Oral History Interview with Marlene Drescher

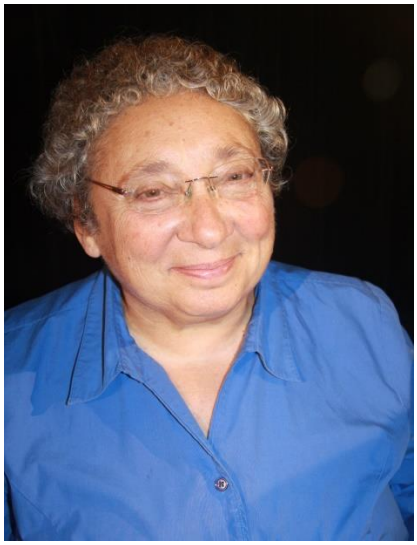
Interview conducted on July 31, 2018

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

Margaret Cormier, left, and Marlene Drescher, 1981



Marlene Drescher, July 31, 2018

Recorded in the University of Oregon Libraries

Preface

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

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

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

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

Abstract

Interview conducted July 31, 2018. Marlene was born in March 1951 in Port Huron, Michigan. Her parents were Jewish immigrants from Ukraine. In 1969, Marlene went to the University of Michigan, and later to law school at Northeastern University. Marlene knew she was a lesbian when she was in college. Marlene talks about the protest movements she was involved in, and being arrested. She also discusses the various law cases she worked on during her time as a law student. She mentions her lesbian collective household, their affinity with the SDS, and her feminism. Marlene visited the West Coast, and moved to Oregon. She worked in a law firm with Mike Goldstein in Eugene starting in 1979. She refers to Eugene as the "Lesbian Mecca." She talks about discrimination and harassment cases she worked on. Marlene was put on retainer by Starflower Natural Foods & Botanicals, and discusses the Starflower cases and the nature of Starflower. Marlene describes social life in the lesbian community, and attitudes about sexuality. She talks about a legal case involving Golden communal land. She talks about various cooperatives in Eugene, which attempted to run businesses in positive and egalitarian ways. After eight years in private practice, Marlene took a job at the University of Oregon as Director of Student Advocacy. In 1988, she represented two gay men who challenged the University of Oregon policy that married student housing was only available for heterosexuals. She talks about the anti-gay political measures in Oregon. She discusses the Baleboostehs Jewish women's group. She discusses her experience foster-parenting, and then adopting her daughter. She discusses Nadia Telsey and the services of the Rape Crisis Network and the Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS). Marlene ponders why so many social services organizations in Eugene were run by lesbians.

Additional subjects: Abortion; Affirmative action; Associated Students of University of Oregon (ASUO); Baleboostehs; Cabbage Lane; Civil rights movements; Climate changes; Collectives; Cooperatives; Cormier, Margaret; Domestic abuse; Domestic Violence Clinic; Drug abuse; Drug use; Garbagio's; Golden Communal Land; Group decision making; Heterosexuality; Homophobia; Income disparity; Health care; Judaism; Karate; Lesbian mothers -- United States; Lesbian separatism – Oregon; Marriage equality; Marijuana; Mother Kali's Bookstore; Newman, Connie; Non-traditional working-class skills; Planned Parenthood; Poverty; Practice of law – United States; Race discrimination; Racism; Spirituality; Rainbow Rascals; Riviera Room; Sex discrimination against women; Sexual harassment; Sheklow, Sally; Students for a Democratic Society (U.S.); Trucking; Vietnam War, 1961-1975 -- Protest

movements -- United States; Wages – women; Women lawyers; Womenspace (Eugene, Or.)

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Session Number: 011

Narrator: Marlene Drescher

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 Marlene Drescher on July 31, 2018, taking place in the University of Oregon Library's 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. Marlene, 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.

Drescher: I agree.

Long: Thank you. So let's just begin with a very straightforward first question. Can you please tell us where you were born, where you grew up and something about your early background?

Drescher: I was born and grew up in Port Huron, Michigan, which is about sixty miles north of Detroit. And my background is that my parents are both Jewish, and they really were— my father was an immigrant from the Ukraine and my mother, also from the Ukraine, was the first born on this continent. Her older sisters were born there. It was pretty much a first generation kind of a thing.

Raiskin: What year were you born?

Drescher: Oh, March 1951.

Long: And do you have brothers or sisters?

Drescher: I had three brothers. Two of them survive.

Raiskin: Okay. And are you— did you grow up there your whole growing up time?

Drescher: I did, until eighteen. I went to University of Michigan and later went to law school in Boston and lived in Chicago and San Francisco along the way.

Raiskin: When did you know you were lesbian?

Drescher: Well, I knew for sure, by first year of college, but I had crushes on girls in high school. I don't think that I thought of them as sexual at the time. So first year of college 1969-1970.

Raiskin: And do you have a sense of what your parents would have thought at the time?

Drescher: I actually have more than a sense. I told them and my mother freaked out and said it was because I smoked marijuana. And my father asked me why I was taking all those women's studies classes. It was very difficult for them because my grandmother, as she aged, lived in the home of my aunt. It was a very traditional Jewish family on both sides. And so much changed in our generation. I think it was really difficult for them, and difficult for me, too, of course. They weren't exactly the "*Call Me by Your Name"* kind of adult figures.

Long: What did you study in college?

Drescher: I started in anthropology. And I was a member of Students for a Democratic Society. I started studying Poli Sci, but really what I studied was what was happening in the streets and among my friends. Later, I did drop out of college for a time and later, as a result of being arrested a few times in political activities and having a crush on the woman lawyer who defended me, I did decide to go to law school. And that's what I eventually did. I took the shortest path and the most appropriate path for me to a law degree which was through Northeastern School of Law which had a co op program and was the by far the most lefty approved and certified law school and in the nation.

