

**Transcript of interview of Arden Eversmeyer by Margaret Purcell in November 2008. Purpose of the interview was to record a basic history of the Oral Herstory Project. The interview was done in Arden's home. Arden, Margaret and Mary Henry were present.**

M = Margaret

A = Arden

(at one point, Charlotte, Arden's partner is in the room too and adds a few comments and at another, Mary, Margaret's partner, contributes - C will = Charlotte, MH will = Mary)

M: Just like you say when I listen to your tapes and read the transcripts, "Start at the very beginning." Tell me how the project was born.

A: The project was born because here in the Houston women's social group of LOAF, Lesbians Over Age Fifty, we suddenly had two or three women who were having very serious health problems. One of our members, Betty Rudnick, said, "Arden. Why don't we get all of these women to write a mini-bio of themselves?" So we tried to do that and, duh. Nobody ever has anything to say about their own lives. So that, of course, fell through.

In the meantime, one of the women did, indeed, die, whose story I still regret not having. Then in 1996, OLOC had its first Gathering in Minneapolis. Attending the Gathering was Degania Golove from the Los Angeles area. She, at that time, was connected with the June Mazer Lesbian Archive there. I had met Degania on one other occasion so I knew basically who she was. I shared with her this thing about trying to get little mini-bios and that we still had a couple of women I was sorely concerned about and that I would love to have their stories.

M: Were you talking to her because you knew of her connection with the lesbian archive?

A: Oh yes. I knew she was with the archive. So she got real excited about it and she told me she'd send me some material when she got home, which she did. Printed material on the process and some of the things you needed

to do, like contracts. So I did a little basic, fundamental, beginners type of thing of how I was going to do this. Then my first interview...

Ultimately, I also got some more information on oral history work off of the Internet.

M: Now that would have been 1996?

A: '86 is when I talked to Degania.

M: '96?

A: '96. Yes. It was after that that I started doing work. I think my first one was probably '98 and my first oral history interview was with Marie Mariano, here in Houston. That was a learning experience!

That was my first interview. And since then, there has been a refining of the way I work with them. There's been a change in the kind of questions I ask them. She was, of course, wide open and receptive, so it was not a problem. But that is not always the case with some of these women.

M: For some reason, I was under the impression that you were somewhat motivated because you had given your own interview.

A: No. I even forgot about that. I was well into the project, having done it for some time, and somebody said, "Well, Arden. Have you been interviewed?" And I said, "No." And then I remembered, after the fact, that I had agreed to do an interview with a friend of a mature student at the University of Houston who was in the women's studies program. The assignment was to do an oral history. The professor had told them "Now, these people need to have a history and that they certainly don't if they're 21!"

Corrine first approached me, asking if I would do an interview. I told her sure. She said she needed to be sure that it would be acceptable to interview a lesbian. She didn't want to screw up a grade with homophobia. But it was fine. That happened in 1990. We did the interview and she gave me a copy of the paper that she turned in that brought her an A+. And I had stuck it in a filing cabinet and I had forgotten about it. So that (the 1990 interview) was the basis for the first part of what became my book (Herstory). Then in the late 90s, her partner [Corrine's partner, Marguerite Shelton] interviewed me for an addendum to what had happened since

1990. And, of course, that became outdated since the Oral Herstory Project...

M: What motivated her (the second interviewer)? Was she a student?

A: No. She just wanted to do it. She did one of the other interviews that's in the collection as part of her doctoral dissertation. The interview with Helen Cathcart was done — I was there — the interview was conducted by Marguerite Shelton at home. Helen was already well down the line and terminal with emphysema and lung cancer. She was living in the home of a friend, D. D. was present at the interview. So the information that Marguerite was looking for, to meet her needs for the dissertation, was a little bit different than what I was looking for in terms of a life story.

That interview was conducted by Marguerite there and Marguerite in turn did the interview on me that became the addendum to the original paper that was submitted. Then I did a first person narrative to bring mine up to date. So there are three parts to my story.

M: Getting off track right away here... is there any recording of either of your interviews?

A: No.

M: Is there a recording of Helen's?

A: Probably but that would be... Marguerite would have that as a part of her dissertation.

M: When did this all become known as the Herstory Project? And why "herstory" instead of "history"?

