

George Oberg

SR 11293, Oral History,

by Brian Aune & Heather Burmeister

Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN)

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OBORG: George Oberg

BA: Brian Aune

HB: Heather Burmeister

Transcribed by: Brian Aune & Heather Burmeister, ca. 2009

Audit/edit by: Pat Young, ca. 2009

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This oral history interview was conducted as part of the Portland State University LGBT History Capstone course, Winter Term 2009, with Instructor Pat Young.

## Introduction

George Oberg lives in Vancouver, Washington. He was the first president of the Second Foundation, which was a gay rights organization during the 1970s. During the interview, he talks about the early gay rights movement as well as the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. He talks about how his partner died of AIDS.

**Interview**  
*2009 February 18*

BA: We got to get this thing going right now.

OBERG: I used to have one of those. I gave it to a friend...

BA: This is actually Pat's, which is really nice of her. She lent it out so we didn't have to check anything out of a...

OBERG: That one's more expensive than the one I saw...

BA: Its great. You click it right into the computer, its really handy dandy. Yeah.

OBERG: Yeah that's nice, but huh.. I mean this is a picture of Gary and um, Mame is what her drag name was, Mame. They had done a show and they took it up to, it was so good, it was excellent. But they took it up to Mattagan (sp?) Hospital for the troops.

BA: Oh yeah?

OBERG: It was fantastic. Just fantastic.

HB: Oh, nice.

OBERG: I sewed the Brooke costume.

HB: Oh, wow.

OBERG: For Gary. I did all of this stuff for him.

BA: So who were the presidents again one more time?

OBERG: Oh well, I was the first, Dave Fredrickson, Ron Powell, and Jim Snelling.

BA: Great.

OBERG: From there it kind of went downhill.

BA: Yeah. And the first year was seventy...?

OBERG: Seventy, seventy-one.

BA: Seventy, seventy-one.

OBERG: Um, I did a thing at the Q center too and um and I took myself some notes.

BA: Oh, great!

OBERG: Questions that you had, had.

BA: Yeah.

OBERG: Um, I guess to know me first before I became...

HB: Yeah

BA: Yeah.

OBERG: The Second Foundation. How I got to and why I did what I did.

BA: Right.

OBERG: Farmboy. I was raised till I graduated high school. I'm a, well I was, well had a farm out in Hazel Dell, Minnehaha.

BA: What were you farming out there?

OBERG: Anything that would grow and if it didn't poop too much.

BA: (laughter)

OBERG: Rabbits, chickens...

BA: Oh.

OBERG: cows, pigs, ducks. Um, that was about it.

BA: OK.

OBERG: Bailed hay for the neighbors, tossed hay for the neighbors, milked neighbors' cows.

BA: Right.

OBERG: So I was an ol' farm boy, went off to school, went into the army. Um, came back and was offered a job at FMC corporation. That's Food Machinery and Chemical

Company Corporation in their specialty chemical division making rocket fuel for the government.

BA: Oh.

HB: What year was that?

OBERG: That was 1959. Um, my father was kind of disapproving of me. And he showed it, but mother was very dependable and reliable and taught me how to sew and iron and do my own buttons and paint and do all the kind of things that we needed to survive. And um, so I made it up to FMC and just... I got to go back to when I was at Western Washington University. I knew nothing. All I knew was that I was different than most and just... I was coming out to friends but not just out and um I had met a gentleman there who had invited me to go to a party. It was at the musical director's home and um so I went with him and it was the first time I had seen two men kiss, men in a dress, friends just sitting and talking and having a very good time and nobody looked ashamed one bit. And um, it just blew my mind out, but they had told me about a place in Seattle, where there was a gay bar you could go so my great plane went down fast.

BA: So how old were you than at that point you were...

OBERG: 22, 23?

BA: So you were out of the army? OK. Three years you were in the army and then straight to college?

OBERG: Well I was, I was an RFA 55er for 6 months and then seven and a half years, reserves. I had already had two years of reserves in at that time.

BA: OK.

OBERG: And , um thinking of where I am in all of this... I made it through the military and then let me see, going to the bars in Portland and ended up being a bartender at the Half Moon Tavern um...

HB: Where was that?

OBERG: Huh?

HB: Where was that?

OBERG: Um, about 2nd, 3rd and Yamhill. Right smack downtown. Kiddy corner to the um, uh, or there was a place where they'd keep a band for the military to go into... its in the book.

BA: Oh yeah?

OBERG: There is a little slowing down when you get a little older. Things come to you, then they wander away.

BA: Yeah.

OBERG: Tending bar and listening to people and went to a few drag balls and I think basically down inside, just wasn't the image I felt I wanted to portray for gay people. Especially younger gay people. Of what I was a younger gay person when my father was sure that I was either going to be a hairdresser or on a stage in skirts, cause that's all he knew about. And um, so I had expressed my opinions to a few of the guys, younger people at the bar who looked like they weren't really having a good time doing the bar

scene, that I wished there was some place where we could go and just be, visit, have company, and do things. Dogs, walking, hiking, fishing. All the things that I used to like to do. And Terry Tinnel and like it was Don Downing, they had been going and having a couple of meetings at Portland State. And already had talked about what it was that they had really wanted to do. And um, they had invited me to a meeting and I can't remember the actual name, it was in the basement. I went in and there was, I don't know 15, 20 guys all sitting around in a group and got me into a circle, sitting and the ones who were deeply involved and highly motivated and everything else were kind of peeking over the whole show. And not being very fair too. There were some very intimidated people there that were doing something they were almost afraid of. So, insisted that we start and listen to everybody. That even if they talked slow and drug it out a little bit, we're going to listen to what everybody has to say. Well damned ended up they elected me president, which wasn't what I went there in the first place.