And during Law School, I got to work in a number of very political situations. Northeastern after the first year, every other quarter, you have to be placed in a legal setting. I got to work with the People's Law Office on the murder of Fred Hampton and I got to work with the people suing the Chicago police and the FBI for illegal surveillance and other unlawful activities and then later with the Chicago legal center for battered women, which was one of the first legal centers for battered women in the country.

Long: Well, can we— Before you go on, can we go back to when you were a student at the University of Michigan?

Drescher: Yes.

Raiskin: You said you were arrested. Was that for protest during the Civil Rights period or anti-Vietnam?

Drescher: Well, both, yeah. I was arrested a few times and then the police— The big thing that happened with the police was after I came out, I was living in a radical lesbian collective and the police had received a teletype you have to be of a certain age to think of what a teletype is, from Detroit saying that we were harboring a black fugitive who had won a shootout with the police in Detroit. And they broke down our door and threw us out in the snow.

Actually, I was sitting on the couch near the door, and we had a baseball bat near the door because there was a motorcycle gang living around the corner. And the motorcycle gang had been unfriendly to us, we'll say. So, I jumped up from the couch, I heard

the stomping on the front porch. And then one kick, I jumped up two kicks, I had the baseball bat ready, three kicks, the door hit me in the head, my glasses went flying, and a rifle was pointed at me.

So, we sued the police and that really was a very interesting thing because of course, they were outraged that a bunch of crazy lesbians would sue them just for violating our civil rights. And that taught me a lot. That helps me learn both about the police who arrested us whether we did anything or not. For example, I was once in the backseat of a car that was pulled over and the police recognized me as one of the plaintiffs and arrested all of us. I was arrested for interfering and not listening to a police officer. I don't know; we spent the night in jail and then we were [then there was a lesbian lawyer]— someone paid her bail and later had a trial and that was a lawyer, I thought, Oh, wow, she's cool, I want to be like her. And that's when I decided to go law school. I finished up my degree at U of O and went down to—

Raiskin: At University of Michigan.

Drescher: Oh yeah, University of Michigan, thanks.

Raiskin: And did you— were you— can you describe your radical lesbian household and feminism at the time for your community?

Drescher: Yeah. Well, this was Ann Arbor, similar to Eugene, small-ish university town, sort of a progressive community— people really brought progressive values through the university and outside of the university to Ann Arbor. And it was very close to Detroit. And

there was a horrible riot in Detroit in ‘67. I mean, it looked like it was bombed out. It looked like Dresden after World War II. And let's see, you wanted a description of the lesbian collective. We were very strong feminists. I had seen them on campus before, and I knew one of them through SDS. And I was trying to be straight at the time. I was initially in sort of a lefty, hippie collective living with my black male lover when I got together with the lesbians who previously I'd thought of as sort of scary and why did they dress like that? And why they were their— why did they all have short haircuts? And then I became friends with them and came to terms with my own sexuality. What we did, we were very leftist. There was one working class lesbian and she was sort of my hero because she was strong and athletic and her hair was really short.

And we did karate, we all did karate, and we all decided that we would learn nontraditional skills. So Angie, who is the working class one and I decided to go to auto mechanics school and Barb decided to become an electrician, which she did become and still is an electrician today. And Lynn was a carpenter. We each tried to develop these nontraditional working class skills. And Angie and I went to this auto mechanics program. It was largely a court-referred program, so there were a lot of pretty tough guys in there. But Angie was pretty tough, too. It was interesting.

I mean, I remember once the guys were surrounding us and asking us questions and karate came up. And they were all kind of, "Oh, yeah, can you show us some?" We were in a circle— and Angie,

who is very powerful said, "Yeah, I can show you some." She did a series of sidekicks like in a whole circle and they were perfect. And they were like all chest high. It was like, they didn't bug us that much after that. And later, they became friends. There was an abandoned ‘64 Dodge Dart in the backyard of my hippie lefty straight commune. Nobody wanted it. And these guys said, "Well, let's try to start it." And they took a strong rope and they pulled it out. And then it was not an automatic transmission. It was— you could lift up from the clutch when it was going and then try to start it. And we did that. They were pulling the thing and I was in the driver's seat. And I had my first car. That was like, "Hey, this is—" And I love that car. In fact, I wish I still had that car.

Raiskin: What car was it?

Drescher: It was a ‘64 Dodge Dart and it had push buttons, instead of first, second, and third you would push a button or reverse. It was a great old car. In fact, Peter DeFazio used to make commercials with his old Dodge Dart. Anyway, does that give you a sense of the radical lesbian collective? We also had— We had a newspaper for a time and I don't know there was— we had affinity with SDS and we had affinity with a lot of the other political things going on at the time.

Raiskin: Were there other Jewish women involved in your collective?

Drescher: Yes, Lynn who was taking carpentry classes also is Jewish. And yeah, she's a hasbian, she now is married to a man.

Raiskin: So you finished law school. And what happened after that?

Drescher: Actually, my last year in law school, I went to a National Lawyers Guild convention in San Francisco. And my older brother had moved to Oregon and his second child had just been born. And I hadn't been out to Oregon at all yet. And I met my law partner-to-be, Mike Goldstein and his now they'd call it "administrative assistant" at that time, she was the secretary, Connie Newman and few others in the law collective. He was the only lawyer. I flew out to San Francisco without any idea how I would get to Oregon or how long I would stay or any of that stuff.

