# Oral History Interview with Shoshana Cohen

Interview conducted on September 4, 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

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 25-50 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 September 4, 2018. Shoshana was born in 1950 in Charlottesville, Virginia. Until the age of twelve, she lived in Scottsville, Virginia, where her family had a dry goods store. Hers was the only Jewish family in Scottsville. As a child, she was mischievous and a tomboy, a temperament that bothered her parents. She went to the American University in Washington, D.C. in 1968, during the anti-Vietnam war protests. She protested at Nixon's inauguration. She transferred to the University of Denver where she received a degree in sociology. She moved further West to Eugene and attended graduate school for a short period. She discusses her impressions of Eugene, and the many cooperatives and collectives operating at that time. She talks about working at Starflower Natural Foods & Botanicals as a bookkeeper, and the nature and character of this cooperative. It was a volatile place, and those who worked at Starflower felt they were outsiders and outlaws. Shoshana talks about the changing character of Eugene after Ballot Measure 9. She got involved with the synagogue in Eugene. She discusses the break-up of the Soviet Union, and Mao-

tse-tung. She concludes her interview by discussing the Neo-Nazi protest in Charlottesville, aging, and her interest in fly fishing.

**Additional subjects:** Acker, Joan; Accounting; Alcoholism; Baleboostehs; Bars (Drinking establishments) -- Oregon – Eugene; Book and Tea Bookstore; Collectives; Coming out (sexual orientation); Cormier, Margaret; Cormier, Thomas; Damselflies (women's fly-fishing group); Drug use; Eugene (Or.) -- Social conditions; Glass, Charlie; Glass, Debbie; Gertrude's Café (restaurant); Goldman, Marion S; Judaism; Sloan-Hunter, Margaret, 1947- ; University of Oregon. Department of Sociology; University of Oregon. School of Architecture and Allied Arts; White supremacy movements – United States; Willamette People's Food Co-op; Women's Press Collective.

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Long: This interview is part of the Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project. The recordings will be made available through the University of Oregon library's special collections in university archives. This is an oral history interview with Shoshana Cohen, on September 4th, 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.

Shoshana, 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.

Cohen: Yes, I agree.

Long: Thank you. Why don't we just start with a basic question. Can you please tell us when and where you were born and a little bit about your early years?

Cohen: I was born at the University for Virginia Hospital in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1950. I grew up or spent the first 12 or 13 years of my life in Scottsville, Virginia, 20 miles South of Charlottesville on the James River. We were the only Jewish family in a town of 250 people. My parents got there because my grandparents immigrated from Lithuania, not together. They got married once they were in this country and wound up in Lynchburg. And during the depression they lost their business and their store and found a place in Scottsville. So I spent years zero to 12 in Scottsville.

Raiskin: And so you grew up with your grandparents and your parents?

Cohen: No. My father came back from World War Two and they couldn't find housing in Washington D.C. and I'm not quite sure what he had planned on doing up there, what jobs. So they moved to Scottsville and my grandparent's soon retired up to Atlantic city, New Jersey.

Raiskin: Do you know why they had trouble finding housing?

Cohen: I think after the war, a lot of people had trouble finding housing because a lot of people came back to the Washington area. I've heard a couple of times it was hard to find housing there.

Raiskin: What did your parents do? What did your parents do for a living?

Cohen: Owned a dry goods store, became a clothing store. My grandfather and grandmother started, it, started the one in Lynchburg. Apparently they started by... Grandpa would

take a horse and a carriage and peddle dry goods throughout Southern Virginia into North Carolina.

Raiskin: What was it like being the only Jewish family in that small town?

Cohen: We were aware of it. Mostly because every now and then a teacher would mention it and my mother mentioned it to us. And a lot of my friends went to Bible School in the summer and I didn't have to go, which made me happy actually. We had to drive all the way over to Charlottesville for a Sunday school. We got out of a class for the High Holy days. But yeah, we were aware that we were different, but we were kids and yeah, we didn't really notice it.

Raiskin: What was your temperament like when you were a kid?

Cohen: My temperament. I was a mischievous tomboy and I had... Yeah, got into trouble a little bit. I think I was kind of an unfocused kid, a child. My father's child. My parents

were worried about me, mostly because I was such a tomboy. But yeah.

Raiskin: Did that bother them?

Cohen: Yeah. I mean, they never said that, but I think they were concerned about how I would turn out.

Long: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Cohen: I have a sister who's 17 months older than me.

Raiskin: Did you ever think of yourself as different in middle school child or up through high school or around your sexuality?

Cohen: I didn't recognize it as different. My dreams in my dreams because as a teenager, you have, well, I had sexual dreams. In those dreams, I was always the boy or the man and I was never the woman.

Raiskin: Did you see yourself in a dream?

