

## Oral History Interview with Diana DeWeese-Schmidt

**Audio Recorded:** November 1st, 2017

**Transcribed by:** Jane Thier

(00:00:00:00)

JANE THIER:

This is Jane Thier. I'm here with Diana DeWeese-Schmidt. Could you please say and spell your full name for me please?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

D-I-A-N-A D-e- Capital W-E-E-S-E Schmidt. S-C-H-M-I-D-T.

(00:00:18:00)

JANE THIER:

Thank you. Today is November 1st, 2017. We are at Diana's house in St. Louis, Missouri. Diana, do I have your permission to record this interview?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Yes, you do.

JANE THIER:

Thank you and thank you for participating. So, we'd like to start off by just having you tell me about where you come from and how you landed in St. Louis.

(00:00:37:00)

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, I was born and raised in St. Louis. We lived in the city until I was thirteen years old, or twelve years old. At that time, we moved out here to South County, and I went to Lindbergh High School. When I got married, I moved back into the city, and after I had had my first two children, Cat came to work for me as a babysitter, and that's how we met.

(00:01:07:00) My husband was a severe alcoholic. I was on the verge of divorce when I met her, and I had to hire someone to be in the home when I was working. So, the rule was: even if he comes home, you do not leave, regardless of what he says, because he was drunk and he would come in and say, you can go home now. And Cat was strong enough to say, no, I'll just stay until Diana gets here. So that's how we met. She was my first [pause] experience with a lesbian. I didn't even know what queers were, and that's what they were called in that day—were queers. When I found out she was a lesbian, I came unglued.

I went to my Al-Anon sponsor, I was crying, I said, oh my gosh, this lady that's taking care of my little girls is a homosexual! You know? [laughs] And she said, Diana, she's a homosexual. She's not a pervert. She doesn't want your babies. She wants a woman her age or somewhere around there. She said, you told me yourself you like her better than anyone who's ever watched the children so far. And I said I do and she said, so, just relax! So then I totally relaxed! [laughs]

(00:02:33:00)

JANE THIER:

So tell me about your relationship with your partner, Cat, beginning to now.

(00:02:37:00)

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, it was the most exciting thing that's ever happened to me. Certainly the most eye-opening when I first realized that I was really attracted to her. I was going to counseling, or, to a psychiatrist, to deal with my husband when I found out I thought I was gay, or queer. We switched over to that because I was freaked out by it, you know? I just didn't know how to handle the fact that I may be attracted to this woman. And she helped me to work through that, and then it got hot and heavy, you know? And I very shortly after that separated from my husband.

(00:03:24:00) When I did, he charged me with being a lesbian, and we were ordered to—it was a court order, I forgot to look for those papers for you. It was a court order that she and I were completely to stay away with—from one another. We were to have no association whatsoever. It was in my court papers to have no association with Cathy Schmidt.

JANE THIER:

After your divorce?

(00:03:54:00)

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

It was during the divorce, but yes, it was supposed to go on afterwards, too. And I guess they just didn't follow it up. But we were nervous for the first couple years, you know? Just in case somebody would do something further. And at one point in our relationship, now, it wasn't—Cat and I had been together probably, oh let's see—Dawna was twelve years old, ten years old—at one point in time, not my ex-husband, but his wife—she and he were both alcoholics. I don't know if they were married at the time, but she used to call and give me these prank phone calls and call me all kinds of names and say stuff, and I never even met the woman.

(00:04:43:00) One day, the phone rang and this lady asked for Dawna. And I knew I recognized the voice, but I guess I thought it was her 4-H leader. And I said okay, and I said, Dawna, telephone! And she got on the phone, and I could hear this lady talking loud (00:05:00:00) and Dawna went, Mom! And I got on the phone and she's telling her, your

mother's nothing but a no-good lesbian whore! She's a homosexual! And, you know, we hung up the phone.

Well, about two or three days later, I got a call—no, Cat and I and the two girls were sitting in the living room watching TV. It was like ten o'clock on a Sunday morning. And during that period of time, long johns were a big popular clothing item. So we all four had our long johns and our pajamas on, and we're sitting there. We'd had breakfast, we were watching TV and there's a knock on the door.

(00:05:36:00) I open the door and it was someone from the child protection agency. I had been charged with exposing my children to homosexuals, that they had been approached by homosexuals and were being exposed to all this horrible behavior. I was gonna be investigated.

(00:06:04:00)

JANE THIER:

Now when you say "exposed to homosexual behavior," did they allege that you were having sexual relations in front of the kids?

(00:06:10:00)

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Right, or that our homosexual friends had, you know, tried to mess with the children. That's what it was, you know. Somehow that they—they never did say the word "molest" but that's what they were intimating, was that someone had. So, of course, that was very tragic.

The next day, I called the school principal where the kids went to school, and I explained to her what had happened. And she said, Diana, don't worry about it, she said. I said, well, I don't want the kids to be embarrassed, because they said they were going to school. And they were fourth or fifth graders, I don't know. Third or fourth? No, probably fourth and fifth. So anyhow, she said, I will bring them into my office and have them interviewed privately, and I will stay with them. And I said okay.

Well then, another lady came and did a second interview, and that day, that Sunday that they showed up, I was able to go in and get records from Camp Wyman, where Dawna and Shawna attended camp every summer, and they'd been going like four years while they were to the point now where they could be junior counselors. And we had wonderful reports of what great children they were, and how easy they were and how they got along with the other children, and they were so happy to have them come back the following year and be counselors. So, the lady who was there investigating, she said, as far as I'm concerned, this right here is enough for me. But she said, I'll present this at the office, and we'll do the interview with the children, and she said, I'm sure this will go away.

Well, then, the next afternoon, she called me. She said, Diana, we're not going to go to the school to interview the children. We're gonna come to the house and we just ask that you leave or go to another room. So that's the way it worked. (00:08:12:00) And once she

got done interviewing the children, she called me in there and she said, I suggest you call and report yourself anonymously two more times. And she said, if you do that, we'll do a short little investigation, and after that, it will be red-flagged—be harassment, and nobody will bother you again. So that's what we did.

It was pretty upsetting, and I was so afraid the kids were gonna be embarrassed, and that's one of the things that we did. And I'm sure our children missed out because of it, but we never let their friends come and spend the night, because we didn't want their friends to see Cat and I sleeping in the same room. We were in a very small apartment; we only had two bedrooms. Now, they got to go spend the night with their friends, and a couple times, they did have a pajama party, but it was very limited, because we didn't want to expose them to being ridiculed or made fun of at home.

So, yeah, it was a very touchy situation back in those days, and I told you when we talked last week, he charged me with being a lesbian. He tried to get full custody of the kids, and the only reason that he did not was because I had proof of his extreme drunkenness, and I was the lesser of two evils. And like I said, part of the divorce decree was that I had complete disassociation from Cathy Schmidt.

