Oral History Interview with Donella-Elizabeth Alston Cleveland

Interview conducted on September 5, 2018

By Professor Judith Raiskin, UO Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Linda J. Long, Curator of Manuscripts, UO Special Collections and University Archives, UO Libraries

For

The Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project

Donella-Elizabeth Alston, early 1990s

Donella-Elizabeth Alston Cleveland, September 5, 2018

Recorded in the University of Oregon Libraries

Preface

This is an ongoing community-engaged oral history project. Linda J. Long, Curator of Manuscripts in the University of Oregon Libraries, and Professor Judith Raiskin of the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Oregon, conducted video interviews with eighty-three narrators in the summers of 2018 and 2019. The interviews were held in the UO Libraries' recording studio. This collection includes the video interviews and the bound and on-line transcripts. Associated with the interviews are materials collected from the narrators, including photographs, diaries, flyers, business records, letters, posters, buttons, and T-shirts that document the businesses, organizations, and cultural and political activities discussed in the interviews. These collections will be made available separately as individual archival collections and can be searched and retrieved using the Library's Online Catalog.

In the 1960s-1990s hundreds of lesbian-identified women came to Eugene, Oregon from across the United States. These women founded cornerstone organizations central to Eugene's history and influenced Oregon's political landscape. They created and worked in collective businesses, ran printing presses, and founded cultural organizations (theater companies and dance troupes, music bands and choirs) and gathered in lesbian cultural spaces (book stores, martial arts studios, restaurants, bars, and softball teams). They became leaders of Eugene community service agencies and worked in City and State government positions. A number were instrumental in leading important legal challenges of discriminatory policies at the county and state levels regarding employment and housing protections, benefits, lesbian and gay adoption, and marriage equality. Those who came to study or teach at the University of Oregon were influential in making institutional change protecting the rights of lesbians and gay men.

The artist Tee Corinne, whose papers and photographs also reside in the University of Oregon Special Collections, asserted, "The lack of a publicly accessible history is a devastating form of oppression; lesbians face it constantly." The Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project seeks to preserve a specific and vibrant history that otherwise is lost. This collection of interviews captures a range of engaging and important stories that reveal new angles on lesbian history, women's history, the counterculture movement in the 1960s-1980s, Oregon history, feminism, sexuality, intentional communities, and women working in jobs reserved for men. Looking back over twenty-five - fifty years, the narrators reflect on the complex relationship of individual aspirations and larger social

movements in times of dramatic historical change. Many of the narrators have retired and continue to be involved in vibrant artistic, scientific and political work.

Abstract

Interview conducted on September 5, 2018. Donella was born in Michigan in July 1967. She grew up in New Jersey, first in Englewood, where everyone on her block (save one), was African American, and then in the smaller town of Norwood, where her father was the first black postmaster. Growing up, she was very social and had lots of friends. When she was in college, she realized she was a lesbian. Later, she and a friend moved to Oregon, because they both wanted a change. They drove out to Oregon, and rented a house in Cottage Grove in 1992. She recalls this was during the campaign for Ballot Measure 9. Donella describes the lesbian social life, stores and cultural places in Eugene, such as Baba Yaga's Dream coffee house, Mother Kali's Bookstore, and the publications The Women's Press and The Lavender Network. At this time, Donella worked at several jobs. One was at a lumber mill and she describes an accident when she lost some of her fingers in a chop saw. She discusses being African American and living and working in white Eugene, where she experienced some racist incidents. She discusses working at the University of Oregon. She talks about working with NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League) and at Mother Kali's Bookstore. She describes her interest in the theater and working with director Carol Dennis. She also talks about Betsy Brown, Gladys Campbell, Kendra Morrigan, and her partner Deb Cleveland. There were only about seven to ten black lesbians in town. She discusses gay marriage and her concerns about President Trump.

Additional subjects: African Americans -- Oregon – Eugene; African Americans – New Jersey; Catholic Church; Marriage equality; Theater – Oregon – Eugene; Sawmills – Oregon; United States Postal Service.

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Narrator: Donella-Elizabeth Cleveland

Location: University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon

Interviewers: Linda Long and Judith Raiskin

Date: September 5, 2018

Long: This interview is part of the Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project. The recordings will be made available through the University of Oregon Libraries' Special Collections and University Archives. This is an oral history interview with Donella-Elizabeth Alston Cleveland on September 5, 2018 taking place in the University of Oregon Libraries' recording studio in the Center for Media and Educational Technologies. The interviewers are Linda Long, Curator of Manuscripts in the UO Libraries' Special Collections and University Archives and Professor Judith Raiskin of the UO Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Donella, please let us know if you agree to be recorded for this project and that you give your permission for the University to preserve and make available your recorded and transcribed interview.

Cleveland: I give my permission.

Long: Thank you very much. Let's just start with basic question. Can you tell us when and where you were born and something about your early years?

Cleveland: Okay. Actually, I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but I grew up in Englewood, New Jersey. I think my parents were on vacation and the doctor said, "Oh she's not due until August," and I came early. Let's see. So Englewood, New Jersey, my mother's family is one of the—I guess the term you would use is legacy black families in Englewood. They've been there for over a hundred years. So the house that I grew up in is the house that my granddad built on land that he bought, which he sold to my mom and my dad for a dollar to keep them from moving out.

Apparently the story as it's been told to me was that my mom and my dad got married in July of 1965 and they were going out somewhere in the evening. And apparently my grandfather who was living in the house because this is the house that was in my mother's side of the family. And dad just married mom and moved in. Grandpa apparently said something along the lines of, "Where are you going?" And she said, "Oh we're going out to wherever." And he said something like, "Well, no decent woman is just leaving the house at nine o'clock at night." And she said, "But daddy, I'm with my husband." And so after that they decided enough of this, we're just going to move out. And they were going to look at houses and the way Ma told the story was grandpa was putting his hat on and she said, "Where you going?" And he said, "I'm going with you to

make sure there's a room for me." So rather than just pack up everybody, he sold them the house for a dollar. And that was the family home for forever.

So even now I can still tell you the names of the people who lived in those houses going up and down the street. So I very much felt like I was related to everyone. Englewood at the time, I think it had something like— I remember looking it up. I think it was something like 26,000 people, 21,000 people, something like that. So not a huge town. People typically lived in Englewood and would work in New York. You could get to the Hudson very easily from where I lived. And the GWB to go into New York and all that kind of thing.

I grew up with the sister that raised my mother because my grandmother passed away when my mom was something like five. My aunt Marion lived in the house right next to us. Across the street was a school pal of my mom's. Everybody on my street was African-American except for one person. Miss Connie was married to my uncle's brother on the opposite side of the street. You got my mom's sister over here and then on the other cor— my mom's sister and her husband, and on the other corner you've got that husband's brother and Miss Connie. So very much—

Raiskin: Were there are a lot of kids in the neighborhood? Or cousins?

Cleveland: Not really. Not on my street. And I went to the Catholic school, so whenever all the other kids would be out, I would be in, because I had the Catholic holidays, they had the Jewish holidays. We never

we only kind of converged in the summertime. But, Oh gosh. The lady who sold Avon, Miss Rose. I think her name was Rose. Her grandchildren would come over to play in the summertime. And so then I would get to play with them. And then my aunt Frieda, who was extended family, went to school with my mom. I think she was a year behind her or something like that. Her granddaughter would come and play in the summertime because her mom worked. And so she would be staying with her grandma. And neither one of us was allowed to cross the street by ourselves. She'd be on one side of the street. I'd be on the other side of the street. We just throw a rock across the street. I'd throw the rock and then she'd pick it up and then she'd throw it back. I mean, never when cars were passing of course. It was just street. But it was very much like that.

And not a small town, but I remember— so now we're talking about the seventies, okay. So the '70s black and white TV, kids. My mother had sent me down to the store to pick up a pack of cigarettes for her. Which is unconscionable now. But she would send me down to the store to play a number and we're not talking the lottery where you scratch off the ticket, we're talking about the underground. And apparently my family was somehow involved in the numbers racket. That and bootlegging, but that's another story. She would send me down and she'd give me a matchbook cover and she'd say, "Here, give this to Mr. Mays. Tell him to play this number for me, straightened box and pick me up a pack of Salem 100s." And I'm nine. I think it was nine the first time I was allowed to walk down to

the store by myself. And you better believe that I went down to the store and I came right back.

And so many of the neighbors, "Does your mother know you're down here?" It was a block away. You could almost see the store from my house. But going, "Does your mother know you're down here?" Coming, "Does your mother know you're down here?

Raiskin: What do you make of that adult protection?

Cleveland: When I look back on it now, it's just fricking magic. You know? I mean we're thinking about, I guess it was in the '80s when the whole stranger-danger thing was getting into vogue and when you talk about now, helicopter parenting and all that kind of stuff. We rode the metal roller skates, fell down, busted our knees up and no helmets. In the house next door my cousin Elsie and her brother, again, extended family, not related by blood, lived next door. And they had the coolest thing, I don't even know what you call it, but it was like this brick— the house was here and then there was this brick thing that was just right there. And the old men, they were all retired. I'm going to assume that they were all— perish the thought— sixty or above—and they would all sit out there and they play checkers or they play dominoes or whatever in the summertime. And I'm riding my bicycle, my tricycle, whatever, up and down the street. I can only go to the corner, turn the bike around, come right back. And there'd be six or seven of these old men and never was there ever a thought that anything untoward would occur, never.

I remember going by one time on my bike and just peddling away going, "Gentlemen," as I pass by. And one of those old guys just said, "I wish I was her age." And the other guy said, "I wish I was her age with $1 million. I think it was— not to say that bad things didn't happen. When the riots were going on in '68, '69 and that time they hit Englewood as well. But it's in my memory that at some point in the ‘70s my mother started locking the front door. There was a point where she did not always lock the front door.