Heather and BA: (laughter)

OBERG: But I had been president of the union. I was a sergeant in the army, um junior Chamber of Commerce, things that, that uh... had taken classes on just giving speeches to loud crowds of junior Chamber of Commerce people. Worked as safety director for FMC, had gone to conferences with the uh... American Chemicals Union. Things like that. So really wasn't my intention to go in there and kind of take over anything. I'm not a marcher, I don't carry banners, I work quietly with influential people. Underground is more effective, you get more things done.

BA: Yeah.

OBERG: Um, so I ended up being the president of the Foundation and I wasn't there to have my way about things. I was there to make sure they kept the books straight. I took minutes of the meetings, they did all the registrations that needed for registering for

becoming a non-profit organization. And just took care of business. I didn't, wasn't concerned about, they wanted to get involved in the Metropolitan Church, there wasn't one at the time and that's when it got started, um the youth counseling groups was one of ours. Um, we didn't have much of a lesbian attendance. There were a few. Drag queen, everyone was welcome, that was it you guys, if you're going to have a club that, for gay people, it is for all gay people. Its whether they are on crutches or if they babble or whether they got... whatever. It has to be inclusive and after they found out, they really understood what it meant. It was a real turning point in the way things were run. Anyways, I had a great time. I learned gobs. I had some really good times. Um, to get prepared um for the counseling part, I went to the Lutheran Family Services Seminars and just learned how to listen and then um...uh I think it was Donald Downing or Dave Fredrickson set up a counseling seminar with Father Abbot of William Templeton House and we spent I think six weeks going once a week, learning how to listen. Just learning how to listen and to pick things up. People were saying to try and guide them along listening for people who might need more than our services, than just listeners and stuff. Bump them up to somebody else or make sure they had some counseling. We didn't handle drugs or alcohol problems like that. Just people who were dealing with coming out, how they felt about it, how they could feel better about it. That all helped.

Then after the internal things kind of got all together, dear Dave Fredrickson who is not with us any longer uh says, " George we have got to kind of go public." "Public? What do you mean David, public?" "Well, I've made an appointment." "You've what?" "I've made an appointment with," he says "the Dave Kingman show." Which was a KGW talk show host, which eventually he moved up to Seattle to set up there, big time. And so, on this given night we climbed the steps of the gallows, so to speak. I mean it was like trudging up to the gallows, to publicly come out. I worked for a company who had federal contracts. I was being investigated by the FBI, I had uh clearances. Um...

HB: This was during the time...

OBERG: This was 1969, 70. Right at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. That's how I got the job, at at at the bar because the bartender was in the air reserves and he got called up active duty and he, we were friends. We had sky dived together and so he says, "Why don't you just take over my job (inaudible) to hire." So I took over the job as bartender as a bartender. Then I worked for Roma's as a bouncer, a couple of places and uh don't remember, oh Three Day Colt. I can't remember. I haven't been to a gay bar in 15, 20 years. Oh, but I do go to Starky's from time to time.

BA: Right. What, who were you working for that you had to have government clearance and everything?

OBERG: FMC Corporation. We were manufacturing rocket fuel for the space program.

BA: Oh, wow.

OBERG: I've had clearance in the army cause I was in the (inaudible) military government. Was hard to explain but we would set up a small town's government, make sure their water system worked and that all of their artwork was locked away in a safe and there was a big police force and some kind of orderly control presence available. That kind of thing.

BA: Wow, yeah.

OBERG: But then when I was in the reserves, two of my best friends were General Warrant and General Cushing, and my grandfather was judge Rashious Harlow Back and they were all judges and lawyers and they were all like this and I couldn't do anything in this town. My father was a police officer, my grandfather was a judge, my other grandfather was a general marshal. I could do nothing and get away with it. Nothing. It

didn't work. Well we had fun. We finished the counseling thing. We got those, um Tom Cherry, we got all the members of the group, of the core of the group. Brought em here and we had a, a um... a session to learn to trust where we lead each other around with blindfolds on, fall backwards and get caught. Things like that. And uh, then I got a call from, I don't remember the lady cause it was just like, "whaa?" You know that kind of, "You want me to do what?" And from then on there was this, "Yeah, this is what we want." The Oregon Counselors and Teachers and Coaches Association, it was actually it was the Oregon Counselors and Teachers and they included the coaches. They were having a seminar at the Red lion and um they wanted me to put on a talk about counseling young gay people.

So I had a contact in San Francisco who was Ed Mauer and he's written some books you may or may not have read and he was a political organizer, gay rights stuff in San Francisco. So he sent me some stuff and I went and stood in front of 350 teachers and so on, "I'm your local fagot and I'm going to tell you what it is all about." But um, I had handed out to all of them, the crowd a comment sheet, what they thought of the talk and were there any comments that they had to make about it? How they felt about teaching it, talking to young people about this sort of thing. Got most of them back.

I did not get a single negative response from any of them, and a whole lot of them were gay teachers who were very pleased that this was happening and said that they just didn't have the guts to do this but that they were very thankful somebody was. That felt real good. I got an invitation to... one of the high schools over in Portland. It was like Lake Oswego or... it wasn't downtown, it was out in the bushes someplace. And um talked to the students about that. The school was required to have an opposing opinion so they had in some very, very far right winged minister who had the kids actually rolling in the aisles. They were laughing at him. He didn't realize really how silly he was sounding, but the kids were so far ahead of him, if not ahead of me even. I was pretty naive about things. And so we did those um, lets see...

