

ONE Archives: Pat Rocco Int.

Transcribed by Kip Hargrove (August 2010)

Jim Kepner: This is Jim Kepner, April 27, 1983, doing the first of a series of interviews of gay activists for the National Gay Archives. We're currently at 6732 Franklin Place in Hollywood, where our interviewee, Pat Rocco, has lived for the past two years, while managing Hudson House, a city-funded residential facility for gays, lesbians and others in need of housing. I first interviewed you, Pat, in the fall of 1968, a few months before Hollywood's trade press began calling you the Cecil B. de Mille of male erotic films, pre-porno, that is. A lot's happened since then. You went through a few years of mounting fame as a gay filmmaker, then helped found several important organizations in the local gay community. But perhaps we should start out with this house, which is currently being vacated. That gives us a three-pronged opening question: why are you leaving here, where are you going, and what's next for Pat Rocco. You can take those in whatever order ...

Pat Rocco: [laughs] OK. Well, why I'm leaving here is really tied in, in a number of ways, to the other parts of your question. Let's go with, uh, ...I'm going to Hawaii, with David, my other half. We've been together ten years. He's leaving his job as a court person. I'm leaving my directorship of Hudson House and a number of other organizations that I'm involved with, either on the board or as a member or as an officer, something of that nature, to make a very big change in both of our lives. We'll be opening a combination movie theater, restaurant and store in a small town in Hawaii, kind of starting off brand-new with everything that, uh - with our entire lives, really. The why of it - it just seems time for a change. I guess after so many years of day and night, particularly with Hudson House, the telephone calls, the knocks on the door,...

JK: You don't stop at five o'clock.

PR: Oh no, there's no such thing as business hours at Hudson House. And I suppose I should explain what Hudson House is. It's emergency housing for gay men and lesbians in the gay and lesbian community in Los Angeles. No one is turned away. Jobs are supplied through the United States Mission, which is the founder of Hudson House, and a comfortable place is provided, a residential house that's fully furnished, nicely furnished, and right now we have four houses, and a dormitory, and someone in an emergency situation can call Hudson House and we'll help. We're here for that purpose. It's a great need in the community that has been ongoing for a long time, and I'm really proud of the growth that it's had and the number of people-- Up to now it's more than four thousand in the years that we've been working, that Hudson House has in its way helped. Proud of that. So that's what's going to be happening, and I'm making a major change.

JK: And you see a sort of vacation from the gay movement for a little while.

PR: I guess you could put it that way.

JK: Could you go back a bit and tell us a bit more about Hudson House, how it was set up, some of the problems you've, uh...

PR: OK, well we started in 1978, February 15th, as a matter of fact, was when the first house opened. There had been a number of other houses in Los Angeles. Union House, Edgemont House, Fountain House, Van Ness,

JK: ...residential...

PR: That's true, it was, before it became, for alcoholics.

JK: ...Baxter Street...

4:14

PR: Right, exactly, but all those places, except for Van Ness, which changed over into alcoholism, as far as help-type places, they all closed, and it was researched as to why they closed. They all had problems with management, with rules, or lack of them, with liquor, with sex, with dope, that kind of thing. There were no houses for a while, no place where a person could go in an emergency situation. And so Bob Humphries of the United States Mission and a few others got together and decided that there really needs to be a place. It's definitely needed. Bob ran a greasy guy contest, is what he called it, to raise money, to get some rent for a house. A little bit of money was raised through the contest, and then we sort of waited. And I was living on Hudson Avenue, and the house next door to me became available for rent, and I said, Bob, let's jump at this, here it is. It's a nice little old house, three bedrooms, and we can start with this. So he put up the money from the contest, I put up some money too, and the house was opened. Within the first week it filled up. I think it held 18 people. But in filling it up and in getting it started, it was important that we based how Hudson House was going to run, on how the problems of the other houses that had been in Los Angeles had been run, and why they closed. So I set up a series of rules and regulations that are in effect today, and they are really what has kept the house open. Strong management, fairly strict rules, but all with a feeling of love and support behind all those rules, and behind the operation, that made people feel comfortable and supported. We served meals. We had a small kind of a rental thing.

JK: Does Hudson House still serve meals?

PR: Right now Hudson house does not. As of just a few months ago we discontinued meals because of the situation of the economy going crazy with food, and it was just putting us off the block. So what we did was we lowered the rent and discontinued the meals. That was just recently. But for five years it went on with breakfast and dinner every day. That was the first house. Six months later we opened up a second house, filled that up...

JK: Because a large number of people have complained about charging the same amount and not serving meals, so could you be a little more specific about that. It was lowered and..

PR: You mean just recently?

JK: Yes.

PR: OK, that was just last February and where rent had gone up to seventy-five dollars a week. We lowered it down to fifty and started, uh, stopped the serving of food. That doesn't mean, however, that people themselves are not working with food now in their own way. What's happening is that they're combining with each other, they're going to the store together, they're shopping, there's two or three refrigerators in each of the houses, so there's plenty of room for people to store their food. The kitchen is fully equipped, and people are combining and doing their own thing. They're cooking together, they're eating together, and they're sharing together and Hudson House is very much a sharing place, which is what it's meant to be.

Now, before, the manager of the house was also the cook, and he'd have to, or she, sixteen, eighteen people breakfast, sixteen, eighteen people dinner. That's a lot to expect of a person, but we did it for five years

JK: ...René was working his tail off.

7:39

PR: Right, right, exactly. You were a resident for about two weeks, I believe it was, for a short period of time when we were on Hudson Avenue. Going back to Hudson Avenue, we, the first house was doing so well that when another house became available for rent just on the other side of me, where I was living, we grabbed that one and a few months later a third house on the same piece of property became available and we had three houses. This went on for about, mm, two years, and then on the same piece of property, there was a very large, large house, a two-story situation with a lot of private rooms upstairs, and that became available and we jumped at it, and we had a half block. We had a half of a city block, a kind of a city within a city there at Hudson House, with an empty lot besides that we could use for, like, yard sales or football playing or selling Christmas trees, which we did one year, and it was really something.

The owner of the property decided that he wanted to build a condominium on the house, on that lot, all that property. So he gave us something like, I think, a four-month notice, gave us plenty of time, and we had to vacate the houses, and in the interim of that four months time, I rented a few more houses so that everybody that wanted to could be able to move over into what the continuation of Hudson House was. They leveled the houses, we stood there and watched them, that half city block, as these big bulldozers took over and leveled what had been our home for so many years, our homes, I should say, all of those houses, and uh, but we were still going. We were down to two houses then for a while, and then built up to a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, that kind of thing. And during that five-year time, we've only had to close one house, and that was just recently.

9:37

We had a kind of a more expensive house for fully employed people. It was up on Holly Hill Terrace here in Hollywood, which was part-way into what's called Whitley Heights in Los Angeles. The Whitley Heights people did not like us being there. They brought out petitions, they made phone calls. It's kind of an exclusive area and they didn't like the idea of a so-called halfway house, particularly for gays and lesbians, in their sort of snobbish area there. The pressure was put on through City Hall. The pressure was put on through the Department of Building and Safety, who said we had too many people in the house and all that kind of thing, that it was more like a boarding house and that it wasn't zoned for that. And that, combined with the fact that it was our most expensive house and very difficult to maintain, we closed that house, so we're down a little bit lower now.

I feel very good about the past of Hudson House, of what it's done for people and how we've been recognized by the City. As a matter of fact, around me here on the walls are some of the things that City Hall has been nice enough to say about us. Like, here's a commendation here from Mayor Tom Bradley.

JK: ... tribute the other night. It was a beautiful one.

