

Interviewee: Cheryl Parham (CP)

Interviewers: Henry Noren (HN) and Andrea Villicana (AV)

Subject: Oral History of Cheryl Parham's Life

Date: April 9, 2022

AV: So can you start by telling us your name, the date, and then where we are?

CP: Okay. My name is Cheryl Parham. It's April 9th, 2022, and we're in the building at 3003 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland, which is right across the street from the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Johns Hopkins University campus.

AV: So first off, we're just gonna ask you to tell us a little bit about who you are.

CP: Okay. I'm a Baltimorean. I was born and raised here. After high school, I started working for the Social Security Administration for a couple years, but I didn't like it so I decided to start college. Went to Coppin State to be a teacher, but after two years I realized that the finances weren't going so well. So saw an ad for a, to join the military, which when I was in high school they always bring these people from the military to come talk to you. It was one thing I never wanted to do, but the brochure said, you know, finish your education, get all these other benefits, so I said, "That's for me." So I went in. I really liked it, but, and when I went in I said, "Well, how long do I have to sign up for in order to get the benefits?" They said, "Two years." I said, "Put me down." So that's what I did, and had a real nice time. I was stationed over in San Diego. They called them Hollywood Marines back then, because right near the beach and it was really nice.

Anyway, eventually I got, after I got out I got back into government, and then I transferred over here to the Baltimore/Washington area 'cause I think it still is that the Baltimore/Washington area is the highest grossing salary of the United States government, especially DC. So anyway, did that for a while. Then I met a woman, and I was looking for a job, and she heard that the Gay Community Center here was looking for applicants. They'd just got a grant from the federal government. It was a grant for staff. I was an outreach worker, and that started in '82. I think '84 Ronald Reagan became president. Slashed that program out. So, but I stayed with the Community Center volunteering, eventually becoming vice president. Eventually became president for two terms. So got involved – very political back then. This was the '80s. Very political, and it was good.

So as president, I saw a lot of different things, you know, but it was good. I saw the opening of the first building where we actually owned. We were the only Gay Community Center that actually owned our building, so it was an old warehouse, pinball machine warehouse. But made it, and it's apartment house now, but for many years. Then I got kind of burnt out by the '90s, and so I got away from that for a while, but I'm still in touch with the Gay Community Center. And here we are now. I'm now retired, and doing what I want to do.

AV: Absolutely.

HN: So just going back in time a little bit, can you tell us what area of Baltimore you grew up in and if there were any spaces available to gay and lesbian individuals around there at that time?

CP: So we're at the university, Johns Hopkins University, but I grew up around Johns Hopkins Hospital back in the day. During that time, you had to be really bold to come out as a gay or lesbian person, which gay wasn't even – only term you heard "gay" was on TV, *The Gay Divorcee* or something like. It was a nice term. Until after the Stonewall riots. Then the term became associated with gay. But when you were gay or lesbian, you were ostracized. If you were a trans person, you were kicked in the butt. So it was really hard until gays started saying, "Enough is enough." But not that the violence ever went away, but gays and lesbians didn't feel like they had to stay in the closet. They can come out and feel like, you know, this is my life, whatever. Yeah.

HN: And can you talk a little bit about your family growing up and your relationship with them?

CP: Well, my father, God rest his soul, was somewhat of a good man, but we found out just before he died that he had a brain tumor. So that brain tumor – this is only guessing – caused him to leave. Like when the weather got warm, he was gone. When the weather got cold, he came back. But he was a good man when he was there. So it was usually left up to my mother. So I grew up with two sisters. Ten years after my youngest sister, then my mother was pregnant with my brother, so he came into the picture. My mother's side of the family is somewhat of a close-knit family, so if we weren't home, we were usually down my grandmother's house. And then I had cousins who also would either live – when their parents, their father had – they lived here in Baltimore, but their father got a job up in Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania, so he moved the family up there.

So we would go up there a couple times a year, stay for the summer or something like that.

And so we were really tight, and I mention to my cousins now we were tighter then than the family is now. Most people, we don't know each other. Trying to do the family reunion, sometimes it go well, sometimes it doesn't. So growing up with my family was really good. When I grew up, I was like a bossy person, so I'm always trying to tell other people what to do or whatever. But I kinda liked my growing up years.

