

Scott Philips

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by Julie Liddick & Daniel Ramsayer

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This oral history interview was conducted as part of the Portland State University LGBT History Capstone course, Spring Term 2010, with Instructor Pat Young.

Introduction

Scott Philips is a retired music teacher who taught at both the middle and high school levels throughout the state of Oregon. Scott has been an active member of the Portland's gay square dance club, the Rose Town Ramblers, for over twenty years. During the interview he talked about his years teaching, coming out, the many years he has been square dancing, and his involvement in the Portland Leather Community.

Session 1
2010 May 10

JL: My name is Julie Liddick, it's May 10 and we're here to interview...

PHILIPS: Scott Philips

DR: And I'm Daniel Ramsayer.

DR: She said something about what we're supposed to do...making sure that there's no other Scott Philips.

JL: Can you spell your name for us please?

PHILIPS: It gets narrowed down because it's a one "L" Philips. And initial "C". Which with the bureaucracy of the current age here, it irritates be because I've gone by my middle name for 70 years and Social Security insists that I go by my first name. And the TSA now insists that I go by my first name and I have no idea who that person is. It's a battle I've been fighting since Social Security came along. I won't win, but its fun to try.

JL: It's always fun to try. Alright, well let's start with some general questions. What is your age?

PHILIPS: 70

JL: Wow, I never would have guessed that one.

PHILIPS: So far, I'm lucky; most people have the same reaction. I've been guessed in the last year as young as 50, and I thought "oh, you're my friend."

JL: And where did you grow up?

PHILIPS: Medford

JL: And you live in Portland now?

PHILIPS: In Portland now.

JL: Right over here in the SW, right?

PHILIPS: I just moved, almost two years ago, into the Terwilliger Plaza. Are you familiar with that? It's a continuing care retirement community; it's that big, tall tower next to Dunaway Park. Do you know where the old "Y" is? Or used to be the "Y"? On Barber?

DR: Vaguely, I know where that is.

PHILIPS: It's a block and a half on the other side of the 405.

DR: Yeah, I drive there going home, I live in Tualatin.

PHILIPS: Well if you have to drive through that area, I hope you don't have to do it during rush hour. Cause I watch, it's just absolutely horrible watching the rush hour traffic.

DR: It's pretty intense.

JL: Would you like to talk about, I know you said your retired, what was your occupation?

PHILIPS: I was a public school music teacher for thirty years. For the first sixteen, actually the first twenty years, I was a high school band director. I taught at Crater High School in Central Point, which was right next door to Medford. And I was the director of band there for sixteen years, and then moved to Portland was at Franklin High School for four years. And for the second time in my career I got completely fed up with football and basketball, which when you a band director that rules your life.

JL: I was going to say, "Don't those go together"?

PHILIPS: I didn't particularly...it wasn't so bad up here because my friends in Medford agreed with me that marching band was a waste of time. I had to have a pep band at the football games. Down in southern Oregon I really wasn't a music teacher for the first 25% of the year because I was doing one show after another. Thursday night rehearsal for Friday's game and Friday morning you pass out music for the next weeks show. So you teach by rote, which really wasn't teaching. So I went to middle school, was at Robert Grey for six years, out here by Wilson. Tripled the size of the band program, as music teachers got...it got more difficult to keep them with budget constraints. The only way I stay an instrumental teacher and not have do classroom music too, I ended up in up in George Middle School out in Roosevelt area, the three years. That program went nowhere and I knew it would never go anywhere because the kids didn't understand the meaning of the word practice "you mean I have to take that home?" A year after I retired, there was no music program at George Middle School and unfortunately there's an awful lot of elementary and middle schools in the Portland School Districts that have no music anymore.

JL: That's a shame.

PHILIPS: I don't know, there's probably some high schools too. I'm not sure. Welcome to the budget problems. At the elementary level, the first thing they cut is music, P.E., library, all the things that help kids.

DM: In my elementary school our librarian was a volunteer. We had none of the other programs.

PHILIPS: It's very sad. Who knows what...I retired eighteen years ago, so it's probably worse.

JL: Were you out at your last school?

PHILIPS: Not to students. I was telling Judy...right?

JL: Julie.

PHILIPS: I was telling Julie earlier that at my last school there were eight of us in the building, six women and me. They wanted me to stay and I said no, you're on your own girls. But none of us were really out to students, it wasn't important. Being gay had nothing to do with how effective I was as a music teacher. And unfortunately it probably would have created more problems. But, some staff knew it; the principal had no problem with it. Now in southern Oregon, I was very closeted.

JL: When did you come out?

PHILIPS: I was late, I came out about 35 or 36; which is one of the reasons I left southern Oregon.

