

- Okay, were gonna record now, and I think, I'm recording now. I enter, am I recording now? I believe I am. What I'm gonna do now is get the telephone set up and we're gonna talk to Mary Simms. Today is April 8th, 2013. Track two will begin in a moment. As soon as I set the phone up. Pushing the button. Okay, I'm on the other phone now so I'll go in the other room where I can relax and I have to look at a couple of the notes. You didn't find your paperwork anywhere about that purpose, huh?

- No, you know what it is, I think I have to go up in the attic--

- For heaven sakes. Yeah, well that's travel too, just get up in the attic. You're like me.

- And I don't know which box, because I got some (mumbles) here too.

- Oh, you're collecting, well, you know what, we'll just do the best we can. We know there was a purpose of some kind and you know why I can bring up the recollection of meeting y'all there, and it was the planning time for the the Dyke Pride week, but you were telling me about how even the task force even began, and how you were involved, and if you were involved in NOW for a while. Your involvement... Where would you start in your story as far as, let's see... You came out. I know that I had that written down. Yeah, you came to Miami 1962. I was looking at some of my notes from when we talked about that, and grew up in Pennsylvania. So you came to Miami to live. Then how do you find lesbian communities there?

- Well, I... Actually, I found a gay community first.

- Okay.

- And it was through work I found this. I worked at a beauty shop on the beach years ago, and I had made friends with a gay boy.

- What did you do at a beauty shop?

- I was a maid and shampoo girl.

- Oh, really?

- Oh, yeah, yeah. I've done many observations, but I met this woman, and she introduced me to Helen Delabuh.

- Helen was the first lesbian you met there, then?

- Actually, I met her lover who was a white woman. She came to the beauty shop. Her name was Judy Gray.

- Huh. Yeah.

- This was while I was still with my husband.

- You were still married then, right?

- Yeah, yeah. And so when I met Helen, I only got one child, which was Anthony. He was two years old.

- Oh.

- Yeah, (mumbles). And then for years I hung out with... And Helen introduced me to the woman who was... Well, I was having feelings for her lover, but then I found out she was involved with Helen, so I didn't (laughs), you know?

- Oh, yeah.

- And I was still with my husband, so I had been making sure to that. Then Helen introduced me to a woman named Betty Harris. She was a singer. All the singers I started hanging out, you know, going to clubs with. This is...

- What year was this, Mary?

- This was back in 60?

- Just roughly.

- I had Anthony in about 66.

- Wow, yeah.

- And it wasn't until 69 that I... Had an affair with this woman.

- So you came out the same year, did you know that?

- No, I didn't know that.

- Yeah, I was in Chicago met my first lesbian there in 69, too.

- My first lover was in entertainment.

- So she was an entertainer.

- Yeah, her name was Betty Harris.

- Wow. So how do you get to be this political, radical lesbian, and connect with the NOW and the lesbian task force and all that? How did that happen for you?

- Well, me and Betty were very temporary. I moved in with her, and then Helen introduced me to this woman named Jacquelin Took, and she was who introduced me to Louise and Marianne. I met Louise and Marianne when they came from Texas back in the 19... 69 or 70, and I lived with Jackie, who I didn't think (mumbles) till 74 when me and Jackie broke up and I started hanging out with Louise.

- So was there influence in that area?

- Yeah, politics, yeah.

- Yeah, feminist politics, or?

- Yes, because Louise and Marianne were non-religious. They were working at FIU, or they were social workers or something, and they were teaching at FIU, and they were members of NOW, and they were living in 74, I think it was 74, with nine women, and they were talking about they were members in Now, and they wanted to start a task force called Lesbian Task Force, and that's how I went to doing it then.

- So had you had any comment of connecting with any kind of other... or lesbians? And then how about any feminist stuff? Did anything like that come through for you through any means whatsoever, or was it all through Louise and Marianne?

- It was all through Louise and Marianne, because I... yeah. You know, they opened up a whole lot of evidence for me, because--

- So what clicks works for you and the lesbian, feminist politics? What clicked most for you?

- For me it was the excitement about the music, the books, you know? I had never... You know, it just opened up that lesbian culture for me.

- So how would you define the lesbian culture?

- Well, women-only music, women-only... Sort of like we started learning about Olivia and women's music--

- How'd you start learning about that?

- I'm not really sure, because it came as Lesbian Task Force information.

- Through the Task Force, yeah.

- Yeah, yeah. We had different things going.

- Huh. So what would you say was your most prominent, or most important action in terms of being a political activist, so to speak?

- I think (mumbles) all of that to the Lesbian Task Force, because they sort of pushed everyone into their best potential. They were coach-ier than any... They give women opportunities to lead any organization, and yeah--

- What kind of leading position did you take on?

- I became the (mumbles) chair person for the Lesbian Task Force in Louisiana.

- Oh, wow. Chair person, so what does that mean you did now?

- Facilitated meetings.

- Facilitated meetings, so you had never done anything like that before?

- No.

- Oh.

- Not really. And we had a lot of projects. If a woman thought of a project, she was put in charge of it and there were a lot of women who became politically active with the Lesbian Task Force. It was amazing.

