Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Gail Malmgreen
Interviewer: Whitney Strub
Date: November 30, 2017
Location: Rutgers University-Newark

Whitney Strub: Alright. It is November 30th, 2017. This is Whitney Strub with the Queer Newark Oral History Project. I'm here at Rutgers Newark with Gail Malmgreen to record an interview largely about your experiences as a witness and archivist of Newark history, I suppose is how I would put it, if that—

Gail Malmgreen: A Newarker.

Whitney Strub: A Newarker, of course. Of course.

Gail Malmgreen: Dedicated Newarker.

Whitney Strub: Which is great, because your knowledge runs deep, and that's what we're here for. We had discussed this a little beforehand, how to organize this. Ultimately, we have sort of a series of people that I think you're going to speak about. To get the ball rolling, you could probably sort of set yourself up biographically and talk about your own background that brings you to this conversation.

Gail Malmgreen: Right. My background is a little bit unusual, family-wise. My mother's family were Jewish immigrants that came from Russia at the turn of the century, briefly in New York, settled in Newark. My grandmother sewed in sweatshops, and she had several brothers and sisters, and so on. My father came from a Norwegian American family, not Jewish, raised in East Orange. Parents also came from Norway around the turn of the century, and briefly in Brooklyn, and eventually settled in New Jersey, with a large extended family.

The fact that I was part Jewish, part not Jewish was a bit of an outsider thing. When my parents got together in the '30s, it was not an easy thing. His family wasn't sure about it. She was against traditional Jewish life, and so on. I wanted to say that they both became involved—especially my mother, who was really the political activist, and the totally devoted Newarker. Went to Barringer High School, was very much inspired by the teachers that she met there. There was a kind of Americanization process they gave her, English Literature and all that sort of thing, breaking out of the tenement life that she had been raised in.

Her parents broke up, which again was very unusual. She was raised in an all-woman household, her mother struggling with three daughters. Her mother had been sort of pushed into almost an

arranged marriage, with a man whose first wife had died, leaving him with three young children. He quickly married my grandmother, a young girl recently from Russia, and it didn't work out at all. Eventually she left him, taking her own three daughters with her, and raised them. They all went to college, which was an extraordinary thing in the '30s, really—well, my mother graduated from Barringer in 1927, so she went on to Newark Normal School from there, which was, again, a wonderful experience for her, broadening, and so on.

She ended up in a very political—she became very political during the Depression in a kind of general left culture, general Bohemian culture, where everyone was experimenting and getting interested in modern art and modern literature. They used to go into New York to jazz clubs, and she would talk about hearing Billie Holiday, and this kind of thing. It was a very different life from the life that her parents' generation had known.

She met my father in that milieu. They both were working as social workers, case workers in the Newark Welfare Department, which was doing a lot of business in those days. They both had come out of college. My mother didn't particularly want to teach. They ended up as social workers. It fueled her interest in social conditions, it really did. She was assigned to work in the Italian neighborhood that was the old First Ward, that was later demolished when the urban renewal kind of swept it away. She was deeply involved in that neighborhood. That, too, inspired her, and she got to love Italian culture, and became very interested in it, and so on.

My father left that work after a few years and ended up working in publishing in New York, which became his career for the rest of his life. He always commuted to New York. My mother continued working until she had children. I was born in June of 1942. After that, she did not work, except for her political activism, which was very rich, I would say.

It seems to me that the political environment that they came out of, and they had a circle of friends, radical Jewish friends, and a lot of friends who weren't Jewish, some Italian friends. Most of them were linked by being involved in some way with Bohemian culture and left politics. It created an atmosphere of great openness and whatnot. I wanted to talk about the first intimation I have of somebody who might have been gay, who my parents knew. Again, I can't really quite prove this, but my mother at one point had a woman supervisor, who she always talked about with great

reverence. Her name was Magdalene Peter—an unusual name. I've seen her name come up in the archives, where she was involved in some way as an administrator of some WPA project, or something like that. I think she was a Welfare administrator of some kind.

She loved my mother, and continued to write her very, very intense letters, way into maybe the '50s and '60s, I still saw letters coming. I didn't know the details, but there was something about the way my mother talked about her that led me to think—and my mother was very woman-identified. She loved strong women, women who were feisty, women who tried to do revolutionary things, or were different in some way. There was something about the way my mother talked about her that led me to think that she was probably gay.

I have a feeling that there was a big culture of women who didn't marry, who might or might not be defined as gay. I'm really not so interested in that question, but I think there's a big book to be written, or a big study to be done, especially in the Progressive Era and into the '30s, and later. Leading women throughout the city, the teachers that my mother knew growing up, the librarians—so many of these people that consciously, clearly made a decision not to marry. It wasn't that someone was killed in the war, or whatever. The Beatrice Winser generation of professional women. My friend, Martha Vicinus, has written about these women—

Whitney Strub: Right, right.

Gail Malmgreen: - in regard to England, but it's the same story. You know, the suffragettes, the people who devoted so much of their time to politics who were involved in all these social betterment projects, who often fought their way into various professions. Often they weren't married, and so on. The nurses, and everyone else. Anyway, that's the first intimation I have. I don't want to just go on for an hour. You really have to ask me a question.

Whitney Strub: No, no. I mean, are those letters something you preserved? They're going to be archived?

Gail Malmgreen: I'm not sure. Again, they're not explicit, but they're just, "My beloved Abby, I really miss you," or, you know, reminiscing about the old days, or whatever. She knew my mother was married and had children.

Whitney Strub: Are you going to put those in archive?

Gail Malmgreen: Well, I'm gonna go through my family material completely, and put together an archive. At the moment, my thought is the Newark Public Library.

Whitney Strub: Oh yeah, no, that would be—

Gail Malmgreen: I had thought originally the Jewish Historical Society, but as I look at it, it's not so much Jewish. I mean, there's so much material in there that's not Jewish, that I think it's better to think about the Library. Absolutely. I don't throw stuff away. No, no, no, no, no.

Whitney Strub: I figured, as an archivist.

Gail Malmgreen: If I find those letters, I will, especially since I've found references to her name now. I had a sense of who she is. You know, I could be wrong, but they certainly had a very intense-natured—

Whitney Strub: Right, right.

Gail Malmgreen: Again, there are these flashes of memory and things that don't—aren't necessarily fit together into a big picture. One of the Italian families that my parents knew when they were young and first married was the Padula family, and I later found out that Jerry Padula, who was one of the many sons of that family, went on to work on Broadway, was the creator of *Bye Bye Birdie*, and so forth and so on, and gay. Here's an Italian family coming out of that neighborhood that my mother had known so well. I remember that he was a friend of theirs way back. I probably never met him.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: They talked about him, and so on. I had a cousin who was gay. These are very vivid childhood memories, a beloved cousin, I really loved him. He was the son of one of the three half-sisters of my mother, the much older sisters from my grandfather's first marriage. My mother was from the three younger sisters. They remained friendly with their half-sisters after the marriage broke up. This was my cousin, Arnold Joseph. His mother had married someone named Joseph, and his father owned a pet store in Downtown Newark.

Arnold, who had to be—he could have been ten years older than I, at least—I'm sure he was. I was a little kid, and he was a big, tall guy. He would come to visit us quite a lot. Not only I, but everyone loved him. He was a wonderful, loveable guy. The thing that intrigues me is that, it was—I knew he was gay, and I can't

quite understand how people knew someone was gay in those days, since the word was never mentioned, it was never talked about.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: Possibly one of my aunts might have said something, or whatever. To me, it was almost more like osmosis. It really seemed so, although it really can't be.

Whitney Strub: So people didn't even talk about it in the kind of coded terms.

Gail Malmgreen: No, really not. It was just obvious, he wasn't getting married, and whatnot. It was something about people—I don't know. It wasn't—I didn't live in an environment where people made disparaging remarks about gay people, or jokes about them, or anything like that. There was a kind of a Bohemian respect, or whatever you would call it. I can't remember a time when I didn't know that my cousin, Arnold, was gay.

Later, by the '60s and '70s, we'd talk about him, and we're no longer seeing him [he moved to Florida]. I think my aunts would probably have been more up front about it. He was an interesting guy. He worked in this pet store in Downtown Newark, and he was a very—how can I put it—he was sort of an impressive guy. He was devoted to animals, he understood animals. He was particularly devoted to horses. He was a horseback rider and he competed in horse shows, where he wore fancy jodhpurs and all this. We didn't know anything about this. We were city kids, you know? He had pictures, he had ribbons, and he seemed very elegant to me, and very accomplished, and very kind. He used to come and visit us, and he would always ride us on his shoulders, he's a tall guy. Warm and outgoing.