HB: What were the numbers of people you counseled? Like, were there...

OBERG: Well, we did a lot of just group. We have usually well, if we did a group here I always had my lover, my lover was always with us. Now, he was absolutely not interested in this thing what so ever. He was... not negative. It just wasn't one of his things, it didn't ever bother him, it just he didn't need any political background. He felt totally attached to me and that was it. He didn't care about the rest of it. But whenever I had anyone in, I had someone else with me, cause it was just safe.

HB: Yeah

OBERG: Had taken telephone calls form Idaho, Montana, people had read our Fountain. Our newsletter form the club and all kinds of young people asking questions that at their age nobody could answer because no one could even answer those kind of questions for them, cause they were usually sexually questions. Not so much how do I get involved, but I'm having trouble with this sort of thing and is something wrong or what should I do? All kinds of things. Dad's locked me out of the house, what do I do next? If there was a town where we knew somebody, can you find a family that will take him in for a night or two and call the courts and tell them why and they did. It just, those things that they weren't big things but they were BIG.

One Thanksgiving, Gary and I used to have Thanksgiving together just the two of us and fix spectacular meals and sit there between the two of us and somebody should be here sharing this with us. So with that attitude, I think it was the next Thanksgiving, I had talked to the Board and we fixed Thanksgiving dinner for anyone who had no family tot go to. Or anyone who wanted to. It was potluck but we would furnish the turkey and the main things, the dressing and stuff. We held it at Zorba the Greeks. He said we could have the place for the day because he was closed anyways. And we were just, Tom

Cherry was kind of holding my hand, cause I had no idea how this was going to turn out, you know? We get six people and all of this food and everything else. The place was packed. Just... one of the bigger, funnier things that happened. I did have another satisfying thing that happened along the way. Cause I was attempting, I love to teach. I really wanted to be a teacher. Coming out of that age, that time frame, it wasn't going to work.

While I was going to both Clark College and Western like a year, come back on the weekends. I worked for Emil B Freis. He's a blind piano tuner and he had a school called a piano hospital that he taught blind people how to repair and tune pianos. Ant the four and a half years that I worked with him, um I started out was just going to be his driver. Pretty soon he had me doing this and that. Pretty soon I was teaching kids how to do things. One boy in particular um, I was sent to the airport to pick him up, get him into the car, bring him into town, take him to the bank, this is your bank, this is where you go, he's on a stick, he can't "No see nothing." Blind as a bat. Here is the bank and here is the teller and this is what you do and you got your money in OK. I'm going to take you up the street and drop you off and you know what the address is, find it. Now the lady who saw me do that was just horrified and red me out to no end but it was my job to see how well they could make it home, cause they had the address, they were supposed to ask questions, they could find north and south and that kind of thing. It took him a couple hours to go not quite a mile, he got there but um... he had never tied his own shoes, been totally babied or taken care of by somebody, his mother. So I had him at a drill press learning how to drill little holes in hammer shanks. You put a little wad of leather in there and a little steel rod and it becomes a hinge.

And of course, hello dear (to his cat), my kitty wants in. Um he was drawn, just scared to death of the machine and he made his pass through and it was just perfect and sparks went off. I mean the joy in his face, it just lit up. It was just totally satisfying, I was just positively elated, you know the first time in his entire life that he got it. Yeah, we had a lot

of those but that was one of the really exciting ones. Also teaching Charlie White how to drive a car. He'd take his eyeballs out, put it in his pocket and the lady across the street just went nuts.

Heather and BA: (laughter)

OBERG: We just went down to the Crosby Bowl and I had him driving around the parking lot, so he could learn how to steer, things like that. I've had a lot of fun in my life. So we did the Foundation thing, we had the counseling group, we go the center so we had a place, a meeting hall. We had a library, we had offices, it ran well. My dear lover Gary, we spent a lot of money and almost all of my time taking care of Foundation stuff. And, um he wanted to work on the house, he wanted to start working on the place. We were renting rooms out and dealing with that. So at his insistence, so he said at 72 we were done and got the renters out. This place was pretty plain and empty when I took it over and it hadn't changed much from when I had moved in here in 63.

I had my grandmother, she had Alzheimer's and I wanted to take care of her. So I bought the house from her so that it would be mine. So if anything happened to her, it wouldn't be a problem, and um she would have money for whatever she needed. And uh, it was pretty plain. Grandpa had painted it in 1944 and she thought it was just fine. She had Alzheimer's. We didn't know she had Alzheimer's, we thought it was just dementia, but she was getting pretty bad.

I met Gary in April of 69 and he moved in with me on July 4th of that year and died of AIDS in 1992. It hasn't been all bad. Yeah, we miss him, but there has been a whole lot more afterwards. I took in a total of seven, eight AIDS patients here at the house, along with Gary and then after he died. The county was very happy about that. Yeah. Its all been, it just's been a trip. It's not like good that I had these bad things happen or bad that I had that I had these bad things happen, it's just been a huge learning experience. I did

things that I never thought I could before. It's just been weird. There have been a lot of experiences that I've gone through and I'm glad that I did everyone of them. Other than the loss of my dog, that was hard to take. Having a lover for 24 years and um having known and met and having friendships with hundreds of people that went through the Foundation and they're all over the country, what left of them.

HB: Are you still close with them?

OBERG: It's just uh...its just been a nice trip. I made it all the way to 71 in a few months and it hasn't all fallen apart. Not like I was told it was going to happen when I was young. You had some questions that you...

