



**Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory  
of  
Joanne Gold**

An Interview  
Conducted by  
Lauren Rollit  
01/13/2021

Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

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*Supported by a two-year Mellon-funded Community Archives grant, LHA is facilitating The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project which seeks to continue the Lesbian Herstory Archives' commitment to collecting and sharing Lesbian stories.*

Lauren Rollit 00:03

Okay, so hello and thank you for joining me. Today is January 13, 2022 and we are recording an oral history with me, Lauren Rollit, talking to Joanne Gold about her life history. So this is a Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project interview, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archive and we are recording virtually from both Ottawa, Ontario and Northampton, Massachusetts. So, Joanne, I'd like to thank you for making time to talk with me. First of all, can you tell me a little bit about where and when you were born?

Joanne Gold 00:46

Sure. Thank you, Lauren. I'm happy to be doing this. I was born in Stamford, Connecticut, February of 1957. So I'm on the eve of my 65th birthday next month and [laughs]— where are we going from here? About my childhood?

Lauren Rollit 01:15

Sure. Could you tell me a little bit about your experience growing up?

Joanne Gold 01:18

I grew up in a suburban Jewish family and I had a pretty good life in my childhood. When I graduated high school, I ended up going to college in Buffalo, New York, as part of the SUNY system, the University of New York system. I majored in design with a concentration in pottery and it was a really exciting time to be in school. Perhaps I should backtrack a little that I— a number of events kind of set me up when I got to Buffalo to be more open to the women's movement and to resources that were available on campus. And I was really in very much an exploratory place in my life and early on in that first year, I managed to find the Women's Resource Center on campus. And there was a very serious older student who was part of the Women's Resource Center, who I fell in love with. It was pretty exciting. I actually wooed her by inviting her to my dorm room, where I ostensibly gave her a pottery lesson. I had a potter's wheel in my dorm room and while I was teaching her how to center the clay, I read her excerpts from my journal about all my feelings for her. It was pretty wild. Anyway, unbelievably or not, we're still together. That was 1975. So we kind of have lost track of the years but it's a lot of years. 46 or something. So it was, like I said, it was exciting to be in school at that time. The Women's Studies Department was brand new. I took every course that was offered. Judy Chicago was big. I took “women in art” and created feminist art. Everybody was— that's all we were talking about and reading books and listening to music and it was a very exciting time for sure.

Lauren Rollit 04:19

Can you tell me a little bit about how you got involved in the women's movement at that time?

Joanne Gold 4:19

Well through this women's center that was on campus. They had a lot of activities in which I partook in. There was a— I joined a consciousness raising group, a CR group, which was the big thing at that time. So that was one thing. At that point, the whole of books that had been written about lesbians fit in like a couple of milk crates. So the women's bookstore was a traveling bookstore, and they would come to the Women's Resource Center with these milk crates full of books, and we would all devour them and read these books and discuss them. So there was a lot of discussion and it felt very like we were breaking ground, like we were doing something that was outside of the norm. But definitely had some excitement to it.

I wasn't out to my parents yet and I still remember when they came to visit, at this point, we were living together in a communal household. There were seven of us and we were sharing a bedroom but I didn't want my parents to know that we were. And so we like set up these twin beds and did a whole setup to try and fool them into thinking that we were just friends. And that didn't— my mother actually guessed what was going on. And so that— I did come out with them pretty early on with not great success [laughs]— it was not— it didn't go well. So that household was cool because it was— we were all involved in the women's movement. We were all out as lesbians and we were— six of us were art students and we actually did an art show together called "Our House." That was pretty exciting. My partner Jodie was the only one who was working. She had just graduated and so that was our, my time in Buffalo.

