

Wendy: Interview with Fred Berger, June 28th 2017. This interview is being done in the Glickman Library room 520 and, Fred, can you please spell your full name?

Fred: It's Frederic Jay Berger, F-r-e-d-e-r-i-c J-a-y B-e-r-g-e-r

Wendy: Thank you -

Fred: So I don't have to speak down?

Wendy: You don't have to you can just - it will, it will definitely record. One thing I wanted to remind you is that during the interview, if I ask you any questions you don't want to answer, you can just say, "Not interested in answering that." You don't have to give an explanation. Or if you want to talk about something I haven't asked about, feel free to do that. Or if you want stop the interview at any point you can do that as well. I'll turn off my cell phone so we don't get interrupted in the middle, and at the end of the interview, about an hour or max hour and a half, if we're not done and want to schedule another time to meet as well, we can definitely schedule a follow-up interview.

Fred: So we'll try this out.

Wendy: Ok. So, could we start with just the basics? When and where were you born?

Fred: Ok. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, March 29, 1947.

Wendy: And, you didn't mention wanting to talk about family origin, but is there anything you'd like to say about your family?

Fred: I don't- I don't mind, if you think it's important. Well, we lived in a suburb of Cleveland called Shaker Heights, it was a, at the time, well it still is a wealthy suburb, about significantly Jewish maybe half, um, my father was a doctor so we were pretty well off, but, but um, we lived among a lot of really rich people so I never knew that we were well off until I was older. And my family was very stable, my father was a doctor, um, my mother worked at home, she didn't work outside the house, um...

Wendy: Did you have siblings?

Fred: I had, I was the middle, very much in the middle. I was two months to the day, two years and ten months, from my sister, who was younger, and my brother was two years and ten months older, so, I was very in the middle. Um, my brother died when he was 28, I was 25, very tragically, which I can mention if you want. Um, so I've been the oldest since I was 25. My sister and I- my sister lives in Portland, she moved here in 79. I moved here in 81, but she's still here. Well, she didn't... she lived in Brunswick for a long time, but then she divorced and she lives in Portland. Um, we're a very stable family, I don't know if you'd... call it close. I mean we did a lot together, we took vacations, but I don't know, it was, I never felt, like, that close to my brother or sister or my father, you know, that's sort of the way it was in those days, you know, families were more formal. So it was very stable my- we moved into our, house when I was three

and my parents lived there till they died 60 years later, they lived in the same house. Uh, my mother died about 7 years ago. My father died the last- about 3 years ago and he lived in Portland with my sister the last four years, um...

Wendy: When did you have a sense of yourself as gay?

Fred: I think very young, like five or six. I remember going, it's one of my earliest memories, which is sort of funny, um, I went to a day camp that was at the elementary school and it was a, she was probably a teenager, the counselor, and I remember one day saying to her, "I wish I was a girl." And she gave me- I started saying, "I wish I was a girl," and she gave me this look, and I said "Gorilla." I remember that so well. I don't remember her response or anything but, I mean really young, and then suppressed it forever, you know, I never had sex with anyone until I was in college, 19, that was with a man, but, um,...it was really repressed. I mean, I don't think I, you know, they didn't talk about being gay so I didn't know really what it was but I knew that I was different, you know, than common experience I think. I was good in school, I was very active in student government, student newspaper, not sports but lots of things like that.

Wendy: And then you went where to college?

Fred: First I went to the University of Rochester, that was sort of what they called a safety school, you know I didn't get into Harvard and Cornell, um, and I wasn't that- I wasn't very happy there. I felt like growing up where I did was very sheltered, and I felt like I always wanted a bigger experience, and that school was very sheltered. It was on a campus outside of a city, we never went in the city, I think in two years I saw the city once or twice, um, so I transferred to NYU downtown, and that was good and bad. It was so different from anything, you know, that's what I was looking for, a different experience, but it was overwhelming. It was, it was, um, it was almost traumatic, you know, um, just 'cause it was such a change to be on my own, and then to be in the big city and it was, this was like 1969, so it was, well, let's see 69, no sorry, 66, end of 65. Um, I graduated high school in 65 so it was end of...no wait let me get this right. Ok graduated high school, so spent one year in Rochester, so this would have been the fall of 66. And that was a really tumultuous time politically and everything and...