BA: Well um.

OBERG: I wanted to make sue to cover all the things.. cause I could babble on and you'll have to slug me once and awhile.

BA: No, that's fine um, I yeah. On the Thanksgiving Day...

OBERG: Yeah.

BA: Where was that again?

OBERG: Zorba the Greeks.

BA: Zorba the Greeks, downtown?

OBERG: Downtown Portland. And...

BA: Oh yeah. OK, who is Tom Sherry again?

OBERG: Dr. Tom Cherry.

BA: Oh, sherry?

OBERG: Cherry

BA: OK.

OBERG: As in maraschino.

BA: Right.

OBERG: Um, he's a doctor of psychology. He's not a psychiatrist. He's a doctor of psychology and does counseling I think he has a child counseling center in southwest Portland, somewhere. I haven't seen him in some time and he's a member of the same club I belong to of prime timers but he never shows up for meetings.

BA: Yeah.

OBERG: So far I haven't got my computer to stay of long enough to even write him a note. I'm really mad at that.

BA: What year was that again on Thanksgiving?

OBERG: Oh. (laughter) Talk about the blind people that I know. I can't remember.

BA: Seventies?

OBERG: Probably about 71, right in there. Right at the beginning...

BA: Right at the crux of everything.

OBERG: We were getting... we were the largest gay organization on the west coast. We had hundreds of people in the membership. We were moving. And like I say, all I was doing was, I just had reigns in my hands. What he published in the newsletter, I like it or not, that's what he wanted to say, its what he wanted to say. I just made sure that they were there on time and that the books were kept properly and that the money was counted and rents were aid and there was two signatures on every check and that kind of thing. That was my job. I was quality control in the chemical company. I was an inspector in almost every job I had ever had, to make sure that everyone was doing what they were supposed to be doing and I know its pushy that way. Oh god, here comes George and that damned clipboard again.

BA: Somebody had to do it.

OBERG: Well, it was what they were paying me a lot of money for.

BA: Yeah

OBERG: One of the things that I have yet to mention was that after Dave and I had been on the Dave Klinger Show, and the whole thing was over, and he treated us very respectfully. Nothing like snide remarks or anything tacky about him at all. He was very inquisitive and asked nice questions and allowing us to give our explanations. Pretty much it was really Dave Fredrickson who was the thinker. He knew about the history, he uh... I knew nothing about um the thing in New York...

BA: Stonewall

OBERG: I knew nothing about that. I was just a little town boy doing my jobs. I wasn't into this rioting stuff. Wouldn't think of being physical with anybody. Do, he was the one who was in charge of setting things up. Getting the right appointments made, seeing the right people, he was a member of the...the airport, the uh...transportation commission of Oregon or whoever they are that runs the airport. He was a grounds tech, he was an engineering in grounds decorating, a degree in it uh...another one was George Nicola. Big thinker. He and I, we did the things at the Q Center with Barbara Roberts, who I dearly love. She's a good lady. She was a good governor. She told me things that were really neat. She hired or she appointed the judges to the courts. I mean we got friends. She made sure the courts were going to be fair.

HB: How was that in this area that you know, during Stonewall there were a lot of things going on with the police and raiding bars. Was there a lot of that going on here at the time?

OBERG: Um, I saw a little bit. Usually or often, the people who were hassled were the people who were, looked like they could be intimidated. These big, burley officers never tried to tackle me. I wouldn't put up with it. I wore a badge in the army, I was one of the guys who carried a nightstick and walked my post with a gun. Just like he did in the streets, I make sure everybody did right too. But he was, no traffic, 2:30 or 1:30 in the morning when the bars were closing, there was no traffic and somebody would kiddy corner across to get to their car and he gave them a jay walking ticket. He sat there waiting for the bars to close. Another friend, now he was cruising the park looking for a Jon yes, but he wasn't being overt at that moment and two police officers arrested him. He had done nothing wrong, and I know Russ, if he had he'd a told me. I've known Russ since 1959. He was, tend to my roommate at the time, they were together for 43 years

until Ron died here 2 years ago. Which just about everything that could go wrong from heart and the shake um...

HB: Parkinson's

OBERG: Parkinson's, yeah. Yeah, we're losing em kids. But, all these friends its...now there wasn't a lot that going on. I never felt it. When it did flare up here in Clark County, one of the, he was either a county assessor's office, he was either the assessor or the county clerk or something like that and I do not know the particulars. I know that he was run out of town because he was gay. Whether he did something that they caught him at or something like this, I don't know, but it was that kind of thing that the newspaper uh...

BA: It went public?

OBERG: It was front, it was headline news.

BA: Scandalous.

OBERG: Oh yeah. Well they're doing it to Oregon uh Portland governor, uh major now...

BA: Sam. Yeah.

OBERG: God, if we knew stories that went behind that kid's back. That the guy who turned him in, was doing him when he was a kid. That's...yeah. But you hear the newspapers or TV reporters they, "He was doing it with a minor," or "he was doing it with a teenager." It doesn't even matter, he was just doing it with an adult. But they like to twist it; they love to make it stink. I get so pissed. I can't watch the news anymore.

BA: So when was uh out of curiosity, when was the first gay bar in Vancouver?

OBERG: Its down on was it 4th, 5th. It between Washington and Main and its called the Bank Tavern. It opened, 15 some years ago.

BA: Fairly recent.

OBERG: Uh huh. It's just another gay bar. I've tried to go there but its just another gay bar. They're all the same all the way. Gary and I have been all over the world. South America, Africa, Europe. They're all the same. If you're not looking to hook up, then you shouldn't be in a gay bar. Because, it's no place to socialize, it's a gay bar. So...

