

- Okay, this is Rose Norman. I'm with Barbara Esrig. How are ya? On November 11th, 2012. And Barbara's gonna talk about her lesbian feminist activism in Gainesville, which began when she moved here in 1979.

- Well, my feminist activism started right before that. (wind blows) Um, I was a lay midwife and we were doing home births. 10% of the births back then were done out of the hospital and I was with a group of six women. I moved from San Francisco in '76 and I got my nursing license there, but I put my nursing license in the bottom drawer and came to Oregon. One of the reasons why I put my license in the bottom drawer is that there was a really strong lobby. The California medical lobby was really strong and you weren't allowed to do home births. And so, when I moved up to Oregon, things were a lot looser, but I still didn't want to be a nurse midwife because there were too many constrictions. And so, there were a group of women and we all got together and it was sort of a synergy that happened within a month of moving there, actually within a couple of weeks, and we all wanted to do home births. And the politics there was really women being in charge of their birth process and the hospitals always made it a medical issue and we really believed that it was a natural thing and that women should have control over their bodies. So there was always that bottom line. We started training and delivering at the same time. We were pretty wild. Um. But we all had some medical background. I was a nurse, like I said, and we were learning from a nurse midwife. Her name was Miriam, and she was teaching us about home deliveries and complications. We worked with a doctor back-up. There was this wild doctor, Ray, he worked at the naturopathic school and he had worked with the doctor who was at the farm, CB Eskin's farm in Tennessee, so. And we worked with a pediatrician. I mean, one of the things that was really important, we always believed in safety and if, you know, when we were doing prenatal care, it was really mandatory that if, you know, we really believed that the women needed to go to the hospital, that she would go. You know, I mean, it was fine if she didn't want to go and if she wanted to do that, but we weren't gonna be her midwife, and that was just safety and our belief that it wasn't flakey. Nursing, it wasn't flakey midwifery, it was really good prenatal care, a really fabulous home birth and postnatal care. And we, you know, instruct about lamaze and we instruct about the late genes, you know, about nursing and all kinds of things. And that whole thing cost the pregnant woman \$100, and that included covering the two midwives and all the pre and postnatal care, so it was wild. And we did a lot of births. The hospital percentage was something like, 2% of home births and a lot of that had to do with good prenatal care. So, a belief in women's choice of where their birth should be started then. And my midwifing partner was a lesbian.

- What's her name?

- Claire Englander. She lives in the Puget Sound now. She was really involved in the lesbian community and I really, really wanted to come out in Eugene, but there was, back then, and on the west coast they were a lot more concrete and a lot more radical and I was living in a commune at the time and there were men and women there and, you know, she just didn't wanna bring me out. You know, I had been with women before, I had been bisexual. I really wanted to come out, and she just wouldn't back me. I mean, we're still really

good friends. I just saw her a couple months ago when I was up in Seattle. But she really didn't want to bring me out and, so when I wound up going to Florida, I was, like, sobbing.

- Why did you go to Florida?

- Well, this group of people. One of the midwives had lived in Gainesville before and they wanted to pick up and go to Gainesville and I really didn't want to, but um, but I did. (wind blows) Before that, though, I have to say that there was a woman in Eugene named Moon who had alternatively fertilized, they called it, herself with a turkey baster and I was her midwife and Claire was her midwife. And Milda was born and it was a whole community, a whole lesbian community. The idea in 1979 for lesbians to have, to want to have children, really was pretty radical and, you know, when I wound up moving to Florida, the lesbians here just could not even believe it or fathom that any lesbian would want to have a child. But the other thing I'd have to say, you know, in terms of what was going on there, with a lesbian who died and in her will, she had some money that she wanted to distribute to women's organizations and we needed speculums and fetoscopes and things like that, and so we came to that meeting and really had to prove ourselves that we were feminists.

- You were in Gainesville now?

- No, this is still Eugene, in Eugene. That we were feminists and that we really wanted and that we were against the medical establishment and that we were doing this to give power to women. And so again, that, you know, it's this feminist belief of taking care of your own health care, which segued into what I wound up doing in Gainesville. So we were at Moon's birth, Claire was there and when I moved to Gainesville, within three weeks, I left the group of people that I was with, which included a man, and our relationship really wasn't happening at that point. It was happening enough that I wound up moving, but I also really knew that I wanted to come out, and just couldn't. So I wound up coming to Gainesville and within three weeks, I came out and I called up Claire and I said I came out and she was with Moon at that point. Within that three weeks she had hooked up with Moon who was the lesbian who had had the kid, and eventually she wound up getting inseminated, or, you know.

- It wasn't, a lesbian couple, I had taken it was a lesbian couple having that birth, but it was just Moon on her own?

