

Jose Sarria
Interviewed by Paul Gabriel
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Transcribed: Loren Basham

PAUL GABRIEL: Can you tell me how old you are? Give me your age in 1961.

JOSE SARRIA: Well, let me see. I was born in 1923, my mother recorded my birth as December the 12th, 1923. So that would make me....

PG: Thirty-eight.

JS: Could be.

PG: In '61. Okay. And where were you living at that time?

JS: In 1961, now let me see. 1961, what the hell did I do in 1961. In 1961 I ran for office. I was living on 14th Avenue in a very, very Jewish area of San Francisco because I, and I was on a main boulevard, 14th Avenue is a main boulevard that connects the Golden Gate Bridge with 19th Avenue which goes down to the Peninsula. And I had my campaign photo in the window, which caused a lot of, you know, people would slow down because it was pointed out. It was a campaign picture of me, but the funny part was that when the picture was taken it was from the waist up because at that time I never owned a complete suit. I had just, I had borrowed, actually, for that picture, I had borrowed from my dresser his shirt and tie and a jacket. I had no pants. And at the time the picture was taken I was, the dress maker was here and I was trying on, being measured for some of my costumes so I had red high heel shoes on. But of course they don't comment ____?____.

PG: What was your rent paying job at that time, what you did just to make a living?

JS: At that time the Black Cat existed and we had come up with an idea of selling food by the ounce. Five cents an ounce. And in the middle of the financial district with all the women secretaries, the men secretaries, every body wanting to eat a fair lunch but not pay a lot, you could, it was, 5 times 16 is what, 80?

PG: I don't know, my math is not very good.

JS: Eight.

PG: Eighty.

JS: Eighty cents. So you could get 1 pound of food for 80 cents. And that was very, very good. You were eating lettuce and fruit. I would make a lot of dinners every

Thursday and it was a little bit more but even then I would make 7 to 12 dozen enchiladas. But I was working as, I ran the kitchen. It was a little kitchen. I managed that and I did my shows.

PG: At the Black Cat?

JS: At the Black Cat. It was all done right. We had another outlet too by this time. The 90 Market Street, I did the cooking down there because it was a regular kitchen and then we would send the food up for lunch at the Black Cat and there would be 3 to 500 people that ate there and then we had 90 Market Street. That was the good money that we used to pay for the Court expenses at that time.

PG: How many, at that time between 1961 and 1965 or '66, did you belong to any, at that time they called them homophile organizations. Did you belong to any?

JS: Well in 1964 I belonged to SIR, I belonged to the Tavern Guild. I was never a COIT. I was always invited, but I was never was a COIT. Lets see, what other organization. I was, never belonged to the Daughters of Bilitis. What other organizations did I belong to? They were forming political ones and I was always in the ground work in that type of a thing.

PG: Were you involved in the League for Civil Education?

JS: I founded it.

PG: Say the name for me, the camera.

JS: The League for Civil Education was the first nonprofit corporation that I founded here in the State of California. Which later evolved into the Society for Individual Rights. S-I-R.

PG: Why did you get involved in these organizations? What caused you to do it?

JS: Well, when I came back from overseas I began working at the Black Cat. I replaced my lover who would get drunk and was unable to go to work and that there was mishap that happened in my life. So I had to change my, how I was going to make a living. So I went to work at the Black Cat. And while I was there I learned, which I could not understand, how people had to live double lives. I never in my life lived a double life. I have been always myself. Never was somebody in the daytime to be somebody at nighttime. And that really was very, very shocking. It was also shocking to hear about how people talk about their parents. And specially about the grandparents. Because I always felt that everybody felt the same way I did about go visiting grandma and grandpa. I mean it was a treat to go visit my aunt because she let you do everything you wanted to. You wanted to do this, fine, fine. Of course you paid for it when you got home, because those things weren't, you didn't.... The hatred that some people had for their parents and the hatred for their grandparents, I mean.... Most of my friends that I

