



**Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory  
of  
Jane Kennedy**

An Interview  
Conducted by  
Elise Tosatti  
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Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

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Jane Kennedy 00:01

Okay.

Elise Tosatti 00:01

Hello. Hi Jane. Thank you so much for joining me today. This is Friday, December 3, 2021 and we are recording an oral history with Jane Kennedy. My name is Elise Tosatti in New York City and I'm talking with Jane Kennedy who is in North Carolina about her life history. This is a Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Jane, I wanted to start by asking how you would identify yourself and what brought you to the Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project.

Jane Kennedy 00:36

I identify as a lesbian and that is probably one of the the fewer identities that I have lived through at different times in my life. I've been a lesbian feminist. At other times, I've been a radical lesbian separatist dyke. But today, I am a lesbian as my identity. I'm definitely a she/her kind of gal. Yeah and what brought me to the Archives a number of years ago, when I was in New York City, I had the opportunity to visit the Archives in Brooklyn and was really amazed and touched by the work that they were doing. And so happy and relieved that there were people out there who cared enough to organize something like a lesbian archives, so that women could create essentially our own herstory and not be dependent on somebody else telling our stories. So I had decided at that time that— you know, I had kept journals and different papers over very many years— I would at some point in my life want to turn all of those over to the Archives. And have them there for lesbians in the future to discover and know that they've come from a long lineage of women who were lesbian and proud.

Elise Tosatti 02:26

Thank you. Before we get started with a little bit of background on you, are there any parts of your story in particular that you wanted to focus on today?

Jane Kennedy 02:38

Yeah, I think my interest in this particular project was to recount for the record, so to speak, my experience getting pregnant my way back in 1989, 1990. And I just felt like my journey through that could be helpful and illustrative for women today who are wanting to get pregnant their way on their own.

Elise Tosatti 03:13

Thank you. Before we start talking about how you went about doing that and what your experience as a mother has been, I'm wondering if we can talk a little bit about your earlier life experience before you became a mother. Would you mind starting with where you were born and what your kind of early life was like?

Jane Kennedy 03:33

I was born in New York City, specifically in Manhattan and that was in 1951. We lived in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. And I was raised as a Catholic. My parents were from Irish lineage. My father was first generation American. His parents had immigrated here in the late 1800s, early 1900s, from Ireland. And my mother's mother had also immigrated from Ireland at about the same time. My mother's father's family had originally been from Ireland but he had been in this country a couple of generations before he met my grandmother. So I have a very Celtic lineage and have always felt very close to that lineage growing up.

So I was raised mostly in Catholic schools. And even through my first year in college, I was in Catholic college at that time. And then after that, I went to a variety of other colleges that were not denominational in any way and I was really pretty disassociated from the church and everything that the church stood for. You know, by the time I was a late teenager. And through different schools and education, I ended up in Asheville, North Carolina in 1977. And that's where I came out as a lesbian. I had been in love with a woman prior to that. And I was just thinking, you know, it was just one of those things. I was just in love with my best friend and that was all there was to it. Then when I moved to Asheville, there was a community of women, most of them lesbians, and the light bulb went off. And it was like, oh whoa, there's other women out there that I could fall in love with. So that really began my lesbian lifestyle. Up until then, I had been involved with men and had not really thought much about my sexuality. I mean, it wasn't a conscious choice. You know, it was just kind of like doing what you did, you know. And once I became more involved in the feminist movement and I was getting all of my social, psychological, spiritual needs met through women, it became a more natural thing. It was like well, why wouldn't I want to also have this other part of my life touched by women so to speak. So that's when I fell in love with my best friend at the time. And yeah, so we had a short relationship but our relationship ended right before I came to Asheville. So I sort of came to Asheville with a broken heart and really needed a community and I found lesbian community.

Elise Tosatti 06:55

Can I ask how old you were when you came out?

Jane Kennedy 06:59

That would have been, let's see, in like '75, 1975, so I would have been like 24.

Elise Tosatti 07:09

And what was it like for you to have this community of gay or queer and feminist women around?