(00:09:47:00)

JANE THIER:

Wow. So were these—was this like the 1980s?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

No, it was in the '70s, like 1973.

JANE THIER:

1973?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

'73, '74.

(00:10:00:00)

JANE THIER:

Tell me about what St. Louis was like during those times. Because what it sounds like is there was a lot to be concerned about. About the kids, about you and Cat in those early years. What was it like outside of the house?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, it was fine as far—I guess I grew up—I was an only child for seven years, and then I had a brother, and I guess I was really very protected and didn't realize that—I didn't know that there was that kind of discrimination. Like I told you, I didn't even know what

gay people were. I didn't know what a queer was. I just didn't know. I never had been exposed to that. I had no idea what it was. And, so, I don't know, I guess.

St. Louis was—I never went out very much. Publicly, I was married, and I did try to go out for a while, and whenever I was married, I thought, well, maybe if I go with my husband to these taverns or places that, and I go have drinks with them, maybe he wouldn't drink so much! So that was pretty much my exposure to outside St. Louis until I started dating Cat.

And then we went over to East St. Louis to a club called Schrader's. I would go over to the newsroom where they had drag shows. Down in the city, one of the first bars in St. Louis that I was aware of was Betty's CB and that was catty corner of California and Shenandoah. So, we would go in there a lot. That's kind of where—that was where all the queers were, where they hang out. They had a jukebox and you could go in there and dance and drink.

As a matter of fact, I was six years older than Cat, so she took me to the bar a few times, and she was underage. She was only twenty years old. So she had her twenty-first birthday. So I made a cake and put her name (00:12:00:00) on it and everything, and chased down the bar that afternoon. I walked in with the cake and it's got the twenty-one on it. Happy 21st birthday! And she said, oh shit! Get that thing out of here! [laughs] Now I know then at the time they wouldn't have cared. There were a lot of underage people going in there, but she didn't know. She had just started going there a few months before.

When I met Cat, she had long hair. She applied for a job as a babysitter. She had hair almost to her waist, and I was a hairdresser. It was the prettiest, healthiest head of hair. Thick as a carpet and no split ends. And I think I saw her one more time. She applied for the job that day, and then her girlfriend that she was living with was supposed to be the babysitter. But she showed up one day, and I liked her, and she was okay. The second day, Cat came, and she said, my girlfriend can't come; she's sick. Well, she never did come back. That girl never did come back. But she had five kids of her own.

But anyhow, the next time I saw Cat, she had her hair chopped off to here. And I found out later that she had gone to Betty's CB for the first time, and she saw all the dykes, and saw that they all had short hair. So, when she came back, she had this hair chopped off, and that was awful! It was because Suzanne just cut it with the scissors. She looked like that kid from Dutch Boy Paints. Just a little thing.

So I said to her, Cat, what did you do to your hair? And she said, oh, I just decided I wanted a change. And I said, well, you need to let me cut it. So then I cut it and styled it for her in a way that was more acceptable. So, that's how she started. She's never had any hair since then. She had a mullet for a while. She did do the mullet thing when it was very hype, and a perm. We did a perm and a mullet. She wore that for a few years.

(00:14:00:00) And that was my exposure to St. Louis life, and I told you that we—she was doing drag at the Executive Lounge down there. I don't know, I think it was Mike Shannon's now, if it's even still open. But at the time, it was The Executive Lounge. She was doing drag. I went with her. They said, Diana, the waitress didn't show up. Would you help us out? So I started waiting tables. Well, after about an hour and a half, here comes these detectives! And they held the badge up: nobody move, you're all under arrest!

JANE THIER:  
For what?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

They said two guys in the corner were doing lewd and lascivious behavior. I was waiting tables; I never did see that. I didn't see it! So I don't know if it was a lie they made up, or if they were just hassling (00:15:00:00) the gay people. I'm not sure. But anyhow, they were taking me to—everybody had to show their ID as they went out the door. Well, they wouldn't let me go, because they said I served an underage person. So I had to go to jail. Well, Cat was on stage performing, and when she got ready, she was right behind me. They said, what's your name, sir? She said, Cat! And when the guy heard her voice, he said, this one's a woman! [laughs]

And I'm crying, and she said, Diana, don't worry about it. I'll be right behind you wherever you go, I'll be right behind you. And she did, but she had to first find a 7/11 or something and get some alcohol to try and get that beard off of her face, because it was on there with spirit gum. So when she showed up to get me, her face looked like it was on fire, because she had scrubbed it with that alcohol.

But it turned out that the girl that they said—the drag queen that they said was underage, she called her mother and had her mother bring her ID down there. And she said, because Mitch said to her—she said, if you're underage, I'm gonna beat your ass. Mitch was Cat, you know. And she said, I swear I'm not! I'm old enough. My mom's gonna bring my ID down here, I promise! I promise. So her mother brought her ID, or his ID, and that was okay. Then I was able to go.

Everybody eventually got let go, but there was like seventeen of us in this one little square holding cell. I don't know if it was at Central, but it was in the middle of a big room. So there were all these cops walking by and making comments and you know, you could hear them talking about the queers, you know, all these queers. And it was just like you were kind of on display there in this little—it was a cage with bars on it, anyhow, in the middle of the room.

(00:17:00:00)  
JANE THIER:

Tell me about what it was like to be dating, or emotionally involved with a Drag King during the '70s and '80s. It sounds like such a crazy thing.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Oh, it was wonderful. It was wonderful. I was very—of course I was so proud of Cat. She was so good. And she's got—she made me throw them all away which we're sorry now—but she had trophies like this. Denny B was the first Drag King that we saw, and he was wonderful, and as soon as Cat saw it, she said, I wanna do that. I think I can do that. You know?

So she started practicing and we figured out how to do the beard and bind the breasts and do all of that. And it was a very exciting time, because it was Mr. and Mrs. Mitch, you know? And we were going to a counselor at the time because we were having trouble with our oldest daughter. Every time we would get dressed to go somewhere, we'd say, kids, go in and get dressed. We're gonna go out to dinner, go to a show. Five minutes before we get ready to leave, our oldest daughter would bust [sic] into tears. Okay, she didn't want to go. She, you know, we'd say what's the matter with you? I don't know, I just don't wanna go!

So we started going to counseling, and the counselor at the time, she said to Cat one day, well, tell me how you see yourself, or how do you think you're viewed in your community? And Cat said, Elvis and Priscilla. Well, I about flipped out! I was pretty shy! And I said, Cat! And she said, what? We are! She said, when we walk in, people notice us! They always say, oh, hey, Mr. and Mrs. Mitch, you know? She said, that's how we're viewed! Now I can handle it okay, but then I was very shocked.

