

Transcript of Interview with Gregory Piazza

NG: So, today is Tuesday November 17th at about 1 o'clock and I'm speaking with Gregory Piazza.

GP: You can, just Greg is ok.

NG: Ok great. I'm speaking with Greg here in Ferndale. It's a beautiful sunny day, even though it's November. Alright, I guess um what I'd like to do is basically have a conversation, you know, nothing too intense. I don't wanna have an, um, firm script or anything, you know? First off, if you wouldn't mind just, if I can ask, kind of your background. Where are you from originally?

GP: Originally, I'm from Madison, Wisconsin.

NG: Madison, Wisconsin. Ok.

GP: I was born there April 16, 1951. In Janesville where Paul Ryan and Dr. Adamany who was president of Wayne State were both born in Janesville, which is a suburb of Madison. Where my mother lives. I went to a parochial elementary school and then went to a very good brand new high school. Madison Memorial. It was specifically built, this was in the 1960s, specifically built to be more like a college campus was their outlook and we had box scheduling. We'd have an hour lecture and then a 20 minute discussion group. And this was new. This was new stuff and it was one of the better schools.

NG: Did you like it?

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GP: Yes. It's changed a lot since then. When I go back it's very strange. Anyway, I had, Madison in the 60s had a program called the Stagecoach. And what it was, the, Madison was built on the "city beautiful" plan. And what that is, it is an idea, a way of constructing cities that came about in the late 19th century and early 20th. It tied in with things like the arts and crafts movement and the art nouveau. One of its ideas was that people needed adequate recreation, so every place in Madison is within 10 minutes or so of a park or picnic ground or a beach. Madison has four lakes. It's built on an isthmus between the lakes.

NG: Hmm, I didn't know that.

GP: Yeah, the lake is ringed with park land primarily. Red link? Commercial owns the development. And what the Stagecoach outreach program was is they would do fairy tales, dramatizations of fairy tales. And we would come in, the players, we were in an old Jeep they'd have out for us and pulling a wagon, and we'd come into a park and we'd jump out of the Jeep and we'd sing as we set up the stage. You know people would come, little kids, adults, and you know we did, I played the beast in Beauty and the Beast and it was Hansel and Gretel. We would go to four or five parks a day, there were that many parks, over the course of a summer. Then at

the end of the summer we would have a stage play that we did Augustin Daley's Under the Gaslight, which was the first melodrama, the first play of any kind, but first melodrama to use the scene where somebody got tied to the railroad tracks. Only in this case it wasn't the heroine it was a one-armed Civil War soldier.

NG: Interesting.

GP: He was fighting the villain and he got tied to the railroad tracks and she had to chop her way out of the hut where she was captive and she ran and untied him before the train went by. The train visually consisted of two flags with guys behind it running along like that only opening night in 1967 one of the guys tripped and the flag fell.

NG: Oh no. (laughing)

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GP: Anyway, so the women who were running it said, you know you'd make a good character actor. And there was a semi-professional program for undergrads at Wayne State University in Detroit. Why don't you look into it? So I did and I got accepted into the BFA program and then got a job working in the costuming shop in the old Hillberry. In the days when it was in the basement behind what was then the Studio Theater. Which, if you saw the space you'd never imagine that we could get anything out of there. But we had tons of stuff. So I was exposed to a lot of people who were extremely good at what they were doing. This was, I came here to Detroit in August of 1969. At that time the Hillberry, I think, was in its golden age. And, I learned a lot. Unfortunately, I did not get very far in the program because I'm not that good of an actor. So, I stayed on and got a bachelor's in speech and graduated in '73. And between then and now, I've done a lot of different stuff. A lot of stuff. In '74, I moved into the Palmer Park Apartments district. Known in some places as "the Park." To most of us. And I stayed there until 1991, when the city just got too bad. People had really started leaving.

NG: Was that when the crime was really bad?

GP: Stress, save our streets, there were rogue cops who would go around and beat up black guys. It was ridiculous, it really was. Anyway, the Park was, Horace Greely said "go west, young man", and if he was speaking to a gay man of that era, it was "go to Palmer Park, young man." Cause if you had the slightest bit of money you went there for quality apartments you wanted. There was the atmosphere, you wanted entertainment, we had it. There were eight bars, either within walking distance or a short drive to 7 Mile or 6 Mile. They were all distinct; they were all different. And it really was the heart of the gay community.

NG: Interesting. Was that a dramatic difference than Madison, for instance?