Jane Kennedy 07:15

Well, queer back then was not a term that we used. Queer was still very much seen as a derogatory term in the seventies. So what was it like to have that community? Well, it was eye opening. It was life expanding. It was really exciting. We were very much here in Asheville in the, you know, this little part of the mountains working diligently for the feminist cause. And we had several organizations here in Asheville. The Asheville Women's Center, we had a chapter of Women Against Violence Against Women here, we started the first Women Take Back the Night March in 1979. It was a very alive time. It was a time that was rich in building our herstory. Michigan Womyn's festival was alive and happening. And, you know, that was something that I got to enjoy several times in my life. So living in a woman's nation was really kind of the ideal and the goal of it all. And that was true for me until about the time I was 33. And then, it was like something else shifted inside me and my innards were wanting me to go in a different direction. So a lot of my radical part really kind of stepped back. And this other part of me stepped forward, wanting to be expressed in the world.

Elise Tosatti 09:10

When did you first know that you wanted to become a mother?

Jane Kennedy 09:15

Well, that was around this time when things were really starting to shift for me. I was doing a lot of psychological work. I think like many people growing up in the United States, I came from a very dysfunctional family. And so that provided me with lots of opportunities for psychotherapy kind of work and I was doing a lot of inner child work at that time. Recovering my inner child and trying to heal some of the wounds of the inner child. But I just started having all of these thoughts like have a baby, have a baby, have a baby and I was dreaming about babies. I was seeing babies everywhere I went. I was seeing pregnant women. I was just like, it was almost like this obsession. It was like I was haunted by this idea of having a baby. And one side of me was like, sure, okay. And then another part of me was like, oh, no no, that— you're just working out your inner child stuff. You know that you're just trying to give birth to your inner child.

And I guess one of the pivotal things that happened was in the late eighties. I went to a woman who was a psychic and had a psychic reading. The first thing she said to me was, "you are surrounded by babies at night. You are helping those souls in their preparation for coming into bodies. Two of these souls are very important to you and they will either come to you or through you within the next five years." And I said to her, "but I'm a lesbian, how am I going to get pregnant?" I said, "I'm not going to, you know, go find a man just to have sex with." And she said, "you know, the word that I'm being given is a facilitator. A facilitator will come along. Just trust that." So I was like, okay, fine. Well, within a very short period of time of that happening, I was at that time involved with the first duration of the AIDS project here in Asheville and was at that time an AIDS educator. Did a lot of traveling around in western North Carolina talking about what it was, what it wasn't, how you actually did contract it, how infectious was it. You

know, people were worried about toilet seats and blood donations and all kinds of stuff. So there was a lot of misinformation out there, very similar to today. And so I was kind of on the front lines helping people understand what it was and what it wasn't.

And I met a guy who was also gay. He was living here in Asheville and he was also working for the project. We had the opportunity to work together several times on different programs. And as a result of that we became really good friends. You know, and I took him into my confidence about wanting to have a child. And he just in that initial conversation, he was like, “oh my god, that's great. That's wonderful. Good for you. You know, that is— why shouldn't lesbian and gay people have families?” And so that was our initial conversation. A week or so later, we got back together. And in that time, I started wondering, oh is he the facilitator? And so the next time we got together, I said to him, “you know, I've really been thinking about our conversation and how supportive you seemed of my wanting to get pregnant and have a child.” And I was like, “would you be willing to be my sperm donor?” And I could tell he had been thinking about it because I mean, he didn't hesitate and the first thing that came out of his mouth was, “I would be honored. That would be great. I would love to help you do that.” So we proceeded to move from that point.

What I was doing was like really sort of off the grid, you know, for the time using a sperm donor. And using a known sperm donor. I knew women who had gotten pregnant going to a sperm bank. But at that time, sperm banks were not set up to allow a child to know who the sperm donor was when they were 18 or something. And it felt really important to me that my child know their biological roots. So I had made the choice to use a known sperm donor because I wanted the child to know who their biological roots came from. And so this was all making sense for me that this facilitator would be somebody that I would know. But I had books at that time. One of them was called *Getting Pregnant Our Way*. And it was like a little almost like a stapled together paper book that some radical lesbians had written somewhere about getting pregnant and how to handle sperm and and so I had that. But I also had some information from the National Center for Lesbian Rights NCLR. They had a pamphlet on getting pregnant and using donors and they actually had a contract, a donor contract. I got a copy of that.

