

Repository

LGBTQ Religious Archives Network
<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/>

Title

Diane Sidorowicz Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

July 25, 2019

Extant

1 hour 22 minutes interview and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Diane Sidorowicz, one of the first woman leaders of Dignity, discusses meeting her wife through the church, and working together on projects establishing Dignity Boston. She contrasts the lack of equality and warmth she experienced in her childhood church with the support she has received through Dignity.

Biographical

Diane Sidorowicz, early leader of Dignity Boston, was born in September 1954 in Dorchester, Massachusetts, to Irene and Frank. Diane had two brothers, six and seven years older. Diane was raised surrounded by a number of extended family members, all of whom were immersed in Roman Catholicism. Diane's father worked several jobs—metal pressman and lobster fisherman, among others—to try to support his family. Her mother started full-time work in a cafeteria when Diane was eight years old.

Diane attended the local parochial school, St Margaret's that included an all-girls high school, Msgr Ryan Memorial. Her particular academic interests were in science and math. Noting the economic limitations faced by her parents, Diane decided to pursue the college-bound track in high school. Diane was the first in her family to consider college and her small high school did not have guidance counselors, so she was on her own to navigate how to get into and finance a secondary education. Diane's father offered to provide financial assistance for her college, but to that end he invested heavily in a risky enterprise. He ended up losing all his financial resources which led to a final estrangement and divorce from Diane's mother. Diane completed high school in these dire circumstances.

She decided to get a job to earn money while she explored educational options. She started working at Polaroid Company in the fall of 1972, when she turned 18. Diane took advantage of Polaroid's tuition assistance benefit to begin college part-time while she was working. After struggling with health issues over a period of time, Diane was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in 1976. This condition required regular medical attention and a number of procedures and surgeries in the years that followed. But Diane persisted and completed her college education in 1984.

Diane began working on the assembly line at Polaroid but took training classes there which allowed her to move up to being an electronics technician and finally an electrical engineer in the manufacturing division. In this position she traveled around the world to procure electronic components and assemblies from Asia, Mexico, Canada, UK and the US.

Even as she juggled work, school and travel, Diane faithfully attended Mass almost every week in her local parish although she felt that she did not really fit in. The sexual attraction she had felt toward women in high school blossomed into an intimate relationship with a friend a year after high school graduation. This relationship continued surreptitiously for three years. Diane ended that relationship, realizing that her friend was probably not a lesbian.

Diane started exploring community resources that could help her deal with her sexual feelings. At a bookshop she found an LGBT community newspaper that she read and absorbed each week. In the newspaper she eventually spotted a very small ad for "Gay and Catholic?" with an address for a weekly meeting. In November 1975 Diane ventured for the first time to St. Clement's Church for a Dignity Mass. Diane was deeply moved by the vibrancy and intimacy of the worship service and the small community gathered there. She had found a spiritual home and immediately became a regular participant. After a year she was elected to the board and held a number of leadership position in the following years. The Dignity membership was heavily male and so Diane became one of the first woman leaders of Dignity Boston. She often attended the biannual national conventions and worked on a variety of projects locally and nationally.

Lourdes Rodríguez-Nogués came to Boston for graduate school in 1977 and shortly thereafter began coming to Dignity meetings. Diane and Lourdes became friends and Dignity colleagues, but each was in relationships with other women for a number of years. Finally, in 1992, when each was single, they got together and confessed what had been a long-time latent attraction to each other. So they began their long-term relationship.

Diane retired from Polaroid on disability in 2001. Her physical condition would not allow to keep up with the travel demands of her position there. She explored other employment opportunities but none were appropriate positions that would be manageable for her. In 2004 Lourdes was invited to purchase the psychological practice in which she had been working. Lourdes was elected to the board of directors of Dignity U.S.A. in 2004-05 and served as vice-president and president.

Even though Diane came out to her family as a young adult, to her mom after being told for the nth time what a disappointment she was and to her dad, by a neighbor, they never became accepting of her and Lourdes. She was estranged from her dad and mom. She was surprised when her father left her money in his estate upon his death in 1995. Diane and Lourdes used this unexpected gift to purchase a house in Provincetown. This home has become their primary residence in their retirement even though they travel to and stay in touch with their many friends in Boston and continue their involvement in Dignity Boston. Her mom died in 1997, the morning of Lourdes' 50 birthday celebration. The party went on.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Diane Sidorowicz, one of the first woman leaders of Dignity, discusses meeting her wife through the church, and working together on projects establishing Dignity Boston. She contrasts the lack of equality and warmth she experienced in her childhood church with the support she has received through Dignity.

This interview was conducted by Mark Bowman, the executive director of LGBT-RAN. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology and has played a key leadership role in establishing a number of religious ventures and programs.

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/diane-sidorowicz>.

Reproduction and Use

LGBTQ Religious Archives Network owns the copyright and allows personal, educational, and other non-commercial uses of the Content according to its stated Terms of Use:

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/terms-of-use>.

Languages

Collection material is in English

Cite as

“Diane Sidorowicz | Oral History”, LGBTQ Religious Archives Network,
<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/diane-sidorowicz>.

Digital finding aid created by Sarah McCall, 2023

Tags

Sidorowicz, Diane

Dignity

Catholic (Roman)

Activist (religious institutions)

Women and Religion