JL: What were the results? What impact did it have on your life?

PHILIPS: Coming out? It was freedom, I guess.

JL: Yeah?

PHILIPS: Yeah. I took a year leave of absence from Crater High School, and went and studied, I'm a horn player, French horn, and studied horn with a good friend of mine that I played the Peter Britt Music Festival with. He taught at the University of Northern Colorado and that was sort of my break. I had a guarantee job with Central Point but what they offered me was horrible, so I resigned and came up here. Was technically a substitute for the first two months, replacing a fellow that had two heart attacks and he had the third and he didn't survive. And the rest is history.

JL: What would you say you're most proud of in your life?

PHILIPS: Oh, that's difficult. Probably the work with the students. Every once in awhile you get a really talented person. I only had one private student when I came up to Portland and he was very talented but he ended up going on to something else. Most of my students didn't go into music but they have an appreciation for it and we need the audience and they're the audience. I taught quite a bit of private lessons when I was in southern Oregon and I've had two past students that went into it professionally, actually three. One that ended up playing in orchestras in Germany for several years. So that was kind of nice.

JL: Yeah.

PHILIPS: As far as being proud of it, you're already proud of those who do well, but it's the whole, you know, the whole group. That's the nice thing about bands, it's a group activity. Two or three people can't save it.

JL: If two or three are off, the whole bands off.

PHILIPS: Right, right.

DR: And everyone will know it.

PHILIPS: That's what makes me laugh about athletes. You know they're very talented and all that but as a horn player in the symphony orchestra if my average of hitting the correct notes was 90% I would have been fired a long time ago. If their average is 50%, their wonderful and they get paid millions.

JL: Full scholarship...

PHILIPS: Right.

DR: Injustice of the world.

PHILIPS: Absolutely. Well that's unfortunately what most Americans, the public, think is important. Rather sad.

DR: A bunch of men running around in tight pants after a ball.

JL: And patting each other on the butt. What kind of challenges has being gay had an impact on your life? What challenges have you faced?

PHILIPS: You know, I don't think I've been aware of any challenges. I suppose subconsciously as a teacher there were probably challenges in not talking about it but I wasn't consciously aware of it. And that probably goes back to my comment that being

gay didn't have any effect on me as a teacher. I did my job as an educator and when I wasn't teaching then the other side of me came out.

JL: What kind of clubs and organizations are you active in or have you been active in within the gay community?

PHILIPS: Well basically only two and that's the square dance community and the leather community. My late partner was very involved with the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court, so for the short time we were together I went to a lot of their things. But it wasn't something I pursued afterwards. I still have some friends from the court system, but as a whole I don't get turned on by all that. The drag queens can be a pain in the rear.

JL: I've lived next door to a couple.

PHILIPS: Well Cylus, my partner was the reigning Prince when he died and the drag queens drove him crazy too. But he was involved because he really liked what the court stood for and they raise a tremendous amount of money for good causes. That's what was interesting, I wasn't...he was overjoyed when one of the drag queens did something outrageous and got into trouble. He thought it was hilarious.

DR: And there's no lack of that happening.

PHILIPS: Well, the one who was Empress when he was the Prince...she was not a very strong Empress...she was...her boyfriend left her and they were at a bar in Vancouver and they got into a little argument and he hit her tiara and it hit the floor and broke into three pieces. Cylus thought it was the best thing he'd ever seen.

JL: That's Chloe Stone; I lived next door to her. Told you I lived next door to a few of them.

PHILIPS: You've heard that story?

JL: Many times. Small world.

DR: That's one thing I like about Portland, everyone know everyone through someone.

PHILIPS: That's true. And of course, the Empress before Chloe was Poison.

JL: Yes.

PHILIPS: Their two opposites. In a way I felt sorry for Chloe. Nobody could follow Poison.

JL: Well let's...

PHILIPS: Anyway...So, my main activities are square dancing and leather, so.

JL: Well let's talk about the square dancing. I'm going to turn it over to Daniel and let him ask you some questions, here.

DR: Thank you. How did you get involved in the Rosetown Ramblers?

PHILIPS: Well you know, I had square danced when I was a kid, my parents square danced. That was before it was organized like it is now. There would be an old group that would get together and somebody would decide "I want to be the caller" and they would go out and buy a record and the records had, even now the old 45's that the callers used, one side has just music and the live callers use that. The other side has somebody calling, but back in those days when I was in high school, they learned the

calls that were on that record. If they went to another group that had different records, probably calls they never heard of before. Anyway, I got into it that way.