Wendy: Were you involved politically with things?

Fred: Just peripherally, I'd go to the anti-Vietnam marches but I never had any kind of leadership role or anything. I was pretty lost, though, just being in, in the big city and still hadn't come out, and hadn't any kind of sexual experience until right shortly after I got there, so... and when I say my family wasn't close, just that there was no one to talk to you know...period. So I guess that's something everybody would like to have when you're that age, and that, uh, situation, but I never had that, so it was a very lonely time.

Wendy: So, how did you find the first man that you were involved with, or was it just-

Fred: On the street...Well you know, I knew about 42nd Street was a big gay area at that time and I, one night I went and let this guy pick me up, this older guy, it wasn't bad, I mean, it was a sexual- my first sexual experience. But I didn't really come out until, you know, I had more

experiences. Some like that and others with, occasionally with a friend, but, in college, so I was never really out until after college, so...

Wendy: So you went to NYU, graduated from NYU?

Fred: Basically, I left with about three credits left and I moved to Oregon.

Wendy: What year was that?

Fred: '69

Wendy: Oh, so were you in New York for the Stonewall riots?

Fred: I missed it by like a day or something. But, see, I wouldn't have, you know, I did go to a bar occasionally in New York but I wasn't really active in any way. I think I actually left, I got sick, I got mono, I had hoped to stay in New York after I graduated. Um, but I got mono and I left. I went back to Cleveland and I never went back to New York, so I had three credits left and I finished them eventually, a while later, um, so I really think I left maybe the week of it or the day before or something, I don't know, it was in June of 69, so...

Wendy: And what did you do in Oregon?

Fred: Um, I worked at what they called a free school. It was this sort of hippie school. I wasn't really a hippie but I was sort of on the edges of it, so I worked at this school and it was just on a farm and it was very unstructured. It was fun, that's mostly what I did. Then I started to come out there, I went to a group, it was at the university, even though I wasn't a student, but I went to a group and still didn't come out to people I was working with and so on but I had gay friends and so, I sort of feel that's when I came out. So that was, so I stayed there for two years. I left in 71 and, uh, moved back to Cleveland into my parents house for a while and then I got an apartment there. But, um, the true trauma of my life, of my family's life was, um, my older brother's name was David and in 1970 he moved to Israel. He wasn't- he wasn't religious but he was a competitive weight lifter and he went there I think because he wanted to get on their Olympic team, and he was one of the athletes that was killed in Munich.

Wendy: Oh, my god.

Fred: So that was 72, yeah. Um, my sister and I were there, sort of, we were- we went to see him compete and then we left to go camping and the next morning while we were at the campsite we saw something, we saw the television and then we came home and then, uh, you know, the funeral, and it was all...I don't know how old you were or whether you remember that

Wendy: I remember it

Fred: Yeah it was a national thing, it wasn't just our family, you know, it was trauma for us but it was totally public, you know, we were on T.V., the funeral was, the funeral wasn't on T.V. but it was pub- it was open and it was thousands of people. So that sort of defined, certainly defined

my parents life for a while, and then again, I felt very alone with it because I, you know, my family just wasn't, I don't know, sort of like everybody dealt with it in their own way, you know. My parents had a really good marriage and they dealt with it together. But I never felt like, I felt like I was alone with it; my sister was alone with it. I don't know, my sister and I did get closer doing that period because we had been there, like I said, we had been there and then there was the problem of how to get home and all that, so being with her through that was good and we were closer for a while, we're not as close now as we were for a while, so anyways that, that was...

Wendy: Huge

Fred: I don't know. It was huge, but I didn't, I don't feel like it, I don't feel like it influenced the rest of my life that much. I don't talk about it much at all. A lot of people who know me don't know about it, I think when I lived in Portland probably nobody knew about it. So, I don't know, I mean, I've always had some problems with depression, like growing up, and I think that contributed to it later but as far as influencing how I lived my life later, I don't feel like that changed too much

Wendy: Did it influence your attitude toward being Jewish?

