Q: Hi, my name is April Arcibal, and I’m here with Pat Cramer. We are doing an interview on the American studies project for Professor Laurie Green. It is November 1, 2017, and we’re here at Pat Cramer’s home, located in Austin, Texas. We’re going to talk to Pat about her experience with activism in Austin, Texas. So to start off, when and where were you born?

A: I was born in Seattle, Washington in 1949, and I moved to Austin in 1967 to go to UT, and I don’t know why I decided on UT at all. They had this program called Plan Two, and that was my major. It was Plan Two, which is basically you don’t know anything, so you just -- and I didn’t graduate until 1977, and I graduated with a bachelor of science in nursing because my plan at the time, when I started studying nursing, was I knew that nurses made a lot of money. And I was going to become a nurse and make a lot of money, and of course save it all because I was a hippie, and we saved money. You don’t buy shit. And then I was going to move out to the country, you know, and live out on a farm. That was my idea. Well, in the meantime, that’s when we went out on strike and I had -- course, you know, had to quit school so I could participate actively in the
strike, you know. And all these people came out to our
picket line, the New American Movement folks, and I became
part of the Bread and Roses collective, which was this
house over on, just west of UT. It wasn’t Pearl. Maybe it
was Rio Grande. I can’t remember. It was over there. And
it was the progressive organizing space at UT. And the New
American Movement met out of there, and other groups did
too. And so we had all this labor organizing going on over
there, and oh, we just had a good old time and --
organizing marches, you know, against the nuclear power
plant and anything else that we need to organize around.

And my experience at UT was, it was very great. I had a
great time at UT. You could drop in and drop out so
easily, and it was so inexpensive that you could -- you
know, I went, you know, I dropped out and went to Mexico
for a while and came back. And then I went back to school,
and then something happened, and I moved to Houston and
went to work in Houston for a while and came back. And
then I went on that trip around the world with that
international school, and when I came back, that was the
early ’70s. I wanted to keep on traveling, and I knew that
I would get embedded though once I returned, and sure
enough that is just what happened is I got embedded in life
back in Austin. And so I stayed, and that’s, I think, that may have been when I decided to study nursing. I don’t know. Because that was -- and I graduated in -- I must have been working. I don’t know. I was down in Houston for a while working, and it was when I was taking classes for nursing school, and that’s -- and I was a shuttle bus driver, and I was active with the Bread and Roses and everything like that. And I dropped out when we went on strike because it was such a thrilling experience. I had to be part of it, and --

Q: So what type of strikes were you involved in?

A: Well, just that one, but I’ll tell you what, back earlier in Austin history was the Economy Furniture worker strike, which still resonated at that time in Austin. And Gonzalo Barrientos, who used to be our state senator, was an activist with the Economy Furniture strike. He helped organize the Latinos. And the Chicano movement was going on at the same time, you know, and there was marches from Saint Ed’s down South Congress to the capitol for the farm workers. Oh, and Cesar Chavez, they were organizing for Cesar Chavez, and then when the workers down in the valley thought that Cesar Chavez wasn’t getting around to them fast enough they formed a Texas farm workers union, and so we all supported the Texas farm workers union, marched to
the capitol. There’s just lots of stuff going on, and I just learned so much about the labor movement and the history of progressive, you know, progressivism in the United States from the New American Movement people. And the women’s political caucus formed I don’t know when nationally, but I remember it was around, I think, Janna Zumbrun, who was a lesbian activist, joined the women’s political caucus around ’75, and they cut their teeth on political endorsements and organizing people to volunteer for candidates and get out the vote and get people elected.

Well, after the success of the women’s political caucus Janna was the one who wanted to start the lesbian/gay political caucus and wanted to endorse, and I had come out in ’76, and so me and my girlfriend fell right into that organizing. And there was -- Anita Bryant was going through the United States with her campaign to save the children from homosexuals. She was the spokesperson for orange juice, the Florida orange juice industry. And she came through town, and we just organized a big old rally down on Auditorium Shores, you know, against her. And there was this -- two distinguished retired military people, people who had been kicked out of the military for being gay, and they went on a national tour, and there was
the MEMCC, the Metropolitan Community Church had just formed, which was a queer church, and so Troy Perry, who was a minister who started the church, he went on a tour. And so what we did, we wanted Austin to be on their tour, so we organized a banquet for them. And that was right around Anita Bryant time and all that time, and it was after that, ’78, that we formed the lesbian/gay political caucus here in Austin, and Janna and Steve Thomas were chair and co-chair, and my girlfriend was on the board. I was just a -- I was an activist. I just did whatever needed to be done at the time. And so after that I started -- I stopped focusing on issues, issue campaigns like the anti-nucs and abortion rights and women’s rights and went more for electoral politics. But all sorts of organizations were going on, and you know, we all helped everything that we could. So anyway, that was ’78, and then in ’79 Houston formed their political caucus, but we were first in the state, and then also in the early ’80s we formed a lobby and organization too, but that’s the ’80s, and we’re not into that. And let’s see --

Q: So tell me your experience in, I guess, creating one of the first lesbian/gay --

A: We used mimeographs, okay. There was -- I don’t even know if they had a Xerox machine back then. Okay, so we ran
mimeographs, you know, and our newsletters were mimeographs. We borrowed a mimeograph machine from down at that place on the drag. People’s Community Clinic started in the basement of that Congregational Church right there.

