

LESBIAN

HERSTORY

ARCHIVES

**Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory
of
Carol Crayton**

An Interview
Conducted by
Mallory Leger
2/23/2022

Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

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Interviewee: Carol Crayton
Interviewer: Mallory Leger
Date: 02/23/2022

Mallory Leger 00:02

Hello, thank you so much for joining me. Today is Wednesday, February 23, 2022 and we are recording an oral history with me, Mallory Leger, talking to Carol Crayton, about her life history. This is a Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project interview, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. We are recording from Guelph, Ontario, Canada, and Toms River, New Jersey, in the USA. So just to get started today, it's so nice to be here with you, Carol. So looking forward to our conversation and I just want to start off with asking when and where you were born.

Carol Crayton 00:43

I was born September 5, 1949, in Brooklyn, New York and it was Labor Day. My mother was playing a game of poker when her water broke. [Laughs]— she walked to the hospital, and here I am.

Mallory Leger 01:06

That sounds like a very exciting way to come into the world. [Laughter]— and so she walked to the hospital.

Carol Crayton 01:13

She walked to the hospital, yes.

Mallory Leger 01:15

How far away was the hospital?

Carol Crayton 01:17

Oh, a few blocks from where she lived. Yeah.

Mallory Leger 01:21

Well, they say walking is good for labor, so [crosstalk]— okay, and so where did you primarily grow up and spend your childhood?

Carol Crayton 01:33

Most of my childhood was actually in New Jersey. We moved to New Jersey when I was at the age of three. I went to school in New Jersey. Public school education, right up through college.

Mallory Leger 01:55

Okay, so you spent a good portion of time in New Jersey, then?

Carol Crayton 01:58

Yes, yes.

Mallory Leger 02:00

Okay, great. And so what was your childhood like growing up in New Jersey?

Carol Crayton 02:06

Well, the earlier parts of my childhood were in the city of Paterson. I was very involved in the neighborhood action as a child, always outside interacting with the kids. I went to the public schools, I went through the public school system there, and really found that I was very comfortable in that environment. And it became even more evident to me when my parents moved us into a suburban area of Paterson, Wayne. I really missed the city atmosphere. So by the time I turned eighteen, I moved back into the Paterson area and resumed my life and ended up working in the inner city.

Mallory Leger 03:12

So you found that you were more comfortable in the city and that's where you wanted to be?

Carol Crayton 03:16

Yes, yes. Also as a teenager in the suburb of Wayne, I— my grandmother actually moved with us— and my grandmother was a very significant person in my life. She was a free spirit. And she had been married many times and ultimately found happiness being on her own. And she took me along with her on her adventures as a kid growing up. She was always going into New York City, because her sisters lived in New York, and her interests were there. That's where she was from. So she took me into New York as a child all the time. I was very comfortable, you know, riding on the subways and so on. And being part of that, I think I got a lot of her spirit and interests integrated into my own life.

Mallory Leger 04:18

Yeah, it's so special to have those connections. I mean, as we're doing here with our elders, and it sounds like she was such an important elder in your life.

Carol Crayton 04:26

Absolutely.

Mallory Leger 04:26

Yeah. Could you tell me a bit more about her spirit and how you think you've carried that through, maybe through your life and who you are?

Carol Crayton 04:35

Well, she was very independent, as she left home at a very early age. Her parents were born in Poland, and they had come to Pennsylvania. Her father was a coal miner in Pennsylvania and as soon as she and her siblings— there were a few sisters and two brothers— they left Pennsylvania, and they headed toward New York City. They all moved over there. And my grandmother, I think she was about 18 herself when she left Pennsylvania. So she lived a very independent life, and I think she experimented a lot. I look at old photographs of her during the 1920s and she had really, really short boyish hairdo. And she wore men's clothes. She always had female friends, always. She was married, she had a lot of boyfriends and so on, but she always had one significant female friend throughout her whole life. And mourned them whenever they left in some way, either through death, or through moving. So I noticed that about her. She had a very strong connection with women but she also had this sense of independence. She always fostered the idea in me that I can ultimately rely on myself. That I didn't need anybody in my life to define me. I needed to define myself, just as she had. So that was a major lesson, a life lesson that's influenced me.