11:00

PR: Yes, it was. Here's something from Councilwoman Peggy Stephenson. Over in here is a State resolution from Herschel Rosenthal. And way under the lamp here – I don't know if you can see it here – is a resolution from the President Pro Tem of the Senate, David Roberti. And surrounding in here, by the way, there are several more walls of pictures that can't be seen but hopefully we'll be able to get to them - we're sort of surrounded by them - are some other pictures that relate to Hudson House. When we opened Hudson House number 4, as an example, we had a big outdoor party and actor Jack Albertson was one of our guests, who helped open up that house. Over in here is Hudson House marching in a Christopher Street West parade. Birthday parties. Well, this one happens to be for me [laughs], and just a few of the Hudson House people...

JK: How many birthday parties would you say were celebrated at the houses?

PR: Oh, hundreds, because we would never overlook a resident's birthday, and we've had as many as 120 people, when we had all the houses going, in the houses, so there was a birthday almost every day. It was a big occasion, and everybody liked the idea that we went along with that and didn't spare the fact that it's cake-and-ice-cream time again. It was good times, and still is good times, and we continue to do that because I think it's important, that kind of personal feeling that you're part of a family, and as part of a family, if you have a special occasion in your life, we want everybody to know about it. That's all a part of what Hudson House is.

Now just a few weeks ago we celebrated our fifth anniversary. We've done what we'd never done before, and that's have a big event, a kind of a sit-down dinner at a nice place. We've never done anything quite like that.

JK: The others were very enjoyable, the backyard...

13:00

PR: We had backyard things and things like

JK: ... amateur shows...

PR: Mm hmm, right. In-house things were fun, and only occasionally we'd have the public by. A lot of the times it was just for us. But this one we thought we'd celebrate in a big way, and we were very pleased to have members of the city council there, particularly Pat Russell and the mayor and many of the presidents or chairpersons or representatives from a number of organizations. That was a great deal of a show of support for Hudson House, the kind that we hadn't actually solicited before, but the fact that we did, and everybody came and everybody had nice things to say, it was kind of a love-in kind of evening. And, being so pleasant, it gave a kind of a warmth for the residents who were there, who, as you know, when they come to Hudson House, they usually don't feel too good about themselves. They come from difficult situations. They've been thrown out by their parents, who says "we don't want a gay person or a lesbian" or whatever "in our house" as a parent. Or they come from across the other side of the country and they come to Hollywood and they try to find a job and things don't go well and they're out of the money and they're sleeping in the parks, or worse, working the streets. Or someone who is working the streets and says "this is not for me." Hudson House provides that kind of refuge so they can get out of it with a different kind of a job available to them immediately on an emergency basis. Or they're kicked out by a lover, or they've lost their job and lost their funds.

There are so many reasons why a person comes to Hudson House. I could tell you stories of people, how they've come in, many people with the only thing they have is what they're wearing. I remember one person who I'll never forget, walked literally from the state of Washington clear down through to Los Angeles, found Hudson House, and when he came in, he could hardly walk. He was only, like, 18, and his feet were so swollen, the first thing all the residents...of course, they're very supportive. When someone new comes in, they're very supportive. A big basin, hot water, epsom salts, we soaked his feet and the poor kid, this was just one of so many things. There have been a few tragedies at Hudson House too. We've had a couple of deaths. We've had one birth.

15:20

And when I say it's like a city within a city, it really is, particularly when we had all the houses together. Now they're only maybe ten blocks apart, but there still is a feeling of that, because once a month we get all the houses' people together and we have a monthly party get-together, and each time it goes from house to house. Each house does it once a month. And that's kind of fun because it's their only chance really of meeting the other people in the other houses, because they're not close together any more like they used to be. So we still maintaining that single-family unit in each house, large family unit when all the houses get together, and it's very warm and very good.

JK: Some of the residents have stayed for quite a long time.

PR: Yes. We've had some people who have been with us...

JK: Some are encouraged to get on their feet quickly...

PR: Well, all are encouraged to get on their feet quickly. Once they've gotten a job, they're encouraged to bank their money and save it and get ready for the time when they have to put first-, last-month deposit, and key, on their own place and get off on their own. We're here to help them in that time. But some people really like the idea of communal living and shared living, and we've had some people who have been with us for a couple of years. They really like that idea. And others want more privacy, and naturally they're going to try to get out and get on their own as soon as they can.

JK: At the concert at Hollywood High, which you were emceeing, a couple years ago, when the San Francisco band and chorus showed down here for the first time, there was a big announcement made about major city funds coming to Hudson House, and then for a long time, those funds seemed to go into limbo.

17:10

PR: Well, in your preface you had said that a "city-funded program." I have to correct you, that's incorrect. We have never been city-funded, ever. We've had to do it ourselves, and we managed to do it by the contributions of the people who live in the houses. We have a set rate and they have to share their paycheck with us in order for us to exist. But it's on a low basis. I don't think anyone would be able to find the kind of rentals we have anywhere in the city in our situation.

But getting back to the funding situation, yes, that interesting night at Hollywood High School, the first gay event there, by the way. Deputy Mayor... Inside, inside Hollywood High School, in the auditorium. More than 2000 people showed up. Deputy Mayor Grace Davis made a presentation of a commendation and then another representative said that there would be, I think it was, at that time, \$65,000 available, being made available through a grant to Hudson House. That amount grew to \$140,000 by additional grants being added to it within a short period of time. However, ...

JK: The additional grants came out of the Hollywood revitalization funds.

18:25

PR: That's right, some of them. It came from two places. The other one was a small amount from someone. Anyway, it grew to \$140,000, which we could not touch, because there was a loophole in it. To get a grant you had to be in the Neighborhood Strategy Area – NSA. Well, Hudson House was two blocks outside that. Two short blocks made the difference of our not being able to get that funding. Well, we didn't want to lose it. It had already been voted on by the entire city council, and it was sitting in the bank ready for us to use. So something creative had to be done. It was decided to open within that NSA an employment office, and we called it Crossroads Employment and Job

Counseling Services, kind of an extension of Hudson House but run as a separate entity. A staff was hired, and...

JK: That was incorporated.

19:22

PR: And that was incorporated under Hudson House Incorporated, because it had to be a corporation, and the \$140,000 was used there and there only, and it couldn't go to the houses. You couldn't filter it off, that would be illegal. Now the funny thing is, since then the city has discovered that you don't have to live within this certain area to be poor or to have an emergency. You can live anywhere, and so they have dropped the NSA situation. Unfortunately when we had that money given to us, that rule was still standing and we were blocked from it. So we have managed all these years to do it on our own. And sometimes it's been good, and sometimes things have been so bad that the managers who were hired...

20:09

JK: I think most of the community still does not know that you did not have all of that city funds, you just haven't had city funds for ...

PR: Right, we haven't had any, none, not one thing. But there were a couple of times when things were so bad at Hudson House, because they could be good as well as bad, that the managers, who have a small stipend salary, had voted to give up their salary in order to be sure that the houses continued on. And other times, when things were so good that we were able to put aside some funds to be able to open up another house, and furnish it, which takes four or five thousand dollars.

20:43

JK: We have the same problem at the Archives.

PR: I'm sure. So it's upsy-downsy, but mostly it's up and mostly the houses are full, and for sure, they're doing the job they're supposed to do, and that is helping people. People helping people.

21:00

JK: There was a recent split between Crossroads and Hudson House.

PR: Well, not really a split because there never was a togetherness. They had to operate as two separate situations, because one was funded and one was not. One was incorporated and one was not. There was kind of an understanding between the two, that if someone came to Hudson House, we would immediately shoo them off over to Crossroads and they would help them get a job. But there couldn't be a split if there wasn't a togetherness to start with. They were run as two separate entities, had to be.

21:37

JK: And, uh, let's see – how close was the relationship to U.S Mission prior to the time when Hudson House and Crossroads ceased to be working closely together?

PR: Well, U.S. Mission, the United States Mission, is essentially the founder of Hudson House through Bob Humphries and through his contest that raised some of the initial money. For the first several years, there was no real close relationship between Hudson House and the U.S. Mission, even though they were part of it.

JK: ...not formally...

