

Oral History Interview: Diane Sidorowicz

Interviewee: Diane Sidorowicz

Interviewer: Mark Bowman

Date: July 25, 2019

Mark B. This is Mark Bowman. I'm here on July 25, 2019 doing an oral history interview with Diane Sidorowicz, and we're doing this interview, we're recording this via Zoom videoconferencing. So Diane, welcome. Good to be with you. Would you just begin by saying your name and spelling your name for the transcriber?

Diane S. Hi. My name is Diane Sidorowicz, S-I-D-O-R-O-W-I-C-Z.

Mark B. Thank you, Diane. So in this interview, again, we just want to hear your life story and focusing on your involvement down the road with Dignity. But I'm just going to ask to begin with how you came into the world, where you were born, your family situation, what your early years were like.

Diane S. I was born September 28, 1954 in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Dorchester is a little town encapsulated with Boston. And my great-grandparents owned a triple decker, and my great-grandmother's youngest daughter lived on the third floor, my great-grandparents lived on the second floor, and me and my family lived on the first floor. I had two older brothers, six and seven years older than me. My parents had always wanted four kids,

but after the two boys came 13 months apart they didn't—and then there was no kids—they thought that was it. And then I appeared.

I was born in a Catholic hospital, of course. Just to let you know, the Catholic part of the family, everybody was buried in a Catholic cemetery. So I was born in a Catholic hospital and I actually still have—the little bracelets they put on kids or babies when they're born, now they're the little plastic things—I actually have beads with a little tiny medal, like a little holy medal on it, and it spelled out my name. And there were also little pink beads so they would just look at my wrist and know I was a girl. In fact I'll take a picture of it when I send you some photos.

And so now just to let you know, my great-grandmother had children for 22 years. And so her youngest daughter was actually four years younger than my mother. So my mother had all her children and then her aunt started having children, so these cousins I grew up with, they were my age, even though they were my mother's cousins. So that's enough for the family.

Mark B. Tell me about your parents. Did your father work? Was your mom a homemaker? What was their situation?

Diane S. My dad did a lot of things. He always had three or four jobs. His main job was a metal pressman. So he formed metal cans. And he also washed floors for a cleaning company. He was a lobsterman, and he dug clams, and he went hunting in the winter. Unfortunately, if he killed an animal, he

would then use that to barter for food, because he didn't have an education, so he did anything to help the family.

My mom didn't work until I was eight, and then she went to work full-time and I became a latchkey kid. And unfortunately, in the school I went to, a parochial school, of course, I came home for lunch. So I had to come home for lunch and make my lunch and go back to school. Because my brothers then were in high school. What else do you want to know about my family?

Mark B. Those early years what did you like to do? What do you recall about the first ten years of your life? How did you spend your time? What were you interested in?

Diane S. Reading and fishing. I would go, in the summer I couldn't wait to go out on the boat with my dad. So we would either do lobstering—we would have to catch fish to feed the lobster pots. We would dig clams. And his clams were always the cleanest because he would dig the clams, hang it over the boat in an onion bag so the tide would naturally clean the clams and all the sand would just fall to the bottom of the ocean.

But being on the boat, it was...you know, I could, even though I didn't know I was meditating, it was a way to let your mind drift. Sometimes we would talk and sometimes we wouldn't. My dad would always be closer to the bow, I would be close to the stern. And we would just be fishing. And sometimes, again, we would talk or sometimes I would just have all that time to myself. And you could...whether I thought about God a lot, I used

to think about heaven a lot, because there I am, and the sky, you know, all I have is blue sky and water. Those were my very, very special times. And then my other thing that I really enjoyed was reading. I read every book I could get a hold of.

Mark B. Good, good. You mentioned you were in parochial school. Your family was practicing Catholic, they were regular participants in the life of the parish and going to mass? What were those experiences like?

Diane S. Not my dad. My dad, because he worked almost seven days a week, not full-time seven days, but he had his full-time job and then he had all these part-time jobs, he only went to church, he went on Christmas day with me. I had to go to the children's mass, of course, and he went with me on Christmas day. And other than that he only went if, you know, weddings, funerals, graduations that, of course, were held in the church from a parochial school. So he did not go to church on a regular basis.

My mom did until...oh, wow. She was probably about 50 years old or so when she stopped going. And I say she just got lazy, but she never really said why she didn't go. She used to make up reasons.

Mark B. So what was school like? Can you talk about the school years? You went to Catholic school throughout your under education?

Diane S. Yes, 12 years. Walked to school every day because I went to the local parochial school and then the high school, which was attached to the

parochial school, but that was only all girls. It was a little further walk, but it was also in the parish, so I did the 12 years there.

Mark B. Highlights of school? Things you recall from the school years that stand out in your memory? How were you involved in school?

Diane S. I was a very good student, very polite, attentive, followed the rules. I'm not a goody two-shoes, but I used to panic if I didn't have my homework done or if I misunderstood the assignment. And so one time—we used to even have homework on the weekends, at least three subjects. And I would try and get some of my—well, I would try to get one subject done on Friday night and the other two—I used to get up very early so the other two Saturday morning so I would be done. And so I was very good at that. I was horrible at projects because we never had... Like people would say well, you know, cut out some pictures from a magazine. Well, we didn't get magazines in my house. So I wasn't good at that. Or in the fall, bring in some leaves to show different leaves from the tree. Well, we didn't have any trees on my street. So that was kind of hard. So projects I used to panic about and maybe rush through.

But the only one I did really well in was science projects because I was into—I'm an electrical engineer, so even back then, when I was in sixth grade, my science project was on electricity. So that was where I excelled. Other than that, history projects, even though I like history, I was horrible, and math—I like math, but we never had any math projects to do.

Mark B. Any extracurricular activities, sports or clubs or other kinds of activities you did in high school?

Diane S. In high school, yes. I was on the bowling team, candlepin, and I was on the school newsletter. We didn't call it a newspaper because it was one page. What group was I in? I was in... Well, we tried to do a sodality, but it fizzled because we didn't want to be sodality like the sodality from the '50s and '60s, we wanted to do it a little more modern, and of course the nuns didn't want us to do that. And the sodality people in the...the older women in the church, they wanted us to follow their rules, so that didn't go anywhere.

