

LESBIAN

HERSTORY

ARCHIVES

**Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory
of
Audrey Seidman**

An Interview
Conducted by
Susan Evan
1/03/2022

Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

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LEOHP Interview

Interviewee: Audrey Seidman

Interviewer: Susan Evans

Date: 1/03/2022

Susan Evans 00:03

So hello, thank you for joining us. Today is Monday, January 3, 2022 and we are recording an oral history with me, Susan Evans, and Audrey Seidman about her life history. This interview is part of the Lesbian Elders Oral History Project, which is a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. I'm recording from Brooklyn, New York, and Audrey is recording from Albany, New York. We're going to get started. So just start Audrey, would you like to share with us when and where you were born?

Audrey Seidman 00:35

Sure. I was born September 20, 1953, in the Bronx.

Susan Evans 00:43

Nice, in New York City. So what was it like growing up in the Bronx? Did you live in other parts of New York City too?

Audrey Seidman 00:51

I did. I spent my first six years going to Kindergarten in the Bronx. And then we moved to Whitestone, Queens, which is where I lived until I went away to college and then actually came back for six months after grad school before I moved into an apartment in Flushing.

Susan Evans 01:14

Queens, living in Queens, what was it like living with your family, growing up in Queens, then?

Audrey Seidman 01:19

Oh, well, we had a nice little corner brick house and the houses were all pretty close together. But my father loved to garden and so he had the hedges going around the side and my sisters and I would have to follow him when he cut them, picking them up. You know, school was good, Girl Scouts, I did the usual. I grew up in a Jewish family going to a Conservative synagogue. And back in those days, in the fifties and sixties, it wasn't important for women to be educated or Bat Mitzvahed the way it's expected now. It was really much more of a boys thing, although it did happen. So I never went to Hebrew school but I went to synagogue with my dad. We celebrated all the holidays. So, you know, I grew up with a fairly strong Jewish identity. And, you know, New York was an interesting place to be; there was some diversity, not as much as there is now.

Susan Evans 02:33

You mentioned you moved away for school before moving back to Queens eventually, so where did you go to college?

Audrey Seidman 02:40

So I actually went to undergraduate school here in Albany at the State University at Albany. Now called UAlbany. I spent four years here, very active in campus life, came out as a college student, basically my junior year, even though I could tell you a story about going to the Union Street Library in Flushing when I was 16 to look up homosexuality. I began to wonder about myself and the book I picked out of the shelf was a Psychology book and it said that if women continued to have crushes on older women past the age of 13, it meant that they were immature. So I closed the book and said, "I'm immature" and went on with my life for a few more years. But by the time I was a Junior in college I decided immaturity was not the bag at that moment. So, you know, started the coming out process then. And after that, I went to graduate school in Syracuse for a year.

Susan Evans 03:54

What were you studying?

Audrey Seidman 03:55

I did my Master's in Public Communication. From eighth grade on, I had hoped to go into Journalism. But in college, even though that was continuing to be my goal, I found that the Women's Studies classes I was taking were pushing me into more of an activist framework and I began to question whether I wanted to be a neutral observer, or a communicator who was an advocate. So when I went to Syracuse University for my Master's in Communication, I followed the public relations thread, and that's the career I started when I went home.

Susan Evans 04:45

I'm wondering when you were studying journalism, taking Women's Studies classes in school and also starting to come out, what kinds of communities did you find yourself like gravitating towards or being involved with, maybe even in college or before college, stuff like that?

Audrey Seidman 04:59

Yeah, so in college, when I came out, there was a Gay Alliance on campus. It was mostly guys. But there was also a gay community center in downtown Albany. And there was a lesbian rap group that would meet there, whether it was every Friday night or every other Friday night. And so that was my first real lesbian community. I began to attend that. I stayed in Albany this summer between Junior and Senior year and started going to the bars, and really started building community at that point. There was just the beginning of lesbian culture. I remember Maxine Feldman came to campus. She was my first women's concert, women's music concert. I

remember being really scared, going to that looking around left and right, who was going to see me going to this lesbian concert, but I found some others. And moved off campus my Senior year and really felt freer to connect with the women. So frankly, when I came back to Albany, I left in '75, and came back to take a job in '84, I already knew some women, but the same sense of community that had been there in the seventies didn't feel the same to me. My experience was that people started going back to their living rooms at that point. So it had to be rebuilt in a way.

