

**Larry Butwinick**  
**Interviewed by Martin Meeker**  
**February 25, 2004 and March 1, 2004**  
**Imperial Court; Drag Queens, 1950s and 1960s**

**Transcribed: Loren Basham**

**MARTIN MEEKER:** So we are recording now, I think, although I am not hearing myself again. O.K. I think that we are in better shape now, but I am wondering if this, yeah, I don't know if my microphone is working as well as yours but yours is the more important one. So, Larry can you just briefly introduce yourself and just.... The way that these things usually begin is that just basic information. Full name, when and where you were born, and then we can just go back to talking like we were talking before. You can bring out the photo album and we can talk about some of the people.

**LARRY BUTWINICK:** O.K. My official name is Lawrence David Butwinick. If you count all those up it's eighteen letters. It's too much to write.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** So I sign my checks "LD." I was born in Los Angeles in the Jewish ghetto on September 6, 1924. It makes me 79, about to be 80 years old.

**MM:** That's quite a milestone.

**LB:** I don't believe it. I had a big party when I was 75, at a restaurant. Which was, people came from everywhere. It just so happened I had a friend from England visiting. My sister came from Miami. Several cousins from Los Angeles. A cousin from Seattle. And we all camped out here at the house. Bed rolls on the floor, whatever.

**MM:** Where did you have the party?

**LB:** At Roma. Aroma?

**MM:** Mmhuh.

**LB:** In Alameda.

**MM:** Yes, I've heard of that. And where there friends as well as family in attendance?

**LB:** I beg your pardon.

**MM:** Friends as well as family?

**LB:** Oh yes. I had forty people.

**MM:** Wow.

**LB:** Yeah. I don't have that many family members extant.

**MM:** Yeah. What are you going to do about your 80<sup>th</sup>?

**LB:** Well, I don't know. Maybe.... I'm not in very good shape now. I'm really not want to doing celebratory. Is that a word?

**MM:** Yes, it is.

**LB:** O.K. Because I often make up my own. We'll see.

**MM:** O.K. So we've got plenty of tape here. No, that's not tape, disk. And so I guess maybe we should start out with the photo album? O.K. let's do that.

**LB:** I started drag in the 50s.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** Actually there's a picture, a folder in there. My first drag.

**MM:** Maybe just a little background. Before you started performing drag. Were you performing it or was it just house parties, or...?

**LB:** Yeah, just parties. Yeah.

**MM:** O.K. How did you get into it? What were the circumstances the first time?

**LB:** One picture, a friend of mine who's in that picture.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** He's the one that started me. Here's a group. That's me on the end.

**MM:** And what year is this then?

**LB:** About 19...., I would say '57. I don't remember. The Baroness on one end.

**MM:** And that's Henry Von Dykoff, right?

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** And the one next to me, Tom Little is the one who got me into my first drag.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** That was my mother's dress.

**MM:** And this was at somebody's home?

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** Do you remember who's?

**LB:** Henry.

**MM:** It was at Henry's home. And at this point in time do you know where he lived?

**LB:** On Oak Street.

**MM:** On Oak Street. O.K. Are there any other people whose names you can remember from this photograph?

**LB:** I should, but I can't.

**MM:** And so, was 1957-58 about the first time you did drag at one of these soirées?

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** O.K. You said that when you moved to San Francisco in what year?

**LB:** '54.

**MM:** '54. And before that you lived in ...?

**LB:** Richmond.

**MM:** Richmond, California?

**LB:** Yeah.

**MM:** And before that?

**LB:** Berkeley.

**MM:** Berkeley. And before that?

**LB:** Many places in Berkeley.

**MM:** Many places.

**LB:** While I was going to school.

**MM:** So I should be mindful of that. We can spend as much or as little time as we want to, but perhaps you can talk a little bit about being raised in Boyle Heights and then just sort of progress and bring us up to date to what we are going to talk about in the photo album.

**LB:** Well I have always been gay. From the very tender age of like about eight.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** I was already diddling with the boy down the street. After which his mother found out and came up screaming at my mother, "don't you let him near my boy again." But I remember distinctly 'cause we had a porch with a day bed. And I remember crawling underneath the day bed with a little boy. To play.

**MM:** And your mother was approached by your neighbor? Did she come back to you and say anything?

**LB:** I don't remember that. I was always the good one. "Couldn't possibly be my boy." You know. Very protective. Too much so. She wouldn't let me have a bicycle. I might hurt myself. That kind of thing.

**MM:** There are quite a few hills in Boyle Heights, right?

**LB:** No, not where I lived. Not near Brooklyn Avenue. Its all flat there.

**MM:** Were you born when your parents lived in Boyle Heights?

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** Yes. Can you describe that neighborhood? At all? You lived there until when?

**LB:** Until I went into the service.

**MM:** And that would have been in 19....?

**LB:** '46.

**MM:** '46. O.K. So from age, from birth until about age twenty-two, you lived in Boyle Heights?

**LB:** Right.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** No when I was eighteen when I went into the service.

**MM:** Eighteen you went into the service. So that would have been, you were born in '24, that would have been '42, right?

**LB:** Earlier, yeah.

**MM:** During those first eighteen years, what do you remember about Boyle Heights?

**LB:** The wonderful delicatessens. Oh, my back, I fell. My back is not doing too well.

**MM:** Do you want to move to another spot that's more comfortable?

**LB:** I don't think so. Well, as I think I told you, unofficially before you were recording, about the synagogue, should I repeat that whole story?

**MM:** Sure.

**LB:** The 1933 earthquake. Friday night. The Sabbath. Grandpa is at the synagogue for services and the rest of us are all having dinner at my grandmother's house. My two aunts, my mother, grandma and me. And all of a sudden I started shaking. We knew enough to go under a wooden doorway. Which wouldn't fall apart. Except under extreme .... So my mother panicked and my aunt grabbed me and put me under the wooden doorway. And my mother wondered where, couldn't find me. "Where's Larry, where's Larry." "I'm over here." So we stopped shaking. We got out of there. Went outside and bricks had fallen from the chimney. So we said, oh, God, how's grandpa. And also one aunt was missing. She was at a theater, the Paramount Theater, I remember. And when she finally got home, she said, oh, it wasn't bad except that huge chandelier kept waving back and forth and back and forth. We wondered if it was going to come crashing down. But it didn't. Then grandpa finally got home. He said, oh, everything was fine. The only thing that I was worried about was that a big beam would come down and crush my new homburg hat. And we all laughed at that, of course. He was a great jokester. And a very natty dresser. Very.

**MM:** Did you admire him for that?

**LB:** Oh, yes.

**MM:** Did you try to emulate him then?

**LB:** To some extent, yeah. In the dressing.

**MM:** What was your grandfather's name?

**LB:** Morris Kaplan. And he had a lovely pocket watch, which I inherited. With a chain and fob. Which I gave to a younger cousin, now. And I had his ring and that's a long story, how it was stolen. Shall I tell the story?

**MM:** By all means.

**LB:** Well, I had just come back from a trip, I don't remember where. I used to travel a lot. A friend of mine was picking me up. We went into a bar at the Hungry Hunter in Oakland. There's banquet kind of seating all upholstered things on one wall. And I had put my shoulder bag so that the top of it, which would fit on my shoulder, was faced away from me. And my friend and I were busy talking about what had happened on the trip and I turned around and my bag's gone. And there had been a couple, man, woman, sitting next, not far away. So called the police, and yeah, they had noticed the people had left without paying. And got out of there in a hurry. And my jewelry was in there. I had a wonderful Lapis ring I got in Mexico. Beautiful ring. Could not duplicate it and it cost me \$50.00. Big deal. But it was lovely Lapis. So I had one made with the insurance money. But it was never the same, I sold it. Then grandpa's ring, which had, it was all smoothed off, his initials. So I had my initials put on and a little diamond I had in a raised setting. It was an eye on there. And I had a high, if you know what that is. It's a symbol of Life to Life. L'jigm. (???) The toast in Jewish is L'jigm, to life. And it's little symbol is call the high. It looks like an "h".

**MM:** Oh, O.K.

**LB:** Except it doesn't have a cross piece. The cross piece is at the top, rather than the middle. And I had that with a chain. And a wonderful gold type tie clip. All antique. And I don't remember what else now. Anyway, that's a digression.

**MM:** Did you enjoy collecting jewelry before or after you participated in any of these drag parties?

**LB:** Oh, I always like jewelry.

**MM:** Was that an added benefit when you started doing some of these drag parties and you got to go out in more outlandish jewelry?