Mike offered me— Mike and Connie offered me a ride. And I got to know them— actually, I was going to drive with Connie, that's right. And Connie was attacked on the street. It look like sort of a mentally ill guy just plowed her in the jaw and she fell unconscious. And I took her to the ER and it was one of those experiences where it was sort of like automatically you are close to this person because you've gone through this sort of traumatic event.

And then because Connie was injured she did fly back to Eugene. Oh, I had a good friend in Eugene also. Mike and I drove together from San Francisco up to Eugene. We talked politics the whole way. And he wanted to have another lawyer in his law collective. I mean, he had a couple law students and the secretary. And I saw that I would have the opportunity to do a lot of other things here in Eugene than I would in Boston. A lot of things that I wanted to do.

I wanted to do police misconduct and sexual harassment and sex discrimination and ADA stuff and all of that stuff. So, yeah, I wanted to come out here and that's how I came to Eugene.

Long: What year was that?

Drescher: That was in 1979.

Raiskin: What did you heard about Eugene before?

Drescher: I had heard that it was a lesbian Mecca. It was sort of like Northampton, in Massachusetts. As Northampton was to Massachusetts, Eugene was to Oregon. And also, I thought there was a lot of crunchy granola and things to pick off bushes that you could eat, all of which was true and remains true to this day.

Raiskin: How did you find the lesbian community when you got here?

Drescher: Well, they found me, actually. We were— the law firm was Goldstein and Drescher, and Margaret Cormier came to me. There were a couple of other lesbian lawyers, but I don't know, they came to me and Margaret always referred to it as "Drescher and Goldstein." And she wanted me to represent Starflower and she came to me with my very first case, which was a shareholder derivative case, a lawsuit against Starflower by two of the former collective members.

Raiskin: Could you describe Starflower as you knew it when you first encountered it?

Drescher: Starflower was largely a lesbian collective that distributed natural foods, herbs and spices across the Northwest. They had a warehouse and they had a couple of trucks and they had people with forklifts putting cheese in and out of the cooler and cutting cheese and distributing grains and things like that all over the Northwest.

Raiskin: What was the case?

Drescher: The case was a shareholder derivative suit. Starflower was actually incorporated incorrectly. Another lawyer in town who is a lovely person, she's pretty old and she has disabilities which is also why Starflower probably went to her because they had that values ethic of going to someone they could relate to. But she set them up so that each member of the collective would receive one share of stock for every month they worked at Starflower.

The stock was never valued beyond that. There was no financial record really of how much the stock, which nobody kept track of and no one received a certificate. I think they did keep track of how many employees worked how long, but the two people who brought the lawsuit, actually, so as someone pointed out to me later, were the only two people who ever worked at Starflower who never had a lover at Starflower [laughs]. It was sort of like that. It was like Starflower was a great incestuous family full of drama, and fun and hilarity and drugs and craziness. It was really fun to represent them.

And even though I was in a way over my head on the shareholder derivative suit, and one of the people who was suing was actually Margaret Cormier's brother, who was the opposite of Margaret. Margaret was beautiful and smart, and ambitious, and could do all kinds of business things. And her brother was just kind of—suffered I guess, in comparison to her. So, he was one, and of course none of lesbians would sleep with him. And the other one was a lesbian who, none of the other lesbians would sleep with her.

Raiskin: What was the outcome of the case?

Drescher: We settled for very little, but it chewed up a lot of time. And I mean Starflower, put me on retainer, I think I was retained for $600 a month, which was crazy because I was also defending them when the truckers would nail some kind of sign on the highway and be dragged behind the truck for miles. One trucker was arrested when she saw a bunch of right wing bumper stickers on several cars and pulled over and started ripping them off and she didn't notice these cars are parked in front of a police station. That kind of fun stuff.

And then, of course, all of the Staries would come to me with their other work too, and eventually I learned how to do it. But also at the same time, I always had a police misconduct case, which I started taking without realizing how much work they really were. But they were very, very important cases to me, as well as the sex discrimination case and sexual harassment cases. Anyway, what was that question about?

Long: Well, I wanted to follow up. If you could provide more— It sounds like you were down at Starflower frequently.

Drescher: Yes.

Long: Can you tell us what a typical day at Starflower might have been? The comings and goings, the friendships, the—

Drescher: I never was there for a full day but I can tell you in the morning, they would come in and there was a notebook. It was their dreams notebook. And you'd think maybe this was dreams for the organization, but really, it was their dreams like the night before. And everyone would write their dreams in this notebook. And that was also the notebook that they wrote the minutes from their collective meetings. And every collective member was also a member of the Board of Directors. And you can imagine this was not the most efficient business-like way to run Starflower.

Raiskin: How many employees were there?

Drescher: It varied, I think. I'm just guessing, there were contract workers, and then there were collective members. And I'm guessing twenty-something collective members and may be up to ten contract workers depending on how the business was going. And both of those numbers varied. But Margaret would know for sure.

Long: I wonder where that dreams and minutes book is.

Drescher: Well, funny, you should ask, because during the shareholder derivative suit, they requested discovery of Starflower minutes and

I had such— I enjoyed this so much— handing over the dream book, along with it during the depositions, Starflower official minutes and imagining what this super straight lawyer would think while I would— I mean these dreams were— anyway. And I don't know where that is now. The other lawyer might still have that, I don't know.

Long: Yeah, in a law firm somewhere, in a file.

Drescher: That could be.

Raiskin: It'd be great to have.

Raiskin: What was the typical weekend in Eugene at this time for the lesbian community? What would you do on a typical the weekend?

Drescher: Like a lot of women— I mean, at that time, there weren't a lot of lesbian social things going on, so many of us did go to the bar, which was called the Riv Room. And it was sort of a dive, but you'd see your friends there. It was sort of like the place I had gone to in Ann Arbor which was called "The Flame" which is a great name for gay bar.

