



**Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory  
of  
Anne Charles**

An Interview  
Conducted by  
Miranda Perez  
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Miranda Perez 00:00

Alright. Do you have to click anything to confirm?

Anne Charles 00:04

Continue.

Miranda Perez 00:09

Yeah. Perfect. Okay. I'm so excited to be here today with you. Today is Saturday, August 21, 2021 and we are recording an oral history with me, Miranda Perez, talking to Anne Charles about her life history. Anne is currently in Montpelier, Vermont and I'm in New York City and we are able to speak here over Zoom. This is a Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project interview, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Alright [laughs]— and yeah, so we can just dive right in. I thought maybe we'd start like where were you born and when?

Anne Charles 00:56

I was born in Houston, Texas in 1951.

Miranda Perez 01:00

And last time we spoke you brought up Buffalo. Is that— did you? How did you get from Texas to Buffalo?

Anne Charles 01:08

In infancy.

Miranda Perez 01:10

Okay.

Anne Charles 01:12

After I was born, my mother and grandmother moved to Buffalo. My mother had been working in New Mexico and met my father and then my mother and grandmother moved to Buffalo, and a suburb of Buffalo.

Miranda Perez 01:35

Why did they move up there?

Anne Charles 01:12

That was where my family was from. My mother had gone to New Mexico to work and it didn't work out with my father. My father was a Franciscan friar. So he decided to return to the Franciscans and my mother and grandmother thought enough of this. Let's go home. So that's what happened.

Miranda Perez 01:35

So you were raised by your mother and grandmother?

Anne Charles 02:16

Yes.

Miranda Perez 02:16

And other family there. What was that like?

Anne Charles 02:18

It was interesting. It was, you know, I always felt like an outsider. Because not only did I not— I mean, my father wasn't accounted for. You know, I couldn't say he was dead. The lie was that my parents were divorced when I was very young. But all the kids said— Rio was my childhood nickname— "Rio doesn't have a father." I was very curious. My mother didn't tell me the story until I was going into my senior year of college. So you know, it was a void and we grew up in a largely Catholic neighborhood full of nuclear families. And in that regard, I was an outsider. I felt like one anyway.

Miranda Perez 03:13

Yeah, absolutely. What was it like for you when you finally heard the story?

Anne Charles 03:18

It was like the twilight zone.

Miranda Perez 03:21

Yeah.

Anne Charles 03:23

Tingles went up and down my spine. I mean, I was like, ahhh! It was— and so my mother was really paranoid about it to the end of her life. But I went back to college. Luckily, I was going to college in New York and told some of my friends and it became this big secret that I used to tell only a few people but since my mother's died, I've been much more open about it.

Miranda Perez 03:53

Wow. And last time we spoke you brought up sort of— so you went to, you grew up in Buffalo and then you went to undergrad in New York?

Anne Charles 04:06

Yes, I went to Barnard.

Miranda Perez 04:08

Okay, and then after Barnard— well first, I guess let's what was Barnard like? What was it like being in New York? What was the year? What was going on for you then, there?

Anne Charles 04:20

It was fabulous. It was '69 through '73. So I arrived the year after the riots in Colombia, and the fall after Stonewall had occurred. But I didn't come out as a lesbian till 1975. But it was very heady. I discovered a more advanced, sophisticated form of feminism than I adhered to in Buffalo. I mean, I saw the need for feminism at home. My mother was struggling with jobs and, you know, men were being hired and paid more and all that sort of stuff. But I developed an analysis. I came of age politically and it was fabulous. It was a really great time. I wrote my senior thesis on Karl Marx and you know, it was great. It was an intellectual awakening for sure, and a social and psychological one as well. Although, I dated men all through college.

Miranda Perez 05:33

Okay.

Anne Charles 05:33

That was the imperative of the time, I felt. Although, you know, I was attracted to women. And Barnard had a lesbian organization but I was too afraid to go.

Miranda Perez 05:46

So did you kind of know under the surface like how did you— because then you came out two years after you graduated? What was that process like? You were dating men and then, but you were also like, yeah.

Anne Charles 05:59

Well, I stayed in New York for two years after I graduated and I got a job on Wall Street and then I was fired for insubordination. And I, you know, was politically alien from the whole Wall Street scene. It was just very incongruous that I worked there. So I moved to Indiana to get my Master's in English for geographical change. When I arrived, I thought, okay, I'll be bisexual because I believed that everyone is bisexual, and so forth. So I went to— I mean it was West Lafayette, Indiana— it wasn't even Bloomington which was progressive.

But I went to a little class that one of the graduate students offered about “LGB.” I think it was just gay and lesbian at the time. Literature. I didn't realize it but I was sort of the new item on the scene. And this woman, I don't know if you've read *The Well of Loneliness*, but this woman who resembles Stephen Gordon pursued me, and I thought, okay, I'll give it a try. I'm bisexual. But it turned into this drama. She wouldn't have slept with me if she didn't love me, you know, this

whole business which I hadn't bargained for. I was seeing a man at the time and he and I had much more in common intellectually and so forth. So but once I was with her, I thought, okay, this is it. So I was living in the graduate school dorm, and I sat on my bed and said to myself, I am a lesbian. So then it unfolded. I got well with someone else. And this was all in my first year of my master's program. And then, I broke up with her and got involved with my officemate, who was straight. And that was a relationship that was real.

