

Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,  
Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas

Beth Black  
Oral History

Interviewed by  
Tami Albin

December 14, 2008

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**Beth Black:** Narrator  
**Tami Albin:** Interviewer

**TAMI ALBIN:** Okay. So today is December 14, 2008, and I'm here with Beth Black. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed.

**BETH BLACK:** You're very welcome.

**ALBIN:** I appreciate it immensely. So I'll start off this interview the way that I start all of them off. Please tell me where you were born and when.

**BLACK:** I was born in Huntsville, Alabama in 1955, lived there for two years and then moved to Lawrence, Kansas.

**ALBIN:** Um-hm, and so what brought you to Lawrence, Kansas?

**BLACK:** My parents are from Lawrence. They had actually—well, my mom had grown up in Lawrence. My dad had spent his high school here and every year since, except he was in the army and that's why we were in Huntsville. So I was born there, done with the army, came back to Lawrence. And then I lived here for the next twenty years.

**ALBIN:** So any siblings?

**BLACK:** Oh yeah, three brothers. I was the only girl.

**ALBIN:** What was that like? (laugh)

**BLACK:** Fascinating. (laughter) Well, at the time I was very aware—everybody always asked me, Oh you poor thing. What was it like being the only girl? And I was so sick and tired of the question that I just totally ignored it. It's like, rolled my eyes and moved on, didn't even like talk to people about it because I was just—I thought it was a stupid question. Years later it was like, I have a lot of perspective. (laugh) I mean, I was very,

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as a young adult and as—well actually as a teenager young adult and for many years I was really angry because I was treated so differently as a girl than my brothers. There were some nice things, in retrospect, that I got from being a girl, but there was a lot of stupid stuff that I wasn't encouraged or allowed to do.

**ALBIN:** So what was your childhood like in Lawrence?

**BLACK:** Um—well, I guess the really great part of my childhood is that every year we would go camping and floating down on a canoe trip as family—as two families. And we'd do that once a year and it was great. I thought everybody did that in the world. And we'd be in the middle of nowhere. This is in the Ozarks so not that far away, but away from Lawrence. And it was just the best time in the world. And so that—I thought everybody did that. I didn't know anything about motels or any (laugh) of that. But my dad was a building contractor so he, during nine months of the year was very, very busy, was pretty much an absent father, not completely, but not very actively involved in it. My mom was the boss and—we were out playing outside all the time, I mean, kick the can, and I can't [remember]—all the games.<sup>1</sup> I was always running away from home, "running away from home". I'd take my little lunch and be gone for the day (laughter) and then I'd be back.

I moved many times in Lawrence, and the longest we lived in one place was five years and it was on the—was the outskirts of town at that time. And so I had a perfect playground to be running away. And I'd spend a lot of time in the prairie kind of rolling around in it and looking at animals and creatures going around so—it was very, in some ways, idyllic as far as I was encouraged to be very independent, and all of my brothers were very independent and we kind of went our own ways. And I was not—I was the third child. I was the only daughter—oldest daughter (laugh) I almost said—the only daughter. And because of that I was expected to do all these things that my brothers weren't expected to do as far as helping my mom out and just paying attention to a lot of things that they were oblivious to. And so I always kind of felt like I was the oldest child even though I was the third. And then my little brother that was the last one, he was three years younger than me, was kind of—I kind of felt like I was—I was an older

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<sup>1</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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sister, I was bossing him around, but also we had this bond that I didn't have with my older brothers even though I was closer in age to them, because they were out working for my dad and [encouraged]<sup>2</sup> to do boy things that I was never encouraged to do. And so it was a little bit of a split even though the years don't work that way, two [kids] and two [kids].<sup>3</sup>

**ALBIN:** So what was school like for you?

**BLACK:** I was in a bunch of schools. In fact we're in my old hood, one of my old hoods here, Sunset Hill, is that one of them, Sunset Hill? I remember like getting those shots, or polio shots, and one of my classmates had polio. It was like one of the last—because I was born in '55 and it was almost, in the United States anyway, taken care of. I remember Jeff having polio and being very aware of people being—like there was a couple people in various different classes that were not normal. And I didn't think I was normal, but health wise I was pretty normal. But I always kind of paid attention to people that were different, and I ended up being a physical therapist, so that was—it was a long road to there. But yeah, I think there was some roots to that, that I saw people that weren't—didn't have the same health abilities I did.

**ALBIN:** So what made you think you weren't normal in school?

**BLACK:** Oh I—who knows why I didn't think I was normal. I mean I—there was an [rule] in my family that it was never good enough so I was never good enough.<sup>4</sup> And whether it was looks—I always wanted to be smarter and I was pretty smart, but I wasn't as smart as some people. (laugh) Some things came real easily to me and I got spoiled pretty early on as far as what it took to be a student. And then I got to KU and it's like, Oh my God, study? You got to be kidding me. (laugh) How rude. So not being normal—well, when I was in junior high and high school I guess kind of the things that started leaning towards me coming out way early was just kind of my best friend was really into boys and I was really into her. And I would have been fine just the girls

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<sup>3</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

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continuing to stay together and do our thing and stay up all night and have our slumber parties and all that kind of stuff that we did.