Fred: That's a good question. Um, I don't think so. I mean, there was so much support in that time, but it wasn't just Jewish people, you know, it was a national tragedy really, and the response was, you know, totally sympathetic from everybody. And I don't know why I don't bring it up even, know you know I just, I don't know- you don't know how people are gonna respond. I've actually had some weird responses at times when I've mentioned it and it sort of, either I feel like it would change the way people look at me or it does, I don't know, but you know my close, the people that are close to me know that. A lot of people don't, so...

Wendy: Interesting

Fred: But, um, I don't think, you know the main thing I was interested in talking about was my period in Portland.

Wendy: Yeah

Fred: Which, I was very active, and I don't feel like that, well that was... I was here 10 years later than that. I don't feel like that had a lot to do with it for some reason.

Wendy: No, I-

Fred: I don't know why.

Wendy: I, I just ask because it was such a national and international thing, whether it affected the way you saw yourself going forward as a public person or not, It doesn't sound like it.

Fred: Well I wasn't very public about it.

Wendy: uh huh

Fred: My father was very public, he was on TV all the time

Wendy: Uh-huh

Fred: And my mother who is, uh, not a real public person went through a period of being very public, and it changed her a lot, sort of temporarily. I meant she went from being a housewife and dressing really well to letting her hair go gray and being serious, but that didn't last, it didn't last a long time, so...

Wendy: So, ok so before we skip to Portland, you went, you become a social worker, right? Is that what happened?

Fred: Not till after, I was-

Wendy: Oh, so you moved to Portland

Fred: Yeah, so, I moved back to Cleveland and I worked. I went back to school for one year to get certified as an elementary teacher and I did that for a little bit, but not very long, a year or two, then I learned, I learned to do picture framing and then I had a business picture framing and I moved out to the country, about an hour, and lived on a property that had eleven acres and ran this one person picture framing business in a town near there, and that was nice.

Wendy: And then you find your way to Portland after you sister moves to Maine, is that it?

Fred: Yeah, I had a, well I've had a fe- I had a partner in Cleveland for about two years and then we broke up, and then I met Miles Rightmer. I don't know if you know him. He lives, well I heard that he doesn't live here anymore, but he lived here for a long time and he worked for the state. He was an AIDS educator for the state, um, so I met him in 1977, and he moved out to this farm with me, and we lived there for about four years and then decided that, I'm not sure what we decided, maybe it was too isolated and we were looking for somewhere to move, and my sister, who's name is Barbara, moved here in 79 with her husband. They lived in Brunswick. Um, and we had visited them and we liked it so we just decided to move here to Portland. So that was 81, That was may of 81.

Wendy: Ok, so you moved here with a partner.

Fred: Yeah, we met in 77, so we had been together for four years when we moved here

Wendy: Ok, where in Portland did you first live?

Fred: Well we always lived out a little bit, like Woodfords area right near Deering High School.

Wendy: And what was it like in 1981 to be a gay couple in Maine, in Portland?

Fred: Well, my time in Portland, I lived here from 81 to 89, May to May, so it was like 8 years. Um, it really was, I don't know if it was the best time in my life but it was certainly the most productive and satisfying, and I don't know exactly what it was, but when I came here, I don't know, it just felt very comfortable, um, being gay was pretty easy even then. Um, I just really liked it and then, um, somehow all the, I've always sort of been interested in social issues and fairness and stuff and had done some things growing up, like, I was involved with the Temple youth group and we used to, like, tutor kids in the projects and stuff like that. The environment I grew up in was very liberal, my family and the area, you know, their friends, um, and then Portland just seemed... it was very liberal even, even then, um, so, somehow that encouraged me to start doing things and that involved almost entirely gay and AIDS things.

Wendy: So this was the early years of the AIDS epidemic?

Fred: Yeah, um.

Wendy: Did you know people who were living with AIDS?

