Oral History Interview with Sarah Douglas

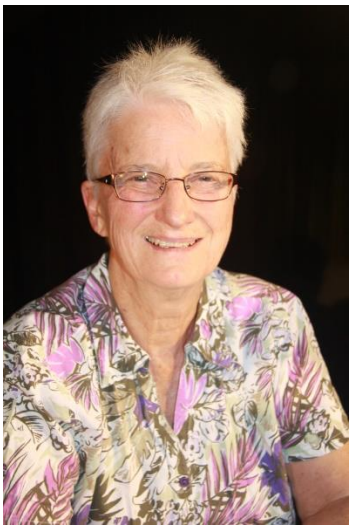
Interview conducted on July 31, 2018

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

Sarah Douglas, ca. 1984



Sarah Douglas, July 31, 2018

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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 to 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 July 31, 2018. Sarah was born in 1944 in Asheville, North Carolina. She attended Smith College in 1962 for two years and then UC Berkeley, graduating in 1966 with a degree in philosophy. She was politically radical and became a lesbian in 1968. Sarah received a Ph.D. in computer science from Stanford University in 1983 and came to teach at the University of Oregon Computer & Information Science Department. She was attracted to Eugene because she knew about the lesbian separatist lands in southern Oregon and about the strong lesbian community in Eugene. Sarah was closeted at UO until she got tenure in 1989. She discusses the LGBT faculty at UO and homophobia on campus. Sarah served as co-chair with Cheyney Ryan of the UO Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Concerns, 1989-1991, which addressed inequalities experienced by LGBT faculty, staff, and students on campus. Sarah discusses when a Law School instructor, Greg Johnson, came out to his class in 1990, and the consequences of that action. She discusses the Oregon Citizen's Alliance (OCA). Sarah lived in Veneta, Oregon, just outside Eugene, at that time. She discusses the conservative nature of the citizens of Veneta, but the liberal character of the City Council. Sarah discusses the periodical The Lavender Network, which was published in Eugene. She concludes her interview by discussing transgender issues, aging issues, and states that she does not believe in marriage.

Additional subjects: Aging; AIDS (disease); Ballot Measure 8; Ballot Measure 9; Brand, Myles; Closeted gays -- United States; Coming out (sexual orientation); Drescher, Marlene; Gender nonconformity; Lesbian community; Marriage equality; Moral turpitude; Oregon University System; Racism; Same-sex marriage; Transgender people; University of Oregon – Faculty; University of Oregon – Students; University of Oregon. Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Concerns; Veneta (Or.); Vitulli, Marie; Vetri, Dominick R.

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Session Number: 010

Narrator: Sarah Douglas

Location: University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon

Interviewers: Linda Long and Judith Raiskin

Date: July 31, 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 Sarah Douglas on July 31, 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.

Sarah, 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.

Douglas: Yes, I give permission for the interview and also the distribution or circulation of any of the media documents that come out of it.

Long: Okay. Wonderful. Thank you very much. Why don't we go ahead and just ask you a basic question. Can you please tell us where you were born, where you grew up, and something about your early background?

Douglas: Yes. Do you want my birthdate?

Long: Sure.

Douglas: I can give that. Yeah. January 25, 1944, just at the very end of the Second World War. I was born in Asheville, North Carolina. We were there only maybe three or four months. Both my father and my grandfather were in the Navy, in the Civil Engineering Corps and they were at war. My grandfather had decided to move the women of his family to Asheville, North Carolina as being a very safe place in case we were invaded. And so I was there born, my mother was pregnant. I was the first grandchild, actually on both sides of the family. My mother was there with her three sisters and my grandmother. It was a very female oriented, matriarchal-oriented thing.

After about three or four months, we moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where we joined my grandmother's sisters, three sisters, Sarah, Ann, and Ruth. I am named after two of them. So I'm Sarah Ann. Then we moved again, and this time my mother moved to some Navy base somewhere, I think in Rhode Island. My father

was still absent. He had visited once or twice and I didn't really see my father till I was almost three or four years old. And at that time, we moved to Bermuda. Now the reason for this was my father was involved in the war in the Pacific and the invasion of Okinawa and everything and all of that didn't seem to settle down and end until that period of time.

About 1947, '48, we moved to Bermuda. Then from there on, the rest of my life until about seventeen, it was one move after the other, either one or two years and sometimes even less than that. We lived in a lot of different places in the United States. Also in the Philippines, in Bermuda. I have two sisters that were born in those places. And then for a period of time we lived in Virginia, but we moved for several places from Norfolk, Virginia to Northern Virginia. I started high school there in Virginia, in McLean, Virginia. I was in my sophomore, and junior year, we moved to Newport, Rhode Island.

Then the final year of my high school, my father retired from the Navy and decided that the whole family would move to California and he was going to begin in Ph.D. study at Stanford University in civil engineering. And so we all moved and I spent my last year of high school in Palo Alto.

Long: Palo Alto High School?

Douglas: Not Palo Alto High School. It was Cubberley, which doesn't exist anymore. It sort of grew up in the '50s and then they did away with

it maybe ten years after I graduated. And then they had created a new high school called Gunn High School where my two sisters, and by that time a brother who's fifteen years younger than I am, they all attended that. From there I went two years to Smith College. I had a full scholarship because my dad was a PhD student at age 45. And from—

Long: Sarah, what year did you start at Smith?

Douglas: 1962.

