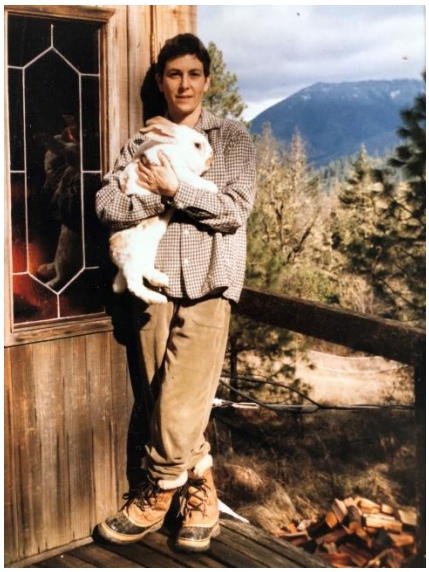
Oral History Interview with Aggie Agapito

Interview conducted on September 5, 2018

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

For

The Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project



Aggie Agapito at WomanShare Collective, ca. 1985

Aggie Agapito, September 5, 2018

Recorded in the University of Oregon Libraries

Preface

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

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

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

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

Abstract

Interview conducted on September 5, 2018. Aggie was born in 1950 in Torrance, California, and grew up in southern California. She attended college and worked in California until moving to Oregon in 1985. She was introduced to the lesbian land communities in southern Oregon by attending a week-long photography workshop (the "Ovulars") at Ruth and Jean Mountaingrove's lesbian land, Rootworks, in 1984. She moved to WomanShare Collective lesbian separatist land and lived there before returning to college. She moved to Eugene in 1991, attended the University of Oregon and started a career in education. She adopted an infant in 1996. She discusses the Eugene lesbian parenting group, Rainbow Rascals.

Additional subjects: Collectives; Communal living—Oregon; Counterculture -- California; Hippies -- California; Hippy culture; Interracial adoption -- United States; Lesbian community—Oregon; Lesbian mothers -- United States; Lesbian separatism – Oregon; Parenting; Plan Loving Adoptions Now (PLAN) (Adoption agency); Ovulars Photography Workshops; Rainbow Rascals (Lesbian parenting group); WomanShare (Grants Pass, Or.)

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Narrator: Aggie Agapito

Location: University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon

Interviewers: Linda Long and Judith Raiskin

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Long: This interview is part of the Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project. The recordings will be made available through the University of Oregon Libraries' Special Collections and University Archives. This is an oral history interview with Aggie Agapito on September 5, 2018, taking place in the University of Oregon Libraries' recording studio and 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 at the UO Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Aggie, 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 contribute.

Agapito: I do.

Long: Thank you. Let's just begin with the basic question. Can you please tell us when and where you were born and something about your early background?

Agapito: I was born in Torrance, California, which is near Los Angeles, and in 1950. I came from Italian, English, Irish, Welsh, Scottish family, Italian on one side and the other side a mixture. And we're a really close family. Both sides of my family lived in the same city and we were always together. We did a lot of— Every Sunday we would go to the Italian aunt's house and have— I'd watch the aunts making pasta in the kitchen and just have such great memories of all my family. And my grandmother on my mother's side would take care of my brother and I a lot. And anyway, family was really close and really fun growing up.

Long: And you had a brother?

Agapito: Had a brother. He's two years younger, almost two years younger, named Vince. And we were really close. We are really close.

Raiskin: And did you have cousins? A group of cousins?

Agapito: A lot of cousins. There were, I think, thirteen of us. And so we were— All the cousins were very close and we played together a lot and all holidays and— We didn't all go to the same school, so we didn't see each other. Torrance was about a hundred thousand people type of city. So we would see cousins and aunts and uncles and grandparents on weekends.

Raiskin: Were you a religious family?

Agapito: Well, a little bit. I mean, my parents— my father was Catholic, Italian Catholic, and my mother was Protestant. So when they got together they decided to be Episcopal. And I remember going to church and not being very interested, but I liked the pretty stained glass windows. And some of the things that happened in the church were fascinating to me, just how old and ornate everything was. But at— and I was in the choir, which I thought was really fun. I liked having a little outfit on the little white thing with a black, I think it was white color with black ruffling thing. Anyway, but at age fourteen, I remember going into my mom and dad's bedroom one morning. It was Sunday morning and I said, "I really don't want to go to church anymore." They said, "Okay." And that was sort of the end of that. I didn't follow it anymore and didn't want to pursue the religious part of it anymore.

Raiskin: And were they strong believers?

Agapito: I'd say yes. But around the time that I decided to not go to church anymore, I saw them slacking on not going. I'd say not that any type of religious values outside of the church, I never thought about church or anything that had to do with religion. So I'd say that they weren't, maybe they weren't that strong religious followers.

Raiskin: What were you like as a kid?

Agapito: I was a tomboy. My mother would— I had long curly hair, and my mother would put it in a ponytail. And it was a ponytail, I was really into horses and I— she'd make me wear a dress all day on Sunday and I cried all day. I hated it so much. And I couldn't wait to get into my jeans and my little canvas shoes with the rubber end on it. And it was just— that was the outfit. I mean she would even— my jeans would get worn out and she'd iron a patch on them. And the shoes would get worn out, and I didn't want anything to get replaced with anything new. I just loved all my old clothes.

I really lived in a wonderful fantasy world. I mean we played outside from the moment we woke up to the time she called for dinner. And it was just a life of— For children then was you just went and played at all the neighbor's houses or they'd come to your house and play, but you didn't really check in with your parents. You just played and ran kind of wild on the block. And I guess in 1950, because we were all Baby Boomers, there were a lot of children. So we had big groups of kids and we'd just play. We'd play army. We'd play all kinds of— we'd walk on the concrete walls that would go down the backyards, and we'd walk along them all the way to the end of the street. And we'd— there were just so many wild things to do and there was a lot of freedom as a child. And then you'd hear that evening call. All the mothers would be out on the streets calling for their kids to come in, and you'd reluctantly go home.

Long: Did you have any close friends when you were growing up, in school maybe?

Agapito: I did. I had my best friend Barb and she lived a block down. And then I had my best friend Traci, and she lived on my street just about eight houses down. And yeah, we were best buddies, and we did all those things I named, all together, all the time.

Raiskin: And what grade— what was that when you were running around like that?

Agapito: It was elementary school, probably first grade through fifth grade I'd say at least. And toys were not really that much of a thing. We had dogs and we'd put them on a leash. And we'd go to the top of our hill and we'd put our roller skates on and then we'd whack the back of the dog's back with the leash and GO. And then we'd kneel down and we'd roll down the hills with our dogs, like racing, like a chariot or something, I don't know. But those are our activities.

And we— Also, I was walking past a magnolia tree this morning. And I saw all these little, little things that come off the magnolia flower and it's the stem and it drops off after the flower finishes. And those were my little people. So there'd be little small ones for the children and bigger ones for the adults. And I would play with those in my garden. And there was little mounds of baby tears, because it was California and lots of things grew down there, kind of more tropical.

And I would make little houses, like dig into the baby tears and make my little people go in there. And I just remember— and I was very curious too about— I ate a lot of different things that grew in the neighborhoods. So little— I experimented with rosebuds and ice plant and these little berries that grew on this tree next to my house that tasted like little apples and I never poisoned myself. I don't know how I never did, but I was—I mean I ate the grass like I was a cow, because I loved watching how cows ate. I mean I just experimented.

Oh, and I had an imaginary horse that was tied up to the mailbox. And I'd come out of the house and I'd take the reins off and then I'd leap onto the horse. And I galloped to school, gallop down the street. And you know, just that vivid imagination. I don't know. It was fascinating to me. And anyway, that was— I always wanted to be my cat George. He'd be laying there in the sun and I'd go, "Oh, George. If only I could be you and you could be me." Because I don't think— I didn't like school very much. It was a little more difficult for me to learn to read and write and do math, and I didn't like it. I had to wear a dress to school and I really didn't like that. So I really wanted to be my cat so bad. Anyway, there's my childhood.