**LB:** Well, it was a different scene. Female jewelry as opposed to male jewelry. So yeah, this much.

**MM:** It's almost totally different.

**LB:** Mmhuh.

**MM:** So I assume you graduated high school when you were 18, about 1942. Did you enlist or were you drafted?

**LB:** Drafted.

**MM:** And what branch did you go into?

**LB:** The Army.

**MM:** And how long was your service?

**LB:** Till 1948. And I went through many things during that time. First I was assigned to an office, 'cause I had done office work before.

**MM:** Where were you stationed then?

**LB:** In Colorado. Fort Carson. It was camp then, Camp Carson. Oh, that's and interesting little thing. Not that Camp Carson was brand new, and they wanted to do some planting around the barracks. So they handed me a pick. I took about three picks and I passed out. I was so embarrassed. Yeah. This poor little nelly, whatever. Yeah. Who can't even do a little picking. Then a doctor assured me it was the altitude. I had always lived at sea level. So I didn't feel quite so bad. Then, while I was there, my uncle was a vaudeville entertainer. Trombone. And my aunt, his wife, did a little comedy thing with him. Where he would get his tongue stuck in the mouth-piece, that kind of slapstick. Anyway, they were in a USO show and they were appearing very close to where I was and the only thing was, our battalion had been quarantined for measles. All these kids end up in the service. But he got me out of there to see the show. And one of my first gay experiences occurred.... As a matter of fact, I think it was the first where someone approached me. The stage.... Oh, they went to enter at the officer's club. I was not, I was a private, so I couldn't go. So he put me in the hands of the theater manager. Who was a sergeant.

**MM:** Oh, he was, O.K.

**LB:** So I went to the noncom's club for dinner. And after dinner we saw the show.... Oh, while we were waiting for all the guys to all line up outside, there was a little window in the door. Little skinny thing. I was just looking to see who was out there and what was going on. And meanwhile I feel a hand in my crotch. Scared the hell out of me.

**MM:** Mmhuh.

**LB:** Actually, I ran all over that theater and he was right behind me. We could have got points for the track that we'd been at. I finally let him catch me.

**MM:** Did you know what he wanted?

**LB:** No. Except at that point just to feel me. But later we got, he had a little room that he lived in in the theater. So after he said how about you staying here with me tonight. Ohhh, I protested. No, no, not that.

**MM:** Did you know, one thing I am always interested in when people talk about their first sexual experiences.... Because we are not taught this is how you have sex with you, like other men or boys. I was sort of interest in this process of how people learn and how people respond to these new experiences. I guess when this guy asked you to spend the night, was it quite clear to you at the time that that was going to involve some sort of sexual encounter?

**LB:** Oh yeah, that's the way he started; by groping me.

**MM:** Have you ever heard or learned about homosexuality before then?

**LB:** Oh, well, yeah. I had heard about it.

**MM:** Do you know from what sources, do you remember?

**LB:** No.

**MM:** It must just have been people talking, do you think, or did you ever read anything?

**LB:** No, I didn't read anything.

**MM:** And so this guy provided you with your first introduction to it?

**LB:** Ahuh.

**MM:** Was there any talking? Did he, was it just a physical experience or did he tell you or share any ideas with you?

**LB:** I don't remember any conversation. Actions speak louder than....

**MM:** Sure. Especially some actions. Did you fear getting caught..

**LB:** No. Because he was, he secured the building. In other words, if he hadn't been the only one around, I would have been, had trepidations. But he was it.

**MM:** When you said that you, you described yourself as "nellie," in relation to the gardening incident, and that you were also serving in a sort of white collar job and a clerical job in the armed forces. I've read certain accounts of people who were drafted into the army and upon being drafted they look at certain people and they think that maybe they would be more appropriate in clerical jobs rather than the front lines. Do you think that had happened to you? And do you think that sexuality had anything to do with it?



**LB:** No. Sexuality didn't have. I don't remember. Of course, through interviews they decided all of this. No, I think just my qualifications. I could type pretty well. Of course, you know, you take a test, aptitude. And I scored high in that area. So, I think that's really what determines it.

**MM:** Were you ever asked during the induction process is you like girls or if you didn't like girls or anything like that?

**LB:** I don't remember that.

**MM:** You don't remember having to lie or ....?

**LB:** No, not like "don't tell," or whatever. No. We didn't have any of that. It was assumed that everybody is straight.

**MM:** O.K. Did you ever come across any problems in relation to that. I mean was there ever any accusations during your time in the service, or...?

**LB:** No. As a matter of fact, I found a couple of married men who wanted to play.

**MM:** I have heard that wasn't so uncommon. So after, what was it called, Camp Collins?

**LB:** Camp Carson.

**MM:** Camp Carson in Colorado, where did you go?

**LB:** Louisiana for maneuvers.

**MM:** Mnhuh. You roll your eyes when you say that.

**LB:** It was a horrible place. Because it was winter time. And the ice forming on the trees and ice storms, you know. Sleet storms, I guess. All night long you're in a pup tent; you can't sleep because you are afraid the limb is going to break out and hit you on the head. Because you hear the crash, crash, all around you. Fortunately that never occurred. But when you wake up in the morning and you look out, a single blade of grass or weed is an inch in diameter from the ice. Terrible. It was a horrible place. It was near Shreveport, Louisiana, is of course, the training ground. In the summer I guess they did tanks there. Where the hot dry, I don't know. Oh, I was glad to get out of there. Then we went to Fort Ord.

**MM:** In Monterey?

**LB:** And while we bivouacked out there to...

**MM:** What was that name again?

**LB:** Bivouacked.

**MM:** I don't know what that means. I've heard it before, but....

**LB:** It means camping.

**MM:** Oh, O.K.

**LB:** That is we were in tents, pup tents.

**MM:** It's an acronym for something though isn't it?

**LB:** I don't know. It might be. It means you're sleeping in a tent, at least in army terms.

**MM:** And was this the first time, well, I guess you had been in Southern California. was this your first time in Northern California?

**LB:** \_\_\_?\_\_\_ works, 1940 if it is in here. That was before. I had come up to the fair.

**MM:** Oh, on Treasure Island?

**LB:** Mmhuh.

**MM:** And you came with your family, because you must have been....

**LB:** Just an uncle, one uncle.

**MM:** And did you stay in San Francisco?

**LB:** We stayed with my cousins who lived there.

**MM:** Do you have any impressions of the fair? Is there anything in particular you remember about it.

**LB:** Oh, the Tower of the Sun.

**MM:** That was the big center piece, right.

**LB:** Yeah, right. I don't remember much else. The fountains. Rides don't impress me any more than when I went to Disney World. I didn't go to Disney World, I went to Epcott. I didn't even want to see Disney World.

**MM:** Didn't want to see the built environment?

**LB:** Well of course the little villages made as they were in the original country.

**MM:** And they had that as well at the fair too, right?

**LB:** Oh, yeah, I guess they did. Did you go; you weren't old enough? No.

**MM:** No.

**LB:** Yeah, I'm sure they did. I don't remember that.

**MM:** I never had an opportunity to go to a fair. I've read a little about some of them. They sound fascinating.

**LB:** I have never been to a world's fair. Expositions.

**MM:** Yeah, that's what, expositions.

**LB:** That one in San Francisco wasn't a world's fair because New York was doing it. There could only be one. And they got the \_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_ fair.

**MM:** Yeah, it was sort of like the Olympics of the day, wasn't it; it's a big festival?

**LB:** Ahuh. And then Seattle would be the one. I went to that.

**MM:** In the '60s?

**LB:** Was an exposition. Which was some fun. I went up to the needle. Terrible, I'm drooling. It's so embarrassing.

**MM:** No worries.

**LB:** Well, it is to me. I'm and old codger, drooling. Shit. Want some more coffee?

**MM:** I'm fine, I still have half a cup. Do you want to take a break for a second?

**LB:** No.

**MM:** No. O.K. Well I'm sipping. I had a little bit of coffee on the way down as I was fighting the rain.

**LB:** Had a road drink?

**MM:** A road drink, exactly. I didn't finish the whole thing because I had to keep both hands on the steering wheel during the storm. So, was. I imagine for what must have been a good welcome diversion after going to Shreveport.

**LB:** More so, in more than one way.

**MM:** How so?

**LB:** One day my cousin shows up as the company bugler. I hadn't seen him, of course, since the war.

**MM:** By this time the war had...?

**LB:** But he and I had diddled before.

**MM:** Mmhuh.

**LB:** He lived at the beach. My aunt always took a house at the beach in summer time. And I was her care giver. Wheeling her on the wheelchair and all that. This was her future daughter-in-law's parents lived there and this was the brother of the bride. My cousin's daughter-in-law. And the brother of .... And we were out on the beach one day and went in to take a shower. And I grabbed his cock. And he liked it. So from there on, I was screwing him, whatever. And then he, oh yeah, the next encounter after all this over a period of time, we both went in the service. Then he appears at Fort Ord. So what we did, we immediately crawled into a pup tent. Hellllo, nice to see you. Nice to feel you. So that was really funny. So periodically during our stay there we'd crawl in when work didn't demand otherwise.