Cohen: In the dreams? Yeah. I mean, I would see a man and a woman and I was a man. I was the man. So yes, I mean, that's what I know.

Long: So you went to public grade school, public high school?

Cohen: No, I went to public grade school. My mother was concerned that we would grow up and marry Scottsville boys, farm boys. She was from Baltimore. She was from a big Jewish family and grew up in a Jewish neighborhood and she was upwardly mobile and she'd gone through the depression and that had a major effect on her that she never articulated. Anyway, she wanted us to move to Charlottesville, but school started, my sister was a year older. The real story here is in the gray with mom and dad, but we wound up going to St. Ann's Episcopalian Girls School and that's where I graduated, from St. Ann's. It was great.

Long: In Charlottesville.

Cohen: In Charlottesville.

Long: What was great about it?

Cohen: It was great because it was a small school. I was not a good student. I think I was almost the bottom of my class at St. Ann's and I certainly wasn't prepared for the academic rigor. It was great because you could be more of yourself. You didn't have that social awkwardness. What would have been awkward for me because I was shy, a big school and boys and girls. I mean, I had boyfriends. But I mean, to me they were friends. And I didn't have that social pressure and it was just a lot of fun.

Raiskin: Were your friends at school dating when you were in high school?

Cohen: Yes, and I occasionally dated, but not all that often. I just went back from my 50th high school reunion. So great.

Raiskin: So you graduated high school?

Cohen: I graduated high school and then I didn't have that many choices in terms of college and I really had no idea

what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go. But I wound up at American University. My mother was happy about that because there were a lot of Jews there. I think it was 60% Jewish at the time. All the kids from the suburbs of New Jersey and Boston, the kids that didn't get into a George Washington or the better schools, they all went to American university. That was hard for me, but I had an aunt and uncle that lived nearby, so I spent a lot of time with them. Because it was a culture of people that I was not used to. A lot of [inaudible 00:09:20] and people... Yeah, from the suburbs.

At the same time, it was 1968 and there were big anti-war demonstrations in Washington, D.C and I participated in those. And I mean, there were hundreds of thousands of people that came. In '68 and there was another demonstration in '69. I can remember being at a demonstration for Nixon's inauguration and I mean, it was so crowded that you could lift your feet off of the ground and you would just be held up by the crush of the crowd.

But I didn't like American university. Wound up going to University of Denver, transferring there and graduating from University of Denver in sociology.

Long: Why did you choose Denver?

Cohen: I chose Denver because I didn't get into University of Colorado at Boulder. A good friend of mine and I had decided we wanted to go West and go to school out West. She was going to school up in Boston and she unfortunately died in 1969 of meningitis. Now, there was somebody that I was in love with, but I didn't know it at the time.

Raiskin: What were your feelings for her?

Cohen: Oh, I, well, they... I was drawn to her physically, but I couldn't have described that then. And she was very popular. A lot of... She was from high school. I mean, she was a boarder at St. Ann's. I think a lot of people sort of were in love with her, but for me it was a little different.

Raiskin: So you moved to Denver-

Cohen: So I moved to Denver. Finished school there. During that period of time, there were still, I mean, Denver was unlike American university, which was sort of in the belly of the beast. There as much political activity. I think the most formative events that I went to were, or was, it was an event, was a feminist conference at Fort Collins. It must've been Colorado state.

I heard about it because a friend of mine, Jane Gibbons, who is still a good friend of mine and lives around the corner, was working for a feminist newspaper called Big Mama Rag. And so I went, I don't even know who I went with. I don't know whether it was people from the university or who it was. I remember hearing Gloria Steinem speak, and there was a woman named Margaret whose last name I.ve forgotten.

Raiskin: Sloan?

Cohen: Yes.

Long: What was that, Sloan?

Raiskin: Margaret Sloan.

Cohen: Yeah. Oh my God. It was a very powerful experience for me. And there were other... I mean, there were workshops and so on. And there was, I can't remember, there were these fierce lesbians there. They seemed angry and they had short hair. But I was just taken, I was taken by them, by the whole event. I can't say, "Well, it affected me in a, b and c." But really, it was just another big influence that I internalized in some way.

Long: What year was this?

Cohen: Let's see, I graduated in March of '73, '72 or '73.

Raiskin: Did you identify as a feminist then?

Cohen: No I didn't. I mean, I was beginning to, but I wouldn't have labeled myself then. Just this information and these experiences were coming in and I was probably more like a deer in the headlights than grasping it boldly.

Raiskin: What were your plans after you graduated college?

Cohen: Well, I was going to graduate school and that's how I landed in Eugene. I got into a couple of graduate... Actually three graduate schools, and I wound in Eugene because Eugene had a Marxist sociology department. At the time Al Szymanski was a professor here. He was a Marxist sociologist. I think Mimi Goldman, when I came here, it might've been Mimi Goldman's first year here. She's retired now. Joan Acker was on sabbatical. Gosh, who else? I don't remember the names of other people, the other people.