Raiskin: Did things change significantly in middle school or high school for you?

Agapito: Oh, not so much. Probably at about age fifteen, I— we had grade school from kindergarten to eighth grade, all in the same school and that was Meadow Park Elementary. And then you'd go to high

school in eighth grade and that was South Torrance High. And my mother made all my clothes, almost all of them. I'd get to pick one dress out at Sears, but mostly my mother made my skirts and dresses. And high school was— I was kind of leaning towards the bad girl side. I don't know exactly what that draw was, but it might've been because I wasn't really good at— I didn't feel very smart, and school was boring. And I think that I— so I leaned towards hanging out with the girls that were having more fun.

And I ditched a few classes and then I think my senior year— that was the last year girls were wearing skirts and dresses to school, and I started being a hippie. And I loved that because it was more like my childhood. It was a freeing of— you didn't wear a bra. You didn't have to, so I didn't. And loose fitting clothing, and it just was— I had still had— Well, I think I'd cut my hair by then and stopped wearing makeup. And I loved being a hippie, and then the protests of the Vietnam War started happening.

I had— Some of the young men that I went to school with had gone off to fight in the war, and two of my close friends were killed in our group of young people, young men and women. And after they were killed and we mourned their loss that senior year, something changed in me. And I think I loved— well, being a hippie was what I needed to do. It felt like a type of protest that I— I don't know exactly what I want to say about that, but it just was a part of what was going on there. Just protesting the bigger picture of the war and protesting the life that maybe my parents wanted for me,

which was being a secretary or a wife. And that was— nothing more was— not even talking about college. There was just a life of— and so I did get married. I got married young at eighteen and—

Raiskin: Had you been dating this boy?

Agapito: Yeah, Yeah, a little bit of dating in senior year in high school. And we got married pretty much after we graduated. And well, that didn't work out too well, because I was— Oh, gosh. Do we tell about this? So he started selling pot and I worked full time. He didn't. He worked at McDonnell Douglas Aircraft. That was the big thing in Torrance. And he got laid off and he started selling pot, marijuana. And I worked full time in a ski shop in a retail position. And I came home one night. I was watching Dr. Welby, M.D. I remember it very well, sitting on my couch.

And all of a sudden there was a knock at the door and I opened it and ten plain-clothed cops came in and raided our house and handcuffed me, handcuffed him. And then proceeded to just tear our house apart, looking for drugs. And I remember we had a poster on the wall of the Statue of Liberty being raped by a police officer or FBI or something. And they ripped it off the wall and went "sheh, sheh, shew" [gestures ripping]. And then— so I was down on my knees handcuffed and I said, "Can I at least put some shoes on?" And they said, "All right," reluctantly. And then they took me to jail, took us both to jail. And my best friend Barbara, who was my childhood friend, same Barb.

And that was just like the beginning of— I began— I got out of jail after five days. And then I think I was arrested for possession of dangerous drugs and then convicted on a misdemeanor. And that was a strange turn in my life. And I just— I remember saying to my mother as she saw me— my mother and father looking at me from the other side of the jail window, and I said, "Mom, it's okay. Marijuana will be legal someday. There's nothing wrong with it." And this would've been what year? About 1969, I'd say. Yeah, 1969. So anyway, that was a big turning point. And I think that after that I, I don't know, I was a protester. I was at— I was living an alternative lifestyle and I loved it and got out of jail. Only was married for about eighteen months.

And then— I always worked full time though. And in fact when I got out of jail, I came back to work and my boss was a little mad at me. She says, "Where have you been?" I said, "In jail. I can't believe no one called you and told you." She's, "Get in here. We need you." And I just went right back to work. Work was always such a strong ethic. My work ethic was always really important. I never— I was a hippie, but family taught me really work and earn a living.

And even after that first short marriage, I never went back to my parents' home. I mean, I love them, but I was independent. At eighteen, nineteen, I was an adult. I felt it, and whether I knew very much. I thought I did. And I always had my own apartment. But I lived at the beach then with a friend. I think we rented a little cottage just the other side of the highway. And then there was the

sand and the ocean, you could see it. And we both lived there, a woman friend and I, $100 a month and—

Raiskin: Why did you get divorced?

Agapito: You know, I fell out of love for him and didn't feel— something changed. The fact that I went to jail and the fact that I became a hippie kind of during the time we were married. I remember the transition of clothing, of hair style, of no makeup, and we sort of had different views. And I decided that the being jailed was pretty traumatic. And I think he didn't become a hippie with me. And the hippie part was the change of lifestyle that we both were going in different directions. So I believe that—

Raiskin: Were you mad at him for putting you in that position?

Agapito: No. No, I didn't feel bad about it. I just thought, "Oh, well." I had kind of an attitude of the authorities are wrong and we're right. And it's just a matter of time before we prove that there's nothing wrong with smoking marijuana. But I did start smoking when I was fifteen, and then I stopped smoking when I was thirty, marijuana, I have to clarify. I never smoked cigarettes. It was a fun time in my life.

Raiskin: You moved to the beach with—

Agapito: Moved to the beach, decided to go to college. I'd never been to college. So started going to the community college, taking one class at a time, history or ceramics or it'd just be one class that I'd take

while I worked full time. And just enjoyed exploring college and what I was learning. I went to Los Angeles City College and met some new people in that circle of college friends and met a man that— he was also hippie. He worked at the ski shop where I worked, and we became partners and lived together for seven years. He was a photographer and worked in Hollywood. And so together we moved to Hollywood.

I was a messenger for a— see, what do they call it? A messenger company in Hollywood. I would take a script or something important from the agency to the actor's home. And so I'd met a lot of movie stars. I knocked on a lot of movie stars doors and—

Raiskin: Like who?

Agapito: Dolly Parton. Oh, my gosh. Cary Grant. Raquel Welch. I remember her very well.

Long: What do you remember about her?

Agapito: She had on her pants suit when she opened her door. Oh, Dolly Parton was the most exciting. I went to some hotel in Hollywood. They said, "You're going to make a delivery." And they didn't ever tell you where you're going. I got to the door and Dolly Parton opened it. It was her hotel room, and she gave me a hug like this [gestures]. And I remember looking down at her breasts and they were huge. And I was not a lesbian, but I was getting close to being it, and she was short. And she went, "I thought you were going to be an old boy." And she hugged me, and I was in rain boots and a

sweatshirt. And I just remember smiling ear to ear. And so she signed for the package. I left.

And I remember going to the pay phone that was down the hall, calling my mother right away. And a phone call is ten cents. You put it in the slot. And I go, "Mom, you're not going to believe. I just went to Dolly Parton's room." And then I remember seeing the maid who was cleaning rooms. We both looked at each other. And we went— because she knew Dolly Parton was there too.

And another delivery was to some agent and he had a small lion, a baby lion in his backyard. And I remember trying to figure out how to get down to the house, because I could see it down there. So I opened the gate and then I see out of the corner of my eye, a small lion, not very big, coming towards me. And then it jumped up on me and put its paws like this [gestures]. And I went— And then I hear, "It's okay. He won't hurt you." And I went, "Okay." And then the baby got down and I went down the stairs and— I used to have a list of all the movies star's homes I went to. Honestly, it was a fascinating experience, but we don't need to talk about that anymore.

And then so, I was now in the relationship, my second male relationship with a man. And we got married and he was Jewish and I had all Jewish friends. My best friends were Lauren and Jules. They were our neighbors, our hippy neighbors. And so the four of us bought a house together in Silver Lake in Los Angeles. And we lived in a duplex. It was a— I remember we bought it for about a

hundred thousand dollars, ninety-nine thousand. And we split that and it was a house that was being foreclosed on.

And then I learned about the woman, Mamie Sevard who lived there. She died in the house and I don't know, I've always felt very close to her and loved looking, finding old things in the basement that belonged to her and her family from the early days. And her husband had worked for Disney and anyway, fascinating.

Long: What year was that?