Q: Oh, wow, because that’s - okay.

A: That’s -- yeah, it was in the basement of that church that they started People’s Community Clinic. And it was there for many years. And where was I going with that? I don’t know. I don’t know. Let’s see, and People’s Community Clinic, and they helped people, you know, bunch of hippies, you know, go there to get their healthcare, but being -- ifs you were a UT student you could get healthcare at the UT health center, which was very fortunate. The breakfast project was Larry Jackson, and it was part of the Black activist’s movement in east Austin, coming out of east Austin, and the Brown Berets were the Chicano activists at the time. And they were very active too, you know, supporting all the labor struggles, and they had these brown berets and (inaudible). And they were organizing, you know, about that boat racism, getting after those -- that boating stuff in east Austin over by Fiesta Gardens.

Q: Can you explain a little bit about the boat?

A: So it was every summer Austin -- I don’t know. It was like this old Austin chamber of commerce types organized an
annual summer fair and fest in August of all times. August, oh, my God, so hot here, to do anything -- but they would have music, and then part of their (inaudible) was having these boat races on Town Lake east of I-35, and it would deafen the community for days with these boats, and it was all these rich white people, and so of course, you know, the people felt, you know, like they were being sat upon. And so anyway, that was one of the projects that the Brown Berets took on, was getting the boat races out of east Austin. So all the UT activists went to go help, you know, and there was demonstrations and people getting beat up and by the cops and everything like that, but eventually, you know, those boat races did get stopped. And yeah, it was successful.

A: How long did it take for that?

Q: Oh, I don’t know. I don’t know. Not too long, a couple years maybe, yeah. I can’t remember when they stopped it. I would have to look it up, yeah. And so anyway, the -- and then was just a lot of Chicano activism, Black activism, and the breakfast project, Larry Jackson’s breakfast project was part of that. And sending kids over to the UT to collect money, you know, for just doing whatever the hell Larry Jackson wanted to do. I do now know what he wanted to do. And let’s see. I remember the
biggest anti-war demonstration. I remember just being on Tenth Street in between Caprice and Colorado because I think we were heading for the, from the governor’s mansion down to the capitol, and the tenth street was packed solid with people, and it was a lot of UT, you know, professors and workers and students.

Q: At that time, were most of the -- was the population mostly UT students, people from the university in Austin?
A: Well --

Q: Because I know it wasn’t as developed as it is now.
A: Well, you know what, I don’t know how many students were in the student body at the time, but with the population of 150,000, I don’t know if they included the students in their count. I don’t know. So anyway, yes, UT students were a big part. That was -- they were the leaders of the anti-war effort in Austin. It came out of UT. I know that SDS was active, but I never found out about SDS until, you know, later on. You know, New American Movement was the first activist organization, you know, progressive organization, that I associated with, and SDS, I guess, came before that.

Q: And what was SDS exactly?
A: Students for a Democratic Society, and they were -- they organized, you know, on campus in the ’60s anti-war
efforts. And you know, I don’t -- see, I’m not familiar with the early stuff of that. But I know it was a large anti-war group. And Black Panthers was around at that time too. And all sorts of stuff going on. It was a time of a lot of people, you know.

Q: Doing a lot of things?

A: Yeah, and the thing was is that the ’50s was such a repressive era, you know. It’s like, you know, it was so white bread, so Eisenhower, (inaudible) Eisenhower, and Leave it to Beaver, and it was just so unreal. It didn’t really have anything to do with reality, what we were seeing as students on campus. It was, you know, a totally different world, and I think, you know, it just broadened everybody’s horizons to be in Austin at the time and coming from a repressive society, you know, era of the ’50s, and all of a sudden to we have people, you know, and I guess it all came from the Black movement, the Civil Rights Movement. That started all the activism in the ’50s, and it all bowled over into the ’60s, and everybody started to question and disagree on the status quo and going along with the president and whatever the general -- oh, no, no, no, no.

Q: Well, especially in Austin because Austin is so liberal compared to the rest of Texas in general, so.
A: Mm-hmm, and I didn’t know that at the time, but hey, 50 years ago, and let’s see, and I do remember running north from the capital, you know, trying to get out of the tear gas after one of the demonstrations. That may have been that big one. I think that was after Kent State. In the ’70s there was these students killed on Kent State campus, and people erupted over that, and also there was some secret bombing of like Tonkin Bay. People got real upset over that, and that spawned big demonstrations, you know, when shit would hit the fan like that. And so it would be really big protests, and on campus there was this place called the Chuck Wagon Café, and that’s where a lot of people met up and talked about stuff, and there was even a sit in there. And I don’t know if they used tear gas to shut it down or not, oh yeah. And I, you know what, I was always -- felt like I was -- I never wanted to be a housewife. You know, I loved my parents deeply, but when they’re -- you know, it’s like, my mom’s life was all about her children and keeping the house.