I ended up deciding to drop out of school because I was feeling very constrained by my art major and the expectations around it. I just felt like I wanted to just go out in the world and do clay work and not have to be beholden to coursework in a college situation. So my parents were very upset and they basically said, "if you drop out, then we're not going to give you any support at all." And I said, "okay" and so that's what happened. So Jodie and I actually packed all our belongings in a Volkswagen Squareback, including our dog, and pretty much everything we owned fit in that car, which included milk crates. Everybody had milk crates then. That was the furniture. Milk crates of records, and a lamp, you know, and the dog and we moved out to New Mexico. That was in 1977. So we moved to Santa Fe and there was a burgeoning lesbian community in New Mexico at that time that we got involved with. We joined a Jewish lesbian group, which was really fun. We had meetings and because I could read and write Hebrew, I was part of rewriting all the prayers to change them to the feminine and we did all this kind of stuff and we had Passover Seders. But it was a pretty exciting time out there. You know, all the women we knew were kind of living sort of on the edge. Were not really in touch with their families very much.

In fact, there were some really awful things that happened that I think should be part of a herstory in that one of our housemates at— this was probably around 1980— got into an accident on her bicycle and was severely injured and was in the hospital in a coma and her partner was not allowed in to see her. We all camped out in the intensive care waiting room for days with her. And her— this woman, the woman who was in the coma, had been estranged from

her dad, who was her only living parent for like 20 years. She hadn't talked to him even and he ended up being the one that made all of her medical decisions and they wouldn't even tell her partner what was going on. It was pretty awful and it made a big impression on me, I think. So, yes.

Lauren Rollit 10:45

So you mentioned that you yourself, your family was not very supportive when you were coming out and also your decision to, you know, drop out of school, what was it like to not have that support from your family at that time?

Joanne Gold 11:05

It was, it was fine. I didn't mind. You know, I felt like I didn't need much to live on. Everything was so much cheaper back then— rent, food. And so, you know, Jodie and I both found work. I joined a collective of potters and they were all older than me. It was an incredible opportunity because I had nothing. They just said, you can use whatever we have here. You know, I was like 20 years old and I was able to use a raku kiln and all these glaze chemicals, and acquired, you know, tools and whatnot.

But one story that I like really is my dad who was pretty old school. He was raised Orthodox Jewish and it was just beyond his comprehension that I had made this choice in my life. So every week, these were the days of, you know, there were no cell phones or anything. So we would talk long distance on the phone at a particular time every week. And every single week, he would hassle me and say, "So when are you going to cut this shit out and have a normal life? Did you— you know, you're going to do that?" And I'd say, "No!" And we would go through that every single phone call. So at one point, I received in the mail, a package wrapped in brown paper. And it turned out to be one of these books that you can send away for that they advertised in the back of the New York Times Magazine. The title was *How To Cure Homosexuality*. And I looked at this book and I just like—we had a fire going because that's how we heated our house and I threw the book into the fire and burned it up. That was the first thing and then I called my dad and I said— and it was anonymously sent but I knew who it was from— and I called my dad and I said, "I know you sent this book and that's not okay." I said, "if you want to continue to have a daughter, if you want to continue to have a relationship with me, you're gonna have to learn how to deal with this and so I'm cutting off all contact until you can figure it out." And so about two, three weeks later, he called and he said, "I don't want to lose you as a daughter and I'm gonna really try." And that was an incredible moment for me. It also— he became a model for me of how difficult it is and yet how important it is to be flexible as a parent. Because your kids don't— they're not going to be the way you have some expectation they're going to be. So anyway, he went on to be able to joke about it like he would joke around it. "Jodie was his cutest son in law", you know, and we came to a really lovely place. But those first few years were really, really hard.

Lauren Rollit 14:57

What was it like to have this community of other people who were having similar experiences who were also queer part of the women's movement, to have that community at that time?