Long: Okay.

Douglas: Yes. And after two years there, I was very unhappy. I don't know. I was sort of a science major, not sort of, I *was* a science major. I wanted to do medical research in biochemistry and such. I was aiming towards a science career, but that was not a good place to choose if you wanted to really do science. I took all the science courses they had there. Then I also in the summertime, my senior year in high school that summer before going to college, I got a telephone call from the school district and the school district was getting a computer and they had asked the high school who their good math students were and I was named. They asked me if I'd like to learn how to program a computer.

It was a commitment, all the years that I was in college I would come back and work every summer. I learned how to program a computer and immediately it was this incredible fusion of both mathematics and language because programming languages are

languages and I was just fascinated. I worked there every summer while I was in college. In my second year at Smith, I was getting really unhappy with the science stuff and I was also getting a lot more politically involved in things, and the civil rights movement was going on. And so I came to the conclusion that I should transfer to the University of California at Berkeley and also that I should switch majors.

Now, what happened, I switched to philosophy. So I graduated with a degree in philosophy. I actually have enough for a degree in biochemistry, too. But philosophy was the thing because during the summer after everybody went home, I would play with the computer and I tried to get it to answer questions in English about biology. I had a little database, we would call it, of biology information. And I had simple questions that you wanted to ask in English. So I'd have to parse those. So I took courses in the summertime in linguistics and grammar and all of those sort of things and I decided that I needed to figure out how to put meaning in the computer.

I thought, Well, where do they know about meaning? And I thought, ”Philosophy.” So I switched without ever having taken a philosophy course, I switched to philosophy and graduated from Berkeley with a degree in philosophy and my father was just distraught. He said, "How on earth are you going to earn a living?" And such and so forth. And I said, "That's okay. I know how to program a computer and I believe that I will always have some sort

of vocational opportunities in that." And I couldn't have been more right. I mean, it was absolutely true because my whole career then, both working and academic, is in computer science. So that's how that happened.

After I graduated from Berkeley in 1966, it was the free speech movement times. It was civil rights. It was anti-Vietnam. I was so upset with the United States that I left the country for a year and a half and lived in Europe, lived mostly in Spain and in a little second-third class pension. I had a one-way ticket to London and $1,000. And I sort of ran out of money about halfway through. I worked as a tourist guide for a Spanish bus company at an English resort on the north end of the Island of Majorca. Most people don't know about all these things.

Raiskin: Can I back up a little bit?

Douglas: Yeah.

Raiskin: And ask you— in high school or when you went to Smith, did you identify as a lesbian?

Douglas: No, I did not. In fact, when I was at Berkeley, my house, in the house that I was sharing with other people, there was a woman who was a lesbian and a very good friend of mine. We had gone to high school together, but she was ambivalent about that. And she had fallen in love with another woman in high school and the parents had come down really hard on them. I did know a little bit about that [her sexuality], but I didn't have any real identification.

I went away to Europe for a year and a half. And then when I came back, I started programming computers again because I decided that if I wanted to change the system, I had to be here to change the system.

So this was a radical departure from my parents who were obviously Navy, very conservative, staunch Republicans. I'd grown up that way. I loved Eisenhower, but in college and particularly at Smith with the civil rights movement and then at Berkeley, of course, everything just blew up. I mean, I just began to realize what was going on and that really affected me.

I became quite a liberal radical person, at least according to my parents. I worked for almost fifteen years and I was in computing in the production end, I had groups of people that programmed for me and did design of systems and things like that.

I was the chief “architect,” quote unquote, of the admission's application system for all twenty-two California state universities. So it was one of the first applications. This is very early in computing, very early. That went on for a long time and I ended up being the computer data processing director at Cabrillo Community College in Santa Cruz. I moved over to Santa Cruz and from there, one of my mother's friends took me out to lunch and she said, "How's everything going?" And she and my mother were feminists. I mean, they really were. She said to me, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "Oh, I'm just bored. But I love Cabrillo. I love the Santa Cruz community." And by this time I was a lesbian.

So I would say 1968 is when I became a lesbian after I came back from Europe and I fell in love with the very woman who was in my house at Berkeley.

And we are still friends. She lives in Jerusalem now. She's been in Israel for almost thirty years and we are very close friends. Santa Cruz community was fantastic in terms of being a lesbian but I was not out. I mean, in the educational environment one did not do that, but I knew many lesbians of course, in Eugene and I mean, in Santa Cruz. The result of this lunch with my mother's friend, I decided to apply for a Ph.D. program in computer science. So at thirty four, I went to graduate school for the first time and I spent five years at Stanford and got a Ph.D. And I was almost forty years old when I was out on the job market looking for a job as an assistant professor.

And that's how I ended up coming to Eugene, is that I accepted a job here at the university. But then I should make this point. At that point in time, there was huge demand for anybody that had a degree in computer science like that and especially from Stanford. I could have really gone anywhere and I did not want, first of all, I did not want to go to any of the Ivy League schools because you would go there and then you would not get tenure. I didn't want that. I was too old and I also wanted a lesbian community. And so it was Eugene that spoke to me and my partner at the time who was Namascar Shaktini. You may know her, Julee.

She had a Ph.D. in the History of Consciousness from Santa Cruz and was a comparative literature person, but primarily women's studies and worked on Monique Wittig, a French writer, French lesbian feminist writer.