Susan Evans 06:50

Do you mean people weren't, there wasn't as much of like a bar, or maybe like outside of the home kinds of social scenes, when you say went back to their living rooms? Were there any other kinds of projects you were involved in? Whether it was when you were living in New York City and Queens again, or living in Albany kind of organizing, helping organize those kinds of spaces and things like that?

Audrey Seidman 06:58

There were women's bars and back then, when I moved back in '84, there were some women's bars, at least one at a time. But people were starting to sort of settle down more, the gay community center was much more of a male place. But then there was a project to start a women's building. I got involved in that and by '86. There was in fact, a women's building in Albany, maybe even '85. But nevertheless, that's where I got involved and really was involved in not only lesbian, but just women's community. Oh yeah. So I became quite the activist. I had studied a little bit of Gerontology. I got a Certificate in Gerontology when I was in Syracuse University, and came back and found a job at the Jewish Association for Services for the Aged, and was doing public relations for them. Not long after I was there, I started to hear about a group that is now called SAGE. It then stood for Services and Advocacy for Gay and Lesbian Elders. I think that's what it is now. [Note: It then stood for Senior Action in a Gay Environment, and is currently Advocacy and Services for LGBTQ Elders]

Susan Evans 08:51

GLBT, I think.

Audrey Seidman 08:52

Yes, so it was a nascent group. It started in '78, Chris Almvig founded it, and I learned about it in '79. I started to go and offer my communication skills. I became the Editor of their newsletter, and eventually joined the Board. I was Secretary of the Board, I was Co-Chair of the Board, so I served on their Board from '79 to the end of '83, I believe. We hired the very first staff person. There were no staff when we started and we did the friendly visiting. We had socials, I met a very dear friend Beri Greenwald, who was a graphic artist who came out publicly later in life. She had been out, you know, in relationships all of her life but she was six months older than my mother, so a generation different. She and I became partners in the newsletter and then she

actually was also on the Board serving as President for a year and she and I developed a very close friendship 'til the end of her life.

But there were other groups that I was involved in, the group that sustained me when I first moved to Albany [correction: Flushing, Queens] was called All the Queen's Women. There was this little storefront in Flushing, and it was started by mostly heterosexual women to offer services like battered women's services, a helpline. But when they started a lesbian rap group, the lesbians started coming in greater numbers and it got to the point where the little storefront could not hold the lesbian rap group. They had to rent a larger space, which actually ended up putting some pressure on the group because of the larger rental. But that organization lasted for many years and created a community of friends that exists to this day, which is very, very significant to me. There's a lot of history of activism, collaborating with NOW. We did a very early feminist Seder at the Unitarian Church in Flushing. So All the Queen's Women definitely has a place in lesbian history in Queens.

Susan Evans 11:28

Awesome. Were you ever involved in Pride marches in New York City?

Audrey Seidman 11:32

Oh, yeah. So I was— also, I became active with the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which was a group that was fighting for the civil rights which we did not yet have. And so I, you know, went to demonstrations. I remember very clearly when we went to the City Council offices to demonstrate and I also started attending all the marches. There was one of those early years in the late seventies, possibly '80— I don't recall exactly— where I was running the media for the Pride March. So yeah, it was an adventurous time. It really, it was really quite, quite exciting.

At the same time, I was active in my professional life. I was working at JASA, I went to the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, a mental health agency. I was doing a lot of innovative things and I joined a group called the Community Agency Public Relations Association (CAPRA), which was a professional network of PR people who worked in the not-for-profit sector. I became President, Program Director and President of that group. So being involved, being connected, and volunteering is sort of just part of my makeup.

Susan Evans 13:12

Yeah. I'm wondering, since you are involved in so many kind of firsts or a lot of starts of different organizations, have you had time to really think about a lot of these organizations like SAGE that still exist, but in such bigger and new forms? Have you had any thoughts about watching those organizations change over time?