Q: Right, well, that was the status quo back then, to be a housewife.

A: Yeah, yeah, and I didn’t want to have anything to do with that. I knew that way back when. I knew that was not for me. And so I always was, you know, doing whatever the hell
I wanted to do. And you know, of course it drove my parents crazy, but you know, they still supported me, and I was -- I’m sure, you know, I was rude. I’m sure I was just a terrible child sometimes. I’m sure of that, but I’m grateful to them now, you know, for everything they did for me, you know. I wouldn’t be the person I was, but I was just ready to try anything new, and I wasn’t scared. And thankfully, you know, I’m still around to tell these tales, and thankfully I never had to go to jail or anything like that. I went to jail one time. That was when -- I think that may have been the ’70s. I can’t remember. It was Kissinger, Henry Kissinger who had been Secretary of State under Nixon --

Q: We’d have to look it up.

A: I know. Henry Kissinger came to town. We all knew he was a war criminal, and so we had a demonstration planned on the UT campus where he was speaking, and we all just stood up silently and held a banner that said, you know, you’re a war criminal or something like that, and the police all arrested us and threw us in jail. That was the first time I’d been jailed as part of a protest, but we did have a lawyer, Bobby Nelson, all lined up. She and her husband, Martin Wiginton, owned the split rail, which was a great place to go to just south of the river, and then they had
this place called Emma Joe’s up by (inaudible) on Guadalupe, and so anyway, Bobby Nelson was our attorney, and we just spent, you know, a few hours singing songs in the jail, and then they got us out. It was so funny. This was when I was a little straight girl, and I had gone with my boyfriend the previous night to a gay bar with our gay friend. It was called Pearl Street Warehouse. And we -- he got into a fight with the DJ. Well, they called the cops, and they hauled our gay friend down to jail, and so I stupidly talked my boyfriend into going down to the police department and telling them he did nothing wrong and try to get him wrong. And of course when we went down to the police department, and I knocked on the door -- my boyfriend tried to talk me out of it, but oh no, I wouldn’t hear that. And I’m sure alcohol was involved. And so we went down to the cop shop, and I knocked on the door, and they opened it up, and I said, “We’re here, Kent Carrington, he was arrested, and we wanted to see if we could get him out.” He said, “Oh, do you?” He said, “Just wait a moment.” So he closed the door, and then he opened the full door, and he and another cop came out and arrested us both and threw us in jail overnight for public intoxication.

Q: Oh no.
It was -- and so we spent the night in jail the night before our planned demonstration. And I was in a cell with this woman who had been high on drugs at some concert, and they popped her and threw her in jail. So we got out the next morning. I went over to UT, you know, we were in the demonstration, by God, I was back in the same booking room the very next afternoon. And the cop looked down at me. He said, “Weren’t you in here last night? And I -- what were you in for?” “You know,” I said, “armed robbery.” I was such a smartass, yeah. But anyway, it was so funny. The two times I’ve been to jail it was back-to-back, you know, overnight and then a few hours the next afternoon, and you know, it was funny. That was -- that must have been like ’75, something like that, because I’m still a little girl, straight girl.

What age were you at that time?

Let’s see, I was born in ’49, so I was like 26 in ’75. I was a late bloomer. What happened was this girl who was in one of my classes for nursing school, she went to Galveston to go to PA school, physician assistant school, and she came back. And when she came over to visit me she said, “Guess what, Pat?” I said, “What?” She said, “I’ve got a girlfriend.” I said, “No!” And I had never thought about that. You know, had never thought about that, crossed my
mind, but after she talked about it I started thinking. I started thinking, well, you know, I don’t have a lot of girlfriends. You know, I mostly hang out with the guys, you know. And that’s very interesting, and that just started, sort of set my mind in gear, and then one of the bus drivers, one of the other shuttle bus drivers was this girl, and she, you know, made it known that she was bisexual. Well anyway, I sort of developed a crush on her, and I asked her out, and that was how I came out, was we kissed, I fell in love, you know, and oh, we were meant to be. And I had no problem being queer. I didn’t have any problem with that. There was no -- I didn’t go to -- my family didn’t have any church in our house, you know. We didn’t get told what was right and wrong except you be good, you know, follow the golden rule, you know sort of stuff like that. So I had -- I didn’t think there was anything wrong with it. Some of the guys I knew -- oh, this one guy said, he said, “Oh, that’s so terrible. That’s like taking an ice cream cone and dipping it in shit.” Isn’t that awful? Yeah, yeah, that was his reaction to my news.

Q: A horrible analogy.