And not to say that there weren't boys that I was interested in. I thought they were interesting, but it was really obviously different. And my best friend, who I just saw yesterday, Jo, was—like she was looking in a certain direction and I wasn't. I had no sense of—like it didn't even cross my mind about being romantic with Jo or with anybody particularly. But I was really aware that I wasn't the same. And she—so she had been my best friend like since kindergarten (*unintelligible*) and we continued. In fact, we even lived together some in college at KU. But it became this bigger and bigger thing between us that she was having dates and doing this other thing. In fact she had started—there was kind of the three of us that—she had another good friend that wasn't really my real good friend, but another good friend, and I was always (laugh) really jealous of her. And I—that's the only piece that I can relate to as a child, that I knew early on that I wanted her all to myself. And it took me coming out and Jo and I were still roommates (laugh) to figure out, Oh hmm, maybe there's a connection there. (laugh)

**ALBIN:** So what prompted you to come out?

**BLACK:** Well, so I got through junior high, high school here in Lawrence and then kind of didn't know what to do. So this was in the seventies and there was just a lot of turmoil in the seventies, early seventies. There was turmoil in the high school for one thing. And I didn't really like school. I wasn't challenged in school and didn't really—I was really lost. And I loved animals and wanted to become a vet. And so for the last two years of high school I went and worked at the vet half days. And there was a program there that was really for—kind of a vocational, [for] people to be able to do farming and whatever, and they found a place for me basically to help me stay in school, that I worked for the vet and I had to do some like—take some tests and do some educational things with the vet besides work there.<sup>5</sup> And then I took like English, and I think I had two hours of class I had (laugh) to be at school. So I didn't really see my high school friends too much at that point.

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<sup>5</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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But graduated from high school and then it's like, Well now what am I going to do? (laugh) And it was really hard for me, so—the people that were my friends in high school went right to college. Many of them went to KU and I did not. I worked in the hardware store downtown, Hardware Store which our families were very connected with each other.<sup>6</sup> So I worked there and—well I started working there after high school, so I worked through the summer and worked through [what would have been my] first semester of college.<sup>7</sup> And three or four months into working at the hardware store it was kind of like, Okay I'm not going to do this the rest of my life. (laugh) I mean, I kind of loved it. There were things that I really loved about it, but couldn't see doing that every day. And I had stayed in touch with some of my friends and would go visit them up on the Hill and it's like, hmm, everybody's like really having a good old time so why not? (laugh) I was very lost. I was very kind of like, Okay what am I going to do? And so I ended up starting college. It was really just one semester [that I sat out], but it felt like it could have been a year, it could have been two years as far as—as dramatic it was for me of not—of kind of recognizing, Well there's nowhere—I'm going nowhere without a college degree or nowhere without some direction, whether that was college or what.<sup>8</sup>

And so I started college, and that would have been winter of 1974. So it was a whole year after that I took a class called Female Awareness. So it was a college class. And it was really one of those consciousness-raising groups that shouldn't have been a (laugh) college credit thing. Although we did have a little credit and we did go to Watson Library. Every week we had readings we had to do, so we had to go to the library and sign our name and do these things.<sup>9</sup> But it was like fireworks going off. And we had to read *Sappho Was a Right-on Woman* and *Rubyfruit Jungle* and all these great books, and other really good, strong feminist books too. And I was a feminist already. In high school I identified that.<sup>10</sup> So there were maybe ten women in this—there were two women teachers and maybe ten women that were taking the class.

**ALBIN:** Who were the instructors, do you remember?

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<sup>6</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>7</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>8</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

<sup>9</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>10</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

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**BLACK:** I wrote them down. Let's see—I have them here somewhere. I thought I did.

**ALBIN:** It's cool. I was just curious if—

**BLACK:** Well, they're not lesbian. I'd be really surprised if they ever came out. Because what happened in the process, there were two lesbians going in (laugh) and there were like eight or something coming out by the end of the semester. And the two women, the two instructors, really were uncomfortable with the direction that it went, because so many women were coming out in the process of the course. And so there was—one of the lesbians that was there was really, really opinionated and strong and probably thought of herself as a separatist, but I don't know that I heard that word at that point, but it was very—like there was—part of the coursework was that we were supposed to occasionally get together with the men's awareness group. And we all decided that we weren't going to do that and I think Joann might have been the one that brought that up first. And so every week we'd come and we'd been—some of us had done our readings and we'd talk about different things in there. It was just like really [intense].<sup>11</sup> Because the first thing I said out loud was that I thought I was a political lesbian. (laugh) And then all it took was a little bit of time (laugh) and there I was, yeah. So I was—that was—'75, so I was nineteen.

**ALBIN:** What was KU like at that time?

**BLACK:** Well KU—I mean—so the first year I was at KU I got really involved in kind of lefty politics, anti-war.<sup>12</sup> The war was over but kind of like the leftover—all the stuff about Vietnam and [how] it was treating of soldiers or treating of the Vietnamese or babies left over at Vietnam and all that stuff.<sup>13</sup> There was—I picketed over on Dillons about Cesar Chavez and head lettuce, so that kind of stuff. There was just a lot of stuff going on all the time. So this was kind of—at some point, and I think it was either that same semester I took that class or maybe the semester before, there was these dances called the Gay Liberation Dances and—at the union. And I lived at a Scholarship Hall

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<sup>11</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>12</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

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up on the Hill, Watkins Hall.<sup>14</sup> And so a lot of the Scholarship Hall people would go (*telephone ringing*) and party and show up at the dance. And it was definitely a lot of alcohol going on, a lot of drugs. And I remember like I first took acid there. You don't need to—don't need to answer that?

**ALBIN:** No. (laughter)

**BLACK:** You could interrupt.

**ALBIN:** It's okay.

**BLACK:** You said I could interrupt, (unintelligible). So I can remember like taking acid and going to the Gay Lib Dances and—again not really understanding (laugh) too much of what was going on. And then I had several friends that would go with me to do that. Again, it was totally just a fun thing. Not a disrespectful thing to do, I hope anyway. I don't think I was being disrespectful. And then once I had this class and was meeting lesbians—not just women coming out, but meeting lesbians that were like solidly as lesbians and knew who they were—it's like, Oh yeah, let's go to that dance. And so it was like, That's my dance. (laughter) So lots of things going on at KU.