Long: Do you remember where the Rivier Room was located? What cross streets it would have been?

Drescher: I think it was on Broadway. It's where the Oregon, not Oregon Contemporary Theater, but the other theater is—

Raiskin: Actors Cabaret?

Drescher: Actors Cabaret, yeah. It was within the block. It didn't go as far as the corner.

Long: So it was on Broadway?

Drescher: Yes. That, and there were a lot of parties that people would have at their homes and a lot of Halloween parties, especially those were fun, and—

Raiskin: Who would have them?

Drescher: Well, I had one of the Halloween parties. It was great. I turned my whole basement into like a creepy corner, and blindfolded people and took them around and had them feel the brains and then there was this treasure chest they could open and as soon as they did I press this balloon that would puff air into their faces like— it was totally dark. I don't know. Closet door, I would secretly open which showed a glowing skeleton. Of course, no one was really scared but I think they appreciate the effort. And everyone came totally dressed up. But you know—

Long: Where were you living?

Drescher: I initially lived on Fourth and Adams, and that was a lesbian household. And then later I bought a house at Twelfth and Monroe not far away. And then years later, as I grew up, I bought my place out on the Ridgeline Trail, which is where I still live.

Raiskin: What were the attitudes about sexuality in the community at that time?

Drescher: Pretty free and open. I remember some women talking openly about the S&M parties or the— I don't even know what that stands for, the BDSM parties they would go to and the poly-stuff, poly— whatever many sexual partners stuff. And it was— a lot of it was fueled, of course by marijuana or other drugs. I remember— what was that called? It started with an E. It was a drug that made you feel like everything was right in the world—

Raiskin: Ecstasy?

Drescher: Ecstasy, it was Ecstasy. Yeah, that was a big thing. And in fact, one of my friends had a chemist make it for her and all of her friends. I'll tell you in another few years, whether long term brain effects.

Raiskin: What did you know about the lesbian land at the time?

Drescher: Well, I knew it existed, and I visited it and then later I was asked to represent them. The women at Golden when there was— they had been growing marijuana, and there was a bust. And we went to court and I filed an unlawful search and seizure motion to suppress and I actually got the evidence suppressed, which made the local newspaper. So, they were scot free because there was no evidence, because the cop had unlawfully trespassed on their land. And that's how he found out that they were growing marijuana.

Raiskin: Were they growing it just for their own use or for sale?

Drescher: Yes.

Long: Now Golden was the lesbian and gay male land. So there were men on Golden?

Drescher: Actually adjacent, at that time anyway, Cabbage Lane was adjacent to Golden and Cabbage Lane was for gay men and Golden was for women.

Long: Oh, okay.

Raiskin: What year was that?

Drescher: That must have been probably early ‘80s, maybe ’82-ish.

Raiskin: So was this— were you enjoying yourself at this time of your life? Or were there—

Drescher: Yeah, I was. There were stressful parts, too. I mean, I didn't want anyone to go to jail. So, I took this stuff seriously. But it was really fun to win. It was really fun when Starflower was going well enough that they could buy another building and I was involved with that. And it was almost always fun. Some of it was stressful too. I didn't like people being sexually harassed. I didn't like to see people discriminated against. I felt like I was doing the right thing and representing people and even people who didn't have lawsuits, I could listen to them and I could talk with them and sort of at least have someone feel like they were being heard.

Raiskin: What kind of discrimination harassment did you see?

Drescher: Well, one of my discrimination cases— a very attractive straight woman worked at one of the lumber companies. She did this thing where she would go out and assess the value of timber, and they really harassed her. First of all, of course, they all wanted to date her and she didn't want to date any of them. And they would leave pornographic things on her desk and make comments and she was very upset. So, we sued them and it was a big timber company. They should have known better. She had gone to HR and gotten no relief. And she later told me that it was the time of her life that she had felt most empowered after she came to me and worked with me.

And then one of my other cases involved a black woman who— it was a police misconduct case and they had basically beaten her up in front of her children after they came to serve a court order on her for failure to appear on traffic violation. And they chased her through the house and knocked her down and hit her in front of her two young kids. So that was another lawsuit that—a it was important to help her feel vindicated, and she did. She got some money in the end. I mean, it didn't make the situation go away, but she got some money.

I mean, I didn't always represent lesbians. Another straight woman I represented was in Coquille, and she had been beaten up by her husband or boyfriend I can't remember and called the police and the police took him away and she said, "Is he going to be in jail overnight?" "Yes." "Are you sure he's going to be in jail overnight?

Otherwise, he's going to come back here and really beat me up." "He's going to be in jail overnight." They told her repeatedly. Well, of course, in the middle of the night he was let go and came back and beat the shit out of her. We sued the local police and the sheriff's department. And you know, it was that kind of thing. A guy with epilepsy, the police thought he was drunk, so they beat him up and threw him in jail and wouldn't listen to him. So, I mean, I did represent a lot of lesbians, but a lot of other people, too.

Long: You have a number of different organizations listed down here. One is Mother Kali's, Garbagio's, Surata [Soyfoods], Zoo Zoo's. Can you talk about those?

Drescher: Yeah, sure. Mother Kali's was always in some kind of drama.

Raiskin: The feminist bookstore.

