

Don Lucas Interview

by Susan Stryker

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Recorded at Lucas's home in San Francisco

In Co-operation with Joanne Meyerowitz, University of Cincinnati
and the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California

Introduction

Don Lucas was a founding member of the San Francisco chapter of the Mattachine Society in the 1950s, and later the Mattachine Society's national executive director. He described himself as a "lay counselor" who worked with many different kinds of individuals who sought out the Mattachine Society. In this capacity, he came in contact with Louise Lawrence, a male-to-female transgender person living in San Francisco since the 1940s. Lawrence seems to have been an important figure in mid-20th-century transgender history in the United States, being in contact with many other transgender people throughout the country, and with many of the social scientists who were beginning to take a professional interest in transgender phenomena. Lucas's recollections are the only first-hand accounts of Lawrence and her circle now known to exist. A photograph of Lawrence can be found in the San Francisco Chronicle, October 2, 1954.

Later, in the 1960s, Don Lucas was in contact with another segment of the transgender community in San Francisco while heading the Central City Anti-Poverty Program. In this capacity, he came in contact with the Tenderloin's burgeoning transsexual/transgender population, and helped establish better access to social services for these people.

SS: So we were just talking a little bit a minute ago about Louise Lawrence, who was probably the first person that I know of other than Christine Jorgensen who we might conceivably call a transgender or transsexual activist. Now, was she--did she have surgery and do hormones or was she a crossdresser?

DL: I think she was a crossdresser. I don't know for sure but that was my impression, because at that time the only person I knew who had surgery was Christine Jorgensen. The others had self-inflicted surgery, in other words they did surgery that had to be completed, but not complete actually. So, I don't think so.

SS: How was it that you met her?

DL: Through Mattachine. She came to one of our meetings, our meeting in the Friends Church on Stockton Street. Then after that she came quite frequently, came to the office. I did many fundraising things in my flat, dinners and brunches and things like that, and she was always coming. Then once they had--there was a group of transsexuals or crossdressers, I can't remember, but I don't think they used the term transsexual. She had

SS: What was the group like?

DL: Well, I really don't remember. It was just simply a meeting. I don't remember even what they discussed.

SS: So, it was a social group? Or did they do--

DL: Yeah, I think it was more social. I just remember that they were an extraordinarily beautiful group of women. They really were.

SS: Any female-to-male?

DL: No, they were all male-to-female.

SS: What was Louise Lawrence like as a person?

DL: Oh, she was very nice. Very educated. Very vocal. Could carry on tremendous conversations about almost any subject. And very dignified. A very dignified person. She just sort of stood out.

SS: Do you know if she had any problems socially because of how she lived her life? Or did she just fit in really unremarkably as a woman?

DL: Yeah, from my observations she was extremely comfortable with her herself and in society, and I don't think she ever had any problems whatsoever, because if no one were to know that she was a crossdresser, then they simply wouldn't know.

SS: And would you say that was also the case with the other members of the group?

DL: Yeah. They were all very . . . um, this was in contrast to some other crossdressers or transsexuals that I knew independent of her, that did have some problems because they still had psychological problems with trying to get surgery and not being able to, and doing self-mutilization, and tremendous socialization and psychological problems.

SS: So you saw a real difference between some transsexuals/transgenders who were well integrated into society and others who had a more marginal existence?

DL: Yes.

SS: Do you know where Louise Lawrence lived?

DL: She lived downtown in an apartment, I think on Pine Street.

SS: And some of the other less well-integrated people, how did you come in contact with them?

SS: Now, even back in the 1950s, did you see very distinct social groups—you know, transsexuals, crossdressers, transvestites, drag queens, fetishists, whatever? Were these social divisions that were already in place--

DL: Oh, yes, uh-huh--

SS: --and some people didn't want to have anything to do with members of the other groups?

DL: Yes, that was very much the case. You had these distinct groups of people and they associated with other members of their group and that was pretty much it. Didn't even want to have outsiders even know about them, or know of their group at all. But I was pretty much able to go between groups, from group to group to group, because I was never judgmental. So that worked out fine.

SS: One of the things that interests me is that there wasn't a lot of attention to transsexuality in the United States, to surgery or hormones, before Christine Jorgensen.

DL: No, I don't know that I know of any.

SS: Well, there was some, but it was much smaller scale. But with Jorgensen, it was headlines around the world. And then after all that attention to her, really over the next 10 years, that was when the Harry Benjamin model for how to manage transsexualism was really established.

DL: Yes, Dr. Benjamin and Dr. Money.