Mallory Leger 06:49

Yeah, what a— it sounds like she just played such an important role of offering that guidance for you at a young age. And so how from a young age, you said, you spent a lot of time with her, she was someone that you recognized left home young as well, and had a lot of independence and community also in, amongst other women. In your adolescence and young age, in the decisions you are making, did that influence any of the decisions you were making? And if so, how did that influence you?

Carol Crayton 07:19

Well, one area she helped, had to do with talking about my friendships, being able to speak about my friendships and my feelings toward my female friends, particularly. The boys— when I was a young teenager, you know, I had boyfriends and they, those relationships really didn't mean much to me. It was kind of like, just okay, it was the social thing to do. But the friendships I had with my female friends really were very significant. I always felt like I could talk about those with her more easily than I could with my own mother. My mother was very— is, she's still alive now, at 94— she's also a very independent woman but her background is very, very different from my grandmother's. Very. So in that way, I was able to open up about my feelings and my attractions toward other girls without being judged in a negative way from my grandmother.

Mallory Leger 08:36

Yeah. It's so important to have those role models at a young age and be able to talk about those relationships as they're developing. I'm so glad that you had that. Do you want to speak any more about your relationship with your mother or father as well?

Carol Crayton 08:53

Okay. Well, as my grandmother represented freedom, independence, and adventure for me, and I certainly did experience that whenever I was with her. My mother, as I referenced, comes from a very different background. She was born in Puerto Rico, and she herself lost her mother at a very young age, the age of five, and she ended up with a lot of stepmothers, and stepbrothers, and stepsisters, and she was always rebelling. So around the age of nine, her father sent her to live with her grandmother [laughs]— her grandmother, the irony.

Mallory Leger 09:53

Yeah.

Carol Crayton 09:53

So anyway, my mother eventually at the age of 12, left Puerto Rico and came to New York, with her cousins. And now she was on her own to navigate the language because she did not speak English when she came to New York. She finished schooling, and graduated from high school.. She then started on her way, met my father, and eventually married. But she— it's interesting, because as independent as my mother was and is, and how non-traditional her upbringing was, in certain ways, she was very traditional in our household. She believed that my being the oldest, and being the daughter, it was my responsibility to look after my brother and my sister, and be the little adult. So in that sense, again, she built up the sense of independence in me, which has worked for me. But by that, also, there were so many responsibilities put on me and expectations that I felt hemmed in. Thus, my grandmother represented something of the contrast. So I, over the years though, I have taken and appreciated all that the women, these two major women in my life, have represented, lived their lives, how they have, and I've taken those strengths, as much as I could incorporate in my own life. I am appreciative of all that. Then my dad emphasized education. He emphasized "Carol, you're not going to give up going to college and get a job to earn money to send your brother through school, as your mother would like you to do. You are going to get an education." Because he— being brought up by my grandmother, he said, "You need to be able to depend on yourself, and to be able to get through life on your own." So education was very important. I got that from him.

Mallory Leger 12:23

Yeah, yeah. It sounds like you had these three important people who, you know, instilled education, independence. And again, this community of women and freedom, and so these three different people that kind of showed you the different ways that, you know, you can be independent, that you brought these different philosophies into your life. So you grew up with these three, these three people and then did make the decision to move back to the city. Could you tell me a bit more about that move back to the city?

Carol Crayton 12:53

Yes. Well, this is the point at which I decided that I was going to become a nun, okay. That was at the age of 18. And I decided to— I was weighing whether or not I wanted to live that lifestyle or to join the Peace Corps. This was in 1966, where I was wrestling with this. I graduated from high school in 1966. I was only 16 when I graduated. I was too young yet to enter the convent. You had to be 18 years old. So for those two years in between, I was weighing back and forth, whether or not I wanted to go into the Peace Corps or go into the convent. The Peace Corps appealed to me because I wanted to help people and do something. Working, not working yet in Paterson because I was still in high school, but coming from Paterson, I did know families that were struggling in the city and so on. I just always had that awareness growing up. I wanted to do something constructive like that.