AV: Was there ever a time that you had to, quote, unquote, come out to your family, and how was that received?

CP: Well, I came out to my mother. I think I was 21. Even though she told me at the time that my father had said earlier that, said, "Why she's always caring for my brother?" Because I would take him to museums or movies or get him exposed to everything else except for the neighborhood. So what made me come out was because my sister, I was going with a friend of mine, and she said – she was getting ready to go out, and she said, "Cheryl, the family thinks you and Ann are going together," and then she just left. I had no – I couldn't say yes, no, or maybe so. So I discussed it with my friend at the time, and I said, "Might as well say it. They already know." So we tried to figure out who would be more receptive, and I said, "Well, my mother's really cool, so she's gonna be really receptive," and she was. So that was good.

AV: Yeah, yeah, that's great.

HN: Did you have any gay or lesbian role models, either in your community, just like in pop culture when you were younger, that you were looking up to?

CP: No, actually I didn't, because when I was growing up there wasn't – or in my community or in my city people weren't out like they are now. You used to say, "Oh, wow." It wasn't until the early '70s when you start seeing how this person was, that person was, that you say, "Oh, wow." But growing up, no, I didn't have a role model. Now, you can, some people you can always tell, oh, they're gay, so and I kinda admired them, but I didn't know them personally. I'd just say, "Oh, yeah. Uh-huh."

AV: So how did you navigate that after coming out, not having any role models and kind of being in a community or an environment where it wasn't really acceptable to come out? Did you take that

pridefully or did you just kinda, I don't know, I guess go with the flow?

CP: I think I just went with the flow. Once I felt comfortable with myself and my family felt comfortable with me – it's not like I had anyone in my family who talked about me or tried to sit me down and put hands on me or something like that. I just went along like it was always that way, but I was still kinda cautious because I grew up in a time that it was kinda dangerous to be out. So I'm not a violent person and I don't try to step out there to expose myself. Gay Community Center kinda changed that a little bit. But so I just kept on being Cheryl. Yeah.

AV: When you joined the military, at that time were you out to, I guess, other people in the military?

CP: *[Laughs]* I'm sorry. Reason I laugh, because when I went to join, the recruiter woman, she said, "Well, you haven't heard any rumors about coming to the service?" I said, "No." She said, "Nothing, no questions you need to ask me or anything like that?" And I said, "No." I'm still thinking about these benefits I'm about to get, you know. And it wasn't till much later – I can't even remember when it was – and I said, "Oh, my God. She probably was wanting to know about other lesbians in the military or whatever." So even though I went in there under the radar, for the most part most people know I'm gay. So there was this young lady in the thing, and she would go – I found this out from another woman – and she would go and start telling other women, "Oh, Cheryl gay. Cheryl gay." Which kind of worked in my favor, you know. So it was interesting.

HN: How was your school environment in high school and then when you went to –

CP: College.

HN: Yeah, college.

CP: Yeah. It was all right. Like I said, I wasn't out. Nobody ever said anything about sexuality or anything like that. You just got through high school. And college same way, even though it was in college that I met my first lover. Yeah. Wasn't my first experience, but my first lover. So I'm all about getting there, get that work done, and get out, so I didn't – I was afraid, when I came out of junior high school, junior high, you know, is middle, junior – a close friend of mine, but we weren't looking at each other that way, wanted me to go to a all-girls school, and I was afraid to go to a all-girls school. I

knew that was gonna be, that wasn't gonna work in my favor. So I said, "No, I'm going where my family went to high school." So it kinda was all right. And then I think when – I had a point, but every once in a while it kinda slips. I might get back to that.

AV: Do you want to share a little bit about that first experience that you mentioned earlier in college?

CP: Well, I knew this young lady. We grew up together. We lived down the street from each other. So I think, I believe we were in high school. I think she went to one school, and I went to another, and I saw her one day and she invited me over. And then I told her how I felt. She got nervous, so I left. Then after I was working and she was in school – yeah, no. no. She was working at this shop or whatever. I think I had just took my nephew to see the *Nutcracker*, and we stopped at the store. I forgot, I don't know if we get something to eat, something to drink or whatever, and there she was. So she invited me to call her, and I said, "Oh, okay." So it came from there. It was like, okay, so I'm gay and you are a hot mama. You just wanted to get some, so that's how it was.