GP: Oh yes. Intensely different. In terms of Madison. At that time at least, Madison didn't have a gay bar. And I don't think it does now either. If you want to picture Madison, picture Ann Arbor with four lakes and the state capitol.

NG: Ok.

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GP: The atmosphere is virtually the same. They look alike. They feel the same to me. So when I go to Ann Arbor it's like going home.

NG: That's interesting. I haven't been to Madison, but I used to live in Ann Arbor, so I can kind of picture it. So, the Palmer Park area, or the Park, was the center of the gay community back then?

GP: Yes. Just about everybody who was gay had some attachment to the Park. Either you lived there, or your ex-boyfriend lived there, his best friend or your third-cousin who's gay, whatever. And it was difficult to get into an apartment in the Park. How I landed I still can't figure out because I went door to door, which was considered something you don't do, but for some reason, maybe it's fate, I don't know. And then once I got in there I started digging into the history of the place. That just took off. It's a historic landmark district now and I wrote a book on the architectural history. And I just finished a biography of Senator Palmer, who owned all the land.

NG: Oh neat.

GP: He owned maybe 600 acres.

NG: So, what inspired you to write the books?

GP: For the architectural history, I took a look at and even now take a look at those buildings. It's such exquisite design. And when you take, they used to do tours every year until it really got to be too much, and there was an art fair when I originally moved to the neighborhood, they set up an art fair. We had a very active residents group, which was unusual in the area and it included landlords and we did a huge fair. And then I did tours, and after many years I thought you know I've amassed all of this information. So, a couple years ago I decided to put it into a book. I ran into Dan Austin and he said let me introduce you to Arcadia Press and they agreed to publish it. It came out a couple years ago. It hasn't done very well. And then I wrote a biography of Senator Palmer, which is probably going to be out in the spring, with a different publisher. So, I'm not sure when it's going to be out. But anyway, you look at the quality of the workmanship in those buildings and the owners really didn't care if you were gay, most of them wanted someone with willful employment. But if they got a tenant who was stable, good job, money to pay the rent, who was not only willing to keep the apartments in good shape, sometimes would make a deal where for a cut in their rent for a couple of months they would put in a top of the range stove paid for by the tenant. And the apartments got painted every time that somebody moved. So, it was freshly painted, the floors were refinished. You had hardwood floors. And the rents at the time were, looking back on them now a 2 bedroom apartment single bath was maybe \$250 a month, which was considered more high-end in those days.

NG: Sure. Now, that doesn't sound like a lot, but back in the 70s that's quite a bit.

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GP: No. So, when you walk around the neighborhood looking at the architecture, what you come to realize with the book is that we start with May 1924 was the first apartment building, it was owned by Woodmire and Gaye. And as you walk around the neighborhood, with the book as a guide, you have an example of every period in their corporate life. From the 1920s when they split into '55 and you can follow them right around the neighborhood and see them adapt and change. There are, well there aren't a lot of them left anymore, what's called Moorish revival. Those elaborate arching, it's based on the El Hambra in Spain. In fact there's a place in Highland Park on Woodward there's a building that takes up the whole block. That was, it's right below Davison. They took up the whole block, they had underground parking, magnificent apartments. It's a burned out shell now, but somebody may try and save it because it's so unique.

NG: Hmm. That's cool.

GP: The Park has quickly what's becoming some of the only examples of these architects' work. Because the other parts of the city have been run down so far.

NG: It's really too bad how a lot of really beautiful old buildings have kind of crumbled over the years.

GP: Well, it was always the car maker's mentality that every year you got a new car they really didn't care. Ford was setting up his museum, which was a bit more ahead of the curve on that though.

So, each of the bars was distinctive. The fun started Thursday night and didn't stop until dawn on Monday.

NG: Always a party, huh?

GP: Always a party somewhere. Yep. Always a party somewhere. Of course, we were young. We were in our 20s and early 30s. Highly educated people, there were a lot of lawyers for some reason. A healthy crop of teachers. Of course hair dressers, you had to have the hair dressers. There were a couple buildings that were efficiencies, all efficiencies. One of them was at Third and Merton, which is unfortunately gone now. It was, since it was efficiencies the rents were even lower, around \$150 a month. So, a lot of the drag queens moved in because like I said the owners didn't care as long as you maintain and weren't having wild parties. And since most of them were referrals, you already knew what you were getting. And they would give the big drag shows which were at Bookies which is gone now. Which is a little west of the gas station, that side McNichols and Third. So, it was an easy walk for them right from that building.