22:18

PR: Not formally, right. But lately, particularly in the last year, there's been a very close relationship, and it's very right, because they have been offering these immediate emergency-type jobs. And Hudson House is really the housing division of the United States Mission, and as such, the relationship has been on-again, off-again, but right at the very beginning, when I was appointed Executive Director of Hudson House, it was with the understanding that I would take it and run with it and go with it on my own without any supervision from the Mission, that I would be able to have a free hand. And that was important to me. And I needed that to not have to go and ask a million people a million questions about "can I do this, can I do that, is there money for this, money for that". With the books, I could tell, you know, OK, there's money to get extra food this week, there's money to get a storeroom, there's money to put aside for the possible opening of another house. I had a nice free hand, and that worked out very, very well. That kind of thing still continues today. With my situation of leaving Hudson House after all these years now, Rita Kanjemi [sp?], who is my assistant, will now become, and she's been for a couple of years, will now become the director. René Joubert [sp?] will become the assistant director, and we've elected a new treasurer, and the changeover is going very smoothly. I'm training them, and by the time I go they should know everything. Rita already does, really. But it should be a nice, smooth changeover.

23:50

JK: Do you remember Rita, I mean, René, from the old Jolie's? [sp?]

PR: I'd never been there, but I'd heard about it. I know that he'd been to the early gay bar situation, which was Jolie's, as a pianist, entertainer, and he's done some of that for us too. We have a piano in the house that he manages now, and every once in a while, he'll sit down and people will gather round and he'll sing some of the songs, many of which the young kids have never even heard of. But he'll do a little entertaining here and there and it's fun.

JK: I'd like now to go back to, sort of, the beginnings of the Pat Rocco story, but first, is there anything more about Hudson House that you'd like to...

PR: Well, if something comes up, it'll come up.

24:37

JK: Okay. About your childhood. Where did you grow up? Under what sort of conditions? When?

PR: Well, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, and had a large Italian family, many aunts and uncles. Our grandfather had a little Italian grocery store, and I lived in New York and went to school there until I was, I think, 11 years old, and that's when my father, who was a draftsman, decided to come out to California, and so we picked up stakes - I was the only child - and came out and settled in Inglewood, where I went through grammar school. And then there was a split. My mother and father divorced and they both remarried. On my father's side there was another sister. On my mother's side there were two sisters and a brother, that came afterwards. So there was kind of a goodly-sized gap between [me and] the additional children. I lived in Duarte, California, and went through high school at Monrovia-Arcadia-Duarte High School - MAD High School.

25:51

JK: Now, let's see, how are you using that term?

PR: No, M. A. D. - Monrovia-Arcadia-Duarte, that's how I'm using it.

JK: That was a synonym for "gay" in the 40s and 50s.

PR: Mad? Oh, really? I didn't know that, okay. You learn something new. Um, I came out, as far as I can recall, when I was about 13 years old. I can remember vividly the first sexual experience that I had that was overtly and specifically as they called at that time "queer", "gay". There had been what is considered the normal relationships between boys early on, much of that that had gone on when I was little and grew up and from what I understand, that happens all the time, and you sort of grow out of it, or whatever it is they call it, however it is the psychologists want to put it, I don't know, but it happened a lot in my early life. But I do remember the specifically, the first incident that I knew was not just playing around. It was a hitchhiking situation and it was with an older man and we went to a park and whatever. I had no relationships with anybody in high school except one, whom I still know today, all these years later, who also, who became a teacher later on. But I did have a particular instance with a high school teacher that caused a real problem with me. Not with me so much because I had learned, even at that early age, kind of accepted myself for what it was, and in the '40s, that's ...you don't do that, or at least, it wasn't done, but I really had, and, uh, but it was discovered with the high school teacher, I forget how. Evidently he had done some things with other young boys, and my name was brought up and it was kind of a scandal brought to the principal's attention. And I remember going in to the principal's office with my mother and it was a point of discussion, and what are you going to do to stop all this nastiness and all of that, and I fought it and said this is the way I am. Like, I was 16 years old and...

JK: How did your mother react?

28:36

PR: Very unfavorably. There was not much support there from my mother. And so it was in my last year of high school, and I was about to graduate, and they would not allow me to graduate in a normal manner for the last couple of months. Because I stood up and did not say the things they wanted me to say, I could not graduate with the class. They sent a tutor to the house to finish out my studies, and come graduation day, I was not allowed to march in the group and all of that. I got my papers through the mail. I went to the graduation ceremony, sat up in the bleachers and cried my head off while all my classmates went through the whole thing of pomp and circumstance, and they handed the scroll and the thing with the hat and the robes and all of that sort of thing, and I had to sit in the background. Very unhappy situation on that.

29:28

Um, went to college for just a short time, just a year, but during that time there'd been another talent that had been growing that I guess had started when I was really very young, and that was singing. And I loved to sing, I just enjoyed it. Music was a big thing with me. And when television started coming in in like '46, '47, '48, I saw this as a field that I wanted to get into somehow. And so I got on. At the time there were many local talent shows on television. That seemed to be the thing that everybody did. Betty White was during that time, with Al Jarvis, and they did a talent show, and there were many of these, and I got on them, and I won almost every one, and I was winning watches and bicycles and games and whatever. Here's this little kid who just gets up there and is very gutsy and sings his heart out. And did very well. And in college I had been working in some religious work thing and I cut a couple of records. I cut an album of records, religious records, and I also did one of the early weekly television shows on NBC called the Anna Mae Show, where it was kids who were, each half-hour show was like Anna Mae's got a problem, and what are we going to do to help her, and I was kind of the male lead in that. And so the singing career was going pretty well. I would get jobs and one thing would lead to another and finally I was doing some nightclub work. I worked with Phyllis Diller for a while. I worked with a number of people. Marge and Gower Champion, I did a year-long tour with them and did a number of television shows. And then in the late '50s I got on the Tennessee Ernie Ford show and was a regular on that for three years. And that's when NBC went color at just that time...song and dance, not too much dance, fortunately, because I'm not a professional dancer, ...

31:30

JK: I saw a couple clips...

PR: You did? [laughs] Good for you. Um, and singing was going well. I always had a love for theater, though, and movies. That always stuck with me, which may be why, right now, I'm going off to open up my own movie theater, because I had my own movie theater, again, late, uh, early in 1960, after leaving the Ford show, by choice. I left that show to open up my own movie theater, which was unfortunately a bad area. It lasted a year and was fun for a time, it was good....Moorpark. Moorpark, California, and um...

32:03

JK: What theater was it?

PR: It was the Park Theater in Moorpark. Isn't that interesting. [laughs] Because we're going to get to the Park Theater in Los Angeles and the strange things that happened there, in a bit, so, um...

JK: The movement got its first spurt from my entrapment in front of the Park Theater.

PR: Mm hmm.

JK: In 1952.

PR: '52? Really? That must have been something. In '52 that would have been the kind of newsworthy thing that Christine Jorgensen was, with her situation. Now, it's uh...

JK: Were you in the service, or...

PR: No I was...

JK: ...were you between the drafts?

PR: I was never in the service, and I purposely did not want to go in the service because it was right in the middle of my career. I'll never forget the instance. I was, uh, I had avoided the draft purposely, and the service, I don't know what branch, I guess it's the armed forces made a thing of it, and at the time I was in San Francisco working at the Purple Onion with Phyllis Diller, and they made a thing of coming in and arresting me right after a performance for supposedly avoiding the draft. What they had not taken into effect [sic] was that I had sent the proper letters explaining that I was homosexual, and, because... I used that, it was true, but I used it because I want to stick with my career. And it hit all the newspapers, it was quite a big thing, and um...

JK: What year was this?

PR: This was about '55, '55-56, right in there, somewhere in there, maybe '57 at the latest. And so a kind of a big thing was made of that, but it was all explained out and everything worked out OK in the long run. I didn't go in the service, I did continue with my career, but I had to be very open and up-front about the whys and wherefores of it, and the story came out afterwards. Nobody seemed to mind, even in that time. My gig at the Purple Onion was not upset in any way, the people weren't upset, and certainly Phyllis Diller wasn't upset, and she's been a friend ever since, and so it worked out OK.