- It was just Moon, she was single. But she had the support of the lesbian community and Milda wound up being brought up by the lesbian community. It was a really cohesive group of, you know, 20 women who shared childcare and brought her up and the sperm donor was a gay man who said that, you know, he wouldn't interfere with a ton of, you know, he would just donate his sperm. And Claire wound up inseminating with his sperm also and she had a daughter and so the two girls were half sisters. Anyway, so that was sort of their story. And I wound up coming Gainesville and Gainesville was a really different kind of environment in the lesbian community. I had contacted a couple of women who were midwives, lay midwives. One of them was Randi Cameon, who's a lesbian.

- Spell that?

- Randi Cameon. And Joan McTigue, and actually, I think I contacted Joan from Oregon.

- How do you spell?

- Joan McTigue, and she was working at, both of them, actually, were working at the Gainesville Women's Health Center. So I hooked up with Joan and was doing some home births. She was a PA and she. So I broke up with Bill, which was very easy.

- So there was already a Women's Health Center?

- Yeah, yeah there was one going on since, I think '76 and this was '79.

- Okay. Joan is a PA and Cameon is.

- And both of them were PAs. (wind blows) Joan was breaking up with her husband. I was breaking up with Bill, I was coming out. I came out, and that night I met Connie Jylanki and Corky.

- Connie, C?

- Connie. Jylanki. Connie and Kay used to be together.

- Jylanki.

- And Randi and Corky had been together for years and years, on and off

- Okay.

- And they both still live in Gainesville.

- Mhm.

- And Connie was living with Sally and I really, Connie and Sally and I went to Morocco together, but that's an aside.

- She was partners with Sally or just living with her?

- No, they were living together. (wind blows) And Joanie, so um.

- They were all living together?

- Yeah, and another woman, um. But Sally can talk about it.

- Okay.

- This place called Grove Park.

- Mhm.

- So I came out and immediately, Joan kind of took me under her wing and brought me over to the Gainesville Women's Health Center, which was a really, you know, was an abortion clinic and a women's clinic. It was a women's clinic and an abortion clinic. And, at the time, Roe vs. Wade had passed and, you know, people were really positive about. There wasn't, the religious right hadn't sort of taken it as their, you know, their issue at that point. I mean, there were a few, but there wasn't the same kind of contention and, and in fact, the thought in the medical school, there was a rotation where physicians could learn how to do abortions. They could do a rotation, you know, I mean, a years' worth. So the doctors who were doing the abortions were medical doctors, I mean medical students. And all of them, I mean, we really taught them how to do conscious women's healthcare and they all became, they really became the best OBGYNs in town. Tom Tyler, Luke Howski, Brad. What's his name? Brad Williams, and there were some women who moved from Gainesville who were also really great.

- Mhm.

- But being a nurse, I had to take my license out and so I was doing women's healthcare and I was also assisting abortions and doing, I was working the recovery room. It was really radical. Lots of CR was going on there.

- At the clinic?

- At the clinic. Yeah, there was lots of women's health conversations and being in control of our bodies and doing lots of workshops and it initially started with, mostly, strong feminist women and there was, like, this tide that happened that was really kind of funny, that over a very short period of time, like, I think four women, Judy Keith Lee and Linda Lou, Marilyn, Pam Smith, Randi, they all came out, like, within a couple months together. They were working on a watermelon farm out in Archer And somehow they all just sort of dropped the males that they were involved with and hooked up with each other. (laughter)

- Linda Lou, Pam Smith, Randi, Judy Keith Lee and who?

- Not Judy Keith Lee, because she wasn't working there. Linda Lou Simmons. Cheryl LaMade was working over there.

- These were all the people that were working at the watermelon farm?

- Gainesville Women's Health Center. No, at the Gainesville Women's Health Center. Well, those. Yeah, all those women there, not Cheryl, were at the watermelon farm. You know, they were doing that in the spring. And they worked there for a long time, that's another story.

- So that's not related to this story?

- Well, the only thing that's related is that they were all involved with men and working at the Gainesville Women's Health Center.

- They were working at the.

- They were working at the Gainesville Women's Health Center.

- And the watermelon farm?

- Right. The watermelon farm was just, you know, it was somebody's farm, a woman named Lois and a partner. So in the spring they, you know, and they all, but that wasn't like a job, you know? It wasn't like getting paid, that was. I mean, it was for Lois, but it wasn't, you know, for anyone else.

- Mhm.

- Mm. But it really radicalized a lot of women and.

- The clinic did?

- Mhm. And there are photographs of the Gainesville Women's Health Center back then.

- Who has those?

- Um, I can get them.

- Okay.

- And what I'm gonna do is interview Marilyn, Pam and Linda Lou together. They want me to, 'cause their memories. (laughs)

- Mhm.

- Together, they have one cohesive memory of all of that.

- Now, do they get together with each other or with other women?

- With each other.

- But that's three women, is it, was it four?

- Well, that's not totally true. Um. Linda Lou got with Becky.

- Becky Dale?

- Becky Dale, uh huh. Well, let me see. Well, Linda Lou and Judy got together.

- Judy?

- Keith Lee.

- Judy?