Joanne Gold 15:12

It was very supportive. There were— it's like we had the same language. We shared the same music and it all felt like it was kind of secret in a way and outside of the norm. So it had almost like a club feeling to it, you know, like we all belonged to be part of something. And in those days, there were a lot of people, you know, experimenting being in multiple relationships. It was very fluid. So there was a lot of that going on. In New Mexico, there also was women's land, outside of Santa Fe that we were involved with called ARF, which could have been for Association of Rowdy Females or it could have been ARF as in like there were a lot of dogs, like really a lot of dogs. So we actually spent a lot of time out at ARF. Women were building structures out there and it had a real separatists feel to it. There were no men on the land. Women did everything, all the construction of the buildings and we planted gardens down there. We held saunas, you know, all this kind of— sweat lodges, and all this kind of stuff. And actually, my partner lived out there in a teepee for a summer when we were taking a break from each other. But it definitely— it was like you felt like you belonged to something. And actually, just a few years ago, there was a 40th anniversary of ARF and we went to it. A lot of people came and it was quite something to see all these people forty years later. That's pretty wild. So I feel very blessed that I was part of all of that. I really do. Feel like it was great for me. It was a great coming of age time, both with the New Mexico part, the art part, and women's community part.

Lauren Rollit 16:30

So you live in Massachusetts now, how did you end up back there from New Mexico?

Joanne Gold 18:34

So while we were living in New Mexico, I started to develop some health problems and I was working full time as a potter. I also cleaned houses and was a waitress. So everything was very physical that I was doing. It got to the point where I needed to make a change and I couldn't continue working with clay anymore, which was a real heartache for me because it was my passion of my life. So I decided I needed to go back to school. I could have done it out there but it felt really hard to think about living there and not being part of the vibrant arts community in the same way that I had been. And also, I was very close with my grandfather, who lived in Connecticut still and I didn't want to feel like I had missed out on being with him in the last years of his life. And so we decided to move back East to be closer to family and also to go back to school. So that's how we got here. We got lured to Northampton by friends who already lived here, who we knew from New Mexico. This is a well traveled route from Santa Fe to Northampton, like a lot of people did that. So we moved here, not to Northampton, but to the

valley as it's known, the Happy Valley, which is the Connecticut River Valley, Northampton is part of. We moved here in 1984 with two dogs. And that's how we arrived here. I went to school for dental hygiene. I decided I needed to learn how to do something that would actually earn some money [laughs]— and be like a career because it's pretty tenuous being an artist. And also, it was in the back of my mind that I wanted to have a kid and I wanted to have a stable income. Jodie also went back to school and got her master's degree and so we both kind of went to school and did that. And then, and we both were working and we ended up buying our first house in 1988 and we also had, at that time, had what we called our 12th year, recommitment ceremony. So that was in '88 and we actually were part of a book that was called *Ceremonies of the Heart*. The subtitle is *Celebrating Lesbian Unions* and we were one of the couples in the group that— we described our ceremony and it was really an amazing thing to have this ceremony. Because at that time, we were very hidden in our lives. I was not out at work, Jodie was not at work and I distinctly remember, one of my coworkers was gonna get married and she was preparing for a wedding. And everybody at work was, you know, supporting her and asking her questions. And it was— she got a lot of support around that. And I was planning this similar event that I couldn't talk to anybody about. So and we also both made the decision to not invite our birth families because— and that was a very painful choice— because we didn't think that they would be able to fully rejoice with us and we wanted that day to be total rejoicing. We didn't want to feel like we had to take care of anybody and so we did that and it was beautiful.

Lauren Rollit 23:08

Could you describe a little bit about what that ceremony looked like?

Joanne Gold 23:12

Yep. Well, we both were raised Jewish, although Jodie's family really didn't practice at all. So it was important to me to include some aspects of a Jewish wedding. So we did blessings over wine and bread and at the end of it, we both broke a glass, which is part of a traditional Jewish wedding. We also felt we needed to bring in our time in New Mexico because it had been such a special time for us. So we did some blessings that were more from Native American tradition that was very much kind of for us associated with living out in New Mexico and it was all done in a very respectful way. We weren't trying to, you know, be Native American but there were certain rituals like we burned sage to clear the air. So that was part of the ceremony too. We both decided that vows did not work right for us. So we called— we each wrote something which we read publicly and we called them our "promises of commitment." There was something about publicly putting your union, your commitment out to another person that was so powerful and I didn't think it would mean as much as it ended up meaning. Because we had no support from the regular world that to have this support amongst our community— which at that time included men and women— of social— we were both involved with social justice organizations, kind of more radical political stuff so those folks were there. And oh, also part of the ceremony was music is really important to both Jodie and I. I play guitar and sing and Jodie plays the flute. I