Audrey Seidman 13:34

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Actually, I'm remembering that the it was first called Senior Action in a Gay Environment. So they've changed the name to update it— but yeah, I mean, it was really a labor of love for this cadre of volunteers. Now it's a multi-million dollar nationally recognized, internationally recognized, policy involved organization, which is wonderful in a way. They're building senior housing in the Bronx. They're doing amazing things. In some ways it's become so big that the personal relationships feel diminished in some ways as well, at least I'm at a distance. You know, I've always contributed. I had them in my will. But it feels different. It's lost. It's lost an intimacy. It's lost a valuing of the small contributions that have been made, or some of the historic long term contributions. But I'm thrilled to see the work that it's doing and I certainly— you hope that it continues to do the good work it is.

Susan Evans 15:06

I first learned about SAGE from my roommates, who are also my friends, who had mentioned that they were hoping to get involved in some way. That was the first time I even heard about the organization. I looked at— I was like, oh my god, this is like a massive organization. But it's so cool that you were involved right at the start of it. I'm wondering, back when you were mentioning, when you were in college and going to see different musicians and stuff, that's something that I feel like with my friends, and even one of my brothers who's gay, like music has always been something we really connected with, or was an easy way to find out if other people might be gay based on musicians they like and things like that. So I was wondering what that was like for you.

Audrey Seidman 15:48

Oh exactly, Susan. I mean, if you went around saying, "Do you know Meg Christian, do you know Chris Williamson?", I mean that was the— as Alix Dobkin of blessed memory would say, it was lesbian code. So yeah, the culture of lesbian music was really vibrant and strong. I mean, in graduate school, I went to my first Chris Williamson and Meg Christian concerts. When I moved to Albany, I found out that there was a women's music program on WRPI, which is the radio station associated with the engineering school. It was put on by a cadre of women who would volunteer Sunday afternoons from four to six. We would take turns and play women's music, and it didn't have to be lesbian music. It could be any women's music. So I volunteered for that '86 and I think I may have the record for the most years. I think I stayed in there till 2001. The show no longer exists. There were times when the college students, you know, mostly the men or boys would give the volunteers a hard time. We were expected— we had to pass radio licensing tests so it was really an interesting project. I had started doing some radio news in college. So radio, you know, was something that I felt comfortable with so I went and I was a DJ and I also did interviews. It was very exciting because when I would go to women's concerts, I'd bring my little tape recorder, and I got some entree into speaking to some of these people as well. Face The Music had a big anniversary concert every once in a while and Suede, actually, you

know, who I believe is coming back to Albany pretty shortly this month for a concert, performed. We had Ruth Pelham and Cathy Winter in our own community. So women's music was really the soundtrack of my life in those earlier years and I feel sad a little bit that that doesn't exist in the same way. Or at least it may with people I'm not familiar with.

Susan Evans 18:28

Yeah, I definitely think it's there in a lot of ways. I also think, like music I feel just, with online streaming and just like how accessible different kinds of music are like, I feel like the sense of community with music sometimes expands where there might be an artist who is gay, and a lot of their listeners are gay, but also people who aren't gay might listen to that music because it's so much easier to find. Whereas maybe with radio stations or like live performances, you have to be a little bit more in the know to find certain things that way, but yeah, definitely.

Audrey Seidman 19:00

I should mention to you that we called our program Face The Music because that was the name of the first album of Meg Christian. It was a song of Meg's. And Pat Humphries, who's a well-known lesbian musician, actually listened to our show and wrote another song that she recorded called Face The Music. So eventually we changed our theme music to the Pat Humphries song, and so people did hear us— you know, for years, we would take phone calls once in a while. Men would listen— I mean, you didn't have to be a lesbian or a woman to listen to the show. We tried to make it engaging. I would try to share some news and community events. We would always say what was going on in town. So yeah, I mean, for me, that was a very exciting time to really spend that time and you make friends doing that, the women that I took turns with, doing that show.

Susan Evans 19:59

Yeah. I was thinking because how you worked in Public Relations, and you studied Journalism, and you had all this time working in like radio, kind of DJing and Journalism, which is like such a cool kind of media. I'm wondering how— if you maybe could trace your career a little bit as you've gone through your life— where you were kind of starting in PR, and where that may be, where you kind of just moved along in your career?