- Keith Lee. Actually, I think Judy was working at the Women's Clinic.

- And she was already gay?

- Mhm. And so they. Marilyn wound up, you know, I'll have to, they'll have to just.

- That is not important. But they got together with.

- Well, the point was that they went from men to women. They got together in their own couples.

- Mhm. You said the clinic radicalized women. Do you mean towards the lesbian lifestyle, or?

- Towards feminism. You know, I mean, everyone were feminists, but I think it radicalized people into lesbian feminism and there was a lot of stuff that was going on and there was some backlash, you know, there was some anti-abortion stuff that was going on, but pretty much, right at the beginning it was just, we were just really supporting each other.

- I need to stop and check it. Okay, this is still Barbara Esrig, this is Rose Norman, November 12th, 2012. This is part two, the interview. Okay, radicalizing them.

- Okay, now at the same time that I was working there I was still doing home births and there were a couple of, Randi was doing home births. Joan was doing home births there. Cheryl did some, a couple of births with me. She was in medical school at the time. (wind blows) And there was some lay midwives that were living in Gainesville. I mean, yeah, so I was hooked up with them. They were really. We had started doing home births in '76 and they were just starting to do them in 1979 and '80. We were, I mean, Oregon was a lot more progressive than Gainesville was in terms of the home birth scene. I mean, it was sort of like going back. I

mean, they didn't really, they were just starting to do births, so their, some of them were doing births by themselves, which was really dangerous, you know. And also, just the whole climate was really different for home births in Gainesville. Pretty much, it was a norm for the granny midwives, the African Americans had a lot of home births but in terms of, and, and they had their own midwives that had been there forever.

- I'm not following you here.

- Well, there's, you know, there was sort of a, um. Midwifery has been around, you know, since day one and in Oregon, um.

- Can you keep it on Gainesville?

- I can, but I'm just saying that. So in Gainesville, it was.

- There were mostly African American midwives? And then the white women were coming along, all of a sudden, out of another complete tradition, or?

- Yeah, it was more of a political position rather than an economic. You know, I mean, there was a lot of segregation and there was a real, um, tradition and economic and personal. I mean, it was just the way that most women in the African American community were having children at home.

- Even in an urban area like Gainesville? Or are we talking rural?

- Gainesville wasn't so much urban, you know, and most African Americans, I mean, they were living around. You know the hospital Alachua General didn't get desegregated until near, oh, the '70s.

- I never even thought about that hospital being segregated.

- Yeah, I mean, that's a whole other story, which I can't get into.

- So what I'm hearing is that the.

- So there was sort of a hippie vocabulary.

- These lay midwives in Gainesville are coming at it from a hippie perspective, a political perspective? Are they learning anything from the granny midwives?

- There was a separation there. You know, and, um, there was a separation there. It wasn't intentional. It wasn't an intentional separation. (wind blows) It was sort of a political movement in the white hippie community of not wanting to deal with the hospital regulations, whereas the African American. (wind blows) It had always been done. And when it became illegal, the grannie midwives were grandfathered, grandmothered into, the African American midwives were exempt from that. You know, I mean it was, the

people didn't want. You know, the laws in Florida didn't want to deal with the African American community, they had.

- What was illegal? Home birth or midwifing?

- Home births for, you know, I mean the lobbies sort of gone up just like the lobbies in California. You know, they made it, it was illegal for lay midwives to have, to do home births. In Oregon it was sort of laissez faire and there was hardly any African American population, it was a non-issue.

- Mhm.

- Whereas here, there was a certain tradition that always had been.

- Mhm.

- It just the way that births were done at home. Um. I think we better stop to make them move away.

- There was an offshoot at Alachua General. The way that the hospital was, it was a three story hospital and it was segregated. I've heard this story because I do, because I was doing oral histories later on with people that had been born there and black women as well as white nurses who were there during the desegregation process. And the way that the hospital was set up, there was, the main floor was the mid-cert floor for white women and the second floor was the pharmacy and the medical, you know, the x-rays and all that kind of thing. And then on the third floor was labor and delivery for the white women and delivery for everybody and behind, in the back of the hospital by the boiler room on the first floor was called the annex and that was for coloreds. That's what they called them. And there were two large rooms, there were wards, and one was male and one was female and they were separated by sheets, you know, by curtains.

- Mhm.

