

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

Katherine
Oral History

Interviewed by
Tami Albin

May 31, 2008

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Katherine: Narrator

Tami Albin: Interviewer

TAMI ALBIN: Okay so today is May 31, 2008 and I'm here with Katherine So I'll start this interview off the way I start off all of them which is tell me where you were born and when.

KATHERINE: Okay. I was born August 30, 1951 in Houston, Texas. My mother— Yeah. My mother grew up on the Gulf Coast. My grandfather was a rancher and a retailer. He owned a local mercantile. A little bitty town called Louise, which is about 50 miles southwest of Harris County in I think it's [Wharton] County and El Campo is the county seat.¹ Little bitty town. And my grandmother was my grandfather's second wife, the younger wife. And the older wife had left him and gone back to Houston. And the two—so the two older children, his two—his son and older daughter—she was the oldest—had moved back to Houston when he married my grandmother. And then they had two children. And my mother's the youngest of those four.

ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: So there was Irene and Charles and Neal and my mother, Burnis. So she grew up on a ranch riding horses. My grandmother was also a home economics teacher. So they were—in many ways the feeling I get is they were really like upper-class people in a rural ranching community. My grandfather was also the president of the bank, a bank that still exists, Louise State Bank. And the story is told that when the stock market crashed in 1929—my mother was born in 1924, okay. Stock market crashed in 1929.

My grandfather told all of his depositors that he would pay them back penny for penny. And so my—the way my mother tells it is my grandfather worked himself into an early grave. He had some kind of condition, he had to go into Houston to the hospital and he

¹ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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died when my mother was sixteen. So then my grandmother becomes the matriarch of the ranches that were left and the mercantile and her school—teaching school. And so when I knew my grandmother, there was still a house and some property outside of Louise, and there were Brahman cattle and rice still being produced that were my grandmother's. She was also an artist. She threw pots. She had her own kiln. She made all of our clothes—my mother's clothes, my clothes, from the time I was—that I can remember, and did that until she died. And she died in '73, so she was born in 1897 so she was seventy-six. And my mother always wanted to—let me back up.

My mother was educated—my grandmother was educated. By that I mean she had a bachelor's degree which was uncommon at that time. And she kept going back to school and getting certifications for her—so she could teach more things, make more money as a teacher, which you don't make that much money as a home ec teacher but because she was so skilled and such an artist she did really well teaching home ec and making clothes and doing all that stuff. So my mother also was educated. She had a bachelor's in business administration, spent a summer in Mexico City going to summer school, learned Spanish. And of course backing up again, the workers on the ranch were either undocumented Mexicans or African American. So she grew up in a very diverse but very class-structured society where they were the—they were the white—this is my impression, the white aristocrats, you might say.

So a lot of the things that I was taught as a child come from this. I was taught upper-class values—education comes first, being stable with money, having a job, what we would consider today middle-class values. But when you're the rich aristocracy in a rural area before women really had a place, it comes to you a little bit differently. So—I didn't even know this until quite a ways into my adult years that that was—those were the values that I had been given and that—that was somewhat different from the kids that I grew up with. So my mother wanted to work for an oil company and she wanted to be in a Spanish-speaking country. So when she graduated from what is now TWU [Texas Woman's University].

So my grandmother went to the College of Industrial Arts in Denton, Texas. My mother went to Texas Woman's State Teacher's College in Denton, Texas. My grandmother got her certification at Texas Woman's University. It's all the same university, right? And I think now the doors are open to men, I'm not real sure if that happened. I think

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that happened in the seventies. But it's kind of interesting. I should have by rights gone to TWU. I didn't. So my mother graduates from what would then have been Texas Woman's State Teacher's College, middle of the war. So six-day workweeks were the norm. She interviews with Humble Oil Company, downtown Houston and they put her in the basement in the file room. She has a bachelor's degree in business administration. They put her in the basement in a file room where she spent six months doing filing six days a week during the war. (laugh) The other piece of that is when my mother graduated from college she received a horse and ten flying lessons. Those were her graduation gifts, or at least two of her graduation gifts.

ALBIN: Those are interesting gifts.

KATHERINE: Another indication of upper-class aristocracy, white aristocracy, in this little rural area. She never got her pilot's license. She took the ten—now this is the era of Amelia Earhart, right. She took the ten flying lessons but never got her pilot's license. And the horse lived on the ranch until it died. When she got a chance at Humble to say, What I really want to do is I would like to be transferred to South America to a Spanish-speaking country, and they told her, We don't send women to other countries. We don't send women to any other countries. So this would have been like 1949, 1950, somewhere in there.

She did finally get out of the file room though. After they told her she would not be sent to other countries she—somebody was leaving because they were pregnant and they asked her to fill in for this person, so she basically got a promotion by default. And then she spent forty years with what then became Exxon and ended up—was never higher than what would be called an administrative assistant, with her bachelor's degree, right? She never wanted to go into management. She was always involved in some form of personnel, human resources. When she retired, she took—after the Exxon Valdez in was that 1980?

ALBIN: I don't remember.

KATHERINE: Yeah. They offered—because of the fines that were being levied upon Exxon they offered early retirement to a whole bunch of people. And my mother took early retirement in 1981 so she was less than fifty-five for sure. Okay, twenty-four—so

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she was fifty-three, fifty-two, fifty-three, which is really early retirement for her because she's in really good health. So she's been retired since '81. And never went into management.

And the other piece of this is—and the reason I'm talking about my mother and my grandmother, they told me in ninth grade to take typing so that I could always get a job. I could always be either a secretary or a teacher. Now this is what they were basically, even though they had college degrees. If I took typing I could always be either a secretary or teacher, which I was pretty sure I was never going to be either one at that time, right, because I was really good in math and science. I knew—I was always college bound because my grandmother and my mother were educated, right? I knew I was college bound but I wasn't interested in the things that they were interested in really other than horses. And all three of us are horse freaks.

My father—my real father my mother met at Humble. And the way my mother tells it he was kind of a dandy. I haven't seen him since I was ten. He had a good singing voice, which I have a good singing voice. And the story that I hear is that my father divorced my mother when I was three. And the way other members of the family tell it is that my grandmother is the reason because she was so autocratic. She was—and she did. She just towered over my mother, is part of what I remember. My grandmother was always running the show. And with—I mean, she was really good at it but very autocratic. And apparently that ran off my real father. My mother didn't remarry until I was thirteen and I took his last name. And he was a horseperson.

So from before I was thirteen—although we did a lot of riding like on vacation and stuff. And my mother had actually bought me a horse when I was twelve, but after she remarried then we were in the horse business and she actually didn't get out of the horse business until 1999. So from about '67 through '99 we were in the horse business, our family. And when Dan came along basically what we had was a business not a family. So this is all happening in Texas, right. No connection to Kansas whatsoever. (laugh) I wanted to do something in agriculture. So while all my friends—I had a lot of friends who were a lot like me in the sense that they had educated parents.

We lived in Bellaire which was—it's actually a separate town within Houston now. It's completely surrounded by Houston now. I went to high school with the kids from

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Meyerland. Meyerland is—was originally a Jewish community. So I went to school with kids whose parents were educated, who lived basically in the 'burbs in the fifties, sixties. And they were going to—they were getting four-year scholarships to Rice University and other places like that. And so those are the kind of kids I went to school with. That's the kind of academic competition, you might say. I had really good schools elementary, junior high and high school. I was a really good student. The first time I even thought about whether or not I was gay or not would have been during summer camp. I went to summer camp for ten summers—nine summers and then there was a big break and then the tenth summer I went back as a counselor.

ALBIN: So what year at summer camp did that happen? Was it like the first year or—

KATHERINE: Well see I started going when I was seven. I went to one camp when I was seven and then at eight I started at Rocky River Ranch which is in Wimberley, Texas, and went there the whole rest of my camp career. And I always had attachments to other girls and attachments to older girls and crushes on counselors, but I didn't know what that was. I didn't know what that was until I was twenty-one or so. It just never—and I even had—even at camp the kids and the counselors would call me butch baby. I have a pillow. It's probably still in the closet in my mother's house that has—everybody—butch baby, blah-blah-blah, butch baby, blah-blah-blah. I didn't know what that meant. And the kids in the cabin with the thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds called me a queer. I didn't know what that meant. And I didn't look it up or anything. I wasn't really curious about it. I knew it was derogatory but I didn't care, it didn't bother me.

ALBIN: And how old would that have been happening? Like do you remember what age you were?

KATHERINE: That probably started happening when I was around ten, eleven.

ALBIN: Wow.

KATHERINE: Yeah.

ALBIN: They were calling you a butch baby (laugh) at that age?

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KATHERINE: I think so, yeah, maybe twelve, thirteen, maybe a little older. But see by the time— At this particular camp when you get to be fourteen you would go into the Western Empress and it was those kids that were calling me queer. So I had to be younger than that. So I had to be eleven—at least eleven or twelve before that—that that was happening. And—but again I didn't—I didn't know what it meant and I wasn't particularly curious about it. But—and there's a lot I'm leaving out about family life that is pertinent but not—for my way of thinking not causal. So I'm just going to leave it out unless it comes up again.

ALBIN: Okay.

KATHERINE: So I—when I was looking for colleges in high school, I was looking for a college where I could study agriculture. And I had finally identified animal science was what I wanted to study because I was interested in animals. Wasn't interested implants, not at that time, at all. We had horses, we had dogs, cats. I was always—somebody was always giving me a hog-nosed snake or a lizard or—I remember having grasshoppers. You know those big grasshoppers that eat—they can eat a grape, big ones, and turtles and possums and all kinds of stuff like that. And I always had a hamster. Never had rabbits or gerbils or ferrets, only hamsters of the rodent variety. And I was always doing things like teaching my hamster how to do mazes and doing science fair projects on how fast—how long it took for the hamster to learn the maze, stuff like that.

And so I finally identified animal science, that's what I wanted to study. But A&M was not accepting girls in 1969. So I went out to a little school out in Alpine called Sul Ross. And they have range animal science. So I did that for a year. And then A&M opened its doors to girls, to women. So I transferred in 1970 and then graduated from A&M in '73 and had applied to vet school and was admitted. So in other words, I got my undergrad degree before I was admitted to vet school. I started in vet school and for many reasons, more than one reason, dropped out the second trimester because they're on a trimester system, or they were then. And it was at that point that I had come to the realization that I was gay—

ALBIN: And do you think—

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KATHERINE: And again, I'm leaving a lot out, which maybe I will go back and put back in at some point but—basically I met my first girlfriend in vet school. And when I dropped out I had met another woman in Dallas and moved to Dallas and lived with her for about a year. It was my first relationship.

