

- Okay, so I was saying, you know if you see where our country is right now, where this professional basketball player comes out and you know, Chelsea Clinton sends him a tweet and President Obama calls him or something like that everybody's real proud of him. You know and same-sex marriage is being legalized in more and more places and there's just been a sea change. And I, you know it was really instigated by, originally, by some of us who came out in the late 60s, the 70s and got real comfortable with ourselves as gay men and lesbians and bisexual men. That was before the term "transgender" was used. But drag queens, the people that really instigated the Stonewall riots, um... (paper rustling) and, just lived lives as visible gay and lesbian, bisexual people. I know I always did. And I'm not, you know, it wasn't as overtly political although we did participate in the Dyke March, you know, as part of Pride. Things like that. But, really what's changed society's mind, you know, and especially younger people, is you know anybody that knows a gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender person, is much more likely to be in favor of equal rights for us. Because they know that we're not, we don't fit those horrible stereotypes and we're not all pedophiles and blah-blah-blah, all the things they used to say. "Communist pedophiles" or something. I don't know. You know, it's always gotten me that we got lumped together with Communists since the Communist party in Russia was very anti-gay itself.

- I know! (laughter) Cuba, you know they persecuted gays.

- I know!

- They're very straight-laced in many ways.

- Yeah!

- It was a bourgeois corruption or whatever.

- Yeah, like we've gentrified all these neighborhoods.

- Mm-hmm (laughter)

- But, you know I just think you know you see a lot of the legacy in the lives, like I said, of those of us who are still politically active or who went on to have careers or jobs that still had to do with social change and LGBT issues or equal rights period or social justice period and who lived pretty out lives and certainly all of my family, you know, knew about me.

- Did you have any, umm going backwards for a minute, did you have any trouble coming out, family issues, as some people do?

- Well, by the time I came out to my mother she had had a brain tumor and she had surgery, it was a benign brain tumor and they were able to remove it, but it left her with brain damage. And knowing how liberal she was, always, I think she probably would have been okay with it. But she kind of lost her short-term memory and all she had was her long-term memory and all the things she had learned growing up. And so she constantly told me she was praying for me to change. But I just would say, you know, well we're just gonna have to agree to disagree about that. One time I think she said I was going to hell and I said well that's okay Jane will be there 'cause Jane's Jewish. (laughter) She's doubly damned. Anyway, but my sisters and brothers no, I mean.

- No problem.

- No, they were pretty matter-of-fact about it. Yeah, I mean, it's never really been an issue.

- Let's go back to Alpha just a bit since I've got

- Okay!

- a chance to ask you. So you were involved uh what particular Alpha things where you involved with?

- Well I was in one of the rap groups, dinner co-ops, I lived in a communal household, Hummingbird Heights.

- Rap group, uh, dinner.

- Yeah, I was always in one of the dinner co-ops. I played softball, I was in woman's song theater.

- That was the second incarnation woman's song.

- Yeah, the second incarnation of woman's song theater.

- Yeah I saw one of the performances in Piedmont Park that ya'll did.

- Oh, really?

- And I was coming over here to visit Dorothy, yeah.

- I don't even remember that.

- Maybe it wasn't Piedmont Park but it was somewhere you did, you did a reading from Monique Boutique

- Yeah, that's right

- While wearing some kind of tunic.

- I remember that. (laughs) Yeah.

- And Elizabeth and Margaret did this skit that I had read earlier in Reader's Digest or somewhere, or maybe not Reader's Digest because they were so conservative, this person it was supposed to be a Kinsey researcher

- Oh, yeah.

- was interviewing a Lesbian asking her what body parts she like the best that kind of thing. (laughing)

- Yes.

- So I saw that one. And Hummingbird House, where was that?

- Hummingbird Heights.

- Hummingbird Heights.

- It was on Euclid Terrance, Sue Berres bought that house and still lives there. Yeah Euclid Terrace between, it just runs between McLindon and Euclid right as you get up to Little South Points to that V you, you know the point of the V.