I think we were trying to look for a little more modern way that women who were spiritual could come together. You go to grammar school and, you know, the Baltimore catechism, and then you go to high school and you have these younger nuns. My freshman homeroom and religion teacher, I swear she was probably 24 years old or so, and she really pushed us to broaden our views. Not extreme, but a lot more than the Baltimore catechism did. And it went wild. Songs like Judy Collins' "Both Sides Now," we played that. All of a sudden I had to listen and really hear the words, hear the lyrics, and then have discussions.

And it was...you know, we talked about, in religion class we talked about social events. No political events, but things that were going on. I mean, that's when...I was in... In fact, it was too bad because I got out of high school right when busing started, and it was horrible in Boston. Horrible,

horrible. It was the most ugly events. And I wish that I had been in high school because I'm sure they were starting to talk about that.

But we talked about racism. And you didn't talk about that. You had the white section of Dorchester and you had the black section of Dorchester. And you just...no one went into their other sections. And all of a sudden I get to school—now I didn't have not one Latino or one black person in grammar school. I get to high school and now they come from different parishes and all over Dorchester, and all of a sudden there were three African American girls in my class.

Now it's not like I've never seen a black person or never interfaced with one, but now they're in my class, and talking about racism when you have black people in the room, it was a little uncomfortable. You know, it kind of pushed you because you were afraid to tell the truth, you were afraid to say what was in your head or in your heart. Some things were uncomfortable.

Mark B. Yeah, good. What were your relationships like in high school? Who did you hang out with? Who were your groups? How did you identify yourself?

Diane S. So you had to choose... In the first two years you all took the same classes, and then come junior year you had to choose whether you were going to go the college route or the business route. And I chose the college route. And there were about—so my graduating class, there were 63 girls and there were 20 of us in the college group in junior year and eight in

senior year. So those were my friends. Those were the ones that you hung out with because you were all in the same classes, and if you got stuck somewhere with either math or science, those were the friends you hung out with, rather than the business group. And a lot of the business group, I swear half of them did not go on to a secondary school. They were just...they had to go...you had to take a route.

Mark B. If one of those friends was going to describe what Diane was like in those days, how would she say...who would she say, you know, what was Diane like?

Diane S. She was fun, but she was mysterious, and I think she was mysterious because she kind of knew. She knew she had these attractions to especially one friend, and she didn't... She cared about saving money, and going to school, and not just hanging out with her friends. I didn't really hang out. You didn't... Because there were some attractions. It became very uncomfortable for me.

Mark B. Good. I'm sure we'll get into that a little later. So you're finishing high school, thinking of college. Was this a big thing in your family? Did other people go to college or you were one of the first ones?

Diane S. I was going to be the first one. And what happened was my dad had said, because I was the first one, he said I will pay for the first two years of your college and then you have to figure out how to go further. And unfortunately, because we were such a small school and such a small number were going on to college, we didn't have any college counselors.

The nuns told us to go to the BPL, the Boston Public Library, and do our research in figuring how to do anything.

Mark B. [Laughs.] Oh, my goodness.

Diane S. I didn't know. My dad didn't make a lot of money. He didn't help me with tuition financing or student loans because he didn't want to tell me how little he made. And I didn't know how. I was, you know, I didn't know how to fill out a form. You need some help. So I thought at least I had two years of college paid for and then I could work with the college folks to help me either get loans, or a scholarship, or work-study.

So my dad also said it would be best for you if you can go to a local college and live at home. And that's horrible for any kid. They should not have to live at home. So my dad made a big mistake, and he was going to surprise me at my graduation and pay for all the tuition, my whole four years. So he invested in a startup company. This is back in 1972.

And he lost everything that he had saved for my college, plus he borrowed on the house. Because now my parents had bought the house, the triple decker that we lived in. He bought the house and borrowed on that. And this is what I'm told. First I'm told there's no money for tuition. And then I'm told... My parents split up the night before my graduation because of this, because that's when my mother found out he borrowed on the house.

Mark B. This is before your high school graduation, correct?

Diane S. The night before my high school graduation. So I was told... Excuse me.
I'm going to take a little water.

Mark B. Feel free to.

Diane S. So I was told—so my graduation was the end of May. I think they warned me around April that I wouldn't be going to college. So I thought maybe I would work a year, save everything I can, and then that would give me some time to figure out financing. And the night before my graduation they said, well... My parents were splitting up. They told me they were splitting up for good. They had already split up probably six or seven times in my lifetime, but this was it, they were done.

And my mother said to me and unfortunately, if you want to live here, you have to pay room and board. And I said, well, how can I save money? I have a high school diploma. How can I save money for college and pay room and board? And she said, well, you can't live here for free because your father has borrowed on the house, and we're splitting up, and I can't afford it.

So I sort of put that out of my head and went to work. Now I'm 17 years old. I wasn't going to be 18 until September. So I had to wait till then to get a good job. I got a job at Polaroid, because you had to be at least 18 to work there. I got a job there because they had tuition assistance. And what I did was I went to school at night for engineering at Northeastern.

Mark B. Wow. That's quite mature and dedicated for someone at that age, Diane. You must have been very determined to see that through.

Diane S. Well, I saw how hard... My mother's mother also didn't graduate. She didn't graduate high school. Neither did my mother. My dad left school in elementary school because his parents split up and he had to help support the family because his older two brothers sort of took off and he had to help his mother with his two sisters, help support them. So he quit school to go to work. This was during the Depression, of course. So I went to Northeastern. It was easy to get in back then, especially because it was a night school. And unfortunately—so that was 1972, and then in 1976—

Mark B. You started there in '72?

Diane S. Yes. As soon as I started at Polaroid I applied for tuition assistance. In the first year they paid 25% for the courses and then after a half a year they would pay 50%, and they kept moving it up, and the longer you worked there the more they paid, so at some point they were paying my entire tuition, but I paid the books, the fees, anything else. But that was really sweet, a sweet deal for me.