ALBIN: So how did you find your first girlfriend in vet school? Like how many women were in the program?

KATHERINE: Not very many. She was very butch and she's one of these women that collects girlfriends. I mean I know now. In retrospect I realize she's one of these very seductive women who—and they never tell you the truth. They never tell you that they've got a partner in another city right, while they're seducing you. (laugh) And it's just one of those very—she was one of those very charismatic people that just—that attracts baby dykes. And she attracted me right to her. And she's also what I would call now stone butch. If there was going to be sex it was going to be her initiating it. And I'm basically butch so once I got the hang of this I'm like, Okay now it's my turn. And—your turn to be passive. And she wasn't going to have any of that. And so that was like—it's like a one-night thing. But then I knew. It was like that was the confirmation that I knew I was gay.

And the person that I met in Dallas that I ended up living with was very femme. Turned out she was from Houston, very messed up person also. And she was my first experience in meeting someone extremely co-dependent who—very needy. I basically took care of her for a year. I worked, she didn't. I cooked, she didn't. I cleaned she didn't. I took care of her for a year, so you can imagine what our relationship was like. I mean about the first three months there was—it was a relationship. Then about the last nine months it was me taking care of her, me caretaking. And—when I broke up with her I had also found out about the religious Order that I ended up joining that Mary may have told you about. Did she tell you about the Holy Order of MANS?

ALBIN: She—is this the one that she was involved in as well?

KATHERINE: Um-hm, yeah, but we didn't know each other at the time.

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ALBIN: Right. Was this in Chicago?

KATHERINE: She was in Chicago.

ALBIN: She was in Chicago.

KATHERINE: This was in Dallas.

ALBIN: Okay.

KATHERINE: There was a—it was one of my friends from vet school actually, David. And David's a really interesting part of my life. I don't know where he is now. I know he's not a vet anymore. Last time I heard he had gone to osteopath school. And he was married and doing really well, had at least one child. David became—he was like my brother. I mean I didn't have any siblings. So for David and I to even connect was kind of a minor miracle. He'd grown up very Jewish, not Orthodox Jewish, Reformed Jewish, but lived—grew up in a Jewish part of Dallas. And—but had—he was becoming a Christian through this order. And there was a—what's called a Christian community in Dallas and he was involved in this. And he—when I—he also knew Debbie, my lover, at the time. She was also Jewish. So we had gone to a service and it was okay, no big deal. I grew up Methodist. My mother was always Methodist. And so this—the service we went to was more catholic which I wasn't used to but there was something about it that was compelling.

So when Debbie and I broke up, and David and I had kept in contact even though I'd dropped out of vet school, he took me to an Easter service at the Christian community. And it was like my life was changed in a matter of moments. There was—I had this incredible come-to-Jesus kind of experience, what people would say today. So I started going to their meetings—their classes and stuff. And there was a class, the very first class, where the person who was teaching talked about homosexuality in a negative way. But the space that I was in it was like, Oh well everything else about this feels good. So I actually—I joined the Order, I took life vows in November of 1976, and I was in the Order for six years.

ALBIN: So what did you do in the Order? Like were you like a nun in the Order?

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KATHERINE: Yeah I was Sister Katherine. Yeah I was Sister Katherine. And I started out in—so I was in Dallas when I met the Order. And Mother Ruth, who was our—who was at the Christian Community at that time, she and her husband actually lived in Wichita, Kansas. So I moved briefly from Dallas to Wichita and then joined the Order in San Francisco and did my six weeks of novice training in San Francisco and then was sent to Reno, did my first year training in Reno, took life vows in Reno, then was sent to St. Louis. And at that time once you had done your first of training and taken your life vows you did a year in the suborders. So I spent a year in the Immaculate Heart Sisters of Mary. And during that time I went to Baton Rouge on mission. And that's a whole 'nother story in itself. And that—we shut down that mission and sent all of our furniture and stuff to Houston.

And then I was back in St. Louis for two more years and then in Wichita, Kansas for a year. Now what happened after six years of being in the order and watching how the Order dealt with men and women, dealt with—or didn't deal with homosexuality. And in different places there were—I've heard that there were a number of homosexuals attracted to the order and in different places were dealt with in various ways, different ways. I never have been able to confirm a lot of that, it's more like a rumor after the fact. But what I saw was this was an Order that was dealing with—just with—that was dealing with men and women in a way that just didn't—that didn't feel right, number one. Number two, from what I could tell we're not dealing with people who are homosexual. And my last year in Wichita I fell in love with one of the sisters there. Not that I hadn't had crushes before then and in many ways was dealt with the way you are in the Roman Catholic Orders—they separated us, time in the chapel on my knees, this kind of stuff, like this is going to go away.

ALBIN: So did someone—so with the crushes, did people find out these crushes were happening?

KATHERINE: Oh yeah. And when your housemother finds out you're in deep do-do, right?

ALBIN: So then—so at that point they dealt with it by separating you and you were on your knees?

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KATHERINE: Um-hm, yeah. Forbidding you to see this person, putting you in the chapel, the kind of—it's a kind of spiritual abuse.

ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: And—it's—my—so what this did, what that did was set up this conflict between my faith and my sexual orientation. And when I left the Order I just—there wasn't any way I could see that I was going to resolve that in the Order, because I had fallen in love with a sister who was in her first year of training because they had changed the structure. And basically what she did was she was just playing with me. She was just a big tease. She had done this with some of the brothers. She had had like an affair with a brother. I didn't know this at the time. And she was wanting to have an affair with me. And I finally started catching on that this is—in a way this was another femme fatale, like the woman I had fallen for in vet school. And it was insulting. It was demeaning. Because here I was really struggling with these issues around homosexuality and my vows and my faith and it was setting up a lot of conflict in me.

There were other things going on in the Order that didn't fit—it didn't fit for me anymore. So I took what they called a sabbatical—a suspension, I'm sorry, suspension. And what that means is that your obligation to serve your vows within that entity are suspended. You—no matter what anyone thinks about that, you can't take vows off your soul. (laugh) You can't remove the vows. They're there. They're there for this lifetime. And what I know about myself is that I've probably been under vows many, many lifetimes. This is just another one of them. This just manifested in a different—slightly different way in this lifetime. And what I found was after I left the Order the vows were still there.

And the vows that we were under—I hope I can get them right because I always forget at least one. There's five of them. Slightly different from the Roman Catholic vows but similar—poverty, purity, service—and see there's two more—humility and obedience. Okay. Now the way the Order—this order taught obedience was obedience to self, obedience to your inner knowing, our inner conscience. But the way they taught it was through a hierarchical obedience system of human beings, which was always a little bit hard to know, okay I'm being obedient to you because that's going to teach me to be obedient to myself. That was always a little confusing for me. Humility I got. Poverty I

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understood. And poverty really has to do with use of money, being conscious about your use of money. Purity had to do—instead of celibacy—although we were under vows of celibacy in the suborder for a year at a time, purity meant how you use your sexual energy. So we learned a lot about redirecting sexual energy, which has been very helpful (laugh) to me in my life. It's probably one of the best things I learned in the Order was energy management, especially since I already had this pattern set of being attracted to people who were not good for me, right? And service. Of course service I'm very service oriented.

And that was a good thing that the Order taught me was—so the vows are there. But I leave this order, I leave the structure and I'm out in the world again and basically I have to decide, Am I a Christian still? Is God going to love me? Is Jesus going to love me? Have I just been thrown out of heaven, so to speak, or a chance at heaven? I mean all these weird ideas that Christianity gives us no matter what denomination you're talking about.

ALBIN: What would you call the denomination, I guess, of this order. Because you said they're Catholic-like, but they weren't—

KATHERINE: It was interdenominational but it was very catholic, little "c", in its rituals. And the interesting thing about this Order is it was subsumed into a Russian Orthodox sect here in the United States, which is not how it was started.

ALBIN: Right because you called it—Is it the Order of Man?

KATHERINE: Holy Order of MANS, M-A-N-S, M-A-N-S is an acronym. And we call it the HOOM, H-O-O-M. And there's tons of HOOMies. There's a Yahoo group for HOOMIEs which Mary's really active in. I'm not anymore because they just bicker, bicker, bicker, bicker. And—it's now called Christ the Saviour Brotherhood. So those who did not leave before 1988 and who stayed they are now Christ the Saviour Brotherhood. The other interesting thing about the Order, and that's why the vow of purity rather than celibacy, is that you could marry within this order.

ALBIN: Because you mentioned that—

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KATHERINE: Priests and teachers and brother and sisters could marry within the Order.

ALBIN: Right, because you had mentioned that the couple moved to Wichita (*unintelligible*).

KATHERINE: Exactly. Right. So that was very unusual for a religious order and very new age, in some ways. Although the Essenes, which a lot of the information about the Essenes have been lost but basically if you remember your Bible, Zacharias and Elizabeth are believed to have been Essene. So they were the parents of John the Baptist. Mary and Joseph were most likely Essenes, the parents of Jesus. And the community that they lived in was probably an Essene community, an Essene Christian community. So it's not really new age. It's really harking back to a time before Christ when this idea of—I mean there weren't holy orders then. But there—you've heard of the desert fathers that wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls? They were monastic hermits who were probably celibate and all male. But these communities had families—men, women families in them and were attached.

So there was a monastic tradition long before Christianity and a community of faith tradition before Christianity that probably both Mary and Jesus and Joseph and all of the main characters in the early part of the New Testament were involved in. And so in some ways the Order was bringing that into the twentieth century through revelation, through this man that started the Order. Another piece of the Order was that we studied all of the sacred text. We studied the Gita, we studied the Qur'an, we studied the Bible, just about anything we could get our hands on. And we looked at what are the similarities, what are the differences? And we were educated in that way. And we taught this kind of broad view of religious traditions to the people that came to our classes.

The other thing, the Order was an initiatory Order so baptism was considered an initiation. There was what we called an illumination, was another initiation. There was the parting of the veil, self-realization. There were ordinations. Ordinations were considered initiations. So it was a very initiatory path that we were given in this Order that has been lost to all of Christianity. You'll find an initiatory path in some of the Eastern traditions but not in Christianity—not in Western Christianity any longer. So this

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was something again bringing forward the esoteric and mystic part of Christianity that's been basically totally lost in our churches, our western churches at any rate. So this fit for me, really well but once I left then what do I do?

ALBIN: Well what do you think it was—you had mentioned that it was really—it attracted a lot of gays and lesbians.

KATHERINE: I found out later yeah.

ALBIN: Why do you think that was?