A: Yeah, how perfect for him, you know, so anyway, but I didn’t have any problem with that. I, you know, there was
a women’s community here like you wouldn’t believe. We had our own bands. We had dances. We gave dances. We had so much going on, and then there was the Houston women’s international thing in ’77, and that was right after I’d come out, so I knew a bunch of women who’s gone down for that, you know, and we were -- we did some work on campus, you know, organizing and supporting that effort, you know, raising money to help women get to Houston and stuff like that. And so it was just a lot of -- and all these lesbians, a lot of them were activists, you know, and so these were all the people we turned to to help us work on campaigns and sign them up and become members of the lesbian/gay political caucus, and of course they all became members. You know, we were young, burgeoning women at the game, you know, the Stonewall had been in 1969 in New York City, that was what they called the start of the gay rights movement. And earlier in Austin there had been a radical gay -- or the radical gay front, something like that, gay liberation front had formed, but I didn’t know anything about that. Janna did, Janna Zumbrun, she and her girlfriend started a lesbian newsletter that went out.

Q: Oh, cool.

A: Oh, yeah, so you know, and then she was real active with the women’s political caucus, and then we all started being
lesbian/gay activists, and we also went to the women’s political caucus because you know there was -- a bunch of people we knew were active in there. And so we were active too, and --

Q: So did you become an activist after you came out or before?
A: Before.

Q: You did a little bit --
A: Before, definitely before. It was when I went on strike is when I would say I became an activist because it was like organized. Before I was an individual, not a member of any organization. After ’74 or ’75, whenever that strike was, was when I became a member of an organization and worked with an organization. Yeah. And New American Movement was all over the country, you know, and I went to a national convention up in Chicago, met all these Chicago activists, these old communists. Oh, it was just great. We had a great time. We had just a super time. And you know, me and my girlfriend drove up there too, and she was part of New American Movement too, you know, when she and I started going together she started going to Bread and Roses. We all started doing everything together. She became an activist too, and we went up to Chicago for this national convention, ended up staying there. And for the summer we got a job doing some typing or something like that for some
leftist up there. I can’t remember who it was, but it was this place they called the summer palace. It was this big apartment on the Southside of Chicago, but it had these 12-foot ceilings, huge rooms. It was a real old building, you know, back when they made these huge old buildings, and he lived in that. And so we stayed there. It was fun. We had a great time. And let’s see. Maybe that wasn’t the summer of the convention because that was the summer that Elvis Presley died. You know how you kind of mark things by -- after that convention I got a ride with some activist from the west coast, and I headed to California because I didn’t have to be back at work or anything until September, and I think Elvis died in August. I’m not sure. Somewhere, one year, but that was the year I went to the west coast, and I visited them, and then I hitchhiked up and down the coast, and hitchhiked backed. People hitchhiked in those days. When I got back from my international travels and I landed in, what, New York City, I hitchhiked to Ohio, to my parents’ house.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, to my parents’ house.

Q: With everything you had you just --

A: Yeah, I didn’t have any -- you know, it was just a backpack. You know, yeah, you just hitchhiked.
Q: You just stand on the street, be like, hey, can I get a ride?
A: Stick out your thumb with the sign and you get rides. Everybody did that.
Q: (inaudible)
A: Yeah, it was, yeah. And let’s see, and I stayed involved with New American Movement for many years after that, but mostly I became active with the lesbian/gay electoral, lesbian/gay political caucus. We -- our first year, 1980, was when we endorsed our first candidates and worked on their elections and got our people elected, and you know, it was a new thing, you know, for Austin, you know, to have, you know, queer people asking questions about how you stood on 2106, which was the sodomy statute, which was, said it was illegal for males or females to have sex with one another. You could only do it, you know. And it was, a person commits an offense if they, oh gosh, I used to know the words because I was part of this theater group called I Pass for Straight in the late ’80s, and we sang the words to the sodomy statute on [laughs] stage, you know, as part of our act. And it was hilarious.
Q: Oh, I bet.
A: Yeah, and part of one year, our ALGPC printed up a tee shirt. It was this – Gary Hattic’s idea, 2106, and then we
stamped repeat offender. [laughs] And it did not get repealed until that case in Houston, Lawrence and somebody got caught having sex when the police busted into their apartment. They charged them with sodomy, and it went to the Supreme Court. And it went to the Supreme Court, and that was the law that brought down all the anti-gay statutes, including the one in Texas.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah, I was part of a lawsuit in the mid-80s too. Texas Human Rights Foundation, you know, filed a lawsuit which was a gay, you know, like an NAACP or MALDEF, you know, the legal arm. And filed a lawsuit, you know, against 2106, and you know that was our main focus for years was repealing, getting 2106 off the books, and it didn’t happen until whenever, the ’90s. So --

Q: It still happened.

A: Yeah, oh yeah.

Q: Took a while.