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NG: That's convenient.

GP: So, you have fine drag entertainment, you had dancing at Menjo's, there was a place in the same building as Menjo's that was called the Glass House, after many different names it became the Glass House. That was kind of like your neighborhood bar sort of thing. On 7 Mile you had the Outlaw, which was bike/leather and cowboy bar. And you had Heaven which was young guys and their sugar daddies and E-Ramp which was a tougher leather place. By car you could get anywhere in a pretty short amount of time. So, we had everything we needed.

NG: Did you have a favorite of those places? A favorite bar?

GP: I usually hung out either at the Glass House before I got involved in Levi leather clubs and then the Interchange, which became the Eagle. It's at Alden and Trumbull, just south of Henry Ford Hospital. They were going to buy the land that it sits on, but they decided not to, and now it's a bar. It's a straight bar and I can't remember what the name of it is. It's still there.

NG: Menjo's is still there, right?

GP: Menjo's is still there. They're going to reopen the part that was the Glass House.

NG: Interesting. So, what was your favorite aspect of living in that neighborhood, the community, or?

GP: I think it was the freedom to be me, you didn't have to lie to your neighbors, you could let your hair down. We did more coffee? clatchings throughout the building and my best friend lived on the fourth floor and I was on the third of 990 Whitmore and we were constantly going back and forth. Two more friends lived on the third floor on the other side. There was one in the building across the street, the building down the block there were two more. So, if you wanted just to get together on a Sunday, it wasn't difficult.

NG: That's nice.

GP: They used to say you know it's 1:00 in Palmer Park on a Sunday afternoon because all the gays are running around with their chaffing dishes going to brunch.

NG: Sounds like a good time.

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GP: Yeah, it was. It was delightful. I remember some friends had a party, I think it was New Years Eve, they lived at 660 Whitmore, and a friend of theirs across the hall had a party and we were carrying on and the door to his apartment said come and join me. We walked in and he had this very elegant apartment. The old portraits of the ancestors on the wall, a piano which was an antique then and this was the 1970s. The people you met were unique. They were very different, if you look. And a good example of that is the religious institutions. There were five religious institutions. There's a little church, it's like Protestant Methodist Episcopal, they're on 6 Mile, or 7. Then there's the white spired church, which is the 5th Church of Christ Scientist. Across the street is Detroit Unity and across the street from that is the Greek Orthodox. It's a Mormon

church now. And on the west end you have Temple Israel. So, what's unique about that is that normally you'd get churches in subdivisions, but they're usually on major streets. These five were right in the middle, three of them especially are right in the center, of the community.

NG: That's interesting.

GP: What was great was the celebration of the holidays. Cause I could sit in my apartment, my first apartment was across the street from the Greek Orthodox, and of course their Christmas is at a different time of year, their Easter is a different time. So, for Easter I could open my apartment windows as it was warm enough and I could hear them processing around the church and singing and the incense. And when I looked at the other end of the Park, the High Holy Days at the synagogue, you'd hear the chophar? blowing and people coming and going.

NG: That's neat. Seems like kind of an eclectic mix.

GP: Very. I've often told people, and I say in the book, if you want to know what Palmer Park was like in that era, read Armistead Molpan's(?) Tales of the City. He's talking about San Francisco, but it's the same place. His major characters could have fit right in Palmer Park without a hitch.

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NG: I'll have to take a look at that. It sounds good. So, do you, I guess you lived there for about 20 years then? Until 1991? What changes did you see during that time?

GP: Yep. I turned around and people were gone. And then I thought, where are they going? A friend's car was firebombed. They never caught the guy because it was the wrong car. They were trying to get the car behind him. And when he threw the Molotov cocktails, which I heard crash on the pavement, I looked out to see Rich's car going up in flames. I thought, people are going, it's time to go. And this is what was happening in the rest of Detroit. The decline was really beginning. It was accelerating, and for years I stayed away from the Park. I didn't go there. I didn't want to see the wreckage. But when I did go back, which was a few years ago when they set up the group that's now promoting the public park the Friends of Palmer Park, I was amazed that it survived. With very little loss. We lost maybe three buildings, three or four. And a few that are abandoned. But then you consider that originally, depending on how you counted, there were like 75 buildings. So, it was that few. Part of that is because the three major owners who are left had been there for so long. I mean, John Seco(?) is managing buildings his parents had bought in the 1950s. And Jerry Pecchia(?) has been there ever since the 1970s. And McHale's have come in and done just a phenomenal job. They'll buy a building and they'll preserve the exterior details, completely gut the interior so you've got that new shine within and restore the architectural detail, which I thought that nobody was ever going to do.