- And that's were all the females were and so you could have a woman with malaria separated by curtain with someone in labor who was separated with someone who broke their neck with somebody, you know, who had malaria or something, you know, whatever. And there were only black nurses in the black annex, you know, in the annex, they were African American because the white nurses weren't working with the African Americans. And so when a woman. There was a hand-helmed elevator, so when a black woman was ready to deliver, the nurse had to move her up to the third floor. She labored on the first floor and delivered on the third floor. So in this hand-helmed elevator, she would go up to the third floor with this woman, like in end stage labor, about to deliver, and depending on how it went, sometimes she would deliver in the elevator, sometimes she'd deliver in the hallway. So that was the first unit that got desegregated, and nobody complained about it, because like, we don't want to keep having to steer the woman delivering in the hallway. And so that's, and actually I spoke to the head nurse of the OB unit and she spoke about how, you know, she was always against the segregation of how they were doing the hospital, but it was really remarkable to me that, you know, as early as the '70s, I think it wasn't desegregated until. (wind blows) But

it was. So most African Americans wanted, I mean, they weren't going to the hospital. It was just way too, you know, uncomfortable and didn't make any sense. So anyways, so back to this other thing. So when I was interviewed at the Gainesville Women's Health Center and they knew that I was doing midwifery, they were all interviewing me and wanted to know really clearly my feelings about abortion because not all midwives believed in abortion. My mother had had an abortion in the '50s, and so, and she had always put a lot of money into Planned Parenthood. I mean, that was sort of her thing. You know, I came from a. (wind blows) You know, it was really a woman's right to do what they wanted, you know, what they need to do for themselves. And so, for me, it wasn't a difficult transition to do abortions and to do midwifery at the same time. It all had to do with choice. And that was sort of the bottom line. And I also, you know, we were, I was doing eviction checks. We were doing Planned Parenthood stuff. We were doing abortion stuff. We were doing all kinds of women's health care. We were teaching the doctors about speaking to women in a respectful way. Putting mittens on the stirrups so that they weren't cold. Warming up speculums, showing women their cervix. All of that was done at the women's clinic. And there was also a really strong contingency of lesbian political work that was being done there. And it went on.

- Such as?

- Well, we were lobbying, you know, we were marching, we were doing marches. On Thursday night, we'd all go dancing.

- Okay, how is lesbian political work coming out of the Women's Health Center? Is it women there are doing these things?

- Yeah, women there, you know, we were marching, we were doing take back the night marches. We were involved in, you know, just a lot of education about women's healthcare and how we needed to take control of our body. But that was the bottom line, and that we weren't gonna let men, the medical establishment, take over our, you know, who we were.

- And one of the issues at festivals that Robert Bennett used to talk about was how lesbians tend not to get pelvic exams and that they should. Is that something y'all tried to get lesbians to do or?

- Yeah, we did and we do. You know, I think that women really have a hard time with it, and this is true, lesbian or not, women who were sexually abused. There was a lot of education about that too.

- Mhm. You mean like child sexual abuse?

- Yeah, child sexual abuse. So. So.

- I'll go ahead and pause that.

- Yeah, so, I was living with three women. I was living with three women, lesbians, while I was working at the Gainesville Women's Health Center.

- Before you left the first time?

- Before I left, yeah, and, you know, I was still really ambivalent about living in Gainesville even though I had gotten into this, into the women's clinic and I was, I still only had one foot in the door and was thinking about. First, I thought about moving with, living with a woman that I had a crush on in New York City and then I traveled over to Oregon and got my old house back and then came back to Gainesville to get my stuff and things happened and I never went back and one of them was I got into. I had my LPN license in California and I decided to get my RN license.

- I thought you said that you left Gainesville after you got your RN.

- Hm?

- I misunderstood. I thought you had said you got your RN in Gainesville and then moved to Oregon. That's not true?

- No, no. I got my LPN license in California, I moved up to Oregon, then I moved out to Gainesville, worked at the clinic as a midwife, went back to Oregon for a month and then came back here and wound up starting RN school. And after, when I started RN school, I moved back with, shared my house again with lesbians and that's really when I. (wind blows)

- What year is this?

- That was in '81.

- So you left in '81 and came back in '81?

- Yeah, I was only gone for four months, I think.

- Okay.

- Maybe three months, maybe I was gone for three months.

- Okay.

- And then suddenly, it just all made sense, why I was in Gainesville. I sort of fell in love with Gainesville.

- Mm.

- I think, a lot of my resistance was that it wasn't my idea to come here.

- Mhm.

- And even though I came out and, I hadn't gotten into a relationship with a woman, but I was involved with a lot of women that were just coming out. And by the time that I came back, even just in those three months. I mean, there was just, I don't know, it just became my idea, that's all I can say.

- Mhm.

- Suddenly made sense, so. So I wound up going to RN school and then I moved out to the red house.

- So, did you not move back in the house where you have been living, or you did?

- I did. I moved back in and one of the women who worked at the, and they all worked at the Gainesville Women's Health Center, one of them eventually became President of NOW. (wind blows) And everybody was pretty radical then.

- You know, one of the things Corky said was that in the early days. (wind blows)

- It would happen.

- So is this a lesbian President of NOW, or in?

- Yeah.

- Okay.

- Yeah.

- This is Gainesville NOW?

- Mhm, Florida NOW.

- Florida NOW.

- Yeah.

- Okay.

- And she wound up, I think, moving to Tallahassee or something. I don't want to tell that story.

- No, no, no, no, okay.

- But anyway, so, I moved to Gainesville, got my RN, moved out to the red house.