I dropped out after a quarter because it was overwhelming and I realized I couldn't write. I couldn't express myself in writing in the way with that one needs to do when one's in graduate school. I still have a block against writing to this day. But it was nonetheless a very powerful three months for me. Yeah, I just absorbed a lot. And it really, for me, it gave me a great framework an understanding, dialectical materialism did, and this is a kid who was from a small town in Virginia who read, I can remember on Sundays,

after Sundays, well, after being... It was morning Sunday school. After being... We'd go over to Charlottesville.

Well, actually this was when I lived in Charlottesville. It must've been because I couldn't have been reading Ramparts Magazine when I was 13 years old, but I can remember in Mincers, which was the university bookstore. Reading Ramparts Magazine and reading all of these anti-war articles and Sidney Hirsch, David Horowitz, who switched, who changed from a leftist to very reactionary person, and other people. So that three months was pivotal for me.

Raiskin: What did you know about Eugene before you came here?

Cohen: It had people, just big alternative lifestyle. That's all I knew. I thought it was going to be pretty comfortable for me having come from a college town and we lived around the university of Virginia. I mean, we lived in the university neighborhood. So it just... Yeah.

Raiskin: When you came, what did Eugene look like?

Cohen: What did Eugene look like? Well, it was green and wet I mean, I was up here at the university and I don't remember the downtown too much. I do remember we did, both Jane and I did go to Women's Press and got involved with Women's Press here because Jane in particular had the experience of Big Mama Rag, in Denver, and we knew we would meet feminists. I don't know if we called them that and like minded people, at Women's Press.

Long: And Women's Press published newspaper?

Cohen: Published a newspaper. Yes. And it was at... We met at third, New Lawrence, the old building, it's still there. The other thing I remember about Eugene was the slugs, disgusting.

Raiskin: Could you describe Women's Press?

Cohen: Oh wow. Describe Women's Press. Well. This is where my memory fails me. I remember going in to Women's Press and they're meeting the women and being certainly intimidated. These were people who had definite

ideas about issues and some of the women that I met there, I still know. Yeah. I really... That's about all I can remember.

Long: Didn't they publish a newspaper that was actually called the Women's Press?

Cohen: Yes.

Long: Okay.

Cohen: Yes.

Long: So the press was called Women's Press and then-

Cohen: Oh, yes. I'm sorry. Yes, that was the name of the newspaper and it came out, I don't know how often it came out. Maybe monthly.

Raiskin: What kind of articles-

Long: It was a feminist news-

Cohen: Yeah, it was feminists. It was a feminist newspaper. Articles about, gosh, probably from a feminist perspective about what was going on in the world. I can remember

writing, I can't even... I remember writing an article with somebody about the speed... It was about the speed queen washer and it was about women and women's work and laundry and that sort of thing. So it's focus was women's work, women's lives. They dedicated, I can't remember... And of course I threw this away. One issue there was two... Gosh, maybe you would remember this or know about this. There was a kind of counseling going on back then, therapy and I cannot remember the name of... They devoted one article-

Raiskin: Was it co-counseling?

Cohen: No, it was way before co-counseling. Radical therapy, I don't know. Thomas Szasz. They devoted one whole issue to that. So I think the issues had themes and not all the time, but-

Long: Do you remember the women who ran it?

Cohen: Some of them, yes.

Raiskin: So you left school and so where were you living and where were you working?

Cohen: I was living up at 24th in Columbia. And Jane moved out and moved down to fourth in Adams actually, and a lesbian couple moved in with me. And this is when I was beginning to realize, geez, I was a lesbian. When I dropped out, I think I worked, I did, I worked at Willamette People's Food Co-op for, I don't know, six months or so. It was located at 24th and that street before Columbia- it in that little store place.

Raiskin: What was the food co-op like?

Cohen: What do you mean, we sold both food, health food, natural foods, the people who ran it, we all ran it. There were two or three men, and it's interesting, I can remember the men, but I can't remember the women.

Long: So it was a store where... Was it a store where people would just walk to purchase things?

Cohen: Yes.

Long: The goods.

Cohen: Yeah.

Long: Okay.

Cohen: As much as I can remember. And then I got a job at Starflower and I worked at Starflower from '74 to '82 and then I left town.

Raiskin: Can you describe Starflower and what your first impressions were?

Cohen: Starflower was incredible then. I felt like I had arrived and sort of... It was full of very dedicated people. Debbie Glass and Charlie glass and Margaret Cormier started it, along with, I want to say Mary Lawless. It was dedicated to a consensus decision making and feminism, which meant that women could do everything and work and learn non-traditional women's jobs. And it started out, or when I was there, people were doing everything.