We had done some research and we knew about the women's land in Oregon, and we talked to people and we got a connection to Marlene Drescher here in Eugene and they just told us what a great lesbian community it was. And so I accepted the job at the U of O. We did not go to women's land because we couldn't figure out how we could support ourselves. I accepted a job in the Computer Science Department at the U of O and Namascar taught off and on in the French Department. And we were immediately embraced by CSWS and—

Raiskin: —and Women's Studies—

Douglas: —Joan Acker and Marilyn Farwell and many, the few lesbians that— none of us were out. Marsha Mabrey in the Music School who later, unfortunately, did not get tenure. She was African American and one of the only— I should point this out, the biggest concern I had about coming here to Eugene was racism. And I knew about this because at Stanford I ran into a woman in the comparable CSWS down there. I ran into a woman who was Japanese and had been here teaching in the Linguistics Department and had terrible experience and she was very upset. So, I knew right from the beginning. I also did some analysis of the history of

Oregon and Eugene and I knew that blacks and Jews couldn't own property until 1948, I think, and the Constitution changed.

But I was very concerned. I could see it was very, very white. But, I said coming back from Europe, you can go there and you can try to change things. And so I really right from the beginning was involved in the university and trying to make changes here at the university. So there you have it.

Raiskin: Why do you think that your colleagues who were gay and lesbian were not out at that time?

Douglas: Well, this is a very important question. Technically, at that time at the U of O, we did have a rule that Dom Vetri in the Law School had managed to get on the books. And we are talking about OARs. This is before the university became private-public and had its own independent board as it does today. It was part of the Oregon University System and there were a set of rules for each university as well as overall for the whole system. And in late 1970s, Dom had managed to get a non-discrimination on faculty for sexual orientation. He had managed to get that in there.

But in general, you knew, for example, moral turpitude is the biggest reason for eliminating your tenure if you manage to get tenure. And of course, the two are always connected because getting tenure means you have to be tenurable, which means that you wouldn't have any moral turpitude. So the whole issue, the whole social issue, there was one of intense discrimination. And so

I led two lives. I had a private life in the lesbian community and a few lesbians here at the university but I was not out until I got tenure. And—

Long: What year was that?

Douglas: Nineteen eighty-seven, I believe. I came here in 1983 and I guess tenure would have been '87, '88. Moral turpitude has to do with your behavior. And at that time there were anti-sodomy laws in Oregon. And in fact, there was a case of a woman who was, I think a PE teacher on the coast who had a relationship with a student and she was charged with sodomy. I mean, how do women commit sodomy? But there was danger out there. My department suspected, I believe, although I lived out in Veneta on a farm or outside of Veneta, even, on a farm. And I just really maintained two separate lives and almost all of the women faculty here were in the closet. I mean, really, I mean, there were suspicions, but we were all pretty much in the closet.

And then I got tenure and then we had the task force on Lesbian and Gay Affairs.

Long: Before we get to the task force—

Douglas: That was, yes—

Long: Yeah, that was a big moment to have the task force. But let's go back a little bit. Can you tell us what Eugene— how you found Eugene and what Eugene was like—

Douglas: Oh yeah. Sure.

Long: — and have you had this kind of dual existence?

Douglas: Yeah. Well, I was used to living a dual existence. I really didn't come out to my parents until, oh, I guess I was almost fifty years old. I mean, there was never any question with my siblings and my parents knew but they never acknowledged it and they never talked about it. There was this duality thing. But within Eugene and in the lesbian community, people were totally out and I just loved having a community of people. So there was Marlene Drescher and at that time she was with Eva Bever who is a real estate agent. We met Marilyn Farwell and Marsha Mabrey in the Music School. And there were a number of other women in the community, Christine Frazer, who ran this garage, women's— sort of like a co-op garage.

She was also in Starflower. And Jamie King and Laverne Gagehabib, who's no longer here but was one of the only other black women in the community. She and her partner, I think Jan McLaughlin or Loughlin or something like that. And I mean, again, just a total lack of diversity. I mean, just very disturbing to me. I was involved at the university for years in affirmative action and with the black community here and such, but it was rare.

So, there were a lot of women that were living outside of the university. There was Mother Kali's bookstore, which was kind of the center of the community in many ways. And Izzie Harbaugh

and Lorraine Ironplow who was her partner. They lived out in the Veneta area. So we sometimes went over to their house.

I broke up with Namascar in about 1986 and so I really didn't have any permanent partners until I became involved with Marie Vitulli, who's in the Math Department here and that was about 1994. So I was a single dyke. I had a lot of friends who kept wanting me to put things in the *Weekly* and all that. But, yeah, the community was very much a community. And then it started, times changed and things started to split off. I don't know, at the university here, I knew Julee, I knew her partner Mary, who came, I don't know in 1985, 1987.

Raiskin: Eighty-seven.

Douglas: Yeah. There was a whole group of us. We would sometimes go skiing and sometimes do things like that, but we also had these country dykes. We had a group of women that lived in the country and we called ourselves the Country Dykes, and that was Kathy Niebel, who's still here in Eugene, was working for FedEx, as a driver for FedEx. All these wonderful women. Eva Bever, of course, still had her place out in Veneta and I had bought this farm just a block away from her house. There was a lot of stuff going on there.

Raiskin: Did you ever feel fearful living in the country?