A: Yeah, so anyway, it was -- and then, oh man, oh, there was this guy in town, Steven Hotze, the Neo-Nazi. Oh, he wanted to -- they, in the late ’70s, Austin Human Rights Commission passed a rule that said you couldn’t discriminate in housing or public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation. Well, Steven Hotze led a
movement called the Citizens for Decency to get that off the books because they wanted to be able to discriminate where they chose to. They didn’t want to rent to a gay person. They wouldn’t have to. They didn’t want to serve a gay -- and see, what would be going on, we would be going into these clubs -- this is what happened. We went to the Driskill, and to test the ordinance, okay, this fair housing ordinance, we went to the Driskill. And there’s like four couples, two boys, two girls, you know, two sets of girls, two sets of boys, and we started dancing as heterosexuals, and then switched in the middle of the song, and they made us all leave. Oh yes, they made us all leave. They got us out, and I think that’s -- I can’t remember what the progression of events, maybe that was -- I don’t remember, but we did that. We did that. We’d go to these bars, you know, that were advertising women only -- happy hour for women, and then they would let the guys in right. Well, all those nights we’d go down there to -- [laughs] and they would throw us out too. Oh, God, oh yes, oh yes, we had quite the time. [laughs] Oh yes, and let’s see. What else? What else?

Q: I know you were talking about the economic basis of the Vietnam War.
A: Yes, okay, so that’s when I got -- New American Movement explained about capitalism and what that was and how that was behind our war efforts and the industry of weaponry, which I believe is probably the second most profitable industry behind pornography, which is the number one profitable industry in the world. And I bet weaponry would come number two, and it’s people making money. And that’s why, you know, they wanted to go to war, was to keep their, you know, markets open so they could sell their goods and stuff like that, and it was all economics. And I knew we had no fight with those Vietnamese people. We had no fight with them, you know. It was all economics, so that’s what they taught me, and that’s how I came to an understanding of the world and how it runs. And all of a sudden everything became very clear because you could see where the power was and you know what the economics were behind everything. So that was very interesting to me, and it answered all of my questions. And --

Q: So you mentioned stuff about the women’s political caucus. Then you talked about how it formed. So do you -- what other things do you do now, as being a retired activist?

A: Well, I’ll tell you, my heart is still -- my heart is very soft for people, you know. I care very deeply about people, and so now my -- what I volunteer for is, you know,
it’s like family elder care. I’m a bill payer for a couple of disabled people. And Meals on Wheels, my clients there, those people need a meal delivered to them, you know, every day. And I used to belong to the handy wheels. I would go out and fix things in people’s houses and stuff like that. And whenever Project Transitions or one of the gay organizations needs volunteers I always volunteer to show up, you know, and help do whatever it is that needs to get done. But I just don’t serve on any boards, except my neighborhood association, you know. But I always will -- if there is a call to step up, I will always step up. I will always do that just because it’s in me. And it’s something that never leaves you. If you have a call to help others you will always help others.

Q: Yeah, you’re able to do it.

A: And so I, you know, that’s, I think, where all my motivation comes from. It’s that basic golden rule. Do unto others, you know, as you would have them do unto you, and helping others, there is no other thing that I think you can do in your life that has greater value than helping others. That’s it. And --

Q: I can agree with that.

A: Yeah, and so all the activism is all about improving conditions, you know, making things more just and more
fair. And that was the bottom line for everything. There was — justice needed to be done, you know. Fairness, equity, things were not right, and guess what? They never will be, and so that’s why there will always be people agitating to improve things, to make changes. And I guess thank goodness there always will be, you know, because unfortunately, gosh. Of course, I just saw Blade Runner, oh man, I’ll tell you. When I think about the future and what the future holds it’s kind of scary.

Q: It is kind of scary. I can agree.
A: Yeah, yeah, especially with global warming and all our major port cities are going to be, you know, a large part of them are going to be under water.

Q: So was global warming and climate change and all that, was that ever --
A: No.

Q: That wasn’t ever talked about?
A: No.

Q: In the ’70s, it wasn’t even a thing?
A: No, Earth Day started in the ’70s and also recycling. I remember getting active in recycling in the late ’60s, early ’70s. That was a hippie thing. Yeah, you know, everybody disdained hippies. You know, your ideas are
stupid. You know, we are a consumer culture not a, you know.

Q: Look at it now.
A: Right, and so many ideas have proved out to be very valuable ideas, and so the Earth Day came out of environmental action, and Rachel Carson’s book about DDT started a large, you know, awareness of the environment back then. That was in the ’50s Rachel Carson published her book that showed the harmful effects of DDT, and they got that banned. And I think everything sort of grew on the backs of that as time progresses. And the Matagorda Bay and anti-nuclear power was basically an environmental movement, you know, to protect the environment because nuclear energy was, you know, potentially a catastrophic, you know, source of energy.

Q: Yeah, no, it’s hard to imagine what it’s going to be like in the next couple years.
A: Yeah, well, hopefully we’ll have a lot of wind and solar energy.

Q: Right, but you never know.
A: Yeah.

Q: So --
A: We had a -- back in the early ’70s I was living in this co-op over on west of Lamar, and this one guy, he wanted to
start a big garden, and he talked some farmers into letting us have an acre of land off of East Martin Luther King. And by God we ran out there and we planted potatoes and stuff like that. Oh, my God, that was back to, you know, that was the whole hippie thing, go grow your own food, you know, do all this stuff, go back to the land.

Q: And you did that.

A: Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, but I’ll tell you what, that acre was big. An acre is a huge amount of ground, oh, my God. It was just, oh, my God, it was -- [laughs] he had a lot of ambitions, and I was sort of taken aback by the size of it, but nevertheless, it’s just one of the things we did. And you know, Wheatsville Food Co-op formed back then too.

