

Petie Brown, CJ Curtis & Judy Long Interview About Summit Station

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Interview with Petie Brown, CJ Curtis & Judy Long
(with Luster Singleton, Julia Applegate, and Sharon Huber)
Ohio History Center, 800 E 17th Ave, Columbus, OH 43211

PB = Petie Brown, CC = CJ Curtis, JL = Judy Long, LS = Luster Singleton, JA = Julia Applegate, SH = Sharon Huber

LS: Peter Brown, how do you get to Summit Station?

PB: I needed a part time job [clears throat] one that would let me be free enough to sing a weekend someplace or two weeks someplace. I always had a job to come home to.

LS: So you were a singer? Or you were an aspiring musician out on gigs and stuff?

PB: Yeah, I learned my craft 'cause I was always a trumpeter as a musician.

LS: uh huh

PB: But nobody, at that time, was hiring female trumpeters, anywhere! So anyways I had to figure out how to sing and play guitar and I learned my craft up and down Cleveland Avenue where nobody would know me. So I could figure out, hmm, how's this gonna do? And, so I went in there and some girls called me, they knew the owner of Jack's. I come in and I get, see if I can get a part time bartending job. All I knew how to do was open a can of beer! [everybody laughs] Luckily it was on a Sunday night. [coughs] and the owner of the bar, he just went off, he took off, and about midnight somebody said 'well I want a screwdriver' well, let me see. You know how to make that? [everyone laughs] That's how I learned, people told me and it was rough at the start 'cause we had fraternity boys and there were two other straight bars in this block.

And they were not happy about this and it was the campus area so a lot of the guys decided 'they just never met the right man' [laughs] and if you didn't

behave, the whole group would run you out with pool cues. We didn't hit anybody until they hit us.

LS: So when you were bartending did you, did it just come upon you, this idea to open up a bar?

PB: No I got a, it just kind of fell in my lap. 'Cause I'd bartended for so long and it didn't have any business, the previous owner. So he decided, well lets... but the first night by the time closing came, the bar was full of women! That night it became a gay bar.

LS: wow

PB: The third lesbian bar in the United States.

LS: I never knew that. The third in the United States?

PB: [nods head] There was one in California and one in Michigan.

JA: And that was what year?

PB: '71

JA: '71, so it started out as a straight bar?

PB: It was a, it was a Go-Go bar.

LS: A Go-Go bar?

PB: It was Jack's A Go-Go.

LS: Is that why it was Jack's A Go-Go? I never knew. I always, I lived in Zanesville and people would talk about Jack's A Go-Go. And I didn't know why it was called that, I didn't know it had been a Go-Go bar.

PB: Well he never changed the name, well he did change it but he didn't change the sign.

LS: For the young people, what is a Go-Go bar? What happens at a Go-Go bar?

PB: [laughing] it was a Go-Go bar, dancin' and stuff, hee hee .

LS: So a little bit more risque behavior.

PB: Yeah, it changed real fast.

LS: And so did the women come because you were there and you were inviting your friends?

PB: I think so and then everybody that come in kept calling other people that night, on a Sunday night. And it just, the grapevine just filled that place up that night. And that was that.

JL: Do you recall, I remember that, Thursdays...

PB: [nods] Baseball, Softball night.

LS: How did, what?

PB: Softball teams after they played their games and practices different nights, they'd all come in to get a brew and, so Thursday night you couldn't even hardly get in the bar. That was really cool.

LS: It was pitchers and mugs, pitchers and mugs.

PB: Uh huh [looks down, remembering]

JA: So, you were a musician, you didn't plan to start a bar, the bar just because of working in the bar, the bar kinda became this magnet for people, right?

PB: Yeah and then I quit, to go sing full time. So I left all that. But I'd come back and sing in there. And umm... [pauses, looks down and laughs].

CC: Your first manager was...

PB: My first manager was Holly and she, do you remember Holly?

LS: I remember uh...

PB: Nancy Lee?

CC: Nancy Lee?

LS: Nancy Lee, that's who I remember.

PB: Jerry Hass?

LS: I remember her.

PB: She was the day manager and got the supplies and stuff and Nancy Lee managed the staff in the evenings and took care of nights.

LS: I started, Nancy Lee, well for me I had never seen another person of color say they were gay or lesbian or whatever.

PB: umm hmm, it took a while.

JL: So she, and she was kinda country like me so I would go up after work which would be about 11, and never talked to anybody, but she just sorta took me on and I would help her close in the evening. And have one more beer.

PB: See that's a perfect example of what made that bar, people like Nancy Lee and so many other bartenders, customers like you, it wasn't me, I didn't make the bar. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people made that bar. You know one person can't make a bar and it's not about me it was about all the different bartenders, people who were just coming in to have a beer, would jump in and help close the bar. In the very first year when I was just starting bartending there was a girl named Melinda ...Ansberry...Ans- something, she lived in Lancaster and she didn't drink, she drank Coca-Colas and she was there almost every night because by the time it got late at night people had to go to work and uh I was always sittin' in there alone 'cause you couldn't close in case somebody [makes a beckoning gesture]. Well after a while, seemed like, she's always in here at closing and she has to drive to Lancaster and get

up and go to work. So one night it was just me sittin' back there and she's walking away acting like she's doing something [smiles]. I said why are you always here because I don't want you alone in this bar at 2 o'clock in the morning.

LS: wow

PB: And that's the kind of people that made that bar.

LS: Did you have a sense of what you were providing?