NG: Right? That's a lot of work.

GP: It's a lot of expense.

NG: That too, definitely.

GP: But they did a phenomenal job. And that's kept the neighborhood together while we wait for the prosperity to come from the south. The big problem there is Highland Park.

NG: Yeah, that seems to be a pretty rough city I guess.

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GP: So sad. The business district along 6 Mile was just great. Now, someone probably needs to come in and just level those first three blocks. The buildings parallel to 6 Mile, between Woodward and 6 and Hamilton and 6.

NG: That seems like it would help if they did it.

GP: Well, that was a fairly decent residential neighborhood in my day. But it's sure gone to crap now.

NG: Do you get back down there often now?

GP: Yeah, we reconstituted some of the tours a couple years ago. And the city is now putting a good amount of money into the historic log cabin, which was a real surprise to me, given my dealings with the city back in my day.

NG: So, what is the log cabin?

GP: The log cabin was the summer home of Senator and Mrs. Palmer. And it stood, still stands, and for many years, they donated it in 1895 and for many years it was a museum. It was full of Palmer treasures. He was a pack rat. Honest to god, he was a pack rat. And then in the 1970s the furniture and other artifacts were moved to Fort Wayne. And I suspect that they will go back to the cabin at some point, since the city is taking renewed interest. But this group has been around to really lobby for the cabin and restoring the cabin. He was an interesting character. He was a state senator and a U.S. senator; he was envoy to Spain and president of the Columbian Exposition at the Chicago Worlds Fair. He gave the first speech in the U.S. Senate on suffrage for women in 1885. And Susan B. Anthony was in attendance. The biography has a, a bitchy letter from Susan B. Anthony to them looking for money. "Don't tell me you don't have it, I know you do!" "Don't tell me too many people have asked you!"

NG: She was rather forceful, huh?

GP: She wanted 500 bucks from each of them. This was the 1890s.

NG: That's a lot of money.

GP: They got some money from both of their estates. He died in 1913 with an estate value of four and a half million dollars. She died in 1916 with an estate of six million. And she founded what is now the Skillman Merrill Palmer Center downtown. Merrill Palmer Center.

NG: That's a lot of money, even now. I'd be happy with that.

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GP: It's a good chunk of change.

NG: So he never lived to see women's suffrage come into being?

GP: No. But then neither did Susan B. Anthony.

NG: No. That's true. That's too bad. So, I guess, how did the LGBT community in Palmer Park effect the rest of the city do you think?

GP: I think as an example of how a community runs and how it sticks together. I mean, you couldn't be a bigot and live very successfully in the Park. You knew someone belonged in the neighborhood. When we were all sitting out on our porches or walking around, you knew people. You could go other places, I went to Chicago, Kansas City and New York and you would see people and you didn't know each other's names but you knew you lived in 660 Whitmore and I lived in 700 or I lived at 225. There was kind of a hierarchy in a way by what building you lived in. 660 Whitmore was an exclusive building, 980 Whitmore was famous for other things, it was partly because there were five choir directors living there. It was five pianos and a spinet in there. And there were unique buildings like 999, which is all cast concrete. Townhouse apartments all stacked on top of each other. So, it was either by unique architecture or by the cost of living there. And you had in most buildings one apartment that was done to the owner's taste and that would be his private pad, so there was a cache if you could say "I live in the original owner's apartment." So, yeah that was a big deal. Top of the grade appliances, special finishes, special outlets, fittings, one of them had a mural on the wall in the dining room.

NG: Interesting. That's pretty cool. So, with how tightknit the community was back in the Park, you say a lot of people moved out and I'm assuming spread out to other areas, did the community kind of dissolve, well I guess dissolve might not be the right word..?

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GP: Dissolve is the word. There's no center to it. Ferndale has kind of taken over that kind of thing. People just kind of moved and didn't have any place to move. Then a few years ago they started moving here. Now it's become the second incarnation of Palmer Park. It won't ever be quite that way again because you won't have people who develop those buildings and stay with them for so long. There is a building 225 Mertyn, that was held by the owner's family from the day it was built in 1929 till they sold it, which was about 2005, I think. It stayed in the same family all that time.

