

## Jim Zipper, 1983

00:00:00      **Janet Kahn**

... like no notes about what I'm going to be asking you about. So anyways, we'll just try to keep on our toes. And you should feel free you can talk if you want. I mean, if you have questions, if there's a way a conversation is going and you feel like we're not following up on some issue of interest or that you think would be good for the paper for the project.

00:00:26      **Jim Zipper**

OK. I'm going to try to. OK.

00:00:32      **Janet Kahn**

OK. So I think for me the easiest place to start, if it makes sense to you, would be tell me, start by telling me how you first heard about Fran's Place or the Light House, when it was, how you heard about it, how you decided to go and the first time you went and things like that. So give So give me your introduction to Fran's Place or the Light House.

00:01:06      **Jim Zipper**

OK. I think that's pretty hard to do because I think I knew of Fran's Place like as a young boy coming through school. I'm sure we talked about the fags at Fran's. So I always had in my mind that the bar was there, that it was a gay bar. Exactly when I really realized that, I mean, I don't know. I'm sure I knew it all the way through school. So actually, I think people in Lynn always knew that Fran's was a gay bar and I always knew. I didn't go there until I came out of the service. In fact, I was 21 when I came out of the service, so I wasn't legally able to go there anyway before that.

00:01:50      **Janet Kahn**

So give us a sense, what year was that? place at the time?

00:01:56      **Jim Zipper**

1960. Yeah, 1960. I was 21. Well, actually, I was almost 22. I got out of the service in February of 60 and I was 22 in March of 60. And I knew I was going to Fran's I mean, I was always a gay man and I always knew I was gay. It's just that I didn't dare to go to Fran's before that as I was young. I don't think so much because I was too young. I think just because of the people that I knew. I was afraid to. And actually, Fran's was the second gay bar I ever went to. I used to go to Punchbowl before I went to Fran's .

00:02:39      **Janet Kahn**

That was up here also?

00:02:40      **Jim Zipper**

No, that was in Boston, right in Park Square. It was back in the 50s when they used to have like the Haymarket Square area. They used to have the burlesque. But, that was the straight burlesque and the Punchbowl was sort of the gay burlesque. The Punchbowl was, as far as I know, was as famous as Scully Square for most people. From what I've heard, there were very few sailors that didn't know the Punchbowl existed and that it was in Park Square. It was right there in the big windows. It was obvious. There were big lights on the outside, big bright blinking lights. And it was sort of, it was a beautiful bar, is what it was. Mostly gay men, to the best of my knowledge, although there was a woman named Tex who used to be a barmaid there for years and a woman who played the piano and sang there. But basically, it was a men's bar. In fact, I think it probably was exclusively a men's bar. I don't remember seeing any lesbians in there.

00:03:59      **Jim Zipper**

And the beauty of the Punchbowl, as opposed to Fran's was that it was a place that gave you real good feelings about being gay. It wasn't like Fran's was sort of a dump. Punchbowl was sort of just a way out on the fringe gay experience. It was really nice. People would take off their shirts and dance in the windows. And all the sailors would be looking in and laughing at the fags. And it was really nice. It made you feel good being there. At least it made me feel good being there.

00:04:35      **Jim Zipper**

I think I went there first because I just wasn't ready to go to the Lighthouse because I lived here. Probably within my first year out of the service, I started going to the Lighthouse. And at the same time, I told everybody that I knew that I was gay. And that meant that I basically was brought up in Wyoma Square. And there was a neighborhood bar there. And we started drinking there probably at 17 or 18. I'm sure the drinking age then was 21.

00:05:15      **Janet Kahn**

I think so.

00:05:15      **Jim Zipper**

But I mean, this was a neighborhood bar. And you could drink. I guess in most neighborhood bars, they didn't care how old you were. As long as they knew you. And um. So the people that I went to school with and that I grew up with, I used to go up there and drink with them. And like when I got out of the service, I'd still go and drink with them. But then I would go to Fran's later in the evening. And so after a few months of doing that, I finally told them. I said, you know, where I go when I leave here, the the reason why I leave here so early is that I go to the gay bar. I go to the Lighthouse. And that ended those relationships for a long time. Excuse time. Excuse me. Hello? Hi, Pat. Great, how are you?

00:05:56      **Janet Kahn**

OK, so the people that you came out to at that point were people that you had grown up with, were they?

00:06:05      **Jim Zipper**

Yeah. And you know, the strange thing was is I always, you know, it's strange because I always believed people knew I was gay. I mean, I believe they knew it. They just weren't saying so. As it happens, it wasn't true. Nobody knew I was gay. And that ended, I mean, that ended my going to the bar totally and ended all those relationships for a long time. And so that sort of pushed me off into the gay bars, which it didn't really end up doing because then I started hanging out with people that I worked with. Yeah. But I'm not quite sure what you mean.

00:06:55      **Janet Kahn**

So tell me what your impression was of Fran's. I mean, you said that as you were growing up, you were aware of Fran's, that everybody in Lynn, or was it the Lighthouse then?

00:07:02      **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, the Lighthouse.

00:07:04      **Janet Kahn**

OK, that everybody in Lynn knew about the Lighthouse and you knew about it growing up. What did you, do you remember what you had heard of it or what your impressions of it were from before you went?

00:07:14      **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, I basically believed it to be a rather trashy gay bar. I'm not even knowing what a gay bar should be. I knew that Fran's wasn't one of the nicer gay bars, just like, I mean, I hung around a neighborhood bar that was

kind of a nice, friendly bar. And then the other bars I'd go to that were kind of trashy, downtown Lynn. Well, Fran's was in that class, and that's the way everybody talked about it. That's about the bar itself. As far as the people in the bar, I mean, of course, everybody talked about it being fags and lesbians and all the things. And of course, I never said anything about that, which was to my own detriment for years. I didn't know it. So I mean, the things they would say is that's where the queers go. In fact, you know, you never hear people talk about lesbians. It's always about the queers.

00:08:13        **Janet Kahn**

Meaning men and women, or just men and women?

00:08:15        **Jim Zipper**

No, I believe just men, you know? People never particularly, to the best of my knowledge, I didn't know of anybody who knew any lesbians or ever talked about anybody being a lesbian, you know? Like, I mean, it sort of wasn't known then that women were, or at least as far as I know, it wasn't known. I mean, you know, no one known. I mean, you know, no one ever talked about girls being together. I mean, I heard a conversation the other day at the building 19 and 7-8 about these girls talking about their girlfriend that was a lesbian, and they were, you know, and that was a lesbian, and they were, you know, and I says, oh, back 20 years ago, you never heard of that. I mean, people knew there were gay men and there were queers, but they didn't particularly know there were lesbians, or at least they didn't openly think about it like that. I doubt they ever thought about it. So it was basically gay men that were talked about.

00:09:06        **Jim Zipper**

And the type of people that I went there, I assumed were the people that I really wanted to be with, but I was afraid to be with, you know? Basically out of guilt, out of fear, shame, you know? So I never went there. When I did go there, I mean, the impression, the bar was a trashy bar, and it was a dirty old place. The lesbians that went there were roughnecks. Actually, as far as I can see in the Lighthouse, which is very strange, I think, of the way life is in the is in the lesbian community and the gay men's community, I think the lesbians are, generally speaking, a a far nicer and closer group of people, but they certainly weren't in the Lighthouse. The Lesbians in the Lighthouse were, I mean, they were what I thought all lesbians were, a bunch a bunch of roughnecks. And I attributed it to, back in those days, to the idea that I said, gee, I guess those women are trying to prove that they're men, and therefore they're acting out this behavior that's sort of macho, you know? Like, the fights now are always lesbians. Men never fought in the bar, you know?

00:10:23        **Janet Kahn**

There were fights between lesbians, or they were fights between straight people and lesbians?

00:10:27        **Jim Zipper**

It was always between the dykes and over some, whatever they called the women, the female part of the old dykes and the femmes back in those days. They didn't call them femmes. I don't know what they called the female part of the couple.

00:10:44        **Janet Kahn**

They didn't call the butch and femme? No,

00:10:45        **Jim Zipper**

No, I mean, the butches were called dykes. I don't know what they called the femmes. I'm trying to think, but I really don't know.

00:10:56        **Janet Kahn**

I don't know either, probably the girls.

00:10:58        **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, yeah, right. They were probably the ladies or something. I don't know. It's sort of, I have no idea. But the fights were almost always amongst what they used to call the dykes of the women. And it was strange because, I mean,

00:11:15 **Jim Zipper**

I basically grew up not liking lesbians for a long time because of my experiences there. But that was the only lesbians I really knew, that I know of, was from the Lighthouse. And I mean, it's the same with gay men. I mean, the only gay men that I knew were from the Lighthouse or from bars in Boston. And the bars in Boston were all male bars, so I never met any women there. The women that I did meet were in the Lighthouse, and they certainly weren't women that I'd wanted to be around. And I really identified that as being all lesbians. And I didn't really know any of them for years.

00:11:49 **Jim Zipper**

The gay men were sort of a real mixed group. I mean, they probably went in age from like in their 50s to whatever they could get into the place at, like typically at 18, you know?

00:12:07 **Janet Kahn**

So the first time you went to the Lighthouse, you were saying you were about 21. Did you go by yourself? Did you go with someone else? Did you know anyone there?

00:12:15 **Jim Zipper**

I went alone many times.

00:12:17 **Jim Zipper**

And I went alone pretty drunk because I'd already been up to the straight bar I used to hang at and then I'd go there if I got the courage I think it was. You know, I'd get pretty drunk, and then I'd go there. So I really don't know too much about the place really. I mean, you know, it was how I first got there and who I first met. I mean, you know, after a few months, I started going there. After I told my friends and I stopped going to that bar, then I would go there right from work. Then I got to meet the people there.

00:12:54 **Jim Zipper**

At that point, the afternoon crowd or the early evening crowd, like, you know, the supper crowd was basically gay men. Lesbians would come in later in the night, generally speaking. And by that point in the evening, I mean, I was I mean, I was usually pretty well drunk, so I didn't get to meet too many people, except the regular crowd that was the real drunks. I mean, they were the ones that went there early and stayed, you know? And I went there for years. I mean, and a lot of people disliked Fran, the owner. But I mean, I know from my own personal experience that Fran is a beautiful woman. For many, many, many times, I mean, I had a tab there for years, and Fran would take my paycheck on a Friday night and hold it for me and then give me back my money that I had left. I mean, and she always had my money. I mean, I never knew what was happening, you know?

00:13:47 **Jim Zipper**

And one time, this lesbian, real dyke, she got this young guy to take me home to her place. I thought it was his house, right? And when we were there, she stole my money. I didn't know she was coming, but she didn't come with us. She sent him along with me to her house. And then she came in later, and of course, I didn't hear it. We were in the bedroom or wherever we were. And she stole my money and left.

00:14:15 **Jim Zipper**

Well, I went back to Fran's, and I mean, I was drunk anyway. I went back to Fran's. I told Fran, I says, this guy, I still see him in Boston once in a while. I said, he came in here, and he had some lesbian woman. She took my money. And you know, the next day, Fran had my money back. I mean, she really run that place, and nobody there bothered her in those days, you know? And she knew everybody. She was really good. She took care of an

awful lot of gay guys in particular. The lesbians didn't seem to, they didn't seem to get that close to her. I don't particularly know why the gay men sort of, you know, were attracted to her.

00:15:04        **Janet Kahn**

So how long has she been connected to the bar?

00:15:07        **Jim Zipper**

Oh, since the 30s.

00:15:09        **Janet Kahn**

That's a long time.

00:15:11        **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, oh yeah.

00:15:15        **Janet Kahn**

Yeah. I mean, you're talking 50 years almost, but she's been there.

00:15:19        **Jim Zipper**

I think they, actually, probably it was the early 40s. I know since before World War II, so it had to be in the late 30s or early 40s.