So I was working in the warehouse, I was truck driving, I was meeting every... Yeah, we were doing everything and

strong women and we were all having fun and it was hard work. And then I sort of drifted towards the more of the business aspect of it and became a buyer along with Charlie Glass and then became the head buyer and was the buyer for years and years. That was great. I mean, you bring in truckloads of grains, truckloads of juice or truckloads of cheese and go and visit the vendors as this representative of this feminist collective and deal with people on the one hand, on a professional level, on the other hand, just totally different than the rest of the world.

That was the good part. Plus certainly selling very good food. The collective meetings were hard though.

Long: Can you describe that typical meeting?

Cohen: Well there was a lot of yelling and some crying and we had to... The process was consensus and that shifted after a while because consensus when you're running, I think consensus is hard when you're trying to do pretty much anything. But unless you all have the same goals and same ideas about it, the issue. They were long, they were, I think, I

believe although I could be wrong about this, we took terms leading the meetings and I think as the company grew or as the collective grew, you had more different types of people come in and with different ideas and that made it difficult. Also, people were sleeping with people and boy, that made it difficult. A lot of fun but difficult.

Long: Can you take a moment to describe some of the people you worked with? Who they were, what they were like?

Cohen: Oh gosh. Well, let's see. There were artists, there was a filmmaker. There were musicians, there was a band. There were, what, three or four people who played music. And it wasn't just women. There were guys in there, gay guys, faggots. And then there... Starflower herb company were two gay men, a couple, since died, from AIDS. And they were upstairs. They didn't want to have anything to do with us, although one of them was married. There were writers. It was a very... Many of the people were very creative. It was a very volatile place and it seemed like the center of the

universe and we were very proud to be working there and I think somewhat arrogant as well. And some of that was from the fact that we were these bold out front feminists, lesbians, gay men. We were outsiders. We were outlaws and different.

Raiskin: What was it like going to the... Where were the farms that you would go get the food?

Cohen: Well, I can remember visiting the Posey's farm in Idaho. We bought beans from them and I can remember going to Wheatland and it was also in Idaho, bought wheat from them and then going down to [Newdson's 00:31:08] outside of the Chico or Red Bluff. Going down to the rogue Creamery, which is still there, although owned by somebody because that's where we bought our rennet-less cheese. And that's actually how Starflower started. Debbie Glass had the creamery make rennet-less cheese and it was called [Vella's 00:31:36] Creamery or what's his name, Bella ran it.

She would take it around in her car and start selling it. And that's really the beginning of Starflowers Wholesale Foods.

Here's another thing about Starflower company. And so we were part of a network of food co-ops and food collectives. There was big or several collectives in the Bay area and there was co-op in our cadre, there were co-ops in Ashland and Cave Junction and there was a natural foods wholesale collective in Portland and in Seattle.

Raiskin: Do you remember Nancy Solomon?

Cohen: I met Nancy Solomon when she was 18 years old and she was working in a natural food collective in Portland. She was enamored of Connie and me, because we were these dykes. I think she... Anyway, yeah.

Raiskin: Were those other collectives also feminist?

Cohen: Well, I think everybody was feminists, but I mean, this is what I was talking about. In the beginning, they were different currents going through the collectives. San Francisco was strongly, I think the San Francisco collective was strongly anti-racist leftists. There were certainly some people and the Starflower collective that were leftist, who

came at the collectivity and the feminism with leftist filters. Portland, I honestly don't remember the Seattle collective, I don't remember.

But Seattle and that whole Northwest area had a history of wobbilies and so I think a lot of the... Or some of the members of the Seattle collective identified as modern day wobbilies. And there was also a back to the land movement within the food movement, not just... They were separatists and the people who lived on the land there, but there was a big, not a big, but there was a back to the land movement and grow and eat regionally regional foods movement.

So this whole modern farm to table movement is I think all young people think they've discovered something new. We thought that we had probably discovered something new with that back to the farm or back-to-the land movement and my hunch is it wasn't new. When we discovered it and it certainly isn't new now.

Long: Do you recall anybody... In the leftist organizations, was there any residual sexism? Did you experience any of that?

Cohen: It depends. Not as a member of Starflower, as a member of somebody in the leftist movement, in an anti-imperialist movement in Eugene and going to conferences. I mean, yes, those issues came up. And then later on, when I lived in... This is far afield, but when I lived in San Francisco and was doing work with basically Jewish lesbians on peace in the middle East, I mean we experienced a lot of that. We were trying to work in coalition with a variety of different people and Palestinians and other leftist groups. And yeah, there was a lot of issues there. Sexism and probably racism. I mean there's... Yeah.

Raiskin: How did you feel coming out as lesbian?