When I was in high school...I grew up, well I grew up in the middle of a orchard, we were barely farmers, my father was a veterinarian, but we had animals and horses, so I was involved with a group called the Junior Posse. And a bunch of us from that group went square dancing. In fact, about our Junior year there was a lady giving square dance classes to adults and we asked her if she minded if we came out. We sort of kept to our own square so we wouldn't drive them nuts. So that was kind of fun.

Then I got out of it and when I moved up here, when the Ramblers were first forming, I thought well that will be interesting but it just didn't fit my schedule, teaching at Franklin with all the evening commitments I had. And when I transferred to a middle school, I thought "oh, I've got time". So I got back involved, enjoying the Ramblers at that time. That was probably the fall of 88'. I'm guessing.

DR: So that would put you at 22 years...in the. Okay, that was the follow up question, I did the math in my head, sorry. What level would you put yourself at as a dancer?

PHILIPS: I'm a challenge 2 level. Are you familiar with the levels?

DR: No, no. It'd be great if you...

PHILIPS: That's where the big improvements came my parent's day. And I'm not sure which came first, but there's a national organization of callers called Caller Lab and they've organized all the calls on the various levels. Basic and mainstream is the first level. If somebody comes to the Rose Town Ramblers to learn to square dance, the first year that's basically what they do. Everything from there on up is based on what you learned in basic mainstream. The next level is a pretty short level, it's Plus. Most,

particularly in the straight square dance world the vast majority of dancers stay at mainstream and plus. They have a lot of fun, there's more fluff. They don't call if fluff, but we call it fluff. And then there's advanced, and then there's C1, then there's C2, then there's C3A, C3B and C4.

JL: And C is for Challenge?

PHILIPS: Challenge. The only unofficial level is C4. It's where they throw everything that they figure out where to put anywhere else. As I say everything's based on that first year. So supposedly as a Challenge 2 dancer I know over 800 calls. But what makes it challenging is that they take various calls at the mainstream level and they put them together and give it a name. There are...there are...well those of us that are C dancers, we're the ones that can break down a square in mainstream when they call the original call because we can't remember the original call cause sometimes there's three, two or three variations going up the ladder.

JL: Sounds confusing.

PHILIPS: Right. I look at C4, Challenge 4 dancers and the vast majority of the C4 dancers in our community are from the Silicon Valley, San Jose. You know all the computer nerds. And you watch, you know you'll watch them dance and the caller will throw out something and you can just see the gears going like this. Okay, next.

JL: But that doesn't take the fun out of it though, does it?

PHILIPS: The rumor is that C dancers are too serious, we don't have any fun. But in actuality we do and we break down. I went to a fly in (we can into that sort of a little later) in Chicago several years ago and on the last Sunday they go out to the Belmont Rocks and basically have a picnic and square dancing outside. And there's one very serious gay

caller from Toronto who spent the whole weekend making sure he had at least eight C1 dancers so he could call C1. Well we've been sort of over off to the side telling jokes and laughing and things and we laughed our way through the entire tip when he was calling and it really frustrated him because C1's supposed to be serious. We didn't make any mistakes, we had a good time. It's a myth that C1 dancer don't take it seriously.

DR: Sounds like a good myth. Do you lead, follow or both?

PHILIPS: Both.

DR: Both, yes.

PHILIPS: But usually at the beginning you make your choice, during that 1st year. Some people if they move on to plus the second year get brave and do both sides. Once you get to advanced there just a small number of calls that are sex oriented. Depending on whether you're whether you're the boy's part or the girl's part whether you go left or right. So it really doesn't make a lot of difference. Things can get messed up and people can be in the wrong place in Advanced and Challenge and go for quite a while before things break down because all of the sudden they call one of those calls and it's "well there's two girls together, we can't do that". Why are you together? The rest of your squares right here.

DR: So, when I've seem square dancing before, I've seen them in these amazing outfits. Do you have any of these?

PHILIPS: No. You've watched straight square dancing.

DR: Yes, I have.

PHILIPS: We're very proud that in the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs that we have no dress code.

DR: OK.

PHILIPS: To me, I may be getting ahead of myself with my activities but I'm on the governing board of ten different national dance organizations and I'm the representative for our gay organization. I was an officer of the organization for ten years. And the number of dancers in the straight community is just taking a nose dive. Twenty-something years ago the national convention was in Portland and there were 22,000 dancers. The coverage on T.V. every night I thought was abysmal because they showed all these dancers, usually in their seventies or eighties (of course I'm there now) in these, you know, outrageous outfits and it's amazing the women can get their men or husbands to wear matching shirts. And that same convention came back to Portland about 8 years ago and they were down to 8000, 22 to 8. Last year that same convention was in Long Beach and they didn't quite make 4. Now their already at 5,000 for Louisville this year. But in the straight square dance world, it's dying, because their dying. This governing board that I'm on did a survey at 3 different straight national conventions and it was a two page survey and frankly all we had to look at was the first line...age. And the huge percentage of those people were seventies or eighties. Unfortunately I ran the same survey at our convention twice and our big age groups were fifty and sixty.