00:15:29        **Steve Harrington**

Huh. Huh. There was always a gay bar, even?

00:15:32        **Jim Zipper**

It started out as a seaman's bar. And then, actually, the lesbians started going there first for prostitution, as far as I know. Getting the sailors' monies, you know? And then, I don't know how the gay men, I guess the gay men went there for the same reason. I don't know. And then, as the seaman started drifting out, because the, I don't know what they had here in Lynn at the time, but they started moving into Boston, and, you know, East Boston and Boston. The bar became a lesbian and gay bar. Basically, it was the attraction of those people to the big money of the seaman that brought the gay and lesbian crew there, from what I understand.

00:16:18        **Janet Kahn**

And the sailors were there for what reason? I mean, was there a base?

00:16:22        **Jim Zipper**

Apparently, there was a seaport or something, a boat place there or something, you know, a ship place, right on the ocean. I mean, Fran's used to be almost on the ocean back then.

00:16:36        **Janet Kahn**

Huh.

00:16:36        **Jim Zipper**

And apparently, that's how it came about.

00:16:41        **Janet Kahn**

Are there people who still go there or are still in the community from that era?

00:16:47 **Jim Zipper**

Oh, yeah, there's people that go to Fran's from that era. I see people that are my age there, I probably see five or six when I go in there, in the period of two or three times, and they're like, maybe per month, I see five or six different people that people that I know that come back from those original days.

00:17:08 **Janet Kahn**

But from your original days?

00:17:08 **Jim Zipper**

From my original days.

00:17:09 **Janet Kahn**

So that would be the 60s?

00:17:10 **Jim Zipper**

That'd be the, yeah, well, yeah, the 60s, yes.

00:17:14 **Janet Kahn**

But when was it, when did sailors use that bar, when did seamen?

00:17:19 **Jim Zipper**

I think back in World War II.

00:17:20 **Jim Zipper**

I think after that, it was really gay.

00:17:22 **Janet Kahn**

So my question is whether there's anyone from that vintage, did Fran's family still own it at that point?

00:17:28 **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, Yeah, Fran's family owned it.

00:17:31 **Jim Zipper**

Fran's husband used to be in the bar when I first went there, he died of something. I think the guy was a bookie, but I don't know. Yeah, she and her husband used to be there when I first went there. And then he died, and then she's been there since.

00:17:51 **Jim Zipper**

And they had a much bigger bar it was a nice bar well, well not a nice bar it was a trashy bar I mean, it was a nice crowded bar. It was really a, I mean, a real active, wild bar. And it was stacked with people in the front and the back room, used to have a back room that that was open all the time. I don't know exactly what happened to make the bar turn out to nothing. I mean, it's built, and you know, it's not much of a bar now. It's a nicer bar for the looks of the bar but there's not a community there anymore, there's not a crowd there like there used to be.

00:18:29 **Janet Kahn**

And was there a sense of community before? What does that mean when you use that term?

00:18:33 **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, there you use that term? Yeah, there was a real sense of, I mean, basically I knew all the gay men there, and I knew a lot of the lesbians there, and they knew each other. A lot of them lived together or would share apartments and that. A lot of them worked in the shoe shops. I was sort of an outsider most of the time, only because I was too guilt-ridden in that to really become part of the whole thing. I would have sex with the guys, but that was about it, I didn't really get involved in the subculture or whatever you want to call it.

00:19:14 **Steve Harrington**

And these were a lot of people that worked in the shoe factory, the shoe?

00:19:16 **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, there used to be a lot of shoe industry here, and a lot of them were shoe workers, and they worked in the downtown area. I don't remember particularly any GE workers, but most of them worked in like the old Hogan Square and the Box Company and the shoe companies and the other places we had here. It was a real busy place, and it was loaded with people. There were probably like 200 or 300 people in there on the average night. Both rooms were packed with people. And I mean, there was a lot of drugs, a lot of gay and lesbian activity going on. But it was a real meeting place. A lot of the people from here to Boston, from Boston north, they pretty well went to Fran's. I knew a lot of people from Revere and Chelsea. It was a nice place to meet people.

00:20:16 **Janet Kahn**

So, and folks who met each other there formed friendships, formed lover relationships?

00:20:21 **Jim Zipper**

Oh yeah, sure.

00:20:23 **Jim Zipper**

I think the gay community was there, the only gay community per se in the North Shore was there. I mean, it's where people met other people.

00:20:30 **Janet Kahn**

And did you socialize with folks that you met in the bar? Did you socialize with them outside the bar?

00:20:35 **Jim Zipper**

I did sometimes, not much, not much.

00:20:39 **Jim Zipper**

Not because I couldn't. I mean, I personally couldn't probably, yeah, but not because they weren't socializing. I wasn't, I was too full of guilt and too full of shame to be part of it, you know? I hadn't yet learned.

00:20:54 **Janet Kahn**

In some of the interviews that Pat and I have been doing with lesbians who go to the bar and went to the bar, some years ago, one of the things that emerges is that for some women, it was a place where they went to meet somebody, a lover, to be in a relationship with. And once they were in a relationship, they tended not to go to the bar while they were in that relationship and went again when they were single again. Is it your sense that that's a pattern that men followed also, or not?

00:21:25 **Jim Zipper**

No, I don't think men followed that pattern at all. I know at all. I know lesbians follow that pattern, I agree with that. They would go there and they'd meet somebody and you wouldn't see them until they lost that lover and come back with another lover. It was amazing. The men, if they were in lover relationships, they were loose ones. Typically, I mean, you didn't find, there were maybe three or four gay couples that I know of that used to go to Fran's regular. Generally, they also would have sex with other people. I don't know of any couple that was there that didn't have sex with other people. And so, there might have been some who came there and met and disappeared and I just didn't know, but the people that I knew that were whether they were in a relationship or not would still go there, and it wasn't like, you know, they met somebody and disappeared and disappeared like you were saying.

00:22:22      **Janet Kahn**

And how long did those relationships last, typically? Was there, were people looking for long-term relationships or no?

00:22:30      **Jim Zipper**

I think they were looking for long-term relationships. I don't think they were getting into long-term relationships. Myself, until I was 30, I never was in a relationship that lasted more than a couple of nights. I mean, after that, I was too full of guilt and I'd leave. But in fact, what I normally would do is, it might last as long as a week, you know? And if I was taking a week off, I would probably stay drunk for the week and when I sobered up, I would say, frig this, and walk away. I would say that of the people that I know, most of the relationships didn't last. But, you know, maybe a few months if they lasted that long. I see the same thing today down there, with the gay men, relationships just don't last. Of the ones that have lasted, like there's a couple, Bob and Emery, that have been together, oh God. They met as kids in Franklin Park. Like, you know, they were like 13 and 14 when they met each other and they've been together since and they still are together. But they weren't a monogamous couple.

00:23:52      **Steve Harrington**

And they were open about that and that was easy?

00:23:57      **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, I think, I don't know how that happens with gay men, but I think it's nice that it does happen. I don't know of any gay, I mean, I know of another gay couple, a black and white gay couple met. It's been, oh God, Richard and Albert, they've probably been together for at least 25 years. And they both still work in the shoe shops, what's left of the shoe shops. In fact, I think they worked down in Norelco. And they've always worked in the shoe shops. And they're the same way, I mean, you know, for years they would have sex with who ever they felt like, but they were still a couple. And they still are.

00:24:45      **Steve Harrington**

You know, what I'm interested in knowing is, so the kind of squabbles and fights that you say the Dykes had, that you said were usually over another woman, you didn't get the sense that that happened with men, or you did?

00:24:58      **Jim Zipper**

No, no, it didn't happen with men because I don't think that, maybe it's because the men weren't that committed to each other. I don't believe that to be true necessarily. It's just that they sort of accepted the idea that, I mean, you know, sex amongst each other was okay. I don't know of any couple that I've ever known of that haven't had sex with other people. Okay. I don't know. You know, and I'm not talking about together either. I mean, that also happens quite often, but but I'm talking about alone, you know, and and in each other knowing.

00:25:40      **Janet Kahn**

So what is it that defines the bond of those relationships, these relationships that last for many years? What makes them a couple?



00:25:50 **Jim Zipper**

Well, the fact that they share a lot of common interest, I'm sure, like, I mean, I'm sure they really care about each other. I don't know exactly what the word love means. I don't think so. I don't think you know whether someone loves somebody, but I mean, they have a lot of concern for one another. They have a lot of companionship with each other. Mutual interest, like having someone to have meals with and to live with and to sleep with, you know? To have someone that sort of is your special person that care about you, even though it's not your only sexual partner, you know? I personally believe in that philosophy, and I think that it's great to have a lover, but it's also great to have sex free. In the confines of the relationship, without your lover. And I think that that's the way most people, I think that's the way most gay men do it anyway, even though they don't sometimes acknowledge it to their lover. I believe that's always been that.

00:26:58 **Jim Zipper**

But the more stable couples, if you want a couple, the ones that seem to last are the ones that, for some reason or other, were able to acknowledge that in the beginning. Were able to see that that's really what they wanted, that they really wanted sex with other people. They didn't want to be tied to one person for sex, but yet they wanted the other qualities of a lover relationship, which I believe is the real love of relationship and has nothing to do with you having sex with other people.

00:27:26 **Jim Zipper**

I mean, you know, to me, my philosophy about sex is, and it's sort of a philosophy that I think you find amongst gay men, except for sometimes they won't acknowledge it. That's what they do anyway, though, is that, you know, I mean, sex is like a meal or anything else, you know, or or a friend you go to a movie with. Well, instead of just going to a movie, then you have sex with them also. And it has nothing to do with your, if you want to call it your deep feelings or your commitment or, you know, just like going to a movie. I mean, I go to movies sometimes with people that I don't really care too much about, or go to dinner with them, you know. But I enjoy their company for the movie or whatever. The same thing sort of applies to sex. And I think it works fine. And so it really doesn't interfere with your lover relationship.

00:28:17 **Jim Zipper**

When I was 30, after a couple of years of therapy, and a psychologist that I liked very much, the guy convinced me that I had to get into a relationship, that I was simply killing myself by not being in a relationship. I was too isolated and too lonely, you know. By then I was pretty well drunk all the time. I mean, I had a job and I always maintained a job. And exactly how a person can do that, I don't know. I don't know how you can disassociate your business life from your social life. I don't know how that happens. I was crazy, basically, and a drunk, but I managed to maintain a job and rather some semblance of sanity there. I don't know quite how you can do that. But anyway, I did it for years. And so at 30, I entered into a relationship with this guy who was 18. I met him at Fran's. I was teaching school at the time and I had my summer vacation. And I mean, not my summer vacation, my Christmas vacation. And I said to this psychologist, I said, look at it, I said, between now and the time that we start back to school again, I'm gonna have a friggin' lover. We've been talking about for two years. And I finally, I says, okay, I'll go get myself a fuckin' lover. Well, I did. It was an 18 year old kid in Fran's a real thin, pretty boy, all dressed up and sort of like half-dragged. Oh, I mean, and I've always been attracted to that type of person, and he was really screwed up. And I mean, I was really screwed up, so it was just what I needed. And he was staying with his aunt, who lived right around the corner from Fran's, and we spent the rest of that Christmas vacation at his aunt's house. And that started our relationship.

00:30:07 **Jim Zipper**

That lasted for 11 years, two stupid drunks. It was a hell of a relationship. But we had sex, but not all that much. He was sort of, because of his problems, whatever they might have been, he was insecure. And it came out as his being jealous of me, which he had no reason to be. I mean, I was a really screwed up drunk. But he was anyway, so it was hard for him to accept my having sex with our friends. And so I did have sex with our friends, but I generally had to hide it from him. And then when I'd get drunk, he'd find out anyway, and then there'd be a fight. And he was doing the same thing, only I didn't care. It was okay with me for him to have sex, because I thought it was okay for me to have sex too. But then he couldn't deal with my, and so it created a lot of trouble. Created a real lot of trouble.