Agapito: Nineteen seventy. And then in 1970, I went to Europe with a friend. I traveled for a month and a half with my friend Debbie and I worked also at a ski shop. I worked at the ski shop for a long time. I was the one of the buyers for the clothing, the women's clothing. And so Debbie and I went to Europe, we traveled. I got married to Pepe who was Jewish. We had a really fun— He had really rich parents that lived in Indiana, and I loved his mother. She was an artist. I loved my first husband's mother. She was French, and I just had the most wonderful times with the mothers of my husbands. They were just the sweetest, wonderful women and taught me so much.

And then I came back from Europe. I decided to go visit my friend Barb, who is now living in Hawaii and I had my last messenger run. So I was also being a messenger. And was in a town north of Los Angeles along the beach and for some reason— I'm not sure I'm remembering now, I wanted to go to a gay bar. And I walked

in, and I realized that it's all women and nobody knows that I'm straight. This is the most incredible experience. So I remember my husband's out of town, and I decided to just go to this bar after my last run. And a woman— I hadn't been there very long, and I kind of was looking around trying to decide just to look cool and pretend like I knew what I was doing.

And a woman said, "Hey, you're pretty cute. Can I buy you a drink?" And I went, "Sure." And so that was that. She bought me a drink. I went home with her. We had great sex. And I just said, "Wow, what have I been missing?" I remember saying to my husband shortly after that that I didn't want to be married anymore. It was time to be gay.

Raiskin: And so what was the draw of being gay?

Agapito: I just remember— I don't know if I can remember it as much as feel it. I just remember the feeling of this seems so natural. This seems exactly what I want to do. And it wasn't, this is what I wanted my whole life. I enjoyed sex with men, but I enjoyed sex with women more. And there was a sensuality of closeness that I didn't experience with men.

Raiskin: Had you thought about— had you been attracted to women before?

Agapito: No, no. Other than that being a tomboy. I did not like dressing up, but I can't really equate that to being, feeling that I liked women more than men. It just was— when it finally happened, it felt

completely natural. And I never thought anything was wrong with it. Because I grew up in an environment of love the one you're with, being a hippie, free love. And it really— so that flowed into my experience, my sexual experience with women over men. It didn't really matter to, "Oh, I like women better." It just was, "I get to choose and I choose women." And I never had one single moment of guilt. It just was matter of fact. And there was no turning back. It was— there was no turning back. I was real clear that the moment that I had that physical relationship with a woman, I was finished with men. And—

Long: Did she know that was your first time sleeping with a woman?

Agapito: Yeah. She knew.

Long: Did you ever see her again?

Agapito: No, she didn't want anything to do with me, because I was married. And I said, "Fine, I'll go to the bar again and meet someone else," which I did. And then that woman became my partner for about three years. That was Paula. Paula.

Raiskin: How did the divorce go?

Agapito: It was fine. It was amicable. The worst part was writing the letter to his mother who I loved dearly, and we stayed friends for quite a while. Yeah, everything was equal. He came from a rich, old Jewish family, and he had given me this eight carat diamond ring. The size of the diamond, I could still see it. It was humongous, and the thing

couldn't even be worn. It had to be kept in a safe deposit box. And I remember saying to him, "This was your great-grandmother's. You take that back. We'll split this. Oh, how about this couch? We'll, I'll take this section. You take that one." We were fine about it. We went our own ways.

Raiskin: And so which way did you go? What happened after that?

Agapito: I moved to Long Beach, California. There was a big lesbian community there, and I kept my messenger job and my ski shop job, mountaineering. It was a ski shop mountaineering place in West Los Angeles and let's see, what did I do next? Just lived in Long Beach, California. There was a bar there. Oh, that first bar that I came out in was called Que Sera, Sera, and that was in Los Angeles I believe. And then the bar, I don't remember the name of the one in Long Beach, but there was a great lesbian bar in Long Beach, and I just spent time in that town being part of the larger lesbian community.

We formed a lesbian group called, oh shoot. I remember interestingly enough, we didn't want to use the word lesbian. We were concerned about that. So we called ourselves the women's, I can't remember it now, but I do remember that somebody had the wherewithal that every time we, once a month, once every six months, all of the information from our political group went to the lesbian archives in Washington, D.C., and that was in the early seventies.

I'm trying to remember what we actually did, but I think we put on concerts, we brought different women to Long Beach, different women, lesbian musicians to Long Beach. And we would have fundraisers. I wish I could remember what we were raising funds for, but anyway, it was a fun early political lesbian group that I was part of. The Women's Union, that's what it was called, The Women's Union. And let's see, that was Long Beach.

Raiskin: How old are you in Long Beach?

Agapito: By this time I'm thirty, and I came out at age thirty. So that was my coming out year.

Long: What do you mean by that?

Agapito: Well, went from straight to lesbian.

Long: But did you tell your parents?

Agapito: Yes, I told my parents. And, again, told them in the most proudest way. I was so excited about becoming a lesbian, and my parents were just sweet. They didn't understand it really, but we were a really close family, so there was no love loss. It was just, "We support you." And I'm sure behind the scenes, my mother was sobbing, but they always supported me, and they were always sweet and loving.

So yeah, age thirty, 1970, that's when I came out as a lesbian. And I remember early times of stopping racist comments and jokes. I was living in Los Angeles, and I had some black friends, and there was

an early understanding for me of racism. And I remember seeing someone had written on a concrete wall “Black is beautiful.” And I loved that statement. I just went, "Ah. Oh my gosh, there's a new awakening going on in our country and this is so wonderful."

And Pepe and I, that was my husband, when we were hippies, we did have a lot of black friends, because we lived in Hollywood, and life was different there. It was a very strong mixture of cultures and lifestyles, and everyone accepted everybody. Really it was a great new teaching time for me to accept everyone who they were and no matter what they believed and how they lived their life. It was really fun.

Anyway, then back to Long Beach. Off I went. Then I met my friends, Janice and Shelly and with my girlfriend Paula, we went to my first feminist week, it was called Califia. And that was my first experience at learning about all the “-isms.” It was a fascinating time period, and there were weekend gatherings for Califia, maybe every May and then one summer a week gathering for Califia. And it was for all women, but mostly lesbians went. And it was a really exciting — I'm repeating myself, but political time. And I didn't really know much about “-isms.” It was a wonderful experience. And then—

Raiskin: What did the workshops focus on? What kind of “-isms?”

Agapito: Fat oppression, classism, a really new understanding of classism and the type of family that I grew up in. My father was a

firefighter. And so understanding privileges of what some women grew up with and what some women didn't have when they were growing up. And then there were wild times. There was always lots of fun sexual escapades. I don't know. Califia was a very freeing experience. I guess I'll just say that. And a lot of the women that I met there I'm still friends with today. In fact, one of the women, Irene Weiss, she just died, well, she died two years ago. She was ninety-two when she died, and I'm sixty-seven, so I realize, I don't really remember that women were that much older than me when I was there. But there was a real age range and a wonderful learning from older women and their struggles and what it was like for them to be lesbians in the '30s and '40s. And they would show pictures of them, and that they were mostly in the military and some of the clothing that they wore in those time periods.

Anyway, very wonderful learning experience learning about older lesbians that I didn't know anything about. And about that time Janice and I and Shelly decided we were going to go to Oregon because there was an Ovular taking place, and we didn't know much about it, but we were three photographers and we wanted to go. So we flew—

Long: Can you explain what "Ovular" was?

Agapito: Ovular it was, it had another meaning. Ovular meant, I don't remember. Linda, help me.

Long: They used the term Ovular. They were a series of photography workshops for women, and they use the word ovular instead of seminar, because seminar comes from the word semen—

Agapito: Okay, thank you.

Long: —and ovular from ovary.

Agapito: Yeah, okay, ovular from ovaries. Thank you. I didn't remember that. I just thought it was wonderful that they used a different name. And so we went for a week and lived at Ruth and Jean Mountaingrove's home in southern Oregon. Sunny—

Long: Rootworks.

Agapito: Rootworks in Sunny—

Long: Kings.