Douglas: No. I had lived in the country mostly as an adult. I lived in a cabin in redwood canyon in Santa Cruz. Living in the country itself was not anything that I was afraid of. And of course, we haven't got to

the OCA yet, but I left all my doors unlocked in Veneta and my car unlocked and everything. And when we moved into Eugene in 1991 [2001], I had the opposite. I was fearful, but that has to do with general criminal issues or whatever. And you're at—

Raiskin: I meant as a lesbian living in the country.

Douglas: Yeah, I did not, I did not feel that. The whole neighborhood was a pretty progressive neighborhood and we were very out within that neighborhood and there were straight people and conservative people. In fact, well, we'll get to that later about the OCA, but the mayor of Veneta and his wife were both staunch members of the Republican Party at that time, but it was the old Republican Party. And then when the OCA stuff happened, I testified before the city council out—I was out, and they were incredibly supporting and such. I had more fear at the university to tell you the truth because of the things that I did later with the task force. I was very out. I was out there. I got death threats and all kinds of lovely, anonymous things.

Long: Can I ask about the farm you had? In what way was it a farm? And why did you want to have a farm if you did not grow up on a farm?

Douglas: No, I was a suburban kid for the most part, but I loved the country and I'd spent a lot of time in my youth hiking and camping and I loved nature. I lived in Santa Cruz in this cabin on a creek in a redwood canyon for almost twelve years. I mean, it was pretty

primitive. I just love living in the country. I love being in the country. I think because of nature, the nature connections, the trees. One of the reasons that we very much wanted— Namascar and I very much wanted to leave the San Francisco Bay Area was because we could not afford to buy a house. The prices or the cost of living was just skyrocketing.

And we were now both academics and it was really hopeless. It was just impossible to— I had a small house in Santa Cruz, which I had near the Cabrillo College and I sold that. I was able to sell that and take the money and then buy this farm in Veneta. It was not really the farm per se, but the fact that we were in the country. Both of us were novices and Namascar wanted goats. The first thing that happened was we got goats and two of them were pregnant, and they had three babies. And of course, we were milking and we had to learn how to milk and all of that. We had chickens, we had a giant garden, we had cats and dogs, that kind of thing. But more than anything, it was in the country and there was space and trees and you could see the moonrise and, etc.

Raiskin: What was your involvement with some of these measures? You referred to the Oregon Citizens Alliance and around, so the dates and the task force, how those things intersected.

Douglas: Yeah. Well, the task force started in 1989 and originally the chair of the task force was appointed by Olum, who was the president then because we had had an incident with a gay student who had run for student body president. And he had been just lambasted with

all kinds of discriminatory, awful stuff. So, the president, and I think also triggered by Cheyney. Cheyney is very much—

Raiskin: Cheyney Ryan?

Douglas: Cheyney Ryan was very much pro-student and very— he had been a conscientious objector in the Vietnam War. I mean, there was a whole group of us on campus that had all those experiences. He convinced the president that we should form a task force to look at the problem, at what the experience was for gay and lesbian people. Well, they didn't use the word lesbian, the gay people. Now there had been three, I believe, three other presidents of the student body association who were lesbians and they were in fact, taunted and such with pornographic— I mean, it was awful. But it had not become the issue that it was when the gay man, and unfortunately I can't remember his name right now. When he ran for office, he did not win.

Cheyney was appointed the chair of this task force. And immediately there was an uproar from those of us on campus. By this time I was totally out because I had gotten tenure and this is 1989, in summer of 1989. I was totally out. Somehow the discussion came that one of us should be co-chairing that committee.

Raiskin: One of us being?

Douglas: One of us lesbians. And that was partly because we needed the gender balance. And we also thought that whoever was the chair of this or involved with it should have some stake in the community

and really know. And so somehow, I mean, I said "Yes." So, I'm going to do it. I volunteered and Cheyney was very welcoming. He was fantastic to work with. He had a lot more political experience that than I did at working in the university with these things. And so we started the task force and it ran until 1991, I believe. I'm not sure. I think it was 1991.

Long: And for clarification, it was—

Douglas: No, 1990. Sorry.

Long: Okay. UO president Myles Brand established the task force?

Douglas: No, it was Olum who established the task force.

Long: Oh.

Douglas: Yes. And Brand inherited it.

Long: I see.

Douglas: I think it was during the summer. It was right before Brand came. Do you know what dates Brand was here?

Long: I don't.

Douglas: Yeah. Because I'm pretty sure Olum is the one that started it. And he had no idea what he was doing with the two of us, both Cheyney and I. We were really out to do something. We had twenty-one members of the task force, most of them were straight.

Long: Do you remember who some of those members were?

Douglas: Yeah. Actually, I have a copy of the task force report. And in that it lists all of the task force members here and additional participants and consultants. We had people on the faculty, we had students, we had staff. I don't believe we had any community members, but we had people like Shirley Wilson who was the Dean of Students who I think we all suspected was a lesbian, but she wasn't out. We had Dom Vetri, who was from the Law School who was the only—he was out. We had a number of other people. I don't know who I should mention here, but many of them were straight people that we brought in to work on issues. We met regularly and at the end of this, we decided on a survey.

And a lot of this was in some sense what I was trained and interested in because of the work that I do in computer science. We did a survey of the faculty and students both straight and not, all around the university to look at the issue of homophobia on the campus. And the results of that were very, very important for the committee.