BA: Yeah, meat market.

OBERG: Yeah some are more meat markety than others. I just never enjoyed...I right off the farm no matter what I was doing, or where I was going whatever if you were to ever ever ask me what I really wanted could really tell you well all I ever really wanted was a boyfriend. all I wanted was to have a boyfriend and once I had Gary nothing else mattered. It was just got it. My lifetime wish and that was just great twenty-four years no fighting. Getting along beautifully where do you want to go to dinner? Anyplace you want to go. Fine. Where do we go next? Well, let's go to Israel? I don't want to go to Israel they shoot people there. Okay let's just do North Africa then.

So yeah just a wonderful guy really truly was totally non political would never go vote he just he was really above it all actually genius when it come to piano played piano just bring tears to my eyes Went to work at, well when I met him he was still a senior at University of Oregon so we saw each other on weekends between April and uh June or July...no he was still in Eugene hadn't finished up yet and so he July to that September went back to school in September until December and he graduated or finished up he didn't graduate until that spring. And uhh just couldn't have a better person to live with it

really was it was just when he was a cook I was his assistant when I was a cook he was my assistant and he loved the yard and I didn't really care for doing yard work that well so he did the yard and I did inside and ummm everything was just great. He brought home his paycheck and gave it to me and I took care of the books when I first met him his checking account was just was in total disarray.

And so I says we can't have this so I took over of his finances and made sure that everything was always paid for and under control that we had money for things we were saving up money for China when he told me in 1988 that he had AIDS so I had been off work. FMC had shut their plant down in '83 and so I was off from '83 to '88, actually it was '89, January of '89 that I got a job and whoa those were the most wonderful four years off anyone could go through. took care of Gary wasn't ill then I mean he had things going on that I was suspicious of, but since we weren't sexually active ..it was something I wasn't concerned about. but there were things that I had noticed. He was always a very, very silent sleeper, and he had become a little thrashy and he had had one night sweat. Then he had a gland that they said oh it had just calcified and well it's one of the lymph nodes kiddo and I know what's wrong with the little lymph nodes to your throat because I had been reading about this even before AIDS had come out.

One of the other projects for the Foundation was they wanted. . . There was a outbreak of syphilis and gonorrhea and uh Dr. Ajax from Olympia came down he's a epidemiologist and wanted to know if I could help through the club and all if I could do posters, talks, things like this, and could he use my house as his office while he rounded up people who had made contacts that he was supposed to check on so make calls you know, say I think we have to see you or you should see your doctor that kind of thing okay. So we did a poster which I was extremely proud of and boy there was a lot of people who did not approve of it to no end. It had this really hunky guy with a work hard hat on, standing (George stands and poses, looking over his shoulder) 'Had any bad meat lately?' I loved it I mean it just it..it..oh well

BA: What was it a poster for?

OBERG: It was to make people aware of ...uhuh unprotected anal sex.

BA: Oh this outbreak that was going on, yeah.

OBERG: Uh-huh. And uh over in Portland everyone thought it was great, but the people in Olympia didn't like it one damn bit.

That was just going to far but that's the truth you guys if you don't handle the truth it gets out of hand. But uhhh they'd rather tippy-toe around it and whisper rather than actually go and do something about it.

HB: How was. . . Was there any sort of, cause I know in other parts of the country during the high point in the AIDS crisis there was like a lot of sort of uh backlash you know against gay people was there any of that?

OBERG: At what time?

HB: During the AIDS crisis, in the late eighties, early nineties...

OBERG: Well, ever so slight that I would ever notice...um because I had people here and if one needed a doctor and things like this. um. Since it was very early on ummm I'd asked my dentist if he would handle an AIDS patient he had absolutely no experience with it at all had no idea what precautions they would have to take. And now that I see the precautions that they're taking now why weren't they doing this way, way before that even anyhow. I mean now you know rubber gloves all the time and masks and shot shields and everything well you know you really should have been doing that probably

for the past fifty years well, and my chiropractor she didn't really want to do it although she is gay, but She's just...

BA: Scared?

OBERG: It wasn't scared for herself, it was her patients. And I think it was probably more of what uh uh uh Robert was, my dentist was concerned about although he didn't know how to handle it he would be working with blood and drilling all that kind of thing and I can understand all that. He also probably didn't want somebody gaunt and looking like that um sitting in the waiting room. So there were people in Portland to take care of it and uh that kind of thing.

Along with that when Gary had to tell his company that he had AIDS um I wasn't expecting nor was he expecting any we were just, this is just the way it is that the way we flew our airplane and rode our ship and it was our ship and if you didn't like it jump, because we were going where we were going and we had had his company we had had them here for picnics we used to have a swimming pool out back and we would have big parties...come in...fantastic parties um they came to his aid immediately. His uh 401 thing you can't open it up but once a year and the time had past and we needed the money and social security Medicare was not paying for your AZT at that time and uh his boss says the hell you won't give it to him and he went to Seattle and went to the bank in Seattle and came back with a check for his 401 program and uh I came I was working the county would bring in a nurse who would stay for four hours in the morning. I would come home from work and there would be flowers on the porch from neighbors all over the place envelopes with money from the people he worked with uh you know I didn't have any feeling of any kind of disapproval or uh uh negativeness at all yeah the neighbors were spectacular here and the friends I um Gary worked up until he just plain couldn't work that was I mean he's he sometimes only make it in two days a week. And finally he just wrote a letter saying I can't handle it anymore.

BA: Where was he working at?

