which was Thursday, or something. Then later I asked she and Nancy both out to dinner and Nancy turned me down. [Cheryl] accepted me. And it was for Saturday night but Cheryl called me on the phone and says, "Well, do I have to wait till Saturday? Can't I come over before?" Which turned out to be Friday. We never did get out for dinner.

This is a relationship that you didn't take the initiative in?

Well, yeah, I took the initiative by talking to her, standing and talking at the bar. We talked about different things. Religious stuff, some of it, yeah. Different

ways of thinking, differences in people's minds. So yeah, I would say I did [take the initiative]. But I wasn't a speed demon on it, no. She came at me really quick which kind of surprised me.

Was that the first time you'd had a situation like that?

That fast, yeah. She just walked right up. True, Dennis. I was really surprised by it.

How long have you been together?

It'll be five years on January 22 [1998].

Is this the longest [continuous] relationship you've ever had?

Pretty much so. I had dated a girl one time then ten years went by and I dated her again. But [Cheryl] is, yeah, I'd say the longest. And then she's followed me here [to Boulder City]. She came here, did all my packing out of Los Feliz, so she's been right there for me.

Are you happy with that?

Yeah. Cheryl and I get along *fair*. We have our very heavy duty ups and downs because we very much both want to be the boss. It's true. We have a lot of talking that we have to do, that we *do* do. Try to keep our relationship going, actually. Am I miserable with her? No. Am I completely happy with her? No. And I think that probably works the same way with her. She's not miserable with me, she's told me that. She says she adores me, but we do have problems, as everybody seems to.

Have you worked them out?

We are working on our problems. We do take the time to do that.

That's what makes a situation work.

Well, to make the situation work, one of us better learn to say we're wrong.
 [laughs] *Has either one of you learned that yet?*
 That's one of the big ones. Well, Cheryl said it three times yesterday. I'm pretty
 Oh, you're counting! [laughs]

Counting! I'm keeping notes now. [laughs]
Is she keeping a tally, too?

I hope so. Yeah, I think so. But it's gonna take a lot of that because we rub each other the wrong way [with] a lot of things. In all honesty.

In general, then, after we've been through your whole life ...

I didn't tell ya five thousand stories, but I can only have room to tell ya so many.

Are you generally happy now with what your life has been?

I think so. I think I've been very fortunate in my life.

In what ways?

In the fact that I've grown through many things that have happened in my life. I've always been able to take a look When I went to the hospital to see my father when he was dying of emphysema I used to walk in that place and I would look at these guys, the vets—he died in a vet[eran]'s hospital. And I'd look at these guys in there and there'd be nobody there [to see them], and I'd take fruit and *da-da-da*, and all this good stuff [for them]. I'd think, "Good God!" Now I think of that even more, that these people have so little and I have so much. And to anybody in their right mind, with any thought whatsoever, that knows anything of the world at all can take a look at the world around 'em and say, "Hey, look how lucky I am. Look how fortunate I am." How could I *not* feel

fortunate? There's not a thing that I don't have. Physically. Materially. There isn't. Take a look. I could say I'd like to have a big yacht [but] what would I do with it? You know what I'm sayin', Dennis? I have so much. I eat well, drink well, sleep well. I don't owe anybody. I haven't got a payment in the world except the house payment every month. So yes. I would say yeah, I'm pretty well content with my life right now. I have many friends and that's important to me.

Well, I want to thank you especially for spending so much time with me today and talking.

It's a pleasure!

Thank you, thank you!

Oh, you're welcome, welcome, welcome, Dennis!

END

Notes

Nova Scotia's Eastern Pointe Island lies about two miles off the east coast near Lunenburg.

Frassmann note [April 2, 1985]: "One girl lived on my side of the island, three lived on the other side. I got this information from my brother through a photographer."



l-r: Cheryl Gobel and Dorothy Frassmann, 1997

[photo courtesy of Dorothy Frassmann]

Notes

1. Nova Scotia's Eastern Points Island lies about two miles off the east coast near Lunenburg.
2. *Frassmann note* [April 2, 1998]: "One girl lived on my side of the island, three lived on the other side. I got this information from my brother through a photograph."
3. *Frassmann note* [April 2, 1998]: "[The spears] had long wooden handles with sharp pointed metal ends attached, probably through slots, and taped."
4. *Frassmann note* [April 2, 1998]: "One of the kids that I played with fell through one of the frozen ponds and drowned. He was around 6 or 7."
5. *Frassmann note* [April 2, 1998]: "This bowl bit of hair cutting was only done a few times, I believe."
6. To "go down" in sexual terms is to perform oral sex.
7. *Bennies* are amphetamines.
8. Dorothy here means that Martha didn't want her baby brought up either in a lesbian relationship or under the economic circumstances in which Dorothy and Martha then were living.
9. "Out" in the sense of being openly and freely gay.
10. For a history of the court system of gay philanthropic organizations, see "The Intriguing History of the Imperial Court System" in the *Las Vegas Bugle*, August/September 1997, pp. 32-35.
11. This kind of law was not particular to Los Angeles. San Diego's Municipal Code section 56.19, the so-called Cross Dressing ordinance, was enacted in 1966. This ordinance made it a misdemeanor to wear "apparel customarily worn by the opposite sex with the intent of committing an unlawful act." The law was originally passed to protect sailors on leave in the city who picked up what they thought were female prostitutes only to discover they were men in drag. Never mind that prostitution was illegal and the sailors themselves were breaking the law. The ordinance was invoked exclusively against gay men and almost always against Blacks and Hispanics. The law's constitutionality was questioned and the San Diego City Council voted to repeal it—but not until March 1998. See "Bad Law Headed for the Rag Heap," in the [*San Diego*] *Update*, issue 848 [March 25, 1998], pp. A-1 and A-13.