A: It got its name when OLOC [Old Lesbians Organizing for Change] approached me, the Steering Committee approached me, about adopting the project as a major project for the organization. I was doing it on my own, as I could, and, of course I was paying all the expenses. They said they could subsidize part of the expenses for me. Well that sounded good, too. It was probably about... it was after 2000, or around 2000, when OLOC approached me. At that time, we called it the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project. We adopted the word "herstory" as a feminist thing because history has written out women so much. We decided to use the term, create our

own, and use it for the project. That's how it got its name. And, I think, unbeknownst to me, it got renamed by the Steering Committee, but I still do not use that name.

M: The name being...?

A: The Arden Eversmeyer Oral Herstory Project, which I find a little but much.

M: Did you always have the same qualifications as to who was going to be interviewed?

A: That's gotten a little more refined. As I used the OLOC database, which I had access to being on the Steering Committee, I used the OLOC database as a starting place for finding old lesbians. Of course, Marie had already reached 70 and Jo Stewart, who had died, had reached 70, And Betty Rudnick had reach 70.

I was looking at discovering information on how women were finding each other. We all agreed, mutually, that there certainly wasn't any information network out there. We didn't have periodicals and organizations like we have today. So that began to form the information I was looking for and focusing on women who were born before 1930, in the teens and the twenties. It was just amazing, some of the things they did to find one another. That too, evolved, from the very beginning. I just got more focused on... not to exclude others, but trying to find these women who were born earlier.

Today, we laugh, because somebody came of age and they had a 70th birthday and they were born in 1938! So 70 becomes kind of a buzz word, a magic number kind of thing. But then, they [the women just now turning 70] have some history too. If they were born in '38, that's okay. They're 70 or older, they have history. 70 becomes kind of a magic thing.

I have interviewed women who were younger, whose stories I felt were really important to have in the collection. For instance, somebody who had been hospitalized in a mental hospital and given "the cure" so to speak. There's a lot of women who have experienced that and not many who will talk about it. That becomes an important part of our lesbian history.

So the age 70 thing, I still use as kind of a bench mark for people I'm looking for.

M: Who is the youngest?

A: I think the youngest is Sandy C. in Florida. Absolutely incredible life that woman has lived. I didn't know her birth year until right before I went to her and then I thought it would kind of tacky to back out of the interview. I'm so glad we have it [the interview]. It's an amazing story.

M: Have you always had a goal or a sense of what it is you want to come from the project? Or is that something that has evolved?

A: It just happened. As this thing grew and as we started getting more and more of these completed stories and somebody says, "Why don't you right a book?" And I think, "Sure, Arden! I'm gonna' write a book." Well, you know...

That, again, is something that has just happened. This thing just kind of took on a life of its own. It was nothing that I ever envisioned, let alone a website, for God's sake!

M: What do you think the women who offered to do their stories feel about it.

A: Almost without exception, when they get their book [copy of the completed Herstory] back, they're pleased. I get the nicest letters and emails. They are happy with the end product, of the time and energy that they have contributed to it. There's only been one, out of all these women, who when she saw her book, wasn't surprised at what she had done with her life. [The one who wasn't happy] just always said she'd never done anything and she'd wished she hadn't done the story. And that's Jennie.

She really never acknowledged that she came from a working class background; she had to leave town, her home, to have a life; she worked her way through school; she became a school teacher; she bought her own home, in San Francisco, for God's sake; she was activist, involved in the AIDS things when it first came out and helped with that. She has never seen her life as something positive.

M: I thought she had a fantastic story. In fact, it was the second or third story that I wrote because I was so taken with her.

A: But that is the only one who said she was sorry she did it.

M: But she gave you full permission?

A: Oh, yeah.

M: How did you come up with your set of questions and have they changed over time?

A: They have changed to some extent. I originally had some questions that were very personal and I got a sense of backing away. For instance, asking somebody if they identified... Oh, first I would always ask somebody if they saw themselves as a gay woman or a lesbian, as neither. Because that would tell me, to some extent, their degree of internalized homophobia. And so at one time, I had on there if they identified as butch or femme. Well, you don't ask that. You don't. Sometimes it comes out in conversation. Sometimes, just talking about their lives, there is no question where they would fall on the scale. So I took that out pretty quick. That was... even if somebody was considering [giving an interview] and they saw the outline, which I always give them to kind of get their thoughts together, that would be the put off, right there.

M: I've noticed in reading them that you very seldom ask anything about them being a lesbian until they bring it up. And even then you really don't try to draw that out specifically.

A: Because it's not about sex.

M: Or sexuality, even.