Anyway, he was a wonderful part of our family, and very much accepted and not accepted in the sense that you didn't know these people's social life, or their—

Whitney Strub: They wouldn't have, like, partners or special friends that—

Gail Malmgreen: No. No. Very much it was separate. Separated. He'd come and visit the family, and he'd visit his mother, and all this stuff. He was welcomed into the family, but nobody talked about what kind of social life he had. It would not have been proper, or whatever. Plus we were little kids, so we didn't know what the adults might have been saying to each other, or whatever. He ended up eventually

moving to Florida, where he got involved in very high-end, like, taking care of the dogs of very wealthy women, and stuff like that.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: My aunts kept up with him regularly, and so forth. This would have been in the '40s that I knew him, because I was a little kid. My parents had another couple of gay friends who, again, it's the same osmosis thing. I'm a little kid, I'm five, six years old, four, five, six. They had these friends who were known as Bernie and Irving, they were a couple like all the other couples that my parents knew, and they were Bernie and Irving. They always came over together. Again, we liked them, treated them sort of like uncles, and so on. Knew nothing about them, the rest of their life. My parents—you don't ask your parents questions when you're five, six years old—

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: - about people's background, or anything like that. They were furriers, which I think is kind of interesting. They weren't artistic kind of people, or intellectuals or anything like that. They were furriers, they worked in the fur trade, which was big in Newark, historically. One of the great things that I always remember about them—first I remember how totally accepting my parents were. As I look back now, there's no question. There was no gap between their treatment or involvement with these people and with their straight friends, who were all having lots of children, you know, it was just after the war. Everyone was buying houses and having children.

They made me a teddy bear. This was a highlight of my childhood. They made me a beautiful teddy bear that was made out of scraps of fur. That's how I knew that they were furriers. My mother explained to me that they had actually made this, and it was black and white, it had sort of patches. Somewhere I will find a picture of myself with this teddy bear, because it was a cherished possession. It was absolutely great. Then they disappeared from our lives, and I never asked why or what happened to them, or whatever. I suspect they probably moved somewhere.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. They had drifted in your parents' orbit through, like—

Gail Malmgreen: Through Newark circles, they obviously knew—

Whitney Strub: Jewish circles, or—?

Gail Malmgreen: Probably. Yeah, probably, I would imagine, because they were obviously both Jewish. People come and go in your life, when you're a child. You get interested in something else, and you go to school, you know. I remember them very warmly.

Whitney Strub: Would there be family photos of them?

Gail Malmgreen: I don't think so. Quite frankly, if I saw them, I'm not sure I would recognize them. I don't really—it's possible, but I don't know. We have tons of photos. It's possible.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: What I would like to know is, who they were.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Gail Malmgreen: Exactly how my parents knew them, and all of them. Well, you know.

Whitney Strub: Right, right, these are the fragments that we—

Gail Malmgreen: Most of my parents' friends are all gone. My relatives of that generation are all gone, and it's kind of sad. It's a rich and complicated life. I went to Maple Avenue School. We lived then in the Weequahic section. We lived in Hillside briefly, until I was in the fourth grade, we lived in Hillside. Then I became very involved in sort of the school life of the Weequahic neighborhood, which was very rich, as Philip Roth tells us, although we didn't indulge in athletics the way he did. You know, we had friends of all kinds of stripes. There always was a sense that we were different, in a way, because my father wasn't Jewish, especially. Most of our friends were from much more conventional Jewish families, so people were having bar mitzvahs, they were going to Jewish summer camp, they were members of synagogues. We were none of that.

My parents' friends tended to be people who weren't that. They either were Jews who did not participate in those kinds of things, or did it lightly, or they were even non-Jews. That was sort of unusual to have. Then we related quite closely to my father's family, who all lived in the suburbs and had a lot of cousins all my own age. We spent Christmas with them every year, big Christmas, huge family thing. We even went to Norway to visit the family. There was an intense shot of my father's milieu overlaid on this Weequahic super-Jewish milieu, and always shot through with my

mother's politics. My mother became very, very active in Newark politics, probably from the early '50s, at least. As soon as we were old enough to kind of more or less look after ourselves. Or my father would take care of us in the evenings, my mother would go out to meetings.

Whitney Strub: Which kind of groups?

Gail Malmgreen: She started out, you know, she was even active in the PTA. It was sort of like, whatever was going, my mother would get involved in. I don't even know some of the earliest ones, but eventually it was NAACP and CORE. She tended to veer a bit to the left of the mainstream of these things, so she would have been happy when CORE came along. It also meant that she always had a lot of younger friends. One of the sort of unusual aspects of my parents was that their closest circle of friends were often people who were young, like Derek [Winans], and even younger. Terri Seuss, who we mentioned. She had a whole circle of people like that. They were really the closest friends. It was a bit odd, in a way.

Then she got involved in political reform movements of various kinds. Bob Curvin, in his book, gives a detailed account of how blacks first moved into city politics in Newark, and the splits between various factions of them. The older line people, and then different other reform groups that came along—she associated herself with the George Richardson's group, and even ran on one of his tickets when he was trying to put together one of these Rainbow Coalitions, and became quite friendly with Hilda Hidalgo, a gay icon of the Latino community. She knew Hilda Hidalgo quite well, I remember her talking about Hilda—

Whitney Strub: This is before Ken Gibson? This is, like, mid-'50s?

Gail Malmgreen: This is before, it's all—yeah.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: It's early and mid-'60s. It's detailed in Bob Curvin's book. I found one of the flyers, my mother's election flyers, where she and Richardson and Hilda Hildago and a whole bunch of other people are running for state offices, assembly, and whatever. They never won anything. As Curvin points out, they actually did rather poorly. They were, like, the New Democrats, the Freedom Democrats. A little bit inspired by the Mississippi Freedom Democrats, that kind of thing.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, that shows up in *Troublemakers*, that campaign.

Gail Malmgreen: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Whitney Strub: Actually—oh, sorry, go ahead.

Gail Malmgreen: No, no. Ask away.

Whitney Strub: Well, I was just going to follow up on Hilda Hidalgo, then. Did you know her at the time?

Gail Malmgreen: I did not.

Whitney Strub: No? Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: As we're moving into the '60s, when I was still in high school, I was pretty intensely involved. Although my mother went off and did her own thing. We stayed home with my father and pursued our intellectual interest, and were intrigued by our various teachers and school politics, and all that kind of stuff. From the time when I went away to college, which was in 1960, my relationship with Newark was somewhat different, in that I was—a large chunk of the time, I was living elsewhere. I would come back. We were a very, very close family. My brother—I had one brother, three years younger, who was very involved also in Weequahic, and had his own circle of friends. Also involved with the younger political people that my mother knew. He went to Brandeis three years after I left.

For both of us, it became something where we kind of came and went. We would always come home for holidays, and often came home for summer. We were very close with our family, until anything intervened. He eventually moved to New Mexico. I was married briefly. There were times when we spent less time and more time. I have a sort of moving kaleidoscopic image of the stuff that my parents were involved in, there would be all these people that they knew much better than I did. Or I knew them through them. My recollections are fragmentary.

You had asked me about when I was in high school. I worked in the Weequahic branch of the Newark Public Library in the summers. That was the first paid job I ever had. I loved it. I couldn't believe that someone would pay you money to go to the library every day. You know, it was great. I did this when school wasn't on, it was in the summer. There were two librarians in the branch at the time. One of them was Miss Lillian Nichols, who was

a classic example of the kind of woman that I talked about before, who probably came from a very distinguished Newark family, because Nichols was one of the founders of Newark names, and never married, and so on. Very kind of a bright, old fashioned type of librarian.

Her assistant was a guy called Charles Thomas, who was black and very gracious, and a lovely guy. Again, he was one of those people that I'm just sure he was gay. I just know he was gay. Do not ask me how. I knew nothing about his personal life. There was something about his demeanor, he had a rather effeminate demeanor, which a lot of the gay people that I'm talking about did not have, necessarily. He had a kind of a high voice, and had some mannerisms, and so on. He was a very good librarian, and he was a wonderful supervisor. He was my direct supervisor, and I found him very inspiring, and learned a lot about being a librarian from him, and that was great.

Whitney Strub: You never got personal with him, though, in terms of learning about his life?

Gail Malmgreen: No, no. No, no, it was you saw these people at work. It leads me to think—you know, alright, someone has to write another book on this sort of gay world of librarians in Newark. It is—somebody even asked me recently, one of the many gay librarians who flourish in the work now, why were so many librarians gay? Well, you know, it was a safe space. A lot more could be said about that, or learned about that. Of course, people get jobs through people they know, which contributes to it also.

Whitney Strub: Right. It's a hard history to document.

Gail Malmgreen: It shouldn't be, really. Librarians, you know, some of the first leaders of the gay movement were librarians.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, no, that's true.