- Yeah, it was amazing. It was amazing when I got there, and you were already doing any work... Well, how much before that time period where the Dyke Pride week came in had you done anything of that nature before? That major Dyke Pride week? You remember what I'm talking about, the Dyke Pride week, right?

- Oh, yeah. We did dances.

- So you had done dances already?

- Yeah, we had done dances for fundraisers, and one of the things that the Task Force voted on was that the chapter would get 10% of anything that we made a profit on, and I guess that was some of our downfall, because we were giving the chapter a lot of money. Because we'd give one dance, and made 700 dollars on it.

- Oh, and what was... So the purpose, if you were to even reflect on any sense of what the purpose of the task force was and then do it--

- It was feel... And I'm, you know, I'm not stating the... I remember part of it, but I'm not stating. It was to promote positive lesbian... It was about culture and teaching and all that. That was our purpose, but it was short and it was simple. But that's it. And we were very proud of it, because we started every meeting with stating our purpose.

- Wow, yeah.

- Yeah, and it was only a couple sentences long.

- So tell me about the Dyke Pride week, because that seemed to be a pretty prominent thing. Or was there some other prominent thing, because of the dances? It was a social group. You created social... Did you do political actions, or were you more of a social networking?

- We did workshops on positive lesbian... I remember doing a workshop in Jensen Beach. Organizations would call us and we would do a workshop trying to promote a positive image of lesbian women.

- Okay, wow. Yeah.

- I think we did a couple workshops at university. You know, just on lesbianism. One of the workshops that really sticks out for me was we did a workshop on what is a lesbian, and we did a whole number on different stages of lesbianism, but at the end the whole theory was a lesbian was any woman who said she was. You know, it had nothing to do with your sexuality, it's just if a woman identifies as a lesbian.

- Yeah, yeah. Wow. Let's see, you had that workshop. This was all in the early... well, mid-70s, you said, right? Because 74 or so?

- 74, 75.

- So you--

- I don't remember what year you came.

- Well, we came somewhere in 76, I believe it was.

- Okay.

- And that's what I remember coming, and first it was Martha and Lucy that kind of introduced Joan and I to the idea of we could go to the YWCA and there'd be a whole group of lesbians there, and... I mean, I remember you offering to help Joan with her van, because there was a mechanical problem with the brakes

that we had--

- We did the teaching. We had women with different skills that would teach us how to do things.

- Oh, yes, yes. Was that all along as you were a Task Force?

- Yes, and you realize that the Task Force started in Marianne and Louise's house on 43rd?

- No, I didn't realize that.

- It got so big that we had to move it to the YMCA, because there were so many women there. We had almost 200 women in the Task Force at one point.

- Wow, wow.

- Yeah, we had to move it. I mean, it got so big that we couldn't meet at the house.

- I recall you going to Sebastian's, and you actually would go in the bar, and I think you weren't the only one, but I recall you, specifically, that you'd kind of go up to the women and start talking and telling them about the Task Force.

- Yeah, we had a newspaper that we'd spread it into bars. Make women aware of the political side of the... We even talked the bar into putting up a billboard. It was in the women's rooms so that we could put announcements on it for our dances and any meetings that we were having, and the rumor about... They said I must be liaison to the bar. There was so--

- Ah, that's what I remember. Yeah.

- There were several women who were liaison to the bar. (mumbles) to either recruit women.

- What was the political motivation in that? What was the reason for doing that?

- It was to make women aware of the lesbian culture outside the bars, because it wasn't a safe meeting place outside the bars.

- Oh, yeah.

- It was what the lesbians had. We had picnics, we had ballgames, we had... We were promoting a sociable agenda outside the bars with the Lesbian Task Force. We had women who were dealing with the legislative. Several of us went to the members on the board of NOW. There was five lesbians on the board of NOW, and there were five. Several of us went to the national convention. So we were very... trying to be a part of the NOW structure at the time, and when we went to Philadelphia it was (mumbles) that was the year of the

lesbian in Philadelphia.

- Wow.

- Yeah, if we had ran alone with that... You know, what was really wonderful was that we got to learn about the culture that was happening all over the country, because, you know, I had never learned. I had learned about (mumbles) and rich, and all the women who were writing--

- Poets and so on. Writers?

- Poetry and the political side of the lesbian culture that we have in the 70s. It was awesome. It was just a growing time for women.

- Yeah, and that's real similar for what Mindy said about the cultural time, yeah. In her story, where... And she even thinks that what she brought was some of the music too, because I know that she was saying... But you knew about Olivia records and some of the other records that might have been out there. Linda Tillery, Sweet Honey were out there already. Let's see, I'm trying to think of who else was out there, but you knew of some of the music, you were saying, right?

- Yeah, and the Moon Circle with Tay Garner.

- Oh, Moon Circles and Tay Garner, too, wow.

- Yeah, that was like our... I had a (mumbles) at the time, and I think when I closed my door and left the house and heard those words... When I came back from Circle in the spring it was like... it's fitted every mood. So you know, we learned about the women's culture that was happening, and there was a lot of it, because people were exploring and just finding their woman-ness, yeah.

- And so what about Miami's lesbian culture, then, in terms of were there writers or musicians that you could say that were from Miami that... Were participating and being part of this culture? Or did you feel that you were as a lesbian there, and that the Task Force?

