

Video Title: June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives: Jinx Beers accepting NLGJA Journalists AWARD 2017

Interviewee: Jinx Beers

Interviewer:

Transcriber: Adriana T.

Transcriber: Mikhail Z.

Formatter: Serena R.

Recording Date: circa September 7-10, 2017

Release Date: July 24, 2018

Location: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Interview Length: 00:12:06

[applause]

Beers: Well so the first thing I want to tell you is that—I get asked this question so much I wanted to just get it out of the way. Yes, my legal name is Jinx. [laughter] And no, my mother didn't give it to me.

I had a very nice plane trip here from Los Angeles, in Southern California. Unfortunately, my luggage decided to take a detour. I don't exactly know where it's been, or who it's been with, because I still don't have it. I'm told that it's somewhere in the city here now. And it's on a van, you know. But I suspect that it might have stopped off to have a drink because it hasn't gotten here yet. [laughter] But I do want to thank Mitch for buying me a nice clean shirt that I could wear tonight.

[applause]

And thank you also for this. This is an unusual surprise for me. This is not something I ever dreamed of. Forty-two years ago, there was a—what I would call a “squabble” in the city of Los Angeles in the lesbian community. And I was pretty well known by then and I was told that I needed to take a position on one side or the other side of this squabble. Well really the person who told me I had to do that wanted me to be on their side, of course. [laughter] Well I thought about it, I decided there was some wrongdoing on both sides. And my decision was to stay neutral and not give an opinion. Well, ha, that didn't work out too well. Because what happened was, they informed me that I was no longer welcome at the Westside Women's Center that we had there. And I was also told that I could no longer put an advertisement in the ONE newspaper they had in Los Angeles—run by the same people who had the Westside Women's Center. And I have a witness right here who heard me say, “Well, if I can't be in their newspaper, I'll start my own!” [applause] And I did exactly that.

And the first issue came out—well it wasn't a newspaper, it was two 11.5 sheets of paper stapled in the upper left hand corner. [laughter] And the headline across it said, “What Is This?” [laughter] But we went out into the parking lots of the women's bars, and put them under

windshield wipers, and we took some into the bars, and left them. And whatever bookstores or whatever there was, there were lesbians we'd try and hand out this paper.

The next month—this was going to be a monthly and it turned out that way. The next month it was 4 pages! Doubled in size! [laughter] Well it kept growing, kept getting bigger, and thicker, and getting harder to staple. [laughter] So we decided that well, we'll print it on 11x17 and then fold it and staple it in the middle and chop it and it's going to be more like a magazine or maybe a newsletter. Okay. That's bond paper. That's a little thick. So we kept adding pages and you know what happened? What happened was, it got sort of awkward putting it together. So I thought, well we could go to newsprint because that's thinner, you can do more with it. So we did a few issues where it was a sort of magazine format as newsprint. And it just didn't sit right. So we did the ultimate, we went to newsprint, stapled the newsprint and we went to a larger format, a tabloid format size. And we ended up with our regular issue on a month-to-month basis with 64 pages.

Now here's the [applause]—here's the important part. Everyone who worked on that paper and I had it for 13 and a half years. I was the publisher and managing everything. Everyone was an unpaid volunteer. Sixty-four pages of love.

One time we were late getting on the street by two days. One time in 13 and a half years. And frankly, I'm proud of that. Because [applause]—I knew nothing about putting together a newspaper. I knew nothing about journalism. You heard what people were saying, or what some of what people were saying about what I did. I worked 57 years—I was in the air force for 16, in Regulars and Reserves. I worked for the state of California in traffic safety research. You know those red and white wrong way signs that you see now on off ramps? When you see the off ramps? I worked on the team—I was with the team that created those and did the research on those signs! The last project I did was change the message boards for the freeways—before there ever were any changeable message boards. So, I spent 20 years representing a fantasy and science fiction artist selling her work at fantasy and science fiction conventions all over the United States. Drove all over the United States. And then as he said, I spent the last of my career—the last of that 57 years—working for the Department of Water and Power in the city of Los Angeles. So I served my country, I served my state, and I served my city. And the citizens of all of those and that never had anything to do with journalism. So that was my background that started a newspaper.

But the truth is that in less than two years, the Center that kicked me out was gone, the newspaper disappeared—this newspaper that wouldn't let me be in it disappeared, never to be seen again, and the *Lesbian News*, the name at least, still exists 42 years later. I am not associated with it. It's not today what my paper was back then, but the world is not today what it was back then. So everything changes, everything moves on. But it works for whatever society is at that moment.

I guess there's a couple of lessons here. But the main one is: don't piss somebody off. You know? [laughter] I got very pissed off on a personal basis when they told me I couldn't be part of what they were. Eh! Who needed 'em? But the other thing that I think is really important is that one person can in fact make a huge difference. If you've got an idea or if you see something that needs to be written about or needs to be done, do it! Because you do not know what the result is going to be down the line. It's just—for me to be standing here this evening, is just unbelievable *to me*, okay? And I'm sure it would be unbelievable to all of those way over 100 women, unpaid women, who helped me put that paper together for all those years. But you know what? You weren't there back in 1975. The media that you know today, well part of it didn't even exist, and the other part of it didn't know we existed. So there wasn't anything there for the general lesbians, particularly lesbians, though I knew a lot of gay guys that read it too, but it just wasn't there. And it was important to me to be able to put out there to everybody who wanted to read it what was going on in the world for our personal causes. That was important.

And one person can make a difference. I feel that I did. I had numerous, numerous, I cannot count how many people, have come up to me and told me that over the years. And I just want to close with telling you that I have one little postcard that I received that just really took my heart. It's just a plain old common postcard and wasn't signed. To this day I have no idea who mailed it to me. And the only thing it said on the back was, "Thank you for being there." And that told me I was doing the right thing at the right time.

[applause]

Thank you, too, thank you to all of you, not only for this award but thank you for being there and taking our cause to the world today. I couldn't do it today, but you weren't there 42 years ago. So thank you so much.

[applause]

[END OF VIDEO]