So anyway, I did. I ended up going into the convent because I had a very strong spiritual background for myself personally. And I thought, I'll go into this order because I like the whole idea of meditation, and prayerfulness, and contemplation. At the same time, it was a missionary order, and they had missions in South America. So I thought, well, here we go. We got the two, components that appealed to me at that time. So I did join the order, and their order was just outside of Paterson, New Jersey. And while I was in the order being trained, I was working in Paterson again. I was teaching religious classes, I was doing social work, doing home visits and community action projects. So you know that there was the segue in, and I stayed in the convent for five years. The year I entered, they closed the missions in South America. So I had to readjust my thinking and I said, “well, inner city work that's—” and coming from Hispanic background, I spoke Spanish, a lot of, a big Spanish community in Paterson— I said, “this is it for me.” So it was okay. And after those five years, I stayed in the area and I continued teaching in Paterson for 10 years, and then worked. Did some social work for a few years.

Mallory Leger 16:03

Sorry, go ahead.

Carol Crayton 16:05

Oh, so that— anyway, that was the segue, and how I ended up getting back to where I felt most comfortable.

Mallory Leger 16:13

Yeah, would you be able to tell me a bit about the transition from the convent, out of the convent and into— you mentioned that you were teaching and went into teaching and about that— that transition and yeah, coming out of the convent?

Carol Crayton 16:27

Well, you know, coming out of the convent was coming out in another way. Because it was while I was in the convent that I realized that I was gay, and that I was attracted to women, and I was going to act on it. I felt that it wouldn't be honest for me to take a vow of celibacy knowing that I was not going to keep the vow. And I decided that— also I was having a lot of issues with the Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church— the irony, of course, is the more you learn, the more you question, and then the more you become a critical thinker. So I went through this entire process of learning while I was in the convent, that I really— it wasn't the place for me. I could, I really wanted to work with people; I didn't have to be a nun to do that. And I could have a very deep spiritual life without being a nun. I'd have more freedom. And then, realizing that I am gay and was not going to observe the vow of celibacy.

So I did have a relationship with a woman while I was still a nun and that's when I, that was the turning point. I said, "That's it, I, I just cannot be a hypocrite here." So making the transition out of the convent, it was easy for me on a secular level. Being in society, it was easy for me. By that time we were not in the habit, you wouldn't have known I was a nun looking at me. So that part was easy. What was interesting to navigate was my sexuality, and finding community. I was, you know, I had community in the convent, but now I was seeking other community. This was in 1972 when I left. And of course during that time period, there was an awful lot happening in movements in our country, with the women's movement, with gay rights, with social, civil rights, and all of that spoke to me. I just threw myself into joining groups, you know, getting involved, learning again, networking. That's how I eventually ended up learning about Joan Nestle, and reading as much as I could about the feminists, what they had to say, and joining NOW, the National Organization of Women. Going to those meetings, and then networking with other women and finding gay women, who were part of that, and then moving out into the gay groups and then finding out about these house meetings that were taking place with the founders of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, who were coming to houses and meeting with us to tell us about the projects and workshops that we could be involved in and create ourselves. Then that led to Lavender Express, which was an outgrowth of one of these meetings, and here I am, you know, talking to you years later and the Archives had been well established and working on projects like this. It's amazing.

Mallory Leger 20:39

It's yeah, it's so great to hear about the way that yeah, just the history of how it all came together and how you were there, you know, as this was all being developed, and where the project is at now. It's just so wonderful to think about all that hard work that's been done, and is continuing to be done. So I love hearing about that, thank you.

Carol Crayton 20:59

You're welcome.