**MM:** You weren't concerned about people being suspicious of your time spent together? In and out.

**LB:** We didn't seem to be. And after we got out of the service, he started going with this girl.

**MM:** He did or you did?

**LB:** He did. And they married.

**MM:** Was that shocking to you?

**LB:** Ah, disappointing. 'Course, we had never kissed. I always wanted to kiss him because he had a gorgeous mouth. He would not allow that. So I figured, well, this is it. No it wasn't "it." Her father had a women's clothing manufacturing company and Bob got a job as one of the higher ups in the company, his son-in-law. He'd have to come up to San Francisco periodically on business. First thing he'd do is call me. "Come down to the Chancellor Hotel."

**MM:** No pup tents?

**LB:** So this continued for years. Then they moved the factory to El Paso and during the summer time, Momma would bring the kids, there were three of them then, to visit the grandparents in Beverly Hills. Too hot in Texas in the summer time.

**MM:** Sure.

**LB:** So Bob was left alone to fend for himself. He tried to get me to come down. I was teaching then, so I had the summer off. But I just somehow never wanted to go to Texas. So I never went; and by then I had a lover, too. So I don't remember when the last time was that we fucked.

**MM:** Did it, I'm thinking sort of late 1940s when this was happening, till how much longer it lasted. Was there a point when he started dating women and was going to get married and you learned that, that you came to a realization that you were different, that this wasn't just sex, and for him it was just sex?

**LB:** Yeah.

**MM:** How did that happen?

**LB:** No, when he wouldn't kiss me anyway.

**MM:** And you wanted to kiss him?

**LB:** It's over, yeah. Over a period of time I realized, even before the marriage announcement that he wasn't going to be "mine." You know. Which I wanted very much. So I took what crumbs I could get.

**MM:** So it was mutually satisfying then?

**LB:** The sex was, yeah.

**MM:** So, were you ever sent overseas, ...

**LB:** Oh, yeah.

**MM:** ...or did you spend the rest of the time at Fort Ord?

**LB:** No, we were sent this....

[End of tape 1, side 1]

[Tape 1, side 2, Larry Buttwinick]

**LB:** ...I never went in, D-Day.

**MM:** So now you were sent over the wounds? And your division just wasn't at \_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_.

**LB:** No.

**MM:** Seen the bullets, or....

**MM:** They held you back...

**LB:** We just sat there.

**MM:** ...for policing or something?

**LB:** Not doing anything. This was on the South Western tip, Exeter. And of course I got up to London quite a few times. And I had the address, no that was later. What was the hotel I would always go to, right down town, a big hotel. Anyway.

**MM:** What about the hotel?

**LB:** That's where I used to go. To have a drink and maybe have dinner. Just a nice hotel.

**MM:** Was there sort of a gay presence there?

**LB:** I don't remember any, no. I had very little gay contact in the service. During the course of some kind of, we were hospitalized again somewhere in England. I can't remember where. And this one married guy wanted to play crotch-grab-it. So we did that a little bit. Oh, when I was in the service in Fort Mead, Maryland, that was the prep staging, preparation area for going overseas. I got up to New York, I had family in New York. So I used to visit them almost every weekend. And also there was a place where we would get free theater tickets for servicemen. So I got in line and this very attractive Southern Boy was in front of me. We both got tickets to the same show. I remember, it was, or do I remember? I can see her face. Anyway, one of the big stars. So after....

**MM:** It was a live show?

**LB:** Yeah, stage. Broadway type. I asked him if he had any place to, where he was going to sleep. Well, he hadn't thought about that. So we rented a hotel room together. Which we did. And then he wanted to practice he said, because he was getting ready to marry and he had never practiced doing anything.

**MM:** Especially behind.

**LB:** Yeah. He just wanted to put his cock between my legs, not inside. Just to pump. So I let him do that.

**MM:** It's sort of a detailed question, forgive me if this is too detailed. But I have always wondered what people used for lubrication.

**LB:** Spit.

**MM:** Spit. People didn't use like vegetable oil or Crisco or anything like during this time.

**LB:** Natural spit.

**MM:** Natural spit. That works too.

**LB:** Does it now?

**MM:** It does. Some of us are more blessed with prolific saliva glands than others. Sometime I feel like I have too much saliva. So when did you finish your term in the service?

**LB:** January of '46.

**MM:** January of '46.

**LB:** I was in Brussels on D-Day.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** Visiting a friend who was in the hospital.

**MM:** On D-Day or VE-Day?

**LB:** VE. Sorry. I said D, VE.

**MM:** VE or VJ-Day?

**LB:** VE.

**MM:** VE-Day, O.K.

**LB:** European.

**MM:** Yeah.

**LB:** That was wild. Aldold Mux (sp?) is the main boulevard in Brussels, you know that?

**MM:** No, I have never been in Brussels, but I can imagine what it looks like.

**LB:** Lovely town. It's a little town.

**MM:** Like Amsterdam, sort of, that kind of....

**LB:** Mmhuh. Yes. And there were about 15 of us all together with arms hooked marching down the middle of the boulevard. Great fun.

**MM:** Were these friends of your or just...?

**LB:** No, just people out reveling. That's all. I don't remember doing anything else.

**MM:** Just drinking a lot of Belgian beer, probably, huh?

**LB:** Probably.

**MM:** So did you attend college after your service?

**LB:** Yeah, GI Bill.

**MM:** GI Bill. So you didn't have any problem with dishonorable discharge or anything like that?

**LB:** Mmhum.

**MM:** Did you know anybody that did?

**LB:** I had a couple of suspicions, but I don't know any for a fact.

**MM:** O.K. So you were about to go to what university?

**LB:** Berkeley.

**MM:** You went to Berkeley. O.K. And you studied there for how long?

**LB:** Well actually, I was in Los Angeles after I got out of the service. I lived with my aunt for two years while I went to City College there. Because I had never taken an academic course in high school. And there were certain subjects I had to make up which I did in LA, part of it. Then when I came up here there were friends from high school who had an apartment in Berkeley. They needed, they had a spare room to rent, and he said, "get away from the family." Time for you to sprout your wings.

**MM:** Were these gay friends?

**LB:** A couple. Actually, they weren't married yet. Les and Liz. I am still in touch with them. So anyway, I came up to live with them. I only lived with them for one semester and then I moved to an interracial fraternity.



**MM:** Really? That was....

**LB:** Black, purple, everybody, anybody who wanted to be there.

**MM:** What was it called?

**LB:** Beta Sigma \_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_.

**MM:** Do you know if it still exists?

**LB:** I don't know.

**MM:** And you lived there for the rest of your time?

**LB:** No, just one semester, again. Until I met some gay people and from there on it was gay, gay, gay. I joined the chorus.

**MM:** Well, how did you first meet this group of gay people?

**LB:** Chorus.

**MM:** Chorus.

**LB:** There was one outstanding singer, marvelous tenor. David Shenker. (sp?) He later changed it to David London. Because he admired George London. He went on the road. He went to Vegas. Marvelous tenor voice. Some training, you know. But anyway, David was in front of me, the lead tenor, I was baritone. \_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_ back. Go for broke.

**MM:** Now somebody can laugh.

**LB:** I met him first and through him I met others. Well actually I met in the bar, Mary's First and Last Chance.

**MM:** Sure.

**LB:** You know that bar?

**MM:** Well I know it was part of a lawsuit ...

**LB:** Oh?

**MM:** ...back in the 1950s. It was raided.

**LB:** Oh, yeah, periodically.

**MM:** But apparently there was one big raid it became the subject of an important lawsuit. That sort of redefined the legality of gay bars. Where was it located, do you recall?

**LB:** 20<sup>th</sup> and Broadway.

**MM:** 20<sup>th</sup> and....

**LB:** Telegraph.

**MM:** 20<sup>th</sup> and Telegraph. No kidding. Right where Sears is now.

**LB:** Um, on the other side of the street.

**MM:** Was it, probably the building is not there anymore, is it?

**LB:** I don't know.

**MM:** Was it on the corner or was it ...?

**LB:** It was on the corner.

**MM:** Interesting.

**LB:** Maybe it was on 21<sup>st</sup>.

**MM:** That's actually where I live.

**LB:** You live downtown?

**MM:** I live at 21<sup>st</sup> and Telegraph.

**LB:** How come?

**MM:** I bought a place, actually. It's a refurbished 1908 Mission style and they turned it into two condos I got the second floor. It's really sort of changing.

