

**Interview with Jean-Nicholas Tretter**

**Interviewed by Scott Paulsen  
University of Minnesota**

**Interviewed on November 20, 1993  
at Mr. Tretter's home  
St. Paul, Minnesota**

**SP:** This is an interview with Jean Tretter and we're talking about the gay community in the Twin Cities, from the 1940's to the 1980's.

Jean, I'd like to ask you about your background. Where did you grow up?

**JT:** I actually grew up in Little Falls, Minnesota. That's my home town. One of my few claims to fame is the fact that I was born and grew up in the same hometown as Charles A. Lindbergh. My family had lived there since pre-territorial days in Minnesota, that whole general Morrison County area.

**SP:** From there you came to the Twin Cities directly?

**JT:** My father was in logging and lumbering and he was one of the last really full-time independent loggers in Minnesota and towards the end of that logging era in Minnesota, what the independent loggers had to do, is they would move their sawmills. It was no longer a case where you had a sawmill in one place for fifty years. It was a very mobile operation. We lived in Little Falls and would go up to different parts of northern Minnesota. I would do that especially on my school breaks and during the summer, things like that. But in the end, he had taken a contract to cut cotton woods, the old cotton woods down in southern Minnesota, in and around Willmar, because they were starting to clog some of the ditches and things like that. They were originally planted in the 1930's as wind breaks. So he was logging down there and he drowned in Kandyohi Lake and after that my mother and I moved to the Cities, because that was the most logical place for her to get a job, etc.

**SP:** So she was not into this business?

**JT:** No.

**SP:** Helping your father run it?

**JT:** No. It was very good and very profitable for him. We were very obviously an upper middle class family but my father who was from basically immigrant parents, had never gone to school beyond the fourth grade and, he was proficient in speaking English but had never learned to read and write English. She was just not involved into the business at all, she had always had other

things. She had dealt in real estate while my father was just in the logging part of the business. So she knew nothing about it. It was kind of sad because when I look back at it now, I see that we were kind of taken for a ride when she sold off the remnants of the business. It was too bad but those things happen.

We moved to the Cities because that was the easiest place for her to get a job. Our financial structure hadn't been set up to, and I imagine because my father, because of his lack of knowledge of English reading and writing, just that all sort of thing, it hadn't been set up in such a way that there was trust funds or anything like that, it was just there and once he was gone, it was not replenished. That allowed us to move and get settled and that was about it.

**SP:** So, when you came to Minneapolis or St. Paul, what time was that?

**JT:** St. Paul, 1958.

**SP:** 1958?

**JT:** Yes. We settled in the northern suburbs. Our family had always been more St. Paul oriented than Minneapolis oriented. We settled in the northern suburbs around Roseville and Little Canada, that is mostly where we lived.

**SP:** So that's where you went to school also?

**JT:** Yes. Capitol View Junior High School and then Alexander Ramsey, what was at that time Alexander Ramsey Senior High.

**SP:** So what was your first career? It was with your father?

**JT:** My first career?

**SP:** Yes, I guess it would be a job.

**JT:** Yes.

**SP:** Nothing that you want to do for a lifetime.

**JT:** Well, I wasn't old enough really to know, in 1958 when my father died and we moved here, I was 11 years old.

**SP:** Oh, I see.

**JT:** So, I wasn't that knowledgeable actually. Yes, that was really my first job. I used to go up, like I said, during school breaks and summer vacations and that.

At the old logging mills they used to have a thing that they called "skidways". Those were logs that were set up, that when you brought logs in the sleighs during the winter or with the

caterpillar during the summer, on a sled, the logs were carried on those big sleds and then they would tip the sleds up, then roll the logs off on to the skidway. The skidway ran up to the loading cart by the sawmill and you would have to move the logs up the skidway and eventually load them on the cart. The cart would go back and forth and the log would be sawed. My job, as a little kid, and I was paid a dollar a week which was tremendous money in those days. I was one of the richest kids around as far as school went. [My job] was to use a canthook to roll the logs up the skidway. So what I had to do, always, was just to keep all the logs moved up front, moved along the skidway up to the front so that when my father was done sawing the log, there was another log right there that he could just take another canthook and tip on to the saw-cart. That's what I would do all day long, just take another canthook and turn those logs up the skidway one right after the other whenever the sleigh or the sled would bring more logs and I always had to keep them right up front.

**SP:** When you got out of high school, you did what?

**JT:** I went immediately into the Navy. I was from a single parent household in 1964. What were you going to do? I had no college fund, nothing like that. All the social security payments basically went just to maintain any sort of a lifestyle at all. There wasn't money available for college or trust fund or anything like that. We all kind of knew the Vietnam War was coming, even in my graduating class in 1964. I went into the Navy because I knew that if I went into the Navy, number one, I could go into the service that I wanted and I definitely didn't want to be in the Army. I didn't want to be drafted. Besides the Navy would let me have kind of a choice of careers and I had qualified to the language program in the Navy.

**SP:** You didn't come out during your time in the Navy?

**JT:** Not really...

**SP:** More specifically, what I want to ask is, did you come to a self-admission at that time?

**JT:** Oh, I came to a self-admission long before that. I kind of knew all my life that I was gay and I started dealing with it publicly about 1965. I actually did, on several different occasions, tell different people in the Navy that I was gay and basically came out of my closet in the Navy at the same time.

**SP:** Do you think that was the right thing to do at the time? I mean did you need to, did you trust people?

**JT:** No. I thought it was the right thing to do at the time. When I look back now I'm not sure. There's a lot of things I would do differently. As to how open I would be, I don't know. But, see, being in the language program and speaking the foreign languages that I did within the United States Navy, I was fully under the impression, I fully believed that if the Navy had found out that I was gay or a homosexual, that, and because I was in the security group, because I had had training briefings and gone through security training because I was doing all this foreign language stuff and worked with a lot of classified documents, I firmly believed that in my heart and soul that they would send me to Leavenworth if they've found out because that was what they

always told us, whether it was true or not. I now have some doubts. I think now that they maybe would just have dismissed me or discharged me, put the little mark on my record so that everybody would know in the future why I had been discharged, of course, they still dishonorably discharged people for being gay or medically discharged. That was kind of that period of time when they were switching over from the dishonorable to the medical discharge and I know a couple of guys that got discharged for being gay or for at least for the perception that they were gay. One, I know, is gay for sure. I was just firmly convinced that because of my position in the Navy, I would go to Leavenworth that was all.

**SP:** Were there any examples, that you can think of, of what you knew you shouldn't do in order to not be discharged? Is there something that these people did that you saw [and thought,] "Well, I can't be caught in the act or I cannot admit to certain people."?

**JT:** The two that I remember the best and that I am the most aware of, I would say that the one, I think, that actually had gotten caught or at least was self-admitted, the other one was extremely effeminate and I think his effeminacy was directly related to his being gay as opposed to just a person who displays effeminate qualities. How he was found out, I don't know except that he was very gay and very effeminate both at the same time at least by the time he got out. The other guy, I think, was either caught or was self-admitted. There was a number of people which I only knew the one guy that was thrown out and maybe that if he wasn't actually caught in physical act but, that somebody else had said that he was. He had just admitted it.

**SP:** I want to ask you about, if you can comment on the Navy experience, how that affected your life after you got out of the Service? That was in what year?

**JT:** I got out in 1972. Well, it certainly colored my life completely, how I do things, everything from how I charter in the log books at work to how I approach problems to the fact that I spend usually a couple of months of a year in a hospital because of Agent Orange-related diseases. There probably has been no other single factor, voluntary factor, that has had a greater impact in my life. Things like being German-Scandinavian have had a greater impact in my life but that wasn't voluntary. Being gay is probably having a greater impact in my life but I don't consider that voluntary either. I'd say that it has probably had a greater impact than my religion. Yes, it's just colored my entire way of thinking and my way of living my life.

**SP:** Is it being in a segregated situation like the Navy is, as far as segregating the sexes, did it prepare you for a segregated bar, for instance, one that was for men?

**JT:** No. I didn't need a preparation for that. I loved it. I loved the segregation of the Navy, I loved the segregation of gay male bars. I prefer the company of men. It's just that simple. Even socially, that's not to say that I don't have women that are very close friends. But if I'm going to choose as to whom I am going to run around with, I'm always going to run around with men, I'm much more comfortable with men. I'd much rather talk about gay male things. But I'm much more comfortable sitting in a group talking about hunting, fishing, and sports than sitting in a group, and I realize those are stereotypes, than when I'm sitting in a group talking about weddings and boutiques, showers and babies, all that kind of crap, I'm just so much more comfortable with men. Now if I'm sitting in a group of men and we're talking about fashion, something that would

be considered a woman's topic, it doesn't bother me at all. I don't know, there's just something about my entire nature that I -- and maybe that's part of my cultural growing up, the fact that being older and I grew up in a time when men were much more segregated from women. The women went in the kitchen afterwards and did the dishes. Men went in the living room and smoked cigars and cigarettes, talked sports or watched TV, whatever. That was the society that I grew up in. That's probably got more to do with it than the Navy. I was just really comfortable in the Navy, I didn't have any problems.

**SP:** Can you tell me, after you came out of the Navy is there a pretty natural progression into coming out? Can you see it if you look back: after the Navy, I came out or I was preparing to or I was looking around for a group to socialize with?

**JT:** I had already discovered all my socializing factors. I was prepared to come out. That was one of the reasons I kind of volunteered. That was right towards the end--1972 is right towards the end of the Vietnam War, I'd been in since 1964. I enlisted, I still had some time to go on my enlistment but they were trying to get rid of people then, because they were downsizing after the war and I very much wanted to get out because during the time that I was in the Navy, I had been able to identify gay and lesbian culture and gay and lesbian social groups so that I had prepared myself. So when I got out of the Navy, I did move into that lifestyle immediately and that was exactly what I wanted to do. I was happy in the Navy, I enjoyed the work. But the thing I didn't have, was the whole socialization process and I learned that when I was in the Navy and that made me uncomfortable with the military. Once I knew that I could actually live as an open gay person in the world at large, why the hell did I want to be in a group of men taking orders from somebody else to polish my shoes all the time, when I can go out and be in the total world of men in a gay bar and polish my shoes when I wanted to. There was no reason for me to stay in the military anymore other than the fact that I liked the job. I liked the ability to travel. I liked the ability to use foreign languages. But that wasn't as powerful as the ability to be open and honest with my own sexuality, into engaging my sexuality whenever I wanted to. It's still against the law, but that wasn't the same kind of fearfulness that there was in the Navy.

**SP:** You weren't so involved in your job, it wasn't the people you lived with.

**JT:** I don't understand the question.

**SP:** You can go into a gay bar, those are not the people you worked with, they aren't in the Navy.

**JT:** I didn't mind if I went to a gay bar, if I worked with the people or didn't work with the people or whatever. My social life, as I said, I'm much more comfortable having a circle around men. So when I went into the Navy, other than my own groups of friends that I hung around with, I didn't know how to socialize as a gay person. I didn't know that gay bars existed, especially not in Minnesota. But an awful lot of things happened when I was in the Navy too. Suddenly, there were newspapers articles on--I went in in 1964, 1969 was Stonewall. And then in early 1970's, Baker became president of the student body at the U and that hit the newspapers.

**SP:** You found out about this where? When you heard about Stonewall, where were you?

**JT:** When I heard about Stonewall, let's see, Stonewall, I do have to have been in Washington DC at this time, and there wasn't that much in the papers about Stonewall because obviously the heterosexual press, other than just reporting on riots, reported that there was a homosexual riot in New York. [They] didn't want to even report on it because they didn't like reporting on gays and lesbians and the alternative press didn't realize the social significance of what did happen at Stonewall. Gays and lesbians didn't understand the social significance of what did happen at Stonewall. Let's face it, it took years.