KATHERINE: Uh, well I'll tell you what someone told me when I started getting sober—that gays and lesbians are possibly the most spiritual group of people incarnating. Now this was somebody in the eighties telling me this, mid-eighties okay. And one of the reasons we drink and drug so badly is not only our cultural homophobia and our internalized homophobia but because we're very sensitive and open spiritually and psychically. Now I don't know—there's no way to verify that. There's just no way in the world. But I know I met—when I started getting sober I mean I met a lot of people like me. Not necessarily people who'd been in new age orders but who had incredible psychic and spiritual gifts and insight and abilities that—I mean that's a whole 'nother kind of phobia that we have in our culture, the phobia of the paranormal.

And as fundamentalism, which that revival started in the eighties—as fundamentalism has been revived, the squelching of spirituality has continued to be greater and greater and greater and greater to—where now we have these total splits between fundamentalist churches and even mainline churches that aren't fundamentalist. But then the mainline churches have always damped down the spiritual and left it out. So I—and I think that's—and I think that contributes to the fact that a lot of gays and lesbians are wiccan or some other pagan or attracted to eastern religions, attracted to Buddhism, attracted to Native American spirituality, Sufism—which I did all those things too. In that time between leaving the Order and walking into MCC which (*unintelligible*) the first time. I got involved in Sufism, the Gurdjieff line of teaching, Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Have you heard of them?

ALBIN: Um-um.

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KATHERINE: I got involved in Native American ritual. I'm a pipe carrier. I sort of dabbled in Buddhism, more from a—mostly I've read about Buddhism and tried some of the techniques and like—have you ever heard of Charlotte Kasl?

ALBIN: No.

KATHERINE: Let me get—I think one of these books is—

ALBIN: Okay.

KATHERINE: You think it's still working?

ALBIN: Oh yeah. Yeah we're good.

KATHERINE: Charlotte Kasl is—she's a heterosexual woman who is a Buddhist who works with all kinds of clients. She's very, I would say, welcoming. And she has a series of these. This is just one of them. This is, *If the Buddha Married*. The first one that I read was, *If the Buddha Dated*. If the Buddha—and then there's another one, *If the Buddha Got Stuck*, it's in the other room, and then *If the Buddha Married*. And so in this way I've sort of dabbled in Buddhism and I've listened to a lot of the lectures by the Dalai Lama as he's come to the states and presented these huge lectures that then get online. And I've bought some of this books. I read his book that he wrote about ethics—*Ethics for a New Millennium* that kind of changed—that was kind of what changed my life. It was like 1998, '99. So yeah all those things I—and I can't say I dabbled. I mean I was very serious about each one of those as I was doing them. And—because those were the years of the Moral Majority, of Pat Robertson, Falwell. And I couldn't call myself Christian. I didn't want to be confused with fundamentalists and the rise of the fundamentalism again.

ALBIN: So what's the date range we're looking at there?

KATHERINE: Like '80 to 2000.

ALBIN: Okay and when did you join the sect?

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KATHERINE: Oh when I joined the Order? I joined the Order in '75 and I left in '81. And so from '81 to—it was seventeen years so 1998. If I went to church it was on like Christmas Eve and I would go an Episcopal church because they always have such great music, and you get to kneel and I was used to kneeling—If I was going to pray I was going to kneel—and—or Easter morning and that was it, because I didn't want to be confused with anybody who was calling themselves Christian in a public forum. I just wasn't going to do it. So it was seventeen years. I walked out of an Order house before I really walked into a church that was going to serve my needs and meanwhile studied the Fourth Way—that's the tradition that Gurdjieff began—Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Studied Native American spirituality and a little bit of Buddhism thrown in for good measure.

And during those years I was going back to school, working, going back to school working. And that's kind of what I do. And I also—I got—I took my last drink in 1985. So I was spending a lot of time and energy getting sober and dealing with childhood issues, family issues, the things that I've left out of this story that for many people instead of being able to hear my story would hear that story and go, Oh well that's why you're gay. And I've never believed that and I don't believe it to this day. Those were—there were things that happened to me that happened to lots of people who don't then turn gay. There's always been that attraction to the same sex in me. And no matter how long it took me to figure that out, that's always been there. So yeah so a big part of my story has to do with being a person of faith. It's probably the—faith and education are the two threads that really—and animals—(laugh) and eventually plants.

I got—when I was in the Order when I was in St. Louis my housemother said, Okay this is what you're going to do. You're going to start a garden. I said, But Reverend Paula, I don't know anything about plants. If I water them they die, if I try to grow them they die. Well you're going to start a garden. This is what you're going to do. I said, Okay. So like with anything else I went to the library and I got a bunch of books. And we actually built raised beds in our parking lot. And I got involved with the American Community Gardening Association and I started a community garden at—in two other places in St. Louis. One was another church and one was our—we had a shelter for abused women. And so by the time I left St. Louis I had like—I had landscaped the Mary House and started three gardens (laugh) in a two-year period. And I found I really had a knack for

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it. So when I came back to Texas after I—well—and we did the same thing in Wichita actually. I started a garden there that was pretty successful as well.

And when I left Wichita and I went back to Texas, I decided to go back to school. I thought, Well maybe I'll just go ahead and go to vet school. And so I ended up at A&M taking graduate classes. But I'm drinking heavily now. When I was in Wichita—when I was in St. Louis I would be one of about three sisters who—like say we'd have some wine on Christmas Eve. Well I was one of three—there weren't any empty wine bottles [left on Christmas Eve.]² So this is just like binge drinking on occasion. When I got to Wichita I was drinking beer which we kept in the refrigerator downstairs, for lunch. Okay so I really started—because I was really very unhappy in Wichita. And so I left, went to—went back to Texas. I'm enrolled in a graduate program and my drinking becomes fairly steady, not really—just steady.

So like there's a gay bar in College Station and I go out on Thursday nights and get drunk. It wasn't that I was getting drunk all the time. I was very high functioning, because I was working and supporting myself and working on a master's and, supporting myself. But by the time I finished that master's and I was living in Austin and working, I went—I got again into that pattern where you're drinking at lunchtime. And so when that happened again—so that'd be like '85—'84 actually. I know—I knew by then that that was a sign of alcoholism. And I also knew there was alcoholism in my family. I didn't know how deep it was until I got sober then people started really telling me about it. Up to then it was a lot of—there was a lot of denial, partly because of my stepfather who was drug addicted and alcohol addicted. So everybody's protecting him, my mother specifically but you have to keep up the image. But at some point I took one of those ten-question tests. And so I knew that I was—I had—and if you take that there's like if you have like three or more you might be an alcoholic. And I had like four or five. So somebody said, You ought to think about AA and I kind of blew [her]³ off.

But I guess I must have started reading because during the summer of '85 I started trying to control my drinking. So like I didn't have any alcohol in the house but on the way home from say mowing a lawn or something I would buy just a can of beer. Then the next time it would be (unintelligible) can of beer. The next time it'd be a tall boy.

² Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

³ Added and edited by narrator during the review process.

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The next time it would be a six-pack. The next time it would be two six-packs. So I convinced myself—I experimented with myself to see if I could not drink, and I couldn't. I couldn't control it. At the same time I had—I had been working with a woman who worked with people both individually and in groups for about a year at that point—Helen—very important person in my life. I had met her through NOW [National Organization for Women] because during the years that I was working on that master's at College Station I was a NOW activist. And I had met Helen through NOW. And she was—she's—her training was in counseling psychology but she was basically a licensed clinical practitioner in Texas. And she—I was seeing her individually and I was also in a group where we were learning—where we were studying the Gurdjieff books. But the first year I was working with her I was still drinking. And my agreement with her was I wouldn't drink before I came to a session. And I found out later she worked with a lot of alcoholics, (laugh) I was just one of many.

So September of 1985 we start a new group. And there's some new people in this group on a Monday night. And it turns out the person sitting next to me had six months sobriety, Pat.⁴ She became probably my—if she were still alive she'd still be my closest adult friend. And I'm—yeah, I'm a little bit emotional. Um—so Pat takes me to my first AA meeting. And the way that happened was September 20th was a Sunday, 21st was a Sunday. And there was a fundraiser for somebody, a woman who was going to lose her child in a court case. So it was a lesbian woman whose child was going to be taken away from her by a judge and we were raising money for her to keep fighting that case. And this was a bar in Austin that had an outside courtyard and there was a music group I remember and they were having dollar pitchers of beer. So I put like three dollars in my pocket. And I said, I'm going to come home with two dollars. Again, I'm trying to control my drinking, right, trying to put limits on it. So I go to this event and I get home and I have nothing in my pocket. So apparently I drank three pitchers of beer myself, by myself. (laugh)

And the next day, or actually a week—the next day was the meeting, a group meeting, at Helen's where Pat said—after the meeting was over we went out for coffee or something and she said, I can take you to a beginner meeting. I go to a beginner meeting on Sunday afternoons at 5:30 or whatever. And the other piece of that was

⁴ Edited by narrator during the review process.

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that Sunday morning—so this was the Sunday morning that I had gone to this event at the lesbian bar, right, at the gay bar. There was an article in the *Austin American-Statesman*. Now this is the year—yeah this is the year when—or the years during which—now I can't think of her name—the woman who was the treasurer—Kansas State Treasurer—Ann Richards, she was our Kansas State Treasurer and she's a recovering alcoholic. And even though this is against the traditions of AA, she had shared her story in the *Austin American-Statesman* and there was an entire section on all of the recovery groups in Austin. And there were like 250 meetings a week in Austin at that time. And I had read this article and I had thought, Maybe I should think about this since I couldn't even stop at one pitcher. And then at the same time here's Pat saying, I know a beginner meeting I can take you to it. So she took me to the meeting a week later. So my last day of drinking was September 21st so that's my sobriety day, 1985.

So I got involved with this whole group of recovering people in Austin. I loved it. It was great. And we're all lesbians, right? And at that time there weren't any gay groups specifically but within the next year or so there were several that were started and now there's like an entire club that's GLBT AA in Austin. It's very well established. But we went to—we went to that beginner meeting and we went to an Al-Anon meeting again on Sunday afternoons. And then we also went to a Saturday morning meeting that was all women. And those are the places that I got sober, and mostly with other lesbians. That was my support group—Sober Dykes. And so let's see '85 through '89 I was in Austin. And that—remember at this point, I have a—I have a bachelor's, I have a master's degree right? But the job—I never could get a job using my master's that I had gotten at A&M. And I'm getting sober and I'm thinking, Okay I want to do something significant with my life. I want to do something—I want to find out what my bliss is and follow it. So I decided to go back to school right? So I went back out to Sul Ross, out to Alpine for a year. And their program was not really what I was looking for.