What would you like to go into next?

34:26

JK: This thing, I think, that for gays, the first perception of being different, which sometimes can come at remarkably early ages. People react differently on that, but when

did you first have a feeling of being not quite what was expected in one way or another? Sexual attraction, maybe, or gender role, maybe.

PR: Not a gender role but a sexual attraction, and that was probably around 12, 13, where it persisted, where I wasn't enjoying myself going out on the obligatory dates in high school and in grammar school and whatever it happened to be, where I was obviously attracted to other young boys my age, where I would even occasionally hero-worship perhaps an 18-year-old football player or something of that nature.

JK: Film stars?

PR: Film stars? Not that I can recall, but people more closer to the age that I was at the time. And then the beginning of the sexual experience, experiences, I knew what was going on. I knew the words that people were using that they applied to me, the fairy, the queer, all that other stuff. I knew that applied to me. I hid it.

JK: Did you get it directly or did you just hear it and know that you were included?

35:58

PR: No, it was never aimed at me, it was never aimed at me. I guess I was not effeminate, and I guess like so many other people, hid it. I wasn't overt, and of course, at that time, it wasn't the time to be overt, in the '40s and early '50s. But I would get on a bus and I would go to downtown Los Angeles when I was a teenager, and managed to get into a place called Maxwell's. You probably have heard of that.

JK: Second near Hill.

PR: Second near Hill, and that was just like a standup bar but it was the only place that I was - and somebody told me about it, I don't know how - but I knew here were other people like me. Of course, they were much older. And then I went to a place called Le Beouf's, Le Beouf's which was in a cellar.

JK: Sixth and...

PR: They had a piano bar, and I ...

JK: Broadway...

PR: Right. No, on Spring Street, on Spring Street, right, and they had a piano bar and I was a singer and I was a kid and I guess I was considered "chicken" and so they welcomed the fact that I was able to sing and get along and do all that fun stuff, and so it became fun for me to get away from home, nobody knew what I was doing, I would just sneak out and forget the homework and get on a bus, and I don't know what the age requirements of going into a bar was. They didn't serve food or anything, but I got away with it. I just went in there and I must have been only 17, 16 maybe. And so, that little singing thing helped out in that thing. I made friends easily. But there were always older

people. It was a while before I found people my own age. I thought I was the only young one, you know.

37:51

JK: What other parts of the gay community, such as it was, did you discover around then or in the next few years?

PR: I discovered no gay community at that time. I didn't know the existence of one. The only gay community that I saw was in a bar. Where these people went after the bar, I never knew, unless it was with me for that one night or something like that.

JK: Did you run up 5th or 6th Street from the terminals to the library?

PR: No.

JK: It was just ...

PR: That's something you knew about. No, I don't, I don't know about that.

JK: Or in Pershing Square, hear about Pershing Square?

PR: I think I may have cruised Pershing Square a couple of times as a kid. I think I may have.

38:33

JK: This may be jumping a lot, and if it is, you might want to fill in some other things first. But you were associated, and I'm not clear in what way, with the performance of "The Drunkard" for many, many years, and at or after that time you had a head shop, Bizarre Bazaar.

PR: Mm hmm. "The Drunkard" was the longest running play ever. I think it ran 23 years in Los Angeles. Well, I tagged on just as they were about to close at one location, which was the Press Club in Los Angeles. I reopened another production and tagged on to the run of it, therefore running it for three years additionally, which made it go like 26 years. When we finally closed, it closed after 26 years in Los Angeles.

JK: Joe Adair was in...

PR: Joe Adair was in the production from the beginning and through that time.

JK: Had he been in it before you got – did you meet him there, or did you –

PR: No, I don't remember how I met Joe, quite frankly.

JK: He starred in several of your films later...

PR: He did, and we'd been fast friends from that early time on. "The Drunkard" played Troopers Hall, which was my early establishment with Estelle Millmar [sp?], who runs Troopers Hall, the president of Troopers.

JK: I didn't know...

PR: It was at Troopers Hall, and that's where I knew Estelle, and then of course Troopers Hall later on became the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion of the gay community, and it was through my...

40:10

JK: Let's talk about Estelle here...

PR: Sure. Estelle, what can you say about Estelle? She's kind of a short, brassy, wonderful, and sometimes hateful, woman who knows exactly what she wants and how she wants it, and she'll go along with you, as long as things are going well, and she'll support you, and sometimes she'll say "No, I don't want you to do it that way", because we were using the hall so many times in so many ways and sometimes we would do some special effects on stage that would maybe hurt the stage or hurt the curtains. "No, you cannot squirt shaving cream at somebody on the stage!" and whatever. But ...

JK: She didn't object to that dry ice?

PR: The dry ice, yes, we had used dry ice with lots of stuff. And that was during SPREE time, and we'll get to that. But it was...Estelle is a wonderful person, and amazingly, you know, what a wonderful voice at her age, she's close to 80 years old.

JK: Who ran a gay bar around 1937...

PR: Yes, I heard that. She ran a gay bar around 1937, knew what was going on, and was one of the first people...

JK: Her first appearance on stage was at the age of...

PR: I never heard her tell a story

JK: It was told from a SPREE stage...

PR: Yes, I've heard her tell a story, I don't remember the age, though, probably 2 or 3...

JK: A few months.

PR: A few months, something like that, was carried on and did a whale and that was how she started. She sings, she tap dances, she's close to 80 now, she still does it all, and she still runs Troopers Hall with an iron hand, and keeps the place going. And Troopers Hall, through my early relationship with Estelle, became the place that I said, "Estelle, can we

bring this meeting in here? Estelle, can we bring MCC in here? Can we bring in the bike clubs in here?" I introduced all those people to Estelle and she opened up the place little by little after we had first established it for another gay organization. And that was unusual for the situation. So it worked out.

42:23

JK: Was it Bizarre Bazaar, or are there other points in between?

PR: Bizarre Bazaar was the first head shop in Hollywood, so-called head shop, posters, paraphernalia. We served a thing called LSD coffee. We sold the underground newspapers. We showed midnight movies. Midnight every night we'd show a movie in the back of – half of it was head shop and half of it was like a little coffee shop, and we had a projector and we just showed movies at night, and people would jam in there and sometimes watch through the windows in the front. It was a very popular little place. Right across the street from the post office in Hollywood on Selma Avenue. And to look at it, I'd put up a huge marquee up at the top, talking about head shop and all this other stuff, and LSD coffee and that kind of thing, that I had made myself. Turned out to be an illegal sign, but we did keep it up for a long time. It was like 4 by 8 going in a crossway thing with letters on both sides, so you couldn't miss it coming down this little tiny street, here's this big marquee for a store that is no wider than this room but was kind of long, long enough for us to make a nice big picture on the wall in the back. It was a popular place, and I enjoyed running it and hiring people to be part of it, and all of that, and made a lot of friends there.

43:47

And it was through that relationship, because we sold the Free Press that I always read it when it came in, and I read an ad one day that said we need a photographer for, to shoot male nude studies. I had dabbled in photography all my life. I'd always loved to take a camera around with me and I'd dabbled sometimes with little movie cameras too, and I had made home movies of stuff, and I was interested in photography always. And so I decided to answer the ad. Well, I answered the ad and they gave me a camera, they gave me a model, they gave me a roll of film, and they said go with it, let's see what you do. And they liked the results and so they gave me more models, and well, you get the gist of it. I wish I could remember that first ... It was an author who wrote stories that went in nudist magazines. I mean, when you say nudist magazines, like nudist camps, because at the time, that's the only they can get away with showing some nudity, by having them playing volleyball, or sitting on the beach or something like that. But that progressed pretty quickly.