PB: I had a sense that people were very happy and we made sure they were safe. Like Judy said, at night time, late night, we would walk everybody to their cars, a whole bunch of us. Judy and half the bar sometimes. We made sure everybody got home. And there was a time when we had a lot of police harassing us 'cause they didn't like the gay bars, especially ours. And every night, now this was a one-way street, heading south, they would sit on the other side of the street 'cause people parked their cars on the West side of Summit. And they'd sit there and write them jaywalking tickets.

LS: I remember that.

JL: I do too.

PB: Because the only place they could cross was way up by Hudson or down by 17th.

LS: Or by Lane.

PB: Yeah something like that.

LS: Yeah you'd have to walk quite a few blocks.

PB: So, one night, we didn't like that, so there was Tchapinko (sp?) and Tiny and Holly, who came with the bar when I bought it. No she wasn't there yet, maybe she was I don't know. I was (inaudible) well we didn't have cell phones, and there was a phone up close to Hudson and we had a phone in the bar. So somebody was at the phone on Hudson and they would call the bar if there

was police coming down the road. And they would yell at us. Because we were out there with uh paint rollers on sticks with the paint pan, rolling pens. And we painted a crosswalk! [everybody laughs] And the cops really couldn't write us up for anything because it would have come out that they were discriminating and harassing everybody in the bar.

LS: So you just made a crosswalk and that took care of that.

PB: That took care of it.

JA: Well the distance from the bar to Hudson, that's at least a quarter mile.

PB: Uh huh

JA: So it's not like it was close.

LS: And you'd been drinkin' which is another dangerous thing to have to be walking that far.

PB: And it wasn't a bad neighborhood but it was also not the best, there was a lot of crime.

LS: Is that what prompted, well I remember there was that bar right next door and there would always be the frat guys who would on dares or whatever decide to come over, is that what prompted, there was a sign on the door that said, what did it say?

PB: It said five dollar cover charge, ladies night, five dollar cover for men. And that worked for many years.

CC: umm hmm

LS: And I saw many a man pay five dollars and then say OK, I'm out, now you can go.

PB: Well we educated a lot of people one on one, the guys, old men, young men, one on one we educated 'em. We're like, we're just people.

(off camera): Peter, tell them about your construction worker friend. The guy that came in... I can't remember the name of him.

PB: Oh, when I bought the bar, there was this big guy, happy guy, Chuck.

LS: Oh, Chuck!

PB: He came with the bar, when I bought the bar they said yeah well he comes with the bar.

[everyone laughs]

PB: And it was him and I that totally remodeled that bar top to bottom in 1993. That's when we built the stage and raised the ceilings and made the bar longer and the mirrors and the flooring. We did everything to clean it up. Took us about a fair time to uh...from February. And when we weren't down in the bar before the customers arrived, I'd go upstairs and sand the boards that we did all the trim with and shellac 'em, there was a ton to do. Because I had a little bit of difficulty when my dad died. So I just wanted to stay busy, and so I did. And by the end of that I kinda had a nervous breakdown. Cause I finally let it in, I was so busy and that's how the bar got remodeled. But Chuck, me and Chuck we did that.

JA: So Chuck had already been hanging out with you at the bar for 20 years by that time.

PB: Well I don't know when he came in. There was some time when I was not working there when I was off singing. And then I came back and bought it because... Don, Danny maybe I don't know who it was, one of the boys from (inaudible) had given Don a check for so much money to buy the bar. Well I knew then it was gonna be a boys bar. And we had so much blood sweat and tears in that bar, and went through so much, I went, I don't think so. I had just bought my first business nine months earlier and uh I had it paid off and I didn't have a dime to my name so, Don did like many bar owners they carry part of the loan then you go borrow the rest of the down payment. And the night I opened at Summit Station I didn't have any quarters, dimes, nickels, fives, tens and ones. I had to, people just kept giving me money to fill in the

cash register. I didn't think about that, I was thinking about supplies. I had to borrow the money to open the cash register the first night. [everybody laughs]

JA: So when was that, when was it that...

PB: June 15, 1980.

LS: So lets see Carrie, where and when do you enter?

CC: Well, somewhere between the 1980 show and the 1981 which was the first time that we did a group. Petie came up to me and said 'I want to do a Christmas show at the bar' she said 'for all the people to thank the people for coming in, uh to the bar all year long and those that don't have any place to go at Christmas' and she said 'now I know that you are a professional and that you have your own dance studio and so forth, but I really would like you to help me with this' you know.

PB: And ballerinas.

CC: Yep, we've got these [laughs].

PB: She's a professional and here's Blake, Holly, Trace, Junior, Heidi.

CC: All different sizes all different kinds, we had short little Heidi and then we have you know Debbie who is bigger.

PB: Junior who was tall.

CC: Tall and skinny and just all kind of shapes and 'we would like to do a ballerina number, now I know you're a professional and you probably, but if, you know, you could help me out' and I kept saying 'I'd love to'.

PB: None of those people could dance, none of them was...

CC: And she's buying me cocktails the whole time, everytime I get about half finished, she'll have another. And I kept saying 'She's not hearing me, I'm saying Petie I'd love to do this'.

PB: I couldn't believe she would actually...

LS: Say ok.

PB: take a bunch of little Dykes and teach 'em to be ballerinas.

CC: That's what she said, yep, and so by the end of the evening we were putting a show together. The very first show we had was like 40, 45 minutes long and Petie did Santa Claus which she did every year thereafter but the definite star of the show was the Columbus Metropolitan Petie Brown Ballerinas.

PB: Ballet Company

CC: Ballet Company, excuse me, Ballet Company and they were definitely, from there on they were always the last number in the show and they definitely were the stars. Their costumes were, we changed them every couple of years. But they were basically the same basic, they wore sweatshirts that Sharon and I made net tutus, that we sewed on the bottom of the sweatshirts. They wore thermal underwear for the tights and they had these little booties on, and the first year we had um two red ones two green ones.