Drescher: The women's—. Yeah, the women's feminist bookstore and it was run by two really nice women, smart women, well intentioned women. But somehow, the community felt they owned it. It got caught up in a lot of drama. And one of the things I was asked to do was to help them separate the drama from the bookstore. I had to talk with some of the women who were creating the drama and later—I didn't even remember this—someone who has since become a friend said, "Well, should we talk about the letter?" I said, "What do you mean?" "The letter you wrote?" I said, "What do you mean?" "The letter you wrote for Mother Kali's to me telling me never to come into that bookstore again." "Oh, no, I don't

remember that, I'm sorry. It sounds horrible for you." But she's very nice. We have a nice friendship today, that sort of thing. Some of it was bigger, like Garbagio's actually. We had to file bankruptcy.

Raiskin: What was Garbagio's?

Drescher: Garbagio's was an alternative garbage service where they tried to do recycling and I think composting and they would pick up the garbage by hand and no trucks going "Ynih, ynih" [open trucks without lifts]. And they had a lot of women. And I also represented Surata back when they were a co op.

Long: What was Surata?

Drescher: Surata is a tofu-making business. And I think I represented Genesis Juice back when they were co-op. But eventually these co ops, the way they were being run, which was not purely like businesses. It was a wonderful sort of adventure and attempt to run a business the way you'd like to see businesses run. But the competition just wiped them out. Like Starflower folded when Safeway started selling organic food, they could undersell them. And when some bigger distributor stepped in, where you didn't have collective meetings that went on for hours and hours, and the collective was buying food for everybody, and everyone was getting paid to be there and make a decision. It was really interesting, actually.

Let's see, who else did I say I represented. I represented a lot of women from the various co ops that I represented when they

wanted to buy a house or were involved in a personal injury accident or if they had a criminal case. Sometimes there were divorces, sometimes other kinds of lawsuits, but sort of more run of the mill stuff. The big stuff that I did was representing the co ops and then police misconduct, sexual harassment and sex discrimination cases.

In fact, one of my sexual discrimination case was someone who later worked at Starflower and with her— with the outcome of the sex discrimination case, she went off to Japan for a year and she came back with these really nice pictures of women in the baths. I mean paintings, women in the baths in Japan and I still have them in my bathroom.

Long: Where was your law office?

Drescher: We were in the Lane building.

Raiskin: Which is?

Drescher: Which is down by the train station. And it was right above Monster Cookie at the time. I don't know if Monster Cookies still exists— so we would smell the cookies every afternoon and you wouldn't gain a whole lot of weight if that's what you ate for lunch and dinner. I mean, one Monster Cookie.

Raiskin: And how long was your— did you practice last?

Drescher: Well, I was in private practice probably for about eight years and then I took a job at UO as Director of Student Advocacy, also for

probably about eight years, I think maybe longer. And there again, sexual harassment of students became my issue, along with gay rights stuff. I was on the President's Committee on Gay and Lesbian Rights. I think something like that. Myles—

Raiskin: The Task Force?

Drescher: Pardon?

Raiskin: Task Force.

Drescher: Yeah, the Task Force, the Task Force.

Long: As a staff member?

Drescher: Well, I was actually employed by ASUO, as student advocate. But I was probably considered a staff member. I ran into Garrett Epps who used to work at the Law School because I had another job at the Law School later. And he introduced me to his wife, is someone he had worked with at the Law School and I was like, "Garrett, you're so generous, because he's like this nationally known constitutional scholar.

Raiskin: So were you involved on campus with— you were in the Task Force and were you involved in gay politics on campus or relationships with people around campus?

Drescher: Very much so, and I took— we had a few cases which changed things like I represented two gay men who wanted to have a place in what was called family housing at the time. And they couldn't

because they weren't married. And— No, it wasn't called family housing, it was called married student housing at the time. And eventually, we went through the channels here and to get to affirmative action, which basically always wanted to rubber stamp what was in the best interests of the university. And then taking it outside of the university, I did get the guy— what was his name? He later became president of the Oregon bar, but he was a very out gay man. And he took it to court and to the court of appeals and before the court of appeals got to decide it, U of O decided to change it. So that was good.

Long: What year was that?

Drescher: Well, these guys probably initially came to me, I'm guessing, I don't know, around '88 maybe.

Raiskin: Did you ever see police harassment at the Riviera Room?

Drescher: I did not, no.

Raiskin: That would have been an interesting case.

Drescher: I wasn't a real frequent person at the Riv Room.

Long: What were some of the other social activities you took part in within the lesbian community?

Drescher: At that time—

Long: At that time.

Drescher: In those early days?

Long: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Drescher: There were a lot of parties and I guess the house that I was living in initially with a bunch of other lesbians, there was camping and there was I guess just trips to the coast and Ecstasy and marijuana and a lot of checking people out.

Long: How about softball games? Did you go to any softball games?

Drescher: I went to a few. One of my lovers at the time played on a softball team. I went to some of them, but it really wasn't my thing.

Long: What can you tell us about when the anti-gay initiatives came through different times in Eugene?

Drescher: Well, I remember we all took it really seriously and worked on it. I did not have a leadership role. Probably the thing that I remember most is one of the later OCA measures we had Passover seder at the Hilton to raise money against the OCA and Sally Sheklow was the main organizer of that. And I know she asked me in some other context, I had talked about my family and what it was like to be Jewish, and how our rabbi who was a Holocaust survivor had this beautiful voice to sing in Hebrew. And little Frankie Levy had a high little voice and he would sing along with Rabbi. And then my father who is tone-deaf would also try to sing. And the three of them sounded actually really exquisite together. So I told that story to this huge crowd. And it was like how we're all different, but we

all contribute in this way that is beautiful. And I think people— I think it was mostly very straight people who attended that event.

Raiskin: Were they Jewish people, or?