[Dog enters room] You wanna go outside? Come on.

(00:19:00:00) So that was pretty nice, and we always were treated very well and very respectfully.

JANE THIER:

And you were well-known?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

We were very well-known.

JANE THIER:

In what spheres? In just the spheres of the bars and the clubs you two would frequent as a couple? Or more so just in general in the neighborhood?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

No, more in the gay community. Very much so in the gay community.

(00:19:22:00)

JANE THIER:

Tell me more about the gay community that you're talking about. Like, who was it comprised of? Just tell me about that.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, I don't know what to say. There were so many—well, we went to—there were four—Betty's CB was on this corner. Across the street from that catty corner was Pat's Palace, and then if you went down the street a little bit closer towards Gravois, there was another bar called The Kitty Cat Club. So, people just used to run up and down that street, you know? And then a little later on, after a couple of years, another bar (00:20:00:00) opened nearby but didn't stay open long. So there were like four bars in that three-block vicinity, you know?

JANE THIER:

And these were all lesbian bars?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

And they were all—well, they were just gay bars. And there were a lot of straight people who came in. Not so many straight [trails off] There was a straight couple, but there were a lot of guys, and they were like—what was the name? There was a group called a motorcycle club called The Saddle Tramps. A lot of those Saddle Tramps hung in those gay bars.

And I'm not sure, like I said, I was young. I didn't pay a lot of attention then. I was so in love with Cat that I didn't really pay a lot of attention to what was going on around me. And people would say, well you know Diana, so and so, you were there! And I would say, I don't know! I didn't see it, or I don't know, I wasn't aware of it! But that's 'cause I was just there for her, you know?

(00:21:01:00)

JANE THIER:

So you, like, followed her lead?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

No, I always held my own pretty good. I mean, you know, I held my own pretty good. But we walked in the door one afternoon, on a Saturday afternoon, and she's very gregarious and vivacious, and loud. And she hit that door with her hand, and it made kind of a loud noise, so when the door opened, she said, hey, we're here! All these people



turned around. I wanted to crawl in a hole! I was so embarrassed. But everybody said, hey, you guys!

I just didn't like to have attention drawn to me. We would go places and once she knew that, she would always make sure that she went in front of me. Or if we had to, like, walk down steps, she would go first, so that she kind of shielded me a little bit from the embarrassment. It took me a little while to get over it.

I don't think I was embarrassed to be gay. I was just embarrassed, you know? To be out. (00:22:00:00) I just wasn't—well, like I said, I was a pretty protected child, and being out in that public in that kind of scenario was kind of hard for me to get used to.

I used to go to meet my mother and daddy to have drinks at my mama's girlfriend's bar, and my dad would have to stand outside and wait for me because I wouldn't walk in the bar by myself. So, I've gotten over that now. [laughs]

(00:22:36:00)

JANE THIER:

So your partner Cat is very gregarious as a Drag King of a lot of note, actually.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Yes.

JANE THIER:

So tell me about your relationship during these years as a very yin-and-yang couple. Like, did you both work? Did you run in the same social circles?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

No, we kind of both gave up our social circles and became a couple in the gay community. I don't know. (00:23:00:00) Well, Cat of course was young. She had gotten out of high school and went to work as a nurse's aide or in a nursing home, and that's where she met her first girlfriend. And they were living together when we met. So, she pretty much was just involved with her girlfriend and the family, and her family, and she had a real hard time of it with her mother. Her mother was very mean.

And then whenever she and I became involved and started living together—it was my family that I was involved in. My high school friends, I quit seeing all of them because I was married to that alcoholic and I wouldn't see anybody, you know? So it was like we both just had our families, not a big group of friends that we had bummed with.

(00:23:57:00)

JANE THIER:

So the gay community, you say that you were very popular in, what was that community like? Was it warm?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, we've talked about this many times recently. You never knew anybody's last name. Very seldom did you know their last name. People wouldn't tell you where they worked. Very, very rarely did anyone get a picture, or bring a camera, because you didn't want anybody taking pictures of you, you know?

Now, I didn't care, and Cat didn't care. We didn't have jobs with those kinds of positions. I had my own beauty salon—or, worked in a beauty salon—I had to get rid of it when I got divorced. And Cat was just trying to find a job at the time. She kind of, you know, hopped around, had short-term jobs.

For one thing, she couldn't keep a full-time job because she couldn't stay away from me long enough! She'd have to call in sick because she wanted to be with me! (00:25:00:00) So she had a hard time holding a job there for the first four or five years we were together!

Or we'd go to the bar in the afternoon to have one or two drinks. Well we'd just start having so much fun and she'd call work and wouldn't go in! Now it might only be her third or fourth day on the job, but she, you know, she couldn't leave! [laughs] So, now you couldn't get her to stay home from work if your life depended on it! It has to be a true emergency.

(00:25:27:00)

JANE THIER:

What does she do now?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

She's a route coordinator and a courier for Quest Diagnostics. And she just celebrated thirty years there.

JANE THIER:

Wow!

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

And she's very well-respected in her job.

JANE THIER:

These people that you're talking about—who you didn't know about their families or last names. Are any of them still in your life?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Yes, we have gotten reacquainted with another couple. They've been forty-five years. They'll have (00:26:00:00) their forty-sixth in February, and Cat and I will have our forty-fifth in February. We've gotten reacquainted with them in the last ten years. There are eleven of us that kind of have come back together. We knew each other in the bars as young kids drinking and carrying on and then everybody kind of went their separate ways, grew up, you know, you're raising your kids, you're not in the bar all the time.

And then someone died about ten years ago, and we all left the funeral home and went to lunch. And since then, we've been a pretty cohesive group. But there were a lot of people that came out that you don't see, except now, one of our elders, a mentor, just had her eighty-first birthday. But about—well, this was her tenth anniversary—she went to a funeral, and somebody made the comment to her—it's Betty Nealey, I'm sure you'll hear her name many times—she's eighty-one years old, like I said. She's a pillar of the community. And someone said to her, boy, it's really nice to have everybody together, I wish we could do this. And she said, yeah, I wish we could do that more often! And somebody said, well, Betty, why don't you do something about it? And she said, well, you know what? I will.

So that summer, she had the first party, okay? She had it at her house, and then the next year, she had it at Tower Grove Park. And then she moved it to her house and every year, there's a few more people and it's all older people that we hung with back in the day. We've got—Gail and I both have a phone list, and every year we get a few more names on it. We call it, and invite them. The last time it was at Betty's house. There were a hundred people, and she said, okay, we've got to go back to the park. (00:28:00:00) So the last three years have been in the park, but this year was the tenth old heads party. We call it "Betty's Old Heads Party."