SS: Did you, hm . . . how should I say this? There was a time before Jorgensen when there were plenty of people who were, shall we say, like Louise Lawrence. That is, living in the gender they wanted to live in, being the person they wanted to be, but the idea of surgery or hormones wasn't a real possibility for them. Either they didn't know about it as a possibility, or it wasn't within their reach, or they didn't want it. Did you know of people who were sort of in that category? Did you know anything about how some such people came to agitate for, or demand, to get access to some of the things that were possible medically after the early 1950s?

DL: No, I don't think so. Because, well, I'm trying to think, it really wasn't, like with Louise's group, I don't recall ever hearing them talk about the possibility of surgery, or anything like that. It was only these other individuals. And I really don't remember anything like that. Of course, with Dr. Benjamin, we discussed many such cases. And you know he dealt with both male-to-female and female-to-male. I met a number of people through him that he was working with.

SS: So how was it that you met Dr. Benjamin? I know he had his summer practice here. Do you know when that started?

DL: Yeah, he had his summer practice here. You know, he was a gynecologist. He had his summer practice here in the 30s, maybe as far back as the 20s. You know, the two main madams in San Francisco were his clients. Sally Stanford and--oh, I can't remember the other one. He took care of Sally and her girls. And I can't remember the name of the other one. I met Sally Stanford through Dr. Benjamin. I met Christine Jorgensen through Dr. Benjamin. His goal was to be able to get the operation accepted and available in the United States, because at that time--this is probably in the mid-to-late '50s--the arrangements were made in Mexico. He would send them down there, and then he would follow through up here. They had to come back immediately. Any post-surgery treatment or follow through had to be done here.

SS: Now, I know there was this thing they used to call "the Mexican two-step procedure." People would go down and have an orchidectomy, and then come back. Getting the vaginoplasty was much more difficult. But you think people would go to Mexico for both?

DL: That's a good question. I remember from talking to Dr. Benjamin that getting the vaginal work done was near impossible at that point. It was done--well, it was done in Denmark until the tremendous publicity bombed with Jorgensen, and then they shut it off.

SS: To every one except Danish citizens.

DL: Yes, that's right. But there was somewhere else.

SS: Casablanca?

DL: Was that where it was?

SS: Well, I know that Casablanca was one place for surgery, at least by the '60s, with George Bourous. But I was asking you if that was the other place in the '50s.

DL: Oh, I don't know. I know there was another place, but that it was very expensive.

SS: There was no place in San Francisco?

DL: No. No. There were doctors at UC who would do the breast implants, but that was as far as it would go.

SS: Was that at General, at the teaching hospital, or--

DL: No, at the clinic, at the UC medical clinic, up on, oh--

SS: Up on the hill, on Parnassus?

DL: Yeah, uh-huh.

SS: Was the Langley Porter Clinic involved at all?

DL: No, just up at UC.

SS: Who was the guy at Langley Porter? Carl . . . ?

DL: Carl Bowman, yes, at Langley Porter. Oh, he was extremely liberal about all this, very open about all of these matters--homosexuality, lesbianism, transsexuality, transvestism. All of these things. He was extremely ahead of his time in his positions.

SS: Which were what, basically? [Phone rings. Break in recording.] So we were talking about Carl Bowman, maybe Bernice Engle, too. What can you say about them?

DL: Yeah, Bernice Engle, she was his right-hand person. She was very nice. A very nice person.

SS: So you said they were liberal and progressive on many of these issues. But were they in favor of surgery, opposed to surgery, for transsexuals.? Do you know? Do you ever remember talking about that issue with them?

DL: No, huh-uh.

SS: I just wondered what sorts of medical services or support transsexuals might expect from Langley Porter.

DL: I don't remember talking much about transsexualism or transvestism with Dr. Bowman except maybe in passing. Mainly about homosexuality. Of course, even he at that time wanted to see it be--oh, what would the word be?

SS: Depathologized?

DL: Yeah! That would be it. And then I took a number of clients to Langley Porter for evaluation, because they had other, very difficult problems.

SS: So, you say Harry Benjamin was here in San Francisco pretty early on, that he had madams and their girls for clients--

DL: Yes, but also many of the socialite women of San Francisco for clients, too.

SS: And that, from what I've read, Louise Lawrence was really the first transgender/transsexual/transvestite client he ever had anything to do with. Is that right?

DL: Oh, really? Well, I don't know. Early on, when I knew Dr. Benjamin, he was already very involved with transgender, both here and in New York, with Dr. Money. Now when was that? Must have been 1953 or '54.

SS: Let's talk some more about Benjamin. Do you know anything about who his transsexual clients were here in San Francisco? Or what it was he tried to do with or for them?

DL: His main concern, from what I observed, was with people meeting a psychological profile that would allow them to live as a woman. That was his biggest concern. He, well, he insisted that his clients dress and live as a woman for a year. And then he re-evaluated them. And if he felt they were psychologically suited for transition, he would recommend the procedure.