OBERG: He was working for uh called Winter Products. They were very similar to Precision Cast they make cast items and things of this sort. And he was their um personnel director, hired and fired. And uh very carefully through the years they would have big orders big crowd small orders have to lay people off he would very carefully pick good workers out and then the next up grade then they would bring in their new guys they'd go off and know that be ready to be back to work when it was time because he'd already tell them that they would be the first back. And he would bring back a work crew for the company that was just spectacular Their efficiency went way up They didn't have to hire the 300 they could hire the 225, because they worked better than people just off the street. And he was their audiologist. He went to uh audiology school, medical school so he could be the company audiologist. Just a brilliant guy. He had his teacher's certificate for uhh he was... degree in special Ed for advanced students. Just a great guy... totally enjoyed him.

BA: So when did the Second Foundation cease to be? Did you leave before or . . .

OBERG: no no.

BA: You stuck it through the whole time...?

OBERG: Being active I quit in '72. It was '74 that I think it kind of fell apart. I can't tell you, I don't really remember exact dates. I just did my thing and stepped back and let other people handle it. It was no reason to hang in there and say well this is the way I did it because that's just too inclined to do that and don't want to do that's not good. Gary just insisted that he wanted to get this place in shape. And he painted it just we worked on it

like crazy it did not look like this when I when we started uh I have a bottle of wine sitting in the kitchen counter if anyone would like a little glass of wine?

BA: Sure.

HB: I don't drink.

BA: Sure. Sure.

OBERG: That's alright .Well, I don't either most of the time, but ...and if you like to wander around and look about.

BA: Sure.

OBERG: The house was in the news was in The Oregonian back years ago...I had saved this so you could see this in enlargement, Ron Powell's lover of forty-three years, my best friend Russ Howerton, gave these all out at one of our dinner parties as placemats, sweet guy, that was at my sixty-fifth birthday. That was at the dull & pennies we were on stage doing whispering hope I had on my uh I went over to the big and tall lady's store and she said most of the men buy their things here. Three-piece pants suit, and my Montgomery Ward's purse and hat, and my toilet brush for cleaning up my act and I had on my army boots. I couldn't get serious. And uh this was the last year at the Q center that we did. I've followed with the Just Out [local gay newspaper started in 1983] since its inception.

BA: Oh great. That's the big names.

OBERG: Yeah.

HB: That's beautiful dog, by the way.

OBERG: That's Coco, Coco she was. She died right there in my arms right at the strike of midnight in '98 to '99 turning into '99. Just, yeah. Throw a ball as high and far as and she caught it and she would roll. And back she'd take a step back. Back she'd take another a step back. Back and whew . . . sit and stay. She would sit and stay for hours. Never had to be spanked never ever. We'd go on walks and pick up a chicken bone. Spit it out. Dad. Spit it out. She was a great dog.

BA: I just wanted to ask real quick about the Fountain...

OBERG: Well that was the newspaper and I really as I said that was really Bill Hutchins was the publisher and others contributed. it was done monthly, I think. Done on just typewriter paper and handed out at bars. It was our way of announcing things and that's how we ended up with a big crowd that we had at the Thanksgiving dinner. Um we had part...not parties but we had dances or gatherings at the community center that we had rented. God I wish I had kept...somewhere I had pictures of the original when all of us the board had gone in to look at the building to see if it was going to fit our needs and everything and what it was going to cost I had pictures of the very beginning of that but where it all went...

BA: And so it was published right at your headquarters then?

OBERG: wherever, no, wherever he could get it published at...uh...

BA: Where was where was the headquarters?

OBERG: Well, I bought a mimeograph machine...

BA: Oh, okay.

OBERG: From Montgomery Wards. Turn out thing you know, the blue little things you type on...that's what it started at...

BA: Where was the Second Foundation headquarters?

OBERG: Geez, it was on...

BA: Did you all move around a lot? or was it...

OBERG: No we just did the one place. And uh, well it grew and then it shrank so, let's just see if we...(looking through book)...Epithian ballroom, National Gay Pride Week of July...June 1971 holding a dance for 200 with a live rock band but that's not where our...

BA: That was my other question, was any recollections of the first gay pride celebration?

OBERG: See we were having it, but we didn't know that's what it was. We were just proud and we were gay. It didn't have a name nationally at that moment.

BA: Right.

OBERG: In our hearts it was happening and yes we were it. uh but I didn't have, it just wasn't something we uh didn't plan on. Floats and dykes on bikes or anything. I mean, geez my dad would have been so happy. (laughter) He would have just been thrilled. (laughter) Dykes on...He had a motorcycle club. and somebody with girls with their tops off on motorcycles. He'd been just. . . (laughter) It wouldn't have mattered. He'd uh been a happy guy.

BA: That's great.

OBERG: Uh. you really ought to either find this or sit down and read it.

BA: Yeah, I wrote it down.

OBERG: Origins of the Second Foundation is page 51 and it goes over, hit and miss, to 64.

BA: Great.

HB: I think, I think Pat has a copy of that.

OBERG: I'm sure she does, she and Dave are real close friends. Yeah, I uh I uh I haven't been able to keep up with all the things. I just, taking care of this place is just taking care of all my time, and I really wish it wasn't that way, because there's a lot going around and things that uh that uh now I have time and I don't mind expressing my opinion um I wish there was more...oh, get along rather than animosities between different groups of people. Um it's a lot of things. It's the gay marriage thing. Gary and I didn't have any problems. We went to a lawyer, we made our wills out to each other and we put each other as caretaker and the person in charge. And when the minute. . . the minute . . . I turned off his stay alive equipment or the minute he died everything in the house that was his was mine, no matter what. He had his company and his insurance and I had my company and my insurance.