And now we're in the stage where we're trying to decide: we know we're going to have to kind of hand the reins down, or let someone younger in. But we don't want—we want the responsible, nice people, because we know that all of these elderly people—they're not gonna come if it's gonna be like a drunken bar party, you know?

It's like a reunion. So, we're trying—we want to include some younger people, but we have to picky about who they are, and who they run with. So, we've got some people's names in mind that we're gonna invite next year. But you want it to be a nice party, and like I said, if they're—if they think it's just gonna be a big drunken party, they're not gonna come. So, now we're seventy and eighty, a lot of us, some sixty-year-olds, so we're gonna start inviting some of the fifty-year-olds. And then when something happens to us, they can take over, because we would like it to go on, especially in Betty's honor.

(00:29:22:00)

JANE THIER:

Great. Great. You mentioned earlier that you were at an event at which Cat was performing, and the police came in and raided and you went to jail.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Right, right.

(00:29:33:00)

JANE THIER:

Crazy story. Was that something you had to worry about often, especially in the '70s and '80s? Like were all these bars—

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

You had to be very careful, and it was—everybody knew—like all those drag queens, they could be dressed to hilt, but they had to have on men's underwear, because if they did get arrested and they didn't have men's underwear, they would get arrested for masquerading. (00:30:00:00) It was the law: they had to have one item of women's clothing on. So yeah, everybody was pretty cautious about that kind of stuff; you had to be.

And that's why people didn't tell us their last name or where they worked, because, especially when you're young, you know, somebody that you don't know really well, they flirt with your girlfriend or they get pissed off, and next thing you know, they're calling your job saying, Susie Jordan is a queer! She hangs out at the Kitty Cat Club! So people were protective of their privacy, because you couldn't trust everyone.

As you get older now, and our friends Jan and Gail who are very dear, but they both had high positions in high companies. You know, one at Bell Telephone and the other at—oh, not McDonnell Douglas, what's the—where they make the airplanes? I can't think of the name of it right now. Anyhow, she had high class clearance to work on this stuff that she worked on, and they were very quiet about their stuff. They didn't tell anybody any of their business. Now, since they've both retired, they are not as shy about it. They are in all of our photographs and stuff. It's okay now, but for a long time, you couldn't do that.

(00:31:22:00)

JANE THIER:

Would you consider that what we could call today as being closeted?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, they were closeted in some areas of their life. They weren't closeted, like—because they did come to the bars, and they did hang out in the bars, and they had gay friends that they did things with.

Like, you know, go to people's houses, play cards, you know, barbecue, stuff like that. They had a small group; everybody had their small little group of friends that they bummed around with, but yeah, they were closeted at work, most of them. Most people were closeted at work.

JANE THIER:

What about you?

(00:32:00:00)

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, I didn't say I was openly gay, but I always worked in the beauty industry, the hair industry, so, you know [laughs] it's so full of male and female homosexuals that it wasn't a big deal for me to keep it private, but most people did know that I had lived with a woman.

Now, I did lose a couple customers, because of one that woman who just loved me. And at the time, I was doing them. I was divorced from Bill, but I was still living in the home that we had had together. I was looking for a place to go, so I was doing these people on Saturday mornings at my home. And Cat wound up working for me. I trained her; she was my shampoo girl after we started going together. So she knew all of my customers. And Helen came to the house one day to get her hair done, and I can't remember what it was, but something—she knew when she left there that Cat and I were a couple, okay? Which I guess she had never realized it before.

Well, she called in the middle of the week and said that she didn't think that she would be able to come back anymore. She was gonna miss me, but she didn't want to be exposed to that, and she didn't want her child exposed to it. So, I lost her as customer, and she was a good friend until then! But some of the girls that Cat went to high school with, as soon as she—and they were very good friends with us—and when she told them she was gay, then they were no longer friends. So, people didn't associate with homosexuals in that day. Or if they did, it was on the sly—very quiet.

(00:34:04:00)

JANE THIER:

So, tell me about how working in the salon, or having to deal with people like that compared to the sense of community you described at the bars and the clubs—like, the gay community.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Tell you what? What do you mean? What the difference was? Well, I don't know, because like I said, I didn't really talk about it that much. They just knew I was in the middle of a divorce with my husband, and they all knew what a bad drunk he was, you know? Now I don't know—I probably—my customers did not know that I had been

charged with being a lesbian. Usually, the customers talk more to you than you talk to them, so they were not—they didn't know a lot of the stuff that was going on.

I feel like I'm probably not telling you enough, but I'm pretty casual with (00:35:00:00) my life and I don't have a lot of secrets. Now, Cat, on the other hand, is much more—she doesn't want people to know her business. She's pretty private. I, on the other hand, don't really care what people know, you know? It just—I don't do anything that I'm ashamed of doing, and Cat doesn't either. But she just says, Diana, people don't need to know your business. They don't need to know your business. You can't trust people. So, she's a little more private.

Sometimes I get in trouble because I'll say something and she'll say, Diana! Don't keep telling people my business! And I said, Cat! It's not just your business, it's my business, and I want to talk to somebody, you know? So we have a little bone of contention there occasionally.

JANE THIER:

That's so interesting that Cat is the more private one in your relationship, while Cat was so active in the Drag Scene.

DIANA DeWEESE SCHMIDT:

Right, and she still is. Now she DJs! She's a very popular DJ. Yeah, she's very out there. And she's out at work. When she went for her thirtieth anniversary, she took me. Everybody knows I'm her partner, but when she started working there, it was Smithkline Beecham, and they started covering domestic partners very early in our relationship, so she always was—she always was out at work.

Once she got through that first little, I guess, five-year period, and she got a good job that she was able to stay with, then she started being out to everybody, you know? So, she was always more—we'd go to the grocery store or anything. She would just be out. And I was the quiet, bashful one.

JANE THIER:

When you say out, do you mean out—

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

She looked like a dyke! She looked like a dyke! She walked like one, you know, and she was—what do I wanna say? She didn't take any crap off of anybody. Oh, we went into a bar one night, okay, we went into Herbie's Lounge, down there in the Central West End, which was a very, very popular gay bar. We were in there and there was a black man sitting in there with a white woman. They were obviously together. They were sitting at the bar. Cat and I were sitting at the table. I think we were having lunch, I don't

remember what. Well, it was very obvious to both of us that he was sitting there dogging us, talking about the two of us, the queers sitting there together.