**LB:** I must say, I would not.... When you said 21<sup>st</sup>, the only thing I could think of is "up the hill."

**MM:** No, no.

**LB:** Because 21<sup>st</sup> is a very elegant area up the hill.

**MM:** Well, yes, indeed. But I'm not up the hill.

**LB:** That's what I thought. But when you said there was water standing around, well it wouldn't be up there.

**MM:** No. Well, you know....

**LB:** On the hillside.

**MM:** I live right next door to the old "Y"

**LB:** Oh.

**MM:** Do you remember, that must have been right near this bar.

**LB:** Ahuh. Yeah. Sure, we used to go there for the weekend.

**MM:** And stay at the "Y"?

**LB:** Yeah.

**MM:** While you were at Berkeley?

**LB:** I guess so, yeah.

**MM:** Do you remember when this bar was opened, was it opened in the '40s? Or '50s?

**LB:** I don't know, I didn't come up here until '48. So I wasn't going there until the '50s.

**MM:** O.K. Were you going while you were still in school?

**LB:** Mmhuh. Yeah.

**MM:** So you graduated about '52 or so?

**LB:** '51.

**MM:** '51. O.K. What did you study there?

**LB:** I was waiting for that question. I tell everybody basket weaving.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** General ....

**MM:** That wasn't a question until the '60s.

**LB:** General curriculum.

**MM:** O.K. So that's like liberal arts at a college today, right?

**LB:** Yeah. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do.

**MM:** What did you do once you graduated?

**LB:** Bookkeeping. Like my aunt, I screamed at her I hadn't taken that academic course. So I couldn't get into college. And so what did I do, back to what she had suggested which was bookkeeping. So I worked for Hertz Truck Rental and I had the accounts payable. And the vehicle records.

**MM:** And this was when you were living in Richmond, I guess?

**LB:** Yeah, working in Oakland.

**MM:** O.K. Where was the office in Oakland?

**LB:** 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and San Pablo.

**MM:** How did you get around then before BART?

**LB:** Car.

**MM:** Car.

**LB:** Well, I was going to school at SF State, during this time I went back to get my teaching credential. So I went to SF State and I have forgotten who I got this old wreck of a car from. But it performed. So, I mean, it looked terrible. But it worked. And then I graduated and it was just '51 to, no I worked, it was only a year at SF State. And then I went to work in Lafayette, at Spring Hill School. A wonderful principal, a lovely lady. And through her we went to the opera. Took the kids. You don't have student activities anymore, I guess.

**MM:** Really. I went to one once.

**LB:** Well I imagine they do down on the peninsula.

**MM:** Well, you went to the SF Opera.

**LB:** Yeah, but I meant through your school.

**MM:** Oh, O.K., yeah.

**LB:** In other words the more higher socio-economic would have.

**MM:** That's possible.

**LB:** Well, that's how Lafayette was. So anyway, I taught for eight years and decided that was enough. I didn't want to be a gray haired grandpa type elementary teacher. Actually, that's not true. That's what I tell everybody, but I'm telling you the truth.

**MM:** What's the truth?

**LB:** Now it will be published for everybody to hear and see. I was picked up by a cop for approaching him at the park.

**MM:** Really, what park?

**LB:** Aquatic Park in Berkeley.

**MM:** Mmhuh. And you were arrested?

**LB:** Yes. He had a tape in the car, recording everything I said. So....

**MM:** Well, you're not alone if it makes you feel any better.

**LB:** Oh?

**MM:** No, I mean there are plenty other men that I have interviewed who....

**LB:** Oh, yeah?

**MM:** ...had a very similar story to tell.

**LB:** And my principal at that point was a lovely lady. I even kissed her. She wanted me to. We'd go out once in awhile.

**MM:** But this ruined it for her then, huh?

**LB:** Well she appeared at my hearing.

**MM:** How did she, did you ask her to, at the ....

**LB:** No....

**MM:** Was she notified by the police?

**LB:** Well, by the school board. Whoever was in charge.

**MM:** So the police had notified the superintendent or something?

**LB:** Yeah, this had to do with my credential. Which was, of course, going to be revoked. So...

**MM:** What year was this?

**LB:** '63. So I said screw all this and took my money out of the retirement and went to Europe for three months. And I gathered every phone number and address I could possibly manage through everybody I had ever heard of going to Europe. And I had quite an impressive list. So I landed in Glasgow, which was where I thought well I'm going to combine this and have a retrospect of my army service. That's where I landed before. And saw Glasgow again. And then over to Edinburgh, London, and I had an address in London. I had this lesbian. This is our anniversary. '63, 42, 41.

**MM:** Forty-one years?

**LB:** Yeah. In fact I wrote Norma, I saw her on this last trip I took. The fatal one, the first one that I had all the oxygen and attacks and things. In May, all this started in May of last year.

**MM:** So you went there on your fortieth anniversary with this friend of yours.

**LB:** No, I just told her this is our fortieth anniversary. But I met her in '63.

**MM:** I am wondering actually if you can tell me a little more about, you said that you had collected all these addresses. Did you, this was before you went to Europe on this three month stint. And you collected addresses before you went? And you just, how did you do this?

**LB:** Asked people if they knew anybody.

**MM:** Knew people or bars or hotels or all of the above?

**LB:** No, people.

**MM:** Just people. So just people you could go...?

**LB:** Individuals to contact.

**MM:** O.K. Were you familiar with any of the guide books that were coming out?

**LB:** Not at that time.

**MM:** Because I interviewed this one gentleman who had just put together one of the first ones about Europe and he I think did it in 1959 or 1960 called *Le Guide Gre*. Have you ever heard of that one. It was sort of small hand published.

**LB:** No, I just knew the *Damron*.

**MM:** The *Damron*, and that came a little bit later?

**LB:** I knew Damron.

**MM:** Oh, you did? What do you remember about him?

**LB:** Domineering.

**MM:** Yeah.

**LB:** Very positive. Go-go man.

**MM:** Really.

**LB:** Played evidently a good game of Bridge. Because I know people that have played with him. I didn't. Didn't see him that much. He was sort of on the fringe of the group that I traveled with. So once in a while we would run into each other.

**MM:** Was he pretty well known as the producer of these guide books?

**LB:** Well, after a while, yeah.

**MM:** Which would have been in the '70s or '60s? Because he started in about '64.

**LB:** I would say it took until the '70s.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** Before they really were well known.

**MM:** Really caught on. Yeah, because I think for a while they were just called *The Address Book*, in the 1970s he put his name on them. So....

**LB:** Are you working on a degree?

**MM:** I have one.

**LB:** I mean a higher one.

**MM:** I have as high as you can go.

**LB:** You have a Ph.D.?

**MM:** Yeah.

**LB:** Oh.

**MM:** In history.

**LB:** Are you working on one in gay life?

**MM:** It was, it was. I wrote my theses on Gay and Lesbian Migration in San Francisco. But I am working on a book that deals with questions of communication, you know, information about sexuality circulars. I mean that is just sort of why I was asking these questions about what sort of, like before you went to Europe, what sort of information you were gathering and what you were looking for like bars and hotels or were you just looking for people that you might meet up with, just a friendly face there who could speak English. I mean those are just sort of questions I am interested in.

**LB:** Mmhuh.

**MM:** But I generally most of what I am asking about here about your time in service and stuff is standard oral history, life history questions as well. It would be a contribution to the historical society's archive. Why do you ask that question? About my education.

**LB:** I just had a feeling because I was interviewed for a guy who was getting, working toward a degree, I've forgotten what, master's I think, at San Francisco State. I have forgotten how he got my name but he came over and we had lunch and subsequently he said there would be a little gift certificate for you at the end. And several weeks later I got a \$15.00 gift certificate at Macy's. Do you know what you can buy for \$15.00 at Macy's?

**MM:** A pair of socks?

**LB:** How long does getting on the discontinued or reduced or whatever as pair of silk pajama bottoms.

**MM:** Oh, that's nice, but not tops.

**LB:** Just the bottoms, oh, and a wild pair of shorts, under shorts. But it cost me all that, it cost me \$3.00.

**MM:** Do you remember who this person was?

**LB:** No, I don't know if I even kept his name. But it wasn't as detailed as yours.

**MM:** Well, I have never done the gift certificate thing. Maybe I should.

**LB:** Starting with me.



**MM:** Well, where do you shop?

**LB:** I don't. I don't need anything really. No, if anything, I need to get rid of stuff. I still have a suit that I had made in England. It's such a heavy fabric. Why did I do that. It's a gorgeously made suit. On Fleet Street. With a vest and I have a little watch pocket, a special opening for your fob. That you put on your wrist.