The only thing that really pissed me was that the government would not or the social security would not pay for his burial and that they would not pay for his AZT and uh we had spent him down to...we took all of the...uh I had the house was in both of our names, the cars was in both of our names and everything else, the minute we knew he was sick,

we took...immediately got rid of his name on everything. The bank was spectacular, the lawyer up at the corner was spectacular, did the papers and came down at like 8:30 or 9 almost 9 o'clock at night make sure that he had them on you know that everything was done immediately. The bank no trouble at all switching, getting his name off of all the, getting his name off the checking account uh everybody was just... even got a sympathy card from the bank, along with the one from the for the dog too, she used to go in there and give them hell, but uh...

BA: So visiting him in the hospital and everything like that was fine, when you'd go see him cause you know since you weren't married...?

OBERG: Oh we didn't have any trouble...

BA: No problems?

OBERG: I even went to the hospital at nine o'clock at night and they never said a word.

BA: Good.

OBERG: And then Gary once asked them. Or I guess the nurse was in and he was asking me, "Could I see CoCo?" Now he had just gone through pneumonia so I have I you know he was if you have ever seen anyone have to go through this you know with the cold sheet and oh God it was awful. (sigh) The nurse says "We can fix that."

BA: Oh.

OBERG: So the next day I bring the dog up and they wheel Gary out to one of those enclosed little places and so he could be with the dog.

BA: That's great.

OBERG: I suppose if there had been it probably give me a point of where it was good and bad but it was all just strangest thing pleasant and it wasn't it was a nasty thing to go through but I just didn't have ...nobody. Even my boss at work he gave me some money for a thing and said take it home take whatever time you need off while he's dying. It took him twenty-two days when I pulled the rubber thing on his little feeder. Friends all came down. Lloyd and Tracy, Ron and Russ, Barry and Monty, all came over, and they did the laundry and they went shopping and they did the cooking and all I had to do was take care of Gary and work. Gary had been in the bedroom upstairs to begin with and to change the sheets or change him or take care of him we'd have to get up on the bed, and it was just bone against bone at that time and it...you know it wasn't saying much because we had him on a lot of morphine.

BA: Yeah.

OBERG: But you could see he was distressed. And so we laid off the morphine for a couple of oh about a day and a half he just was just awake enough to ask him "were you hurting?" and he knew that (sigh) when you got on the bed it just makes everything hurt (sigh) so we (sigh) we decided that we were going to have to move him downstairs so I called the county and I says "we'd like to have a bed downstairs." And I had barely got hung up and the guy from the thing was there with the bed they're just snap, snap, snap cause they they're pretty pleased with the way we were taking care of everything and at that time I also had a fellow from Portland also upstairs.

And so we didn't know how in the heck we were going to get Gary downstairs without just really hurting him. So we were thinking and thinking and Lloyd and Tracy says "Well, let's wrap him up in the blankets, make a cocoon." So we put down three or four blankets on the floor and took all the sheets and everybody got on the ends pulled it real tight and

lifted him off the bed onto the sheet then rolled him up into a cocoon then the two strongest of us carried Gary all wrapped up and we did it once with Tracy in the blanket once to see which chairs had to be moved and which angles best to take down the stairs and which corners do you take left or right so that got him in and on the bed just pum-pum-pum-pum-down. Good cooperation.

BA: Good friends.

OBORG: Umhmm. Yeah when we had er there . . . and the nurses when they knew we were have to no longer feed or give him his medications cause the doctor called and says "it's time to turn him off". Which is a really hard, that's another one of those things that you're not used to doing. And uh yeah we uh shut him off and everybody showed up and I think there was a basketball game or something like it was May. It was May. He died in May the 22nd in May... April the 22nd there was either a football game or basketball game on and we had chocolate Hershey's kisses and we were throwing kisses back and forth to each other and we were playing music on the piano and ball game was going on and we were partying the whole bunch of us and Gary was in the middle of it. but the doctor says that he would probably be aware that we were there but he couldn't feel any pain, he was. We made sure he had no pain at all.

But the hardest thing I did was to have to walk up there and pull the tube on his feed bottle and disconnect his medications. They were in a little jar in his pocket that ran into a shunt that went clear to his heart. We had to take him every six months over to the to Portland and they would re-insert the thing and bandage and all that. So I had to disconnect everything and that was something um everything went okay. We were noticing again as he was laying in bed and a nurse from Seattle a male nurse from Seattle had heard that we needed help and he came down to stay with us. And he says, "You know, he's wincing or something's wrong." I says, "I don't know what it is." "He has to pee doesn't he?" "Ah yeah." He's he way past I mean he just wouldn't be one of those

persons to ever wet his pants, I mean he would just his butchness just wouldn't allow that, so we dashed up to the store and got a catheter and catherized him and everything was fine from then on, just perfect, but it took twenty-two days for him to starve to death,

BA: Wow.

OBERG: But it's ...I had my little list of everyone to call immediately. His mother, and the mortuary and the doctor and the county coroner and whatever and the county health department they had come in just before we detached and to make sure that everything was good and he says "you know you're running this place better than we could run it for any of our customers." So we're not it wasn't it since it took so long from eighty-eight to ninety-two to see him go through a number of twice with pneumonia and other things that could go wrong by that time I had gone through all the emotions of letting go.

BA: Yeah.