Well, after about ten or fifteen minutes, Cat said, fuck this. She got up, she walked over to the bar and she said, hey! She said, I wanna tell you, for a black man sitting here with a white woman, (00:38:00:00) you've got a lot of nerve! She said, you're sitting over there talking about us, what you think we're doing wrong. And she said, the spyglass is just as much directed at you as it is at me. And he said, I am so sorry, you are absolutely right. A few moments later, he sent us over a drink. But she would be very—very aggressive. Assertive! Both! She can be both, but most of the time it's assertive. But she certainly does not have a problem confronting someone.

(00:38:38:00)

JANE THIER:

So, over the course of our conversation, you've said words, like, "queer" and "dyke." Where do you stand on these as terms today? Or if someone were to address you with either, what do you think?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Doesn't matter to me one way or another.

JANE THIER:

You don't find the term queer—

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

No.

JANE THIER:

How do you feel about it?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

I don't feel any way about it. It doesn't bother me in the least, you know? It doesn't bother me in the least. I know a lot of people that we associate with—one girl in particular, she's single, she doesn't have a partner right now, but she would be very upset if someone referred to her as queer, you know, so. But the rest of them, I don't know. They may not like it, but they wouldn't—we're all at an age now where we don't worry too much about those kinds of things. When we were younger, it was a little bit different, for some of them. It never was for me. I don't care what people call me, as long as they call me for supper. [laughs]

(00:39:42:00)

JANE THIER:  
So how do you identify yourself today?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
As a gay woman.

JANE THIER:  
Gay woman, OK. How does Cat define herself?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
Oh, absolutely as a gay woman.

JANE THIER:  
Gay woman, OK.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
Yes.

JANE THIER:  
And your relationship, how would you call it?

(00:40:00:00)

DIANA DeWEESE SCHMIDT:  
Well, I've always viewed her as the male, absolutely, without any—I mean, she fits into the male. Our psychologist that we were going to when Dawna was young—I told you we went to the psychologist for a while—and she said, Oh my gosh Cat, you are just like my husband! She said, I cannot believe it!

But Cat knew when she was three or four years old that she liked women. She used to kiss the ladies on TV and different stuff like that. So she's always know she was gay. And like I said myself, I was twenty-one or—no, twenty-five when I met her. I didn't even know what a gay person was. You know? I don't think I even realized there was such a thing as a gay person. I had—I didn't know that I was that sheltered, but when I look back on it now, I really was very sheltered.

(00:40:58:00)

JANE THIER:  
So, your marriage with Cat, when did you get married?



DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Two years ago. It was two years ago in July.

JANE THIER:

Wow. [writing down] Congratulations.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Thank you.

JANE THIER:

So you said to me earlier you've been together for forty-four years. What's the starting point for that?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, I can tell you it was June the 10th, forty-four years ago. It was—I seduced her. I seduced her. We went somewhere that evening, and we were drinking and doing whatever it was we were drinking. I can't even remember where we were at! But I'm sure it was Betty's CB, and, I don't know, she went to the bathroom, and I put a slinky nightgown on, and when she came out, I unbuttoned it and let the top fall down and that was it! [Laughs.] And that was from the shy little girl who didn't know what a queer was, you know?

(00:42:00:00)

JANE THIER:

Oh, wow.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

But once I discovered it, babe, there was no turning back!

JANE THIER:

That's so funny. So—that's crazy! So, uh, wow. So you said that Cat is the male in your relationship.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Um-hm.

(00:42:20:00)

JANE THIER:

How does that differ from two gay women being married? Like, talk to me about the decision to—

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

It's just like the roleplaying. Cat just DJ'd for a wedding. Well, I'm sure that the one girl is the male and the other one's the female role, because the one girl had a tuxedo on and the other had a wedding dress. Now I know some of these girls now, they get married and they both wear the gowns, the wedding gowns, you know? But Cat has just always fit into the male role.

Our daughter, Shawna, the youngest girl, she was like seven or eight years old, and Cat was washing dishes. Now, we never said anything about that. We never discussed our roles, or being gay in front of the kids that were young kids. We never even talked about it. But Cat was standing at the kitchen sink washing dishes, and Shawna was like seven years old, maybe eight, she came in there and said, Hey Dad, can I go outside and wash the dishes? Well it took Cat, and she's washing dishes and she didn't answer, she didn't say anything, and Shawna said, Dad! I'm asking you a question! Can I go outside and play, play, play? And she said, Yes Shawna! Just be quiet and go outside and don't leave the yard! So they recognized her role in their life; that's just the role she fit into.

(00:43:52:00)

JANE THIER:

And the kids called you mom? And called her—

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

They called me—no, they didn't. They just called her Cat all their lives. But when they would buy her, as they got older and started buying cards, like, for birthdays, or when they would draw their little pictures, like Valentine's Day, they would bring cards home that would say "Cat", but as they got older and bought cards, they would buy cards for "Dad."

And then when Shawna asked Cat to walk her down the aisle, Cat said sure, you know, I'll be happy to do that. Well, then, right before she got married, she said, Diana, I don't wanna do that. I'm afraid. And I said why? And she said, because I think Shawna just felt like she had to ask me. She said, I'm afraid she'll be embarrassed. And I said, Cat, Shawna would not have asked you if she didn't want you to do that. I said, so, it's too late. You cannot back out. She expects you to do it." And she—I finally (00:45:00:00) asked Shawna in front of her, I said, Cat's afraid you asked her just because you felt like you had to. She said, absolutely not! You raised me; you're my parent. I want you to walk me down the aisle.

So, and then our granddaughter just got married four years ago. She bought us both these little lunch box Christmas tree ornaments, and I think mine had Marilyn Monroe on it, with a little love note in there, how happy she was to have me as her grandmother, and

that I taught her to cook and stuff. And Cat had a little Elvis Presley one, and in that note, she said how happy she was to have Cat as her grandfather. They all call her Grand-Cat. Everybody calls her Grand-Cat. That's her moniker.

And she said how happy I am, and, as you know, I'm getting ready to get married, and she said, you've been so important in my life, and teaching me how to behave and all the important things. I can think of nothing better than having you walk me down the aisle. Well, by the time Cat got done reading that, we were all in tears. But she said, since my father can't be here, I would like for you to do it. So she walked her down the aisle, too, when she got married.

Our family just is a family. We're just a family like any other family.

(00:46:28:00)

JANE THIER:

So, you talk a lot about your daughters. You guys are so close with your daughters, and your grandkids, you all have such a close relationship. Did the daughters ever mention to you, Shawna and Dawna, growing up, what it was like, other than the Priscilla and Elvis thing, what it was like to have two gay moms?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

No, no, not really. No, it's not something that was ever discussed. Even now, I don't think it was ever, you know, has ever been discussed. It's just not something we need to discuss. That's just the way it is, and we don't have to talk about it.