But we also looked at things like, we looked at curriculum and instruction in lesbian and gay studies and there was just nothing at that time, very little. Dom taught a course on legal issues and that had been about it. And then in summertime, once in a while, there might be a course where the word lesbian was mentioned through Women's Studies, but that was the worst. But we looked at all kinds of things.

We ended up writing this report, and this report is anonymous, intentionally anonymous. Basically I wrote most of it and put it together, but I got help from Mary Wood and Anne Laskaya in the English Department. We spent one summer taking all this stuff that had been collected and putting it together. But it is a result of the whole group. And because of my feminist background, my rather radical feminist background, I believe very much that it should be very non-hierarchical. That this was something that came out of all of us.

Raiskin: What were the findings of the survey?

Douglas: I have something for you. Let's see. This is a letter May 31, 1991 when the task force ended, to Myles Brand. We recommended over a hundred items for change on the university campus, but there were some top ones, really important ones. And one of them was to establish in the student services office under the Dean of Students, a position specifically for lesbian and gay students. We added the word lesbian to the Gay Task Force. We added “lesbian.” By the time we ended some of this, I think we had added the word bisexual also. Let me just show you, this says, "Dear President Brand, the Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Concerns," and notice I got lesbian first, right? Because of my feminist issues. "Has major concerns about the existing practices of acknowledging, advising, investigating, and resolving issues of discrimination and harassment against members of protected groups on this campus.

We acknowledge the value in having the formal grievance policies and procedures examined from a legal perspective as Pete Swan, Melinda Greer and Alison Baker are doing currently. We also applaud the public disclosure and discussion which has surrounded their efforts. At the same time, we wish to draw your attention to the fact that this process in and of itself is not enough. Two major surveys we did on campus last year, one of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students and another of all faculty and staff indicate to us that there are enormous problems with the existing system relative to individuals who experience both discrimination and harassment as a result of their sexual orientation.

And while this data does not speak for women in general, or people of color or any of the other groups, it strongly suggests that they may be experiencing similar problems."

Douglas: The rest of this letter is a summary of the findings of the survey. And just top level, one half, 54 percent of the gay and lesbian and bisexual students reported being verbally harassed or threatened. Nearly one-third of lesbian, gay, and bisexual faculty and staff reported being verbally harassed or threatened. Now, among heterosexuals, only 2 percent have been verbally harassed or threatened and less than 1 percent reported experiencing a sexual harassment, physical confrontation or assault on the basis of sexual orientation.

We were making the case here that the university needed to do a whole bunch of things. And with Myles Brand, we had several

things happen immediately after this report. So this was presented in May 1991. Let's see if I have my dates here. I can't, yeah. The task force report just precedes that and is basically a response to the lack of action, lack of response. Pete Swan was the lawyer for the university and they were just trying to say, "Okay, nice job, good thing that you're committing to this." And actually things got pretty wild after that. We had the case of Greg Johnson. So, have you— maybe heard about Greg Johnson? And one of the things that happened, and this was just before the report came out.

In October 11, 1990, there was an instructor at the Law School named Greg Johnson and he was an instructor. He wasn't a tenured faculty member. And on Coming Out Day October 11, 1990, he came out to his class and had them read, it was a legal writing class, and had them read a law case that had to do with sexual orientation discrimination, anti-sodomy. And people in the class complained to the Dean of the Law School about this and there was a huge uproar. It got to the point where there were meetings, large meetings in lecture halls with the students. This was the '90s, too, the early, late '80s and '90s. I mean, we had a lot of political stuff going on on campus.

What happened was that I got pulled into this. Cheyney did not want to be pulled into it, but I got pulled into it. And of course, I immediately wrote a letter to the president and said that I was horrified at what had been going on and they were basically firing this guy. I don't know how this got out, but I get a call from *The*

Register-Guard, from a reporter at *The Register-Guard* who basically on the headlines on the front page says, "Gay Prof, Others Press for Dean's Resignation." Well, the "gay prof" was me and I had written a letter to Myles Brand about— I felt the dean should step down— Maury Holland. I mean, the stuff that was said was just unbelievable. And so there was a big uproar. All the TV cameras and stuff showed up in my office.

I had no idea what happens. I'd never been put in the media before. They kept playing this interview with me again and again in the nightly news. And Cheyney told me that he kept getting these calls from these people over at the Law School to shut her up. Anyway, it was a big thing. And as a result of this, I think it was really made clear that there were issues on the campus, but they didn't really do much about it. And so that's why we wrote this letter later and specifically really pushed to get the position in the Dean of Students Office and also the standing committee in the faculty. Well, it wasn't just faculty, it was the University Senate at that point.

Long: Can you describe that committee in greater detail?

Douglas: Yeah. Well, I think it began about 1992 or '93. It was easy to get that. There was a committee on the status of women, but there had never been one on gay stuff. There were, I think Dianne Dugaw and Amanda Powell by that time had come to the university and they were on this committee. Faculty have the choice of committees that they really should participate in, although many don't. But the

University Senate by that time was, it had been before, but not really— it was a university senate for both faculty, staff and students. And so the committee had representatives of all of those three areas on it. And what happened was, well, the task force, we started this fantastic tradition in the spring in, I guess it was April, I'm not sure. I can't remember because it doesn't happen anymore.