OBERG: And in the middle of the thing I says "don't consi..." you know he was even getting up uh this was before ninety-two and I was working he'd still get out of bed before I would get out of bed in the morning, he'd still go down and make coffee for me he would just had to, so that's a pretty good guy. Hated really losing him, because I figured I'd be the guy sitting on the front porch in my wheelchair all wrapped in a blanket and drooling down my front and he'd be spooning dinner to me. Well, that's not going to turn out that way. Yeah, so now what's next.

BA: I guess that it. I just wanted to talk briefly about The Fountain and the Gay Pride Festival. Where was the Festival at again, you said... I think you already said it but...?

OBERG: Well, there was the dance we had...at the

BA: The dance.

OBERG: At the uh...

HB: I think it began with a "E" I think.

OBERG: Anyway, it's a ballroom, even the McMinamin's used it all the time too. Uh we did it there. I was going say it... Gay Pride was not an organized thing at the time.

BA: No.

OBERG: This was our own...

HB: Celebration

BA: Brand new. Yeah.

OBERG: Gay pride. But it was happening everywhere. and I was unaware of it but people like Neil Hutchins, Lonnie Schworelow, Dave Fredrickson, they were aware of these things going on. I'm still no matter what else I had ever done I was still a little farm boy that I guess come home and play in the garden and work in the house and I had my boyfriend so the rest of the world was on their own and I was just helping out the best I could with their but uh so hey, back to when I did the little radio thing and come down the stairs that night I floated down those stairs just floated. I did not have to lie to anyone anymore about anything. I didn't have to. It was the biggest relief I've ever had in my life. And when I hear people say "I'm so afraid to come out." "Oh yeah, I know, I know what you're going through, but you have no idea how fast you'd better get at it."

I walk into work that next morning, "Hey George, come here." Boss. Oh, shit. "yes What did you need Mr. Bowland?" "Heard the radio program last night." "Oh gosh, yeah, what'd you think?" he says, "I think it was really darn good, and very brave of you to do that. Why don't you close the door?" So I closed the door and went in, and he'd already said it was okay, so he wanted to talk, so he told me about uh his time when he was working uh in company headquarters at that time it was in San Jose, California but had then moved up to someplace in Massachusetts or Connecticut or something like that. He says I had already or he had already had a gay assistant secretary when he was in that job. And he said that he had never had anybody that he found that he could trust and rely on their answers that they didn't mind just saying it's crap it's crap and it's crap and if you don't know it now you'd better find out fast and this is exactly what I want you to do. And I'd already been doing that.

I would send down my report and my supervisor would send down his report and "hmmm, okay, something's wrong here." So he went up and had a long talk with the supervisor and they built him an office and left me to have the lab. When I started the lab there was four of us and when I got finished there was only the two of us. I organized it. um but he was very pleased with the work that I had done. and um he says "you just, if something goes wrong, just let me know. I'm not telling anybody who said or anything I just let me know what's happening because I want to know because I want to know before we spring the leak."

BA: But he was very supportive?

OBERG: Oh very. He says oh yeah, he's already learned that having a gay assistant was just way handier than having a straight one, because you're not involved in the...I was not involved in the socializing of the company people, friendships with, I didn't ever. I'm strictly business. At home is different, but work is work I don't intermingle, because if I have to say no, you can't screw talk me, cause it's no. And he liked that very much. He

says, "Where does Jack get these answers?" "Hocus pocus?" he says "Well, I'll show you something." and so I uh...they were always making a shipment before I okayed it, and in the contract it says that this shipment can't go until my signature's on the okay sheet, because I'm a certified chemist and they had to have my signature on it before it could go out of the shop or out of the plant. And they have a ship time between here and Florida because it was going to Cape Canaveral, Kennedy Center, but it was Cape Canaveral at that time. And I uh...They were always sending them out before so and so I took two of the samples out of the shipment and dosed them ever so gently so that they would not pass. I'd already passed the shipment, I knew it had already passed, so I told the boss, not my supervisor, told the boss "umm that shipment's not going to make it." "Well, how do you know?" "I know it's not going to make it. Why don't you have Jack run it again?" Come down it was all dosed, but Jack passed it. He says, "Oh, okay, I understand."

BA: Red Flags.

OBERG: Yeah, we were dumping cyanide in the river like crazy.

BA: Wow.

OBERG: They would show up on the...I would always pull out the uh it was a 24 hour roll of paper that we would spread out and dumped dumped ,dumped, dumped boss the guy come behind me who was in charge of that "malfunction hup we didn't dump. Those were all malfunctions of the equipment."

BA: In the Columbia?

HB: Ummm.

OBERG: Ummhmmm. Ferro ammonium cyanide called Prussian blue. yeah, they just...oh we fixed that too. That was a corporation and I don't fit I'm not a what you would call a team player in that sense, because I don't I'm like a referee rather than the team I'm a referee. Yeah. They used to like I said they see me coming with my clipboard and they're like "oh shit here comes George." Because I'd take all their numbers and make them verify them. We're working...if we shut down for two and a half minutes it's a quarter of a million dollars.

HB: Wow.

OBERG: Just because somebody didn't turn the switch or something. And it was all automatic, Once you didn't turn the switch and you would set off the alarm everything just started shutting down and it was boom-boom-boom-boom and it took hours to start it all back up again, so if we were only down two and a half minutes it took us another several hours sometimes overnight to get the whole thing running again.

HB: We'd better get going huh?

BA: Yeah, Thanks for your time. It's so great.

OBERG: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]

**Key words:**

President of Second Foundation

Bartender at Half Moon Tavern

MCC

Portland State University

AIDS

The Fountain

Gay Pride.