Long: Were you raised Catholic?

Cleveland: Kind of sort of. Here's the story on that. So my mother's side of the family are co-founders of the AME Zionist church, Shiloh AME Zionist church in Englewood, New Jersey. I forget what year that was. It was either twenty-something or teens-something. I have the paper at home. This is the black church that we're talking about. She had a falling out with the church. She's the daughter of one set of co-founders. Right. And she had a falling out with the church.

Raiskin: Over what?

Cleveland: Reveling Flowers was the Reverend who married my parents. Got married in the backyard of that house. And at some point people in the church wanted somebody younger to be the head Reverend guy in the church. And I think, as the story was told to me, they were trying to think of some way to get Reverend Flowers out of the church. I think they were thinking of, Maybe we can just have this little whisper campaign about something. My mother was having

none of this. My mother was an activist as well. And she also had a very fierce sense of what was right and what was wrong. And so as the story was told to me, she apparently stood up in the meeting and she called everybody out on their stuff. Who was sleeping with who. Whose babies were outside children. Basically, cast the first stone kind of stuff. And then she turned her back and she walked out and she never walked back in.

And so fast forwarding a bit and my mother's opinion, my mom and dad's opinion, the best education you could get was the private school. The private school was Saint Cecilia's Roman Catholic Elementary school. And so they put me in in Saint Cecilia's and my brothers after me when they came along. Now if you work bingo, you get a discount. My dad worked bingo. If you were Catholic, you got another discount on your tuition. So, my parents became Catholic. I thought up until my dad's funeral, I thought that it was just a marriage of convenience. But my mother said, "No, your father was devout". Dad was into it. Mom, not so much. My mother was not one of those folks who've minced words about much. Constance Ray White Alston was her name.

And she did not think that any white guy in Italy needed to tell her when to sleep with her husband. And she also felt that she could pray to God in her kitchen just as easily as anywhere else. Therefore, confession was not necessary, but it helped her get three kids through Catholic school. So, so be it. Who did it hurt? You know? But you're indoctrinated basically. I was definitely the kid that would go

to church before school started. And when it came time to be confirmed, I learned all the prayers. Oh my goodness. I was definitely very, very into it.

Raiskin: Was your mother okay with that?

Cleveland: Yeah, she was fine with it except for when things got a little weird in the sense that when you're dealing with little kids, you might say one thing, but how that child interprets it is all bets are off. You know? So they're telling us, "Mary is the mother of God, Mary is your mother." And so I guess I came home from school one day and I had on like this white sheet with a blue blanket trying to make myself look like the statue that's up—

Long: The Virgin Mary?

Cleveland: Yeah. That's up in every Catholic classroom, right? You've got the crucifix, the television, the American flag and Mother Mary in every class. And so I come downstairs swaddled in all of our blankets and, and I am saying, "Mary is my mother," which did not go over well with my mom who gave me quite an earful about, "No, no. Hell, she's not." So, there was that.

And then at one point there, I guess when we were probably seventh, eighth grade, they're teaching us about the Book of Revelations when all hell's breaking loose, right? And we were terrified that the world was going to end and maybe this relative would go, but this relative wouldn't get to go. And we were just all terrified. We were all just the most saintly seventh grade class and all the parents, as I

understand it, were calling in wanting to know what is going on? And then, "Oh my goodness, I yelled at my brother." Then everybody's taking themselves voluntarily to confession. And the parents were less than pleased, let's just put it that way, that we were just being scared the heck out of.

Long: Apart from the religion, what was your education like?

Cleveland: It was a really good education. I was one of those lucky folks who had two parents in the home. So dad worked outside of the home. He worked in the— When I came into the world, he was actually— I think he was a custodian at Bloomingdale's, which was a department store back in the day. And my mother encouraged him to take the exam to get into the post office, which he did. And he got in. And that's where he ended up retiring. He was the first black postmaster in Norwood, New Jersey in 1981 if you can believe that. And then also the first black postmaster in Westwood, New Jersey in 1985 when he moved again.

As far as my education goes, I put it in that context because everybody kind of had their roles and dad helped with math. Mom helped with English. When you got into the upper maths, none of them could help me because we were doing the new math and they only knew the old math. And so God help you when it came to division. It was a very sound, a very solid education. And my mother was an English teacher, so speaking well and being well-read— heaven help you if my mother heard you say you were bored because then you were marched outside to the front porch. We had

covered closed in front porch and she had like a mini library out there of all sorts of things. And I think I did say one summer I'm bored and she took me out to the front porch. She pointed to the little library and she said, "You see all those books?" "Yes." "Have you read them all?" ""No. "Well I guess you have something to do."

There I am. I don't know how old, I must've been about eight, nine, ten reading *Rosemary's Baby*, which was so not helpful. Goodness. *Reader's Digest*. I learned *All About Eve*. I was just completely fas— *Sybil* was popular at some point. I think that's probably 1976. All kinds of lovely things about psychosis was I learning about when I was a kid. But great vocabulary, great conversations. I think it was good.

Raiskin: What year were you born again?

Cleveland: Nineteen sixty-seven.

Raiskin: Okay.

Cleveland: July '67.

Raiskin: What were things like in high school and what was your temperament? What kind of kid were you?

Cleveland: I don't think I've changed all that much from the person that I was in high school. I was a mother hen in high school, I'm a mother hen now. Born in July I'm a Cancer. That should tell you all you need to know. I started high school at St. Cecilia's High School. Then my father got promoted from supervisor to postmaster and at that time

they had a residency requirement and you had to live within six miles or something like that of the post office in which you worked if you were the postmaster. We had to move. Here we are in this town where I felt like I was related to everybody. To the point where if I was I— I walked home from school this one time. I thought there was something so fabulous about the idea of being able to walk home from school. My mother never drove. My father drove. We had one car, he drove it to work. She had gone to high school with Mr. and Mrs. Cloud, who owned the black and white cab company and Mrs. McCloud— the Clouds were with the high school, but Mr. and Mrs. McCloud owned the black and white cab service.

And what Mrs. McCloud would do is she would pick up the kids who didn't have a bus to take them to school or some parent to take them to school. There was no bus for the Catholic school. I was one of the kids that she picked up. One day I thought it would be great to walk home because it just looks so romantic or so adventurous or something. Police officer picks me up and takes me home. My mother was on the police advisory board. He knew exactly who I was and exactly where to take me. Goodness, now I've completely forgotten what you asked me.

Raiskin: When you say you were a mother hen, what does that mean?

Cleveland: Oh boy. Just that I would just always try to look after my friends. When I was in high school— that's what you asked me, okay. When I was in high school at one point— Okay, so I started high school at St. Cecilia. We had to move from this town where everyone knew

everyone. And I felt completely safe all the time to this town of 6,000 people where we were the only black family. We were like the black Brady bunch. I mean, seriously. If you saw one of us, you saw all of us. It was just kind of that way up until we got to be real teenagers and folk are doing their own thing. But we'd be in the station wagon and people would stare as we were going to the grocery store or whatever. But I was kind of used to that because people would see our station wagon and Englewood and people would be waving. You know? I would see people staring and I would just wave. I had no concept that we were the first unicorns that they had ever seen during the day.

Long: What city was that?

Cleveland: Norwood, New Jersey.

Raiskin: And what a shift for your parents, too.

Cleveland: It was huge. It was so huge and now as a fifty-one year old woman, I can't even imagine what it must've been like for my mother to bring her children to this place that may as well have been Mars. You know? St. Cecilia was not an all-black school, but because they were the best education we had everybody. I had a kid, his name was Moshi, I think he was Palestinian. His parents were, were from Palestine or something like that. We're outside of New York City. You see everybody. Here it was very, very different. I knew it was kind of scary for my mom in some ways. One of my best friends in high school, her name was Linda— it was a regional high school,

Northern Valley Regional High School in Old Tappan. Old Tappan was the town. And four or five towns went to school at that high school because all of the towns were so small that that no one town would have a big enough student body to support a high school on its own.

There was Northern Valley, Old Tappan and Northern Valley Demarest and I went to Old Tappan. and the more I'm hearing myself tell the story, the more I hear my New Jersey accent coming in, it's going to be an interesting review of this tape. It was a school of I think something like 1,200 students, which is not nearly how big St. Cecilia's was. I think Old Tappan was probably comparable to Willamette High School here in Eugene. And at one point— so I lived in Norwood, I had friends who lived in Northville, Harrington Park and Old Tappan. Those are the towns that went to that high school. And my friend Linda, who was white— there were only four African Americans in the school when I was there.

Raiskin: Of 1,200?

Cleveland: Of 1,200. Two of us were in the same class. Corey Booker, you familiar with him? His brother Carey was in my class. We were seniors when Corey came in to school. They lived in, I want to say it's Harrington Park is where they lived. There you go. The other black family in town is now hopefully going to be president one day. Linda invited me to go swimming with her this particular summer day and each town had a swim club. Now where I came from, we had the Englewood Rec Center, which had the pool at one of the— It was the

rec center had the pool that was next to the high school and that would be the pool that everybody swam in, in the summer. And you proved you were an Englewoodian, and then you got your little badge and you wore it on your bathing suit and you swam at the pool. Right.

For the swim clubs— I think it was something similar for the swim clubs up there. It wasn't a swim club as in exclusive and men smoking cigars and things like that. It was more along the rec center thing. But they called them clubs. My mother had no context for this. She only knew clubs are usually exclusive and that usually means we are excluded. She wouldn't let me go. I told my friend, "My mom says I can't go." And she says, "Well, let her talk to my mom. My mom— " we're fourteen, fifteen years old. Then I said, "Mom, Mrs. Dotta wants to talk to you." And Mrs. Dotta explained to her that it was not an exclusive club. And what came to me afterwards from my mother was that she was afraid that if she let me go and I got in the pool, then everybody would get out of the pool and then I would be embarrassed. She was doing what a mom does and standing in front of me.