**SP:** When do you think it started to be referred to as having started a movement?

**JT:** As to having started a movement?

**SP:** Or inspired the movement to take some momentum.

**JT:** You'd have to go back to some of the conferences that were held in 1970, maybe 1971. What was that NASDAX, NASGRA? I think NAGA National Association of Gay-- National Association of Gay something. I'd have to go look it up, but they started holding some conferences and some of the groups and organizations and some of the radicals that had come out of Stonewall started, should we say, confronting. These conferences were really split because you had the new modern social radical that was patterning their lifestyle and their work within the gay and lesbian movement on the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's and you had the old long term Mattachine one, all those sorts of people that dressed in a coat and tie or in women's cases long dresses [Mattachine types] and were the very quiet peaceable, picketers and letter writers and worked on the whole thing about: "well we're really not sick and here's the psychological medical proof that we're not", and would work with that?

As compared to the radicals that came out of Stonewall which were: "we need to change now, we don't give a damn what you think, you can go ahead and think that we're sick if you want to, we don't think we're sick, we just want the change, we just want the rights". So you had a real dichotomy there. There was what? maybe fifteen groups in the United States prior to Stonewall and within a year after Stonewall there was fifty groups nationally. It was a real spark, it was something that really caught on. Gays and Lesbians, suddenly, realized that: "Yes, indeed, we can stand up for ourselves." And you just saw this growth of things. The growth was happening, slowly but surely, I mean there was social change, we were in the coming out of the process of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. We were getting away from the old McCarthyism. We were starting to identify ourselves.

**SP:** McCarthyism? You're talking about the early 1950's?

**JT:** Joseph McCarthy, in the early 1950's, when all gays and lesbians were Communists and all Communists were gays and lesbians and it didn't matter: you were bad either way and the witch hunts of the 1950's. That really hurt the gay movement. The Blunt stuff from England, that whole thing about the Communists and gays and lesbians, pinkos, radicals.

**SP:** Do you know anyone in this area who that affected in a, I would guess, a public way?

**JT:** Chuck Rolland of Duluth. He had been a member of the Communist party and in the Military, served an extensive time, came back, worked for a number of labor unions and worked for the Communist party and was a Communist party member, in addition to being gay in Minnesota, [he] taught classes, travelled around organizing for labor unions in this whole upper Midwest area, and especially in Minnesota, and eventually, as things changed in his life, after World War II and he kind of fell in love, and started going with another Minnesotan, actually, he went out to California because that has always been identified as the gay mecca, he met another Minnesotan who I'd have to look up the name.

**SP:** Is it Harold Call?

**JT:** No. Anyway they became lovers, they went out, they were actually some of the first of that early group of people that Harry Hay pulled together to found the Mattachine Society. As a matter of fact, Chuck Rolland was very instrumental in it because when Harry Chuck was the one that Harry showed his initial plan to found the Mattachine Society. Chuck was the one that issued that famous statement: "Well this is exactly what I was thinking of. This is exactly what I had wanted to do." They all got together with Rudy Grenrich, the fashion designer from the 1950's, and founded the Mattachine Society. Chuck Rolland and--I can go to look the guy's name up if you want to, there was another Minnesotan who was involved, very much so.

**SP:** Of the Minnesotans who didn't go to California, what were they doing?

**JT:** Well, a couple of things. Mostly just socializing.

You had Koreen Phelps and Stephen Ihrig who founded things at the University in 1969, founded FREE (Fight Repression of Erotic Expression). You had Jack Baker, Mike McConnell, Thom Higgins. Thom Higgins was involved with the Minnesota Society for the Blind; the first Gay and Lesbian case, here in Minnesota. We've been a little bit more lucky in Minnesota than a lot of other places. During the 1950's we didn't have the witch hunts. We had a number of gay bars. They weren't stormed and closed by the police. Interestingly enough, the gay bars in St. Paul and Minneapolis showed the same social patterns as the cities overall. I say that's interesting because the ones in St. Paul and in the suburbs were not mafia owned, and mafia controlled because St. Paul had been a free city in all those years with the gangsters, because St. Paul was one of the meeting places in the United States that gangsters could go because no one had a territory in St. Paul because it was considered a free city. Minneapolis had been gangster controlled; the gay and lesbian bars were all gangster controlled. One of the reasons that they weren't raided in Minneapolis, because Minneapolis always had the worst police force. The St. Paul police force was always much more benign than the Minneapolis one. One of the reasons they didn't is because people like Ernie Pesish and that these people that were deeply involved with the Italian mafia at least, paid them off. Even in the 1970's, like I can remember, the police coming in there and getting their envelopes of money from Ernie Pesish and at the old Saloon. It wasn't the Saloon then, that was back when it was Suttons over at 1st and 7th in Minneapolis.

**SP:** Would that be the location of-- was it on the same block as the [Gay] 90's?

**JT:** No, you had to go down to 7th and then go down from 7th to 1st. Now there's a bank there.

At the time it was almost a warehouse district and Suttons was all the way on the back of it and slowly as the community came out, and the community expanded, Suttons continued to expand until it almost overtook the entire block there for a while. Then the bank bought it out and they redeveloped it partly. The old Lockerroom bath was kitty-corner across the 1st Avenue and down Hennepin and down there. But I think Pesish eventually bought the Lockerroom bath but that was owned by actually a different family.

**SP:** And is that also a mafia?

**JT:** Yes, all those sorts.

**SP:** Do you remember the name?

**JT:** No I really don't with the baths. The Happy Hour and the Gay 90's and the Hennepin Avenue baths which were kitty-corner across the street in the old Lumber Building, those were owned by what was known as the Jewish Mafia. Pesish and the Lockerroom and The 19 were owned by the Italian Mafia. The Suttons, Lockerroom, those were owned by Italian[s]. I know Big Al was associated with the Happy Hour Gay 90's. I don't remember, I've heard the names, I might recognize them at some time in association with them. Probably, if I went back to all the newspapers and magazines, I could find the old owners of the Happy Hour Gay 90's. The baths would be a little bit tougher. They were a lot more secretive and a lot more hidden. There was a bath out in Anoka. I'm not sure who owned that, I'd guess the Italians. That was really popular and actually [that was] the last bath house in Minnesota to close was the one on Anoka.

**SP:** Do you know the name?

**JT:** Main Street Baths, something like that. It was a real generic name. I never did get out there. I was always to go out there just to see it as a kind of historical thing and to know about it, because the baths were never one of my real more popular hang outs as far as I was concerned, but I had an historical interest in it. I never did get out there before it closed.

**SP:** Are you aware of raids that took place in the baths? Were there more? Do you think that was like a territory that the police...

**JT:** The raids started coming when it got involved, or when this sort of things got involved with the Minneapolis police and politics.

I think a lot of the reasons that some of the raids were dumped, was purely and simply because of politics.

[pause]

Then they had--It was so messy, that's something you'd have to go back and look at, I believe.

**SP:** Do you want to pause a second.

**JT:** Sure.

**SP:** About the baths.

**JT:** I was going to say. I think if you go back and check the historical records, once again it's something we'll have to pull out of the files and look at, you'll find the current chief of police in Minneapolis, Laux, his name prominently mentioned in a number of those raids. It had a lot to do with Al Hoffsted and how he lost his endorsement at the American for Democratic Action here at the Minnesota Committee. It seemed that Steve Endean and Dennis Watley and I who were all involved with Americans in Democratic Actions cost Mr. Hofsted his endorsement by the A. D. A. when he was running for mayor. A whole bunch of things like that. It's the bathhouses raids, have interestingly enough affected Minnesota politics ever since, not just the mayoral race.

You've got to remember that one of the people that was caught in those raids was a very young political from West Concord, Minnesota by the name of... [Rick Stafford.] He just recently got elected as the party chair for the state Democratic party. That was how Rick came out of his closet and he was on the central Democratic party DFL, Democratic Farmer Labor Party Central Committee. When they raided the baths that was part of the headline, Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor or DFL Party Central Committee member caught at baths. It caused Rick to come out of his closet. He was a small town newspaper writer from southern Minnesota and it caused him to be more active for gay and lesbian causes within the Democratic party. They had an interesting impact, all the way up until the time that they were closed.

I have some tapes that I have done here with Brian Coyle, it was interesting. I have guarded the material for years because Brian had asked me to and I had taped the conversation with him during the whole time that city council was debating the closing of the baths. On the tape, that I have, Brian freely admits that he basically cut a deal with the Minneapolis Police Department that he would vote to help close the baths for health reasons, if the police [vice squad] would stop raiding the bookstores. That could have been very damaging to Brian at the time, especially since a lot of his support was dependent upon gays and lesbians and a lot of the people within the gay community would have seen that as stealing from Peter to pay Paul kind of thing. It was just ripping off somebody else within the community in order to satisfy somebody else within the community. That would have been seen as a real betrayal. The baths are really interesting and not something that could be dealt with lightly. There's a lot good solid political history involved with the baths and the outcome of those various raids and the people involved on this Minneapolis mayoral politics and state politics.

**SP:** Like you said, it was for health reasons they were interested in closing the baths.

**JT:** That's the public reasons that is always given was the health reasons, face it. It was fundamentalist Christian bigotry that caused the baths to be closed. The baths were the most vociferous promoters of healthy sex in the entire state of Minnesota, a lot better than the Minnesota Health Department or anything that [unclear] were doing up there at the top of the state at the time. The baths advocated condoms, they advocated safer sex, they talked about it, advertised it. It was their business and it was in their business interests. I mean, all too often,

politically and historically, we'd like to close our eyes and just kind of say: "Oh well this is ok, and the real reason they were closed was because, it was to help the health environment." It had nothing to do with that. It was religious bigotry pure and simple.

**SP:** So they had a reason which they could justify at that point, which was AIDS.

**JT:** Yes.

**SP:** Previous to that?

**JT:** Oh no. As a matter of fact, interestingly enough, previous to AIDS, they didn't really try to close the baths. For a lot of years, the baths were raided more, well there were two basic reasons that one raided the baths back in the early years: number one was political expediency depending on what office you were running for, or who you wanted to embarrass. If you could embarrass Hofsted or Fraser or some of those people by catching some of their campaign staff in the baths and they had voted against you, or they didn't like what the Police Department was doing or had said something bad about the Police Department and you raided to embarrass them. Or if it helped your mayoral campaign to say: "Look, good Christian citizens of Minneapolis, here I am getting rid of those scum and this filth because we raided the baths." But the baths would be closed for a day, half a day, an hour, something like that, then they opened back up. There was no reason for them politically to close the baths. The baths were good business, they were good taxpayers. In addition to some of the other things that the baths did like, for people like me. I basically lived most of my time here in St. Paul, if I was in Minneapolis, and of course I always drive, and I was too drunk or I felt I was too drunk to go home or it was snowing too bad or just whatever the reason, I could stay for twenty-four hours at the baths for \$5 until I sobered up, I sure couldn't get a hotel room with a shower. I didn't have to be sexually active. I could go there. I could stay. I could sober up. I was with other gay men that I could talk to, once again all-men environment. You didn't have to participate in sexuality. So they kept a number of people off the highways, quite literally.