Gail Malmgreen: Anyway, I loved Mr. Thomas. We treated him—he was, again, very proper, without being stiff or unpleasant about it. We always called him "Mr. Thomas," and he taught me a lot. He was great.

Then I went on to college, and it was a whole different world. It was the '60s, the '60s were just getting going. Politics obsessed us. I was recruited into SDS in the cafeteria line by Paul Booth, who was also in my class. Kathy Boudin was a fellow student at

Swarthmore, I didn't know her. We were very, very sectarian about our politics. It's important to understand that.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: People think that, you know, oh, you were involved with the Communists, or something. We despised the Communists. We had nothing to do—my mother had been a Trotskyist for a while in the '30s. She even taught us, it was like the way you learned in Sunday School, the people you never dealt with were the Communists. There were all kinds of historic reasons for that. We just absorbed this with, you know—I was much more overtly political than my brother. My brother was more in the folk music movement, which was another whole stream that sort of carried him along. He became very involved in that.

Carl Wittman was a classmate of mine. I remember taking a class with him, some kind of class in Political Science, or something, and admiring him because he was a good student, and he was very well-spoken, and he was also very kindly and pleasant. I was very interested. We did not know when we were in college that he was gay. Nobody I knew in the radical movement, my own peers, did I know to be gay. It was, of course, a very macho culture. That was more my problem, and it led me eventually into identifying a bit with the Women's Movement, because these leaders, these guys were so macho. You could never get a word in edgewise. They were really intimidating. You looked up to them, but I couldn't speak at meetings. I just—they were really intimidating. I think Tom Hayden was of that type.

Whitney Strub: Right, right.

Gail Malmgreen: They knew everything. They had the answer to everything. You know, and they didn't pay very much attention to women, except as helpers. Carl Wittman was not like that. He associated—in terms of his friendships, I would say he was a little closer to the Communist-oriented group. It was quite a group. Mike Meeropol was in my class, and he was—you know, we looked him up in the library, one of my socialist friends and I, and figured out that he was the Rosenbergs' son, because that was never alluded to. They had quite a considerable group on campus.

That was my political education in that way. Then the Women's Movement started getting going shortly after I left college, and the Civil Rights Movement was really going. When I went home during those years, it was all about CORE and Bob Curvin, and all

these people that my mother had come to know. Of course, Derek. Derek is a whole separate story, Derek Winans. It goes back to, really, the early '60s, as far as I remember, from my family. There's so much to say about Derek that I'd almost rather leave him aside.

My mother and her friends, mostly women friends I have to say, who had a lot of time for politics, many of them Jewish, but not a hundred percent, but mostly Jewish, oriented toward CORE. When I'd come home, there'd be a picket line or something. We picketed the White Castle hamburger place down on wherever it was, Elizabeth Avenue. It was a bunch of black guys coming from CORE, and a bunch of Jewish women, pretty much, including some young women. I remember carloads of hoodlum types, who I now assume were probably Italian, although I wouldn't have known that at the time. They'd cruise by us and yell really vile stuff, because they see these black guys and they see these white women.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: They didn't approve of the picket line, and whatever. It was almost a little bit scary. My mother was all for it, so we participated in all these things, and eventually it became also draft resistance. We had a few friends who tried to become conscientious objectors. We used to picket the courthouse downtown. Then first the SDS group came in. My parents got to know them quite well. Phil Hutchings they knew quite well, and Tom they knew rather well. They used to have meetings at our house, and people stayed at our house sometimes.

My mother did not take a completely uncritical eye to the group, because Tom Hayden's girlfriend, who we knew well, Connie Brown, used to come and cry on my mother's shoulder about how unhappy she was about how Tom was treating her. My mother, with her feminism, would look at this a little bit askance. They weren't quite sure about the extent to which they were sort of disrupting currents of politics that they had been involved with before. They had been involved with Stanley Winters and the Clinton Hill Association, and all this stuff. The SDS project was a bit of a disruption of that.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: They liked Bob Curvin a lot. They knew him well. They knew Ray Proctor quite well. He was only the head of CORE for a brief time, you probably know. He continued around. He stayed around. He

was one of these charming guys. I can't remember if I actually met him, but I remember a lot of references to him. They were always, oh, Ray is doing this, Ray that. The women, my mother's women Bohemian friends all liked him a lot, you know, found him very attractive and charming and so forth. At this period, I mean, Ray was president of CORE somewhere in '63, '64.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: I have the dates, actually, in our database. The organization itself moved more toward black nationalism. When Ray moved out, it changed quite a lot. But '62, '63, '64 was the heyday of Bob Curvin and Ray Proctor, and John Davis arrived on the scene. How we knew him was that Derek introduce him to us. He and Derek became very close. I thought of him as a New York based guy, but I now realize that he spent more time in New Jersey than I knew. He seemed to come from New York, and he knew New York, and knew people in New York, and had been associated with the NAACP in New York, I believe.

He came out, and somehow, he was like an emissary, or something, somebody who was sent to kind of help the Newark people to raise their game, or something like that.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: He was very smart, very sophisticated, extremely good-looking. Always very elegantly dressed. Derek loved him. Derek, too, had a kind of Ivy League—you know, there was a part of him that really wanted someone he could talk to—

Whitney Strub: John Davis was white or black?

Gail Malmgreen: - and John was that person. Black.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: Black, yeah. He was a lover of Ray Proctor's for a while, as [Ray's] family mentioned in their interview. I didn't know—I knew nothing about that. I knew John was gay. I always met him with Derek and knew him through Derek. Derek used to bring him over to our house, and brought him up to my parents' summer place in the country, which was kind of a hangout for all these young people for a while. He seemed like sort of a figure from another world, a figure from New York, in a way. He had that

quality that James Baldwin sort of had too, you know, kind of elegance of superiority. Not unfriendly, but—

Whitney Strub: This is still the mid-'60s here, we're talking about?

Gail Malmgreen: Yeah, it has to be probably the early '60s. I don't remember when John died, it wasn't all that long after this period, because my parents, I'm sure, went to the funeral. I remember they had the funeral program, and so on. You know, one of the things I don't understand is, Ray Proctor died of AIDS much later. I had assumed that John Davis also died of AIDS, but I'm not positive about that. It may have been a good deal later that they went to his funeral.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: It may have been that the relationship carried on when I was no longer living close to New Jersey, and he died later. I don't know. The time I'm remembering is in the mid-'60s, when Derek first brought him around.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Did he read as gay then? This was another of these understood—

Gail Malmgreen: Well, that's another big question, actually.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: I ask myself over and over again, exactly when did I know that Derek was gay? I would bet that I probably didn't know that John was gay at the time, because I probably didn't even know that Derek was gay at the time, or hadn't consciously kind of thought of that. The story of Derek—that's another complicated matter. Most likely at that time I would not have thought of John as gay. He is positioned—he was sent out, and it became—his title was Youth Coordinator for the NAACP. He, Derek and Bob Bender and their other cronies, they used him in all kinds of campaigns. He became a kind of an advisor to all these guys who were trying to do various radical things.

There was a big campaign in the early '60s, where Derek and Bob Bender decided they were going to take over Americans for Democratic Action. That's a big story that I'm going to be explaining in our database. It doesn't have to do with gay history, particularly. They engaged in a big battle with the old leadership, Jewish, old leadership of Essex County ADA, and [it became] very bitter, very unhappy. It resulted in a trial in which Derek was

expelled from Essex ADA. John was one of their advisors, kind of behind this. He was one that was supporting them in this effort to do this. What can you say? At some point I'll have to start on Derek, I think. Perhaps we've gotten to the point where we can go back and—

Whitney Strub: Okay, well, you don't more about John Davis' background, then, his *[cross talk 00:36:27]*?

Gail Malmgreen: No, I wish I had his funeral program, which I know I have at home somewhere, because it would have a biography.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, that would definitely be of interest.

Gail Malmgreen: His name comes up in the NAACP records now and then.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: Not with biographical background, you know, how he and Ray Proctor met, whether he came out to New Jersey because of his connection with Ray Proctor, which is quite possible.

Whitney Strub: We just don't know?

Gail Malmgreen: No idea.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: Derek—

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah. Derek Winans—or actually—sorry—before we do this, I just have one follow-up question, if you don't mind about—

Gail Malmgreen: Yeah.

Whitney Strub: - about your parents' kind of Bohemian world.

Gail Malmgreen: Yeah?

Whitney Strub: I'm just wondering, the way you're narrating it, sort of queer people fit into it pretty easily.

Gail Malmgreen: Yes.

Whitney Strub: Was homosexuality ever explicitly discussed at any point, or never?