failed to mention that that was part of our early years when we lived in Buffalo. So if I could backtrack for just a second, there were coffee houses going on at that time and Jodie was the MC of the coffee houses on campus. We formed a group with my roommate and the three of us became the *Gay Trio*. So it was myself and my roommate and we both sang and played guitar and we harmonized and Jodie played flute. So we have this history of making music together. So fast track to the ceremony, we played a song that was actually a poem that Jodie wrote to me that I set to music. So I played the song and guitar and sang it, and Jodie played flute. There was not a dry eye in the house. It was really very, it was very sweet. Then Jodie and one of our closest friends played a flute duet. So there was that part too. Then part of the ceremony was that we asked people to stand up and offer us their blessings. And people said very beautiful things and it was very sweet. It was a potluck, of course [laughs]— everybody was a potluck then— [laughs]. So we actually held it at a Quaker Retreat Center, which at that time, we were the first lesbian ceremony that they ever had there. And they were really wonderful to us and it was important to us, in our choosing of where we were going to hold it, that we agreed with the values of the place. And so that felt like a good decision too.

Lauren Rollit 27:57

You mentioned how special it was for you to have, you know, your community be there and witness that ceremony. Can you tell me a little bit about what the community was like at that time?

Joanne Gold 28:14

Well, I mean we were involved with several overlapping communities that had to do with our politics and the women's groups. There actually was, at the time, a very strong separatist community here, which I really didn't like. I didn't feel at home in it at all. And that actually was a challenge. So at that time, there were women's festivals, women's music festivals that happened and there were rules that if you had boy children, you couldn't bring them because nobody, no male people were allowed to be at the festival except the guys who came in to clean the porta potties. I actually made some choices, at that time, to not not be involved with that part of the lesbian community. I felt more at home in sort of social justice groups that we became— we were part of a group called New Jewish Agenda, which was kind of a very left leaning sort of radical Jewish group. We were instrumental in bringing a speaking tour from South Africa, a rabbi and a priest from South Africa came and toured. So that was, for me, felt so much more at home and I felt accepted, we felt accepted as a lesbian couple.

Then as time went on and we started thinking about wanting to have a child, we started connecting with other people that were thinking about that. So then that became another community of people, lesbians, who wanted to start families. We were very much estranged from the separatist community because they were really against it. I mean, what if you had a boy? Oh my god. So yeah. And so when we actively, we actually joined a group of women, a group of lesbians who were actively thinking about getting pregnant. We shared tips on artificial

insemination, which I like the term alternative insemination a whole lot better. But that was the term that was used back then. So we learned from each other how to do it and who you had to talk to. And of course, there was no insurance coverage. Everything was out of pocket. But it was— that group was incredibly supportive. I mean, I actually had trouble with some dear friends of mine who thought I was— cause I really wanted to have a kid, kind of more than my partner did. There were friends of ours who felt I was pressuring Jodie into doing this and that it was wrong. And we've kind of had some really strange friendships and actually friendships that ended over it. So out of that group that met about wanting to have kids, I think about 40 children were born out of that group. It was a little baby boom that happened here in Northampton.

Lauren Rollit 32:21

Can you describe your experience as being a lesbian couple trying to have children?

Joanne Gold 32:28

Okay well, it was challenging. So we made the decision. We had to think about whether we wanted to have an anonymous donor or a known donor and there was only one [note: sperm bank called Cryobank] that was in California that allowed the identity of the donor to be known to your child when they turned 18. We decided to not go that route because we were afraid— a lot of people were afraid that their children could be taken away from them by family members and so we chose an anonymous donor. For a year and a half, I drove to a sperm bank at the University of Connecticut in Farmington, which was a couple of hours drive every month when I was ovulating. So it was— we learned all these tricks and how to do the basal temperature and all of this stuff and registered with these banks. It was all pretty wild. We felt like we were doing something that was like pretty wild.