Agapito: Sunnyside, sunny something.

Long: Well—

Agapito: Sunny Valley?

Long: Near Sunny Valley.

Agapito: Yeah, okay. So we spent a week, and that was a fascinating experience as well because Ruth and Jean didn't really believe in a lot of things like running water and electricity and refrigeration and washing clothes. It was a very simple way of living, and we all came from the city. And so the first thing was, okay, open the ice

chest and get out the peanut butter and jelly and make a sandwich and use a candle for electricity. And if you need to bathe, go down to the stream and fill gallon water jugs with water, and let them sit in the sun if you wanted it to be a hot bath or just pour cold water over yourself to wash with.

And Janice, Shelly and I thought this was the funniest thing we'd ever experienced. Like, "What are we doing?" And sleeping in tents, which was fine, but I remember getting a tick in my arm pit and I went, "What is this?" And I went, "Ahhhhh!!!!," running, screaming from the tent. And I went, "Somebody, get it out!" Oh, and you had to pee on the ground, and there was an outhouse up the hill, but it was a two holer. So it meant someone had to sit next to you, and I remember feeling mortified, and I said, "Janice, please, please come sit next to me. I don't want a stranger coming up the hill and sitting down next to me."

And Janice dropped her flashlight down the toilet. And then forevermore we'd look down and see a light way down. And we didn't want to look down, but then we'd see the light and go, "Oh, eew!" Anyway, just the lifestyle of Ruth and Jean Mountaingrove made us laugh really hard. But little did I know I'd be living the same lifestyle at WomanShare a year later.

So, back up a minute. On the last day at the Ovular, we heard that WomanShare, the famous WomanShare, which I had bought a book— I'm swiveling in my chair, so sorry. There was a bookstore in Pasadena, the only woman's bookstore that was available in Los

Angeles that I knew of. And I went to the bookstore, again a very exciting time to walk into a women's bookstore, and I was perusing the shelves and there was this book called WomanShare. And it looked really interesting. And I bought it, and I remember going home and reading it cover to cover, fascinated by it.

And then when we were at the Ovular at the end of the week, they said, "And you're going to have a show, a showing of your work." And we printed our black and white images, and we each had a series on the wall and the women from WomanShare and Tee Corinne, were going to come view our work. And I went, "Ah, Oh no, this sounds really nerve wracking. I can't believe it," because we really looked up to these women that we'd heard about.

So I see first Tee Corinne in a big caftan, a flowing caftan, walking up the road and the caftan swaying. And everyone, "That's Tee Corinne." And then the next group was Billie and Shannon and Bridget from WomanShare. And again, our hearts thumped. We were nervous, and they didn't say anything to us, but they just walked into— I think Natalie Barney was where our photographs were displayed.

Long: That was the barn.

Agapito: The barn, Natalie Barney at Rootworks, and I remember Tee Corinne looking at Billie, no words were being spoken, they just silently walked by. And I don't know what we thought, we were really nervous. And very casually we introduced ourselves to each

other, and I think we sat around and there was a little critique of our work. I don't remember what was said, and then they left.

And I think Janice was the one who had the nerve to say to Billie and Shannon and Bridgette if we could come visit as we were leaving. And they said, "Okay, sure. Come give a visit." I don't remember exactly how, but I remember Ruth had this big old truck, and we got in the back, and it rumbled down the road. She was taking us to the airport. And—

Long: Was that in Medford? The airport in Medford?

Agapito: The Medford airport. Oh no, I think this is what we did. Ruth drove us down to her little town, which was in Sunny Valley I think. And there's a small store there, and Ruth and Jean had made some pretty strict rules. I might be making this part up, but I think you couldn't eat candy. So, we got to the little market, and I remember we bought some candy. We were really excited to finally be able to have some candy. And that was as far as Ruth could give us a ride.

So we had to hitchhike to the airport, but we decided to hitchhike to WomanShare if I remember this right. And we finally visited WomanShare. It was really fun. We were there an hour, and again it was the experience of women had their shirts off and were naked, and we just thought that was the coolest thing. And they said, "Come back sometime." They encouraged us to come live there.

And I was happily in my relationship with Paula. Janice said, "I am going to come live here, and I'll be back in November." And it was

probably summertime that the Ovular had happened. And so I remember helping Janice moved back, and I helped her pack her car. She had a little Volkswagen. We stopped in San Francisco to visit Shelly. We kept coming up and driving up, and then we drove with her little Volkswagen Bug down the road, up the road to WomanShare, and we unpacked her.

And everyone was really sweet to me and they said, "Aggie, you got to—" Oh, I changed my name at that point. As we went over the Oregon border, I said “I'm choosing the name Aggie.” And Janice said, “And I'm not going to eat Cracker Jacks anymore.” And she threw her Cracker Jacks out the window as we went over the Oregon border, and I sort of ceremoniously threw out the name Deb out the window, because my name was Debi. And so we were excited, here we are, it's November. Everyone said, "Come, back." And I said, "Oh no. I'm happily in my relationship with Paula."

I get home, and Paula said, "I don't love you anymore, and I found a new lover." And I remember sobbing and then going, “Well what do I have to lose? I think I'll move to a WomanShare.” I called them up and said, "I think I do want to move." And so it was January 2, 1985. Me and my yellow pickup truck with everything I owned in the back, moved to WomanShare, and that was the beginning of a really wonderful new chapter in my life. I lived at WomanShare for three years. And how are we doing?

Long: Yeah.

Agapito: Are we good on time?

Long: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah. It's 10:39. Would you mind going back to the Ovulars and describing what it was like to do photography at Rootworks where there's no electricity, no running water?

Agapito: That was crazy. Ruth made it seem so simple, and that told me what a skilled photographer she was. And she had this amazing setup. So she had a darkroom. She had a holding tank somewhere outdoors that was lined with plastic, and you would dump all the old chemicals into this holding tank. And then they would, I guess dry up in the sun. And then I'm not sure what she would do with them.

Long: And this was the time before digital photography. So it was a wet processing system. So you process the film—

Agapito: Most of us had experience with developing our own film and then processing the negatives and then going into the different water baths and chemical baths to make a print. Ruth had a tiny little dark room set up. The tiniest, only one person could fit in at a time, and you had to be really efficient. And you'd go into it and move around into the different sections until you had your finished print. And then what else? Anyway, you'd come out, and she had a really beautiful old camera. I want to call it an 8 X 10. I don't know what it was, but it was a wooden camera with the front that stretched out,

and she took a lot of photographs of us with that or of things and people and individuals.

She did teach us a lot of wonderful things, but I think the inspiration of living in that environment for a week, and just our imagination just ran wild. It was really, really fun. Learning how to take photographs of people and things and use lighting in ways that I'd never used before. I think some of my most beautiful photography came out of that, and I never did do anything like that again. I did take some classes at Long Beach Community College. Nope, yeah, Long Beach Community College in photography. But I moved into colored photography. And—

Long: Because you were only doing black and white at—

Agapito: I was only doing black and white.

Long: And how did Ruth power the enlarger?

Agapito: Oh, I think she had a bunch of batteries, and they were lined up car batteries, and I wasn't very interested in it, but I do remember how innovative she was. Yeah, car batteries all lined up, and it must've been a solar collector of some sort. That's how she powered it, because they didn't have any electricity there besides for the darkroom.

Long: And how many women were at your workshop?

Agapito: Well, I'm going to guess about nine to eleven or so. We were really close. We all made great friends with each other, and I'm not

friends with any of the women anymore, but I know Janice and Shelly still are in somewhat contact with some of the women. They know where they are.

Raiskin: So you were there in the summer and you came back in the winter? What was that like?

Agapito: Coming back to WomanShare?

Raiskin: In the winter.

Agapito: Freezing, freezing cold. I have never been so cold in my entire life, because you go from a naturally heated home where you switch the thermostat on, to "Okay, here's your tin lizzie" was what my stove was called, because I lived in the hexagon was the name of the cabin at WomanShare that I lived in, and some of the stoves were cast iron, but the stove in my cabin was made out of tin. And it was like an oval shape, and they taught me how to build a fire. But it's one thing to build a fire, and it's another thing to keep it going all night.