grew up with it was a treat to go to the farm and milk the cows and feed the chickens. And grandma spent extra money for candy and you got to eat ice cream in between the meals, she'd make you goodies. So I got, I figured right quickly that these people are missing out on life; this is wrong. And of course biggest essence is the double lives they were living because they were gay. And I couldn't understand that. I have always been gay, there is no such thing that I came out of the closet. I just don't understand it. In time I have understood it. But I was never in a closet. I never had to come out of a closet. I was always me. Even when I began to do my shows I didn't change my name, I created a character, but I never changed my name. If I wore a dress I am Jose, if wear men's clothes I am Jose. If I don't wear clothes, I'm still Jose. But you see, a lot of them change their names. They become Steve there, there to identify with a woman. And I never have. I have always been very unique in that way. I have created a character and the character's name is Jose. Now, of course, later on I created a character of the widow. And the character is still Widow Norton or Jose, Empress I. But Jose is there. Not any other.

PG: In the early '60s, say like from '61 to '65, a lot was happening in San Francisco with homosexuals in it's process of course, but you could say during that time things really changed. Homosexuals stopped, maybe as you said before, sort of hiding and more of them began to come out and sort of challenge the way they were being treated. Why do you think that happened? What caused that?

JS: Well, you had the beatniks and the flower children. They helped an awful lot. They're the ones that rebelled number one in dress. And that time is when they tried to impose women always, there's always been a dress for women where they would dress with men's slacks or tailored suits, men's type of suits. And they tried to insist that that had be a dress, a Coco Chanel look. And I could tell a story about a girl that came, a lesbian that came to the Cat all the time. She worked in an office. And she had a beautiful, paid very expensive money for her outfits, which were long pants and a jacket. Very tailored and her name was Suzie. Well the boss announced that no more pants were to be worn that they had to have skirts. So she went out and bought a 3 piece outfit, which was the skirt, the jacket and a cape. Very stylish. We didn't realize she had such beautiful legs. She very, very stylish. She came it and she came in and showed us her outfit she paid \$200 and some odd dollars, she was very proud of it. Didn't like the money she paid for it. But she was very proud of it. And she had the sniffles. And she went to work with her little sniffles and wearing her short dress, her skirt and everything. And it just kind of lingered, she couldn't, she really couldn't shake this cold. One week went by, one month went by. The beginning of the second month and she was really having trouble because of the disease that she could not get shaken. Went to the doctor's they went around all kinds of medicines and everything. And she said, I know what's the trouble, wearing this damned skirt I'm getting a draft and I've got the sniffles. So she took off her skirt, put the pants back on again and then the sniffles went away and she told the boss, you can fire me but I'm not wearing no more God damned skirt, that's it. Now for the men, the young people changed the white shirt, the conservative tie for what was supposed to be a correct look for a businessman, for the office. Hair, in those days haircuts went up \$14.00, \$10.00 that was ridiculous. And the queens, not the queens, the

young kids that we had ____? _____. Then the long hair came out and colored shirts. And they helped. And of course the queens picked up right away, the homosexuals, picked up on this relax of dress. Today we have what is a dress as you like on Friday. You go in and you see people dressed very casual like, but it's once a week now. The bosses found out that they got to have something like that. But that was the beginning was the youth did it, not so much the gay people did it. But they picked up right away.

PG: Why was that so important for gay people to be able to be more relaxed in their dress, do you think? How did that help them...?

JS: Well, in the 1960's, of course I had been preaching "gay was good" and the crime line in getting caught, we were jamming the courts with the arrests by pleading not guilty, demanding a trial by jury. I ran for public office. There were a lot of things that were contributing, little factors that contributed. And people were beginning to emulate me. And it Jose could do it, I'm going to try. You know. Sometimes it would work. And then I think that the people in business realized that they had to. You couldn't tell someone to cut his hair if he wasn't going to cut it. Because now they have balls enough to say I'm not cutting my hair so you can fire me. And the minute you got fired you went down and you got unemployment. And you say I got unemployed because I won't cut my hair. There was no law that said you had to cut your hair. And then came the beards. Whiskers, the mustaches and the beards. And unions, like the cook's union and waiter's union, tried to say no you have to have a clean face. The men would put a mask on like they do in the East, Eastern countries, so they wouldn't shave their beard. I mean people were beginning to decide that they were not going to conform and that was it.

PG: What led you to run for the Board of Supervisors then? You say yourself that you kind of had to, at least for the picture you had put on the appearance of conformity. But at the same time you are running for the Board of Supervisors, everybody knows you're gay. Why is it...?