PB: There were some blue ones.

CC: Yeah, but the blue ones came the next year and then we had one white one because I had an odd number. I can't have eight, I can't have six, I had seven. So we put a star on the center of her tutu and her tutu was white.

PB: Who was the star?

[people in background 'Peter']

PB: No not Peter.

CC: No Peter was not in several of them.

PB: He didn't come 'till the, I used to stand beside him and do the encore in the Santa Suit.

CC: That was Stephanie, Stephanie was my star and I taught them in Petie's kitchen, that's where I taught the ballerinas what they were doing.

LS: Well the popularity of it grew to where I remember, the women actually got into altercations waiting to try and get the tickets.

CC: Oh yes.

LS: And I remember that you finally had to go to, you could only buy so many tickets and that people would stand in line and argue with each other about who got there first and who was gettin' favors on the seats because at first you could pick where you were gonna be and the women would piss and moan at each other about their placement in the

CC: Yeah you're correct, we went from that one night forty minute show to two nights two hour show.

(off camera): And multiple weekends too, didn't you do it over multiple weekends?

CC: No only one weekend, but Luster is right we got a lottery drawing is what we had to do, you had to come, stand in line, get a ticket and then that's how you get it yeah. We had two people sitting up, selling tickets with a floor plan of where the seats would be, first come first served. Where do you want it? And then we of course video taped. And in those days hardly any of us had a camera or, none of us had a camera. I rented a camera every year for several years so that we could video tape the show.

LS: And then they'd have a big thing and watch it, afterwards you could watch it.

CC: Yeah of course and it just got bigger and bigger and we always had Santa Clause.

LS: When did the idea come in that you started raising money for the FACES (Family AIDS Clinic and Education Services) unit. Which was the new Family

and Children HIV and AIDS unit at- which I don't think it started as FACES or maybe it did, I'm not sure.

PB: Yeah we did a lot of, we built a playground for some place...

JL: Well we did a suicide benefit when we had people in our group commit suicide. And we did a benefit for the suicide hotline or whatever, to raise awareness.

PB: And we did a lot of benefits all through the year, all kinds.

CC: Several cancer benefits.

PB: And we did one for the dog shelter. And we got a thank you letter from them. And uh...

SH: You also supported Franklin County Children's Services at Christmas before the FACES.

CC: Franklin County Services, yes we did.

LS: Had a couple women worked at the unit? I just remember...

CC: Um, actually how it started, we took it over the very first year that the party for the aged children at Children's Hospital, the FACES unit, happened was Braison and Sonia Ross and myself. The three of us were in a little committee and Braison had a connection somehow with the unit and he says I would really like to do a party for these children. Well that one again, just like you know our shows at the bar, started fairly small. We're talking you know like, we thought there were 35 children and it turned out to be 50, but it started very small. And then the following year Singular Sensation got involved because this was such a great thing and of course back then you know...

LS: They were having trouble even getting nurses to work the unit.

CC: Right and the children, I mean it's not their fault. And so we were very, all of us, we did our show and we would have this big fish bowl at the end of the stage and people would just drop money in it. They would tip us but also they

would just go up and dump money in it. And Peter of course always gave us a donation. And she would give us things, we would have like an auction for the FACES and so forth. But this party was phenomenal. And we had people like Lindy's restaurant would give us turkeys. A couple of turkeys to serve. We had a big dinner for them. We gave presents to every child. We got their names from the FACES unit and how old they were. And that was a fun night. We would, Shottensteins would give us the same percentage that they gave Toys For Tots. We would go in at ten o'clock at night when the store was closing and they'd give us a shopping cart and we would just walk down through the toy aisles. Well we've got 5-7 boys, you take that one. 5-7 girls you take that one and you have 10 to buy or 5 to buy whatever it was. And we'd walk down the aisles. And this was the Singular Sensations group. And pick the toys out, and they rung us up a bill at the end and we would pay for it with the money that we got from doing our show at Summit Station.

SH: Then we had a big wrapping party at our house.

CC: Yes then the wrapping party came and their garage was filled...

(off camera): Garage, basement, kitchen, living room...

CC: And we would wrap all the presents and put on the outside what they were. Girl this age, boy that age and wrapping 'em and everything was included in the prices of the thing. And that amounted from anywhere from twenty-five hundred to thirty-five hundred just for all of that stuff. And we would have a big party it would be a fun time wrapping and also stockings, we stuffed stockings and the little toys and different things we put in them came from McDonald's gave us things and the Limited was very nice to us. They gave us a topper to put on the stocking every year. So each child that was there got a stocking but only the children's names who was on the FACES list got a present and then of course we had the best Santa Claus in the world, Santa Bob, next to Petie of course.

PB: I loved that role, everybody liked me. [everyone laughs] Here's one of the thank-you notes from the early shows.

CC: Oh, yeah.

LS: What does it say?

CC: This says, these are the one we did for the dogs, the animal shelter. And then when one of the gals in our group got cancer, we did a big cancer benefit and it was a couple of nights too.

LS: I remember there being support for the women who were going through domestic violence and abuse and things like that.

Women and children living in their cars 'cause of abusive husbands.

JA: I'm curious about... when I moved to Columbus it was 1993 and so at that time Summit Station was one of the first places I went. But it seemed like it was maybe in a, it kind of had slowed a little bit. I don't know if that's because there were other bars that were around but it seemed like there were some nights where it was really busy and other nights where it was really slow. Was there some thing that had shifted or am I remembering it wrong?