I did change some of it because I was very clear that I was having this child. I would be the one who would be emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, financially, physically responsible and was not looking for the sperm donor to provide me financial support in any way. But we were friends. And so in the portion of the contract where it was saying “no visitation,” that the sperm donor wouldn't have any visitation, I changed that to the donor would have visitation because we were friends. The donor would be coming to see me and the child consequently and so we both signed that. We both dated it but very foolishly, I did not have it notarized. It was not witnessed by anyone other than us. But it did exist and it eventually became a very important document as time went by.

So once he had signed the agreement between us— and that would be that he was released from any responsibility as a parent, that the child was my child and that he would see the child— we proceeded to do inseminations. It took nine inseminations. And you know, he was really cooperative. He would go somewhere else, make his deposit, bring it to my home, leave it with me, and then I went inseminated myself. It's really not a mystery how people get pregnant, you know, how a woman gets pregnant. So it's like, okay, so I slurped it into a big syringe and I inserted it. And the only time in my life I've ever used the diaphragm was when I was getting pregnant [laughs]— I'd use a diaphragm, put my feet up against the wall, and stay like that for like an hour or something. You know, but it took nine times and then I finally did get pregnant and my child was born. It's so interesting that we're doing this interview today. My child was born on December 2, 1990. So she had her 31st birthday yesterday.

It was a wonderful pregnancy. It was a very fun time. It was really fun in a way of like, kind of freaking people out, you know, especially in the workplace [laughs]. All of a sudden, Jane is pregnant and it was like, she's not married, we don't even think she's lesbian. You know, because I wasn't necessarily personally out at work. I mean people suspected that I was a lesbian but in, you know, the late eighties and stuff, people weren't really coming out a lot at work. But it was a big suspect at the time. And then I showed up pregnant and then everybody was really confused. But I just kind of laughed about all that. My lesbian friends had a one— we had a great time. You know, we had this wild lesbian shower, baby shower, and just had a lot of support and a lot of encouragement and a lot of excitement around one of us having a child.

And so, you know, the whole birthing story is a very long one because it took four days to get through labor. I was telling a friend yesterday, “giving birth was my first lesson in parenthood and that is: you control nothing” [laughs]. My birthing experience wasn't anything like I had imagined and hoped for and planned for. My— they had to break my water, I was on pitocin, I ended up in the hospital. I was [laughs]— you know, there was all this medical intervention. My original dream was a home birth with a midwife and music playing and my women around me and this ritual birthing and you know, none of that happened. But I have to say that the hospital here in Asheville in 1990 was really wonderful. I mean they were very open to this whole tribe of women that were in the waiting room for like two days before the baby finally got born in the hospital. By C-section. They allowed when I did go in for a C-section, they allowed not only my partner to go with me but my videographer came into the surgical suite as well. And the attendants in the surgery and the nurses at that time, everyone was so loving and so kind and so supportive. It almost chokes me up to this day to think about how well we were treated in 1990.

So then my baby was born and the sperm donor did come to visit. And as time passed, things started getting more difficult between us. I would get really nervous anytime he was coming to visit. He did not live in Asheville at the time; he lived in another part of the state. So he— it

wasn't a daily occurrence. But when he did come, I would get very nervous and very uncomfortable. And my partner and I started having problems because I think we did not do a good job of preparing ourselves to be parents. You know, I knew that I really wanted a child. That was my number one thing. And the woman that I was with at the time that I got pregnant, she and I had had an on again off again, on again off again relationship for four years before I started inseminating. I got to the point where it was like I just have to do this on my own; I can't wait for this relationship to smooth out. I just have to proceed. So I actually did several inseminations before we got back together. But when I actually got pregnant, we were together. And I said to her very clearly, "this is my number one priority. If you want to do this with me, I will welcome you into this process with me. But you need to understand being a mother is my number one thing." In other words, our relationship was going to be secondary in me to my becoming a mother. And that had definite problems. You know, it had definite issues. It brought up definite issues between us.