Fred: Well, what happened is I- my role as an activist or whatever you wanna call it, it's always, or during that time was just sort of a facilitator. I wasn't like a leader and everyone says, you know, follow him, do what he says. But I was a really good facilitator, organizer, so when I saw things that, I saw that needed to be addressed I'd figure out who else would want to do that. So, I did that with a couple different things and one of them was AIDS, and I was one of the founders of the AIDS Project, which I think now doesn't have that name anymore or it doesn't exist, I'm not sure. So, we got together a group, Frannie Peabody, who you probably knew or heard of, was one of them and I had a friend who was a nurse, well actually I- we became friends after it, her name was Kristen Kramer. We just got together a group and we started meeting at Frannie Peabody's living room, and I wish I could remember exactly what year this was but I think around 83, and I was the first board president. I was never the director of it, but I was board president, and we just put this organization together. There were very few people with AIDS here, but I guess after we established the organization, we got to know them and, and there hadn't been much publicity about AIDS at all, so, um, it was really the beginning.

Wendy: And Frannie's nephew or something, her grandson...

Fred: Oh, her grandson, yeah, that's why she was involved, her grandson had already died at that point in California, I think. But it was a really good group. I don't know if you know Susan Cummings Lauren, she's a social worker, she was in that group, but she was, was she a social worker? I think so. Um she was in that original group, and people were really committed and we figured out what to do. The first thing we did was organize a hotline and we rented a space on Deering St, was it Deering St? Downtown. and we set up a hotline and we just answered people's questions. That was very successful, then, boy, what happened then? We did a lot of publicity and fundraising and public speaking and so on.

Wendy: But you didn't have to do direct care?

Fred: Well, that's what I'm trying to remember.

Wendy: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Fred: I don't think so, I think we, we helped find a group of doctors who were interested. There were just a few who were really sort of specialists and we directed people to them, but people weren't living very long you know, but some of the materials that I gave to Susie were articles about the first, the earliest people with AIDS, and one of the things that was always satisfying about doing things in Portland is the newspaper, the Press Herald was always very responsive, you know, they were always interested in what we were doing and we had more contact with these people with AIDS than they did, so we would sort of lead them to each other and they would write articles about it. So, I guess the direct care was more in, you know, in the hands of the doctors, but I'm trying to think if we did like a buddy system I think we might have done a buddy system at some point, um.

Wendy: Do you remember how the general republic responded to the, to the fact of the AIDS epidemic and to the association with gay men? Was it, was there fear around it in the Portland area?

Fred: Not that I remember really, um, partly because the newspapers were putting a very positive spin on it. There were some nurses here at the University who were involved, there was a lesbian couple that I cannot remember... I remember what they look like

Wendy: Could it be Maggie Fournier?

Fred: Yeah, Maggie, and what was her partners name?

Wendy: Yeah, I can't remember her partners name.

Fred: But, um, they were involved peripherally, um, I wish I could remember more about exactly what we did, the hotline was important, we did public speaking, um, you know, went out and talked to groups. No, I don't really remember a- a negative response. I mean, you would think there would have been but, maybe I just don't rem- no I don't remember it, I don't think there was.

Wendy: Well that's-

Fred; I mean politically-

Wendy: Encouraging.

Fred: Politically, socially, there was a minister at the Unitarian church named Reverend Hastey, um, who, event- he was married but he eventually came out as gay and he was involved, um...

Wendy: So, was there an overlap for you between doing AIDS work and just being part of the local gay community? Was there a gay community? Were there gay bars?

Fred: Yeah, definitely. There were at least two gay bars at that time, um, in December of 82 I opened a bookstore called Our Books and that wasn't much of a store, but it became a community center for the gay community, so we had a lot of meetings there and um, it was, it was a focus to the gay community. There were at least two bars, one was called The Underground and the other was around the corner from it, and I can't remember the name right now.

Wendy: Where, where was your bookstore?

Fred: It was on Pine Street, just as you walk up there's a porno bookstore there, and I was next to it, and then I was there about four years, and then when I moved out they took over so I don't know if they used it for storage or expanded or what, and then the bar that's still there...