44:55

At any rate, I was doing that for a while and enjoying it, and I started taking a little 8-millimeter camera along with me and making some minute-and-a-half to three-minute camera studies of some of the male nudes that I was shooting, and sometimes even making a little tiny storyline, until finally I had a kind of a backlog of these little 8-millimeter films, and by that time I'd also graduated to 16-millimeter. And so I decided to put an ad in the Free Press, same place that I'd gotten – this may be six months had

passed by, only – or possibly a year. I put an ad in the Free Press saying there's a catalog of male nude films available, for a quarter. I was deluged with mail, deluged with mail. I had to get hundreds of copies made of all these films, and suddenly found myself in a business. I had to hire somebody to do the mail situation, and the little one-page catalog for a quarter grew to four, five, six, eventually I think to a forty-page catalog. It became quite elaborate, and color catalog. And it was doing very nicely. And I'd closed the head shop at that time and was concentrating pretty much on the mail-order business. I took a great deal of pride in each of the little films, not only that I'd done earlier but the ones that I'd done subsequently, in how they were done, what they were saying, the storylines in them. I'd used some of my own personal relationships that I'd had, sometimes, in developing these silent storylines that could tell a story without any sound, because you didn't distribute the sound – there were no sound 8-millimeter films at that time, or 16-millimeter for that matter either, along that line.

46:44

The owner of the Park Theater on Alvarado Street somehow got wind of what I was doing through another person and called me and said we'd like to take a look at your films. I'll never forget the session. It lasted all day, where they wanted to see everything, so I threw everything on the screen in my living room there on Detroit Street. One film after another. The end result was they said these films are good enough to be shown in a regular theater rather than just mail order. How about let's try a couple first. So I took a couple of films – I think it was "Love Is Blue" was one of them, and the other one was "Fanny's Hill." One was a comedy and one was very serious. I put a musical soundtrack to them and they squeezed them in another program that didn't have any nudity in it. I think it was "Jason" or something like that, at the Park Theater, just to see what the reaction was.

47:43

JK: That was about...

PR: This is, now we're now talking about 1968, June, about June of 1968. That really started it all, those two films.

JK: [?] by the way, of a couple of programs that the Apollo Theater had, of Queens Gay Festivals at midnight in November of '67.

PR: As a matter of fact, I was, because I gave them some films, not my own, but I gave them some things that had, I had a print of Mr. Universe, which was a Universal film, that had no – it wasn't meant to be a gay film but it starred Vince Edwards and it had a lot of muscle men in it in shorts. And I also had a sequence from a film, an MGM musical called "Athena", which starred Debbie Reynolds and Jane Powell, but it featured Steve Reeves in a contest, a muscle contest, and I cut that piece out of the film and I loaned them that for that very program you're talking about, these midnight shows. And of course there were a couple of midnight-type shows, very quiet, non-advertised, of Kenneth Anger films and things like that.

48:43

JK: Oh, that had been going on since the 40s.

PR: Yes, that I had seen at the Coronet and also at the Cinema Theater on Western Avenue.

JK: That was operating as a film museum.

PR: A membership, and a museum too, but it was like a membership situation.

JK: The Times at that time would not advertise anything related to gays, but they did not recognize the Queens Film Festival.

PR: They didn't know it, that's true. So, the Park Theater. [lighting a cigarette] One more cigarette. There was a lot a comment to the management about those two films. I mean, one was definitely very gay, and one was definitely a comedy that had no gay overtones. It was a comedy...

JK: "Fanny's Hill" was one of the all-time classics.

PR: ...with a pie-throwing contest, fifty pies or a hundred pies, whatever it was that was used in that. It was like a slapstick comedy thing that involved three men and one woman, and it was the first sort-of in a public theater, male nudity shown on the screen. And the other one, "Love Is Blue", was a definite gay story.

49:50

JK: A love story.

PR: Yes, a definite gay love story on the beach. Well, the reaction was wild, and they said, OK, it's time to go with it. Put together a whole group of your films, put a soundtrack to it, we're putting in a new projector, the whole number.

JK: Was it Continental Theaters?

PR: Continental Theaters was the theater chain, right, but it was the Park Theater. And so, I think it was only a month later or something like that, the Original Pat Rocco Male Nude Film Festival, which was what they called it – long title – came about.

JK: The Park at that time had been showing gay programs pretty consistently for three or four months.

PR: Mm hmm.

JK: And mainly made up of feature films like "Some Like It Hot" or the Oscar Wilde films, the films about Oscar Wilde.

PR: Mm hmm.

JK: With a few backyard jockstrap danglers.

50:42

PR: Mm hmm, right. But this was the first nude situation and the first specifically gay and nude situation in a public theater. And they were quite afraid. They had attorneys standing by. And they charged five dollars at the box office for the program when they changed it over. And there was good reason for that. It was a high price at that time, but there was a reason for that. And people would come to the box office in trench coats or umbrellas or any excuse to just walk and not be seen in some way [gestures to cover his face], any diffusion of turning your head or whatever, but they still packed in there, and the films did very well, and I became a movie-making machine from that point on for a couple of years. I was making movies day and night.

JK: And for a while, during the period when TV was hitting the film industry badly, the Park on the nights of your openings and so on out-grossed any other theater in town.

PR: That's true. I'll never forget the out-grossing of one of my films, I think it was "Sex and the Single Gay", where it out-grossed "Funny Girl", which was playing at the Grauman's Chinese Theater at the time. That was a real pleasure. The financing from the films came from the income from the previous film.

JK... The first time, at one of your openings, and I think it may have been "Mondo Rocco", or the one before that, "Dares" – was "Dares" before "Mondo Rocco"?

PR: Yes.

JK: It was "Dares" then when, for the first time, there were double lines around the block both ways. People were not hiding, and when cameramen came out there to photograph the crowd waiting in line, my first reaction was, "What are those cameras going to do? Everybody's going to disappear!"

PR: Mm hmm.

JK: And no one reacted. It was as if all of a sudden I realized we're beginning to be free ...

52:35

PR: That first step. I hope that maybe the films and their content had something to do with that, because the storylines were always positive. I only made one downer film, and that was Joe Adair, who you mentioned earlier, and that was called "A Matter of Life", where there's a suicide at the end. I don't know why I did that. I think he talked me into it. He says, this is a great drama, and I want to act, and all this. So I went along with that. But the films were otherwise all positive, all up, all I think honest. And that part of it, because of their popularity, was picked up by the press, which was particularly endearing

to me, the fact that these little films that were made on such a small budget and that managed to go in this nice little homey theater and do so well, that the press – and I'm talking about not just the gay press, but then like the Los Angeles Times, Look Magazine, Variety, the Hollywood Reporter, were reviewing them and reviewing them well. I never got a bad review on the films. And there were some really interesting things that were said about them. I think I had some blowups made and I think I've given those huge blowups of those reviews to you for the Archives.

JK: And I wrote a couple of them.

53:48

PR: Yes you did, that's true. At that time we had met on a number of occasions.

JK: And on one terrible one. I had the editor of the magazine insert a couple of lines that were highly uncomplimentary that just absolutely infuriated me, where he threw in a gratuitous insult.

PR: Oh really?

JK: And for a long time I had to keep explaining to people, I did not write that.

PR: Hmm. What review was that for, do you remember what film?

JK: "Homosexual Information" in Tangents, review of the first...

PR: Oh, I see.

JK: ...review of the first two programs.

PR: Mm hmm.

JK: And it was a counter-review to a negative one that they had already printed.

54:30

PR: So in a way, the films itself made me kind of a gay liberationist, because of how they were done, the fact they were up front, that they were the first really overt gay films with nudity in a public theater, and that they had something to say that was positive. And that – I've had a number of people tell me that "I came out because of your films." I can't tell you, the letters, the phone calls, the things like that. "They made me feel like I was not alone." "They gave me a real positive feeling about myself because I could relate to the people on the screen." I just can't tell you, they have done, they have changed people's lives, and that made me feel very good.