A: Right. They are being interviewed because they are a lesbian. That's an up front criteria. But to talk about the sexuality in anything that would couch talking about sex, I have found, I would find out more by not being specific than if I asked a question and they backed away. Then that would shut down an interview.

It has to do with, hopefully, having the time, and in most cases I do, having a little bit of time to sit and visit with them before we ever start. I would say, easy, 75% of the interviews that I've done, I never saw them before interview time. Never met them, didn't know them. Knew very little about them. So they need to know something about me. I just tell them anything they want to know. That way they're a little bit more relaxed. Sometimes we even have time to go have breakfast together or something. Just visit.

M: So that you feel more comfortable with each other before...?

A: Right. It's hard to walk in as a total stranger who is going to start asking questions about your life. You're always a little bit on edge, a little defensive. If it gives them a little bit more feeling of security to know a little bit about me and about the project and that I'm not going to go home and say, "Let me tell you about who I met." You know? It pays dividends to have a little bit of time.

M: Are they [the interviews] usually done in their homes?

A: Usually. Sometimes not. A woman in Florida came to the motor home because she had an adult son living in her home who didn't approve of her. And yet, he wasn't working, he was living off of her! So she came to me. But for the most part, almost always, I go to them. And it helps. Because I want them sitting in their favorite chair, relaxed. It works better.

M: Do you think that the questions you ask, like back when you did ask about butch/femme, are shaped by your own life experiences?

A: Of course. Because we come of the generation and era where it was important for you to... actually, for many women, it was a conscious choice. Because of privilege or something that was attributed to one or the other roles. We all came out of that era and I understand it. Someone younger than me talking to them would not have had that experience and would not understand why we are who we are and it had nothing to do with dress... Well, it did to some. With working class dykes, it did. But for the most part, it had to do with the role within the community in which you lived. It was important.

M: I would think there is a huge value, plus, to being an old lesbian asking questions and conducting the interview.

A: There had been women, in fact I know of one incidence of a young woman who showed up at the lesbian resort in Apache Junction. Didn't know a soul. Announced she had arrived to interview old lesbians. Well, she didn't get past the gate. There was no reason, she didn't have a clue about any of their lives or how they came to be who they are. So when I have younger women approach me about wanting to be an interviewer, I don't. You have to have some common life experiences with these women to know what to ask them. Because they're going to tell you things that you don't begin to

understand. I think it makes a big difference. I don't think a young woman could do this work. She might like to try doing this.

M: Or she wouldn't have the same results.

A: Well, the women aren't going to tell her what they tell me. So, yeah. I think it's a generational thing. I think I get more information because of my age.

M: Now that you've gotten interviews from a couple of other people [interviewers], do you see much difference in their interviewing style?

A: Well, they're going to have their own style but they're using my outline. If I train an interviewer, they have the outline of the information I want to get in the interview. For each of us, and with every interview, a question can lead off in different directions. That's gonna happen and that's good. As long as we get that basic, "Where were you born? Tell me about your parents? Do you have any siblings? Did you go to public school?" So, as long as we get that track of growing up and how we began, anything extraneous that they can bring in as a result of one of those questions is good. And yes, the styles are different.

M: When you look at the women in the collection as a whole, do you feel like they represent women of this given age? I look at it and I say, there are a tremendous number of women who didn't live to this age, for one thing. And some that aren't comfortable. And then, of course, there are those who don't know anything about this project. So do you feel like maybe these are exceptions or...

A: Representative? We have some women who have been very activist and very out. We have a lot of women who are still closeted. I would say the greater percentage of the women of say, born before 1930, are still closeted. They still do not know about organizations. They still don't talk about themselves. They may have other gay friends but frequently are pretty isolated.

A story I would love to have is one of my best friends here and she wouldn't even think of talking to me. She is classic of the women of my generation. She doesn't go to gay things, events, she's never been in a [LGBT] bookstore, she's never read a [LGBT] book, fiction or non-fiction. I think that is pretty much the big representation of the women born before 1930.

M: A lot of those women just aren't going to tell their stories?

A: Oh, no.

M: I think the women that have volunteered, they're doing an exceptional service.

A: I do to. They have reached a point in their lives... So much of what I'm running in to, especially here in Houston with women I've known forever, is... There are some buzz words that will pretty much tell you about the level of homophobia. One is, "I'm a very private person." Another is, "We don't use labels." Another is, like with one of my very best friends, her identity as a lesbian, except that she would be a gay woman, not a lesbian, is that that is not the essence of who she is. She just happens to be.