But then right after I got involved with her, I remember going home for Christmas vacation, or for the inter semester period, and discovering I was diabetic. So my whole world— it was like a cataclysm— everything changed. I was open with friends but I wasn't open because it was also my first semester of teaching. And I thought, this is just— I can't handle coming out like this to everybody quite yet. So after my master's program that was full of drama and because of the health things, it took me like three and a half years to get my MA. I moved to Boston, I broke up with this love relationship, moved to Boston, to be an open lesbian, and to test out what it would be like to have a nine to five job as a diabetic. Because I had all different kinds of freedoms as a teacher, even though it was very taxing and grueling. So in Indiana, with this officemate, I experimented with non-monogamy, which was all the rage at the time and I really believed it. And I may sort of believe it now. But it killed a relationship. Everybody, you know, we were all paying lip service to these ideas but when push came to shove, it didn't always work out so well in practice.

Miranda Perez 10:12

I think we're seeing— I don't know, I feel like that's something that I see a lot too in my generation as well. That people feel like they invented these things too. Like people, I don't know, I feel like people feel like they invented non-monogamy in my generation. And it never, it's like, do we not learn that? You know, for a lot of people it works and for some people it doesn't. Just finding that balance. So yeah. You found that pretty early on too. So you said you moved to Boston to be an open lesbian? What was that like? What was sort of the— how did you know that Boston would be a place to go and be open? Or like, what was that sort of decision like?

Anne Charles 11:01

Well, [unclear]— small town Indiana because that was alienating. Oh, I also became vegetarian during this period. All at the same time because I was insulin dependent then, newly. In those days, they had beef insulin and pork insulin. So I thought if I have to be dependent on animal products in this regard, I can at least make some choices on my own to try to protect animals or, you know, not contribute to the killing of animals as much as I could. So I wanted to move to San Francisco, because I knew that was the mecca of gay and lesbian life. And one other thing I should— I went to my first Gay and Lesbian Conference in Bloomington, Indiana, in I think 1975. And it was also the heyday of lesbian feminism, Olivia Records and so forth. Elaine Noble

and Leonard Matlovich were the two keynote speakers. Elaine Noble was a representative from Massachusetts and so that drew me to Massachusetts. And she was involved with Rita Mae Brown at the time. So, you know, I was starry eyed about that whole thing. And I thought if I couldn't move to San Francisco, Boston was a city and it had the reputation of being intellectual. So that's what drew me to Boston.

When I moved there, I had no friends, no job, and it turned out to be a really good experience. But it was, you know, it was useful because I had never moved anywhere under those circumstances. I sold my car to my mother [laughs]— and, you know, had a little stop in Buffalo as I prepared. But then I moved there and it was great. I— it was a heyday of lesbian and feminist publishing in Boston, and a person who later became a friend put an ad in the local, in the feminist paper *Sojourner* about a lesbian book group. So I joined the lesbian book group and, you know, we all developed some really strong friendships. We all— I had a friend who was involved with the Boston Gay and Lesbian History Project, which is what it was called then. And I went to, you know, Persephone Press was publishing out of there. I joined a feminist, the Collective of a feminist magazine called *The Second Wave*. I went to the Women in Print Conference in 1981, which was very exciting and heady. Adrienne Rich was reading on every street corner it seemed. Audre Lorde was coming, you know, I was doing a lot of— I was educating myself about racism and just learning a lot. It was great. Then after I'd been in the Collective for about a year, a new Collective member came and she and I became lovers. And the Collective was like an arena of eroticism. Who was involved with whom? Who was interested in who? Who were ex lovers with whom? I mean it was— I think probably Vintage Lesbian Collective. But she and I have been involved now for 38 years. So we moved all around the country together.

Miranda Perez 15:11

That was Linda?

Anne Charles 15:13

Mhm.

Miranda Perez 15:14

Okay and so what was the— you said the Collective, it was called the Feminist Collective?

Anne Charles 15:18

No, it was the Second Wave Collective.

Miranda Perez 15:21

Okay.

Anne Charles 15:22

They published *The Second Wave Magazine*. It started out as the magazine of the new feminism, and it was reputable. Adrienne Rich published there. But by the time I got there, it had been—it was running out of steam. And they changed the subtitle to the magazine to *The Ongoing Feminism* because feminism was no longer new. And they hadn't published during the whole, they didn't publish during the whole year that I was there. We would call for Collective members and interview them, we'd have fundraisers, in which we danced with each other to try to pretend a lot of people were there. One dramatic instance, I put up a poster for a women's dance in Central Square in Cambridge in front of a lesbian bar during Gay Pride weekend, I was arrested for putting up a poster. So that was a little drama. The Collective bailed me out. I called my lesbian friends who were corporate lawyers and they came down to Central Square dressed in corporate garb. And then I went to court so I have an arrest record, but not a conviction record. It was pure harassment. You know.