Gail Malmgreen: No. That's the great mystery—

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: - in a way. I mean, there was this great level of acceptance without openness, you can say. I think this was probably a big dimension of a certain level of gay life at that time, that there was this dissonance between the acceptance and the openness, and the fact that you didn't talk about it. Why didn't you talk about it? Was it worrying about legal problems? Was it because of the children? Was it—you know—

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: - my father would never have talked about such things. My father was a very quiet-spoken, deeply radical in his beliefs, especially his social economic beliefs. He wasn't the activist that my mother was. He was a quiet-spoken Norwegian guy, you know? Not so happy out on a picket line, or never doing public speaking, which my mother would do, and all that. Not quick to express his thoughts about things. Very accepting of everyone, accepting of people and so forth. Great father. There was much that wasn't really talked about.

My mother was more like, she liked to kind of poke people, and she would sort of edge toward things every once in a while, like I had these hints from her, that maybe she had had friends who were gay, or maybe this, maybe that. Again, it wasn't—this is why it interests me so much to try and figure out when we knew Derek was gay. Because Derek was really—many people have talked to you about Derek, and everyone reacts to him differently. He was a very magnetic person, and very, very close to our family, which he treated as a kind of surrogate family. He had others that he did [this with], but he was with us every Thanksgiving, every Christmas.

Often—oh, another thing that shaped our attitudes about gayness that I really should mention is that my parents' chosen place to vacation every summer when they weren't in western New Jersey was Cape Cod, it was Provincetown. They first took me there in 1946. We're talking about Eugene O'Neill's Provincetown, not gay Provincetown. Artists, Eugene O'Neill, uncommercialized, et cetera. Every single summer after that, until pretty much my father died [in 1989], we were in Provincetown for a while, and developed some ties there, and knew some people from New

Jersey who also summered there, and artists and people, and whatever. Eventually, Derek came with us.

Some of the other friends from Newark, quite a few, would come up with us. My brother and I, in our summer vacations, were experiencing an atmosphere which pretty quickly became rather gay. My mother and her friends we knew, and a lot of the shopkeepers up there in Provincetown, in the early days who were gay, they loved them. They were always hanging out and talking and chatting, and whatnot. I think it was another factor—again, it wasn't like we talked about, oh, how gay this all is, you know? It was another factor that made a gay-friendly environment natural to us.

Then Derek and Al eventually came up, and other people that we knew. It was quite a while. Derek didn't meet Al Jordan until well along in this process. I wouldn't say when they first met. I'm just trying to see when Al died, in 1991, they probably had known each other for, at most, 15 years. They met somewhere in the '70s, and didn't come up to Cape Cod until a while after that. That changed Derek's life. Al was the first person we knew to be a partner of Derek's. I think Derek probably had a hard time building that kind of thing. He came from a very dysfunctional and unsupportive family background. His parents had split, he had obviously a very difficult relationship with his mother, who we never knew. She remarried, and I gathered she had alcohol problems. For whatever reason, she wasn't much of a mother to him.

His father was difficult in a different way, because he was a big, powerful guy who had a lot of money and a lot of connections. Derek probably found it somewhat difficult to live up to his expectations, whereas he had a brother who was straight and very conventional, who inherited the family business and did everything he was supposed to do. He was Derek, bright, you know, Harvard graduate, worked for the Wall Street Journal before he came back to Newark. Followed in his father's footsteps to the extent that he was very active in the Democratic Party. His father, at one point, had been, I think, the chair of the New Jersey Democratic Party, I believe Derek had told me that. He was a big supporter of John Kennedy. The Kennedy campaign was a time when Derek's father really shone. There's little Christmas cards and things from the Kennedys in his papers. Derek followed along, it was the Chair of Young Democrats at Harvard, you know?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I remember that from the news clipping.

Gail Malmgreen: You know, not gay. I mean, went to St. Paul's School, went to Harvard, and I'm sure absolutely not gay, and very unhappy about that, I'm also sure. Because you could even tell before it dawned on me that he was gay, or wanted to be gay.

He comes back to Newark, throws himself into politics. Some of that story is somewhat well-known. All the different issues he became involved with, committees he sat on, projects he worked on. Periodicals he started with his friend, Arthur Jones, a periodical called *Four Corners*, which was sort of in the ADA period.

Whitney Strub: Oh, I don't know that, *Four Corners*.

Gail Malmgreen: For some reason, it was published in, I believe, East Orange. I remember him talking about it. Arthur Jones was a very nice guy, who I re-met at Derek's funeral, who was English, straight, I believe Catholic, originally. Very much on Derek's wavelength, in terms of what he wanted to do in Newark. He spent some years in Newark, died some years ago. Lived somewhere near Washington or Baltimore, or down that way. He soon left Newark, after this period with Derek, and was down there. I think Derek probably kept in touch with him. They were good friends.

There were several couples that Derek was very close to. The Warings were one, Fred and Joan Waring, Arthur and his wife and a few others, that he had these kind of familial type relationships with a number of people. Everybody wanted to mother him. If you knew Derek, you wanted to mother him, because his personal life was so disordered. My mother was always trying to get him to eat, and eat better, and drink less. His apartments always looked like a cyclone had hit them, and he lived in various different places in Newark.

Some of his younger women friends, like me and Terri, and some of the people from the VISTA volunteers, and other political people that he knew, always were worried about his clothes. We would get him really nice looking suits and stuff at thrift shops. We used to do this in Provincetown. We'd go around to the thrift shops, which we did anyway, and buy Derek these really preppy looking clothes. He got to like shirts that had white collars, and were blue or striped, the real English kind of thing.

When Al came along he tried to change his look to a sort of '80s disco look, which didn't really suit Derek very well at all, since he was skinny and pale, and bespectacled, and whatnot. Al used to make clothing for him that was unlike anything anyone had ever

seen Derek wear. Left to himself, he would have some kind of soup-stained, disgusting looking outfit. He just was not capable of taking care of himself. It was also his personality. You just wanted to take care of him. You wanted things to be good with him.

He was always disappointing people, because he was so sort of churned up inside about probably both political and personal issues. He was trying so hard to do so many things, and not solving his personal problems at the same time, that he would—he was capable of showing up two hours late for Thanksgiving dinner. You could expect any disappointment from him.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: Yet you had to love him. I mean, I certainly did.

Whitney Strub: Was his demeanor easy?

Gail Malmgreen: I had more patience with him than most.

Whitney Strub: Was he serious? Jokey? Masculine, maybe? I don't feel like I have a feeling for that.

Gail Malmgreen: Yeah, it's hard. It's hard to explain. Derek is very hard to explain. He would reveal different facets of his personality, depending—you know, with me, I could talk to him about what I was doing at school or graduate school, a little bit. He wouldn't get into the nitty gritty of Newark politics as much with me. He would more with my mother, or someone like Terri who was around, or Bob Curvin, or whatever. He really displayed different sides of himself.

Of course, later—I don't know when he first became actively gay. I suspect he became actively gay before it was an open thing in our family. There was a brief period where he was engaged. My mother was involved, he was engaged to a woman called Jackie, who he had met somehow through politics or something. She was very nice, my mother loved her. I must believe that my parents didn't know he was gay at that point, because my mother really pushed it. She's, like, oh good, Derek's going to be happy now.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: We have Jackie, we love her. We'll invite her over, and—it didn't last very long. To his credit, he kind of figured it out, that this was not something—and she quickly went on and married somebody else. I don't know what the date of that would have been. There

was that period when we didn't really know. It didn't take very long after that, because I think my mother began to suspect when she saw that engagement fall apart, and she started looking at things a little more clearly, and perhaps was hearing something from other friends in the movement, and whatnot.

Somehow or other, again, it just sort of slid into the new reality. You know, fine, Derek's gay, okay. That's how we'll relate to him now. I worried about him, really as a sister. He used to, in the old days, in the '60s, sometimes we would go around and we'd meet people, and he would introduce me as his cousin, which I really liked. Later he started introducing me as his sister, but he realized the sister thing wasn't gonna fly, because people would know enough about him to know that he didn't have a sister. He went back to the cousin thing. I loved it when he did that. I really liked it. It was a great mark of acceptance and affection, and whatnot.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: I worried about him. I thought he was never gonna be happy. I didn't see that the life he was going to be living was going to make him happy, having these kind of brief relationships or friendships with these much younger black guys, trying to fit into multiple worlds at the same time, being so estranged from his family.