M: I'm not real sure, but I've always felt that some of it has to do with feminism, or lack of.

A: I would say there was almost nobody in this collection, of all the stories that I've read, who would say that was the essence of who they were. It's just a part of who they are.

It's one thing to be comfortable and live with who you... with some discretion, not revealing yourself unnecessarily... and it's quite another to say, "This is who I am." and then to see it in print. That just gets red flags going off. So I have a lot of friends here who will not talk to me [do an interview] who are life long—not late bloomers—life long lesbians. I find them to be the most homophobic of the group. The women who came out later have struggled with identity and sexuality. They're more in tune with saying, "This is who I am." People like me, who popped out of the womb this way, I find to have the most internalized homophobia.

M: Internalized. But you're not talking about them being homophobic in terms of how they relate to other people.

A: Just themselves. In saying, "This is who I am." And there's lots of reasons for this to happen. A lot of it's religion, of course. And we're socialized in a manner, some of it's cultural. Some of these women... Heavens! They played softball, you know! That's a whole culture in itself.

C: Some of them are the most homophobic!

A: Some of them are. It's scary. Big friendship groups. Big social groups.

C: And they think nobody knows.  
(lots of chuckling in the room)

M: At some point, I guess I want a copy of the whatever you provide people, generally an introduction letter, an outline. I don't think I have that kind of stuff, but maybe I do, somewhere.

A: I can give you a copy of the letter of introduction when I first approach them, which is what I always do. I don't want anyone intervening for me to set up an interview. What I want is the name and address of somebody they think might talk to me and then I want to start the process. If it's a yes, then I write them another letter and hopefully we can do some of this by email. But then I also mail them a copy of the outline that I use in the interviews. I send it to them and I tell them, "I don't want you to write anything." But that happened once and it got read to me! Just use it to collect memories and make notes. Then it's the getting them to gather the documentation.

M: How much guidance do you give them [about documentation]?

A: I tell them that what I would love would be pictures and any kind of certificates, awards or anything, starting with their birth and going through their life to current time. And I tell them that there is no such thing as too many pictures. It gives you a feel of how they grew and what they looked like and what's going on.

Then I set the documentation in chronological order. Once that is set up, I insert the text. The text isn't going to match the documentation, but it's in order.

M: You've had some that don't provide any documentation?

A: I've got some that I don't have any. Like Jesse. She was already struggling with some short term memory problems. I got a good story from her. I took a couple of pictures of her which are the only pictures I have. I'm very grateful I did, that I had the snap to do that while I was there. I've heard from her, been in touch with her... I cleaned that text up myself. She just wasn't able. So I cleaned it up so that it's readable. It flows. I didn't change any information. Occasionally, that happens. It's a wonderful story with no

documentation. And that's okay. I've got the story, and it's good. Occasionally that happens. I never got a story from Helen in Apache Junction.

M: Do you mean documentation.

A: Yeah. Nothing. That's my half interview when I got one word responses. Never could get...

M: Are there usually places nearby that you can take the documentation and get it copied?

A: I try. If time allows, I like to take the stuff, copy it and leave it there. Otherwise, I bring it home with me and do the copy work. They identify the pictures and things for me before I leave. And I try to get it back within two days. I try to get it out of here immediately. I do not want that stuff laying around.

Sometimes I come home without it. I had two or three interviews... I had seven interviews in Los Angeles and I came home with pictures for three. So those people, and subsequently I've gotten a lot of the documentation from Lila. But I'm still waiting from two or three others. I don't have anything from Joyce. I don't have anything from Kate. I don't have anything from Nancy. Anyway...

M: This was because they weren't set up ahead of time?

A: Well, Joyce was set up ahead of time but I didn't get any documentation. Nancy was set up, didn't get any documentation. Kate, Lila, both happened there. I got stuff from Lila but not from Kate yet. I try to take a picture. I did not get a picture of Kate while I was there. But I try to get one so I'll at least have something for a title page.

M: Obviously, just going and getting color photo copies has to be a pretty expensive process. Can you talk a little bit about the whole thing with expenses? How it's been handled from the beginning and how it's evolved?

A: I've kept track of the expenses. The color copy has gotten much cheaper in the last ten years. It used to be a big part of the expense, and it still is to some extent. Transcribing is the biggest expense. Used to pay \$4.50 a finished page. Pay \$5 now. Finding transcribers is a challenge. I've had

heterosexual women, I've had lesbians, I've had two males. Somebody thinks they want to do it but it turns out to be more than they thought it was going to be. I don't type so it's a no brainer for me.