Q: Oh cool, okay.

A: Mm-hmm, and before Wheatsville formed there as a group going down to San Antonio every Saturday and going to the farmer’s market down there and bringing back produce, and we met at this place at 29th and Lamar. And that’s where we would get together on Saturday afternoon to pick up our produce. And that sort of -- the people involved in that sort of, I think, started Wheatsville Food Co-op back then. And there was this Good Foods store on 29th street, which was the precursor to Whole Foods.
Q: Right, I’m trying to think where all that is because I used to --
A: It was in a -- it was a house on 29th and you know that, where Breeds is? That is -- it was one block west of that, of Breeds, in a house on a corner, was Good Foods.
Q: That’s so cool. I can’t imagine that because I live, you know, a mile, not even, like maybe a half a mile from there, from that house. I would have never known it was that.
A: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
Q: That’s really cool. So what active change have you seen since being at UT from the ’70s to now? Have you seen any sort of positive change, I guess you could say?
A: Well, the thing is, oh man, I can’t believe you all have to pay so much in tuition. That is such a stressor, you know. I just --
Q: Because you were saying it was only 50 dollars a semester.
A: Fifty dollars a semester was our tuition and fees. And books were the big thing. They were like 225 dollars.
Q: That’s the cost of one of my books.
A: God, oh, my God. So any -- that’s one change I can see is that it’s so expensive to go there now.
Q: Even living in student apartments and student living. It’s like, you know, living in an apartment north, you know, it’s crazy, yes. It’s very expensive.

A: And another thing is that UT used to be the focal point in Austin. I mean, it was UT and state government were the two biggest employers, and now that the city has grown so much I think UT is less of a, you know, focal point for organizers.

Q: Really?

A: But I don’t know. See, I’m not on campus, so I don’t know.

Q: There are a lot of organizations. It’s very, very broad over there. I mean, but there’s hundreds of organizations. I’ve never been a part of one, so I don’ really know how they work, but.

A: I’m sure it’s like everything else, you know, you have a board, or it depends too. It may be ad hoc, or it may be formal where you got to have a, you know, board directors and a bylaws and stuff like that, if it’s formally organized. Otherwise you just, you know. One way, if we wanted to get names on a mailing list -- we wanted to create a queer mailing list -- well we would go, we would write a petition, get people to sign a petition and get their names and addresses that way, put them on our mailing list, and put [them?] ALGBC mailing list that way. [Editor’s
note: ALGPC stands for Austin Lesbian/Gay Political Caucus.]

Q: Oh, wow.
A: Oh, yeah.

Q: That’s one way to do it.
A: Yeah, yeah, just get a petition, get people to sign.

Q: And they’ll sign anything.
A: Of course, if it’s something like anti-2106, everybody will sign that.

Q: And as long as they don’t have to pay for anything they’ll sign it.
A: Mm-hmm.

Q: I mean, you see a lot of people nowadays trying to get you to pay for something and then sign. You’re like, eh --
A: Nah, nah, uh-huh, uh-huh.

Q: Walk away.
A: So I think that -- so I don’t know what’s going on at UT these days.

Q: So you’re not too familiar with it anymore?
A: Mm-mm.

Q: When was the last time you went back?
A: I was over there registering voters in the 2000s. I remember I was still working. So it was before 2005. Gosh, that’s 12 years ago. But I go to UT, let’s see.
I’ve ridden my bike through recently. I can’t remember.
Oh, I took part in a study of kinesthetic at the Greg, at
the gym, the stadium. You know, they have a department of
kinesiology. And these students were doing studies, and
they were looking for volunteers and came to my senior
center. Paid me 25 dollars to walk on a treadmill. Hey, I
did that. Yeah, so yeah, that was the last time I was at
UT, and go to the UT women’s basketball games sometimes.
And so now it’s mostly to events. If there was a lecture I
wanted to hear, sometimes they have guest speakers, I will
go to that. In fact, I saw, who was it that spoke at the
KUT studio. There was some -- a woman activist who --
what’s her name? The woman -- Gloria Steinem. Didn’t she
-- she came to UT. I think it was last year, and spoke at
a KUT forum, and so I got to be in the audience for that.