Miranda Perez 16:48

Is that typical of the general vibe? So like, the way that you talk about it is like, it's this is lesbian mecca where like, you know, you're meeting all these people, you're connecting, there's political conversations, there's activism, but outside of— was that more of like, your bubble? Or was that really what it was— what was outside of that? What was the feeling?

Anne Charles 17:11

Well, Boston I found to be very racist in the main. I had a lot of brushes with crime besides being arrested, you know, robberies and so forth. And then white cops would come and invariably say, “Was he black? Was he black? Was he black?” You know, and I temped for a while in a temporary agency, and I met a woman who said the most racist things to me I've ever heard. It was horrible. So, you know, sure, it was my bubble. It was the lesbian bubble. I mean, they were school. You know, I went to anti-rac[ist]— the National Women's Studies Association had anti-racist conferences at Simmons and all the schools around there were good venues for our actions and our works. The Unitarian Church, of course, hosted packed readings of lesbians. Lesbian poetry anthologies, lesbian fiction anthologies, but of course, you know, Boston itself, and I think— well now, it's so gentrified. But I think there was probably a bedrock of racism that still exists. When I arrived, Mayor White— this is 1979— Mayor White passed a law that women had to wear dresses for workers at City Hall. So you know, there's that. But for personal development, it was great. And I have to, I hasten to add that, you know, I had this amusing experience with being arrested I'm sure, because I'm white. The outcome might have been entirely different, had I not had white privilege. So—

Miranda Perez 19:10

Yeah. I do want to go back a little bit to I guess, you were talking about The Women in Print Conference. Attending that and sort of, you could speak to that or generally— what were... if you could point to some of the key texts or speakers or talks even at the conference that were informing your learning at this time? Or your your activism, sort of self growing— I don't know, or conversations or people or things like that—

Anne Charles 19:47

It was the beginning of my recognition of a large context of women in print culture. I mean, so there was a flourishing women's bookstore in Cambridge called New Words. And there were readings there all the time. I remember several things. The Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press was founded there. And the picture of the founders was taken by Jeb and is memorialized in the Eye to Eye collection behind me. And I remember walking by while they were posing for that picture. And, you know, that was exciting and groundbreaking and revolutionary to me. Adrienne Rich was there. And there was all this discussion about class. And the decision was made in one of these plenaries, I think, if you were going to speak, you had to say what class you belonged to. And so a lot of women got up and said, well, you know, it was sorta like me, I was raised working class with middle class values. And you know, there was a *The Lesbian Issue of Science*, which is an academic publication— I don't know if you know it— published an article called "Amazon Auto Body." It was like all these young women who've been raised middle class who were working in this auto body shop and doing working class jobs. Anyway, Adrienne Rich went to make a comment, and she stood up and said, "My name is Adrienne Rich and I know I'm middle class." It was great and you know, it's stuck with me all these years. So it was electric and energizing and the women— we stayed with the Off Our Backs Collective and that was just the whole atmosphere was full of promise and energy and hope and activism.

Miranda Perez 20:50

What was your, cause you mentioned earlier that you were going home periodically to Buffalo, what was that like bringing this work? I guess what were you bringing home to them and what was all of that like? What was their relationship to all your learning?

Anne Charles 22:15

Well, you mean my mother and grandmother?

Miranda Perez 22:24

Yeah.

Anne Charles 22:25

Well, I didn't come out to my mother until I was involved with my officemate. And the first thing she said was, "this is divine retribution" because of my father. I tried to disabuse her and then she met the lover. Her name was Bobby. She was visiting me in Boston and she stopped in Buffalo

on the way and picked up a TV that my mother and grandmother, you know, we had all this stuff on planes with bookcases. And so anyway, they really liked Bobby. They didn't know her. But before that, I brought a lover home and they hated her. She was— it was a problematic relationship, shall we say. But she sort of sat there and stared at me and my family is homo[phobic]— not my mother so much, but the larger family inclines toward homophobia, and that just solidified it. She was overweight and they were really superficial about those things. So that was the first. But I didn't come out then until later, and then only to my mother. But after the first lover came, they made these comments. You know, like it was a shame about me. They all talked among themselves and it got back to me. Nobody ever said anything directly to me. I was so freaked out by that, that I cut off most of my family for like 20 years.

Miranda Perez 24:26

Can you say that part again? It cut off from me a little bit. What caused you to not talk to your family for—

Anne Charles 24:32

Because of the things they'd said about me behind my back. Plus, you know, I had to wonder if it was easy to supplant that homophobia with the wonderful life I was having in other contexts. You know, I was listening to Sarah Schulmans's podcast with Ezra Klein and she said, "a lot of people currently may be adapting the lifestyle without the life" and I was living the life, you know, so.

Miranda Perez 25:07

Absolutely. So you— I wanted to go a little bit forward to where you met Linda and you said that you work together in the Second Wave Collective, right?

Anne Charles 25:24

Right.

Miranda Perez 25:25

And so what was that like? I guess, what— I don't know— yeah, what was it like to sort of come together and now you've been together almost 40 years? How— I'm just curious about your relationship.