PB: In 1993 my dad died and I was only there to work when we redecorated it. And in the attic at night. I wasn't around people because I just, you know some things you just can't handle and you just go to work and keep working until you... fall apart.

LS: I sometimes wonder, there did seem to be because I remember the Columbus Pacesetters the women's football team, Summit was their home, I mean we were like...

PB: I sponsored them because I couldn't sponsor the softball teams, there were dozens of them. We only had one football team, so I was safe to sponsor it. I didn't make anybody angry.

JA: So too many lesbian softball teams to sponsor, you couldn't sponsor all of them so you chose football. [everybody laughs]

LS: I wonder sometimes if it wasn't also due to, there was a shift, from kind of, feminism shifted I think and I felt like there was kind of a move away from, you know suddenly, dyke became a word that people weren't sure that they wanted to be called.

PB: I always said it was a fun word, we already joked about it.

LS: Yeah, well that's where, when I came in it was a good thing, it was a good word, but I feel like sometime around the time that Regan, and people started doing this, wanted to have the picket fence and the family and the looking this particular way and it moved away from embracing Dykehood or embracing being a dyke.

PB: They didn't understand we were all dykes, we were all gay women, we were lesbians. But they didn't understand that we had been calling each other dykes for years and years and years.

SH: We're also talking about a generation that grew up already having the right to, not having to go through everything that we did in the years before that 90's situation. They didn't have to go through the broken windows, they didn't go through stepping outside and getting the crap beat out of 'em.

LS: Sometimes they'd just follow you. You'd get out of there and all of a sudden they'd be behind you and just following you just to make you nervous. You wouldn't want to go to your house. At least that would be my experience, you would just drive around until they got tired and went on and then I could go home. I think you are right about that, there is a certain amount of privilege that came in. They didn't have to worry about getting out of the car. I would take all of the gay stuff - I was proud to have all this gay stuff in my car, because the sticker Kukalas the gay bookstore has these stickers and the Lesbian Ankh. I had all that in my car but I didn't have it stuck on there. When I got to the bar, I would take it all down and put it in my trunk so that maybe they wouldn't know that I or whoever owned that car was in the bar. That was just something that you did. If something happened to someone 'Well did you leave something out?' They did not really have to have that fear and so I think they also could not totally appreciate what Jack's...

PB: What the women did, they made it possible. I'm surprised that you didn't get walked to your car, that someone didn't go with you to your car.

CC: Back out of the bar.

LS: Well you know, I was a young whippersnapper.

SH: Her nickname was Tow Truck.

LS: I was really young, too young. And so I did a lot of just slipping in and out. And I just was extremely private. And so if a group was going to take somebody, I'd kinda go out with that and sorta dart around the corner. And you know 'I didn't need anybody to walk me to my car' [laughs] 'I played football'.

PB: I hear you [everybody laughs].

JA: So it seems like, when I was here, it was a bar for everybody. Like you said, all sizes, all ages. Was that true? Was that how it played out?

PB: Yeah, most of the time. We was teaching the straight people and we had a lot of straight customers coming in regularly. They liked us. There was a younger men from the campus usually, or next door. They'd start pushing their way in the door. I'd start pushing them out and the next thing I know, there's a dozen people behind me, helping me. And that was pretty cool.

LS: What about, there's a unique relationship with drag queens at Summit, that does not operate the same in other lesbian spaces that I've been in and it seemed like drag queens were always a part of the fabric.

PB: They were.

LS: And the support of Summit, how, was it just people you knew and they came in?

PB: When I first bought the bar, you know that little magazine that comes out, I can't remember the name of it, just local. And I thought I should advertise something...I didn't have anything to advertise. [everybody laughs] And so from there I decided, I had sang in some bars that had a lot of Queen shows and were very very good. Back then they really had the costumes and I shared a dressing room with them. That was something else.

CC: You learned a lot didn't 'ya?

PB: No, I kept my back turned. [everyone laughs] I did not want to see because they were not bashful. And they were going to get in dresses and wigs were flying. Well you know how...

CC: Yeah I know.

PB: But they were so sweet and that's when we started entertaining. And then we ended up with all kind of bands and comedians and all kind of entertainment.

LS: Yeah it was a place where if you were a lesbian and you had some kind of something it was a place for you to come and try that out. I know that we were in the women's studies department and it was the go to place. We had people that would go, when we would do our shows and we would have an intermission and then put some live people up there because it was also (inaudible) we wanted to push other artists and give them our platform to be able to do whatever they wanted to do. And I was always grateful to Summit for that, you just never knew...

CC: Well the one thing is, we did a big benefit, and we were packed, for Georgia Jackson...

PB: Standing room only outside...

CC: When Georgia Jackson was in her later years and we did this big benefit for her. And the thing was that the boys, they could have gone anywhere 'cause they were the ones basically that wanted to do this and got in touch with us. But the thing is that there were so many bars in town at that point and they could have gone anywhere else to do that but they wanted to come to Summit Station because Summit was the one that everybody was welcome to, everybody. Doesn't matter. And that was before all of this, you know. We have made such strides in this. But before any of this, I mean you know you walk out, you get arrested. Halloween night, everybody knew that especially like after the Berwick Ball you could walk out the door of a bar and the Police would be sittin' right there to put you in the Paddy Wagon.

PB: Except on Halloween Night...

CC: Except on actual Halloween Day, it was okay. But other than that...those boys felt so comfortable with Petie and with the bar, that they asked if they could do the show and of course they wanted us to be a part of it so we put together a great show. It was very long but it was a come and go thing. Come in early, drop a little in the box...

