

TAPE # LC- 002, 1 of 3
LARRY COURTNEY
08.04.02
JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director
PROJECT REBIRTH

02.00.30 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

INTERVIEWER: I wanted to start at the very beginning. Where were you born?

02.00.50 LARRY COURTNEY: I was born in Albion, Nebraska, which is a little town in mid, in the very center of Nebraska. And I grew up there uh, and, until I was 11. Uh, then we moved to Oregon. We actually lived in Tillamook, which was, is right on the coast. Uh, famous for cheese. And uh, we lived there for a year and then we moved into, closer to Portland.

02.01.28 And that's where I really, my teenage years were spent I went to high school there, and college at Portland State. And then uh, so that's pretty basically you know, where I was.

JW: Yeah, you uh, yesterday you pulled out a picture of a church that your father was uh, connected to in terms of building?

02.01.57 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, yeah, uh, I said Albion because nobody would ever know there's a, actually a little town seven miles away called Loreto. And it's got about 250 people, and I think maybe they count cows, too, to get that amount uh, people together. (CLEARS THROAT) and there's one little Methodist church there. And before I was born uh, I mean, my parents grew up in that town, and my grandfather's house was only two houses away actually from the church.

- 02.02.34 And the church did a renovation project, you know, and they wanted to put in stained glass windows, and they were able to raise enough money to buy the stained glass windows. And so my father and my grandfather were there to help them install them. They worked as carpenters and handymen at that time.
- 02.02.59 And then later after I uh, it was I, I remember it, so I, I remember my father, we (?) the church had wooden steps and they were very old, and, and there were like 8 of them, and so it was very difficult for people to get in. So my dad designed concrete steps. Uh, they, it's an L-shape and so he designed a concrete uh, circular.
- 02.03.30 And he built the forms and everybody was telling him you can't, you just have to pour one step at a time, you can't pour all the steps at once. And my dad said no, you can do this. This is the way you do it. And those steps are still there. So. And then I was baptized in that church as an infant. Grew up there. And uh, was very, it's a wonderful church. Still is. Still active.
- 02.03.58 Very small. Uh, they don't even have a resident minister now. It's uh, there's a minister who lives in Albion and he comes out for services and for counseling.
- JW: On sort of uh, like Sundays will come in and open the church up in the morning and then do the service (?). I lived in a town in Nova Scotia, which (?) outside there was a village. And it was the same kind of thing. Very small church, but a person would come through and uh, take care of it. (?) Interesting. Uh, so how would you describe your childhood?
- 02.04.31 LARRY COURTNEY: I, I would have to describe my childhood as, as ideal. Uh, I know that nothing is ideal, but I had at, growing up I had four older brothers and sisters. There's a set of twins just directly above me and then I have an older sister and then my oldest brother.
- 02.04.58 And uh, then I have two younger brothers who were born after we moved from there. But uh, I just remember it as being wonderful. We had uh, a very close family. It was a very

rural community. Everybody lived off the farms and what not. My dad was like I said, an electrician, a carpenter, a handyman. In later life he became an electrician and you know, uh, went on with that.

02.05.32 But at that time uh, looking back at it, we, we were very poor. But I never thought that. Uh, Mother made our shirts and you know, uh, she canned all the food and for the winter and all of that kind of stuff.

02.05.57 And when I was really young, we had no electricity and no running water. We had an outhouse. I was 9, I think, before we had our first bathroom. Uh, so my kids just loved, loved to talk about it because they had, they can't imagine anybody living with kerosene lamps and you know. And then we moved into you know, into Albion itself, which was a little bigger, and we had running water and bathrooms and that kind of thing.

02.06.29 But uh, it was great. My, my brothers and sisters were, and still are, uh, very loving and protective. I'm, I'm kind of the middle child, but we had like two families, because when I was 10, the four older ones all got married the same year. And so suddenly from being a young one, you know, at 10 years old, I was now the oldest of the three.

02.07.00 And so we grew up really kind of in, in a dual family situation. But have remained very close.

JW: How old were you then, 'cos (?) they must have married quite young it sounds like uh?

02.07.18 LARRY COURTNEY: The twins actually uh, were 15 when they got married. Uh, my sister was 19 or 20. And then my oldest brother, he was in the military, he was in the army, and uh, so he was 22 or so.

02.07.37 It was 1955, so Ellen was 21, 22. And uh, they all got married that same year, and my youngest brother was born that year. So it was a really big year, for my parents, especially. You know? So. So it was just, it, loving parents.

02.08.02 Uh, strong discipline, but uh, just, just very loving.

JW: Uh, so there were 7 total?

02.08.14 LARRY COURTNEY: Seven total. But there were never just 7 in the house. My parents were the type of people that they would rather have us bring our friends in than us go out. Uh, or, it was just an open kind of house, you know, so my brother, my oldest brother he would bring in 2 or 3 of his Army buddies when he came home on leave.

02.08.42 They'd come home. And then my sister would have a couple of friends in. And it just always, it's so funny because there was always food for everybody all the time, I don't know how it came about. But uh, it was just like an extended family. And even as I grew up as a teenager later uh, it was the same way.

02.09.03 I used to bring my friends home when I worked uh, for the railroad. And 2 or 3 of them would come home and stay the weekend. And Mom would uh, we'd get home at midnight and Mom would get up and, you guys want steak and eggs or, you know? It just was a very extended family. But 7 actual (LAUGHS) children. You know?

JW: So you worked for the, you worked on the railroad. Well, tell me about that.

02.09.32 LARRY COURTNEY: Uh, the first summer after high school. No, I'm sorry, between my junior and senior year in high school I worked for uh, Union Pacific railroad. Uh, I was dating a girl whose father happened to have some clout on Union Pacific. And so I worked for a signal gang, which means you're out in the mountains putting up lines for the signal wires.

02.10.00 And so that first summer uh, I just, I was considered the grunt and you know, I was a go-fer and I carried things back and forth, dug holes. Post holes for poles and what not. And then I went back the next summer, intending to only work the summer uh, and then go back to

school. And decided I (?) really didn't have enough money to go back to school at the end of the summer.

02.10.29 So I stayed a whole 'nother year and put away money for school. And by that time I was uh, had been there long enough that I actually got to, to uh, join the union and, and I became uh, uh, I can't remember, assistant lineman, is what they call it. I got to climb poles and actually hook the wires up and you know, ride the trains and what not, and it was, it was.

02.11.00 Looking back on it, it was a lot of fun. But I, also I remember one winter we were in the Columbia River gorge because they were building a new track throughout, through the gorge. And the temperature was about oh, I don't know 30 degrees, maybe colder. (CLEARS THROAT) And the wind in the Columbia River gorge if you've ever been there is just terrific. (CLEARS THROAT)

02.11.30 And so we were on these cliffs overlooking the gorge, and then we'd be up on top of 50 foot poles on top of these cliffs. And you would go up, and literally you could only work for like 20 minutes before your hands just wouldn't work any more and you'd have to come back down the pole, go over, and we had a big barrel with a fire in it and you know, we'd warm up and then you'd go back up the pole for another 20 minutes. And I thought that was the worst experience I'd ever have in my life.

02.12.02 'Cos it was so cold. But looking back at it, it, you know, really wasn't that bad. I mean, you, you forget the, the bad things that happen, you know? And it was, I made lifelong friends there. I'm still very good friends with 2 or 3 of the guys that I worked with. And uh, in contact a lot.

JW: That's a long time. That's a (?)

(SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION)

02.12.31 LARRY COURTNEY: That's 40 years, yeah.

JW: Uh, and then what, what was the sort of path for you after that (?)

02.12.42 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, after, I was working to you know, to pay my way through college, because I, we didn't have, we weren't wealthy. My father was an electrician by that time and by that time we lived you know, on uh, lower middle class kind of uh, existence.

02.12.57 And so I worked my way through school, either (?) for the railroad for a while uh, I worked as uh, you know, busboy and as a waiter and uh, cleaned and did whatever I had to do to pay tuition uh, at Portland State. And then uh, it was at the height of the Vietnam uh, War and so I received a draft notice.

02.13.57 Because they were drafting people, they uh, you know, they kept lowering the standards because they needed more people, so uh, they drafted me, and I thought, I don't really want to go carry a gun through the jungle. So I went and talked to the Air Force recruiter. And I had talked to the Air Force recruiter once, before thinking that this might be a possibility. And so I talked to the Air Force recruiter, and they said well, if you enlist today we can delay your enlistment and you can finish uh, school that year.

02.14.09 And then you'll go into the Air Force and you know, we clear it all through the army and all of that. So that's what I did. So then I went into uh, the Air Force.

JW: And did you, so did you go into the Air Force and end up going to Vietnam?

02.14.25 LARRY COURTNEY: I actually did not. I spent 4 years in Texas, actually. I went to uh, you know, basic and to tech school in Texas. And it was hot and windy and dry, 'cos it was mid-summer. And when we all finished tech school, everybody was praying for wonderful assignments somewhere. And my assignment came, and it was Austin, Texas. And I thought (LAUGHS) some of these guys got to go to Germany and to France and I mean, they were going everywhere. And I was going back to Texas.