The bad news was in 1976 I got diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. So then my courses became delayed, so sometimes I could only take one course a semester. I had 12 surgeries between '76 and when I graduated from college in 1984, so it took me 12 years to get my degree, but I had all those surgeries in between. But I did, I graduated, and then I actually went on and got my MBA.

Mark B. So did you live alone? How did you manage the surgeries and the work and the school? Who supported you?

Diane S. I supported myself.

Mark B. You were very strong willed and did all this on your own?

Diane S. No. I stayed with my mother. I wanted to live with my dad for a while and he said no, that would not be a good idea. So I lived with my mom.

Mark B. And you paid her room and board.

Diane S. I paid her room and board. Now here's the funny part. Remember we have a triple decker. My dad moved to the second floor.

Mark B. [*Laughs.*] Well, they owned the house, so it was the—

Diane S. They owned the house.

Mark B. —cheapest thing for them to do.

Diane S. And because he owed all this money, he couldn't move anywhere else. So it was kind of odd.

Mark B. What kind of work did you do at Polaroid? What did you do there?

Diane S. I started on the assembly line because all I had was a high school diploma. And I worked my way up. I took some—besides going to school at night, because in engineering school you don't get anything hands-on until well towards the very end. So I took calculus and physics. That's not going to get me anywhere at Polaroid right away. So I also took some courses at Polaroid for technician, so I could be an electronics technician.

So I got my way into the instrumentation department, and that's the department that is the upkeep of all the test equipment. And I stayed there, and at one point I left there when I was getting closer to graduation, I left there. I went to the manufacturing, which I really loved. And then when I graduated I got a job as an electrical engineer in the worldwide electronics manufacturing division. And that's where I lived my life.

Mark B. A little bit about origins of electrical engineering. Was there something in particular that fascinated you, that drew you to that? How did you fall into that field?

Diane S. I love math, and I thought accounting was boring. Now little did I know that money management and investing—I wish someone had sort of put me in that direction. I might have gone that way instead. But because I love math and I love science, it just seemed the natural thing.

Mark B. Good. So from 1972 to '84 you're working at Polaroid, you had this time of illness and surgeries and you finished school. Did you have time for anything else? Did you still have religious involvement, friendships?

Diane S. I was going to church every Sunday. Usually Saturday night because sometimes I worked Saturdays just to make some extra money, also at Polaroid. So Saturday afternoon, late afternoon, I would go to my local parish, where I had gone every Sunday, and stayed there. And you could see the numbers dwindling, even in the '70s. The participation at the church was really low. Now of course I'm slowly coming out, but only to myself.

Mark B. How did that unfold? What were you thinking and feeling?

Diane S. Oh, God. I'm not going to say her name, and I don't think anyone in her circle would ever see these transcripts, but I—

Mark B. That's okay. You don't have to say a name.

Diane S. Okay. I fell in love with a friend. And I think because of the dynamics in her family, where she never felt really loved, I was it for her. And we had this relationship for... It started in '73 and it ended...oh, God, somewhere right after I was diagnosed with RA, so somewhere late '76. And she was petrified to be out, petrified. And the funny part is I just ran into her at my aunt's wake, and we hadn't seen each other in over 40 years. So she—uh—oh, are you talking?

Mark B. No.

Diane S. Oh, okay.

Mark B. No, I was trying—I'm sorry, I was trying not to talk. I make signals and motions and things, but you're doing such a great job telling the story, Diane, I'm just totally caught up in listening to you. Thank you. So you met her after 40 years.

Diane S. Yep. And it was—now the funny part is she has a twin sister, so the twin sister and her and a couple other friends were all close. And it used to be uncomfortable that we would kind of push everybody else to find a boyfriend, even though we had her twin sister, we convinced her to date this guy who I knew was really going to be gay, or he was gay who just

wasn't out. And oh yeah, go out with Jerry, go out with Jerry. And so this woman and I could spend some time together.

And a few times we actually were able to go on vacation together. Not for a long vacation, you know, maybe to the Cape for a long weekend or something. But I knew she was never going to be out. And I sort of knew in my head that this life was not for her, that she just wanted to be loved, and I happened to be there.

So we broke up. I had to initiate it and convince her that she was straight, that she would find a man, a good man to love her, and she did. She found a nice man. They have two children. She showed me pictures of her kids last month. And she met my spouse. And the first question she asked my spouse when I wasn't around her was what year did you meet? [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. [*Laughs.*]

Diane S. And my spouse said oh, she was hunting. My spouse and I met in 1978 and we didn't get together until, ooh, '92, so we were friends, but that goes later. I'll tell you. So it was while I was with this woman that I knew I was gay, and it was trying to hide it and go out with my straight friends, and it was just really uncomfortable. So I'm trying to remember—

Mark B. Just want to say a little bit about the milieu? Where did you hear and learn about gay or lesbian? What was that situation like? What do you recall was going on around you that you were aware of or not aware of?

Diane S. My mother's boss—she worked in food services at some small company and her boss was a lesbian. But my mother and her were very close, friendly. So I think that sort of—and that's when I was in high school—and that sort of opened my eyes. And so I heard the word lesbian. And I'm trying to remember.

At my dad's yacht club there was a kid about my age, maybe he was a year or two older than me, and he was definitely gay. And my dad always used to tell me to stay away from him, that it wasn't safe. I thought, well, Donny's a nice guy, you know, what's wrong? No, stay away from him. And I started watching and I realized he was a little more—he was very effeminate and, you know, and his little hands would move, and he would sort of prance around. And I think the rest of the guys in the yacht club allowed him to be there because his dad was high up in the yacht club politics, so they allowed him to be there, but my dad was always, you know, stay away from Donny. So those things in the back of my head.

I remember also having a crush on Marlo Thomas when "That Girl" came out, and a crush on Julie Andrews. When I really think back, I thought oh my god, you know, I thought I always wanted Julie Andrews to be my mother, when really, when I was late high school, right out of high school, I thought oh no, I want to date her because she's hot.