- Yeah, at the Task Force, I mean, yeah. Women were doing their... We had poetry night, and we had art night. Women would get together and share their skills.

- Oh, really? Wow.

- Yeah. And then we had Dyke Night, do you remember?

- Yes, I remember the Dyke Night.

- Yeah, and it was a lot of stuff. We had the women who were coming, so like we had... Ann Reed was down

here, and she was a mechanic. (laughs) We had, you know, tons of women that gave of themselves, because one of the philosophies for the Lesbian Task Force was women's energy was more powerful than money, so a lot of times women, we didn't press so much about the money, but women gave of their time, their energy, and their money. So it became a really positive thing.

- Of sharing, oh.

- Of sharing.

- Wow, yes. So do you remember the Dyke Pride week? So were there Gay Pride marches, or anything like that in Miami that you're aware of? Or was it the Dyke Pride week? And how did that come about? Well, because, you know, there was Gay Pride, but it was mostly men, and they did their thing, and there was nothing geared towards women, and that's what we wanted to do was our energy was women. You know, you could say gay, and you didn't know if that was a man or women, but if you said lesbian pride you knew it was all about women.

- Yeah, wow, yeah. And so Dyke Pride Week, do you remember organizing that?

- Yes, I do.

- Yeah, what was your part of it? Do you remember?

- Well, actually, yeah. I went to the City Hall, and there was... I went down to City Hall to get the River Walk downtown to do a bazaar, and they had... It was like a weekend bazaar. We had food, we had poetry readings, we had a dance. It was a big... it was a whole week. We made a challenge of events that women could go to.

- And so did you figure that was a very successful... Was it very successful?

- I thought it was a success. We get to have the Dyke on the River.

- Oh, wow.

- The city permitted us to have a bazaar on the river.

- I got it. That's awesome, yeah. I didn't realize that. I remember the way artwork got. Were you doing any artwork of your own at the time that you displayed out there?

- No.

- No, but you were an artist already? Or did that come later, or what?



- I was an artist in high school, because I won partial scholarships in New York and Pittsburgh, but I never pursued it.

- Because you were talking about that big mural that you had created for one of the dances. Remember, Gemini dance or something?

- Oh, yes, yes. We did that. Well, with the dances we always had a theme, and we tried to decorate and create art for that, because we'd have three or four hundred women at our dances, because we would hit the bar scene, and the NOW members, and you know it wasn't just here in Florida, because we would travel over every two months as a part of the NOW attends... It's a state organization. We were a part of the state organization, so we attend other things, to those meetings every two months.

- And you were part of doing that?

- Yeah, and Mandy and quite a few women. English, Hunter, you know, women wanted to do it. We would go out of town, and we would connect with other lesbians all over the state. Basically, if we went out of town, we would hook up with a woman like in (mumbles) or somewhere, and they were there for the weekend. Or there was a vibe (mumbles) as we traveled.

- Yeah, nice. Yeah.

- And there's a lot of women who were down there and feminist, I guess, in dealing with the lesbian agenda very positive, a lot of women started coming out.

- Yeah, I remember that too.

- Yeah, it was awesome.

- So feminist theory, did you come across reading any books or any material on that? Or was it all through your experience with other lesbians?

- Oh, no. We bought all the books in. We had Miss Magazine, you know, it was very popular?

- Yeah.

- And we had people with... We started subscribing to other periodicals all over the country, and we started our own newsletter.

- Own newsletter, that's right.

- Lesbianna Speaks, and we would send those to different chapters, because as we started... It was the lesbians that started a Lesbian Task Force in Ohio (mumbles) coordinate all this mail that came in. We got

tons of mail all over the country, and actually because we're in south Florida, we get a lot of the trends of people moving in out in different countries, so we would have correspondence. We would open that mail and read it in our meetings from all over the world. I think Louise and everything for contacting women from England and different countries.

- Wow.

- It was awesome. It was just a connection,

- Which was again promoting that idea of a more positive image of what a lesbian was.

- Right, right.

- In terms of the culture and the general culture. Were you a part of that experience with the phone... Oh, what was it called? When Anita Ryan came out and did all her stuff, and was trying to change something in the law, were you involved in all that phone calling of Democrats?

- Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

- What were you calling that? A phone, what?

- A Phone Bank.

- Bank, yeah, yeah.

- The Phone Bank, our straight and gay... You know, Anita Ryan was a (mumbles) just organized as you already missed her. The founding members were straight and gay started working to fight against Anita Ryan.

- Yeah, but what she was proposing passed at the time. What was your feeling about all that?

- Well, you know, I felt like it disrupted the gay and lesbian community together.

- Okay.

- You know (mumbles). It united us behind a cause.

- Sure.

- Everybody needs a cause, and this was ours.

- Well, Mindy said she used to receive awesome... I mean, awful, awful bumper stickers that save the

children, or something like that.

- Yeah, that's what it was all about. You know, the scare tactic was that, you know, we were corrupting our children with the gay and lesbian information down there.

- Yeah.

- But, you know, she lost her job, because we were fighting in the worst (laughs). We found it... Our money had a positive statement. We could boycott. Our money was strong. Our money was green. Our money was political.

- I like that.

- Yeah, and we had a lot of stamps, and we started stamping all our money, because we said it was a political statement.

- What do you mean you're stamping all your money?