So when I was still an officer of the association at our delegates meeting at a convention when I would give my report on this arts/dance governing board that I'm on I would try and emphasize to all of the delegates of the various clubs and the association "Look fellas, guys and gals, we're not that far behind the straight community if we don't start working hard to attract people." I think one of the reasons that the straight people have trouble attracting people is the dress. I think the younger straight people don't really, well some of them do, but as a whole, they don't want to dress up like that. The

National Square Dance Convention and the group that runs that are a bunch of old fogies (excuse me) and that shall not enter the dance floor without proper square dance attire. That's a skirt, either crinolines or prairie skirts for the women. Men must have a long sleeve shirt. "Perish the thought that a woman would have to touch a man's hairy, sweaty arm." And that's literally the quote.

DR: So spanky pants are allowed?

PHILIPS: Actually, I wore nice jeans all the time and get by with it. A lot of the straight festivals around the country, are weekend festivals, are allowing casual dress during the day and asking for formal attire in the evening. At our conventions we're all in shorts and t-shirts. There are a few of the guys that can't help themselves and show up in crinolines. And actually we have a couple, three of the women that like to come to club dances in crinolines too. Very strange.

DR: Just the feel of the cloth.

JL: I did manage to find one picture of you guys online.

PHILIPS: And old one.

JL: It was an old, let me see...

PHILIPS: It's probably the one where we looked at some of those people, and thought "oh my god he had hair!" How far back was that? I don't even recognize the shirts; that must be before I started dancing. Yeah this guy up in the top corner, I think that's Rick. Somebody's interviewing Rick and he has lots of hair now.

JL: Yeah, this is 1986. And you said you started in 88'.

PHILIPS: That was the first year probably. I not even sure if Rick's in there because he started the second year.

DR: So what would you say is your favorite memory from the group?

PHILIPS: From square dancing?

DR: From square dancing.

PHILIPS: Well for me, maybe this is from my background as a band teacher, I'm an organizational freak.

DR: You'd have to be.

PHILIPS: Which gets me involved in far too many things. I was at Terwilliger for eight months and they elected me President of the resident council. I thought, do they know what they're doing? Anyway, the two highlights for me is my friend Rick, who somebody is interviewing, and I were co-chairs for our convention here in 1998, it was the second convention here, the first convention I wasn't dancing yet. I found that a fascinating experience, we had 1,100 dancers. We were at the, well it was Red Lion when we signed the contract and it became the Double Tree, and it was when there were two of them out on Hayden Island, one on each side of the freeway. We used every single ballroom space they had because our conventions require six large ballrooms, one for each level. That was a lot of fun. It was a four year project. It's now, in the association became a five year project, to do a convention. Mainly for convention, hotel space. Our San Diego club lost their first hotel they wanted because there were two clubs bidding for convention that year and they couldn't sign the contract until they actually got the bid and by the time they got the bid some other group had come in. so we expanded our process to five

years. That was the first highlight and the second highlight stemmed off the first one. You know I really enjoyed that organizing the convention, so I ran for Vice Chair of the association and that was after four years and then Secretary for six years. And last year at convention, I thought “ok, it’s time for somebody else.” Besides the Chairman from Vancouver, B.C., who’s a joy to work with, is not going to run again in Chicago this year and I didn’t want to break in a new Chair, so I made him break in a new Secretary.

DR: So, on the converse are there any difficult memories that you have as a result of that?

PHILIPS: From square dancing?

DR: Yeah.

PHILIPS: Not really. No. I mean there’s an occasional dancer that doesn’t last very long and sometimes we heave a sigh of relief. I think we’ve, it’s either, we’ve had two or three cross dressers in the club since I’ve been in and two of them were great, no problem at all. One of them was just a pain.

DR: You mentioned some about conventions; do you travel with the group to conventions still?

PHILIPS: It’s, going to conventions is an individual choice, and the whole club doesn’t go. Yes, my first convention was in Vancouver, B.C. in 90, 1990. And was it last year or the year before, I got my twenty year medallion, I’ve been to twenty consecutive conventions. The association, I think Chicago this year is twenty-seven. So I obviously didn’t dance the first seven.

DR: Of the places that you’ve traveled, which one has been your favorite?