- Mm-hmm, yeah. So, how many houses were there?

- I think there were like five or six at the height of, you know and each one would have five or six women.

- Mm-hmm.

- So, and there were like 30 or more women living in one of these households, at the height of all of this, I think. And you know eventually I got involved with somebody and moved out to live with her,

- Mm-hmm

- Cynthia. And I think other people did the same thing over the years. Kind of settle down or tried to. (laughs)

- Or tried to mm-hmm.

- And you know, Cynthia and I, the other thing you know is the whole thing about non-monogamous relationships.

- Okay.

- You weren't supposed to have a monogamous relationship. That was kind of imitating heterosexual relationships and marriage and was based on men's ownership of women and so Cynthia and I had an open relationship but it was, and it was just chaotic because we were such a, we all knew each other, you know, so I remember one softball game somebody hit somebody else from the bench before the game and then during the game you know people were out in the outfield crying and you know it was like , it was just this drama. So, it just didn't work out very well it was like we, politically we believed in it but personally it just didn't work. (laughs)

- Yeah, I've never lived that way even though I theoretically believed in it for awhile.

- Right!

- But it seemed as though it would be a lot of trouble.

- Oh, God. I know you had your primary relationship you know and then you could have others, but...

- I remember Ellen and Barbara were saying, and they were most, they held on to it until they finally broke up, but you couldn't tell because they still lived together.

- Right.

- And everything was very uh, very uh cerebral, you know.

- Mm-hmm.

- And they explained that you didn't have a primary relationship or a secondary one, that they were all just relationships. But, that didn't seem quite accurate.

- Yeah, well we called 'em, we said we had a primary relationship and I mean like I was living with Cynthia of course that was my primary relationship. And I didn't like it when she had her other relationships and she didn't like it when I had mine.

- Did you all have set rules like I remember that Ellen and Barbara well we had set rules of behavior.

- No.

- No, okay.

- That probably would have been a good idea.

- Okay. Yeah, so what about the dinner co-ops, a little more about that. Were they always Vegetarian?
- No. No.
- Okay.
- That wasn't a requirement. I was not a Vegetarian back then.
- So they weren't, it wasn't as somebody once said, "those lesbians are always trying to make people eat tofu."
- No. I mean we all used the Moosewood Cookbook and things like that but...
- I think that was a good one.
- And I'm sure some people were Vegetarian but most people were not. I mean back then I think people in the 70's people in general were kind of more into healthy eating and now we are again.
- Right, right, we are.
- It's kind of come back around.
- Yeah, now it's Vegan is the thing.
- Yeah.
- The big thing now.
- Yeah, or I consider myself a flexitarian, that's what Michael Pollack is or somebody I read in New York Times. Huh?
- You eat whatever's available?
- No, I mostly don't eat meat, but you know, I don't go crazy if I'm somewhere and somebody serves meat, I don't eat red meat at all but I occasionally will eat meat.
- I don't cook red meat. Yeah. So the dinner co-ops were people they always met once a week at that time?
- Mm-hmm. You'd just take turns cooking and the rest of the people would come to your house when it was your turn and you would serve them dinner.

- That's the way the one is now, I guess it's the last one.

- Yeah, yeah they were just like those.

- Yeah and also and can you remember and particular stories or anything in particular that stands out in your memory from the Alpha days? You've already told a couple, but.

- Oh I was in a poetry writing group, too

- Yes I meant to get the that!

- and we sometimes would have our poetry, I had a poem published in the Alpha news letter, I don't remember whether it was the Atlanta by then or not, but ...

- Uh huh.