M: Well, you don't have time to transcribe anyway.

A: I've got a good transcriber in California and she has a guy. She talked to me. She had such a backup of interviews from me at one time she said, "Arden, this guy works for me. He does really good work. I trust him. How would you feel about his doing some of these interviews?" I told her, "Let's try it." So he does good work. So I pay her and she pays him.

M: The interviewees, the women that you talk with, have they ever expressed any concern about who is transcribing?

A: No. I tell them it's transcribed from audio tape to the written text and that they'll get a copy of the first draft. Then it's up to them to edit. I say, "Now don't be distressed. Well all have speech idioms." And almost all of them say, "I didn't know I talk like that!" And I say, "Well, it's normal."

M: So up until the point OLOC offered some financial support, you were taking all the expenses on yourself? And do you feel like they've contributed a significant amount?

A: I don't submit everything [to OLOC]. I don't want to drain the well. But I submit, I send receipts for postage. I mail stuff priority, the finished books and any stuff that goes back and forth, I mail priority. So I submit postage. I submit copy work. I submit receipts for the sheet protectors. I submit for the binders, the transcribing. And I seldom submit for reimbursement for travel. If a trip is exclusively to do oral history work, I will submit a rental car, the expense for a rental car. And I might submit mileage. I don't submit plane fare. I try to keep the expenses realistic 'cause I don't want to dry up the well.

I have had one contribution to use any way, that was made directly to me, that was to be used any way I saw fit to use it for the oral history project. I've been kind of shepherding that money and I still have a great deal of it but it will be used probably, maybe part of it for the January trip. Like I would use some of it for my plane flight but I would submit the rental car for reimbursement. So that helps. Most of it, all of it, was 100% mine until OLOC subsidized some of it. I've been pretty careful about what I spend.

M: Since then, since OLOC got involved, would you say they pick up 25% of the cost, 50% of the cost?

A: I imagine at least 50% of my cost [excluding travel and lodging] I've had reimbursement for. And then I play a little game with that and I recycle it. I take that money and I put it in my OLOC travel stash and then we use that when we travel for stuff. Initially, I write the checks out of my account. But when I get the reimbursement check back, I don't put it in my account. I put it in this other spot. Crazy.

M: It works for you.

A: Yeah. I use it for the travel, for OLOC, for expenses.

M: Are costs ever a... I know you've said that you can't justify going, say to New York, for just one interview. If you have a bunch of them that you're going to do somewhere... Is cost ever a deciding factor other than not wanting to spend it poorly?

A: Not at this point because we've [Arden and her partner, Charlotte] been able to financially do what we wanted to do. I have made a practice, if we're going to an event, we try to have a couple of interviews, either in route or there. We've had interviews everytime we've gone to the National Women's Music Festival. So that really works.

M: Women who live locally or women who were attending?

A: Well, we went to one in Columbus, OH and I had been in touch with a woman by mail. We arranged to do an interview. That was one I had to redo. That was because... when it's my mess, then I don't submit costs. That's my fault. So I flew to Ohio to do a redo for Joanne and then she had three more interviews lined up for me. I was there three days, traveled round trip across the state to do two interviews and did two there close to her, hers and another one.

M: You say that one got messed up. Was it a recorder problem?

A: It was a mic that was attached that had a short in the wires. And I got home with blanks. Hurt my feelings.

M: There've been others?

A: I had to do a redo in St. Louis and I had done two interviews in Illinois at the National, and one of them was really bad. So I told them I had to redo it. I went to redo the one and came home with three.

M: The few that this has happened to, have they been more than willing to talk to you again?

A: Oh yes.

M: Do you feel like that story is changed?

A: Basically, they were the same but they were more relaxed. It's paid dividends. The redos get costly in terms of having to do the travel but it's paid dividends.

M: You said you'd come up with the contracts based on information you got from Degania? The concept of the contract and the basic terms, the wording. That came from... ?

A: Yes. From material that I got from Degania. There were some samples.

M: Did you ever have a lawyer look at it?

A: Nope.

M: The contracts starting out as being with LOAF [Lesbians Over Age Fifty].

A: Yes. Because it was local women and I had no concept of it ever being a part OLOC.

M: But why was it with LOAF as opposed to being with you?