Mark B. That is wonderful.

Diane S. And I think there was also, even in high school there might have been an attraction to a nun. Nothing—I never did anything, I never said anything, but I knew there was this attraction.

Mark B. Speaking of that, did you ever have any aspirations for religious life, or that was never anything you thought or dreamed about?

Diane S. You know, when my parents told me that there was no money for college and my mother said you have to pay room and board, I did go, and this nun that I was attracted to, I did go and say maybe I should think about joining the convent. And she said I don't think the convent is your route. She said take a year. And I was actually looking just for someone to save me. And she said take a year, and if you're really interested, come back. I said okay. And I think she knew and she just didn't want to say the words.

Mark B. Yeah, good, good. So you finished, '84, you said, was the year when you got your degree. And you went right on to an MBA or you took a break?

Diane S. No, I took a break. I took a break and really focused on being an engineer. And I traveled a lot. For that position I had to travel a lot.

Mark B. Travel around the U.S., around the world?

Diane S. Around the world. Mostly in Asia.

Mark B. Just say a bit more about that work. What was it you did there, your responsibilities were in your travel?

Diane S. It was a combination of purchasing—well, not purchasing, but defining the specifications for certain components or also assemblies, electronic

assemblies, depending on what company. So most of them were in Asia. Asia was mostly components. Mexico and Scotland and India were for assemblies.

Mark B. I assume there were not many women in your position around at that time, correct? And what was that experience like?

Diane S. Especially in manufacturing. Most of the women were in software or design. And you would go—I mean, they didn't know what to do with me sometimes in Japan because in Japan it was very common that after dinner you would go to the lounge and then they would have these women available for their guests. And they had no idea what to do.

And so one time I was traveling—I had never traveled to Japan by myself—but one time I was traveling with a purchasing manager and he warned me what was going to happen. He said now I do not partake. He said yes, a lot of guys I've traveled with do partake with these women, so we'll just say no thank you. And I said, well, what are they going to do with me? What they gave me was the vice president of the company we were dealing with. And I'm like my god, this is so uncomfortable.

Thankfully, those things ended after like my third trip there.

But in Taiwan they never saw a woman anywhere except as an assembler on their line, and they were all whispering, whispering, and my boss said to me they don't know what you're doing here. They think you're here as a woman to be with me, not a woman who is an engineer. So I said to the engineers that we were dealing with please explain to these women that I

started on the line, I worked my way up, and now I'm an electrical engineer, and that they too—maybe they don't want to be an electrical engineer—but they too can get a degree. So he was a little uncomfortable, but in Asia, if you ask something, they, unless it's unlawful, they respond. So that was good.

And also at Polaroid I encouraged kids, or young kids, younger women, young guys, usually—I mean, I had a guy who was deaf, and he was working on the line. And I told his mother, because I worked with his mother when I started out, and I said, you know, your son can go further. Just because he's deaf doesn't mean he can't be a technician. And so we encouraged him to go to school.

And then when I became an engineer and I had a staff, I encouraged—and in fact they had all men who worked for me—I encouraged all of them to, if not get a full degree, take some courses, because otherwise you're going to get stuck. And at some point, you know, I had one guy, he was probably 30, and I said Elliott, you're getting married. You want to do something for your family. I said just go get an associate's degree. Let's start there. And he said I'm afraid of math. So we would have like little math tutorials. And he went for it. He never became a full engineer, but I know he got his associate's degree.

Mark B. Did you ever feel that being a woman limited your movement, advancement at Polaroid, or were they really pretty good around that in that day?

Diane S. They said they were good, but they weren't. There were, you know, I actually applied for a job once and I was told, well, you're too young, you're going to get married and have children, and then you're going to leave us hanging. And so I desperately wanted this job. I came so close of saying I'll sign a paper saying I won't get pregnant, because I knew I wasn't going to get pregnant. But I thought man, this is...

And you couldn't complain back then. There was no protection. They only said, they, you know. Well, another time I was told that—I don't know why they even interviewed me because they said, well, we're looking for a black man for this position. Because that's what Polaroid did. This guy was actually honest and said we're looking for a black man because that's what we need. Because they needed so many percentages in all these fields and departments and levels. And I said then why in the world am I here? You think a black man would have the name Diane Sidorowicz, really?

That was the phony part about Polaroid, where they would, one, they had—like every time I would hire someone my boss would say to me you either have to hire a black person or a woman. And I said, well, what about Asian? No. We have enough Asians. It's like oh my god, this is ridiculous. How do I say that to a...? So I had to go to HR and say you need to find me—these are the only applicants I need. And I said this is kind of embarrassing.

So once you had your 10%, so you had your 10% minorities, and everybody was grouped in there—women, blacks, Hispanics, not so many Asians because now the Asians were coming in and taking a lot of engineering jobs—so you had that 10%, then it was hard for you to get another job there. Once that 10% was filled it was hard for me to get another promotion.

Mark B. Let me backtrack a bit. You mentioned meeting your spouse in 1978. Do you want to talk about how it was that you met and how that happened?

Diane S. Well, you want to do that or how I found Dignity?

Mark B. You go, wherever you want to go next. That's fine.

Diane S. Well, chronologically I found Dignity first.

Mark B. Go there. Go for it.

Diane S. All right. So when I was coming out, it wasn't GCN—GCN, gay...?

Mark B. Gay Community News?

Diane S. Yeah, Gay Community News. It wasn't that one. It was another paper like the Real Paper, or whatever it was in Boston that I got a hold of, and I found out that there was a gay newspaper. That's how I found out, the gay newspaper. So I found out it was a...I think it was a little gay bookstore on Bromfield Street in Boston. And so one day I went there. Now it's on a street where there's no storefronts. And I went up to the second floor, and it was an old, little musty room with a lot of books and some newspapers

and an old dyke sitting behind a desk. And I think I bought a couple of books and I saw the gay newspaper, so I picked it up.