- After you got your RN?

- Yeah, the next week. I graduated and I had planned ahead of time, and at that point, like, I was really, while I was in nursing school, I was focused on nursing school, but there was a lot of stuff happening in Gainesville.

- What year is this?

- This was in '81.

- So it only took you a year to get the RN?

- Yeah, it was a bridge program.

- Mhm.

- I already had my AA degree.

- Mhm.

- And I had my LPN and so you could get an RN in a year and 13 months.

- Mhm.

- And uh.

- So it must be '82 by now, if you started in '81.

- Yeah, it was just '82.

- Okay.

- I think that's true.

- So right before, yeah, um, actually right at the end of that 13 months of school, I got into a relationship with Sandy Cosgrave. I was a wild girl back then. And there were lots of parties going on, there was lots of socializing going on. I mean, I'm sure Corky talked about the red house and everything that was going on there and I was really, um, a part of that.

- Sandy was living out there too?

- Sandy was living, no, Sandy was. (wind blows) Oh, she was living in the southeast, but she was living in Gainesville.

- Mhm.

- And she had a big New York City apartment, the lesbian, they'd party in. We sort of got together then, and it was sort of my first official. It wasn't the first time that I had slept with a woman, but it was the first time that I called it a lesbian relationship. You know, I had already come out a couple of years, you know, a couple years before, but I somehow just. You know, I used to go Flash and go, how do I do it? You know, how do I get into a relationship? (laughs) She would give me, like, little lessons. Okay, this how you do it, but I was just, I don't know, it was just. You know, it was just hard. But there was lots of opportunities. (laughs) I think I was just shy. But, you know, there was lots of, lots of things going on then.

- To do with?

- Well, you know, lots of marches. Okay, so I moved into the red house and like I said the other day, the room was peach colored. I hadn't quite moved in yet. So I went to see her. I was buying paint and I ran into Sally Harrison and she asked me what I was doing and I said I was buying paint so I could fall in love. You know, and I was with Sandy but it wasn't, it wasn't romantic. It was more, you know, it was sort of an introduction into lesbian sexuality and she was a good teacher. (laughs)

- Mhm.

- We were doing circles, we doing all kinds of, like, um, kind of witchy stuff and feminist and, you know, it would be camping, there'd be a whole group of us and we'd go to the beach and we'd be doing these middle of the night circles and we'd get together at any opportunity and have parties. There was lots of socializing going on then and it was, like, every night. It wasn't like a weekend thing.

- Mhm.

- So, you know, there was lesbian Halloween parties. There was lesbian, you know, all kinds of stuff and the lesbian moms were starting to get together and organizing. A lot of people were going over to the Pagoda and doing CR stuff. There was a really big music thing that was going on in women's music. Sandy Malone and Ruth Segal were partners then and they had, like, amazing musicians coming all the time. You know, it was just like a hub and it was really, really active. There was a women's bookstore.

- Is this Wild Iris?

- No, it was called Iris, actually. It was called Iris Books, and Jeri Green ran it with her partner and it wasn't in the same location as it is now. When it moved, it didn't move far. It went from Iris Books to Wild Iris.

- Mhm. But it was still owned by her?

- No, Jeri got out of that and there were different owners at the time it was Iris Books, there was Friday night was sort of happy hour and so lesbians got between, like, five and seven or. (wind blows) The lesbian community was growing really fast and, I mean, it had started before, but there was this sort of renaissance and there was a couple of lesbians, a woman named Meghan and, um, oh, what was her name? It'll come to me. Anyway, they were both musicians and she wrote this opera, this sort of operetta about Amelia Earhart. Um, it'll come to me. Anyway, they put it out at the Hippodrome, and that was. Now it seems prim but it was wild. It was sort of this big theater and there was just this wild lesbian operetta that was written. Linda Wilson, that's her name. Linda Wilson wrote it and her partner Meghan, they were in this opera and it was just wild. And we just sort of took over the state theater downtown.

- Was it Linda that wrote it, or Linda and Meghan?

- Linda Wilson wrote it.

- Okay.

- Meghan, who was this gorgeous singer, she sang it and they're still together. That was a thing in '81. But there was, you know, the thing is that it was very, very easy to come out in Gainesville in '80s. I mean, it still is, but it was a way that you could. You know, I was living with lesbians. (wind blows) You know, I was really clear. But, you know, there were lesbian teachers in the nursing school, so it was very easy for me to be out as a lesbian.

- So Jeri Green was a lesbian?

- Yeah, Jeri Green's a lesbian. You know, and very politically active, and this was in nursing school, again.

- Oh, you were not UF, you were at? (wind blows) Oh, okay.

- It was kind of a big community college, and so. I later got a degree in anthropology at UF.

- Okay.