Cohen: How did I feel coming out as a lesbian? Great. It was a relief. It was my true self. It is my true self. There was a lot of pressure I think in the Eugene community, the feminist community and the leftist community to... Maybe people put

it on themselves to be a lesbian. And there were some who came out and then went back in, but I mean for me it was just who I was and who I am.

Long: When did you come out?

Cohen: Well, in terms of years, I think 1974. So when I was here.

Long: So you're working at Starflower and what was your social scene like outside of Starflower?

Cohen: Well, there was so much going on in Eugene then. So the social scene in Eugene was, there were bands, there was the Starflower band, Wallflower. But I also was in... Left study groups and we did political work. So there were demonstrations and I mean, not all the time, but around various issues. Mostly, the war was over in '74, but oh gosh, there was... I'm blanking here. There were a ton of issues. Nicaragua, Palestinian issue. And then of course there were the... What was it? The proposition 51? Was it 51? Yeah, I think-

Long: Referendum.

Cohen: The referendum? We were young and so there was just a lot to do. And it was, yeah, just-

Raiskin: Did you go dancing?

Cohen: Oh, yes. Went to The Rev Room. There was a place before The Rev Room called... Well, The Rev Room was there, called Scarborough Fair. Did anybody talk to you about that?

Long: No.

Cohen: Oh gosh. I tell you, I can't remember, but it was... Jesus, who was it? I think off of 11th, somewhere. There were dances there.

Long: Was it a gay bar?

Cohen: No, I don't believe so. But The Rev Room, I mean, everybody went to The Rev Room and I mean, God, it was a scene. With the chains and the red vinyl seats and drinking and dancing. It was a lot of fun and it was a lot of drama.

Long: What kind of drama?

Cohen: Lesbian drama, lesbian romance, drama. Somebody breaking up with somebody, seeing their ex there with somebody else, that stuff.

Long: I'd like to go back to Starflower briefly. Can you remember how much... Well, first of all, can you remember your interview with Starflower?

Cohen: No.

Long: You can't. Do you remember how much you were paid?

Cohen: Oh gosh. $600 a month at one point in time. And I don't remember when, but I remember it wasn't a lot of money. But we had lots of vacation and we had lots of food and we had medical and we had, we had vacation and then we had visiting your parents. So visiting your parents, you had a week or something like that to visit your parents and that was not considered vacation because it was always so hard, mostly hard and formatic for people.

Long: Wait, wait, can we go back for a sec?

Cohen: Yes.

Long: So Starflower gave you time off, gave all the worker's time off to go visit their parents.

Cohen: Well, yeah, those who had parents who wanted to visit them. It was a separate time than vacation. And that was because it was considered pretty hard on the individual to go see their parents and in many cases it was, in most cases it probably was.

Raiskin: So not to use your vacation time, for relaxation-

Cohen: Right, But yeah.

Raiskin: Interesting.

Cohen: Yeah.

Long: Can you describe a typical weekend in Eugene during that time?

Cohen: Oh. Well, working at Starflower I believe what it meant. Some people had to work on the weekends. We weren't open, but if trucks came in, somebody had to go down and unload. Somebody had to go in on Sunday and load the trucks for delivery. But a typical weekend would be possibly going to a party or going to The Rev Room one night, if not two nights. People did other things. I mean, there were meetings, they were activities, people went to the snow. I mean-

Long: Were you involved in any of the softball teams?

Cohen: Softball teams? I was involved in the hippie league for awhile.

Long: The hippie league?

Cohen: Yeah, there was a league that had women and men and this and yeah, my team was get a grip and there were teams like the say hey kid and honor Willie Mays and late for supper and various names like that. And yeah, we would go out and play. There was a league commissioner who

organized it all and would go out, gets down and play ball. I'll never forget this. Once my father came to visit me in Eugene's. This was, no, gosh, I don't know. Well, in the mid seventies. And oh it was fun and it was difficult negotiating my lifestyle with my father being there. But I did take him to one of those games and oh God.

So first of all, there's all this marijuana smoke going around so people are smoking. I'm just sitting there with dad going, "Oh God." And then this woman takes off her shirt, in the outfield, because she said it was hot and she just wanted to play without a shirt. And here's my father from Virginia and I was just dying. I'm sure daddy was actually enjoying it. But yeah. So if there was a lesbian league, I don't remember being a part of it.

Raiskin: Did you have a girlfriend at the time?

Cohen: Yes.

Raiskin: And did you live together?

Cohen: No, we lived down the street from each other.

Raiskin: And still up by [inaudible 00:45:50] and-

Cohen: No, actually by that time I had moved down to the fourth in Adams area.

Raiskin: So do you remember Mother Kali's?