(00:47:00:00) All of them, I mean, they bring all of their friends around, and they always introduce us, if we go somewhere, like to, Shawna's—one of her best girlfriends' son just got married three or four weeks ago. And we got our invitation, and some of those people at the wedding we hadn't met before, and Shawna would say, these are my parents. This is my mom and this is Cat. But she always introduces us as her parents.

They both always did that, except when she did go—Cat went to Dawna's eighth grade graduation, and I don't know if she felt something or whatever, but she said, when we got home, that's the last time I'll be attending a school event like that. And I said, why? She said, I just don't want to put the girls in that position. Maybe because they were older; they were getting ready to move into their teenage years. But that eighth grade graduation was the last school event that Cat went to like that.

JANE THIER:

Like what?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Like in the parent role.

JANE THIER:  
OK.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

In the parent role. So, then I mean, of course, we went to—Dawna quit school and got married in our home, and Cat gave her away, you know. But, Shawna graduated high school, and of course she went to that. And when Shawna got in trouble at school one day, I was working and Cat went up and talked to the teacher about it, you know, to the nun! And got onto her! Got onto the nun! She said, you're too old to be teaching, and you don't have the patience that you need to have for a child like Shawna! So, before it was over with, the nun was apologizing, and Shawna didn't have any more trouble.

(00:48:59:00)

JANE THIER:

Wow! So, in a parent role means you two arrived together with the kids. Did that mean you went to things by yourself with the kids or that Cat also went?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

No, she usually went, too. Like, we would go—Dawna cheerlead for a little while. We went to the basketball games, you know, together, and then shortly after that, we sold the house and moved so she didn't do cheerleading anymore, but she had some artwork that was displayed at Forest Park that she won prizes for. Cat went to that with us. They were older then, it was a little bit different. But they never seemed to be embarrassed.

Now, we have wondered since then, when Dawna went through that spell where she used to cry before we left, we have wondered the last few years, if perhaps she was embarrassed of us (00:50:00:00) together, and maybe she didn't know why she was crying. Because she said she didn't know, but psychologists told her, leave her home. Just don't take her. So we did that two or three times, and she quit crying, and we never had the problem again.

But I did wonder about, I don't know, it's been fifteen years ago, twenty years ago. You know, maybe at that time, she was embarrassed to be with us, and didn't know how to say that, or didn't even know what it was. So I'm not sure.

(00:50:37:00)

JANE THIER:

As an adult, does she ever tell you, like, back when I cried before we left, it was because I was embarrassed?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Yes she has said that. Yes she has. But Dawna is an alcoholic, and she has some problems, so we can't always count on everything she says being the exact truth because she makes excuses. So that may be one of the things she uses for a reason for her drinking, if you know what I'm saying. She's recovered now. She's recovering now. She hasn't drank for three years.

JANE THIER:  
That's great.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
That's her second period. She went four and a half years. She drank for the last three or four, and now she's on the second recovery.

(00:51:25:00)

JANE THIER:  
That's good! Congratulations to her. So you mentioned earlier that you and Cat would sometimes take the kids out to the theater, or go out to dinner. What things do you two like to do together now, and were they things you also liked to do thirty years ago?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
Oh, yeah. We love to dance! We love to dance together, and we love music. So, we like to do things that involve music and dancing. One of my best friends—she's passed away now—was 'Lady Jazz' Mae Wheeler, and we would go to a lot of the programs she directed, over in U City when she was performing, we would go over there. We know a lot of the local blues singers, because we enjoy the blues and jazz, and so we'd do a lot of those kinds of things. Go to the theater, go to clubs to listen to them. We saw Diane Schuur and some of the different jazz artists.

(00:52:28:00)

JANE THIER:  
Were any of these events at some of the old haunts you went to thirty years ago? Or have you kind of moved into less specifically gay spaces?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
Yeah, well now when Cat DJ's on Saturdays. Well we have a friend who's gonna have a seventy-fifth birthday on the eleventh, and we will go to Hummel's Bar, which is a little neighborhood dive, and very gay-friendly. Well, it's gay really, but it's straight-friendly, I guess I would say, because it's predominantly a gay bar. But we go there a lot. We go to Just John's.

But we go wherever we wanna go. Cat and I go wherever we wanna go. We go to The Sheldon to listen to music or wherever. We don't hold back, we go wherever we feel like going. And we're always accepted.

JANE THIER:  
That's great.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
She's got such a great, outgoing personality that she doesn't meet any strangers, so anywhere we go, we're usually accepted.

JANE THIER:  
That's so good to hear—

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
Yeah.

(00:53:32:00)

JANE THIER:  
—That you guys are able to do that. I'm wondering, in your early days, would you go on dates and have that same experience, or—what was that like?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
Yeah, she always—we went to Hawaii when I was sixty, so that was eleven years ago. And we were on a tour bus, and when we first started out on that trip to Hawaii, you could see these couples kind of holding their noses up in the air. They didn't want to be too involved with us. We were obviously gay, and they were not so gay-friendly.

Well before it was over with, Cat would be standing up on the bus making jokes and doing stuff. Before it was over with, they were all vying for space wherever we were at. When we would go sit around the pool in the evenings or go to a restaurant in the evening, [they said] where are you guys gonna be later? We wanna come over there and be with you!

We made some very good tour bus friends before it was over with. We felt like they all approved of us. You know? I mean, and they had—several of them gave us their names and phone numbers, [they said] If you're ever in Fort Myers, call us! We'll go have drinks! You know? Different things. We made friends, but, yeah, I think we're a lot of fun to be around as a couple.

JANE THIER:

What was that like in the '70s and '80s, in your earliest years (00:55:00:00) years when you were still new to being a couple? Was the dynamic still the same as it is today?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Mmm, yeah, pretty much so. I think so.

JANE THIER:

And you were the audience member and Cat was the performer?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Exactly. Yes. That's right.

JANE THIER:

And that's still the dynamic today?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

I was one of her biggest fans, yes.

JANE THIER:

That's so nice. So you went to every show?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Oh, well, there were times I didn't go. [laughs] There was one weekend I didn't go, so, maybe because she was working on Friday and Saturday nights at a bar called The Gallery. Well, that's a lot.

I'm not a drinker. I'm more of a drinker now than I ever was, but I wasn't a drinker. So I didn't want to do two nights in a row. So, she went a few weekends without me. I'd go the one night, I wouldn't go the second night, or whatever. And she came home one night and she said, Diana, you're gonna have to go Friday and Saturday night next week. And I said why is that? And she said, I got this girl and, she said, I think she's gonna be a problem.

Well, this girl had come in there several times, and she was flirting with Cat, and, well Cat was flirting back with her. They were, you know, flirting back and forth. Cat's always been a big flirt. We both flirt.