Mallory Leger 20:59

Yeah, so and you were— yeah, there's just so much great stuff there that we just talked about. But so you mentioned at that time, you're coming out of being a nun and also coming out to your sexuality and that you had met an important woman who helped you come out in that moment. And then that also brought you to these social movements. So I'd love to chat about all of that. So is there a significant person or people that helped you in the— or were there with you and community as you came out? That were significant people for you in those moments?

Carol Crayton 21:38

Well, the people who I met along the way? They were unexpected gifts, you know, and as I said, this whole element of networking how one person leads to another and takes you to different places, not only physically, but mentally, spiritually. And as far as growing, and deepening ourselves, and that's where it went. There were people. First of all, I would say the first major significant person who, you know, in the gay community, who had an impact on me was the woman that I was involved with for the first time. Her name was Mary. She did not identify as gay when we met, she was separated from her husband, who had been in Vietnam, came back different, they just didn't continue their marriage. And I think she's significant because she did not identify as gay. And at that point, I kind of did. But I went along with her rationale as this being a special relationship. Many of us during that time period, who were afraid to come out, and so on, that's how we thought. We said, "This is a special relationship and we don't fit into any category," you know, and "We don't want it to be labeled" because we were afraid to be labeled.

So through that relationship, which lasted seven years, I grew to define myself more and more as a gay woman, as a lesbian. She didn't, she always resisted it and I began to see a divergence in who, how we were growing our awareness and our involvement. She became more isolated and closed, and I became more open and exploratory and curious. Eventually that ended up coming between us, you know, and we ended up going our separate ways. We remained friends, but our lifestyle was very different. Eventually, she did come to that point, you know, she resumed and she had other relationships with women and eventually came to identify. But I grew impatient, I think, because I was curious and I wanted to go to the gay bars in the city, I wanted to explore. And she was not into any of that. So very— more conservative than I. So, yeah, that was a

divergence. So she was a major, the first major figure. I'd say she was the first love of my life, you know, and as I said, we remained friends throughout our lives and were very close. She passed away in the early nineties. But she was a very significant person in my life. As far as other women who might be known, names that are known, all I could say is Gloria Steinem sticks out. She was, at that time period in the seventies, she was like, okay, you know, I am a woman, and I am empowered. And that's how I define myself first and foremost— as a woman who is empowered. I am a woman who is lesbian. I am a woman who is a daughter, but I am a woman who is empowered. So I would say Gloria Steinem was the first major public figure who really made an impact on me and I would oftentimes go back to her in my mind, things she would say, and just how she would carry herself.

The other woman who has made an impact in my life, who has been a major impression, on so many levels is Billie Jean King. She's someone else who has lived, her private life was out there, for the world to scrutinize. It was very painful. For her coming out, she didn't choose to, during that time period. She never folded. Again, that inner strength of empowerment. And what those two women also have in common, which I value, is how important it is to share what we've learned, no matter how difficult, the process has been in our lives and learning things, that we share what we have learned and be inclusive, and give it to the younger generation to take, evaluate, and do what they will. That they don't have to rethink the wheel, you know, just put it out there and be generous with it. So those are the two figures who have and continue to, those are my two go-to women, you know, who I see as very strong women who represent a lot that I value.

Mallory Leger 27:49

Yeah, absolutely, two very important women. Yeah, it's important to be able to— I really love what you're saying about what we can learn, and move forward with what we learn, and not being afraid to tell those stories. I think that's such a big part too of what we're doing, or what's being done with the, with the Archives is making sure lesbian women's stories are being told. And so, you know, in sharing that for you, that's such an important message, is there anything that you feel from your life and within your identity that, yeah, anything that you think from your life that you're thinking about in this moment? Or that informs this moment for you? Or that is wisdom that you think is important to share, much like the women you're talking about?