It took me a long time to get pregnant. I actually was interviewed after our child was born. I was interviewed on NPR and I still have a cassette tape of the recording, which was aired across the whole United States. It wasn't just the local affiliates and it was an interview about what my experience was like as a lesbian couple trying to get pregnant and, you know, and I talked about very— sort of the, you know, at first we tried to make it really romantic. We'd light candles, do this whole thing and after a while, we did it so many times, we'd have to— it would just be like okay, let's just defrost it and do it. It just became like a— it wasn't romantic anymore. But eventually, I did get pregnant and that was pretty wild. And again, my family had to adjust to that. You know, my dad who had been very accepting up to that point, this was sort of like a little bit too far for him. And he— “do you really want to bring a bastard into this world?” I mean, I really got that comment. And it's like, okay! I don't think we can talk about this for a while. When our child Sadie was born, Jodie's parents sent me flowers that were— it was addressed to me only. They refused to acknowledge that she was the other parent.

We went through incredible legal stuff before I went into the hospital. I wrote up a whole birth plan that I got notarized that said, "if anything happened to me during the birth, that Jodie was to be the person who would make decisions about the welfare of the baby." We actually did this notarized thing and gave it to the people at the hospital. We also set in place as soon as Sadie was born, we went through a legal thing to make Jodie be a co-parent. That was all that was available at the time. I mean, with so much fear around families taking children away and we knew people whose children had been taken away so it was real and scary. So eventually when Sadie was four years old, we went through a two parent adoption, which was what was available to us at the time. This was 1998 when Sadie was four. It was expensive and it really ticked me off that we had to spend all this money to say that this child was legally ours. And the way it worked was that I legally had to give her [note: them] up for adoption and then we both legally adopted her [note: them]. So they asked ridiculous questions like, "how long have you known this child?" And I had to say "since conception." Yeah. And all the people in our lives wrote affidavits about what good parents we were, then we had to give them to the judge. My parents actually did write an affidavit— daycare, teachers, pediatrician. Friends of the family all wrote affidavits attesting to that we were good parents. And we did, we went through an adoption at age four.

Lauren Rollit 38:14

How did it feel having to go through that process?

Joanne Gold 38:19

It made me very angry. It really ticked me off that heterosexual couples, whether they were married or not, would be recognized as being the parents of a child. So on Sadie's original birth certificate it said— you know, I was listed as the mother. Then it just said— there were only rooms for mother and father and it said "father unknown" and Jodie wasn't on it at all. So at age four when we did the adoption, in that amount of time in our town here in Northampton, they had changed the form. Instead of saying mother and father, it says "parent and parent." So Sadie— I actually saved the old one— I still have it in a lockbox but Sadie's real birth certificate now lists us both as co parents. It was really painful to have to go through that. And what was so interesting is that of course to Sadie it meant nothing. We were always Sadie's parents. So we went before this judge and the judge said, "what do you think about all of this Sadie?" and four year old Sadie said, "I really like these purple curtains in here." I mean, it meant nothing because we were a family before and we were a family after but we had to jump through this hoop to make it all legal.

Lauren Rollit 39:58

As your child grew up, what was the experience like being parents and raising them in the community that you were in?

Joanne Gold 40:07

Thank you, I appreciate you using the pronoun them because that's a pronoun that Sadie chooses to use now. Luckily for us, there were other women who had gone before us and paved the way. So by the time Sadie got to elementary school, there had already been other families that looked like ours. So when it came time for the kids to do a drawing of their family and post it up on the wall for parent teacher night, it wasn't a big deal that Sadie drew a picture of their family that included two moms. I was always very grateful that, that we were not the first. Yet it was, you know, it was challenging. I always think it was more challenging for Jodie being the other parent, not the biological parent. Women choose different ways for their children to address them and so I was always mom and Jodie always wanted to just be Jodie. So Sadie had a mom and a Jodie. That's how it worked for us. But you know, people who didn't know us personally, it was always like a little awkwardness 'til people would figure out that we were a family.