02.15.00 So I spent the rest of my time in the Air Force in Austin. Which is a beautiful city and uh, I loved it. Uh, I met a girl who was going to the University of Texas, and we dated and then eventually married before I got out. And she uh, we got, she got pregnant (CLEAR S THROAT) with our first son. And my name came to the top of the list as rotation for Vietnam tour.

02.15.33 But because she was already uh, what was she? Four months pregnant, I think, uh, they moved me down until after the baby came. And then by the, actually by the time he came uh, I didn't have time left. I mean, they could have still sent me to Vietnam and extended my tour. But uh, my four years were up, well, like within 6 months.

02.16.02 And the Vietnam tour was 13 months. So they didn't do it. And so I stayed in Austin. I had a lot of friends go to Vietnam and my younger brother. Uh, one of my good friends from like I said from the Union Pacific, he went. And uh, but I uh, something I did not do.

JW: And uh, and then you, your, you had 3 children, is that right?

02.16.30 LARRY COURTNEY: Right. (~JW~) We had uh, my oldest son while we were in the service. And then my, the second son was born about year and a half later. Uh, by that time we were out of the service and home. And then uh, (LAUGHS) and we said, this, two's enough, two is absolutely enough. And then my wife kept thinking, well, we don't have a girl.

02.17.00 You know, so we decided to try one more time, and I have a daughter. (PAUSE) Sorry. They're, they're all really close. Uh, very special kids. And they're all you know, 28 to 32, so they're grown and on their own and doing their own things.

02.17.28 And uh, I have a granddaughter and a, my son's stepdaughter is my granddaughter, so. It's pretty amazing.

JW: (?) you are close to your granddaughter, as I understand (?)

- 02.17.44 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah, I uh, she's been really terrific at uh, when well, she uh, she always loved to come to New York and stay with Grandpa, Gene, and uh, she never quite knew what to call him, 'cos she had Grandmas on both sides and then us and you know, so there was a lot of people.
- 02.18.16 But she always used to like to come and uh, after uh, Gene died, she and her father came up one weekend by themselves.
- 02.18.31 And we had a good time and, and she was just very loving but she didn't say much. And then one, the, the (?) Sunday morning, I think, she uh, came into the kitchen and she said, (PAUSE) Uh, Grandpa, where is Gene?
- 02.18.59 And so I said, well, Gene's gone, but he's with his, his mother and uh, with my grandpa, or my father who would have been your (?) great-grandpa. And with a lot of friends and people that he loves. And that's all she said. And she was, that was it. And then about 2 months ago, or 3 months ago, she and her step-sister and mother and father came up.
- 02.19.35 And spent the weekend and we uh, at that time there was a, an empty apartment in a uh, ground floor. And so I put beds, air mattresses and stuff in the apartment so they could kind of have their own place for the weekend. And so uh, when it got to be bed time, I, I said I'll put the girls down and put them to bed.
- 02.20.01 'Cos Katie's 9 and uh, Taylor is 7 ½, going on 20. She's uh, they're both very bright. But uh, so I took them downstairs and uh, we talked, and I told them some stories, and then we decided that I (?) you know, just doing Grandpa things, you tickle them and you, you become a monster and you know, that kind of thing.
- 02.20.32 And then (PAUSE) just out of the blue, I mean, having a good time, and uh, Katie said, I miss Gene. (PAUSE)

- 02.21.00 And we talked for a little while about it. And it was so funny to see this 9 year old having that much emotion about this man that she just knew as my lover, my, you know, I, I don't know what concept she had as to our relationship. Never questioned it.
- 02.21.28 But uh, we spent nearly a half an hour just holding each other and talking and crying. And then uh, and then it was, you know, we kind of got through it. And uh, she's been up once since then and we just had a wonderful time. She loves to go to Chinatown. 'Cos she loves Chinese food.
- 02.22.00 And she loves chopsticks and all of the paraphernalia that go with Chinese food and uh, she loves the little silk dresses and parasols. So we always end up going to Chinatown when she comes.
- JW: So uh, she I mean, she sounds wonderful. Tell me about Washington, D.C. and Gene. Washington, D.C.'s my hometown, so I have a good sense of the city. I know the people I have uh, I have a pretty strong hold on what the city's like and you tell me a little bit about it.
- 02.22.41 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, after my divorce uh, I had always kind of felt that I was living a lie. And uh, so I decided to see what the gay life was really about.
- 02.23.00 And Washington, D.C. has a fairly active gay population. And so I found some of the clubs and uh, I found a particular piano bar that I liked a lot. And, and I got to know the piano players very well. And it was very quiet and it wasn't a, wasn't a young, hustler kind of bar. It was just a very comfortable kind of bar. And I was, so I was very comfortable there and I'd sit at the piano with them and we'd sing and uh, they had stools around the piano.
- 02.23.32 And uh, one night uh, a mutual friend came in, and Gene was with him, and I had never met him. And uh, I remember Mark bringing him up to the piano. And saying, this is somebody I think you need to meet. And it was Eugene.

- 02.23.58 And so he sat uh, next to me at the piano and we talked and laughed. And uh, sang with the piano player and joked with the people around the piano, 'cos we all knew each other fairly well. I mean, by name. And uh, I just was absolutely, that was it. I just was smitten. His, his eyes, his smile. Uh, everything about him was just life.
- 02.24.32 Just I mean, it was like pouring out of him, it just enveloped you. And uh, we stayed at the bar until it closed, and in Washington that's uh, you know, on Friday night or whatever, it's 4 o'clock by the time you get out of there. So I (?) gave him a ride home, and I took him back to his apartment. And then we made a date for the next night.
- 02.25.00 And the next night uh, we went out to dinner. And then we went back to the our favorite piano bar. And we went to a couple of other clubs and just walked around and talked. And I told him that night, which was October 30th that (PAUSE) I was in love with him and (PAUSE) and he just laughed.
- 02.25.35 You know, he said, you can't. this is, I mean, you can't be in love with me, you just met me. So and I said, well, you watch. And so we continued to date. Uh, until I got a job offer in New York City. And I asked him if I moved to New York would he come with me. And he said absolutely.
- 02.26.01 So we moved to New York in April of 1988 and set up our apartment together. And that was the beginning of when we lived together.
- JW: How long was that after you met?
- 02.26.17 LARRY COURTNEY: We met in October of '87. End of October of '87, and moved in together in April of '88. It was quick (LAUGHS) But I, I knew. You know, and I never doubted it, and I never, never wavered in the, the fact that we were uh, a couple and we were meant to be a couple.

02.26.38 Uh, I don't like the term soul mate 'cos it's used so often, but if anybody knew me it was Eugene. I mean, and I like to think that I knew him as well. Uh, maybe I didn't, but I like to think I did. But he knew me inside and out.

02.27.01 Uh, and it just, we were just together. I mean, it just worked. I'm not saying it was perfect (LAUGHS). No relationship is, but you know, we had our disagreements, but uh, I was speaking with Oliver yesterday about relationships, and (?) we were talking about Eugene and myself.

02.27.28 And he said, oh, I remember you guys fighting all the time and you were, this was gonna happen, and that was gonna happen, and then the next day everything was fine. And well, you know, that's, that happens in relationships, you do that. But uh, it was never, I mean, it was just, we always knew it was Ok. We could disagree and, and it would still be all right. (CLEARS THROAT).

JW: When you got uh, here to New York, tell me about where you guys moved to and.

02.28.02 LARRY COURTNEY: Uh, when we, I first came up I uh, came up and stayed with somebody I didn't know. Actually I, I didn't know about (?) you know, I'd never been to new York. So I had called a church, a Lutheran church up here, and uh, that was affiliated with some people I knew. And so, and I just asked them if they had anybody in the parish who had a room that they would be willing to rent for a couple of weeks while I found an apartment.

02.28.38 And this one guy uh, he didn't have a room, but he said I've got a couch, and you know, I'm willing to share my house with you if you want to come up and live on the couch for a couple of weeks while you look for an apartment. So I did that, and that was a clear up on 200th Street. Uh, very tip of Manhattan.

02.29.00 And so I did uh, every night I would go apartment hunting. And uh, on the weekend and then I finally found an apartment, actually in Jersey City. Uh, and so I signed the lease on

Friday night, and then drove, uh, took the train down to D.C., and rented a truck, and we put all our stuff in it and drove back up on Sunday.

02.29.31 And uh, so we, and we lived in Jersey City from April to December. Uh, all, I was always on the lookout for an apartment in, in the city. And we looked at a lot of them in the village. And but what we could afford we wouldn't live in. You know, a lot of the apartments in the village are (LAUGHS) really bad. You know, students, I guess, going to college can handle it. But you know, at my age I wasn't going to have the toilet out in the hall and a communal situation and the bathtub in the kitchen.

02.30.06 So uh, finally found an apartment on 42nd and 8th. It was a small, really small, one bedroom. But it was really cute, and uh, the queen sized bed just fit in the bedroom and you could, you had about 6 inches on each side of it, and about 3 feet on the end of it. That was it. That was, that was the bedroom.

02.30.30 But the living room was descent. And uh, uh, the kitchen, living room, dining room was all one big room. So that, that was a nice apartment. We really loved it. And (?) then uh, a nicer, larger one bedroom became available later uh, on another floor, and so we moved into that one.