Cohen: Yes. Gosh, thank you. They were down at... I mean, they were all over the place, but in one iteration they were just down the street at fifth in Adams and we used to go there. We used to, I mean go there for poetry readings and just to buy books or just to hang out. Yeah. And there were various cafes to around town that were... God, what was the name of that one? I forgot her. What's her name?

Long: Gertrude's.

Cohen: There was Gertrude's and then there was Book and Tea which I think it was in the building that Beppe & Gianni's is in now. And Book and Tea were two women. Actually one of them, I saw her obituary in the paper recently. That was a great bookstore. I mean, Mother Kali's was too, but Mother Kali's was part of a community and

Book and Tea was a little separate. And then what else? Yeah, I can't think of anything else.

Raiskin: Why did you leave Eugene?

Cohen: I was bored with Eugene. I wanted to be in the city. I wanted to live in San Francisco. I had a few friends down there. Some people I met because I had invited them. I was part of an organization that invited them up here for a workshop on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And I felt at the time that I'd outgrown Eugene.

Raiskin: Can I back up and ask you another question, whether you involved with Bella Boosters?

Cohen: I was, but not until I came back from the Bay area and I was... So they started up, I don't know when they started up, maybe in the '80s. And I mean, I wasn't here.

Long: So what year did you move down to San Francisco?

Cohen: I moved down in '83.

Long: Okay.

Cohen: Down there, I was involved in... Well, the political work I did was with the Israeli-Palestinian peace in the middle East, mostly with lesbian Jews, Jewish lesbians. Down there I became a CPA and so I had a very sort of compartmentalized life. But you could do... I mean it was easy to do that in San Francisco.

Long: Why?

Cohen: Because it was bigger and I didn't have a problem, I mean, if I'd had a problem with not being out at work, I suppose it wouldn't have been easy. But I mean my profession was so different than the rest of my life.

Raiskin: How did you get trained to be a CPA?

Cohen: How did I get trained? Well, I started being a bookkeeper up here at Starflower, in Starflower Botanicals. And I decided when I was down in the Bay area and I got full cycle bookkeeping jobs down in the Bay area and I decided I just wanted something... I liked the work, but I wanted something more interesting. So it was either going to

become a CPA or get an MBA and it was sort of quicker because by that time I was 31 or my late twenties or something. '82, I was 32. I sort of took the quickest route because I'd already had a degree. So I took courses, accounting courses and sat for the CPA exam.

Raiskin: And what brought you back here?

Cohen: Well, I still had friends who were like family here. I knew just sort of economics really. I knew I... What would make me comfortable economically was to have a place of my own and to have that kind of security. And I couldn't get that down there. I knew eventually I would probably retire up here or retire around friends, just get out of the city. And also my friends up here were having babies and I wanted to be around them and I came back, have a house and I am very close to my friend's three boys who are now adults. One has just... He and his wife just had his second child and I'm their aunt.

Raiskin: Did you spend a lot of time with them when they were children?

Cohen: Yes. When I moved back here. Oh gosh. I was over there a lot. Yeah.

Raiskin: And who were you to them in their lives? What kind of things did you do with them?

Cohen: I played with them a lot. We joked a lot. I went on weekend vacations with them. They consider me their aunt. I'm part of their family lore and history. There are stories about me and I have stories about them. I celebrate... Their dad's Jewish. I celebrate, they celebrate Hanukkah with me every year. I'm going to try to get a Passover tradition started with them. Now everybody's all over them. I mean, well actually they're all three still in the Northwest, so that's good. Yeah.

Raiskin: So are you retired yet?

Cohen: Yes, actually September 1st was one year retirement.

Raiskin: And how was that?

Cohen: It's great. I worked at the university for 20 years.

Raiskin: Can you just quickly tell us where you worked at the university?

Cohen: I was the Director of Fiscal Services for the School of Architecture and Allied arts. A lot of words.

Raiskin: And how was that work?

Cohen: I'm sorry.

Raiskin: How was that work for you?

Cohen: Well, when I first started working there after being at CPA and CPA firms, it was odd because there was no there there, there's not as much accountability, as financial accountability is I was used to. So that part took some getting used to. It took some getting used to the whole sort of flow of students. I mean, I was used to working with... I was in small CPA firms, so you would work with small businesses and they would be there for years. But you had this sort of stream of students coming and going. Not that I worked with students, but it was odd, but I loved it and I love working in a higher ed institution.

I loved the walking on campus, the diversity of people. Different races, just I would walk on, I mean you could hear different languages. I enjoyed going to lectures. That was stimulating and work was interesting. I mean, I was a budget director and that was, well, we never had enough money. I mean, you all know, there's never enough money. And I worked with some wonderful people. I worked with Robert Melnick for I don't know how many years? Nine years or so. And then Francis Burnett was the Dean. Oh gosh, just great.