Audrey Seidman 20:42

Yeah, so I worked for these two, not-for-profit social service agencies in New York and somebody said to me, “you know, you may get tagged as the social service or Jewish social service agency PR person,” and none of it was intentional. So I started keeping my ears open for another job and someone told me about a Public Relations opening at the State University at Albany at a Center for Women in Government that was founded three years after I graduated. I also believe in '78. It was an active year for founding these groups. So I threw my hat in the ring

for this job, never really seriously contemplating do I want to leave New York City? But they offered the job to me.

I had recently ended a relationship, I knew people in Albany. It was a town I felt comfortable with, and I thought, well, this won't be forever. So I pulled up and moved to Albany and took the job at the Center for Women in Government, which excited me because it was a group that was doing research, and training, and advocacy, for equity for women in public service. It was really probably the most exciting job that I've had, and I spent nine years there working on topics like women and non-traditional jobs, pay equity, sexual harassment. When Anita Hill broke in 1981 during the Thomas hearings, we didn't have any training staff left, and our Sexual Harassment Prevention Program, which was developed for the State of New York, had been dormant. So the Director looked at me and said, "You! Get that curriculum back out there, get it updated, and get it back out there." So we had a consultant work to update it and then I learned how to deliver it with the male partners, because we always trained in male-female teams. I went around the state then, you know, delivering it to people who would train others. And actually my final training as I was starting a new job at State Parks Agency in Communication, I went and did one more training for the Center for Women in Government and that was for the Executive Chamber for Mario Cuomo [Note: Governor] and his staff. So it was a very rich career. I did conferences for our Women and Public Policy Program on women in Nursing, and women in Social Work trying to inspire women in these traditionally female jobs to become more active in public policy issues that related to their jobs.

I made some lifelong friends doing that as well. So the Center was great and then I moved to the State Parks Agency to do Public Relations and got very interested in their historic preservation, historic sites, as well as the beautiful parks. Made some very dear friends there. But I was an appointee. 18 months later, when George Pataki defeated Mario Cuomo, I lost my job in January of 1995. So that, you know, was a little scary. I was in a partnership at the time with a woman who had three boys. So I was the home person for a while. It took me eight months to find another job. But calling on my writing skills and my knowledge of State government, I got involved in a one year project for a regional BOCES documenting school health and wellness. And in the end of '95, that relationship ended, so, you know, I was glad to have a job at that point. Then at the end of '96, I was hired by the State Comptroller's Office on a special project they were doing for the year 2000 to update the payroll system, create a whole new State payroll system. I was interviewed to be on the Change Management Team, which they needed somebody to do Communications around the issue of helping the 250,000 employee project, you know, make change as smooth as possible. So that's how I entered the State Comptroller's Office. And I've had several jobs there, ending up in their Human Resources office as the Manager of Employee Engagement. I really pursued then a career in Organization Development. I felt that I had done everything in Public Relations that I could possibly want to do and I became fascinated in that BOCES project, with the facilitation skills of a colleague, who was managing this Task

Force, a multi-agency Task Force, and he was feeding me books on organization development, and I became really focused on getting some education and training in that field and became active in their professional group.

Susan Evans 26:46

Do you think that your experiences just in activism, especially just in a lot of, like gay rights activism, do you think that helped inform you working inside government? And kind of having that other perspective of what people are actually demanding and what the kind of bureaucracy of government steps you have to take to actually get things done, whether it's payroll, or whether it's like passing a new law for civil rights, things like that?

Audrey Seidman 27:14

Yeah. Well, I would like to hope that being a lesbian, and a Jewish lesbian, I have to say one of the most shocking things about moving to Albany from New York was how little my initial colleagues knew about Judaism at all. You know, I grew up in New York, where everybody was throwing Yiddish around. You didn't have to be Jewish to love bagels or have friends, to attend Bar or Bat Mitzvahs. So it was pretty shocking how little people knew, how few people knew even Jewish people. If you aren't from the city of Albany itself, people from the suburbs or other places— now that's changed some, but it's still not New York City. But I think, you know, it made me more sensitive to diversity issues and I would hope that being somebody who has been othered has helped me to not do that to others.