Well, finally, after this one night, the girl pushed this dime over to her. She said, here, I keep telling you to call me. Here's the dime, she said, make the call.

(00:56:25:00)

JANE THIER:

Oh, God.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

So Cat said, you gotta go down there with me. So I went down there, and here this girl comes in and she struts up to Cat and Cat said, Shirley, I would like for you to meet my partner, Diana. And Shirley said, that was not necessary! She said, you could've just told me! And Cat said I've been telling you, you know? And she said, you needed her to protect you!

Well, so, now, the woman wound up being very good friends of ours. We bummed with her until she died two years ago. We both went to Arizona (00:57:00:00) to see her, because we knew she was gonna die. But, yeah.

And she always flirted with Cat, and said, if anything happens to Diana, I'm the next one in line! And for a year or two, Cat said, yeah, yeah, and finally she said, Shirley, you're just too gauche for me. She said, you never could be my wife. She said look at them toenails, you know? She said, no, you ain't the one. But she was our good friend.

JANE THIER:

Wow. That's so cool that you're able to maintain that friendship.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Yeah. Because I was confident. I knew that Cat wasn't gonna do anything. I knew that she wasn't gonna do anything.

JANE THIER:

Very loyal partnership.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

But, she was very very much a flirt! She's not as much a flirt now as she used to be, but you know. We both flirted because we knew we were gonna go home with each other.

JANE THIER:

Wow. Lot of trust.



DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Yeah!

JANE THIER:

Did you ever, either of you, get caught up with men who would think you were just friends?

(00:58:00:00)

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

This is funny. We were going to Slay's restaurant, which is now Sam's. My mother and Dad used to go there a lot. And my mother was quite the little drinker and quite the little diva. Anyhow, she always made her children, my brother and I, we always had to kiss everybody goodbye, you know? And it didn't matter who they were—oh, give Joe a kiss, oh, give Betty a kiss, oh, give this one a kiss.

There was this man at Slay's Restaurant this one night, who kept hitting on me. He was sitting next to me, and I was talking to him, and everything. Of course my mother was on the other side, and she's just—she was egging it on, you know? She liked for us to be involved with men, you know?

She liked Cat, but every now and then, she'd say, well, you girls are just silly. You need to both just get a boyfriend and stop this. Stop this, stop this stuff you're doing. Well anyhow, I was trying.

This guy kept saying he was gonna leave, and I could see Cat was getting really upset. Matter of fact, we went in the bathroom and we had a fight, and I wound up slapping her in the face! You know, because she was just out of control. Well, I was trying to get this guy to leave and finally I said, I'll walk you to your car. Okay? And that—I did that to get him out of the restaurant, get him away from there, because I was afraid of what was gonna happen, you know.

Well, of course when I walked him out to his car, he tried to kiss me, you know? Well, Cat was right behind us. So, there was a little scuffle there, and then he did get in his car and leave, but of course Cat and I had a knockdown, drag-out fight before it was all over with. I tore the transmission out of my car. But we were very young, but yes, we did have an incident with that man.

(01:00:00:00)

JANE THIER:

Oh wow!

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

And that's just—me, I was so young and so insecure. Now, see, if the guy had been putting the moves on Cat, she could've got rid of him immediately! I was different; I didn't know how to do it. I guess I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I don't know what I didn't want to do. All I wanted to do was get him the hell out of there before she got any more upset than she was. And it backfired on me, you know, because he tried to kiss me and stuff then. And she said it's your own damn fault, stupid! You don't walk some man to his car if you're trying to get rid of him! Which is really true, but I was too dumb to know that at the time. I would handle it differently now!

JANE THIER:

Wow! You've had such an exciting past, you and Cat!

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

We've had a good life. We have had a lot of excitement in our lives, but we've had a good life together.

JANE THIER:

Yeah! And now you're in the golden years.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

That's right, that's right. We're getting there. She just turned sixty-five, so, I'm hoping that she's gonna try to retire in the next year or two. She's kind of torn. She doesn't know if she wants to or she doesn't want to. I think if she could—well, she said—she's worked nights for the last twenty-five years. She said, Diana, if I could—if someone quits days and I can move up, she said, I'll stay! And that would be all right with me, because we would have our evenings to do to things. And that's what we're both missing.

You know, we can't go out to dinner with our friends. We're limited to those two days on the weekend, and that's a lot to try and get in. You've got to get your family events in, you've got to get your friends in, and you've only got two days. Or if she worked days, we would be able to do a lot more with our friends. So, that's what we're hoping for. Or that she'll retire! We'll see.

(01:01:55:00)

JANE THIER:

And you're long retired?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Yes. I had to go out on disability. Well, I've been out since—I retired when my daddy died. I've been out since '90 I guess. I have emphysema and COPD. And at the time I

was smoking. At the time, I only had forty-two percent lung capacity. Now I've been off cigarettes, like, twenty-one years, and I have fifty-three percent lung capacity.

JANE THIER:  
Congratulations!

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
So I have improved. But, I had to go out on disability. I was a surgical technologist at the time. I went back to school after—my grandmother had Alzheimer's, and I quit my job as a hairdresser and stayed home with her to walk through the Alzheimer's. Well after that three-and-a-half years, I felt like I needed to go back to school to take a refresher course for hair or whatever. And I thought, well if I've got to go to school, I might as well do something different.

So I went to school and became a surgical technologist then. And I worked in an operating room for the next eight or nine years, until I had to go on the disability. And I loved that.

JANE THIER:  
To go on disability?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
No, to do work in the operating room. It was great. It was very good. I liked it.

JANE THIER:  
And during that time, Cat was still at Quest?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
Mhm. Yes.

JANE THIER:  
Wow. Busy people!

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:  
Once she got her a job that she liked, and she stayed with it. Like I said, she struggled the first four or five years. She would like the job, but she just wasn't settled down yet. But you gotta realize, she had just turned twenty-one. So she hadn't sewn any oats yet. She

would call in, or not go in, because she wanted to stay home with me, or be where I was.  
[laughs]

(01:03:50:00)

JANE THIER:

And were you a stay at home mom?

DIANA De-WEESE-SCHMIDT:

No, I wasn't. Well, I was, part of the time. And part of the time, after Cat and I got together, I did hair in my home, because I had my license and everything. So I just brought my clientele with me and did it from home. So, in that respect, yes, I was a stay at home mom for several years.