Anne Charles 25:39

Well, there have been a lot of changes. I think we were drawn to each other because we were so different and it's timing too, I think for both of us. She had two sons and when we met in Boston, all of her friends were lesbian mothers and all of my friends were single. So those two worlds

came together. And we disagreed about monogamy. We disagreed about every— so we kept having these arguments and breaking up. And I remember one of my friends saying, "That's too bad you broke up; you just barely got started." So we got through some of that. We had a big argument at Gay Pride. We were standing, you know, because it was hot in Boston, and we're standing sort of arguing, and a friend came along and tugged at our shirt, our shirt tails and said, "dance it out!" So we argued probably on every street corner of Cambridge.

Then I decided I was working in fuel assistance at the time. And that was a whole other education about street life and so forth. I decided to go to graduate school; I felt I was stagnating intellectually so I decided to enroll in a Ph.D. program. My choices were— it had been five years at that point between the MA and a Ph.D. and I wanted to go to Berkeley. But I had majored as an undergrad in political science. And I wanted to go in English. So my GRE's in the special English field were a little low. If I had waited a year and read more, I could have gone there. But you know, they didn't have scholarships and so my choices were UMass Amherst or University of Wisconsin-Madison. Madison accepted me right away early admission. In my letter, I said I was interested in the work of Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde and lesbian, you know, and a more feminist teaching there, and one was a lesbian. And I thought Madison, Wisconsin would be a good place for the kids. So that's what I chose. Then it was like, should I go by myself or should we go with Linda and the kids? That was a whole back and forth thing. I went on to an astrology fair and the woman who read our cards was Lisa Leghorn, who written this feminist book called *Women's Worth*. So she read our cards and we presented the dilemma. And she said, "oh just take her." So we went!

So it was hoot. We all moved lock stock and barrel to Madison. And we didn't know the area so we chose a really conservative area which was— our first year was kind of an unfortunate experience for the boys. It was very conservative there. We went, Linda and I went to a lecture about alternative families and we thought, okay, sure, this is us. And it was a religious Bible thumping, homosexuality is sin kind of place. So yeah, we went into there was a women's bookstore there and still is, and we were like, where's the lesbian mothers group coming from Boston, you know? So it was a little bit of an adjustment but we found our way. Linda is a poet and she was chosen to be one of the Wisconsin poets of the year. She did a reading at this storefront on the main street. It was Geno's pizza. And because she was a lesbian mother and open, they wouldn't do any more readings of those award winners, the poets of the year. So it's also a mixed bag. But the academic program, I mean, I was learning a lot. But I was like, I'm a lesbian, I'm a lesbian, I'm a lesbian. There was another lesbian in the year before me and she was saying the same thing. We couldn't make an alliance, unfortunately, which happens sometimes.

Miranda Perez 30:56

Were you like the two lesb[ians] in the program? What was the program exactly that you were in?

Anne Charles 31:04

Well, I was in there getting my Ph.D. in English.

Miranda Perez 31:08

Okay.

Anne Charles 31:08

Sure. And the other problematic thing about that, it was almost all white. All these white people were writing, doing their scholarship on people of color, which I thought, I mean, people of color are doing wonderful work but it just seemed like appropriation to me. So I wrote my dissertation on sapphic modernism. I did my special topics on lesbian expatriates and, you know, I had a lesbian mentor, and who was a French teacher, and she said, “if you're going to do this work, you've got to be open.” So I became a lesbian scholar and developed a network nationally, and a little bit internationally, of colleagues and supporters. It took me a while and it was also all these people were getting Ph.Ds at that point and so there was like a revolving door. Programs would admit you but then stop your TAsip after a short amount of time so a lot of people were left in the lurch in the middle of Wisconsin without jobs.

Linda, at this point, had gotten bored with Madison or something and decided to move with a friend to New Orleans. I had finished all my coursework and had been accepted to the modern—I had a paper accepted at the Modern Language Association, which was like huge. My first paper I had ever given at this— so I stayed in Madison to finish the paper. I was scrounging around for work. This woman let me be a grader for class and so forth. So Linda took her younger son and moved to New Orleans. I stayed in Madison but then I applied to the University of New Orleans and got a job there. So I delivered my paper, which coincidentally took, the conference was in New Orleans. And this is my only academic essay that I've published. The rest were all reviews. And it's anthologized in *Lesbian Cultural Studies*, a volume Julia Penelope and Susan Wolf put together in the early days. And I don't know that I would be giving the same paper but it was very political. Only lesbians should work on the lesbians kind of thing. It was a critique of a very popular heterosexual feminist book of criticism called *Women of the Left Bank*. She's prejudice against butch lesbians and all these straight feminists praise the book without getting that so in my enthusiasm, I pointed it out and the paper was kind of a success when I delivered it. There's the whole butch lesbian prejudice. I don't know if it still exists, but it was pretty prevalent then. So anyway, then I got this job at the University of New Orleans. Linda and I moved in together and her son, her older son, had moved out and gone back to Boston. He moved out in Madison and the younger son also moved back to Boston by that time. But then he came back to New Orleans and things went wrong that way.