I was absolutely committed to being a breastfeeding mother. And that was really hard for my partner. You know, it's hard for a woman to not feel like she's also getting to bond with this baby, because this baby is so literally physically attached to this to the other mom, you know. And we just didn't know what in the hell we were doing. Although I had all of this clarity in my mind about what kind of mother I was going to be and I was going to allow for attachment, I was going to allow breastfeeding on demand, I was going to, you know, really be a child focused mother, that wasn't her values. That wasn't how she saw parenting, you know, she saw mothering very differently. So it triggered a lot of her own psychological stuff and it triggered a lot of my psychological stuff so we started getting very unstable. Then the sperm donor started getting more, wanting to have more time with the child. And consequently, we ended up in court.

In the court proceedings, we attempted the first court case, we attempted to terminate the sperm donor's parental rights to kind of move him back a little bit more. But technically, we did not meet the definition of parental abandonment. In order to terminate someone's rights, they have to be shown to have abandoned the child for a minimum of six months with no contact whatsoever. And we just could not prove that. We didn't have that. I mean, there had been enough either phone calls or actual visits that the court didn't see that we met the criteria. Well, then he decided to countersue me for custody and visitation. So we went back into court. And, you know, everything that we're seeing in the media right now, cases going to judges, judges play a huge role in how things play out in your life. And I was absolutely blessed. I don't know how it happened but somehow we were assigned to Judge Gary Cash in Buncombe County, North Carolina in 1990 and this man got it [laughs]. This man understood what we were trying to do—that we were trying to have a family of our own. After two and a half years of court, back and forth—and oh it was just horrible—his final verdict was that my partner and I were the child's psychological parents and the sperm donor was more like an uncle. He would have one day visitation with two weeks written notice to the mother from 9am till 6pm. Period. Because the

agreement between us had said that he would have visitation. So that contract that I had, even though it hadn't been notarized or witnessed, it still served because it did have our signatures on it. It served as a— to tell the judge what our state of mind was at the time that the agreement was made. And what he saw in that was that the sperm donor was going to be more like an uncle. And so he gave him that amount of visitation. No weekends, no overnights, no holidays, nothing like that, even though he had tried to in court make it look like, you know, he needed to have the same custody and rights to the child as like a divorced husband. And that we had planned this pregnancy together and we were a “we” and it was like we weren't a “we”. I was an “I” and you were “you” and I was doing this. So I was very, very fortunate then. I really feel like lesbians prevailed in that case. And my understanding, I have been told that that case is still taught or was at some point in North Carolina law schools as part of studying custody cases in the state.

And we were assisted. NCLR did give us, give my lawyer some legal advice. Lambda also was involved and helped my lawyer with, you know, building the case and such but I think they were more interested in the case being appealed. Because evidently, at the appellate level, you can make more case law at the appellate level. So, but we didn't go into appeal. He did appeal. But what ended up happening was his lawyer did not appeal correctly. Didn't follow the timelines or the paperwork that was supposed to be and when the appeal went to court, it was thrown out because it hadn't been done correctly. And at that point, the sperm donor just threw up his hands and said, "okay, we'll just live with whatever." So we lived like that for eight years. Him coming once a month from nine to five usually on a Saturday.

It was very hard on my child. She didn't like it. It was disruptive to her life. She had two parents and she wasn't really, understand— like who is this person and why am I having to spend time with him? But you know, all that said, he was a good person. I liked him. You know, he was interesting. He was funny. He eventually became a school principal. I mean, he had a really good sensibility about him so I didn't feel like she was being damaged in any way by him. In going to visit with him, did I know that it was hard on her? Yes. But I had a court order saying that that's what had to happen. So it did. When she was eight years old, she said she wanted to spend more time with him. And I was like, okay that's what I've been waiting for. You know, I wasn't trying to stop a relationship or prevent a relationship from happening. I just wanted to make sure that she felt secure and okay. When she said she wanted to spend more time, then we made arrangements for that to happen. Well, of course she and her other mom— I mean, her other mom and I at that point were living apart. And my daughter was having to go see her every other weekend. Then he wanted a weekend a month. And I was like, you know, it was just I was just being barraged by both of them. You know, more time, more time, more time. And it was very difficult, I would say from 1996 to about 1999. I was in a very tumultuous state in my life. I was being buffeted about by these two people who wanted more and more time with my child. And it really didn't stop until I made this major shift inside myself and stepped into my power in the situation and said, "I am the mother. I have been recognized by a court in this country as the

biological mother. And I therefore will make the choices for my child until such a time that she is able to make choices for herself." And I just let them both know, you'll see her when you when I say you can and that's it. And it really started shifting everything. It became a lot less intense. It was once I just declared my power, the other players backed off a little bit.