- Um, so, yeah. (wind blows) So I was living with lesbians, I was working at the Gainesville Women's Health Center with lesbians, I was going to school with lesbians. (wind blows) Lots of social stuff that was going on. And so it was almost like, you could think that everybody in Gainesville were lesbians. I mean, there was just so much activity. So, and, when Sally and I got together, when I was living at the red house and that happened really quickly. We started to do spirituality work together, and there was a group of lesbians that went down to Cassadega to learn natural law from Eloise Page.

- Okay, spell Cassadega.

- Cassadega.

- Is this a town?

- It's called a camp, yeah, it's a camp, but yeah, it's a town. It's near DeLand, DeLand, DeLand.

- Oh.

- And it's 100 miles from Gainesville and every Friday night we would go, every Friday night to do these natural law classes and there was a group of lesbians that used to go there.

- Natural law?

- Natural law.

- Okay, and they did it all through the week, but you went on Fridays?

- We went on Friday, yeah. And Cassadega is a spiritualist community. There's psychics that live there and there's these little houses. People own the house, but the camp owns that land. And Eloise Page came down in the '40s, I believe, from New York state and started this community, and so there was lots of psychics there, which really fit in well with lesbians. But that whole. (wind blows) It became, like, a really commonplace thing in Gainesville. I mean, Flash was in Gainesville. She didn't go to Cassadega, but she was doing readings back then.

- What kind of readings?

- Psychic readings, and she still does. You know, she was doing tarot readings. She was using tarot cards. She made up her own deck of tarot. So a lot of people were into tarot, it's like readings and doing circles and having, doing feminist, you know, and just different things.

- And this was coming out of Cassadega or just?

- No, this was coming out of Gainesville. I mean, this was going on in Gainesville, but what happened was that Cassadega, which was made up of a lot older group of, I mean, Eloise died about three years ago at the age of 98 or 95 or.

- Whoa.

- Or something. So the physics there were not part of the hippie community. They were older women and a few men. (wind blows) It's a really interesting place. I mean, you could still go down there and get a reading in Cassadega. Um. So we went there every weekend. Every week, there were a group of us that went in a

van. There was Sally and me and Anngil and.

- Who was Gill?

- Anngil, Anngil. She's a lesbian in town.

- Okay.

- Yeah, um, she actually did polarity. She was doing alternative health stuff. Cheryl LeMae. Um. Sandy Cosgrave. Sandy wound up with Marcia Zyman and they lived in Cassavega and Sandy became a psychic in Cassadega. Lived there for several years. But they were there and took to lesbians and we sort of came under. (wind blows) Lou and Smith, they all went. They went in different cars. We were about three carloads of lesbians. (laughs) We went down to, every single Friday, which was really a commitment 'cause it was 100 miles each way. And I was with Sally at the time. We were doing political actions, like lots of, you know, we were trying to pass the Equal Rights Amendment, we were doing marches there and going to Tallahassee and we were doing lots of take back the night stuff. We were doing the Peace Walk. Did Corky talk about the Peace Walk?

- Yeah.

- And I was involved in that. And there was just this pretty amazing flavor of Gainesville. We sort of became the hub.

- The hub of what?

- The hub of feminism and lesbian feminism. And there was also the variety show that was going on there. And that was the lesbian variety show.

- Mhm.

- And that started in the mid '80s and that was, you know, that is still going on, you know, we have it every year. And there was this great little, I think you probably saw it, but there was this sign, Gainesville dyke, you know? Whether you live in Melrose or Archer or Hawthorne, you're still a Gainesville dyke. You know, it was sort of a, um. There were always country dykes that came into town, but the action with that kind of politics, more in Gainesville.

- Mhm.

- And, you know, out in Archer there was the watermelon farm and there were dykes out there. There was obviously dykes in Melrose. Not as many as there are now, because it was a much tighter knit place, but the red house, you know, went out there, because that was definitely a center place, but it was. You know, and people went out to the Pagoda and but.

- How far is Pagoda from here?

- Pagoda is in St. Augustine. It's just on the other side of St. Augustine on Vilano Beach. It's about an hour.

- Okay.

- From here. So, that's what was. Was working at the Gainesville Women's Health Center and then she moved to the Pagoda. She was one of the people, we all went dancing on Thursday night. But then I, um, we started a Jewish lesbian group.

- Okay.

- That became pretty important. You know, and we still have seders every spring. Lesbian seders. It started off, 'cause there was anti-Semitism in the lesbian community and, you know, people were, it sort of became this thing that, you know, the Jewish women were always loudmouths and, you know, they were always the ones that were over-talking everybody or they were pushy, and so. So we wound up, and I think some of this started, the group started around Christmas because Christmas is a really difficult time for Jews. (laughs)

- Yeah.

- And I always felt it, but it was really interesting, you know, it's what happens with support groups is that you suddenly find out that you're not the only person that feels that way. So we got together and met on a Christmas, somewhere around '85, maybe. We had already established a lesbian writers' group, which I was involved with, which was great, and then some of the women in the writers' group, you know, we would write things and decided that it was sort of an offshoot of that. And there were actually quite a few Jewish lesbians in Gainesville. Maybe eight or 10. And so we started, the first group started talking about Christmas and what our experiences had been as children. And then, you know, we started talking about itches in the community that we felt. And so that was. (wind blows) It was really important, talking about our experience with the Jewish, sort of the Jewish angle of education. It was really pushed.

