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 2 VOICES of the Oral History Project of GLHSNC
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 6 Interview with Ted Rolfs
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 9
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 11 GLHS OHP #00-02 - McCarthy Era Project
 12
 13 TR: That period of the '50s, I wish I had refreshed
 14 my memory with what was going on. It will come to
 15 mind, I guess, as we talk.
 16 LE: Well, in a way, I'm glad you didn't 'cause I, I
 17 sort of wanted it to be personal, you know, as they
 18 come, your feelings and how, things that happened to
 19 you. Maybe, maybe you should tell me a little bit
 20 about yourself up to the '50s so I have a sense for
 21 it.
 22 TR: Oh, that might be a good way to start. I might
 23 tell you that I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin,
 24 the third oldest child of a family of nine children. My
 25 father, a physician with a general practice. We lived

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1 the largest department store in Milwaukee, the Boston
 2 Store. Ah, they were on this trip to Europe after
 3 graduating from Yale, and when they were returning on
 4 the ship, the gangway was about to be taken up, and
 5 the mother stopped the quartermaster and said, but
 6 only one of my sons is here. Where's the other one?
 7 And the one who was there said, look, momma, sit down,
 8 I have news for you. And the news was that the other
 9 one was not going to come, that he had a letter. The
 10 other brother had a letter to read and it said, Momma
 11 and Pop . . . they were a Jewish family, there was that
 12 way of addressing their parents, I believe. I'm not
 13 coming home. I've found my true lover. I'm a
 14 homosexual. And when that got to Milwaukee, it was a
 15 front page story.
 16 LE: Really?
 17 TR: Yes. And I could see my parents in a huddle.
 18 They knew the Stone Twins and when I would come along,
 19 they would hush up. And I, I figured that ah they
 20 knew then that I was a homosexual. I was browsing
 21 through my father's medical library, and found a
 22 marvelous discovery of books which made me feel -
 23 there were annotations in their books like Hadlock
 24 Ellis's case histories and - and Wilhelm Schtechel and
 25 Kraft Ebbing and a lot of things. And where there

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1 quite well in a great big three story house with a
 2 cook who lived in, more like an aunt than like a cook
 3 or servant - and a maid who lived in. In those days,
 4 life was rather gracious, you know? I, ah, was taken
 5 by my family to hear Sousa's band, or the third or
 6 fourth farewell tour of Madame Schumann Hike, but that
 7 was about my cultural exposure, until I met two gay
 8 fellows who were twins, identical twins, both gay.
 9 Their name was Stone, their last name, and they were
 10 referred to as the Rhinestone Sisters. Ah, they led
 11 me into amateur theatrical productions and took me to
 12 see musicals and beyond what I had found in my family.
 13 After all, at home I was taken to the circus, and I
 14 could see the half-man and half-woman and feel an
 15 identity there, thinking some day maybe I could get a
 16 job like that.
 17 But these two young friends of mine, ah, were about
 18 three years older than I, which is quite a bit when
 19 you're young. And they graduated at the same time
 20 from Yale and as a commencement gift, their parents
 21 took them on a grand tour of Europe to the spots that
 22 were part of the grand tour. And I had them to my
 23 home many times, to family dinners. My parents knew
 24 them quite well. After all, they came from a rather
 25 prominent family. Their father owned, I would think,

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1 homosexual topics, they were often marked. And I
 2 thought gee, you know, my dad's onto me. And now with
 3 my friends, my friend, hitting the front page of the
 4 Milwaukee paper, it's time to say good-bye. So I told
 5 my father I wanted to leave home. I'd five sisters.
 6 I thought I would interfere with their marriages.
 7 Some were being courted, and the thought was generally
 8 that homosexual was a flaw of genes or something, that
 9 they didn't look at us with the kindness of a left-
 10 handed person. Anyway, I, I took this book. My
 11 father said look, you're uneducated, you're going to
 12 ruin us some day to leave home, but if that's your
 13 wish, do as you want. You can always come back. So I
 14 went to New York. That was 1929.
 15 I've gone on too long with that. But ah, I then,
 16 I'll just say briefly that ah I was employed by an
 17 English firm of architects and interior designers.
 18 The principal was ah Sir Charles Allen, and their
 19 offices were in London. And when the Depression hit,
 20 they survived for several years. But as it deepened,
 21 they returned to London and I was out of work. And by
 22 maneuvering, I got on ships in the Merchant Marine.
 23 That would be 1934. And I, I sailed, and in 1930, I
 24 sailed up until about 1950, which is really the period
 25 you're interested in now. I was taken off ship's,

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1 screened off as a subversive. I'd been very active in
 2 union affairs. And there were, I think, about two
 3 thousand of us in the Merchant Marine who were
 4 deprived of our livelihood without trial, just guilt
 5 by hearsay, by what others had said. I'd been very
 6 active in union work. Perhaps you'd rather question
 7 me than have me go on.
 8 LE: I want some details on this.
 9 TR: I was in that period now, 1950. I was in union
 10 leadership, at least aboard the vessels I sailed.
 11 LE: As a Master Maritime.
 12 TR: Well, I began in the National Maritime Union
 13 and then later joined the Marine Cooks and Stewards
 14 Union.
 15 LE: That was the black men's union, wasn't it?
 16 TR: Ah that . . . I began as a sailor working on
 17 deck. There are three departments, you know? There
 18 are Culinary Workers who prepare the meals and take
 19 care of the housing of the people on ships. Then
 20 there's the ah, the sailors, who go about painting and
 21 chipping and steering, and fire watches and so on.
 22 And then the other group is the Black Gang. I thought
 23 it was that that you referred to. They work in the .
 24 . .
 25 LE: I thought, I thought that, I meant, I meant, I

1 the union and saw that ah . . . and was told there are
 2 many men, hundreds, thousands, really, playing cards,
 3 waiting, hoping that they might be called to work.
 4 And I had no experience. But my observation was that
 5 this black man was a very pompous ass. In his jacket
 6 pocket, he had a cigarette [case] with this monogram
 7 on and he often arrived in a car with a chauffeur.
 8 And then he was, he dressed as if he'd just come out
 9 of Bond Street. He never had what some of the later
 10 union leaders had was a quality of the men that had
 11 been organized. Anyway, what irked me most was I
 12 attended a meeting and saw that he had used a gun to
 13 call the meeting to order, instead of a gavel. Just a
 14 revolver. Of course, he had a permit so he was within
 15 the law, but it seemed so obnoxious to see a meeting
 16 called to order that way, so intimidating, you know?
 17 But anyway, I wrote a letter to my father saying if
 18 I could get from him a letter from the governor or the
 19 mayor, or both if possible, saying that I was known by
 20 them and that favors to me would be appreciated by
 21 them, he would react. This man would react. And
 22 exactly what happened, these letters were . . . the
 23 one from the governor had a gold seal with a streamer
 24 of silk, white and red, the colors of the state, and
 25 rather formal language. And that he was acquainted