**MM:** Fashionable.

**LB:** Oh, lovely. A beautiful suit.

**MM:** So you said that you moved to San Francisco in '54 and this while you were teaching?

**LB:** No, oh yeah, I guess that is right.

**MM:** While you were teaching out in Lafayette.

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** So you must have been, now you were commuting then, right? Driving over the bridge at that point. And you had a group of gay friends that you were spending a lot of time with in San Francisco at this point?

**LB:** Yeah, some.

**MM:** Like this group. O.K. Where did you guys go? Aside from these house parties which we can talk about.

**LB:** Bars.

**MM:** Which ones?

**LB:** Dolan's, which isn't there anymore.

**MM:** Where was that?

**LB:** Sutter and, near Union Square. Upstairs.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** We went there, interesting point, in drag on New Year's Eve. Which used to be allowed. But not at Dolan's. They asked us to leave.

**MM:** You're kidding. I thought it was only Halloween, because there was, wasn't there a law that said that you couldn't deceive or dress in clothes intent to deceive and so it was only on Halloween that they generally let people get away with that?

**LB:** Well they started letting you do it on New Year's Eve too. But not there.

**MM:** Was Dolan's sort of ....

**LB:** It was very embarrassing.

**MM:** ...considered a respectable establishment?

**LB:** Oh, yes. Cuff-links.

**MM:** O.K. Did you ever hear the phrase piss elegant?

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** Is that the way that somebody might describe ....

**LB:** Not that place, no. It was elegant but not piss elegant. There was one that was piss elegant.

**MM:** What was that?

**LB:** That was at 356 Taylor Street. Downstairs. There at five o'clock you didn't dare appear without your cuff-links.

**MM:** What's this....

**LB:** That's when all of the ribbon clerks get off of work.

**MM:** Now what is, can we do, because I have seen this term and I have never really seen it defined. Piss elegant. I mean it sounds sort of like negative.

**LB:** Ultimate.

**MM:** Is it something that people would aspire to or is it something that people ....

**LB:** It's derogatory, really. I mean super, you know. Over the top. Too much.

**MM:** Sort of campy elegance.

**LB:** Well, more than just camp.

**MM:** Taken too seriously maybe.

**LB:** I guess you could define it that way. But, just outlandish.

**MM:** Borderline Liberace.

**LB:** On what?

**MM:** Liberace.

**LB:** Oh, yeah.

**MM:** O.K. So whatever bars that you can recall, did you ever go to the Black Cat?

**LB:** Oh, yeah. Jose was a very good friend.

**MM:** Was he?

**LB:** Yeah. Lost touch now. In fact the last time I saw him, he was down right nasty.

**MM:** Really?

**LB:** Which he could be.

**MM:** Yeah, I can imagine.

**LB:** He was appearing here in Hayward, doing his famous operas.

**MM:** Mmhuh.

**LB:** Did you ever see him?

**MM:** I've never seen him do his opera. I've met him several times.

**LB:** Ahhh. Did you interview him?

**MM:** I've never interviewed him. He's been interviewed so many times that he sort of tells the same story now. He has a monologue, but the monologue has already been recorded, so he's not someone that I could probably get more information from. So I try to interview people who haven't been interviewed before. I've definitely listened to a few interviews. I read the biography somebody wrote of him. Which is not great. I have heard some of his performances. I heard that record he put out, *No Camping*, I think it was called or something, back in the '60s.

**LB:** Don't know it.

**MM:** Yeah. It was just a recorded performance at the Black Cat.

**LB:** I was part of the original Court. The Empress The First.

**MM:** Can you maybe describe the founding of that?

**LB:** This picture.

**MM:** Which picture is that?

**LB:** Inside. This outfit was made for one of his functions.

**MM:** Now, is this you?

**LB:** The Grand Duchess, yes.

**MM:** So this is you, ....

**LB:** And the Grand Duke.

**MM:** That's beautiful. You call this a gown?

**LB:** Oh yes.

**MM:** And, who made the gown?

**LB:** He did.

**MM:** He made it? Who is this, what was his name?

**LB:** He liked Maximilian.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** But his name was William Bliss.

**MM:** William Bliss.

**LB:** But he wanted Maximilian Von Blisenbaugh. (sp?)

**MM:** O.K. Now this was, this was for coronation gowns?

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** Or one of the coronation balls. But, from what I understand, like the way that historians have been talking, because actually, believe it or not, historians are talking about the early days of the Imperial Court, and just maybe, tell me if I get the story right

or if I get the story wrong. But there was sort of a series of boz arts (sp?) balls that happened and then there was the famous one that happened on New Year's Day in 1965 that was sort of, that patrons were harassed by the police. Do you remember this one, it was sort of a benefit for the CRH. You don't remember this one.

**LB:** What is CRH?

**MM:** The Council on Religion and the Homosexual. And I guess Jose was sort of part of this. And then it was about nine months later, that would have been a year after the Black Cat closed that they held this ball at the Hilton in San Francisco and then it was, which one is this. Yeah they would have been like this, right. And they held around Halloween or in January.

**LB:** The Baroness.

**MM:** This was the Baroness and that's you. But this was from 1971. O.K. At the Hilton Hotel, that's beautiful. We have quite a library of eye makeup in the file. But it's always nice to have those sort of feather deals so you don't have to deal bouffant wig. But then at some point he, there's like this first coronation ball....

**LB:** You can't see the tiara on top.

**MM:** Oh no. You have a tiara?

**LB:** I love that little one, and the Baroness made it.

**MM:** I can't see it. Was he older than you?

**LB:** Mmhuh.

**MM:** Do you know by how much?

**LB:** I don't know exactly how old he was. But the wonderful story that goes with him. Are we ready for the baroness episode?

**MM:** Yeah, let's do the baroness episode.

**LB:** O.K. At his memorial, for which of course this composite was made by his lover, Arthur Hurwit, (sp?)

**MM:** Oh, I didn't know Arthur was, I've met him before.

**LB:** He's a member of Belles of the East Bay.

**MM:** O.K. But he lives in San Francisco, right?

**LB:** Right.

**MM:** And he's also a part of G40 Plus, I think?

**LB:** I think so.

**MM:** Yeah, O.K. I've met him before. I've been to his Benefit Erotica garage sale.

**LB:** Ahuh. Where Henry's clothes are hanging in the living room. They're there all the time, for sale.

**MM:** I didn't know that. That's funny.

**LB:** So he put this composite together and handed them out at his, Henry's, memorial.

**MM:** I mean....

**LB:** The story at the memorial goes that Henry was a very considerate person. He chose the day to die, the day he was in his doctor's office.

**MM:** That's convenient.

[End of tape 1, side 2]

[Tape 2, side 1 (2-25-04), Larry Butwinick]

**LB:** ....doctor's office.

**MM:** That's convenient.

**LB:** Supposedly he dropped dead in the office while seeing the doctor. Now I hadn't seen him in a long time. We had sort of gone separate ways.

**MM:** You tell that story sort of, are you saying is facetiously? That he was considerate, or in fact he was considerate? Like is that sort of an irony that he dropped dead in his doctor's office?

**LB:** I don't know. Because I guess maybe I didn't consider him as generous as others might. Although he was very generous to me. That crystal bowl he gave me. But it was probably pilfered. He was a great snatcher.

**MM:** Really? Was he....

**LB:** \_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_

**MM:** ...Robin Hood, stealing from the rich and giving to the not so rich?

**LB:** No. To his friends.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** Who might be equally as rich as he.

**MM:** So he walked out of the house and that became his tiara was in his hand bags?

**LB:** He became a butler at Rose Court, which was Mrs. Cameron, the Chronicle newspaper.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** Her home. Yeah he was the butler there. You see all these beautiful things there. So much, who is going to miss a bowl.

**MM:** So indeed this might be from the family of the Chronicle?

**LB:** There is another bowl in there. A Chinese bowl he gave me.

**MM:** I have always found this representation to be interesting because it shows some of the different sides, like they say "the three faces," you know. The handsome young man, the sort of SM, motorcycle, South of Market guy and ....

**LB:** The gorgeous drag.

**MM:** The gorgeous drag from the Imperial Court.

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** Which one did you know best?

**LB:** I'd like to think I knew the best.

**MM:** As Henry? What was he like as Henry? What was he like as Henry? How was he different as Henry than as these other personality?