02.30.55 And then when the, what they called the penthouse became available, we moved into that, which was a nice duplex with two bedrooms and two baths and a terrace. And it was really uh, a beautiful apartment.

JW: Is that what I saw yesterday?

02.31.12 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah, from the (?) from my window you could see the, the terrace of the duplex. (?) the kitchen and dining room and terrace are on the second floor, actually. And then uh, living room and two (?) bedrooms uh, on the first floor. But yeah, that's what, what you could (~JW~) see from there. (~JW~) Right in the middle of Times Square, which is noisy and hectic, but uh, it's a wonderful place to live.

02.31.40 Particularly if you like theater. Eugene was uh, absolute theater buff. He took all the theater magazines. Uh, we went as often as we could, as we could afford it. Uh, we actually worked for a year as volunteers for an off-Broadway uh, company.

02.32.05 And uh, worked backstage and we got to know a lot of wonderful people who were in the business. And later when we uh, after that uh, sometimes some of those people would be like dressers backstage or stage managers for a Broadway show, and they'd (STUMBLE) call and say, I have house tickets for tonight. You guys want to go? And so a lot of times we got to go for nothing or for you know, ten, twenty dollars.

02.32.35 And then uh, we found the half-price ticket booth. So we, we loved to go to the theater. And Gene bought every soundtrack (LAUGHS) I think, every CD uh, of theater sound track uh, that he could find.

02.32.59 He loved music just of all kinds, but being right there uh, with the theater district, it was just, it was just so fun. You know?

JW: You mentioned the music corner yesterday?

02.33.13 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. We had, when uh, I can't remember which apartment we were living in, but we bought a new stereo, a big stereo with the five CD changer thing and uh, we kind of began to, it was in one spot, and we kind of began to build around that as our music center.

02.33.44 There was a bookcase full of CD's and there were, and then we bought pictures or things of interest that was musical, that we tied into that, and then friends kind of got into it, and they would give us uh, somebody gave us a bust of Beethoven, and some uh, nice uh, paintings and things like that.

- 02.34.10 And figurines that were angels that had music, trumpets or tambourines or something. Uh, and, and because Gene liked all kinds of music. It, it was amazing. Uh, if you look at his CD collation it's (?) he, he bought the music.
- 02.34.32 I you know, that was Ok, you, you know what you're doing I (?) you know, uh, and I, I couldn't even buy him a CD for a gift because he probably already had it, or he had ordered it, 'cos he belonged to the CD clubs and what not. But there's everything in that collection from uh, opera to rap uh, gospel uh, he loved gospel music.
- 02.35.00 And one year as, for his birthday, I gave, well, I gave us both, but I gave for his birthday, uh, season tickets to the Met. And so and I think that entitles to seven operas for the season. He loved it, just absolutely loved it. And then uh, when the season was over, we just decided we really couldn't afford another, another season the next year. So we didn't do it again, but he, he loved opera.
- 02.35.33 And we went when we could. Uh, but he also uh, we went up to uh, there's a, a little theater on (?) just off 125th Street. It's not, not a big theater, but uh, they had a gospel concert. And uh, we went up there and uh, it was supposed to be like an hour and a half and it turned into a 3 hours. You know, and it was (?) wonderful.
- 02.36.02 It was wonderful. But he could, he could sing, he could dance. Uh, he taught ball room dancing for a while when he was younger. And Gene was just, you know, that kind of a person, but I think music was such an integral part of his life. Uh, maybe with the dancing and everything by (?) , it just, it's just sort of, he could absorb it. (?) he's like a sponge for music. He could just absorb this music. It uh, it meant a great deal to him.

JW: I was talking actually to a friend of mine last night about a guy in Scotland who was, he could hear any song, and he could just play it or hum it (?) or uh, he had a great voice. He was, you know, great with the piano. He could do all the uh, I just (STOPS)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: You were describing the things that he loved, which uh, and I guess I'll ask you that, what are the other things, what are the other things that come to mind when you say these are the things that uh, Gene (?)

- 02.37.31 LARRY COURTNEY: If we had been wealthy, Eugene would have had us booked on travel flights uh, every week, because he loved to travel. Uh, absolutely loved to travel. He kept trying to talk me into a cruise. I don't like water. I don't even watch boat movies. You know, I'm not a water person. And but he had been on a couple of cruises with uh, when he was a ball room dance, dancing instructor.
- 02.38.02 These groups would get a cruise and you know, all these dances and they'd have contests on the, on board and whatever. So he'd been on a couple and he kept, that was one thing he wanted me to do, which we did not do. But uh, we both loved to cook. Uh, it kind of got to the point that I did the cooking. Uh, and I, I liked to try new things all the time.
- 02.38.34 Uh, if I see a recipe on television uh, you know, I'll download it from the computer and try it. But he was a good cook and he liked to cook. Uh, we, when we first came to New York, New York was all new to us, and he had never lived her, either.
- 02.38.57 And so Gene and I would go uh, every weekend we'd go somewhere to see what was happening in the city. Uh, street fairs. Uh, to, to the village, to Chelsea, to you know, we just tried to explore the city. And then uh, as we developed and, and as the years went by, we kind of became homebodies and we had people in.
- 02.39.29 Because we liked, we just enjoyed having company and, and having uh, you know, having a dinner party or, or uh. We used to uh, we had five years running at uh, during the Christmas season. We would have a Queen's High Tea on Sunday afternoons uh, in mid-December, after we had the Christmas decorations up and everything.

02.39.55 And I had all of these recipes for actually the Queen's high tea that was prepared for Charles and Diana when they came to Washington to visit the U.S., uh, I mean, the British embassy in D.C. and all of that. And uh, so I had all of those recipes. So I would fix scones and uh, uh, quiche and trifle and you know, we'd have smoked salmon and everything.

02.40.30 And we did it for 5 years. And the first year we had I think about 20 people. And we were in a really, that really small apartment. And the last year we did it, we had 65 people. So we had a, you know, we enjoyed it, but it was (?) a lot of work. And then we decided uh, we just, it was a lot of work and a lot of money, so we decided we wouldn't do that. We'd have smaller gatherings.

02.41.00 And then after we moved up to the uh, uh, duplex apartment with the terrace, the first two years that we lived there, you could see the ball drop in Times Square at, on New Year's Eve, because you had a straight of vision to uh, Number One, Broadway. And so we decided to have a New Year's Eve, you know, an annual New (?) Year's Eve party, which we did for uh, I think four years.

02.41.33 Together. Uh, the first few years, like I said, we could see the ball drop. And then the Reuters Tower went up in between us, so we just decided we'd have New Year's Eve Party anyway. And uh, so we did that, like I say, for four years together. And the year after Gene uh, the New Year's after Gene died, uh, many of my friends called and said uh, are you doing it this year.

02.42.08 And I said you know what? We are doing it this year. It'll be very small, very scaled down, but I don't think Eugene would have been happy if I hadn't done it. You know. So we had uh, a really wonderful kind of love fest for New Year's Eve.

02.42.32 And we all you know, my close friends and, and loved ones spent New Year's Eve together. And it, in our tradition you know? And I'll do it again this year.

JW: It's sounds like (?) much obviously (in his memory?)

- 02.42.51 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah, it was. It was uh, (~JW~) We had uh, I had Gene and I had talked a lot over the years about life and death and you know, as married couples do, what uh, we were gonna do wills, which we didn't do. But we knew what you know, we both talked about cremations, and no sad memorial services. No where everybody's crying and carrying on. We said after, you know, a month or so uh, a party, to celebrate the life of the person, not to cry over the death.
- 02.43.38 And so actually uh, in (?) the end of October I did have uh, a celebration of life for Eugene. Uh, and it was amazing. Uh, I had a guest book and 96 people signed the guest book.
(PAUSE)
- 02.44.07 A lot of the, the actual party I don't remember. I uh, it was kind of a blur. It's just uh, it was so soon after he died. Uh, I mean, I mean, it was a month after he died, but. I still wasn't really uh, things weren't sinking in, and I know that I mean, I, I his, his co-workers came.
- 02.44.33 And many of them had actually been in the building that day. And had gotten out. Uh, our friends from all over came, family came. It was just, it was really an amazing, amazing affirmation of how Gene touched people. (PAUSE)
- 02.45.01 Gene was the kind of person that had never met a stranger. He could, he could sit on the subway and just strike up a conversation with anybody. Uh, he, he just, he could talk to anybody. It just, you know, I (?) always was in awe of him. If we went to somebody's house for a party or something, and there would be people that we didn't know.
- 02.45.26 He knew (?) them by name uh, within 5 minutes and was laughing and talking, and I'm not that kind of an outgoing person. And I tend to stand back and kind of watch what's going on. But not Gene. You know. And if there was dancing, he was dancing. Uh, so he was just, he was just that kind of a person.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

02.46.04 END OF TAPE # LC – 002, 1 of 3

TAPE # LC – 003, 2 of 3
LARRY COURTNEY
08.04.02
JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director
PROJECT REBIRTH

03.00.30 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: It sounds like, you know, like in any good relationship there's a uh, compatibility but a complementary nature, where one might be extraverted uh, as you put it?