In high school, definitely naive. I was a naive person. I made friends very easily. I think I was shy, but I never showed that I was shy. I was in drama club and I was in the choir. My friends were burnouts, my friends were in the band, I was in the color guard, my friends were preppies, my friends were everybody. I just determined that I would try to be as weird as I could possibly be so that if people were

staring at me— so now I'm coming into consciousness about being the only black family up here. So that if people are staring at me, they're staring at me because I'm wearing Jim Morrison style bell bottoms and it's 1982. and I'm the only one who's wearing a dashiki.

We were like the last coffee clutch of kids who just couldn't let go the '60s. What was it? I guess it would've been the twentieth anniversary of Woodstock hadn't even happened yet. So sex, drugs and rock and roll, totally glorified for all of us.

Long: And what about your father? Did he have any troubles in his job then?

Cleveland: The one issue that ever got to my mind happened when Daddy was working in Westwood. My father's name was John Henry Alston, originally from New Orleans and North Carolina. And this happened when I was in college. And so what they would do was— He was the only black postmaster in Bergen County. And I knocked the table by the microphone. I'll try not to do that. Only black postmaster in Bergen County. And they would use him as a test case for other towns. So, in other words when they had an opening— I think the town was Upper Saddle River, which is another exclusive, very white town. At least it was then. And they had a person that they wanted to put in there because the postmaster was retiring. They didn't know how the town would accept an African American postmaster. I mean, this is the eighties, you know? But even so. They would send my dad over there to be the guinea pig to see how the people would deal with it.

So Daddy works there. And, and the story as it was told to me was that getting to be the close of the day— Now, my father, as long as I ever knew my dad, he wore a suit and a tie and a fedora. He would even mow the lawn in his fedora. Right? And so my dad's at work, he's the manager of this federal establishment. My father's in a suit and tie. He looks like a businessman. End of the day comes around and this gentleman comes in, says he wants to talk to the postmaster. When you come up to the counter and the post office— so the person there went back and said, "Hey PM, there's somebody out here to see you." Daddy comes out to talk to this guy. And he calls him every filthy racial slur that you can possibly imagine. And out of nowhere come the postal inspectors and take this guy down. Like he's got the football and it's the Jets trying to get it back because they didn't just put my dad in the post office, they were watching him.

And so the postal inspectors, they carry guns. They're like the post office secret police. And they take this guy down, they arrest him, they take him out and he had his sheet and he had his shotgun in the back of his truck. This is Klan in northern New Jersey. I don't know what he thought he was going to get away with, but he did not get away with it that day.

Raiskin: So you're in high school and you have thoughts about college?

Cleveland: Yeah, it was assumed that I was going, was not a question. You are going to college. My mother's point of view was if you want to get married and have children and all that stuff, that's fine. That's wonderful. Yay for you. You need to get an education so that you

don't have to depend upon your husband to get whatever it is that you want or that you need. Or if you have a husband and you need to leave him, that you're not completely stuck. My mother had a job when she married my father, but when the children started coming, she stopped working. That was pretty much what I was raised with.

I'm being little miss burnout, hippie girl in my school. And I mean I didn't— Okay, I'm sure my great grandchildren will see this at some point, but here we go. I think people thought I was stoned way more than I actually was because that wouldn't have been possible. But I certainly did my share of enjoying everything you could have possibly set in front of me, which granted at that time we're not talking about meth. We're talking about largely grass and beer. And I think one time somebody's mother was out of town, so she came to health class with this bag of pills she took out of her mother's medicine cabinet. Dear heaven, I can't believe I just said that on campus— I mean on campus and on camera for heaven sakes. But anyway, hopefully I'll be dead by the time anybody in my line sees this. I do have grandchildren. And so yeah, I can't remember what you asked me.

Raiskin: It's the historical moment, so I was trying to get the sense of what high school was like, and that does say the time. That does say something about what high school was like. Were you dating in high school?

Cleveland: Oh, you asked me about college. Yeah. Was I dating in high school? It was very frowned upon, and I went into this rant about my, shall

we say, extra curricular activities because I was having fun. I completely enjoyed being in high school. I was a very smart kid and I was a very good student, but I had been so buttoned up, pinned down, hands folded, eyes on the crucifix when I was in grade school. And then to make the change from a Catholic high school to a public high school was really big. I mean in my eight years, so first grade to eighth grade to starting of high school, when a teacher walked into your classroom, parent, adult, anybody, walked into the classroom, you stood.

There was never a question. And then if it was, say, Sister Anne Martina, the principal, you greeted her, "Good morning Sister Anne. God bless you. Good afternoon, Sister Anne. God bless you." You greeted them. High school was not like that, that I remember. Being an A, my maiden name was Alston, so I'm sitting in the front of the class in homeroom. And it must've been one of my early days in high school and an adult walked into the room, I stood up. I'm in the front of the room, I'm standing, and no one else behind me is standing and everyone's staring at me. I just walked over to the pencil sharpener because I didn't know what else to do. And then I thought, Well, okay, so I don't have to do all these things that I have had to do for such a long time. I'm going to have fun.

So I was smoking grass and I was dressing very slovenly. Yeah, I mean elephant bells and kind of balloony shirts or tie dyed shirts or what have you, to the point where— the uniform was sneakers, blue jeans, concert T-shirts and flannels. That's what people seemed to

mostly have worn in my memory. I would sneak these into my gym locker because if my mother saw me with them, she would take them. Because if you are— Am I chopping wood? No. So why am I wearing a flannel to school? Her thing was your father is the postmaster. Everybody is going to know who you are. You have to dress a certain way. Nobody cared. None of the teach— I don't know if the teachers cared, but none of my friends gave a hoot. And I was just trying not to stick out, so I was not going to wear knee socks and patent leathers for the next four years.

And so then I would do well in the classes that I wanted to, but I would slack in the classes that I didn't want to. And when it came time to filling out the college essays and applications and such, I remember having some conversation with my mother. And my mother looked at me like I was from Mars, and she said, "We're not sending you to college. These grades. You're not going to college. We'll send you to business school, we'll send you to Katherine Gibbs' Business School, but we are not sending you to college." I started taking these business courses in school. And the dream was to be a secretary, make enough money to get a customized van so I could drive to California and find Jim Morrison. Yeah. There's ambition for you, which I'm sure gave my parents nothing but heart failure.

And so then when the time came and my friends are filling out applications to Rutgers and to Berkeley and wherever, and I'm talking about, hey, we're going on college visits. We went to our college visit to Katherine Gibbs' Business School where you could see

all the typewriters and all the adding machines. And I just thought, No. They were serious. I can't possibly not go to college because all of my friends are going to college. I can't go to business school. Not that that would have been terrible. But in my teenage mind it was horrible. So guess who whipped her grades around like nobody's business, and I think I missed the honor roll because I started not being a B, C student until it was too late. So, high school was a lot of fun.

Dating. I always had a lot of girl friends, and I always had a girl best friend. Didn't have the language for lesbian or bi or whatever. But I always had my girl best friend, and I did date this pair of identical twins. That sounds so terrible. But not at the same time, in high school. But I mean, we all ran as a pack. I mean, you knew where we were because we were all playing D & D in Craig and Doug's basement, or we were playing D & D in my basement, or we were at Linda's house or whatever. So, I mean I dated, but I only dated those two guys. And in high school, it wasn't a big, big deal.

Raiskin: Did you have any sexual feelings for girls that you could identify?

Cleveland: I think so. I don't know if I can really separate the sexual and not sexual out because what do you know from sexual when you're sixteen? I do remember this particular sleepover at my friend Linda's house, and we were sleeping in her bed. And so I thought I would try something. I mean, I pretended I was still asleep, and I rolled over and I put my arm around her in the bed. And I heard her say, "What are you doing?" And “Oh, what? Oh, sorry, I was just sleeping.” That

was the end of that pretty much. I didn't have language for being a lesbian until I was in college. So for college, shall I jump to college?

Raiskin: Sure.

Cleveland: Okay. So for college, I went to Seton Hall University, which is the Catholic university of New Jersey, not a Catholic university in New Jersey, but "The Catholic university of New Jersey." And at that point I was not feeling the whole doctrine because church in high school was where my parents made me go because they knew I was drunk on Saturday night. You were at church Sunday morning, as if that was going to change anything. And then you'd go in and then everybody was stand, sit, kneel, stand, sit, kneel. And everyone's really feeling the whole Jesus thing, and then trying to run over you to get out of the parking lot because the football game's on. So, it just didn't seem realistic. But at Seton Hall, it was. We had a seminary on campus. I mean at one point I had actually wanted to be a nun when I was in grade school. We had a convent attached to the school, and it was always so calm in there.

I always wanted to be where the women were. To the six year old Donella, that would be the convent. To the ten-year-old Donella, that was the goddess Diana and Wonder Woman, and all those comic book mythologies and Greek mythology. I always gravitated towards that, but I didn't put it together. I just knew that I just wanted to be where the women were, where the girls were. Then at Seton Hall, if you had an arm load of books and you were going into the student center, somebody would open the door for you. It just

seemed like people really lived the doctrine. Then I started going to church, and then I became a music minister, which basically meant that you led songs and played guitar at the altar.

I would do two masses a day on Sundays and all this kind of stuff. And I was really feeling very much in touch with that. And then the AIDS crisis was getting more and more into press and into consciousness. Now it's a Catholic university, so we're not getting any AIDS education whatsoever. We're not getting any contraceptive health education whatsoever. It is, don't do it until you go to that church over there and you get married. And that was the extent of it. This particular day, Father was saying mass and he was saying horrendous things about gay people. And I don't even now remember exactly what he said, but when I think about it, I remember exactly how it felt, and I can still feel like a physical moving knot in my stomach. And I'm on the altar with my guitar, and if I'm there, people think that I agree with what he said. And I didn't agree and I thought it was terrible.