Drescher: I think there were a few Jews but not mostly Jews. I think it was mostly reaching out to the community. I remember Alan Siporin, he had a show on KLCC, the local radio station at the time and he wanted to— he interviewed me. And he said something like, "Marlene, you've always got something to say." And my lover at the time said, "Yes, she does." Anyway, Sally really should talk about that, that was her thing.

One thing I do remember is that they forgot— she had given recipes to the kitchen on how to prepare the Passover meal. And I believe that they had made the Matzah balls correctly, but didn't understand that you were supposed to put them in the soup and cook them, so then we had these raw Matzah balls. That's my vague recollection.

Raiskin: What were the different expressions of spirituality you saw in the community?

Drescher: Well, among the Jews, we had a Baleboosteh group. And that was sort of spiritual. I mean, we would talk about our lives and talk about how to make things better in the world and in our lives, and also celebrate the different phases of the moon. It was sort of part woo, woo astrology and little bits of what we knew from our Jewish background. But we would meet I think, once a month, and

that was— I remember once we had a Passover Seder at my apartment on Fourth Street, and there was a woman named Blue who had a child and she accidentally stepped into the chicken soup pot. I mean, we're all sitting on the floor. There's this big pot chicken soup. The child stepped in it. I don't know, it was all fun.

Long: Could you explain what Baleboostehs is?

Drescher: Baleboosteh is a Yiddish word and a Baleboosteh is a woman who knows how to clean up the kitchen or put dinner on the table without going shopping, you just pull things off the shelf and you make something or you really know how to pack a suitcase. That's a Baleboosteh. So that's why we called that group the Baleboostehs.

Raiskin: And what other spiritual groups did you see or interests that the people in community were following?

Drescher: Well, I know that people followed a lot of woo woo stuff as some of the gatherings I would go to. What I remember is Tarot readings because once I was talked into having my cards read, and it was sort of like shocking, because she could really read the cards and maybe she knew that about my life, but maybe she didn't. Maybe Tarot really was something that worked. I mean to me it was sort of like a Ouija board. But a lot of people were into a lot of women's spirituality and that was something else that I didn't really follow closely. I know that the women's land for some legal work I did for them promised to give me a calendar and I don't know what some

kind of book on spirituality. Maybe you know these people, they make calendars.

Long: We'Moon.

Drescher: Yeah, We'Moon, but they never sent it to me. And it was like, okay. Not that I missed it terribly. But it could have been—

Long: You actually—did you ever live on lesbian land then?

Drescher: No. I lived in lesbian households earlier and early in Eugene. But never on the lesbian land.

Long: Okay.

Raiskin: Have you been involved in parenting in Eugene?

Drescher: I have been involved in parenting. I took in my daughter as a foster child back in— let's see, I guess 2002, and she was like a feral child. She did not know what a book was for, she was totally out of control. Both of her parents were meth addicts. She had been exposed to meth in utero and also dad had cooked meth in their small trailer when she was little. Every tooth in her mouth was rotten. Her first temper tantrum was when we passed a Pepsi machine. And at age three, I wouldn't buy her a Pepsi. She came to me at about three and a half. And I just wanted— at that time, I was the director of the Domestic Violence Clinic, which was a joint project of Legal Aid and the Law School where I would teach third year law students to represent domestic abuse survivors and stalking victims in contested hearings in court.

So I saw a lot of kids come through the system. And I just wanted —it was also after 9/11 and I just wanted to— I had done all this stuff that sort of was on the periphery of people's lives. They would come to me with huge stories and terrible stories about their lives and I could fix maybe that much of a whole big thing. But I wanted to affect the most vulnerable, a child, and I wanted to affect in a big way. And I took Bri in. She was my second foster child.

I took her in committing that I would never let her be shuffled in foster care. And I didn't know details about the parents but Services for Children and Families told me that she would probably be reunited with her families —with her parents in three months. And then it was another three months and then it was another three months and then dad did fail. He hadn't done this and that and mom was in prison for some stupid, she was trying to pass hundred dollar bills that had been Xeroxed off in a hotel room. I mean, they were meth addicts. They did crazy things and they got in trouble. And Bri was not going to go back to them.

I was pretty old at the time. I mean, she's nineteen, I'm sixty-seven. So you figure it out. I got her at age three. I was already well into my fifties when they asked me to adopt her a couple of years later. And she'd been calling me mom for years, and I loved her. Of course, I wanted to adopt her. Has that answered your question? Yes I — And then of course, what was very helpful to me, even from the beginning when she was just my foster child was when I

joined a lesbian mom's group, which was called Rainbow Rascals which I think many people are familiar with.

And Bri came to feel that probably most people had two moms and why didn't she? Then once in school she— during sharing time she said, "I have two moms and one is in jail." And one of the— the children were all like— Apparently, the teacher told me they were all jaws dropping, eyes wide. And at least one of them went home and told her mother, what Bri had said during sharing and that mother had the courage to say to me, "Marlene, I understand your partner is in jail." So, I did get to set the record straight, at least it was one person.

Raiskin: Did you have any issues with Department of — what was is it called?

Drescher: It was called the Service for Children and Families at the time, and I don't know what it is. I think it's called something else now. Well, the first foster child I had who was a cute little girl, probably also about three. She actually had this case of resistant lice. I was working full time and washing out her hair probably three times a week and washing everything that she had touched in the house. My washer broke down; I had to get a new washer. And finally, I had heard not from them but from someone else that they had a lice control program.

So I brought this little girl whose name was Destiny in. She needs you to take care of her lice. And told them what I had I tried and

Destiny on the way there said, "No, no, please don't take me there. Don't take me there." And she knew something I didn't, which was that that was going to be the last time I saw her because when they took her away, they took me to a separate room. And they said, "We think that it's in Destiny's best interest to be with a more experienced foster family." And that was it. I never saw that child again. I think that she really did know that, you just stay away from SCF.