NG: Oh wow. Almost 80 years. It seems like you don't see that much anymore.

GP: No. The values are different. I mean, we didn't just live in the Park, you had a certain lifestyle, you had a certain way you carried yourself. Like I said you knew people, you knew who belonged there.

NG: How long have you lived in Ferndale?

GP: It'll be 21 years.

NG: Ok. So, like right after you moved out of the Park? Did you come up here then?

GP: No, I came over here in 1995.

NG: Ok. So, there was a little time in between.

GP: You know those apartments on I-75 and 14?

NG: Yeah.

GP: I lived in one of those.

NG: Ok. So not too far. That'd be in Madison Heights, right?

GP: Yeah. I was working in Pontiac, so...

NG: Ok. So, that's fairly close. Yeah, so Ferndale, I'll have been here three years now. It's a fun community. I like, it seems kind of the way you were describing, you know there's the little bars everywhere and every one has its own little bit of variety, which is nice.

GP: And there's a new restaurant opening every time you turn around.

NG: Right? It's amazing. It's kind of nice though.

GP: It is. The cache that was the Park will never be recreated. Because we were there in our village and we could be us. We shared the same battles we fought the same closet doors. Gay people today have so much freedom. It's amazing. It's totally amazing.

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NG: Yeah, things seem to have changed a lot even over the last 10 or 15 years with that. Actually, that kind of brings up a question. When you first came out, was there some sort of support system that you had or something that you wish you would have had that it seems like people have now?

GP: Oh, I've always said that we should, we older guys should set up a school so that younger guys will know the ropes. Because as I explain it to some people there's really like the atmosphere of the salon in France, in that you go to a party in this beautiful apartment building

with all of these people who were mostly college educated, with at least a bachelor's, and you have this group talking about what they've just seen on Broadway on their annual trip to New York, and this group that talks sports, this group that talks politics, and the politics were usually liberal, of course. But you had all these around you as a young person and this was in the 1970, so I was 22, and you soaked up all of this culture. And somehow it was just taken for granted that you would soak up all this culture. When you'd have these trips to New York or Chicago or whatever, even with the tough S&M guys you'd see them out of town and you'd say "Oh you're wearing a suit now, but I've seen you in pure leather." So, you learned a lot, you learned how to live. And a certain level of behavior was expected. That was community pressure. There was no one organization that took care of it, and in some ways I think there should be.

NG: Yeah, that makes some sense to me.

GP: That's why projects like this and projects like Tim Retslov's(?) work on gay Detroit are so valuable. Your generation just doesn't know. And you're not in the bar structure that we had then. The bars were pretty much packed most of the time Sunday afternoons, out at Tiffany's. Right on Woodward there across from the Park. It's around where La Dolce Vita is. And you had Ted's, which is now a marijuana clinic, up a few blocks and there's Dutch Girl Donuts. You had Tiffany's there on Woodward. And all of the bars on Sunday, most of the bars would have brunch. And every holiday, we had big holiday dinners. Especially for Christmas, if you weren't going home. It was really a nice service. There was the Back Stage Restaurant, there's a laundromat there now, so you had these welcoming places. I'd often said about Ted's after you go out to the bars, and sitting at the counter you'd have a gay male prostitute, a drag queen, a cop, a real female prostitute, and some guy from the suburbs who's drunk on his ass. But that's where all these people mixed. That was the wonderful thing about the place, you could bring all these characters together, and not to say that it wasn't without its strife, it had its problems, but overall it was totally neat for that. You had a bar for every taste in the city. And it was, there ought to be something, there ought to be some place where young gay men can go and learn about their history. I don't know if Affirmations should do that, or...

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NG: That seems like it would be a good goal to have something like that. Another project to do.

GP: Well, I think because so many of us are dying off, you know when AIDS hit. Your generation has not had the experience of watching friends. And in those days, it was so fast. We didn't have the drugs that you have now.

NG: Yeah, things have changed a lot with treatment. I actually used to volunteer at the Lansing Area AIDS Network back a few years ago and, yeah, I mean people can survive for a long time now with AIDS and that was totally different back in like the 80s. I remember, I was born in 1980, so a little bit of memories of on the news from when the AIDS crisis started. Did you lose a lot of friends back then?