That was the first mass. And I'm thinking about this the whole time, knowing that I have to go to mass again to play again. And then he gave the same homily, and I had the same feeling. And so then I said, "Okay, I have to leave because this is lying and I can't lie in church." It's still a little emotional for me to think about it because I remember what that felt like because everything that everything was built upon was then gone. And so I just turned my back on the church and I didn't look back. And I told God, and I guess I told me, that if it's

meant for me to come back, I will. But for now I can't do a God that believes this because I think I am the monster that Father was talking about, me and friends. And I can't do it. Then I left and I was still on campus. I finished my education at Seton Hall, and I had a great education there, but I stopped going to church.

Raiksin: So you had some gay friends by this time?

Cleveland: Well, that was my freshman year. I think I had people around me who were maybe questioning. And I think just in what you study in school, I think I was kind of learning about stuff and I had seen Harvey Milk's documentary. There was a PBS documentary about that that had come out. And I had seen that even before I started college. No, after I got out of college I saw that. But I knew it was me, and I felt like there were others around me. I know there were conversations and things going on, but I didn't have a girlfriend. I wasn't sleeping with anybody. It was just all that internal stuff that you're doing when you're eighteen-nineteen years old.

Raiskin: Were you scared by it or did you have negative baggage about?

Cleveland: I wasn't scared by it, but I knew enough not to say anything to my parents or my family about it. I didn't come out to my family until I had left New Jersey. But I came out to some of my friends. I think it was after I graduated college. I came out to some of my friends. By then, it was clear. By the time I was sophomore, junior, maybe not sophomore. No, sophomore, junior, senior in college, it got more and

more and more clear, and so I made some tentative steps to come out to friends here and there.

Raiskin: And this is before you've had a relationship?

Cleveland: Yeah.

Raiskin: Were you seeing books or movies or developing a language for understanding this?

Cleveland: I read *The Well of Loneliness*, and I know people think it's an awful book now, but it is still one of my favorite books. And I read that book, it was either the summer— I think it was the summer before I started college. Yeah, I don't think it was the summer I left. I feel like it was the summer before I started. And then there was some other book. I can't remember what the title of the other book was. There were two, but *The Well of Loneliness* was the one.

Long: How did you find out about it?

Cleveland: Knowing me, I probably looked something up in a dictionary. No. Well, okay. Everything starts in the dictionary. So if there's a word that you're not supposed to say, you look it up in the dictionary. I know in grammar school somewhere I looked up "lesbian." Learning about Greek mythology, I probably found Lesbos and Sappho and that kind of thing. But I mean we always went to the library, especially in the summertime. And I don't know how I found the book. I think there was probably something on public television. Yeah, there was some documentary on public television where they

mentioned that book and some other book. And there were two of them, and I read them both that summer. So yeah, there were the books. And then in senior year I had a friend who had a friend who was a lesbian. And my friend Yvette was also African American, and she had another friend who was also black, Afro, dark skinned, beautiful, muscular.

If she would have slept with me, my life would have been wonderful. And she knew about the same kind of music that I knew about. I was a rock and roll baby, which kind of put me in conflict sometimes with my black friends in middle school because they were very much into R & B. And I listened to R & B, but AM radio was still the big deal. Within the same half an hour, you would hear the OJs and Johnny Cash on the same radio show in the same set of thirty minutes. So I listened to everything, but rock and roll was really what resonated with me. FM radio was still kind of coming along. And so to meet another black person who knew who The Doors were was just fascinating. But she had morals, and she wasn't just going to jump in bed with someone she'd known for all of fifteen minutes, which is probably a good thing for both of us.

In my senior year, I was an RA in my sophomore, junior and my senior year of college. And in my senior year, my friend Kathy, she was Kathy then, came to visit me. And over the winter break, we went to visit a friend of hers, and we were going to buy grass. And there's no way to dance around that. And my burnout friends and I were going to buy a bunch of grass, get a bunch of beer, go play pool

because we could then. Drinking ages and all that were not what they are now. And so we went to this girl Shimra's house. Shimra's brother apparently had grass for sale, so we were hanging out waiting for him to come home. But Kathy and Shimra were both pagans. While my burnout friends were downstairs hanging out, waiting for the brother, I went upstairs with Kathy and was hanging out in Shimra's room. And we were just having this woman moment. I mean it was very goddess, spirituality, kind of focused, and just talking about Yoni and what's Yoni and what does that mean and all that kind of stuff.

And it was just really, really— my mind was on fire about what—

Raiskin: Were they telling you about all that?

Cleveland: Yeah. And like my lesbianism and my paganism kind of ran neck and neck. It was just really this incredibly— I could've cared less about the grass and the pool. I wanted to hang out and talk to Shimra and Kathy and find out about all this stuff. So fast forward a little bit, in my senior year, spring, Kathy came to visit me on campus. She went to Ithaca, but she came down to visit and she brought with her her Tarot cards, which I had never seen tarot cards close up before. And they were circular. And I've since found out that there were only two circular decks at that time, daughters of the moon and mother peace. And this was the daughters of the moon deck of Tarot cards, which every image on there is female. And they were not the one, now you can buy them in color, but back then they were still in

black and white, so that women could get out their colored pencils and color them themselves.

And so when she read Tarot for me and then she was turning me on to all this stuff, and then we kind of snuggled a little bit and I just knew I was in love with her. I just knew I was in love with her, and just bells and whistles went off. And then that was just wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. We slept on the floor in my dorm room, and I just, oh, life is so good. And that following January, New Year's Eve, Kathy took me to this New Year's Eve party at a club, never been to a dance club before. And then midnight comes and everybody's hugging and kissing and I love you-ing and all this kind of stuff. And I got up the courage to tell her that I loved her and she said, "Go and love more!" And I was devastated. I don't even know if she remembers this.

We're still friends. I just saw her a few weeks ago. She came out here. She's a musician, and she came out here on a little tour. That was I guess the first real experience of heartbreak and ecstasy all in one moment. That's pretty much as far as it went in college. And I had come out to a few people, like I said, but I didn't come out to my mother until I was already safely in Oregon.

Raiskin: So did you try to find other lesbians at that time in your life?

Cleveland: Yeah. Well, I graduated college. I was a high school English teacher at Pleasantville High School, which was in south Jersey. It's on the mainland, and then there's like a spit of land and then you get to

Atlantic City. That's where I was teaching. And there was the White Horse Pike and the Black Horse Pike, and I think it was on the Black Horse Pike, because you'd pass it. In that part in New Jersey, when people talk about going into the city, they're talking about Philadelphia.

And so people would go into into Philly the same way people would go into the village in northern Jersey where I'm from. I'm going back and forth to Philly, and I saw this bar. And I want to say that there was a neon pink triangle as part of the marquee, but I wouldn't swear to it. And I cannot remember what the name of this bar is, but I went to the bar and I would go and I would play pool, and I'd have a couple of beers and whatever and I would go home, thinking to meet people. It wasn't really a dance club. It was just a little bar. And I went into Philly this particular time.

I got a pink triangle to put on the bumper sticker of my car or the bumper of my car. And I would park my car around the back of the bar because I was a school teacher. And I don't know that anybody actually came out and told me, but it was my understanding somehow that if you were gay, you could lose your job. But I've got a pink triangle on the bumper of my car. I said to me that if anybody ever asked me, I wouldn't lie, but there it was on the bumper of my car. And so I tried to meet people, but I think it was mostly a gay bar. There weren't a lot of women there, and I met one woman one time, but I think she was quite a bit older than me and it was just nothing.

And then there were gay bars in Philly, and I picked up a couple of women in Philly, but it was never anything really serious. It was just first apartment on my own. I'm not going to say anything else on camera, but yeah. Definitely those first experiences that just cemented like yeah, very, very solid. So I knew who I was, but I couldn't, I wouldn't be out at work. But I mean, after I came out to my mother, after I moved out to Oregon, I called my mother on the phone, I've got a girlfriend. I come out to her, and there's silence on the other end of the phone. And I'm thinking, oh my God, I just gave my mother a heart attack. I've just killed my mother. My brothers, who are five years behind me, are on the other end, and all I hear is silence. And then I hear my one brother go, “Duhn duhn duhn.”

He already knew I was in trouble in some way, shape, or form or fashion. And what my mother said was after this silence that seemed to last for an age, she said, "You didn't have to move all the way out to Oregon to do that." [laughs] And so I remember talking to my brother about it afterwards and at some point and saying, did you know? And so my brother Jermaine said, "Well you know Donella, it's not like there was a parade of negroes coming through the house every Sunday, obviously." So there you are. Not fooling anyone but myself apparently.

Raiskin: How did you get to Oregon?

Cleveland: Well, as I say, I was teaching, and I was getting burned out. And it was awful because I went into college knowing I wanted to teach. And so many of the things that we take for granted now were not, at

least they were not in my school when I was teaching. We had no daycare for instance. And some brilliant genius thought it would be wonderful to put the seventh and eighth grades in the same building as ninth through twelfth. This was before I got there. And the vision was supposed to be the school within a school.

The students will never meet each other. They will never interact. Yeah. Pregnancy rate went up. And so now you've got these fourteen-year-old boys talking about how they're going to give a girl a baby. And we've got these girls that have children. I was twenty-two maybe, I had a cat. I had no idea what to tell to this— and I remember this girl so clearly. She's in my homeroom and she says, "Ms. Alston, I didn't study for my test because my baby was sick. What should I do?" And I didn't know what to tell her. She didn't have the family structure that I had grown up with. It was just terrible. My feeling was, and just all kinds of— I had a kid who was pregnant from incest. All these things that in the forty-two minutes that I am supposed to teach them *Hamlet* or what a preposition is, I've got forty-two minutes, there's thirty-two of you, but we're going to spend fifteen minutes because so-and-so is not in class.