Which morphed into the Intersex weekly celebration, one-week celebration. And it was really, it was, let's see, it was somehow during that Gay Pride Week, and I can't remember, gee, I can't remember exactly what week that was, but it seems like it's sometime in March or April, something like that. The committee invited Barney Frank, who was the only out Representative in the House, the Federal House, to come with his partner Herb Moses, to the U of O to speak. They came and we filled, what is it? It's Geology 100, I always think, but that's not the name of the building anymore—that giant lecture hall over there in the middle of campus. And we also had a panel on lesbian and gay studies. Really neat people came.

I actually have recordings of these, so I'm willing to share those with you. We could copy them, but that was 1991. Okay. So all of this is happening. And then, da-da, we have 1992 and the OCA. I mean, all of a sudden all this stuff is going on on campus. When they outed me in *The Register-Guard* and the guy that did this, Jeff Wright, was the reporter, a number of years later apologized, called me up and apologized to me and had not realized what he had

done and had not realized what that meant. But I told him, no problem. It happened and I am out and that's not an issue. But the whole issue of— Well, up to this point, and this is November 29, 1990, they had never used the word "gay" in *The Register-Guard*. They always used "homosexual."

So, all of a sudden, there's all this stuff coming at everybody. I mean, it's coming on the campus, it's coming in the community. And—

Raiskin: Because of the Oregon Citizens Alliance?

Douglas: No, before. I mean, the Oregon Citizens Alliance emerges out of all of this. And of course, the gay rights issues in San Francisco, the San Francisco Gay Parade was making big press and there were lots of people going to it and such. That's how that, and actually that guy, I can't remember his name, the OCA guy, came from California and they came here to Oregon. I think they thought they had a chance at doing something here. They had Measure 9, and that was, let's see, which date was Measure 9?

Long: Nineteen ninety-two.

Douglas: Nineteen ninety-two. Yeah. It was statewide and we defeated it. And it really targeted teachers and people like that in particular, the whole big thing about the gays are out there, they're pedophiles and they're doing these horrible things to children. They're proselytizing their agenda. Measure 9 though, was defeated. It was a statewide measure. It was defeated. But some voting precincts

voted for it. And one of them was the Veneta area. So, there was a big push by the OCA all over Oregon in all the rural communities to bring this back as a local measure, as a local issue, which they did in Veneta.

And that's what I was saying like before, at that point in time, I mean, I was totally out and I went to the city council in Veneta and talked about being a landowner and paying my taxes and being a member of the community and supporting the schools and being at the university and that I was a lesbian. And then by that time, Marie and I had gotten somewhat involved with each other and we went door to door in the Veneta community to try to educate people and convince them in the vote. And then when the vote came, it basically was against us, but it was ignored. It was totally ignored by the city council and everybody else. The OCA did their thing, but they also emerged out of a whole social movement. Part of what went on with the task force, too, was the recognition of the AIDS, God, how do you call it, plague.

And up to that point, gay men had not really been very out. I mean, there was the Mattachine Society, there were a number of groups, but women by and large lesbians, became much more politicized through the feminist movement, as myself. The AIDS movement, it changed everything. And so when we were working with the task force, we were able to go in both as men and women in a united front. And when that comes together that way, when all of a sudden people start coming out of the closet, and by this time I was

out of the closet in my department and it was okay as long as you didn't rock the boat, but people were rocking the boat. And it was happening all over the country and this was just a big movement that was going on all over the United States and in many, many, many communities.

And at that point, we were all really, our political focus at that point was to come out if we could, if it were safe, to come out if we could, and to also publicize how normal we were, which is always— that's a somewhat dangerous thing. But of course, we weren't dwelling on our sexual activities or anything like that. We were dwelling on the fact that we had families and that we had chosen to have families. We had children and we were normal in every other way. We paid our taxes, we voted, we taught in the schools, and we didn't do all of those terrible things that they were saying. And that was really important.

I remember there was a parade, I think in Springfield. And there was a couple that had a child in a stroller or something and they were photographed in the parade and that kind of thing. So there was this whole movement to make people aware that we were actually normal members of our society even though our choice in sexual partners was same-gender. That was going on all over. And—

Raiskin: Was there any controversy about putting forth that image as opposed to the more radical—

Douglas: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I think there were a lot of people who benefited by having a very closed community, the dyke bars and I mean, they're all gone now. I mean, there were all these wonderful bars in San Francisco and I mean, they're really, the softball games and all of those kinds of things. And we kind of lost that sense of community when we became more normalized. I mean, and certainly it ends up with gay marriage, which in my opinion is not over. None of this is over. It will probably never be over. It will just keep going back and forth. But yeah, there were a lot of people who are perhaps a little more radical, but the radical people thought that it was really radical to have families, to have children and to have their own children and create their own families.

That was very much going on then. I was basically, when I came to Eugene, I was about as radical lesbian separatist as you could get and remained that way, but sort of in the closet. And at that time there were several kinds of feminism. There was cultural feminism and I came from a Marxist political background, so I was ready for the revolution or something. But I mean, really, I mean, we did, we've done this. I'm never really confident that it's done. But the Eugene lesbian community was a really wonderful, absolutely, incredibly wonderful place in the 1980s and into the '90s. After the task force, I was still involved in the lesbian community to a large extent that we had a publication called *The Lavender Network*.

And *The Lavender Network* was a publication that we had. I have a copy here I was going to leave with you. This is sort of, I don't

know, a magazine, I guess. I think it came out every two months. It's “Oregon's Lesbian and Gay News Magazine.” And this is August 1993. I edited a piece in here on psychiatric survivors. And looking at how the DSM, the psychiatric diagnostic manual that decides if you're sick or not, you're mentally ill. How that had been used historically and in people's actual lives as homosexuals and as gay and lesbian people. And so I continued to do this kind of work all through the '90s. And I don't know, things changed to some extent. I mean, as I said today, we have gay marriage, but who knows how long that's going to be.