00:31:16 **Jim Zipper**

In the first year, he burnt down a building we lived in here in Lynn, and it was a six-family building downtown Lynn, and he took a couple gallons of kerosene, dumped it on the floors of the building, and burnt the whole friggin' building down. Because I was with. There used to be a beautiful gay bar on the Lynnway named the Aquarius. Oh, it was, when Fran's was in its best day, probably in like 60 no, the date was around the 70s, so I didn't go there at all, in 1969, I guess. 1968, 69, I don't know. The Aquarius was just opening up, and it was a beautiful, I mean, it was a place that burned down on the ocean [the Aquarius was on pilings]. Beautiful, big. A place like some of the places up on Route 1. I mean, it was really beautiful. It was a palace, and they had gay and lesbians from all over, and it was wild, it was a beautiful place. Only lasted about two years, and it burnt down. Maybe it lasted three or four years.

00:32:25 **Jim Zipper**

Well, anyway, Dave and I were there one night, and I ended up with some other guy, and David thought, I don't know what he thought, but anyway, he burnt the building down. That was a real fiasco, but that took a, he ended up in Bridgewater for the observation, and then he got out, and we had to go to court. We dragged it out in the courts for months.

00:32:47 **Jim Zipper**

I mean, you know, and it's strange, because people say that people don't take care of gays and lesbians in the city. See, I know that not to be true, from my own personal life. Here in Lynn, the Lynn police have never harassed me. In all the years they've known me as a gay man. I mean, and I was drunk and falling around enough that I ended up in jail many, many, many nights under drunkenness back in those days, and they never barred me in all those years. And when David burnt down that building, I had to go, We didn't know David burnt it down. He didn't tell me. It didn't dawn on me that David burnt it down. And then the police, a couple of days later, came to me and said, you know, the building is under investigation for for being a suspicious fire. Someone burnt that building down. And I said, oh, well, David and I were staying at a friend of mine's house over in Reading. And I said, David, I said, you know, they said the building was burnt down. Well, David told me, he says, I burnt that building down. I said you fucking David.

00:33:53 **Steve Harrington**

Is this the building you lived in?

00:33:53 **Jim Zipper**

Yeah. He was mad at me. He took all my clothes and put them in the middle of the room and put kerosene over the whole place and burnt it. He was mad at me for going out with somebody, whoever it was. Anyway, when we ended up going to the, so then I told him, I says, David, you better come with me. We better get out to the police. You better turn yourself in. They gonna find out anyway. So we came and we got my sister, I think. And let her know what we were doing, what was going on. My sister was always close to me anyway. In fact, anyway. In fact, so was my mother.

00:34:28 **Jim Zipper**

And we went down to the police station and I told them that David did it. So we met a guy named Lieutenant Harney and another guy named Sergeant Higgins, who were in the vice squad or whatever the hell that group is that took care of those type things at that time. And they were the most, they were the nicest people. I remember David was crying and carrying on. And this Lieutenant Harney let us close the door on a room while I said goodbye to David, you know, and they know, and they were really nice to us. And then he used to let me, until David got transferred to Bridgewater, which was a couple or so days later, he let me bring David coffee in the morning and donuts, bring him something to eat at night, you know, in the jail cell.

00:35:12 **Jim Zipper**

And then, then David got out, I think after 30 days or 45 days or something in Bridgewater. And there was supposed to be a court hearing in Salem Superior Court. And this Lieutenant Harney and I got to sort of be friends now, not really, but I mean, you know, I used to talk to him a lot. I used to say, you know, how, what am

I going to do now? And he said, well, tell David not to show up at Salem, which means he'll, you know, be whatever they do, whatever whatever happens on court, you don't go. At any rate. And he said, they'll put out a warrant for him and then we'll just ignore it. He says, and we won't come and get him, we know where you are. And he says then it will, means it'll be postponed. It'll end up in Newburyport. And he said, by the time he gets to Newburyport it'll be another six months down the line. And then he'll have to go to Newburyport. And he said, the reason you should do that is first of all, Bill Nichols, who was a landlord and a good friend of ours, is kind of a politician here in Lynn, and always has been. And like he was the president of the Better Business Bureau and that bullshit, you know. And he owned a lot of houses at the time in Lynn I think he sold most of them since. And he said, you know, give him a chance to calm down and he'll just settle for the insurance and he won't be there raving at the court demanding something be done. And it will also get it out of this area altogether where it won't have been in the papers or anything else. It'll be up in Newburyport.

00:36:43 **Jim Zipper**

So that's what happened. And it was a good six months later or a year later, finally got to Newburyport. And this judge, oh my God, he was so cruel to David. And I said, oh my God, he's gonna go away forever. But they had it all. I don't know what they do in the court system, but they had it all figured out what they were gonna do. And they said, okay, fine. Two years probation. That was it. That was David's fire. So I mean, you know, my experience with the police here in Lynn is a real nice one.

00:37:18 **Janet Kahn**

Why do you think that is?

00:37:23 **Jim Zipper**

Well, I think, well, I mean, it has something to do with the fact that basically I'm a nice person with them when they pick me up and lock me up or something. I don't, in other words, I mean, I don't try to fight with them or something. They further acknowledge the fact that, yeah, you know, he's a, I mean, in those days in particular, they must have acknowledged the fact that, yeah, he's a gay man and yeah, he doesn't know what the hell's going on too well. He's really been beaten by us. And they must have been saying that to themselves because I mean, I was in that jail probably a hundred times. Never had any problems at all. Never had a cop ever do anything mean or cruel or say anything mean or cruel.

00:38:12 **Steve Harrington**

What do What do you mean beaten by it? I don't understand that.

00:38:16 **Jim Zipper**

Well, I mean, I was screwed up enough that I think they knew that, that, hey, this guy's got so many problems. I mean, you know, there's nothing we're gonna do to, I mean, you know, there's no need of adding any more problems to him. He doesn't need anymore. I think that's what they would say. I don't really know what they said, but, you know, I mean, that might have something to do with the way they treated me, as as opposed to like, for instance, I know I know people who go there and end up complaining about they got roughed up or something. Oh, my personal feelings are is that they that they went there and they antagonized them. I'm not I'm not saying that's true, but that's my feelings.

00:38:49 **Jim Zipper**

I had the same experience in Boston police. I mean, I've got picked up by the Boston police so many times for cruising and so many times for having sex in public. I mean, I used to have sex like, and they'd catch me right in the goddamn public. And, you know, I started drinking in Sporters and I would come from Sporters up to where Haymarket Square used to be, you know, coming down over the hill. And there's a police station there, a district station. They got to know me so well there. They honest to God, the sergeant gave me this card and he says, look at it. He says, Jim, anytime you miss your bus or you can't make it, you just come right in here. And they used to put me in the cell and let me stay there for the night. In the morning, they'd get me up, give me coffee and donuts and say, you better get going. And that's my experience with the cops. Even the ones that would catch me doing something. I mean, they were a little bit meaner.

00:39:38        **Steve Harrington**

Where would you get caught?

00:39:40        **Jim Zipper**

Well, like here, right in Lynn, unfortunately. The MDC cops caught me on Lynn Beach. And I mean, they aren't as dumb as some gay and lesbian people like to think they are. They aren't as homophobic, at least in my belief they aren't. I was having sex with some guy right over the wall and the goddamn cops come with their lights and trying to break down on us. And so they took us down to the station and they harassed us for hours. And that was the end of that.

00:40:10        **Janet Kahn**

When you say harassed, what do you mean?

00:40:12        **Jim Zipper**

Oh, you know, like this was probably like, oh God, in 65, 66, and they would, you know, say, hey, you faggot, you know, and go through the whole thing about you dirty queer and this whole thing. But then what they would do is like, after that, when they'd seen you on the beach, they'd actually stop their goddamn cruiser and they'd come out and they'd say, They wouldn't come out, they'd yell out the window, they'd say, hey Zipper, how's it going tonight? You know? I mean, really, I used to get so pissed at them.

00:40:38        **Steve Harrington**

They called you zipper?

00:40:40        **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, that's my last name, Zipper.

00:40:42        **Jim Zipper**

And they'd say, hey zipper, how's it going tonight?

00:40:45        **Jim Zipper**

I'd say, oh, screw. You know?

00:40:48        **Jim Zipper**

In Boston, I had a, I got caught on sex many times on the Esplanade. And never, ever once did they ever do anything. I mean, they anything. I mean, they harassed me. One time they really harassed me. Hey, faggot, get in the wagon, you know, and you go to get in the wagon. Don't get that dirty body of yours in our wagon. On, and kept on going and going and going. Get in the wagon, get out of the wagon. We ain't taking you in, no we're not. We don't want you, no faggot touching our wagon. You know, oh geez. But they didn't do anything. I mean, they never physically did anything. And they never actually took you in. Just sort of harassed you, you know.

00:41:26        **Jim Zipper**

In other words, I mean, what I'm feeling is, is that they weren't all that hateful to me, you know. They might me, you know. They might have been having a little fun. They might have been enjoying it. And they might have also been conscientious enough, which which I sort of doubt, but they might have been, to where they figured this might stop him from coming here so much. I don't know if that was one of their intentions or not. Might have been, you know. That's my experience with the place.

00:41:53        **Janet Kahn**

Was Was the Lighthouse a place where people had sex? Or did they meet people and go out?

00:41:58 **Jim Zipper**

Never had, never had, never had sex there. Well, I can't say that. I mean, I've had sex in there a couple of times. No, it wasn't known for a place to have sex. Sex went on in a very, very minor.

00:42:17 **Steve Harrington**

In the bar itself?

00:42:18 **Jim Zipper**

In the bar itself.

00:42:21 **Steve Harrington**

Not the johns, in the bar?

00:42:22 **Steve Harrington**

Not in the johns, in the bar.

00:42:23 **Jim Zipper**

I mean, there used to be a time when Fran's had a lot of booths and the whole back room was full of booths. It was a back room as big as this house, in short. And it was booths on both sides, the dance floor in the middle. I mean, and there was sex occasion in the booths. Very subtle.

00:42:41 **Janet Kahn**

So when you talk about going to a Fran's place, to the Lighthouse, actually, that point, the Lighthouse, when you talk about going to the Lighthouse after work, where did you work then?

00:42:53 **Jim Zipper**

Well, in between 60 and 65, I worked at Honeywell in Brighton and MIT in Cambridge. The next couple of years, I worked in a place called Transitron in Melrose, which is now a part, it's kind of a Basically, I guess it still has a place in Wakefield, basically out of business. I taught school the next couple of years in Peabody. And then, oh, then I went to an electronics place in Cambridge again in 1970, and I stayed there until 80. And then at the last company, I moved to there in 80, going back now.

00:43:40 **Janet Kahn**

So, and were you out at work 20 years ago or whenever you were out at work?

00:43:45 **Jim Zipper**

No, I basically came out probably at work at Transitron first. And there was only selectively, like with the people that I would drink with. Basically, I was so drunk in those days, by the time I got to Transitron, I mean, anybody, I would go drinking with anybody, and then I would tell them all about my being gay. So anybody who drank with me knew I was a fag. And I never had any problems with that, never. I mean, I know I worked for the Director of Engineering at Transitron, and he was a rather straight-laced, middle-class engineer, and he had no problems with my being gay. I mean, and he knew it.

00:44:36 **Jim Zipper**

When I taught school, I taught high school in electronics in Peabody High, and the Director there knew I was gay. He knew I was gay because I told him, but he was a little leery. He didn't quite know what to do with me. He was more worried about my being a drunk than being gay. I mean, it was there that David burned down the

building when when I was there, and I didn't have any clothes, and then I didn't have a car. Oh my Jesus, I got a broken jar in those years. When I was teaching school, I heard I was teaching school, the guy didn't have a broken jar, and my mouth all wired up.