SS: Do you know how many people he saw?

DL: No I don't, but from what he said to me over the years, I would say that it ran into maybe, I don't know, 30 or 40, over a span of maybe five years in the late 50s.

SS: Now from the transsexual people you met--well, that word "transsexual" didn't really exist until the--

DL: No it didn't, and that's what's so confusing!

SS: That's why I was asking that question about people like Louise Lawrence, who sort of lived the life, and did they see surgery and hormones as a way of doing what they were doing more to their satisfaction, or were there new people--of course some new people would come along after they heard about what was technically possible and want that, whether or not they had been living that way before. It was in 1949 that this guy David Cauldwell--did you know him at all? [Shakes head no] Wrote for Sexology magazine?

DL: Oh, Sexology. Sure.

SS: He wrote some of the very earliest American literature on transsexualism, and he coined the term transsexual.

DL: Oh, he did? I thought Benjamin--

SS: Well, Benjamin says he coined the term, too. But then he said later something to the effect that "Well, it's been pointed out to me that D. O. Cauldwell used the term before I did. If I'd seen his article, I don't remember it. We came up with the term independently. You know, it seems to be the term that makes sense here, so it seems intuitively obviously that this term would be coined." And I think Benjamin was saying that around 1953, '54. But before then, people used the word transvestite, usually, or sometimes hermaphrodite. Jorgensen was first labeled a transvestite.

DL: I do remember early conversations with Dr. Benjamin where the term transgender would come up.

SS: Oh really? Because what I had heard was that Virginia Prince had coined that term in the 1970s. But Benjamin was using the word in the 1950s?

DL: Uh-huh. Yes. I remember hearing the word then.

SS: That's really interesting. Because you know, Dr. Money in Baltimore--he's not solely responsible for this, of course, but he was a big player in it--in shaping modern social science's notion of gender identity and gender role.

DL: Of course.

SS: And Margaret Mead, I think, too, had a big role. But basically, the idea that there's a difference between your physical anatomy, the social role you live in, your sexual orientation, that all of these things are distinct elements, and that it was largely through sexological science that the concept of gender, as most people understand that term, really took root. So to hear that Benjamin was using the term transgender in the early '50s is really interesting to me.

DL: Well, he may have gotten it from Dr. Money, because I know he would talk about their conversations quite frequently. But I remember that term rather than transsexual. I don't remember transsexual until much later, probably the late 50s or early 60s.

SS: That's probably when it spread into more general use. You see some debates about it in the medical literature. You know, "Is it a transvestite? Is it a transsexual? Is it a pseudohermaphrodite?" The term transsexual was just starting to take hold, and I would say that probably not until Benjamin published The Transsexual Phenomenon in 1966 did "transsexual" become "the" word. I wanted to ask another question about Claire Elgin. You said she was tattooed all over--

DL: I'm sure that must have been the same one. But there were two of them, two of them that were almost identical in their backgrounds. The one from San Jose, and the other from down around San Mateo, or somewhere. Both had managed to self-mutilize, to get the penis removed.

SS: That was actually what I was curious about. One of the biggest objections to doing any kind of genital surgery was, well, doctors would say "This is healthy tissue. I'm not going to commit mayhem." So people would castrate themselves.

DL: That's right.

SS: Forcing the doctors hand, so to speak.

DL: Well, they couldn't do it. There were mutilization laws. They couldn't do it. They were breaking the law if they did. So, well, one of these persons was Claire Elgin, though I can't think of which one it was. One of them did self-castration, the other actually used a meat cleaver, and removed the whole thing.

SS: And they survived that?

DL: Yes, they survived. Of course, they had to go to emergency, and they had to take care of it. But that always stuck in my mind. I mean, it was very shocking. But that was two cases I knew. One of them was Claire Elgin, but I don't remember which one.

SS: You said you knew Christine Jorgensen?

DL: Yes, I met her through Dr. Benjamin. She was performing here, and Dr. Benjamin and I went to see her performance, then went back stage and talked with her for about an hour. Interesting person. I know some of the things we were talking about at the time were--oh, what were they?

SS: This would be the late '50s?

DL: Yes, or maybe even the early '60s. Oh, what was the point of the conversation? There was something important about what it was we were talking about. It's almost slipped my mind. It had to do with the operation. The availability and the complications.

SS: Now, she went through a couple of stages.

DL: Yeah, I think it was even more than two with her. At least three. I remember talking about it with her. About three or four stages.

SS: Were there complications?

DL: Yes, I think there were. And that's something that I understand not many people know about, the real problems she had with the operation.