JS: Because people figure.... Now at that time too, everybody considered themselves second rate citizens. The propaganda, the malarkey, that they had, that you read about made you believe you were a second rate citizen. You did not count. You had no rights. They thought.... Our rights were never really taken away from us, but they imagined they were. I.... This was my way of proving by doing things and making them see that I had rights. Nobody knew because they never bothered to read the laws or anything that if they got arrested they had the right to ask for a trial by jury. I told them, they did it and they found out that's a right that never was tried to get united.

PG: What was common among homosexuals when they were arrested? What did they do?

JS: Well, they paid and didn't make too much noise because they were afraid that they would be denounced. And I said, you have rights, stand up for your rights.

PG: So that's why you ran for the Board of Supervisors?

JS: And so I wanted to prove to them that I, as notorious as I was, and as notorious as they thought I was, and as notorious as I thought, that I had the right to run for public office. That was a right that was given to me for being born an American. I had that right. And that is why when the Democratic Party and the Republican Party were denying me the right to use that affiliation, which was required by law, one or the others you had to use, that was also denied. When I announced some other people probably would have said well I can't do it because I'm not known. You cannot deny me this. So said that you have to have an affiliation, well I had an affiliation because from the first time that voted I was a democrat, a registered democrat. They didn't tell me that I couldn't register as a democrat because I was a queen or gay. No. So I tested them, I used brinkmanship. I would have gone all the way but it's a matter of using brinkmanship that I push to get me what I wanted. I listed myself as a democrat; they said they would not sponsor me. I think ___? ___, I got what I wanted. And that was it. And I proved to the world that as a gay and as notorious as I was, I had this right. Ten years later other people came out of the closet and did the same thing. And today how many people do you have in political office, in the House of Representatives, in the Senate. Judges. That all are out. They are not doing a bad job. Some of them need their heads examined; but no, I shouldn't say that. They are doing a job and they are elected if they weren't re-elected then they weren't doing the job. A lot of them have had small little incidents in their lives, but because of their good work the people have forgiven them and they continue. I always say one's work will always, you will always be saved by your work.

PG: Why was the Tavern Guild formed? And the League for Civil Education. I mean what were they responding to, why did you even want to do that?

JS: Well at the time that the, see the Tavern Guild was formed before the League. The Tavern Guild was formed because of the harassment of the police department and the ABC. We had a network already, we would phone and advise of it. The police would come to one bar, we phone to our next neighbor and put them alert. We would put them on the alert so that finally from a little Thursday social gathering in which they discussed bad check artists, how to cope with the police coming in and the ABC. Because you see that they didn't tell you at the time that they were surveiling you, you would get a notice a couple of months later. Very vague that they were in there and that they saw this and this and this happening. How can you defend yourself. So they decided to form a group of the bar owners. Where they failed is that they never did anything for the membership. They didn't get them insurance, they didn't try to unify the wage scale and do things like that. And that's why today the Tavern Guild doesn't exist. Now the League, by preaching that "gay was good" and that became an argument with the Mattachine Society. Because prior to that the Mattachine Society was an educational thing. They were talking to the lawyers and the doctors and to the Indian chiefs. And I said, they're talking to the wrong one's. They get arrested and they have money they can get out of it. They get arrested they have names, they can buy their way out. But I want to reach the poor little guy on the street that doesn't have money, that doesn't know the law. The one where its really going to hurt. And that's what were teaching. That's why it was the

League for Civil Education. Our first group, and we discussed what were our rights. And it was through education. That lasted until there was an argument as to what should be most important. The first magazine, the publication that the League put out or the meetings. There were some said that the education part was more important and the work on the paper. And at that time Guy Straight ran the publication. So they said fine, you keep the publication and you run it. We'll take the education part of this corporation. And that's where it was divided and it became SIR, the Society for Individual Rights. Which then was the nucleus for the political parties to be started, for the center for the deaf-mutes, center for the youth and the senior citizens. All little things branched out. I used to tell people you find what you want to do and that's what you've joined.

PG: [some technical interruption]

JS: So Guy Straight took on to publishing the *Vector* magazine.

PG: Oh, he published *Citizen News*?