00:45:22        **Jim Zipper**

So they were kind of glad to get rid of me. When I left, two years later, they didn't say, why don't you stay? I left because I was really a little leery of teaching high school boys.

00:45:37        **Steve Harrington**

Because of David, or?

00:45:39        **Jim Zipper**

No, the Director knew because I told him. Other than that, I don't know who knew about me in school. But, I didn't want any more contact. When I went to my job in 19, whatever it was, when I left school, I went to a company in Cambridge, a small electronics place. They didn't know I was gay when I went there. But David came in about two weeks and applied for a job, and he got it. Well, Jesus, then he became so jealous, he would see me with these, even some of the women who worked at the place. So he let everybody know that I was his lover, which was just fine. And that first Christmas, he came to a friggin' Christmas party, the first Christmas, in a pair of slacks, and a sequined blouse. I said, oh, I feel horrid.

00:46:38        **Janet Kahn**

And what did people, what year was this?

00:46:40        **Jim Zipper**

This was probably like, probably 1970, Christmas of 70, probably. He shocked that whole company, and they were never the same towards him. And they really liked me there, though. David, he sometimes would get a little hostile. Didn't like that about him. He only stayed about two years and then gone. But the company never had any problems with me. I mean, I was their test manager. David was an assembler. And they never had any problems with the fact that I disassociated my private life from my job. And they were satisfied with that.

00:47:28        **Jim Zipper**

And like, I went to leave that company in probably 80.

00:47:33        **Jim Zipper**

And my boss was, my boss all those years. He was the executive vice president, and he says, what are you leaving for? And I said, because I'm beginning to feel uncomfortable about being gay here. Well, he told me, he said, that's not true, Jim. He says, who is making you feel that?

00:47:55        **Jim Zipper**

And I said, I don't really know, Dick, but I said I really feel uncomfortable here. You know, he went around and he asked all those engineers there who thought that, and he came back to me with a whole story about, look at Jim, this one has known you these many years, and this one, and they know you're gay, and they don't have any problem with that. Why are you using that as an angle? And he was right. You know, I really have to say that everybody that was there wasn't homophobic about me, whether they were in general, I don't think so. I mean, they were just, I don't find the homophobia to be all that real sometimes. I'm not saying it isn't, I'm not saying there isn't a bunch of fanatics that are homophobic. I think the average person just doesn't, just out of plain ignorance, acts homophobic. That isn't real. I mean, that's been my experience anyway. I don't know how true it is.

00:48:51        **Jim Zipper**

But anyway, I did leave that company, and I went to this last company, and there, when I went there, the guy that is my boss now, wasn't, we were, I was a test engineer, he was he was a design engineer. He's a real feminine young guy. And I said, oh, God.

00:49:14 **Jim Zipper**

So, our boss, who was the director of engineering, I explained to him that I was a gay man, and I said, look, I just wanna let you know before I come here, so it'd be no problem. Well, he had gay tendencies I don't care. I mean, he was a married man with a nice family, and a suburban, but I mean, I know he did. He never would acknowledge it. I know he wouldn't. I mean, he wouldn't allow it to be known. But he was a real nice guy. And I actually was sober probably a year and a half when I was there.

00:49:50 **Jim Zipper**

So, they were really nice to me at this company I'm at now. And I didn't have any problem there. I started wearing this pin that I wear probably last Christmas. No, not Christmas, probably last January. And I never had been that open at work before. And my boss now, who's the young gay guy, he confronted me on it right away. He said, I don't want you to wear that. I said, let show you to wear that. And I says, well, I'm going to wear it. I said, whether you want me to or not. I says, you may have to decide what you're gonna do about it, but I'm wearing it. And I explained to him, I said, you know, he says, well, that's a political statement. I said, it's I said, it's not a political statement. So, finally, you know, I had to confront him and say, you know, I mean, I'm wearing it or I'm not gonna be here. And then it just turned out that, you know, unfortunately, he's a closeted gay man and a feminine gay man on top of that. So, he probably has had a lot of persecution or something. But whatever has happened to him. Anyway, now it's on this time later. He still glares at it once in a while. He understands the idea that, you know, that that's the way it is. He knows that the people in the company haven't changed their relationship with me at all. In fact, if anything, a lot of them are a lot of them are a lot closer to me than they were before. In fact, most of them are closer to me than they were before.

00:51:37 **Jim Zipper**

And the thing that scared me about wearing the pin, the reason why I didn't want to even wear it to work, and I almost didn't keep the pin because I didn't want to wear it to work, is because I'm rather outgoing at work. And I pat people on the back a lot and I hold their friggin' hands. And the guys, you know, and I says, now if I tell them who I am, they're gonna say, oh, he's been doing this all along because he's a friggin' faggot, you know? That has not happened at all. I mean, I still do it. And they still do it to me. It's just like, and I say, hmm. One guy, a Portuguese guy, said to me within the first few days of wearing the pin, he said, you gotta throw that in the rubbish. He says, you're a man and all this bullshit. You know, I said, oh, good God. And the funny thing is that he's gotten over that completely. He now pats me and we're just like, like we were before the whole thing came about. He was the most hostile person of the whole company. And so, so that made me feel real good.

00:52:48 **Janet Kahn**

So when you say you were almost afraid to wear this pin that says Gay and Proud, why did you decide to do it? I mean, what?

00:52:59 **Jim Zipper**

What brought me to wear the pin in the first place?

00:53:00 **Janet Kahn**

To work, yeah.

00:53:02 **Jim Zipper**

Well, I mean, I didn't actually start wearing it to work. I started wearing it out. Like when I come home from work, I'd wear it in the evenings and I wear it out. And then I decided that that was basically a lie to myself. I mean, if I couldn't wear it all the time, why should I wear it at all? It's like I'm saying to myself, the reason why I put the pin on, is I was saying to myself, I'm a gay man. I like myself. I like being gay. Why should I let society keep dumping on me the idea that it's not okay for me to be gay? I mean, it is okay for me to be gay, but

the me, but the pin says to me, it reinforces my feelings about my being gay. All my life I've been intimidated by the fact that I was a gay man. It's not really quite okay. Well, I mean, it is okay. And so the pin just really reaffirms my belief in me that it's okay for me to be me. And the way I know it really does that, is that every time I go through this argument with myself, well, okay, why don't you stop wearing the pin? And I say, well, if the pin is no longer an issue with me, then why don't I wear it and stop wearing it? What difference does it make? So I really catch myself lying to myself. I mean, sometimes I'd almost like not to wear the pin. You know? But the truth is, is that the pin lets me know that I really am a gay man, and that it's okay for me to be that. And that's why I wear the pin, really.

00:54:38 **Jim Zipper**

I didn't wear it to work at first, like I say, and then I found myself, you know, saying, oh, I had all those nice excuses, like I told you. And then, finally, I said, you know, and it took me a month to wear it. I mean, I brought it, I put on my shirt in the morning, and then my jacket, and I'd wear them, and then I'd get to the coffee shop sometimes, and I'd take them off. Sometimes I'd make it all the way to the door, and sometimes I'd even get in the building. Then I'd pull it off quick, and I'd say, oh, geez. I mean, it was nerve-wracking, finally to leave the pin on. Finally I did it, and then it was just fine. Now I don't ever go anywhere [without that pin] on my jacket or on my shirt.

00:55:25 **Jim Zipper**

And what I have really found was that the only time it's been off, probably in the last nine months or whatever, has been at my mother's funeral. And that sort of pissed me off, but, I took it off basically because my niece asked me to, and she explained to me that, you know, there was enough of a problem with my mother's death, that the funeral wasn't the place and the way to make, to bring this whole issue up. Well, I mean, I don't agree with that. It was the place to bring it up. I should be able to wear the pin there as well, you know, but, the truth was is that in respect to my, the grief that my brothers and my sister were going through, I figured it just wasn't. I mean, I really had feelings about, you know, how I wanted to wear it, and yet, I should have been able to wear it, but knowing that society is what society is, how unkind and unfair was I being to them to put this burden on them on top of it right then? So I gave in and I didn't wear it. It sort of pissed me off, and I had a real tough time about it for about a week, getting back into the nice feelings with my niece and my sister, in particular. And my niece, more so, because she's the one that that actually said to me, you know, don't you think you could really take that off? First of all, I had, I used to wear one on my, I mean, I wear one on my jacket and on my shirt, and she said, well, couldn't you take it off your jacket, uncle? And I says, well, okay. And then she says, well, she says, I really meant, can't you take it off altogether, you know? I says, yeah, okay.

00:57:14 **Janet Kahn**

So how old were you when you first thought you were gay over whatever you thought at that time?

00:57:21 **Jim Zipper**

In In those days, I think it was more or less, more or less being queer. I mean, you were, really queer was the word. Faggot was the word, but it was more of a, it was more of a term like fuck you, you know? Where queer was the odd queer person. And I think I thought I was queer when I was like, well, like long before I could masturbate. I probably was four or five or six when I really thought I was queer. I know by the time I was eight or nine, I knew I was queer. And I liked boys. I mean, I liked boys from the time I was a little boy. I used to go out and try to play with boys. I mean, and the strange thing is, is the neighborhood I grew up in, the boys all did play around. I mean, people tell me boys don't play around. I don't know where they get that from. I mean, I don't know, maybe they don't in most neighborhoods. The neighborhood I grew up in, every kid played around. And I loved it. I mean, and I knew I was queer.

00:58:23 **Steve Harrington**

What kind of neighborhood did you grow up in?

00:58:26 **Jim Zipper**

A rather nice neighborhood. Up in Wyoma Square. It was near the sidewalks, by the lakeside. A rather nice neighborhood. I I mean, they were working, lower middle class, probably upper poor class or something like



that. You know, sort of down, but a nice neighborhood. I mean, single homes. Most of the homes were single homes. Most of the, most people didn't have a car, but in those days, we didn't have a car anyway. You know, for back in those days, it was like an average suburban neighborhood. And because the city wasn't so, the city wasn't trashy in those days, and the city was still the place to be. And although I was from a poor family, we lived in a fairly decent neighborhood.

00:59:17      **Janet Kahn**

So what did you do with that sense about yourself as queer as you went through elementary school, junior high school? When did you have your first relationship with a guy? Or first?

00:59:26      **Jim Zipper**

Well, I mean, I always had sex with guys because I grew up in a neighborhood where people had, I mean, I had sex before I could masterbate. Long before. And I always continued to have sex. I don't know. But those were basically straight kids. In fact, some of the greatest hurts in my life, and the reason why I grew up real young to hate women was because they were stealing the boys from me.

00:59:51      **Jim Zipper**

You know, and they really were. I mean, we used to play around. You know, like we'd go play ball, or we'd go to a clubhouse or something else. We'd play and have sex. And the next thing you know, the girls are stealing my boys, you know? And I mean, I really hated girls for a long time, you know?

01:00:12      **Janet Kahn**

Till you met girls who didn't want your boys?

01:00:14      **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, you know, really. I mean, I used to say, hey, you know, and of course, I mean, you know, that was the normal thing. And I was the one that wasn't doing the thing that they were all doing. And I was the one that was the one who was the different one and they were just doing the thing that they should be doing. I don't I don't know if they should have been doing it, but I mean, I mean, they were doing the things that people do. And I was really getting bullshit at the girls. I mean, I didn't like any of them. I used to, you know? And I mean, and they were trying to get the boys, which was the thing that people, a lot of people do. And I didn't understand that. I was ripshit.

01:00:52      **Janet Kahn**

But you weren't angry at the boys for deserting you?

01:00:55      **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, I was hurt. I was hurt by the boys. I was angry at the girls and hurt by the boys. I was really hurt. I mean, I was, I really felt rejected, unwanted. And especially, I mean, like, by the time I got into high school, almost all the boys were seeing girls.

01:01:10      **Steve Harrington**

And did they see you as queer when you were in High School?