Nobody can find him because he tried to knock over a gas station, and now the entire class is upset because so-and-so's in jail. And I just felt like I do not have the tools to be sister, parent, priest, social worker and teacher in forty-two minutes. I was going to stop teaching and naturally get a job with the board of education, the state board of education so that I could write policy. I knew everything,

and my chairperson of my department was going to write a letter on my behalf. I was supposed to get tenure that year, but I left so that I could work for the state board of education. I just resigned. I didn't have a job with the board, but I thought, Well, I'm going to resign.

I resigned my job. And then that was the summer that my friend Linda said, "I broke up with dirt bag. I'm going to drive to Oregon." I said, “Oh, well I just quit my job, so I guess I'm coming with you.” And so we open the road atlas. It's a book. We opened the road atlas, this humongous thing, and we go like this. And wherever our finger fell, we would write to the chamber of commerce and ask them to send us things that tell us about your town. So, Wilsonville, Otis, Drain. And we would ask them to send us stuff about your town.

Raiskin: All these towns in Oregon?

Cleveland: Yeah. Oh my stars. We could've ended up anywhere. And so this is actually— we had an interesting experience if I can digress for a second with Wilsonville. And I don't mean to disparage, and I'm sorry if you're watching this and you're from there, but this was not very happy thing and you should know the history. This is after the Rodney King riots. All anybody back East really knew about Oregon, at least the people that talked to me, was about the African student who was beaten to death by the skinheads up in Portland. And then the riots that happened down in California, that all this is happening in quick succession of each other.

So, we call Wilsonville, and we talk to whoever's the head of the chamber of commerce or whoever's talking to us. And we're, send us your newspaper, whatever you think so that we know about your town. And he's telling me about, "Oh, Wilsonville, we have this many people and it's a really nice place. We have all kinds of people, well not *all kinds* of people. All the riots in California, we don't have those people up here." I'm talking to him on the phone. I am those people, but he has no idea. And so Wilsonville was very quickly dispatched as a place that we would move.

Raiskin: Did you know the history of Oregon?

Cleveland: No, I didn't know the history. I knew nothing. I knew absolutely nothing. We just literally packed up, put the cat and the—

Cleveland: —packed up, put the cat and the record albums in the moving van. Got the biggest moving van you can get before the cab is separate from the stuff, with an auto trailer pulling my Escort. Our two cats roaming free because heaven forbid we drugged them, which, after my cat walked across the gas pedal on the highway, you better believe that those cats were doped up and caged after that. That was terrifying.

We drove out here, accidentally blew up a gas pump in Wamsutter, Wyoming. Terrified. We clipped it with the van, and the gas pump fell over, flames shooting up in the air.

Long: Oh, my God.

Cleveland: It was something like— there was this big sign on top of this gas station with a big yellow sun on it, and it said, "If it's Sunday, we're in church and so should you." I will never forget that. Population's something like 416, 412. Something like that.

This is the town that we clipped the gas thing. Flames are shooting, we're just terrified. This guy comes out with Elvis Presley greased-back black hair, big belly. I know it sounds stereotypical, but this is what he was wearing.

Long: What state was that in?

Cleveland: Wyoming.

Long: Wyoming.

Cleveland: Wamsutter was the name of the town. He comes out, and we're just these two skinny, I know it's hard to believe, but skinny, twenty-four, twenty-five year olds, trembling. Just like, "Okay, it's my retirement, my-my-my pension, everything that I took out of my teaching pension. I'm just going to have to wait tables. I'll just be in Wamsutter until I die."

He comes out and he gets his fire extinguisher, he puts out the fire. He puts an arm around either of us, and he says, "Y'all got insurance?" "Yeah." "It's going to be all right." And so it was.

We came out here. I lied to my mother, told her I had a job. Totally didn't. We get out here, and we were working with this company called the Rental Assistance.

Raiskin: You came to Eugene? You chose Eugene?

Cleveland: Yeah. We came down— Franklin Boulevard turns into 126, does it? Whatever it is, if you keep driving on Franklin Boulevard, and it takes you— Yeah, it's 126, I think. We were coming down 126. We came in, it was July, and we came in, I don't know, 2:00 in the morning, something like that.

We park at— I think it was the Franklin Inn. We got a room, and we check in. Then wake up the next day, and in the lobby is a *Register-Guard* with, above the fold, "Welcome to Country Fair." We just thought, "Hallelujah, we've found our people."

Raiskin: Can you describe Country Fair?

Cleveland: Oh, my stars. Okay. Country Fair is Woodstock and magic in the woods. That's Country Fair. It's very much a "be who you are." Kids will say how they have their regular friends and their camp friends. Country Fair is like, you can be exactly who you are. You have your Fair friends, and there's Fair family. There's also hippie hierarchy, which is a whole other thing. It's got its pros and cons, but for that weekend, it's the most magical, wonderful place to be.

Raiskin: How many people would come, then?

Cleveland: We didn't go that year, so we just saw the article in the newspaper. We just thought, "Is this real? This is what people do here?" We just thought, "This is just amazing."

We actually lived— we got an apartment, we got a house, rather, to rent in Cottage Grove. Our feeling just was, "If this is what's going on in this town, this is where we're supposed to be." I had already long since read *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, and so then of course we're driving around Pleasant Hill trying to find the bus. It was just ridiculousness. That was something.

Long: What year was it when you got to Eugene?

Cleveland: Nineteen ninety-two.

Raiskin: Why did you live in Cottage Grove?

Cleveland: Because that's where we found a place we could afford. Things were on the depressed side at that time. You could almost sing a song and paint a picture, and buy a house out here.

This guy had, I think it was, five acres of land. There were two houses on the property. There was a loft in the back and a ranch house, and this other guy and his dog were renting the loft. Linda and I were renting this beautiful— it was a three or four bedroom farmhouse, refurbished, with a breezeway in back. It was just gorgeous. Five hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. Yeah. That's like when my mom would say "Oh, yeah, for 25 cents you could ride the trolley, and get some ice cream, and buy a pizza." Whatever. Yeah, $525 a month.

We were living out in— Cottage Grove is what Oregon looks like to a girl from Jersey. You couldn't even see the house from the road. I

remember calling my family and saying, "Oh, my gosh, you can't believe that there's bears out here. You have to walk down the road to your mailbox."

Raiskin: And the covered bridges.

Cleveland: Oh, my word, yeah. Well, covered bridges I had seen before from Pennsylvania Dutch country where we would go on vacations. But just the idea that your mailbox wasn't on your house and that there were bears eating corn out of people's gardens— my cousin said, “Do you have a bathroom in the house?" Oh, my gosh. It was really something. It was different, but it was really nice. For a time it was really nice.

It was also rather confusing. I said I was a rock and roll baby. I loved rock and roll music. There was a song that came out in the '80s called “Old Hippie.” I think it was by the Oak Ridge Boys. My friend Jennifer turned me on to that song because she really liked the song.

Then, to hear the song, this is before you downloaded everything, you had to listen to the other twenty songs that the radio station was playing to hear the one. I started listening to country music, and I really liked it. It wasn't too far afield from the Allman Brothers and Marshall Tucker, and all that other stuff that we were listening to at the time.

When I'm out here, there was— not KLCC and not KRVM, but there was another independent radio station. They used to have their office on Olive. It was kitty-corner to where Cozmic Pizza is now, I think,

in my memory. They've since closed down, but there was that independent radio station, and then there was one of the country radio stations.

The independent radio station in 1992 was playing "No on 9" commercials. The country radio station was pro-9, and they were playing those commercials on the radio station.

Raiskin: Nine is the anti-gay ballot measure.

Cleveland: Anti-gay ballot measure.

Raiskin: By the Oregon Citizens Alliance.

Cleveland: Yeah.

Long: That was happening right when you arrived?

Cleveland: That was happening right when I got here. It was a little frightening, because then— One dj's telling me to vote against it, the other dj's telling me to vote for it. What is" It?" It didn't make any sense to me. Then as I realized what they were talking about, taking rights away from gay— you can lose your job, you can lose your house, all that kind of stuff.

It seemed to me that, I think Springfield already had some legislation at the time that said that if you were gay you could lose your housing or lose your teaching job. I think. I wouldn't quote myself on it, but that's what I feel like I knew at the time.

Then there was a bar in Springfield called the Landing. It's closed within the last three years or so, but they were having an open mic night. I sing, and so I thought, "This will be great. Let's go down at the bar, maybe make some friends."

Here Linda and I were driving, pink triangle still on the bumper of the red Escort. I'm driving into Springfield and I'm parking the car. I'm just, "Dear goddess, please don't let anybody break the windows on my car," because I didn't know what I was going to get. Then walking into the Landing, and no other brown faces but mine. I got up there and sang anyway, and they were two stepping before it was all said and done. Everything worked out fine.

It was really kind of scary. Then being out in Cottage Grove, out in the woods. All the people were nice, but with those ballot measures out, I remember being nervous about where that was at.

Raiskin: What did you know about the lesbian community in Eugene that had rallied against this? Did you see that? Was that visible to you?

Cleveland: No. Not really at first, because there were so many other things we were trying to do. We were trying to find a job so that we could pay the $525 a month. Trying to just figure out where we were. Everything came into dribs and drabs.

My friend Linda was not gay at all. There was no "let's find community." I didn't know what even to look for. I got here and, even having been playing around in the Village when I was in college, Eugene was the first place where I ever saw two women

walking down the streets, holding hands in the daylight. I just thought, "Okay, this is worth staying here for."