JS: *Citizen News* first and then he went into the *Vector* magazine. And the other group, the co-owner, the League changed the name just of ___?___ papers by-laws, and that became that until it died and that was it. First the publication and then the organization.

PG: Why do you think SIR died? What was achieved so that it didn't need to continue?

JS: Thing were, when I found the political things it was always tied together and the friends taught themselves. They didn't need.... And money. Bad leadership. All of that were different little factors. And it was best just to let it die down. The bars, the Tavern Guild, died because from a high of 150 to 160 bars it dwindled to 23 bars. The drinking habits changed. AA became very prevalent amongst the gay people. Bars can't exist. The types, gays now began to form little groups your town and your country, western country, a leather. They began divide and be into various little groups and that also hurt the bar situation.

PG: Tell me about the California Ball raid and CRH, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual. I know its very famous but do you think that was also important for the gay community here? And gained rights?

JS: Well coincidentally I had screamed at the church, you'd better shit or get off the pot. Because I, being raised with religion, not an overdose but we were a good Catholic family. Ate fish on Friday, went to mass on Sunday and played around during the week. And everybody has had that type of training. And they leave home and its missing because the feel they are second rate and they can't go in and confess. They have no faith to go pray. You don't have to go to church. They think you do because this is the way we were all raised. There was something else that came to my mind...Oh yes. Where I ended up personally was most families there was always music of some sort that was taught to the child. You either sang or you danced or played and instrument. Now comes the time when you are kicked out of your home, you're told to leave, they don't

want to see you no more. And you have to pack up your very few belongings and leave for the big city or you decide that you cannot live in this small little hamlet. And what is the first thing you pack? Although you haven't been practicing or using it, it's the instrument that you learned. The violin, the trumpet, the trombone, and that. You packed it and you took it with you to the big city. Maybe once in a while you took it out reminiscing of when you took lessons. Maybe if it was something very important in your life at the time, you tried to small little band of musicians or you do something. Because of that in the way that the orchestras and the marching bands helped the gay community got started all over the United States. I think we have what, 20 gay bands and orchestras. Because they put out an SOS, people who play an instrument this following thing. And they did, that we are. They played in the Rose, the Rose Bowl in Hollywood. All 12 of them got _____, a big concert. And it was a big thrill to see a marching band or go to the concert when we've had dance orchestras that were wonderful. But it was because of leaving home and having these instruments. And so I think this is a reason why the MCC Church got off on a good kick because nobody wanted to _____. Homosexual religion and the homosexual [CRH?] were the first. They sponsored that ball. Everybody was having the time of their life. And because it was raw, I mean it was just plain harassment, they came in and started arresting people that were in charge of the ball. Still has not been resolved technically. And so they arrested. That was the first time and everybody screamed, rant to rage. But it was the beginning and then pretty soon Father Cromey....

PG: Cromey?

JS: Cromey, yes. He had to preach. And then you had the MCC Church, his name is, I met him in a freight elevator at a coronation in Los Angeles.

PG: Troy Perry?

JS: Troy Perry. Being a rejected priest formed his church today. A church felt through the United States and then became apostle of the MCC. And the people then, that they would not be successful, but they needed that, they needed religion some place. Then with the MCC growing and certain branches of the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, they all felt, the Episcopalians were the first and have stayed very constant. And their congregations have gotten stronger and that's there. Religion is there for the gay person if he wants it.

PG: So, if I'm hearing you, you're saying that during this time, like '61 to '66, whatever, that the most important thing for gay people is that they began to demand civil rights.

JS: Yes. I think they got tired of hearing they preach about it, they were going try they and doing it by me running for public office, by me getting out and leading parades, by me doing something of just getting up and preaching gay is good. I inspired, there's a lot of people who were inspired by my sermons. They have come to me and said, thank you for what you have done. I now can live my life openly, I was able to do this, I was able to do that. I want to thank you because I have been with a man who I met coming to see