Susan Evans 28:22

For moving back to Albany and kind of, I guess, both moving back to Albany and trying to find or noticing how like lesbian, gay and like, just women's communities have kind of changed. Now, you mentioned kind of with Jewish communities, the difference between being in New York and then in Albany. I'm kind of wondering more about how your Judaism and you found community in that way like throughout your life?

Audrey Seidman 28:49

Yeah, good question. So I think in the late nineties, I started to notice a more spiritual yearning. I had read a few books. And I remember I just saw a friend, my friend Mia, she and I took a trip to Seattle in 1999 together and she had taken a book out of the library called "Practical Kabbalah". Kabbalah is Jewish Mysticism. And I said, "Can I take a look at that?" I started reading it and didn't want to give it back to her until I finished it. So I did read that book and I really started to feel a pull towards getting more knowledge about my own religious faith. I wasn't religious. I had as a teenager rejected the concept of God. You know, God is a three letter word that means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. But the childhood image of God was not one that sat well with me. And certainly, because there were Priests, and Hasidic Jews holding up

signs saying "You're an Abomination" when we were demonstrating at City Hall, I was— you know, religion wasn't something that I needed to get close to or intimate with.

One of my friends from State Parks passed away from cancer in 1998 and one of the things I noticed was how her religious faith as an Episcopalian sustained her during these tough times. So that made me curious, you know, what could a religious, a spiritual journey, offer me as an individual? And when I read this book about Kabbalah, I actually began to see that it could become a wonderful self-improvement system. That's how I looked at it. Perked up my ears and I actually heard about a lesbian weekend at a Jewish retreat center called Elat Chayim. It was actually a GLBT weekend. So I signed up for it and then they had to cancel it because they didn't have enough people. So I think that was '99. Then in 2000 I got their brochure because now I'm on their list, and I see that there's a workshop with Rabbi Shefa Gold called "Establishing Your Spiritual Practice"; chanting, writing, movement, whatever. So I said, you know, why not? A week sitting in the country, you know, I'll do this. If I'm going to have a spiritual practice, this might be an interesting place. It's a place that's warm and friendly to me as a lesbian. So I went; had I known that Shefa Gold is the chanting queen of Judaism, and that we would be doing 99% chanting, I might not have gone. I'm the writer, not the singer in my family. However, I returned, I don't know that I returned the changed person, but I began new practices. And every Sabbath for years and years, I would just chant through the service. It was just a different way of experiencing— you know, if you go to synagogue, you're reading a book. It's a rote service. But the chanting opens up the heart in a different way and you're really focusing on one phrase from each prayer. So you're going through the service, you're not leaving out, you know, but it's a much more heart opening, meditative process. So I started going to this retreat center, taking different classes every summer for many years. Then I joined a synagogue. So that's how I found my Jewish community up here. And I'm sad to say that even though the Women's Building no longer exists, I'm still in touch with some of those people. That community as it was, no longer exists, and because I didn't continue on as a social activist in quite the same way.

I mean, I did a lot of things back then. I was the President of Holding Our Own, a women's fund in Albany. I served on the board of the Women's Building, on a Community Foundation Task Force to do a project for lesbian and gay people. But at that point, I was focusing on my spiritual journey and so I joined synagogue Berith Sholom in Troy, who happened to have a lesbian rabbi, which made it very inviting to me. Then I went to an adult Bat Mitzvah. There was a generation of women who missed that opportunity and it was very common, you know, in the nineties and two thousands, for women to be making up for that by studying and celebrating a Bat Mitzvah. So I went to my first adult Bat Mitzvah in Albany and I remember one of the women saying that she really was glad to be doing that while her parents were still alive. And I thought to myself, maybe I should do it too, soon. So I told the Rabbi, put me in your next class and so I guess we started studying in 2004. And in a group of seven women, I celebrated my Bat Mitzvah, in 2006 at the age of 53. And after that, I wanted to remain in a Jewish learning community.