I think that was over by Baba Yaga's. There was Baba Yaga's, and— that was kind of a fun place. Then the—

Raiskin: Can you describe Baba Yaga's?

Cleveland: Baba Yaga's was a bookstore and a coffee shop, and they would do community things in there. There would be— what was it? A drag kings' night, which, I had never seen anything like that before. They had a room in the back where they had erotica, and not just the books in the room. I was in no way prepared for the things that were behind that purple curtain. Oh, my God.

There was a women's ritual theater troupe called Goddess Is. I want to say this is '92 or '93. Maybe '93. I'm not sure which. Goddess ritual theater group, all women. Not all lesbians, but all women. They had a performance at Baba Yaga's this particular day. I had never seen anything like that before.

You couldn't get in. Women were from everywhere, trying to see this play, where they would just take a theme and ritualize it. Maybe the theme— I later became a part of Goddess Is, but that first time I was just watching from the outside and just completely enthralled to just see ritual and theater melded in this way, and all women. It was just really, really magical in there. They had artwork on the wall by women artists.

Baba Yaga's was here, Mother Kali's was still here. At that time, when I got here, Mother Kali's was on Franklin Blvd. Beth White was one of the managers. It was Beth and Izzie, with her irascible self.

Just the books. There was a lending library in there where you didn't have to pay any money, and you could just borrow a book and bring it back. *The Native Tongue* trilogy that Suzette Elgin wrote, I found those books there. They had the cassette tapes, so if you wanted to learn Laadan, you could check out the cassette tapes and teach yourself this woman's language. It was amazing.

I remember being— I think it was the first time I was in the store. Beth was there by herself, but she was on the phone. She was talking to her girlfriend on the phone. This is not a cell phone, this is the phone of the store that she's having this conversation. She's talking to her girlfriend who isn't feeling well. She says, "Did you drink your tea? There's some chamomile. What does your body say?" I'm thinking, Wow. This is really— People don't talk like that in New Jersey, at least not in that time, not around me. It was really something.

Women's Press was here. That was a women's newsprint magazine. At that time it had a lot of stuff in it about whatever was organizing around No on 9. I was slowly finding *Women's Press*. Then the *Lavender Network*, which was another gay newspaper run by two gay men who were partners, if I'm not mistaken. I don't remember their names. That was here. They were free papers. You pick these up at Mother Kali's, you pick these up at Baba Yaga's.

Mother Kali's had— I'm just remembering this. There was the Women's Calendar. Every month they had a— It was just on legal size paper, and both sides, and it would tell you what was going on and where it was going on.

This particular one, skipping down a few years, this woman knew all about herbs. She would take you out on the logging roads, or whatever, and you'd just have an herb walk and be out there overnight in her tipi. I could be dead. She could've been a complete whack job. But, "Yeah, I'll go away with you in your pickup truck to god knows where with— " This is before cell phones. You were lucky if you had a CB in your car. We were in her tipi, and she showed me how to find wild ginger. Oh, my goodness.

I got that from the Women's Calendar that Izzie had on there. It was really something to be a part of that. I found so many books from Mother Kali's. So many books. Briefly got to work for them for a hot minute. Got to work there.

Job-wise, I didn't come out here to teach. I didn't want to have the responsibility that— that's a lot to carry. It's a lot to carry at any age, but it was certainly a lot to carry at twenty-something. I just wanted to, "Let me be a waitress. Let me be something where I come to work, I punch in, I leave work, I punch out, and then that's the end of the job." I'm not thinking that, Should I have said that? Because I think that person's going to be an ax murderer when he grows up. That kind of stuff.

I was working at a lumber mill, one of the mills in town. I was working there through a temp agency, and it wasn't supposed to last long. I was working there in January. Wasn't supposed to last until the spring, and then it lasts until the spring. It wasn't supposed to last until the end of the summer, and then it was August and it was lasting. It was between there and being a hostess at Red Lobster.

Raiskin: What were you doing the lumber mill?

Cleveland: Whatever they told me to do. I was working the chop saw. There was some weird staple thing where it would— there was this machine that you put in these wood planks that were about that big, and then you put them through the saw machine and it would dog ear it. Then it would lay on this conveyor belt, and then it would staple wire to it. Then it would come out the other end looking like a little fence that you would put around an area of your garden, or something like that. I worked that machine. I pulled green chain. I was flipping boards over my shoulder. It was really—

Long: That's hard work.

Cleveland: It was hard work—

Long: And dangerous.

Cleveland: —but I was in great shape. Oh, my God, I was like 140 some pounds, wearing the clothes I wore in high school. Man, I dug the job. Passed for a man, if you can believe that. Hard hat, boots, size fourteen. I

was loving it. It was really cool, but it was not what I wanted to do forever.

Then, working at Mother Kali's was the hot ticket. If you could get on there, you just made lesbian superstardom. Finally, there was an opening, and so I went to go get a job there.

I was doing theater here in town. There was a theater troupe called Oregon Festival of Musical Theater. I had done *Little Shop of Horrors* for them. I was one of the trio in *Little Shop of Horrors*. The next year they were doing *Cabaret*. Let's see, if they did *Little Shop* in '93, this must've been '94.

I was working at the lumber mill. This particular day I was working, I had like a week to go. We were in tech week for the show. This was going to be at the Hult Center. We're in tech week at the Hult Center, I think it was something like a Wednesday. The curtain went up on, I want to say, Friday.

I'm working this machine. When I left that week, I wasn't going to have to go back to the mill because I was going to start working at Mother Kali's. I was onstage in the chorus at *Cabaret*. The chop saw pulled my glove in. I'm fighting with the chop saw, chop saw wins. Then I ended up partially amputating fingers on this hand in that machine.

Needless to say, I did not perform in *Cabaret*. Izzie tried to hold the job for me, but she really needed somebody to work there. They either had moved or were moving from Franklin to Thirteenth, and

she was going to start working with the textbooks with the university here. I knew computers. I knew how to type. I didn't know computers well, I mean who— But I knew them well enough to be able to do data entry and that kind of stuff, which is what she needed. She needed somebody to do a lot of data entry work and to help her figure out this computer jazz, which I was very confident that I could do.

They interviewed me and I passed muster. My activism was in the right place. Which, they asked, "How do you define your feminism?" I knew if I didn't have a cogent answer, I was not getting that job. I felt like I had been vetted from soup to nuts, and I was really excited to work there. But, she really needed the help. I was not leaving my house. It was horrible.

Raiskin: How'd they get you to the hospital from the sawmill?

Cleveland: It was either the mill or the temp agency, Barrett Business Inc., something like that. One of those two contracted with some EMT-ish thing.

It was a very insulting process. This was an accident. There was no nine ways about it. There was absolutely an accident. I'm in shock, so I'm not feeling anything, but I'm trying to find a foreman so that I can find someone to get me some help.

I find the guy, foreman or manager, whatever. He gets me wherever I'm supposed to go. I'm in an office or something. It's very hazy in my mind anymore. EMT guy comes, and he gave me a shot of

something so that— the shock was keeping me from feeling anything, but I guess the medicine came in behind the shock.

I'm there, and I've given him my hand, and I'm not looking. I'm still going. "I should faint. Nope? Still awake. Okay. Nope, still awake. All right, one more. Nope. Oh, well. I guess we'll just go to the hospital now." I'm not kidding. Oh, my God.

I'm in the van with him going to the hospital in Springfield, I think is where— we went to McKenzie-Willamette. The mill was in Eugene. Why we didn't go to Sacred Heart, I have no idea, but the contract, whatever.

I'm in the van, he's taking me to the hospital. He's on the CB with the people at the temp agency, and he's saying, "Okay, I have her and I'm taking her to the hospital." She says, "All right. Was she high?" This man was so embarrassed. He's trying— because she doesn't know I can hear her, and I guess he thought, "I don't know that I can tell her that she can hear her."

He just didn't know what to do, and he's trying to drive, and he's got this woman with her hand bandaged, trying to drive me to the emergency room. "No, she's doesn't appear to be under the influence of anything." "All right. Send me the paperwork." Like I had just ruined her manicure. It was really, really an awful experience.

I go, and I'm still thinking, "I've got a show to do Friday." I was supposed to be the person who was going to stand on a piano with a saxophone, miming that I'm playing the saxophone in the opening of

Cabaret. The nurse is there, and she's doing whatever it is that she needs to do. I said to her, "I'm in *Cabaret* at the Hult Center." She said, "That's really nice."

I said, "Yeah, I'm thinking— because I'm going to stand on the piano with a saxophone." She said, "I don't think you're going to be able to play a saxophone." I said, "It's not for real. Maybe I could just wear a black glove and nobody will see the bandage." She said, "I think you better talk about that with the doctor." No clue whatsoever.

I was with my girlfriend at the time. Nobody was telling me how bad it really, really was. That was pretty much the end of that.

Long: What was your experience coming to a state that's so white? You said you didn't know about Oregon's history, but how did you manage that?

Cleveland: Having gone to a very integrated school, I never had anything but a white teacher until my freshman year of college. I'm friends with white people. That didn't bother me, going to high school, negotiating all of that. It wasn't weird to me to— it was weird, but it wasn't weird. It was, "Okay, I've been dunked into this soup before. I know how to swim here. This'll be okay."

Not seeing so many different people— you get used to it, and so used to it to the point where, when I have gone back home and gone into New York with my cousin, or just to be walking in Harlem where Audre Lorde walked, it's jarring sometimes. To think, Oh,

yeah, Eugene is not the real world. Eugene is definitely not the real world. There's more, and you've forgotten how much more there is.

Long: Did you get tired, this is just an assumption on my part, but of being the novelty?