your opera for 42 years. I don't really forgive you, but I've put up with his shit for 42 years, but he's been my companion for 42 years. People say that I inspired them. Maybe I did. Last night, I just came up from Hollywood and the end of the production number they shot lots of confetti. It was very, very theatrical. It was very nice. Well the hotel comes in, you will pick up all that confetti or we will charge you for cleaning it. Well, as per usual, in the function, there are only 3 or 4 people who do all the work. This one boy came up and said, you know we have no help, came up to the hospitality room where everybody is sitting around drinking and talking and having a very good time. And a few hardworking queens are downstairs trying to pick up the confetti and breakdown the sets because it had to be done before or they would have to pay 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 hundred dollars. Well there goes the profit for the evening. So he came up and he was in tears. And the ___?___, here there was a room full all drinking, not lifting a God damned finger and 4 or 5 people downstairs trying to pick up confetti on the God damned rug. And I said, this is really a crock of shit. I want every God damned one of you to go down to the ball room. We are going to help them move and breakdown the sets and we are going to pick up the confetti and then we are going to come up here and chit chat, drink and socialize. But we are going to go down there right now. That means every damned one of you. In dress, out of dress. And I happened to have my nightgown on at the time, I put on my pants because we couldn't go through the hotel like that. They had a vacuum cleaner and it was all full of paper so naturally it wasn't picking up everything. I put one queen to cleaning it out and we picked up. And in less than 5 minutes with cooperating, with everyone working we cut everything up and out and everyone back upstairs to drink. They said, God, when Jose says something, I never saw so many people move. I said it was a pleasure to go down to the ballroom and found everybody on their knees picking up confetti. That's a lesson. But then, you see, you have to be able to let your wishes be known.

PG: Tell me, many people are doing political things at this time and you were doing that too, but around this time something really important that you did was.... First it started as a joke but you ended up with what turned out to be the court system, you founded it. Do you think that was just as important as the other stuff that was going on?

JS: Yes. It was important in many ways. Up until that time the gay community was very "I-I" and "I-I" communities do not go far; they die. Nobody likes to be part of an "I" community. I said we had to change that. We had to become a "we" community. We have to work together, we have to help one another. We have to phone your friend. Don't be in contact and then when you read in the paper that they found your friend who was dead in his apartment of a heart attack and he was laying there for 3 or 4 days. That's wrong. If you have a friend, you call them up to find out how he is doing. So it was very, very important. We started up a community. The community was dividing. A city where people were running in all directions. There's always the smart queen or two, they can figure out how to make an extra buck without having to schlep too hard they are going to do it. So I wasn't going to allow that. So I took the bull by the horns and I formed the court system that united the community, that got rid of the people that were going to make money off of the queens. Not completely because I had to be on my toes, but people began working together. And I believe the court system had not been

organized at the time that AIDS came out, we would have had a bigger, bigger problem. Because, you see, there was already a working "we" community. And this has hit all of us that it was easy for us to shove out money to do what we had to do the help one another. Had there been no court system, and they raised millions and millions of dollars all through the United States, Canada.

PG: How was the, going way back to the beginning, in '65, how come the court system was able to do this. All this you've been talking about? What made it that way? Because somebody from the outside could say it's just a bunch of drag queens.

JS: They still say that. We are trying to change that image. But how we are changing the image by letting people know what we are doing. You have to blow your own horn. And it took 15 years. We were feeding the elderly and the gay and the poor for Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas and doing this. It took 15 years for them to give credit to the gay kitchen, to Tessie's (sp?) kitchen. Fifteen years. But every year they said, Glide church fed so many, the Methodist Church fed so many. Fifteen years they said the gay community, Tessie's, Empress Tessie's Kitchen fed 900 people. That was the beginning. Now we are changing, one of the things in the international court meetings that we have, regional meetings, we must change that image. We are not a bunch of silly drag queens. We are silly and we have drag queens, but we have a purpose and the only way you are going to show this is by.... And this is happening to make them a little bit better. So now I tell them, I say, you have created a character, but you can't live that character. It's not necessary for some of you to always have to dress to do something. You create a character, but you should be able to do what you want to do. And people are working together. The friendships that have been made. The working together. It's really heartwarming because number 1, I put a big pot on the stove and I put rich, I put poor, I put Asians, I put Blacks, I put Latinos, I put White people and put all kinds of religion and I have mixed it all up. And the funny part is, it's blending, it's blending. It's coming out of everybody. At a coronation when one steps down and he says good bye to his brother and sister empress of another kingdom, there is really, truly a sincere feeling. They were the rulers, they were the leaders and now they step down. And they are both have helped them to become. And its very touching to see that. Tears are shed, they embrace and the friendship continues.