Yeah. And I wouldn't say there's a lesbian community anymore in Eugene quite like that period of time. That was a very, it was a combination of feminist and lesbian really—

Raiskin: What did it feel like living through that time here?

Douglas: Well, I came out when I was twenty-two, twenty-three. I mean, the only thing we had was Freud who said that you had matured immaturely sexually and of course, all these horrid things. I mean, my mother once pointed out to me a high school counselor who was, obviously now years later, of course, I realized she was a lesbian and she dressed in suits with a tie. She had a tie. And she always looked very nice. She had a skirt on, but she had short hair. And my mother made some sort of noises and hints about, “Well, you don't want to do that.” And I don't know if she thought I knew what it meant. I had no idea. And that kind of prejudice, that kind of discrimination where I could lose my job because of who I am

and who I love, when you grow up with that both in terms of your mental ability to survive in society and your social— people go into the closet.

And the closet is a horrendous thing. It took me about five years of work with a psychological counselor to be able to come out to my parents, even though everybody in my family pretended that, "Oh yes, yeah, we know about her." When you come to a community where everybody is so strong and supportive and you've made a choice, you've made a commitment as to where you're going to work and where you're going to live, it was so exciting and comforting, so to speak, but I was still in the closet. Yeah. And until I got tenure, I was in the closet and then I was out of the closet.

Yeah. The other thing about the task force which was really good for me was I got to know a number of the gay men in the community. Two of my really good friends, a couple, Harry Wolcott and Norm DeLue had been together for years. I did a Fulbright lectureship in India and Harry was doing one in Thailand. We visited in Thailand as well as here. We were very, very close. He unfortunately passed away a number of years ago, but he had gotten involved with a young guy. He and his partner, Norm, owned a property out up, Willamette Street, way back up in the country there. And they owned maybe twenty, twenty-five acres. It was wooded and they had built this beautiful home up there.

Harry had gotten involved with a young guy who was renting a cabin on their property and they had a sexual relationship. And so this young guy then went to the police and yeah, the whole thing, right? Harry got dragged into court and was outed. I mean, that was it. And that was probably— I would guess that was in the '70s or '80s, about '70s. And he wrote a book about it. I have a copy of that book. He wrote a book about this, but he became, he was in the Ed School and he was an educational anthropologist. And that was really difficult because Norm was a school teacher in the Springfield, was a elementary school teacher in the Springfield district. That was all over the newspapers and everything. And it was really incredible—

Raiskin: Did he lose his job?

Douglas: No. Oh no, he did not. He did not. And yeah, I mean, that kind of thing, that was still going on. But there were lots of other gay men in the university that hardly anyone knew existed. I think they felt more vulnerable than the lesbian women who were supported by CSWS and the whole feminist stuff. And there was strong unity there and support, but for the gay guys it was really hard for them except for Dom Vetri. Dom Vetri was incredible. He was really out there. He was just great. But he was, of course, a lawyer and in the Law School.

Raiskin: What do you think about Eugene as a place to age as a lesbian now that you're retired?

Douglas: Well, we own our own home and we have a lot of friends here. We have many, many, many friends. I don't know. I mean, I don't see any difference between just being younger and aging. I don't know. It's all one thing, one seamless thing. I still have a desk in an office at the university here and I'm appreciated by my department. So I have connections to the university and, I don't know, what can I say? I have many, many, many friends, lesbian and not lesbian.

Raiskin: And are your friends talking about what they are envisioning for their future?

Douglas: I think the word that everybody worries about is the physical decline and that's both the physical body in the normal sense of it as well as mental dementia. And people are kind of worried about, what are we going to do if those things start happening to us? Where are we going to live with? Mobility. People are talking about downsizing, getting into a house where there are only one set of little stairs or something. But there was a really interesting thing a couple of months ago and I can't remember exactly the date, AARP, which is the, what is it? American Association of Retired Persons. Marie is a member of that and I'm by default a member of that.

They had a panel here, a workshop panel here in Eugene and we got invitations to go to this workshop on aging in the lesbian and gay community. And I mean, we were astonished. Here's AARP, and it was people from Portland who had organized this. And there were a whole bunch of lesbian women in the audience that we knew, almost everybody we knew and one gay man who we

also knew. But it was really, really interesting because as this workshop went on and the panel went on, we began to realize that there were a whole bunch of people in the room that we didn't know who they were.

And it turned out they were the providers. What the concern is, is that as you get older and you have to move into some retirement community, what's it going to be like? Is there going to be discrimination? Are there going to be problems like that? The providers that were there in the room were all these people representing these retirement communities, all of the ones around Eugene and talking about services and such as you age, for example, as a veteran being able to get services and things like that. That was an amazing thing because one of the people on the panel gave a brief history of what it was like for people our age—

I'm seventy-four now. But what was it like for people our age to be younger people back in the '60s, the '50s, the '60s, the '70s? And if we're going into these retirement places with our peers, are we going to encounter the same prejudice and the same discrimination? A lot of the younger people in the room where these provider peoples, they were people who represented the sales part of it or they were the managers, they had no idea what we've been through so to speak because gay marriage, oh yeah, it's all solved, problems all solved. Right? Yeah. But the problem is that if you're an older person and you move into these communities,

you're with other older people who may not feel exactly the same way as younger people do today.