SS: Like what? Some of the common problems are fistulas, difficulty with urination--

DL: Infection. I think that's what the problem was with her. I remember she said she had a difficult time working through the complications of the operation.

SS: A difficult time emotionally?

DL: I think so, yes. I think that's what she was referring to. I mean, I think she was expecting a very clear transition. And it wasn't.

SS: That's something I didn't know about. I knew she did it in stages, that with the first big wave of publicity, all she had had done was an orchidectomy and a penectomy. Didn't have vaginoplasty at that time. That was actually a couple of years later. There was a big flap in the press about it when the details of that first surgery came out. But I didn't know about any complications. It doesn't surprise me, though. There often are.

DL: It was in its infancy then, too. Anyway, she was a very interesting person.

SS: What made her interesting?

DL: Well, she was very professional. At the same time very reserved. Not the sort of person who wanted to make a big deal of herself or what she'd gone through. And she went through an awful lot. But she, I remember she was very interested in--this is what she and Doctor Benjamin were talking about--the progress towards acceptance and the ability to perform operations here in the United States.

SS: Now I know Reed Erickson actually had a lot to do with that. The more I learn about him the more fascinated I am. It seems like he was the big behind the scenes player. He had money.

DL: Yes, he had money.

SS: And he kept Benjamin on his payroll. He kept Money on his payroll. He had Donald Laub on his payroll. He paid people to do work that he wanted to have done. He helped set up the first clinic at Hopkins, and helped set up the Stanford program. He was the grease that got the wheels moving. He set up the Erickson Educational Foundation to put out some of the first self-help literature. Then later, here in San Francisco, working with Elliot Blackstone, the National Transsexual Counselling Unit. Did you ever meet Erickson?

DL: No, I never did. Well, I don't think I did. I may have met him in Los Angeles. Yes, I know I did, one time, at either the One Institute--yes, and then also at the Daughters of Bilitis convention. So yes, I met him.

SS: But you just met him through organized homophile activities and functions?

DL: Yeah, just met him like that. Didn't really talk with him much or know anything about him.

SS: Let's see who else I have here in my notes--oh, Bunny Breckenridge.

DL: Bunny Breckenridge!

SS: So you knew him?

DL: Well, yes, but I can't recall the who, where, when or what. I remember the name, and I remember the person, because he was extremely eccentric.

SS: What do you remember about him?

DL: Well, a very flamboyant person. That's all.

SS: Flamboyant how? In manners, dress?

DL: Yes, in manners and in dress. And egotistical. Very egotistical.

SS: Was he somebody who would come to Mattachine Society meetings, or just somebody that you met socially, or just heard about?

DL: No, I knew him, but I cannot remember where, or in what capacity. It could have been through Chester Allen Arthur. Yes, I'm sure that's where it was.

SS: Another eccentric gay man.

DL: Yes, uh-hum. I went to some of Gavin's--we called him Gavin Arthur--went to some of his parties. You'd meet some very interesting people there.

SS: Do you know if Bunny Breckenridge identified himself as a gay man? Or were there any gender issues that you knew about? Do you know how he identified himself?

DL: I knew--presumed--he was gay. It had been discussed.

SS: Because he announced at one point that he was going to have a sex change. Never did. And was running around down in Los Angeles with the transvestite director Ed Wood, Jr. who made Glen or Glenda. I've seen mentions of him at the time as "Bunny Breckenridge, eccentric gay San Francisco millionaire, who publicly announced he was going to change sex", that he cross dressed, was extremely flamboyant, but that he never went through with the operation. I just wondered how serious that was.

DL: I don't think anything was ever serious with him.

SS: Do you know if he was one of the namesakes of Gore Vidal's Myra Breckenridge?

DL: Yes, I'm pretty sure he was.

SS: So did Gore Vidal have any local connections here?

DL: No, none that I know of.

[End of Side One]

SS: So, we had been talking about Bunny Breckenridge.

DL: Right. Anybody else?

SS: Oh, I've got several more names here. Dixie MacLaine?

DL: That doesn't sound familiar.

SS: She starts appearing in the public record when courting publicity after having surgery in the 1950s. One of the people who came in after Jorgensen. Charlotte McLeod, Tamara Rees. Those were some others. Dixie MacLaine is somebody I don't know anything about. Did you ever go to the Beige Room?

DL: Uh-huh.

SS: So what was the scene like there? Was it mostly female impersonation, theatrical female impersonation, or were there, do you know anything about people we would now call transsexuals, did they go there? Were they ever in the audience?

DL: I don't know. I mean, if they did, I didn't know it at the time. Yeah, I remember going to the Beige Room, in the late '40s, early '50s.

SS: What as it like?