- Everybody was bringing money in, and we would stamp it lesbian money.

- You would (laughs)?

- Yeah, well (mumbles)

- Oh, wow.

- So it became a political statement that we spent money, and it was amazing, because we would hand this money to people, and some of them would notice, and some of them didn't, but it was a statement. They didn't realize how much money lesbians spent, we'd spend because grocery stores. We spend money, because some of us have children. We do the same things as normal people. We spend a lot of money.

- Yeah, yeah really. So do you remember this experience where... Who went to jail? You or Judy? Remember, you got arrested or something, because you were with a white woman, or did Judy get arrested?

- I was with Nancy. She was down here for the little... She was a white woman, and I was dating. She was here for the missile classes. She was in the army.

- Well, were some harassment above that? Because it was around the same time Joan and I got arrested and Louise got arrested.

- Yeah, well they were doing... It wasn't so much a lesbian thing. It was a black and white thing.

- For you?

- Yeah.

- What exactly happened, Mary?

- The cop came up behind me on 69th street, and said I went too slow through a green light, and I was eating chicken. I said I don't eat chicken. I'm a vegetarian.

- All right, then what happened?

- Well, I had a bench warrant for a ticket or something, so he took me down to jail, but that was the excuse that I went through that light too slow or something. Something ridiculous.

- Something ridiculous, yeah. Just like Louise was... she was carrying a pocket knife or something, wasn't she?

- Yeah, yeah. Well they were... I don't know if they were arresting gays, or who looked like gays, or if they were harassing the black and white thing.

- Yeah, well did you find a lot of that within lesbian culture? This, any kind of racism stuff? Or wasn't there something that happened up at Lou's with Louise at one time? Do you remember anything about that? And then a lot of us stopped going to Lou's, that bar up north?

- Lou was... yeah, she had, I think kissed a black woman.

- She did. I mean, from your perspective, how do you know that? What was it? Did she say something? Did she do something? What (mumbles) there?

- I think she refused to give up. You know, she refused to serve somebody.

- No way. Really?

- Yeah.

- That late?

- Yeah, it was late.

- Geez. Huh.

- It was late.

- I remember something about that, but I just remember Joan and I were up there a couple of times, and then we heard about something happening with Louise, and we said, "Well, we're never going there again."

- Yeah, so I mean the culture... You know, the lesbian culture was just (mumbles) as the southern culture down here. I mean, there was prejudice against color. You know, we had enough on that as women.

- Yeah, yeah.

- It's like... our biggest scheme was meat, men, and money... divide us.

- Yeah.

- Because we were... a lot of women were becoming vegetarians and becoming very political about the environment, so a lot of us were changing our eating habits.

- Did you do that then, or did you become a vegetarian in another way?

- Oh, I became a vegetarian through the Lesbian Task Force. I met this woman named Susan who was from England, because I was a heavy meat-eater. She said, "You know, Mary. I'm not trying to change you, but think about it. It takes 24 hours for that meat to digest in your system, and your body could be doing everything by killing you."

- Really? That's how she mentioned it? So it was through the woman, Susan, huh?

- Yeah, she was from England.

- And you felt it was a political thing, too?

- Yeah, it was a political statement, but it didn't come easy. It was hard giving up meat.

- Oh, yeah. Me too. I eat fish again now, myself. I have gone back to eating fish.

- Yeah, I mean... It's, yeah. One minute you like to say that we go around in circles, we go up higher. (Laughs) We come back where we started. I do eat the fish, and I do chicken and fish. I just can't listen to red meat.

- Yeah, me too.

- But the biggest shock was seeing Marianne do fish.

- That was a big shocker. But when I met them they had a big freezer full of meat too when I met them. When they live on 43rd street?

- Yes.

- They had a big great dane dog, if I remember correctly.

- Yes.

- And then they had also a freezer full of meat. Now that's a kind of strange thing that I remember, but I remember that. But a house full of lesbians making music.

- Yes. Yeah, we had Dyke night. We had music night. We had art night. We had, I think that we even had how to repair your car.

- Bicycle too, wasn't it?

- Yeah, everybody was sharing their skills, which was empowering. We empowered women. That's what the Task Force... It empowered you to be the best you could. It took you from... You know, because I was as shy... I remember being in the meeting when the Task Force started and not saying much. Just being pulled out by the Task Force and by their leadership to become a leader and involved. I mean, every woman was involved.

- That's a key word, yeah.

- Yeah, that's what we tried to do. We would make every woman feel important and be involved, because we all had talents, and we were all leaders. That's what was special about the Task Force. One of the things that we kept saying and repeating was that every woman was capable of being a leader. We really didn't have a leader, you know. If you chose you want to lead the Task Force, and that's what the beauty of it was. We had two chair people, a chair and a co-chair, but we had 50 leaders, you know what I mean?

- Yeah, wow, yeah. What an awesome feeling to know that there was not just that hierarchy in the same way, huh.

- Right.

- Now, there was a split in the task force, you recall that, right?

- Yeah, it was over men.

- Really, yeah? How so? What was that about?