AV: Were there ever any times in college or in middle school, high school, and junior high that you didn't personally experience anything, but maybe you saw someone else who was out maybe be attacked or be persecuted for being out?

CP: No.

AV: No?

CP: No.

HN: Yeah, so just back to the idea of growing up in Baltimore. How would you say Baltimore specifically shaped you as an adolescent, and then moving on to after you left Baltimore to go to the military?

CP: I'm sorry, say that again?

HN: Would you say Baltimore shaped you in any specific way, growing up here?

CP: Well, I really can't say because I just lived in Baltimore, so that, what I grew up in as is what I take with me the rest of my life. So I really can't compare it to had to – 'cause if I was, had moved to another city, Richmond or Philly or something like that, it might

have been different. But I have nothing to compare it to, so I'm still that Cheryl who was looking at women from an early age.

*HN:* And would you say that Baltimore is a good place to come for young gay, lesbian, trans youth today?

*CP:* Well, I think so because there's enough of support here in the city that someone can go to. I know Towson – I'm sure just about every college has some gay, lesbian, trans, queer, the whole gamut, student group on campus. And if they don't want to do that, around town they'll find some other youth group down the street. There's the Pride Center, formerly the Gay Community Center, LBGQ and all that. So I think it is better once everybody came out, because there used to be, when I first came to the Gay Community Center, there was a gay hotline so that people who need to talk about their lifestyle or who can they see or whatever, there was somebody on the phone to be able to talk to them. So I thought that was a good resource that lasted for quite a while. So even though it's not that, there are places that people who feel like I need some, to see somebody like myself, where can I go without going down to the local bar and meeting somebody who's in their 40s and you just turned 18. Which, okay, but sometimes they're younger than that. You know what I'm saying?

*AV:* Are any of these spaces do you think mostly for youth, or do you think that some of these spaces are open both for the older generations and the younger generations?

*CP:* Well, the Pride Center is open to all, to everybody. Whatever group needs to meet, that's what they do. You go on your specific day, whether you're a student, whether you are trans, whether you're lesbian, whatever your – whether you have an addict or whatever. They have it in that particular building. Now, as far as specifics, as far as like for youth, I think the Pride Center are the only ones that offer space for youth to meet.

*AV:* How do you feel about that? Do you think having those spaces for youth would have been helpful maybe for you or some other people that you knew when you were younger?

*CP:* I think so, because you sit and you wonder, am I the only one? You know you're not the only one, but how do you go and approach that kind of thing? When I was growing up, we all grow up in the form of the Bible, and it's always Adam and Eve, and it's always Jack and Jill, and it's always some man, some woman, whatever. So as a gay person, it's like you have to choose, well, I like women

so I must be like a man. Or I'm a man, I must be like a woman. And to me, it's not what it is. Now, you can feel like you're trapped in a body and that you really and truly think, well, I feel a lot stronger or I feel a lot masculine than what I'm showing, so I'm going to relay that, but that's not always where it is. It's just like you're attracted to somebody and you might look the same.

But we get caught up in these roles that people want that we don't necessarily have to be the opposite sex in order to attract the same sex. You know what I'm saying? So anyway, so I think that if it was when I was growing up and I was able to go and meet with other people like myself, no matter what they were, butch, fem, whatever, I think it'd have been great. Yeah.

*HN:* You mentioned growing up in the context of the Bible. Do you want to talk about your relationship with Christianity a bit, growing up in the church or your involvement still, if you're involved in that?

*CP:* The Bible we know is, they only put certain sections of the Bible for us to read, and it's always in the terms of what the man thinks we need to know. And it's like come on. Let's bring it all out in the open. You dedicated one Bible, I mean one part of the Bible for a woman. It's like you know Jesus had a couple women around. It was – you know. Anyway, I have strong ties. I feel very religious. I'm not involved for church now, even though I was in this church that I thought had the same feeling that I have. Their beliefs were the same, but it's hard for me that if you believe in this, then why aren't you practicing this? So I left that church. I don't care for a church that wants to belittle you in front of the congregation. And they're so strong against – if the preacher see you and he's gonna make the sermon out of you, you know, and it's like why are you putting me down and you're talking Jesus Christ? That's not the way Christ did it. You know what I'm saying? God only did ten commandments, and nothing in the ten commandments says anything about homosexuality, so what is your problem?