JK: They frequently had a ... quality and the sort of romantic idealism that the Disney films had at their best, and the MGM musicals of the '30s and '40s had at their best, where many of us growing up looked on the screen and saw all of this solid heterosexual

idealism and just wished that we could see ourselves, our own kind, dancing through the same kind of thing, and in your films for the first time, that happened.

PR: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

55:43

PR: What more can we say about the films? I don't know. If there was a period, of course, that the films...

JK: I want to talk about "Disneyland Discovery" and how you happened to make it and how, when I took friends, I saw it at your house at a press preview and was extremely excited. I took six or eight friends to the Park Theater and it wasn't on the program. Then I took other people back to the Park Theater a week or two later and a badly mauled version of it was on the program.

56:15

PR: Okay. This is what happened with that film. In seeking out locations to do a film...

JK: It was the most beautiful of the ideal gay self-discovery films.

PR: And it was called "Discovery." "A Disneyland Discovery" was its full title at the very beginning in its original version. In seeking out locations to do films to make it interesting and each film different, one location was Disneyland. Went there one day with two actors and one help-type person, had a 16-millimeter hand-type camera and a tripod – and since then, tripods have been outlawed at Disneyland – and made this film of two young men meeting.

JK: You didn't ask, of course...

PR: Oh no, just went in, just went in...

JK: They didn't mind home movies...

PR: They just thought it was home movies being taken. The storyline was two young men meeting at Disneyland, enjoying the company of rides together, going on many rides, in some cases, walking hand in hand, and eventually going across to Tom Sawyer's Island, where they had a kind of a superimposed kissing scene, where we'd see them both clothed and naked, superimposed and going back and forth between that situation, and then at the end we see them walking out hand in hand from Disneyland and leaving, essentially to go on to whatever.

57:46

When the film came out, a noted attorney at that time, Stanley Fleischmann, was called in...

JK: Censorship attorneys...

PR: Oh yes, it's true. Counted, as he watched the film, that there were 17 full ways that Disney could sue for the use of that film. We played it in its full version the first week, then the film was pulled – that's when you went and it was gone – and it was edited to about half its length, and signs were taken out, identifying things that identified Disneyland were taken out.

JK: that identified it too much...

PR: But there was still no way – you could still tell it was Disneyland. Music was changed because in the original version, all Disney music was used as a background for the film, and in the final version, only one Disney song was used, and that's "When You Wish upon a Star" in the shortened version. So that's the story of that film, except that it has had a lot of notoriety because it was shot at Disneyland and because Disneyland and the Disney studios all knew about me all of a sudden, and I'm sure that their reason for not going through with a lawsuit was it would have brought more notoriety to something that was just sort of an inside thing, and they would have simply blown it up out of proportion. I almost wish they had now. [laughs]

But the second version played pretty well, I thought, actually. It didn't hurt it too much.

JK: [unintelligible]

59:29

PR: The music was a little jagged, right, in the adjustment.

JK: Jack Robinson, who will come into the story again in a minute, in another way, in another one of your astonishing films.

59:40

PR: You're talking about "A Breath of Love." "Breath of Love" was a ballet film for two males, taking place in several locations. One of the locations received quite a bit of notoriety because there was a nude scene of him running nude across the Hollywood Freeway.

JK: In fairly full traffic, it appeared.

PR: In somewhat full traffic. It was shot early in the morning and very carefully, with people parked to block the on-ramps and off-ramps and just enough traffic to know that it was the freeway, and I was on a bridge and shot it from the bridge, and I shot it in a little bit of slow motion, not a lot. It still looked natural. And at one point he runs across the freeway, goes over the barrier in the middle, and runs across the traffic going the other direction. And just that one short scene caught the imagination of so many people, and they call it the "freeway film" just for that little scene.

JK: It was a beautiful film otherwise. The choreography, most of which was done in the editing, I think, was exquisite, and there were restless scenes in that when Jack Robinson steps out from the Hollywood Hills and walks across Los Angeles, if you think about [unintelligible]. The opening and closing scenes done with different color filters were extremely effective.

PR: Mm hmm. Yeah, the kind of birth...

JK: And again, it was a beginning, a touching on gay symbolism in a very different way from what ...

PR: Well, the sex of the symbolism was certainly there, yeah.

JK: ...other gay filmmakers were doing.

1:01:38

PR: It was particularly, that was particularly pointed out, that symbolism and the feeling of the film in, I think it was, Variety. There was a comparison to the films of Shirley Clarke in that.

JK: Now, an earlier one that got an enormous amount of exclamation points from other gay photographers was the first one that had a full gay male kiss...

PR: Mm hmm...

JK: ...with Voldemar, who was certainly ...

PR: And Tiny Tom...

JK: ...the best star in the early period. And the one that caught me entirely in the first program, went through three or four shorts, "The Magician" and so on, that were fun, but then came to "Yes", and it was suddenly much, much more than fun.

1:02:47

PR: Yeah, that was one of my first serious films done up at the cabin.

JK: A very, very moving film, done with elements where I wouldn't have thought, it didn't seem, that having a leather man walk through the ravine up near the cabin and find a blond nude lying on a rock, would have that much emotional impact. Or the hair-combing scene. But the emotional impact on a sort of symbolic level was ...

PR: It was done very slowly, I shot it very slowly, and the choice of music was very – oh God, I spent like days and days selecting the right music for that, where everything was picked up with the music. Fortunately, it was a musical background that helped.

1:03:35

JK: My roommate and I had been to the Park Theater about four or five times before that, and we had each time decided that we would not go back again. And then he began hearing that there was one filmmaker there who was different, very, very different. And we went, and after the first two or three shorts, I was interested. I was pleased, but still had the feeling, for five dollars, I can do better somewhere. And then, “Yes” came on, and it finished with that program, when I saw it finished with the ...

PR: That was the last film, I think, on the program.

JK: Well, I guess we came in on the middle or something, because it finished with the blue ...

PR: “Love Is Blue”?

JK: “Love Is Blue.”

PR: Oh really? Oh it must have been a repeat than that was put in that.

JK: And I think we didn’t see it the first time it showed. We saw it on a repeat. We didn’t see that program the first time it showed. We saw it on a repeat a few weeks later. And after that I got that first... And then did the interview with you not long after that for Avanti, I think it was.

PR: Avanti, I think it was, yeah.

1:04:58

JK: And then it was for Tangents.

PR: “A Breath of Love” again. Back to that. It was, uh..., being a male, nude ballet, it was certainly different from anything I’d ever done, and was choreographed very well by Lynn McMurrey, and carefully photographed, indoor and outdoor sequences, sequences that took place in the middle of streets in some cases, and certainly the one we just talked about on the freeway. And later on, I think it was a year later, I entered that film in the San Francisco – not erotic film festival, they hadn’t started that yet. It was just a film festival of some kind, a major film festival, in the shorts category. Well, I imagine they were pretty surprised to get a film of this nature in that situation. But it won. It won first place and was again later shown and introduced by Bette Davis. And I didn’t even know this until after it was over, or I would have gone up there. And that was certainly a thrill.

JK...impressed by Bette Davis...

PR: Always impressed by Bette Davis. Impressive woman. So that was part of the program that was called “Pat Rocco Dares” and I guess that’s where the – that was one of the “dares” situations. Another one of the “dares” situations in that film program – which is one of my favorites, by the way, as an entity – that particular program, of an entity of a lot of films in one cover title, I had some of my most favorite films in that. “The End”, a

film that was shot at, a lot of it was shot at a place called The Patch, which was a gay bar and I took it on an off night, the whole bar...

JK: Was it shot there after the raid?

PR: Uh, before.

1:07:03

JK: Because the raid at The Patch in August of '68 had caused...

PR: Was it August of '68? Then it would have had to have been after then.

JK: ...what caused the founding of the Metropolitan Community Church, and of ..., and of SPREE and the growth of the Advocate from a small newsletter to a full news magazine.