- It was a separatist... It was part... You know, meat, men, and money. It was partly men and it was partly money, The Task Force now decided that every woman in the Task Force should be a member of NOW, and

so all the money that we were handing over at the general meeting, you know, we handled a couple hundred dollars from our fundraisers. At one point we had more members in the Task Force than we had on the (mumbles). We had more money in our trainers than the Task Force had. It got really sticky about the money, and they said, "Well, we want every woman "that belongs to the Task Force to be a member of NOW." And we said, "No, we've got five of us on the board." There was five lesbians on the board, and any woman who wants to become a member of NOW, we encourage them to do that, but we don't make it an option, because we're dealing with lesbian issues, but we are giving back to the chapter. They got greedy and started (mumbles). And we said, "Well, no. We're not going for it. "We'll break up." And it was that and it was the separatist movement, because the separatist movement got really big here. A couple women came here from California and different places, and started... Because we had (mumbles) the groups, and we started talking about the separatist movement. A lot of women... You know, I don't want to shut out men for my life, and that's your... So there was a big party on the beach, and ran into some men, and we had a big blow up, because we were on the beach with no tops on, and the men had to wrap up. The women just came together (mumbles). When I got back to the Task Force at the meeting, you know, we put it on everything. Some of the women decided they decided they didn't want to be friends with us. So it was that and the money that broke us, yes.

- So it had a little bit to do with those two, huh? I guess they consider concepts or something, because they would... I mean, men are one thing, and the Lesbian Task Force... did they ever do anything other than the Anita Ryan time period, was there any other connection with gay guys? Or was there any...

- We did workshops that was open to the public on lesbianism, so we had to deal with men.

- Huh.

- Asking stupid questions, but we kept it very positive, and when they ask if we hate men, we said no. We'd just rather put our energy toward... You know, we try to keep everything on a positive note. We'd just rather be with women. You know, some of us had children. There was a point in time where... I was a mother of two boys. I really couldn't be a separatist, but I could respect the state and not bring my sons to anything that was women only.

- Well, also, Mary, didn't you realize that there were times when there was that need to be with only lesbians or with women, and then there was set time when you didn't have that need. Wasn't there some understanding, or a political reason, or a social reason for--

- Yeah, sure.

- You to make that decision, and sometimes that might have been very hard.

- Yeah, and you know, it wasn't that... I wasn't a separatist. It was the Lesbian Task Force that wanted to be open to a women's space. When I traveled with NOW, I took my boys to the NOW meetings because I thought feminism needed to be instilled in every man. It's just that there was a time and a place.

- A time and a... Yeah, so that did make since. And was it hard for you at different times to make that decision?

- No, no, because if I was doing lesbian things, the boys went with their father. And I was more lesbian things, but I also knew that they could be accepted at NOW meetings. I remember being the only male and us going to Georgia for the national conference at NOW to do the part where we vote Patricia Island into... She was running for president of national.

- So you have Anthony, and what's your other son's name?

- Patrick.

- Patrick, and how many years difference were they?

- About two years.

- So what do you think... Do you think they got something out of being around all that during their growing up time?

- Well, you know, my son was maybe 12 or 13, and you can hear him. (mumbles) daughter went on the bus to Georgia to this conference. He was the only male on there, and some women came up to me who were in the Task Force, and they said, "Was that your son on the bus, "who he was able to talk about Wicca and"--

- Oh, really?

- And the women's movement...I said yeah. (laughs)

- He's grown up and, you know, him now... And also when we were in the planetary sessions he would sit in there and take notes, and he'd come out and tell us how to vote. We were talking with the women, you know. So it was a good time... NOW was a good time for my boys, but they weren't involved with the Lesbian Task Force.

- Interesting. Now that they're grown, do you find that some of what they learned, they passed down to their next generation, their children?

- I think they are very tolerant of women.

- Okay, I mean, different kind of thing would happen I imagine, for them.

- Yes, they're very respectful of women. And, you know, I guess they have a different than most. Because they were raised by a crazy lesbian (laughs).



- Yeah, but you had that thought. I mean, I knew open lesbians who had children, and they had the boy children, and they had to make decisions different times. Well, where they could be, where they could not be, and then they had feelings like maybe they should be there. But they also had respect for that women-only space, time. But they also thought that they could raise their sons to be a lot more cautious and more loving of women, because in this misogynist society it's a rough thing for guys to do that.

- Right. They also, you know, I think they needed time with their male counterparts, because they do have a different outlook. I think the best rule that, you know, men should take care of their boys, and boys should take care of their girls. You also need to teach them how to interact with other women and men, you know. You need to teach them there is some respect. You know, I remember my daughter. We were working around the yard, and she had a wheelbarrow. Her brother went to grab it. She said, "I don't need your help. I'm a woman." and she was like eight or nine. (laughs) It also teaches our women to be independent.

- Yeah.

- You know, don't wait around to... It was.. having two sons and a daughter was an experience.

- Yeah, what the age difference there? Because you had Anthony first, right?

- Yeah, and then two years later Pat.

- Pat.

- A year later, Ronda. They're very close.

- They're very close, like... For my family it would've been the three of us real close too, that same kind of reason. Categorizing of two years, one year different. Yeah.

- Yeah, and the same way my mother had me. I'm the oldest, and then two years later you get my brother, and then nine months later she had my sister.

- Okay, all right. Yeah.

- They were born in the same month, I mean, a year apart.

- Isn't that something.