And I went home and devoured it. Devoured that newspaper. And I don't know how many issues of that newspaper I read. It wasn't a lot before I found an ad that said—now the ad was tiny. It was like those little personnel ads they had. Well, there was an ad and it said “Gay and Catholic.” And I thought gay and Catholic? Please. And it had an address of where they met. It said Dignity Boston and an address on Boylston Street. And so I said, well, I'm going to go.

Now the problem was the first week I went the address was wrong. There was a digit missing. So it didn't name the church, it just gave the address. So I was up and down Boylston Street forever looking for this address. I said there's no building. I even asked somebody on the street, like a cop or something, a meter maid, I don't know, is this a real address. And they said oh no, there's no such number. I thought ah, what a joke. Some jerk is probably sitting around watching me go up and down looking for this number.

A couple weeks later—now I couldn't get the newspaper every week because it required me to go into Boston either during 9:00 to 5:00 during the week or on Saturday I think it was open until 3:00 or something. So I found another time to get there, bought another newspaper, and the address was now different. And I thought okay, this is it. So I went. It was at St. Clement's Church.

Mark B. Do you remember what year this was?

Diane S. 1975. It was the end of November. I think it was the Sunday before Thanksgiving 1975. I parked in front. I found a space right in front of the church, like half an hour early. I sat there and I watched people go in, mostly men. And I kind of thought well, yeah, they could be gay. Because I never wanted to assume anyone was gay or anybody wasn't gay.

And then it's 5:25 and I'm thinking all right, you're either going to go in or you're not. So I thought well, I'll go in, I'll sit at the back of the church, if I get nervous, I'll leave. So I go in, look in the main sanctuary, it's dark. Dark as can be. And I'm thinking oh my god, I'm set up again. And then I'm getting nervous about who's playing this stupid game with me. Of course it was playing with me, not anybody else.

Mark B. Of course.

Diane S. And a guy comes behind me and he says excuse me, can I help you? So I didn't want to say Dignity. I said I'm looking for the 5:30 service. He says oh, it's downstairs. Now I don't know if you've ever been in the St. Clement's church. It's an older church. So now there's an iron gate and a winding stone staircase to take you to the basement. And I'm thinking oh, my god. I said oh, okay. And he says, well, you know, it's going to be starting soon, come. He takes my elbow. He starts leading me down. I mean, very politely. But he just sort of, you know, sort of guiding me to the stairs so I know where the stairs are. And I thought oh my god. My

car's outside, so at least that's a clue for anyone that's looking for me if I go missing.

I go down there and men are laughing, people are talking. I look around. There's one other woman there. And I'm thinking this is not a Catholic mass. People are talking. And we're sitting on folding chairs. But there's an altar, or a table, and a crucifix, and candles. The guy who brought me downstairs introduces himself to me, which was not done in the Catholic church, asked my name. And I said oh no, I'll just sit right here.

And it was winter, so I had my coat on. Now you go to church, you always left your coat on, even if it was winter. It's kind of weird. Here everyone took off their coats, like they're here for the long-term and we're going to get comfortable. I sat there with my winter jacket zippered.

And it was an incredible liturgy. They didn't even use inclusive language back then, but it was very welcoming. The sign of peace was—and people were very polite because I was brand new, so most of them, I mean, most of the guys that knew each other would either hug or kiss, and most people were just shaking my hand. And after the liturgy they invited me to stay for coffee, which I did for just a little bit. And my heart's racing. And people asked me how I found them, and people are introducing me to other folks, and please come back.

And I left and I thought oh my god, I've never ex—these are the liturgies that you would only experience when you went on a very good retreat with people who were trained to do retreats and have a liturgy that you

could really feel included. And I started to cry. It was really hard. I went back the following week and lo and behold, people remembered my name. I thought you remember me? And they said, well yeah. And, you know, after that I knew I was never going to go back to my home parish. This was what I needed.

Because my home parish was just so hard. I mean, our pastor didn't even believe in the sign of peace. Even though it's in the damn Bible that Jesus offered the sign of peace be with you. He refused to do it. I don't know, did he not want to touch someone? But in China, you know, I went to mass all the time, and you do not shake hands. You put your hands together like you're praying and you bow. And that's their sign of peace. At my home parish it was so sad that they didn't want to do that.

So that's how I found Dignity. And I never left. And the following year I got elected to the board. I said I don't know anything about being on a board of directors. They said oh, please, this is Dignity Boston. We'll guide you. And I get elected to the board and next thing I'm elected treasurer.

It was nothing but family. That was my true family. They were there all the time for me. You needed something, they were all my big brothers. When my grandmother died it was friends from Dignity. Back then you used to have the afternoon service, the evening service, and between people who lived further away, family members, would come to the closest house to eat dinner. And it was my Dignity friends that made

dinner for my whole family in between those services, the wake services for my grandmother.

And I thought, you know, you folks hate me for being gay, but here are the people—yeah, we don't see any of your friends making dinner. My friends are coming forward. And my friends all showed up. Any time there was a funeral they showed up, or wake they showed up. So that's my introduction to Dignity.

Mark B. That's an amazing story. That's wonderful. So you met your spouse at Dignity, or related to Dignity?

Diane S. Yes. My spouse is from Cuba. And she came to Boston in '77 to go to school for her graduate school. And she met a woman and they started to live together. And that woman brought her to Dignity and said I want you to... I know that there... Now her spouse or the woman she was with at that time didn't come to Dignity, but she knew of Dignity, and so she brought her to Dignity. And I don't think I met her the first Sunday she was there because it was Easter Sunday and I was off with my family. But when I met her, now I'm still treasurer, and they were going to join as a couple. And so her partner at the time did all the talking. And I knew this woman was from Cuba, so I didn't think she spoke English because she just sort of—this was like her second or third time at Dignity and she was still in shock about what's happening here. And I just went over to her and introduced myself, and that's when I realized she spoke English. And that's how we met. We became...