Whitney Strub: Yeah

Gail Malmgreen: Yet he had a hunger for it, in a way. The holidays were huge for him. Christmas was the center of our year, Derek's and mine. We'd go out shopping together. He loved Marshall's, we'd go to Marshall's, and he'd buy tons of stuff. The other thing Derek was notorious for, which was both charming and infuriating, is that money could not stay with him. If he had any money for any reason, if somebody paid him $500, he would immediately spend it. As much spend it on someone else, or give it to someone else, or he'd go to a restaurant and just spend it. He could not manage money in any way, shape or form. I think that was kind of a rebellion against his family, too.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: We'd go up to Marshall's and he'd spend all the money he had, and get anything that took his fancy. Usually wild gourmet foods, children's books and clothing, and stuff like this. Then we'd go home, and we'd have a big, huge session, because I loved to wrap packages, where he would decide which person each thing was

going to go to. He gave every person in his office a Christmas present every year, and their children, if he knew they had children, grandchildren, whatever. This was when he worked at IYO [International Youth Organization, in Newark], or other work things that he had going. All our friends and my family, and all this stuff. We had a great time where he would be assigning all these things, and I would wrap them and write the tags. It was like a big tradition. It was really a big tradition for us.

Even when he was in poor health later in his life, which he often was, he'd come over, and we'd do something like this for a couple of hours. Then he'd have to go to bed and go to sleep. He was often really wrecked. Of course, I realized from what other people were always telling me that a lot of it was his drinking problem. I mean, he drank like a fish and smoked constantly. Constantly. He had people bring him cigarettes in the hospital. He was in and out of the hospital many times.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: He drank much more than I ever saw, because he was always drinking when he wasn't with us. There were all these stories of bars. He was assaulted outside a bar one time, and I'm sure he was terribly drunk. Eventually, it really took a toll on his health. Other friends were concerned about it. You couldn't do anything.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: You couldn't get Derek to do anything. That was another great quality of Derek. Whether it was political tactics or money, or some idea he had of going somewhere, whatever, or taking care of his health—he would not listen to anyone. That was very frustrating. His last illness was, I believe, connected to his drinking. He fell downstairs at his home in Forest Hill. It was undoubtedly because he was drunk and he broke his leg, and he died in the hospital through kind of an oversight, but he was sort of a wreck, anyway.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: It was heart failure, but it was really—and perhaps they didn't monitor him as closely as they should have, some of us felt. At that time it was kind of a miracle that he was still walking on earth, you know. That was just really very sad, it was tough. It was really tough. He was such a rich person, personality-wise, that people cared. Bob Curvin has a passage in his book where he talks about

his funeral, how many people came. [Bob] was really surprised, you know? Especially since he'd infuriated so many people. People that hated him, you know? There probably were people who hated him who came to the funeral.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: He was the perfect combination of loveable and infuriating, and so sharp. That's what I liked about him. I'd see him—he always—I never knew him to use a computer. I don't think he ever could or would. I don't know that he ever used a typewriter. He had yellow pads. He always had a yellow pad with him, and a lot of pens. He would write everything that he was doing, whether it was a grant proposal, letters, you know. He had spent a lot of his time writing drafts of things for guys who were on the city council, or people wanting to present something on behalf of an organization. He would write it out, but always with this yellow pad. He'd have all these women typing them up for him in the office. I'm sure the women who worked with him probably felt rather exploited, but he wasn't a computer kind of guy, or a typing kind of guy.

He was interested in everything. I mean, he had an interesting relationship with my brother. My brother was very good-looking, very straight. I think it was sort of like the younger brother that Derek would really have liked to have had. He wasn't—my brother wasn't terribly athletic, but he was much more physical, for example. He was just very fond of my brother and loving to him.

One birthday—my brother's birthday is in the summer—Derek gave him a canoe. Where he got this canoe, I'm not sure. It was a used canoe, he had gotten it from someplace, and had somebody bring it up on top of a car to our little cottage in Warren County. It was a big surprise for my brother. It was a surprise, my brother was just thrilled. This was the kind of thing my brother would love. They all took it out on the Delaware River. The first time they went out, Derek went with him. It tipped over, and Derek—you know, they all managed to save themselves somehow, and Derek lost his shoes, his sneakers that he was wearing. They must have been too big, so they came off. My brother and whoever else was there, they sort of saved him and saw to it that he got home, and whatnot. This was the kind of adventure they were always having. He liked my brother, I think my brother is a very gentle person. He's kind of a New Mexico craftsman kind of person.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: Not at all macho, not at all threatening to anybody. I think Derek liked him because he was sort of a masculine guy that he could relate to very happily, very pleasantly. Like I said, he was like the younger brother that Derek would have liked to have had. He did not have a good relationship with his own brother, that's for sure.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: He was connected with Grace Church, like Louie Crew [now Clay], who he knew quite well. That he had his funeral at Grace Church was interesting, he was kind of reaching back to some kind of an old family tradition, and he respected it. He liked being connected to things from the past. He got in touch with people from St. Paul's School late in his life, which really amazed us, but he did. I think he went to a couple of reunions and whatnot. He wasn't at war with those things anymore. He was trying to—you know.

His political tactics, he'd do anything. He'd pack committees, he'd bring on—how he did the ADA, he brought in a whole bunch—signed up a whole bunch of new members so they could vote for him.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: He would do anything, he had no—he didn't have a sweet sense of ethical behavior when it came to politics, he really didn't. He thought politics was just knock-down and drag-out, and he saw that it was in Newark. You had to fight people on their own terms, and all that kind of thing, you know? His relationship with the black community is probably worth a book in itself. I can't speak authoritatively about it. I don't know exactly what his relationship to his various employers who were black would be. That's why I said interviewing Carolyn Wallace would be good. Before that he worked for Donald Tucker, the Councilman, for quite a while. He had different kinds of relationships with the black community. How about all of his young black gay friends, and then, you know—

Whitney Strub: Well, actually, I want to ask you about that.

Gail Malmgreen: Bob Curvin, yeah, he knew everybody. Well, something that just occurred to me as I'm thinking over this history is that I really think that what Bishop Spong represented and what he did in Newark and elsewhere was very important, because—and I didn't even know him and I never heard him speak, but he was in the

newspapers and so on—but he made it possible for people of my parents' generation and after to speak openly about gays and gay issues. You'd had this culture before that went on, even among liberals, where everybody knew people were gay and whatnot, but you just didn't talk about it.

What he did was really different, because he put it in the headlines. He stood up and sort of said, "Listen, it's part of our life, and it's okay." For a lot of people who weren't Episcopalians or didn't know him, but if you talk about the atmosphere around Newark, and there was, obviously, a shift. You know, when we suddenly started amongst ourselves and much more openly accepting that the gay people we knew were gay, you could even talk about it with them, and this kind of thing. I think Spong was quite a watershed, really, in that way, and forced people who had nasty attitudes, or hadn't come to grips about how they felt about things, to confront that, too. The politicians, and everybody else.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Could I ask you, you kind of glossed over this earlier, just sort of Derek's gay life becoming visible through his relationships with younger black men?

Gail Malmgreen: Well, I don't think it was—it became visible through that. It was more that at a certain point, we kind of knew he was gay. Perhaps he then felt comfortable enough to introduce us to people. I mean, this was all—the first inklings of it were before Al. Al Jordan, his partner, came on the scene pretty early on. Again, I'm missing—I have gaps, because I wasn't here. I was living elsewhere, a lot of different other places. The '70s and '80s were very broken for me. I returned to this area, really, at the end of the '80s. Went to library school in New York, and lived with my parents for a while, and sort of got my job at NYU. From that point on, I was involved here again. There's the '70s and '80s when I really wasn't. I can't fit the chronology together very well.

What kind of relationship he had with these people—I don't know, he didn't come and go, "Here's my lover," or whatever. In many cases, I think it probably wasn't [sexual]. Because Derek was such an odd guy, and he was so much older than these young men were, and they were interested in attractiveness and the party scenes, and all that sort of stuff. That really wasn't something that Derek would really—but I could pause and tell you the thing I did that was not good about Derek and his papers.

I went to his house shortly after he died with an idea of trying to salvage whatever I can find, and I hoped that I would find a lot

more. I gave this small collection to the New Jersey Historical Society. It was disappointing, there were odd bits of things that just happened to be lying around the house. The house was its usual, complete bomb site décor. I could see that a lot of the materials that he had were things that had belonged to other people, young guys that had stayed in the house. There were their high school scrapbooks and their family scrapbooks, and so on. A lot of those scrapbooks don't have very much to do with Derek. We don't always know even who the people are.

One of the things I found in the house were bales, literally bales of mail, unopened—I mean, medical bills, telephone bills, going back for years, and so forth and so on. Mixed in with this stuff—and I was trying to sort it out, so I took anything that seemed to make any sense that was at all political, biographical letters, and even flyers and things like that. There was in there a huge amount of sort of—I don't know what you call it, advertising material for really super-raunchy clubs in New York, gay clubs. Really more raunchy than I had even seen, because I don't normally—you know. They're, like, little postcards and little flyers and ads and stuff like that. Lot, a lot of it.