So I applied to several other programs and I was accepted at Fort Collins at Colorado State. So I moved to Fort Collins and I'm there for three years and I get a Master of Science. And then I spent a year in a spiritual community in New Mexico that—a sort of chilling out year after getting a master's degree. And then I got hired with Texas A&M in Vernon. Now the group in New Mexico was—I mean, they accepted me totally and I had lesbian AA in Albuquerque and that went pretty well. When I got to Vernon—we're

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back in Texas. We're in North Texas. We're in the land of fundamentalists again. And it was—it was awful, it was just awful. I had been pretty out in Fort Collins although not—not as much as I am now. I had been really careful about who I'd come out to but I had a good support group in Fort Collins too of lesbians, and many of them sober or in recovery of some kind. No religious or faith group while I was in Fort Collins. And the group that I lived with in New Mexico they're kind of a Fourth Way offshoot. So we did—we did movement work, we did energy work but no religious or what I would call liturgical work.

So I get to Vernon and my boss he says, Come to the Presbyterian Church with us. That's where he and his family goes. So I sang in the Presbyterian choir for about six months and I was done with the Presbys. It was just too mainstream for me. Just too—too much like what I'd grown up with—not spiritual at all. It was all about money and rules and dogma that I didn't agree with. And here's all these educated people raising their children this way and it just—it just—sometimes it just made me sick. I mean it was like, Oh my God. When these kids get away from Vernon and they realize that this is not going to help them in the world, it's just going to be a rebellion. (laugh) And it's like I just—I couldn't sit there and watch that. So here I was without a church, without anything but myself really again. And I had a good job for eight years in Vernon but the whole time I was, in many ways, in spiritual emergency, especially the early first few years. What helped turn that around was—the first two years I worked like fifty, sixty hours a week and Richard was my boss. Richard and I did some incredible work.

ALBIN: What were you doing?

KATHERINE: I was a research associate. We had a—we had 35,000 acres of an experimental ranch and I was the modeler for this. That's what I'd gotten my master's in. I was modeling ecosystems and we were modeling this range system. So with the 35,000 acres what we basically had was repetitions that were ranch size, okay. And it was one—it's still in existence and it's still one of the most original range management research—range research projects in the world. I mean you don't usually get that amount of acres where you can divide it up so that you have replications.

You may have got a ranch over here and a ranch over here and a ranch over here and a ranch over here but they're all—they're each a demonstration if you know anything

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about research. This is a demonstration, that's a demonstration, this is a demonstration, this is a demonstration. You can't really compare—you're comparing apples to oranges to kumquats to mangoes. So in this case we were able to compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges and make—and really see some distinctions for the treatments that we were working with. And it was very unusual. In the first two years we were able to make a lot of progress. And we went to Rapid City, South Dakota for the—I can't think of the name of that organization—Range Society meetings. And the three of us who went together—our boss and Richard and I, we all got sick. We all got some form of flu. And by the time we got back home all three of us were sick. I stayed sick for like six weeks.

ALBIN: Wow.

KATHERINE: I stayed home for like a month. Basically I had a complete, in a way, mental, emotional and physical breakdown after that trip. And when I look back on it now—this was in February. It was during Lent. This would have been '97—'97 I believe. Yeah, because I started in November of '94 and then '95, '96, '97, so early in '97. And I basically was in spiritual crisis for another six months even after I was able to go back to work. It turns out there was a respiratory fungus in Vernon that was being passed around. People would get well and then they'd get it again. And when you look back on stuff like that it's like, Oh my God. It was awful. But at the time we didn't know what was going on. And finally I heard that other people had gone and gotten tested and there was this respiratory fungus going around.

So I finally just went to one of the doctors in town and I said, Okay. I'm hearing this from other people. Have you heard—he said, Yeah I heard something about that. Well go ahead and give me the antifungals because I need to get over this, whatever this is. But I also knew there was more going on. So that was the physical part of it. The rest of it was spiritual emergency. I mean I was just—I didn't want to be in Vernon, I wasn't happy, people didn't like me. They were homophobic. But of course they never said, We don't like you because you're a lesbian. It was, Well you're not doing this right and you're not doing this right, and you're not doing it. And I finally figured out it was homophobia, but it took me a while because I'm a little dense about these things. I think the best of people until they sell me so badly—that I'm being so abused subtly and overtly that it's like, Oh my God. This really is homophobia. And—so it took me two

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years there, a little more than two years, but I finally figured out that's what was going on. And so then I tried to leave. I tried to leave Vernon for an entire year. The same year I'm trying to get well I'm trying to leave Vernon right? I couldn't leave. I could not find a job elsewhere doing anything close to what I do.

So I finally—I mean I am literally brought to my knees, Okay God this is not funny anymore. Clearly you want me here. What the hell do you want me here for? Why here? I am miserable. These people are assholes. They're homophobic, they are racist, they are gender biased, they don't like me, I don't like them. I love my work and Richard's probably the best boss I've ever had. Those are the only redeeming—and I'm making decent money and I've got health insurance and I've got dental insurance and I've got vision insurance. And you've answered a whole bunch of my prayers with this job, and I am miserable. This was supposed to be my dream job and I am miserable, completely miserable. What are you going to do about it? And of course the answer to that question is always, What are you going to do about it, right?

Somewhere in there I visited some of my long-time friends in Dallas and I went to Cathedral of Hope in Dallas for the first time, which at that time was still an MCC [Metropolitan Community Church]-affiliated church. Incredible experience. And again, I don't remember which year it was but it was somewhere in that time of real spiritual emergency. And I found out that there was an MCC in Wichita Falls. So eventually I went—Wichita Falls is about 45 minutes from Vernon. And I went to a service there in the summer, I think, of either '97 or '98. And I went out to lunch with some of the folks and I didn't—it didn't click for me. The people didn't really click, the pastor didn't click, the service didn't really click for me. So it was another maybe six months.

Meanwhile I also—going way back to the eighties again—before I left Austin I had made a connection with a Native American teacher in Dallas. Then I'd gone to Colorado and I'd come back to Texas. I contacted her again, Stephanie is her first name. And I said, Stephanie I am—I didn't say it this way but this is what I would have said if I were doing it again—Stephanie I am in spiritual emergency, help me. So I would go to Dallas and I would work with her. I'd stay with her for a week. And she was married at that time. And she sent me to a homeopath. Actually she said, I will not work with you any longer unless you go to this homeopath and you get checked out and you start doing some things right for yourself. Well the other thing I know is that I started into perimenopause

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about that time. So some of what was going on was menopausal, perimenopausal. But I didn't know anything about perimenopause. I would have considered myself too young to be going through that. It wouldn't even have occurred to me. But I followed her directions. I did everything she asked me to do, everything she asked me to do. And sure enough—it took me another year.

So if it was February of '97 which I believe it was, it wasn't until like February of '98 that I was really well again. And I believe it was November of '98—I think this is right—that Pastor Nancy came to Wichita Falls MCC. I had heard that the other pastor had left and I had heard there was a new pastor coming. And it turned out the Sunday that I walked into that church again was her first Sunday after they had moved—the church had moved them from Baton Rouge. So there's Pastor Nancy and her spouse Barb and their son Zachary. Zachary's like five or six at that point. And that was beginning of my time at Wichita Falls MCC, so '98—'98, '99, 2000, 2001, 2002. That sounds right.

ALBIN: So did you know her when you had been to Baton Rouge in the past?

KATHERINE: No. But I—I was in the kitchen of this church. And she walked in the door and I went, I know you. She said, You do? I said, I know you. Who are you? And we introduced ourselves. There was instant recognition as if we had a contract in this life to reconnect and be something to each other. And we certainly do. I mean, we're—they're in Minnesota now and we're still friends with them. So there's another piece in there that I need to bring out and I'm trying to remember exactly how that worked. So I found MCC. And at some point also—and I was going to the homeopath—it'll come back in a minute.

So I started driving over to Wichita every—When you live in Texas, Wichita Falls is Wichita because it's in Wichita County. When you're in Kansas Wichita is Wichita. So I'll try to remember to always say Wichita Falls if I mean Wichita Falls. So that began like five years of membership in that MCC church. And I went to regional conferences. I never went to their general conference, which is the international one. But I went to the regional ones. I eventually served on the board, I sang in the choir, I did special music, I served communion, I preached. And when Mary came to live with me she did all those things too. I mean we were a good fit for that church and that denomination at the time. So that brought me back into Christianity in a way that was meaningful for me.

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And during those years—I don't know if you've heard about the case. I should—I just recently looked this case up again because one of the MCC Topeka guys is part of KEC [Kansas Equality Coalition]. And apparently there's a similar thing going on in some town here in Kansas. So there was a ACLU lawsuit. Okay let me back up. First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls. The pastor there wanted to raise a million dollars to build a New Youth Center. So on Mother's Day of I believe 1999 he gave a sermon on homosexuality in order to raise money for his church. And it had—and there was—there were—you've heard of the book, *Heather has Two Mommies*?

ALBIN: Um-hm.

KATHERINE: And then there's one for guys too, I can't think of the name of it. Well *Heather has Two Mommies* was being—was—he wanted to censor that book in the Wichita Falls Public Library. And he wanted to raise a million dollars to build his youth center. So this sermon had to do with these two issues. And out of that came a lawsuit against the City Commission of Wichita Falls because they were going to instruct the public library to censor these books. Nancy was one of the like twelve plaintiffs in the ACLU lawsuit against the City of Wichita Falls on behalf of this book. And—so this took about a year, maybe a year-and-a-half. It was very well publicized. I was actually in court a couple of days with her and the others. So this was—this was not only—for me the thread was the political action but social activism and my faith coming together, my spirituality coming together and my education coming together in this place at this time for like five years.

And going back, when I was basically brought to my knees—oh I know what it was I meant to add yeah. And I said, God you better show me what you want me to do here because I hate it here. And I don't want to hate it here. I don't want to live somewhere where I am hated and where I hate to live. And I'm going to—and I stopped using that kind of language. But at the same time it was like, You got to show me what I need to love about this place. But I also said at that time, I said, Okay I'm going to stop trying to leave. When it's time for me to leave you are going to have to show me where the next place is going to be. In fact, you're going to have to make it so obvious that I won't be able to miss it because otherwise I'm going to stay here forever. And sure enough it worked out that way. But the piece in the middle—As I began to get my legs under me again working with Stephanie and the homeopath—physically, mentally, emotionally, I

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also reconnected with the tradition of the Holy Order of MANS. So we're ten or more years past the time when the Holy Order of MANS doesn't exist any longer, but the Internet is booming.

ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: Right? So one day I go into my office and I look up Holy Order of MANS on the Internet. And there's a group out of Australia of HOOMies talking to each other. And through that group I found one of my sisters that I had known at the Mary House who was living in Austin Texas with her husband. They'd had two children at that point. And she had been in contact with one of the offshoots of the Order, had been ordained, and was working with people who wanted to follow in that tradition.

So I started working with Sara and was in—yeah January of 2000 I was ordained a priest within that tradition and in February of 2001 was ordained again what's called a master teacher, just another level of functioning and obligation. You can think of it as—we think of it as being a bishop. And then later I was also given the Rites of Ordination. So there were really four ordinations in that line. But the significant thing about this is during that time of reconnecting with the HOOMies is when I connected with Mary.

ALBIN: Oh—

KATHERINE: Now Mary was ordained in 1973 because she's been ordained for twenty-five years now.

ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: Right, she was ordained by Father Paul when he was still alive, okay. So—and in connecting with her I invited her to come to my teacher ordination in Wichita, Kansas in February of 2001, and that was the day that we met. So that's part of the significance there.

ALBIN: Right. So had you like been talking over e-mail or—

KATHERINE: Um, for about six months.

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ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: But about—this HOOMies group, there was the one in Australia and it morphed into something else and it morphed into something else. And the HOOMies group that we were both a part of at that time like in 2000—there was a guy from Idaho who was supposedly a HOOMie, racist Nazi bastard. I'm sorry. He just was not a nice person. I questioned whether he was ever in the Order. But I was—it's like I was in that place where I was really trying to connect with people and I was—it's like I was having all these issues with people at work but I was really trying to like see things from their point of view and not be in—it was like I was coming to a place in my life where I was getting old enough where, I don't want all this antagonism in my life. I want to try to get along with people, even people who don't like me, who don't get along with others.

So there was this guy, his name was Lloyd, and he kept going off on me. And I—it's like, I didn't know what I was doing. And Mary's one of these peacekeeper kind of people. So I wrote Mary and I said, Mary what am I doing? So she'd write me back every once in a while, try this, try this, try something else. So that was the level of our communication at that point, until the day that we met in Wichita. And so that day—that was February. And the reason I remember this is that my friend, Pat—the Saturday that Mary and I met, my friend Pat died that Sunday. I didn't know it that day but—and I know that that Wednesday was Ash Wednesday and it was the 28th. So 27, 26, 25—February 24, 2001 Mary and I met.

And we—it was interesting because I had driven up from Vernon to Wichita and I had stayed in a motel and I drove out to—I can't think of her name—the house where we were going to have our gathering and she had a chapel in the backyard—Elizabeth, Mary Elizabeth's house. And I walked in the door and Mary was washing dishes. They had just had some breakfast. And there's Mary Elizabeth and there's Mary who I'd never met. And there were two other people, or three other people, that were with us that day. And we're sitting in the living room. We had what we called a gathering. So we were—there were some things that were kind of on our agenda and I had come ready to share some things that I wanted to share with the group, get their opinion on it. The whole day—Mary's sitting on the couch and it's like we're the only two people who are talking to each other. Everything I would say everyone else in the room would like

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disagree with and they wouldn't get it. Then Mary would say almost the same thing I had said and she would get it. This was happening all morning long, it was actually all morning, because we broke in the afternoon because the ordination was going to be in the evening and we were—we needed to take a break.

So that was really all morning, I felt like she was the only person in the room who was getting anything I was saying. Like we were the only two people on the same wavelength. And part of that was because the other three people in the room had been part of the Wichita Christian Community. Mary and I had actually been members of the Order. So in a very real way we had had different training. And we realized that later but that day it just seemed like kind of this really odd disconnect with the other people in the room and odd connection between us having just met. So we had lunch, we take a rest, we go through the ordination. We're back in the house because the chapel's in the backyard. And she has to go home. So she drove in that morning from Chanute and she drove back home. And she's getting ready to go out the door and I said, Well did you have a good day? And she said, Yes but—and I'm looking at her face and I'm just going, Something is terribly wrong here. I didn't know what it was. She said, But I have to go home now and I don't want to. I said, Okay well I'm going to call you Monday and see how you're doing. Because we'd already exchanged phone numbers and addresses and stuff.

So I drove home Sunday and I received word that Pat had passed away also. And I called Mary on Monday and that began like a once-a-week phone conversation with each other over a period of time that lasted maybe sixty days. And then at some point we realized that we were falling in love with each other. She's still married, right? So this whole other level of complications that came out of that. Could we take a break for a minute?

ALBIN: Yeah certainly. Yeah.

(break)

ALBIN: Okay.

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KATHERINE: So I was just thinking about the connection between my life and Kansas. And I said earlier there wasn't a lot of connection but actually I lived in Wichita, Kansas for a year while I was in the Order and then the connection with Mary Elizabeth who lives in Wichita and the connection with the Holy Order of MANS offshoot groups. Because both of my ordinations were in Mary Elizabeth's Chapel. And so there is that connection actually physically.

So I met—I meet Mary and that was February of 2001. The other thing that happened in 2001 was I had been—I—my boss, Richard had been promising me at that point, six years, that eventually I would be made permanent with Texas A&M. And in 1999 I bought a house in Vernon. Not a great house, first time home buyer, but I wanted to show them that I was willing to become a permanent resident of Vernon and that I was going to stay around should they decide to go ahead and follow through on that promise, which I know now they never intended but—or I'm guessing they never intended to. So I was trying to establish some stability.

And the other thing was I had tried—well no I had dabbled with the idea of doing a Ph.D. in range or ecology because my master's is in ecology—one of them—the one from Colorado. And—but the universities that I could have gone to were all more than four hours away. And I'd also had this realization that I really wanted to teach. And so I looked into—I actually looked into alternative teacher certification programs in Texas. And there was a Title-something office in Wichita Falls that administered an alternative certification program, but what you did was you had to find a school that would hire you. And then—so you would have to—in my case I would have had to commute to God-knows-where from Vernon every single day to school. And then you had to come into Wichita Falls every Saturday and go to class all day long. And that just didn't fit for me. So I let go of that. But I kept—online I kept seeing these ads from University of Phoenix for e-education, okay, so teaching online. And it was basically adult ed. And I looked into it and I looked into it and finally I called them and in August of 2001 I started a master's program with the University of Phoenix completely online at a distance, thinking, I'll do this now and at some point I'm going to want to teach face-to-face but this will get me started. And I was doing some face-to-face stuff in the church. I was teaching discovery classes, I was teaching vacation Bible school, stuff like that and getting a feel for teaching and really enjoying it. Here's my grandmother coming through me again, right?

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ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: And so I meet Mary and we realize at some point that we love each other and she begins to initiate divorce proceedings. Now she—she has to tell her own story but basically when I met her what she said was that she and her husband had really been having trouble for like five years because he had gone on the road as a truck driver. He was home once a month. She and her children had begged him to stay home and he wouldn't do it. So for five years she had lived in this situation with an absent husband, children who were either out of the house or getting ready to leave, and so she had started living her own life basically. And so she really felt like a separated person. And the other piece was that he was always taunting her with, Well maybe we should just get divorced. So for her birthday in 2001 I went to Chanute which is—her birthday was this past week, May 27th. So my gift to her was a service.

I created—we actually together created a service, a Sunday morning service that she could participate in, I could, her husband—he was still her husband at the time, and her two children and their various friends, boyfriends, girlfriends. And it was incredible. It was this wonderful thing but her husband was—he was really rude to me the entire time. And I left early, early Memorial Day morning, Monday morning. It happened that her birthday was on the Sunday so I guess Memorial Day was the 28th that day. So that morning she sits down with him and he does his, Well maybe we should just get a divorce. And she said, Yes I think we should. And she breaks it to her children on that Memorial Day.

So I left like five o'clock in the morning to go back to Texas because I had to go back to work on Tuesday and that's a really long drive. And that was the beginning of the institution—the beginning of the divorce. And it was somewhat nasty, the things went on over the summer, but finally her divorce was final in September. And in October she moved to Texas. She had—in the summer she moved out of their house and moved to Pittsburg where she worked. She had always worked in Pittsburg and traveled. So she had—she moved out of the house as part of the, Yes we're getting a divorce. And then in October she moved from Pittsburg to my house in Vernon.

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And um—so just to put this in perspective, her—9/11 occurred September 11, 2001. I was sitting in a realtor's office and he got a call from his wife and said, You need to turn on the TV. So he turned on the TV and we see the airliners driving through—flying through the World Trade Center, both of them. And I'm on the phone with Mary. She's at work right? A week later we fly—she and I fly to San Jose for an ordination that she was having. She was having her teacher ordination like a week later. We fly. Best flight we've ever had, probably the best flight we'll ever have in our lives because it was—people were not flying, they were canceling. We were still flying. We were determined to fly out to San Jose and do what we had to do. And another week passes and her divorce is final. And about two weeks later she moves to Vernon with me. As a result of 9/11 our grant proposal which goes in on December 1st, went in on December 1, 2001, that first grant proposal was destroyed because of the anthrax scare in Washington, D.C. The grant was supposedly sent in again in January. Supposedly the grant never got to the committee. In June of 2002 I get the word that my position will not be refunded as of September 30th.

ALBIN: Wow.

KATHERINE: So we say to each other, Okay. We've moved for love, we've moved for work, we've moved for school. What if we chose a place we wanted to live and then worried about getting work? So we had already eliminated the coasts, neither one of us wanted to live on the coast. And we'd eliminate the northern half of the country because we didn't want the winters. We'd heard about Lawrence. We'd heard that Lawrence was a progressive place. So we took a trip over, I think it was July 4th weekend, came up here to Lawrence and looked around, liked it, came back home, made the decision, we're going to move to Lawrence.

I went back and we rented a house in like around the first of August. We knew we weren't going to be coming until the first of October. Actually I think we came back—I think we came back Labor Day weekend and actually rented the house. And I—what else did I do? I brought one of the cars up here and then I—and I registered with Kelly Services, because I had worked for Kelly Services when I was a lot younger. And various times in the Order I'd work for Kelly Services. And so we—we packed everything up, we drove into Lawrence like October 15th or 13th. And by—and a week later I was working at Pearson temporary. About two weeks later Mary was working

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temporary at Pearson and our household was set up. I mean, it was seamless in the very beginning.

But then the cost of living in Lawrence began to really affect us because we didn't have—well you can't earn a living wage in Lawrence if you're not working for the university and I've heard that the secretary to the president of KU has a Habitat for Humanity home because she couldn't afford to buy her own home. So the cost of living in Lawrence was prohibitive for us. It was very difficult. While I was living in Lawrence I also kept hearing these ads about this Transition to Teaching. And so I applied to that and then that's how I taught for a year in Kansas City. And then when that year was up and I wasn't going to stay in that program that's when I came to K-State and we started our time here.