1 was thinking of another union. There's one union that
 2 was started by a black man in the . . .
 3 TR: Oh, oh, I did make some mention of that, yes.
 4 LE: Wasn't that the union you mentioned then? Or
 5 is that . . .
 6 TR: Yes, that was the ah, the was they ah
 7 International Seamen's Union, it was called.
 8 LE: Oh that's right.
 9 TR: And a, a black man was the head of the
 10 Stewards' Department. In fact, there were two
 11 sections: one for black members of the Stewards'
 12 Department, and one for whites. And he would meet
 13 with each group separately. And, of course, his
 14 rationale was that some ships wanted only black, some
 15 was only whites, which was the case.
 16 But I had tried to get . . . mind you, I'd had no
 17 experience on ships. I might as well had a bit more.
 18 I'd no experience on ships. I'd come from dropping
 19 out of college after two years or working for this
 20 English firm for five. Then, seeing if I couldn't get
 21 a job as a seaman. Never been any place but Milwaukee
 22 and New York, and the whole world was calling.
 23 LE: So you did mostly travel? That's why, because
 24 then, you became a seaman in order to travel?
 25 TR: Yes, that was my thought. And when I went to

1 with my parents and had met me and anything that might
 2 be done for me would be appreciated by the governor.
 3 And the mayor was more informal. He was a socialist
 4 mayor who had . . . Milwaukee had a socialist mayor
 5 for about thirty years, Mayor Horne. And while he
 6 represented a, a conservative kind of socialism, he
 7 lived in a simple wood-framed house and my parents had
 8 little to do with them, but had me pick up a Socialist
 9 paper at the door and burn it when it was going of
 10 course. But I was already beginning to think that
 11 this rebellion I felt I could identify with
 12 socialists. Well, let's see, I got the letters. The
 13 man said yes, you're the kind of person we always can
 14 find room for. But, he said, you know, what's in it
 15 for me? So I gave him a hundred dollars and kept my
 16 mouth shut. I would've been murdered. I think not
 17 that far, but beaten up anyway. If these men
 18 qualified, knew of my backdoor shipping, I told no
 19 one. Got a job on a ship. And each time I came back,
 20 there was someone there to meet me for more money.
 21 And it, it deepened my sense of what I'd done that was
 22 so wrong, and made me feel that I belonged with the
 23 others sweating it out.
 24 So I went to meetings that were held by rebellious
 25 seamen and they printed a little paper which sold for,

1 I think, two cents. And I would sell that paper on
2 the waterfront during times when I waited for ships.
3 And helped to organize a group that later overthrew
4 the union I was in. In fact, we brought that man to
5 court and sued and won the case. So that was the
6 beginning of a new union, one that I expected so much
7 of. But in later years, it turned out to be just
8 lousy. The man who headed it retired with a million
9 dollars and he was, he was so beautiful when he was
10 young. So idealistic and when he didn't know, he took
11 answers from people who were communists or socialists
12 who gave what, I thought, was good advice. And he
13 took that advice. But later he had the touch of
14 honey. He was making big money and buying a Cadillac
15 car and having the union pay for it as a car he needed
16 it. All these rotten things. He's dead now, that was
17 Joe Kern.

18 LE: Joe Kern?

19 TR: So ah, I came out to the West Coast and shipped
20 in the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, which, at that
21 time, had a leadership very far to the Left. In fact,
22 the president of the union, Hugh Bryson, was brought
23 up on charges as being a communist. There were five
24 counts against him, that he lied when he said he was
25 not a communist. Hugh . . . there was a document, I

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1 I forget what it was called now. You had to sign a
2 document if you were a union official that you weren't
3 a communist.

4 LE: Yes, it was part of the Taft-Hartley Law,
5 wasn't it?

6 TR: Yes, that was it, exactly. And they, they said
7 he lied when he signed that document and that had
8 these other counts. Well, they found him guilty of,
9 of one or two charges. Anyway, he had to do two or
10 three years in prison. A great wonderful guy, came
11 from Illinois. Parents were farmers in Illinois. And
12 a great guy, worked as a cook. And I still have
13 contact with him. He's ah, in prison, he was
14 respected by men who were his enemy on the outside,
15 you know, men who were in the laundry there starched
16 his shirt collars and gave them extra ironing and did
17 things. He was, he taught a course in prison in
18 public speaking and parliamentary procedure and such
19 things. Today, he heads a big group selling and
20 buying motels and he's very successful. Has saddle
21 horses; lives in . . . I forget that horsy community,
22 name doesn't come to mind. But he made it honestly,
23 not through the graft in the union, just on his own
24 intelligence. But there were . . . oh, I'm telling
25 you, well things were the feel of the '50s.

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1 LE: Well, that's what I'm interested. Now, you say
2 you, you were, were you kicked out of the union by the
3 union or by the government or?

4 TR: I was kicked out . . the government took me off
5 as a subversive. Ah, I, I, quoted Truman who spoke of
6 the action in Korea as being a police action, and that
7 we shouldn't have any army there, and that we should
8 work for peace and not extend war. And, and many of
9 such remarks were reported. And I went to Washington
10 for a hearing, but no trial. Ah, they, they produced
11 all sorts of strange things. They claim that I pulled
12 down the ship's flag from the stern and threw it over
13 the side. And, you know, I didn't nothing of the
14 kind. Ah, at the captain's dinner, there would be
15 little flags about this big that would be put in a
16 vase on every table with balloons to make it look
17 festive. And somebody had taken one of those flags,
18 and broke it from the little mast, and pinned it on
19 the crew bulletin board with an article from, an
20 editorial from the Hearst paper which was saying that
21 ah, fight communism in your union and the Left Wing
22 movement. And ah, you know, I had the highest
23 position in the union aboard ship and I said look, I'm
24 not censoring that bulletin board. Put on it what you
25 want. But don't put the flag up next to it. And I

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1 took the flag off and that was reported as throwing
2 Old Glory over the stern. Oh yeah, and that all came
3 up at my hearing in Washington. The Coast Guard held
4 a hearing.

5 LE: That was under the Maritime Act, I believe, or
6 there was some special law denying communists from the
7 American Maritime Union.

8 TR: Or communist sympathizers. And they, there
9 were approximately two thousand people pulled off of
10 ships, and even on the Mississippi River and the Great
11 Lakes. They pulled them off, no trials. And when one
12 of the hearing Coast Guard men said where did you go
13 to school as a youth? I said I attended a parochial
14 school. He said could you bring evidence from the
15 priest that you were . . . I said look, stop there.
16 You have no more business to inquire about my religion
17 than you have about my politics. I will not bring a
18 priest and I have a freedom which you seem to be
19 suppressing. And that kind of talk got me nowhere. I
20 said here I am in Washington, DC, the showcase of
21 democracy. And, you know, that I came here with this
22 friend who sits with me now, a black man, and we
23 couldn't find a place to eat in your city. Aren't you
24 interested in that? I was in a lifeboat with him and
25 he took command of it, when a white man from Texas

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1 became hysterical with our life. But oh, in
 2 recollection, it still fills me with emotion. But
 3 they would want no part of that and I like cut the
 4 strings too with my talk. There were about seven
 5 Coast Guard officers. They're the ones who head the
 6 Merchant Marine, you know? But they wanted, they
 7 wouldn't, wouldn't give me any consideration.
 8 LE: So what was it? It was just a verdict there
 9 or was it a hearing that they had set.
 10 TR: Well, it was just that I couldn't go to sea
 11 anymore. That's the only thing I knew, really. I had
 12 been on ships for fifteen years. It was a trade I
 13 knew and had a liking - I had an Able Bodied Seaman
 14 Certificate. I could sail on deck. I had every
 15 rating in the Steward's Department from dishwasher to
 16 chief steward. And ah, I liked the work and I was
 17 well liked. There, even people in some of these
 18 companies tried to get me cleared through the Masonic
 19 Lodge or something they belonged to, but nothing
 20 worked. Ah, let's see, what might I say of further
 21 interest on that subject?
 22 LE: This was, that was in 1950's?
 23 TR: No, that was 1950, the McCarthy period. And
 24 there were repercussions too of the McCarthy period
 25 that I may have touched upon that time you heard me