Q: Oh, cool.
A: Yeah, so if UT brings in speakers, you know, somebody I
want to hear, I will go over, you know, and hear what’s
going on. So if I hear something interesting going on, oh
yeah, I’ll go to UT, oh yeah. I used to take classes, you
know. They had informal classes. I would take informal
classes from UT.
Q: So you were pretty involved in your college, young adult years. Were your siblings at all the same way or even your parents or were they --
A: No, no.
Q: This was all new to them?
A: Yeah.
Q: How did they react to --
A: Well, my sister said she’s proud of me. And my mom and dad, I never told my mom and dad what I was doing, never.
Q: Like all college students.
A: Never, never, ever. They did not know anything that I did, you know, because I didn’t want them -- you know, I’m sure I knew that they would be shocked and horrified. So of course I didn’t tell them anything, come on. [laughs] And my sister, you know, she was a year and half older than I, and she was never a rebel, you know. I guess I was because I just didn’t like the status quo, pissed me off. And then my other -- my brother, who’s five years younger than I, he’s the one that’s severely ill with schizophrenia, and he graduated from high school, went to college and had his first psychotic break, and has been ill ever since. And so he sold underground newspapers up in Dallas before he became ill. I went to a Jimi Hendrix concert with him in Dallas after my family moved there, and he was a, you know,
his mind was out there even then. But he became psychotic, and his mind doesn’t work anymore unfortunately. And then I have a brother five years younger than him, and so he was just a -- he was, you know, eight years old when I left the house, so I never really knew him. And so he was a partier in college. He went to college at Ohio. He was a partier and a doper and stuff like that and had fun. But I -- he wasn’t an organizer or anything like that. But whenever I called -- and then he moved to Austin in the ’80s. He would always be a volunteer for me whenever I needed one, you know, and we had a march or anything like that he would be a volunteer, you know.

Q: So you guys were still close.

A: Yeah, one of the most exciting things that happened, in 1979 we had our first national march, March on Washington to lesbian/gay rights [sic]. And we organized. There was this guy in Houston, Ray Hill, who is still an activist down in Houston, and he was one of the main organizers, and our goal was to get 100,000 people to Washington, DC back then, which was, you know, that was our goal. And so we organized in Austin. We had fundraisers, you know, to get people to Austin. Of course every, you know, all the -- we all went. Of course we did, oh, my God, that was so -- exciting.
Q: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

A: Yes, we got 100,000 people there, and we had, you know, we had the mall. You know, we had speakers, and it was a big success, and that was our first national march for lesbian gay rights, and we had a great time.

Q: You had 100,000 people over there?

A: Yeah, from all over the country, and that was at -- you know, we were riding those subways lines in DC, and you’d get on the subway it’d be all queer people. Oh, it felt so great going to the grocery store. Oh, there’s all these queer people everywhere. It was so exciting. We had a great time doing that.

Q: That’s awesome.

A: Yeah, it was awesome. It was awesome. And that was just 10 years after Stonewall.

Q: And Stonewall was?

A: Was the -- a bar in New York City that got raided by the cops.

Q: Oh, I just learned about this.

A: Yes, and do you know why? Why the queens were also mad? It was the day that Judy Garland -- Judy Garland had died, and her body was on display in New York City. So all the drag queens, of course, got all dressed up to go see Judy Garland, and that was going on all day in New York City.
Everybody was passing through viewing Judy Garland, and then they went to the gay club, to Stonewall. And so when the cops tried to raid it that night they just fought back, you know. It ended up they locked the police inside. They were throwing things and setting cars on fire, police cars on fire, and that was what they terms the start of the modern gay rights movement. But before then there had been people, there had been gay organizers before then. They would dress in suit and ties and go march in front of the capitol, you know, in DC protesting, you know discrimination and stuff. They were brave people because you could lose your job, everything, you know, and just get totally screwed over if they found out you were gay. But these people were very brave. And they also, I guess, had their way of making a living. Some of them were lawyers and stuff like that.

Q: We eventually got to society saying, okay, it is fine, you know. Unfortunately it had to be like that. It couldn’t just always be fine.

A: And then I think there was another march in ’83. I can’t remember, but one of our local girls said, “We need to have a march in Austin.” And we’d never had a gay rights march in Austin. So we did in ’87. That was our first
lesbian/gay rights march, and that was the biggest march Austin had ever seen, they said.

Q: It was successful?
A: Oh yeah, it was huge, oh yeah.

Q: How many people were in the march?
A: I think there was like 30,000 some. Oh yeah, it was huge. Oh yeah, it was a big success.

Q: I mean, Washington was 100,000 and 30-something --
A: Yeah, yeah, but that was, you know, you didn’t have to travel to come to Austin.

Q: That’s true.
A: So anyway, we couldn’t believe it in the middle ’90s when people said they wanted to get married. You want to get married? What the hell are you talking about? I mean, we were radical activists, you know? We were not into getting married and joining the military. Oh, my God, that was the two big things, you know, these centrists gays, not radical gays, wanted to do. They wanted to get married and be able to join the military. [laughs] We didn’t know what to do with that. And they went ahead, you know, and they kept getting at it. It was these activists in Hawaii, actually, that started the marriage thing going.