- Jewish, what about education?

- Angle, like, you know, education was always really important in a Jewish family. I mean, that was, like, the number one thing, is to be educated and sort of, you know, Jewish parents are always. (wind blows) Headed for college and.

- You must have broken with your family over there if you didn't, if you just went and got an LPN to start with.

- Well, I had a two year.

- Okay, so.

- I mean, and, you know, the truth of it is is that the education. Well, my mother went to Vassar, you know, and my brothers both went to Tufts and my mother's attitude about me was. I was adopted.

- Mhm. Are you writing about that?

- You know, and my job was to marry well. As women, our job was to marry well, which I definitely broke from that. (laughs) I didn't marry well. (wind blows) And I got married, not well. (laughs) And then had two kids and by the time it was, I got married in '67 and by '72 I was single. I was a single parent. Was that who Esrig was?

- Yeah, that was Esrig. And, you know, the reason why I kept the name Esrig, I didn't, my father, my stepfather, adopted father and I did not along, so I didn't want his last name.

- What was it?

- Safran. Safran. I didn't want to keep his name, and most of the time I was married, all until the last six months, I think, you know, or four months, Mark, who was my husband at the time, had his stepfather's name.

- Mhm.

- Which was Fagan, and he couldn't stand his stepfather and so his dad died when he was only six months old, so he never knew his father, but his father's last name was Esrig and so it was sort of his political action to take his father's name and we never knew. (wind blows) And so, when we split up. (wind blows) Either of us, except for our name and I didn't change it. You know, I, some of it was I didn't know what to do with the kids and the name and it was only 1972, I got divorced in '73 and then the next day I moved to San Francisco.

- So originally, your name was Mark's other name? Fagan?

- Yeah. Actually, my name was, I was born with the name Linda Kyle, Kyle, and then my mother adopted me with her first husband, so I went from Linda to Barbara Blake, was her first husband's name. So I went from Linda Kyle to Barbara Blake and then she got divorced six months later and at three she married a Safran. So from three on I had his name, Barbara Safran, and then when I got married it was Barbara Fagan, which Mark hated, and then became Barbara Esrig, and then I got divorced, so that's sort of the.

- Phew, that's complicated. (laughs) I'm gonna have to change the battery. No, okay.

- Okay, so in 1986, I bought a house, which is the house that I live in now, which was sort of a group decision, but I had lots of lesbians that came by and checked out this place and it was really, a fabulous house. But it

was sort of a potential, I was falling in love with the potential.

- Oh, a fixer upper, okay.

- It was a fixer upper. It's sort of what I did in relationships, I think, was fall in love with potentials, like this person is, would really be a great person if only, and, you know, you see how great that is, so. So here was this house and that sort of became my main focus, but what happened in this house was that it became the place where we had seders, lesbian seders for Jewish dykes, and had lots of potlucks and the house became sort of a center of community. You know, people still, they wanted to have their birthdays there, they wanted to have Thanksgivings there. People wanted to, you know, it just became a center place and so I got into a relationship, it was a 12 year relationship. That actually started in 1990, which I know is the.

- '94's the cutoff.

- Oh, it's, okay. So Marcia and I got into this 12 year relationship and I was working a lot. At that point, I was a psych nurse. I had been a psych nurse all through the '80s and wound up doing psychiatric home care. And in '97, which I know is out of the primary, but what happened was that I got into this head-on collision. And the only reason why I bring this up is because there was this amazing community coming together, which really saved my life and the way that that happened was sort of beyond me. (laughs) I got into this head-on collision, was with Marcia. She put a email out and.

- Marcia was in the car?

- No, no, Marcia was at home.

- Okay.

- You know, they called her up in the hospital. She wasn't my power of attorney yet, so a couple of other women met her at the hospital along with me. They told her to bring somebody with her. My accident report said fatality, so I was really in bad shape. So three women were there and by the morning, there were 100 women in the community in the waiting room. And it was, you know, lesbians, they sort of came and sat and stayed. It was a pretty herstorical event at the hospital, because I was, I mean, it wasn't a time to be in the closet. Marcia definitely wanted to be the person known as my partner and there were all these lesbians who came and there were circles being done in the waiting room and there were, Flash was doing tarot readings and telling the doctor what they should be looking for. Dottie, who was the director of Wild Iris at the time.

- Dottie Papasey.