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1 fear that ah, that I, it'd be better for me if I ran
 2 for union office if I couldn't be labeled. In fact,
 3 the fact that I was gay, I tried to stay in the closet
 4 pretty well too . . . and was nominated for union
 5 position in this new union that was formed, the NMU.
 6 In fact, it'd be well to keep out of that because
 7 anyone opposing you in an election would sooner or
 8 later find out what you had done in bed with somebody
 9 else. That would doom you. So, yes, there were
 10 experiences, sexual experiences, and, you know, even
 11 then communists were not altogether against
 12 homosexuals.
 13 LE: Tell me about that.
 14 TR: Well, they spoke of ass consciousness, that one
 15 shouldn't be ass conscious, but class conscious. That
 16 was often repeated. But even ah . . .
 17 LE: Specifically talking about gays?
 18 TR: Well, by talking about gays, and I knew a
 19 number of gays who were communists. You see, the line
 20 in those days, or the Marxist line, was not against
 21 homosexuals. It wasn't against homosexuals until
 22 Stalin came into power. Ah, Stalin had, I think, for
 23 something like seventeen years been in either a
 24 monastery to study to be a priest in the Russian
 25 Orthodox Church, and he carried with him a lot of that

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1 speaking earlier. The Senators and Congressmen had
 2 men as their secretaries; there were no women. They
 3 had men. And these men, for the greater part, were
 4 gay men. And when this great big thing, McCarthy,
 5 came down on homosexuals, well Cohen, I believe one of
 6 his aides was a homosexual.
 7 LE: (speaking too softly to be audible).
 8 TR: Yeah. Then they began to fire their
 9 secretaries and then women began to come in. And if
 10 they were lesbian, you know, it wasn't known or
 11 whatever they were. But I met some of these men. Ah,
 12 they got on ships, they worked as pursers, they worked
 13 in lower capacities in the Steward's Department and
 14 some of them worked as stewards on airplanes. In
 15 those they were . . . well, I guess today they have
 16 men too, I guess, stewards on airplanes.
 17 LE: In ah '49, before this was happening, I'm sure,
 18 you were probably most concerned with the political
 19 ramifications that were coming down. But where, did
 20 you have any inkling that there was an anti-gay part
 21 of what was happening or?
 22 TR: Ah, yes, I was really not a member of the
 23 Communist Party but certainly what might be called a
 24 fellow traveler. I attended meetings, I was trusted
 25 to attend meetings of communists and I had a great

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1 baggage. And it was he who brought back, you know,
 2 this feeling that there are Mata Haris, that they
 3 could be blackmailed. If you get them in the Party,
 4 somebody will blackmail them and then you can't trust
 5 them, you know? Ah, they're, they're dangerous. And
 6 to this day, although I read in the B.A.R. a week ago,
 7 maybe you did too, that in some of the
 8 communist/socialist countries, there's a meeting and
 9 an opening now coming.
 10 LE: I think there's something . . . I didn't read
 11 that. I heard something like that.
 12 TR: Yes. In one of the late papers, it, it spoke of
 13 little groups forming and ah, it was known where they
 14 were meeting and joining, and the police were not down
 15 on them. I guess in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, some
 16 of those countries, East Germany. East Germany, I
 17 remember.
 18 LE: And Poland however.
 19 TR: Yes, probably Poland too, they named those
 20 countries. And then, and then the representatives
 21 from these groups came to some meeting in Holland or
 22 somewhere.
 23 LE: Hm, I'll have to go look at that information.
 24 Yeah, what, we can make a break.
 25 TR: Pardon?

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1 LE: I said we can make a break, you know, I'm
 2 waiting for each socialist country not to be anti-gay.
 3 TR: Yes. I thought it most regrettable that ah,
 4 that Cuba and all these countries who I was so eager
 5 to see changes come through, and then don't Their
 6 attitudes were not good toward homosexuals.
 7 LE: Well, one thing I hear is the El Salvadoran
 8 representatives here from the rebel forces, they've
 9 been talking to the gay community and have spoken out
 10 for gay rights. And made connection between the gay
 11 struggle here and the fight in El Salvador. So it
 12 looks like there's an opening there.
 13 TR: I hope so. And yet I think of the most
 14 machismo society being that Hispanic, Latin group.
 15 LE: It'll be a struggle, that's for sure.
 16 TR: Oh, it will be a struggle, but there's
 17 certainly a lot of beautiful gay Latinos and ah they
 18 understand the question and the need. I, I personally
 19 put the blame on the Catholic Church too. I was
 20 raised as a Catholic, you know, and I think that the
 21 Church considers homosexuality, you know, a sinful and
 22 mortal sin. So that these young Catholic kids have
 23 learned from nuns or priests probably that ah it's one
 24 for God to punch a guy in the face who's queer.
 25 LE: (speaking too softly to be audible)

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1 to look out for.
 2 LE: Did you know any gay people in the Communist
 3 Party or, or sympathizers at least ah say in the late
 4 '40s, early '50s?
 5 TR: A man of great influence in my life was ah,
 6 Paul Robeson. I think I mentioned him.
 7 LE: Your (inaudible) said that you mentioned it or
 8 him.
 9 TR: Yes. I was working in the Steward's Department
 10 on a ship when he was returning from Europe. The war
 11 hadn't started but the clouds were darkening and it
 12 seemed that it was on its way. He had ah taken his
 13 son out of school in the Soviet Union and now he was
 14 coming home with his accompanist, Mr. Brown, and his
 15 wife, Islanda, and Paulie, Junior, who was a boy of
 16 probably eleven or twelve. I remember his mother
 17 saying Teddy, he can speak Russian and he knows some
 18 Yiddish and he'll learn his native English well too
 19 some day. He'll go to school at home.
 20 But ah Paul had been singing at the open coal pits
 21 in Wales before those wonderful Welsh singers, you
 22 know, welcomed him and ah, though he sang without a
 23 collection or passing the hat, they collected funds
 24 for - which he sent to emerging African countries.
 25 There was great hope that . . . was Doctor DuBois was

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1 TR: I was interested in hearing this man Studs,
 2 who's in Congress, you know, say that ah to his
 3 personal knowledge, there are more than thirty people
 4 in Congress who are gay.
 5 LE: Oh, I hadn't heard that.
 6 TR: Yes, he said that. And he said furthermore,
 7 don't think that I have been forced out of the closet.
 8 My constituents know, knew that I was gay, many of
 9 them, and I was not hiding from anybody.
 10 LE: I wished I'd heard that.
 11 TR: I, I was reassured by that because somebody
 12 said well, why should we champion him because he's
 13 gay. He was pushed out of the closet by discovery.
 14 LE: That's, that's interesting. Let me ask, you
 15 said you knew, you knew members, other members, or you
 16 knew members of the Communist Party that were gay?
 17 TR: Oh, yes. But many of them, they were excellent
 18 workers, and ah they were apprehensive too as Stalin
 19 came in and the line was changed and there was a chill
 20 that they sensed, as I did.
 21 LE: Oh, this was in the '30s then, the mid '30s or.
 22 TR: Well, no, that was ah, yes, let's see . . .
 23 when did Stalin come to power, do you remember?
 24 LE: It was around '32, '33.
 25 TR: Yes, so it would be about that time, something