**LB:** Well, of course he would adapt to your costuming. So he'd be much broader in drag.

**MM:** And these were both drag?

**LB:** Oh yeah.

**MM:** Hank and the Baroness?

**LB:** Whereas Henry was a very sweet guy. But not when he got into these personas. Then she became Muua (sound). Demanding as the Baroness. I never saw him in his leathers, so I don't know what he did there. But I knew him best there. Just a nice, nice guy. Because he lived with us for about two years.

**MM:** Who is "us?"

**LB:** My lover, Bill Bliss. He was the one that made all the gowns. I had a wardrobe that would choke a horse. It was gorgeous stuff that he did. He could do anything. He was so clever. No patterns, designs. He did all of the designs himself. Henry did the bead work down the front of this gown, well actually by the yard. But he put it on.

**MM:** Did Bill do this professionally or was this something he did as a hobby.

**LB:** No, a hobby. He was a teacher. An elementary teacher.

**MM:** What did you end up doing after teaching, after you returned from Europe?

**LB:** Well, I needed to work, of course. So I was member of the Bernal Heights Association in San Francisco. In fact, I was the president one year. My lover, Kurt, a new different lover was president ....

**MM:** Was this before or after Bill?

**LB:** After. Because Bill and I split in 1960 and I met Kurt in '61. Oh, so I started asking around in the association. "Anybody know where I can get a job?" "What can you do?" I don't know. So a legal secretary lady said this guy needs someone to do an estate inheritance tax. I didn't know anything about that. No place to go to learn. No school. Manuals from here to here. That's the only way to learn it. So I dove into this thing, the R & T code. Didn't memorize it. But I had a lot of help in the State Controller's office. The attorney assigned to us was Ed Sanderson, what a wonderful man. And the head auditor, Al Schmidt. Both of those guys helped me tremendously. So gradually I got the hang of what I was supposed to be doing. The most important difficult area was husbands and wives when one dies. And depending upon what the nature of the property was, community or separate. And how it was taxed as a result. Or a marital deduction trust, which was the bane of everybody's life. Which was all based on the federal. But anyway I evidently became somewhat of an authority in local areas. I was asked to speak at various legal secretary's meetings.

**MM:** So you didn't have to become a CPA for this, did you?

**LB:** No. Just be good with numbers.

**MM:** So kind of building on your bookkeeping? That was a unique experience.



**LB:** Well I had always been good with numbers. As a matter of fact when I was teaching, my best teaching success was teaching math. In fact I would take some of the other classes. We would exchange. Lucille would take my kids for P.E. and I would take hers for math, because I was never really good at ball throwing. Wellll, feeling but not throwing. Anyway most of these referees, they were called they still are, could do their own tax work but chose not to learn it. Because it was very involved. So they hire people like me. There were a few of us around. Tax preparers and I would work at home. For great deal and some I would go into offices. As a result I met some wonderful people going into their offices. How are we doing on the time?

**MM:** Well I think, well I was just checking the sound level.

**LB:** I want a playback to see what we have done.

**MM:** We can certainly do that.

**LB:** Just a little bit.

**MM:** In fact, I'm going to ask if I could come by again.

**LB:** Oh.

**MM:** And we could finish up at another time. Would that be all right with you?

**LB:** Yeah. You think we're not finished.

**MM:** I don't think we're finished. Actually I would like to go through this in a little more detail. Because once you got started talking and you, you never know how someone is going to remember and the degree to which they are going to remember and what sort of experiences they had. Oral history, you know an interview that lasts an hour and a half covering someone's life of many decades hardly scratches the surface. And I think it would certainly be worthwhile to maybe give another go at it and talk about....

**LB:** I want recognition in the book.

**MM:** Oh, absolutely.

**LB:** As well as some of the profits.

**MM:** As well, I'm not entirely sure if this interview is going to relate to the book. Like, for the most part, the folks at the historical society called me up and they said that you have this photo album and they also suggested that I conduct an interview, again to talk about the book so that we have some context for it. I mean talk about this book so that we have some context for it. But as far that other project, I'll certainly, that's something we can talk about if you are interested. It's, there's not going to be any money in it, to be quite honest.

**LB:** You have to pay to get published?

**MM:** Well it will be on a university press, so....

**LB:** What does that mean.

**MM:** Well it's not a trade press. It's not like Random House it will be like the University of Chicago Press and generally the people who buy it are libraries and professional historians. It might get a wider audience, who knows. But then in some sense it will cost me because I have to pay for a lot of images that I want to use. I've got a chapter that *Life Magazine* .....

[End of CD number 1]

[CD number 2 (3-1-04) continuing tape 2, side 1, Larry Butwinick]

**MM:** O.K., so what, can you describe the picture?

**LB:** Well it's sort of a *follies bergere*-ish (sp?) can-can with a little drape around down in front of the crotch. And then the bare leg to the long stocking. Black stocking. And arms stretched upwards fuller on the side of the draped fabric across the crotch.

**MM:** And where was this photo from again?

**LB:** This was taken before I knew him.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** So this was prior to 19.... This would be in the '60s.

**MM:** O.K. I see most of these, most of these, this one says 1949 on it.

**LB:** Of, really?

**MM:** Yeah

**LB:** I never even looked.

**MM:** Yeah, it says January 10, 1949.

**LB:** Wow,

**MM:** Now I see that most of these photographs are inside homes. Did most of these drag parties happen inside homes or did sometimes or did sometimes they happened....

**LB:** Never.

**MM:** They never happened out in public?

**LB:** Oh, no. Seldom did you ever go out in public.

**MM:** And were there performances or was it sort of people getting together.

**LB:** People getting together.

**MM:** So people didn't really get up and perform or sing and do, ad lib some songs or anything like that.

**LB:** Just got together any excuse to get in ladies dresses.

**MM:** O.K. Were there, how many of the guests showed up in drag and how many didn't?

**LB:** Depending on the event.

**MM:** Yeah. What were the different arrangements then? I mean were there certain events that it was all drag and,...

**LB:** Well Halloween, of course.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** And then they said we could go to the bars on New Years Eve, as well as Halloween. And we tried that in one place and they threw us out. On New Years Eve. But we went to other places. Some accepted us and some didn't.

**MM:** Do you remember what places accepted you?

**LB:** I can't remember the names, they are no longer in existence.

**MM:** Sure.

**LB:** This is also before I knew him. There's no date on it. Actually, I dated these. That was \_\_\_?\_\_\_ one man. I can't tell, there is something stamped back, but I can't tell if it's a date. These were all taken at about the same time. In the '70s.

**MM:** So these are all the 1970s, huh?

**LB:** I think so.

**MM:** Were these at the show, Imperial Court events or ...?

**LB:** Which one are you looking at? Ah, yes, of course these were in his order.

**MM:** Oh, I see.

**LB:** Yes.

**MM:** Can you just give me a thumb-nail history of the Imperial Court from what you know?

**LB:** Well, of course, Jose put it all together and then selected people to be part of it. The more attractive drags and we had various functions like Bitch and Stitch Club.

**MM:** Which was?

**LB:** You brought your hobby to a meeting and we had drinks and hors d'Oeuvres in the evening, sometimes in the afternoon.

**MM:** What were the various hobbies that people would bring along?

**LB:** Oh, God. I don't remember. Well, sewing sequins and pearls and things on fabric for a gown. That was Henry's favorite thing to do.

**MM:** What were yours?

**LB:** I don't remember. Maybe just listening.

**MM:** Just bitching. Not so much stitching, more just bitching.

**LB:** This is my first time in drag, I think I showed you that.

**MM:** Yeah. And this wasn't until the late '50s, you said, right?

**LB:** Ahuh.

**MM:** Now you had been, you had met Henry before this, right?

**LB:** Yes, well actually this was at his home.

**MM:** O.K., alright.

**LB:** This gathering. But it was through the guy next to me, Tom Little, that I met all these people.

**MM:** Now how was it, I imagine that you knew a lot of these people before you did drag. How long was it that you knew them before you...?

**LB:** Just Tom. And he was my roommate. Well, we rented a house together. There were four of us and we rented a house. And after I got out of the school in Berkeley and we called it P., it was on Parker Street so we called it Parker House. This I think is a very good picture of me as a woman.

**MM:** You on the right side.

**LB:** Yeah I think so.

**MM:** Well, you're on the man's left. Well so it looks like at one of these parties there were men who sort of did male drag, unless that's a woman in male...?