- Yeah, my brother's the early part of February, and my sister was born February 22nd the next year.

- And see my brother was born December 10th the year after I was born on December 30th.

- Yeah, it's the same kind of thing. Yeah, nine months.

- Yeah, yeah well how they did the month, I don't know. But yeah, yeah. Well, now is there any other story that you would say that would involve a certain sense of the topic that, you know, they're dealing with on this project is... I should actually read it to you. I think I got it handy here in this folder. Yep, I do. Is to... And what they've done, you know, they've done some round of interviews up in the north Florida area and Gainesville, because there was stuff that was going on there. I've tried to just collect a few of our stories. I'll talk to Marianne, and I'll talk to Barbara, and maybe I've got a little story of hers. Let me see. Here it is. This is what it says: "A Her-story of Lesbians: Feminist " Activism in the South, Particularly the Years 65 to 85. "The role of southern, lesbian feminists in the women's "movement needs to be documented before it's forgotten, "and while these activists are still around, of course. "The idea for the project began at Women Rights," and then that's basically all it said, and it was Merrill Mushroom, who used to live in Miami years ago, and her grandmother still lives on Miami Beach. So she comes down. It was her idea to do this, and I followed up by saying, you know, I came to this wonderful community in Miami, and I think it's an important thing to be documented too as far as all that was happening there. I think you hit on a few really important points on how I felt and learned to feel about myself (chatters over one another)

- We also contacted Olivia Records, and were showing their albums out at the Lesbian Task Force.

- Oh.

- We also were selling the (mumbles), and Mindy brought the jackets down, and we were selling those.

- Yeah.

- We were living up to our purpose, which was to educate women on our culture and teaching, and the whole thing. I'm going to have to look up and get our philosophy, because it was simple, but we tried to build the culture. I think that Louise and Marianne, even after the Task Force ended, kept that culture going with something special.

- Yeah, yeah. That came up how much after the Task Force dissolved did that happen, do you know?

- Maybe a year or two after. They moved from 43rd, and they started cooking vegetarian food, and you know it went on for 25 years.

- Yeah, something like that. I've got a little bit more detail on that. And I'll probably talk to Marianne and see if she wants to add a few more things, because I know Something Special has been documented pretty well out there, you know, but I don't know if she'd like to do sort of like what you're doing and what Mindy did. So I don't know if there's some other specific thing that comes in mind, a personal story or something that just made you feel--

- Well, you know, the Lesbian Task Force made me a leader. They pulled out that leadership ability in me.

You know, I'm a shy person, really, and so they brought out the person that was, you know, they pulled it out, and even though I remember sitting in the meeting and Louise... if you said anything, we'd fight about it, because Louise would ring you up on it. (laughs) It was like they were... Marianne and Louise created the Task Force as a test on group dynamics.

- Oh, interesting to look at it that way, yeah.

- So that's what they did. They started a group dynamic, and I thought it was an experiment for them being social workers on how to relate to group dynamics, because that's what they were teaching us. They were teaching us positive group dynamics, and they really, between the two of them, they always kept out the negative forces that would break a group up.

- Really?

- For the first two years I felt that. I felt that it was women who could have come in and tried to disrupt the Task Force, but because of the positive group dynamics that's why it lasted so long. The Lesbian Task Force was the longest organization I've been in, because I've been in quite a few women's organizations after the Task Force, and none of them had that group dynamic that the Lesbian Task Force had.

- So what would be an example of keeping out a negative force out of the task force? How does that come up?

- Well, you know, if you came up and said, "I don't like this," then Louise would say, "Well, what would you like," and that's it. You got it, you know? It was like if you came up with a negative you have to come up with a positive, and then you have to take it on. She would say, "Yeah, you could handle that. Go ahead." (laughs) And if a woman came in and said, "Why don't we "do a dance?" She said, "Great, you got it." You know, and find the women who want to help you do this. And so it was like... If you came up with an idea, if there was women who were willing to help you with that idea, but they put you in charge of that idea.

- Yeah, that's pretty awesome to look at it from that perspective of group dynamics.

- Group dynamics, and it really pushes you to grow and expand your world and expand your experience, the Lesbian Task Force did.

- Yeah, you've got some awesome things to take note of about your experience there, and you know just know how you blossomed yourself is probably the most extraordinary thing inside of ourselves to know that we grew and we blossomed through the experience.

- I think that the Lesbian Task Force gave us confidence to speak. It gave us confidence to even say the word lesbian, okay?

- Yeah, yeah.

- Because one of the things that we talk about in group is, you know, words are our power, and if you make that word positive, no one can use it against you. If you walk down the street and somebody calls you a dyke, you turn around and say, "No, I'm a super dyke." (laughs)

- Yeah, I hear you.

- You would just use the negative to make it positive. It was an awesome feeling to do that. It was powerful. The Task Force gave you the power to be whoever you wanted to be, and the energy to do it. I still see that meeting with all those white men at the City Hall looking at us and saying, "Well, I just want to talk to your leaders," and 15 women stand up and said, "we are." The frustration on this man's face... They had (mumbles). They said, "well, we didn't know there was that many. "the evidence in..." you know? We took up half the hall is actually what we did.

- Really? Oh.

- Yeah, and there was women on every (mumbles) bench.