GP: Oh yeah. We were literally going to a memorial service every weekend at one point. So and so has it, so and so's ex has it, da da da, it just went down. I remember I sang for a while with the

Great Lakes Men's Chorus, which was an all male gay chorus. Founded around the same time as the larger chorus that sings now. But, I remember the director Keith calling me one Sunday and the other baritone was a guy named Michael, who was a teacher, when he said Michael is gone I said "Tell me he got hit by a truck, tell me he got run over by a car, tell me his elbow slipped down his throat and strangled him, don't tell me he died of AIDS." And all Keith did was cry. The emotional impact on you, and I've made a couple quilt squares, and every time the quilt comes I say I'll go down there even though I don't want to, because I don't want to see all the ones that I don't know about.

NG: Yeah, that's always an emotional thing to see.

GP: So, that helped break down some of the socialization or the structure of the society that we created. And we created that society almost in secret. My Masonic brothers might get upset, but we were almost like the Masons in the way that we'd recruit. You know, you're just around somebody and you observe and you mentor, that kind of thing. But you don't formally apply.

NG: Interesting. I guess that still, depending on where you are, that still seems to be the mode of how things are operating, depending on if you're in the U.P. or something, it's a lot more underground in communities in those types of places. But how have you seen that change, I guess that's not really a good question. Things seem to be a lot more open nowadays.

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GP: Yeah. I was watching TV the other day and I thought, I know things have changed because, who was the actor, Jesse Tyler from Modern Family, Jesse Tyler Ferguson and he was on the View, I think. And he said, he's adopted some children apparently, and someone asked him and he said, "Yes, my husband and I." And I thought, it's really changed when a male can sit there and talk about his husband and nobody batted an eye. Nobody challenged him, it was just the most normal thing. And talk about two men adopting children.

NG: Right? And who would have thought even, well 2004 was when all of the gay marriage bans went through like 20-some states. Going from that to now, is a pretty dramatic shift.

GP: I know probably more married gay men, you know in my youth they were really married to women, almost every gay man I knew had children because they had stifled their sexuality and done the wife and kids for as long as they could. Now it's guys that have been together 20 or 30 years.

NG: That's pretty impressive. Well, it was, I guess just last year that the gay marriage ruling came down from the Supreme Court. How did you feel about that, seeing that actually become a nationwide thing?

GP: I'm ambivalent. I'm one of the few ambivalent ones because it's kind of a you like it or you don't sort of thing, but I kind of come down in the middle. I feel that we gave the conservatives and the conservative Christians enough ammunition to blow our fannies off. Referring to each other as husband and wife, those words are just so freighted with stuff, cultural stuff. Marriage

being more about politics and guarding sexuality. So, I don't really know. I know the people I know are happy. And I understand. I've been single for many many years. So, I've never had a situation where I needed someone to be on my insurance, or me to be on someone else's insurance, or have access to an estate. That's all foreign to me. Because in relationships I've had we didn't do those things. We weren't even clear then on what term to use, did you say lover, was he a partner, friend, special friend? It's kind of strange.

NG: Do you think that society is kind of co-opting or taking over relationships? You know, by allowing marriage now it's like society is telling gay men and women that they should be married now as opposed to the way things were before?

GP: I think that some people. The conservative bunch are still stuck back then. That's what they can see. They can't see the reality. They don't deal with reality very well.

NG: That seems to be true.

GP: Like the new President-elect. You'll never hear me call him President Trump. The President, and I respect the office... That was one of the strangest elections that I've ever witnessed.

NG: How have you felt about the whole, I guess year and a half campaign and everything? Do you see society kind of going backward on things?

GP: I can see them trying. They're trying already. Because all the gay marriage rights and everything can go just as fast. We have to really be diligent because this guy's a screwball.

NG: I guess it's hard to tell what he really thinks. At least Trump. The Vice-President-Elect is, well I don't think any of his views are hidden on that. So that kind of worries me more than Trump himself does.

GP: You know in my day we'd be at a party having this discussion.

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NG: Yeah. I like your image of the salons in France, it seems very descriptive.

GP: How did we lose that sense? Well, a lot of people died off is what happened. And there was no one to take the younger people and introduce them. It's like I said, expectations were higher. You had a standard to meet, in a way.

NG: Yeah, some things it's too bad that they've been lost over the years. Technology seems to have changed a lot of that as well.

GP: Yeah, technology. I'm no fan of technology. Like I've seen this week with this printer. I went and bought it at MicroTech on 14 and I-75. In a week and a half I was back in that store at least twice a day trying to get this thing to print. And finally the guy who got it to print did it in five minutes. I don't know what he did.