PG: Do you think the court system, you talked about these people being leaders, do you think the court system gave from the very beginning? Let's go, trying to go back to the very beginning, do you think it gave something to some homosexuals who maybe otherwise felt left out of, like from SIR and the Tavern Guild and Daughters of Bilitis and CRH and all of these other organizations? I mean, do you think so?

JS: Did it make some leaders out of them?

PG: Did it give them, did they maybe felt left out of other gay organizations and maybe they felt that the court system was for them? Or was it more fluid or, I'm just wondering.

JS: Well, those other organizations that you mentioned were the beginning just the same way that ___?___ became the motorcycle clubs. Everything reaches an apex, you might say, and if they don't take inventory of what they're purpose is. Or they lose the purpose, the organization dies. And in some cases, they just outgrew the demands of the community so there was a need of something else. The court system is 31 years old. That's a long time. However, I have been around and I am preaching and I am looking and I guiding ___?___. I have made up my mind because I am a positive person. Yes, it has caused them to find a niche. A lot of them come to a new city, they move to a city and the first thing that they will join will be a court. Entertainment, you can meet people, they have a home, they are with other gay people. They can meet people in their profession, because the court system includes everybody.

PG: Why do you think, you said it lasted 31 years compared to all these other organizations, you said they came and they did some work and then they disbanded or they fell apart. How come the court system has not only survived but flourished? Why do you think? Compared, it started the same time. All these organizations were acting for civil rights.

JS: Well the court's not civil rights so much as doing good. My main purpose of the court system was to, because at that time the thought or the mental thinking of the queens was that they wanted rights, yes. And they thought that they were entitled to special rights. And those organizations said that was not right. We are not entitled to any more rights than the next man who could be straight, crooked, bent or whatever. The law says, doesn't specify. Everybody is the same. Now the politicians change that around a little bit when they want to get a law passed. And they'll screw it up so that everybody thinks that homosexuals are looking for something special. I understand there was an article in the paper about the young people standing on the street kissing and carrying on. A male boy and a girl can do that but they said why can't two men do it or two women do it. You see what I mean? That's discrimination. I haven't read the article yet. But your question is that....

PG: I was asking how come you think the court system...?

JS: Okay, the court system was not founded on getting political benefits, because as a nonprofit corporation you can't. In the beginning it was a contest. You ran, you won, you said good-bye. In San Francisco, you ran, you won, and that is when your work began. You fed, you collected, you gave, you did. Some of them, that was the only purpose in life. They found their niche. They formed organizations, little groups to make pantyhose or They found a niche, they found a purpose in life other than going, working in the parks at night. No, no, no. They found something to do. And it was always in some charity vein. And by doing this they began working with the community that they lived in. Pretty soon the community saw that they were no different than anybody else. That they had the interest of the community at heart. That they helped vote and promote betterment of the community. Because all those things were being tied in; you have to be part of the community. You must get out and vote, you must get out and sweep the streets, you must take an interest in your community. This is where your

living. You buy a piece of property, you have make sure your lawn is cut, you have to be an asset to your part of the community. This is what I, what my wish was and this is what they were beginning to be part of a community. And they found out that the straight next door neighbors liked them for being them, themselves.

PG: Even it they looked like, even if they dressed up very strangely?

JS: Well, yes. Even if the neighbors knew that they were gay, they said, why those boys save. They take care of their mother, they do things around here. They are an asset to the community. Look how they painted their house and fixed it up. And I've known people who said could you come over and give my husband a hand? And that's become part of the community.

PG: In the mid '60s, gay people started feeling they could go out and picket for the first time. Like in San Francisco they picked Grace Cathedral for Father Cromey.

JS: Yeah, '69.

PG: In '65.

JS: In '65? Well, I picked the church in '69, I've got a picture of me doing that. I picked Grace Cathedral.

PG: Do you remember when they had the

JS: The ___?___ was the leader of the church movement, he was the leader. I just got on the tables and kind of backed him up and gave him support. But he was the one who stuck his nose out.

PG: What did he do?

JS: He just said that gays had a place, God.... I think he's gay too.

PG: No he's straight.