So I joined Lev Shomea, which was part of ALEPJ (Alliance for Jewish Renewal) at the time. Lev Shomea doesn't exist, but it was the very first spiritual direction training program in the Jewish tradition. I studied spiritual direction, and then I'm continuing on with my spiritual journey here and training. I then wanted to be part of an interfaith learning community. I became very interested in interfaith work. And I heard that the Clinical Pastoral Education program at Albany Medical Center was transformative and so I applied to that, and managed my work schedule so that I could spend every Monday at the hospital. I studied with a group of Christian and Buddhist people how to be a hospital Chaplain. And so I did that '12 to '13, and then came back '14 to '15, modifying my schedule further to spend two days a week at the hospital. It was an amazing experience, accompanying; it's a trauma hospital. So I've seen a lot of different things. Lots of stories about ministering to people of many different faiths, I have to admit that I could say the Lord's Prayer by heart, not the Jewish healing prayer because it's not a very Jewish community, I don't get to say it as often.

And with COVID I'm not volunteering quite as much. But, so that was part of my journey. Then the last thing was the Spiritual Eldering Program. I took "Aging to Sage-ing" which was originally part of ALEPJ, the Jewish renewal community, and now as part of Yerusha, which means "legacy". And now I'm teaching. I mean, my retirement gig is offering workshops on spiritual or conscious aging. I've gone into workshops on retirement, how to find balance and wholeness in retirement. Next week I'm starting a group— I was approached by a woman who's 89, who felt like she didn't have friends who were willing to talk about what it's like at that age, they didn't want to talk about mortality. So I took a flyer at it, I developed a flyer and I've now got a group of people who will start meeting next week to talk about what we call the "December years."

Susan Evans 38:30

Wow. You've been involved in so many sorts of things, and so many I feel like, just like diverse groups, in kind of the largest sense. I feel like that's really apparent in how you're kind of going back into Judaism and your spirituality and then like seeking out these interfaith groups. Do you think that kind of trying to seek out those, like more interfaith communities has also, have you been able to find other people who are lesbians or gay or like queer in like larger senses, who are also involved in like, different spiritual communities like that?

Audrey Seidman 39:28

I mean I have found other lesbian people or queer people actually, but it's almost been incidental. I'm very active in what's called the Interfaith Story Circle, something started by a woman 27 or 28 years ago, and I've been sort of helping to organize the circles for the past several years. We're doing them on Zoom now. There are other gay people who come to that but it's really very incidental. I'm also very involved— I'm a chapter head of the local Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, which is a national or actually international group of Jewish and Muslim women, where

we come together to build friendships and learn about each other. Actually I had to summon my courage to raise the topic of homosexuality in that group. I did come out to one of the Muslim women who I met when we were both on the Board of the Interfaith Story Circle and it went okay. I mean, she knows me. I think she still loves me. But she's not at the point to say, "Oh, that's fine". I think that, you know, the Muslim community is so much newer to this country, that the changes that are occurring in it seemed to be happening in a much younger generation. So the generation of my age and older, you know, we talked about it and some of them were just fine. The younger women in the group were absolutely fine. Some of the older women, you know, I think they don't want to be offensive, but they still think, you know, like some Jewish people still believe that it's against God's law. But the truth is as long as they treat me well and love me as a human being— and I do get that from them— you know, our judgments of each other could be left aside. But that's what I mean, the sisterhood has been a wonderful, wonderful experience. I've learned a lot about our commonalities [Note: I was active in the local "Welcoming Congregations" group, edited a bitmonthly column for the gay community center on queer people and faith traditions and helped to organized interfaith pride services.]

Susan Evans 42:09

For sure. I'm wondering, since this oral history interview is part of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, just living in New York City especially when the Archives were started there, first the Upper West Side then in Brooklyn and now you doing this interview, what does the Lesbian Herstory Archives, how does that fit into your kind of life and how do you feel connected to the Archives?

Audrey Seidman 42:42

Yeah, well, I don't remember exactly when I learned about the Archives but I certainly did. And I certainly knew Deb and Joan, and Morgan Grenwald, who used to work for SAGE. So I mean it's a group that I've always felt— and I may not have mentioned that— I didn't really study Journalism at the University, I took a double, I took a major-minor in American Studies. So history has always been really important to me and documenting history. I did historical research for the Albany Bureau of Cultural Affairs for two summers up here. So history is important. So I always attended to what the Archives was doing. I've been a longtime contributor, you know, small amounts of money to the Archives, and I've put it in my will, that they would get my journals and my papers. I'm hoping to have the time and energy and forethought that the right time to go and do a process they call un-journaling, which might be taking out pages. But I'm pretty much an open book and so if having my papers would be helpful to the Archive, I'd be glad to have them there. And so far, it's in my will. I have given some of my community activism papers from the Holding Our Own, Women's Building, Face The Music to the University at Albany library. That's online. So, I believe very much that it's important to document our lives. We need to be visible.