You had the political reasons, the other reason for raiding the baths was to punish the mafia people. When the Pesishs didn't pay you enough or if you felt that they were shorting your cut—I mean it seems funny when I talk about it now, because it seems a lot like it's one of those almost romantic novels that you might pick out about the mafia underground, but that's exactly what happened. The police would for some reason be angry. You pick the reason. Be angry at Pesish or whoever they were angry at and those were the baths that got raided. So, yes, it was a punishment. Because the bars were the real cash cow that was where the big money was made as far as the various gangs were concerned. The gangs were concerned. The bars brought in tons of money.

One of the reasons the various gangs in this area got out of running the gay bars is because they stopped being cash cows. The Equal Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Movement in the form of Steve Endean and me, we got to a point to where we were strong enough to demand money from the bars to say: "We need you to contribute to this." for whatever reason. As the community grew, you had more and more of those things that you'd lose customers if some of that money wasn't going down to the community and they just weren't as profitable anymore. They weren't

making the big profits and so, they eventually sold out and took advantage like Andy and Little John. God, when the Pesishs sold them, the old Suttons which became the Saloon or actually I guess it was the Saloon when they sold to them, they got taken for a ride. They were thinking of themselves as community members, they both worked in the bars, especially in the Saloon and the Suttons for years. They saved their money and went to buy this thing and thought they bought it all in good faith, but when they got it, they found out they were like \$10,000 in debt from back taxes that hadn't been paid. And of course, by then all the contracts were signed, the t's crossed, the i's dotted. They suddenly found out themselves that they had not only taken on the indebtedness of the bar but they have taken an additional indebtedness from back taxes. It took them a while to scrape out. The Blooms' did not have the same problem when they bought the Happy Hour Gay 90's from Big Al and then moved out to the suburbs to Classic Car Company, a few places like that.

**SP:** Big Al? What is his full name? Do you know?

**JT:** No, I don't think I ever knew his full name.

**SP:** Is that the Jewish mafia?

**JT:** Yes, they sold to the Blooms, which are the ones who own the Happy Hour Gay 90's now. They are still very profitable businesses obviously, but they aren't millionaire makers like they used to be.

**SP:** Oh yes, Blooms?

**JT:** Yes.

**SP:** Who are they?

**JT:** Well, they are just a family, they were, to the best of my knowledge a very honest family, they were related to various other families involved in both the gangland things in Minneapolis. They were related in that, but they weren't really involved in any of the more gangland things. The Happy Hour Gay 90's was a good deal. It wasn't good any longer for the gangs because it wasn't losing money like it used to but it certainly was profitable enough and a profitable business to be involved in. They kind of had first option because they were related. When the gangs went to unload these things because they wanted to get to other operations and other businesses, of course, they've been unloaded to a relative or a friend, somebody like that because the Blooms are obviously making very good money out of the Happy Hour Gay 90's. It's just you're not getting that total outlay that you had before. Of course they contribute a lot in and are forced to contribute a lot back to the Community. If they didn't do some of the things like for Pride and for AIDS, they'd lose their customers. There'd obviously be some people that would go there, that would go there until their doors are shut, locked. I think that if they offended too badly [unclear] did not have a good reason for offending any major Lesbian and gay organization and that organization called for a boycott, they could lose money really fast in a place like that.

**SP:** Yes. Do you know when this happened to the Blooms' at the [Gay] 90's? [inaudible]

**JT:** Well, I'm not sure, I can't tell you an exact date. I know the family started moving out in the late 1970's. I'd say that the Blooms probably bought the Happy Hour Gay 90's about 1978, 1979. By the early 1980's the Pesishs were out of the Saloon. The baths were the last things to go. It was just like a matter of months before the City Council closed the baths that the Pesishs sold out before, I think it was less than a year. Once again it was some gay guys that had it taken on. It may have been a little bit over a year. But some gay guys wanted the business, and saw the potential in the business but didn't have the political clout and that was another reason why the City Council thought they could close it. All of sudden, there was no political clout there, there was no implied money or implied threats or anything else.

**SP:** I read an article in the Advocate and it was talking about how the author Randy Schultz and the title said something about—, no it wasn't the title, it was just the article about these cities not having gay owned bars. Do you think that was exceptional? Maybe, he was referring to Los Angeles, or in the Advocate...

**JT:** Yes, well, I don't think that was so exceptional. I think we probably were later and maybe that's more the point here. I think we were probably later in having gay ownership of our bars than were a lot of the other places. I don't think it's exceptional. I think most of the gay bars in most of the cities in the United States that I am aware of, there were two primary owners and that was either some sort of mafia or gangland connection that own the bars. Remember the bars in those days too were outlets for things like drugs, prostitution and all kinds of things as compared to what they are now, the other one was generally the private or little gay entrepreneur that would spend his life savings opening up a bar and try to make it successful. Sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't. But gangland ownership of the bars was pretty universal. So I don't know what article you're talking about but I would suggest that Schultz is talking about a period of time where we lagged behind the rest of the country in private ownership.

**SP:** That was about in 1978?

**JT:** That would be about right. They started dumping the gay bars in major cities, right after 1969. Well, because all of a sudden, it was fashionable for gay people. Remember the spirit of being gay was much more—, there were less people but there were much more radicalism then and you went to gay bar, you didn't go to non-gay owned gay bars. Most of the gangland connections, they started dumping the bars in the early 1970's. So by the time you're talking 1978, yes, in most of the big cities, all the bars would have been gay owned. We were just behind the times and that was about the time that they started dumping here.

**SP:** Ok. I didn't get to ask this question yet, I'll ask you now. When you came out, who did you trust? Did you find someone who you could talk to and test this out on?

**JT:** Well, as you know, coming out is not, not a simple process. How does one come out? My official coming out, actually took place in, shall we say, December of 1971 at which time I was home. I was more aware of gay bars at that time and I'd been in the Navy and my best friend from high school that had been in the Army. He'd been in the Army Medical Corp and I'd been in Naval Linguistics and I was at that time stationed in Washington D. C. and I was trying to get

him to come out there because we both had a mutual interest in libraries and archives and museums, the Smithsonian and all this kind of stuff, and I've been begging to come out because I knew I was going to get out in April and I had been trying to get him out. [I said,] "This is the only time and it's the last chance you have, you can stay with me and it'll be cheap, you can't refuse it." So when I was home at Christmas later that year, I went over to his apartment, we were going to run around that day, got over there at about breakfast time, we were just chatting and of course, I was nagging again about coming to Washington D.C. He finally had about enough of it and he just sat down and he said: "Jean, you know, there are only seven bars in the entire Twin Cities area that I can go to". And I looked right directly at him and I said: "Are you trying to tell me that you're gay? But so am I". It just totally switched the whole relationship. I think we both had been suspicious of each other but hadn't had that confirmation and that was all the confirmation we needed. So, suddenly, it was instant family, instant group. He showed me the routes to take and the highways to travel and the roads to walk down and the doors to walk in. It was totally switched around. I was immediately at home and I came out. There are other ways positive and negative that I've been opening throughout the Navy and throughout my life but that would actually be my most official coming out.

**SP:** And after that, what happened? Where did you go to socialize? Who did you socialize with?

**JT:** Are you talking about after I went back on leave for the rest of my time in the Navy or after I got out of the service and started socializing?

**SP:** Here.

**JT:** Well, like I said, I had my instant clique of friends because I had known John. John and I had been friends since 1958 when I moved to the Cities, as had our other friend, Roger who was Roger Anderson who is the sculptor who lives in San Francisco right now, who is rather famous. When the Minnesota Museum of Arts did that big sculpture exhibit with Paul Manship and all of that a few years back, Roger was one of the three artists that they invited to participate. I believe the Minnesota Museum of Arts owns his Busephilous. The three of us had all been very good friends and, so I found from John that Roger was gay too, which was appropriate and very nice again, friendly and warm. I had my clique.

I had all of John's friends and fitted in perfectly with them and then I had my own little thing because after you get out of the military, you're allowed to wear your uniform for an x amount of time, I forget now what it is, it's like two weeks, a week or something like that before you have to switch completely to civilian clothes. It didn't take me very long to find out that uniforms were popular, no matter where you went. I was considerably thinner, considerably blonder, considerably younger back then and I was walking down to the old Suttons on 7th and 1st dressed in my full—dressed in blues with all my medals, I had like my fourteen medals, each had a little ribbons. You don't actually wear the medals that's considered gauche, except under certain formal engagements. I was wearing all of those and the ribbons, dressed up with my full blues, walking down the street. A little short kid runs up to me and says: "I want you". I thought it was something else that he was saying but it turned out that little short kid was Steve Endean who had just that month formed the gay rights lobby, the first gay and lesbian lobbying group. He saw me as the perfect example of a gay person to be involved with him.

At that time I was still pretty politically naive, I was conservatively Republican, having come from a basically dairying and lumbering family from northern Minnesota, Morrison County no less. So my politics were very conservative. Within a matter of days, I was getting out of the service and getting back home, once I got home here, because I drove cross-country which is a whole other series of stories. Within just a matter of days, I was the associate chair of the Gay Rights Lobby in the State of Minnesota and I was in charge of Republicans. Now it all sounds kind of silly and almost flippant but those were big dealings back in those days, that was—you had to start some place and that was the start, and that was the start of the whole political thing. Steven was...

**SP:** What was he doing at that point? I mean, how did you run into him? It was on the street?

**JT:** Yes. He was heading down to Suttons to campaign, somehow, or lobby somebody about something, trying to get gays involved in the political system. Yes, so he just saw me and for some reasons identified me and I think probably because of the military uniform and the fact that I looked fairly conservative, short hair and all this kind of things which was big deal back in those days, kind of have short hair that identified you politically, very much. What Steven was doing was, he was working on forming the Gay Rights lobby and starting to lobby at the Legislature. [He was] living hand to mouth in a little dumpy apartment over in Minneapolis on Spruce Place. He had already started doing what became his life work.

That was how we met.

**SP:** At that point, was that a big surprise for you to enter into something political? Did you have exposure to it, I mean just the fact that it was new to you?

**JT:** O.K. Remember I went into the military immediately after high school. Back in that day and age—I make it sound like it was so long ago. I guess maybe to younger people it is a long time ago. But back in those days in age that day in age, one was not involved in political parties until the age of twenty-one because you couldn't vote and nobody cared about you. I had had no previous political experience because by the time that I was twenty-one, I had already been in the Navy for five years. In the Navy, you really can't be—you're not supposed to be political, even though if you were enough rank [you could]. Look at Colin Powell and his treachery and evilness.

I had had no political experience. My family was politically aware. It is a cardinal sin in my family not to vote. It's like burning a book. It's one of those things you do not do in my family. There are things that you can do and some things that you can't do, and some things that are just absolutely totally forbidden: not voting and burning books are two that are absolutely totally forbidden. For all the trials and tribulations and rights and wrongs in dealing with my family with being openly gay, my sexuality is less of a concern for my family than if I were to not vote or if I were to burn books. So I was basically politically naive and Steve got to me. I had just gotten out of the thing [Navy]. But I was also politically concerned and aware and wanted to get involved. I just didn't know what to do. When I went into the service, young kids weren't allowed to be involved in politics. When I got out of the service, I hadn't had a chance to build up any of that

experience. So Steve was very good for me and it was an important thing for me in my life because I had Steven around to teach me the politics. He was able to teach me about precinct caucuses, and going to county conventions and going to senate district and what the difference between a senate district—I had come from northern Minnesota where state delegates are elected on the basis of counties, not senate districts. Those systems have since changed within the Democratic Party too. I was also a Republican, I didn't know any of that kind of stuff.