I was somewhat surprised. I mean, not absolutely horrified. I didn't know anything, what Derek might have gotten up to in New York. Again, it sort of saddened me in a way, because to me it represented things that he kind of aspired to that he really couldn’t enjoy in his own life. I got rid of it. I don't know my own motivations a hundred percent. I can't tell you what my own motivations were. A little bit trying to keep Derek the guy I knew, a little bit thinking it wasn't quite respectable enough or something, I don't know. That would normally be my motivation. I think at least some part of it had to be that I didn't want Mrs. Wallace to come into the house and find all that stuff, because the house had been left to her. I had only a very short time to get anything out that I could get out. I knew that the next person in there was going to be her.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: I was protecting Derek, in a sense. Yet, distorting his life picture, as you would put it.

Whitney Strub: Right. Right. I mean, are we talking, like, kinky leather SM bars?

Gail Malmgreen: Yeah, yeah. Stuff like that. I don't know exactly what they were, but there were loads of pictures with guys with almost nothing on, and they all had these rippling muscles and all that stuff.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: You know, I don't remember it that clearly. I remember thinking, wow, this is pretty hardcore stuff. This is not a disco that you go to.

Whitney Strub: Right. Right. Yeah, it was—

Gail Malmgreen: I guess it was protecting Derek. People probably put a lot of effort into protecting Derek.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: Giving him another chance, and helping him and all of this. Another story that occurs to me, we were talking about John Davis earlier. Derek had quite a colorful history with cars. He liked to drive, and he always needed transportation. Mostly he always had to get rides from people. There were a lot of stories about people giving him rides. He was always asking for rides. Every once in a while he had a car. He had a car while he was living with my parents briefly, that was very nice, new car, but it was repossessed very soon after. They came to my parents' house. That was something that had never happened to us before.

We were sad about that, because Derek actually had his own car. Not too long after that, again, this must have been in the '60s, he really wanted to go to New York, and somehow talked my father into lending him his car, which had to be a fairly rare occurrence. He and John Davis took this car to New York. Who knows what they were doing, but they managed to crash it into—not damage it very badly, but they crashed it into, like, a wire link fence at a schoolyard. I remember hearing the story. When the cops must have come, they found they had quite a bit of pot in the car. You know, just to make things worse. This was my father's car, you know.

My father had to be told about this I don't know how Derek got out of the pot thing, or whatever happened about repairing the car, but my father had to go up to some God-forsaken lot in New York to get his car back. It was typical of John Davis and Derek that nobody hated them after that. It's not that my parents threw him out of the house, or anything like that. It was just like, oh Derek, I

guess we won't lend you the car anymore. There were other stories like that. Interesting that it was John Davis.

Whitney Strub: Right. How long did John Davis stick around the Newark scene for? Or you don't know?

Gail Malmgreen: I don't know. I can't tell. He sort of fades out in the paper record that I'm reading, somewhere in the '60s. You need to know his life story.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, no, I—

Gail Malmgreen: He might have gone to Washington. He and Derek occasionally dabbled in things in Washington. They would occasionally go to Washington, try to get grants and stuff like that. The other thing I don't get any kind of picture of at all is, any relationship or clashing that might have gone on between Derek and his group and the real Black Power people. I mean, Baraka's name doesn't come up in any of the stories that I know or whatnot. I'm sure Baraka would have had no use for these guys.

Whitney Strub: Right, right.

Gail Malmgreen: It would be interesting to know what his relationship with Bob Curvin was. I really don't know.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, no, I agree. That would be really—

Gail Malmgreen: Derek would have been a really tough fit for anything that Baraka was doing.

Whitney Strub: Oh, yeah, I can imagine. Tell me about Al, then. You said he enters the picture in the mid-'70s?

Gail Malmgreen: Al Jordan, yeah, I would say it would have been sometime in the '70s, but again in this period that I'm fuzzy about.

Whitney Strub: Right. Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: Eventually, we got the news, we got the news from my parents. I think Derek was really proud of the relationship when it started, and really thrilled. I remember him being kind of giddy with excitement and affection about this relationship. We learned that Al was really going to be his partner. Al was very—you know, he came from New York, how he met Derek, I have no idea. Probably

through friends in New York, or whatever. Derek induced him to come over to Newark and settle down.

Al was a real homemaker. He was a homemaker. He didn't want to just sleep on people's couches or move around, or anything like that. They always had a home of some kind. Derek had lived here and there before then. Eventually, they had a rather nice apartment, a small apartment on Grafton Street at the end of Branch Brook Park there. Al was a designer, and really like a tailor and dressmaker. He made a lot of women's clothes, and other things. He could make almost anything. Where he got his training, I'm not sure. It may be mentioned somewhere. He was very talented at that. Derek kind of hustled him jobs in youth training programs, or anywhere where he could use his skills. I don't know that he ever really made very much money at it, but he was good. Occasionally he made a couple of things for my mother, and so on.

They had this very loving relationship, and we were surprised, because it didn't seem like the Derek we knew. Derek seemed a little bit healthier. He certainly ate better, but I don't think he cut down on the smoking and drinking, particularly. My impression was, and I don't know to what extent it's true, but my impression was that Al, who was probably a bit younger than Derek, had relationships with other young black guys that he knew in Newark. It wasn't, like, a monogamous relationship. Derek probably would have liked it to have been, but that wasn't in the cards. It just wasn't going to be that way. Their worlds were very different, and so on.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: Their worlds came together, to a certain extent. The fact that Al brought his parents over to their home and introduced them to my parents, and they would have occasional gatherings at their house. I remember going over Christmastime, and all this kind of stuff. There was a lot of decorating going on by Al.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: A lot of food, sometimes catered. It went on. It went on very happily. I think they were together for almost 15 years. They came to our house a lot. He got to know all of our other friends, my parents' friends, and so forth and so on. His funeral, Al's funeral, was the most moving, wrenching funeral I think I've ever been to in Newark. It wasn't huge. It was kind of hosted by the people from IYO. It was in their neighborhood somewhere, and they had a little food reception at IYO's office afterwards. They had gospel singing,

and several people speaking. The emotion in the room was tremendous. His family was there, and he had a lot of brothers and sisters.

If my recollection is correct, and I think it is, he had at least one brother who was gay, and maybe a sister as well. It seemed quite accepted in his family. I think his brother also had something to do with the clothing trade in New York. I remember meeting a few of these people as they would come out for Christmas, and whatnot. It was kind of an interesting family. Then his parents moved back to Savannah, and Al died, and that was really tragic. I think one or more of his siblings also died fairly young.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Did they acknowledge it as AIDS at the time, or was that not spoken—

Gail Malmgreen: It wasn't part of the service, certainly, but I think that probably Derek's friends knew. We knew.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: I don't remember, and I may not have ever even known, how long he was sick. I don't get the impression that I was around while he was sick. I was there for the funeral. It was very tough on Derek, it was very hard.

Whitney Strub: Sure.

Gail Malmgreen: Then he moved into this period of having different black guys live with him. His friend, George, who a lot of people knew. Somebody—I think Louie Crew mentions him in his—I got the impression was not really a lover, was more of just a guy that Derek knew from the black community. He wanted company. He was with Derek when Derek moved into his house that he bought from Liz Del Tufo, which he inhabited for the last 15 years or more of his life. It was a nice little house, little carriage house in Forest Hill, very nice. It had an English garden and whatnot, all trashed eventually by Derek's inhabitant style.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: It was the nicest place he ever had to live. It could have been a good thing for him. Liz Del Tufo lived pretty much across the street, and she has a big house, which is well-known. She entertains and so forth, and she kept a wary eye on it, because it had been her father's house. He had fixed it up so nicely. Derek

had neighbors who lived on the other side of him, who were an older Italian couple, whose children probably had grown, or whatever, I don't know. I remember hearing about them. I don't remember their names, but Derek used to talk about them all the time. They were totally conventional, patriotic, Italian couple. They came to love Derek. They had a dog whom they adored, and Derek eventually got a dog, who he couldn't take care of very well. They took care of the dog when Derek needed them to. They sort of adopted the dog. They kind of semi-adopted Derek. Nobody understood the relationship, you know, at all. They loved him.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: They had an elderly Italian mother who lived with them, her mother, or something like that. Their house was spic and span and neat. Derek once asked me to buy a Christmas present for the wife, he always gave them very elegant Christmas presents. She wanted a particular American flag pin with diamonds and red stones, and blue, and everything. It had to be a really nice one. I got it in Washington for them. Derek, you know, Derek extended out in many directions. What you can say is that he had a great ability to draw people to him, but he had little ability to put it all together in a way that was really coherent.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Were you around for his AIDS activism in Newark, the People With AIDS Coalition?