So it would kind of glow red, a deep red color. And I am so glad I never burned the cabin down, because I had a candle or oil lamp, both. And then the tin lizzie was trying to keep me warm, but there was a lot of things I didn't understand. Like I guess you have to wear socks at night and, "Oh, I guess I need to wear a hat, and here's my sleeping bag, and how do I stay warm? I guess I better wear long underwear. That'd be good." And then getting into the sleeping bag and pulling it up over my face, because my fire went

out and, "Oh no, I have to get up and pee. This is really a really hard thing to do. Do I go out the door and pee on the ground or do I pee in my little yogurt, Nancy's Yogurt container?"

And anyway, there was basic, basic living skills that you had to quickly learn and not run home to mommy. I really thought it's a good thing that I'm really strong and independent, because I probably felt like calling my mom and saying this is too hard, but luckily I had Janice there. And—

Raiskin: Where did Janice live at WomanShare?

Agapito: Well, Janice lived in one of the other cabins. The Yarrow, maybe. I can't remember which cabin Janice lived in. Actually the very first cabin I lived in was over at Fish Pond, and I had brought my rabbit and my chicken with me. And it was a tiny, tiny one room cabin upstairs, and I reluctantly took my chicken, Mimi, to the chicken coop. There was a cabin called the Chicken Coop, which I lived, in, but there was an actual chicken coop for the chickens. And I loved the chickens a lot. I took my chicken, Mimi. Put her in in January, and she immediately got pneumonia, and the other chickens pecked at her.

So I had to give her antibiotics on a piece of bread, but she came through it. She survived, and she became one of the chickens in the chicken coop. And then my rabbit, Bun, was a big rabbit, and I kept him in a little, little, little cage inside my little one room cabin.

Anyway, I had my pets with me. And yeah, it was an amazing experience. And learning how to live with a collective of women and trudge through the snow to a morning collective meeting or evening collective meeting and then being happy that summer had come, because then you could run around with no clothes on if you wanted. And the food was delicious. There were at least seven of us living there. So that was one person for every night of the week. And so you only had to cook and clean up one night of the week, and the rest of the time you could do whatever you wanted.

It was so much fun. You would garden, or read, work on art projects, work on photography, sit in other people's cabins, enjoying talking, work on different chores that needed to be done, but you'd work in groups. We'd have to go out and cut wood. Somebody was always good at knowing how to fell a tree. And so then you'd chop the tree. Someone knew how to hook up the tree to big chains and fell the tree, and then a gang of women would be with chainsaws, and you'd be sawing big logs. And then you'd haul them into a back of the truck, and then haul them up to the woodshed, and take your turn chopping wood into pieces and hauling that in a wheelbarrow up to the housing.

Agapito: Hauling that in a wheelbarrow up to the house and starting the stoves. And luckily we had electricity for the stove. I was happy about that. But, I believe that was the only electrical.

Long: Was that at the main house?

Agapito: At the main house.

Long: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Could you tell us about what the philosophy of living was at WomanShare? It was a collective. So, women could come and live there in exchange for work? Can you explain that?

Agapito: Well, it seemed like in the early days when I moved there, they would just— well I remember I was at WomanShare when they decided if I could live there or not. I guess I was visiting and they said, "Yeah, you can. The collective met, and we've decided you could live there." And I remember being very happy. Then when I lived there, women would just come up the road. They would hear about us from different ways. I believe women read the book or they'd— I don't really remember the ways that they'd hear about WomanShare. But all over the world, women would come from. And a lot of Swiss women, a lot of German women, Italian women, French, a lot of women from the U.S. And I remember Janice was in charge of correspondence. So she was the one who would be the one who would say, "Yes, come visit." And it was—

Raiskin: And this is through mail?

Agapito: —through mail. Yeah. Everything was in through writing and mail. Then maybe the phone would ring and whoever would happen to be in the house would answer it. And they'd want directions. So you'd have to give them directions, how to get up the mountain road and what to look for. And they'd eventually come up the road either on foot, car, motorcycle. And most everybody spoke English

somewhat, and enough to communicate with us. And what was your question again Linda? You said something about—

Long: How the collective operated?

Agapito: How the collective operated, right. Well, the collective was, we would have a weekly meeting I believe. And then, we would all sit around in the living room and there'd be topics. So you could add topics to the list. There may be just general topics about how much money we had available. I believe we each paid $115 a month towards food and the mortgage maybe, or the household fund. And then someone would be in charge of cooking, shopping, cleaning, and that would rotate. Those responsibilities would rotate. But at the collective meeting, you might have a grievance that you'd need to put on the list.

For instance, my grievance, one time, the person who cleaned the house was called Hazel and there was a TV show with a maid and her name was Hazel. And so we decided that the person who would clean, who had the responsibility of cleaning, would be called Hazel. So, call it “Hazeling” the house. And so, I would start emptying the garbage in the bathroom and there would be Kotex and tampons in it and I'd throw them into the wood stove and I'd light it and they'd start burning. And then it's like, "Ooh, ooh, that is a really bad smell." So my grievance at the collective meeting was no more tampons and Kotex in goes into the wood burning stove. Those need to be thrown out into the regular garbage. And even something like that had to be totally discussed and everyone had

their feelings about it. Like, "Well maybe that would fill up the garbage too much," and, "Well I don't notice. Some people didn't notice the smell, what was wrong with that?"

It was exhausting but hilarious at the same time because, who knows of what a grievance could be? It could be— I didn't want to make things up, but anyway, anything and everything came to the collective meeting. And there'd be some pretty interesting disputes and grievances and, in the end, collectively we would decide on something.

Long: Was it all done by consensus then?

Agapito: All done by consensus. That was another wonderful new experience that I learned. I never lived that way before.

Raiskin: What did you think of it?

Agapito: I liked it a lot. I thought it was a wonderful way to live. I liked living with lots of people. I came from basically a nuclear family and I thought that this was really fun experiencing what you were good at, you could do and excel at. And what you weren't very good at, you could learn new skills. I learned how to weld and I learned how to use a loom. I learned how to cook from some of the Swedish and German women, some wonderful vegetarian foods. Meat wasn't allowed in the main house, but you could cook meat over at Fish Pond. I think you couldn't—was it not drink alcohol? Maybe it was sugar. You couldn't eat sugar.

There were all these restrictions at the main house, but you could go do it at your own cabin or at Fish Pond. So, sometimes we'd say, "Want to make hamburger?" "Yeah, let's go." And so, someone would have gone to town and gotten some hamburger meat and then we'd be over at Fish Pond making hamburger. And you'd be nervous that you might get caught, but there was nothing wrong with it. But still, the vegetarian people were really strong-minded, so anything that was forbidden, you'd be sneaking it. And I think I remember somebody would hoard cookies somewhere and then you'd go, [whispers] "Come on up to my house, we're having cookies." And anyway, it was hilarious.

There was a lot of—one funny thing, I have to tell this story, Janice and I were new. She got there in November, I got there in January and sometime at one point everyone had to sign up for a task that you didn't want to do, but you had to take turns. And so cleaning out the outhouse was one of the tasks and they called it the shitter. And so someone had to shovel out the shitter, which was in a big tin barrel that was buried in the ground. And you'd go and you'd sit on a little toilet seat with a little lean-to over it for privacy. And so our job was, you need to shovel it out into a wheelbarrow and you take it down the hill and you dump it into a big pile on the ground and then cover it with plastic. And then that would be composted to be used on ornamentals around the ornamental trees, not in the garden.

So Janice and I said, "Okay, we'll do it," not knowing what we were getting ourselves into. And so the day came, we took our wheelbarrow, we put little bandanas over our noses for the smell, and then we rolled up to the outhouse and it was kind of full and we're going, "Ooh, ooh." And so then we took shovels and one at a time and they mix sawdust with it. So we'd shovel in and go, "Oh, oh," shoveling it out. And we'd be having our noses covered and then laughing. We laughed hysterically and then we started going, "Oh, there's a Lincoln Log." Because poo swells up with water, no one knows this, but they get really large. And you were shoveling and laughing and practically peeing your pants because you were dry heaving. And anyway, we had a lot of initiations into going from city girls into country girls. And that was a really bad experience.