- Yeah, so the group was very diverse as far as I saw. I was coming from San Diego, it seemed like that Miami's culture was the most diverse culture I had ever seen.

- We have black women, we have Spanish, we had Jamaican, we had a couple black, we had white, we had, you know.

- A few rednecks in there?

- Yeah, we had a few rednecks in there, but you know what? Even at that we were very... The Task Force was still very diverse and very loving.

- Yeah, yes.

- It was more like a family, and that was because we gave everybody the freedom to be whoever they wanted to be.

- And so what about class differences? Did class differences show their face at all as far as you're concerned?

- Of course, of course. There was women, but even the ones with money, they didn't flaunt it in the task force. Sometimes some woman's energy was better than your money.

- Oh, yeah.

- Because they could get it done. We had women who would donate paper. I mean, we printed a news... We printed our paper, and it didn't cost us a penny. I mean we printed 500 copies of Lesbianna Speak every month.

- Wow, every month?

- I don't... It might've been every two months.

- Okay, but, you know, regularly too.

- And we mailed it out. Women would give us money for stamps. We had money in our treasury.

- Yeah, wow.

- And it didn't cost... We had events and we didn't have money. We had a sliding scale.

- Another important piece of the politics, huh.

- Yeah, so you included the poor women and the women who had money, and if you didn't have money, maybe you could (mumble). You had access to tables, or you could get something from your job, you know? It was that kind of give and take.

- Pretty powerful.

- Yeah, it was. It was very powerful.

- So what came after that for you in terms of...?

- (mumbles)

- What?

- (mumbles) (laughs) Actually, I was part of Sisters Supporting Sisters.

- Oh, yes. I almost forgot about that one, huh.

- Yeah, I was part of a women of color, rainbow women, but nothing as powerful as the Lesbian Task Force.

- What was the Sisters Supporting Sisters? Was that the one that Charlotte? No, she didn't do that one.

- No, it was... Hattie... It was a woman who was...

- It rings a big bell for me, and I can't remember.

- Yeah, the woman who moved up to Gainesville and did the artwork for the book, the publishing company. What was it?

- Yes, I remember vaguely.

- Kat.

- Kat?

- Yes, Kat Wong and--

- Wow.

- ...her lover.

- That's that piece that happened at the time with Joan and the money, right? Wasn't there a weird thing with Joan and the money at the time with that one? Was it the Sisters Supporting Sisters thing? There was a weird thing that I remember, when I already started being with Barbara, and there was something weird with Joan taking that money and using it or something. I forget. Was that through Sisters Supporting Sisters?

- No, that was part of the Task Force.

- Oh, really. I don't know if that ever got resolved. I just thought it felt real crummy.

- Some of that money went to, you know, because I think we had close to 1,000 dollars, and some of that money was borrowed money to help with--

- When she opened Our Place?

- Our Place, yes.

- Oh, really?

- Yeah, but she gave that back. That was part of the initial startup money for that.

- Yeah, so a lot of things came out of that, because the other thing that Charlotte did was a women's preservation society or something.

- Yeah, and it had something (mumbles), but you know... I guess the Task Force was a umbrella for a lot of

organizations.

- Excellent, uh-huh.

- Yeah, it was an umbrella of women who went off and did a lot of other things.

- Yeah, that's a part of that leadership thing, I bet you, too, from the sense that there's so many different... I remember Louise always saying, too, that something would change... Knew something would shift and something new would come up, and something else would drift.

- Yeah, whatever we needed would happen. Yes, and it would put... We would get together with other organizations that were going on, women's organizations, because, you know, the Lesbian Task Force wasn't for everybody, but you could always branch off and do other things.

- Like everyone is their own leaf. Well, is there anything else that you might want to add to any of these thoughts about your feminist politics or your activism in Miami? Because you're still a part of it, being in trading and being part of the Lesbian Task Force. It's pretty big in my mind.

- A big part of my coming out was the Lesbian Task Force, because I guess I was involved with a women of color, and they seemed to hide in the closet, you know, one of my lovers at the time, so it was a freeing thing for me to get out and say, "Hey, I'm a lesbian." At the time, with the civil rights movement, and my mother was very involved with the civil rights movement, and I could just, you know. She can be involved in that, and that's good, but I want to be involved with the women's movement, because that's part of me too.

- Okay, wow. Your mom was real involved in that, huh?

- Yeah, she was... My mother went up to DC for tent city.

- She was? Wow.

- Yeah, yeah, yeah. And she was very active in Miami, and she was part of model cities and liberty cities. There was a rebellion going on all around me at that point, and I guess I chose the gay issue, and my mother did the black issue.

- How was your mom with that for you?

- Well, you know, when my mother found out she told me the same thing she told me about my husband. Baby, just don't let anybody abuse you.

- That's a wonderful one, yeah, wow.

- And I said that the world can kiss my ass, because my mother loves me and she can accept me for who I

am. So that was one of my--

- Do you still have your mom?

- No, my mother passed away in 74.

- In 74, wow. That's around the same time my dad passed away.

- Yeah, Good Friday.

- Oh, really, wow. Wow, just recently then, and it's almost that many years.

- Yeah, yeah. Easter has never looked the same.