Gail Malmgreen: No. No, really wasn't.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: No. In fact, he mentioned it, actually, he would talk about it. That was the period when he brought Barry home. You know, it had to be in the early '90s, if it was after Al's death. I'm pretty sure it was. He didn't bring Barry to us with Al. At that time he would say, you know, I'm really trying to—he was helping people get on SSI a lot. He would talk about things like that. He would just talk about them kind of as things he was doing to help people. I didn't know about the committee. I didn't know about Charles' [Cummings] involvement, or anything like that. I wouldn't. My life wasn't so closely connected to what he was doing at that point.

Then he was always trying to help these young patients who had no money. He brought several of them to meet my mother, just to have a good meal, or whatever it was. Then he started bringing this

Barry, who everybody liked. I remember he spent a couple Thanksgivings at our house.

Whitney Strub: This is a younger black man?

Gail Malmgreen: Yes. He was—Louie Crew makes him a little bit older than I—when I knew him, I was told, I think, that he was 26. Either of us may be off by a year or two, but he was in his mid-20s. He was very young, you could tell he was. Very sweet. I didn't exactly know he was homeless. I didn't really know where he lived. Derek didn't say too much about that. He brought him over. He was rather artistic, very nice guy, young guy. He was crazy about movies. He was a big movie buff. We gave him a Christmas present one year of one of those gigantic guides to the movies, in the days when you did that with books, rather than a computer.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: He was really thrilled with it. He was always talking about movies and watching obscure movies, and all this kind of thing. Very soon after we met him, he just died. Derek would come back and say, "Oh, so-and-so's died," "So-and-so's died." It was as if so many of the young friends that he had were just wiped out.

Whitney Strub: Yeah?

Gail Malmgreen: It was really devastating. It was tough.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: I didn't know the full extent of Derek and Charles' role in trying to organize around that.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah. I mean, the papers they left at the Newark Public Library are great. I mean, it's a small collection, but it's so useful. This is just kind of a detail question, but in Derek's papers, all of those photographs that he has with Al and with assorted crew around them, were those at Murphy's Bar, do you know? Or were they at his house?

Gail Malmgreen: I have no idea. Derek was always talking about bars, or people talked about bars in relation to him. I never knew the name of anything.

Whitney Strub: Okay, because yeah, they don't—I don't remember there being any exterior ones that set up the scene. They're all just set inside somewhere.

Gail Malmgreen: I found the pictures very obscure, too. You couldn't really tell what was going on. Some of them were picnics and parties at someone's house.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: Some of them—but who knows where these pictures came from?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I mean, a lot—

Gail Malmgreen: A lot of them don't have Derek. There are very few pictures there that actually have Derek in them. My guess was that some of them belonged to other people, or Al. There's one or two scrapbooks, I think, that are identified as being Al's.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, okay.

Gail Malmgreen: He may have gathered some of these pictures of friends of his, or who knows what, you know? Identifying them is going to be—

Whitney Strub: Yeah, it's tricky. I mean, I suspect some of them are inside Murphy's. It's hard to verify that, and they won't let us digitize them, so it's hard to show them to somebody else who could—

Gail Malmgreen: Well, you can't really see anything, anyway.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, no, I know. They're not—

Gail Malmgreen: Yeah, well, I was worried even when donated them that you don't know who these people are. You don't know that they're family. First of all, you don't even know that they are gay.

Whitney Strub: Right. right.

Gail Malmgreen: Secondly, you don't know that their families know they're gay. You really get into some tricky territory.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I know—

Gail Malmgreen: My guess is that many of the people are gay.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: What interested me, and I don't remember, I haven't looked at the collection in a long time, but there were a couple of albums that included a lot of family photos, weddings and stuff like that. It interested me that these gay family members were clearly very well integrated into these large family occasions, you know?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: You could see that these people had pretty good relationships with their families.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, it is. Yeah, it's a great social history. It's just very difficult to actually—

Gail Malmgreen: You don't know what you're looking at.

Whitney Strub: - pull the details out. Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: Yeah. Yeah. There's some hints of high schools that people went to, and so forth. It's a gigantic hidden world. Semi-hidden world, I'll say.

Whitney Strub: Right, right. It's like the photos offer a glimpse, and that's basically all.

Gail Malmgreen: Yeah, but I mean the whole history of black gay life in Newark, except those few parts of it that were higher profile, like the clubs and the dances and things like that.

Whitney Strub: Right, right.

Gail Malmgreen: The rest of it, the everyday life, people's relationship with their families, with their employers, that kind of thing, you know?

Whitney Strub: What would be great is if somebody left a diary. Somebody like Ray Proctor, somebody like Al Jordan.

Gail Malmgreen: Oh, God, that would be, you know—

Whitney Strub: I haven't seen anything like that.

Gail Malmgreen: - amazing. How about even Derek?

Whitney Strub: Yeah. No, right, right. Absolutely.

Gail Malmgreen: There are people who more about the details of some of these things. Well, some of them are just like Louie Crew, who can tell you about his own life. Adele Oltman, who tried to interview Derek probably knew more. She was based in Newark at the time at the Historical Society. I think she's still around in New York, probably knew what some of the bars were. I mean, she interviewed Derek in a bar one time, she told me.

Whitney Strub: Yeah? What was the name again? Adele?

Gail Malmgreen: Adele Oltman, O L T M A N. People can tell you who she is. She was hired by the Historical Society to do some oral histories.

Whitney Strub: Okay

Gail Malmgreen: Working with Max Herman around the anniversary of the riots, the 40th anniversary of the riots, I think it was. Or maybe it was even earlier than that, like the 30th anniversary or something. She was married to a guy called Brendan O'Flaherty, Dan O'Flaherty, who's very active in city hall type politics. He teaches at Columbia, but he dabbles in politics in Newark. They were married for quite a while, then they split. She ended up in New York. I haven't been in touch with her for a very long time. I just noted that she tried to interview Derek, because I was very upset, especially when he died, that no one ever really had done an oral history. She told me she tried, but he insisted on meeting her in a bar.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: You know, she said it was so noisy, and he was smoking all the time. She got rather frustrated with it.

Whitney Strub: No, that I understand. This is just a random question actually, that came to my mind while discussing the '70s and your work as an archivist of Newark. Do you know a magazine from Newark called *Stuff* magazine?

Gail Malmgreen: No, no.

Whitney Strub: Does that ring a bell? A few people have mentioned that it really covered the bars and gay clubs in the '70s, but I can't—and it's got such a generic name that I can't Google my way to it.

Gail Malmgreen: Strange. I don't know, but Barbara Kukla would know. She's gathered a lot of little magazines.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Yeah, that's true.

Gail Malmgreen: Her interest is music, and music clubs—

Whitney Strub: Well, it covered that too, it sounds like.

Gail Malmgreen: - and things like that. She might know. I really don't know.

Whitney Strub: Okay, yeah, I was just curious. It came to mind while talking about this.

Gail Malmgreen: If I haven't seen it, I don' know it. What I've seen, it's by chance because so much hasn't been preserved.

Whitney Strub: No, right, right. Absolutely.

Gail Malmgreen: That really is a problem. *Four Corners* exists, and there are issues of it. I'm sure you could find some at the—but I think it was an attempt to be kind of a political magazine.

Whitney Strub: No, I will look that up for sure.

Gail Malmgreen: It didn't last very long.

Whitney Strub: Yeah?

Gail Malmgreen: You know, they didn't have any money.

Whitney Strub: Right, right.

Gail Malmgreen: It just—there's an ADA newsletter, which is well-preserved in the papers of the ADA in Washington.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: It's kind of interesting. You can see Derek wheeling and dealing. At one point a young intern for them was Barney Frank.

Whitney Strub: Huh.

Gail Malmgreen: He has an article in the ADA newsletter.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: He probably was still living where he was raised in New Jersey.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: Everything connects.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. No, truly. Truly. Okay, well, you know what? Let me ask you, because I think we've gone through most of the names on my list. Went into Derek in fantastic detail. Before we run out of steam here, though, let me ask you about Donald Dust, because that's a name you've mentioned in the past that I—

Gail Malmgreen: Oh, yeah, well, there's somebody who I didn't know. Only heard of when I started looking into the archives. Originally knew him as a keen preservationist. He worked with Liz Del Tufo and her committee, to get sites put on the national and state historic landmark registers. That's how I knew him. There's a good-sized collection of his papers at the library that relate to his efforts to do that. Then I was looking through something else somewhere, and I saw the clippings relating to the fact that he was murdered. He lived on James Street, and was very keen to have James Street developed as a historic district, which it was. He lived in one of those brownstone houses, very nice.