PR: That's true. But a whole bar full of people were hired not only to be dancers but then also eventually in the dream sequence in the end to be nude, a whole dance floor full of nude male dancers, dancing with each other, which was a dream sequence within the film. One of my favorites, because somehow or another I was able to interject a real Hitchcock feeling into it. As a matter of fact I used music in the background that were from Hitchcock films, notorious for stealing other people's music and making it work for films that I had made.

1:07:59

JK: And an excellent rock group in the program.

PR: Had an excellent rock group, right, and the rock group, a couple of times I would be running music from the rock group and a different set of music in counterpoint to it, playing at the same time, like some of the Hitchcock-type music in the background with the rock in the foreground, and combining the [?]... I was learning to be a photographer and a filmmaker by doing, quite frankly. I was pushed into it by the demands of the theater. When the first programs of films that were intended for the mail suddenly became not mail-order films but theater films. And suddenly I stopped the mail-order situation, or did it in a different way, and became a film-making machine, shooting films constantly and concentrating more on, now, this is for an audience of people rather than one person sitting at home and looking at it on their own screen.

So the concept of bigness, as much as was possible under the limited budgets that there were for the films, made it... Special effects – I didn't do special effects by going to the laboratory and said I want this, this and this. I did it by just doing them [laughs] in the camera. So if I wanted a double exposure in some particular thing, I'd shoot the film and then I'd roll it back and then I'd shoot over it and carefully watch the timer to see that it's got in the right place at the right time, sometimes hoping for the best and sometimes lucking out and sometimes not lucking out, but shooting enough so that somewhere I'd

be able to use it. And it was really a growth thing in learning to be a filmmaker by actually doing it, by being plunged into this thing of popularity...

1:09:52

JK: ...enormously wonderful effects...

PR: Well, they were chancy, some of those early effects.

JK: The best, probably, in "The Kiss", was it?

PR: A film called "Kiss", right, that came out later, not the first "Kiss" film, though. The early "Kiss" film was interesting.

JK: ... where you got the sort of primitive ritual that was, uh, enormously effective.

1:10:19

PR: Kissing had not been done in these early-on films, and it was about the third...

JK: One of your films was kidnapped from the Park Theater and landed in Westlake.

PR: Yes! That's right, you remember that? I had forgotten that. Somebody broke into the theater one time and took the film, only one of the reels – there were two.

JK: [?], I think.

PR: I don't remember whether it was on or not. But somebody grabbed a roll of film, ran across the street to the Westlake park, and threw it in the lake. [laughs] Yes, that's true. Fortunately I had a standby print.

1:10:55

JK: The theater also, during those several months, became a gay community, became a community. Attending the theater, it wasn't like merely going to a film house. You were part of the community. They had an early manager there, I forget his name, the heavy brunette guy...

PR: Yes, I know who you mean.

JK: ...who was...

PR: Started with a J. Joaquin or something.

JK: Yeah, who had that ability to make people feel part of this community, and that they were part of an enterprise, part of a family.

PR: Mm hmm.

JK: And we had very little of that in the gay community at that time.

PR: That's true.

JK: And it was sort of one of the first places...

PR: Other than a bar. Other than a bar.

JK: ...and MCC, which was starting at that time too.

1:11:46

PR: Mm hmm. As the films went on and I was going from story to story, I started doing some interjecting of news events rather than just stories, male-oriented gay stories with nudity. The very first gay march in Los Angeles that I'm aware of, which went from Olvera Street to the California State Building, was photographed in sound, and those speeches are recorded. No one else showed up of any media kind, so some of those early films of marches and demonstrations that were used in film programs, along with the other films, became the first historical films to be made of what was happening in Los Angeles, as far as people growing up and saying, "Hey, listen to me. I'm gay and I'm not-- I don't feel bad about it."

1:12:32

JK: One thing used to scare me in those several documentaries you did, you had a degree of bounce which I didn't learn until several years of SPREE, which comes in a minute or two...

PR: What do you mean by "a degree of bounce"?

JK: Bounciness. And every time you stuck the camera, I mean, stuck the mike in front of my face, there was just that degree of whoopsy-boo sort of a bounce that absolutely froze me. And it wasn't that I was afraid of a mike, but I got tongue-tied more often in your documentaries than anywhere.

PR: That's funny. Yeah, I can remember a couple of the instances. One was outside the Encore Theater, where you spoke about-- it was right after a church service. Another was in a--, you were carrying a candle...

JK: In the first Hollywood candlelight march.

PR: ...in the first Hollywood candlelight march, and I'm sure there were others.

JK: That was in January of '69.

PR: Mm hmm.

1:13:33

JK: Now, about the time of that candlelight march, I had gone to one of my first meetings of Metropolitan Community Church, a gay church in Huntington Park, that was growing by leaps and bounds. It had gotten up to almost a hundred members in two or three months. And at the first meeting I sat next to, and I forget whether it's—which season it is—shall we call it Dick Summers or Dick Winters [laughs]

PR: Um, Dick Summers.

JK: OK.

PR: He became Dick Winters when he became the president or founder of SPREE.

JK: ...who in time was president of SPREE, was treasurer of MCC, was later treasurer of the Advocate, was involved in the Advocate experience. I sat next to Dick, talked to him, and found that both of us shared an enormous enthusiasm for your films, of which we had seen two or three programs. I had interviewed you. And at almost the same moment, we both--you know, what they really need is a sort of fan club, a group that would encourage not only Pat but encourage more people to do the same thing. These kind of films are something we've needed! We grew up wanting this kind of image in the films. And so we talked about it again the next Sunday, and after that Dick met with Charles Robinson, who was living with you at the time, and discussed setting it up, and the Society...

PR: And when then they came to me, and they said "We, uh, it looks like we'd like to start a fan club for you." And I said, "You've got to be out of your mind. Who starts a fan club for a filmmaker? I'm no movie star, I'm no – you know, whatever. I make films." And they said, "Let us do it. Let us set up a board of directors. Let us find a place to put on, uh, to get some people together." And I suggested Troopers Hall, because I had used it before and it happened to be right around the corner from where I lived.

JK: And you were in SPREE for nine years.

PR: Almost ten. Almost ten. SPREE came about.

JK: The most God-awful acronym ever.

PR: Oh, I know, the Society of Pat Rocco Enlightened Enthusiasts.

JK: SPREE was a good name.

PR: Right. That was it.

1:15:52

PR: That first night I'll never forget because I thought, "Who's going to show up? Who wants to come to something like this?" They asked if I would be there, would show a couple of films, and maybe have a couple of people who were in the films there. And they put out a little notice, I think, in the Advocate, and maybe Magpie and maybe Data-

Boy, at the time that, you know, “Films fan club starting for Pat Rocco,” that kind of thing. First meeting of such-and-such at Troopers Hall. And um...shock, that first night. I mean, the place was packed, everybody from Troy Perry, you know, everybody was there. It was an “in” night, and half the people signed up to be regular members.

JK: And that sense of community was just overwhelming.

PR: Right, it really, really was. I was overwhelmed. I mean, I didn’t think anybody was going to show up. Why would they? Maybe a couple of people might trickle in. But that was the start of something unusual. It was not only a fan club but the club itself grew to reach out and use people in a manner of learning how to do films. People who would want to be in films and be behind cameras and work equipment and lights and things started making their own films, with some help from me here and there, and then a stage group through one of the members, Gerald Strickland, started that. They made their own theatrical repertory group within the organization and started with little short skits that eventually grew into full-size major productions.

1:17:34

JK: One night a month for a while, two nights a month, sometimes going out into the bars for extra performances.

PR: Yeah, a few times, for extra performances. But here was this group...

JK: ...and one theater production.