Miranda Perez 35:18

Yeah. So just to get the timeline correct. I want to— you did your Ph.D., you stayed in Madison to complete your Ph.D.? Yeah.

Anne Charles 35:32

No. I didn't—

Miranda Perez 35:33

Okay.

Anne Charles 35:34

I stayed in Madison to complete that paper. The Ph.D. took me 10 years because I moved, ABD all the dissertation, I moved when I was finished with my coursework and had delivered that paper and got the job teaching at University of New Orleans. So I'm involved in campus life there and it took me a long time to finish the dissertation but I finally did in 1998. After 10 years, they had to give me a little extension because it took so long.

Miranda Perez 36:10

Wow, yeah. So now you're in New Orleans and I know we spoke a little bit about this last time, but you said that you were involved with the campus life and that sort of distracted you? Can you speak a little bit more about that?

Anne Charles 36:24

Sure. I was director of the Women's Center for a year. And I was able to bring like Lilian Faderman to campus. And a group of the students, it was all you know, they were taking Women's Studies classes. I was teaching Women's Studies, too. Most of my English courses were cross-listed with Women's Studies and so they were all Lesbian Avengers or many of them were. So and there was a lot of anti-racism work and it was a very exciting period. And then I get the good fortune, and chutzpah if I may say, to propose and offer the first Lesbian Literature course in 1992. To be offered in the school, I think maybe in Louisiana. And it was a fabulous experience.

Miranda Perez 37:21

What were some, can you speak more about the class itself?

Anne Charles 37:27

*Stone Butch Blues* had just come out so we all read that. And there were wonderful anthologies by women of color and Asian lesbians. And we were able to look at some of, to read some of those. The first class was composed of I mean, there were some lesbians, and I would have been

among them. I took the class— this is digression— in Wisconsin called Lesbian Culture, in which I was a rah rah student. So there were lesbians in the class, of course, but there were a lot of heterosexuals, including some heterosexual men. I was surprised by that but it turns out that they had sisters who were lesbians or their mothers were lesbians. So that was a pleasant surprise. And it was a really positive experience. And then I offered it again, on the upper level. And I, because I hadn't finished my dissertation, I had to be admitted to the graduate faculty on a case by case basis. So they approved this graduate course and that was good, too. And then I continued to teach at University of New Orleans. They had classes that were upper class people and graduate students. So I was able to teach some of those. I've taught lesbian queer modernism. I taught and I was able to, you know, sort of pick up some steam. In the meantime, a tenure, I was an unretained instructor, they called it. So a tenured faculty member who was gay, came out of the closet at this point, and proposed and offered a regular offering of Gay and Lesbian Literature. So that was offered annually and I taught that a couple of times. She taught it a couple of times.

Miranda Perez 39:44

Did you feel like these institutions that you were a part of, where you were doing this sort of work like at Madison, it was University of Wisconsin in Madison and then in New Orleans, did you feel like these institutions sort of validated the work that you were doing? Did you feel like they encouraged you to be teaching these courses? Or is it really like, sort of department by department? You kind of had to like, or yeah, what was that like?

Anne Charles 40:20

Well, it was, you know, a mixed bag in both senses. The faculty at University of Wisconsin was very feminist. In the English department, they were all heterosexual feminists. And one of them said to me, she's famous too, of all different stripes. Psychoanalytic feminist and archetypal feminist and the archetype feminists said, I would never come out if I were you. This straight woman. And the other one kept saying in the classes, "lesbians and women!" I was like, what the fuck! I've never been in a class where lesbians were mentioned but what's wrong with this picture? But then they— lesbian in French was my real guide and mentor, so she was like a beacon. But I heard a lot of dirt about these famous feminists being homophobic. One in particular, a feminist historian who's very famous or was at the time. So in New Orleans, it was a very interesting little dynamic because I got more support from my heterosexual cisgender male chair in English than I did from the Women's Studies program. I mean, one of the prominent members of that Women's Studies program said, "The problem with Anne is she's too out. She's too lesbian." So there we have it. Women's Studies. Well, another one, another straight woman said, "You're important in this department because of the kind of work you do." So that was— and she gave, she worked on violence against women and she made a big contribution to that program. But—

Miranda Perez 42:21

How did you respond to some of these things? Because I feel like you, yeah—

Anne Charles 42:26

It's all behind my back. That's the thing, things get back to you.

Miranda Perez 42:30

Right. Did you sort of—

Anne Charles 42:31

I remember this anthropologist. We're going to this Louisiana Women's Consortium thing around this day. We were in the same car and she said, "Where did you meet your partner? Heeere?" It was so condescending, you know. She's the one who said, "Anne's too lesbian." But—

Miranda Perez 42:39

Yeah, you were so it's— the way you describe this time, you were so full steam ahead. You know, how did you, where do you think that— I mean, I guess throughout your life, where do you think that sort of drive comes from you know?

Anne Charles 43:13

Feminism! the [unclear]— everything that I discovered in Indiana when I first came out, and I never went to the Michigan Women's Music Festival. This discussion group I facilitated has just been talking about it. But you know, Olivia Records and all that, a lot of dyke woman's work and all that exciting stuff that was going on, you know, I got it. And I still have it to a certain extent and I'm not letting go of it.