Carol Crayton 28:43

Well, words, words are powerful. They have so much power and I believe that we really need to be thoughtful. We need to be introspective and thoughtful before we use our words, to translate those thoughts to others. I've seen how words have destroyed people, you know, how words have deformed people, and how words have confused people, and how words have liberated people. Very powerful. So from where I am, and you know, I guess it goes back to the fact that I'm a teacher. Words are important as a teacher. I'm a counselor, words are important. I'm a writer,

words are important. That's our form of communication, that's a form of conveyance and connection, community, creating community. It can unite, bring us together or it could divide. Very powerful. So that's what has come to me at this point, after a lot of reflection and looking back on life and how words are so needed for clarification, too, because, you know, forgiveness is another big word in my vocabulary. And we are often— I find that people find it so difficult to forgive, and once we get there to forgiveness, it's important to verbalize that to those who need that, who need to hear that and to whom we need to speak that. And not only forgiveness to others, but to ourselves. I think we're very hard on ourselves on many levels, and we hurt ourselves deeply by the words we use inside our own heads and the fact that we don't forgive ourselves. So that's all component, that's where I'm at right now in my contemplations. And it carries over to what I'm doing now in my life. I still continue to teach and counsel, but it's through writing, you know, it's through working with women who have cancer, and I also integrate the healing work of Reiki with that as well. So that's what I'm doing now. I try to balance it all and integrate it in my life, and then carry that through in some way.

Mallory Leger 31:53

Yeah, it sounds like you've really taken the lessons that you've learned through these women and incorporated it so much into your own life, and I— it's so great to hear about the work that you're doing. Yeah, so and you've talked about how you were a teacher, you know, a teacher, writer, and now doing Reiki work and the healing work that you're doing now and so you really expanded— done so much different kinds of work. Could you talk a bit more about your relationship to teaching and how you got into teaching and that kind of transition as well?

Carol Crayton 32:24

Well, I love teaching. Once a teacher, always a teacher, and we can be long winded. We like to give lectures. But again, my father was— he was not a teacher, formerly a teacher, but he was a teacher to me. He loved books, he loved to read, and he always guided me toward, and he always sat and talked to me about ideas and challenged me, played devil's advocate at times. He suggested teaching as a career for me. I did follow through on it. I loved my teachers, and I wanted to be like them. So I ended up going to college, and majored in Education and English as my major, so I became an English, high school English teacher. And, again, as I taught I also realized that I was doing a lot of counseling with the students so I went on for a Master's degree in Human Services and Counseling as well. So I integrated the counseling with a lot of the clubs that I was facilitating in the schools as well. Then when I retired from public school education, I decided that I wanted to continue the teaching in some way so I did a lot of volunteer tutoring and counseling; additionally, I wanted to teach writing, because I enjoyed writing. I love writing poetry, I like writing essays, and I've always felt challenged about writing fiction, and I love the process. I love teaching about the process. I'm never going to be a famous writer, but I would love to capitalize on the methods of writing and teach that, you know, and I just love that so much. So anyway, I've continued to engage in facilitating writing groups, and then currently

journaling with the women at Mary's Place by the Sea in Ocean Grove, New Jersey, which is a retreat place for women who have cancer.

Mallory Leger 35:17

Well it sounds— I mean journaling can be such an important part of archival work in itself and about, you know, writing our own stories, and making sure we can share our stories and our truths, as you've been talking about. So I think that's such a special project you've been doing, and it's great to hear about your relationship to teaching and how you've carried it through throughout your life. And yeah, so talking a bit about your transition professionally, from a nun to teaching, to writing and how important that's been throughout your life, and in the counseling and healing work you've done with lots of communities. You also mentioned before, the importance for you of really wanting to identify as a lesbian woman and how that was important for you, when you're coming out in the tensions that understandably had with Mary, as you were both kind of on different paths at different times with with the language you were comfortable using. So I just wonder if you could talk a bit more about yeah, coming into and finding the gay community that you're a part of. I know you mentioned a lot of the movements that were happening at the time that you've gotten involved in, as well as the gay bar scene that became an important, that you mentioned, you became a part of. So I was wondering if you could talk about those moments and times in your life that became a part of your identity and how you learned more about who you are.