PR: Mm hmm, doing major shows such as – they would adapt big shows like “Mame”, “Li’l Abner”, “Damn Yankees”. Make it a gay show, adapt the scripts, adapt the music, and build the sets and all this, and mostly just for one night—“The Mikado” – and do these gay productions, huge productions, for one night, sometimes two, and a few of them along the way I directed, but most of them was the direction of the people themselves within the organization, who finally had a way of getting on stage, of displaying talents, of being musical, of being dramatic, of being funny, of being sad, of doing all these things, sometimes amateurishly, sometimes very professionally, but always with that degree of “We’ve got a chance to be on stage. We have a built-in audience”, because the audience was always there. I mean, a good-size audience always, month after month, year after year.

1:18:44

JK: For a while had to put in bleachers to get up to 200 or more than that, I think, for a while.

PR: The SPREE Awards started after the first year, and they eventually grew as an annual thing, honoring the people in television and the people in the over-ground motion picture business who were using gay themes or characters in a positive way. I guess the outgrowth of that would be AGA now. AGA stands for the ...

JK: Alliance of Gay Artists.

PR: Alliance of Gay Artists, who now does their own annual event. It's funny, they've never acknowledged the fact that SPREE started that, and that's too bad because things have to root somewhere, and the root of that really was SPREE. We managed to get a few actors down there to accept their awards and a few directors occasionally to accept their awards, and the announcement of the awards always came out in *Variety*. "SPREE Honors..." etc. etc. whoever it is, for gay themes or gay character or whatever it happens to be. And the organization was really something. Field trips, groups would get together and go to Catalina, to Disneyland...

JK: To visit Ron Dilly in prison...

PR: Yes [laughs], to visit people in prison, if a member got into prison or got into trouble or something like—we did visit Ron Dilly, who was one of the people who was in the films, and also in the stage shows. It seems that once I had put somebody in a film...

JK: Some of them were competent actors, too.

PR: True. Once somebody had been in film, in one of the films, they became a kind of part of the family. Voldemar, Ron Dilly, Brian Reynolds, others, who would be a part of SPREE, in a way, sometimes as a guest, sometimes as a regular. But they would become kind of their own little movie star in their own right. And they would always tell me, "God, the film is only showing in one theater and yet I can't walk down the street, everybody comes up to me and says, 'Weren't you in that...? Didn't you...? Weren't you...?'" And they became movie stars, signing autographs, doing all this kind of thing, till eventually, when the films opened, instead of just opening the films, we decided to do them—why not do it the Hollywood way? And we had a couple of interesting opening nights for the films where we would block off the sidewalk, not asking anybody's permission, just doing it, and people would gather and then limousines would pull up and the stars of the films would come out.

JK: Spotlights.

PR: Spotlights, the whole number. And Lee Glaze would come and do a whole flowery number with throwing the rug down and throwing roses to the crowd.

1:21:28

JK: And Lee was the bartender at the Patch.

PR: He was the owner and the bartender at the Patch, right, and... Those were fun days. And they led to—well, of course, SPREE went on for ten years. But as a filmmaker of the particular kind of films that I was making, that only lasted from about 1969 – or '68, excuse me, '68—through about '72. During the time, about '71, is when they had, when films started going further and further and finally people went to hardcore films, visual sex. I had a big decision to make, whether to go along with the crowd on something that I

had started, or to make a change, or what? Well, I decided not to go along with it. And so I stopped making films per se for that kind of genre and made a series, through the years, of documentary films, of things going on in the community, most of the time without any backing whatsoever, just because it kind of needed to be done and needed to be documented.

1:22:39

JK: Parades, demonstrations, and...

PR: Parades, demonstrations, gay-ins, things like that, right. And made one major film for One Incorporated, where we went to Europe and shot in six different countries in Europe, and it was called "One Adventure."

JK: That had been my idea, and I couldn't afford to go along.

PR: Right.

JK: So I did the introduction to that.

PR: I had done one earlier film, "Marco of Rio", right, which was, I guess, the first gay travelogue.

JK: Was that your first trip overseas?

PR: Yes, it was, it sure was.

JK: That was a beautiful film.

PR: Did that in Rio. That was fun. That was part of that one that I was saying was one of my favorite films, compilation things, "Pat Rocco Dares." "Marco of Rio" was an 80-minute film, and so it was like a feature film, and then the rest of the films on the program were like anywhere from 10 minutes to 25 minutes.

JK: This was the one where you had the commercials in it, wasn't it?

1:23:38

PR: It was, right, where we did the take-offs on commercials. There's around the room here, there are some pictures that have to do with SPREE. Let's see if we might be able to point a few of them out. Maybe just so we get a couple of visuals. Behind you here – I don't know if you can see it – is Jim Cassidy. Now, Jim Cassidy became one of the most popular porno stars ever, and he started in the films.

JK: We undressed him at one SPREE awards show, and I suddenly ended up between his legs wondering "How did I get here? What do I do next."

PR: He was a beautiful, beautiful muscle man, and his name was Rick Chesnick. I named him Jim Cassidy. I said, "You need a name that's got some guts to it," and I went along and I thought about it and I said, "Jim Cassidy! That sounds good." And he became a popular porno star in both gay and non-gay films, very popular, very big, one of the biggest ever.

Let's see if we have anything else here that relates specifically to SPREE.

JK: You began doing photography for the gay newspapers, and this one got a bit of a surprise.

1:24:41

PR: Right. That was the cover of a newspaper, City Hall with a nude in front of it, not a double exposure in any way. It was a regular situation there, a nude in front of City Hall, shot very carefully. Let's see if we have anything that might relate to SPREE perhaps on that wall over there. Maybe we might be able to go over there. Let's give it a try, shall we? Okay, um, well, I don't know if you can see down here. This was one of the people who was involved with SPREE wearing a SPREE tee shirt. Leonard Matlovitch at one time visited SPREE. Quite a notoriety thing. We can get into this thing about the slave auctions.

JK: There's a Rocco poster up at the top at the corner there.

1:25:31

PR: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, way up at the top, I almost forgot about that. That was the small version of what was a large poster for "Mondo Rocco." And this, oh this, this right here, I should relate to this right here, concerning SPREE, because SPREE was the very first gay organization in Los Angeles - and maybe anywhere else, I don't know, you can correct me on this - that got a commendation from City Hall, from Mayor Bradley. This is the commendation and this was, let's see if it's not dated here somewhere. Well, it tells about "Whereas in October 1969, author-actor-producer Gerald Strickland instituted within SPREE the stage show", and it talks about the workshop and the 500 members of SPREE, and organizations in the gay community, the largest membership of any organization, and talks about relationships with other organizations, and how SPREE created the Judy Colma [?] Memorial Award, and it mentions Troy Perry, it mentions you, Jim Kepner, it mentions a number of other people.

"SPREE has distinguished itself in its support and encouragement of a considerable number of other organizations in the community, doing benefits, donating from its treasury, giving volunteer time and energy, participating with Christopher Street West from its founding in 1970," - and he wrote out the whole name, "the Society for Pat Rocco Enlightened Enthusiasts" - "the only continuing gay repertory theater company of its type in the nation, for providing much-needed unique service to the community of Los Angeles. Tom Bradley, Mayor." And I do believe that it is the first commendation to come to any gay organization. I know of none that came before it. Perhaps you can correct me, Jim.

JK: Not quite the only gay repertory theater at that time, but certainly one of the very few.

1:27:30

PR: Mm hmm. Well, let's see if we've got anything else here that relates specifically to SPREE.

JK: Is the one over the door a SPREE photo?

PR: The one over what door? You mean up there? No, no, that's not.

This has to do with Gay Pride Week, getting the first Gay Pride Week proclamation from Los Angeles City Hall, in Los Angeles. That's something I personally worked very hard on. The mayor felt he couldn't do it alone. It had to be done in conjunction with several council people. It was a risky thing for the mayor to do, and for any council person to do early on in those years.

JK: The Herald Examiner had a very strong editorial...

PR: Yes, they did, but this was it, its first presentation. This was taken at a SPREE meeting. It was first shown, this proclamation, at a SPREE meeting, and it's signed by several city council persons as well as

1:28:24

[DVD stops here.]