So then my child was seeing the sperm donor weekends. Then we did open up a little bit to Christmas holidays and stuff like that until 2003. When she was 13, he was living in Colorado at the time so I had to put her on a plane to go and see him. And there was a parting of ways. She finally— he brought her to an airport to send her back home to me. And he said to her, "do you miss me and my family the same way you miss your moms when you're here?" Because she would be calling one or both of us every day while she was with him. And in between her actual physical visits with him, there was no contact between them. And she said, "Mom, I screwed up all my courage" and she said, "I just had to be really honest with him and say, no, they're my moms and North Carolina is my home." And he was very upset and hurt by that and sent her an email shortly after saying that he was done. He was tired of trying to, you know, put himself in her life. And that she knew where he was and if she wanted to have any more contact with him, then she would be the one that would have to initiate it. And by golly, she deleted that email and there has not been one word exchanged between them since 2003. You know, no notes, no birthday acknowledgments, no Christ— just wow. Cut off. And when I talk to my daughter about that these days, you know, her feeling is she's glad. She's like, there was nothing. There was— she felt no parental connection because she had two parents and she didn't need a third. And so for her, what she tells me today, was she said she wanted more time with him because he had been badgering her. Tell your mother, tell your mother you want more time, you want more time. And just to get him off her back, she did it. So it wasn't something that even at the time was all that important to her. So, you know, it was an interesting journey through all of that. Yeah.

Elise Tosatti 33:59

I'm wondering what are some of the other significant moments you think of in this journey of being a lesbian mother at a time when there weren't very many examples to look to in the experience of raising your daughter? You had a child during the AIDS crisis, you've been through other significant social and political changes. Are there any kind of moments that stand out to you or events that have kind of significantly impacted your experience as a mother?

Jane Kennedy 34:35

Ah wow, that's a great question. So I would say that there were times you know, just like so many women who end up as single moms, you know, for whatever number of reasons. There was— it was very lonely at times but I had a wonderful support network. I mean, my family was extremely supportive. My mother actually was more supportive of me as a lesbian mother than she had ever been of me in any other time of my life. It was really interesting. And my friends

circle. I mean, it's difficult to raise a child alone. I mean, I don't think you can really do it. I really do believe that it takes a village. And one has to have really solid supports in place in order to do it, and to do it well. And I, at that point in my life, I was very much into a career. I had a wonderful but very demanding career with the American Red Cross Blood Services. So I was, you know, juggling a child, a dog [laughs]— and a full time job. But I was also financially okay so I didn't have to struggle. I wasn't worried about falling into poverty or how I was going to feed my child. I had a job that I could support us both, without help from anybody and I didn't get help. Even her other mother never provided any financial support once I left that relationship. Yeah. So the significant events were the fact that I had a job that could support me and my child. That was really significant.

And I think also, I did not send my child to public school because I was concerned about how she would be treated as a child from a, you know, a non-traditional family. And so she did go to a school here called the Rainbow Mountain Children's School, which had a lot of alternative families. So she didn't stick out at all. I mean she was— there were other children from lesbian families but lesbians who had children in marriages prior to, you know, their coming out. Which the lesbian mothers I knew at the time were mostly women like that, who had been inside marriages and had children, and then came out later in life. So yeah, so but that meant, you know, also paying private school tuition. You know, keeping her kind of in this little bubble of safety.

Elise Tosatti 37:38

One question that I've been thinking of is just wondering if you have any other thoughts that you'd like to share on what made it possible for you to even imagine this possibility for yourself at a time when you weren't able to see examples of other lesbian women having children outside of relationships with men? Before you knew that you were going to have a good experience in the hospital and before you knew how any kind of legal battles could play out— if you could speak a little bit to like what made it possible to envision that and pursue that desire?