A: For an organization and LOAF is incorporated. We [Arden and Charlotte] went on the [OLOC] Steering Committee in 1990. We were already on the SC and LOAF was started in 1987.

M: Where in the [interview] process is the contract signed?

A: First up.

M: Before you even...

A: When we're visiting, when I first go there. I say, "We need a contract with you. And you, on faith, are going to have to believe that I will honor that." I tell them that there are two kinds [of contracts] and I explain what they are. I get one of each out and I put them in front of them and they can read them. Before I leave there, I want one of them back.

M: You let them tell their story and then they decide...

A: They decide. I'll tell them an example of a conditional contract. There is a woman in Arizona who has an autobiography. The condition of our using her story is that we give credit for that autobiography in anything we use. Sometimes it will be that the story can't be used without their permission and their permission to see how it is written, during their lifetime. Or it could be that the story, their information, cannot be used until after their death. So I tell them there are different kinds of conditions, whatever they are comfortable with.

M: Do you feel like you know which one they're going to sign before they sign, before you get there?

A: No. Because I probably don't know them.

M: So you have a couple that say they can't be used for anything.

A: Ann is one.

M: The experience, I'm sure, was good. I'm sure it was important for her to tell her story. Any regrets that you spent the time and money to get a story that she doesn't ever want you to use?

A: No. Because I have no way of knowing until I get there. I would not dream of saying, "Sorry about that. I don't want your story." And I was doing others in the area at the same time.

M: So you feel stories like hers... do you think any of the information can be used in some way?

A: It probably can be used as... For instance, we have a woman who is still, in her old age, fearful of anybody discovering her. So we can't use her story. No names, no place.

M: But general statements about people who live with this kind of fear? When they [the Herstories] go into the after life, archived or whatever, how does that work then, that there is somebody whose story is in the collection that they said was never to be used for anything.

A: I think, at such time as these books are moved to a permanent home, we'll have to flag books, they can't be used for research but they are part of the collection. I think they'd have to understand that there may be some stories there that can't be used for scholarly research, or read or something.

M: I noticed one of them, on their contract, said assumed names and places. To use a pseudonym for all the names in the stories as well as where she lived. Has that ever been a discussion with anyone else?

A: No. I would dearly love to have Billie's story. I've talked to her over the years and she is just locked down. She thinks nobody in her little city knows about her. I have told her that we could do it anonymously with no name and no pictures and she just can't. But I would. I would do it anonymously.

M: Has anyone ever expressed concern about outing someone else in the process of their telling their story?

A: That is part of the beauty of them getting the first draft and taking anything out they don't want in. I tell them when we're doing this, I said, "You do not need to be careful about your pronouns and things because you have the ability to take out of this interview, once it is in draft form, anything you don't want in there. So that covers outing and an oops, you know. I tell them that up front and it gets them more relaxed to talking too. 'Cause they're not constantly sitting there worrying about what they say.

M: In all of these that you have sent out in draft and gotten back, have you seen this happening?

A: Oh, yeah. Taken out an oops.

M: Specifically to do with outing other people?

A: Well, they just didn't feel comfortable with using a name because they didn't have that person's permission, or whatever. So we just take it out.

M: Anybody ever change their mind once you started the process?

A: Yes. We had an appointment with a woman in southern Illinois. She was an ex-college professor. We were on our way to Lansing for a Steering Committee meeting. She was so sweet. We actually parked the motor home in her driveway and spent the night and had a wonderful dinner with her. She just got cold feet. That's okay. That was just where she was at that time. I suspect if I wrote her again, if we were driving in that direction, she might. She felt badly about changing her mind since we had driven there, but, you know. She wasn't the only stop and we were in route to a destination, so. Yeah. It happens.

M: With a story like H., do you feel like she pretty much changed her mind and that's why there was so little information?

A: No. She was just jumping up and down.

M: It was just that she didn't have anything to say?

A: No. She didn't know how to talk. And there wasn't any kind of a lead in question that I tried that would get her to start talking. She had yeses and nos. I don't know if there is a complete sentence in her responses or not. That was an experience. And she wanted to do it! She was up front wanting to do it. It wasn't that I begged her. I did not.

M: Gay, lesbian, queer... Do you have to feel people out?