01:01:15      **Jim Zipper**

No, as a matter of fact, nobody ever knew I was queer because the whole kid I grew up with played around. I mean, I don't know whether that's normal or not. I mean, from what I understand, it's not. Every time I read something, it sort of says that that isn't normal. Most people I've talked to say they didn't grow up in that type of an environment. But I grew up with every kid played. There was only one or two kids that wouldn't. And they were the strange ones because they wouldn't get involved in sex with other kids. We had 10 or 12 kids that were

always playing around with each other and I thought kids did that.

01:01:47        **Steve Harrington**

In high school?

01:01:48        **Jim Zipper**

No, I mean, even before that.

01:01:50        **Steve Harrington**

Okay, but in high school too?

01:01:51        **Jim Zipper**

By the time high school, no.

01:01:52        **Jim Zipper**

By the time I get to high school, it was pretty well known the boys were with girls. Couple of the kids would still come around once in a while, but they weren't really, you know, I mean, they would probably like to have sex, but they wouldn't allow themselves to do it. By the time I got to high school, there was only one other kid that was outly, well, he wasn't outly gay, but I mean, who I knew was gay. And I mean, we lived gay lives in our...

01:02:22        **Steve Harrington**

You and this friend? Was he a friend?

01:02:25        **Jim Zipper**

No, he wasn't a sexual partner. Actually, we had sex a few times, but he wasn't somebody I was attracted to.

01:02:32        **Steve Harrington**

What was your relationship like with him?

01:02:35        **Jim Zipper**

It was two young gay guys, both knowing we were gay, and someone to talk to. Spending some time together, but not all that much time. Somebody to talk to.

01:02:49        **Janet Kahn**

So you talked about being gay or queer with him?

01:02:52        **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, I talked about going out and picking up people. Cruising, if you want to call it that. In those days, it wasn't called that. In those days, it wasn't called cruising. We talked about who we were with, or how we met. I guess things that gay people and lesbians talk about. It was nice having him around. But then he went to St. Mary's High here in Lynn, and then I went to Lynn Trade High, which separated us from most of the high school years. Plus, I moved into another neighborhood from the ninth grade. He moved into another neighborhood in the other direction. So actually, he moved to Peabody, and I moved down to this part of Lynn. So during high school, we didn't see that much of each other. Basically, I worked when I was in high school anyway. And in school and work, we didn't really have much time. And he did the same thing. He was from a rather poor family also. He had to work.

01:03:58        **Jim Zipper**

But that wasn't the problem that actually happened in high school. I think more of the problem in high school was, the thing that happened to me for many years, and I think probably started in junior high school, was the idea that I knew I was very gay, and I knew I liked being gay, and yet, I was very guilt-ridden over being gay, and I never let anybody know I was gay, which really hurt me a real lot. Because, I mean, I would let people talk about the faggots and that, and I wouldn't say anything. And yet, I knew I was the faggot, you know? And it really hurt me. It created a lot of damage in my life. Which is one of the reasons why I hope that that thing on the North Shore, the Alliance can really start making itself be known as a, so the kids don't have to feel so terrible about being gay or lesbian.

01:04:59      **Jim Zipper**

And, like, you know, it was always that feeling that, you know, like, I mean, I never had a friend, and the reason why I couldn't have a friend was that, like, in junior high or in high school, I knew if they knew who I was, they wouldn't want to be with me. They would hate me, you know? And yet, I mean, like in high school, I went to Boys State in the 11th grade, which I think two kids out of each school went to Boys State back then. I don't think they have it today. I mean, I was popular, apparently. In the senior year, I was the senior class president. And it took me years to figure that out. Years. In fact, I don't think I figured that out until I got sober. I mean, I had already lived such a divided life. I was coming on to them like I really was one of them, and like I really cared, and like I really was interested in the things they were doing in there. And yet, in myself, I basically hated most of them, you know? I felt really hurt and rejected by them, and unwanted by them. And so, I developed a real hate for them. And yet, I obviously didn't show that, because, I mean, I was very, apparently, what you call very popular. And, I mean, I didn't even know that I was living this, two completely different lives, you know? And that creates a lot of havoc in your life.

01:06:25      **Jim Zipper**

I did the same thing in the service. I was there about a month, and people really liked being in the service. And, I mean, had a lot of what you'd call friends, but they weren't really my friends, and I knew it. And that created, I mean, that sort of division happened to me for years, you know?

01:06:47      **Janet Kahn**

So, you talk about, you know, before I was sober, after I got sober. Do you relate your drinking to being gay, or not?

01:06:56      **Jim Zipper**

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I drank to escape the pain. I mean, I drank for years, just because I couldn't stand living. I hated to be alive. I hated to, I hated being gay. I hated, I hated almost everything, many, many, many, many years. And I drank just to escape. I would have been on drugs, except for the fact that I was just too afraid of drugs. I was very fearful, too. And I knew what alcohol did, because I had drunk it before I got so far out of control. I would I would have gladly gotten into drugs, except for the fact that I was just too scared. I mean, I knew I was crazy, and I knew my life was a wreck, and I didn't want it to be any more painful, and I knew drugs would only maybe, would have been a good chance of making it more painful.

01:07:43      **Jim Zipper**

But yeah, I drank directly because I was gay, I'm sure. And I drank because I felt hurt, and isolated, and lonely. And I couldn't stand myself. I hated myself, hated the world. I hated everybody and everything I could think of, which was terrible. I spent years like that, you know?

01:08:08      **Steve Harrington**

How'd that change for you?

01:08:14      **Jim Zipper**

Well, actually, you know, it's really strange, because when David, when the psychologist, after a couple of years, convinced me to let David into my life, or somebody into my life. I let David in. My outside world

became worse, because David was much younger, like he was 18 and I was 31. And he was pretty screwed up, not that I wasn't. But you know, the strange thing about it is, is that outside, my world became much worse because David got us in a lot of trouble over those years. But inside, it was so nice to be able to have somebody in your life, to share your life with. You know, the idea of having somebody, and actually, my life started getting better, even though everything in my life was getting worse. My inside life really started getting better.

01:09:05      **Janet Kahn**

Through that attachment?

01:09:07      **Jim Zipper**

Just through the attachment. Through the attachment. Through the attachment of having somebody else in my life, part of my life, to share my life with. And it's amazing, because I know today that today that people should have somebody in their life. I mean, at least I believe they should, myself included, you know? Because my experience tells me that you should. I don't know how true it is, but I mean, it's the way I feel about it. I don't know how much you need to feel about it. But that made my life start to get better. You know, the loneliness, the isolation, the hate, the hurt, all started to get a little better, even though there was all kinds of outside trouble happening. And basically, David was a very destructive person. Not that he was any worse than most people. He just, I mean, he came from a terrible childhood. A real abusive childhood. So those years were really tough years. But they weren't, they were still better years for me in my getting a little bit to be able to get out and be with another human being. And I really needed that.

01:10:14      **Jim Zipper**

So then, when I got to be, like, 40... By the time I got to be 40, first of all, there was so many terrible things that happened. I mean, I had my first suicide attempt when I was probably 23. Direct result of the Catholic Church. Direct result. I mean, no question about it. My life was terrible anyway. The military years really screwed me up. Here I was living with all these guys for four friggin' years and scared stiff of having sex with them. And, you know... By the time I got out of there, I mean, I was already a wreck. And I... Somewhere along the next year or so, I sought out the Catholic Church a priest.

01:11:04      **Jim Zipper**

Well, I ended up with the nicest Italian man, a nice, jovial Italian priest. Oh, my God, did he create havoc in my life. We actually started a gay organization back in 1961 or so called HA, Homosexuals Anonymous. And as a matter of fact, John Rechy, you know John Rechy who has the books... Well, John Rechy has probably half a dozen books and a play out. We met him in New York because this Father Serino had just started this Homosexuals Anonymous, he and I. And it was our intent to get a group of homosexuals and to enlighten the clergy on homosexuality. But John Rechy somehow or other read... I don't know, he read an article about Serino and us, or a priest told him about it. And he contacted Serino, and we went to New York to see this guy. Well, a friend of mine... In fact, the kid I grew up with, Glenn, and I went with Father Serino to see John Rechy. But when we got there, Serino decided that he ought to go alone because he didn't tell this John Rechy that he John Rechy that he was bringing us with him and he wanted him and he wanted to feel him out about the Homosexuals Anonymous first. So when Serino was out talking with him, Glenn and I are in bed having sex, and then here we are with this... And we're saying, oh Jesus, what's this all about? So that...

01:12:33      **Jim Zipper**

But you see, the problem that happened was I was under the impression Serino was this nice, loving man who was very accepting of the fact that we were gay and that he was going to help inform these people that these people that it was okay for us to be us. But that isn't what he was doing. What he was doing was he was going to... He was really tolerating us, you know? Until he could get the time and... Until we, whatever, would finally come to see that we were living wrong. I didn't know that's what he was doing, but that's what he was doing anyway.

01:13:12      **Jim Zipper**

But by the time I was 23 or 24, anyway, I left his place one night. He used to work at the Holy Cross Cathedral. And I stopped and had a couple of beers and and thought about all the things he had told me. And I went up to

that friggin' Dover Street MTA station and I and I went down in front of that fuckin' train and I went to my first, you know, mental hospital. Boston Mental Health Center, something like that. It used to be in Boston. And a direct result of that stupid religion. You know, the guilt, the shame. That pretty well drove me away from him.

01:13:53        **Steve Harrington**

He originally told you that he was supportive of you?

01:13:59        **Jim Zipper**

I don't know that he told me anything. I assumed that's what he was doing. I don't know what he told me. I couldn't tell you today. I mean, I wouldn't know what he told me. I was under the impression that he was, that he understood me and liked me and cared about me. And, of course, he did those things, I'm sure, but with the intent that, oh, I would learn someday to be, or to live right. In other words, I was a sinner. He was going to reform. That's what I know today. It wasn't what I thought he was doing. I thought we were teaching other people. Like, we used to go and talk to groups of priests, you know. We would actually sit and talk to them and talk about my life and what's going on. And I thought our intent was just to enlighten them as to it was okay for me to be me. Their intent was to inform the priests, is to let them learn how screwed up a gay person was, I think, is what they were really doing. And, therefore, be more tolerant of them, be more understanding, not more accepting. Yeah. But be more, you know.

01:15:03        **Janet Kahn**

Yeah. Pitiful.

01:15:05        **Jim Zipper**

Yeah. Yeah. And I said, oh, are you shitting me? But I didn't know that for years either.

01:15:11        **Steve Harrington**

Do you remember why you first went to Serino?

01:15:13        **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, because I wanted, um... Well, I wanted to get rid of some of the guilt about being a gay man. I mean, I was... I never liked myself as a gay man. I mean, I hated myself. I mean, I didn't hate sex. I didn't hate guys. I just hated the idea that I had this terrible belief that it wasn't okay to be me. And I really believed it wasn't okay or it was the wrong thing to do. And yet I was doing it and I wanted to do it. And I mean... And that gives you a good conflict.

01:15:58        **Steve Harrington**

Uh-huh.

01:15:59        **Janet Kahn**

It does. Yeah.

01:16:04        **Jim Zipper**

So you're asking me why I drank, I guess. And so I figured that... I mean, I drank like a drunk from the start. I only drank, like, until I got into the service probably two or three times. And every time I got drunk... And I got drunk because, I mean, I just didn't like being gay. I wanted to escape, and I escaped for years. It was terrible.

01:16:34        **Steve Harrington**

You know, when you made that suicide attempt and then you went to the mental health clinic or was it an inpatient center?

01:16:41 **Jim Zipper**

Oh, yeah.

01:16:43 **Steve Harrington**

How did they treat you, being gay?

01:16:48 **Jim Zipper**

I really don't know. There was another gay guy there at the, whatever it was, Boston Mental Health Center. And he was an effeminate gay guy that was, like... Either he told everybody he was gay or everybody knew he was gay. I don't know which. And, like, I wanted to go to bed with him.