**ALBIN:** So what other classes did you take when you were at KU?

**BLACK:** Well let's see—I ended up getting a degree in social work, so I took a lot of social work classes.<sup>15</sup> But before I got there I thought sociology. I thought certainly women's—what was it called at that point? I just spaced out. Women's studies. Women's studies. I was going to do a triple major—women's studies, psych, and art history. Oh that's the other thing. So before I came out—I started school in the spring and then—so I had one semester, and then I followed another good friend (laugh) that had really wanted to go to France. She did a study abroad at France, and so I—when I heard that she was going to go I applied to go also. And so that summer was the first year I had ever been out of the country. Well no, that's not true. I had gone to Ontario, but just like across the river, across the lake. But other than that, I'd never been out of

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<sup>14</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

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the country. I had hardly been out of the Midwest, and hardly out of Kansas [and] Ozarks area because that was—that was—[as] I mentioned that we'd go canoeing.<sup>16</sup> Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas was kind of like—that was my circle of my world, and beyond that I didn't really see. So I spent a summer in France.

And it was like an eye-opening experience because, first of all it was Paris, that's pretty cool, and France in general was pretty cool, but I just—it—I grew up, I think. I think I was exposed to a lot of different kinds of people, a lot of situations, the history of—the world is much bigger than Lawrence, Kansas (laugh) which I hadn't really experienced. As a kid I was a townie. The university was here, my parents—the first major part of my life had nothing to do with the university, my—nothing had to do with the university. It was there but it was really kind of schizo. There was like the east side of town. There was a lot of splits in Lawrence. Now whether it was race, class, university versus townie, there was just a lot of splits, and I was really kind of in my own little world. And I think that going over to France really kind of blew me out of that world in a real good way. And so I came out after that. And so everything was kind of like open. But I think also because of that experience I looked at Lawrence in a different way. I really kind of enjoyed KU and loved the freedom that I felt like I had there, but I didn't feel like that overflowed into Lawrence at all. My experience in Lawrence was that it was little (laugh) and you couldn't get—well as a kid—as a teenager you couldn't get away with anything. Everybody would find out about it, and it would get back around to the people you don't want to know. And that led to me thinking about wanting—or feeling like I couldn't stay here. So as I got closer and closer to graduating I just knew I was getting out of town.<sup>17</sup> (laugh)

So I just—it was just clear in my mind that I didn't feel like I could be who I [was]—and I kind of knew that I wasn't at all—even though I thought at twenty that I was so old and so together and I knew myself.<sup>18</sup> But like somehow I knew there was enough—that there was enough growing yet to go. And I'm totally [making] this point as a 53-year-old, I feel like that's something I want to keep moving towards forever, but at twenty I

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<sup>16</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

<sup>17</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>18</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

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thought like twenty-five maybe I'd be done.<sup>19</sup> (laugh) But I knew that there was still more to go and I just didn't feel like it would be possible for me to be the person I wanted to be without being very aware of people around me not liking it or not being able to—or deciding I would compromise, I would not be me because of the reflection it would be of the people around me, whether it was family or friends of family or whatever.

And so I left in '77, like a few months after I graduated from KU, and moved up to Minneapolis where, I had heard really exciting things like—I kind of skipped over a lot of stuff at KU. There was this great hangout place at KU and I was—after I came out called the Women's Resource Center, which was a student-funded student organization. And Joann, this woman that was in my class, was really big. I mean, she practically lived at the Women's (laugh) Resource Center. And so like I started reading *Lesbian Connection* and what was that, *Redstockings*? *Redstockings* I think. There was a lot of kind of controversial stuff coming through, and that was a really good place to get it, besides just kind of in between classes you go hang. We're talking an office that's as big as from here to here—

**ALBIN:** Right (laugh)

**BLACK:** From here to you (laugh). And so if you got four women in there it was pretty cozy. And then there was also a Gay Lib Office, but we never went there. So that was the men's room (laugh) and then there was the women's room. It was pretty separate. And I would go to the Gay Lib dances, but I didn't overlap with the gay men. And that was kind of how I came out, was that there was a big, strong separation that the men did this and the women did that. And I don't know if it was because there was so much feminism going on at the time, that that impacted it or what, but for me certainly it was separate. And so in *Lesbian Connection* and things I've read, and then somebody had gone up to Minneapolis and came back and said, Oh it's a great place.

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<sup>19</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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Anyway, knowing nothing about (laugh) Minneapolis, and knowing that one woman who I'd gone to junior high school with lived in Saint Paul, I packed my bags and went up to Minneapolis to live at twenty. And that was a pretty big deal. So it was the first time long ways away from my family and not really having anybody. I did have my dog, had my golden retriever that I took with me and [borrowed] my family's big old station wagon.<sup>20</sup> Drove up there. Thought I, without notice, would be able to find my junior high school friend, Lynn and stay at her place. Because she had said, Oh sure, come up and visit. So I [left].<sup>21</sup> (laugh) Ah, the stupidity of youth. And so I get up there and she's not home, nobody's answering the telephone. And so I hang out—this won't mean anything, but I hung out at this one park that during the day it's a nice place but at night it's where all the gay men were cruising, and that there had been a lot of gay bashing and—anyway, I was—nothing happened that night I was there, but I was hanging out using the telephone. Where is she? Where is she? Anyway, never did show up. And so me and my dog and a station wagon full of stuff, we drove around for a while after not being able to find anything. I didn't have—I didn't have any money. I probably had—if I had a hundred dollars with me it would have been a lot. It was just kind of like that's what I did. And so I stopped at a police station and I said, I'm (laugh) new in town and is there any way—I have a sleeping bag. Could I like sleep inside your police station because I don't know really where I should spend the night, like camp or whatever. And so they had pity on me, let me stay there. And so I spent the night there and then Lynn did come back and so I did [stay with her for a while].<sup>22</sup>

But—so—and Minneapolis-St. Paul—so Lynn was close but not like where I wanted to live in Minneapolis. And I didn't know anybody. So it was a very brave thing. And it was a great thing for me to do because Minneapolis was really, really, lots of things going on. There was a women's coffeehouse. There was a women's bookstore that I had joined The Collective, and worked there every week for one day a week, and lots of music, lots of politics. Like every night there was something going on, gatherings, and it was really stimulating and great expansive place for me to go. So I ended up being there for twelve years.