So I know that before I really became comfortable, I said, "You know, I need to talk to a psychiatrist," because of the way I felt. So I went to the psychiatrist and I said, "I like women, and I don't know how to deal with it." And so he said, "Well, why?" I said, "Because it's in the Bible." He said, "Here's the Bible. Show me where it is." Well, I didn't know the first – that's what you say in church, you know, it's blasphemy, it's this, that, and the other. He said, and he told me, he said, "When that Bible was written, it was written so that men wouldn't love men and women didn't love

women because you need to procreate and have kids and all that." And I started thinking about it. I said, "Well, you know what, that makes sense." It's like growing up and your mother said, "Don't eat that. You eat that, you're gonna choke and die." And you grow up and you say, "I don't eat that." He'll say, "Why?" "Because I'll choke and die." "You ain't gonna choke and die." You know what I'm saying?

You know, people does things to satisfy themselves. So I mean I pray every morning before I wake up and every night before I go to bed, and I'm thanking God all the time. I strongly believe that I have a guardian angel over me all the time. I recognize that. So I feel comfortable with my sexuality because God knows. He don't make no, make mistakes. You know?

*AV:* I don't think we've asked this before, but do you have your own family? Do you have kids or are you married?

*CP:* No. No. No. I knew at a very young age I was gay, I was a lesbian, and so having sex to have kids, even by mistake, is not something that I wanted to do. I think I'm blessed in the way that I'm not somebody's mother, even though when I was in my teen years I wanted kids. I'm thinking that's the way I'm supposed to. The more kids, the merrier. Now it's like get that kid away from me. But no kids. Yeah.

*HN:* I guess it would be good to go a little bit more into your work at the Gay Community Center, so can you just tell us a little bit more about the Gay Community Center and what they did at the time that it was formed and when you were working there?

*CP:* Gay Community Center was a big outreach community type thing that just tried to – it's different groups that came to form the center and wanted to make sure that gays had rights here in Baltimore, and even the state. So when I was there we, a group of us was part of the trying to get the gay rights bill passed in Baltimore. That's housing, job, and something else. And so it took a couple of times for us to go down to city hall, but eventually it was passed so we were happy about that. And that's because of the Gay Community Center, and groups that gets together to form some kind of a law change makes it better for the whole. For the whole, you know. So that was a good thing about the Gay Community Center. And also because we had a three-story building, we were able to have all these different groups coming here to meet on certain days, certain times, and that sort of thing.

When the gay clinic opened up they – bunch of, couple of doctors said, "Here come this AIDS thing. We need to open this clinic," and they did in the Gay Center. That went on a while before they branched out, and for the AIDS they started HERO, and then the other part of the clinic started for STDs and stuff, but eventually rolled around and realized we need to open this up to all, women included. So it's a good thing.

AV: So it seems like in your younger years you weren't, I guess, as involved in gay community or gay or lesbian community projects or outreach or anything like that, so what changed when you decided to take on this role with the Gay and Lesbian Center?

CP: The job. When I was told, "Oh, Cheryl, there's a job at the Gay Community Center," I said, "Gay Community Center? Never heard of the Gay Community Center." And because, I think because it was a mostly white center, it's mostly white people, and mostly men. But it was a job, so as I go there Monday through Friday and talk about being gay and the process and all that, I come to realize how many people, black, white, Chinese, whatever, needed someone to identify with, so.

HN: How many years were you involved there, again?

CP: I worked there for two years, I think '82 to '84, and then I continued to work there until, I think – well, be involved volunteering until '89, I think. '88, '89.

HN: So what specifically was the work you were doing in terms of the outreach programs?

CP: Well, we sent out information, flyers that said that there are – me and another guy who would come out and speak to groups about being gay, and to open up people to what gays are. So we went to colleges and community groups. Also, because we didn't do this all the time – we had to wait till somebody called us – in the meantime we manned the office, womanned the office, whatever, and so people also called during the daytime to get information about their gayness and what they, you know, what can they do, and that sort of thing. So we also kinda like switchboarded during the daytime.

HN: What kind of questions were people asking at that time, if they called?