Raiskin: Were you out at work?

Cohen: I mean, I wouldn't say I was out. Yeah, I would probably say I wasn't out at work. Yeah.

Raiskin: Do you think it would be uncomfortable in your job?

Cohen: I think realistically, no, I mean on a personal level, yes, that's why I wasn't out. Plus, I mean it I haven't been in a relationship in a long time, so that whole... All of the conversations you have and all of that, I didn't have those

about my significant other or my partner or whatever. I mean, if I talked about any family, it was the boys. It was about Leon, Tim and Myles. And I think in my office it might've been uncomfortable for some people. I mean, there was one person whom I adore, very religious. Certainly not with the faculty. The faculty and the administration.

Raiskin: Were you involved in any committees or anything on campus that had anything to do with feminism or gay... Anything on campus.

Cohen: By the time I came back here and I got this job, I didn't want to be involved and I was burnout. I mean, nine years in a collective really, it takes another 18 years to recover. I also felt that a lot of the committees here, they were involved with the Academy and it didn't affect me.

Raiskin: Were you involved still with lesbian community in Eugene when you came back?

Cohen: Well, when I came back... I came back in '92 and the community, it was very, very different. That nine years. And

this happened in San Francisco too. I mean, well, the big thing in San Francisco was the AIDS epidemic, but there was a shift in sort of the defined lesbian community and it dissipated. People got older, younger people who came in didn't... The environment was different. I mean, part of... I mean, we created an environment, a community for ourselves for a number of reasons. It was very vibrant and alive and active, but it was also a means of survival.

The generations before us possibly had communities, but there were a lot in bars and there was a lot of alcoholism and partly because of this gender... All of the stuff that was going on in the '60s and '70s. We created a community that we were certainly more out and open. And I think that sort of began to dissipate in the '80s. In San Francisco, you could see the focus was on the AIDS epidemic. I don't know what was happening up here, but when I came back, there weren't... I mean, people had left, first of all, a lot of people left, but there weren't the organizations, there was ballaboostas which was kind of beginning to slander. People were, I don't

know how you say it, getting on with it, doing different things weren't as focused on the lesbian community or that was my perception. Anyway, I also came back as... I mean, I left. In the sense of lesbian community was an alternative community, at least in Eugene.

In San Francisco, it seemed like... And maybe, or that was the community I was in. I don't know about the university for instance. San Francisco, you had lesbians and just... I mean, there was more variety, class, race, social levels and so on. I came back and I didn't... I mean, I was not part of the alternative community anymore such that it was. I mean, I-

Long: Starflower had closed.

Cohen: It had closed. I mean, none of those organizations were here.

Raiskin: Do you remember Measure 9? I think it was about right when you came back, in '92, '93.

Cohen: Yeah, vaguely.

Raiskin: This anti-gay measure that turned people out.

Cohen: Right. It turned people out, but I mean, it didn't create, well, I could be wrong about this, it didn't create... It turned people out. But were there communities of people here or organizations here like there were in the '70s too to fight it? I mean, honestly, I don't remember. I mean, what happened to me when I came back is I got involved in the synagogue and I was on the board and I was the on the finance committee and I was the treasurer.

Raiskin: And were you out as a lesbian doing that?

Cohen: People knew I was a lesbian. I mean, I didn't wear a badge that said, "Oh, by the way, I'm a lesbian. I'm a Jewish lesbian." But yeah.

Raiskin: Did the synagogue feel like a progressive place?

Cohen: Yeah, it did. And I think I was more focused at that point in time on my Judaism and how to fit that into my life. That didn't come from just the sky. What happened is I was in San Francisco, there was... There are several now, but there was one gay Jewish synagogue. And I'm going to

butcher the name if I say, so I'm not going to say it. Do you know-

Raiskin: [Bahabachelom 01:03:45]?

Cohen: No, I think that was over in the East Bay.

Raiskin: [Shazaha 01:03:52]?

Cohen: Yes. And God, that was... I would go to High Holy Days there. That was so powerful. That was so powerful for me because I had these two important parts of my life that I could combine and everything... I talked about how I compartmentalized my life. It was so important to go there, to be there, to recognize that. And aside, in Charlottesville, my sister was the first girl to be bat mitzvahd. And I was the second girl to be bat mitzvahd. Before that they were just bar mitzvahs.

So that was in my background, but I had given that... I had wandered away because of my politics and so on. And I think I came back to it specially after the breakup of the Soviet union and and then, information about China and

yeah, I now feel like I am really wandering in our conversations.

Raiskin: At your retirement. Do you see yourself staying in Eugene?