- Interesting, isn't that? That those holidays, those pieces of time always have that remembrance of something that's so prominence of a mother's life and dying times, and how amazing that you can... Yeah, you must've had an amazing mother to be so involved in the civil rights movement in that time period, because it was such a... It was so much a part of our whole cultural growing and being here to be a part of that.

- Yeah, and I think she had something to do with a supermarket on 62nd and, I think 22nd. They used to charge so much to cash checks for black people. My mother and them protested, and that market went up in flames, but she was at the (mumbles)

- Wow, wow. Did you go when you were a kid?

- No, but she did take my sister, and that's why we went to Obama's inauguration, his first inauguration, because my sister was there when Martin did his speech in DC.

- Really, your sister was there? Wow.

- Yeah, and so we just... All of my four sisters... Me and my four sisters went to DC for the... And just in memory of my mother and the struggle that she went through during the civil rights. It was very important for us.

- That must have been awesome, Mary. Wow. Wow.

- Yeah, me and my sisters all... We drove up, and we got to DC in a hotel. We were there for the inauguration. Yeah, amazing.

- Oh, I get shivers. That's just so... Again, another way of being empowered in your life. And your life in a different way than even mine, even though the whole experience of Obama becoming a president has



affected so many of us in a way that, you know, like I was having this bet with this guy Billy who worked at my job, and when Hillary and Obama were running, I was going okay, who's going to win here? Clinton or Obama? And I had to get him a little boy doll that was a brown skin like Billy, brown skin, right? I don't know. I kind of go by the fact that, you know, he could maybe consider himself black, but he was really, you know, brown, I think. You know what I mean?

- Right, right.

- So Billy and I had this thing, since we were the same age, right? So we know that the 60s, the civil rights movement. We knew some of the women's movement stuff. He would tease me and call me an old hag or something, but when President Obama got to be president, I had to give him the award, because Hillary Clinton didn't win. (laughs) He just retired this last year, but he kept that sitting on his desk the whole time.

- You know what? It was disappointing, and yet it was gratifying.

- You're right, yeah.

- Because for me, Hillary was mine, because that's who I was voting for. Then I couldn't be disappointed, because it was a black man of my race who was going to be president.

- Yeah, yeah.

- So, you know, it was...

- Well, you know, I've never been so touched by seeing an inauguration on television, and you were there?

- Yes.

- Wow. Wow, because Beth and I sat here and watched it, and we were going oh my gosh. This is amazing. Because--

- And you know what was even more amazing is that you know how when Bush came out of that tunnel? (laughs) And I don't think they heard it on the TV, but the whole crowd booed.

- Really? No, I don't recall.

- It was a big, huge, boo. It was... it just made your skin prickle.

- I said, "Where's all the republicans?" and there was a fleet of people. I had never seen so many people.

- I know, right?

- And in one voice, they all booed this man. (laughs) I'm sure that didn't come on TV.

- I'm sure it didn't. I don't think it did. I don't remember that.

- That was a high point for me.

- I'm trying to think of this fella's name. He was one of the younger fella's, but he was more our age, I'd say, but he was always a follower of Martin Luther King, and I was trying to think of his name, and I cannot think of this name for the life of me. You probably know who I'm talking about, because he was going to run for president at one--

- Jesse Jackson.

- Huh?

- Jesse Jackson?

- Yeah, Jesse. Well, I wanted to tell you a quick story real quick. You know how you said you made a choice somewhere along the line where this is, you know, you're going to be for civil rights, or women's movement, or lesbians, right? Well, I had to make a choice too. At one time, because I don't tell this story very much, but I was singing in a rock and roll group, a theater group in Chicago, and I'll have to send you this little article. We did a performance where Jesse was supposed to speak before the performance, and the show was called The Civil War and it was about the civil rights movement and about the war in Vietnam, and against the war and all that, and Jesse decided he couldn't speak after he heard the show, and I was the lead singer in that show. It was rock and roll music with all kinds of slides and light shows, and so in that theater group, I was real involved in that anti-war movement and the civil rights movement, until I met the feminist movement and being a lesbian, and that was like in the same year that you did the... In 69, and I just felt that was my path, so to speak. That now I had to shift my focus, and I was going to be more of an out, proud lesbian, because all the other movements seemed to fit okay too in that, I mean, they just seemed to be there too. He was really a pretty awesome guy. I remember meeting him that time, and we were all young then. Hey, we were young. That was probably in 1960-something. 60... must've been 67, 68? Must've been right around before I came out in that time.

- Okay, that's when I came out, because Ronda was born in 68.

- She was born in 68? Wow.

- Yeah, my last kiddie was born in 68.

- Yeah, wow.

- (mumbles) and left my husband.

- Are you still connected with your ex-husband too?

- Yeah, he's around the corner.

- That's great. That's good.

- He's 86 or 87.

- Oh, he was a little bit older, okay. Yeah, not much.

- And I tell him every day. I said, "Vic, I gave you two caretakers." (laughs) The boys take care of him.

- Do they? That's great, Mary. Wow.

- When he went to the nursing home, those people were bad to my husband. The boys would go there at two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning to make sure they changed him.

- Oh, really? Oh, wow.

- Now my one son keeps him, and the other one goes around and makes sure that, you know, gives him a hand.

- Yeah. It sounds like you've got really loving children. That you have been blessed big time with such loving children.