- CP:* First they'd say, "I'm gay." And so, "Okay. What's the problem?" And, "Well, what could I do?" And then we say, you know, "Well, how old are you?" And if they were a young person, we'd say, "Well, we have a youth group that meets da, da, da, da, da. We're located here." Or we'd just talk. Or they'll say, "And how did you come out?" or, "Where can I go?" or something like that.
- AV:* How was the work that you guys were doing in front of groups or on campuses or things like that received?
- CP:* Surprisingly pretty good, 'cause it was a mixed crowd. I say that – I'm talking so I'm not like looking right at somebody's eyes or anything like that to say, "Oh, yeah, they're gay," or whatever, so but this was a really mixed group. I remember being out at UMBC and talking for a group there. Very well received. They asked questions and went on. And sometimes they had to cut it off, cut time. Class up, time to go. But yeah. Even when we went to a church, we went to a church. They had little tables set up with the church members and everything like that. Even there it was received very well, none of this, you know, bring me here and then we're gonna blast at you or something like that. We really did very well.
- AV:* How did it feel to put yourself out there like that?
- CP:* Well, I really didn't think about it too much until, as president of the Gay Community Center, I had to be on TV, had to give news. You had to be on the news for whatever reason, the gay rights bill or whatever. But there was this group. I hope they're not around anymore. It was Man-Boy Love, and it sound just like what it is, and they were meeting in the center. Now, I'm naïve so I'm thinking we're still talking 18 and over, so I had the cameras all up in my face, and you know how you explain this, and I jibber jabbed and whatever, but so nothing – whatever I've done before that and after that never compared to being on TV, on the local news, talking about Man-Boy Love.
- HN:* And I guess did your family and friends who weren't really part of the gay community, what did they think seeing you on TV and doing that kind of stuff?
- CP:* Well, my mother and my sister – oh, my sister would be sitting at a bar and see the news on the TV and she'll say, "That's my sister up there." And she told my mother was kind of proud that I was, you know, on TV.

HN: Did you ever mentor anyone at the Gay Community Center who was from the younger generation?

CP: Actually I did. There was a young girl. I think she was 15. She might have been 16. And she called, she would call every single day, and eventually we became friends – not that kind – became friends, and she went off to the military. We stayed in touch. Next thing I know, we're both working at the VA, Veteran's Hospital downtown, and she was, she became – she did medical work in the service, so she was a physician assistant when she came out. And every time I look at her, I think of this little 16-year-old. So I would think that I did well, but the last time I talked to her she said, "Well, Cheryl, I'm not gay anymore." I said, "What you do, you and your lover broke up?" "Yeah, I'm going to church now." And I said, "Oh, Lord." I said, "Well, you know God loves you anyway, no matter where you are. Your final day is gonna be thought by God. It's not the people you go to church with." But we were both in a rush, so I never got a chance to talk to her about that. It was like sad. Yeah.

HN: And I know you mentioned that the Gay Community Center originally, I guess, at its inception was mostly run by white, gay men?

CP: Yes, they had the money.

HN: Yeah. You said it was mostly a white organization. Can you tell me a little bit about how – did you ever try to involve the Black community or any other communities more?

CP: No. Actually, to be honest with you, I didn't. I know the lesbians, they got together and they said the Gay Community Center is the white man organization, da, da, da, da, da, but I didn't personally reach out to either the Black or white communities. They came. I welcomed them, but I didn't come out and say, "Oh, it's not as bad as you think," but I see what it was. It's not like – because let's say I did go out there and get all these women and all these Blacks to join. Then it's almost like what's going on now with Congress. It's like you've got the Republicans who are dead set on keeping anyone who is not like them suppressed, and they want to make sure that they don't lose anything. Like what you gonna lose? So it was almost like that. I saw where it is, but I also knew that what they were doing otherwise as far as different groups was good for the community.

But to be trying to bring these people in to join the Gay

Community Center, it wouldn't work. But it's not like everybody who came to the Gay Community Center was all white, 'cause it wasn't, 'cause some of the groups that came there were mixed groups or Black or whatever, but they didn't come join the center, come to our monthly meetings, or anything like that.