Wendy: Blackstones

Fred: Blackstones was next door but I think they came in just sort of as I was leaving.

Wendy: That's interesting, that all those businesses were right on that little stretch. Was it known as a gay neighborhood?

Fred: It sort of was, yeah.

Wendy: Mhmm, so you, you say you became an informal community center, what kind of things happened there?

Fred: Well, because I was there all the time I sort of um, was available to the newspapers and stuff so that, was that aspect of it but... do you know about the whole history of Charlie Howard, the gay man who was thrown off a bridge? Well, that was a real impetus for, for me and the political organization, the MLGPA, Maine Lesbian Gay Political...was founded sort of as a result of that, and I think we used the bookstore for early meetings of that. or early formative meetings of that, and then around 83 we started, me and a couple other people started Our Paper, which was the gay newspaper, and we worked on it there, so there was a lot happening there. Um, it was about, it was there for about four years, although the newspaper eventually, uh, got it's own office.

Wendy: So, talk a little bit about the paper, how did that start what was the-

Fred: The paper was great, it was a wonderful experience. I think it was my idea.

Wendy: Mhmm

Fred: We had sort of a, uh, collective sort of structure, although we didn't put any money in it, but we totally worked as group, so I was sort of the head of it. But we never were called editors or anything, and it was a really good group of really committed people, I don't know if you ever knew Diane Elze, or heard of her, she was a fire ball of energy, I mean she...but we'd have these long meetings. We'd decide what we wanted to write about, we'd send out people to do



interviews and then, you know, it was before computers so we had to, um, I don't know, I guess we typed the articles and then had somebody print them and then cut, cut 'em up into strips and then pasted 'em up and we would, we would do that part, one night and we would stay up until like three in the morning working on it but it was a lot of fun, and it was, everybody was so committed. I mean, we used to have these meetings, well we used to have sort of like retreats on weekends where we'd spend a whole day, or two days, just brainstorming about how to improve the paper, but people would just give us their time and it was- it was fun. So, all those things I was involved in, um. I broke up with my partner Miles in '84 so then I sort of used all these activities as a way to, I don't know, get over it or spend my time. It was a bad break up, I mean we- it was like 35, 30 years ago and we haven't talked. We talked like, briefly afterwards a few times but he, for some reason blamed, blamed the break up on me and I felt it was mutual but anyways, so he found, he's been here that whole time in Yarmouth, I think, but Susie told me she thought he moved around recently, but we had no contact for like, ever since.

Wendy: Uh-huh

Fred: So, anyways. So, I had a lot of time to spend on projects, but all those things were sort of interconnected, you know, some of the same people working on the AIDS project as were working on the newspaper, and, um...

Wendy: Can I just say one of the things that I'm noticing is you, the people you described working with the AIDS Project and the people who were working with Our Paper were a mix of men and women. Was this common in Portland? Because I know in the early '80s in my experience there were two pretty different communities and then the AIDS epidemic brought lesbians and gay men closer. Was that happening here or was it always pretty mixed?

Fred: Well, I thought it was mixed, I don't remember being split really, um, Diane was a really strong personality and she influenced a lot of what went on and she was never really a separatist, she just felt like, you know, we were all, especially with AIDS, we were all in this together, and the newspaper and, um, so I don't remember that. The newspaper was at least half women, it might have been more and you know people would write, maybe the women would write articles re-you know relating to lesbians but I don't know. I don't think time has made this look better than it is; I remember it as just people getting along and there was a really strong sense of community, um, and I think there wasn't, there was a few sort of crazy Christian Evangelists in other part of the state who would say things, but there was no really strong opposition to anything we were doing that I can remember, so we were- it was very liberating, you know, we did what we wanted and we felt supported by it and-

Wendy: And the local business community ran ads, did they financially support?

Fred: Yeah, mostly the gay-it was, it was supported by ads and um, I think they were all, almost all gay businesses that I can remember.

Wendy: Can you remember any of them?

Fred: Well the bars, um, you know, I gave Susie all the newspapers that I had but um, I don't know, we never had a problem financially which was pretty amazing, and the paper lasted- it lasted a little bit after I left. I think it totaled about ten years

Wendy: Wow.