[Interference]

**JT:** That was a very positive thing for me too, the fact that Steven was able to teach me that stuff and it was real learning thing. [interference]

**SP:** So within a year you switched?

**JT:** I [interference] in Minnesota Republican to [interference]

**SP:** Now it's working. O.K. you switched?

**JT:** Maybe it was because it was on a tilt there. Within a year after working with Steven working with the Gay Rights Lobby, which eventually became the Minnesota Committee for Gay Rights (MCGR) and then Minnesota Committee for Gay and Lesbian Rights (MCGLR) all these other organizations that it has become all over the years, but within a year I had switched from being a conservative northern Minnesotan Republican to a urban DFLer.

When I got back and got into the practical look at the reality of the Republican Party, it just drove me nuts. That's been cause for dissension in my family ever since that, because my family is still basically Republican. They are not as Republican as we used to be in my family, but just so dismayed and disoriented and everything else politically by the fundamentalist Christians taking over the Republican party. My family is very conservative financially and very liberal socially. As far as they're concerned, the fundamentalists Christians have just destroyed the Republican party, just totally destroyed it, and that's very dismaying. We're looking at a history here of going back, well yes with some of my relatives to the time of Abraham Lincoln and the founding of the Republican party here in Minnesota. And to see these fundamentalist Christians come along in a period of ten years, just totally destroy the Republican party in the State of Minnesota, that's very frustrating for them, very frustrating. Like I say, I converted a long time ago. Most of my nieces and nephews.

... history of, since my grandparents and great grandparents first immigrated to Minnesota, they were always Republicans. My grandfather was on the City Council of the City of Little Falls for fourteen years as a conservative Republican. Right from the beginning we were the landowners in Morrison County when my great grandfather, John Tretter got here in 1847. You look back at the records of Morrison County and all the land grants, especially in and around [unclear] are all in the names of various Tretters, as it went out to his sister and his wife. They would get as many land grants as they could.

It's been a dramatic and a traumatic change for many members of my family. A certain amount of

that has been the fact that I am gay and that I am openly gay. My family, for what they like of me, and maybe that's a bit unfair, because I'm putting too much emphasis on myself, I don't think my family likes to see the persecution of any peoples whether they'd be gay or lesbian or [unclear]. My family is quite liberal in that respect and the idea that the Republican Party would want to persecute and advocates the persecution of Gays and Lesbians. It's one of the reasons that we have become increasingly Democratic over the years, which has been a real difficult and traumatic thing for my family. We're talking about abandoning over a hundred years of family politics, because of religious bigotry.

It's interestingly, though, that this whole thing, with this all bigotry thing, it's helped me in my historical perspective, understand better what went on in pre World War II Germany with the Nazis coming to power. By watching my family, and seeing what difficulty they've had changing with the fundamentalist Christians, because our family is Lutheran all the way back, there are some Catholics in our family too, but I've been better able to understand historically what the Germans went through, watching what's happened with my family. [I can see] how they can gloss over and say: "it's really not that bad, really not that bad" until all of sudden Pat Robertson comes up with some outrageous statement, then, they can't deny it anymore, they have to face up to it.

**SP:** Their identity has been smudged?

**JT:** Yes. So, it's really interesting. I guess if anything I have played an important part in that in the fact that I won't let my family get by with ignoring the outrageous statements that the fundamentalists make. I say: "Wait a minute! Stop! Here it is! It's in the newspaper! That was on television! Look at it! You have to deal with it! I am gay! These people are talking about me!"

**SP:** I want to ask you about some of the establishments that were around. Did you hear of any that weren't exclusively gay but, were open to gay people. It doesn't have to be bars, just places like coffee houses, things like that.

**JT:** There have been some. I remember in high school, beatniks were very popular in high school. There was a place up at Snelling and University called the Purple Onion. They did all kinds of radical things that were still accepted, acceptable back in those days. They served whale meat, they didn't serve any liquor because it was a coffee house. I mean back in those days whale weren't considered an endangered species, we're talking 1962, 1963, this was a beatnik place. As high school kids we could get in there, but one of the reasons we wanted to go there was other than just the exotic nature of beatniks and the Purple Onion and the fact that they served quail meat that you could eat, there was always these kinds of hidden rumors that a lot of beatniks were homosexuals. You could do that. It's always there.

**SP:** Where does that kind of reputation come from?

**JT:** About beatniks? I think just because they're exotic, because they advocated free love and although, I think most people, when they were advocating free love, were talking about free heterosexual love, not confined marriage. Gays and lesbians have always demanded that the definition of free love include gay and lesbian love. Anybody that's radical and different is granted with being homosexual, the Nazis in Germany were all homosexuals, watch some of the

cartoons of World War II. Hitler and Goebbels and Goering and all those are painted as being very effeminate. Some of the propaganda from World War II is so anti-gay because they paint all the Nazis as being very gay. Well, as you and I know, the Nazis got rid of the gays when they executed Roem and threw the Brown Shirts out of the party, well, they didn't throw them off, they killed them all. So those kinds of stereotypes carry over.

It [homosexuality] was different here, in Minnesota because they were considered a novelty evil back in those days and that was that heavy influence. It's one of the things, I miss the most as I grow older and see it disappearing in Minnesota, because I miss the Scandinavian influence. That very modifying, kind of peaceful gentle attitude toward sex, that a lot of the other religions and cultures just simply don't have. So it was a novelty, it was a curiosity. As to it taking place, I don't know exactly how you want me to proceed because you said not really bars, but when you go back to being a little kid— The little boys in Minnesota, back in the 1940's, the 1950's and even up into the 1960's, it wasn't a sin, it didn't have this dramatic or at least not in the areas that I grew up, it didn't have this whole dramatic thing about were you going to be polluted for life and you're going to end up being an axe-murderer because you are molested, it was considered part of the natural sexual expression of little boys. One stopped little boys from doing it because it wasn't socially polite, but one knew and accepted, at that point in time anyway that all little boys did it and they all did it every time they got a chance.

We can talk about, depending upon what you want to do, I'm sure some members of my family would be unhappy, but we can talk about growing up and going to the farm with my cousins, the fact that right after World War II, when I was growing up there was a severe, severe housing shortage, after World War II, so my mother used to take in returning servicemen because we had a big house. As a little kid I was terrible, I grew up, I shouldn't say terrible, I was sexually aggressive as a very very little kid. These poor guys, I must have terrified them, but there weren't very many that kicked me out or turned me away. I used to crawl in their beds, I'd wait until my family went to sleep and sneaked out of my room and sneaked down to wherever the current sailor or Army person or whoever it was that was staying with us during the housing shortage, I crawled in bed with him and I was just very sexually aggressive with him.

I remember having a classic affair as a young kid in the Little Falls theater, what was it? The Little Falls? Was it called the Flyer? There was the Falls and the Flyer, there were two movie theaters, I don't remember which one that was but there was one guy who must have been a teenager when I was a very little kid. I would sit next to him or he would see me sitting in a movie and movies were big for kids back in those days. That was what you did in the 1950's, you got your money and you went to your movie when the family was all here for Thanksgiving, all the kids went to the movie in the afternoon. That was how you got the kids out of the house, so that the women could go talk in the kitchen and the men could go talk in the garage or the living room. I used to have an affair with the real traditional gay affair with the coats over the laps and all this kind of stuff. The fact was that gay sexuality was all over, it was just there. As a little kid, people in reference to this, people are going to think I was a tramp and actually I was. I didn't stop being a tramp until I got into high school and started learning that homosexuality was wrong and I'm talking about high school, I'm not talking about junior high or anything like that, I didn't have any common sense then either. That's wrong to say because that's oppressive again, it's not common sense. I was sexually liberated until I started learning a different social moral value

system in high school and God, was I sexually liberated! [laughs]

One of the biggest things that happens every year, small farm towns in northern Minnesota, especially when you're the county seat like Little Falls was for Morrison County, the county fair comes to town, usually American shows come with all the rides and barkers and the... What are they called? The guys that set the things up and ran it, the roustabouts. That was prime ground for young kids that wanted to have affairs with men. When those carnivals came to town, I just loved it. It was kind of a nice trade-off because I remember as a kid, wanting to get into things like the House of Mirrors or the Hall of Mirrors or the House of Horror, something like that and not really having enough money or not wanting to spend my money on that because I knew that was kind of hokey as compared to spending my money on the Tilt-a-Whirl or on the Bullet. If it was the right guy, you could go to bed with him and he'd let you have free passes to get into the House of Horror or the Hall of Mirrors or whatever for the rest of the thing. Like I say, I can remember doing that with Royal American shows at the State Fair even when I was still in the military. I came back in, that must have been 1965 that I was back in the Cities for the State Fair in between tours of duty. I was here for the State Fair and I tricked out with the guy from, I don't think it was the Hall of Mirrors, I think it was one of the horror houses, as in scary horror. That sort of sexuality and those sorts of sexual situations were present.

My best friend John and I, even though we never came out to each other, we used to go downtown St. Paul. There was a little bookstore on St. Peter, right on the corner, that didn't have heavy duty erotica, but had a lot of muscle magazines that were really popular in those days, [unclear] and all that kind of stuff. I know we used to go in there as junior high teenagers. I remember that as being very kind of scary, that was when I was starting to get this kind of social, moral, I remember at first that it was very easy but then you slowly find out that it wasn't necessarily good, but we used to love to go in there and look at the muscle men. We didn't realize exactly what was going on and that John was gay and that I was gay. We just knew that we wanted to go and look at the muscle magazines. None of us lifted weights or was trying to be more muscular or anything like that. It was just, we'd go into that book shop, we never had enough money really to buy any, but God, it was fun going in there and it got increasingly scary because it seemed increasingly like people were going to catch us. It was a real kind of, I guess, dichotomy that one lived because you didn't want to get caught because you knew people were going to tell you it was wrong. I can remember that going all the way back. But yet, you didn't feel guilty about it, the sure as hell wasn't as much guilt about sex when I was growing up as there is nowadays. It causes me to look with some disbelief at some of these kids that say: "Oh my God, that priest molested me fifty years ago and I've been a tramp ever since in my life." And I think: "Wait a minute, somebody is pulling a heavy duty guilt trip on you here." I was molested and I molested people and I remember as a little kid, it was fun, it was exciting, it was adventurous, it was exploring sexuality, I was doing all kinds of things that I can put into words now that I couldn't put into words then. I just knew that I enjoyed it and it was something that I wanted to do.

The one thing that does amaze me about that whole concept of sexual history and places to have sex other than bars in Minnesota is, we must have been damn lucky in this area because I never, as a kid, ever caught anything. I never had gonorrhea, never had had syphilis, I never had sores or venereal warts or anything of that stuff. I don't know if that's all that milk and sugar and boiled

broccoli or what it is, but when I think now about the stuff that I used to do as a little kid. My God, can you imagine where some of those soldiers and sailors [used to be] that used to stay at our place. And here is a four year old kid crawling in bed with them, performing sexual acts on them. It maybe was that just I always ran into very decent people, maybe the ones that had diseases were the ones that sent me away with a pat on my butt and said: "No way little kid."

Maybe people are more clean, maybe they were, maybe they aren't now. I don't know. I don't know what it is, but I know that's the one thing that's kind of puzzled me all my life, is I know I got all these sexual experiences as a kid. Now, I can understand not getting something from my cousins, my sister-in-law's younger brother, who is actually much older than me but because we were all farm kids, we were all country kids, we were all very small town kids. But, when I think about these other things, the soldiers, the sailors, the roustabouts; God, why didn't I catch anything? I surely should have but I didn't.

**SP:** I want to ask you about coming out of that period and going to bars and becoming politically active. For you coming out of the Navy and becoming more mature and becoming aware politically. In reference to the Gay Movement, did you need to go to bars for this? Was your sexuality made more complicated, tying you to more things, like politics? Is it necessary to know groups of people?