Jane Kennedy 38:20

Yeah. Well, I had known a woman in the early 1980s, who used sperm from a sperm donor. So I knew that the insemination process was physically possible. So that kind of opened a door. But then when it came time for me to go through with it, like I said, it was really important to me having done all my own psychological work that my child know what was brewing inside her psyche. And what the makeups of the people were that fed into her own development. And I believed everything I believed ardently about women and feminism and we could do anything we wanted to do and I could make it happen. You know, I just really believed that. And also, there was a real spiritual component to it too. I wasn't having a child to have, you know, some little mirror image of myself born into the world. I was having a child because I was really spiritually feeling a calling to be a mother. You know, that I was Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet*.

You know, they speak to us on parenting or children. And he says, "your children come to you and through you. They are not your children. They are the children of tomorrow." And so I really saw myself more as a vehicle through which this other being's soul was wanting to incarnate. So my whole parenting was really about that. It was being a support and a guide to this little creature, this little being who had her own agenda coming into this world. And by golly, she has shown me [laughs]— in her life she did come in with her own agenda. And I think it's our responsibility as parents, as mothers, to support our children to become who they came into the world to be, not who I think she should be and things like that. So, you know, I would say the example that I saw my feminist politics, my spiritual understanding, you know, those are the things and then the support network that I had. Those are the things that gave me the courage, the strength to go through with it.

Elise Tosatti 41:00

Have you noticed differences in the way people respond to you as a lesbian mother over the three decades of your daughter's life?

Jane Kennedy 41:12

Yeah. You know, I think that's something that has evolved also. I think initially, it was more like a "huh?" Like, "huh, how'd you do that?" And now as time goes by, it's like people just think it's really cool [laughs]— it's like it's really no big deal anymore. Yeah it's a lot more acceptance and a lot more "yeah, sure, why not?" So we're definitely past that stage of the evolution of lesbians creating family that's odd and weird. Now it's definitely much more socially acceptable and understood.

Elise Tosatti 41:55

I'm wondering, what would you say has been most difficult first about the experience of becoming a mother as a lesbian?

Jane Kennedy 42:09

Hmm. Well, you know, that first court battle that we went through. That was really, really tough. We woke up one Sunday morning to headlines in our local newspaper saying "lesbian and gay man battle over child." And it was some reporter in Asheville who had gotten our story and it was like a Sunday exposé. And everybody in Asheville, from therapists and Baptist ministers, weighed in on what I was doing and what my life was. And, you know, I was told that in the newspaper— now our names weren't there because a custody case is a juvenile and those are all protected. So identities could not be assigned to it. But in the newspaper, you know, these people were making comments about what an atrocious thing this was. How this child was going to be. You know, it's an abomination that this child should be born to this lesbian and a lot of them, it was like, well don't even let the gay man have the child. They didn't want either of us to have the child. So there was a— you know, the broader environment was not hospitable. But my piece of

the world was. So you know, I had peace here and as long as— and then I guess that also played into my not sending her to public schools because I didn't want the greater world to be infiltrating our little safe bubble. Yeah.

Elise Tosatti 44:11

On the flip side of that, what would you say has been most special to you about the experience of becoming a mother and living as an out lesbian?

Jane Kennedy 44:27

I have always been comfortable with my lesbianism. It's nothing that I have ever felt weird or uncomfortable about. I think a lot of times how we present to the world about who we are and how we are, meets us. So the fact that this is who I am and this is okay, then that's how other people approached me. It was like, oh this is okay. I think that the mothering journey, whether we're lesbians or heterosexuals, it's a big journey. It's a big journey. I think that my delight with being a mother is because I was really able to hold on to that spiritual understanding. So, you know, the timeline of her life was the sperm donor disappears when she's 13 years old. And from the time she was 13 to the time she was 18 was a wild ride. I mean she was rebellious and she was uncooperative. She pushed against every boundary I tried to set with her. And, you know, to this day she thinks about— we'll talk about now her teenage years and she's like, "oh Mom, I'm so sorry. I was such an ass." Because when you have a parent who's like really supportive, it's really hard to push against that. But you have to. I mean that's part of our process. Teenagers have to push. They have to break away to begin their own individuation process. As much as I understood that, it was hard. She really gave me a good run for my money from the time she was 13 till she was 18.