Fred: And we would distribute it for free, and we'd distribute it in the library. They'd put it out on a table, and various places. No, I think it was sort of an unusual time you know I, I really enjoyed it, I think it was good for the city, and I think it was the beginning of a lot of things, one thing I haven't mentioned is I twice ran for city council. Once I think '82 and again in '86, and I didn't do very well, but, you know, I ran as an openly gay candidate which was big in that time, and I always think it sort of paved the way for Barb Wood, who I've been trying to get in touch with for weeks, um, but that was sort of a symbolic thing, that wasn't- I didn't really have the experience to be a city councilor and probably wouldn't have liked it if I had won, but, um, I think it was important [inaudible].

Wendy: Do you remember what kind of political issues were hot in the years that you lived in Portland in the early '80s besides the AIDS epidemic?

Fred: Well, gay rights because we were trying to, well after the Charlie Howard thing then the political organization started, and that was Dale McCormick, was the main person in that and I wasn't too involved. I went to the meetings but wasn't really very involved, and that focus was always on getting a statewide gay rights bill. But the focus was always statewide and a lot of the people involved lived, you know, other places than Portland, so there was a lot of publicity and a lot of, um, a lot going on around that publicly, um, other issues I really don't remember too much,

Wendy: Susie mentioned something about an anti-porn ordinance?

Fred: Oh yeah, that's another thing I organized.

Wendy: Talk about that, what was that?

Fred: I don't know! I read in the paper, my sister always kids me about this because I read in the paper that this Christian group was- was organizing a ballot measure to restrict pornography and so, we, you know, we saw it as a censorship issue and I put an ad, I found this group I don't even know if it had a name, and I put an ad in somewhere I think the, I don't know, for people who were interested in working on a committee to do this, and we got a committee together and my sister reminds me, I don't really remember it, I was starting this group and I, this was when I had the bookstore so somebody interviewed me and I said uh, "we have a committee to organized to fight this." Well, at the time there was no committee, it was just me, and we didn't have a name or anything and, but we spent energy on that and we did pickets and stuff and it almost, the, the ordinance passed by very little, like 50 percent or 49 percent, and it- it never had any effect. It was never enforced, so they didn't close that, the video porn, video bookstores that are here now were here then, and they were never closed or- or nothing happened at all.

Wendy: Do you remember what year that would have been?

Fred: It was early, it was probably '82 or '83, well I had bookstore starting in '82 so '83 or '84.

Wendy: Alright, huh.

Fred: So, I think that's the last, that's the only thing, other thing I was involved with.

Wendy: So, how was it for you to kind of be the media face of the community in some ways, because of the bookstore and, did you, were you comfortable?

Fred: I didn't mind it, other people did it too, you know, maybe I would refer the newspaper to someone. My friend Kristen [00:39:00.14] (sp?), who I'm still friends with, she lives in Philadelphia. She was dating the anchorman for one of the stations so it was very easy to, to get him to, you know, to interview somebody. Me or somebody else. I didn't mind, I- I've always been comfortable politically, publicly, in, was it the 8th grade? Yeah in junior high school, 9th grade, I was elected student body president, and it was a big school like a thousand kids, so every week, no, not every week, maybe once a month I had to lead the assemblies, and I never minded. I always enjoyed speaking publicly, it didn't make me particularly nervous or, um, I wasn't afraid of it. I think I was, must have been pretty good at it, I don't know, so...

Wendy: So, you were very politically active. You were doing commerce, the newspaper, organizing around AIDS, what was it like socially for you to be in, did you, I mean, you break up with your boyfriend and then...

Fred: That was my social life

Wendy: That was your social-

Fred: Yeah, that was my social life. Well, I had some friends, too and then in '77 I met my new partner, so it was three years without a partner and then I met, his name was Allen, I met him in '70, I mean '87, right before my 40th birthday, or the night of my 40th birthday, something like that, and we were, we were together about five years, and we were, we're still good friends. We talk every week. He lives in Boston, um, so that was sort of my social life, you know, and we, we'd have parties, too, but it would usually be the same people, but it was all gay, you know, it was all- my whole life was gay except for my sister, she, she had kids.