**JT:** Yes, if I interpret your question right, I would say absolutely. Remember we're talking about a period of time now, when basically there wasn't anything. There were erotic bookstores where we could go and buy male erotica. As a matter of fact, you might want to keep in mind that it was DSI, the publication here in Minnesota that first won the court case, the Supreme Court case with Ron Meshbesh as the lawyer to allow male frontal nudes to be sent through the mail. That was a Minnesota company and the court case was won by a Minnesota lawyer.

**SP:** Federal case?

**JT:** Yes. So you had your erotica but that wasn't a place of socialization. We're talking about a period of time, right after 1969, where there was one, possibly two and then with the founding of Steven's group, three social/political activist groups in the entire state outside of bars. Bars were your point of socialization. If you went to places like Bare Ass Beach or Loring Park or Rice Park or the little one over here in St. Paul, of course Rice is in St. Paul too, but...Minnedale Park or whatever that was up there.

**SP:** What location is it?

**JT:** It's right on the corner of— It's Marydale Park, it's right on the corner of Maryland and Dale. That used to be a big park for the northern suburbs that didn't want to drive all the way down St. Paul. Back in the 1980's, they ruined it and kind of destroyed it as a gay meeting place park because they decided to remodel it for the families and it now has things like swing sets and sand boxes. They cut down all the bushes and most of the nice trees. But, yes, that used to be a real popular little park for the northern suburbs: [unclear], Stillwater, North St. Paul, Roseville, Little Canada, White Bear Lake. The guys from that area would go to that Marydale Park on Dale and Maryland in St. Paul, as opposed to quiet downtown where all the downtown gays met, the

central city gays. But anyway, going to those places: Marydale, Rice, Loring, Bare Ass Beach, Calhoun Beach, any of those things, those were very sexual, very one time fly-by-night affairs. That was quickie sex.

The bars were the place for socialization, that was where you met people, that was where you talked to people. Sure, you tried to be sexually active out of there, but the primary function of the bars whether people wish to admit it or not, at that day in age and at that time was so far. There were no church groups, there were no social groups, there were no alcoholics groups or Alcoholics Anonymous or anything. Gays and lesbians didn't have things like that, there was no Gay and Lesbian Community Services, there was no Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council, there were no newspapers, there were no magazines. If you got magazines and newspapers other than the PSI publications which were basically frontal nudes and erotic, you had to get it from California. The Advocate was in existence, but the Advocate barely got out of southern California. The big magazines then was One. That was basically it. You didn't have that.

Your social consciousness was built in the bar. The bar was the [unclear] and you formed your groups. You had your friends. We used to have like cocktail parties or birthday parties and we all got out together. There were some gay theaters where they showed blue movies. We'd do excursion trips like go to Excelsior which used to be an amusement park, Excelsior near Minneapolis. There were certain rituals that you went to. If you went to Excelsior, you went on a Sunday afternoon and then you ended up with the Townhouse in St. Paul. Everybody went to the Townhouse in St. Paul on Sunday afternoon, late evening. Just like Wednesday night the Townhouse was cheaply night for ten, twenty years, it was cheaply night on Wednesday night, so you went to the Townhouse on cheaply night. Now it's a country and western bar, it's all different different kinds of things. For years we went there and part of that ritual was on Sundays the bars close at midnight in Minnesota except for The 19 which served threetwo beer, so therefore could be open until 1:00. So you had that kind of mass migration from about 11:00 o'clock until 12:00 and every Sunday night there were all these cars going down the freeway or whatever the road was, once 1-94 was made that was it. There was this absolute mass migration, that was all gays and lesbians going from the Townhouse to The 19. So it was a real socializing atmosphere. The bars, everybody condemned them and said they're bad and, "Oh, geez you can never trick." But still it was where you went with your friends. Maybe you had a birthday party for your friend there, maybe you all went out to dinner before. There were any gay restaurants then here, the Happy Hour didn't serve food. There wasn't a law requiring bars to serve food on Sundays for them to be open.

You did things socially with your clique. Everybody usually knew what clique everybody else was from. You could cross and sometimes you joined different cliques, but basically for one reason or another, you were friends.

**SP:** Could you describe what kind of cliques there were? What separated them?

**JT:** I think knowledge of people because in coming out, there was always kind of a safety factor. The clique that I belonged to, maybe that's the best way to go about it, was one that kind of stayed pretty stable over the years because we all had pretty much similar interest. It was like me and my long term friend John. We met each other when I first moved here in 1958, we've gone to

junior high and senior high together, he was in the Army, I was in the Navy, we came out to each other, he introduced me to his clique. His clique consisted of another friend who we call John-John because of the whole Kennedy thing and because he was the youngest one and he's been a guy that was—A lot of his early life reminds me of my early life, he had been pretty trashy and sneaking into bars as long as he could. Then, there was Bruce. Bruce was the big swishy one in our clique. He worked for the Minneapolis Tribune, I believe, at that time. Then there was Tom, the trashy one. He's the one that went to the baths all the time and always had adventurous stories leaving out of somebody's second floor window when they brought the chains and whips out of whatever. He always had some fantastic story to tell us. There were other peripheral people that would come and go and be in the clique for a while.

Cliques were basically made of—, there were seldom made up of ex-lovers. They were more often made up with people that had become friends for whatever reason. A lot of times you became friends because both of you had the same ex-lover and you could commiserate with each other about how an horrible guy he was. Like I said, John and I have lifelong friends and I just kind of really fit into that whole group. Our group was known as being kind of an intellectual group. We talked a lot about plays and authors, music. We weren't really the sports group or anything like that, we discussed a lot books and not that a lot of the other groups didn't do it, but ours kind of got a real reputation for being kind of a brainy, egghead kind of, kind of clique. That was just our clique.

**SP:** Can you think of any terms that were used to describe those? you'd say: "Oh they're classified as," like you said, jocks.

**JT:** Sure. Well, you're going back into gay speak now. That was used a lot, especially in the early 1970's and even before. Cliques weren't classified as much as individual people were. An individual person could be classified as a jock. An individual person and this would be a very incorrect, unpolitically correct term today, a person could be a dinge queen. A dinge queen was a guy who was into African-Americans, a white guy that was into African-Americans. A snow queen was an African-American who was into white guys. There were Rice Queens, those were guys who were into Orientals. You had dairy queens, I don't know how erotic we can get on these things, but people often believed—And you could belong to more than one group or grouping like that. But people believed, I guess we all believed, that if you drank milk and ate dairy products, now, there, we go with that Scandinavian cultural Minnesota-Wisconsin connection again, but if you drank milk and ate dairy products before you went to bed with someone, your sperm would taste better. If all you did was drinking scotch or whiskey, it was supposed to have a very sour, bitter maybe even salty taste. So there was a social pattern where you would stop...

**SP:** You said there was a social ritual going to...

**JT:** To restaurants after the bars. And depending upon the clique you went with, depended upon if you were the asker or the askee. So, for instance, if we were in a bar and I ask you to go home with me, then you would kind of come and join my clique for that evening. You might run back and forth and there was a place, not too far from Suttons, called the Venice Cafe and that was a very popular one and we would run back and forth between tables and socialize, from one in the

morning until about four in the morning, the Venice Cafe was owned by gays and lesbians and it was another whole way of socializing. Had it been the other around and you had asked me and I had agreed to go home with you, then I would have gone over to your clique and sat with your group and been introduced around. There were certain constraints on our social actions. I think exacerbated by being Scandinavians and Minnesotans, a lot of stereotypes that we reinforced bringing with us from our childhood because of my clique, for instance, I can't think of anybody in my clique that was not at least part Scandinavian. Tom was from North Dakota, Bruce was an urbanite from Minneapolis, John and I were both Norwegians from North St.-Paul, I was actually from northern Minnesota, John-John was the most worldly of us all because his mother had originally come from Mississippi, he wasn't, but his father's family had been the Norwegian Consulate here in Minnesota, so he had his good strong Minnesota roots.

You had a social structure and within that [clique]: you went to the restaurant afterwards and you introduced your trick all around [like,] this is John, this is John-John, this is Bruce. Our group was a little bit unusual because we were open enough, even in those early days that we would use our real names. Most people either gave, and I mean that quite literally, most people, we were very unusual because we did use our real names. Most people either gave a false name or used cognate names an awful lot. It was Steve with the Blue Glasses, and there was Bobby the Bald. All these people that had cognate names but, we never really knew their real names, and they could friends and lovers or hung around with us or part of the club for a while.

You're introducing your trick for the night around. One of the things that the other members of the clique did not do, was to try to trick out with the person that was going home with you, in other words one did not steal tricks from other members of your clique. Now, other people from other cliques might try to steal your date for the evening. It was socially expected that members of your clique would help you defend your trick against somebody from another clique. It was a very, very tight knit kind of family type of affair. Another thing that never happened within a clique, at least not that I know of, is the clique members did not go to bed with each other, they were, we used the term a lot, sisters. They were people that were close friends and sometimes relatives. Anybody could go into your clique. You might have at first met this person in your clique by going to bed with him, but once they joined the clique and became an official member of the clique, one no longer went to bed with them. You didn't think it was much, especially in those real early about forming relationships, that didn't come until, let's say, well not middle 1970's but we're talking 1973, 1974 before people really started thinking. You knew that relationships existed, you knew that all that crap about how gays and lesbians can't form long term relationships was a bunch of bunk because you knew that Hirham and Olaf over there had been together for fifty years and they were a couple.

Couples were different, couples were very seldom parts of cliques, couples could be friends with anybody in any clique. You were a real scumbag if you tried to break a couple up, especially one that was a long term couple. Short term couple you could break up, that was just part of the game plan, but if somebody had been together say over three years, you were real looked down upon as a scumbag if you deliberately tried to break up that because you fell in love with somebody who was a long term couple. But we knew that couples existed. But most people weren't into trying to form couples. We talked a lot about it. Always the old thing about: well, if the right guy comes along, we'll run away and live in Fargo together. Run away to Fargo was the one we always used,

Des Moines was too far south.

**SP:** Fargo being the paradise?

**JT:** Yes. Well, Fargo was the paradise just because we couldn't think—generally if you run away, you ran run away to Chicago or San Francisco or Los Angeles. But, see, if you're running away with a lover, no matter what the city was like, the city became paradise because you were in love and you were to become lovers. So you ran away to Fargo. I could, if he came along, sure, I'd run away to Fargo with him and lived happily ever after. Fargo had kind of a bad reputation, I guess, it was like, "Oh my God, it's like going to Boise, Idaho. You're going to live there, up in the middle of the prairie? There, I'm going back to Fargo, but you know what I mean. "What are you going to do?, Grow sugar beets together?" But that was the thing. If you, if you're going to be a couple, then you had to give up your clique. You can remain members, friends, that kind of stuff and have them over for dinner. But, you kind of lost your clique's status when you became lovers, because, then, your central focus was supposed to be on your lover. But most of us, like I say, we talked about it an awful lot, but most of us didn't expect to find lovers and fall madly in love and move away to Fargo and live happily ever after. We kind of expected that they'd be back in two weeks at the bar in two weeks again, this sort of thing, maybe just having an affair.

**SP:** What did you think a relationship consisted of? What is something that was for older people, I mean, kind of retiring or was it for a certain type?