01:17:13 **Steve Harrington**

This was a patient?

01:17:14 **Jim Zipper**

This was a patient, yeah. But I was too afraid. He wanted to. And I was afraid that someone would find out who I was or do something to me or whatever. I mean, I was so full of fears at those points that I don't even know what the fears were.

01:17:36 **Steve Harrington**

So they didn't know you were gay? The professionals?

01:17:38 **Jim Zipper**

I'm sure I'm sure they did.

01:17:39 **Jim Zipper**

I'm sure they did. I mean, I'm sure I even told them that it was. But I think I was more afraid of the other patients, of people who were... I don't know what I was afraid of.

01:17:52 **Janet Kahn**

Where are we now was afraid of. Where are we now in your life? Are we in your 30s or your 20s?

01:17:56 **Jim Zipper**

Well, the first suicide attempt was when I was 23 or 24. That was this event.

01:18:05 **Janet Kahn**

And at that point you'd started to go to the Light House and the Punchbowl?

01:18:09 **Jim Zipper**

Oh, yeah, I had been to the bars for a long time.

01:18:11 **Janet Kahn**

And did you have a circle of friends who were gay at that point?

01:18:14 **Jim Zipper**

No, I never had any friends. Never had any. I mean, I didn't allow myself to because, first of all, I didn't have any straight friends because I just basically knew they didn't like me. And if they knew who I was, they wouldn't want to be with me. So I didn't make any straight relationships or straight friendships. In the gay world, I would have sex with people for a night or two nights at the most, probably. I'd see someone twice at the most. And then I'd be too full of guilt and I wouldn't see them again. So it was just like going to the bars and going with anybody, anytime. It didn't really matter. Or going to any place. It didn't even matter.

01:18:57        **Janet Kahn**

So when you ended up in Boston Mental Health or or whatever the place is, there was not a circle of friends for you to turn to?

01:19:06        **Jim Zipper**

No. No, I never had any friends. David was the first person that I ever let into my life. Including my friend Glenn. I mean, he wasn't really a friend. He was somebody I grew up with when I was a gay kid. But he wasn't close to me. And I wasn't close to him.

01:19:21        **Janet Kahn**

When you talk about having come out to this group of folks who you used to drink with at the neighborhood bar, whatever that was, were those folks that was, were those folks that you considered to be friends or not?

01:19:32        **Jim Zipper**

Well, you see, I was... I guess I figured that maybe by now they really know who I am and they really like me anyway. That wasn't the case. When I told them, they let me know they weren't. They didn't want me around no more. That was very painful. That was probably one of the couple of most painful events in my life. I mean, that really... Any attempts I ever had to reach out would definitely stop then. I mean, that was the end of it. Because I really did believe that these people knew I was gay and that they were just not saying anything because I didn't say anything. And that all I had to do was just explain it to them and air would get over with and we'd be all friends and I'd be fine and we'd be all friends and I'd be fine and I could be in my gay self-identity. But that wasn't what happened. And that was probably the what happened. And that was probably the most painful single event in my life.

01:20:27        **Janet Kahn**

I want to ask you... This is going to change the topic somewhat, but you had mentioned a gay couple who...

01:20:35        **Jim Zipper**

Wait a minute. That sounds like something...

01:20:38        **Jim Zipper**

It's just truck directed or whatever. I don't know what

01:20:42        **Janet Kahn**

It's fine.

01:20:44        **SPEAKER\_03**

One thing I want to ask you about was this couple that you had mentioned, a black man and a white man who were together. And that made me realize that I have no sense of sort of whether or not the Lighthouse and Fran's were totally white bars, whether black or Hispanic folks also went to the bars, what kind of relationships those folks had, whether that was an issue or not an issue.

01:21:10        **Jim Zipper**

I don't particularly think it was an issue. I don't know of any Hispanic people that went to the bars just because apparently they just either felt rejected or or they chose not to be there. At least back years ago. Today I think there's probably more there now than ever. I don't really know that. I think I've seen some in there. Black people... The only black person I can think of is this... Is this one guy in the couple? I don't remember any other black men being there. But it's...

01:21:54 **Jim Zipper**

I don't particularly think Fran's was that discriminating. I don't think it even intended to be. I just think that they just didn't... I don't think many black people acknowledge the fact that they're gay, period. I know a lot of men that I swear are gay that are black or Hispanic, and I never see them in any place acknowledging the fact that they are. So the only black man that I know of was... What was his name?

01:22:23 **Janet Kahn**

Albert.

01:22:24 **Jim Zipper**

Albert. Albert Metzinger. Albert one time blew me right at the bar. I mean, I couldn't believe it. I was so drunk and he... I mean, I was standing at the bar and I said, I don't believe this. So I was doing... This is good old Albert. He was too much. But at any rate... Yeah, Albert was...

01:22:52 **Steve Harrington**

A slight diversion. Albert blew me.

01:22:58 **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, too much. But yeah, the best of my knowledge there was no problems with being black or Hispanic. It was just...

01:23:10 **Janet Kahn**

But not many men or women who were...

01:23:12 **Jim Zipper**

Not many that I know of. I don't remember seeing any of them.

01:23:17 **Janet Kahn**

When you talked about there being fights at Fran's, and you were saying that the fights were mostly between women, were there any issues between straight folks and the folks who were at Fran's? Were there ever straight folks who came to gawk? Or were there ever fights outside the bar? Or...

01:23:37 **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, if there was a fight that was amongst men, it it was almost always a straight man and a gay man. Almost always. I've never been in a fight there, but I got a couple of black eyes there from straight guys. Who simply would... In fact, one night I got thrown in jail for disorderly conduct because a straight guy punched me in the eye. I called the cops. When the cops came, I was then so pissed off, because the guy said... He says, He's a fucking faggot. And he tried to grab my balls, and I punched him. And then I was so ripshit. I was yelling and screaming at the cops, because because I was drunk anyway. And the cops threw me in jail for a night because of disorderly conduct to them. I said, I don't believe it.

01:24:26 **Steve Harrington**

This was at Fran's?



01:24:27 **Jim Zipper**

At Fran's yeah. So straight people over the years have done that with men at Fran's. Not particularly with the lesbians. If a lesbian's in a fight with a straight man, it's because the straight guy is trying to go with their girlfriend or or somebody they want to go with. That happens a lot there. Or at least it used to. I don't think it happens so much today. In fact, it's very few straight people will go there today. Years ago, there used to be a lot of straight men who men who would come in looking for the lesbians to go home with. And unfortunately, a lot of lesbians would go home with them. So therefore, with them. So therefore, it kind of kept it going. Which means it was okay with me. And of course, a lot of the gay men would go home with them, too. Which was okay with me, too. But both of those things would have been better had they not happened, as far as I'm concerned. It would have been a nicer bar.

01:25:21 **Janet Kahn**

What about the relationship with the cops? How did the cops view the Lighthouse or Fran's Did they ever pull raids? During election times?

01:25:28 **Jim Zipper**

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. They used to pull raids, yeah. They used to really piss me off. I used to yell and scream at them. I get thrown in jail.

01:25:43 **Jim Zipper**

I remember a cop. I don't know who he is. He was on the vice squad. I, I never did know who he was. Like I said, I was so drunk so much at the time. He came in there one night. He was looking for somebody. I'm convinced, but I don't really know, that he was looking for some guy to give him a blowjob. I told him to screw. And then I realized he was a cop. And he showed me his identification. And he showed me his gun. And he went through the whole thing. He was going to shoot me. And I said, oh my good Jesus. Now what did I do? But that was very seldom. But they were in there a lot. The vice squad were in there a lot. Especially when the bar was a big place. It used to be a real big place. Real active. Oh, they were a pain in the ass.

01:26:41 **Steve Harrington**

What years was it most active?

01:26:43 **Jim Zipper**

I would say in the 60s. All the way through the 60s. And definitely in the early 70s. Probably up until 72. I don't exactly know what happened. It almost died out. For a period of a couple of years. I don't really know why. I guess because people just became more easier for them to get into town, gradually, and they started going into the bigger gay bars. I don't really know why.

01:27:18 **Jim Zipper**

Used to have a softball team there. Bowling team. The lesbians were really active in it. Yeah.

01:27:31 **Steve Harrington**

And did they play other bars?

01:27:34 **Jim Zipper**

No. No, they just had a team there.

01:27:47 **Janet Kahn**

So I'm trying to get a sense of sort of what role the Lighthouse or Fran's in particular played in the lives of gay folks. And also bars in general. If you think back to the 60s, what would your life have been like if there hadn't

been the Lighthouse or Fran's?

01:27:59 **Jim Zipper**

Well, I suppose I would have went into Boston to a gay bar. I mean, I was, by then, like from the time I got out service, I was alienated enough from straight people that I wouldn't have gone to gone to straight bars, generally speaking. It would have been gay bars. And Fran's was very nice to me because... And I mean, I spent all my time at Fran's .

01:28:39 **Janet Kahn**

What does that mean? Seven nights a week?

01:28:42 **Jim Zipper**

Seven nights a week. Saturday and Sunday afternoons and nights. I mean I lived there. And I did that for probably like five of the years between 60 and 70. The rest of the time I spent in Sporters. I went through a phase where I spent a lot of time in Sporters. A real lot of time. In fact, I moved right across the street from Sporters years ago.

01:29:13 **Jim Zipper**

Right next to the Holiday Inn where it is now. So between those two bars, basically. Because the Punch Bowl went out apparently probably around 61 or so. It wasn't around long after I started going to gay bars. I used to go to Jacques' a lot. I liked that. Jacques' used to be a beautiful place. Many years ago, I don't believe it to be true today, but many years ago they used to have a woman who sang there. She was really good. She sang there for years. And they had a huge crowd there. Upstairs and downstairs. They used to pack that place. And those were the big bars I mainly went to in town. Although I used to go to Mario's some. I used to go to 12 Congress some. But mostly Jacque as'nd Sporters.

01:30:07 **Janet Kahn**

Did you sense that a lot of the folks who went to these bars, say particularly Fran's and the Lighthouse, drank as much as you did? Didn't drink as much? Was drinking a big part of bar life?

01:30:27 **Jim Zipper**

I don't know that I know. There was a certain group of people who probably would come in at 10 o'clock at night leave at midnight. That were in there to cruise, dance, whatever and then leave. Which was I think probably very smart. There was a crew like myself that typically would go after work and stay until the bar was closed. Drunk or not drunk. And very seldom would I leave the bar sober. I don't know if I've ever left a bar sober for years. But I spent my life. How many people were like that? I would say for instance in the Lighthouse probably 20 people that I knew that that pretty well lived there.

01:31:17 **Janet Kahn**

Guys from the Lighthouse? Guys from Sporters?

01:31:21 **Jim Zipper**

Most people I know are from the Lighthouse. The first person I knew to commit suicide was from Sporters. It was a Puerto Rican guy. I used to have sex with him but I didn't really care to. It just. It was a person I got to be a friend with. And that part of the Sporters crowd typically would go home with somebody and so he happened to be the one. So he would come home with us once in a while. But his name was Jose. Excuse me.

01:31:54 **Janet Kahn**

Okay, so what we're talking about was the whole phenomenon of suicide in the gay community. I'm interested to hear about what you have to say actually because one of the women that Pat and I interviewed recently also started talking about the number of of gay folks that she knew and used to hang out with who now are dead

either through suicide or accidental ODs or got killed outside a gay bar or whatever. And that was the first time in thinking about bringing some light into this project that it really struck me as an issue.

01:32:40 **Jim Zipper**

It's a big issue. Like I said, the first person that that I knew to commit suicide was Jose. I don't know how he could do it. He put his head in an oven and gassed himself to death. I don't know how he could do that. How he could stay there. How he would be able to stay there. But he was a regular at at Sporters all the time. And I was always suicidal anyway so I anyway so I was kind of bothered.