DL: Well, it was like Finocchio's. It was a drag show. And then they would have one night a week a show devoted to amateurs coming in and doing things. It was, it was simply another drag show.

SS: Were there lots of places like that in San Francisco?

DL: Yeah, there were. There were probably five or six. I wish I could remember the names of some of them.

SS: This would be in the '50s, right? Now, Finocchio's is the famous one, but the others . . . ?

DL: Yeah, there was one right down on the wharf, and upstairs, I can't remember the name of it, was very popular. And the Beige Room was extremely popular. There was one downtown that their shows were of a cocktail lounge type thing. Singers with a piano. There were quite a few in those times.

SS: Were those sorts of places where these different subsets that we were talking about earlier--fetishists, Louise Lawrence crossdresser types, drag queens, female impersonators--did all sorts of people come to these bars? I'm just wondering about how

much interconnection and overlap there was between sets. Were there shared social spaces?

DL: I really don't think there were. Most of them were pretty well segregated. Homosexuals primarily went to the Beige Room and some of these other places. Then you had lesbians—Mona's Candlelight, that was the main one. It was pretty well that one went one way, and one went the other way at that time. There wasn't much mixing.

SS: I was just curious. Did you know people who say, when you met them, were theatrical drag performers but then began living as women and seeking surgery and hormones? Or did you know of butch lesbians who transitioned to become men? Did you know of people like that?

DL: No, no I didn't. All of the—well, I know of one lesbian who performed as a male singer and who lived as a male.

SS: Know that person's name?

DL: No, huh-uh. This one goes back. I met her in Portland, Oregon in an establishment up there. She moved around to the various establishments, and then I saw her here. It was at the Beige Room, later on. But she lived as a male. But that's the only one I know. The others were all strictly entertainment. They were entertainers. They simply dressed for entertaining and that was it.

SS: Was there then, I mean, how did drag--femme drag--work in gay male subcultures in the 50s? Was there a lot of it, were there people who . . . Well, like now--I'm sorry, I'm struggling to find words--let's say lived down around Polk street, and maybe did sex work as women, would trick as women, but if you asked them they'd tell you they were gay men. Or people who would spend a lot of time in the clubs doing girl drag, but they would tell you that they were men, and would have no interest in living as a woman all the time, even though they might spend a lot of social time in gay social environments, dressed as women. That's something I know of from at least the 60s forward, but did people do that in the 50s as well? Was there any kind of scenes like that here in San Francisco?

DL: Oh, I don't know. I've known, like I said, entertainers who were extremely professional drag artists, who were not homosexual. That was their entertainment. And they always made a point of saying they were artists. I've known quite a few like that. I think Charles Pierce was in that category, actually. Then there's a group that I knew who did not entertain professionally. But they were hairdressers, business owners, and they had kind of a set of their own in which they crossdressed, entertained, for themselves, or for special events. Then of course you had the crossdresser who did it professionally as a hustler. I knew quite a few of those. But these are all different categories. And the twain never met.

SS: That certainly seems to be the sense I'm getting. But my curiosity is still piqued. I think, surely there must be overlaps and connections somewhere between the categories. What were they? Where were they? Was it going to the same bars, perhaps, or --well, it seems to me that later, early in the 60s, Glide Memorial became a big networking hub for lots of different groups, and that there might have been some cross-over there.

DL: Yeah, that's true [about Glide], but I don't remember any [cross-overs] happening even there. They stayed distinct. There wasn't much cross-over that I ever saw, or knew. Well, let's see, I can remember one organization where there was some cross-over, but it wasn't because of this [Glide]. It was a group called Citizen's Alert.

SS: Oh, right.

DL: And there you found pretty much a cross-section of these people, these groups, but they were there strictly for another group purpose.

SS: Because they were all interested in the same--

DL: Right, because of the police brutality.

SS: And they were all coming together around a common issue.

DL: Right, uh-huh.

SS: Were there any other political issues or social issues that brought these different groups together?

DL: The only thing I can think of was that. And then of course the EOC, the Economic Opportunity program that we started in the downtown area. Which was completely different from the other groups around the city. Because there you had all these groups working together.

SS: So let's move on and talk about that some. My understanding is that this was all sort of a Kennedy-Johnson era Great Society sort of program, spending money to address the root causes of social problems. There was, let's see, Western Addition, Chinatown, Hunter's Point, the Mission. And that it was largely homophile activity that got this new area, the Central City anti-poverty area, established.

DL: Yes, that's right. Our first meetings were held in the Mattachine office, to form, well, we formed the Central City Citizens' Council, the CCCC. That was made up of a number of groups, including church groups, the Salvation Army, and a number of other social service agencies in the downtown area. And that was a group formed to petition specifically for recognition as an area of poverty.. And that's how we got it. It took about 8 months of very, very hard work to get that.