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<sup>20</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

<sup>21</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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**ALBIN:** So what did you—once you got settled in (laugh) Minneapolis, what did you do?

**BLACK:** Well, I had gotten my degree in social work, so I was working with—in Minnesota—I had a bachelor's in social work and again, if I went there for my career I made a poor career choice because in Minnesota you needed to have a master's in social work to really get much choice in jobs. So I was a childcare worker and I worked with [kids]—I was twenty.<sup>23</sup> I worked with adolescents that sometimes were seventeen years old and I was the wise sage which—I mean, it is a crucial three years, but it was anywhere from 12- to 17-year-olds. Usually they were runaways and temporarily were staying at the shelter before they would be either going back home or foster care or whatever. So I did that for a couple years and then decided it wasn't what my heart—well, the reason I—or the emphasis I was studying in social work and what I liked the most about social work wasn't like a typical social work thing, but there's a community organizing part of social work that I was very active in and that's really what I wanted to do, because I—one of our projects, there was two bachelor's students and then a graduate student that our project was developing Women's Transitional Care Services here in Lawrence. So we had to like create policies and find people in the community that were willing to work with us, and so that's really kind of where my heart was. But again with a bachelors you don't do that kind of thing. Maybe you could in Kansas at that time and maybe in some states, but not in Minnesota. It was—so I was kind of like—I was—I had a college degree and that made me eligible for certain things but not really anything in my area of work.

**ALBIN:** So when you left to go to Minnesota, had you come out to your family at that point?

**BLACK:** Yes, oh yes, um-hm. So—okay so the first—okay, I lived in Lawrence. I didn't live with my parents, but I would every Sunday go and have dinner with them, almost every Sunday. So we were still pretty close. Now I was much closer with my mom than my dad.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

<sup>24</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

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(pause)

**ALBIN:** Okay, we're back on.

**BLACK:** We're back on, okay. So I'd see my parents regularly every—almost every weekend, and so it became clear at some point I was going to have to come out to them and how I was going to do it and which one I was going to do first. And I was much closer with my mom so I thought probably that would be the first person to talk to. But I don't know, it took me—it was like, I didn't—it was one of those things I thought our family had never dealt with before. Years later I found [out] differently, but I didn't know anybody that had ever come out to their family, I didn't know anybody—well, there was one boy that I thought probably was gay, but our families weren't close so it was not in our realm of anybody that had dealt with this before.<sup>25</sup> And my family dynamics weren't all that together at that point. My parents were kind of living together but not together. They didn't share very much and my brothers were all [gone]—all of us were everywhere but home.<sup>26</sup> And so it was basically my parents [that] I needed to tell them and how and when.<sup>27</sup>

So I eventually told my mom. And I think I took her out to eat, like it was for lunch or something. Definitely I didn't do it at home because I didn't want to do it the two of them together. And so I told her about it. And I was involved with somebody at that point, but I don't think it was until later that I introduced her to Ricki but—anyway, so I came out to her. And what I remember about that is she said that she was sad because she was afraid I was going to have a really hard life. And she said, The only person—she only knew one person that she could think of and that she really hasn't done very well, like she's had a hard life. And to get her to elaborate on that was not going to happen.<sup>28</sup> (laugh) And so I said, I don't think it's that bad of a thing. I think it's a good thing for me. But that was her response. And at that point—I don't know that she would have said it but—oh, as the years went by it was clear that—because when my little brother got married and had a couple kids— Who's that over there (laugh) making noise.

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<sup>25</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

<sup>26</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>27</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>28</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

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**ALBIN:** Yeah, she's just moving. (laugh)

**BLACK:** My little brother had gotten married and had a couple kids, and just to see how positively she reacted to that was kind of surprising in some ways. But it just kind of reinforced that this is kind of the way she would love me to have turned out, so—she's come around. She knew this one [lesbian] that drank a lot and was really not—kind of lost.<sup>29</sup> And then within—well after I left town, within a few year her boss was a lesbian and there were a bunch of lesbians in her life after I left town. It's like, Well shit. It was really good because I let them do all the work basically. But it was kind of like, Why didn't you come around five years a little earlier? It would have been really nice. (laugh) But it was. They did all the work because basically my mom got to see healthy women that she admired and respected and liked, and that they seemed to be doing just fine as lesbians. So I think that really helped change her mind a lot. So by then I must have been twenty-five or something. And so things were getting easier between me and my mom. And then so while I was still in Lawrence—and I'm really jumping around here, so that was within the first six months or so after I came out to myself I came out to my mom.