And then Janice reminded me of one recently. The shower was clogged and we had to unclog the pipes. So I remember they said, "Okay, Aggie and Janice, it's your turn." So we had to go out to the back of the house, the ground is frozen, and we're digging in the frozen ground and going, "How do we even do this? Billie and Shannon go, "Keep going, keep digging." And then we'd finally find the pipe. And then, I don't know, we had to unscrew it and unclog, I don't know, I don't remember many of the details. But I remember the physical details of being freezing and my nose was freezing, my hands were freezing, and I was digging in this frozen ground and it was crazy hard to do. But we had a great sense of humor. We laughed our heads off constantly. We made jokes about

it. And that's how we got through the funny experience of it is laughing a lot.

Raiskin: And so what was the draw? It sounds very difficult and since it's not actually a prison camp and you can actually live otherwise, what was the draw to live there?

Agapito: I think the women were so much fun, that there was so much daily excitement and laughter and, a little bit of heartache. Somebody's heart was broken by somebody. But, it was a mixture of fascination of living with other women and doing tasks that you didn't want to do but you had to because it was your responsibility. Reroofing a cabin or building a solar hot water heater or cleaning out the ditches that ran down the road. And you do everything in big groups, so you'd either do it two at a time or three at a time or it would be the entire collective had to do it because it was required a lot of woman-power to manage a project. And, it was fascinating to me how so much got done and it was enjoyable. Even though it was hard, it was enjoyable and fun.

And there were so many extracurricular things that went on at WomanShare like workshops and I got to meet so many wonderful women in my lifetime there, in my life experience there. Friends that I have to this day. And again, the cooking, the food was fantastic. We just loved eating and, oh we would can all summer. Bev Brown was living with us at the time and she was the expert gardener and she grew gigantic cabbages and rows of tomatoes and strawberries. And we'd have big canning parties in the house and

Bev would teach us how to can and garden and everybody brought their skillset. Everybody was good at carpentry or welding or car engines or building a structure or chopping wood and felling trees, and amazes me. There was not anything that we couldn't do. There was nothing that we couldn't do.

We finally ran electricity down to my cabin because I decided to go back to college at the community college and I needed electricity and I was trying to write essays by candlelight in my cabin, while I froze, and I finally had to come up to the main house to do my homework. And I went to the collective and said, "I really would like to have electricity in the cabin." And there was a lot of discussion about— though finally they said yes. And I remember my ex-partner Paula, who was an electrician, coming up and helping me string electricity down to the hexagon. And I had light for the first time and it was really exciting. I could be a student and I could study in my own cabin.

Raiskin: What were you studying?

Agapito: I was studying horticulture. And that went on to moving from Rogue Community College to OSU to study horticulture. And then Lane Community College to get the science part and that's when I finally moved to Eugene. That was about 1989,1990. And then, finally going to Olympia to go to Evergreen State College, because they had a reciprocity program between the University of Oregon and—or was it Lane Community College? I forget. But a reciprocity

program that I could pay in-state tuition at Evergreen in Washington. So that led to my career in ecological agriculture.

Raiskin: What was Eugene like when you came here? What was your impression of it, and of the lesbian community here?

Agapito: It was a wonderful community. It seemed like I learned a great skill at WomanShare, and that was making friends and learning how to reach out and meet people. And I found a fantastic lesbian community in Corvallis when I went to OSU. I found a wonderful, wonderful lesbian community in Olympia when I went to Evergreen. And when I moved here to Eugene, I also found a fantastic lesbian community. It was really fun and I met a lot of women, and a lot of women knew me because they'd come to WomanShare. We would have "Talent-No-Talent" shows every summer. And so, women would have hilarious entertainment. And a lot of women would come from Eugene, from far and wide, they would come to WomanShare for our— oh, it was the talent show had centered around our, usually an anniversary party for WomanShare.

But anyway, Eugene was really fun. I think my first job was at Organically Grown Co. And somebody knew a lesbian there that worked there named Flaxen was her name. And I got in touch with her and I said, "I'm looking for a job and I know so-and-so." I don't know who I knew, but another lesbian. And she said, "Oh, come on down." And she hired me and I was a—I forget what my title was. But anyway, I worked in a warehouse and I packed pallets full of

produce out of the coolers. And we'd wrap the pallets up. And at that time Eugene was well known for its twenty-one natural food stores or something. There were a huge amount of natural food stores in the city. It was phenomenal. I love natural food stores, so I made a practice of going around to all of them and finding out all the different ones. Some were tiny, some were big, some were—

I really loved co-ops and those are sort of my saving grace. When I'd go to a city or town, I'd find the Corvallis co-op or the Olympia food co-op. When I came to this town, co-ops were a bit, there was something going on that co-ops weren't as popular, but there was a lot of private enterprise in natural food stores. And so working at the Organically Grown Co-op was really a fun way to feed my organic— I loved organic farming and I decided I wasn't going to be a farmer, because I couldn't make a living at it. But I did like working in the retail end of it. So, I went to work at some natural food stores in town and that was my way of life until I decided to go back to college I guess.

I finished my undergraduate degree in Olympia and then came back here and did my work in natural food stores and then decided to go back to school and get a master's in special education at the U of O. But before that, meeting women was so much fun. There was a group here— anyway, I can't remember the name of it, a lesbian group. I'd sort of trained myself to find the lesbians through either Mother Kali's Bookstore or— I was used to gay bars, but in the gay bar here was a little different. It wasn't women only. So I was not

used to— I didn't really go to the gay bar very much here. But I'm trying to remember how I connected with lesbians here—

Well, before I lived here, I was having a long distance relationship with a woman named Cindy Lewis. And so, she lived with LaRosa. She was roommates with the LaRosa. I had my long distance relationship, so I'd drive from WomanShare up to Eugene or she'd drive down. And then that's what made me finally move to Eugene. So, through LaRosa and Cindy, they knew a lot of women and I believe that's pretty much how I got to experience the lesbian community. Then women started recognizing me and knowing me from WomanShare and I believe together through all that, that's how I made friends.

Long: Did you know about Starflower? Was it still operating when you arrived in Eugene?

Agapito: I believe it was, but I didn't really know about it. And I probably, if it was still operating, I would have liked to have worked there. But I don't think— I either heard about it or knew about it, and found Organically Grown Co-op. There were lesbians working there, but there were also men as well. Straight and lesbians.

Raiskin: Why did you decide to study special education?

Agapito: I was volunteering. My partner Cindy was working with Mobility International, USA, short word MIUSA, for that organization. And they were an organization that worked with people from all different countries, also the U.S., people with physical disabilities.

And I— Because I was her partner and they needed volunteers for things, I'd said, "Oh, I'll volunteer." They were going to cook for sixty participants at a gathering at the coast. And so I said, I'll do the cooking and I had to cook on a wood stove, which I'd never done, but I was making chili and hot dogs and whatever it was, required big batches of scrambled eggs. And MIUSA was just a fascinating organization and I'd never really spent time with people with disabilities and just was, again, a new learning curve for me, a new, wonderful experience.

And so, stayed volunteering for MIUSA for many, many years. And decided to go back and get a degree teaching special education and working with people with disabilities, because I did really love the work. And loved the population of people and all the different things that are brought to enriching my life and society and it was wonderful fun.

Raiskin: Where did you end up working in that field?

Agapito: Well, it was very hard to get— I had this wonderful dream of becoming a special ed teacher. But when I got into the work, for various reasons, it was really a struggle for me. I actually found out I had a learning disability. I went to a psychologist and got tested. And it really helped me make sense going all the way back to my childhood, that why I struggled so much. Meanwhile I had to get through my graduate program and I had a two-and-a-half-year old child, two-and-a-half-year old daughter. And one of my saving respites was working at Special Collections, and I met Linda. And

she had a baby as well and we connected with our children and our lifestyles and we became close very fast. It was one of those experiences that I might not have survived if I hadn't worked at my work-study job at Special Collections, or met Linda and Peggy, and because our daughters were all the same age and basically within months or couple of years of each other.