JS: He's straight? But he felt that the gays had a place in their house of God. And he stuck his nose out and said we want communion. And he was.... They sent him out of town for awhile. I don't know how he has managed to survive, but he has.

PG: Do you remember in 1966 they had a big national conference of gay organizations in Kansas City? And then they had Armed Forces protest here on Armed Forces Day and then summer they had this big meeting of gay organizations again. Do you remember any of that?

JS: Okay, in '66, yes. Because I gave a ball to raise money so that we could attend the conference in Kansas City. It was the first homosexual conference ever held in the

United States. And I gave a ball as the Empress and I divided the money so that the 4 organizations in San Francisco could take a bus to Kansas City, not enough for plane tickets but enough for a bus and we made it. Then the next conference was held here in San Francisco. And its been going on ever since in various parts of the country. I think the last one we had here in San Francisco was about 3 or 4 years ago.

PG: Do you remember that conference in the City? At all.

JS: I don't think I attended. I had been responsible for a lot of things starting, but I have never attended anything. The day isn't long enough.

PG: Did you go to the demonstration at the Federal Building on Armed Forces at all, do you remember doing that at all?

JS: Once I did one, I forget, I did one. I went down. I don't always feel that that is the right way to do things.

PG: Why is that?

JS: I don't know. I think you do more by voting and not changing the laws. We felt we could change them. I was told about this march last night on the night, a couple of nights ago in defiance of the marriage law and the other one that was passed....

PG: Defense of Marriage Act.

JS: Yeah. That was one and then there was another one that we lost by 1 point that was the....

PG: Oh, the Fair Employment.

JS: We lost that, didn't we. We wouldn't of had it had we not voted for some of these idiots that we voted for or that we sat on our asses and not voting. That's how that's going to change. Do I need to go out there and is it going to do, however it is the beginning. In this last election I saw a lot of people voting, which is a good, healthy sign. I mean the people who get elected feel that they are there for ever and ever. Well, I got news for you: nothing is written in stone. And I think this next election we are going to find that.

PG: What do you think about.... Can we talk about the time in the '60s and people were really, gay people were concerned about fighting back and you said a lot of the organizations were getting civil rights and the court system was helping people to feel good about themselves and be part of the community. But by the late '60s there was something new happening and a lot of that is sort of symbolized by Stonewall. Do you think Stonewall deserves it's reputation for liberating, that's when gay liberation happened, do you...?

JS: Well the gay liberation did start, 'cause it was slow reacting. But I think that was when national, national it was made; the country was made aware of the fact that homosexuals do exist. And I think it was an awaking that the homosexual was not going to just sit back and be pushed around anymore. Those queens who even within the ranks of the gay community are always considered not, the ones that tear down the community which I am not but they are the ones that really don't have anything to lose, basically. And they got tired. They took off their heels and they used them.

PG: Do you think that in San Francisco, the gay community already sort of ...?

JS: Oh, yeah, we already, long before the '70s we already had arguments and had won decisions by courts. We had our arguments with the telephone company. In our own way here we quite success was marked. Open more, more freer. This was the Mecca.

PG: There were rumors as well back here. If you, do you think its.... Today a lot of people afraid to use the word "queer," for "gay," and they talk about in the late '60s when you could say homosexual liberation happened, a lot of things happened. Women became feminists and leather dykes came out and crazy drag queens and all these things happening. And people began to say, I want to be queer. What do you think about that?

JS: Well, queer, for the older person, queer was not a nice word. Faggot, for an older person, faggot was not correct. There now, transvestite is a word now which is slowly being put away. They are using transgender. Its words. Gay is a nice word. Gay by definition means someone is happy. We've adopted it to mean someone who has a different lifestyle. But that's better than homophile, that's better than lesbians, bull dykes. I mean those are not very nice words. Some of them sound like it was a rare and exotic disease. Well it isn't. Homophile, oh ___?___ when that came out. That came out in like you said in the '60s. We were homophile. Homophile my dear wouldn't change. Homosexuals, we're gay.

PG: What was bad about the word homophile?

JS: I don't know. Maybe it was because they wanted us to change and I wasn't about to. A horse is a horse, a cow is a cow. Don't try to become a partner. And everyone looked like an independent thing.