And so that was quite— they had no idea about the laws and losing your job and the incredible prejudice, losing your family, and they had no idea about this. That was good and it raised this issue. And of course, the whole issue of transgender came up. And that's the sort of on the edge thing right now in this LGBTQIA community.

We talked about all of this and what could you do? Marie and I have made a few trips around town looking at some of these retirement places. So, we went to Cascade Manor. The salespeople got us in and they had us for this open house for potential people. I mean, I've sworn I'm never moving in, but Marie is interested in this place.

Anyway, so we go there and they give us this tour and everything and then we're all sitting around in this outside—

Raiskin: How did it feel going through as a lesbian couple for the tour?

Douglas: Well, my parents were in a retirement apartment place very similar to this down in the San Francisco Bay area. What I saw was the same kind of facility that my parents were in. And it was very—

Raiskin: But were you self-conscious going through as a lesbian couple?

Douglas: Absolutely not. No, no. I mean, we're totally out. I mean, we have been so out—

Raiskin: And they treated you—

Douglas: Yes. Well, here's what happened, though. We come to the end and we're all having these drinks and things and we're outside in this patio area and there's people who are also there who have lived there, who have come and bought places and stuff. And so Marie says to this guy who's giving the spiel, she says, "How many lesbian and gay couples—how many lesbian and gay people do you have living here?" And there was this total horror. Oh, and all— I can't remember, I think it was a he, all he could say was, "We have a lesbian on the staff." That was it. Well, of course, Marie did that intentionally.

I mean, and then we were looking at one of these other places, these friends of ours from the university are in that Jean Tate place down on Olive, I guess it is. And there were a couple of these apartments for sale and they were very interested in getting other retired U of O people so they'd tell us about this. And everything's going fine and he takes us around and we look at these places and everything and we get to the very end of it. And this is a straight guy with his wife and he's known us for years. He's known me for years. And he says, "Well, and I don't think you would have any problem being here as one of those people." And Marie was like, she has not experienced this. Marie came out when she was forty-five years old. I am her first woman lover and her first partner, first lover, first everything. And she has not experienced this. And of

course, I've told her all about these things and she was just like, she could not believe it.

And she realized it was this coded message and that of course, there was an issue, there would be an issue. So, that's a big thing. One of the things that we've talked about in aging all over has been, are there any co-housing groups? We understand there might be one up in Seattle for lesbians and gays, but every time I look at any of these, it's like, who knows? I mean, I would like to live in a multi-generational context. I don't really want to live in the kind of over fifty-five place that my parents lived in. I just don't like that at all.

Aging is a lot about, how do you manage all of this and people are looking at, well, what happens if you get dementia? And how do you deal with all of this? We are so out that we don't even think about this, we just go in, we do our things. This is my partner. We are not married. We have no legal partnership or anything, but we've been together twenty-four, twenty-five years and we have all kinds of other legal papers which we needed.

Raiskin: Why have you decided not to get married?

Long: Yeah.

Douglas: Oh, well, I'm opposed to marriage. To me it's a bad institution for women and it's about really owning property and it's the history of it. So, yeah, it's to me. And I was very upset when the political agenda, the political focus like Basic Rights Oregon and all of the

groups started to turn towards gay marriage. And it took me a while to be convinced that, well, okay, one can use it symbolically. It's the biggie. It's the biggie. And yeah, I can agree with that. But even if I were straight, I would not be married. I mean, to me, it's just I don't understand it and I don't want to participate in it.

Raiskin: Thinking about this interview in the future, what would you tell a young person watching this about what's important or experiences that you've had that are important and you want people to know what the joys were perhaps of being in this community?

Douglas: Well, to thy own self be true. The integrity that comes from recognizing who you are and that's in various shapes and colors and behaviors, and being able to embrace that and accept that is really critical for many, many things in life, including one's happiness, one's success, one's creativity. And sometimes it's tough. It's really tough, but I'm going to be one of the ones that stands up and I'm always going to be there. I'm going to always be one of those people. I didn't know I was that kind when I was fifteen years old and following my parents' Republicanism. But boy, I sure found out, and I think the world is what you make it. But it's very important to have that integration between the self and who you are in a social context and to not be afraid.

The other thing is I was looking at all of this stuff this morning and I thought, this is amazing. This is just amazing. What an exciting thing to have lived through this period of time, both for women and for lesbian and gay persons. What an incredible thing. And to

have participated in it and to be able to have participated in it. And some of that, of course, we all have certain privileges and I've had many privileges. But I really want to use those privileges to widen that up. And I'm still very concerned about racism in Oregon. It's a very deep concern for me here. It still is in the whole United States, in the world. It's just extremely disturbing.

There's a lot of work to be done. And gay marriage, it doesn't just mean, I mean, there're still sodomy laws on the books in a number of States. And Oregon, by the way, still says that marriage is legally defined as that between a man and a woman. And we haven't eliminated it from the Constitution. That should be eliminated. I don't know why we haven't done that, but that's, I guess onward and upward.

Raiskin: Thank you so much for this interview.

Douglas: Oh, you're welcome.

Long: It's been really great. Thank you so much.

Douglas: Oh, good. Well, I have—

[END OF INTERVIEW]