Cleveland: I'm such a narcissist that— for me, all the world's a stage. I'm performing. Not in a bad way, but it's just—

When I was a youngster under my parent's care, it was, "Come over here, Donella. Recite your spelling words for Aunt Matt." There's performing. In high school, yeah, I knew that I was smoking grass on the commons, but my parents only wanted to see the, "Okay, so she sucks at math, but let's see the A grade in English." There's performance again.

It was just, "What do I need to do to be able to survive here?" Just, "Okay, so this is what I need." We've moved from the uniform, to the flannel and the concert T, to whatever one has to do to survive out here.

Luckily, I found places that fit me. When I was leaving Jersey, the chairperson for the English department where I was teaching, she said, "Are you sure you want to do this? Because they beat a man to death out there. Are you sure you want to do this?" I said, "Yeah, I'm ready to set down roots somewhere." She said, "Yes, but are they ready for your roots? Is what I'm trying to tell you."

I think that you can put me anywhere and I can be as naive or as savvy as I need to be to survive, whatever it is. Because I'm just bound and determined that nothing that is set in front of me is going to make me feel like I can't do this. It's not an option.

If I have to— it's not like pretending. It's not so much like, "I'm going to listen to that country music station, but I really hate country music." It's not that. It's really that— I know who I am. I have a very firm sense of myself. I have a very firm sense of what I like, what I don't like. What it's like having to be in a closet. Done it. Not doing it again. That it really doesn't matter. It just doesn't matter. It's really about the world around me accepting me, at this point, and if the world around me does not accept me, then I just go home, wherever home happens to be, I just go home. So, it never really bothered me, which is not to say that I am not at times reminded of where I am and who I am.

I've been on this campus since fall of 2000, and I've been in the Ethnic Studies Department ever since then, and hopefully that will be where I get my retirement party when that blessed day arrives. We are now in Alder Building, but at the time that I'm speaking of we were in McKenzie, the old law school, and I'm not sure what year this was. It's got to be 2000, it's got to be in the aughts, it's somewhere in the aughts. It was a beautiful spring day, and I was in my office, and I was taking a break, and I thought, "Okay, let's go get the chocolate chip cookie because it's three o'clock. Just be outside in the sun." You know how much we crave the sun in the spring out here. And so I

left McKenzie, I crossed the street. I'm walking down past Rennie's, and then there's the Christian— Is it NCU? I'm not sure if it's Northwest Christian College, but I think it's affiliated with it, and there's the building— so there's Rennie's—

Long: Rennie's Landing, a restaurant.

Cleveland: Yes, Rennie's Landing Restaurant and Bar, right there. And so walking down. So there's Rennie's Landing, and then here's the bookstore. There's a little alley, and right between that little alley and Rennie's Landing is this building that is somehow affiliated with Northwest Christian. At the time it was Northwest Christian College, if that helps to date it any better. There was a plaque or thing that hangs out on the side of the building like that, and it's got a crucifix on it, and a swoosh. I think what it is, is a symbol of the risen Christ. Here's the cross, but there's no body, there's just the garment, if memory is serving me correctly.

I was passing that, and there was a man smoking a cigarette, leaning against the wall under that sign. He sneered at me, and he said, "Martin Luther King, Jr." [sneers] And then he spit in my direction. He didn't hit me, but he spit in my direction. I was really having one of those song in my heart, look at the sun moments. And then there's this man, so even though I will find a way to— if I have to imagine that everybody is a unicorn, I will have some way to have a wonderful day. But there are moments when Eugene reminds me of where I am and who I am and how Eugene sees me. Fine. I got my cookie, and I went back to my office.

Okay, another story. So, again in McKenzie, so it's 2000 aughts, and I think it was a Friday. In McKenzie at that time, there was a testing center on the fourth floor, and they would let the students come in from the high school to take, I don't know, whatever state testing or something. I think there was some testing to get into college. I don't know that it was SATs, but it was something.

This particular day, this young lady, a high school senior, is coming in with her father. McKenzie Hall has these big, broad steps. Currently, Cinema Studies is in where Ethnic Studies was, and you walk up these big, broad steps into the building, and on your left hand side was Ethnic Studies, on your right hand side was History, at that time. History is still there. But we would be the first building office you'd come to, and we had plate glass windows. At that point, I had somebody in the office helping me for a hot minute, and so she was in the reception area. It was like an **L**, and you'd come into the short side of the **L**, you'd see Monica. If you went back to the long side of that **L**, and you'd see me.

Monica was there temporarily, and he came in with his daughter, and they wanted to know where the testing center was. I gave them directions, and where do you park, and all this stuff. The basic questions. We had posters, framed posters, in the office of Audre Lorde, Paul Robeson, and then posters of some of the events that we have were framed in the office. Above my desk was a Paul Robeson poster. I helped them out, and then the daughter is walking back

around the **L** to go out the door, and the father is there, and he happens to see the Paul Robeson poster.

He says, "That's Paul Robeson, right?" I said, "Yeah, Paul Robeson." "He was a really famous singer." I said, "Yeah, he was a famous singer. He was an activist. He was the first African American to play on the football team at Princeton. He was the first black Princeton graduate." I was telling this man, and he said, "He sings that song, "Old Man River," didn't he?" I said, "Yeah, he made that really famous. He sang it in the movie, and I think he sang it on Broadway as well." And then he started to leave and he said, "You want to sing it for me?"

I was speechless. Even now, when I think about it, I just could not believe that someone would say that to a black person, in, let's just say, 2005. How do you even have that thought and then let it get loose in front of somebody that you don't know? And his daughter was right there, and she just went— she was so embarrassed. She just didn't know what to say. I honestly, I wish I could say I had a great comeback. In retrospect, I've got lovely things to say, but at the time, Friday afternoon, getting the accounting done, looking forward to being home, have just helped this nice family, and then that. It just sucks the air out of the sunny day.

I think I actually, behind that one, I think I said I was fine, and I started going back to work. Monica's checking in with me and, "Are you okay?" "Yeah, I'm okay. I got to get this done before Monday because I have a meeting with—" And then, probably within twenty

minutes, I said, "You know what? I think I'm going home." That one made me cry. I don't know why that one, but that one made me cry. So, I went home. I went home.

Raiskin: What was the community that you surrounded yourself with, or the home that you've built here? Who are those people?

Cleveland: Well, let's see. I was finding community. I started being a little active with NARAL for a while. Then there were the women that I met around Mother Kali's, a lot of pagans. I'm dianec, as I define myself as dianec, which basically means that I see divinity as female. I know that, well for me, divinity ultimately is genderless. It's ultimately energy. But, if I get to choose and I get to choose, I prefer to conceptualize divinity through a feminist and a female lens.

I found other women here that define their spirituality in the same way, so that has been a very sustaining community. There was always so much of everything. Then there's the theater community, and you can't throw a baseball that you're not finding gay people in theater. That was also very nurturing.

Raiskin: Were you involved with Carol Horne Dennis's theater production?

Cleveland: Oh wow. You know? Carol and I had, in the time period we're talking about, we kept meeting and passing each other. I didn't get to be in any of Carol's productions until farther down the line. But yeah, Carol's a buddy. Carol, oh my God, she is one of the most amazing directors. She gets things out of me as an actress that I did not even know that I had. She directed *Doubt a Parable* at the Lord Leebrick

Theater when it was still the Lord Leebrick Theater. It's Oregon Contemporary Theater now, and it's on East Broadway, but at the time it was on Fifth and Charnelton.

I auditioned for— In that play, there's a role for one black female actress, and she plays the mother of this little boy who may or may not have been sexually abused, molested by a priest at this Catholic school. You never see the boy, but there's the head nun who's older, there's a younger nun, and there's this younger priest who's in question. And then there's this mother of this boy and Carol was the director. When I auditioned for this part— it's Eugene, if the role specifically calls for a black actress, there's not a whole lot of us here. But for me, I don't care, if it's a play that I want to be in, I'm going to audition for it. So, sometimes it happens that the character is African-American, sometimes not. But Carol was directing that play, and that is, I think, even still to this day, of the top three performances that I've ever given, I think that's the number one, the best performance.

I don't care what she tells you, she's the reason that I did that performance as well as I did. There were things in my voice that I don't think I ever do, but for Carol. She just has some— that woman's auditions are masterclasses in theater, just amazing. So yeah, we met each other that way. So, I guess my communities are lesbian, and then bigger, and then expanding and contracting. If I could have led a separatist lifestyle, which I really, really wanted to, I would have, but the woman that I was with before my wife had a son and Devon was nine turning ten when GL and I got together.

So any hope of living on women's land was pretty much out of the question because we had the boy. And then I was in a committed relationship as far as I was concerned, so it just wasn't to be, but I met women like Betsy Brown who was just— if she could have worn a labrys in her back pocket, she would have, oh my God, she was just amazing. I kept meeting women. Like Gladys Campbell. She was another buddy. I found out later that she was one of the Amazon Kung Fu people. Now, by the time I got here, I don't even know if Amazon Kung Fu was still happening. But here's a friend that I ran into from drumming because she had a women's group, not all lesbian, but it was a women's group that was women conga drummers.

And then there was Goddess Is, which were women pagans, women witches. And then, gosh, just finding places where I felt like— Eugene is the kind of place, in my opinion, where the doctrine of "If it doesn't exist, create it." You can do that here. Goddess Is came out of that, Sophia Sanctuary, which is a women's temple without walls has been here since Mabon of— which is fall Equinox of 2000, and so I'm a co-founding mother of that temple, and we're still here, we still celebrate International Women's Day. It's not just lesbian, but it's only women.