**LB:** No, that was my lover. He had always wished he had been born in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** And because he would like to have been part of a royal court and all the regalia that goes with it, and so that's why he adopted the name, I think I told you, of Maximilian, his name was William. And the family name had been von Blisenbach, (sp?) but it was shortened to Bliss. But he liked Maximilian von Blisenbach. So then he adopted the title of arch duke. Which was about the highest you could go, other than the king.

**MM:** And nobody would dare take a title like that.

**LB:** What?

**MM:** Nobody dare assume a title like king or queen?

**LB:** Well no, he wanted to be arch duke. In fact he associated himself with, well Maximilian von Hapsburg. You know, who was also a prince. But not a king even though he made a king in Mexico. That didn't do him much good. So then, of course, I became the arch duchess.

**MM:** O.K. and you're....

**LB:** And that's that big picture.

**MM:** O.K. , now,...

**LB:** And there's a smaller in the same, in the same gown.

**MM:** Oh, that's nice it's in color. Now I wonder because a lot of these photographs in here, you know like this one right here and the early one here of Henry, certainly are before 1965, when I've been told the Imperial Court was founded?

**LB:** I don't remember the date.

**MM:** You don't remember the date. But, I mean, did some of these concepts and titles, for example, precede the founding of the Imperial Court?

**LB:** I think so. Well, I don't know. The Baroness, for instance, if she had that title before Jose threw all this together, I am not certain. There would have been no reason to be a baroness unless you had associated with the court.

**MM:** Yeah.

**LB:** So it sounds like that we adopted that after Jose.

**MM:** But, I mean you know him before Jose started all this. Do you remember, was there ever a time that you didn't go by the Baroness?

**LB:** I didn't know him that well. I didn't see him that often either. We only had drag parties. We weren't that close at the time. Not in the beginning.

**MM:** Do you remember any of the circumstances at the beginning of the court?

**LB:** No, it's just that I think Jose wanted to lord it over somebody.

**MM:** So was there some resentment of him?

**MM:** Yes.

**MM:** And what ....

**LB:** And there still is.

**MM:** O.K. \_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_

**LB:** Well he's such a dominant person.

**MM:** And so that's whose story has been told.

**LB:** Mmhuh.

**MM:** Right? What were the other stories that people might have told about the court and these drag parties?

**LB:** Stories?

**MM:** Well, I guess, you know the old adage, right, history is told by the victors. O.K. And in some way Jose because he's dominant and because he's remembered, it's his

story about the drag parties and the Imperial Court that has been told. I am just wondering if there are other stories that may not be the same thing that he has told.

**LB:** I don't know. I know very little about him except there were a few important events that occurred in his life. For one thing he was a shoe salesman. You knew that?

**MM:** No.

**LB:** I think women's shoes. And the other thing was he inherited a house somewhere in the Midwest, I have forgotten where now, and went there for quite awhile to live in the house and decided he couldn't stand it there. He had to be back in the big city. So he came back. I don't know what happened with the house. But it seems to me somebody, some gay person, left it to him. Because he was admired.

**MM:** On what basis do you think people admired him?

**LB:** The fact that he was not afraid to speak up no matter where it was. To say "I'm gay." That kind of thing. Outspoken. Way before anybody would discuss this openly, he did.

**MM:** Did that, did people you know admire him for that or maybe did people also...?

**LB:** Oh, some would shy away.

**MM:** Yeah. Why?

**LB:** They didn't want to be pointed at. I still have friends like that today. You're not supposed to be associated with gay....

**MM:** You're not supposed to flaunt it, is that the part of it?

**LB:** Or just not supposed to even be identified with it. Let alone "flaunt."

**MM:** Why do you suppose, I mean, I guess it's sort of a difficult question to answer, but for those who wanted to shy away from it, do you think they were fearing for their jobs, do you think...?

**LB:** Ahuh, yeah. Public, right, public opinion. Less than human. Deranged.

**MM:** Is, no that doesn't make any sense. I guess I am sort of really interested in this because from what I see there were all these drag parties that were very informal that people just had at their homes. And then ten years later, you're renting halls at the Hilton and California Hall and there's newspaper coverage of it and it's written about in gay publications. And I guess I don't understand how we get from something that was just in somebody's living room to something that is a major public event.

**LB:** I think Jose was a big part of it because he told, he talked freely about this no matter where he was. So I think he did contribute greatly to the regularization of the gay community.

**MM:** Were there others who also...?

**LB:** Yes, Michelle, who was a singer, an entertainer, also outspoken.

**MM:** Were Michelle and Jose friends?

**LB:** Yes. Well, on and off. Each one wanted the spotlight. So they had to fight over that. Michelle lived over my back fence for awhile. Two years that I lived on 24<sup>th</sup> Street. He lived on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Or was it Elizabeth? I think maybe Elizabeth and 23<sup>rd</sup>. Had a nice house. Big back yard. And who else was there? There were others but his name comes right up forward. I can't think of anybody else right now.

**MM:** So Jose went by his real name, Jose Sarria?

**LB:** Ahuh.

**MM:** Michelle went by a drag name.

**LB:** Yes. I am not sure what his real name was.

**MM:** Did he have a regular day job too?

**LB:** Yeah. I don't know what.

**MM:** But not wearing a gown and going by the name Michelle?

**LB:** No, nothing gay.

**MM:** Did any of these people that you know of who were particularly visible and I guess flaunting, did any of them work in gay businesses? I mean we traditionally think of gay businesses. Or did they kind of put on a straight performance, I guess, to work in a straight business? Because to have a job, from what I have been taught, at this point in time, you couldn't flaunt it on the job.

**LB:** No.

**MM:** So I wonder how these people managed to get work or if perhaps they changed their behavior....

**LB:** Bartenders.

**MM:** Bartenders?



**LB:** Yeah. So many were bartenders. In mostly gay, well at least in San Francisco. Waiters. And I think every waiter I met in San Francisco was gay.

**MM:** Really, and not just in gay restaurants?

**LB:** Mmhuh, anywhere. Gordon's Restaurants, Westly Ho. (sp?) Gay Yale. (???) Excellent food. I was there opening night and it was on Sansome and Broadway, right at the freeway onramp. And opening night there was a free dinner, but you had to carry your own trays through the kitchen, so they would fill up whatever they had there.

**MM:** Oh, really?

**LB:** Yeah.

**MM:** Did they make you do your dishes too?

**LB:** No. Just carry the trays. I remember I liked their liver and onions. Mmm, they did such a wonderful job, crispy type liver. With bacon.

**MM:** Wow. Sounds savory. But that's something I have to talk to my doctor about tomorrow. I can't taste half of the food I eat. Particularly meat. No taste.

**MM:** Strange.

**LB:** It sure is. The medications.

**MM:** What about the hot chocolate?

**LB:** I can taste that.

**MM:** That's good.

**LB:** I can taste fruit, I like fruit. I make a compote, I usually have one going all the time. That I enjoy. Salty things. But it's just ordinary meat

**MM:** I have heard people talk about Gordon's before and they described it as a gay restaurant. I am not sure what that means though. Is a gay restaurant just mean like it's ownership and clientele or ...?

**LB:** What else?

**MM:** Well, I mean is there a certain kind of food?

**LB:** No.

**MM:** It was just basically continental or American food.

**LB:** Good food. Well prepared. No, Gordon was the chef.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** He prepared or oversaw everything. In fact they finally left that area and went to Marin County and opened another, it wasn't called Gordon's, something else, because I guess they sold the name with the restaurant. I never did eat in the Marin County one. They said it was very good.

**MM:** So what other pictures do you have here to show?

**LB:** Well, I think you've already seen this.

**MM:** And this is the 1971 SIRebrities. (sp?) Yes. And that's you and Henry Hondikoff. (sp?) And now SIRebrities is from the organization SIR, right?

**LB:** I guess so.

**MM:** What was the ...?

**LB:** Society for Individual Rights.

**MM:** O.K. and what were they.

**LB:** A gay organization.

**MM:** How did they differ from the court?

**LB:** Well, for instance they had a bar. What was his name, Bill.

**MM:** Clamp?

**LB:** Yes. What do you know about him?

**MM:** I've heard about him.

**LB:** He had...

[End of tape 2, side 1]

[Tape 2, side 2, Larry Butwinick]

**LB:** He was very active, well he organized SIR. And then SIR put on shows. Like *Boy Friend*.

**MM:** What was *Boy Friend*?

**LB:** The *Boy Friend*.

**MM:** I've never heard of it. What was it?

**LB:** It's an English very, well I can't find the adjective. A comedy very arch.

**MM:** Camp?

**LB:** This type. Very funny. Anyway it was a tremendous success. They did *Mame*. I believe I have forgotten her name. They did that at California Hall. And the lead's parents were there. They introduced them, they got up to applause.