So I struggled through that program. And along with realizing that I had a disability and I realized I didn't want to be a special ed teacher. I could go into massive details about why that was so hard for me. But mainly, I realized what was my original goal, which was working with people with disabilities. And I thought, oh, well I don't have to be a special ed teacher. I have the background now. I can do anything in that field, and so I did. I finally found a job working for Direction Service, which was a nonprofit agency working with families who had children with disabilities. And it was my perfect niche. I loved my work. I didn't have to stand up in a class and work with in front of thirty children or whatever. And anyway, I fell into the perfect role and with my education.

And meanwhile, my life here in Eugene, I just met wonderful, wonderful people and raised my daughter, met my partner Toby, who I met when Maya was born. But we had a women's dinner club and there were four of us, four women, Judy Goldstein, Harriet Rubin, Toby Finkelstein, and myself. And we would meet once a month and each of us would cook dinner for the other three at our houses. And at that point I said, "I'm going to adopt a child."

And then I remember taking Maya, she was just like a week or two old, to Judy Goldstein's house and she was in a tiny little carrier and everyone fawned over her. And, that's how I met— I've known Toby and then I had a dream about her, a sexual dream, and I told the three women at the table and that was sort of the start of our relationship.

And so, Maya was kind of always raised by the village, because my daughter's name is Maya, and Toby and I got together shortly after that. I was in a past relationship with a woman named Lisa and I was going to be a single mom, but Lisa wanted to help. And so I invited her to help me because it was after I had this tiny baby, I thought, what have I done? This is way harder than I ever expected. So I appreciated the help. And so anyway, dinner club, met Toby, got into a relationship, started raising my daughter, went back to school. Met wonderful women like Linda and Peggy, I believe I met you Julee here on campus and started realizing how many lesbians there were in the community, in every area. Professors at the university.

I worked at the corner market at New Frontier Market. Just wonderful, wonderful connections with all the lesbians in Eugene, and how much fun it was living here despite some of the adversity of the different measures that were taking place.

Raiskin: About the ballot measures?

Agapito: About the different ballot measures. I do need to go back in time for a moment, I hope we have time for this. But, when I lived at WomanShare, there was a very— Grants Pass was a very heavy, heavy right-wing, white, as well, and right-wing community. And we had heard that there was going to be a pro-abortion march, excuse me, anti-abortion march in town. And so all the right-to-lifers were coming out and were going to be marching down the streets of Eugene. Excuse me, marching down the streets of Grants Pass. So, four of us decided to go have a pro-abortion stance. And some of the women at WomanShare were afraid to come, because they had jobs in town and they didn't want to be seen.

Agapito: But, four of us had nothing to lose and we wanted to go protest. We made signs on sticks and we took a tape recorder. I think I hung an old— I was a house painter in Long Beach, that was one of my jobs. I had my own house painting business, and I had this little boombox. I put a little cassette in it. I had brought that with me to WomanShare, and so I carried it around my neck and held a sign. And we were chanting. When they got to be on the street, we had to be on the sidewalk and we said, "Keep your laws off our bodies, keep your laws off our bodies." And we were being jeered, and shouted at, and I believe that that tape, cassette tape, might be in Tee Corinne's collection, but, and I might have a copy of it.

Anyway, it was a very thrilling first experience at being political in a very scary— I believe Grants Pass was the head of the Ku Klux Klan and the right wing. It was a very scary time, and that

would've been nineteen— I'm going to say '86, 1986. And very thrilling to protest in Grants Pass. So then moving forward, back up to Eugene, the one I believe, I think it was No on 9, I'd have to get clarification on that one. But I remember holding a sign walking up across the Coburg— What's it called? The Coburg Bridge?

Raiskin: The Ferry Street Bridge.

Agapito: The Ferry Street Bridge, thank you. I had a sign and it said, I believe "No on 9," and there were three of us. And we were marching across the Ferry Street Bridge with our signs so that all the cars could see us going back and forth. A man came towards me and he had his own sign. And he had something negative. And I took my sign and I whacked his sign with my sign, and then he whacked his sign on my sign. And then it was like, "Whoa, we could get into it." But, then I got a little bit scared and I kept going with my sign, and that's the most violence I ever experienced. And then there were— a lot of it's vague, but different women would have house parties, and trying to raise money, and trying to recruit people to help on canvasing door to door, and phone. They call those phone banks, I think they call them.

And I'm a pretty timid person. I'm more of an introvert, shyer. And it's really hard to get me to go to things like that, let alone hold a sign and march. But somehow I mustered the energy in many occasions. And really it was a scary time to live in Eugene. And you didn't want to go to Springfield because it wasn't safe and they were very— they supported— here I'm not going to be able to

repeat the politics very well, but they were in support of the anti-gay/les legislation. And so whatever was going on, there were towns that you didn't want to go to. You didn't ever go to Junction City, or Springfield and give them your business.

You only supported businesses that supported gay politics. And even in Eugene, if you found out that a business was anti-gay, everyone would pass the word really quickly, verbally or by phone, and say, "Oh, we just heard so-and-so." I won't name names, "But we just heard so and so's business. Don't go there and don't shop there." So word spread really fast who we could support and who we couldn't.

Raiskin: Can you say something about raising Maya and what it was like to deal with the schools or other families?

Long: And actually if I could just ask if you could go back further than that and tell us what it was like— what the adoption process was like?

Agapito: Sure. So in my younger years, I wanted to have a child, tried to get pregnant and couldn't, even went to an infertility doctor in Los Angeles when I was married. Got divorced, became a lesbian. And I remember thinking, Oh well, I lost that chance. Gays and lesbians don't have children. And I didn't know anybody with any— the only people I knew were people that already had children, and they either lost their children in a divorce because they were gay or, or they got to keep their children. But I didn't ever know of

anybody successfully having a child when they were gay. So I left that thought behind. I went through life. I moved to Eugene and a couple of friends, I believe I knew two women in Seattle who were the first to fight for the adoption of the daughter that they had together.

I knew of them because I had friends in Olympia and it was about the time those two women fought for the right, the first in the country I believe, to adopt their child together. And then, so I'm really not sure what came over me, what thought processes came over me to adopt a child. But it was part of the zero population control that I remember in the ‘70s being, it was so important to me that the planet was becoming overpopulated and there was a push, and it was called zero population control. And I was so a part of that. And I do remember before I wanted to get pregnant, if I was to get pregnant, I’d have an abortion. That that was important to me. We weren't married, but we were in a relationship. The man that I was with, we were both very sure that I'd have an abortion because I so strongly believed in zero population control.

So then we decided we wanted to have a child and that it would be okay because you were allowed to have— the belief was one child per adult, so you could have up to two children. And so then I thought, "Well, we could have a child." That belief came with me, and I believed strongly in abortion my whole life, my whole adult life. And then protesting in Grants Pass, and then finally wanting to adopt a child, I realized I didn't want to give birth. It always scared

me anyway, and I didn't need to. So I felt like I was a perfect person to adopt. And I knew now other women were starting to use artificial insemination and that they were choosing gay men to inseminate. And I thought, Okay, that's wonderful, but I don't need to do that. In fact, what I'd like to do is give an unwanted child a home.

I believed in that very strongly and started— then the first person I knew that adopted was Lynne Lucas, and her daughter was from China. And I went, "Hmm, that's interesting. I could adopt. I could adopt and I could adopt as a single parent maybe." But I went to an agency and they had some meetings. It was in McMinnville. And I remember being afraid of being lesbian that you couldn't be— the word was, you couldn't really be a lesbian, but you could be a single parent. So I hid my being a lesbian. I wore matching earrings, which I never do. And I kind of put some dye in my hair to look a little younger maybe. And I remember wearing a blouse, I called it a blouse. And I went to the adoption meeting and I went, "Okay, I'm ready for this. I'm going to jump through every hoop they tell me to do."