**JT:** My concept [of relationships] and I have some reason to believe that was a fairly common concept in those early days here in Minnesota at least. I certainly would not say that that extends beyond Minnesota to other parts of the nation, [unclear] A lover was someone with whom you settled down with on a permanent basis. You became inseparable, like identical twins. True lovers, back in those days, wore matching clothes and it wasn't considered silly or out of it. You both wore the same shirts, you both wore jeans, you both wore penny loafers. You almost looked like twins, you cut your hair the same, etc... And there was a lot of people like that. It was kind of this whole platonic binding together and finding the other half. There wasn't this kind of gay and lesbian literature and history written in those days too, so people, most gays and I would say, basically all educated gays had at some point in their life read Plato and Socrates because of the sexuality that was involved in it. When I was reading it in junior high, the junior high librarians didn't have any idea, they just thought that I was kind of a brainy egghead because I was reading Plato and Socrates. I was reading it because Socrates was talking about the robes being draped low and feeling the hot burning in his chest when he saw the chest of this other young man, that was really great stuff. Plato was talking about the finding of the other half and that other half combining to make a whole entire person. That was what a lover was in those days. A lover was somebody that made you whole and complete. You did everything together, you went to every place together.

People who constantly had lovers, who would have a lover that would last three weeks or even a year were looked at as being basically kind of silly and flaky. [unclear] They were treated more like really silly people. If you had numerous lovers, it was like, "Oh, who's your lover this week?" because, they would run in and say, "Oh, I'm so in love. We're going to go and we're going to live together and I just moved out of my apartment and I'm moving with him." Then two

weeks the guy is moving in with somebody else. Those people didn't have a lot of respect. They were considered flaky, they were considered dizzy queens.

A true lover was somebody that you moved in with and that you shared your whole life, had joint checking accounts with, matching clothes, etc. The only thing that split true lovers apart, usually in those days was the old holiday routine, "I can't really take you home to Mother's over Thanksgiving and Christmas." For a lot of guys that was always a difficult time for lovers. It was also a time, if you were a gossip or into social history, you could tell which relationships were falling apart. It seemed like invariably, whenever two people were lovers, very seldom it would seem like both of the lovers' families lived in the same town, so that could be of lovers living in Minneapolis, one of your families would be in Fargo and the other one would be in Minneapolis. You could get a clue on Christmas Eve and Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day by going down to the bars as to which relationships was in trouble, because suddenly the lovers would appear there, whereas normally they couldn't go out to the bars unless they were out with their lover. You could almost predict over the next year which relationships would fall apart by who was present at the bars on holidays and who wasn't.

**SP:** Now, to me this sounds like there was much less anonymity.

**JT:** There wasn't anonymity between lovers. The people that you met on a regular basis, other than your clique, were the ones who would give you a false name. I went with a guy that was a truck driver for a while, Dan. Whenever I called him, I was always his dentist and when we were dating for a while, his roommate must have thought that he had the worst teeth in the world, because whenever he was home and not on a long haul, we'd be calling each other. I learned Dan's real name simply because we got involved for an extended period of time. After you got involved with somebody, you got to know what their real name was and a little bit more about their life. But if it was just a one night stand or a one night trick, very seldom, very seldom. This was actually a considerable improvement over the earlier 1960's or the late 1950's. There used to be what was called a costume bar here in the Cities. It became, I believe it was called the Hippopotamus. When it first started out it was on the second floor. It was down on Hennepin Avenue, maybe about Ninth Street around there and it was like on the second floor. You went up the staircase and at the top of the staircase leading into where the bar was and actually it was an after-hours club. There were cubicles and it was like everybody had their own cubicle because it was like a private club and you would disguise yourself. That was in the late 1950's, early 1960's, and you would disguise yourself and when you got up to the top of the stairs, you would find your cubicle, take your disguise off: your rubber nose, Marks' Brothers' glasses and your floppy hat and big raincoat and stick it in the cubical, go inside and party for as long as long as you want, come back on before you went back up on the street so that nobody could see that you'd gone in there because it was known as a place that homosexuals haunted.

There was a lot of that hidden stuff here in Minnesota. I was never that deeply involved in being hidden, ok, I guess I came out of the service and of my closet at the same time and I was kind of surprised about it at first because I was always giving my real name, I wasn't imagining that you'd had to think of a phony name. Besides, I knew John and he knew me so we already knew our names. It was a very transitional time just right after Stonewall when the old hard habits were dying very slowly and new ones were coming into being, we were definitely part of that newer

generation that was much more liberal and much more free about what we were doing.

**SP:** So, the new traditions would be what?

**JT:** The fact that we'd choose our real name right from the start, the fact that we talked about our families and our jobs, the fact that we believed right away in the things like gay culture and gay history. We just accepted those as realities or as a lot of people didn't. A lot of people would laugh at you. I know when I first started teaching gay history, the people would always laugh and say: "What is that? That can't possibly be! You're not a country, you're not a religion, you're not anything, so therefore you can't have culture. You can't be a cultural entity." When I first started talking about archiving things, it was always: "Ha, ha, what are you going to do, archive old condoms?" Remember that was back before AIDS and so condoms were not even popular but that was a big joke about that.

**SP:** Who would you hear this kind of comments from? Were they people who wouldn't dare saying that now?

**JT:** Basically, they wouldn't now. But there was a couple of different situations that people would do that sort of thing: number one there were the genuinely afraid people, people that were afraid of being exposed, really didn't want to be down there, and were almost confrontational about their sexuality and were really terrified by anybody that was open or doing anything that was open. There were those kinds of people. Anytime you have a system, a social structure, a social system of cliques in where you have large numbers of cliques within a particular social atmosphere like a bar, you're going to have also those who'd be people who wouldn't want to, for whatever reason, publicly ridicule you or publicly get back at you in some way. So, they would also be included in that. It was just really difficult at that time for a lot of people because they led very hidden lives. When there were others of us that were very out like Steve Endean, like my other friends and myself, we presented a threat to them one way or another. You add into that the social structure and that also gives you another added layer of people that are not going to take you seriously.

The gay community and the gay and lesbian community has long had a problem with leadership. To me that's very understandable; we don't want leaders. We don't want strong leaders whether it's Jack Baker or Steve Endean or Allan Spear, whoever you're talking about. I see this around the country. It's very typical of Minnesota but I see this in other areas as well. My feeling is that the reason for this is, we all grow up never trusting anybody else. We grow up gay. We're told that it's bad, that it's not good that you shouldn't be gay. We have enough courage of convictions and enough strength within ourselves to finally one day stand up and say: "Hey, I know it's not true I'm going to be who I am regardless." That takes a real strong powerful individual to be able to do something like that. You then throw this person into a social milieu. This person who has discovered themselves, all by themselves and has enough of a strong personality and enough self-confidence within themselves to come out of their closet and be openly gay or at least somewhat openly gay. That person is not going to very easily abrogate that self-won freedom by giving it to somebody who is a self-proclaimed leader.

In my opinion Baker's single biggest fault was that he didn't realize that if he were to lead a

nation of gays and lesbians, that was a nation of very specific individuals: each of who had a story to tell, each of who probably had a certain amount of trauma and trial, and tribulation in reaching on the point to where they're able to come out and be open. You don't manhandle people like that if you want to be their leader. That's where we get all of our problems with leadership.

**SP:** You can see that developing through the 1970's? Was there kind of a period of this, let's say, Utopian vision in the beginning?

**JT:** In reality, I don't think there ever was a Utopian vision. I think Steve Endean, myself and others had been very surprised, including people like Jim Kepner from the International [Gay and Lesbian] Archives. Jim and I have talked about this. We've been very surprised about how rapid our progress has indeed been. I laugh at utopianism because in the early 1970's with the dawning of the new awareness after Stonewall, there were several attempts were made nationally to form Utopian gay societies, you were a "Gay Zionist" or whatever. That term eventually fell into disuse because there were two kinds of "Gay Zionists": one was a "Gay Zionist" who wanted a gay homeland for gays and lesbians, the other was a gay Zionist who was of the Jewish faith and was gay and wanted a homeland for Jews. So, that particular term kind of fell into disuse because there was too much confusion there with "Gay Zionists". Gay Jewish Zionist as compared to "Gay Zionist" was too confusing and people just got too confused.

There were at least two very, very serious attempts made in the early 1970's made to form gay homelands here in the United States. One was to take over of actually three, now that I think about it because there was the lesbian separatist thing which actually is still going on in some of the mountains in Arizona. Then, there was a group that tried to start a thing in Alaska like the Mets in Valley thing from the 1930's. Another group tried to take over a county in California. It was a real difficult decision because when you're confronted by that and you're living here in Minnesota. You have a family history here and you have your friends here, etc. Maybe you and all your friends would kind of like to pack up everything and go out to this new gay community in California that's taking over a [county]. But generally you're leaving a job that's paying you. You're leaving, whether you're getting along with your heterosexual family or not. In my clique, were people had been founders of the State of Minnesota. We were territorial pioneers and pre-territorial pioneers. We had relatives who had been involved in the political process and in city councils. My great-grandfather helped built the county courthouse in Morrison County. Like I said, John's grandfather had been the Norwegian Consulate for years and all these were people [rooted in Minnesota,] with the exception of Tom who was in North Dakota but who had similar roots in North Dakota. So we had very, very deep roots in Minnesota. To suddenly think of packing everything up and moving out in California, as much as we wanted to do that, we also wanted to stay home because this is where we were from; we were Minnesotans. Besides California was hot and there wasn't any snow and the only attraction there, was the fact that we could live in a real totally gay community that would be all gay and wouldn't allow straights. That was really very, very alluring but it was a very hard decision to make and we just didn't have, I think, if all of us would have had more faith in its success.

But, you look back to a lot of these Utopian communities, especially in the United States from the 19th Century, if you know your history, you kind of have a difficulty in believing in Utopian communities, even if they are gay and lesbian Utopian communities. But I really think that, if we

would have really believed in its success, I think, all of my friends and a lot of other people would have just packed up and left. At the same time I'm talking about all these cliques and about all these people that were very frightened in the bars and about some of the animosity between cliques or animosity between people because of a dispute over a trick or something like this. There was also, then, a closeness within the community that you never see today, or at least that I never see today.

Like we were talking the other day. Maybe, I was a little hard on younger gays and lesbians these days. Maybe I'm just getting old or it is a transitional period again like it was a transitional period when I first came out. We're seeing cultural diversity being touted, maybe at the same time with gays and lesbians. In young gays and lesbians we're seeing in more poly—, one of those benign communities where everybody mixes together and where everybody lives happily ever after. Again the word is escaping right now.

**SP:** Polymorphic.

**JT:** Yes, polymorphic, but there is another word where everybody kind of blends together. I know it used to be very popular in the 1970's when we would talk about it. It was one of the big disputes as to whether we wanted to, as gays and lesbians, keep ourselves separate from mainstream society or blend in mainstream society. At the same time, there were all those antagonistics. It was also a closeness and there was an allegiance to each other. There was even kind of an allegiance to the bars. If you were a Sutton's queen, you were not a Happy Hour queen. It didn't mean that you couldn't go to the other bars, it's just that your "home bar", that's what they were called, they were called "home bars" and your "home bar" was Sutton's or the Happy Hour, The 19 or the Townhouse or whatever your "home bar" had to be and that was where your social life was located around. That was a very good example as I perceive it or as I remember it of a lot of what we talked about how we could fight amongst ourselves but, we presented a more unified picture as a whole to society. I don't see that anymore at all. I see them seldom as presenting a unified picture as a whole to society. You see it's sometimes like in the marches in Washington DC. I didn't think that this last march was as unified as 1987.