So that's how—we came to Lawrence—we came to Kansas because we chose Lawrence because we thought it would be like Austin and when we visited there were a lot of really positive things that we liked. Living in Lawrence wasn't as good as our dream of living in Lawrence. We did become members of the Unity Fellowship there and that's where we had our holy union in 2003, which is a really good experience that was now five years ago. And we still enjoy going back there. We were there last Sunday for Katie's baby shower and we went to Third Planet to get me some incense and we went to Sarah's Fabrics and we looked in the window of the Yarn Barn, places like—and we ate lunch at Einstein's, and the Aladdin was always one of our favorite restaurants.

ALBIN: It's a good restaurant.

KATHERINE: Yeah. And—we have some memories. And we had a nice little house there. It just cost us way more than it should have. One of the things I liked about Lawrence was the public transportation. We managed to get by with one vehicle for almost two years because I could take public transportation out to Pearson. Mary had to drive to La Compton but I could take public transportation. So until I started teaching I didn't have to have a second vehicle.

ALBIN: Were you involved in anything while you lived in Lawrence at all?

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KATHERINE: We went to one of the Friday night dinner things.

ALBIN: Oh one of the First Friday Potlucks?

KATHERINE: Yeah. But it didn't—we didn't connect with the people there. For one thing there was quite a bit of drinking. And I tried going to one of the AA Groups that actually met at Unity Fellowship. Again, there are quite a few GLBT people there but I just couldn't connect with them. It was like I really tried and we just couldn't connect. And it was the same thing with the folks at Unity. We just—it—part of it, I think, was a class thing and part of it was just we were new and people didn't want to take us in. They didn't want to welcome us, for whatever reason. And—

ALBIN: So what was the decision to move to Manhattan?

KATHERINE: Well when I was teaching—during the year that I was teaching there were quite a few opportunities to learn about teacher events in the summer and many of them are here at K-State. So I had signed up for one. It was actually a course that they would actually pay you to take. And it was funded by the Howard Hughes—they have a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Grant. And so I was actually scheduled to be here in June. So I came for that and I stayed in the dorm and just kind of fell in love with the campus because everybody I met was just wonderful. So then I—I said, Mary I think—I know that I want to get my certification and I think this would be a good place to do it. So she decided that she would go to school full time.

So we moved here in the summer of 2005 and we were lucky to get this house which is a lot less—it's much more affordable than many places in Manhattan. We just lucked out, it was in the paper and I found it. So then she decided to go to school full time. And I actually didn't start until the spring after she started because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do at the time. But I tried to find work first. Because I thought, Well I'll work and support her. And I couldn't—it was very much like Lawrence in the sense that I couldn't find an affordable—I couldn't make a living wage just doing work, just working. And there weren't the kinds of jobs on campus that I was qualified for. The openings they just—they weren't—and I applied to a whole lot of different things but I never got interviews, not on campus. And then I applied to the school district and I got several interviews but no offers.

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ALBIN: So what type of things are you involved in now? Are you involved in political organizations or—

KATHERINE: Well one of the things that we discovered right away that summer was First Congregational UCC. They have a Taize service on Thursday afternoons and they were having that through the summer and I really enjoyed that. And we found out they were open and affirming. And we'd never been affiliated with UCC before but we learned that open and affirming meant GLBT friendly. It actually applies to all levels of diversity but it's frequently directed specifically at GLBT people. So we started going to First Congo. And the first year we were members I was in—we were both in the choir actually. But after that first year we decided to start something called Rainbow Table. And that has become really a community organization. And we meet about every other month and have a potluck basically. And the way that Mary and I envisioned this originally was it would be a service project. We would be—we would have our meals but we would also do service work.

And that's how the Pride Prom came to be. We wanted to have a dance and somebody said prom. And then we were at a PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays] meeting where GSA [Gay Straight Alliance] kids came and they said prom and we thought, Well here's our opportunity to have a dance, right? So that's how the Pride Prom was born. Obviously we also at some point got involved with PFLAG which I've never been involved with before. I'd known of it but I'd never been involved. And we joined and now we're both on the executive committee, which is where the real work gets done for PFLAG. What else are we doing? We took some students to—twice now to Kansas City for the GLSEN [Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network], the youth empowerment summits, and we're working toward putting a coalition of people together on campus primarily to hopefully have K-State host a youth empowerment summit in the fall of 2009. What else are we doing politically? Well Mary was on the HIV-AIDS Awareness Week committee that put together this—the event last fall which culminated in a service at our church where MCC Topeka Choir and Drum came and sang. Mary's the Christian Ed director for the church which is not really social activism but leadership position. I'm still in the choir when I go. I was on the deacon board but I got off of it. (laugh) Enough said.

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ALBIN: How many people take part in the Rainbow Table?

KATHERINE: Well I sent eighteen postcards out so that's—so somewhere between twenty and twenty-five are on the list. The situation in Manhattan right now is that there's a lot of contention right now in the GLBT community. The director of RAP, the Regional AIDS Project, depending on who you talk to he was either fired or asked to resign recently. There's a new person in town who I think came to Manhattan because he's helping his father who's ill. He's hooked up with another person who almost everybody who knows him has difficulty with, and they are planning events now that directly conflict with Rainbow Table and other events. (laugh)

There was a KEC chapter here that was affiliated with FHHRP [Flint Hills Human Rights Project] and that blew up in the last year, again this other person caused a lot of it. There are issues—the last Rainbow Table gathering we had there were—there was another gathering scheduled on the same day by some people in Rainbow Table so there was an intentional split of the gathering the last time we had it. Our pastor has said informally that he's not sure Rainbow Table should continue for various reasons that I don't really understand. There's—there's a lot of—there's a lot of people getting on board here in Manhattan but there's also a lot of contentiousness within the GLBT and ally community right now. And I'm not real sure where—really what that's about. The GSA is doing really well, PFLAG's doing really well. And I was—I ran into somebody, another activist, in Wal-Mart yesterday and we were talking about this. And I said, If I lived in Dallas I could be in a group with educated lesbians with three dogs, no home who make less than thirty thousand a year and there'd be five hundred lesbians just like me and Mary and I could be part of that group. Right?

ALBIN: Yeah.

KATHERINE: And this guy that everyone loves to hate, he could be in a group with people who lie, cheat and steal and they could go to a lie-cheat-and-steal bar and there'd be five hundred gay men just like him. And they could have their own little group, we lie, cheat and steal. Right? It'd be okay. But we don't live in Dallas. We don't live in St. Louis. We don't live in New York City. We don't live in Austin. We don't live in San Francisco. We live in Manhattan with less than fifty thousand people. And if we want something important to happen with our community here in Manhattan, we

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have got to work together. And these actions that divide us will tear us apart. There are people in this town who have lived here for twenty, thirty years who will not come to any of these events. The ones I know are mostly affiliated with the university and they will not come to any of these things.

ALBIN: Are they active with things on campus?

KATHERINE: Uh-huh, but they will not come to these things—

ALBIN: To the community events—

KATHERINE: —any of these things. They will not come to Rainbow Table, they will not come to the Pride Prom. They will probably not come to the Flint Hills Pride event at Milford Lake. This is its fifth or sixth year. I mean it's not a big secret. They will not come to the HIV-AIDS—they will not come to the World AIDS Day service at their own church, because some of them are members of our church. But they're not going to show up for that. Now that's not because K-State is not a—K-State is a very welcoming place. I don't know why they won't come. But I suspect—I suspect it's because all of this has happened before.

ALBIN: Right—

KATHERINE: And it's a cycle and they've seen it and unfortunately it does seem to be male related. I hate to say that. Because I know women are enculturated to make families and pull everybody together and men are enculturated to fight and go to war. And that's what I see. That's what I see as—I see this hegemonic masculinity being played out in the GLBT community in Manhattan that just breaks my heart. It just breaks my heart. And I have to—I'm in the process of stepping back from it and finding my support group in other places like MCC Topeka where we—every time we walk in the door we're welcomed as if it was the first time we were there.

ALBIN: So have you started attending that church?

KATHERINE: Well we do periodically.

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ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: Yeah. Not—we're not intending to become members. We don't want to drive an hour to church. I did that for five years in Vernon. That's why we joined First Congregational. But I'm seeing all this stuff going on among mostly the gay men and it's not nurturing for me. It makes me want to scream and yell and shout and beat somebody up. Now I have to say we kind of found the same thing in Lawrence. We found that there were—there were gay male groups and they interacted with each other and they're mostly wealthy people, and there were lesbian groups and they're real closed, and they're more middle class to poor, educated—some educated, some not, and they stuck to each other. And the groups didn't congregate. And we couldn't even get into the lesbian group. We couldn't even break into that—whatever that group is and feel comfortable. Here we tried to take an active role and say, Okay let's be leaders in this. Let's try to pull people together. And I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen, I really don't.

ALBIN: So do you think you're going to stay in Manhattan once you've both finished your degrees? Do you think you'll stay in Kansas or—

KATHERINE: I really don't know. What I want to do is when I get my certification I want to teach in Junction while I'm finishing that Ph.D., because Junction has a kind of diversity that I'm interested in, and at my age I have a few years to put into the school system. And I want to make the biggest impact I can during this time of real high need, hoping that there are going to be people coming behind me to take my place, hopefully some teachers of color because white women teaching children of color years and years and years, we've already got that. We need some people of color teaching children of color also. We need more diversity in the teacher corps. And I know K-State is working really actively to bring students of color to K-State and have everything available, anything that they want to do.

Unfortunately, teaching is not a career—someone who's trying to bring themselves up out of working class into middle class isn't going to choose teaching unfortunately unless they have a real commitment. And there are several students that I've been following since I've been here who are people of color who want to teach and who are probably—I'll probably be supervising them in the next few semesters. So hopefully that

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trend is beginning, where by the time I have to quit teaching—if it just gets to be too much for me, there's going to be some hopefully K-State graduates coming behind me who are going to look more like their students. And we'll see. But that's what I want to do. And I don't—I know that—well here's what I would like.

I mean I've—this is another piece I haven't talked about but from the time that I was in the Order I have wanted to be part of a land community. And I've looked and I've visited a few and I've also done a lot of research on cohousing. In fact one of the things—another one of the things that attracted us to Lawrence was the Delaware Street Commons, although that didn't really work for us. That group didn't really work for us. We didn't feel like we fit into their vision. I've tried to stay abreast of the co-housing movement. There's an elder care, elder housing movement, that's sort of an offshoot of the co-housing. So my—and now MCC as a denomination is starting to talk about building retirement living facilities. So that's something I'm interested in.