Wendy: Were you involved at all in what was going on nationally at the time, or was it pretty local and state based?

Fred: The only thing we did- we went to the AIDS marches. There were- I- Susie has some pictures that I gave her of the contingent from here going to either one or two marches on Washington, um, otherwise there was nothing national about it. Sometimes we would have speakers come from a national organization but, um...

Wendy: Well, it sounds like it was a pretty exciting time.

Fred: It was, it was. Well the interesting thing about it was once I left I- once I left here and I went to social work school, I never did this stuff again, I never- that was the entire length of my social activism, which I'm not sure exactly why that happened, you know, I started working and that took the focus, and it was a job that I liked pretty well, and it was satisfying, so, um, plus I was- what happened was I left Portland May of '89 to go to social work school. I went to Smith School of Social Work in Northampton and it was a three year program and, so, I was living in Massachusetts and my partner Allen moved with me, but then he didn't want to move back to Portland, I did, and we stayed in Boston, and I lost touch with almost everybody. I mean, I really didn't stay friends or in contact with those people. I think other people moved, Diane Elze, I think not too long after, I'm not sure, um, so it was interesting. I mean, it was a really satisfying, good time in my life and I look back on it and, with really good feelings, but I don't know why after that, I mean that was it, those eight years were my, you know I, even now I don't do, we're- my, I have a new partner, well he's not new, partner of 20 years, and we live in Florida, and I do one support group. There's a big gay community center. I do one support group, but really I haven't been involved much at all since that.

Wendy: Interesting, where in Florida?

Fred: Fort Lauderdale. There's a huge, retired gay male population. I mean, huge. I think it's the biggest in the country. There's a big five acre community, gay community center, there's, everywhere you go you see gay men out, they're all old, older than I am, but, um, anyways, we've been there about 12 years.

Wendy: So, you've seen a lot of changes- there's a huge community center versus a bookstore that was the community center.

Fred: Yeah, that's true.

Wendy: Yeah.

Fred: Um, But I lived in Boston about eight years, and then, or maybe closer to ten, and then one winter, one winter day, I went to Provincetown for the weekend, and on the beach, this was Martin Luther King weekend, it was about 20 degrees, there was one person on the beach cruising, and that's where we met. We've been together since then, 20 years, almost 20 years.

Wendy: So, that really isn't the divide between people you might meet cruising and have, you know, a sexual relationship, and people who have relationships.

Fred: Well, not in this case.

Wendy: Yeah, not in that case.

Fred: No, and my other partner, my, Miles, the one I moved to, um, moved here with, I met in a bath house, so. Allen, the one I was with after Miles, we met, I don't know, I think in a bar here, so.

Wendy: Yeah

Fred: But, my life, I was thinking, you know my whole life, really, has been with gay communities or gay friendly communities, all my friends have always been gay except for women, straight women, but I haven't had any male friends. So this last fall we bought a condo in Wells at this big community with 200 cottages and, so, we only spent one night there last year, but we've been here now five weeks, so we're gonna spend the whole summer. And there are some gay people there but it's basically straight, and it's like a new experience for me, and they're the nicest people. I mean, we have seen no evidence of homophobia, and just, it's this really friendly group of people almost all straight, married, most a little bit younger than us but not, I'm 70 and my partner is 74 and the, most of the people there are like somewhere around retirement age, like, in there 60s but um it's a new experience, and it's really changed my, I never disliked straight people I just never had that much contact, and the men especially, they're friendly. They're not afraid of us, I don't know, it's a new experience at age 70. I'm finally living in the straight world, so.