PB: Standing room only, some people standing outside and we did a big 'ol show for Charlotte Parks. We just did a ton of benefits in that bar over the 34 years.

LS: I feel like that Summit is actually the longest running bar, lesbian bar, I actually think I feel like I was trying to research that and out of my research I figured out that, that it was the longest running lesbian owned, operated women's bar you know. It set the standard, I would go to other places and I'd be like 'what is this?' [everyone laughs]

JA: I had friends come from England in 1996 or 7 and they could not believe what Summit Station, they were like 'why don't we have this in London?' It wasn't just that it was a bar, it was the family, it was the community that was created'.

PB: The song 'We are family...' almost every night when it was closing time, the whole bar would sing that. And another song from Cher was ... 'those were the days my friend, would that they'd never end' and we knew these were the days that we would be, rethinking, like now.

LS: Also it was a place for women to get connections for employment. I can distinctly remember, when I'd be bartending folks would come in and say 'Hey, there's X amount of jobs that are coming up here that are hiring women, come on over and get a job and I always thought that was really special too. The way that women would help each other get employment. And some would say 'this is going on' and they needed some lawyer advice. And someone would say 'well you know so and so, they'll be in here, just go up to them when they come in'. So many transactions and things happened.

CC: And accountants.

LS: It was sort of like the golf course you know the men go to the golf course, the women come to Summit to get their business advice, to wheel and deal, to figure out how they would do something because as women they might not be able to, so I always remember just the dealings that would be going on at the tables.

JA: Something that I'm thinking about too is, when I started going there when I was 23, I didn't have any money and I know a lot of people at the bar also didn't have very much money. And you talk about all this money that was raised and, again I think it speaks to the generosity of the culture that you created there because, as the 90's went on there were other bars, other lesbian bars in town and it sort of felt like there may be some class lines like sometimes the people with less money were at Summit Station and the people with more money were Slammers or at Wall Street and yet it was always donations coming out of Summit Station and Jacks. So it was the people with no money that were always giving what they had even though they didn't have a lot.

CC: Yeah, a lot of the other bars always came to me and wanted to know if my group would come and perform there. We did shows at several other bars here in town but we also went to Toledo and Dayton and Mansfield. All of those people because we were the first all female dance troupe, singing, dancing, whatever. And Sonia Ross would come with us sometimes and Braison would come with us sometimes and Luther was with us sometimes. Oh Brandy Lamont, yes Brandy Lamont too.

LS: I know Brandy I mean...

(off camera): I had to sit next to Brandy one night, I mean to tell you, whew that dude could drink!

CC: And my daughter Misty Blue. And we did a big show at Wall Street.

JL: We did two big shows at Wall Street. You know you gotta remember too, there is a big discrepancy between the men and the women as far as money. Wall Street was pretty much supported by men and the women went in. Slammers I don't know much about but I never felt comfortable there. Summit

you would walk in there and that's where you always felt like you were at home.

LS: It's true, there was no judgement, other than they didn't know you, and they wanted to make sure you were supposed to be in there. But once that was established, nobody gave a rat's butt about- that type of thing.

PB: About anything...

CC: We had one gal that was with us that was a student when I had my dance studio and she wanted to come do the show with us and so Midge, married and four kids later, today. And so we had a couple of those who came in, saw the show, really wanted to do it. Come on, you know? Anybody that wanted to get up on stage.

PB: A professional ballerina?

CC: But Petie's right, when it came to the ballerinas, that was special, not anybody could join the ballerinas. If somebody wanted to join, the ballerinas took a vote on it because that was special. And then there was the year that the ballerinas wanted Vegas headpieces.

(off camera): Oh god!

CC: Sharon and I and Judy Long's mother made these ballerina Vegas headpieces that were like this. [holds her hands apart over her head] And Petie joined the ballerinas.

PB: No, I went along before that.

CC: Yeah she was there before that, but she was one of the ones that was pushing, you were pushing.

PB: Well, I thought we should have 'em.

CC: That was a funny story. There was the year that we were doing 'Let it Snow'. And they had to come down the ramp, always the ballerinas come down the ramp and pose, and then come on stage. Well, I did not know when

you use snow, the snow that you buy for trees and things? That if it lays there it gets slippery. Almost every ballerina that came down the ramp fell flat on her tushie.

(off camera): It seemed like it was part of the number.

PB: Then there was a problem with one of the nettings?

CC: Oh, another one of my brilliant ideas.

PB: Let Judy come up here and tell you about, tell that story about the ballerinas.

JL: So we are all standing there and we have these tutus on and they put these plastic, glittered, snowflakes on our tutus. And we're waiting to go out, now we didn't really practice in our tutus because usually they were the last costume ever done. And so we're standing there, we're getting ready to come out and Shushie and I, we go, "oh my god, we're stuck, we're stuck. I gotta go, I gotta go" and the next thing you know we are going "High-Ya" [karate chop motion].

PB: I didn't know that we got stuck until we were doing that number, I didn't know that in back.

JL: We were out there doing our number and we had to get close, now we're all stuck and we go to pull apart and our tutus are over here...I mean it was just a mess.

PB: I think people thought it was the act.

LS: Yeah we didn't know. Most people, they had no idea because it was such a joy just to see ya'll in the ballet costume knowing you couldn't dance. Like we guessed that you wouldn't be able to dance and you all just kept going.

JL: Yeah CJ said it doesn't matter what happens just go.

LS: And you all were trained enough to just keep going with it no matter what happened. And CJ would just be there like...

CC: Yeah, just shaking my head.