Miranda Perez 43:44

Yeah, all the people that you have built community with, you know, throughout these times, it's really empowering to hear about so thank you for sharing all of this with me too.

Anne Charles 43:58

Thank you for asking.

Miranda Perez 44:00

Yeah, this is so wonderful. But I wanted to, I guess going into the sort of timeline piece of what you know, you're sharing. I have another question that sort of goes away from that. So I don't know if you wanted to speak more to your time in New Orleans and teaching and ending up where you are now in Vermont before I do that. I don't know if there's more.

Anne Charles 44:26

Okay, so how did I end up in Vermont?

Miranda Perez 44:28

Sure. Yeah.

Anne Charles 44:30

Hurricane Katrina happened. And Linda had moved here. It's a long story, but we were having a long distance relationship. I was teaching in New Orleans; I have this wonderful class lined up. It was women writers from around the world and international feminism. It was the second week of classes and hurricanes had come during my time in New Orleans before but I had no idea. So when— we had four cats, three cats at that point, and the dog had died. My mother had been spending time with me because she was getting elderly and coming down with dementia. But luckily, she wasn't visiting.

When the Mayor declared mandatory evacuation, I really got scared because all the hotels in the area were booked up. I had no family in the area. I was going to ride it out but mandatory is like a huge alarm. So some of us had decided to stay and I had a small circle of close friends. And we were all saying, "well, what are you going to do?" and "I don't know." So I talked to one pair. I said, "You know, I have no place to go, I'll be fine." You know. So she called back and said, "Pack up your things. Pack up the cats. You're coming with us." And so we did a caravan. She had a car. Her husband had a car. I had a— I was the only one with the air conditioning in my car. And it was 98 degrees, you know. I felt so bad because we had an eight hour commute to Baton Rouge that would normally be like two hours. And people had dogs in the back of their trucks. And you know, it was so hot. Her car broke down on the way [laughs]— we had to leave her car and she, and they had three cats too so we evacuated to a sort of a plantation kind of place. He was luckily from Louisiana. She's from Austria. [Unclear]— and so we evacuated to some relatives of his and there was everybody. There are people in wheelchairs, infants, all kinds of pets. I mean, my pets stayed in the barn. Their pets stayed in the bedroom with them. I slept in the bedroom with them. And you couldn't see what was going on, you know. So then we all caravan to his mother's house. And well, they took in the pets and me again. The pets stayed in the garage, my pets. And I was, you know, we had no idea. We thought this is going to be a weekend and we'll be back at school. I brought the book I was teaching, *And They Didn't Die*, a South African novel. They went on Google Maps to see because they owned their house. They have a beautiful house Uptown and they were worried about that. I was a renter. So anyway, Linda's daughter-in-law is from the New Orleans area, a suburb of New Orleans. And she called and said, "you know, look, you're not going back on Monday!" I was so— and her parents were living there too, in New Orleans.

So anyway, then Linda took a plane down and met me in Jackson. I had stayed a few days with my friend Todd's mother. And we drove— I drove to Jackson and she picked me up and it was

incredible. I mean, nobody would let you use the bathroom or anything. It was like, and during my time, staying in that part of Louisiana, it was really like people from New Orleans are lower life forms. It was racism pure and simple. The whole— I mean, it was a glimpse[se] and these people were being good to be in one in one sense. They took me in but it was just clear as day. They had arranged for cheerleaders to perform for New Orleans refugees. And you know, these people were saying no, we don't want— I mean, it was race. You know, because people from New Orleans were coded black. It was really an eye opener. And I think somebody did— wrote a New Yorker article about this particular small town he was from which is Houma, Louisiana. But anyway, so that was—I knew it, but I saw it. You've lost your—

Miranda Perez 50:08

Yeah, I've been muting myself periodically just so I don't interrupt your talking. So—

Anne Charles 50:17

Linda was living here and I moved here. But meanwhile, I went to Buffalo. I evacuated to Buffalo immediately with the cats. And we dropped me off. Then, while I was in Buffalo, it was such a vivid evening. I was trying to— I had to buy a computer because we had to teach throughout this whole thing. So I was assembling a computer desk and George Bush was on television declaring that we were going to war in Iraq. And then my aunt called me and she said, "Look, your mother can't stay alone by herself anymore. This is up to you." So I mean, it was so intense. I had no clothes. I had to buy. Linda was with me when she kind of dropped me off. I got new clothes and the computer and, you know, our connections to school were severed because we couldn't get online. So I had to use— go to a library to get email. That school prided themselves on being the only one that still paid people. But it was expecting us— and you know, it was terrible because these students in my upper level class were wonderful and promising, but they couldn't keep up so a lot of them failed.

Miranda Perez 51:50

They were teaching all like through email?

Anne Charles 51:53

Mmhm.

Miranda Perez 51:54

Wow.

Anne Charles 51:55

Yeah. It was really a baptism by fire if I may use a Catholic expression.

Miranda Perez 52:03

There's interesting parallels I feel like to, you know, this sort of crisis that you had to like move online and sort of virtually and what we've just gone through.