Susan Evans 44:46

Exactly. And then this interview, one of the most visible ways too.

Audrey Seidman 44:51

Susan I could add too that I don't have my own children. I did help to raise three boys in my Albany relationship and I'm still connected to them, and their seven children. I have a niece and nephew I love and I'm newly a Great Aunt, which is the highlight of my last few months. But legacy, I think I think as we get older, legacy, what are we leaving behind, becomes important. Then when the people who knew us are no longer here, what remains? So I think that all of us have something to offer to the Archives in terms of building a legacy for us as individuals, but as a community.

Susan Evans 45:46

Yeah, I think I mean, this interview so far, community has been, I feel like the kind of the most central thing and how every person, a community only exists because of all the individuals that are a part of it. And they're, in that way, each person is so key and so important to it. But yeah, I love how you were thinking about that through like legacy in that sense. I'm wondering if there's, is there anything else you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered any other kind of topic, or point in your life, or story you want to share?

Audrey Seidman 46:20

Well, I guess the only other thing I would add is, you know, I'm single now. So community is really important to me. I've been single for a long time, actually. So when people have partnerships, there's a different support. But right now, I had my first surgery earlier this year, turned out fine. But it was my Bat Mitzvah sisters who took me to the hospital, who picked me up, you know, who made sure I was okay. So I mean, what an example of community. You know, the woman from All the Queens Women who's in hospice now, we're sort of gathering with more intent to be there. So relationships and community are really important. And I think you're right, that community is an important thing to me.

Susan Evans 47:24

I guess I just had one question when you're thinking, now when you were talking about relationships and things and noticing how things are different, have you found like, with either just community spaces changing, like with bars and stuff, and like now with dating apps and things, what has it been like to watch that relationship scene, I guess, shift over time? And things like that?

Audrey Seidman 47:49

Yeah. I remember, several years ago, there was a restaurant in Albany that the Gay Community Center, or the Lesbian and Gay Community Center would take one Wednesday night a month and have it be Lesbian Night. And I went, I remember walking over to a group of women in their 30s and saying, "So tell me, how do you meet people these days?" And one of them said, "Walking our dog." It's so different. So, you know, I don't know that I'm sad that the bars aren't the place now. I think I met one person that I dated in a bar in New York. But you know, I mean, we would have lesbian groups. I remember starting a lesbian singles group after I moved to Albany when I wasn't meeting people. That's how I met my partner. But right now everything is online for the younger generation. I actually did meet somebody in 2001 in California and got pretty seriously involved for six months. Too hard to make it work long distance. But I've connected online, it's an arduous process sometimes, but it seems to be what people do. I'd much rather meet somebody in person. In this age of COVID, meeting new people becomes really hard. But even before that, and as I get older, I think it gets probably even harder. I have to say I don't have regrets in my life. I am generally a very positive person practicing gratitude so I am grateful for what life has given me.

Susan Evans 49:55

Yeah, I would also say you're a very proactive person. I mean with starting things whether it's like just a singles group to be the person to like initiate people hanging out in any way. And then also from like an organization that's now like as big as SAGE being involved in earlier stages, it takes a lot of kind of confidence and just, you know, like eagerness to wanna get out there and meet people and communicate with people, which seems to be another big part of your life.

Audrey Seidman 50:21

Communication has always been a theme for me, whether it was editing the newsletters of these groups, on the radio, you know, spreading the news about the culture, trying to reach people who needed it.

Susan Evans 50:32

Exactly. Yeah.

Audrey Seidman 50:33

Thank you. Yeah, of course.

Susan Evans 50:36

Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or cover?

Audrey Seidman 50:40

Not that comes to mind. Thank you.

Susan Evans 50:43

Yeah, well, thank you to everyone who is either watching or listening to this interview through the Lesbian Elders Oral History Project through the Lesbian Herstory Archives. And yeah, so thank you so much.