Mary is very, very focused on, I've got to finish this degree, I've got to get working, I've got to pay my student loans. I'm the one who ends up being the visionary and the, Okay but Mary the next time we take a vacation I know we need to go visit Nancy and Barb and see Zach graduate and we need to go to Texas and visit Sarah and we need to go to Portland and visit Katie, but we also need to start going to these places that we think we might want to retire to and check them out (laugh) because that's going to take a lot of research. And we're going to have to—there's financial implications there too. And I take the *Lesbian Connection*. I've been taking it for years and years. And there's—every once in a while there'll be something in *LC* about a new—either land community or retirement group that's starting up. But they never—you never—like you see it one time and then it's gone. And there's getting to be enough of us, the baby-boomer generation that this could be a really big movement in our country but I don't know how we're going to get it moving in a way that will really attract people and be affordable. The facility that MCC wants to build in Sarasota, Florida is so out of sight. It's for wealthy gay men.

ALBIN: Right. Sarasota Florida?

KATHERINE: Three—you're going to have to have three hundred thousand dollars to move into it.

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ALBIN: Oh wow

KATHERINE: I'm not going to be worth that when I'm put in the ground.

ALBIN: That's a lot of money.

KATHERINE: Well and Florida. I mean between the fires and the hurricanes, who wants to live in Florida?

ALBIN: And the politics. (laugh)

KATHERINE: Yeah. Yeah. And I took this survey, this online survey. And I said, Wrong state. Consider Texas, New Mexico, South Dakota, Arizona and then we can talk. No. Do you think—how likely is it you might be move—not likely at all. (laugh) It just—it's just crazy. I've heard that there's a movement at Cathedral of Hope, which is now affiliated with UCC, to plan towards something like that in the Dallas area. That might be something I would consider.

ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: But—so I really don't know how long we'll be there. I have at times thought, Well maybe we'll end up in Topeka because this internship that Mary has that's going to be paid at the VA could turn into a job. But she also—there's also opportunity at Fort Riley with men coming back PTSD. So we could end up being in Junction City for some period of time as well. I like Kansas. In fact, I really like Concordia. I've been there two years in a row, I've done a retreat at the Manna House which is the Sisters of St. Joseph. And they actually have a better, I think, fabric shop, better than Sara's even that's called Country Cousins.

ALBIN: Okay.

KATHERINE: Yeah. I mean I would drive to Concordia now before I would drive to Lawrence. And it's just got a lot of—but if there's gay people there I'm sure they don't have a Rainbow Table, I'm sure they don't have a church, I'm sure they don't have any

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social groups. If you're gay and you live in Concordia you're probably driving to Wichita to get your social needs met, or Omaha or Lincoln or whatever it is due north but probably not in Concordia unfortunately. It's a sweet little town. And they have a junior/senior high school. Like last year they had a position open for a math and science teacher. Well that's what I want to do. And they needed someone who could teach both because they have such a small population. So I don't know. I just don't know where we'll end up. Well I don't know where we'll end up for sure and where we go along the way I really don't know either.

My house in Vernon ended up being foreclosed on. When I could finally start paying the mortgage again when I was teaching, they sent my checks back to me. They literally sent my mortgage checks back to me. And I couldn't get a live human being on the phone. The mortgage company in Oklahoma City called Midwest Mortgage. I could not get a live person. Now this was before all this recent foreclosure crisis, this was right at the beginning. This would have been like three years ago now. It was amazing. I—so my house ended up being auctioned off.

ALBIN: Wow.

KATHERINE: So I don't know if we'll ever own a home. We've talked about saving up for like a fifth wheel or a Winnebago or something but with the gas prices the way they are now I don't even know if that's a possibility.

ALBIN: Yeah.

KATHERINE: I would love to be able to have—I would love to winter in Texas and summer in South Dakota, something like that—be winter birds instead of summer birds. Maybe share a condo or duplex in Austin and share another in Rapid City something. We love Rapid City. It's a wonderful place to be a tourist, South Dakota is, wonderful place to be a tourist.

ALBIN: I hear that's one of the locations where a lot of GLBT people retire is South Dakota.

KATHERINE: I'm not surprised.

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ALBIN: It's affordable. And North Dakota, like both the Dakotas.

KATHERINE: Um-hm.

ALBIN: Which is impressive. Can we—let me go back to your first relationship.

KATHERINE: Debbie.

ALBIN: Okay so then the one before that with the stone butch. So prior to that situation, what was it that went off in your head that kind of—I mean you talked about having these crushes but what else happened along the way?

KATHERINE: Okay the other influences like, How did I know there were gay people?

ALBIN: Yeah, yeah.

KATHERINE: Even though I didn't know the name?

ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: At camp in the summertime there were definitely gay counselors. But the camp was owned by—when I first started going it was owned by a woman named Mama, we called her Mama, Carol. And when I was like eight or so her partner was still alive, Jane. Jane died of breast cancer like maybe when I was nine years old. It was like the summer I didn't go to camp she died. Now Carol, Carol, had a daughter, Polly who was married to Ernie. And they had two daughters. So this wasn't like your—Carol and Jane were not like people who had never married and were lesbians their whole lives or anything. Carol had had a life. Obviously there had been a husband at some time to father her daughter. And—but—and of course nobody talked about that relationship the way I'm talking about it. But eventually I caught on. Jane was her partner. And they had bought the camp at some point. And then Jane had died and Carol had carried on with Polly and Ernie helping in the summers. Polly, I think, was a teacher, Ernie was a principal. So they had their summers free enough that they could help with camp.

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Then two definitely dykes bought the camp from Carol—Sandy and Skeet. Sandy was a school nurse in San Marcos and Skeet was—and Skeet's real name was Mary. They—she was—what was she? Something to do with the school, so again, summers free. And they had also been involved with Girl Scouts for years and years and years. So there were people in Texas who knew them—they had been in the Lubbock area—and knew them from when they were in the Lubbock area. And then when they moved to Wimberley to take over Rocky River that attracted some people to Rocky River to help out.

But the real answer to that question is that there was another question, Jane and Gloria who started at the camp when I was about thirteen, Yeah it was the year that Dan—that my mother remarried. And Jane and Gloria were clearly a lesbian couple, although again I didn't have names for all this. But they lived—they had their own apartment, where they were in apartment, right? And they were both teachers, public school system. I think when they first started at Rocky River Gloria was getting her masters at what's now Texas State University, used to be Southwest Texas State Teacher's College. It's now called Texas State University over in San Marcos. And Jane, I don't know what she was doing in the school district at that time. But the whole time I knew them they were teachers of some kind. And—trying to think of the sequence here. So Jane was the head of the Riding Department and Gloria would like—she'd go to school in the morning and then she'd come back and run the store in the afternoon. And they took an interest in me. And this is a part where we're going to go back to what was happening in my family.

My—my mother married a man who was—he is—he was a pedophile. But he was a pedophile—he liked teenage girls. So there's a different name for it. It's like [ephebophilia] or something like that.⁵ I've seen it written down before. So we're not talking about little boys. We're talking about girls. So he sexually molested me for like seven years. And I came to understand that I was—my mother was his fourth wife and I was the third family that had teenage girls that he had come into and molested the oldest daughter. The previous wife he'd had, the younger daughter was in junior high with me. It was the older daughter that he had molested and at the time he was married

⁵ Added and edited by interviewer during the review process.

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to my mother she was going to the University of Houston and he had her in an apartment. And I don't remember how I found all this out. I just know that when it started I didn't know what was going on.

As it progressed for about a year, I finally went to my mother. I was fourteen. And I said, This is what's happening. This shouldn't be happening. She said to me, So what do you want me to do? I just married him. Want me to divorce him? She says this to me like I'm supposed to make this decision for her. So at that point she basically divorced me, stopped being my mother, at fourteen. So this continues until I'm twenty-one, twenty. I ran away from home when I was twenty-one basically. I had already graduated from A&M and I was getting ready to enter vet school. And I got up one morning and I drove to Jane and Gloria's in Wimberley. And the way I did it, it was a day off. It was my day off. It was like a Monday morning. And so I had slept in. And thank God—thank goodness Dan had something else to do that morning. And I woke up and I said, Okay this is it. I hadn't planned this forever and ever and ever. Although when I look back that last year I had sold off all my horses. And I had just finished a young horse that we had bought. And that young horse was ready to go on to somebody else. And I got up that morning and I drove to Wimberley. And I drove in such a way that I didn't think Dan would be able to catch up with me basically. And when my mother called them, because she knew where to call, Gloria said, She doesn't want to talk to you. So then Dan calls—She doesn't want to talk to you.

So they harbored me for about a month before school started that summer. And this is where it gets really interesting I think. They, being teachers, they didn't have a lot of social life during the—their social life was in the summer. And they had friends in Dallas and they would go to Dallas for three or four days at a time and go to the bars and hang out with their friends and then come home, because they had a piece of property in Wimberley that was about three acres. And Jane had her horses and it had to be mowed and the horses had to be fed. So what they did was they had some of their friends from San Antonio come up and stay the weekend with me. Again, another lesbian couple. Again, I don't have words for all this at this point. I just know that Jane and Gloria are a couple, they live together, and they had—what were their names? See I can't even think of their—but I knew their friends that came because I had met them over the years. So the entire weekend they were going to Dallas I was mowing the pastures with the tractor.

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ALBIN: With a bush hog on the back?

KATHERINE: That's right. Yep. And they came back. And by the time they went to Dallas the next time during that summer—because we're only talking about maybe six weeks—

ALBIN: Yeah.

KATHERINE: Because I remember the horse show was in June, early June. It was in Hondo. And we got back from that horse show. So—yeah maybe six, maximum eight, weeks before school started again. And basically everything that was mine I had in College Station still. So it wasn't like I had to pack a whole bunch of stuff into my truck. And what I did pack in my truck I dropped off in College Station then I went to Wimberley. So the next time they were going to go to Dallas by then I had said to them—I had talked to them about their relationship a little bit. I still didn't have words for it. But I had said to them, I think I'm probably gay too. So it was the first time I was coming out to myself. And of course they don't have anything to say. One thing, they're—I mean I'm twenty. I turned twenty-one that summer but I'm still twenty so I'm still underage really in Texas. My mother probably could have—God knows what she could have done to them. So they're not saying anything. They're just providing me with a refuge.

ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: Right? But I said, I think I'd like to go with you this next time you go to Dallas. And so I did. They took me with them the next time. And so—this is a time in Dallas when the bars are still being raided, when bar owners have to pay the police to not be raided, hush money. And what was really funny is I remember we were at this bar and Jane is sitting like between me and this other person. And one of their friends turns to me and says, What do you think about her, or something like that. And I look at Jane and I'm going what do you think—I'm like—I don't know what to say, right? I don't know what's going on.