Q: Oh wow.
A: Oh yes, way back then. It was these activists in Hawaii.
Q: That’s really cool.
A: Mm-hmm.
Q: I’m assuming in Honolulu where the base was? Was it military aspect too? Like --
A: Well, I don’t know. I don’t know what, you know. We were, you know, we didn’t know anything about them. We were radical activists, sorry. We don’t do marriage. No, no, no.
Q: That’s funny.
A: Yeah, yeah.
Q: So your experience as an activist, you would say, has been positive?
A: Oh, definitely.
Q: It’s been great.
A: And I think that, you know, it’s like I am still an activist, although I’ve kind of retired, but I, you know, I am much more active than a lot of people. And I consider myself retired.
Q: So when you say you’re more active than a lot of people --
A: Yeah, it’s like my neighbors who are raising their family. They don’t have time to do anything. They’re raising a family. You know, these people are making a living, you know. And it’s like that’s where your focus is, right? And my focus was never on making a living or having
children or raising a family, so my focus was always on working for, you know, equality and justice. And I still am not concerned with making money or -- and I have no children, so you know, hey, that’s -- I can continue to be active really, compared to other people who have family to worry about, and jobs, stuff like that. My jobs were -- I worked at a variety of jobs. I was a nurse for two years before I realized, oh, this was not for me.

Q: For two years?
A: Oh yes, it was --

Q: And that’s what you went to college for?
A: That’s what I went to college for, and I dropped out in the middle of nursing school, went back, got my degree, went to work at Brackenridge, stayed there six months, and they wanted me to be a charge nurse, and there was no way I was going to be a charge nurse.

Q: What’s a charge nurse?
A: That is in charge of the floor. It’s like one time my patient -- oh, nurse, oh, nurse -- and she started vomiting bright red blood. And then she started -- excuse me -- she started shitting bright red blood. I didn’t know what to do, so I ran to the charge nurse, and she saved that woman’s life. She said, “Pat, go get me a bucket of ice and some saline, and an NG tube,” and she was calling the
ER, emergency room, to get her operating room ready for her. And she put an NG tube down the woman’s stomach and put in ice cold saline to try and stop the bleeding. An aorta had given away at the lining of her stomach and was bleeding into her stomach, and that’s why she vomited bright red blood and expelled bright red blood from her rectum. She was internally -- well, I didn’t know! I didn’t know, and what if I was charge nurse and somebody came running to me with that? Oh, no way Jose, I said, uh-uh, no. I am not. By action or inaction you could kill somebody. Oh no, no, no. No. So what I did was I went into private duty nurse, and I went into different, you know, scenarios, and I was a, you know, a visiting nurse. I had a license, and that’s what they needed to give drugs and stuff like that, but eventually I left, and I started driving a school bus.

And for AISD, for the handicap students. And when I was doing that, and I was doing, you know, I was on the board of this and that, and I was doing fundraising and being an activist, and I met a woman who was working for this representative out of Houston, and that’s how I got my job in the capitol working for that rep was meeting this woman at a mail out. And this was in 1980, and so I went to work
for this rep and stayed there till ’85, and then Cecilia Burke, who was a member of the political caucus, had just been appointed tax collector, asked me to come be her secretary at the tax office, and so I left the capital, and I went to the county. And so I got to be -- and Cecilia was an activist, so I got to be an activist, you know. At work I was helping her. I was doing all the stuff that I needed to do. I went on several boards, but that was my last job was Travis County, and I retired after 20 years of service. And I loved my job.

Q: In the early 2000s?
A: Yeah, in 2005. Yeah, and I had started work at Travis County ’85 as -- I was working for a Stacy Suits, he was a constable, and between sessions, you’re staff, you needed to find some work. So I worked for Stacy, and I needed some dental work done, so I begged him to make me a permanent employee so I could get dental insurance, and that’s why I got my anniversary date was ’85 before I went to work in the tax office in ’86. And I had been, you know, being a -- I worked on a couple of campaigns. I was paid staff on a couple of campaigns, Pam Reid, you know, took over from John Milloy, who took over from Ann Richards when she was county commissioner, oh yes, oh yes. Oh, it was great.
Q: He had a very busy life.
A: Yeah, and Ann Richards’ husband Dave Richards was our attorney for our striking shuttle bus drivers, American Transit Union Workers. He was our attorney.

Q: Oh wow, that’s convenient.
A: Oh yeah, oh yes, he’s an activist, oh yes. Him and Ann Richards were democratic party activists from the get-go. I saw her too, back in her drinking days down at this bar, you know. Have you ever seen somebody stand on an aluminum can and touch the side with the foot and then collapse it? I saw her do it.

Q: What?
A: Yeah.

Q: I’ve never seen in that in my life.
A: Oh yeah, it’s like a magic trick. I saw Ann Richards do that.

Q: Wow.
A: Yeah.

Q: Do you have any other final thoughts on being an activist?
A: I think it’s a great life. I think that it’s energizing, and it’s -- and also it’s like, it is, it’s like a wave that always is there, you know. It’s like a wave of energy that’s always there, I guess, as long as there’s human
beings, and activism will always be there. It’s just a kind of energy.

Q: Are you still in contact with any of your fellow activists?
A: Oh, sure. Oh, yes, definitely, I see them. Not as much, you know, parties is where I’ll run into them, you know, stuff like that.

Q: But you still know them.
A: Or -- yes, definitely, oh yeah.

Q: Awesome, well, thank you so much for this. This is great experience. It was a lot of fun talking to you.
A: Yes, April.

Q: I really appreciate it. Thank you so much.
A: Mm-hmm, and let me find a blank piece of paper, and I’ll sign.

END OF AUDIO FILE