03.00.54 LARRY COURTNEY: Uh, and, and Gene was really that. He was an extravert. And me and all of my friends, we used to call him my Social Secretary. But he wasn't only my social secretary, he was social secretary to (LAUGHS) other people, too, because I just had a call the other day from a very good friend of mine, and she said, you know what? I totally forgot somebody's birthday because Gene didn't remind me. But that's the kind of person he was, I mean, he had his book and everybody's birthdays, anniversaries, everybody was in it.

03.01.28 And the week before he would make sure that the cards were there and, and sent, and if there was an event uh, he was the one who organized it, and you know. And it, even if I suggested something it would be, finally it would be him actually doing the, I mean, he would go online and get the tickets.

03.01.56 Uh, we went to Paris a couple of times and he (~JW~)

JW: What was that like?

03.02.01 LARRY COURTNEY: Oh, that was wonderful. That was absolutely incredible. Uh, like I said, Gene, Gene loved to travel. He would have traveled all the time if we'd had lots of money. Uh, we had actually met some people here in the United States through another mutual friend, and they had stayed with us, (?) and they were from uh, actually Normandy uh, in (Ruwan?)

03.02.27 And uh, they stayed with us for a week, and they invited us to come uh, to France uh, the next year. Which we did. And uh, they had a little really tiny little flat in Paris that they kept. And so we stayed there, and for the first few days they were with us and then they went, they had to go back to Ruwan to work. And uh, Gene and I explored Paris.

03.02.59 And just had the most wonderful time. We spent 8 hours in the Louvre one day, and uh, it was just incredible. We spent a whole day at Versailles. Just walking around the gardens. Uh, and just soaking it in, you know? And then uh, couple of years later we were able to go back.

03.03.28 And really enjoy it with having been there and having a little bit of knowledge of where things were, and you know, seeing new things. And then in 1999, uh, my cousin and his wife who we're very close to, live in Connecticut (CLEARS THROAT) they had never been to Paris, and they wanted to go. So the four of us went.

03.03.59 And just had uh, it was so much fun to, it was almost like we had turned into tour guides, 'cos we'd been there a couple of times. And you know the, you got to go see this, you got to go see this, you got to do go this. (?) and we enjoyed just, just sitting on the sidewalk uh, at the cafes, you know, and having a glass of wine and watching the people go by and just wondering what they were doing, you know, where they were going.

03.04.29 And uh, uh, it was uh, it was pretty, pretty incredible.

JW: Sounds like you guys also shared uh, kind of an intellectual curiosity.

LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah, in a sense (~JW~)

JW: Spending 8 hours in the Louvre

(SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION)

03.04.51 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah, it uh, there was, I think both of us are, were very curious. And both of us had studied art in college at one point or other. And music and dance and what not. So we were really compatible that way. And to see in person all of these things that we had studied, you know, and whatnot, it was, it was pretty amazing. And just, just to go to places, uh, we didn't even go to the Moulin Rouge uh, as, as going in.

03.05.30 But we, we had to go see it, you know, the actual building where it was, and that kind of thing. We did actually go in in 1999, when, when my cousin and his wife were there. Uh, we went for the show. And uh, but it, it just, there was always something uh, even if we were just sitting at home watching television. Uh, you know, I was, uh, Gene loved Biography channels and History channels, and so did I.

03.06.03 And so we uh, you know, we had a real uh, communion of, of souls in that sense. And then, then there were the times when we didn't, and he wanted to watch football. And I have no interest in watching football on television. I like, if I'm in a stadium, I get really carried away, but I have no interest in watching it on television.

03.06.27 But you would think he was in a stadium when he was watching it, 'cos he was screaming at people as they were running and or whatever they were doing. But it got to the point that he would watch (?) he would watch football, and he loved college basketball. And so it just

didn't interest me, so I would go upstairs to, and turn the food channel on and I would watch cooking shows and learn all these new recipes while he was watching football.

- 03.06.56 So it wasn't uh, we didn't share everything. I, I enjoyed sports to a point, never, never played them uh, in my life. But uh, he just, he could watch any sport on television and just be delighted. But you would think he was there. 'Cos he was yelling, you know, he was cheering or telling the umpire where, where he could go or whatever. You know. But he, he just enjoyed.
- 03.07.27 Uh, and then after the, after the football game he could watch opera on PBS. You know, and tape (Tourinndot?), and just. I, I uh, actually thinking about it, putting it into words, he's maybe one the most interesting people I've ever met. And (?) (PAUSE) I really didn't think about that 'til now, because he, he just uh, he liked everything.
- 03.08.03 I (?) can't imagine anything that he didn't enjoy. Uh, he could be a severe critic. I mean, if we went to a play for instance and he thought it was bad, he could, he would tell you know, I mean, he would tell people uh, this is what I thought of it. But he enjoyed the, the uh, act of actually going and, and being there, even if it was bad.
- 03.08.33 You know? So I remember we went to one uh, with two friends who were up from Washington. Actually it was the piano player from the piano bar, and his friend. And uh, I, by intermission, I just, well it was before intermission. I said, I just, this is horrible.
- 03.09.01 I'm just not, I'm not gonna watch this. I just am not gonna stay for this. So since we only live 2 blocks away from the theater, I said I'll meet you guys after the show. And then we'll go out to dinner or go have a drink or whatever. So I did, I just went back to the apartment. And I, you know, listen to music and what not, and when it was time for the show to be over, I went back.
- 03.09.28 And they had stayed through it all, but they, they thought it was horrible as well, but they were willing to stay to see if maybe it was gonna get better at the end. And I, I just couldn't

be bothered. It just, it was wasting my time, I thought, you know? But uh, he really could uh, could absorb uh, I guess that's the best way to say it. He really could absorb what was around him. And he did that with people.

03.10.02 Uh, I can't, I can't even imagine the number of people uh, lives that he's touched in one way or another. And I mean, for two weeks after September 11th, no for a month, at least a month, I kept a phone log.

03.10.35 Uh, the first two weeks I kept it hoping that I would be able to show it to him, to tell him (PAUSE) how many people cared, and were concerned. And then after two weeks, when I gave up hope that he, that Gene was coming home, uh, then I kept it for myself.

03.11.05 And just uh, I have pages and pages and pages and pages of just people calling, and even if I didn't get them, get the phone, the messages were don't bother calling back, we're just calling to make sure you're OK, and if you need anything. And it just, and that went on (PAUSE) that went on for a good month.

03.11.34 And then it began to taper off as you know, things like that do. But it was, it was amazing to me. 'Cos some of these people I had met maybe once or not at all, some of his co-workers. I'm still in touch with one of, two of his co-workers that I had never met before he died. And uh, one was one that he used to go down and have his cigarette breaks with uh, twice a day.

03.12.04 And she's just (LAUGHS) she's, she's a very funny person. And uh, she called Gene her Hoochie-mama. 'Cos she said, he, he always, he could give her a snap like that if she needed it. And uh, so uh, actually we're going to lunch together next week.

03.12.29 But it, it was incredible the number of people that he actually touched and uh, I mean, personally. I (?) mean I've seen, you know, I've been to a lot of things where there was an enormous crowd because they knew of this person, or knew about this person. But I mean, these were actually people that he, that he had touched. Whether I knew them or not. And it was, it's (?) pretty amazing.

03.13.02

JW: Was there a, you sort of articulated it, was there a theme to, I don't know, (?) to what they were saying?

03.13.20 LARRY COURTNEY: I think the, the theme uh, was that uh, Gene's joy of life, (joi de'vive?) was infectious. Uh, (CLEARS THROAT) might not always agree with him. You might get really angry with him, but in the end, you would, you would still be friends, and not just me, but I mean, other people. And because he would just, he'd tell you the way it was as he saw it.

03.14.02 There wasn't this way or that way. This is the way Eugene saw it, and Eugene would tell you, this is it, you know. You look like crap in that color, you know? That is not a good dress for you to wear. Or you know, or that's, that's the most fabulous thing I've ever seen. Or, that piece of music is you know, disgusting or it's wonderful, or. But it was, it was something that, and it was not a causal uh, just something out of his mouth.

03.14.37 It was something that he meant. It was, it was real. And he could tell somebody that you know, green makes you look like a toad. And the next day, that person would not wear green any more, and they would be just as close as they were before, you know?

03.15.00 It just, he, they knew that he was not mean. Uh, I never saw him being mean in my life. In his life. Uh, but he was honest. Truthful. Loyal. He, if you were Eugene's friend, you were his friend for life. It would just, there was no question.

03.15.31 No matter what you did, you know? Uh, we've had some friends that we had problems with and even though it might, we might be estranged for a little while or whatever, Eugene would always manage to get it, get it back in place. Because he just, uh, he valued people. You know?