Anne Charles 52:15

No kidding. So then, I went back in December, I took my mother with me. There was a lot of drama, you know, do you need malaria shots to go back? That kind of thing. And so my mother had a panic attack and they thought she was having a heart attack. She was in her nineties. This was over Thanksgiving. But we went back; it was just incredible to go back. Linda drove me back. And you know, usually you go into a city, there are lights everywhere. Everything was dark. All the street signs were down. There were— one of the reporters at the local paper wrote a collection of his columns called “One Dead in Attic” because then everybody's doors there were like signs: one dead in attic, two pets dead. They shot the dogs that were— I mean, it's unspeakable, really. And that's why I don't read like I don't read Jasmine Ward, who's supposed to be a wonderful novelist. And turns out she was teaching at my school. We were, you know, and the school was devastated. Because all the power lines were underground. And so anyway, we taught, so I taught for a semester in this satellite campus in a suburb. And, you know, they cut out major departments, Communications, but English kept going because it's kind of a staple.

Then my mother had some sort— oh, she had a transient ischemic episode, which is like you have a stroke and it reverses itself. And so I called the doctor. It took the ambulance like a half an hour to come. They had a makeshift— it was like in a tent. And I got her there. They didn't even have a bandaid. And I thought, look, I'm diabetic, I gotta get out of here. You know, plus, they were encouraging you to leave at school, because enrollment had gone from like 17,000 to 2,000 or something like that. So I taught spring semester and then I taught in the summer and then I packed up.

Linda came down, picked me up, and she found a place for all of us in Vermont. Then we went ice— I went back and packed my mother up and we moved her to Ver[mont]— she'd been living in her place 30 years. That was a huge struggle but we succeeded. Then we all lived here together for about five years before she died. And I went to a lesbian party in this time. Linda had been here earlier so she knew some people. It was a birthday party. And I said, I was looking for work. And one of the women at the party put me in touch with the head of freshman English, at Champlain College in Burlington and they hired me. So I just took a semester off and read and got myself together. And then I started teaching there in January of probably 2006 or 2007. Katrina was 2005. So it must have been 2007. I don't know. Anyway, so I did that for a while. I wasn't as open as I would like to be. I couldn't teach English and then my retirement came in from New Orleans. I was commuting to Burlington, and commuting in this weather is a lot different from commuting in New Orleans. So it was the same amount of time, but a whole different experience. And I had taught for 30 years. So then I retired and we started the show. This women's discussion group. I mean, we started a grassroots LGBT group here in central

Vermont, because everything was going on in Burlington and we wanted to have a presence here. We organized a couple of gay pride marches, LGBT, because we wanted it not to be corporate and, you know, we did that. And then I started the women's discussion group as an arm of that organization, and then Linda thought of the show, and we've been doing that for almost five years.

Miranda Perez 57:39

Right. So can you speak more about the show? Yeah [unclear]— thank you.

Anne Charles 57:49

Sure. So we started out as a biweekly news show. And Linda, it was Linda's idea and I was like, no, no, no. All my friends said, "Look, this is too much work. Don't do it." So first, she was going to do it at Goddard, which has two hour radio shows. And she and a friend, who was going to do it with her, went over the instrumentation and everything was so intense. She said, "No. I'm gonna do TV." And so the friend backed out, possibly because she didn't want to be on TV or the visibility, I don't know. But the friend backed out. And I was sort of roped into it.

She just went to the cable access show here in Montpelier at the table access station and said, "look, I want to do a show" and they said, "fine." So she solicited me, and then neither of us knows much about Vermont. We've been here 12 or 13 years. So a friend of ours knew our third co-host, Keith, because he had us born and raised. So they said we should bring him on. And we modeled— Linda and I had been watching *Gay USA* in New York for like, certainly all the years here. I don't know if they covered it in New Orleans. I don't think so. But they're a wonderful show and we modeled our show a little bit on them. And because of my academic connections, we hit— we were able to meet them in New York and talk with them about how they did their show and they were very generous with their connections, their news connections and so forth. So we did it bi-weekly because Linda and I at the time liked to travel and but then when the pandemic hit, we switched to Zoom and we thought we could just— we had an interview at the end of many shows when we did the new show. We thought we could— we came upon the idea of an interview show that we could do weekly. We could interview people all over the country and all over the world on Zoom. So it's been quite successful. But now it's a lot of work. But we're not traveling. So it's a one week news show and one week interview show and each of us interviews a person of our choice. And we can't pay. That's the downside. So famous people make— I mean, people who are interested in those things— may turn us down, but it's been really rewarding.

Miranda Perez 1:00:55

Yeah and so you do that. So there's a new episode sort of every week.

Anne Charles 1:01:00

Right.

Miranda Perez 1:01:01

And like you said that they oscillate. I wanted to just go back quickly, just to ask how long you were working at Champlain College? I realized I— that was a question, I was just curious.

Anne Charles 1:01:12

I think five or six years.

Miranda Perez 1:01:14

Five or six years, okay.

Anne Charles 1:01:15

I was an adjunct. And the line between full time faculty and adjuncts was huuuge. It was like you were a lower life form.