Cohen: Yes. For now. I mean, two years before retirement, I was trying to sort out what I would do and where I would go. I've always been attached to Virginia, believe it or not. I think those people who... Many of us who are raised in Virginia have a strong sense of being a Virginian. And I still consider myself a Virginian. And part of that is the history. The revolutionary war history. Everybody thinks, "Oh, the civil war, oh Charlottesville." But there's such a rich history there that we all learn.

Raiskin: How did you feel during the Charlottesville... I don't know what to call that.

Cohen: The neo-Nazis-

Raiskin: The Nazi protest, yeah.

Cohen: Oh, I felt terrible. And the Robert E. Lee statue is two blocks away from the synagogue. And uh, so that happened whenever it happened and I went, I've been back twice and I actually went to the synagogue and went to Friday night services there. Gosh, that was August after it happened and drove down the street. I mean, the statue which I passed, God knows how many times. It was, like I said, two blocks away. And of course now there's a security guard outside of the synagogue.

Raiskin: Was the Jewish community frightened by that?

Cohen: I'm sure. I'm sure they were. I mean, there were people who went down to try to protect the synagogue. I don't know. I think I know one couple from the synagogue now, I went to Sunday school with him.

Raiskin: So you can imagine moving back there?

Cohen: I thought about it after my father died. My father died in 2009 and I was very close to him and I mean, he was 91 years old and my grief was for him, but I grieved a lot for

the loss of home, the loss of place. So that's important to me. And so picking up and going someplace. I mean, if I had enough money I would think about maybe the Bay area, but I honestly, this is home, this is place. The boys are within two hours. There are two babies up in Portland that want to be close to and I'll just travel to other places and I like standing in rivers and fly fishing. I love standing in rivers, there's just nothing like it. We're very fortunate here.

Raiskin: Where do you fly fish?

Cohen: I fly fish on The Deschutes, The McKenzie The Rogue, a little bit The North Umpqua.

Raiskin: Do you fish alone?

Cohen: Oh, I have a fly fishing partner, Charlie, but I also fish alone.

Raiskin: It sounds meditative.

Cohen: Oh, it is. It's wonderful. And yeah, I like that and I like the beaches on the East coast. I like the North Carolina beaches. Flowing water.

Raiskin: Do you have any thoughts about aging as a lesbian?

Cohen: Well, that's interesting. It's different now in a certain way. Aging as a single lesbian is thinking about... Well, it can be scary, but I have family, I call them my family of choice. And now lesbians can get married and have those companions, those, not that the... Well, being legally married does have certain advantages.

Raiskin: What's scary about aging as a lesbian?

Cohen: I can't tell what scary about aging as a lesbian versus aging, period. I mean, right now what's happening for me or the last few years is the whole aging process. I mean, it's like, "Oh my God. Nobody told me about this. I didn't read about this." I can't really... As a lesbian, it's just the aging process and aging alone.

Raiskin: Can you imagine going into a retirement community or building institution?

Cohen: No. I mean, there are lesbian senior communities. I have friends who are moving down to someplace in Apache junction, which is-

Raiskin: Arizona.

Cohen: Which just... Well, Arizona sounds dreadful to me for many reasons, one of which is it's locked. But, yeah, it's a whole moving into-

Raiskin: Even if it's lesbian community.

Cohen: Yeah. I mean that has a little bit more appeal, but right now, it's yeah, the whole community. I mean, I've never lived in an apartment. I've always lived in... I mean, in San Francisco, there were the town homes, but I... Oh I like some space, some grass.

Raiskin: So if you can imagine somebody watching this-

Cohen: What?

Raiskin: If you can imagine somebody's watching interview, somebody younger, maybe, is there something you could

tell them having lived the richness of your life? Any advice you would give to a younger person?

Cohen: Wow. The advice I would give to a younger person. All these cliches come up. I think the one thing that I think about is that change will happen. Things change. I mean, I started out, I came out in '74, lesbians and gay men were outlaws. We were outlaws. And we were just pariahs. I mean, we were just... And now lesbians and gay men can get married, which honestly is wonderful on one level is, I mean, it's great, but it's bizarre. But that's the arc of change that's happened in my lifetime, in my adult life. And so that's what I think about, it's change. It's the possibility is always there and change for good. The good.

Raiskin: So you're optimistic about the political future in the United States?

Cohen: No. No, I'm not. I think what I have read and what I have experienced of younger people is they are not so concerned about... Educated, younger people, about who you sleep with, whether you're gay or straight. So on a

certain level, I think that's gotten... It's different now. It's better. But yeah, the rest of... Yeah, I'm not hopeful. It'd be interesting to see if the human race will be around in the next 150 years in this form. Gosh, and on that note-

Long: Well, was there anything else that you wanted to talk about, we didn't bring up?

Cohen: I don't believe so. Yeah.

Raiskin: It's been really nice talking to you.

Long: Yes, thank you very much.

Cohen: Well, thank...

[END OF INTERVIEW]