Wendy: That's wonderful. Can you just say a little about, you run a group in Florida, what are the issues that the community that you're working with, what kind of issues are they dealing with at this stage in the-

Fred: Prostates. I laugh because that's the most common. I don't know, they're mostly older than I am. I'm the youngest in the group, they're- they're, there's one man who's 94. Most of them are in their 70s, it's mostly, it's really a lot about health, health and some, some about relationships but, um, it's sort of a boring group because people forget that they've already talked about something so they talk about it over and over. You hear the same stories all time and I never say, you know, we've heard this before, and well, often it's not very interesting, but some of it... occasionally it is. Occasionally somebody will have a- something serious that happened to them. Not that health isn't serious but, um, it used to be like an average of 12 it's gotten down to like six or seven, but it's been going for eight years which is a long...

Wendy: And just one more time, is there any link between what you're doing in Florida, say and the national scene? Are people, um, concerned politically or involved politically or is it just they're older and...

Fred: Yeah, well, the gay community center, you know, they're... as an organization very involved. But most of these people, they just- they don't have a lot of energy. I guess my partner, Ken, this community center is about five years old maybe a little more, and sort of was just getting started when we moved there and he started a couple things there and one of them was this group that met once a week called "Coffee Conversation" and it's at the community center in a big hall and, um, just a place, free coffee, free donuts, to get together. Well, he started it with about four people and now it has, every Tuesday there's 200 people, almost entirely men, but that's what they want to do, is have coffee and talk about their health, it's- it's not a real active-it's, and that's who the- the community center is almost entirely senior gay men so it's not a real active group, um, people feel like, you know, um, I've done - I've worked, I'm retired and just want to drink coffee.

Wendy: Well, those are all my questions. Do you have anything that I didn't ask you about that you'd like to- to talk about?

Fred: Well, let me think. I think that that pretty much covers it. I sort of feel bad that I didn't keep in touch with the people in Portland so I'm trying to make an effort, I'm trying to reach Barb Wood, but I wasn't able to go to the Gay Pride last weekend, or two weeks ago, whenever it was, so, I don't know how well that's gonna work. But, I feel like, in a sense I've come, come back home but it's, everything's different you know. But my sister, you know, my sister lived here continually. My father lived here for four, the last four years of his life, so, I've been coming back to Portland a lot but I never contacted people, I never ran into people, once I ran into Barb Wood in Provincetown, one time, we were still living there. Let me think if there's anything else that I think is important. I think that sort of covers it- it just was a very special time for me and I think everybody, and it was so alive, like something would happen and people would just respond, you know, like form a group or they'd call a press conference or have a march or something and it was- people were committed and they were giving of their time and they really, they really felt like a community, you know. I don't know what it's like here now, or I know that most places aren't like that anymore, but, um, so it was, it was a good time in my life and I'm really appreciative that Susie and you are interested in- in the history. It's really history.

Wendy: Well, thank you for sharing your history, both in the form of an oral history and also in your papers, um, it will be really useful for future generations.

Fred: Good, well, let me know if you ever have any programs or anything that you might-

Wendy: And tell me again what months you are in Maine?

Fred: Well, this is the first year that we've done, done this. We're here, we've been here about five weeks and we're here till about September 12th.

Wendy: So, like, June, July, August?

Fred: Yeah, most of the summer. My parter had a stroke last year and he's a little bit limited. I mean, he can do most things, but we used to travel a lot, we- we travelled all over so we don't travel anymore, so that's sort of why we- why we bought this place and I think his health is sort of declining, I mean, sort of not, but-

Wendy: Mhmm.

Fred: So, I don't know, so we're not, we don't do a lot.

Wendy: Do you know about the group SAGE in town?

Fred: I didn't know there was one here.

Wendy: Yeah, I haven't been to meetings but I hear they're pretty well attended.

Fred: Do you know how we would get in touch with-

Wendy: Yeah, Equality Maine, if you went on their website they have a link to SAGE and you could just click on it.

Fred: Oh, I didn't think about that.

Wendy: Or call them, they could tell you when the meetings are.

Fred: We don't go out at night, I hate to say, Ken goes to bed about 7:30 and I go to bed about 9:30.

Wendy: I think there might be some daytime events, yeah, it'd be worth- worth checking into, anyway.

Fred: Yeah, we used to be in SAGE in, in Fort Lauderdale

Wendy: Yeah, well, thank you very much, Fred.

Fred: Thank you