PHILIPS: Oh that's hard to say too. I'm very fond of Chicago. This will be our second Chicago convention. Part of it's because I belong to another group in Chicago and so I go to Chicago twice a year and I like Chicago. I never traveled before I got into square dancing; I was too cheap to travel. That's been a liberating thing. Oh it's just money. So I've seen a whole variety of places, my first convention was Vancouver, the second one was Miami and I think Albuquerque was the next one. And from there without the list I would not be able to tell you where all we've been. But we've been to Vancouver again and we're going back to Vancouver in three years, two or three years. We've been to Toronto, we've been to San Diego, Anaheim, Phoenix twice, I mentioned Albuquerque, Baltimore. People on the east coast get a little tired coming to the west for conventions. And we keep saying well "first of all you have to bid for a convention, we can't come unless you bid for it. And second of all, the majority of our clubs in the association are on the west coast, Denver or west. You know so it's a double edge sword.

DR: So, do you have a favorite travel memory?

PHILIPS: Actually, my favorite travel memory has nothing to do with being gay, other than the fact that my travel partner was gay, and that was a 16 day riverboat cruise in Russia, couple years ago. All these weekend trips I do to conventions and leather events can't quite compare to that. I'm waiting for the stock market to come back so I can take another one of those trips.

DR: It's like, we're asking for the Rose Town Ramblers, but really we just want the stories.

PHILIPS: I know. Well, we're basically on square dancing now, eventually we'll change topics.

DR: Yeah, and the last one is are you still an active member?

PHILIPS: Oh yes. Rick and I, it's amazing, we worked together for 4 years putting on the convention and we're still good friends. That doesn't happen in all clubs. The other good thing about Portland was that the Rose Town Ramblers didn't suffer at all from the convention. We've had clubs in the association that so much effort was put into a convention that the bottom fell out of the club afterwards. And I can't help but think that part of it was the way that the committee organized it, I've heard Cleveland is having trouble even before their convention I had heard that club members were frustrated because they didn't know what was going on, the committee was doing their thing. And our case, for 4 years Rick and I were at Ramblers every week and we said something about convention every week. We started out with the 2 of us, and as we needed something we'd get another committee chair and pretty soon the committee got up to about 10 or 15 people. But it wasn't until we needed somebody and usually they stepped up and by the end everybody stepped up. We had more volunteers than what we knew what to do with. So, it was a group effort and they all had a good time, they weren't pushed into it when there was nothing for them to do, they were asked to do something when we had specific tasks 'oh yeah, I can do that'. And the club faired very well after that convention, which we were very happy about. Vancouver BC is the same way; Squares Across the Border is one of our stronger clubs. They're coming up onto their 3rd convention in 3 years. Because of the way that the people who organized the committee include everybody in the club, everybody stays happy.

JL: Do you think you got more after the conventions that were held locally?

PHILIPS: Not necessarily. You know, getting members is, to me, a real big problem. When I started dancing, our beginning class when I started with the ramblers was about 6 squares, times that by 8. Now their very happy if they get 10-12 people. I don't know what the solution is, back in those days the club would go out to all the bars and do

demo dances and of course country western was huge then, the old CC Slaughters, up on Stark, it was packed every Sunday. We always picked up lots of new class people from doing the demo dances. They rely entirely on Gay Pride now, which I think is a mistake but I don't know where else to go, because I don't think the bar scene is the answer, because not as many people go out to the bar scene as they did back in the 80's. They're all online now.

JL: Maybe you could try something here. [Portland State]

PHILIPS: Or that, my suggestion to them was to start working with Q center, and see what activities, if they could take a square and do a demo dance. Anything to publicize it. Let people see how much fun it is.

DR: Well, I know that the QRC held a show and tell of square dancing on a Friday night, and usually we get that many members, and we had like 40 people.

PHILIPS: Now where is this?

DR: QRC is on the 4th floor of Smith Memorial Student Union.

PHILIPS: I'd never heard of that. How interesting.

DR: It's the Queer Resource Center, and they got 40 people and most of the people I had never seen.

PHILIPS: And where did the square dancing aspect come from? Now you have me fascinated.

DR: A good friend of mine named Alysa works there and she just saw, oh what was it, something 'Fever'? It was a Travolta movie where they were square dancing? Anyway, but she saw a movie from the 80's about square dancing and she like 'Thats Amazing'.

PHILIPS: That sounds perfect, I would love to have the Ramblers get involved with that. I may have to call you.

DR: Oh no, that'd be fine. I can totally give you the contact information and we can set something up. It was a great thing to do, it was fun.