01:33:10 **Janet Kahn**

To see someone do it.

01:33:12 **Jim Zipper**

To see someone do it, yeah.

01:33:12 **Janet Kahn**

How old were you when Jose committed suicide?

01:33:17 **Jim Zipper**

I lived in by Sporters probably in 65, 66. So it was a couple of years. Actually, if that's the case he case he must have been the second person. No, no. He was the first person. Then in the Lighthouse there was this real nice young guy that I liked very much. I think his name was Bobby Green. And like he was 20. And what he did is he got a couple of fifths of vodka, went up to his grandmother's grave at the cemetery in the middle of winter and drank himself until he passed out and froze to death. And I said, what a strange boy. And of course he was the kind of a kid that always talked about his grandmother. He loved his grandmother. And the funny thing was he was from Fran's and this must have been the someplace in the mid 60s. In the middle of the 70s another kid from Fran's, John [Jock] DeWitt [lived on Ober St., in Beverly], he did the exact same thing with his grandmother in the graveyard. Drank himself to death right in the middle of the... They didn't find him for three days, frozen solid. I said, wow.

01:34:47 **Steve Harrington**

Did these two guys know each other?

01:34:51 **Jim Zipper**

No, because John was too young to have Billy or Bobby. I can't remember what his name was Wayne. He was like ten years earlier. And they were both probably about 20. And John [Jock] DeWitt was probably 23 or 24. 23 or 24. From a nice family. His father was a pilot, a commercial pilot. And he had, you know, he was just a real nice person. He was Never. Everybody liked him. He was very social.

01:35:24 **Janet Kahn**

What did you think when you heard that he committed suicide? Why did you think he committed suicide?

01:35:29 **Jim Zipper**

He committed suicide because his father didn't like him being gay. That's basically the reason why he committed suicide. All the other things might have added on to it. The social outcast. Basically it was his father who caused him to commit suicide. In Bobby, I mean in John DeWitt's case. In Bobby Green's case I don't really know what happened to him. He just got overwhelmed.

01:35:55 **Jim Zipper**

There was another guy that, David's best friend when I met David, I'd say he was 18, his his best friend was 18. Ronnie I met. Ronnie had a real tragic life. He was a kid like David who had a tough starting of his life. And they were two real nice looking young gay kids. Real kind of real pretty real just nice gay kids. And Ronnie got involved with with some guy who caught him passing counterfeit money and went to prison for a couple of years. And then he went on to drugs with another person. And I used to see Ronnie on Union Street here. In the middle of winter with nothing on but like a women's shirt and some shorts or or something else. Running around trying to get drugs or whatever he was doing. And he finally overdosed about maybe 5 years ago now. And you know they didn't find him for about him for about a freaking week. And when they did they did they contacted his family and his family wouldn't even take the body. They wanted nothing to do with him. It was so It was so cruel. And he was a beautiful young kid. I mean a nice person nice personality. He wasn't like that. He was a real drug addict really, really sick case.

01:37:49 **Jim Zipper**

David my ex-lover two years ago spent ago spent the winter in the streets of Boston. Oh it was cruel. I used to go down and talk to him. God it was painful. I mean he'd have I mean he'd have blisters all over his feet. No shoes, no clothes. He'd be frozen. Buy him a meal. It was terrible.

01:38:13 **Jim Zipper**

That was probably one of the most painful things in my life was dealing with David those two years ago. He went to San Francisco, thank God, but I think he's back. It's tragic. Because I kept telling him. Since we broke up five years ago he's called me like once a month and I told him I said David stay in San Francisco. Don't come back here. What the hell are you coming back here now for another winter? But I'm pretty sure he came back. And if he's anything like he was when he left he's in for another another tough winter. It's really terrible. God. I mean he was so sick.

01:39:03 **Janet Kahn**

Physically sick?

01:39:04 **Jim Zipper**

Physically sick. Emotionally sick. Didn't know what to do. Didn't know where to go. Didn't know who to turn to. And that happens, I believe that happens, to a lot of gay men. Oh I don't know about lesbians. I really don't necessarily I don't know at all about lesbians. I don't that. I don't know of any lesbians who have who have been that destitute and and killed themselves. I I don't know if it's common or not. I just don't know. Gay men I know a lot of gay men. It's tragic.

01:39:46 **Jim Zipper**

I, should have died the last time I tried to commit suicide. And I ended up in the hospital. And it was the most horrifying experience. And you know I was so crazy at the time that that I really believed that God was keeping me alive. I used to believe in a God then. That God was keeping me alive to punish me. And therefore there was no need to of me committing suicide anymore because because I wasn't going to make it anyway. It was just going to get more and more painful. And I stopped committing suicide after that. I was 29. Just before I met David. That was the last time I ever did it because it just wasn't worth it. I wasn't managing to do it. I don't know. I guess I was so crazy by the time I tried to commit suicide crazy usually that I didn't even know how to do it right. And I swear that's true. It's the weirdest thing. I guess I know I'm very glad today that I didn't. But that wasn't true for years. I wanted to be dead for years and years.

01:40:52 **Janet Kahn**

During that time were you aware at all of there being a gay liberation movement? I'm trying to think when was Stonewall

01:40:58 **Steve Harrington**

69.

01:40:58        **Janet Kahn**

and when did that fit in?

01:41:02        **Jim Zipper**

Not really. I didn't particularly know about Stonewall. I knew more about the Mattachine Society. Which unfortunately when I wanted to get involved in it was like in the late 50s and early 60s. It was in that era that McCarthy had made it a bad name and had said it was a communist organization. And I sort of believed that. I mean I did believe that. I did believe that. And so I never contacted those people. Had I done that probably it might have changed my life. Who knows?

01:41:46        **Janet Kahn**

So that's about the time that you were in the service? Or just coming out.

01:41:50        **Jim Zipper**

Fifty-six to sixty.

01:41:53        **Janet Kahn**

How did you know about the Mattachine Society? How was it publicized? How did people hear about it?

01:41:59        **Jim Zipper**

I saw it in a magazine of when of some type when I was in the service. It used to be publicized in I don't know what type of magazine I could have seen it in. It might have been a weekly paper type. It might have been a magazine. I don't know. I have a hunch it was something like excuse me I don't know I honestly have no idea. It was in a regular publication whatever it was. Something that I had in an Air Force base in in those days when I was scared to do things.

01:42:35        **Steve Harrington**

Where were you in the Air Force?

01:42:37        **Jim Zipper**

In Colorado. Lowry Air Force Base for about four years, there.

01:42:41        **Steve Harrington**

And that's where you heard about the Mattachine Society?

01:42:44        **Jim Zipper**

Yeah, I don't exactly know how but yeah. And I managed to read enough about it somehow, I really don't know through what, to know that it was a gay organization and what it was about but I also knew that it was a communist organization, which isn't necessarily true, but in those days I believed it to be true. And that was the only thing that I knew of other than the Daughters of Bilitis?

01:43:12        **Janet Kahn**

Bilitis.

01:43:15        **Jim Zipper**

Bilitis, yeah Daughters of Bilitis. I knew of I knew of them. But I wouldn't, I don't know if I would have been able I to approach them anyway. I think I would have been but I don't really know. I mean I was just too full of guilt that I might not be able to. I mean I think I would have been because I think I wanted some support in

being a gay person and I couldn't seem to find that anywhere. I couldn't find it through doctors and I couldn't find it through religious people and I just couldn't seem to find it.

01:43:54        **Janet Kahn**

And you didn't find it at the bar?

01:43:58        **Jim Zipper**

No because by the time I because by the time I actually by the time I got out of the service I mean I spent my four years in the Air Force in the Air Training Command the first two years I went to school the the last two years I taught and I was a drunk.

01:44:15        **Jim Zipper**

By the time I got out of the service I was really a drunk. I did nothing but either work either be at school or be studying or be drinking. I mean there I didn't have any money I didn't go anywhere I didn't do anything and the money I had I went to the beer that I drank when I was on the base whatever you paid for, almost nothing I mean if I could drink I was drinking. It's not that I drank all the time because I was afraid to. I always made it to work in the Air Force. I mean I was already a real drunk so by the time I got to going to like Sporters or the Light House I mean I would get drunk. I don't think I ever left the place... I don't know if in years . . . I don't know what ever happened to me. I mean I'm sure I made a lot of friends but I'm sure that they they grew to be unhappy with me real fast I mean they just didn't want someone who was drunk all the time and I didn't really want to be with them anyway when I was sober. When I was drunk it was like, uh.

01:45:37        **Janet Kahn**

How did you get along with your friends when you were sober?

01:45:37        **Jim Zipper**

I didn't like myself as a gay person and I didn't like them either. Unfortunately I didn't like straight people either I didn't like anybody and that was and that was very true so so I made it really hard. I think that's pretty typical of people back in those days I don't know in those days I don't know how far they get carried away. There was so many pressures telling you that it wasn't okay to be gay. Which is all stupid. I mean at that point it wasn't stupid it was real in my life I mean I basically was brought up with a family that to the best of my knowledge really loved me. My mother did. My brothers and sisters to the best of my knowledge did. But they really didn't make it okay for me to be gay. I mean it wasn't like they had their arms out saying oh that's nice.

01:46:37        **Janet Kahn**

At what point did you come out to them?

01:46:41        **Jim Zipper**

Well basically I think what really happened there was that they knew I was gay long long before I knew. I guess it basically happened when that suicide attempt happened when I was 23 or so. I guess they basically. If they hadn't already. My brothers and them knew I was gay. I don't know if my mother knew. If she didn't, she certainly knew then. I ended up with a psychiatrist here in Lynn. Not that he had anything to do with that place but they ended up bringing me to him. And I.. for the next 20 years almost. I mean I was always in and out of psychiatric help so my family knew what was going on all the time. My brothers and aunt knew I was gay always. They knew it from a boy that I considered myself a fag, a queer.

01:47:37        **Janet Kahn**

Did you talk to them about it?

01:47:41        **Jim Zipper**

No. Did I talk to my brothers about it in those days? No. You see no I never really talked to them about. One brother I did. My next oldest brother who's like a year older. Well that's not true I talked to my younger brother too who was killed many years ago I talked to him about it. And my next oldest brother. The other two brothers are like are like probably ones five years older than me and the other one is probably seven years older. I never I never talked to them about. My next oldest brother was a year older than me and the other was two years younger than me. We sort of grew up together. They knew.

01:48:24 **Jim Zipper**

My sister who's two years older than me she knew it and we talked many times about it. My niece and I talked a lot about it. My other sister who's quite older like ten years older the only thing that I've ever heard from her was one time Dave and I was at her house and she says well maybe someday you'll get over this and you'll find a nice girl. And that was the last time we ever went to her house. So I never really talked to her about it. But yeah it was just the two brothers that were my age and my one sister talked to her about it. My mother knew. She would say to me things like you know I really wish you could find a nice guy. But we never really sat and talked about my being gay and how would she feel. I don't know whether that was due to. In the past five years since I've been sober and changing my life I don't know whether that was due to my inability to bring up the issue with her or just the fact that I figured at her age I really sort of didn't feel like I had the right to drag her into that. And I don't know if that's just a cop out and I don't really care. I mean she's dead now but I mean like my family was not like a talkative loving, close family. They were really cold. It's funny I had thought in the past week or two I don't ever know of my mother hugging me. I don't ever know of her ever kissing me other than like going into the service or going overseas or something like that or coming home and that was just a little peck on the cheek. Never any closeness of that type. So there was never much ever said in my family about anything ever. Which is right now unfortunately.

01:50:48 **Janet Kahn**

So Steve [Harrington of The History Project] had asked you a little while ago when and why and how you started turning turning your life around how did you make the decision to get sober to stop drinking?