PG: How do you feel about the gay.... We've been talking about building a gay community, it really didn't exist then. How do you feel about it today? I mean, do you feel, do you agree with all the priorities that are being set by the gay community?

JS: Well I think some of them are fighting for things that.... Well if you don't fight for them.... Some of them are too soon. Its not right. For what we see today, is 40 to 50 years of my work. That is not overnight. That's a long time, that's many days, many hours. And many tears and a lot of bloodshed. Like they say, Rome was not built in a day. But from what we had 50 years ago to what we have today, we have a great distance. We sometimes try thinking that we are make steps ahead; we are basically

making steps behind. Because we are not going ahead. Instead of going forward 2 we are going back 1. Because some of the so-called leaders are fighting for things which are superfluous. Are not necessary. But they have nothing else to do so they start to carp on something of that nature.

PG: What issues are not in your, what do you think are important?

JS: Well, this marriage. I don't believe in it. That issue is not the marriage. If you and I want to get married the government can't tell us anything there is supposed to be a division of state of religion. We can go and get married in a church and let Bill and Larry and that's the end of it. But it's the governmental benefits, benefits that society will get from two people living together, working together, saving together; that is what's missing. And that's what I fight for. Because I don't think there should be a difference. Not everybody gets married. Not everybody is legitimate by birth. So at one time, if you remember back in history, legitimacy, my dear, you might just check, you had no rights. You could not inherit. You were nobody. You were no different than the bitch dog that walked the streets. Well, that was changed. Even common law marriage has been changed in some states.

PG: Tell me, if you look back on your life as a member of what we now call the gay community and things you've done for it, what contribution are you most proud of?

JS: Well, for different reasons.... You ask me questions because.... I never did anything with a, how would you say that, something in my mind?

PG: Oh, ulterior motive.

JS: I did not have ulterior motive for what I have done in my life. I've done it because I sincerely believed, I have been told that I was ahead of my time. I don't know. The biggest thing I think has been because of what I see has grown out of it has been the court system. Really. When I see the friendships, when I see the charity-ness, when I see – and its tearful and its sad. When two people are elected and they go out and they're going to change the world. They have done this and not the end of their term comes and they sit there and they say goodbye to you. They say goodbye to the community in which they have planned and organized and done and raised money. And they have stepped down. Of course I was, that's when they want to work the hardest because they got their feet wet. Now they've got a purpose, they know what they are doing. When I see these friendships combine and helping one another. In the court system there is very little "I," it doesn't work. There is a lot of "we."

PG: If you look back over this time, I'm not saying anything that you did, but the things you were involved in, what consequences are you most unhappy with? I would think what sort of came out in that time in the early '60s, mid-'60s, and everything that sort of came out of it. What are you most dissatisfied with?

JS: That's kind of hard to say. I have always been dissatisfied with the people, the gay community, not being able to put aside petty differences and work for a common goal for everybody. I have always said, thinking between stages, you get 5 weeks, thinking of it you have a revolution. Because those 5 weeks are not winning and all the thoughts and things go one way I feel that we missed the boat in that time. Things that we could have achieved had we all put our differences aside and said lets all hold hands and walk together. The black people can take 50 years to get what they've got. In 10 years they enough, it began with the riots in Watts. It didn't take them 50 years. In the integration of schools, segregated toilets. A lot was changed. It took years. It would have been 10 years. That didn't exist. Because you see, maybe it was because they weren't fighting. They were easy to be led by the leaders of the blacks. And they all joined hands and proceeded. Proceeded to follow the leader. Yet the leaders got shot and killed. I think now they are not winning so fast any more. And now we've got too many leaders. And they are too diversified. They are beginning to think.

PG: Back then you were talking about why, why couldn't the gay community work together at that critical time. I know you said it was "I, I, I." What do you mean. What kept organizations from working together?

JS: Jealousy, petty jealousy. Trying to keep up with the Joneses. ___?___ does that. They think about themselves, they think about tomorrow. I made a statement just before AIDS broke out. I said that something disastrous has to hit the gay community to make people realize that no one is, no one is an entity in his own.

PG: An island unto himself.

JS: Yes. Nobody is that. We all need the help of somebody else. No one can live completely by himself.

PG: Thank you.

[End of recording]