Then she moved away from home. She wanted to go to New York City. She is also a lesbian. She was in love with a woman when she was 18 who moved to New York City and my daughter followed her. Now I wasn't— I suspected that there was something going on but I wasn't really sure. My daughter didn't come out to me until she was like 21 or something. So I mean, we suspected and we wondered. She was always a very unique person. I would say in today's thinking, a lot of people would have thought she was a trans child because she always kept her hair really short. She always wore boys' clothes. And on the spectrum, she's a little bit more— she's a lot more on the butch side than her mother is. And she's really tall. Her sperm donor was like 6'3 and she's six foot tall. She's just this big, gorgeous, dykey woman, you know, and she's full of tattoos. And she's very much her own person. I was gonna make a point. Where was I going with all of that [laughs]— about just allowing her to become who she uniquely is. Yeah, yeah.

Elise Tosatti 47:52

How extraordinary.

Jane Kennedy 47:55

Yeah. Well I guess when you have a gay father and a lesbian mother, you know, chances are pretty good. And two lesbian mothers [laughs]— and a gay sperm donor, you know, what are you gonna do? Yeah, she talks about being raised by a tribe of women. Because she had a lot of auntie's around her growing up. Yeah. So she is unusual in her day and age being a 31 year old, being a millennial, she does not identify as queer. She does not identify as— she identifies as a lesbian which is really different than a lot of her friends.

Elise Tosatti 48:40

You mentioned at the very start of our conversation a little bit about how you came across the Lesbian Herstory Archives which I think was visiting your daughter in Brooklyn and a little bit about what it means to you to have a place or a repository for these stories. Is there anything else that you'd like to say about that connection and the impact of this project or the Archive for you?

Jane Kennedy 49:01

I'm just delighted that not only is the Archive now receiving, you know, the documents and journals and letters or whatever women are sending, but they're actually now seeking the stories through the project that they're doing with this. I think that probably opens it up to a lot more women and a lot more maybe cohesive documentation. I think it's one thing to get a story like this that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, you know, via the video documentation and all than just getting a bunch of papers [laughs]— from somebody. So I think this, the idea of this kind of oral herstory will be really beneficial for maybe people doing, you know, studies and research now but hopefully for women in the future too.

Elise Tosatti 50:03

Is there anything that we haven't talked about yet that you would like to share before we close?

Jane Kennedy 50:13

Well, I think I've really covered everything that I had put down here in my timeline. I think that if I was going to sum it up, my hope is that lesbian women know that having a child and family is absolutely possible. That it is a wonderful, wonderful experience to have. That we don't have to deny ourselves motherhood because we're lesbians, which I think a lot of women did early on. Or a lot of women got married because they wanted to have children, even though they knew they were lesbians. You know, I did have a partner at one time in my life who, you know, had two children but knew way before I knew in my life that she was lesbian. But went into a marriage because she didn't see any other way to have a child. So one, it's possible; two, it's a great joy; and three, I think if one is going to use a known sperm donor, you better have a really ironclad notarized witnessed stamp of approval from somebody, some entity so that you don't have to go through any of the legal things that we went through. I think using a known donor—

you know what my ex partner used to say, "you pay now or you pay later." You either pay the exorbitant amount of money they charge you for a little bit of sperm from a sperm bank— I think its up to like anywhere from five hundred to a thousand dollars for a sample of sperm. Well I didn't pay for the sperm but I did have some costs involved later in the court battle that we went through. I don't think it ended up costing us \$10,000 but it was pretty close to it. And so ironclad agreement if you're going to use a sperm donor and then you know, sperm banks are just I think, you know, wonderful entities for lesbians to be connected to. But then having, you know, really going through a discerning process in yourself, you know, do you want your child to have the option of knowing their biological roots when they are 18 or older? Or do you want to be completely anonymous and that is a choice that you have to make and I think a lot of different factors go into, to making that. You know, where you see and how you understand our makeups, our psyches, and our spiritual selves.

Elise Tosatti 53:02

Thank you. I want to just say my heartfelt thanks for sharing your story. It's remarkable. I'm grateful for it and I'm going to stop the recording now.

Jane Kennedy 53:13

Okay. Well, thank you Elise. You were a wonderful interviewer. I appreciate your time very much.