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1 writing a new constitution for them based on the
 2 Soviet Union's constitution and ours and somewhat
 3 altered. But that was the inspiration. But Paul
 4 Robeson was unknown and I went, and given a dreadful
 5 seating in the dining room of the ship. This was a
 6 big passenger ship, crew of about six hundred. I was
 7 the chairman of the Ship's Committee which was the
 8 highest union position. The Engine Department had two
 9 elected officials, the Black had two, and the Stewards
 10 two, and we met as the Ship's Committee, and I was
 11 elected the highest in that job. So I was, I was a
 12 spokesman for six hundred more or less, and I went to
 13 the Steward and I said, surely the captain's list must
 14 have Mr. Robeson listed. He's a very important man,
 15 and look where you put him - what they called
 16 Chinatown near the heat of the galley, where there was
 17 noise and heat every time waiters went in and out the
 18 swinging door. So, oh, he said, he said no, he's not
 19 on the list. Couldn't put him at the captain's table.
 20 I said I wouldn't ask for that. Put him at the
 21 Surgeon's table, the Chief Officer's, the Chief
 22 Purser's - they're all great tables of eight with
 23 important diplomats or people who were getting the
 24 grand treatment. At least invite him. He probably
 25 wouldn't accept. He's with his wife and son and his

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1 accompanist.
 2 Well, then they had this delayed reaction and then
 3 they began to make big overtures. He could be better
 4 seated and he got, and Paul got stubborn. He wouldn't
 5 move. And ah, I then told him I had a lot of new
 6 masters with me and such publications which I gave him
 7 stacks of them. He'd been cut off for a while from
 8 that, and so that gave us common ground. And ah, then
 9 he was approached ah, if he would sing in this lovely
 10 dining room, there was a balcony way up, it'd be like
 11 two stories high - a little balcony where people would
 12 sometimes go and sing to those in the dining room.
 13 And I remember some of the Jewish people running on, I
 14 remember a woman singing Wien, Wien Nur Du Alein, you
 15 know? So lovely from there. And Paul Robeson we
 16 said, was asked, you could sing from the balcony to
 17 the dinner guests and we'll announce, Mr. Robeson, who
 18 you are, you know? After all, he was no ordinary man.
 19 He wore many hats, he graduated from Rutgers with a
 20 law degree, was the first black man ever chosen for an
 21 all-star football team. You know, at the end of the
 22 season, they would pick the best player from all the,
 23 wherever they were playing. They never had a game
 24 together but their pictures appeared, and for the
 25 first time, they picked a black man for the All

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1 ah, it scared the hell out of him, and after that he
 2 had this hideaway in Harlem. He didn't always stay
 3 with his, at his beautiful home in New Jersey where he
 4 had hired help and where he lived in rather great,
 5 grand style. But I was given the key to the hideaway
 6 there - 126th Street and Lennox, as I remember.
 7 And when I went to that place in the morning, about
 8 two or three o'clock, the key wouldn't work. And I
 9 was so tired and so disgusted, I'd spoken at some
 10 union that night, and I'd no place to sleep, and as I
 11 walked away, a man came up to me and he said ah, he
 12 said, we wondered if you were coming alone to Mr.
 13 Robeson's apartment. And I said well yes, that was
 14 the instruction, that I was not to take anybody there.
 15 I guess they wanted to see if I would bring somebody
 16 along. That was a double-check on me. Because it was
 17 ah, I think, about a five-story building with no white
 18 people in it. And I had in my pocket a note from Paul
 19 saying that I had his permission to live there. But
 20 ah it was a strange little apartment, a huge bed -
 21 he's a tall man - specially made for, about eight
 22 feet, you know? And there were books from floor to
 23 ceiling on all the walls. He could sing in Yiddish
 24 and speak in Yiddish and he was studying Mandarin and
 25 there were Chinese books and many wonderful

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1 American Team at the end of the season. So a law
 2 degree, a Shakespearean actor, a great singer, and ah,
 3 he had all these great qualities of very important
 4 men. But he was stubborn, he wouldn't sing. And then
 5 I said, would you sing for the crew? And he did. So
 6 ah, we took him in crew quarters and he sang. He sang
 7 for us as he did for those Welsh miners. And he
 8 became a dear friend. And, as you know, he was
 9 accused of being a communist. He always denied it,
 10 but he was certainly as close as you could be.
 11 And ah, and when I was screened off of ships in 1950
 12 during the McCarthy period, I was in New York and he
 13 said look ah, I know you can't go to sea, you're
 14 probably broke. I have a hideaway in Harlem where you
 15 can live as long as you want, with this stipulation.
 16 That you keep going about and speaking wherever
 17 they'll hear you, at unions, wherever there's a Left
 18 Wing group, we'll hear you. And you tell your story
 19 in your way and stay at my hideaway. Well, the
 20 American Legion had tried to kill him, members, you
 21 remember? He sang with a big group of Left Wingers
 22 and they came along and shot at him. Some people were
 23 wounded. He wasn't . . .
 24 LE: That was at Peekskill, right?
 25 TR: Yes, that was that Peekskill affair. And then

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1 referencing books, and a little place to make coffee
 2 and iron bars on the window. And the door was of iron
 3 with a big bar into the floor, so that nobody could
 4 break in there.
 5 Well, when I got up in the morning, some women in an
 6 adjoining apartment came to attack me and I had to
 7 talk fast. As I recall, they had a toilet plunger or
 8 an iron skillet or some weapon. They threatened me
 9 with, who are you and how did you get in and I, I said
 10 I'm a friend of Mr. Robeson's. I, I have a note
 11 somewhere. And when I got that, of course, they were
 12 very kind. But they brought me mulberry muffins or
 13 something that they made next morning and coffee. And
 14 I lived there for months. And I would ah, of course,
 15 I heard Paul say that he wasn't a communist, but he
 16 couldn't have been closer to it. And he poured
 17 hundreds of thousands of dollars into a Left Wing
 18 black paper that was available all over the South,
 19 certainly there was a Marxist line to it. And he put
 20 a lot of money into pushing that and his son, Paulie,
 21 married a Jewish girl, and his father wanted him to
 22 feel the harshness of being black and suggested that
 23 he live in Harlem, and he did. And ah, I kept contact
 24 with him for a time. I believe he's an electronics
 25 engineer, a very successful man.