We only have the one child so we were very close with a number of other people who also had children around the same age and we really wanted Sadie to kind of have siblings, sibling relationships with other kids. Excuse me. So they got to have that type of thing. And, you know, other kids were here all the time and Sadie was always other over other people's houses and had a really rich life. But there's just sort of some funny things like— Sadie had— a lot of Sadie's friends had two moms and so for those friends that had a dad, it was kind of like a novel thing. Like oh, the dad and having to like, talk about that. I remember at one point when Sadie was pretty young— I have blue eyes and Jodie has brown eyes and Sadie has brown eyes— and Sadie noticed that and said, “oh, I guess I got my brown eyes from Jodie” and we kind of looked at each other like ahhh, we have to have this conversation now [laughs]— and we did. And we said, "That is cool, you know, that you and Jodie both have brown eyes but actually [you] got your brown eyes from the donor because he had brown eyes." And that was that, you know, because kids actually don't need a whole lot of information at once. So we kind of just took it as it came. It was all very natural for us and because it was Northampton, it wasn't hard. You know, daycare, every situation that we were involved in, we felt very accepted as a family. Any of the pediatricians' offices, everybody was kind of cool with it and we both were addressed as the parents and so I can't imagine having done this in a place where there weren't a whole lot of people doing it because I think that would have been much more challenging. It was a great place to raise your child as a two mom family.

Lauren Rollit 44:39

You mentioned earlier that your child now uses they them pronouns and we'd spoken about your child identifying as transgender. Can you tell me a little bit about what your relationship to that has been?

Joanne Gold 44:49

So Sadie's always been an incredibly unique human being. Really marches to their own drummer. It's one of the things I love about Sadie. So early on, Sadie was very androgynous. You know, people would have a hard time figuring out their gender, which we never cared about, you know. People— if they made a mistake, they would say, "oh my god, I'm so sorry" and we'd say, "so what?" And so we were pretty loose about gender. And so, and part of let's say growing up, they, at some point, really wanted to identify as a boy. And we— it was a new thing and we didn't really get it totally but we kind of went along with it. And you know, I think Sadie would probably have a whole different story about this time of life, but I can only tell my story, not theirs. One of the things that stands out for me is when Sadie was 10 years old, fourth grade, we went on a trip on a vacation to Mexico. And when we got back, we had taken a lot of photos and Sadie had decided on the way to this vacation that they were— we going to be one week at this all inclusive place and Sadie said, "I want to be a boy this whole time that we're there" and we said, "okay." And so Sadie hung out with this group of international kids and I don't think they ever knew that Sadie was born [a] girl. I don't really know how they handled [it] honestly, I don't know. So Sadie wore swim trunks and no top and all the other kids thought they were a boy. So all photos had Sadie with no top on. And when we got back, they had like some sort of sharing in school and Sadie said, "I want to bring all the pictures from my trip." And we said, "okay but you might want to think about that other kids might notice that you don't have a top on and that might be hard." And Sadie said, "Well, I don't really care." And it's one of those moments that you look back on as a parent and you think, ah maybe I should have made a different decision then. And we said, "okay" and so Sadie brought these photos to school and shared them and the other kids reacted pretty strongly. And said, you know, "What's wrong with you? Why aren't you wearing a bathing suit top? You're a girl" and all this. And it was very painful for Sadie and we actually got a phone call from the teacher and we felt horribly guilty that we had allowed them to do that, go to school and make themselves vulnerable like that.

So that was kind of going on when Sadie was younger and I think Sadie struggled a lot through high school and with gender issues and I'm not sure that we were always the best support. I think you can always look back as a parent and think you could have done better. So recently, fast track to within the last year, Sadie informed us that they were identifying as trans and gender nonbinary and so I don't know a whole lot about that. So I've had to really learn about that. Sadie had top surgery in May of last year and it was— the whole thing was kind of challenging and I think the thing I want to talk about most is that it really hit me about how I came of age within the women's movement and with feminism. The whole idea that I felt for myself that being female meant I could do whatever I wanted. I could dress however I wanted. That was what coming me out as a lesbian and being a feminist, I felt freed me up to be whoever I wanted to be. And I felt that in some ways, Sadie's choice to identify as trans, at first it felt like a real kind of slap, like a rejection of all that I had gone through and that had so much meaning for me. I mean, when I gave birth to Sadie and they announced and because we didn't know ahead of time that it