And then two years later before I left town I decided I'd better let my dad know. And I can't remember again where I did that with him, probably at home, but mom wasn't around. So I—because I had a girlfriend and—same girlfriend. (laugh) I had a girlfriend and I wanted him to know about it and so I just told him, I said, Dad I'm a lesbian and I have a girlfriend and I don't think I'm ever going to get married. And he was much better than my mom. So this is somebody who I, at that time, wouldn't have talked about anything with, but just felt like it was kind of this big gap to not have told him I was a lesbian before I left town. But he was just like, Well that's okay. I just want you to be happy. And it was like, Who is this man? (laughter) Couldn't figure out where that came from, but it was really positive. And then I found out a good ten years after that, that my dad's—well my cousin—my dad's brother's daughter is a lesbian who—she's a good ten—less than fifteen years younger than me, or older than me rather, and when I was probably twelve or thirteen or so had disappeared. And my dad's mom, my

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<sup>29</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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grandma, who I was really close to, was really torn up about it and hired a private detective to try and find her. Couldn't find her, couldn't find her, couldn't find her. And my aunt, my cousin's mom, had died, had gotten cancer and had died.

And all this happened and nobody told me she was a lesbian and why she wouldn't have anything to do with her parents. I said, Still nobody's heard from Peggy?<sup>30</sup> [My dad] said, Oh no somebody finally tracked her down and she's still in Missouri, she's still a nurse, and she's still with the same woman.<sup>31</sup> And it's like, What? (laugh) It's like, Hello. So I really think the process—so my—and again, I haven't ever reconnected with my cousin because I don't—my dad didn't. Nobody—few people in our family know how to get hold of her and they're not supposed to. But I—from what my dad said was that Peggy came out to her parents and they wouldn't have anything to do with her. And I don't know if they went as far as disowning her, but it was this really bad, bad scene. And they lived in Missouri on a farm, and so Charlie, my uncle, talked to my dad and so I think he learned a lot from that, that he would not ever let that happen in his family. Of course it would have been helpful to hear that it was going on and that there were some lessons being (laugh) learned here, but I did not—never, until many, many—I mean so many years later that I just—I just wanted to shake him. I just thought, Damn (laugh) there was like somebody else in my family that had went through this. And I actually have tried to find her myself because I think it would be this—we were never close because she was so much older than me, but—anyway, so now everybody in my family knows, I mean, first my mom, first my dad.

Then I came out to my brothers in a letter to them that I wrote all at the same time so they wouldn't have to, one be hurt that they found out before the other. And my little brother said, Oh no big deal. He was kind of the macrobiotic hippie (laugh) little brother, so it was like, No big deal. And then my oldest brother was—was into a Fundamentalist church, a new-agey fundamentalist church but still very much into God and Jesus. And he said, I can't believe you wouldn't think I would still love you even though you're a homosexual. (laugh) This is how he wrote it to me. And (laugh) so it was not a hard thing between anybody. I mean it's not by—by declaration it's not a hard thing. It's a difference and it's one of those things that, as I've gotten older, my brothers have had all

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<sup>30</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

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sorts of other things that have made them stick out differently than maybe the average person or from each other. And so some of that's kind of been blurred over, I mean like the fact that only my little brother has kids. My two oldest brothers didn't follow that kind of, getting married and having kids. And that, I think, would have been much more isolating to me if I was the only one that didn't have kids, because I didn't have kids besides being a lesbian.

So it's—as they've gotten older I think, some of my siblings anyway, we've bonded a lot that we didn't do as teenagers or from early adulthood, so we've kind of gotten over that. And I still have that older brother that is—he's very attentive to my partner, but there's—I'm sure there's something about (laugh) homosexuals that he—he hasn't resolved it in his mind. Like there's his sister and his religion and he doesn't know—as far as I can tell he hasn't figured out how to resolve those two. He's not willing to cut either out, so that's fine with me.

**ALBIN:** Right. So what happened after Minneapolis? You were there twelve years.

**BLACK:** I was there twelve years.

**ALBIN:** Cold winters—

**BLACK:** Well actually let me go back. Because when I came out with that Female Awareness, one of the things that we talked a lot about in that group was nonmonogamy. And nonmonogamy was big. And that's how I came (laugh) out was that you were [nonmonogamous]—not that there was like you had to be, but I believed it.<sup>32</sup> Something I read or in the discussion I decided that was the way to go, that there was no reason to be committed [to only one woman.]<sup>33</sup> And that was my history of being a lesbian here in Lawrence was that you weren't committed to one person by any means, you drank a lot, you probably took a lot of drugs and—I'm a recovering alcoholic and that did not do me very good at all—not the nonmonogamy. I mean, they are kind of all meshed together, but I don't know that without the alcohol—a lot of things wouldn't have happened. I mean, the socializing probably wouldn't have happened, certainly the

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<sup>32</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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nonmonogamy wouldn't have happened as much. (laugh) But we—but there were—I think there were some—because the—something that happens—certainly as we are older I found that we stay in our little twosies that didn't happen with the nonmonogamy early stuff. And that—some of that's age that we stay in contact with people much easier.

But I just think that even here in Lawrence at KU there were so many things going on. There's the Women's Transitional Care Services that got started while I was coming out in the first couple of years of being a lesbian and then there was the Woman House down on Connecticut that didn't last very long at all, and that's what I was [talking] about.<sup>34</sup> So there was Toni—Toni and Mary Lisa that were part of the Women's Resource Center at KU. And then there was a woman that came to town that had a lot of money. Her name is Susan. And she basically bought this house on Connecticut [street] to turn it into like a resource center for the town, not for just KU.<sup>35</sup> And we all had really high hopes of it. There was a woman lawyer. Actually there's two women lawyers, but only one was going to work out of there. And we had dances every weekend at that house and people were really drunk and were hanging over the sides. It's amazing that—I don't know what the neighborhood was thinking at the time, but I'm sure it was controversial. (laugh) Since I was the inside looking out and not the outside looking in, I don't know.