At some point, he was murdered by a youngish black man, younger than himself. Don had worked around city hall. He had different positions, kind of publicity communications positions, and other sort of outreach positions around city hall. Probably starting under Ken Gibson, I would think. Then I don't remember what year he died, but extending possibly into the Sharpe James years. He's very well-known around town. He knew everybody. Very friendly with Charles Cummings and all those people.

From what I've been told, which is certainly not personal knowledge, he just had a habit of cruising and picking up people. Just very randomly, people that he didn't know. On this one occasion, he brought this guy home, and the guy murdered him. I don’t remember the exact method of it, but it was very—it was quite brutal. I also don't remember whether the guy was ever caught. It will be pretty well-documented in the papers. He was, again, he was one of these people who had a great circle of friends who really liked him, really respected him. Was plugged into all these things in Newark, and yet had a different life.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, I think his death is worth investigating, just because like you say, it clearly would have generated a paper trail.

Gail Malmgreen: I mean, if you were to talk to someone like Liz Del Tufo, she could really tell you who Donald Dust was. His background and so forth, you know? The preservation efforts in the city were very much centered on the library in their early years. Of course, Charles Cummings became involved. The library sparked a lot of the original organizing around historic preservation. That, too, is kind of an interesting side light. One could go on and on.

I'm thinking of a lot of the women who were very, very crucial to the early history of the library. Charles' immediate predecessor, Mildred Studley, was one of these people who never married, and so on. It was Julia Sabine who was in charge of the art collections at the library, whose successor was Dane—what was his first name? [William] Gosh, it's eluding me, but did you ever meet him?

Whitney Strub: I don't think so.

Gail Malmgreen: Charles' contemporary. He was very much the same age. He only retired a few years ago, really fine art librarian. Lived in the Colonnades for many, many years. I believe he lives in a retirement community now. I can't believe I can't—Charles Dane, something like that. Anyway, probably gay, my guess would be. I met him many times, very nice. He showed us around his collection when we were surveying it. Very close friends with Charles. There's a lot of it, but the other story I think you should really look into is that of Willard Heckel and Malcolm Talbott.

Whitney Strub: Yes, yes. Yes.

Gail Malmgreen: Again, something I can't testify to personally at all, but people have told me that they were gay.

Whitney Strub: Wait, "they?" Willard Heckel—

Gail Malmgreen: Malcolm Talbott. It was the chancellor of Rutgers Newark at the time. They called it vice president, I don't think they had created the position of chancellor yet. He was the head of Rutgers Newark. Heckel was the dean of the law school. They saw Rutgers Newark through some really turbulent times, including the sit-in at this building in 1969.

Whitney Strub: Just for the record, this building is Conklin Hall.

Gail Malmgreen: Talbott was in charge. He was the one that steered the ship. To the extent that it was negotiated and diffused and settled, it was largely his doing. Heckel was a powerhouse of—

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah. I know him for his First Amendment stuff, actually.

Gail Malmgreen: Civil liberties, and civil rights.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: He was on every civic committee, and there was a wealth of them. Derek was on a lot of them, but Heckel was probably even on more. Because of his position, he often had high positions in these different commissions and things.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: He'd often be the chairman, and so on. My parents revered him. He was one of those great liberal figures of Newark. I don't remember ever having heard or seen him. I know his name is signed to every full-page ad on every issue that came along during his time. I don't know much of his biography. I haven't been able to find it. It's not in any Rutgers [collection] that I've looked at so far, or the history of the law school by Tractenberg, which I have a copy of. I don't recall it having very much biography on Heckel. I mean, he probably has a decent obituary.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: I haven't researched him, you know? One of the—some file that I saw about Rutgers had a thing about him and Malcolm Talbott hosting some kind of a reception at a house that was in Forest Hill. I thought to myself, wait a minute, you know, is this their house? I think it probably was. [GM note: it was not. They both lived on Mount Prospect Ave., Talbott at 375 and Heckel at 352]

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: You'd have to delve much deeper into that to really figure out what that was about.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. He did, Heckel that is, did an oral history with the Presbyterian Church. They have an oral history in their archives. My colleague, Mark—

Gail Malmgreen: In Philly?

Whitney Strub: I guess so, yeah. My colleague, Mark Krasovic, sent this to me quite a while ago.

Gail Malmgreen: I have to look into that, because I'm not sure we knew about that when we were there. I don't remember them having oral histories in general. I certainly want to know about that.

Whitney Strub: This is from 2012 that Mark got—

Gail Malmgreen: That's great, and—

Whitney Strub: I'll forward it to you.

Gail Malmgreen: - it's a question also of what he talks about. Who knows?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah, Yeah, and they—

Gail Malmgreen: It's interesting that they had him. I don't know him as being a Presbyterian. Maybe he was. You never know.

Whitney Strub: Do you know anybody that might be a good source to talk about their personal life? Who's still around? I mean, assuming Malcolm Talbott is not still around—okay. I didn't—

Gail Malmgreen: We have entries on—his papers are at New Brunswick. They're so impersonal.

Whitney Strub: Okay.

Gail Malmgreen: You don't learn anything about him as a person. They're interesting. Heckel's official correspondence is down there too, but again not very—not revealing at all. I don't really know anything about Malcolm Talbott, but there have to be people, especially perhaps in New Brunswick. As far as Heckel is concerned, if Mr. Tractenberg is still around, who wrote the history of the law school—and I think he is, I think I heard him speak at a conference fairly recently—he'd be a very good place to start. Because he's younger, but he's old enough and interested enough in the history of the law school to probably be able to fill you in on some of that.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, okay. I guess he was—one document I found a year ago, about Willard Heckel is this—

Gail Malmgreen: He must have had a *New York Times* obituary, didn't he, I would think. I don't know.

Whitney Strub: I don't know. The Presbyterian Church did a report—

Gail Malmgreen: I don't know as much as I would like.

Whitney Strub: - on the church and homosexuality in 1976, or '78.

Gail Malmgreen: Live and learn.

Whitney Strub: He was part of it.

Gail Malmgreen: Is that a published document? I mean, where is that available?

Whitney Strub: Yeah, in the PC USA. I guess that's the Presbyterian Church website. I'll send this to you.

Gail Malmgreen: It sounds like it's the—you're finding it on the Presbyterian, this isn't of interest to the interview, but not the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philly, which is a rather—

Whitney Strub: Right, well, that was the other thing I mentioned.

Gail Malmgreen: - staid kind of institution. It doesn't have much online.

Whitney Strub: The thing that Mark sent was from their archives, but this, yeah, you're right, it's just from the church website.

Gail Malmgreen: This is from the church itself.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: That's interesting, that they had that—

Whitney Strub: Yeah, it doesn't—I'm not sure what his role was here. It looks like he was part of the task force.

Gail Malmgreen: Well, he was an active enough guy that he could be on as a liberal, or he could be on as somebody who knows more about it than that. Again, it really—he's such an important figure in Newark.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, no, you're right. I would like to—

Gail Malmgreen: It bears delving into.

Whitney Strub: I would like to know more about that, for sure.

Gail Malmgreen: Malcolm Talbott, I can't even remember what we have of his biography in our entry. It was a great surprise to me that they were even connected in any way.

Whitney Strub: Yeah. Yeah, no, I mean, it would be interesting how widely understood that was at the time.

Gail Malmgreen: Oh, it would be very interesting to find that out. Well, it's too bad that Bob Curvin is no longer with us.

Whitney Strub: I know. I know.

Gail Malmgreen: Any number of other people that you could talk to. It would be very interesting to know what Charles Cummings would have said to you, if he were still around. I knew him to be the most discreet person imaginable. I didn't know him that well, but, you know.

Whitney Strub: Well, okay, let me see. I think we—

Gail Malmgreen: I think we've kind of run through—

Whitney Strub: -covered everything I was—

Gail Malmgreen: - most of what I can give you, any kind of personal take on. The rest of it is just my biography in Newark, which is a different subject, really, in a way. It will be interesting to see the transcript. I never can think that I will have done Derek justice.

Whitney Strub: Clearly, yeah, I think—

Gail Malmgreen: I don't think anyone else who knew him would be able to, either.

Whitney Strub: Right.

Gail Malmgreen: Because everybody only knew a part. Their frustrations with him and the gaps would get in the way, and so forth.

Whitney Strub: Yeah.

Gail Malmgreen: You know, short of having him here himself, you will not get the full picture of who Derek was.

Whitney Strub: Yeah, but no, I mean, I do appreciate all of the detail and the sort of the nuance, though, in the way you narrated it. It is very useful. I do have—it helps get me some tangible sense. Anyway, I'll stop recording. Thank you. Thank you again.

[End of Audio]