Page 24

1 LE: Tell me something, I would like to hear more
 2 about you.
 3 TR: Oh, yeah, well I'm way off.
 4 LE: No, that's find, that was very interesting.
 5 TR: Well, these were people of great influence,
 6 people around me.
 7 LE: Ah, when you came from New York, I had a
 8 feeling that you came pretty crushed, it sounds like
 9 ah, getting kicked out.
 10 TR: Yes, yeah, bitter and crushed. Yes, I hadn't
 11 any education. I had no other skills. It's true I
 12 had about five years with that English firm of
 13 architects, but I didn't feel I could apply that. I,
 14 I was more interested in the working class struggle
 15 and going to sea. When I was deprived of that
 16 opportunity, I, I felt very cut off. What I did was
 17 then to go back to City College and take a course in
 18 horticulture and floriculture, a two year course
 19 there. And ah, as you may know, I was working with a
 20 nursery here in The City selling land material. And
 21 there I met longshoremen who knew me. One of the
 22 officers of the ILWU, the International Longshoremen
 23 and Warehousemen's Union. And he said to me - that
 24 was Bill Chester - a black man, vice president of the
 25 International - Harry Bridges was president. And he

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1 recently as a month or maybe two months ago, given me
 2 the benefit of a dental program where I pay a very
 3 small amount and the Longshoremen's Union pays for it.
 4 So I felt very good about all that. And then when
 5 people would come from the Soviet Union on the grand
 6 tour, doctors, educators, I was there to show how
 7 democracy functioned. Oh, they had a big propaganda
 8 setup. Maybe the word propaganda is too harsh. But
 9 they were very mindful and proud of their group. Ah,
 10 during Easter holidays, they would bring students out
 11 of the South, white students. They weren't too
 12 integrated in their schools down there. They'd come
 13 up on a bus to San Francisco out of Texas or somewhere
 14 in the South, of high school age. I would order
 15 drinks for everybody and lunch for everybody. They
 16 would come to the union hall, and different ones would
 17 speak and often I would be called upon as a gardener,
 18 and I'm there in my old clothes, and the officers
 19 weren't dressed much better, and how was it to work
 20 here and questions, and all the time they would serve
 21 Coca-Colas and sandwiches and we had fried chicken and
 22 . . . then we'd put them on a bus and took them down
 23 to a ship and show them how men worked on the docks
 24 and how integrated, you know?
 25 LE: That's great, that's great. So you were in

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1 said Ted, we could use you well. If you want, come
 2 with us. We'll double your pay, triple your pay. You
 3 work as public relations man but you'll come as a
 4 gardener. Oh, we've just got this beautiful new
 5 building.
 6 1S1:600-673
 7 It was built by Henry Hill, who is gay, a great, oh,
 8 kind of a prima donna. He'd built this huge building
 9 for them with a copper dome. They wanted to show that
 10 the working class, that culture came from the working
 11 class, and that without them, nothing beautiful could
 12 be built. That was the message they tried to put out
 13 while they were building it. Of course, it was lovely
 14 then. Today I don't think the maintenance is as good.
 15
 16 LE: That's here in The City.
 17 TR: Here in The City, down at Fishermen's Wharf.
 18 LE: Oh, okay.
 19 TR: I had two men helping me and we, we kept plant
 20 material and everything beautiful and so I quit my
 21 nursery job and joined the staff of the Longshoremen's
 22 Union and worked there for fifteen years, very happy.
 23 In fact, when I retired, I was made an honorary
 24 longshoreman. And ah, they gave me a medical program
 25 for the rest of my life at Kaiser. And had . . . as

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1 the, worked with Longshoremen from what time?
 2 TR: Fifteen years.
 3 LE: That was from what? Let's see, I'm trying to
 4 get the dates.
 5 TR: Well, I, I retired, I retired ten years. I
 6 left in 1973, so it would be '73, '63, back in the
 7 '50s. I'd worked at this nursery out here for a few
 8 years, so whatever it is going back fifteen years from
 9 '73. My affairs were in ports, in Hamburg. It was a
 10 great outlet for homosexual activity. I'm speaking of
 11 the kind before the war. My preference has always,
 12 not to men whom I thought were homosexual, but rather
 13 I wanted the opposite sex, real men. What I thought,
 14 I'm sure then you'll see. But the Germans, prior to
 15 the war, in their uniforms seemed so masculine and it
 16 was quite an easy thing to go bed with them. Ah, I'm
 17 sure you're familiar with some things that happened
 18 now. Hitler killed so many of them. Anyway I did, on
 19 one occasion, become rather indiscreet. When the ship
 20 I was on, leaving New York going through the Panama
 21 Canal, our terminal port was Valparaiso, Chile,
 22 Valparaiso, Chile, where we went down to, I think,
 23 to - yes, I guess that was the terminal port. Anyway
 24 as the ship traversed the Panama Canal, we hired an
 25 auxiliary crew of men. They were Panamanians who were

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1 paid far below the union scale. There was ah, these
2 would be about five or six deck hands who would paint,
3 and men to go in the Black Gang who did dirty work.
4 And then, of course, when the ship came back from
5 the subcontinent up the East Coast - see it was down
6 the East Coast of our country to the Canal, and down
7 the West Coast of South America. When we returned to
8 the Panama Canal, this auxiliary crew of about twelve
9 men would be ah discharged. I always thought they
10 should be organized and on the basis of that, I met
11 with them and began to talk organization.
12 Ah, one of them took my fancy and it went beyond
13 organization. I really hoped that I could arrange to
14 meet him in Panama ashore where we could have sex. I
15 revealed to him that I was gay and he didn't seem to
16 object to it. So one night after I was through
17 working, I was working as a cocktail steward and
18 ship's florist, double job on that ship. After work,
19 I met him. He was through with his duties and we
20 went, it was a hot night in the tropics and we went
21 down below to where the refrigerators are for certain
22 units, and there we sat enjoying a drink. I think it
23 was a Scotch and soda or something like that. Once
24 doesn't drink aboard ship, you know? So we sat there
25 partially undressed when an engineer came in to check

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1 a trial should be handled aboard ship, and that I
2 should be brought on trial. For what I had done or
3 was about to do. So I was knocked off of my work,
4 told I couldn't work anymore, and brought up to the
5 captain's quarters, and there appeared the Chief
6 Engineer, the Second Assistant Engineer, the Chief
7 Officer, the Captain and the Coast Guard captain, and
8 here this trial is presented. If the captain can
9 marry people on a ship or baptize, he can also be the
10 judge and have a trial. And it was an awkward thing.
11 I felt so sensitive. I loved that captain and the man
12 he was having an affair with, and I didn't want to
13 betray them and I didn't. And then they reached for
14 me but there was a limit to what they could do. The
15 result was that ah I was logged several days' pay,
16 deprived of work and ah embarrassed because of my
17 leadership in the union. It was made known to the
18 whole crew of six hundred that I was gay. And in
19 those years, that wasn't a very acceptable thing. We
20 were pretty much in the closet.
21 So I got off of the ship. I couldn't have sailed
22 again on it anyway, and tried to get lost by coming
23 out to the West Coast and remained here.
24 LE: And so that's what the trial was. You say you
25 went to Washington for a trial or?