But I did meet the woman that my mom—was the only lesbian that my mom had ever known and (laugh) she was really drunk. She was actually hitting on me. And she was like a good—well my mother's age, so she was a good thirty-some years older than me, so it was just kind of funny. But I did get—with that house I did get exposed to more lesbians, not—townie lesbians, than lesbians from the university, because most of my exposure at that point was just lesbians from the university. And I was working at [the] Hospital, again following my best friend, Jo.<sup>36</sup> I sound like a big follower. When I see a good thing I go with it. (laughter) So my good friend, Jo, that I'd been best friends since kindergarten, she was working at [the] Hospital and so she got me a job there too.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>35</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

<sup>36</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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And I worked there for a couple years of going to school. And there was a woman there that was in charge of the clinic.<sup>38</sup> So this woman was really a hard ass. (laugh) You know, everybody watched their P's and Q's around [her,] and she was—she had high standards and I appreciate that.<sup>39</sup> And there's things that were intimidating about that, but I really appreciated that. And so Jo and I would come and do our thing. And it was around our school schedule so we weren't there all day by any means.

Anyway, so at one point [our boss] was going out of town and so she asked various people if they could take care of her house.<sup>40</sup> And I think Jo had done it some and other people had done it before. So I did it. And so she invited me over to her place. So this was really early after I came out. And she was a friend of my mother's. Well not a friend of—she knew my mother. They lived—my parents lived in an apartment building for some period of time and she and another woman lived in the apartment building at the same time. So it was a little bit too close to home because—and I don't know if I had come out to my mom or not yet. But anyway it was the outside world and I wasn't quite knowing how to handle the outside world yet as far as them knowing I was lesbian.

And so she has me come over and I meet [her,] who I had never met before, the woman who she lives with, and this is—show me around and this is what needed to be taken care of.<sup>41</sup> And then there was the other bedroom which was [her roommate's] bedroom, but it never was used.<sup>42</sup> So it was like all of a sudden things were like, click, click, click, click, click. (laughter) I get it. Nothing was—nothing was said. And so I stay at their place and take care of it. And so my process in coming out was I was like buying books and lesbian music. And I had Alix Dobkin's *Living with Lesbians* on the record player when they come home. (laugh) And they totally didn't act like they—they came home. I mean, it was not on like playing because I wasn't there. They came home early and I had left it on [the stereo] because I was listening to it all the time at their place.<sup>43</sup> And so I come back and they've come home early. And they put up

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<sup>38</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>39</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>40</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>41</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>42</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>43</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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*Lavender Jane Loves Lesbians* into the sleeve and—not like throwing it away or anything, but just like put it up and had something else on the record player. I mean, nothing said, nothing said at all. But then—so I think, I know they're lesbians, and—but I didn't know how to talk to them about it.

So they're—I was twenty and they were probably fifties, something like that. So it's like the age thing and the fact you're a new lesbian, and she's your boss (laugh) on top of it. And so nothing was ever said. So I continued to work with her. And then another—my "resident director" of my Scholarship Hall who was older than me, all of three years or something, she starts working there too. And she's a lesbian too. And so she starts hanging out with [my boss] and [her roommate] and tells me, well—I mean, basically she tells me that they're lesbians even though they've never said they were lesbians to her either, but she's treating them like lesbians.<sup>44</sup> But then here I—I'm finding out this information that's never been talked about, so that's the way it was. So there was another townie lesbian relationship that I saw. [My boss] wasn't, as far as I know, was never out at all.<sup>45</sup> And it just—so that's my experience of Lawrence and [being] lesbian.<sup>46</sup> And I know that's not at all true. I mean, that's '75 (laugh)—1975.

And then I lived in Minneapolis and that wasn't at all true [now.]<sup>47</sup> I mean there was—there's some—like, I wouldn't go out and say, Hey I'm a dyke, come get me, kind of thing anywhere in the world, (laugh) but it felt very safe in Minneapolis. And then I moved to Albuquerque and—I'm discreet about it at times, but again, I mean I've lived in the same house with my partner for twenty-two years, twenty-three years. All the neighbors—again, we haven't used the word lesbian to them but I'm sure they know, I mean just by looking at us, by us touching each other and the women (laugh) that come and go out of the house, and the fact that we've been together for so many years too. And at work and—I mean, it's just like—so it's a different world in 2008 compared to 1975. And I see that when I come visit and the few lesbians I see (*unintelligible*) it's like, All right. It's even here in Lawrence, (laugh) Kansas which—Lawrence, Kansas, I know,

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<sup>44</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>45</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>46</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

<sup>47</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

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is the liberal oasis of Kansas, but it didn't—it just—even though on the hill it felt that way, Lawrence, which I separate from the Hill, did not feel that way in '75.

**ALBIN:** I'm just going to change the tape.

[Section removed]

**ALBIN:** So why did you decide to move to Albuquerque from Minnesota?<sup>48</sup> The weather or—(laughter)

**BLACK:** Why would you say that? (laugh) Okay so—(telephone ringing)

**ALBIN:** I don't have to get that. (laughter)

**BLACK:** So I was—I left in '88. I would have been thirty-three. Had been there long enough and grown enough. I think part of—Minneapolis was a big city and I didn't really necessarily want to live in a big city for the rest of my life. And I—and there's safety in a big city and I didn't feel like I needed that safety. I thought I needed it when I first moved there. So that was one thing. Certainly the coldness had something to do with it. When I first moved there I was really excited because I have always loved snow and I thought, Oh playing in the snow, skiing, skating, whatever it is, would be great. But what I found in Minnesota as the years went on, and I think it's gotten even worse since I left, is that it was too cold to snow, and I hadn't then lived winters going from six months plus long wearing layers, long underwear always. You never were naked. (laughter) You just survived. So yeah, the weather had something to do with it. Both—the plusses of winter like here in Kansas you get to play in the snow and not have it last six months is—I thought would be much better in Minnesota but it wasn't. So weather.