AV: Just back to the girl that you were mentioning you were kind of a mentor for, how did that make you feel when she was talking about the church? I know you haven't gotten a chance to speak to her since then, but did you ever see maybe a part of yourself in her, and so hearing that may have affected you in any way?

CP: That's kind of a hard question because if she was younger and did that, then I think I would have, but I have matured since then. And I want to bring her along as far as saying you really don't, in my opinion, you don't really see God the way he is. You're looking at God the way man wants you to. But if you're going to believe, then you got to believe that God is inside you, and not somebody you're looking at through, you know, in two-way mirror. So I'm kinda sorry I never got a chance to see. Sometime when I go downtown for my doctor's appointment or whatever, I look in the emergency room to see if I see her, 'cause I think that, I think she should be still working there unless she got out early or something. Yeah.

HN: You mentioned this mentee that you had. Would you say that these kind of connections that were between older and younger generations were common at the Gay Community Center?

CP: Well, no more common than I believe any groups are together. There's always some mature group and some younger group, and they're always kinda mixing together. It's almost like high school, or school, period. Yeah.

HN: How would you say the role of the LGBTQ community has changed since you working at the Gay Community Center, in the decades afterwards?

CP: I don't think it's really changed. I think that the same goals they had back in the very beginning are the same goals now: giving a safe place for everyone to meet and talk about whatever issues they need to talk about, and also to give some support, a lot of support to different groups that's out in the city. So that doesn't change. The people may change. You think the issues might change, but it's just another term, in my opinion. But I think it's always a need. It's always a need for whatever group to get together and talk.

- AV: How do you think the gay and lesbian community supports each other as an older generation versus as a younger generation?
- CP: Well, I think the older generation – oh, wow. Wait a minute. I think the older generation is been there, done that, and so they know how to get together, more or less. 'Cause they're seeking, you know, some of them now are, have been in relationships for years and their partner may have died, and they're just seeking other peoples like themselves, whereas before they always had that partner. The younger generation is where we were back then. We're seeking out other peoples like ourselves in order to carry on in a relationship, because that's – I'm lying. It's we just want a relationship. That's everybody, young or old. We're always looking for a mate. That's the role. So if the older generation – and this goes for anybody – the older generation tried to partake or tried to tell the younger generation what to expect, and the young generation says, "No, that was your time and this is my time." But it's just a vicious cycle that goes over and over again. No.
- AV: So do you think it's important to serve as mentors for the younger generation, or do you think they should kinda go through it and figure it out themselves?
- CP: Still, yeah. No, they still should be mentors. Whether the young wants to listen or not – but you can always know there's gonna be more who will listen than ones who won't listen.
- HN: How do you feel about the closing of some gay and lesbian spaces in Baltimore and around the country? There's been a noticeable decrease in the number of like gay bars and lesbian bars. How does that make you feel?
- CP: Oh, I particularly don't like it, and one of the reasons – they talked about this a few years back – was that now because everything is open, gays go to straight bars and everybody get along hunky-dory, all that kinda stuff. But sometimes you just want your own. You know? I just want to go and just see women, or sometimes just wanna go see Black, or I just wanna see gays and lesbians, men and – you know? Just sometimes. Don't have to be always, 'cause I can mix with the best of them in a straight bar or whatever, but this is what it is. It's like, oh, lot of them, every, we're all mixing now so it's no need to have a gay bar. And it's hard to keep a gay bar going on.

HN: And would you say are there any places specifically in Baltimore that you could name that you frequented, or your friends have been to a lot in the past that are still open or have closed since then?

CP: Oh, wow. There's only two bars that I know of that's been here since, a part before I was born. No, probably not. But and they're down there in Mount Vernon: Leon's and The Drinkery. Other than that, they come and go. Now, there is a bar who was open, then it closed, then it opened, and it closed, and I think it's open now, and that's this leather bar on Charles Street. But most people, even straight people, go to a gay bar just for dancing 'cause the music be real nice. It's hard to find – I don't know with this younger generation. It's like they don't dance anymore, sweat it out. You know? Get it off.

HN: Obviously there's been an incredible amount of progress for the LGBTQ community in the last 50 years. Do you think that there's anything that's gotten worse over time?