JL: So just to let you know how Summit station is kind of like a family. I'm very fortunate, my family backed me. I had a champ in my Mom, she wanted to be a part of our life. And I was in the show for probably 15 years, after about the first 5, my mom, my aunt, my cousins would come for dress rehearsals and sit there. And they would either help with the costumes, they would help critique, they would watch all the dress rehearsals. So everybody in there knew who they were. My aunt still talks about it, my mom unfortunately passed away. But they felt so comfortable in there that everybody called them mom and Aunt Elsie. Cousins couldn't believe how much everybody loved them. But that's what the- it was like a big family. They didn't want for anything to eat, they didn't want for anything to drink. They just you know? And they enjoyed it and uh...

CC: They gave us a big donation before they left.

JL: Both of them would. But that's the kind of place that Summit was. My family was comfortable in there. And that's something that I knew a lot of people didn't have and they were surprised when somebody did have it. It was more, not the norm.

LS: It gave you hope to see that somebody's family could love them, for who they were.

JL: For who they were.

JA: And they loved not just you but everybody at the bar. I mean my dad felt the same way. He was not that accepting of me initially. But when you started the Drag Kings, my dad would come and then he was like a dad to all the other people that were there too.

JL: That's how my mom was. They all called them 'Mom' and 'Aunt Elsie' and everybody had a costume break, well Sharon was in the show, she made a lot of costumes. CJ made a lot of the costumes, they didn't have time to fix it. So they'd run over to my mom to fix it real quick and then get back on stage, so.

CC: Yeah a lot of things were like that. My two sisters came to a show and this was our big 20th that we had. And they came to the show and my baby sister was engaged and she brought her fiance with her. And they get to the ballerina number and my 2 sisters are just laughing and carrying on and her fiance turns to her and says 'is this supposed to be funny?' He wasn't sure whether they were supposed to be serious or not! And of course that just made them laugh even more. But there again, that's the family, my two sisters, if they couldn't be at the show they would come to a dress rehearsal and so forth. And there were several other mothers. Heidi's mother and dad both came. And then there was the year that I was telling them 'only 2 drinks, maximum before the show'. I meant minimum. And Heidi, poor little Heidi, she was really, she had a couple too many. And they knew better than this, so when they got to the ballerina number which of course was the end of the show, Junior had to hold her up for half of the number. You know she'd just kind of be standing there and Junior would walk over and move her over here. There were just so many happy memories up there. And Petie of course started it all. It was her baby and her coming to me and saying 'How would you like, could we talk you into...'. And it just blossomed from there. She always, that was the bar that you went to. You know, you were having a bad night, you went up there, there might not have been more than 2 or 3 people in at the time you went but still you felt at home and safe as long as that's where you were. And very few fights there really. And they always used to say if a fight does break out be careful of CJ because she will knock you down getting away from it. But I always felt very very protected there.

PB: I think of all the people that made it through the years. They all wanted to take care of each other. I don't know how many hundreds of people passed through those doors. I would guess it's in the thousands.

(Off camera, several voices): Oh yes, easily thousands...

LS: I mean Thursday nights alone...

PB: And generation after generation. They'd be at Ohio State and then they'd go to other states and the next group comes along. I always thought if I gave women a place to be, they would do big things. And there are so many women, different groups, that did great things. You give them a place to do it and they're going to do it. They will always come together and we had a

couple different parents that lost a child, teenagers, and we had benefits for both of those. Gravesites, the whole nine-yards. You know, we just did, because most of the people in there did not have a great deal of money although everybody helped. Just like that, do you remember when the sewer backed up, the storm drains? A few hours before the show

(Off camera, several voices): I remember, all kind of garbage.

PB: And there was every kind of garbage, it was nasty.

(Off camera, several voices): It was awful.

PB: It was about that deep [holds her hands apart 18']. And the cast members started doing stuff and everybody got on the phone, next thing you know I don't know how many people were there with snow shovels scooting it out the door.

CC: And the wet-vacs and all of that stuff...

PB: And a lot of wet-vaca and shovels and big brooms. But they all brought 'em, they just- oh we need help, so everybody, through the grape-vine.

LS: Just a few phone calls and the next thing you know people would just show up and...

PB: And I don't know how many wet/dry vacs people brought. For after we got all the 'stuff' out.

CC: And the fans to dry it out.

PB: And it smelled awful, it was in the carpet!

LS: It lingered!

PB: Yeah somebody bought a lot of [spraying motion with her hand].

LS: But still, it lingered.

PB: But the show went on.

LS: It sure did.

PB: But it wasn't because of me, it was because of everybody, everybody. Year after year there was some more. And then what got to be a big thing, was so many people met their partners in that bar. So we had a lot of 10-year celebrations, anniversaries, 5-year anniversaries, 20-year anniversary parties. We had a reception for that straight married couple. And uh...

CC: Charlie and Sheila had their big 10-year anniversary party there, and Kim came in and sang.

PB: Lots of people, people from other states.

LS: When the women would graduate they would come in and celebrate their graduation. So....

CC: Oh let me tell you about one of the awards, well several of the awards. The big Berwick Ball that was an all men's, for the first 10 years, it was an all men's ball no females were allowed. And I came in on their 3rd year because they wanted to do a show and they needed somebody to run the spotlight and they didn't even know where to get it. So they said 'where can we get a spotlight' I told them where to get it and they said 'well now can you tell us someone to run it' and I said yes, me. And that's how I got to be part of the executive committee. But once they let females in we did a number there in competition, several times. And when we did, we always won and then we also won their Grand award. Which was the best number of the whole show. So we've gotten awards throughout and one of the best things, I felt, was when Wall Street came and said 'would you do a show at my place', I mean that was an unheard of thing, to ask if we would perform at another bar. But winning the Grand award at Berwick was really thrilling. So that's where we got our name Singular Sensation because they said 'what's the name of your group' the first year we performed there and I said 'I don't know, Christmas Show'. And so we were doing one number from Chorus Line and one of the gals said, what about Singular Sensation? That's what we're doing, and so from then on it was Singular Sensation. Secondary to Petie Brown's Metropolitan Ballet Company! Always the best, huh?