A: Oh yeah. Because that tells me where they are and how they feel about themselves and, to some extent, if there is internalized homophobia we have to work around. For the most part, unless they were living in urban areas where there was gay activism going on, San Francisco or New York, most of these women were *gay* women. They weren't *lesbians*. I know that I was a gay woman. Then when Tommie died in 1985 and I starting osmosing into a new persona, I became... I started hearing the word... and just like I have embraced the word dyke, not as something pejorative but as a strong person, a strong women.

You see there are so many who haven't done that. They haven't had to. I had to do something. So yes. The word queer is not a good one. Dyke is not a good one. I slip and use that word sometimes. I have to be careful with the LOAF women.

MH: You know that's strange. I guess being a late bloomer, I never had experience with those words and I would identify as dyke.

A: Because it means something different to you as it did to me as a young woman. That brought up a picture as a woman passing as a man and strutting and dressing as a man, maybe riding a motorcycle, getting in brawls. See, that to me, and I think for a lot of women in this generation, still that's what that word means.

MH: I guess if you had to put the two words together, lesbian is more femme and dyke is more butch.

A: And because the word dyke, and a lot of the terms we don't even think about anymore, have been used against us in a pejorative manner. And so we accepted that it was not a good thing. If they could beat us down and make us submissive by calling us words, names, then we didn't want to relate.

MH: It would be interesting to look at that part or, when you talk about that with each woman... the people who always knew and the people who were like me [a late bloomer] and see if there is any difference in the way they feel about that.

A: I suspect there probably is.

M: Sociological study!

A: Yeah.

M: You talked about how it was such a learning experience to do your first interview. Can you tell me a little more about that and how you feel about it now when you show up at somebody's house to do an interview? Are you totally comfortable now when you do interviews?

A: Oh, yes. I look forward to it. I love meeting them new. Frequently, because I don't know them as other people know them where they live, I'm seeing a whole kind of person than what, maybe, somebody thinks they are. For

instance, P. I had met P. because she had been to a Gathering [OLOC event]. She has a reputation of being crazy. If she's crazy, its a kind of crazy that does not relate to being in a mental hospital. It has to do with being a super, super bright woman that has been a researcher all her life. It didn't take three minutes into the interview that I could see... I'd ask a question, she started to answer and she started traveling, mentally. I started traveling down this road with her that was two, three, four steps from the question I asked and I had to reign her back in. That was hard work, working with her. She is crazy like you and I are crazy. She's different, she certainly walks to her own drum beat. She has done some absolutely amazing work in her life and she is ostracized, pretty much, by the community. She's pretty much a loner.

M: She's one of them that I transcribed for you. Even with you bringing her back, there were times I never felt like the thought was completed.

A: ...got the questions answered.

M: So I know she had to have been involved in this research project but she'd never get to what the project was.

A: It was hard work! I tell you, I was tired.

M: Just listening to her was an adventure.

A: Yeah.

M: You've already talked about that you start chatting with them first and that you mostly do the interviews in people homes... Have you learned tricks? How to deal with people who don't really want to talk much about themselves, how to draw stuff out of them?

A: If I feel a resistance to talking about something, I tend not to pursue it. I don't want to risk their comfort level getting to where they don't want to finish the interview.

M: Anybody bothered by the tape recorder sitting there?

A: I had one, who talked to the recorder for a while, and then she finally quit, finally forgot about it. But I'd catch her, doing one of these, you know.

M: Is it hard not to interject any kinds of comments that are really yours?

A: My goodness. Not anymore. Oh, my. The first two or three! When I saw them in written form, I thought, "Well who the hell's interview is this?" With Marie, she's saying something and I'd say, "Oh, yes." and give my parallel experience. The first two or three interviews, I thought, "Oh, Arden."

MH: Margaret thinks I can't do interviews because I'd do that.

M: I don't know that you can't. I think that would be a learning experience for you.

A: Well, it's easy to do [interjecting your own experiences], but once you're aware of what you're doing! The embarrassment of giving a transcript like that back to somebody to edit! I don't think so! So you learn. I make notes. This is something we need to talk about, aside. So when we have a little break or we finish, I say, "You said something about..." So that's how I started talking to Nancy about going to medical school with Louise. And yes, they knew each other. So I make my little notes while I'm doing the interview. But oh, yes. I did a lot of talking at first.

M: Do you find it to be a harder experience, in some ways, to interview someone you know? If you sat down to interview a good friend as opposed to somebody you never met? When you know their story, to an extent, is that an advantage or a disadvantage? Or not really a problem?

A: I don't think so.

M: I would think it would be easier to do something with someone you didn't know, in a lot of ways.