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1 some gadgets in that area. Now we weren't engaged in
2 sex; that would have followed had he come a bit later.
3 But our clothes were off, at least my shirt and the
4 other man's shirt, and we were reaching that point.
5 So, this was reported to the chief engineer who
6 reported it to the captain.
7 And on that voyage, we had a Coast Guard captain who
8 was to, to rehearse with the crew abandoning ship,
9 lifeboat drill, such simple things like putting on a
10 life jacket, always make a bow tie. I mean, yeah, a
11 bow tie. Seems to silly for a seaman. We never made
12 a bow tie. But in the water you could open that
13 easier than a square knot or something else. He
14 rehearsed such things and we had many fire and boat
15 drills.. I wasn't aware the man was on the ship. But
16 when this news came to the captain and instantly the
17 captain was gay, a lovely man, having an affair with
18 the quartermaster. And ah.
19 LE: How did you know that he was gay?
20 TR: Well, the quartermaster told me. Just that he
21 and the captain had been lovers for a long time, had
22 been sailing together for a long time. This was one
23 of the Grace Line ships. And so the Coast Guard
24 captain then told the captain of the vessel that he
25 was glad of the opportunity of showing the captain how

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1 TR: Oh that, no, that came later. When I got out
2 here, I sailed without any problem. I changed unions.
3 LE: Oh I see, this was when you were changing
4 unions?
5 TR: Yes. In fact, I might just say this as
6 explanation. They were short of men on the West Coast
7 and they would call jobs in New York. So if you
8 wanted to go one way, you could get a job in that
9 union, National Maritime Cooks and Stewards Union.
10 So I took a job coming back to the West Coast and
11 became active in this more Left Wing union and ah had
12 no trouble to sailing.
13 LE: Were you afraid, were you afraid this would
14 follow you, this ah?
15 TR: Yes, I was afraid that it would. And maybe,
16 years later, in 1950 when I was screened off of ships,
17 it may have been a part of that brochure or whatever
18 they had on me, although they never mentioned it. But
19 I went to court with five other men to try to be
20 reinstated, and I was reinstated after six years, and
21 it cost the union over sixty thousand dollars, which
22 was a lot of money in those days for a union to pay.
23 And ah, but six years later, I was told I could ship
24 again. But my attorney said that he wanted to know if
25 I was gay. He asked me point blank, are you

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1 homosexual? And I said no, and he said well then we
2 would like you to be a witness in this screening of
3 seamen. Well, we never had to go on the stand, but
4 our names were used in the case and I attended the
5 sessions in court.
6 LE: I see. But he asked you if you were gay before
7 you went?
8 TR: Yeah, yeah. I thought by today's standard,
9 that would have been nasty. Because if I was gay, he
10 wouldn't have taken me. He, I think they picked a
11 longshoreman, a merchant seaman, they were screening
12 longshoremen too, who were said to be communists.
13 They couldn't work on the piers, on the docks. Then
14 when I got a clearance, my card said that I, I was
15 validated the same as if I had never been screened as
16 a subversive. Well, you could have put a brand on my
17 forehead because every time I got a job, I had to show
18 my papers, which gave my history. And my opponents in
19 union activity, ah, got word that that guy is a - what
20 do they call - a screeno, as they called us, we were a
21 screen.
22 LE: This was in the late '50s when this was going
23 on?
24 TR: That would be ah, yeah, it would be six years
25 later. But I never went to sea again. That would be

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1 active in the union, and thought that it would
2 undermine my leadership. But I did have affairs
3 ashore with crew members at times.
4 LE: Ah, I see, I was, in other words, it was always
5 off the ship.
6 TR: Right, off the ship, yeah. Except for the one
7 occasion that was leading up to it, and I spoke of
8 that before.
9 LE: But there were people on the ship that knew you
10 were gay? And there were other gay people?
11 TR: Yes, I think so, yeah, other gay men, right.
12 In fact it was said by the Port Steward of the Matson
13 Navigation Company that he didn't think they could
14 function as cruise ships without homosexuals in the
15 culinary work in the Stewards Department, that they
16 were accustomed to being away from their wives and
17 children, that they were more clever at catering to
18 the public and in general would lend themselves to
19 that isolation of weeks and weeks at sea without
20 contact with women. That was a nice thing to have
21 said.
22 LE: That was during the '50s?
23 TR: Yes, yeah. Yeah, there were attempts made to
24 get me back on the ship, to get me cleared, through
25 the Masonic Lodges I think. Nothing could pull your,

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1 in the '50s during the McCarthy period, about 1950 I
2 would say.
3 LE: I see. Okay, then I don't know if I'm clear on
4 this ah. You said you were picked for a panel. When
5 the lawyer asked you if you were gay, what, what . . .
6 TR: Oh, I told him that I wasn't.
7 LE: Well why was he, I'd like to know, why was he
8 asking that?
9 TR: Well, they were taking ah, representative
10 screened people. They picked . . .
11 LE: Oh, for the, for the . . .
12 TR: For this trial.
13 LE: I see.
14 TR: And none of us had to appear on the witness
15 stand, but our names were used in court and we could
16 hear them.
17 LE: So you were, in other words, you were picked as
18 a test case.
19 TR: Yes, it was a test case.
20 LE: And that was one of the questions they did ask
21 of you.
22 TR: Yes, right.
23 LE: I, I assume being on a ship, you weren't able
24 to have a relation, an ongoing relationship?
25 TR: No, I was afraid to, partly because I was very

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1 they couldn't buck the government.
2 LE: This man, you said he was with the Matson
3 Lines, he was ah.
4 TR: The manager, yeah, he was the Port Steward.
5 That means that every ship that went out, he would be
6 in charge of the Stewards Department and I think the
7 crew, and the stores they put on the ship, and all
8 their services to passengers and others.
9 LE: And he said that publicly?
10 TR: Yes, it appeared in the newspapers. Yes, it
11 was a very fine statement I think.
12 LE: That was here on the West Coast apparently?
13 TR: That was on the West Coast, yeah.
14 LE: Here in San Francisco?
15 TR: That was the Matson Steamship Company.
16 LE: Uh huh, I'll see if I can find that.
17 TR: It would be nice if you could find something
18 like that.
19 LE: Then, it'd be in 1950 then, during that period.
20 TR: Yes, it'd be in that period, yeah.
21 LE: Ah, I take it you didn't divulge being gay to
22 any of your communist friends or . . .
23 TR: Yes, some communist friends knew that I was
24 gay.
25 LE: Tell me about that.

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1 TR: Well, I believe that the communist gays that I
2 met were drawn to the Party, to Marxism, simply
3 because it was a rebellious group working for
4 recognition and acceptance. And that, fundamentally,
5 was the same thing that a homosexual, as we used that
6 term in those days, as a gay person was working for.
7 Acceptance. That somebody would accept one for what
8 one really was without having to obscure it with
9 dating a woman or doing all that, which we used to do
10 to throw up smoke. And these ah gay communists were
11 great guys, I thought. They were better read. There
12 was so much literature poured out. It'd keep you
13 broke to keep up with it. All the pamphlets and all
14 the things that one would buy. Besides there were
15 continual donations for people on strike in different
16 areas. During ah, during the strike period when I was
17 in the National Maritime Union on the East Coast, I, I
18 was sent out to some of the schools like Vassar and
19 Smith and Wellesley to speak. And there were
20 communists there. These young women, and men too at
21 those ivy league schools, from well-to-do families, it
22 seemed that all thinking people at that period - and
23 now this is maybe just prior to the '50s. Gee, they
24 were rebellious people. And I recall the fun of - I
25 would wear my best scrubbed Dungarees and look salty,

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1 my name would yell Hey, Riffraff. It was a hell of a
2 moniker because I hoped I was the antithesis like the
3 bald-headed man called Curly or whatever. Because I
4 had to change more frequently and ah be better
5 scrubbed if I was to carry that name - Riffraff. And
6 it stayed with me, as I say now, for all this time.
7 LE: Okay, when you visited either members or the
8 people here or political acquaintances, friends in the
9 Party or close to the Party, and they knew you were
10 gay, was that ever spoken or was it kept at a distance
11 or were there people that you were close enough that
12 that was shared with?
13 TR: Well, ah, it was never publicly at meetings as
14 spoken.
15 LE: No, I don't mean at meetings, I mean, socially.
16 TR: Yeah, socially and individually, there were a
17 number who knew me. And my attraction, while I
18 certainly liked to meet my own kind who were gay, my
19 physical attraction was toward more of a roughneck,
20 less educated and more macho type. As I said, I - I
21 know I've been to sea many times. I've gone to bed
22 with so many longshoremen who are married and had
23 children, but you could fuck them in the ass or you
24 could do all those interesting things and ah if
25 anybody would say look, is that guy fruit, meaning me.