was a girl biologically, I felt immense relief because I knew that experience for me. I felt like we could provide this really open, amazing environment for a girl child. So I talked about all this with Sadie around the time of Sadie's top surgery and afterwards. Sadie said something which was really pretty amazing when I said that I felt hurt and felt like this was a rejection of me, of us. And Sadie said, "no, what you and Jodie gave me allowed me to figure out who I am in the world. You left that door open enough so that I could find who I am." Then they said something like, "I feel like I'm standing on your shoulders." And so that was just an incredible image for me and has really helped me feel more at home with it. And now that time has passed and I can see, watch Sadie moving in the world as a trans person, I can just feel the lightness about them and how much more comfortable they are. So I know it's a good thing. And I remember my dad having to let go of what he wanted for me. I said that earlier and so I feel like that really has been a strong lesson for me and just loving Sadie where they're at and seeing them as an incredible person. You know, and I screw up with the pronouns. I'm a work in progress and I think most parents are [laughs]— it's hard to keep up with the kids. But I think Sadie knows that we love them more than anything in the world, really. So but I think it's, you know, it's a particularly interesting thing. I think a lot of heterosexual parents who have kids who identify as trans, it's different thing for them than for lesbian parents. So I don't really have all the answers for that yet but it's something I think about a lot.

Lauren Rollit 53:39

Has this experience at all, you know, changed or affected the way that you think about your experiences growing up or your experiences coming of age as a lesbian person?

Joanne Gold 53:55

You mean like my own choices? You know, I think for me, I felt I probably wouldn't have done anything differently in terms of how I came out and did that process. But my partner, it's really been interesting for her because, you know, she often says, "if this was all like available when I was a kid, maybe I would have been identified as trans." You know [phone ringing]— sorry about that. And so it's something we, you know, we've talked about and Jodie, in her professional life, has always been challenged by how to look professional without wearing dresses. And, you know, it used to be really hard to find nice clothes that she felt comfortable in. So I think it's been easier for Jodie, the transition of Sadie, has been easier for Jodie than it was for me. So I don't know if that answers that.

Lauren Rollit 55:27

Yeah. I guess also, is there anything you'd want other parents in the same situation to know that you've learned or that you would have found useful?

Joanne Gold 55:40

I think there were definitely moments, when I think back on them, that I know were very painful for Sadie that I could have done differently. Like insisting that Sadie dress a certain way for a family event. I feel bad about that now. And I guess I would, I would say that parents— you kind of have to just see your kid for who they are, and love them where they're at, and try and let go of how you think they should be acting or dressing. I remember standing in Walmart, in front of the boys underwear section— I didn't have any brothers, I never lived with a man, I didn't know anything about boys underwear. And I had to learn about it because that's what Sadie wanted me to buy and, you know, it stretched my world. So I think that's what it's about when you have a kid that pushes your buttons and pushes your world a little bit farther. You just have to like take a breath and go with it and love them. So I guess that's— a lot of people ask me after Sadie's surgery, "yeah, how are you dealing with it?" You know, like I just said, "I'm just loving them." Because that's what it all distills down to. All the other stuff is like, becomes less important than love.

Lauren Rollit 57:58

So this is a bit of a switching gears so I apologize for that. But these interviews are all you know, collected with the Lesbian Herstory Archives as part of a project for them. Can you tell me a little bit about your connection to the Archive and had you had any experience with them in the past?

Joanne Gold 58:22

I do not have personal experience. I heard about this project online somehow and it sounded really interesting. I think I was really interested in it because my kid is a historian amongst a lot of other skills. So they're always really interested in [the] history of places and people and movements and we've had lots of talks about that and so I really see the importance of archival work. When Sadie was in college at Smith and took a queer history class, the final project we actually did as a family. We talked about what it was like from each of our perspectives to have a child and as a lesbian couple. It was an amazing project that we worked on as a family for months and then we presented it as a final project to the whole class and so I guess I've always been a little fascinated about history of peoples and how important it is to hear people's stories. I think this is a great project. Smith College also has an archives, a lesbian archives, and actually my partner Jodie was interviewed for that. So we're kind of both part of different archives. I think it's a great project.