And then the last thing was I met my girlfriend who—she's from Michigan but had pretty early on moved to New Mexico and had come back to go to school in the Twin Cities. So I met her while she was in school. And so about the time I met her I was really knowing that I wasn't too long for the Twin Cities and Minnesota specifically, and I was

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<sup>48</sup> Edited by interviewer during the review process

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kind of looking at more temperate communities that would be good places to move. And she had intentions to move back to New Mexico. So once we kind of figured out that we wanted to stay together then I had to decide if I wanted to live in New Mexico. And I actually had visited a friend in New Mexico in '74 or something who grew up there. So I had been there before, but it was kind of a foreign place.

And so I went down and spent several visits down there deciding, thought, this is a pretty cool place and I moved down actually before—Gail wasn't done with school yet, and I moved down in January. And I kept on laughing and I'd think, [You] call this winter.<sup>49</sup> (laugh) And still it's pretty remarkable, although I've gotten—I'm totally a wimp. Like, this kind of weather, I'm wearing long underwear (laughter) because it's humid, (laughter) just cuts right through you, that cold weather, the moisture. Yeah, I really do like the warmth. I mean, we have four seasons. I love being outdoors. It's a great area to be outdoors, to go hiking and, when we have snow, skiing so I'm happy. Now we've been there for twenty—twenty years, a little more than twenty years now.

**ALBIN:** So did you go back to school to become a physical therapist?

**BLACK:** Yeah, I did.

**ALBIN:** Did you do that in New Mexico?

**BLACK:** I did that in New Mexico, yeah. So Gail was getting her degree in occupational therapy. And so I was thirty or so—well more than thirty when kind of watching her go through OT and then with her first job. And occupational therapy—well what Gail's first job was—worked with physical therapists a lot. So it's kind of reminding [me] a lot of my days at KU when I worked in the physical therapy clinic.<sup>50</sup> And I was kind of at a place in my career that I had done a lot of things well, but not really because it was what my heart told me that's what I wanted to be doing. And so I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do when I grew up, even (laugh) though I was in my thirties. And so I went back to school to become a PT.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

<sup>50</sup> Added by narrator during the review process.

<sup>51</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.

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**ALBIN:** So do you see yourself staying in Albuquerque?

**BLACK:** Yes.

**ALBIN:** Yeah?

**BLACK:** Yeah. It very much feels like home. There was a point—well, I guess when I was thinking about moving from Minneapolis, there was a point that I thought about moving to Lawrence, but it wasn't—it was still too early. And so that was '88. Now if I hadn't settled— If I hadn't have found a place that feels so much like home somewhere since—more recently, then I can see in the last ten years being willing to reconsider it. But there's just—I mean, there's just too much settling in there. The only reason I [considered it] is just because my mom—being far away from my mom is hard.<sup>52</sup>

**ALBIN:** So when you come home and visit, what are the biggest things that you notice about the changes with Lawrence? Because how big was it? Like what was the size of Lawrence when you lived here?

**BLACK:** Well, the university was like 40,000. I used to say, and I don't know how accurate, the university was 40,000 and the town was 40,000.

**ALBIN:** Right.

**BLACK:** And so when the university stopped in the summer it was a small town. I mean, it really wasn't that small but it was pretty small compared to what it is now. So we lived for a while here. The other place we lived is over there by Deerfield. Deerfield wasn't there yet. And that's where I would run away from home, and the prairies were everywhere. Across the street was this wonderful woman that—it was farm and she would let me come over and milk her cows and play with her chickens and all that stuff. And so it was—it felt like I wasn't living in town for those five years we were out there.

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<sup>52</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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And then for a few years we lived close to the university. All the places we lived except for that one was more inside town and—I mean, it feels like I don't—it's not my town.

**ALBIN:** Right.

**BLACK:** Except that like when I'm coming down 9th Street to come to your house I drive by Sunset Hills. I go, Wow (laugh) I mean, everything looks so tiny. I've been in a couple of the houses that I lived in over the years. Like, I've knocked on the doors and I said, (laugh) I'm a poor starving little girl, would you please take—No. I said, My grandparents lived here and we lived here for a couple of years. Would you let me in? And people have been really receptive (laugh) to that. I've only done it twice. It is kind of fun. And my experience is that you go in and rooms that you thought were huge were like nothing. They're just little tiny things. And I thought that was like a mansion, the one my grandparents lived in. And it was three floors tall, but it was pretty small but—(laugh) Yeah so yeah, I—when I come I don't do that many things. Like this time I had two outside hanging with my family kind of things, and mostly I just—because I just come for a short period of time and I don't really get out and see much. Like when I went to my reunion thing in September, I didn't know. They said, Oh it's at the whatever golf course, Alvamar Golf Course. And it's like, Okay I kind of know it's over there, but you'll have to give me directions on which road to turn on to get to this place. It's not my town. Now this neighborhood feels like my neighborhood because I used to swim. There used to be a pool right up that hill.

**ALBIN:** Right. A lot of people have mentioned the pool. When we talk to people about the area that we're living in they're like, Oh yeah by the pool. I guess.

**BLACK:** The former pool, yeah. Yeah, I learned to swim there. There was this wonderful woman that lived on the other side of the pool that I just thought was the most incredible—when I was coming out, in this consciousness-raising thing we were talking about, Okay what were your images as a child of women? And this one woman that taught me swimming classes was just—she was not like any other woman I knew. (laugh) I mean, she was really strong, she swam all the time. She was a very good swimmer and her body was just an athlete's body. And I don't remember—I mean, when I was—certainly as a child I was not encouraged to be an athlete and in high



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school we had no—we had intramurals. We did not go outside of—we didn't have to take gym. I hardly took anything, so I didn't take anything in high school.