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1 you know, never referred to culinary work but more
2 emphasizing my deck hand job as a sailor. That made
3 it better.
4 At Vassar or one of those schools, they came all on
5 bicycles with signs, these young women, and they had a
6 bicycle for me. And we rode through the principal
7 streets of the community, telling the people to come
8 hear me speak and explain the issues of strike and how
9 they might support it, you know? And they had some
10 very clever signs.
11 LE: That's great.
12 TR: So I was somewhat isolated from the strike, but
13 when I came back, I collected over three thousand
14 dollars, which was a lot of money. The highest
15 collection made by rank and, by rank and file
16 individual. And when I came back, Joe Curran, who
17 headed the union, the National Maritime Union, ah, was
18 introducing me before a student group at NYU or one of
19 those groups. And he said now I know that you've
20 heard a lot about us as merchant seamen. You've heard
21 about the waterfront riffraff. He said I have with
22 you tonight as your speaker some of that modern
23 riffraff. Here is Riffraff Rolfs. And that name
24 stuck, and to this day, I would be walking in the
25 streets of San Francisco and somebody not remembering

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1 You think that guy could be gay? And they'd beat the
2 shit out of him. I, I, to this day, I just don't try
3 to label people anymore. You can't, really. There
4 were so many, many longshoremen who were gay, tough,
5 rough, could do the most onerous kind of lifting of
6 bales and heaving and hoing and whatever. But ah,
7 let's see, to come to, to go back to your question.
8 Yeah, those were gay and communist, I felt a bond with
9 them. And those who were not gay, but were communist,
10 I did have sex with on occasion.
11 LE: Well, these were men that you said were
12 presumably straight but.
13 TR: Yeah.
14 LE: I see.
15 TR: I remember a song we sang about the National
16 Maritime Union ah, With Hunter and Gaines we're
17 through. Those were the corrupt leaders. The ballad,
18 as I remember,
19 With Hunter and Gaines we're through.
20 We'll build up the NMU.
21 With leaders our own, we'll march en masse.
22 Fighting for the working class.
23 That was our tribute - pretty Left Wing though.
24 LE: Yeah, it is.
25 TR: But I taught it to many of my shipmates, and

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1 we'd sing it aboard on the ship. There were other
 2 verses too, people would write new verses.
 3 LE: Okay, when you, when you arrived in New York, I
 4 mean, couldn't go on a ship anymore, ah, you were
 5 started - did you go to school immediately or was
 6 there a time lag?
 7 TR: When ah, when I suffered that trial aboard
 8 ship, then wanted to get away, I got out to the West
 9 Coast by taking that job in another union.
 10 LE: That's right, okay, I got that.
 11 TR: When they were shorthanded, they'd call the
 12 union I belonged to and you could rid of them.
 13 LE: I have two, I have two trials, I got those two
 14 trials mixed up, because you had the one in Washington
 15 and you had the one . . .
 16 TR: The one aboard ship, yeah. And that's right,
 17 the one in Washington, that came about 1950 or '51,
 18 around that time.
 19 LE: Let me get back to that in a second. I want to
 20 ask you, ah, so when you were tried on ship and that's
 21 when Paul Robeson took you in.
 22 TR: Yes.
 23 LE: Did he know why you were tried or was there any
 24 question?
 25 TR: No, no, in fact I'd lost track of him for some

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1 And my experience was in one of those shipwrecks, we
 2 abandoned ship and got to Middleton Island in the Gulf
 3 of Alaska, where it seemed so precious that we could
 4 be around green things and something growing. It
 5 meant so much to me. Now when I went to sea after
 6 that, I always took a plant with me. It was ah, I
 7 don't know how you can explain a hang-up like that.
 8 But I'd take a sweet potato sprouting and hang it, it
 9 just stood so that with the pitch and rolling of the
 10 ship, it would still be there, but all the time
 11 sending out its lovely foliage. And I felt I was
 12 safer with something from land - kind of a talisman or
 13 something I guess. But ah, how'd we come to that? I
 14 have a tendency to digress.
 15 LE: No, it's - you tell me things about yourself.
 16 TR: But ah, we got to this island during the war,
 17 and that's what made me so angry, that I'd been
 18 shipwrecked twice. And, you know, from the time you
 19 were shipwrecked until you got to an American port,
 20 you weren't paid anything. You could be in a lifeboat
 21 for weeks and deprived of your pay. And I can
 22 remember in one of those frightful accidents when the
 23 ship hung on the rocks at Scott's Gap up near, up in
 24 Alaska, going into the Bering Sea. The captain said
 25 well look, the Coast Guard will take off anybody who

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1 time, and then he came out to this Coast where he was
 2 singing at different places. He was made a honorary
 3 longshoreman. He sang before them, and the sang at
 4 benefits too for . . . And then I renewed my
 5 association with him and he, he said Ted, if you want
 6 to come back to New York, ah, you can stay in my
 7 apartment as long as you want. Just have the sheets
 8 washed before you go, and leave it spick and span the
 9 way you find it. So ah, yeah, yes, he encouraged me
 10 as we said on the other side of that tape. Encouraged
 11 me to speak wherever people would hear me, to tell
 12 about the injustice. Because it seemed ludicrous that
 13 we were subversive and were deprived of our livelihood
 14 when people delivering flowers could come on the ship
 15 and they could be communists. You know, sailing day,
 16 they came on with flowers for people whose bon voyage
 17 parties, and others delivering gifts and - those
 18 people weren't screened. But they screened
 19 longshoremen and merchant seamen, but people who were
 20 Left and talkative and labeled as subversive.
 21 LE: What was your life like when you got out here
 22 and you were gardener for a certain group?
 23 TR: Well, when I couldn't go to sea anymore, I then
 24 went to City College and ah, I had been shipwrecked
 25 twice during the war.

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1 wants to leave, but I appeal to those who are brave to
 2 stay with me and he said, of course, the ship is badly
 3 listed, we're on a rock. When the tide comes in, we
 4 might be lifted and we'd be in a hell of a state, he
 5 said. But there, there is an island not too far from
 6 here that we could get to in lifeboats. Who'll stay
 7 with me, he said.
 8 And ah, he said anything to say? I said yes,
 9 Captain, I'd like to ask, Will our pay continue from
 10 this time of your logging the shipwreck? Why, he
 11 said, I'm not looking for schoolboys to debate with.
 12 I want the sailors, he said. I said well, I'll stay
 13 with you, Captain, but it's only right that you give
 14 us an answer. And he said, of course, you'll be paid.
 15 You'll be paid until you get to your own port. Well I
 16 said, I'll stay. And I did and, you know, we had to
 17 abandon ship. And we got to that island, and there
 18 was a house where a man was raising fox.
 19 It was a little island, Middleton Island, it's on a
 20 map. It's about a mile long and a half a mile wide,
 21 and the man had a house where he lived alone. And he
 22 died there, and his body was in the house. And he
 23 kept a journal. I have it somewhere among my things.
 24 I took it with me. He knew he couldn't make it until
 25 the weather changed and a doctor would make a call.