Carol Crayton 36:34

Okay, well, one way that I met other gay women was through my jobs. When I was teaching in Paterson, I went to one of the high schools I was transferred to, and an old college friend of mine was there teaching. I'm not going to mention names, though. And I was like, wow, we used to hang out. We didn't go to gay bars in college. What we did was, we went to the straight bars in the city. This was the two years in between before I had entered the convent. I went to a junior college and this woman was a friend of mine and we hung out during those two years. And then I end up teaching in this high school, and there she is, and it turned out that she was gay. It's so funny because she wouldn't speak about it. And we went away on a vacation, and it was her girlfriend who outed her when she picked us up from the airport. We didn't even talk about it.

So anyway, that kind of started it, because then there ended up being somebody else on staff who— the gaydar was up, that's what was happening— and conversations would take place and then one would say, "Oh, you know, I remember this one woman who taught in that high school." She said, "Weekends start on Thursday, Carol!" and I'm like, "They do?" And she said, "Oh, yeah." She said, "You have to come and start the weekends with me, and my girlfriend, and my friends." I said, "Okay, so what do we do?" And she said, "Well, we're goin' into the city." So I said, "Okay, I'm always ready to go into New York." And she said, "And we're gonna go to the gay bars, have you ever been to a gay bar?" And I said, "No, I've never been, I've been dying to"

and she said, "Okay", and she actually— that Thursday we went in, that Thursday night, we went in and we went to the Duchess, which is an old bar, it's not there anymore, in New York City. And then Bonnie and Clyde's, which is another bar that's no longer there. I don't think it is— and she started talking, we went bar hopping, and my eyes got bigger and bigger. And I said, "Oh, this is fun, I like this." So then she said, "Okay, you get through Friday, teach, and we're going back in Friday night." So that's how my bar life started in the city. And that's how I started getting, making a lot of connections. You know, I met an awful lot of women going into the city— back to New York again, where grandma took me as a kid— and met a lot of women. So I have to say that truly, I mean, every place that I taught— I taught in, let's see, five different schools, and then for a while there, I went into adult education, and another place. Every job, a hospital I worked in as a social worker, every job I went to I met gay women and that's really how the network started spreading. It was through my professions, mostly.

The gay bar scene in the seventies, in the eighties, it was really— they seemed to be the place, the central place for a lot of the movements anyway. People were hanging out there and organizing, and that's where the news would spread in the village, in the West Village, particularly, and a lot of women who are involved in the Archives were hanging around the neighborhoods at that time as well. And that's, you know, through word of mouth, a lot of things happened in that arena. That's where I found the most activity and most opportunity to network with other women; it was through that scene in particular.

Mallory Leger 41:20

Yeah. Well, I love it. It's great that it was through work that you guys, you know, you're able to find other women and then through that get connected to the gay bar community, and then how that then further kind of connected you to these larger movements of organizing that was happening. So when you were meeting women professionally was it— were you able to outwardly meet people and be out within identity with them? How did that feel and how did that go? And how did those relationships build within a professional— yeah, and get to find each other within those spaces?

Carol Crayton 42:00

You know, it's just that— I keep saying gaydar. There's something to it, there really is. Something that's suggested, spoken that's suggested, and a couple of— I never came right out, I was never one to come right out and say, "Are you gay? I'm gay." I'm not— I never did that until recently in my life— now that I am in my 70's. But on some occasions I've had other women come up to me and ask me, you know, so we'll come out that way. Within— see now, this is the 1970s and the 1980s where, and it went into the nineties— also as a teacher in the public school and education, society had not caught up with what we were aware of and enlightened to. And so we had to be careful as educators, not to be out, not to say that we are gay. We didn't want to

invite any kind of suggestive innuendo from people that— and education is very political. There are a lot of political dynamics and factions that are involved in educational institutions.