SS: So you had to approach the city supervisors, or the mayors office? Were there federal people you had to deal with?

DL: We had to deal with the EOC Council, but then we not only did that, but went through the board of supervisors, the mayor--who was Shelley at the time. Board of Supervisors were the most helpful in getting us recognition. Then we actually picketed the offices of the Economic Opportunity Council. Various things like that.

SS: That would have been 1965, '66?

DL: Yeah, 1966.

SS: So how was it then--well, this is a story I've heard from Elliot Blackstone, besides seeing some of this stuff in transgender publications--there was a woman here named Louise Ergestrasse, and she--

DL: Oh, yes! Louise.

SS: --she is the one who came to Elliot after he had gotten his job as SFPD liaison to the Central City area. Louise Ergestrasse Durkin waltzed into his office one day and said, "You need to do something about our problems." She had already gone to Glide Memorial, to set up a social support group mostly for male-to-female transsexuals who were working as prostitutes in the Tenderloin. And Elliot says he was completely clueless about any of these issues until he met her, and that's really where his education began, and how he met Dr. Benjamin and the rest. So what do you know about Louise Ergestrasse Durkin?

DL: I remember she was a real juggernaut. Hah! You certainly knew she was there. She and her partner, it was interesting, she was a very tall, tall, woman. He was a very short man. She was always sort of dragging him along. She was very forceful, very outspoken, a very interesting person. Yeah, I remember when she came flying into Elliot and laying down the law and telling him that he had to do something for her people. She had an organization, but I can't remember what it was.

SS: Well, there was CATS, the California Association of Transsexuals, but there was one before that, and I don't know for sure that she was the person who did that, though Elliot thought she was. There was something at Glide called something like the National Sexual-Gender Identity Association something-or-other, some long unpronounceable acronym. And Elliot says that when Louise came to him, he said "No, we've got to call it something else. We've got to call it COG--Conversion Our Goal. He says he came up with that name, and that he told Louise that if she wanted to play ball they had to use his name, because they weren't going to get anywhere with that other one. Do you know if there was any connection between the group of people who came together around Elliot Blackstone and Louise Durkin, and that other group, the earlier one around Louise Lawrence?

DL: No. Not that I know of.

SS: You said there were others, the ones you were calling less assimilated. Do you know if there was a connection between those people and--

DL: No, those were completely different, because we're talking about things that went on in the early 50s, and then in the later 60s. People from the 50s, Louise Lawrence, her people, never associated with any of the later groups.

SS: So it was a different generation? And you didn't see any continuities?

DL: No, and I don't remember hearing things come up later about the earlier generation. I don't think they even knew them.

SS: That was my next question. I mean, I remember in the late 80s and early 90s when I was transitioning, that I knew a few names of people back into the 70s, just because I have kind of an historical bent to my mind, but I knew nothing of the fact that, say, there was a national transsexual counseling center in San Francisco--even after I was transsexual and doing San Francisco history. I didn't know that was there until I came across a reference in this obscure drag magazine. Then I started asking around, and people would say, "Oh, yeah, Elliot Blackstone this, and Glide Memorial that. You know, I knew some of the homophile history, but had no idea how the transsexual history dovetailed into that so seamlessly. Then come to find out that Benjamin had his practice here for so long--I mean, I always associated him with New York. Then to find out that he was out here so much for so long, and that he knew transsexuals here in the '40s and '50s. There's this huge story that nobody knows about. Then to rediscover Louise Lawrence. There is a continuity here, of place at least. San Francisco is a place where there have been transsexuals, and a transsexual community of sorts, since the 1940s. You know, what's the relationship between that transsexual story and the larger story of sexual variant communities here? [Knock at door. Break in taping]

It's interesting to hear you say that there were distinct generations of transgendered people here. Because I see these historical moments when there were big shifts. One of them was in the post-WWII years, around Christine Jorgensen. And the other was between Harry Benjamin's book being published, and the sexual revolution and Stonewall and all of that, 66-70, around there. Some of it was of course strictly generational--different people coming to adulthood at different times. But it looks like a whole new scene comes together here around 1966-67. It seems like the Central City anti-poverty program played a really crucial role in that.

DL: I never thought of it in that sense before, but I think that's true.

SS: It provided some new kind of access to people for services. Now, do you know how it was that the Tenderloin came to be a place where there was an established transsexual presence by the mid-1960s?

DL: The Tenderloin...no. I don't. I don't know.

SS: I mean, by 1966 or '67 there were a lot of transsexuals there.

DL: Yeah, come to think of it, there were. But I don't know where they came from.