And then so just by normality you have to find lesbians there, and I always do and they always find me. Yeah, so I just went about trying to make communities where I felt like what I saw in my head existed. I still to this day feel like Eugene is exactly the place that I'm

supposed to be. I feel like everything that I have in my life is what I dreamed I wanted when I was twenty-three years old in my first apartment. It's everything I wanted even down to my wife. African-American, blues singer, former truck driver. Honestly, we were saying— we talk about this every once in a while because it baffles the both of us, that I think when we counted, I think we said at the time we got together there were between seven and ten black lesbians in this town. Because we would sit there, do you know, do you know someone? Oh yeah, I know, I know Ruthie, I know her. Well, then there's Pele. Do you know Pele? No, I don't know Pele. Well, she just moved here a year ago, but—

We got down to it, that I think there were no more than ten that we knew of, and then there was the crazy one that nobody ever talked to. "Do you know the crazy one?" "Oh yeah. Because when I was in college in the 80s—" We're having this conversation, and so then Deb, Deb Cleveland's my wife, we just got married. She was and is a blues singer. She was singing at Gay Pride, this particular June. When must this have been? Nineteen ninety-six with the Deb Cleveland Band, she's singing at Pride. It's her band. She's the only female in the band. I was dancing, because I don't care if, if I want to go and I don't have a bunch of friends to go with me, I will go by myself because I want to go. So it's that, I think it was at Amazon Park and her band is playing and it was great, and it's just a summer's day. It's June, there's sun.

One of my friends Barb Ryan, whom I'm sure you have or will interview, was in college here at around the same time that Deb was, I think. So it was either Barb or Jane, in my memory I can't remember which one of them knew her, but Barb knew her from college and I think Jane knew her from somewhere else. Jane Robin, who used to be in Eugene, but she's in southern Oregon now and so she said, "You want to meet her?" And I said, "Well, I'm sure she's busy and I don't want to be in anybody's way." "No. Come on. I know her, she'd be happy to meet you." I just was happy to meet another black woman. I didn't even know she was gay. You can't look at Deb and not know she's gay, but I'm not going to assume. In my mind though, everybody's a lesbian until you tell me you're not. But yeah, I'm just going to keep that as an inside thought.

I'm introduced to her, if she tells the story, she will say that I stalked her. I did not. She told me where she would be and I would go. I just thought, okay, I just met a friend and then I thought, okay, well maybe I've met a friend that has extra privileges, and then she was my rebound after my previous girlfriend and I broke up and we've been together, be twenty-two years, this December.

Long: You said that was 1992?

Cleveland: No, that was '96. Yeah, that was June of '96 I met her because I was just starting to come up from being under the water of my injury. For a long time I didn't leave the house. I'm a very social person. I wouldn't see anybody, I wouldn't let people see me.

Raiskin: Why?

Cleveland: I think I just wanted to feel safe. I also felt very damaged. I was a guitar player I used to finger pick and I still can't quite finger pick a guitar the way I used to. I still haven't figured out how to negotiate that the way I used to. And then I was an actress and so, how am I going to have this injury and be on stage? I just thought that this was so much bigger than I was. When Deb and I got together, she noticed that I was always hiding my hand. I didn't know, I didn't realize that I was hiding my hand, but she noticed that I was always hiding my hand. Then she was the one who helped me come out of that. The theater community was the community that helped me to come out of never going on stage again.

By then I think Measure 14 was up and there was, let's see, Colorado had a measure, if I'm not mistaken, and we had 14 and so there was a play called *Linda* that was being performed in New York. I think it was also being performed in Colorado, and then we were doing it here and it was this goofy musical comedy. Some people say it was not a very good one, but I mean it was dinner theater, we did it at ACE Cabaret Theater, which is what to be the Riv Room. It was really funny and they asked me to be in the show and I was telling—and oh gosh, the director, last name, gay man, Watson is his last name. I can't think of his first name, but I can see his face so clearly.

I said, "I don't think you understand. I don't go out anymore and you want me to be on stage, do you see this?" And this must have been like twelve feet tall in my mind, "Do you see this? I don't go out. I

don't go out." He said, "Well, you could wear gloves if you want to so that you feel less self-conscious, but I would really like you to be in the show." I did the show and it was great. I got to sing and I had black lace gloves for one costume. I had red lace gloves for another costume and it was great. I met another friend through that. I did the show. My character's name was Lizzie the Lezzie. She had guns and she found the woman she loved and kissed her on stage, and it was great.

This woman happened to be in the audience this particular day, her name is Kendra Morrigan. Kendra lives in Canada now, we think. She's gallivanting all over the place now that she's retired. I was going into the post office, the one off West Eleventh off Tyinn, and I'm going in and she's coming out and it's just a quiet day. There's maybe two other people in the place and it's— when that post office, when nobody else is in there, it's cavernous. So I'm going in, she's coming out and she goes, "You are Lizzie the Lezzie." She yells this, "Lezzie, lezzie, lezzie." And we have been friends ever since. Come to find out that she knew Deb from back in the day, as did Gladys Campbell knew Deb from back in the day, and several other people. That I was calling her Deb, they were calling her Sly, and until everybody came to my house for my thirtieth birthday, nobody knew who we were talking about. And so there you are, ten people, what are the odds? What are the odds?

Raiskin: How was getting married?

Cleveland: It was everything that every gay person has ever told me it was and that is that, because I would ask, because we've known people, you're together twenty years, you're together, eighteen years, what could possibly have changed? Your child moved out two years ago, that you raised from a pup, what could possibly have changed? To a person, lesbian, gay, to a person, they said, "I don't know how to describe it, it's just different. I don't know what to tell you. It's just different." And it is, and I can't describe it any better. It's just, yeah. Wow. Well, aside from being ineffable apparently, it's that validation I guess that one can so easily take for granted if you can't have it.

Maybe it's akin to that feeling of, you're a kid in your parents' house and you are always your mother's daughter or your father's daughter. You always are and you can be 100 and they can be 3,000 and that will not change. But there's something about how that dynamic twist just a little bit when your parents come to your house and you're cooking dinner for them in your kitchen and mom doesn't know where the soup spoons are because this is not her kitchen. It's something that you've always seen and maybe you've always wanted, you know what you're supposed to do, you know what it's supposed to have looked like, but when it's really, really yours, it's different for every person. Maybe that's the closest I can come to explain.

We keep looking at each other saying, "What did we just do?" We've raised a grandson, a grandson for heaven sakes, and we already own a house. It's not like, well, it would be nice if someone would give us

a new set of towels, but it's wonderful. When California first got gay marriage for that brief shining moment years ago, and I think our grandson Devon was, I think he was still in the high chair at the time. We thought very seriously about going down to California. It was literally, we woke up, NPR is playing on the radio, I'm cooking him breakfast and making his lunch to send him to kindergarten or whatever it was, first grade, whatever. We're hearing this on NPR and it's, "Oh my God, should we go to California? We should go to California. Well, who's going to watch Devon? Well, let's just take them him with us. Okay, but then we're going to be in San Francisco. Do we have enough gas? Wait, when's payday do we have—" And we're just upending everything to drive all the way the heck down to California.

And then I said, "You know what? We will wait until we have gay marriage here because we pay taxes here. We're raising a kid here, wait till we buy our house and then we will do it that way, because that seems ridiculous to me. It's almost like it's not real, and it would have been ephemeral, it wouldn't have lasted. So we waited until we were ready for us and we own our own home, and now, if I'm sucked up by aliens on Thursday, my brothers cannot come in and say, "Oh, this is nice. I think I'm taking it." So, that really is the thing.

Raiskin: Did you have a party or any kind of celebration?

Cleveland: Well, no, this was the, let's make it legal, because President Spanky is as predictable as the weather, and when that man succeeded President Obama, we didn't know what was going to happen, and so

we had ascertain that he couldn't use executive order to rescind gay marriage, so we figured we were fine and we were always going to do it anyway, but it was, Well, let's wait till the trees get taller in the backyard so we can have privacy. Well, let's wait till the tenth. Well, let's wait until the twentieth. Well, let's wait till we can get all that brush out of there. All these— Let's wait till Devon— Whatever, so that we can have the party that we want to have in the way that we want to have it and with all the bells and whistles that the pagan community will bring us.

And then with all of this, with Kavanaugh trying to get him onto the Supreme Court, we thought all bets are off as to what may or may not happen and what they might or might not do if he gets on, and so we thought at least if we do it now, it's on paper, it's filed away somewhere. At least it's legal and then we can put the bells and whistles on whenever we get around.

Raiskin: So you just got married.

Cleveland: We got married July the twentieth. July the twentieth, 2018, yeah.

Raiskin: Congratulations.

Cleveland: We just got married. Thank you. So yeah, we'll have the ritual and everything probably in a couple of years when summer solstice is on a weekend again, but for now we just needed to get it on paper.

Raiskin: Is there anything— you're not near retirement and you've got many, many more years to go.

Cleveland: No, not that many!

Raiskin: —in your life, but you've lived a very full life and made a lot of changes and I'm wondering if there's anything, if you could imagine a young person watching this, any advice about how to live a good life?

Cleveland: How to live a good life? Well, my philosophy, I guess part of it is, in paganism, there's a poem called the Wiccan Read, and it's got a lot of things that it says about different woods and things like that, but the last lines of it are, "Though it harm none, do what you will." Whatever you're doing, if it doesn't harm you and it doesn't harm anybody else, do it, and if the world doesn't exist the way you want to see it, make it be that way. If that means that you have to move, if that means you have to build a treehouse, if that means that you stop watching television or you stop looking at magazines, because none of the people in the magazines look like you. Don't look at the magazines, don't watch the movies.

Figure out what makes you the happiest and do it, and if it doesn't exist, create it. And I promise you, I promise you that if your intent has beautifulness behind it, has love behind it, has true impure intentions behind it, there's going to be other people that are going to come to that light and you'll find your community.

Raiskin: Thank you so much.

Long: Thank you very much.

Cleveland: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]