The first year or so it was really just at Dignity we would see each other. And it was probably '79, '80 that we became friends. And when we became friends I was with someone else, she was with her partner. And I think we both used to say to each other: why is she with that person? Not that we were going to be together ourselves, but why, you know, I would say to myself why is Lourdes with that person? Oh, my god. And she would say the same about me to herself, but we didn't tell each other until years later.

So we became very involved in a lot of Dignity Boston projects. We had these crappy hymnals that we decided to—because sometimes you'd just have sheets of paper, you'd lose them. We had some hymnals that were so old, falling apart, and we decided to do a hymnal project. And we did that. Lourdes and I and another guy who did all the typing of the songs, because he had a better computer. He had the best computer at the time. And we assembled teams to build the new hymnals.

And I said, well—because we were going to use the binders that you could open up and add a new song if you wanted to—so I said so that they don't rip out we're going to put reinforcers. And it was cheaper to buy the little rings and put them on ourselves rather than to buy the papers that already have them, because it was all about saving money, because we only had a little budget.

So we did all that together. We did the newsletter together. There were a couple other projects that we did together, and we became really close

friends. Then she broke up with the woman she was with and I was still with the woman I was with back then. And then Lourdes met somebody new, and then I broke up with the woman I was with. And then at one point the woman I was with, after we broke up we got back together, which was a mistake. And after a couple years I thought oh, you know, we were going to break up, we don't belong together, this is crazy.

And I get a phone call from Lourdes one day out of the clear blue telling me that her and this other woman (Si), that she was with, Si just walked out and they split up. She said so maybe we can have dinner some night. Because we had sort of, our friendship had sort of... When she was with this woman Si we sort of weren't that close anymore. And I said okay. I said I need to tell you that Pat and I are also breaking up, Pat's moving out. And she said well, I guess dinner will be very interesting now. And so we realized that there was this attraction for all those years, and we started to date. And here we are 27 years later.

Mark B. Good, good, good.

Diane S. And I think the attraction was that she was...it's not that she was part of Dignity, it was that she was a spiritual person, and she wasn't going to keep me from Dignity because her spouse—or not spouse at the time—her partner Si was not religious, and so Lourdes stayed away from Dignity on a regular basis.

I mean, when we lived in Boston we were there every Sunday, and were very, very involved. I was treasurer many times. She was president, she

was vice president, she was on different—even though we live in Provincetown, she's still on the liturgy committee for Boston. I mean, we try to get there every other week when we're here in the States. Of course when we're in P.R. she's still on the committee, but she does it by phone.

Mark B. What about national Dignity? When did you first go to a Dignity convention and what was that experience like, or how were you involved in Dignity nationally?

Diane S. Well, back then, when I first joined Dignity, there were things called regional reps, because there were so many regions. There were so many chapters. I want to say there were 40, 50 chapters. I mean, even in Massachusetts alone I think we had three or four chapters. That's a lot. And so I was elected—when I left the board I was elected regional rep. And our region was New England. And we would get together, I want to say, once a month on a Saturday.

And so our—I forget what they were called—our regional director was on the Dignity board. So the regional directors would get together maybe twice a year, or maybe four—I forget how often they met together for meetings, and then they would come back and we would have our regional meetings. And I did that for, oh, god, I want to say four years, maybe. And maybe longer. I can't remember how long I was regional rep for.

In fact I was going to be—the regional director was leaving and he was trying to groom me to be regional director. But I had so much going on with having RA and going to school that I thought it was going to be a

little too much for me to do all this traveling. And then, unfortunately, the woman I was with had an affair, and I thought, you know, I don't have any energy to do anything, and I stopped being regional rep. So I sort of stayed away from the national scene at that time. But my first convention was in Chicago. I can't remember if it was '77 or '79.

Mark B. We can look it up. We can look that up later and add that in.

Diane S. So whenever Chicago had the first one, '77 or '79. And it was, you know, it was again like a giant retreat. It was fun. You had big dress up dance parties, and lots of great speakers, and incredible liturgies. And I went... I missed a couple of conventions because of either surgery or because of school. Because they used to be Labor Day weekend. And if I took a summer course, Northeastern ran on quarters, so they were way...

They finally caught up with the whole college world. But my fall class didn't begin until the third or fourth week in September, so my finals of a summer class was right after Labor Day. So it was really hard to travel then. So depending, I mean, if I had an easy final I could go, but if I had a tough course I wasn't going to take a weekend, especially if it was across country. So I went to, sporadically I went to—

Mark B. The national conventions.

Diane S. It all depended what was going on on the national scene. Sometimes I thought oh, you know, I don't like this president, I don't like what he's doing. Or I didn't like the direction the national office was headed. But

then Lourdes, we went to a few conventions together. But I also went with my partner before her. We used to go to a few conventions. And then there was that time when Dignity was questionable, Dignity U.S.A. was questionable. And then Lourdes got involved on the board.

Mark B. Around what year was that, do you recall?

Diane S. Oh, god. Hm.

Mark B. If you're not, again, we can always look it up and add it later.

Diane S. Let's see, because Chris Pett has been president for two years, Lewis for two, Lourdes was president for four, vice president for four and then on the board, so go back 13 years.

Mark B. 13 to 15 years or so, okay.

Diane S. So 2005, 2006 she joined the board. And she was on the board for one year, vice president, president. Then they changed how they do their conventions and they have a national convention committee, and a national liturgy committee, so she got herself involved there. And I just sort of sat back. I just stayed on the Boston scene.

Mark B. Good. What about Dignity, reflections...back in the early years Dignity was primarily men. As a woman, how did you feel limited or affirmed in terms of being a woman in that setting, and what were some issues you dealt with?

Diane S. Well, every time they needed a woman they had like, you know, two or three of us to choose from, and so it was really hard. It was like oh my

god, we need a woman. No, you don't always need a woman, guys. Come on, just...it's okay. But back in the '70s only the ordained presider distributed the host. Anyone else could hold the cup because you're not touching anything.

And then Tom Oddo, Father Tom Oddo decided that anyone could do communion, and they were going to start and just have a man and a woman, in the very beginning, do the very first one, and I was chosen. And I thought, wow, what an honor. But then I thought, well, there's only four of us that came on a regular basis, and two of them were a little crazy.