I think 1987 was—maybe from my life, that was probably the greatest event that I will ever see. I would hope that at some point I would see a grander event in my life. But the March in 1987 was such a thing because there was so many of us that came in 1987 from all over the United States. We'd just gone through five years of hell with AIDS. We thought everybody in the world was dying of AIDS. All of a sudden, those of us from Minnesota and from all of those other places showed up in Washington DC and we said: "My God, there's a lot of us! My God, we're not all dying from AIDS. We will be here". It finally went through our thick skulls, and even people like me who had advocated that all my life, there was this sudden brilliant realization in 1987 that we're going to be here.

Once again we were better off in Minnesota than we were in other places. Remember this is the same time that they were doing all the experiments in [unclear] California with death panic drugs. They were using all those things for behavior modification: prefrontal lobotomies, etc. as means of modifying gay and lesbian behavior to make gays and lesbians straight. All we had to do was to go here, lay on the table and get vast quantities of electric shocks to make our hearts

stop and make us stop breathing. So, we were basically lucky compared to the others. But those kinds of threats that we seemed to forget about now and that is one of the reasons I'm into archiving history so that younger gays and lesbians can learn this wasn't that long ago. Those kinds of threats [unclear] files.

There was a perception in the late 1960's and the early 1970's that we were alone against the world. You can see that even in the music of people like Leonard Bernstein who was closeted gay, he had to be married etc. Look at West Side Story; the beautiful stuff, somewhere there is a place for us. This was as big here in Minnesota as it was in other parts of the nation; this big fan following of Judy Garland's Somewhere over the Rainbow. All these things about it's just us and the whole world is against us and someday, somewhere we'll find a place that is just for us where we'll be safe. What changed is, we finally, after the Stonewall riots, realized that we can't just wish for these safe places to come about. We have to make what we have safe for us, and even if it isn't safe we have to go about living our own life.

**SP:** Is that to say that assimilation isn't really realistic?

**JT:** That's my feeling. That's kind of what I was talking about before when I couldn't remember that one word and I still haven't remembered the word that I wanted about a more universal all accepting society. You said polymorphous, and that's kind of on the right track but, I just can't remember what that word was. Yes, I must admit and will admit freely without any shame or chagrin, I think it's important to know that my own personal feeling is that we do not belong trying to blend into [in an authoritative voice] the greater society. We need to know our own history. We haven't been out of our closet culturally long enough to be able to just go about blending into society and the world. We really need to work on that ourselves. We need to be strong within ourselves, have our own identity, our own cultural identity, our own historical identity, maybe someday. But will it really be to our benefit even if we do do that someday? Yes, we have to be a part of greater society. We have to function in it.

We can't go off like those beautiful dreams that we talked about before and all live in one county in California and all live happy ever after, it would be very nice. But, we have to function in greater society. But it goes back to this, maybe the way I feel, the reason I feel the way I do is because of the whole Scandinavian-German upbringing that I had as a kid. When we lived in Little Falls, it was divided basically into four sections: there was the German Lutherans, the Norwegian Lutherans, the Swedish Lutherans, and the German-Polish Catholics section; four sections. You each went home to your own home. We were very Norwegian at my home. We kind of disliked the German part—that goes in all the stuff about World War II and being a German family and America turning the wars and that so. Our family was very Norwegian oriented. That's what we were. We went to the Norwegian Lutheran church. But, when we went to school at Charles Lindbergh Elementary school, when we went downtown we were part of the community as a whole.

What we need to do, at least from my point of view, within gay and lesbian society and gay and lesbian culture is we need to go home and be gays and lesbians. We need to stick within ourselves, our groups, our cliques, our society, with each other and not worry about those other people. We have to go out there and work. That may mean changing laws, that may mean all

kinds of things. But, for us to move out of the suburbs and live between the heterosexuals and have the heterosexuals over for barbecues and go over to the heterosexuals for barbecues, I think that's exactly the wrong things to do. We're not strong enough yet to do that. I'm not sure even if we were strong enough that that would be good. You have to be proud of who and what you are. If you're going to have a barbecue, have your daisy queen friends over for a barbecue. You can be nice to the neighbors and invite them over but, don't live in their world, live in your own world. Build our world. Our world is what should be important to us, not these people. We see that time and time again. We support Joan Growe. Gays and lesbians go to bat for Joan Growe. We do everything we can at the 1983 democratic Convention to get her endorsed because she says she's going to do all this good stuff for gays and lesbians. So, we finally get the endorsement, and we were a very major part, we were in her campaign, we were on the floor, we voted in blocks, we did all kind of things, we lobbied. We got her the endorsement and, she gets up, gives her acceptance speech and never once, never once mentions gays and lesbians in her acceptance speech.

We get involved in the Nuclear Freeze Movement in Minnesota and all over the nation. We really fight for nuclear freeze and we do this and that for nuclear freeze, we're delegates and we host coffee parties to get money for them and put in thousands of hours. I don't remember how many of us worked in the Nuclear Freeze thing. After the conventions cycle, the Nuclear Freeze Movement held their national convention and on this whole list of issues that they're talking about to go along with the nuclear freeze things, African-American Rights and all these things, not one mention was made of gays and lesbians, and indeed cultural diversity that they sought to attend that convention, they did not ask for any of those cultural diversity, culturally diversity to be gay or lesbian. They wanted so many women and they wanted so many men, and they wanted so many African-Americans, and so many Orientals, so many Native Americans. Even though we were integral in this entire success of the Nuclear Freeze Movement nationally, they didn't even ask for us; there was no room for us. So we've got to realize that.

It's very nice for us to get involved in all those things and believe me, I am as much of a believer in things like environment and nuclear freeze as anybody else. But, I also realize that my people, in my concept of society and history, that has to come first, because nobody else is going to put it first. Everybody else is always going to set their own agenda and put it first. Well, if nobody else is going to put our agenda on the docket, then we have to. So, all this living together and melding together as a society is fine and do it where it counts. Do it at the university because we all go to classes together, we all have the same teacher. You do it at work because we all get the same paycheck. You do it maybe in some political things. But, when you go home at night, be gay and lesbian. Your home should be gay and lesbian. Your friends should be gay and lesbian. Identify yourself culturally! Seek to be that whether you live in Minnesota or whether you live in Boise, Idaho. That's what you got to do because, nobody else is going to put us first and take care of us. Sorry, I guess I've got off on my little soap box there but, it's just so integral. I get really wound up in it.

**SP:** Well, let's see the next thing. Are there anymore influences you can think of, any people positive or negative, that influenced the gay community previous to the 1980's?

**JT:** Oh sure. Previous to the 1980's: Anita Bryant. Hell yes, she brought the community together,

not for the right reasons.

**SP:** Not thinking of it either.

**JT:** Yes. It was an interesting thing and that more blends into national history than it does dealing with Minnesota specifically. But, a lesson was learned in Dade County that we didn't really learn up here in Minnesota in time for when she came up here and overturned the St. Paul thing. What happened in Dade County is again that was one that we didn't really expect to lose. All these big gay leaders again, with the exception of Steve Endean which is interesting, from New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco all flew down to Dade County and organized and knew what to do and took care of it, and of course we lost Dade County. There was almost like this collective gasp of gays and lesbians across the country and here was all of our power all concentrated in one area and we lost. It goes back to just what I was saying earlier, people drew back and they said, "We really want to do this, we have to do it ourselves. We are the ones that have to come together, come to this realization, we have to be gay and lesbian. We can't trust to let New York fly in here to Podunk, Minnesota and do this." Unfortunately, we didn't learn that quite fast enough.

What happened which although there was a lot of unity, there was also some disunity during that whole referendum thing. Anita Bryant brought us all together. In the process of bringing us together, an organization was needed to defend the St. Paul Rights Amendment. The organization that was formed was called Target City Coalition because, St. Paul, Wichita and Eugene, Oregon were the three cities that had been targeted by Anita Bryant to overturn the gay rights laws. Lo and behold, Target City Coalition was in Minneapolis/St. Paul was where the law was changing! So there was a little bit of resentment from a lot of people in St. Paul. The fact that all these Minneapolis people were going to show us kind of how to do it, there was some fighting and some dissension. Target City Coalition later went on to be involved in Pride and that independent gay political party in Minneapolis. It did a lot of good things. It was very ineffective in St. Paul. They brought money in, they brought volunteers in. It wasn't what changed the law in St. Paul, bigotry changed the law in St. Paul. Like I say it was just a real hard defeat. So, yes, Anita Bryant was one thing that brought us together.

A pre-1980 thing that brought the community together was splitted heart. Lesbian separatism which was an extension of lesbianism. It was pretty strong here for a while in Minnesota and that had a lot to do with splitting the community apart. There was some real heroes in that war, that fight with the lesbians' separatism: Koreen was one, although I remember a lot of people thinking that she was very much a separatist, actually she wasn't as much as people thought. Another one and perhaps the most prominent one, the one that really did the most to stop the split of gays and lesbians over the lesbians' separatism thing was a woman by the name of Linda Brown. She was really a hero [inaudible]

**SP:** Didn't she start the Lesbian Resource Center?

**JT:** No, that's D.J. Monroe. I think that Linda Brown was probably involved with the resource center but I don't recall her as being one of the founding members. Maybe. If you have the initial incorporation papers or looked at them, it's very possible that she could be involved in that, but I

don't recall her as being, but it's possible. There are a lot of minor things. I don't think that there were any major other things that I can think of that really either split the community apart or brought it together, not that I can think of, at least not locally.

**SP:** For all the press that Jack Baker got, would he appear in a category of being influential or more of a pioneer? Did he unify gay people or did he pretty much just kind of break some ice?

**JT:** Not a simple question because, he fits a lot of those categories that you would say. I would place him as being more influential than a pioneer. But, I'm not sure that his influentialness is necessarily in a positive aspect. I think if anything he hoped to unify gays and lesbians against him, as opposed to a greater unification factor between gays and lesbians. I guess I've been sounding during this entire interview kind of negative towards Jack and I don't really have negative feelings towards him. I know that a lot of the stuff that he did was very disruptive to and within the community but, I think that was because he was another person that saw goals and was single-minded in pursuing those goals, like Steve Endean. The difference was that he saw himself as being the central focus of all those goals: "We need to change the legal system in Minnesota [so,] vote for me for supreme court judge. And help me get elected as supreme court judge. We need to change the status of gay and lesbian students on campus so, vote for me to become president of the student body!"

**SP:** So, unlike Steve Endean, he was an up front person, he wasn't behind the scenes.

**JT:** Yes. Steven was a very up front person but the difference was that Steven said, "Our goal is to change the law so, let us change the law!" If Steven had been a Jack Baker, he would have said, "Our goal is to change the law, help me to get elected as senator!" It's two entirely different focuses. So, I don't see anything malicious in Jack Baker, I don't see anything bad or evil or anything like that. Yes, he got kind of bitter. It may not be over yet, he may come back again. But he was just his whole, he was just centered on recreating himself, centering the focus there. I just don't see it as bad, just something that we needed too.

In the pioneering stage, even though I see him as an influence as compared to a real pioneer because, I don't think he came up with a lot that was original, it's the reason I say he was a greater influence than he was a pioneer. But, in that kind of pioneering stage, you needed someone with that type of personality, that was the time of gay and lesbian personalities of individuals, like we were talking before with Henry Hay Kepner, Chuck Rollen out of Duluth, you needed a Jack Baker at that time. Somebody else that was more into a universal thing for the community couldn't have been elected student body president. So, he served his purpose in time but he was an influence and he influenced us in a lot of different ways. I'm not sure that it was necessarily positive always. But, he wasn't a pioneer and the reason he wasn't a pioneer is because, his ideas weren't original. He just had the power to make them come true.

**SP:** The final thing I want to ask is: I know that you had involvement with some of the sports teams in the 1970's, would that be softball?