SS: Was it that way in the '50s?

DL: Not that I know of. No. Definitely not. I'm trying to remember when it showed up. Because I can sort of remember a period there in the '50s, with Louise Lawrence and that group, and then there's sort of a break, towards the '63-'64 era, when something else shows up. There's sort of a void in there. There's at least a lot of transvestite connections in the early '60s. But that was entirely different.

SS: Heterosexual transvestites?

DL: Yes. heterosexual transvestites. That's right.

SS: Virginia Prince types?

DL: Yes, that's right. Because at that time in Mattachine I had maybe as many as 20 that came to see me in that period, between '61 and '64, some time in that era. And these were strictly heterosexuals, family men, who were transvestites.

SS: And you don't remember any transsexuals from that period? That's interesting. Do you remember meeting any female-to-male transsexuals?

DL: Oh, just a couple.

SS: Do you remember any of their stories, where they were coming from?

DL: No, not really. I remember one, he came to see me quite frequently. He was married to a woman, they had a family, an adopted family. He was an auto repair person. And for the life of me I don't know why he came to me so often, because as I recall, he was a very integrated person. Then there was another one--I'm trying to remember the circumstances of this guy--I knew a person who was in business, I just remember he was in business. Oh, I remember. He was interested in trying to find out about operations. I referred him to Dr. Benjamin.

SS: So you didn't see much mixing between male-to-female and female-to-male?

DL: No. Not at all.

SS: Did you ever meet anybody male-to-female who identified themselves as lesbian?

DL: No.

SS: So they all oriented themselves sexually toward men?

DL: Either that or asexual. A number were strictly asexual.

SS: Do you remember talking with people about choices they made about whether they either were or weren't sexual?

DL: No, I don't. I remember, I don't know if this came up more than once or not. Not sure it did. It was more that the people I was talking to were more on a psychological level rather than a physical level. Psychologically they rejected completely the maleness, and sought after completely the female image within themselves. And that was it. The sexual thing pretty much just wasn't there. They would talk about just the gender thing.

SS: Who they were as a person--

DL: Yes, that's right.

SS: --and who they were to other people? And they just wouldn't want to try to be sexual because they didn't think they could negotiate that with others, just wouldn't want to try, or would think their self image wouldn't be understood?

DL: I get the impression they just weren't interested.

SS: Now, Louise Lawrence, did she fit into that category?

DL: I would say so. I never got any inkling that she was ever attracted to anybody sexually.

SS: It kind of reminds me of the generations of women who came of age after the 20s, until around the second World War, who were very independent, career-minded women. You know, the so-called modern woman. Not necessarily interested in marriage and kids, but in having a career, and having friends, and a social life, a life of the mind, and that was their life. It's interesting to see some male-to-female people of that time finding that social role to fit into. It could work as a coping strategy, a way for them to fit into the world, given their differences.

DL: Yeah, because I knew a number of women in the same situation. They were not sexual. They were not interested in that. They were in business, and interested in business things.

SS: What did Louise Lawrence do for a living?

DL: I don't know if I ever knew.

SS: Do you know if there are any photographs around? Do you have any correspondence, or scrapbooks, or anything that might have more information about her?

DL: No, no I don't. It's strange. In that period people were extremely afraid of having their picture taken.

SS: I can understand that.

DL: Yeah, it's very difficult to find pictures of any homosexuals, lesbians, anybody in that period, for fear of being identified. There was such a great stigma.

SS: I do have here a reference to the San Francisco Chronicle, October 2, 1954, a reference to Louise Lawrence, a picture of her painting a hex sign on her house.

DL: Oh really!

SS: I haven't gone to look that up yet.

DL: That would be interesting.

SS: Yeah, painting a hex sign. Did you know if she practiced a non-mainstream religion?

DL: [Laughing] No, not that I know of.

SS: Hex signs, transsexuals tattooed head to foot, it seems like a really fascinating scene.

DL: [Still laughing] Oh my goodness! Ah, well. One other thing I wanted to mention that was interesting. The heterosexual transvestites, almost to a person, this was the psychology. They were so completely heterosexual, in order to become completely whole, they had to be both male and female.

SS: I've seen that in some people.

DL: You've seen that? It was almost 100%. I got that from all of them. It's very interesting to me. Because it's such a different philosophy of almost any other different type of person.

SS: You know, I've seen the flip side of that among some gay men and some lesbians, that "I'm both. I'm an androgyne. I'm a man who's in touch with my feminine nature, a woman who's in touch with my masculinity." That you're holding both of these things

together. You know, the flip side of that transvestite coin. Different ways of dealing with what it means to those people to be whole human beings. That's an interesting observation you made.