ALBIN: Right.

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KATHERINE: I'm just there. I'm just getting a feel for this stuff. And so that's what that first time in the bars was like. And they wouldn't let me go to the bathroom by myself. I mean they would come and stand in line with me and stand outside the bathroom door. I mean it was that time in the bars. It was dangerous to be in the bars. And they had been around in the fifties and they had been—being closeted as teachers forever and ever and ever. All they knew was being closeted. And they tried to teach me those rules without—by behavior rather than by words. But I really considered them my—in many ways my surrogate parents. Because I'd had this relationship with them since I was thirteen during the entire time the incest was going on. They were my alternative parents. And they protected me as well as they could. Like when Dan would come to camp when I was at camp, they would try to arrange for me to have something else that I was doing. So it wasn't me saying no it was the camp saying no, that kind of thing. But that wasn't very successful. But they were concerned for my safety and they were concerned—they knew what was—without me telling them they knew what was going on.

And of course it turns out of course Gloria, her father, her real father, had molested her from about the same time, about age twelve until she went off to college. And then Jane rescued her from her father and took her away from the family to protect her. And that was the end of that for Gloria. Now Gloria had, and probably still does—because I believe Gloria is still alive, a relationship with her mother that was very strong. And of course once her father died it got stronger. But Jane had had a remarkably normal childhood. She was part of the horse community in Houston. A lot of the people that she rode with as teenagers I knew as adults when I was riding and selling. And her father was an engineer, her mother was a stay-at-home mom. She was their only child—pampered, pampered, pampered. She was just a wonderful, wonderful person. Gloria was a really good person. She had a lot of—a lot of characteristics that my mother has in many ways that finally made it such that it was really difficult for me to visit her after a certain number of years.

She and Jane broke up at some point and Gloria has been with another woman named Marty for years and years and years now. And Jane has been single for years and years and years. So I haven't seen them in a long time. But they were very—they basically saved my life. They saved my life and Helen saved my life. Helen saved my

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sanity. They saved my life, Helen saved my sanity. Helen's no longer living either. She died a year ago last Monday—not Monday, a year ago like a week from Thursday, the twenty-third I believe. And so I really miss them, although my—sort of my contract with them had ended. And I don't think it's an accident that Pat died the day after I met Mary, my friend Pat, who was one year younger than me and who had gone back to drinking, back to smoking. She had had a quadruple bypass in '99. But she couldn't stay sober and she couldn't stay out of habits that were going to not make her ill. She had asthma really bad. And there was alcoholism and heart disease in her family, I mean very predictable. But she was only forty-nine when she died.

ALBIN: Yeah that's young. That's so young. So is there anything else that you want to mention that I may not have asked about or—

KATHERINE: Well I think it's very important for people who hear these stories—because a lot of people say, Oh well she was sexually molested, of course she's gay.

ALBIN: Right.

KATHERINE: I think it's very important to separate those things out. Now I—at times when I'm not in a very good place, because I have no way of knowing—in some ways believe that people like my mother and my stepfather they see someone like me who is growing up the tomboy and maintaining that tomboy stance and there's some part of them who says, Well if she just blah, blah, blah. And in some ways there's this tacit agreement that sexual molestation is appropriate. That's a really ancient belief system. And I think it's very important for people to understand that sexual orientation, I think it's established—I mean there are people that say sexual orientation is set by age three. I was having crushes on girls at age seven and eight when I look back.

So was the sexual molestation, did it have an effect on me? Yes it did, had a huge effect on me. Did it make me more gay? I don't think so. I don't think so. Now in the minds of other adults they may have justified allowing this to occur. My mother didn't stop it. She was the silent partner. And to this day she denies what happened and makes excuses for what happened, tries to blame me for what happened, for what Dan did. She denies that he was a drug addict and an alcoholic and she can't deal with the reality in any way. And she'll do things like say to me, crying, I was a bad mother. And

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it's like, Yeah you were. You were a bad mother, come on. (laugh) But she wants me to somehow make her feel better about that and I can't make her feel better about that. I have my own issues still around forgiving her or accepting. In AA it's all about acceptance—accepting things as they are. Forgiveness doesn't mean you forget but acceptance has to do with accepting things as they are. Perhaps she was doing the best she could. I don't know. Being an educated person, I had my doubts. I don't think that's the best you can do but for my own emotional and spiritual health I have to maintain some level of detachment from what I think she shoulda, woulda, coulda done. And sometimes I can do that and sometimes I can't.

At the same time Dan was probably one of the biggest influences in my life. There were a lot of things I learned from him, some of which were negative, some of which were positive. And he certainly determined the course of my life for a long time either by trying to get away or by having to deal with the effects of incest on the kinds of people I chose, the kinds of people I was attracted to, kinds of situations I got into. And plus the active alcoholism in the family gave me the opportunity to drink at home. I never had to go anywhere else to get alcohol. That was just normal in our family, alcoholic drinking. And then there's people like Jane and Gloria who I used to go to the bars and drink with who to this day don't believe I'm alcoholic because they were drinking the same way I was and they're not alcoholic, right? They saw me binge drinking. They didn't see the maintenance drinking that I did all the time in between seeing them. And for them going to the bar and getting drunk was normal part of their life and they could go on and live their life. For me the binge drinking was part of a pattern of my disease that I can't do.

And so an environment where you're living with a parent who drinks alcoholically everyday, that's an environmental influence that I had to deal with for a long time as well. And then just the whole—when you're incested there's the whole mix-up between love and sex that is rampant in our community anyway and rampant in our culture, not just GLBT people but all people. And so working through all of that took a lot of time, and becoming attracted to people who were good for me, not people who were going to screw me over, people who were good for me. And then the way—interesting thing. I'll tell this last piece. It's just—it's really amazing because it has such a spiritual aspect to it. I was so lonely in Vernon even though I had this—I had my church and I had friends at church. I had—it had probably been ten years since I'd had a girlfriend. And I

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decided to try one of those online matchmaking services. I forget which—I think it was Match—Matchmaker—Match? It was one of those early ones.

ALBIN: Like Match.com or—

KATHERINE: Yeah, something like that. And you can put in your preferences and you can put in lesbian, gay, whatever. And so there was a woman that I hooked up with.⁶ She actually came and stayed with me in Vernon. And this was in '99. Was it '99? No it was early 2000 because she came with me to Wichita for that first ordination and then went back with me. And I actually had cataract surgery in both eyes. One—the first time she came to stay with me the left eye, sixty days later she came again for the right eye. So the reason—it's funny, the practical reason M. was in my life was because I needed somebody to drive me to Wichita Falls. I mean that was really our contract. But what happened was we thought we were in love with each other. She was a vegetarian, I'm not.⁷ And so she comes over to the states once a year for an extended period of time.⁸ She is a multiple personality. (whispering) She's a multiple.⁹

ALBIN: Oh no.

KATHERINE: Okay. I didn't know this until she gets here.

ALBIN: Did she tell you?

KATHERINE: No.

ALBIN: You found out?

KATHERINE: No. I found out because the first night we were staying together she turns into someone else.

ALBIN: Wow.

⁶ Edited during the review process.

⁷ Edited during the review process.

⁸ Edited during the review process.

⁹ Edited during the review process.

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KATHERINE: Yeah. Then she starts to explain to me about her past. This is someone. I mean she—Okay my first lover, Debbie, the one who I lived with, her story is horrendous. It is unbelievably horrendous. I mean you can't make this shit up. It's like her—she grew up with her grandmother and her grandfather and they used to put her in the closet and her grandfather sexually molested her and I mean it just—there was spiritual abuse, there was religious abuse, there was sexual abuse, there was emotional—it was awful, terrible. This person's story is like twenty times worse. Okay Debbie's story was worse than mine, right? It was like, I felt sorry for her right? And I could care for her because her story was worse than mine.

This person's story is like I mean you really can't make this stuff up. And it was this incredible, horrible stuff that her father did to her that caused her to split. But according to her story she had integrated again. But you couldn't always tell. So after she leaves the first time, because she's scheduled to come back.¹⁰ So she had these three or four different places she was going to stay while she was in the states, two times with me. I start researching this. And I'm just like, Oh my God I don't know—I really don't know anything about this. And I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to deal with this person. Well she comes back to be with me in Vernon and she's like a completely different person. And she goes back and—okay so this is the person before I meet Mary.¹¹ This is the person where I say, Okay God I get it. I am—my picker, my chooser is completely broken. I mean we knew I was a bad chooser before. Now we know the spinner, it's broken. It's completely broken. Even when I use my best judgment and my—all the information I have at my disposal, I am still unable to choose someone who is healthy and who's good for me. Now we know. This is it. I'm done. I'm done.

She gets back to [her home], it's middle of Lent, she breaks up with me.¹² And I—again I'm brought to my knees and I go, God okay. Okay, here's what we're going to do. You're going to make me the person that someone else would want to be with. That's how we're going to do it. And that was where I put my attention. And the next thing that happened about a year later I met Mary. And that's where I have tried to keep my attention—to be the person that someone would want to be with. It's not about, I'm

¹⁰ Edited during the review process.

¹¹ Edited during the review process.

¹² Added and edited during the review process.

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going to choose this person, we're going to do this and this—how can I be the person that someone else would want to live with, would want to be in a relationship with? (laugh) She was my ultimate relationship bottom, this person from Hawaii, I mean just unbelievable, unbelievable. Yeah. And her father's still alive, running around free, practicing medicine, in California, still alive. And she has siblings too, still alive. Her mother is hospitalized with early Alzheimer's, another specter that hung over head was, was she going to get early Alzheimer's because early onset it runs through females typically. So it was like, Oh my God, I can't believe this. I just—it was like, Oh my God.

ALBIN: Wow.

KATHERINE: But then I shifted my focus. And this is something I struggle with all the time even now, I mean even my relationship with Mary. It's, How am I going to be the person that she wants to be in a relationship with, that's worth being in a relationship with? How can I be that person when I'm selfish, I'm controlling, I want all these— (laugh) It's like I like my boxes in my living room (laugh) instead of in the storage shed or unboxed. And—anyway—

ALBIN: So anything else?

KATHERINE: (laugh)

ALBIN: Think we're good?

KATHERINE: Yeah. I'll probably think of other things but—

ALBIN: Well I can always come back if you think of more.

KATHERINE: I just don't know what that would have to do with your history project, me philosophizing, but other than that.

ALBIN: We can do that too if you want another time. Not a problem so—so thank you—

KATHERINE: Okay—

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ALBIN: —very much. Appreciate it. (laughter)

[end]