I was very involved in union organizing as a teacher. And that kind of information of me being gay would have been used against me. I saw it happen to some colleagues. So, you know, we were not out in the professional scene, within the professional scene. We had our own separate lives outside of the profession where we could be at each other's homes, we'd be at the bars, we'd be at clubs, we'd be at meetings, houses, other homes. That's where we were free to be, to express ourselves and be ourselves. Being, putting on the professional suit and outfits, whatever, it was a complete change. So I believe that there's been this chronic “schizophrenia” within the gay community, you know, people my age and older— and perhaps younger, I don't know— but where we had to, ah, we assumed roles, you know, we kind of moved in and out and compartmentalized so much; in our behaviors, and how we would interact, and what we would say and how we'd say it, and so on and so forth. And that's been a hindrance. I believe that's been a real hindrance to my generation and in the evolution of ourselves as human beings, where we have had to compartmentalize so much in our lives. We couldn't be out to our families, we couldn't be out professionally, with friends, close straight friends, they were like brothers and sisters to me, I couldn't, I didn't feel safe or free enough to say who I really was.

It was so liberating years later, and it was when I retired from teaching, where I finally, at the age of 54, said, "I'm gay, I am a lesbian, I am a gay woman" to my friends, and "I know you love me" and they said the same thing. They'd say, "We always love you, it doesn't matter." Like it should matter. And some would say "We knew all along." Never spoke about it. Yeah. And I've heard that from friends, very close friends, and in the straight world, and family members as well. So it's had its hindrance in our development, I believe in our human development, in that way. I think I'm curious to see whether there's anybody who's going to write about this, what has been written about this, this aspect of our human development. And I really hope, you know, that it's analyzed more and written about more, and it does become part of our history also. Yeah. Our herstory, I should say.

Mallory Leger 46:53

Yeah.

Carol Crayton 46:53

Mallory, why don't you research and write the book?

Mallory Leger 46:57

There you go. I'm inspired by you and [laughs]— yeah, but well you're right, there's so much there that needs to be talked about and the next generation has been so lucky to maybe move— be able to be more out for some people and that's so much because of the work your generation

has done— so thank you. So that's huge and— but like you said, that compartmentalization and the cost of that is very great. Have you explored any of that in, because I know you've mentioned your writing, and so has that been a part of your writing at all?

Carol Crayton 47:37

Absolutely. I've been journaling since 1972. I continue to journal and I intend to donate those journals to the Archives. I've used it in my poetry, you know, the ideas of that, it's so much on my mind. It's been evident, you know, in decisions I've made, in the way I've been with my own identity as a person, and interactions, how I interact, the psychology of my mind. So I've addressed that a lot in my own writings, yeah. I think it's a— I would, I can't, I don't feel objective enough to do an analysis of it, but I'm hoping that there are others who will be able to do that. People in my generation have paid a lot of money in therapy fees, I think, as a result. Just trying to define ourselves, you know, and it doesn't— I brought this up once before, the whole idea of labeling is a way of categorizing and compartmentalizing. Sometimes I think it's self-defeating to get hooked into all the labeling. I think it just enables more of that dysfunction. So, yeah, if we could strip it down to human beings, you know, and again being very clear on where we're coming from, and trying to be very honest with ourselves.

Mallory Leger 49:24

Mmm.

Carol Crayton 49:26

Compartmentalizing prevents us from really being honest with ourselves. So I think it's played into the whole identity struggle with a lot of gay women.

Mallory Leger 49:40

Yeah. Yeah. And not having the opportunity to be out and yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think it's so— well having to compartmentalize and be presenting yourself one way in a professional space or in friendships with straight people and then on the other side, doing all this organizing and being a part of, as you said, NOW, and Lavender Express, and being a part of that work at the same time and still participating in those movements. Yeah, can you speak it out to just what those movements meant to you, I guess at a time when you were also having to be, not out at work, but then were still managing to connect in these really special important ways?