- 03.16.02 It, it amazes me that someone as full of life and someone who loved life so much only had 47 years of it (PAUSE) I can see Eugene at 90 years old, organizing ball room dancing at the nursing home.
- 03.16.38 Getting all of these old people out of their chairs, because he wanted to dance. I, I you know, that's what, that's the kind of life he would have had, had he lived his normal life. You know? He never would have uh, I don't think he would have ever stopped. It was, that's, and just to have it end like that is, is so, it just, hard to comprehend.
- 03.17.07 Uh, there are still days uh, a year later, that I turn around because something uh, and I just expecting, expect him to be there. Uh, I still sometimes come home from work and why isn't he watching the news uh, on the sofa?
- 03.17.28 You know, I just, that that much energy and that much life just to be gone is, is kind of, you know, it's incomprehensible. That's all I got to say about it. It just doesn't make any sense to me.
- JW: Can you tell me about the day, September 11th?
- 03.17.55 LARRY COURTNEY: Ok. Let me start on (CLEARS THROAT) Monday night. Because for some reason, let's start it on Sunday because Gene decided that. Gene did a wonderful Southern fried chicken, 'cos he, his roots were in North Carolina. And when he did fried chicken he also did something called fried cabbage.
- 03.18.27 And you always do fried cabbage the night before you do the fried chicken, because it's always better the second day. And for some reason, on Monday night, he wanted me to learn how to do the fried cabbage, because on Tuesday night we were gonna have, he was, we had bought all this chicken on Sunday and he was gonna fry chicken. And we were gonna have fried cabbage and chicken. So he taught me, and this is like a family recipe, but for some reason Monday night, we spent the whole night chopping cabbage, and it's a long process.

- 03.19.08 But it's not complicated, it's just a long process. And laughing and watching TV and whatever, but spent the whole night getting this cabbage going. Meanwhile I had stuff in the oven for dinner. And so we, we spent the night with the fried cabbage, and he approved of you know, he walked me through it and tasted it and said, OK.
- 03.19.32 So we put it in the refrigerator, had dinner and went to bed. And Tuesday morning we got up a little early because uh, it was primary day in New York City. And Gene always liked to go to the poles before he went to work, because there usually wasn't anybody there and it didn't take long. So we had coffee and then uh, (PAUSE) uh, he kissed me goodbye.
- 03.20.05 He said, I'll see you tonight. And uh, he left. And so I continued getting dressed. Uh, Eugene had to be at work at 8:30. I didn't have to be at work until 9. So I got dressed and I, I took the shuttle over to Grand Central and then walked to my office.
- 03.20.29 And I got to my office about 8:55. And my message light was blinking on my phone. And if, if that's, you know, there's a message, a light blinking, that's the first thing I normal do is get my messages and you know, and then like e-mails and that kind of thing. And it was Eugene. (PAUSE) And he said, don't worry.
- 03.21.01 The plane hit the other building. We're evacuating and I'm OK. And hung up. And I thought, what is he talking about? What plane hit what building, what is he talking about? Well, just at that time, uh, a good friend and co-worker who was also a friend of Gene's, she came in and she said, Larry, did you get your message from Gene?
- 03.21.30 Because he called me to make sure that you (PAUSE) to make sure that you knew that he was all right. He, she said, I talked to him and he said that the plane hit the other building and they were ok, and, and but the alarms were going off so they were evacuating. And so she said, I told him to get out of there as quickly as possible.
- 03.22.00 So I said, would you please tell me what's happening. (PAUSE) (CLEARS THROAT) And she said, a plane crashed into the north tower, and uh, nobody knew what, you know, why or

how, maybe there was an accident, what was going on. And so we all went into the trading floor of, of where I work, because there are big monitors up.

03.22.32 And I could see the north tower on fire, and you know, they said uh, just unbelievable, just absolutely unbelievable. And there must have been almost 40 of us in that room watching the monitors. And it wasn't uh, just a few minutes that I, standing there, and all of a sudden this other plane came out of nowhere and hit his building.

03.23.02 And there was a collective uh, 40 voice chorus of Oh, my god. 'Cos there were several of us who had, knew people or had people uh, some, one of our (?) people in operations her husband worked there. Uh, one of the, the guys in finance, he has a father and a brother who worked in the buildings.

03.23.28 So we, you know, uh, it's just incomprehensible. And I was just so stunned and, and just absolutely shaking. So my supervisor who's also a friend uh, came and she, she said I, I think you need to go back to your desk. I don't think you need to watch this. Let's just go in and see, you know, just get away from the TV.

03.23.58 So we did, and I went back to the office, and I called home. And I left a message on our phone at home, for him to call me as soon as he got in, because I was worried. And a little while later, uh, someone came by the office and said that the, his tower had collapsed.
(PAUSE)

03.24.29 And then, of course, the second tower collapsed, and finally all of the other people in the office who had people there heard from them, and they were all safe and they were away from the buildings. And uh, of course, at that time Wall Street shut down. And uh, they kind of locked down the city. The bridges got, were closed, the tunnels were closed and everything.

03.25.00 And so our CEO said, why don't we just order pizza and have lunch here, like, 'cos by this time it was 11, 11:30 and uh, we finally found out everybody was ok, and I was, I kept

expecting a call from Gene. And so he ordered in pizza and we, all 40 of us, basically. But he said before that, he said anybody who is scared or who wants to leave, can leave now.

03.25.35 You know, you don't have to stay. Uh, so I thought, well, I may as well stay by the uh, here, as to go home and, and wait. So I told several of my co-workers, who I knew lived in New Jersey or Long Island or whatever uh, I said, uh, if you can't get home tonight, then come to my place, because I'm, I'm within walking distance.

03.26.08 I have a separate bedroom. Gene and I will make up the sofa bed uh, we'll put down blankets on the floor if we have lots of people. Uh, 'cos if you can't get home, uh, you know, and uh, so actually one of my co-workers then came home with me, because she lived in New Jersey.

03.26.30 And then my direct supervisor, who was the one who took me out of the thing came home uh, came a little bit later. But when we got back to the apartment uh, again, I opened the door and expected Eugene to be sitting there waiting. He wasn't. And that's when I turned on the television and actually saw the towers collapse.

03.26.57 Because they were replaying you know, at every 5 minutes they were replaying what had happened. And uh, I turned it off and I didn't watch it again. But then a couple of my other friends came over. Oliver, who you met yesterday, and another friend. And they actually stayed with me for two or three days. So that I wouldn't be alone.

03.27.29 And uh, uh, the day was so surreal uh, by the time I got home in the afternoon, they were talking about people going to, being taken to hospitals. And actually being ferried over across the river to New Jersey hospitals and that kind of thing. And, and so I started getting all this information.

03.28.00 And I got a call from Gene's direct supervisor. She had been at a seminar that day and had not been in the building. And so, of course, she called. (PAUSE) And uh, I told her that he hadn't come home.

03.28.28 And so uh, we started calling all the emergency rooms uh, of all the hospitals that had been mentioned, or any hospital I could find in New Jersey or in New York. And it was amazing because there really weren't that many people taken to emergency rooms. I mean, the St. Vincent's was ready for, they're very close, and they were ready for all this emergency work and they got 2 or 3 patients, you know.

03.29.04 But I called every emergency room. And then the next day I spent the day on the phone calling, trying to contact anybody who might know where he was. And his company actually organized a search party to actually go into the hospitals to, because they lost 200 people in all.

03.29.34 And in case this person was unconscious or unable to identify themselves or whatever, and they actually went to emergency rooms. And (~JW~)

JW: Which company?

02.29.47 LARRY COURTNEY: Uh, A-On Corporation, which is a large insurance company. But they did not uh, they had 1300 people in the, at, I mean, at the World Trade Center.

03.30.00 Uh, they probably weren't all there that day but uh, and out of, they lost 200 people out of uh, the 13. But uh, there was uh, there just was never any news.

JW: (And?) At what point did you (?) let me ask you this question, you had friends with you that (heard from other people?) at A-on. So you must have just uh, I gather it makes sense for you to assume that Gene got out?

03.30.50 LARRY COURTNEY: One of Gene's co-workers uh, called to ask, you know, if he was home. (~JW~) And she actually saw him on the 102nd floor, helping people get on the elevator. And he said, I'll, you know, I'll take the next one. Well, evidently there wasn't no

more, there were no more. Because she actually got down on the elevator after the plane hit, or before, I'm sorry, before the plane hit their building.

03.31.28 And she couldn't figure out why he wasn't out. She said, I know Gene, he's not, you know, he's not a hero, but he uh, he was helping people onto elevators, but I know him, he (LAUGHS) he would be out of there. And uh, she said, I think he's probably, he went down for a smoke and got hit on the head and he's unconscious somewhere. And uh, I basically kept up that hope (CLEARS THROAT) for, well, that was Tuesday the 11th.

03.32.08 And my friend, my friend, Oliver, talked me into going to the Armory where they had set up emergency uh, police stations for filing missing, missing person reports. Uh, thinking that uh, if I filed a missing person report, then the police are looking at it, you know, it was, it was very busy, and there were a lot of people there.

03.32.36 And the, the police department was just incredible. I don't know how they were so calm. It was the, it was so calm in that armory, so quiet. People were being escorted to different tables and they wouldn't leave, let you wander off by yourself. You, they wanted to be right there with you and uh, and they would have you wait and a detective would come and pick you up and take you over to this table.

03.33.06 And he actually filled out the report. All you, he just asked you the information. (CLEARS THROAT) And I think that was Friday. Then uh, the weekend was very difficult.