Raiskin: Why did they take her from you?

Drescher: They didn't— what I learned was that you don't ask them for anything. That if you ask them for something at that time anyway, you're going to pay for it one way or another. And I paid for it by losing access to this little girl who I had, I had only briefly. I don't know, maybe a month or so, maybe six weeks, I don't remember. But yeah, it was not a pleasant experience. But I still did want a kid. They offered me several others. They offered me babies. They offered me ten-year-old boys. They offered me a lot of kids who were not what I had said I was willing to take. So I waited, and I got Bri. And Bri was a very wild child and needed a lot, but she's been a great kid. And Rainbow Rascals, the lesbian moms group was very helpful to both of us, helped her socialize, help me just have a support group.

Raiskin: There was no issue in the State of Oregon for a lesbian to adopt?

Drescher: Not at that time.

Raiskin: And your relationship with the organizations was smooth in the adoption?

Drescher: It was, it was. I had Bri for probably three years before we got to adoption, which was much longer than was mandated under federal law. It was supposed to be fourteen months before they did— during which they would determine whether to terminate parental rights and move to adoption or not. They waited a long time. But I did feel, because I did learn some workers who I became sort of friendly with, were sort of on my side and by then knew who I was and what I was offering Bri. And by that time, I remember they had to search out family members. There was one aunt, Bri's father's sister, who had three other kids from three different fathers. And we had this big discussion over— with a number of workers, and me. And we had her on speakerphone and one of her first questions was, "Well, how much would she get a month if she did take Bri?" And that was sort of like “Hmmm.” Neon lights went on over the table. After that, I felt I was going to get Bri and I did.

Long: Back to some of the other organizations you worked for. Can you talk to us about the Rape Crisis Network board? And the SASS?

Drescher: I was on the board of directors of Rape Crisis Network. And I believe Nadia Telsey was director at that time. And we did a lot of good work. And I think Nadia eventually did— I mean, she did great work. She eventually did burn out and moved on. There was a fair amount of drama. It was mostly lesbians who ran the Rape

Crisis Network. And then after Nadia, it transitioned to actually closer relationship with the university and women who didn't come from the lesbian-feminist women's community.

And I was off the board by then. But I was Director of Student Advocacy also by then. And because ASUO was also contributing to Rape Crisis Network, and they were getting these reports that the place was unfriendly. The doors were closed most of the time. It was hard to reach people when you did reach people. The women who were running it were paranoid. They asked me to investigate it. So, I did investigate it. And all of these things were true about it was not providing the service that ASUO was contributing for. Students weren't receiving it, people in the community weren't receiving it. The feminists who had established it had serious concerns about it.

I had to take this information to ASUO and the university. U of O was also contributing some to it. And we had a big meeting and I said, "Well, if we can't [need to] close it down, let's start something new." And everyone was like "Okay, well we could withdraw our money from there, and give you this and blah blah, blah." And I actually came up with the acronym SASS. I thought it was cool.

Raiskin: Sexual Assault Support Services.

Drescher: Yes. Although people wondered if it was Support Services for Sexual Assault. Like if it was, it would somehow aid sex—. I mean anyway— I mean, I think people were just, I don't know. One

interesting thing that happened with SASS. We had a new director and we weren't sure about, we couldn't work the situation well enough to pay someone and to seek out the kind of feminist director we needed. We got someone else whose name I'm not going to say.

But I also got a police officer on the board because I thought we needed a woman police officer, a feminist, and I thought we needed that kind of relationship with the police to really have these cases taken seriously and investigated and victim services for the women and stuff like that. I remember we were having a meeting, we were still kind of not exactly mainstreaming. We were having a meeting in my hot tub, a board meeting, and the police officer called and said she couldn't attend. I said, "Oh, well, we'll see you next month." "No, no, I am actually falling off the board." "Well, why? why are you leaving?" "Well, you know why." "No, no. Why? Why?" "Well, it's because of your director." "Well, what about our director?"

Well, apparently, some people on the board who I also won't name but who you both know, didn't know this [knew this], but I didn't know this that the director we had hired, had previously been arrested for growing marijuana in Deadwood being a big grower and spent some time in jail. And it was like the police were willing to take some steps forward, but not that far. So she had to step off. And we then— when I found out that other people knew this, and no one had told me I was like, "When does the drama end?" We

had to fire her which was controversial and hire someone new. And that's when we found Phyllis. And you probably know— I'm not going to use her last name, either. But she was great. And SASS then became well established. And Phyllis has gone on to do many wonderful things in the area. But anyway—

Long: Could you describe, I mean, it seems obvious but describe the services that the Rape Crisis Network provided, and SASS?

Drescher: Well, let me sort of lump them together. And I mean, basically, a survivor could call. There was a twenty-four hour hotline, where you could talk with a counselor or an advocate at anytime, whether you were having a difficult time with something that had happened to you twenty years before, or whether you had just been raped and you didn't know what to do, whether you were in agony or whether you were in physical— that you were physically harmed and suffering, and the counselor could get you in touch with an advocate to take you to the hospital where they could— the advocate would be with you during a rape kit was performed by an ER doctor, or the advocate could explain to you what it would mean about filing a criminal complaint. Or whether, whatever the victim wanted to do fully informed, it was her decision whether to go forward, whether to seek counseling, whether to file a criminal complaint, whether to go to victim services, which was through the D.A.'s office.