(Off camera): Ballerinas still (inaudible) though.

LS: So, if you had to, if someone came up and said, hey what would you hope that Summit Station's legacy would be, what do you want people to say?

PB: The people that were there, the hundreds and thousands of people that came through that bar, their big hearts, the giving, the friendship, the support. It was pretty cool. And I didn't do that, the clientele did that. The people in the bar made the bar. And there were so many different generations of bar people and it was wonderful. I had some of the greatest bartenders ever, so loving and friendly.

LS: Well I can tell you, Peter Brown, beyond a shadow of a doubt. Had there not been a Summit Station, I really don't believe that there would be a Lester P. Singleton, a tow truck, still here. It saved me and I thank you for that.

PB: I remember when you were in trouble. I think you were in trouble in some ways, during the...

LS: I was lost, I was so lost.

PB: And I saw that. And it wasn't like I was your best friend but I knew everything you did at Ohio State. I followed you and you didn't even know that I was following you.

LS: No I did not. No I didn't, but you know it just... I know that you don't want to take any credit for it, but there are other people who have had opportunities and have just let them go by. And you saw enough and cared enough to make sure that it was there. And it had to be your heart that really drove everybody else's heart. I know you don't want to take the credit...

PB: Aw shucks...

LS: But I want to have it known that we are very appreciative and I feel very blessed that we are going to have this for people to know our history. To be able to go and find something that gives you this much of a history is quite spectacular. And all of you, I think of you, you all were just a team. And you all

were basically my Aunts I guess. Big sister's and aunts that I never had. And a lot of people felt that way. I don't know what we would have done without Summit Station and I'm glad that the world now has an opportunity to know about it and it's not just going to be a quiet story in the background somewhere. Now we're going to be a bona fide piece of... Ohio history.

PB: History... And that was your guy's doing, wasn't it? You drew that up.

JA: Well, I guess yes, in a way just kind of because history matters, right? Like what we are talking about is that there's going to be a Historical Marker placed in front of the bar. And those markers sit all over the State of Ohio and for anybody who likes history, it gives you an opportunity and, just when you are passing by, you don't have to go there because you're searching for history. But history comes to you through those markers and that bar, that building, that space is still a really busy space. It's still right in the middle of campus and Columbus is booming and enough has changed in the world that I think the larger culture cares about LGBTQ history.

PB: I think that's nice.

JA: It is but they won't know it...

LS: If somebody walks through there and sees that, they're going to be like 'what, 1971, that happened here?' And consequently, it's the first, is that what you told me?

JA: It'll be the third marker in Ohio but the first in Columbus.

LS: The capital city. The first LGBT Historical Marker in our state capital.

PB: Well you should be telling this story here because I think that's terrific, I didn't know any of that.

CC: Yeah, that's great.

LS: It is one of my life goals to have all of the places like, my dream of dreams, is that you can go to the Visitor's Bureau - Experience Columbus, and one of the things that you will be able to do is to take a walking or driving tour of our

history around this city. You know Ohio gets treated horribly all the time when we are the first in so, we are so pivotal to our country's history. And so innovative and so... things happened here first.

PB: So many laws got passed by I think by Stonewall and by all of us, I don't know. But a lot of laws. In the 70's it was rough. There were some good lawyers, women lawyers. I can't remember their names. I wish I could, but they worked day and night to pass the laws.

LS: Rhonda Rivera, and then the rest just went out of my head.

PB: That's the one.

JA: Dottie Painter

PB: Oh really? She's an attorney now?

LS: She was, she just passed away about a month ago.

JA: Not too long ago.

PB: She came in the bar when she was going to school at Ohio State, she was just a little baby.

LS: And she turned into a powerhouse woman attorney.

PB: Yes she did.

JA: And there was a cascade effect because when we started His Kings, we got that opportunity because of Summit Station. Dottie was our attorney. And Dottie helped us establish ourselves as an LLC. You know Jack's gave us the opportunity to, when we did a show, to keep the cover charge. And we, you know it took us...

PB: And you did good things with the cover charge.

JA: We did. We kept that spirit of donation giving.

LS: Giving back.

JA: We always gave money when we did shows. We took the cover charge and we paid the performers.

LS: It might only have been \$5.00 but it was 5 dollars more what you had and at that time \$5.00 could get you a tank of gas, almost so-

JA: Yeah it's true and it took us a long time to get that invite to Wall Street but like you said, they were more, they kind of positioned themselves as more prestigious or harder to get into but by the end of it, they were coming to us because they saw what we were doing at Jack's and at Far Side and at all these bars and they knew if we came we would bring the crowds. But because we had that history with your bar, we set the terms. We said OK, we'll come but we're keeping the cover charge.

LS: And that was a wrestle.

JA: Yeah, they did not want us to keep that cover charge, they wanted the cover charge.

PB: Well...

JA: No because not every bar was as generous.

LS: Most of the bars, we would have to fight for the cover.

PB: You earned it!

LS: They only wanted to give us a portion of it.

JA: Yeah but they didn't think about it that way.

LS: Plus the bar receipts. I'm like 'you got the bar receipts, we're not getting any of that'.