- Um.. well you know most of the things I remember were the kind of outrageous things like all the drama around the non-monogamous relationships, the um, I don't know if I told you this but I once had sex with three different women in one twenty four hour period. (laughs)

- Oh my goodness. (laughs)

- The other thing was we would sometimes have just like friendly sex, like you were friends with somebody and one of us would say well why don't we you know have sex and just see what it feels like. So, I was living with Margaret the woman I had come out with but we were just roommates we were friends here in Atlanta over near Emory and we hung out with a woman named Kitty who was also on the softball team and she was a student at Emory, she was still in school. And I think it was a Friday night and Margaret and Kitty wanted to go out and I was tired or something so I said I'd just stay home and so they went out, they came back, and Kitty came and got in bed with me and said, you know, why don't we have sex and I said oh okay. So we did and then she slept in my bed I guess and she had to get up early Saturday morning and go to work so then when Margaret got up she said, I told her that Kitty and I'd had sex, and so Margaret and I decided to have sex, just kind of for old times sakes, so we had sex Saturday morning. And then I had a date with somebody Saturday night.

- Oh (laughs) Oh no.

- I mean it was not wildly erotic it was more like friendly, you know, let's just see what this is like you know, I remember I did that with another woman in our communal household when she first moved into the house. She just, you know, said why don't we, you know, just have sex.

- And it was kind of political, too, because you were pushing boundaries.

- Yeah, I mean, but I, yeah, yeah.

- Not....

- But you know like there's just some idea that lesbian feminists were not very sexual I mean we were in our twenties of course we were. (laughs) And we hadn't gotten to, I think part of this was you know, we never got to date other women coming up like in High School like you would date men, or college

- Right.

- So ya know, we wanted to just, I wanted to just play around and ya know.

- Yeah. Mm-hmm. Just to do the kind of experimenting that heterosexual kids often did,

- Yeah.

- not all, but many. Yeah, and that's, I know, I guess people had that story about not being very sexual. It seemed to come along after S & M and the more extreme butch femme stuff came back into vogue. Or became ...

- Yeah.

- permissible.

- And I think feminist rhetoric downplayed sexuality because the stereotype at the time was you know lesbians were somehow like sex crazed, remember all those pulp novels

- Oh yeah.

- they always had unhappy endings you know and ...

- So this was a reaction in a way to those steamy erotic stories in which somebody always ended up being rejected and committing suicide or something.

- Yeah, right and one of the women would go back to men and - Right - then the other would either become an alcoholic and commit suicide or whatever,

- Exactly - they were always unhappy.

- But the whole focus was lesbians are about sex, - Yeah

- lesbians are sexual that's what it is.

- Right so this was kind of redefining it no being a lesbian is political and it really did de-emphasize the sexual aspect, but that doesn't mean that ... I think the rhetoric got confused with the reality of people's lives.

- Okay, yeah. Rhetoric got confused with reality. That seems very true to me because most of the lesbians I knew, I mean I was the one who wasn't having sex and I was in a long term relationship. Or not very much anyway and seemed like everyone else I knew was always breaking up with somebody or having an affair with somebody.

- Yeah.

- Or something. So, it didn't seem like the stereotype was true.

- No, but if you read an essay like that Woman-Identified Woman, that kind of talked about what a lesbian... What is it starts out like a woman is the rage of all men

- A lesbian is the rage of all women

- Condensed to the boiling point or something

- Condensed to theyeah

- Yeah so it, you know, it made it, it didn't say the sexual desire of all women condensed.

- No, no it was about hating men really or being angry at men.

- Yeah, or the patriarchy.

- And the patriarchy, yeah. That's what it was about, it was about overcoming oppression.

- Yeah.

- Not, not desiring women.

- Yeah, and making our own rules hence the non-monogamy and the communal households and the whole emphasis on giving your energy to women, your sexual....and you know I think there were women who were just political lesbians and later went back to men.

- Mm-hmm.

- But then there were others of us, I did not come out for political reasons, I came out because I fell in love

with Barbara.

- Mm-hmm. Yeah.

- You know, despite my best intentions. (laughs)

- Yep. Yeah I think..well women came into lesbian feminism for a lot of different reasons seems like, yeah.