01:51:00 **Jim Zipper**

Well I don't really think I made the decision I think it sort of just happened. I mean I really think what happened was that I was out of control enough and and I was crazy enough and I was drunk enough and I mean there was like no place to go. I had given up for years. There was no hope and there was no future and I was just waiting to die. I was maintaining a job not because I cared about working or because I cared about anything there I just knew that the alternative to not having a job was being in the streets and so I did my best to maintain a job. I worked real hard and I tried real hard a lot of times it was hard to make it to work a lot of times.

01:51:47 **Jim Zipper**

But I tried, and like I used to in the last like the last few years before before I got sober. I used to go to town and go and see where the drunks were going so that I'd know where I was going to end up if I ever made it that long hoping that I never got to make it that long. But then what actually happened was like probably in let me see I think I got sober probably in see I think I got probably in this is 83 I must have got sober in 78 which would make this 5 no make no I must have got sober in 79. 79 because I actually won't be sober 5 years until next June. So it must have been 79.

01:52:36 **Jim Zipper**

What actually happened probably around 77 like well I mean to go back one step before that I had what was called a nervous breakdown probably 75. It wasn't a nervous breakdown any more than anyone else's is. It was simply, I simply gave up and I simply wanted to go away. I didn't want no more. And the psychiatrist who I'd seen all these years put me in the Salem Hospital probably around 75 and I stayed there I don't know maybe 2 weeks maybe a month and then I had to leave there and and I had to go back to work and I didn't want to go but I did. And in 77, I was always drunk. I was drunk on a particular night and I went up to the hospital and tried to go in. I wanted to be admitted and they wouldn't take me and I made a big scene and I yelled and screamed at them. So the next day I guess they ended up putting me in a, I don't know they did it that night, they put me in a room or something anyway they kept me there and the next day the psychiatrist talked to me and he said look Jim we don't have anything here for you you're not crazy you're a drunk and you won't stop drinking and we got

nothing for you. So until you decide to go to AA, don't come back here. You'll just stay here anyway. Well I yelled and screamed at that guy I called him all kinds of frigin names. Did I hate that guy!

01:54:18 **Jim Zipper**

But it started to wear on me after that, oh this guy must know something about me. Well then somewhere around then I got caught drunken driving anyway. Probably like in 78 and I had to go to that program they have here in the North Shore they have a CAST program whatever that is. I don't know it's part of the North Shore Council on Alcoholism and they made you record how many drinks you drink every day and then come in there every week and you tell them how much you drank and and how well you're doing and all this stuff. I mean I was telling them I had two or three beers and it finally started to draw on me that the lying wasn't what was bothering me, what was bothering me was that I had to lie. What was wrong with my drinking is what was finally dawning on me oh my god I mean these people are talking about a couple of drinks is too much for an evening and I'm talking about a case or whatever. If I could drink that much and a lot of times I couldn't I was getting I was getting too sick.

01:55:33 **Jim Zipper**

So between those two incidences it started dawning on me it took probably another that was probably 78, 79 another year or so.

01:55:42 **Jim Zipper**

Somehow or other at that period of time I was dropping into right around the corner here they used to have an alcohol drop-in center also run by the North Shore Council on Alcoholism which I didn't know and there was a lesbian woman in there and her name was Fran. And she used to talk to me. I'd drop in quite often. I mean I don't know this she told me this she got me one week when I was halfway sober and she says Jim would you go to an AA meeting with me my lover is sick and I want to go to the meeting and and I don't want to go alone will you will you come with me and we'll go to the gay AA meeting in town. Well I felt like I had to. She had befriended me was nice to me and I felt like I owed it to her so I had to go and I did go.

01:56:42 **Jim Zipper**

As it happened I don't particularly I mean I don't go to AA anymore. I don't even I mean I drink occasionally I'll have a I'll have a beer or something very seldom. I don't believe that alcoholism is a disease per se that you become addicted to it. But anyway AA worked for me for the first year and a half to two years. It gave me that very first meeting a guy who was in his second anniversary of AA he'd shared the meeting which means he spoke for like a half hour and he was talking about terrible life that he had and how he got sober in AA and how he'd been there two years and how well his life was going. And I actually got the hope that my life might really change and you know I didn't believe it though but I mean I sometimes I actually felt like it, like Jesus, you know if I did this, my life would change.

01:57:40 **Jim Zipper**

But you know what really did it, I mean I did stay sober and I went to AA every day three times on Saturdays and three times on Sundays and once during the week. I mean that's all I did was run, run, run, run to AA meetings and I did and I did that for the first year. Then I picked up a drink and oh my God, I became so fearful I just thought now I've lost it in fact it was coming up to my anniversary and at an anniversary in AA they give you a cake. And I didn't even know anybody in AA I mean here I was a year in AA and I didn't know a soul I was too scared, I was too inhibited I mean I used to be so terrorized by people you know. So here it was my anniversary coming up and I was supposed to be getting a cake and I didn't even know anybody and so I said I'm going to have a drink over this. Frig them an not go to any more. And I did well I had one glass of beer and I was so scared I just didn't know what to do I mean I really I guess I basically went crazy so I finally I knew people here in Lynn AA who here who I mostly went to gay AA I almost all the time went to gay AA but occasionally I'd get a Lynn meeting for some reason couldn't make it into town or whatever and I called this one guy and one guy and I said what am I going to do? So he took me up to Mount Pleasant, which is a detox. And I stayed up there for I don't know maybe three weeks and I was sober really for a year and they did wonders for me.

01:59:12 **Jim Zipper**



I met a psychiatrist named Dr. Dunoon who has [?] an organization called Psychiatric Resources and he has a woman named Wendell Zorinsky who's a psychologist that works for him and when I left the hospital he said you need some counseling and I said well fine I'm going to go and I told him I'd go into the homophile league [Homophile Union of Boston?] and he says well I don't really mean that type of counseling. I think you really need a professional counselor. And I said but you know what's the difference and he said well he what's the difference and he said well he says believe me there can be a difference it doesn't actually have to be . . . . And I said okay fine now where do I go? So he told me to try this Wendell Zorinsky. I said how am I supposed to know if you go in and somebody's going to do some help or not? So I ended up going to Wendell Zorinsky and she helped me for about a year.

02:00:01 **Jim Zipper**

Well she's obviously, I guess, what is classified as as a behaviorist with a cognitive restructuring type psychologist and she was truly beautiful and she did wonders for me in a year she honestly helped me change my life around and my second year of being sober and I was still going to AA. That whole year I switched not so much to Boston AA as to Lynn AA not because I had any problem now with being gay but because I wanted to be around more people more stable people more of a community thing so I switched from the gay rather if I can use the words I don't mean this in a derogatory way crazy community. All the meetings in town are sort of crazy because there's such a mixture of people. The suburbs are rather structured so I opted to come to Lynn most of the time and I did for the next year I went to meetings all the time and I started telling people I was gay and they started accepting me as gay and they started liking me as a gay man and I said I don't believe this it took me an awful lot of time to finally see that people really did like me and I made a lot of good friends here in AA here in Lynn and every time I made a friend I told them I was gay. Everybody knew me because when I chaired a meeting I'd tell them I was gay. It started to let me believe that it really was okay for me to be me and so that was my second year started that going.

02:01:37 **Jim Zipper**

And then my third year I got involved in what was called the Advocate Experience which no longer exists which was probably the most beautiful event in my life, which is sort of a consciousness raising for the gay community and I went there for many times and and I went to their two different type of weekends they have and it really gave me some good feelings about myself. And then I started reading a lot of books. I started off with stupid self-help books like Jess Leah's Little Biscuits and some of those other screwballs and then I ended up with like people like Albert [Havelock] Ellis' books which I think are beautiful and Rollo May's books and [Richard] Maslow's books and I started feeling oh my god I'm the one who's going to make my life what my life, what it's going to be and I'm the one who's going to love me and it all started working. And I spent a lot of time with with a lot of gay people talking, people talking, talking, talking, talking and it basically helped change my life and whatever that means. I'm not quite sure. I'm not what I used to be I don't exactly know what I'm about to be I don't know if I'm the real me or what but I'm not that person that I used to be. Terrible. How well I am or how social I am or whatever all that is I is I don't really know. I know that I don't have in fact I just started back in therapy again last week the North Shore Community Mental Health Center has a gay men's group and I've been looking for about oh three months now it just started last week I really like it. And how good I am at social interaction I don't know I have no idea I just say you know I do my best.

02:03:51 **Jim Zipper**

What I know is that wherever I'm at, I'm headed in the right direction you know? For years I was going in the wrong direction it's not true anymore that's the nicest feeling.

02:04:17 **Janet Kahn**

I would think so. I don't really have more questions to ask. Do you have questions?

02:04:18 **Steve Harrington**

No, thanks.

02:04:18 **Janet Kahn**

Do you have a sense of other things that you would want to say to convey to people what it was like to grow up in the 50s, you know, when you were gay? What it was like to be out in 60s or 70s?

02:04:33 **Jim Zipper**

I really don't know because I was out, but I was out not because I particularly chose to be out. I was out because I was drunk enough or crazy enough or whatever that I just didn't have any control. I don't think I particularly would have been out at work in the late 60s and 70s except for the fact that David basically made that happen. Now I am out by choice but then I wasn't and what I didn't know was that even though I mean I used to believe that Dave and I were a rather nice gay couple and that I really was out and in fact yeah I was sort of out in the community. I mean everybody who knew us or knew me or knew David knew we were a gay couple but, my god, I mean I wasn't out to me. I mean I didn't love me. I didn't me I didn't care about me. So I mean there's a total difference in what out is to a person. To me, it doesn't matter to me what out out there is, it's how I feel about me. That out, well it's amazing.

02:05:47 **Jim Zipper**

How much do I really love me being a gay man Jim? I think I like me a real lot and that's beautiful. I never liked me for that.

02:06:04 **Jim Zipper**

And I'm very grateful because I have a lot of nice things. For a person with my background, I could very easily be some of these poor souls that I see that I know. And instead I mean I got a nice job, I got a nice car, I got a nice home, got nice friends. I'm very lucky and I'm really grateful... There's no way. I don't know how all those things came about, but I'm sure glad. I really am. I mean it's nice to be alive today it's nice to be me. It's a long ways from where I came from. I like it. And that's why I mean I really do plan to spend a good portion of my life, in fact I'd like to spend it all but I just don't know how to do that, working to make the world a more beautiful place for gay people and lesbians. And that's really the only thing I have to do with my life as far as I'm concerned.

02:07:22 **Jim Zipper**

I mean it doesn't matter whether I do anything or don't do anything probably in another 30 years I'm going to die anyway. And I'm not going to be any great thing no matter what I try to do or don't try to do but the thing is that I can at least feel good about trying to make the world a more beautiful place for people like myself. And so I mean that that makes me feel good. Whether somebody gets help or not I mean I hope they can but it isn't even so much that it's the idea that I'm doing what I want to do and what I'm doing.

02:07:57 **Jim Zipper**

So the good feelings that I get are not like some people that I know who like want to become active in the gay and lesbian community because they want to make some progress or do something. That's very hurtful sometimes because if something doesn't happen you feel the loss. I'm not particularly, I mean I would like to see things get better but that's not really... the thing is that that's what I want to do. I mean I can't make people go to therapy or get sober or love themselves but I can certainly try and enjoy the job of trying whether they do or don't.

02:08:41 **Jim Zipper**

I know today that you don't change someone unless they want to change. Because I know that I used to believe nobody ever cared about me. Nobody ever tried to help me and I know now there were many people in my life over the years that were breaking their hearts trying to help me and no way I wasn't listening to their bullshit for nothing. So I'm not out to change the world particularly or to make my life beautiful and in the process hopefully be a beautiful person along the way.

02:09:18 **Janet Kahn**

You're on your way.

02:09:21      **Steve Harrington**

Uh huh.

02:09:27      **Jim Zipper**

Fine. Yeah. I'm doing my best that's all I know. What else can you do?

02:09:40      **Janet Kahn**

All you can do.