Lauren Rollit 1:00:28

Before we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to talk about or share that we haven't covered?

Joanne Gold 1:00:34

Yeah, you know, there was one thing and that is that the reason I had to stop working as a potter in New Mexico is I started having health issues. I turned out to be diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis later on and still have to deal with living with a chronic illness, with a disability and it was very challenging being part of the women's community and having a disability. I think there was this myth, mythology, that all dykes are super athletic, and muscular, and can lift heavy things, you know, there was all this— it really was like a mythology. In Northampton, we had a softball, a lesbian softball league and pretty much everybody was on a softball team except me because I couldn't play softball. And nobody was really talking about that at that time. There was really nobody for me to talk to. I felt really pretty lonely in that. I think that has changed a lot over time but it was difficult.

Lauren Rollit 1:02:07

How did it feel for you to have your health issues and your disability impact the things that you could be involved in?

Joanne Gold 1:02:15

Oh, it was very challenging because I, early on, in my early twenties, you know, I felt very strong and it was part of my identity in coming out was like I felt very physically strong. And you know, I used to lift 40 pound sacks of glaze chemicals, and stuff like that. So I prided myself in that physical ability. So when that came, it was really hard for me and it really messed with my identity. And, you know, even when Sadie was young, Sadie and Jodie used to tussle around, like get really physical, like roll on the floor and tussle. And from an early age, Sadie knew they couldn't do that with me and it was just an unspoken thing. We never really talked about it, it just was. So I feel like it's impacted my life in more ways than I even know. I mean, I had to stop being a dental hygienist because I was in so much pain and I had to stop working and that was really challenging. Then I remade myself and found another art form. So now I make painted canvas floor mats as much as I can do that. And so it's yeah, it's impacted my life a lot. And that's actually impacting Sadie's life also because Sadie's got joint issues now too that they probably got from me. So it's not something we talk about a lot because I think it's hard.

Lauren Rollit 1:04:26

What is your relationship with that part of your identity now? How do you feel about being a person who has a disability?

Joanne Gold 1:04:37

I think it's gotten pretty integrated into who I am. It's been 10 years now since I had to stop working as a dental hygienist. And I— that was really hard for me to give up. First, I had to give up being a potter and then I worked 25 years as a hygienist and I had to give that up too and they

were both because of my body. So I've learned how to remake myself several times. I have to, you know, find the inner strength to do that. Sometimes that's really hard. When I lose, I lose that sense, that anchor. I've had to have several surgeries already. Joint replacement surgeries. My hand, my knee, I have to do my other hand probably later on this year. It's interesting, I feel like my friends now, that's just part of my identity to them. I think, interestingly enough, people see me as being really strong, like inner strength strong. A friend of mine is going to have knee surgery and we've talked a lot about what that was like for me and I said, "you'll do fine," you know, I said, "you're like me, you'll do all the rehab," And she said, "I'm not like you. You're amazing. You like, push yourself so much." And I thought, oh, it was really an eye opener to think that somebody saw me that way. It's kind of hard to see yourself. So yeah, it's mostly— I feel pretty good about my life now as I'm approaching my 65th birthday. I'm incredibly blessed to have a partner. We basically have grown up together, spent our good portion of our lives together at this point. I have an amazing kid. We have a good relationship. And that's wonderful and a really, really great community here in Northampton. So life is good.

Lauren Rollit 1:07:36

Cool, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me and to take part in this project. I really appreciate it.

Joanne Gold 1:07:47

Thank you, Lauren. I appreciate your taking the time to be part of this too. I mean, it's nice to get to know you a little bit even if you are all the way in Canada.

Lauren Rollit 1:08:03

Alright. So I'm going to end the recording now but again, thank you so much.

Joanne Gold 1:08:08

Thank you. Bye bye.