03.33.34 Got through the next week. And I went to church. (PAUSE) The second Sunday after that. And uh, (PAUSE) while I was at the uh, communion rail, (PAUSE) I just let him go. (PAUSE)

03.34.16 And I made my decision that he was not coming home. (PAUSE)

- 03.34.32 Uh, so then the next week, I went to the pier where they had set up the family uh, I can't remember now what they called it. The Family Center uh, sorry. Uh, they had taken over all of Pier 94. Enormous space.
- 03.34.57 And uh, I was advised, again, by several friends uh, Rosanna, who is my cousin's wife, is a paralegal in Connecticut. And she said, I heard that they are now you are, you can go file an affidavit for death certificates to get this, the process started.
- 03.35.27 And so I went to the family center that next week, and again, it was just uh, with that many people in one place, because it was, it was mobbed, absolutely mobbed. I was astounded by the organization of it all. They carpeted this whole pier in soft blues.
- 03.35.57 They had blue curtains hanging, just everything soft and uh, it was just amazing. And then the volunteers who were there to uh, when you walked in, you registered at the table and they assigned you a person who took you to this person and that person. The first person you went to see was the lawyer, who actually filed the affidavit for you for the death certificates. And then after he was finished, then the person would come back and they would take you to the next station, which might be the Red Cross or the Crime Victims' board or whatever it was.
- 03.36.35 Uh, it was an amazing process. Just amazing. And my impression of that day, 'cos I spent almost the entire day there was, it was like being, actually being in heaven, surrounded by angels. (PAUSE)
- 03.37.00 These people had come from all over the country as volunteers with the Red Cross or with United Way or with Salvation Army. Uh, the woman who took, who I talked to at the Red Cross was from uh, Seattle, Washington, and she was there for 3 weeks. Just for this purpose. And the kindest, gentlest people
- 03.37.31 Uh, you were offered water every, by everybody or soft drinks or coffee or you know, they had a buffet set up for family members, and then eventually they had a full dining area for

family members and, and uh, the caterers were from every big restaurant in New York. The food was (?) absolutely incredible.

03.38.00 I just was stunned. Uh, but it was that night after I left the family center, even though I had really let Gene go, but the act of filing for a death certificate. And then I walked from the family center and I decided I had nibbled on things all day but I hadn't really eaten.

03.38.35 So I decided I was going to go to our favorite restaurant. (PAUSE) Uh, and we'd been eating in this restaurant ever since it opened (CLEARS THROAT) It's a wonderful, wonderful place, and we had gotten to know most of the staff over the years.

03.38.58 And uh, the first waiter who ever waited on us was now the maitre 'd, and uh, I walked in and uh, he was, how are you and you know, let's uh, just you? And I said, yeah, I've been at the family center all day. (PAUSE)

03.39.29 And he said, did you lose somebody? And I said Eugene (PAUSE) And he just grabbed me and cried. Gene being the social secretary had always called, you know, and talked to Michael and made the reservations, you know.

03.39.56 And, and just said, this is Gene you know, two of us for dinner. So Michael just, and he's the first person (PAUSE) I think he's the first person I actually said it to. The first person that I (PAUSE) I said he was gone.

03.40.30 Took me months to be able to use the word dead, but. (PAUSE)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: What's next?

03.41.39 LARRY COURTNEY: Uh, next? Trying to move on. And then you know, make all the arrangements that have to be made, finding out uh, going to close out his bank account and

finding out that I can't do that because I am not the executor of his will because he didn't have a will.

03.42.08 And uh, doing some things that I knew I you know, I could do. Then my brother's wife died of cancer.

03.42.31 And we had been out to see them in April and uh, knew that she was not going to make it. And we had gone out really to just kind of say goodbye. But. (PAUSE) She died within 2 weeks. And I was talking to my brother and asked, he lives in Portland, Oregon.

03.43.06 And I said, I'll try to get a flight and be there, you know, for the funeral and be with you. And uh, he said I think I would rather you waited, because right now I've got all this support and all this family and he said, I know that you still have things to do for Eugene that you haven't finished.

03.43.33 So why don't you wait 'til say the end of October. So that's when I decided that uh, I had to do some things. So that's when I started to arrange the celebration of life. Uh, (CLEAR S THROAT) still not knowing whether there'd ever be uh, they'd ever find his body.

03.44.05 And what we might need to do at that point. But at some, at some point I had to do something to testify to his life. And uh, so I organized an open house, and I called everybody and I asked everybody that I called to call everybody.

03.44.32 And uh, Rosanna and, and a couple of other friends started organizing people to bring food and they said, I don't want to you to do anything. You just be there. And so uh, we had his celebration and it was, it was wonderful.

03.45.02 And it was very hard. Uh, but I had put together uh, an album of photos of my favorite photos of Gene. And I asked people if they had any favorite stories if they'd just jot them down and uh, and we (?) you know, I interacted with everybody, but on the other hand I wasn't there.

- 03.45.42 Uh, and luckily it (?) I have it on video. So uh, after about 6 months I was able to look at it, and actually see, and (?) it amazed me. I couldn't remember actually greeting some of these people when they came in.
- 03.46.03 I didn't remember them being there. But uh, then the day after Gene's celebration, (?) celebration (?) the, I don't know, a day or two afterwards, I went to Oregon and spent a week with my brother. And my sister flew out from Nebraska.
- 03.46.27 And the three of us got in his motor home and went to the beach. And it's amazing, because uh, we stayed in a, an RV park one night. And there was uh, and it's a big RV and there's a queen sized bed in the back and then a pull out couch in the living room.
- 03.46.59 So my brother and I took the bedroom and my sister had the couch in the living room. And it's the first night that I slept. I mean, I just, from the time I went to bed 'til morning. Did not wake up once. And that's the first night that I hadn't been awake until 2 or 3, and then up at 5 because I just couldn't uh, my mind just was too much.
- 03.47.34 And it, and my brother said it was the same. And we finally decided it's because there was another person in the bed breathing. We actually had, we could hear that other person breathe all night long. And uh, so that we had a really wonderful uh, time there.
- 03.48.01 And then I came home. Back to New York. (~JW~)
- JW: You shared the bed with your brother who had lost his?
- 03.48.10 LARRY COURTNEY: With his wife, yeah. You know, we shared the bed that night, and it was the first night either one of us had slept.
- JW: That's pretty poetic.

- 03.48.19 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah, I, you know, we, we got up in the morning and we, I said, you know, I slept. I slept all night long. And he said, so did I. And we talked about it for a while and, and my sister, I think, is the one who said I'll bet it's because you actually heard that other person breathing in the bed, you know?
- 03.48.43 Because we'd both been sleeping alone since we lost our partner, our mate. And not sleeping. You know, there was no one, there was no. Gene had this very distinct little snore, not a loud snore.
- 03.49.04 And I always would lay in bed (CLEARS THROAT) and wait for that snore. And once I heard that little soft snore, I could go to sleep. Uh, and everything was OK. And when he wasn't in that bed, I didn't have that. And I couldn't sleep.
- 03.49.27 And I guess my brother was the same way. So. Uh. Of course, then I came home. I tried to go back to work. Uh, (?) it was just, yeah, sometimes I could concentrate, sometimes I couldn't. Uh, some nights when I didn't sleep uh, you know, I'd have to call in.
- 03.49.56 And uh, they were very understanding, very understanding about it. And while I was in Oregon with my brother, we went up to visit my mother, who had, was in a nursing home at that point. And, not in a nursing home, but in a uh, this, this friend of ours uh, has a license to have 3, she's a licensed nurse and she has three (~JW~) elderly people (STOPS)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

- 03.50.36 END OF TAPE # LC – 003, 2 of 3

TAPE # LC – 004, 3 of 3
LARRY COURTNEY
08.04.02
JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director
PROJECT REBIRTH

04.00.35 PICTURE UP (NO AUDIO)

04.00.54 LARRY COURTNEY: (MID-STATEMENT) This new life, you know, in this situation, but you know, after thinking about it, talking about it uh, we decided that the baby didn't need to be exposed to all these different people when it was so young, 'cos it would only have been a week or two old at that point, and didn't need to be out with all those people. So she didn't make it. But I thought it was so amazing that there was new life you know, I just, I get so excited when people tell me that they're having a baby, 'cos it just.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: How is it right now?

04.02.01 LARRY COURTNEY: Right now is easier, maybe, in some ways than it was six months ago. Uh, but I kind of, I, I after Gene died, I had an opportunity to move in with some other people uh, to cut down on expenses, and to not be alone.

04.02.39 And uh, but it turned out that it wasn't a good experience for me, and in the, during that period of time I sort of had to suspend the grieving process that I think everybody has to go through.

04.03.01 And uh, when I'm moved out and came back to my own place uh, which is actually the first time I've ever contemplated living alone for any length of time, uh, it was like it all was starting all over again. It was fresh, because uh, I guess I didn't really have a chance to finish the process.

04.03.35 Uh, I'm not sure you ever finish the process, I'm not sure. I don't know, my sister's husband died many, many years ago, and she still buys him a birthday present every year. And she goes out (LAUGHS) and on her birthday, she buys herself a birthday present from him.