NG: It's always a mystery to me too when things like that go wrong and someone's like oh you just need to hit this. I'm like oh great. Do you think that technology has made relationships less personal now?

GP: Yes, I do. I've tried the dating sites. Nah, I've seen wedding announcements where people have met on one of those sites and I don't know how they do it. I sure have never had any luck.

NG: Yeah, it's a brand new world, I guess. Do you have any concerns for the future for the gay community and in the city, or just in general?

GP: Yeah. I think a lot of them have given up on the city and don't really believe that this expansion is going to last. Detroit does have a history of kicking itself in its own ass. We're very good at that. And the corruption atmosphere, I think it's totally gone. Yeah, they're starting to go even farther north than here. They've been looking for a new church for FCC and there's a Church of Christ Scientist which would be an ideal size by the congregation with Detroit Unity across the street. And they're willing to sell and at a good price, but the congregation won't move back in the city. We'd be going back to our community, but they're still scared.

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NG: Why do you think that is?

GP: Even if they weren't gay, I think they'd still be afraid. Because so much has changed, the whole Kwame thing and the police department scandals. I would go home and tell my friends the stories and they would go "the police chief has an affair with a subordinate officer and they both quit, then she has an affair with his replacement?" And I'd say, I'm not making this up. I'm a writer, I'm great, but I'm not making this up.

NG: Sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction.

GP: And Coleman Young did a good bit to keep, a lot of people are still in that mindframe. Because he was just so anti-suburban.

NG: Gotcha. So, with the community in the city and I guess the greater metro area now, what contributions would you say that the LGBT community has made to the region or to the city that maybe people don't know about, or might have been overlooked?

GP: I think a lot of the, just coming to Ferndale and opening businesses and we don't necessarily know that it's a gay owned business, but there's a lot of that and business willing to say that we'll cater to gay. I always say gay people means both lesbians and gays, it's an old habit. If gay means an attraction to a person of the same sex, if you're two women you're gay. Lesbians being separate... I recognize there's transsexuals, transvestites, bi. I've never met very many bi people.

NG: Yeah, there's so many different categories.

GP: One I've heard recently. I can't remember what they call it, but it was the idea that you were neither sex.

NG: Oh uh, shoot. I know what you are talking about, but now I can't think of the term either. Yeah, there's so many. Then there's asexual and intersexed. Yeah, I can't remember the other one now. So, any advice that you have for people in the future?

GP: I think that we need to support places like Affirmations more. I don't support that much, I just the programing is not what I usually need, but there's a senior group that I may take a look at. But, it's to maintain our unity. We need to somehow have some sense of unity. We had a physical unity there in the Park. That gave us a social center. But then again you have technology where people have... The Internet is great. I did all of the transactions for my first book over the Internet. Submission to the editor, research and all that was done via Internet. Now the publisher that I'm working with for the second book is in London, so we do everything by email.

NG: Sure. I guess it certainly makes life easier in that way.

GP: Yeah, but there's got to be a fundamental change. This election I think pointed out to me that there are a lot of people just sitting there and waiting to be aggrieved. And feeling that their grievances are somehow special over others. It's sometimes true. But I think we need to get over the labels, you shouldn't need to figure out if you're intersexed or bisexual or gay or whatever. You are you. The sooner we get to that realization... It's a funny place. I keep thinking about my childhood in Madison. I'm a child of the 60s. So all of that with the University of Wisconsin there, you get all the riots and the student marches and I was in high school and our teachers were not too much older than we were. And they still had friends who were marching, so when we talked about history we had much more of a sense of current history and how that defines us. How we got here. Government in grad school or in grade school, the Nixon Kennedy campaign, we were expected even at a young age, we were barely 12, to read about the campaigns and know what the two campaigners stood for. Watch the returns coming in and discuss it in class. That was the parochial curriculum and if the sisters said do it, you did. We need a few more of those ladies around. There needs to be some sort of central point, something by the whole community. Back in my day everybody knew that community. Everybody knew the bars, everybody knew the character of the places. If I can't see you except by email you only get what I'm telling you, which may or may not be the truth.

NG: So, physical proximity you think is an important factor?

GP: I think it's very important. And Ferndale has achieved some of that. But I don't think that it's there the way it was, and it never will be. It's waiting for my generation to take off and my generation is getting old.

NG: Well, we're all getting older every day right?

00:57:50

GP: You're what, 12?

NG: Haha, 36.