PHILIPS: One thing that's been a draw back for people, and most clubs are the same way; we have a class starting in September. Well in the last 3 years they've done a very good job between Pride in June and keeping in contact with people who signed the card, because June to September is a long time. It's trying to start a class in July when it's hot, it didn't seem to work either. But then the class finishes and you dance and there's not another class till September. Well, they're going to try to overlap, start another group in January, or at least have it for those who are having difficulty to start over again in January type of thing. That'll be interesting to see how that may or may not go. But recruiting is a really problem, you know, it's as big a problem for our gay groups as it is for the straight groups.

Our conventions are down to around a 1000, where we had ours for around a 7 or 8 year run there it was always almost right around 1100. Which in reality is probably about half of our total national membership, it's expensive to go to conventions. The straight convention it's about a 40-50\$ registration, and they don't pay their callers, the callers do it for publicity, we pay our callers a fortune because we get top notch callers. We used to start around 100\$ for early bird registration, now it starts around 150\$ and then goes up as you get closer. Plus your flights, plus 4-5 nights in a hotel. My friend Rick does a medallion project, which is 10 year, 10 conventions, 20 conventions and now 25

conventions. And he was talking about the 20. He figures the average on how much a person spends each year where they go to the convention, if they've gone to 20 conventions, they spend a lot of money. But it's a big family reunion so we figure it's worth it, to see people once a year that you only see at conventions.

DR: Do you want to work on the next few questions? [to Julie]

PHILIPS: So we're going to go on to the leather community now?

JL: Yeah! And area I've never delved into before.

PHILIPS: We're sort of a hidden part. For a lot of years the gay community didn't want to acknowledge that we existed, because we tend to be kinky.

JL: So give me a run down what it is?

PHILIPS: Well, in my mind, and this is just my own personal opinion, there's really two aspects to the leather community. In a couple weeks I'm going to Chicago for International Mister Leather [IML], and I go there every year but I don't go for the contest because I find it quite boring. I go for the crowd, and I also belong to a group called the Chicago Hellfire Club [CHC], which is just one of the two aspects of it. Let me talk about the gentler one first. There are people who like to wear leather, black leather, you know, it feels good, some of them think it makes them look butch. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. I'll have to be honest with you, IML, they're at the Hyatt, the big Hyatt in Chicago, this year, they'll pretty well fill the place up. They have several thousand people show up, it's a huge event. Most of them are what we call stand and model, there's a huge leather mart, all sorts of vendors, just from basic leather to really obscure things, things that freak some people out. And they spend a lot of money buying this stuff and they like to parade around in all this stuff they just bought and show how nice they

look. Then there are those of us who are into leather that are into S&M play, and a lot of people start in the first group, like I did, say 'I'm not into that' and then discover 'well, yeah, we are' so you start dabbling. Everything we do is consensual, nothing is done against anybody's will, that's where the CHC comes in, they are basically a SM club, a male SM club. They have their own clubhouse, it's an old, probably lodge or some sort. The original members of the lodge would be mortified to find what had been going on there.

JL: I just had a picture of a moose hanging on the wall and hats.

PHILIPS: Oh no, those are all gone now, now there's play stations crosses and bondage boards and this and that. In Portland I sorta got in that aspect of the scene through a group down in San Francisco [SF], because I knew that I had an interest in that type of thing, but at that time a lot of guys were meeting at the bars and going home, and I thought 'there is no way I am going to do that', this is not the type of play that you do when you've been drinking all night and going home with someone you had just met at the bar. So, being the chicken that I was, and what I think is smart, I found this group in San Francisco. Well about 13, 14 years ago, quite by accident. There's what I call the straight group, there are Lesbians involved too, Portland Leather Alliance [PLA], actually I was on their board for a few years when they were the National Leather Association [NLA]/Portland. They kicked us out because we had asked questions and asked them to justify some of their financial reports, that's another story. PLA has an event every year called Kinkfest, which has gotten quite large, and the 3rd Kinkfest I was the chair of it, and I just got more and more frustrated with it because to me PLA is more of a straight organization, and they say they want to support the gays, but they don't really. They don't understand how we play, so I gave up on them. Through one of their parties during leather pride week, a friend bid a night in this fellows Dungeon, and when she won she went up to Bruce and she said 'well, I really bid for this with the idea of letting the men have a men's only party', and so she came over and talked to me and says 'well, that's

really a nice idea, I appreciate it, but I gotta be honest with you, if your names associated with it the guys wont show up. So that was the beginning of our men's parties here, and I ran them for several years myself and then about 3 years ago I was getting burned out and one of my best friends realized that, so we now have a committee of 8, we gave ourselves a name 'Dungeon Men PDX' and we have a men's BDSM play party every month in a local dungeon. We average 35-40 guys. Over the years a lot of people have shown up and come once or twice and never came back, and to me that's very fair, they had an opportunity to explore a fantasy in a very safe environment, and when they came to a party and realized 'reality is a little bit different than fantasy I think I don't want to do this' and they had a safe way to find out that 'this is not really what I'm into'. As opposed to the old days when they'd meet somebody in a bar and go home and maybe get in trouble.