04.03.59 You know, and the process uh, I think everybody's process is different. Uh, people say, well, uh, eventually you'll meet somebody. And that maybe true. But I'm not, I'm not a never say never kind of person. Or I am a never say never kind of person, I mean.

04.04.27 So but right now, uh, moving back in and opening the boxes of the things that we had collected and cherished together uh, it's like uh, it's very fresh. Uh, I can sleep at night. That, that I can do. But there's always uh, he's never that far away.

04.05.00 You know? Uh,

JW: What do you mean when you say that?

04.05.09 LARRY COURTNEY: There are still uh, it's, uh, there are still, I just expect him to be there. I just, it's not like I can say (?) he's gone and, and I mean, intellectually I know that that's true. And having uh, being a person of faith that I am, I know that I'll see him again.

04.05.40 But emotionally he's not gone. He's just right there. It has, I don't think I've had the time to let the distance happen. And so sometimes it's so raw.

04.06.07 I've always been an emotional person uh, that's just my makeup. I cry at movies, you know? (CLEARS THROAT) And so I do, I do cry a lot. Because emotionally I have not let him go, I think.

04.06.30 Uh (PAUSE) I can't. There are days that I just can't imagine living another ten years without Gene being there. And then rationally I come to the point oh, well, yes, you can. You have

to do that. You know, you have to go to work, you have to put one foot in front of the other one, and you have to do this and you have to do that.

04.07.03 And there are, there are very good days where that's, that's the side that I, I operate on. But uh, it's not always the case. It's (PAUSE)

04.07.28 Yeah, I uh. I don't know. I, this (PAUSE) I mean, we had such a good time Monday night and, you know, we thank God that we, we he left that morning with us and you know, that we weren't having a fight or disagreement or something or unfinished something, you know?

04.08.04 And I, I hold onto that. But then I think is there, could I have done something else? (PAUSE) Just to let him know how much I loved him. If, did he know that? (PAUSE)

04.08.43 I think he did, I think (?). (PAUSE) And I don't let myself think about it too much, that part.

04.09.07 This is uh, there's nothing I could have done. He just went to work. That's all he did.

JW: Do you believe in God and fate?

04.09.34 LARRY COURTNEY: I do. Uh, I uh, was baptized as a Christian. I've been considered myself a Christian all my life. I've attended church most of my life. Uh, I don't necessarily attend church all the time any more, but I consider myself as a spiritual person and I believe that uh, my faith, that I will see him again.

04.10.09 That he's safe with his mother, with my mother now. Uh, with my sister-in-law. I (?) have faith that someday I'll, I'll be there, too. And I know that that, having that faith has gotten me through a lot of days.

04.10.37 Because there are days when you just can't understand why, when you've got murderers and rapists on the street, and then you have this wonderful man, full of life who just went to work one day and was destroyed.

- 04.11.06 I think if I didn't have that faith, my, I, I just wouldn't be able to cope with it. It would be too irrational to deal with the fact that good people don't always live, and bad people don't always get what's coming to them, you know?
- 04.11.35 But it's not, that's not in my control. And as I said, I can't imagine living another ten years without him, but on the other hand, uh, if I do, and if I live 20 or if I live 30, uh, I'll still see him eventually.
- 04.12.07 And we'll talk about it all. And he'll give me a (LAUGHS) my daughter used to call them bitch snaps. She, she wrote uh, a letter to him (CLEARS THROAT) after his death. And she was talking about her tears and how much she missed him.
- 04.12.33 And she said, and I know what you're saying, just suck it up, girl, suck it up. And she said, Gene, I'm trying (PAUSE) And that's what we all do, we try. (PAUSE)
- 04.13.14 In 1993, we went to uh, Washington for uh, the gay march on Washington.
- 04.13.30 Uh, and my daughter was just about to get married. Uh, I think there's, the march was in June, I think and, or May and, and she got married in September of that year. And lived in Columbia, Maryland. And uh, when she found out we were coming down (CLEARS THROAT) we stayed with some friends who lived on Capitol Hill.
- 04.14.08 And she arranged to meet us at uh, Union Station in D.C. And she came up out of the subway uh, while her, her fiancé came with her. He had to go to work, back to work that day, but he at least he escorted her down to D.C.
- 04.14.28 Uh, she came up out of the subway, and she had this little placard that she had made for the march. And the placard said, I'm proud of my gay dad and my new step-queen. And that's what she called Gene after that. All the time, my step-queen.

- 04.14.56 She marched the entire march with us, and it had been less than a year that she had, since she had been in a really horrible, horrible car accident that had broken her back in 5 places. And she marched with us that day.
- 04.15.27 I am amazed uh, to talk to my kids about how they felt about Gene, or to read some of the things they've written since his death. And the impact that he had on their lives. I, my children would talk to him sometimes because they, they would want his perspective.
- 04.16.07 And I wouldn't, I didn't even know about it, some of the things that I've heard about since he died. Or he would, particularly when they were younger, you know, he would slip them a \$20 bill when I, I didn't know about, you know?
- 04.16.33 And they truly knew that he loved them. And they loved him back. It was uh, it, it always amazes me uh, that a step-parent uh, can come in and be accepted and, and really take on a parenting role.
- 04.17.03 Uh, it's very difficult. I can't you know, I can't imagine doing it. And particularly when you, when you become a step-parent to 3 teenagers, you know, under the age of 18. Who (CLEARS THROAT) you know, are, are just finding out about life and, you know, their father's gay and they're, you know, they're dealing with that, and then this wonderful black man comes into their life.
- 04.17.36 And they are just embracing him because of his spirit. Of his, they trusted him from Day One. It was amazing uh, to see them with him at the very beginning. And uh, I don't think, I mean, they confided in him.
- 04.18.05 Uh, and he never told me. Uh, they would sometimes tell me later, well, I talked to Gene about this, you know. And there were times that he talked to me that uh, you know, I, they confided in me. I mean, uh, there wasn't a one way, just, I mean,. But uh, I just, I was amazed that they had that kind of trust in him.

- 04.18.33 And that's because uh, they saw honesty and trust and loyalty that I talked about before. And being young uh, maybe they were able to see it even earlier and better than I was. You know?
- 04.18.56 I knew that, but they just instinctively. He was always, being a theater buff and my daughter sings. And she did all of these uh, plays in high school. So, of course, every time she came up, he would make sure that she got to see some show, and particularly if Bernadette Peters was on Broadway, because she loves Bernadette Peters.
- 04.19.38 And so we had seen The Goodbye Girl with Bernadette Peters and Martin Short. And just raved about it. And uh, so she was up about 3 weeks later for the weekend.
- 04.19.58 And I didn't know until that night that Gene had bought her tickets to go see it, or a ticket to go see The Goodbye Girl. And so then uh, we waited, well I don't know, I guess we went, we went and had a drink or we went home, I can't remember what. And then we met her, we went back to the theater and met her as the show was closing.
- 04.20.32 And we went around to the stage door. And uh, finally Bernadette Peters came out, and she was really gracious to the fans. I was uh, really impressed. And I got to take a picture of her standing next to Heather and talking to her, which Heather treasures to this day.
- 04.21.01 And this was many years ago. But Gene would you know, he would do that. He just, he knew. He knew the kids really well. He knew their interests really well. He knew when to push them and when to back off. Uh, sometimes I think he knew that better than I did. Uh, maybe because I, you know, I had been with them all my life.
- 04.21.30 But uh, he just had uh, he had, he had no interest in being a parent. As a gay man. He knew he was gay from Day One. And had no interest in marriage and being a parent. And then suddenly he's got three teenagers. And it was just, it's just like well, that's what he is, you know? He's step mother, that's it.

04.22.02 And uh, they never, never resented him or uh, it was just Ok. That's it.

JW: Can you tell me a little bit about uh, Lambda?

04.22.24 LARRY COURTNEY: After Gene died (CLEARS THROAT) (STOPS) uh, and I did all this paperwork and everything. Uh, I got a notice in the mail from Cambridge Insurance that there was a worker's compensation hearing. Well, I (?) this hadn't even entered my mind about worker's compensation.

04.23.02 And so I went to the hearing, and I presented my documentation as the domestic partner, we had registered in the city of New York. And uh, the insurance carrier simply said it doesn't matter. You're not married. You're not legally married. Therefore, you're not entitled to spousal benefits of worker's compensation.

04.23.36 The judge said, you know, I don't know all of, being, he's from upstate New York, and he's (?) on a six month, six week rotation because of all the worker's compensation claims that are happening here in the city.

04.23.58 And he said, I'm not totally familiar with what is happening in the state as far as domestic partnership, etc., and so I want to have, I want to have another hearing in six weeks. Uh, and Mr. Courtney, I would like you to have counsel present and be prepared to present your argument, because at this point it looks to me that from what you have told me, for the 14 years and the documentation that I have, that the benefits should go to you, but my hands are tied by state laws.

04.24.38 So I have to find out. So I had been trying to find an attorney. Uh, since I couldn't close out Eugene's bank account. I was trying to find an attorney, because you have to go to the surrogate court and be appointed administrator when there's no will. Somebody has to be administrator.