Mark B. *[Laughs.]*

Diane S. And the other one was the president, and they weren't going to ask her because it would have been too...you know, all right, they're asking her because she's the president. So even though I felt honored in the beginning, when I thought about it I thought oh yeah, you know, you can't pick a woman who threw herself off the stage at a dance one time because the president, who was a woman, didn't show her any attention. So, you know, it was like... Another woman who lived with I don't know how many cats. So they asked me.

But it was an honor, and it was a way of starting... But I never felt...I always felt equal. And we went through a stage about inclusive language, and that came slowly. But it's really hard when—and I struggled with this for many years—yes, I was made in God's image and likeness, but I'm a woman and God was always a man. Well, did I have a problem with that?

I don't know. Because God was supposed to be powerful, and all I knew for power was my dad, who was very strong.

And even though I never felt less in the church, in Dignity, not in the main—yes, in the institutional church yes, I felt less. In fact I did not—they wanted all.. When you were in high school they expected all the girls who lived in the parish to be in charge of the church linens. That was something that the freshmen and sophomore girls did. And we didn't even have girl altar servers back then.

And I thought I'm not going to do the laundry, no. This church doesn't even want to do the sign of peace and you want me to wash the linens? Little did we know what also was going on with the priests. I mean, that was not even talked about back then. So I did feel it there. But I never felt, even though the language was not changed yet at Dignity Boston, I never felt less of an equal member.

Mark B. Good. Maybe let's switch gears again back to your professional life. So you worked at Polaroid until you retired. Want to wrap it up, and when is it you retired? How did all that play out?

Diane S. I left in 2001 due to the disability of having RA. There was no way I could travel anymore. I mean, I would...and traveling, it's not just the traveling part, it's that when you work somewhere else you work longer days, 12 to 14 hours almost every day. And then you come back and they expect you to show up at work the next day. And I was still having surgeries, and it

was really hard to schedule them in, and I was going to have to have a couple of major surgeries. And I could barely walk at times.

I asked to have a lessened schedule with little or no travel for six months to a year and my boss said no, we can't. You have to find another position within Polaroid. Well, at that time Polaroid was downsizing and downsizing, and they were going to move again even further away from my home. And I thought, you know, this is time to step out, so I did.

And after two years on disability I thought I'm doing better, I'm going to start looking for a job. But all the things that I did, like I looked at Bowes. Bowes actually came looking for me. But their factory was in Stowe, which was a good...from where I lived—

Mark B. You and Lourdes were living together then? Where?

Diane S. Oh, yeah, yeah.

Mark B. And where were you then?

Diane S. We were living in Dorchester.

Mark B. Still Dorchester, okay.

Diane S. Not my house, a different house, thank God. In a much nicer neighborhood. And it was a good 40 miles. And the traffic, I said I can't be traveling maybe up to 90 minutes one way, especially coming home. In the morning I could get there because I was an early riser, but coming home hitting traffic. I said to Lourdes, well, either we move sort of midway between our jobs or I can't take this job.

And I looked around some more, but it was again either traveling a lot or having a position, you know, a factory too far out of the Boston area.

When I grew up, you know, we had Gillette also had a big factory. We had a lot of factories within a 15 mile radius of us.

Mark B. Maybe just briefly what was Lourdes' vocation? What did she do professionally?

Diane S. Psychologist.

Mark B. Psychologist, okay. In a clinic, in a private practice, or some of both?

Diane S. She started...she was a staff psychologist at Simmons College in Boston. And that was an easy commute for her. And even if she needed to she could take the train. Take the train and a trolley. And then she left there, I forget what year. Somewhere maybe late '90s and went to work at Rasi Associates with her friend Richard Rasi, who was also an ordained presider at Dignity. And that was in Copley Square. And when Rich died his partner kept the practice for a year and then said I need to sell it, Lourdes, do you want to buy it?

And so she said to me—now I'm still hunting for jobs and trying to figure out what I want to do. And I said, well, it's been—so that was two thousand—he died in 2003, so this is 2004. And I said okay. I will...let's look into buying this practice. And she said if you took care of all the business end, I can do the clinical end. And I looked at the numbers and realized that Rich had had a horrible bookkeeper who didn't—if you got a

denial from the insurance company she would just accept it as a denial and not do any follow-up, so there were thousands of dollars going out the window. So I said, Lourdes, we can—yeah, there's a way to make money here. So we bought the practice, and we bought it in 2004, and we sold it in 2016 when I pushed her to retire.

Mark B. Good. Excellent. So then you moved to Provincetown in your retirement.

Diane S. Yes. Well, we bought here in '96. When I came out, I didn't come out to my dad until later. And when he found out he stopped talking to me completely, and actually threatened to kill me one night. So we didn't talk for, God... Before he died we probably weren't speaking for at least seven, eight years, no contact at all.

And when he died he left me money. And when he died I found out that he would still brag to people that I worked my way through college, I got an advanced degree, and his big shot engineer daughter. Even though he couldn't deal with my life. And so he left me some money. In fact, it was enough for a down payment here. And every year we toast him because otherwise we wouldn't have had money for a down payment. And here we are.

Mark B. Amazing. So what's the relationship with other family members? How has that played out over the years?

Diane S. My mother was disgusted with me, even though her boss and friend was a lesbian, not her daughter, no. So we—and plus I was not her favorite

child. I wasn't even close. I was a disappointment her whole life because I liked to do math and science, read and go fishing, all the things that she hated. She liked to sit home and watch stupid programs. She knitted or crocheted or did something. She didn't know how to cook. I like to cook. So we had nothing in common. And then coming out made it even worse.

And my oldest brother was her very favorite. He could do no wrong. She's the mother where you read in the paper or you see it on the news the kid's always in trouble and the mother says not my son, my son's a good boy. My son's the best boy. That was my mother. And my brother got—my brother went to prison three times in his life and my mother said he was wrongly convicted all the time, every time.