JL: This isn't one of our questions, this is more just my own curiosity, but what is the average age of this community?

PHILIPS: It varies. The SF 15 Association tends to be an older group, there's a young Hispanic guy who been in the group for about 3 or 4 years now, I was talking to him at their annual run in June a couple years ago and he said 'all my friends ask me why I joined the 15 instead of this younger group' and he said 'I looked up and said one word, 'experience''. And the younger group he was referring to, basically to me in kinda like, not all of them but most of them, and kinda like the stand and model people. One of the street fairs in SF, Door Alley there, on Friday night the Men of Discipline, that's the younger group, the building is the main level and the basement where most of the equipment is. Most of the people are upstairs socializing and showing off their leather. The next night the 15 Association has their party and most of us are downstairs playing. And our parties locally, we're getting a lot more younger men coming. I think a lot of them are maybe the ones that don't come back, but when you're younger you're exploring things and 'this sounds like something that might be fun' and then you realize

'oh no it's not', but you've had the chance to find out and some of them stay. There's a group called Body Electric, I'm not really too familiar with it but I know the fellow who ran it here in Portland for a long time, he's one of our committee members for the dungeon group, leads Body Electric now. An offshoot of the basic Body Electric program is Surrender program, and we've gotten a lot of people from that. I think that's where a lot of younger people coming into the scene are coming from.

I met my late partner through the leather scene, the CHC, and Silas always made the comment that a lot of the problems we face in the leather community is that because of AIDS, we lost a whole generation of teachers, and it's been really difficult to try to bridge that generation gap. CHC has an annual run in September called Inferno, they have session A and session B, and each session is about 250 men, and for the longest time a lot of us would look around and see the same people all the time and we're all getting older. About 4-5 years ago a young couple showed up, and then a couple more the next year, so it's encouraging to see that, that there's starting to be a bridge between the generations. But you see it all the time whether its leather or anything else, young people don't want to socialize with the old people; the old people all want young people. And it's probably not much different in the straight community either. You look at all these ultra rich old men and they have their trophy brides.

JL: Yeah, I'm kind of getting into that undesirable category at 31. So you've been a member with the community for how long would you say?

PHILIPS: I tried to figure this out. I've probably been in the leather SM scene for at least 20 years.

JL: What's your typical attire?

PHILIPS: Actually the funny thing is that those of us that are into SM play don't wear an awful lot of leather. Reminds me of a story somebody talked about at the inferno once; this guy had brought a young man he had been dating and playing with, and they arrived there and they had checked into their room at the motel and the young one came all decked out in full leather and his partner sorta tapped him on the shoulder and said 'just stand ere and look around, and what do you see?' and all of a sudden, it donned on him most of them were wearing jeans and a tee shirt, maybe a leather vest. A lot of them will dress up for the final nights banquet, I don't even wear it because it's too heavy to pack, And if they don't like what I'm wearing well that's their problem.

JL: What's a favorite memory that you have of being part of this group?

PHILIPS: I don't know if I have any specific memories.

JL: Any difficult ones you can think of?

PHILIPS: No.

JL: Well, you mentioned traveling with this group, correct? In Chicago, you said, SF.

PHILIPS: Yeah, the two main groups I belong to SF and Chicago and they each have what we call 'runs'. The SF group actually is the week before gay pride. Usually I miss gay pride because that calendar is interesting. That's a gay resort above Clear Lake, California. About 2 hours north of the city. The one in Chicago is a gay resort in Sagatuk, Michigan. And then the 3rd group I belong to is only option is to have this gathering in September every year out of Philadelphia and we're not supposed to tell people what kind of a camp group that is because the people who own the camp ground don't want to publicize that all these kinky people come. Basically it's a summer camp ground, and we're there after all the little ones are back in school.

JL: Don't worry, we won't tell.

DR: Your secret is safe with us.

JL: I don't know, we are putting this in the Historical Society.

DR: But we don't have to say anything specifically.

PHILIPS: Well I didn't give you the name of the place, or the nature of the group that runs it. And we're not the only kinky group that they rent to either. This group also meets before inferno and after inferno, because the year the other group rents it, they have to have it after inferno, so they go back and forth.

JL: So you are still an active member of this group?