GP: 36? 36, I was in 1988. Or was it 86?

NG: What year were you born again?

GP: 1951.

NG: So, 1987?

GP: That's when I started my master's degree. I remember recently talking to some kids who were in their teens and early twenties and they were grousing about gas prices and I said, when I learned to drive in 1969, no 67, when I learned to drive in 1967, which was the first thing that flipped them out, I remember paying 19 cents a gallon. For leaded gas. In those big cars. And sometimes stations would have price wars and they'd get down to a dime a gallon. But I said I was working when I got my first job, I was washing dishes in the kitchen of a very classy hotel in Madison called the Edgewater. A beautiful white concrete stucco building right on the lake. I mean right on the lake, it was right there. And I started at about 10 an hour. And they said, well we'd never work for that. You can't pay people that. I said, it was 1967. That was the law and people raised families on those wages.

NG: Well, yeah I mean if it's 19 cents a gallon, you can get 5 gallons of gas on an hours wage. Now that would be more than \$10 an hour. So, yeah.

01:00:09

GP: But you could get a hamburger an order of fries and something to drink for 35 cents. You know an expensive meal in a restaurant was ten or fifteen dollars and it was a meal. At Ted's, ah Ted's was great. Ted's was your diner where everybody knew you, kind of like Cheers. And the waitresses like Flo with the big beehive and the ex-navy guy going in getting their first Ted's special dinners. And that was when we'd get everything from soup to nuts and pay \$5, sometimes less. In the spring the owner would go smelt fishing. So he'd get some smelt and since he caught them he had no middle man costs, so it was like \$3 for a smelt dinner.

NG: Wow. That's pretty impressive. I guess I'm just thinking back to your talking about school. Having the kids learn about the campaigns and where candidates stood and all that, it's a lot more civic-minded than people seem to be today.

GP: And it was required. It simply was expected. It was expected that a certain number of you would go on to college and others would go into vocational training. It was just being who those students were and they treated them accordingly. And the slowest kid in the Catholic school would be the average kid the public schools. I think it all comes down to dedication, in a way. Dedicated to the community. People often ask me why I got involved in the historic preservation and I tell them the story of the neighborhood in Madison where I grew up. Or at least the first ten years of my life, was at South Park and Regent Streets near the university, it was called Bush. It

was the Italian and immigrant neighborhood. The city of Madison thought it was a slum and tore it down, demolished everything. Then it turned out that the guy who was in charge of the whole program was setting it up so that his friends could buy the land cheaply and then they were going to build luxury housing, which they never did. The land stayed vacant for many many years before this came out. One of the people that he talked about cheating, we found out it was my grandfather. So, the destruction of that community made a sharp impression on me, even as a 10-year old. So, when I got to the Park I thought this is a beautiful place. This is a different place; this is a place that must survive. If there's anything I can do for the historic preservation and all that other stuff. And it is preserved and it's safe. Through a lot of hard work and expense of other people, but you know I put in my two cents.

01:04:04

NG: That's great.

GP: And I think that in the wheel of time we might return to some place like that again. Slightly different, but I just look back at those times and I think it was so different, so different. Well, I was only 23 years old.

NG: Yeah, viewpoints and things change over time.

GP: I was working, one of my first jobs out of college was working for Central Transport. Madie Maroun, his operation. They had a terminal at 6 Mile and Cohen and I made \$225 a week. Excuse me, that was \$200 cash take home a week. And I was dumb enough to give it up because I couldn't stand it. Working at a trucking terminal is a strange business. They're all weird. They're all strange.

NG: I wonder why that is.

GP: Well, it's like being a cop, being a construction worker, it's such a demanding thing. And in those days truck drivers were not really being paid very well. They were working hard to keep both ends together. And it was considered, like construction work, it was considered blue collar and not really worth it. Stupid. I remember getting into an argument with somebody in an elevator and they were talking about stupid work and I said well you better hope that the person who built this elevator wasn't stupid.

NG: Right. We put a lot of trust in someone who puts elevators together. Well, it looks like we're almost well at 2 o'clock now, so any final thoughts?

GP: I'm excited that the Reuther is doing this. With my research, I spent some time in the Reuther. Probably should spend some more time, but it was interesting between the Burton and the Reuther I got a lot of good information. And there's more, there's still stuff I haven't explored.

NG: There's so much out there. Well, thank you for this. I'm going to shut off the recorder now. But we definitely appreciate you taking the time to talk to us. Thank you.