- 04.25.05 And since Eugene's father is alive, he is, according to federal government standards, he is next of kin, even though Eugene and he had not spoken in over 20 years. Uh, so, the uh, I was looking for this lawyer to do this, and I came across Lambda.
- 04.25.35 And in the course of conversation we, I mentioned the worker's compensation thing. That uh, I had another hearing in uh, June. And they had asked that I bring counsel and I was trying to find counsel, so they called me back and, and we set up meetings.
- 04.25.59 And it just so happened that 20, about 22 surviving partners have contacted Lambda for help. Uh, Lambda decided that they would help me, because this was important. This was the first time, at least in the state of New York, and as far as we know in the nation, that a gay person has sued for spousal benefits.
- 04.26.43 Because had we been a heterosexual couple, at that first meeting, that first uh, meeting with the judge and the lawyer, I would have had to sign a piece of paper and I would have received spousal benefits for the rest of my life or until I remarried.
- 04.27.09 But they are able to deny me that, since I do not have a marriage certificate and did not file joint tax returns. I do not have a marriage certificate because I'm not allowed legally to have one. I can't file joint tax returns, because I don't have a marriage license. And because I don't have a marriage license and I don't have tax returns, in the insurance carrier's eyes, I am not a legal spouse.
- 04.27.37 So that's what the case is. We had a third hearing (CLEAR'S THROAT) at which, at the second hearing they, the worker's compensation people informed me that they had found Eugene's father's address.
- 04.27.58 Something I did not have. I don't, I had no idea where the man was. Oh, I had an idea that he was in Maryland, but I had no idea where. So they notified him that the third hearing would be the last opportunity he had to present his case. Because uh, there are no spousal benefits. There's a one time payout to next of kin.

- 04.28.33 Uh, he did not respond to the summons (?) or not the summons, it was the, the notice. Uh, and he did not attend the hearing. So we presented our case, that in New York state, the worker's compensation law reads uh, married or it reads spouse, I think is, is the word it uses.
- 04.28.58 We, our argument is that the surrogate court of (?) or the Supreme Court of New York has said uh, that the worker's compensation law is to be interpreted in the widest possible, humanitarian reasons, for the humanitarian reasons.
- 04.29.20 And that under that context, as a fourteen-year lifetime committed relationship, signing up for domestic partnership when it was legal to do it, being beneficiaries of each other's life insurance and pension plans, etcetera, setting up our home together, sharing our (?) finances for 14 years, being interdependent, that that constitutes a spousal relationship.
- 04.29.57 Because the law doesn't say a marriage license constitutes spouse. So we have presented that argument and the uh, judge for the worker's compensation board will be making it, a determination uh, in late August. Uh, we don't know what that will be. (~JW~) State law has not changed.
- JW: What do you think it will be, and what will you do if I don't know what the term is, but if it doesn't go the way you want?
- 04.30.46 LARRY COURTNEY: Ok. I best case scenario is the judge would say, from the evidence presented, this is you're the spouse and you receive these benefits.
- 04.31.00 What I actually think will happen is that Governor Pataki has not signed the bill that was passed by both the State Assembly and the State Senate, uh, allowing domestic partners as spouses. And it's on his desk.

04.31.30 So therefore, the state law has not included the words domestic partner. Uh, my gut feeling is that I'll be denied benefits. Uh, and if that happens, then Lambda has to decide, because Lambda is doing this pro bono.

04..32.01 And so this, this organization has to decide whether they want to then take it to the uh, I'm not sure what the name of the court is, but the next, uh, it's not the Supreme Court but it's one of those courts. (LAUGHS)

JW: Perhaps the state Supreme Court?

04.32.26 LARRY COURTNEY: Uh, no there's ,there's a uh, at any rate. Maybe (CLEARS THROAT) it may have to go that far. I don't know. But then they have to decide whether they are doing, they have the resources to do this, and whether it's worth it. Right now we believe it's worth it. Uh, when we started the process my attorney, Adam Aaronson said to me, you know that this could go very public, this could become a very public thing.

04.33.07 And I said, as far as I'm concerned uh, I've been out to everybody that I can think of being out to. I've been out at work ever since I started there. It's not, not gonna surprise anybody to find out I was living with Eugene. Everybody that I know knows it. You know?

04.33.27 Uh, so I told him whatever they need to do. I mean, they're trying to make a point. And I'm willing to fight for that. Because I think it's very important. I don't, I, I cannot understand why, in this day and age, we cannot recognize same sex relationships as being important.

04.33.58 As being, as being the same. The sex of the person you fall in love with has nothing to do with commitment and marriage. Uh, I just, so I (?) don't see it, uh, I don't see why the injustice is still there. And so I'm, I'm willing to fight for. And I have a friend who calls me an (?) accidental activist.

04.34.28 That's absolutely true. I never have been an activist. Uh, the, and this is, but this is something I believe, it has to be changed. And if Lambda is willing to do it, then uh, I'm

certainly willing to do it. And if, if for some reason they're not uh, and I do, I do believe they are, but if for some reason they're not, then maybe I'll, I'll have to do it, you know, I'll have to go on anyway.

04.35.03 Uh, I really do believe it's important. Uh, in August I get to meet Sharon White. Uh, Sharon is the partner of Diane Whipple who was mauled to death by dogs in San Francisco.

04.35.28 And Sharon is fighting the same battle I'm fighting. I, I'm not sure worker's comp but uh, Sharon is fighting for recognition of their relationship as a marriage. And uh, so I'm really excited to meet her. You know. I think she's, she's a tremendous person and I'm really excited to meet her.

JW: (?) you know, in a kind of construct of fate if you will, is there any connection in your mind (?) Eugene's death and the fact that you're now an accident activist? Have you ever thought about it?

04.36.26 LARRY COURTNEY: Uh, somebody, well, I, I know that had Eugene not died, I certainly wouldn't be in this situation. But I, because I, I firmly believe in this, I think I would have at some point come to at least some activism about it. But Eugene's death certainly pushed it to the foreground.

01.36.58 And I, I sincerely believe that Gene is a cheerleader in heaven going, go get 'em. I, I sincerely believe that. Because I know how strongly he felt about our relationship being just like my cousin and his wife. And being as strong and as meaningful and as powerful and as binding as their marriage, or your marriage, or anybody's.

04.37.32 Uh, you know, I have letters from family members, from co-workers, from friends. From my building manager. Notarized, attesting to the fact that in every sense of the word we were a married couple. You know, and it just, it, it uh, I guess you know, Eugene's death made it so much more important to me.

- 04.38.07 Uh, had it happened to somebody else, I'd be right there behind them as well. But uh, being uh, Eugene's death pushed me into doing something that I really believe I should have been doing all along.
- 04.37.27 And when I, when I think about it, it's so typical of Eugene. He, he would gently and sometimes without you knowing it, but he would prod you into doing what you should have been doing anyway. You know? He just uh, that's, I mean, that, with, with my children and with me, and with friends, that's, that's what he you know, he was very good at it.
- 04.39.00 He had, he had a sense of direction in life, and uh, and when you were doing something, he was your best cheerleader. That's the only word I can say. When you, you know, he was behind you 100%. And when you were doing something wrong, he was the first one to tell you, it is stupid.
- 04.39.28 You are doing something really stupid. But uh, I think that he is very proud of me. (PAUSE) And maybe that's why earlier I said he's just this far away?
- 04.39.53 'Cos it's almost like I can feel him pushing, doing that, you know, here, look at the book. On Friday you have this. It's time to do it. You know, I uh. I just know that that if, if the reverse were true, if I had died instead of Eugene, he definitely would have fought for his rights. And uh, I don't think they're extraordinary rights.
- 04.40.13 I don't think they're extra privileges. I think they're the same rights as anybody else. And that's, that's all, that's all we're fighting for is same treatment, not better treatment. Just the same.
- (OFF CAMERA REMARKS)
- 04.41.09 LARRY COURTNEY: You know, a friend asked me, why do you do this? Why do you put yourself in the interview situations, for instance? Because you have to go over it again and again in your mind, and doesn't it just put it in your face?

04.41.30 And I said, yeah, it does put it in my face. And it needs to be there. You know. I realize the importance of Gene's life. And no matter, activism aside or whatever, you know, he as a person was important.

04.42.00 And uh, so I, I when somebody asks me to do an interview or just to talk about Gene, uh, I'm very willing, because it's just you know, even if friends, they say maybe you don't want to talk about this right now. Yeah, I do. I do. He's, he's important. And he will always be important. Anyway, that's why.

04.42.28

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

04.43.03 LARRY COURTNEY: You know, I do, I realize that the first, well, it's always hard. Uh, it's, it's good. Uh, it's good to talk about him.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: (?) I can sense the feeling you give uh, you (?) feel like you know him and I never did.

04.43.32 LARRY COURTNEY: He was uh, he was a person worth knowing. He was. My son wrote a thing about him and he said uh, he wrote uh, I'm just sorry for all the people who never got to know him and know the kind of person he was. You know. And he, he was (CLEARS THROAT) he was a character.

04.43.59 You wouldn't have forgotten him (LAUGHS). That is a fact.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

04.45.34 END OF TAPE # LC-004, 3 of 3