**MM:** The lead was in drag, right?

**LB:** Ahuh.

**MM:** So it was an all male main cast.

**LB:** And very well done. I can't remember his name though, the one who did Mame. It was one name, his drag name. And, well, of course SIR was mainly a place to meet. And to lounge and just meet other gay people.

**MM:** Wasn't that what bars would be though.

**LB:** Humm?

**MM:** Isn't that what a bar would be? How was it different than a bar?

**LB:** Well, because not everybody drank. It wasn't just strictly liquor.

**MM:** Was it open different hours than a bar would be?

**LB:** Probably, but I don't know.

**MM:** Because it is if you go into a bar you are expected to buy a drinks, maybe at the SIR Center, you didn't, you weren't expected to.

**LB:** No.

**MM:** Did you have to be a member to go in?

**LB:** It seems to me there were dues.

**MM:** Yeah.

**LB:** It's so long ago, I can't remember.

**MM:** Were a lot of people who were involved with the court also involved with SIR.

**LB:** Oh, yeah. Well like we have the gay center here in Hayward. A place just to relax and talk to other gay people. SIR was much that way on a bigger scale. Because it was a fairly large establishment. 6<sup>th</sup> and, upstairs, 6<sup>th</sup> and Mission, Howard. Something like that.

**MM:** Yeah.

**LB:** It was quite large. So it was just a place to drop in. I guess they had a bar there. I don't remember, they must have.

**MM:** Or at least during special events.

**LB:** Yeah, but that wasn't the prime purpose, to drink.

**MM:** Do you want to go through this and just talk about some images in here?

**LB:** Alright.

**MM:** If there is anything that strikes your imagination or fancy and you think there might be a story behind it...?

**LB:** Well, this party was in Fairfax.

**MM:** In Marin County. Whose house.

**LB:** I don't remember. This was our own apartment and I was Sarah Siddens. (sp)

**MM:** You were who?

**LB:** Sarah Siddens.

**MM:** Who is Sarah Siddens?

**LB:** A famous British actress in times, the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**MM:** Oh, O.K.

**LB:** Or the 19<sup>th</sup>. And there is the Baroness. And this is a friend who had never been in drag, Glen. I remember his name. So I lent him one of my dresses and he looked lovely.

**MM:** He sits like a lady as well.

**LB:** I think these pictures are quite nice. The lighting.

**MM:** The background and everything as well, sure. So were these parties just like you being anywhere with a party, stand around and sip cocktails and talk?

**LB:** Yeah. That's typical.

**MM:** O.K. So it was sort of you'd be performing in your role a little bit, so if you were Sarah Siddens do you suppose that you would act differently if you were in a different type of gown?

**LB:** Perhaps. But actually it was just to appear in something. Something they hadn't seen before. I always loved this picture of Henry, he's sitting on the floor. Madame Camellia. Violetta.

**MM:** So I have always wondered, Jose, I think is originally Columbian, is that right?

**LB:** I think so.

**MM:** Were there any other people who weren't like Anglo American that participated in this scene?

**LB:** I don't remember. This is another picture of me.

**MM:** Does this mirror in there, is that in your apartment? These are your pictures or was that his?

**LB:** Or was that Henry's? I can't remember. I think that was Henry's.

**MM:** Did people arrive at the parties dressed or did they change...?

**LB:** \_\_\_?\_\_\_ pallets.

**MM:** Nice.

**LB:** I have talked to you about the pallets?

**MM:** Nope.

**LB:** Somebody, oh, cause he works for Gene & Company, (???) textbook publishers. And he was in shipping. He was strong, he'd throw those pallets around. And he'd bring them home for parties so he could be Empress Eugene up on her....

**MM:** Sort of her chaise.

**LB:** On her chaise, yes.

**MM:** Did people come dressed to the parties or did they dress there.

**LB:** No they came dressed.

**MM:** They came dressed. That must have be a spectacle then, if you were a neighbor and seeing a bunch of...?

**LB:** Ahuh.

**MM:** Men in gowns coming into someone's apartment.

**LB:** Or try driving in high heels.

**MM:** Tell me about it, is it difficult?

**LB:** Yeah.

**MM:** Impossible?

**LB:** No.

**MM:** Especially with a stick.

**LB:** No. I think I did tell you about the work that my lover did on Post Street.

**MM:** No.

**LB:** Who am I telling all this to?

**MM:** I don't know. Who are those two?

**LB:** My lover.

**MM:** And.

**LB:** And his folk dance partner.

**MM:** His?

**LB:** Folk dance.

**MM:** Folk dance partner. They are having a picnic on the....

**LB:** Yeah, while we were working on the house.

**MM:** And is this your apartment?

**LB:** It's a house.

**MM:** In your house.

**LB:** Built in 1861.

**MM:** No kidding.

**LB:** In San Francisco.

**MM:** What part of town is that in.

**LB:** Butcher town.

**MM:** Butcher Town. Where is Butcher town?

**LB:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** It was on \_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_. They run alphabetically.

**MM:** Is it still standing?

**LB:** It was the last time I looked.

**MM:** We do a lot of researching down there.

**LB:** Redevelopment Agency took it over for their headquarters. But we redid every inch of that place. And did build it all in, draperies and upholstery. That was a solon set that Henry had. Because that's when he lived with us.

**MM:** Did you have some parties at your house?

**LB:** Some. Actually more Henry's when we lived on Oak Street. Oh this is after Henry. He sort of dropped out and we didn't see him for a long time. He picked up with this other group. Norman, who imagined herself to be Joan Crawford, \_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_\_.

**MM:** Wayne Miller?

**LB:** Mmhuh. And my lover. We're doing a scene from *Cabaret*.

**MM:** And this was you?

**LB:** No.

**MM:** O.K. This says it was cast '71 or '72 *Cabaret* \_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_, right. And this looks like a Disney character, doesn't it?

**LB:** Shit. Dizzy I think is more like it. Whoever designed those costumes ....

**MM:** \_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_

**LB:** Alphie. In his leather jacket.

**MM:** So this is Alphie?

**LB:** Yeah. He did not play the organ, Jack did. But he was posing like he did.

**MM:** Well those were cute guys. What do you suppose these were all about?

**LB:** I have no idea. None. You know what they were thinking of. It's raining, huh?

**MM:** Yes, quite hard.

**LB:** I can't believe we \_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_. That was two years ago.

**MM:** When was this, was that at a party?

**LB:** Light House. The Light House Halloween Ball. In the rotunda of City Hall.

**MM:** Oh, O.K. Did you bring that photo along with you, to show people.

**LB:** I have a tube but it sagged. It's all hanging, it was poofed out before. I couldn't wear those shoes I tried for awhile. And pretty soon I thought I was going to break my neck. And it was on marble floors. Fortunately Leroy was there and gave me his arm. I would have fallen.

**MM:** Was this, was that attached to the dress?

**LB:** No.

**MM:** That's a necklace

**LB:** I could have bought it at K-Mart.

**MM:** The dress.



**LB:** For twenty-five bucks. That was a long time ago, of course.

**MM:** Perfect drag wear isn't it?

**LB:** Yeah. I have a hearing soon though. (???)

**MM:** So it sounds like most of the gowns then were made, they weren't purchased, right?

**LB:** Oh yeah.

**MM:** Was there, I mean I guess there was jewelry and everything that would be purchased, right? Were there specific stores that people would go to, to find their accoutrement?

**LB:** For the jewelry?

**MM:** Yeah, the jewelry and perhaps the hats and the fabrics, and.....

**LB:** Start with Woolworth's.

**MM:** Start with Woolworth's.

**LB:** Cheaper.

**MM:** Cheaper.

**LB:** And work your way up.

**MM:** To...? There were, there were, are there any other stores that particularly stocked things that drag queens might like?

**LB:** Probably most of them now, upper Market Street.

**MM:** Like Cliff's?

**LB:** I don't even know the name. I never go there. But I know that they have all these gay stores up there. But no, there was nothing that I know that catered to, not way back then.

**MM:** Did you ever spend much time in the Castro?

**LB:** No. I don't like the posing. I don't go for museles.

**MM:** Was there a certain point that seemed like was mostly what was happening in San Francisco? Or was there always a place where you could get away that you felt like it was your crowd of people?

**LB:** I never was a bar person.

**MM:** O.K.

**LB:** So I seldom went to bars.

**MM:** O.K. You mostly **did** house parties, then?

**LB:** Yeah. I'd drop in here and there for a drink of \_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_, once in awhile. Do I have to sign anything here?

**MM:** Yes. Let me see here.

**[End of tape 2, side 2]**

**[End of recording]**