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1 He'd call there every six months or so. And the fox
2 got out of their pens and had pups under the floor of
3 the house, and ah, we took the body out and wrapped it
4 in a blanket. It was cold, it didn't ah, it wasn't
5 ah, it wasn't ah, whatever happens to a body when it's
6 dead. So we lived in the house until we were finally
7 rescued.

8 But the point of this story is that when we got to
9 the shipping company office . . . we sailed out of
10 Seattle and here we were, those of us who stayed with
11 the captain. The captain said these are the men who
12 stayed with me and went to Middleton Island. You see,
13 if you abandon the ship, anybody who goes aboard can
14 claim it. But you keep on it ah, you know, they can't
15 do that. So he said these are the men. And he was
16 just hungry for some laudatory recognition and ah, he
17 said ah, we'll have our pay. And the man representing
18 the shipping line said I want to thank you and
19 congratulate you but, as you know, the law says you're
20 not paid for the time of the shipwreck. Well, days
21 had passed. No pay. And ah, I looked at the captain.
22 You could see tears in his eyes.

23 LE: I want to ask you when you got to New York, you
24 were disappointed, you were hurt, you were, I imagine,
25 frightened. You started going to school. Ah, how

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1 or?

2 TR: Yes, I think in those years, ah, there were
3 quite a few people going up to Harlem. There wasn't
4 that racial animosity which seems so sharp. We were
5 trying to break down those racial barriers. Oh, of
6 course, there were dangers there too but ah I didn't
7 seem mindful of them.

8 LE: How'd you, how'd you hear about one of these
9 parties?

10 TR: Well, one would tell another, and ah sooner or
11 later you would hear of a place to go. There was a
12 place where a black woman would say, entertain a
13 lesbian women. In those days, women wore long hair,
14 but a lot of the lesbians had their hair cut real
15 short like black men, you know? And they often wore
16 tuxedos or men's clothing in the street. And this
17 woman, Gladys Bentley, had a huge body, big enough for
18 three people. But on top of it was this beautiful
19 little head with the close-cropped hair. And, and she
20 would sing, a little piano, and pound out songs. I
21 remember the ballad of one:

22 Oh, they take it in the tail up at Yale, up at Yale
23 Oh, they do their concentration while they
24 practice masturbation.
25 Up at Yale, in the tail, up at Yale.

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1 were you meeting, what was your, were you having
2 relationships with people then? Were you, how were
3 you meeting people?

4 TR: Oh yes, I was constantly running into old
5 friends I'd known from years ago when I lived in New
6 York. And they, in turn, introduced me to others.
7 But there were restaurants that one could go to. Now
8 this was prior to Stonewall to be sure. But there
9 were restaurants where people would eat or places
10 where you could get a drink up in Harlem. And if you
11 wanted a black stud, you could do so. Or there were
12 rent parties, called rent parties, often, where to
13 raise the rent at the end of the month, you could go
14 to somebody's apartment and they made nice drinks and
15 there were bedrooms clean and all, and there'd be
16 young men supposedly not gay, but young black men
17 clean and all. Prior to taking them to a bedroom, you
18 had to pay them. It was like a whorehouse.

19 LE: But they were ready.

20 TR: Yeah, in a grand manner. It was all very
21 nicely done. And I had such experiences.

22 LE: Tell me about a couple of them.

23 TR: Well,

24 LE: Not in the, not in the, you know, details but
25 going there, what it was like, ah. Was this common

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1 She wrote things like that. And then we heard about
2 this black woman, lesbian, and the fellows from Yale,
3 when they were coming into The City to go to the
4 theater, especially gay ones said, Hey, let's go up
5 there and hear that song about the Yale gays. And so
6 that spread. There were little dives in the basement
7 like that it was spreading, gayness.

8 LE: When was this, when, what period was that, what
9 time was that?

10 TR: Well, that ran through a rather long period. I
11 found remnants of it there as late as the 1950's, and
12 certainly my introduction to it was earlier than that.

13 LE: Was it in the early '20s when you, or late '20s
14 when you were?

15 TR: No, it would be about '36 or '37, around that
16 time. And there were places too, ah, there was a
17 place - I forget what it was called - a speakeasy
18 place where gay people would go in New York. You paid
19 one dollar to get in and they would put on the table a
20 drink made up of bathtub gin with a little grenadine
21 to give it pinkish color, and it might have a squeeze
22 of lemon. And ah, you sat at tables, you'd, you'd,
23 people that you knew another table would wave you over
24 and you'd chatted like that. And I always played the
25 butch role. In fact, there was a despicable quality

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1 in my personality at a very early age. I keep jumping
 2 around, you know, no wonder you lose track. But ah,
 3 men I associated with, we felt rather superior to
 4 those who were dressing as women or who undulated
 5 their hips or - who were so salient in their manner
 6 that people would say that guy's a fairy, you know?
 7 Well, we tried to pass, smoking pipe, you know, and
 8 that kind of thing. And I remember I often got my
 9 trade by ah, I kept in my pouch of tobacco some
 10 ambergris that I got in Egypt. It's supposed to be
 11 from the, oh, it's a morbid secretion from the sperm
 12 whale's vomit that fastens an odor or scent, you know?
 13 You have heard of it, I'm sure. So I had a little
 14 bottle of ambergris or in some concoction that I got
 15 in Egypt in my tobacco pouch. And when I saw somebody
 16 I like, oh, I smoked a pipe, I'd begin to rub a little
 17 of that in my hand, you know, and then move my hand
 18 over, 'cause I wanted a butch man. And sometimes he
 19 would say Wow, you know, not knowing exactly where the
 20 scent came from. You know, it reminds me of some girl
 21 I had and she smelled so good when she came out of the
 22 shower. I knew I was getting there then. (inaudible)
 23 and those were little tricks. As an old man of 76 or
 24 thereabouts, it seems . . .
 25 LE: You'd go out to seaman bars or this, I mean,

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1 this, where would this be taking place?
 2 TR: Well, this would be at a place where we paid a
 3 dollar to get in, a speakeasy.
 4 LE: Oh, I see.
 5 TR: In the speakeasy time. I just would show you
 6 as a matter (interference) . . . to wonderful parties
 7 she gave in New York - even a Catholic priest there.
 8 And Ramon Novarro was a good friend of his too, the
 9 moving picture actor, and I remember this priest who
 10 had a parish in Manhattan, had a basketball team he
 11 coached, had a Boy Scout troop in his church. And he
 12 said to me, I didn't let on that I had a Catholic
 13 background - I thought it would inhibit him. So, he
 14 said Ted, that's when I was working with this English
 15 firm and I had lovely quarters within the building of
 16 their establishment. He said I have a priest in
 17 Alabama who wants to come up here and get into the gay
 18 world and could he stay with you? And I said yes.
 19 And, you know, he was so flamboyant.
 20 1S2:500-507
 21 He never wore a Roman collar, he dressed in a manner
 22 very swishy, and he was out fucking every night - a
 23 priest! And still quite able to lead a hypocritical
 24 role of going back again. I don't see how they can do
 25 it. Their confessions, it was weird.

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1 (Showing pictures)
 2 That was a boxer. He had kind of a Prexicles type
 3 of nose and I kind of put hair on it. Oh yeah, I've .
 4 . .
 5 End of INTERVIEW
 6
 7
 8
 9

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