CP: I don't think so, not worse. No. I don't think anything has gotten worse. Some things still the same. It's gotten a little better. Like when there's a killing of a trans person or something like that, I mean it was almost all the time, but you don't hear that as much as you used to. So that's progress. But if anything's gotten worse, no, I don't think the gay community will stand for that anymore.

AV: I've just been a little curious since we talked about you spending some time in San Diego. Did you explore the gay and lesbian communities there, and how did they compare to Baltimore?

CP: Well, when I was there it was like the height of the disco season. I mean I think I started going to gay bars before I came out the service, and a lot after I came out the service. I mean I think I was in the bar six out of seven nights a week, and I think only because I think the bar was closed that one night. But the thing about it was all about bars. As far as festivals like we have here, like we have now, there wasn't anything like that then. But the bars, you know, or mix and mingle over someone's house or something like that, that was what I knew back in San Diego.

AV: Was mingling at a person's house for lack of spaces for LGBTQ individuals?

CP: Be honest with you, talk to people who lived there 'cause I was only like a transient. They never talk about, oh, let's go over to this meeting here or let's see what they're talking about over there. It

was always either you're going to a bar or you're sitting in somebody's house with a drink and hors-d'œuvres or something.

*AV:* So you've lived in Baltimore almost, if not all of your life. How would you say the different communities compare in Baltimore? So the different LGBTQ communities across the community or the neighborhoods in Baltimore.

*CP:* Gays are everywhere. You might not know it, but they're in every block and every household. Maybe not in all, but whether they come out or not, they're everywhere. So it doesn't matter what the neighborhood is like. There's no – oh, well, I should take that back. Back in the '70s the area down the street called Waverly was a gay, was a lesbian community, and so, and I believe – I think it started somewhere around 26th Street or so up until 31st Street and Greenmount, over here to Charles. I think it was like majority of lesbian community. And so other than that, gays just lived in their own particular block, and they'd go out to meet other people like themselves.

*HN:* Did you have friends who lived in the Waverly area, lesbian friends?

*CP:* Well, I didn't even know this was going on because when I left Baltimore, the gay community was just coming on itself, and this was like early, the early '70s, and I didn't come back until '79. Yeah, '79. So when I got back, it was like a – went to where I knew, and that was the bars, but the first bar I went to, the only bar I knew was the Hippo that was very popular back in the day. And the guy wouldn't let me in 'cause I didn't have two forms of ID.

*AV:* How would you say you're involved with the gay and lesbian community now?

*CP:* I go to the Gay Pride festival. That's my involvement.

*HN:* And how do you feel about seeing the Gay Pride festival out in the open? Do you ever think, wow, this could never have happened 50 years ago? How does that make you feel, being a part of the Gay Pride festival now knowing that these things didn't exist in the past?

*CP:* Well, actually when I was president, I think we were the first ones to start, my group was the first one to start the Gay Pride festival, where we had a parade and we blocked off the streets in front of Gay Community Center down there on Chase Street. And we

march – had different groups. We had, what is it, the person – master of ceremony. We had all that. And we marched from Washington and Park Avenue up to Chase Street. It's only a few blocks, but it was, it started there. And we went there for, we did that for a number of years, and then we moved down to Dell across the street, and only reason we left there 'cause it was always – if it rained before the festival, we had that little dip and flood in the thing. But then it moved out to – so I'm familiar with the Gay Pride on that. But I'm sorry it didn't happen when I was growing up, though. Yeah.

HN: What do you hope for the future of the gay and lesbian community in Baltimore?

CP: Can't we just all get along? I hope it's no more struggles in the future that when we walk down the street, we – well, we walk down the street now, and unless you're flamboyant people don't know. But this might be like looking at rose colored glasses, but that people can just look at you just to look at you, and stop making thoughts about who you might be or what you're not or something like that.

AV: What would you say to young gay and lesbian youth now, or what advice would you give them?

CP: Keep being yourself. If it's a fad, okay, but don't toy with our hearts.

AV: Awesome.

HN: Is there anything else you want to share?

CP: No, 'cause I think I said it all, because after I spoke with you yesterday I said, oh, I'm, maybe I should make sure I mention this, that, and the other, and I think we all covered everything I would have liked to have said, and I said it. So I'm pleased. I hope that you all, too.

HN: Yeah, we definitely are. Okay, so I'm gonna stop the recording.

*[End of Audio]*