But like in junior high we'd play, but it was all in gym class, and that was the extent of any kind of athletics for girls. And so to see this kind of atypical woman that—she was my mom's age, in fact, is a friend of my mom—that really just took upon herself to become an athlete without any kind of outside encouragement (*unintelligible*). That was something that still sticks in my mind. And that was right up there at—was it [Holiday] Pool?<sup>53</sup> I was thinking when you said [Holiday.]<sup>54</sup>

**ALBIN:** It was called—the area I think, was called, the Holiday Hills area.

**BLACK:** Yeah, I was thinking like maybe the pool was Holiday Park or [Holiday.]<sup>55</sup>

**ALBIN:** I think it was something like that. I think you're right. It was called something like that. Yeah, it's an interesting area. In terms of life in Albuquerque, what's that like? You know, you were talking about how your neighbors know that you've lived there for so long, but what's the climate like for GLBTQ people?

**BLACK:** Well it's interesting. I don't know how true this is, but my sense when I was growing up with Kansas outside of gay and lesbian issues, but people in Kansas tend to let people just be. And I haven't seen that from afar lately, but—with politics, but there's just the tolerance there that isn't necessarily true other places. And when I first moved to New Mexico I thought that that's kind of true in New Mexico too. But what's different in New Mexico is—or maybe it's the year also, but New Mexico is more progressive than Kansas is as a state. People are much more [live] and let live, including gay and lesbian issues.<sup>56</sup> We have an extended Hispanic family next door to us that we've had the father die who was like ninety-nine and his wife just died this [year.]<sup>57</sup> Of the years we've been there, so we've seen the grandparents and then the kids and the grandkids

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<sup>53</sup> Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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and the great-grandkids. So that's like four different generations of family members gone through that house.

And we've been their next-door-neighbors and we went to the funeral and just—I would say white people might generally be a little bit more easily accepting of gay and lesbian issues, but I found that when I've had problems it's very unpredictable, certainly not race or class that predicts anything about that. So we have great neighbors all around is. So I've described that to people in New Mexico, that I feel like in some ways this feels really similar [to] home, that I feel like people just kind of live and let live and they say, Well what about Fred Phelps and what about—(laugh) What about the fact that—Kansas—<sup>58</sup>

**ALBIN:** He gets mentioned all the time.

**BLACK:** I know. I just saw that documentary was on something on Fred Phelps.

**ALBIN:** Was it *Fall from Grace*?

**BLACK:** Yes, *Fall from Grace*.

**ALBIN:** Yeah, it's a very good film.

**BLACK:** I know and I just like—seeing that Jayhawk on his jacket all the time it's like, Why are you wearing a Jayhawk jacket when you like are so anti the Hill? Yeah. And then there was—with the—all the stuff about Bush and Kansas being so strong in the red. So—but it still feels true that there's something about people that have grown up in Kansas that they're very good, nice people, I mean good in the sense of goodhearted I guess. And I think it's sad that politics seems—not that I don't think politics is in all of our lives at all times, but the—kind of the traditional politics has taken over and divided, from my perspective being far away from Kansas, divided Kansas so much in a very harmful way, it seems like to me. But no I—New Mexico feels live and let live very much so. And with our latest election I'm really encouraged with—we totally voted out—

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voted out or got rid of in some way, we have absolutely no representation that's Republican. We have all new U.S. representatives that are Democratic and one returning Democratic senator. So it's like, Wow the world has turned. (laugh)

**ALBIN:** The country seems to have turned—

**BLACK:** Yes, yes. The country has turned—

**ALBIN:** —which is interesting—

**BLACK:** I didn't know if New Mexico was going to go with them—

**ALBIN:** Right—

**BLACK:** Because we tend to kind of go right—can go either way.

**ALBIN:** Right. So is there anything that I haven't asked or that you may want to add?

**BLACK:** Let me look at my little list.

**ALBIN:** Right.

**BLACK:** Oh I can tell—the thing that was happening when I was coming out—I was still good friends with a friend of mine that had not—also had not gone to college at the same time I did not go to college. And she was planning on joining the air force but became pregnant. Not a lesbian obviously. (laugh) Well, not obviously, but anyway, she became pregnant and still lived with her parents. So we were—let's see—must have been nineteen—still living with her parents and she became pregnant and her parents basically made her get an abortion. But before they knew about it—I mean, so she became pregnant, was trying to decide what to do about it, trying to find out what her options were and not wanting to tell her parents because she knew that they would make her have an abortion. And somehow they found out. And this was all happening while I was coming out. And I think the really bad experience she had, her parents basically put her on—I mean, this would never have happened to me (laugh) because I

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would have moved out and lived on the streets or something if they had made such harsh rules for me, but they wouldn't let her leave the house. They wouldn't let her talk to me for a long time. So I had to very, kind of around the back door, find out what was going on with her when I knew what was happening. And this was—her parents were, they're just regular Joe Schmos.<sup>59</sup> And to see them react so conservatively um—I think that impacted a lot my distrust of people being very kind. So, that's the only other thing I can think of.

**ALBIN:** Okay. Well thank you very (laugh) very much. I really appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to come and do this.

**BLACK:** Well, you're welcome. See, get me talking I think I can't say a thing.

**ALBIN:** Oh no, fantastic. It was just—it was fantastic. So thank you so much.

**BLACK:** Well, I look forward to seeing what other people have to say.

**ALBIN:** Yeah, yeah. It's—all the stories have been so interesting. It's just—it's been fantastic, so—

**BLACK:** I would think once you get done that there'll be a whole other huge wave of people wanting to talk and—

**ALBIN:** That's my hope, yeah. So we will see what happens, bit by bit.

**[end]**

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<sup>59</sup> Edited by narrator during the review process.