DL: Well, I think most men and women would be more that way if it weren't for our culture.

SS: Yeah, I think you may have something there. Well, do you know what ever became of Louise Lawrence?

DL: No, I was just going to ask you if you knew anything about how any of these people wound up.

SS: Well, what I've gotten on Lawrence and company end around 1957-58 so I don't know what they were doing in the early 1960s, though I do know that Barbara Wilcox died sometime around there. Now, Barbara Wilcox, she was down in Los Angeles in the 40s. She was someone who was male, who was married to a woman, and she started transitioning, and claimed first that it was entirely endocrinological--that she just spontaneously started developing feminine characteristics and a more feminine nature. Probably I think that's what the reporters for the newspapers got told, and that she most likely was taking a more active role in her transformation. But she made a lot of press down in Los Angeles, and the story got picked up by the press nationwide, when she had a legal change of name and gender. This was before Jorgensen. She was in communication with medical people, trying to get surgery, and was told that it was completely out of the question. Then Jorgensen comes along, and refuels the whole debate. Well, Barbara Wilcox stays married to her wife, who subsequently transitioned female-to-male.

DL: Oh, I remember that now!

SS: They stayed together for quite some time. But there's nothing I know of Louise Lawrence after 1958, except that she died sometime in the mid-1970s.

DL: Oh, she did.

SS: How old was she when you knew her?

DL: She must have been in her 40s.

SS: So she was in her 40s in the '40s and '50s, so she must have been in her 70s--

DL: Yeah, she would have been in her 70s in the '70s. So. Well. Now, Prince, the last time I saw her was probably around 1972 or '73.

SS: She's still around. She's still pretty feisty.

DL: [Laughs].

SS: Did Harry Benjamin ever talk to you much about her?

DL: No, why?

SS: Well, she's claiming now that the literature that Benjamin wrote in the early '50s, mostly in response to the Jorgensen case--that Benjamin knew her at that time, and she has a Ph.D. I think in biology, and she claims that she actually worked very closely with Benjamin. And I know she did write one article that was sort of her grand theory of transvestism and transsexualism, and that it was published in a medical journal, and that Benjamin wrote an introduction to it, basically saying, "This was written by a transvestite, but just because she's a transvestite doesn't mean she doesn't know what she's taking about, so you should all pay attention to her." I have seen that article. But Prince is also claiming that the articles Benjamin wrote under his own name, that he actually collaborated with her. That a lot of his ideas came from talking with her. So she claims that the Benjamin model of transsexualism and transvestism should actually be called the Benjamin-Prince model. Just wondered if you had heard any of this at the time.

DL: No.

SS: I was also wondering if you had heard of a Viennese physiologist named Eugen Steinach, or of Magnus Hirschfeld.

DL: Oh, Magnus Hirschfeld, yes. Because Dr. Benjamin knew Magnus Hirschfeld.

SS: Do you know if he ever talked about anything related to transgender issues in connection with Hirschfeld?

DL: No, I don't recall.

SS: Because it was Hirschfeld who coined the term "transvestite," back in 1910.

DL: Oh, that's interesting.

SS: There's sort of a one-two punch I'm building up to here--there was Hirschfeld who coined the term transvestite, and then there was this Viennese guy Steinach who was associated with Hirschfeld's institute in Berlin, who did these gonad transplant experiments in 1912 and 1913, and then they started doing some of these things on people in Europe, transplanting ovaries and testes. It was Steinach who discovered the effects of estrogen and testosterone. This was in the teens. Starting with the initial publicity to Steinach, people started approaching both him and Hirschfeld, asking, you know, "Can you do that operation to me?" People in the United States couldn't find anybody who would do that, and some of them would go to Europe to seek medical help. But basically, all through the pre-World War II period, people would talk about "the

Steinach operation," by which they meant a sex-change. A number of people went through this in the 20s, 30s, and 40s. Hirschfeld was deeply involved in that. And I know that Benjamin had known Hirschfeld in Germany. Do you know when Benjamin came to the United States? It was pretty early, wasn't it?

DL: I think it must have been around 1914.

SS: Before World War I even?

DL: Yeah, I believe so.

SS: So he came over as a very young man.

DL: Yeah. I used to know. He told me his whole story once.

SS: Yeah, pretty interesting. Glandular extracts, rejuvenation, geriatrics.

DL: Yeah, he knew everybody. Freud, Jung, Hirschfeld. The one in England.

SS: Ellis?

DL: Havelock Ellis, yes. And he would tell the most interesting stories about them, but I can't for the life of me remember what they were. Oh, Jeez. I often think, "Oh! if I'd only had a tape recorder when I talked to these people!"

SS: Well, at least we had a tape recorder today.

[End of tape.]