- Yeah.

- Uh, okay, um (turning pages) Let's see if there is anything that I want to add.

- Yeah, were you involved in abortion rights activities, ERA or ...

- Yeah Georgians for Equal Rights Amendment and oh yeah I remember we all went the feminist women's health clinic or center, we (laughs) we all got like speculums and mirrors and looked at ourselves you know, remember Our Bodies Ourselves.

- Oh yes.

- It was all into, you know getting to know your body and you know...

- So those were workshops they had at feminist groups and...

- Yeah, well no I remember just doing that with some people and there was a woman who used to live here who had a sex workshop or something no that's another example of how we weren't anti sex.

- Right, right, yeah.

- No. We were very much into getting to know our bodies and taking responsibility for the health of our bodies and again kind of defining ourselves for ourselves.

- Like our bodies ourselves.

- Mm-hmm.

- So woman (murmurs)

- Yeah.

- And also that book Our Right to Love was put out by the National, it was still the National Gay Task Force I think, it's got a picture of the Alpha softball team in it and it's, you know if you look at it that's a lot of the

lesbian feminist rhetoric right there.

- Mm - hmm.

- And then some publications I think Sinister Williamston was around then and Feminary.

- Yeah, did you publish in any of them?

- No. I didn't. Vicky Gabriner published an article about softball, about how you know she was, she threw like a girl quote unquote and she'd never played softball and she was not confident about it at all but she, because we had that philosophy anybody can play that wants to she played and she loved it and so that was her, I think that article was Come Out Swinging or something like that you know.

- One thing I didn't ask the others that um and I don't know if 'cause nobody, Lorraine brought it up a little bit, was the women's spirituality thing was there much of that?

- Oh yeah we went out to Saffa's Quarry every now and then.

- I wasn't ever really, because of my Southern Baptist upbringing I pretty against even spirituality much less religion. But I remember we would go out early in the morning to Saffa, we called it Saffa's Quarry and do these kind of rituals, I don't even remember what they were. But, other than that, I didn't, there were other women I think that were more into that than I was.

- Yeah I should have asked them more about that but Elinor came from you know the Mennonite background and she was in Crimea Community for awhile down in South Georgia and it's just that I know that people did more around women's spirituality but nobody has talked very much about it.

- Well you know Charis was opened as a religious book store

- Right I knew that.

- it was part of an urban ministry and so they had a lot of books on theology and ...

- I remember I went first time I went into Charis I saw books by Charles Williams and thought oh this is a Priested bookstore because I'd heard him referred to by Dorothy Sayers it was one of the (murmur) people. So anyway, back Saffa, where was Saffa's Quarry?

- Quarry. It was a quarry I'm sure it's somewhere out on I-20, Lorraine might remember more about it.

- I'll ask Lorraine.

- I remember, you know it was so early in the morning, we'd go out there and then I remember once Cynthia

and I got back home we just went back to bed we were so tired. (laughs)

- Enough of this morning time stuff.

- Yeah. (laughs)

- Well okay well I've got a lot more stuff here now.

- Good.

- Uh, yeah. So, we'll add a lot more to it.

- I love talking about it of course.

- Yeah I know, I have a feeling the others if I interviewed them again they'd have much more to say. I gotta have something, any how. So, you want to add something more before I turn this off?

- No, I just, you know I think for me the lasting legacy of Alpha and the lesbian feminist community was just having a real positive identity as a lesbian and you know went from totally being afraid because I was a lesbian being afraid to tell anybody to being really proud and you know just the very air I breathed everything I did was about being a lesbian for awhile there. Except my job. But even there, you know I worked at a mental hospital and I remember one time somebody brought like a teenager or something in there to be admitted because they were gay and I remember saying, I mean it was still classified as a mental disorder at that time I think, but I remember saying that's not a mental illness. (laughs)

- Hmm wonder what happened to them.

- Yeah.

- Okay, well how do I turn this thing off? (Click)