**JT:** Yes, primarily softball, also I tried to get the gay and lesbian hockey league going. We were a little bit less successful with that. That goes into what we mentioned earlier about sometimes

people that work behind the scenes are far more influential than other people who want to realize or want to admit. I believed in it, I thought sports were very good. I had gone through a long period in my own life where I didn't participate in sports publicly. That kind of changes when I was in the Navy because, I found out I was better at sports than I realized; things like swimming and softball, badminton, etc... So there was a lack in the early 1970's of any organization. When the organizations started forming in that period 1973 to 1974, there was a stereotypical concept that gays and lesbians do not do sports. One of the things that we didn't go into, in reference with me being in the Navy, one of the things that can get my dander up the fastest, is when you tell me we can't. It's just like, I don't believe I read all Steven Hawking's books, on time and this sort of thing. I certainly don't give that man all the credit that everybody else does. He still believes in all this silliness about we will never exceed the speed of light. Well if we can measure the speed of light, we can learn to exceed it. It's a very simple scientific premise. So, when you tell me that we can't do something, I may not be able to be the person that can do it, but I certainly think that we can do it.

The way it actually started: I was working with a gay bar over here on Grand Avenue St. Paul called the Noble Roman. We decided at that time, the Townhouse was a lesbian bar, that we would have an annual and sometimes several times in the year softball game. It was really kind of fun and there was a rivalry between bars and we eventually went into having a annual football game too between the two bars. Sometime later after 1978, just right after I got out of the hospital in 1978, we started talking about forming a softball league and that was right after NAGAA had been formed, which was North American Gay Amateur Athletic Association. They had different teams and different places, and we decided that we needed a softball team here. I coached one of the first teams: the Finale Flyers. We also had another sponsor: Gallery V was one of our sponsors. I think we were the only St. Paul team at that time that was in the first league and [inaudible]. Yes, that was kind of fun. I didn't get into the whole football thing. I really wanted to see a hockey team. I knew so many people. We tried so hard in 1978, I believe, too, to get a hockey league going and we had a lot of interest in some of the gay bars in the Canadian cities coming down and hold a hockey team here. But we just couldn't quite get the financing and everything together. We did practice for years, though. One of our guys who is unfortunately long since gone now but, he just happened to be the manager over at...is it Augustana? What's the Lutheran University? Is that Gustavus Adolphus near the University of Minnesota? It's on the freeway there.

**SP:** In St. Peter?

**JT:** No. I'm talking about right here in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Anyway that loop on University that's right on...

**SP:** Augsburg.

**JT:** Augsburg, ok. Anyway, he ran the ice arena at Augsburg. When we practiced with our gay hockey team, we had all the free ice time we wanted. There were specific hours we had to go. I can remember that it was so much fun and I used to referee the practices instead of playing. I was involved very much. I'd gone over to my friend's John's house, the one that I mentioned earlier about coming out to. I saw a tiny tiny article, maybe three or four lines, from John who had

been in San Francisco, the San Francisco Bay Reporter. John had just been out there and brought one back. Tom Wodel, the Olympic star that started the gay and lesbian Olympic Games which are now called the Gay Games because, the Supreme Court wouldn't let us. It's just a tiny article about him wanting to start that. That was in 1980 and so when I saw that I started organizing. That was one of those deals where I ran around, even at that late of time, to the bars and just made up little flyers and stuck them on the wall because, I was doing it all by myself. I got people interested and got our gay Olympic team together to go out to San Francisco for the first Gay Olympic Games and we had fortunately the largest team from outside of California. We beat New York, and as a matter of fact, we were larger than most of the California teams. I think the only two that were larger than us were San Francisco, where the games were held, and Los Angeles. I don't even remember how many people we took out but it was huge. That was really nice and really fun.

We did a lot with bowling leagues. Actually a bunch of other people had started a gay bowling league over in Minneapolis. We just wanted a gay bowling league too in St. Paul. I still have some of the trophies from that, sitting around. So we went over to Rosebowl because we knew they were going broke. They weren't getting anything and the Rosebowl over on North Snelling Avenue and Roseville accepted us as a gay league simply because, we were, I think, the second league then in the Twin Cities. It was money for them and they were either going out of business or they were going to accept people like us, which would keep them in business and we had a wonderful gay bowling league there for a long time.

**SP:** About what time?

**JT:** I can give you the exact year. [Goes to look] I don't do this sort of thinking intentionally. It's 1978-1979. I know that looks real suspicious to have to get up and look at the bowling trophy like, "Here's my trophy." That was real fun.

Gay baseball never got going because of too few people. Most people don't like to play hardball; it's really that easy. But, we had the softball league by then anyway. Baseball never really got going. Bicycling no, that was like a lot of the other sports that got going with the exception of volleyball which I always went to the tournaments but was never really involved that much in. Cycling was my other big sport. I even competed in the Olympics, [laughs] The dummy that I am, I misread the map or didn't understand it and came in backwards. Not literally backwards, but it was like I was supposed to cross the finish line this way and I took the wrong road and I crossed the finish line..oh god!

**SP:** A surprise?

**JT:** Oh yes, sports and getting sports going here. Oh god, I lost a wonderful lover that time to a friend, a former friend, sitting in the stands once when I was playing softball.

Getting sports going here wasn't that hard but, there was a lot of early resistance to it because of the stereotypes. We used to do all kinds of things, like when Zoogy's was a bar. Monday night football down at Zoogy's was the thing. We used to go down and watch it. There would be old little tables and they had a big TV in the bar/restaurant area and there was lots of other areas.

There were lots of other areas dance areas [unclear] We'd fill up that bar every Monday night to watch Monday night football at Zoogy's and they did specials for us.

**SP:** As the softball team, did you play other teams that weren't gay?

**JT:** No. We would make up a team once a year, in the early years, composed of all our softball teams. We picked out the best players and we used to play the police once a year but, that was about the only one. I was trying to think of there was ever anybody that we played. Up through the early 1980's, there may have been, I haven't been following real close the last few years, when I say the last few years that can be seven or eight going back for me. The annual being game with the police was really the only one.

**SP:** Whose idea was that? Do you know why they came up with that idea?

**JT:** Well, it was something that had been done in San Francisco and Los Angeles. We kind of picked up on it. In 1981, 1982, 1983, it was a lot of fun to go other cities for tournaments and cities would sponsor. There would not only be the Gay World Series but, only one team could get into the Gay World Series and each league would send one team to the Gay World Series. We had some here, more towards the middle 1980's. A lot of other cities like Milwaukee would hold tournaments and we'd go. Each team would get their own fund raising and we would go as individual teams to tournaments and play in tournaments. We found out a lot of the other things. We had a guy that sat on the board since we were a full-fledged team. I think we needed three teams to be a full league and we had four teams so, we had a representative on the board of NAGAA. We knew that these other things were going on and, of course, the Bay Area Reporter would really play up the baseball games between the cops in San Francisco and the gay team out there. As to who originally came up with the idea of doing that here, I really couldn't say.

**SP:** Someone from one of the bars? Was that where these were organized; at the bars?

**JT:** Most of them, although Gallery V was an art gallery. [There was] Grand Final, Happy Hour Gay 90's, Saloon. [The] Saloon even at one point fielded two teams. Townhouse didn't participate, didn't feel they could. Anybody could get together and form a gay team.

**SP:** I find that surprising that the Townhouse wouldn't. Don't they have the type of crowd who would?

**JT:** Well, they do now and they have had for a few years, they've been participating for a few years now. Back in the early part when the league was first forming and then back in the late 1970's, early 1980's, the Townhouse was a women's bar and it was run by Honey who had been around for a long time. There were a lot of women's leagues and a lot of women's softball games and tournaments and they didn't want to belong. They didn't want to be identified just as lesbians and they were more interested in playing in some of the women's leagues. So, they just didn't want to participate. Now a lot of us had women on our teams that didn't want to be identified as lesbians. NAGAA, at that time, had very strict rules: if you wanted to play in the Gay World Series, you could only have so many straight players in your team, the team that you sent to the World Series could not have any straight people playing in it. They had very, very strict rules. If

you played in the gay and lesbian softball team league, it was pretty well known that you had a higher than usual possibility of being gay. People always used to say, "Well, how can you tell that they are really gay and that they are not straight." Well, if they don't have a wife and six kids at home and if they go to bed with men and they are a man, that generally indicates that they are gay.

**SP:** This is interesting because it's almost like a switching: it's like because this is something like a sport, now you have to prove that they are gay, It's funny!

**JT:** Yes, people do that sort of thing all the time. It's kind of frustrating but it's also kind of funny. It also points out why it's so important for us to have that centralized focus to ourselves because, why should we care what other people think? If we want to have an all gay team, we can have an all gay team. They certainly have had enough all straight teams that they didn't want us on for a long time, so when they want to change the rest of the world, we'll change. We'll think about it.

**SP:** That's about all I have to ask you unless there's something you want to add or you think needs to be completed.

**JT:** Well, no, not exactly. I kind of mentioned a lot of the stuff I wanted to. I kind of managed to squeeze in here and there a lot of the early family stuff which I think is very important especially since you said this is kind of for the Minnesota Historical Society. I wanted to make sure that those Minnesota connections were there because, I'm very, I'm proud of my family history and its association with Minnesota. So, people, a lot of times, don't perceive Minnesota as being particularly a gay place and I think both Minnesotans and people outside of Minnesota need to know that we have had a very strong and vibrant community for a long time. It's generally followed the same patterns of the national community. But, we've still been here and we're obviously going to be here and in my own specific researches I found evidence of gays and lesbians going back to the time of Father Hennepin. You've just got to know what you're looking for. I know we're going to be here. We're central, a central part of Minnesota history and you can ignore us all you want but we're still going to be here.

I think that at the same time that you want to talk about history you want to talk about the future. I don't think we are going to go away. I don't think there's going to be a genes splicing or a hidden chromosomes that they can suddenly going to inject into us that will change us. I don't think they're going to find the biological fault. I don't think it is that easy to change gays and lesbians. I also don't think that it would be wise to do it. We provide a biological necessity to the straight world. We're a pressure valve of sorts, we have an ability, you might almost say a spirituality that's different, differently conceived because of our gayness than heterosexuals regardless of what society or culture whether it is Native American or Minnesotan, Scandinavian or whatever. For a species to continue to survive that species needs to have varying view points. By becoming too polymorphous and too much a part of society, society as a whole will lose our perspective. Not only will we lose ourselves but, society will lose our perspectives and that will endanger the species far more than we endanger it just because we are same-sex oriented and therefore don't reproduce. If the species really starts getting low, we can all go out and produce a few kids and help put the species back up. Take it from there.

But, if they were to find a medical solution, a biological solution that would change us all to being straight. First, I don't think they could change someone like me, I'm too old, I've been around too long, I don't want to be straight ever. I can't remember of a time I've ever wanted to be straight. But if all future babies born after January 1, 1994 were all going to be heterosexuals, humankind would honestly be losing something. They would be losing perspectives, just the same way as you lose species when you cut down the rain forest. When you start limiting the diversity of humans, you start losing the perspectives. You may still have plenty of humans hanging around but, you need that diversity of ideas as well, that diversity of being able to perceive the world differently. I just think it's very important. I know I'm blabbing on but, we're talking about historical stuff, I think you've got to have an idea as to why. That's real important not only for everybody to know but, especially for gay and lesbian kids to know. Gays and lesbians that are growing up got to know that by god we were here in the past, we are going to be here in the future. You don't have to blend into society. In fact it's preferential that you don't.

So, that's all I can think of right now.

SP: Thank you Mr. Tretter.

Twin Cities Gay and Lesbian Community  
Oral History Project  
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