JA: Yeah we're bringing you the customers.

LS: We're bringing you the customers, you can at least give us the door.

PB: That's your money for your...

LS: I mean we had costumes to buy.

CC: Right!

JA: But that's a key thing because even like many of the drag queen bars, they didn't do business that way.

PB: They had tips.

JA: Yeah they kept their tips but it was the bar that was keeping the cover. And because we started out at Summit Station, we started out with that arrangement and we kept it. When we traveled to New York City, we traveled to Louisville, we told them all this is how we do business. We will come, we'll send you all our promotional materials but we're keeping the cover charge and that enabled us to travel all over the country.

LS: And we will have our own person at the door, collecting.

PB: That was the trick.

LS: Because we learned, we have to have our own person at the door. You can check ID's, you can have your person there, but we'll... no need for you to collect it and give it to us late.

JA: Right, we knew we had 400 people there.

LS: This does not look like 400 people worth of... But all of those things garnered from a lot of women business, a lot of women entrepreneurs and stuff came to Summit. And, you know, it was also a time when we had that big explosion where they were having to hire women and there were grants and all kinds of things and the folks at Summit capitalized on that.

PB: Everything was coming together in the early seventies, Stonewall, people were coming out. A lot, so much grew from the early seventies, they felt safe

coming out. Plus the laws were getting passed. That's the day the sign went up!

LS: Oh!

[photo of Summit Station sign with a person sitting on the roof over the sign is shown]

(off camera): See Petie at the top?

CC: That's Petie, yep.

PB: I'm like 'well this isn't quite level.' [everyone laughs]

CC: Move it a little to the right, or it's not level. No maybe a little to the left.

LS: What about, is that the update to the outside?

PB: No that was, a friend of mine painted a picture and did something. They painted it.

CC: Actually it looks like people standing outside the door waiting for tickets for the Christmas show.

LS: It does look like it is a line of people.

CC: Yeah it's a line of people standing out there.

PB: We had a lot of them.

LS: Got a little fresh new look, yeah.

JA: But we didn't hear about why the bar closed. So was there, was there something that happened or was it just...

PB: I got too old and I couldn't, I wasn't getting the right kind of managers and the right kind of bartenders. We had some good ones, but if I wasn't there...I got so that I couldn't be around the smoke. The next morning I'd go in there and we had three smoke eaters back then I think.

PB: Yeah definitely in the morning. We'd go to clean and it would smell like a fresh ashtray.

PB: I couldn't even go in there to do the paperwork and just the basics. I was getting old and falling apart. So I was trying to sell it to gay people, women, but I couldn't find anybody that was thinking in the right direction. You had good ideas but it just fell a little short. Cause I knew what would work and what wouldn't work. Been there, done that. Everything that you shouldn't do in a bar as an owner, I learned as an owner. Learned (inaudible). But it was the people, it was just always the people. And a lot of queens, a lot of you guys, a lot of the like queens. A lot of shows, a lot of music went on in that bar. And a lot of people had fun and I always felt the Christmas show gave people the opportunity to give. Whereas you don't always want to give to all the advertising on the TV and stuff. They knew exactly where that money was going. There was no middle man. And it gave them an opportunity to feel good because they helped which made them part of everything. Yeah.

JA: Well those Christmas parties at Faces are still going on.

PB: [laughs] Good good.

JA: They are, they're not funded by your bar because the bar is not there anymore but you started a tradition that's 40-some years old and going strong.

PB: I'm glad to hear that.

CC: Yeah the audience would jump in at some things when we did the show because we always did, I always said there were no encores to anything in our show because that would just last too long and you leave them wanting more. No encores except the ballerinas and the ballerinas did an encore every year. So the audience that came every year knew exactly what they were going to do, knew the steps, knew what they said and they would all chime in and do it. Like a Rond de Jambe. They would say "round the John." And big plie, Judy's doing it in the background. She was a ballerina for quite a while. And then as I said, Petie joined in and was a ballerina for several years too.

PB: I started in, when I was handing out the candy in the Santa suit. And I kept thinking, everyone stood on the step right next to him. And Vicky says come on. So there was Santa in the middle of the ballerinas. And I went out as Santa and I ended in the ballerinas until I couldn't do it any more. But I had my costume on and I did the last part, whatever it's called.

CC: The encore.

PB: There you go, I had a business called the encore. I couldn't remember the name. But, I couldn't do it anymore and the people I talked to that were interested, I knew they wasn't going to make it with the way they were thinking. And I know when we are young, we think we know all there is to know. And we know exactly how to do it and all that. But we don't. I needed to move on and I so hoped it would still be a girl's bar but it didn't work out that way. But we had our time.

LS: We had a good time.

CC: It was at a time when we all needed it. We needed the kind of bar that Petie Brown presented to us. And she doesn't take the credit and definitely all of us coming in supporting the bar, helped the bar, but if Petie Brown hadn't have been there, we wouldn't have been there. It wouldn't have had the umm...

(off camera): Ambiance?

CC: Ambiance, thank you, that we had there. The friendliness, the family it became, it was Peter who started it and who kept it going. As I said, at a time when we all needed it. I know that the experience that I gained working with my beautiful Singular Sensation, I would have never had if it wasn't for her coming into that bar and saying to me 'I want to put on this Christmas show with a bunch of these silly people. Will you help?'

PB: Non-talented in every way, except comedy.

CC: And the drinks were pretty good too. We love her. Every one of us that was connected to her in some way will always love her for what she did and for the help that she gave every one of us in one way or another.

PB: Stop it, louder. [everyone laughs]

END 1:19:55