PHILIPS: Oh yes, it makes for a busy travel schedule. My neighbors at the plaza, I average being gone once a month, June being worse because I go to IML, I'm home for a week and then I go to boot camp, over clear lake, I'm home for a week and then I have to go to Louisville for the straight square dance convention and after that to Chicago for our gay square dance convention. So I think I'm home for a week and a ½ to 2 weeks in June.

JL: So that's the basic questions that we have. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

PHILIPS: No, I tend to ramble on.

JL: It's been great information. I feel like I've learned a lot here. Thank you very much for sharing your memories and your experiences with us.

PHILIPS: Well, whoever gets Rick will get a lot of information too. I think he joined the club the second year, I may be mistaken he may have been in the original group, but I think he said second year. I think the only person who was around from the very beginning was Dick Burton

JL: yeah, we got to see all of his badges, buttons and medals, and he's got like, 25 years plus?

PHILIPS: Plus, he's been to every single convention. When they did the 20 year convention, 20 years pins, I think it was 20, there were 14 people who had been to all 20 conventions, and when it got to 25 it was down to about 8 or 9, and I think it's about 6 or 7 now who have been to ever single convention and I think Dick's one of them. He has a wealth of information.

JL: Well, fortunately our last class we're going to be able to have 5 minutes each to talk about what we learned from who we've interviewed so we'll get to learn a little bit from everybody, so we'll get to share something we learned from you.

PHILIPS: Remember we're supposed to be concentrating on square dancing so don't dwell too long, you don't want to shock your class mates.

DR: I dunno, maybe we do.

JL: It might take a lot to shock our group, really.

PHILIPS: Well who knows, we may see somebody knock on our door and say 'I heard about you from this class at PSU.'

JL: Well there you go. You'll remember.

DR: Quite possibly.

PHILIPS: It's very interesting to see the people that are interested in the SM world, a lot of them are people that most their friends would not have a clue. We don't do it real publicly. Particularly where I live now, I'm more discrete when I leave my apartment. It was funny new years ever though, because they had a new years eve party down in the cafe at the new building where I am and our elevators aren't too full because the heights is only 8 units on the top 3 floors, and 5 from there on down, and I left about ½ hours after the party started, so I come out of my apartment with my leather coat on and my toy bag behind me and my next door neighbor who happens to be a retired supreme court justice, very sweet, he and his wife are wonderful, and he says 'oh, are you going to the party?' and I said 'No, I'm going to a private party, and he says 'oh, are you staying overnight?' and I said 'well, maybe'.

JL: And we'll just leave it at that.

DR: Ask me no more questions and I'll tell you no more lies.

PHILIPS: Well the first year I went to inferno, I have brother that taught at Michigan state for 35, 40 years, so I visited him and my sister in law for a week, and he says 'oh, is this a square dance thing?' and I says, 'well, no, it's something else' subject dropped. The next year I'm going for the Pennsylvania run of Inferno, so I stay with him fro a couple nights in between. 'Well, I know this isn't square dancing so what is it?' and all I said was 'Craig, how much do you wanna know about what your little brother does?' 'You don't

have to tell me if you don't want to'. The answer was so fast I just laughed at him. Its like I says, I tell you anything you want to hear, but you may not want to hear it. That's why I started out saying that #3 question 'topics you don't wish to discuss' I'll talk about anything. Especially now that I'm not teaching anymore, who cares? My junior high choral teacher in Medford, wonderful teacher, my nieces and nephews had him for middle school English and they loved him, and he was extremely closeted for his entire teaching career so that was back in the 50's when I had him, when he retired he literally became the queen of Jacksonville OR. A Viola player from the symphony came down to play the Brent festival one year and was housed with Ray and the viola player happened to be gay, it was a match made in heaven but the viola player said it was a little embarrassing when they went to the grocery store and we'd go by the produce section first and Ray would rip off a whole long thing of plastic bags and throw it around his neck like a boa and say 'okay, let's go shopping'. That's what 35 year in the classroom does. 'I'm retired, I don't care who knows what'. And he worked for the Jackson county museum for a year, and the city just loved him. But they wouldn't of when he was a teacher. That's kinda sad.

JL: Well thank you again, I guess we're going to turn this puppy off. You guys can talk about the QRC.

DR: We're at 53 minutes.

[End of Session 1]

[End of Interview]

Keywords

Square Dancing

Music Teacher

Coming Out

Rose Town Ramblers

Chicago Hellfile Club

International Mister Leather

S&M

Men of Discipline

15 Association

Body Electric

Rose Court

Dungeon Men PDX

Kinkfest

Portland Leather Association

Queer Resource Center

CC Slaughters

Gay Pride

Squares Across the Border