She used to go every Sunday, whatever prison he was in, every Sunday to visit him. I was in the hospital having surgery and she would not come because it was in the summer and it was too hot to drive to the hospital. In fact, my spouse, Lourdes, says now I can't believe that you would drive yourself to the hospital for a surgery. I said well, yeah, if it wasn't on my leg I could drive home. So yeah, I've driven myself to the hospital a few times for surgery.

Mark B. Astounding.

Diane S. Especially if it was just an overnight surgery. That was easy. But I know, it's...I'm not... This is not about sympathy. This is about how my mother...how little she loved me, or even liked me. I knew she didn't like me, but she also didn't love me. The last thing she said to me was—we

were on our way to an uncle's funeral, wake, I'm sorry, the wake—and she said, you know, you have hurt me so much in your life. And I'm thinking hurt her? All I did was come out. You have hurt me so much in your life. I pray that something happens to you, and you suffer, and I'm alive to see you suffer. And so that was it. That was the last. After that I had no contact with her.

Mark B. We're drawing to a close here. Any other reflections on Dignity? We were just in Chicago for Dignity's 50th anniversary. You were around for a lot of those years. As you see it, what have been the gifts, the strengths that Dignity has brought? What are its challenges? Just any reflections you might want to offer after all the time you've been around and involved with Dignity.

Diane S. It's wonderful to see how much Dignity has grown because all the chapters are so different. I mean, Boston is very inclusive. But you go to other chapters and it's very male dominated, and you could just pick them up and put them in, you know, your local church, your local parish, and you wouldn't know the difference except that they were gay men. And they wanted to be so strict with their language, their songs, their rituals. And I think when some of them come to the convention and they see liturgical dance, inclusive language, laypeople on the altar, it has to...you have to be pushed a little bit. And I think even with the keynote speakers. I mean, we have...this year they were over the top. They hit it right for the 50th with the keynote speakers. But you see them growing. Every

convention you see a little more growth with participation, getting the message across, feeling...

Like this year we had a mother came with her gay son and she had to bring the younger daughter also. We didn't ask what the situation with the father was, but we just knew about this little family. And the mother signs up and she signs up to be a Eucharistic minister. She doesn't know anything about Dignity. And they participated in everything, every event. And the son was young. I think he's in college. So the under 30 crowd he got connected with. And they were having a group picture, and they go and they grab him—Andrew, come for the group picture for the under 30 crowd.

And I thought, you know, I used to think Dignity U.S.A. was going to dissolve and there would be a few Dignity chapters that stayed alive, and that was it. But now with the international movement, which actually it started at the last convention we saw a lot of interactions with the international movement.

In my heart I think if we have one person a year find Dignity—because the convention before I think there was somebody from the middle of the country, not close to any chapter at all, found Dignity, comes to Boston for the convention. It's just amazing. You just... That's all I need. I need one person to find Dignity. Like it's worthwhile. We have a purpose.

Mark B. Excellent. Just closing, any other aspirations for you and Lourdes at this time in your life? What are you involved in? Do you have some dreams, plans?

Diane S. I think now, I mean, because my—I saw my parents struggle financially for so many years. Now that we're retired, our financial advisor said you have to start spending your money. You don't want to die with all this money. You don't have children. I mean, yes, you have some nieces and nephews you want to help with college, but do you want to really leave all this money to someone or an organization? I mean, even our house in P-town is worth a lot of money now. It just, I mean, P-town has skyrocketed. So she said start spending your money. And she's forcing us to take money out every month.

So we did. We went to Italy this year, and we used miles so that we could get the sleeping pods. And so Lourdes said to me, okay, we go to Europe any time you're getting me a sleeping pod. So I said, well, that's where our money... So now we're starting to say okay, let's... For many years we never traveled because her parents were elderly, they needed help. She was always afraid, Lourdes was always afraid we'd be too far away for her to get back to Puerto Rico in time. That's where they live. So travel.

We are slowly getting involved with activities in Provincetown. There's a group called HOW, which is Helping Our Women. And there are ways to help—and it's not just women that we help. There's also men that get some of the services. But it's mostly geared towards women. We're

getting involved in different activities that happen in town. We have a plot in the community garden. We're growing vegetables this year.

Mark B. Very fine.

Diane S. We're still going to Boston, of course. Our main group of friends live in Boston. So a lot of them come here. You know, people want to come to P-town for vacation or they want to come to San Juan for vacation. So even though we're away, we go to them when we're there or people come here to us.

Mark B. Good. Well, thank you so much for this time, Diane. Any other, anything maybe you haven't, you thought about you wanted to mention that you haven't mentioned yet in terms of some significance in terms of your life journey?

Diane S. I think that I am... I am in awe of people who can... I'm a numbers person. I'm a straight angle person, engineer. Everything's black or white. The switch is on, the switch is off. But people who can actually, who are visionaries, I admire because I'm not a visionary when it comes to spiritual things.

And Dignity. I can do things like oh yeah, we need to make new music books, and this is how we're going to make them, and reinforcing the pages. Things like that I can do, something concrete. But these things of—we started a liturgy and celebration of women back in the '80s in Dignity Boston, and then it grew to inclusive language, and lay presiders. And that

was nothing that would ever be on my radar. And I think because a lot of these women who were visionaries wanted to be priests. I never wanted to be a priest growing up, never ever. It just didn't seem fun. So I think that's what it is. And I admire.

And I admire when we have these keynote speakers, that they're... You have to sit up and take notice and pay attention, and oh my god, I never thought—I would think I never thought of that. And I don't know how many times I say that to myself. Or even we have some wonderful homilists in Boston, the same thing.

And I have to brag. Lourdes is also a great homilist. And every time she writes something it's like oh my god, yeah, how do you think of this stuff? And she says, well, it's the same way, how do you think to create a new recipe that you're cooking or how you do math, or math puzzles. I do math puzzles for fun. I think that's how I want it to end, our conversation.

Mark B. Thank you so much, Diane. This was just really wonderful. I will stop the recording, okay?

Diane S. Sure.

01:22:30 *[End of recording.]*