Carol Crayton 50:24

Well, the movements provided— I felt like I was home. That was always the feeling I had, whenever I was part of a meeting, a group, an activity where we were working together toward change in some way, I always felt I was home, no matter how different we all were from each other. I just had that sense of safety. This is my niche, you know, it's just, I can be myself here. I can be, I can simply be, and I didn't feel any pressure, I could just be. Also, to work towards

something that I knew was going to benefit other women in so many ways, that was very important to me. It's still important to me. Women are so important to me— I just, I, you know, so I've always felt that sense of safety and community there. I also have found strength, in the past, being able to flip over to doing all the other things that I need to do. So it's— that's the best way I can capture it— a sense of home, strength, safety, empowerment. Knowing I'm not alone, because once you leave the safety of those groups, and the commonality of those groups, and you move into other spheres of your life, where you're going to hear things you that you're not comfortable with and so on, you summon up that to give you the strength, maybe to address that which is uncomfortable for the person who is showing a bias in some way. You know, so it shows as a strength.

Mallory Leger 52:36

Yeah, absolutely. I just love hearing you talk about that, so thank you so much. It's just about yeah, the strength that women can have together, and have had, and can continue to move forward in this moment within. That brings us back to the Archives. I know you have spoken about this, but just again to say is there anything else in terms of your connection and experience, experience with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. I know you've talked about today already, but just anything else you wanted to add about that as you're talking about in this moment?

Carol Crayton 53:08

Well, I appreciate so much that the women who were involved in the groundwork of the Archives, having the dream and then following through on it, and then drawing in so many others to help with this, you know, they've created a community onto itself. It's spilled out into this and to so many, and it's brought so much to all of us and will continue. I'm so appreciative of that. I'm so appreciative of the fact that I heard of these women. I heard of these women, I was part of being in groups where this actually materialized and followed through. The whole idea that it's happened, you know, is so significant after all these years. And, again, it's the sense of community that we have, we know it's there. It represents everything that is safe, and compelling. Also, it's a place where writers— you don't have to be a professional writer, somebody who expresses— it's a place to bring your thoughts, your ideas to, and have it shared for further research. You know, just one small idea can spark an amazing project for someone else and to have this is, it means everything to me. I'm just so proud and happy to be part of this. You know, I'm self published, I've sent my work to the Archives. I appreciate the fact that they accepted my work and the fact that they're willing to accept my journals. That means so much to me personally. And it validates my ticket, you know? [Laughs]—

Mallory Leger 55:11

Like you said, words are so important, our stories are so important. I'm so glad that your, you know, your story can be shared through your journals. That's just such— and your writing, and the self publishing you're doing and here today it's just so wonderful to hear your story. And the

challenges and the wisdom and everything that you have to share, so I'm so grateful to be here with you. I just wanted to say, you know, is there anything else that you'd like to share that we haven't covered yet, as we come to a close?

Carol Crayton 55:40

I think we covered everything that I had thought we would. I hope that you, along with the younger generation who's involved in the project, will stay in touch with us throughout time, and there'll be other opportunities to share with each other. That this just continues to grow. And I think of the women who are isolated, gay women, lesbians who are isolated, who don't know about this, whose voices are not heard. I'm concerned about them. I hope that there's some way through our projects, through the Archives, and through our networking, that we can reach out and help as well, and connect with these women to hear their stories as well.

Mallory Leger 56:54

Absolutely, yeah. I think you really said it so well, that this is an opportunity. This Archive has given us such a good opportunity to give voice to so many people's, mainly women's stories, who might not have been heard otherwise. We need to continue that forth and whose stories need to continue to be told and uplifted and so I really appreciate that and will carry that with me as well.

Carol Crayton 57:19

Thank you, Mallory. I appreciate all that you've done. Thank you so much.

Mallory Leger 57:25

Thank you, Carol. It has been such a privilege and an honor to hear your story. So thank you so much.

Carol Crayton 57:31

You're welcome.