MH: I don't think so. Because if you know them, then you ask you questions in an order, or twist them, so that they call out things you want to make sure they said.

M: But then, I know things about S. that she would never would talk about or acknowledge.

MH: Well, you probably know that she wouldn't talk about those things. But you would know if she didn't mention something, some of her sports things, that you could ask a questions to start her in that direction. We noticed this

reading Annalee's story. She was much too modest. Since we know her, if we had been interviewing her, we would have been saying, "Well, what about...?" about some of those things. I would think, that that way, knowing the person you were interviewing, would improve the outcome.

M: How long does an interview usually take?

A: It varies. Sometimes an hour and a half, sometimes half a day. Those two, Connie and Ruthie, were long ones.

M: Most of them, you pretty much sit straight through or take breaks?

A: Up front, I tell them, "If we need to take a break, all you have to do is say it's time." So, maybe a potty break, or go get a drink, or stretch the legs or something. But for the most part, most of the taping usually can be done within a couple of hours. And then, there's an understanding that if anything needs to be added, we can do it.

M: I wanted to ask a little more about the transcription. How do you find people to be transcribers?

A: Miracles.

M: Started out with people whom you knew?

A: Well, I contacted a dyke who is a full professor at the University of Houston in the Women's Studies Program and active in GLBT things out there. Told her I needed, I was desperate, for transcribers. Out of that, I got the wife of one of the professors and she did two or three and that was just too much. Lorna transcribed for me for a long time. She was unemployed and the only money she was making for a while was what she was making working for me. And that certainly wasn't a living wage! I talked to Pokey and she's the one who connected me with Emily in Santa Cruz. Now Emily has been working for me for a couple of years. She does good work and she's fast. Sometimes, waiting to get an interview done took weeks. And that makes me crazy. I want things to move.

M: Once you've done your part, you want somebody else to do their part.

A: I want it to keep moving. And then, of course, there is that unknown thing that happens once you send a transcript back to be edited. You may never see it again. And there are those.

I've had several transcribers, a couple of them have been good. Emily is my longest standing one and she does good work. Of course, you've done several at your house, too, and they've been wonderful. When I come home with eight or ten interviews, I like to get them gone, get 'em moving. I think Emily has one... two left and then I've got the two brand new ones from Ida that I have to get on CDs and get them someplace to get worked on.

M: So you just ask who has time to take another one now?

A: I just have Emily and you?

M: Lorna's not doing them anymore?

A: Oh, no.

M: I thought I saw her name of something just recently.

A: She hadn't done anything for me for a long time.

M: We've talked about this between you and I but I'd like to get it on tape too... the thing about your paying by the page...

A: Finished page.

M: And there could be twice as much information on one page... one transcriber's page than there was on another.

A: Size type...

M: Margins, spacing between lines... Do you feel like that's under control now?

A: Better. Yeah. Emily's doing good.

M: So that in the future there will be criteria up front, because you need to get your money's worth out of it. There was one or two, Mary's was one of them, Helen's transcript, I swear, there was another 50% worth on each page.

MH: Mine was more dense than some?

M: Yeah. Much more dense.

A: She'd get on a role talking.

M: And it's got a lot to do with...

A: Questions and answers. How many times you have to start, getting them moving, asking them questions.

M: Huge variations on how much went on a page because of all that. No problems with accuracy on transcriptions?

A: Usually, if something isn't understood, there will be a blank line, or a note typed in.

M: I say "Inaudible" if there is something I truly can't get that I think sounded significant enough that it should be in it. Shevy's interview.

A: Shevy was ill already. So the quality of the taping was zip and getting anything out of it was a challenge. Coherent.

M: There are huge gaps in hers and I couldn't tell if it was because she was talking and fading or

A: She'd sit there and talk and all of a sudden her voice would just disappear. But she was already bad, really bad.

M: Sort of a sideline here: this concept of our having a lot of other information that Shevy wrote about her own life. How would you feel about something like that being a part of what is, to this point, actual interviews, as opposed to something that could be scavenged from other source about her.

A: That would be just like a third person thing. You know we're talking about doing that with a couple of women here. Annie was one and Gail was one. They're gone but there's good information on them. To pull that together with the assistance of the partner left behind or a family member or something. That's a lot of work.

M: More work than getting the story.

A: Uh, huh.

M: Do you feel like it could be an addition to the Project as a whole, not that it has to stay absolutely, only information taken from an oral interview?

A: Yup.