Miranda Perez 1:01:28

Oh gosh.

Anne Charles 1:01:28

Which pissed me off because I had a Ph.D. you know, in many— it's okay, it's water under the bridge.

Miranda Perez 1:01:37

And now you have this big project that you're working on.

Anne Charles 1:01:41

It's, you know, passion. A work a passion, you know, because it was like teaching. And the Champlain students, I love all of my students but they were very entitled, as opposed to the New Orleans students. University of New Orleans was a working class school, racially mixed. Seemed more real than some of my privileged Champlain students, although all students I like them all.

Miranda Perez 1:02:13

Right, yep. And, you know, you speak to all of these sort of big names in like lesbian feminist writing and teaching and I was curious what you— I feel like you, I mean, you were really present obviously for the beginnings of all of this thought and you got to see the people who really, the Audre Lordes and the Adrienne Riches of the community. So who do you— I was curious who you feel today you sort of connect to? Who do you feel is doing that sort of transformative work for the LGBT community and for activism in general, if anybody?

Anne Charles 1:03:04

Well, I just finished Pamela Sneed's *Funeral Diva*. I think those poems are intense and timely and really good. This is more— I've been interested in the Black Lesbian Feminist Press lately. I just read a collection of short stories by Penny Mickelbury. She's written mysteries and the press publishes a lot of speculative fiction, which really isn't my bag. But those are two titles. I've been in— I love lesbian drama and I'm interested in photography. And one thing that excites me is the WMN Zine coming out of Brooklyn. I love it because they identify as lesbian and they're talented women a lot younger than I who are doing great work. They haven't they haven't done that many publications, but they're very elegant. And I'm excited by Julie Enszer, the editor of *Sinister Wisdom*. I think she's a fine writer and a real— she's in her 50s I think. She's a real mover in the lesbian world, and very well informed and, you know, those are the people that immediately come to mind.

Miranda Perez 1:04:46

Yeah, that's great.

Anne Charles 1:04:47

I love Irena Klepfisz. She's from the old era. She's in her eighties but I love her work, too.

Miranda Perez 1:04:58

Thank you.

Anne Charles 1:04:59

Judith Katz I think. Elana Dykewomon, especially her novel, *pale*, *Beyond the Pale*. I just finished reading a *Lot* by Brian Washington, a collection of short stories African American gay man. I thought they were fabulous. He's somebody that I want them to watch. There's a lot of exciting energy out there. And, you know, I'm a fan of Arundhati Roy. She's not a lesbian, unfortunately. But she has an essay called “The Pandemic is a Portal” that I think is really fine. Because— I don't know if you know it— but she talks about all this awful stuff that's happening, may be a new opening because all the inadequacies and all the imbalances in our culture are being revealed. And Black Lives Matter and all of these radical movements are beginning to develop strong followings. Sarah Schulman, of course. Love her work too, especially the nonfiction. So—

Miranda Perez 1:06:26

Yeah, I love that. And then, how did you find this space? How did you find the, what's your connection slash experience with the Lesbian Herstory Archives? How do we land here?

Anne Charles 1:06:43

I'm on the mailing list and so I learned about it. Linda and I did a couple of other interviews that we thought we should probably do this too. I haven't, we haven't invited the Lesbian Herstory Archives on the show. I've read everything Joan Nestle has ever written. But she's so famous. I am reluctant to, you know, it's hard because I never hustled. We could never, neither Linda nor I really hustles. And so, you know, we need to just ask people, but and you know, I admire the work of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. We only visited once and it was very informative, and I liked the energy, certainly a worthy project.

Miranda Perez 1:07:43

I've only been there once, as well. So it's sort of funny. This feels like an entry point, in some ways from me. And hopefully for you, too. I hope you can interview all the people that you want to from the Archives and from everywhere. And so my last question is if there's anything that you wanted to like— when you were thinking about this conversation— if there was anything that we didn't cover that you were hoping to include?

Anne Charles 1:08:14

Not really. I am not really sure who our audience is. So one thing we ask on the show is do you have any message for our audience? But since I don't know who the audience is—

Miranda Perez 1:08:29

Could be anyone.

Anne Charles 1:08:31

Well, I'm excited that the promise of lesbian feminism is still alive and many of us are continuing to live it. And if it's changing, fine, good. It needs to be. I mean, you know, sometimes it's been the fashion in people my age group to lament the decline. You know, there's that Bonnie Morris's book, *The Disappearing L*, to lament the decline and disappearance of the women's music festivals, and bookstores and so forth. And I think, you know, those are certainly legitimate feelings but they're being replaced by, they can be replaced by other exciting alternatives. Time marches on and I hope that the outcomes are positive.

Miranda Perez 1:09:27

Agreed. Beautiful. Well said, too. So thank you so much Anne. I'm going to stop the recording now. And then you and I can continue to chat a little bit. But—

Anne Charles 1:09:39

Thank you for Miranda. Performing a great service.

Miranda Perez 1:09:43

I'm so happy. I feel very, very blessed and lucky to have been able to share this time with you. So thank you. And to whoever gets to watch this, hello and thank you for listening.