Sexual Assault Support Services also had an educational arm where they would go out and talk about sexual assault. What was sexual

assault? What does it mean to get consent? What happens when you don't have consent? What it means to be drunk, that you can't give consent unless you actually have your normal consciousness. And the Rape Crisis Network was early on and it was sort of leading up to that and I think— I don't remember if RCN really could provide, I think probably we did have or attempted to have twenty-four hour hotline services. Certainly, the issue wasn't as developed in the public eye or within the police in D.A.'s office as it later became.

Raiskin: It's my impression that a lot of the social service agencies were run by lesbians in Eugene. Is that your impression? And if so, why do you think that might have been?

Drescher: Well, I think that lesbians understood what it meant to be hurt and needing someone. I think lesbians valued helping others because at times, maybe they needed help. And I think that it was the politics of the time to reach out and really help somebody. And I think that was a shared community value. Not by everyone, but by enough people that some lesbians went to college and finished degrees in order to be in a position to help others.

Raiskin: Would you remember some of those agencies were? I remember the All Women's Health Collective? And, can't remember other ones.

Drescher: Yeah.

Raiskin: Womenspace.

Drescher: Of course Womenspace, for survivors of domestic violence. And there was a national organization I think, probably the Our Bodies, Ourselves collective from Boston from the late '60s really started organizing around women's health issues. And of course, it's still a huge national issue. I mean, should women control their own bodies? Or should those old white guys make all the rules? And there used to be, I'm trying to remember it was like, was it federal women's health? There used to be a series of women's health organizations. And there's one in Tallahassee, one in Chicago, one in Southern California.

And I think the All Women one here maybe was loosely identified with those, but I think that abortion was so controversial and had so many people willing to be outrageously trying to eliminate abortion and the people who practiced it that the women's health centers, most of them slowly closed including the one here. Although I'm glad Planned Parenthood, which is— became much more mainstream, was able to take the mantle there.

Raiskin: Do you feel like you ever experienced health services that were negatively impacted by your being lesbian?

Drescher: Well, early on yeah. But I think since I've been in Eugene, people have been— the health providers that I selected for myself— I mean, part of it was to ask my friends well, "Who's good? Who's good for lesbians? Who's going to treat me with respect?" I remember going with my radical lesbian collective in Ann Arbor to a rural bar, where we saw a black lesbian who was briefly famous,

perform, and she wasn't out but we were and it erupted into a big bar fight and I was beaten up. Most of us were, despite our karate, and going to a health provider who asked too many questions, but "How did this happen?" and just shutting down after I told him, "Well I was attacked at a bar because I was dancing with my girlfriend." So, Angie and I both had shiners. I had one shiner on one side and she had one shiner on the other. We went to auto mechanics class the next day and the boys were really interested that they thought we had maybe hit each other somehow like that.

Raiskin: What haven't you asked you that you think we should know about? You, about Eugene, and it's time, about the time of your life that you've been living?

Drescher: Well, I think you've hit the high points.

Raiskin: We haven't talked about your relationships much or what you think about marriage equality.

Drescher: I think equality generally is a good thing. Marriage equality and allowing gays, lesbians, trans people to serve the country, all of that's a good thing. Basically, I think equality is a good thing. I'm not sure that marriage as an institution is enough in the social interest to make it something that I personally would fight for. I mean, I think it's a nice thing. People get stuff out of it. There are tax advantages or social security advantages. But I'm not sure that it's the top of the top. I mean, I wouldn't like to see it go away. I want it to stay. But—

Raiskin: What do you think should be the top of the top?

Drescher: Well, I think equality. First of all, income inequality. I think poverty is so destructive for people. There should be some kind of floor that people don't fall under. There should be something that supports people with children, there should be some— not a minimum wage, but a minimum and a level of access to services. And usually that means enough money to support that. I think healthcare is more important than marriage, health care equality so that people aren't in fear of literally dying because they don't have health care. And these issues definitely affect gays and lesbians, along with everyone else of a certain income bracket. I don't know if that answered your question or not. Were you asking me what's the top priority for gays and lesbians?

Raiskin: Yes.

Drescher: Probably I'd have the same answer: equality. Equal access to health care, some kind of income floor for people, whether they are working, can work, can't work, need housing.

Raiskin: Your life has certainly been focused on social justice work.

Drescher: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Long: I'm wondering if you have something you would say particularly to younger people who might watch this video at some point.

Drescher: The other— the thing that is most in my mind that never was in my mind or in my— on my social justice calendar before, was climate

change. And I do think that we're so close to an irrevocable path of destroying the earth, that we may be able to reverse that if we take the actions that we can now and I hope that if young people are hearing this, they know that there's an old lesbian who used to do other social issues that affected people in other ways and who is now doing climate change work trying to save the planet for them.

Long: When you think about your life in Eugene among the lesbian community, what is something that you feel brought you the greatest joy?

Drescher: I think having circle of friends who share values and ideals and outlook. Same outlook on the world. And being able to feel at ease in that social circle and to feel part of that family and yeah, feel supported by it and wanting to support it.

Long: And what about your faith? Has that been a part of that experience?

Drescher: Well, my Judaism has been. I don't know that I call it faith since I'm at best an agnostic and probably atheist. But I do relate to Jews in a way that is special because we share a background and share experiences and I think, especially people whose parents or maybe first or second generation are closer in experience to me, there's a certain ethic growing up in that kind of household that's somewhat unique or at least similar among Jewish lesbians, especially how we came out, how our parents reacted, what the rest of the family thinks about it, what it is to bring a lover home to a Jewish family

where there hasn't necessarily been another out, gay person. Kind of interesting. Not that other things aren't also interesting, but it's nice to feel at home with someone.

Raiskin: I think that wraps it up for our questions.

Long: Thank you very much.

Drescher: You're welcome.

Raiskin: Thank you so much, Marlene.

Drescher: Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]