JANE THIER:

So over the course of hearing about your life, and your life with Cat, your life with St. Louis and your experience with that, it seems like there's been such an upward trajectory. Like, every year gets better. But, tell me about what you think, at this point, what the best years were.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

What the best years were? Ooh, golly. I don't know, we've had some really, really good ones. [pause] I can't really say the best years. I guess, um, [pause.] Probably the best years for me were after Shawna graduated from high school, and it was just (01:05:00:00) Cat and I, and we were free to come and go. We didn't have the responsibilities of staying home, or seeing about the children so much. So we would get in the car on Friday night or Saturday morning and just head down Highway 66 and we may not come home all weekend long. We'd find some little motel, pull off the road, and the next day, we'd drive another hundred miles. So, I really enjoyed that aspect of our life, when we'd get up on a Sunday morning and say, oh, let's go over to Grafton. And we'd spend the day doing that.

We had a lot more freedom to do that kind of stuff, and that was nice because that was our time together where we didn't have to take care of children or to get them ready for school, or see to it that the homework was done. You know, things like that.

JANE THIER:

Empty nest years!

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Exactly. And they were good! They were very good.

JANE THIER:

I love hearing about how even when your life—when you were young, you and Cat—and you would go to bars all the time, that still the most important part of going out wasn't meeting new people or drinking or finding a new group. It was just being with her.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

That's right, that's exactly what it was, yeah. That was exactly what it was.

JANE THIER:

And that's remained constant even though now you don't go out to bars as much as you did when you were younger.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Right. Right. Yeah, that's true. It's Cat, I mean, her and I as a couple. That's just the important thing, and I don't know. I think she would say the same thing, although I do think she has made the comment lately that she's gotten more years behind her than she does in front of her, and she would like to have the freedom to do more things.

Well, I haven't been able to figure out yet what those things are, but she's got two really close girlfriends that she goes on a trip with every summer. And I'm thinking that she may want to broaden that a little bit—start spending more time doing those kinds of things.

Because, like I said, I'm not a drinker. When she goes out with those girls—they got one night a month they go out—and they may start at noon, and, you know, I may not see her until she gets home when the bars close. And sometimes I go with them, now and then, but after a few hours of that, then I'm done. I don't want to be there anymore, so I will just go on home, and I'll say, "I'm taking the car; you have Becky or Patty bring you home when you get ready." So, I think she may talking about that, but I don't think she really knows, either. She just knows she wants some kind of changes.

(01:07:42:00)

JANE THIER:

So, you both expressed interest in traveling and going to new places, but St. Louis is still home base, or?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Yes. Yes.

JANE THIER:

Tell me about that. Tell me about St. Louis' role in your relationship.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

St. Louis, well, I think Cat—she says that I'm not sure that's really true. She says that she would move permanently, like to Florida or somewhere warm, because she really—she's had a lot of injuries at different times, so she really suffers with pain—bone pain—and stuff in the wintertime. She's been complaining the last three weeks, you know, oh my knees are hurting so bad. So I think she thinks if she would move to a warmer climate, she wouldn't have that much.

Myself? I would never leave St. Louis. I would go for two or three months. I'd be a snowbird, you know? But I wouldn't move. I wouldn't relocate permanently [pause] if I didn't have to. St. Louis is my home. It's where I belong. And I think it's where Cat belongs. She could be a snowbird. I think she'd be happy with that.

JANE THIER:

And you've had so many good days here together, so many good experiences.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

That's right.

JANE THIER:

Do you feel like you couldn't have had them anywhere but St. Louis?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Oh, no, I think we were so in love, it wouldn't have made any difference where we were. Yeah, whatever we wanted to do, we would've done it.

JANE THIER:

Aw. That's so sweet!

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

[laughs]

(01:09:12:00)

JANE THIER:

What else would you like to say? Would you like to tell anybody who listens to this—what's part of your history that you'd really want to share? Yours and Cat's? Just yours?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

I think the most important part about our relationship is the fact that we were both dedicated to the relationship, not just to one another, but to the relationship also. And I think you have to really work on that, because no matter how much you love somebody, you're gonna have fights, you're gonna have arguments, and people wind up walking away because they're not committed to the relationship. I think that's the most important thing that you have.

You've gotta know (01:10:00:00) that if you want to stay in a relationship, it takes work, and you have to work through all those things. But you've always got to remember, it's not just the person that you're with, it's the relationship. You have to work to maintain it.

JANE THIER:

And you and Cat's relationship has been challenging at times.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Absolutely, it's been very challenging, yes. But at those times, when we've needed to—I mean, there have been times when we have sought professional help in order to work through problems that we would see. We were just butting our heads up against the wall. We couldn't fix it, you know? So we would go see someone, and go to counseling for two or three months, and then you kind of get it worked out.

It takes work, and you have to know that you want to stay in the relationship, you know? Because love changes. It changes. It's not always the same. You don't have all that passion and all those kind of things to glue you together forever. You have to work at it.

(01:11:06:00)

JANE THIER:

Wow. Do you have any final thoughts about anything that you want to share?

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

No, just that I've been very happy in the life that I've had. I'm looking forward to growing—well, I'm already old. [laughs] But I'm looking forward to growing older with my partner. I hope that we've set our children on good foundations. I think we have. And they're working to set their children on good foundations.

And I hope when they tell stories about their grandparents that they tell good ones.

Two of our granddaughters, when they were in high school—now they're twenty-four and twenty-five now—oh my gosh, when they told their girlfriends that their grandparents were lesbians, they were the most popular kids in school. Now this was, you know, ten years ago, whenever lesbianism became so popular! Now, everybody wants to

know a lesbian. It wasn't like that before, but yeah, they were very proud to have grandparents that were lesbian.

JANE THIER:

Especially in this day and age where it wasn't always easy.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Exactly, right. Yeah. And they'd always bring their friends over, but you know, yeah. I hope that we've set them all on a good path, and that they've learned to accept differences in people, you know?

JANE THIER:

I'm sure you have.

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

Well, we've tried to. We've tried to. [laughs]

JANE THIER:

Diana, thank you so much for letting me talk to you!

DIANA DeWEESE-SCHMIDT:

You're welcome. I enjoyed doing it!

JANE THIER:

Thank you, thank you.

[end of interview]



**Word List**

Al-Anon (Alcoholics Anonymous)

Becky

Bell Telephone

Betty Nealey

Betty's CB

Bill

Camp Wyman

Cathy (Cat) Schmidt

Central West End

Denny B

Diane Schuur

Dawna (last name unknown)

East St. Louis

Elvis and Priscilla

The Executive Lounge

Florida

Forest Park

Fort Myers

The Gallery

Grafton

Hawaii

Helen

Herbie's

Hummel's Bar

The Kitty Cat Club  
'Lady Jazz' Mae Wheeler  
Lindbergh High School  
McDonnell Douglas  
Mike Shannon's Restaurant  
Missouri  
Patty  
Quest Diagnostics  
Schrader's  
Shawna (last name unknown)  
Slay's Restaurant  
Smithkline Beecham  
South County  
St. Louis  
Tower Grove Park  
University City