12. *Frassmann note* [April 2, 1998]: "The law pertaining to women not being allowed to serve liquor at a bar was changed not too long after this time. I remember when I was in Lakeland, Florida [in the 1950s] it was the same way. Women could not be bartenders."
13. Dorothy here means that relative to the number of bars she enjoyed in Los Angeles and their social openness, there are "no" gays bars in Las Vegas. She also refers to the Las Vegas gay community still being closeted.
14. *Frassmann note* [April 2, 1998]: "The league was started in the middle '60s [and] it lasted through the latter part of the '70s. During that period of time teams and sponsors came and went as new [bars] opened and old ones closed or changed their names. The teams' areas as far as bar ownership was concerned [gradually] spread out to [include] Santa Monica, Pasadena, North Hollywood, Culver City, Los Angeles, West L. A., and Van Nuys."
15. A *rover* is an employee who must be prepared to work wherever in the plant he or she is sent to help. As a result of this "roving" such an employee must be familiar with virtually all aspects of the work.
16. *Frassmann note* [April 2, 1998]: "I found *this* rather interesting. When I worked for Philco Aeronutronics I had a couple of married women there [who were] really flirting with me. One invited me to her home [but] I did not go [because] I was lead on the line and she worked for me. No *gay* was mentioned there or no one acted like they thought I was *queer*. But when I quit the gals on the line gave me a going-away party complete with presents. The gifts I received were men's shirts, men's underwear, men's cologne, men's joke gifts, and from two little Oriental gals that worked hard and said very little, men's socks. I liked these gals and gave them a get-together at a (straight) place called the Falcon Queen after work that day. They obviously knew about me and for the time I worked there—with the exception of the two who flirted with me—never let on. There were 32 of them!! I don't think that at that time *gay* mattered if people liked you. Even the bosses were at the party!!"
17. Broasting is a cooking process made popular in the 1950s and '60s. It involves deep-frying under pressure.
18. The Northridge earthquake devastated Los Angeles and its surrounding counties on January 17, 1994.
19. *Frassmann note* [April 2, 1998]: "And I quit [that] job for her. There was one night when I came in to see her and there were three drunks sitting there, two gals and one guy and they were very quarrelsome and obnoxious. ... When [Pat] tried to cut them off they became belligerent and rude. I told her since they wouldn't leave to turn the lights on since no one likes to drink in the light. That didn't work so I called the owner [Tuck] and told her Pat was leaving and that she [Tuck] needed to come to the bar and close it down or

keep it open, whichever, but Pat was quitting. [Tuck] came down and I told her Pat was finished working there. [Tuck] happened to be a personal friend of mine for a lot of years. Anyway, Pat stayed for two weeks more until Tuck could find a replacement. Then she quit."

20. Dreamed up by Boulder City businessman Kae Pohe Penny Power was a promotional scheme carried out 1985 in support of the 50th anniversary of the completion of Hoover Dam. It involved laying a row of pennies for 10 miles from Boulder City to Hoover Dam.
21. Dedicated on September 30, 1994, Reflections Center is a sculpture garden at the intersection of Colorado Street, Railroad Avenue, Denver Street, and Ash Street endowed by Boulder City philanthropist Virginia "Teddy" Fenton, mother of Pat Fenton.
22. To understand this remark one would need to understand Teddy Fenton and her obsession with her properties and their maintenance. Teddy bought the original house at 643 Avenue D for her son, Richard Fenton, who essentially tore it down to build a new house which he in turn sold to his sister Pat and Dorothy Frassmann. Nevertheless, Teddy still felt the house was "hers," or at least her family's, and that she ought to be able to maintain it however she wished. Her plans for the property included finishing out the house's basement. But Teddy's intense and stubborn attitude met its match in Dorothy Frassmann who made it clear the house belonged to her and Pat, *not* Teddy Fenton. This contention led to an estrangement between Teddy and Dorothy which, at the time of this interview, has long been reconciled.
23. The debilitation to which Dorothy and Dennis refer is an ulcerous condition that has afflicted Teddy's legs for several years and which has made her mostly house bound. Considering the tremendous energy with which Teddy approached her many personal and civic projects and the outside activity these projects required, being unable to continue in that capacity has been an equally tremendous frustration for Teddy. In addition, at the time of this interview, relative to what she was before, Teddy is weakening intellectually.

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