- Right, Dottie Papasey, she put this giant schedule up. Every two hours, women signed up and would meet for hours. There were always two women that were by my bed and there was a high tech nurse, there was always a nurse and I needed, really, one-on-one care, which the hospital really couldn't provide. You know, I

was having surgeries. (wind blows) But there was always a high tech nurse friend and then there was another friend who also, or a woman who took care of the caretaker. So it was a real feminist lesbian paradigm that happened in the hospital and the hospital was blown away by what they saw. You know, women came in and, like, Anngil was doing polarity, Pam Smith was doing acupuncture. I was getting 14 units of blood in one arm and acupuncture in the other, so it was sort of eastern and western medicine were going on. There were people doing reiki and crystals being hung from my IV poles and they wallpapered my wall with, now, I had my 50th birthday in the hospital, so they wallpapered the walls not only with get well cards, but with birthday cards. Women Writes did, like, a little video and I got the video, 'cause that was the only Women Writes I missed, and then they wound up having one in the fall, so I didn't miss that year, but they interviewed all kinds of women who wanted to wish me well. The accident was April 14th and. (wind blows) So I was still in the hospital when that happened. Women were bringing me, you know, t-shirts, lesbian t-shirts of. Yeah, I got the Women Writes t-shirt that year. Anyway, so and how I would connect those two things, just to sort of show the cohesiveness and the feminist paradigm of how to come together when there's a crisis, which was very Gainesvillian, you know. And I always say that it had less to do with me, with them all coming together, than just this sort of group thought that we've got to take care of, you know, the situation in our own way, you know? And again, there was the medical model, which I couldn't have lived without. I broke 164 bones. You know, I had a bad head injury. But there another part that was equally lifesaving, which was the sort of group energy and thought of their quest to keep me alive and to not be alone. And it worked. And the hospital noticed that it worked, and they said that they had never seen anything like that, that people in the doctor's lounges, people in the nurses' station and the cafeteria. The day that I left, the nursing supervisor came in and said that what went on in that room, everyone's talking about. The only time the TV ever went on was when Ellen Degeneres came out, it was that episode. (laughter) And there were women that came in and said, you need to turn on the TV, and I was like, the TV? And there it was and it was like, oh my God, this is another miracle, you know? (laughs) Ellen came out on TV. It was just sort of was a sign of this amazing experience and ultimately, they wound up bringing arts in medicine into the hospital, which is how they perceive it and I became part of arts in medicine and a year and a half after my accident, It wasn't in the hospital at AGH. I was at AGH, Alachua General Hospital, but Shands, which was the big teaching hospital, got bought, had arts in medicine there, and I had friends that were in arts in medicine, some lesbian friends. But I didn't really know what it was, and a year and a half later, Shands bought AGH, they brought arts in medicine in there and they called me and asked if I'd be part of it, because folks were going back to the meetings and talking about what was going on in the hospital and with me and it became sort of one of those stories. And then I just started doing oral histories, which is what I'm doing now, for the last 13 years. But it was a real experience for the doctors, for the nurses, for the housekeepers, everybody wanted to be in that room because of the lesbian energy, and it was lesbian feminist energy. It was a belief that we had strength in numbers and that we'd come together and support people that needed to be helped.

- Wow, that's definitely a story that needs to be told, and to be in there. And probably, I think it should go in the Gainesville chapter as part of why Gainesville was so significant and remains.

- Yeah, I mean, and you know, Women Writes had a lot to do with that too, you know. I was just getting all kinds of cards from people and phone calls and then I was still in the bed when Gail and Gwen got into that

car accident and that was another thing where the community came together. But I felt, like, I was calling the hospital and sort of, it felt like it was sort of this review of my accident, 'cause so much that happened to Gwen had happened to me, like this feeling of, oh my God, she's gonna die kind of thing and potential complications and it just felt like I understood, from the inside. It was really amazing and then I would write emails and tell people what was going on, so it was kind of a surreal experience, but I think that the Women Writes women definitely had had their part in my healing, and there were a lot of Gainesville women that were in Women Writes that were directly involved.

- I wanna get straight now, the arts and medicine. It was already going on?

- Arts in medicine.

- In, okay.

- Yeah, arts in medicine. It started in, um, let's see, arts in medicine. Well, it's 22 years old, so it had been going on at Shands for quite a few years.

- How do you spell that?

- Shands? Shands. And I wanna say the website is ShandsArtsinMedicine.org. One word. Yes. In medicine dot org.

- Okay.

- So and Shands buy AGH and then brought.

- Right, and then they called it arts in healing, but it was the same thing, it's that same group. Arts in medicine were brought to AGH and they asked me to be the writer in resident.

- Arts in healing?

- Well, it was briefly called arts in healing, which was really, you know, you can just say arts in medicine.

- Okay.

- And we became, and that accident retired me as a nurse, but it also allowed me to be much more creative in a way that, you know, working in the hospital, doing patient's oral histories, hearing their story, and it was sort of giving back what women did for me, which was to remind me of who I was when I, I wasn't just a bunch of broken bones. In every room, there's a story, and I do patients' oral histories and I feel really lucky and honored to do that.

- And you get paid for this, this is work?

- Yeah, that's my job.

- Wow. Wow. Okay, well.