And I didn't know what country or where the child would come from. But then it came down to how much a child cost, and a child from other countries costs a lot of money. And I didn't have a lot. And I had won a class action lawsuit from having a DellCon Shield and—

Raiskin: That was an IUD?

Agapito: And it was a IUD. And I was part of a big class action lawsuit, and I won some money while it was living at WomanShare, put it in the bank. And I had that money to use to adopt a child. And so they said, "Well, children from the United States were less expensive." And I said, "Then that's what I'll do and I'll adopt an African American child." And I remember being very excited about it, and telling all my family. And I remember my grandmother who was born in Alabama, who was raised in the South, she wrote me a letter back and said, "Honey, I'm so excited for you and so excited that you're going to adopt a child and I hope that you'll adopt any child except a black child."

And I called her and said, "Granny, why would you say that?" And she said, "Honey, I'm just so scared for you having a white mother with a black child. I fear for your life, and I fear for danger, and for the child, for both of your lives." And plus she was racist, but she was coming from a place of being racist and fearing. And had a lot of fear. So I said, "Well, granny, I *am* going to adopt a black child." And so as usual, I was the one who did a lot of things like being a lesbian, and being a hippie, and taking a different road than most of my family members. And so it was standing up to that and believing in it that it was the right thing to do. But the agency, I had to be very closeted.

Raiskin: May I ask why you wanted to adopt an African American child?

Agapito: I had this wonderful feeling of— it was a political statement in my mind and children needed homes, and I didn't care what color the

child was. I just wanted to give a child a good home, and I knew I could do it. I knew that I had the ability; I didn't make a lot of money, but that I could give a child a good life and be a good parent.

Raiskin: Did you specifically want an African American child or were you open to whatever the agency had?

Agapito: Well, I was open to any, but then it came down to money, and I realized, "Oh, a child from Ecuador costs, I don't know, $40,000. A child from China costs thousands and thousands of dollars." And then I said, "How much is an African American child?" Eight thousand dollars." Then, "This is so sad. Why is an African American child— cost so little? That's terrible." And yet that's what I had the money for.

Raiskin: I don't understand the difference. Different race children in the United States, not other countries, in the United States, would cost different to—

Agapito: A white child would've cost a lot more. And I did not want a white child.

Long: Even a biracial child costs more than—

Agapito: Even a biracial child costs more. And so I remember them saying— I remember my therapist asking me- "Well— " I said, "Well, I would like a child that would be at least a light skinned child so that it would look like I was the child's biological mother. That was

my first thought in therapy. And then I said, "Oh, I see. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter that the child looks like my biological child. I can adopt *any* child and they'll be my adopted child." And then the paperwork came back and it said, "We have a child." First they had a boy. And I said, "I think I'll wait for a girl." And funny how you can make that choice. And then they said, "We have a girl," and they listed her skin color. They listed the skin color of her mother and the skin color of the child. And they said, "Light brown." And I said, "Light brown?" Well, as both of you know, my child is dark brown and she's not light brown. And even on paperwork people lie. The color of a person's skin is—

It's so scary how our society views skin color, and how even I viewed skin color, like it was going to be too scary for me if I had a dark skin child and I was a white skin person. But I'm talking hours, days, weeks. I quickly changed my thinking. I realized that I was being racist, and that I would love to have any child, I don't care what their skin color is. And as soon as I saw that paperwork, light-skinned, fine. And then as soon as I saw her very dark skin, "Love this little baby." So it was a fascinating experience inside of me to go through my own built-up racism and then break down those barriers and realize that color didn't have anything to do with it. That it was about loving this baby. And then again, color did have a lot to do with it, and I was extremely proud to have this dark-skinned child. And her skin was so beautiful, and then I wanted to teach her everything about her culture. And that again, another learning curve for me.

I did everything I could to teach her about her race, and it went on from there. It started such a wonderful new experience even though back when I was young and I saw that, I had young black friends, and everyone was— we were all hippies. And then I saw that sign that said "Black is beautiful." I mean, and stop being racist jokes when I was in my twenties. It just continued my own work of racism inside myself and, and now I had this beautiful child, and I was going to stand up to anybody and anything to give her the best life possible. I don't know if I said all that right, but— maybe you'll edit it all out.

Raiskin: Were you part of any parenting groups? Or do you— you said that Maya was raised by a village, who was the village?

Agapito: Oh all right, let's see. Well, we had Janice and Ginger. We had Lisa, Toby, a lot of— then, you're right, I got involved with Rainbow Rascals, which was a lesbian moms group, and met lots of wonderful women through that. It might've been how I met Linda and Peggy. I do remember the very moment I met them. They came to a neighbor's house of mine, and my neighbor had adopted an African-American boy who was older than Maya, maybe about six years older, and somehow they were friends. Maybe through the university. And we met in their backyard and here we were. They were two lesbians.

Here was— I don't know if I was by myself or with Lisa maybe. I had a little baby wrapped in a blanket. They had even a tinier baby wrapped in a blanket, and they had this little adopted boy. And

here we were, three families with three little black children. It was so much fun. It was like the first experience for me of, "This is my community and this is so awesome. And this is how it's going to be. I'm going to keep meeting people with children of color." And then I met Aquene. She came into the store where I worked and she knew that I had Maya who was a baby, and she had her little boy who she'd adopted, Canyon. And she said, "Well, I'm starting up this group and I'm wondering if you wanted to be part of it." And I said, "Sure, it sounds fun."

And I believe we might've gone to Julee and Mary's house and had a meeting there and we had all of our little babies crawling around, running around. And it just was fun. It was fun getting to hear other stories. And I felt a comradery. I felt a big sense of relief that I was meeting other lesbians, raising children. And there were children of color, there were birth children, there were adopted children of different colors. It was just a fun mixture of women. And what we had in common was we were lesbians and we had children. And that turned into from pretty much Maya's birth to the— All the children's growing up years till they graduated from high school and beyond. So that's been a great experience.

Raiskin: So Maya's gone off to college and you've retired recently?

Agapito: Yes.

Raiskin: So what's your life like now? What are you thinking about the future?

Agapito: Well, I'm actually, I don't know if this is the first time for you two to hear this, but Toby and I are renting out the bottom part of our house. We're going to save the top part of our house where Toby lives. It's a one bedroom apartment, and that's going to be our snowbird apartment. And then I've applied for low income senior housing in Hawaii. And I'm going to go live on Oahu in about a year and a half. And I love it in Hawaii and so I'm going to live there full time. And I might come back and snowbird with Toby once in a while, but she'll come and live there in the winter with me, and then we'll visit here in the summer. But Maya is off to college and I believe she's got a pretty steady start.

You know, it gets rocky at times. She's about to go be an Au Pair in Madrid, Spain on October 1, and she wanted to take a gap year from college. So you know, every mother worries about these kinds of things. But she's a young adult. She's turning twenty-two and—

Raiskin: Remember what you were doing when you were twenty-two.

Agapito: And do I ever, I mean, yeah, I was wild and crazy and off on my own. So she wants to come visit me. Wonderful. But yeah, that's where I am now. I look back and reflect on the fact that I'm retired and all the wonderful experiences I've had. And I feel blessed, and all the women I've known and met. Back at that faithful day, that night that I walked into the gay bar and never had a single regret, never looked back. And here I am today with wonderful friends, and a beautiful daughter, and partner and wonderful plans for the future.

Raiskin: Are you confident that you can make a community in Hawaii?

Agapito: Absolutely. And actually, my best friend Diana, who— one of my best friends, she's lived in Hawaii for twenty-five years. And she actually has done all the leg work to find the independent living senior housing that we're both going to be living in. She's going to be moving from the big Island, and she's seventy-five, and I'll be sixty-eight this coming September. So it's a good time for me. I still have— if I have a lot of life in me, that's wonderful. I see myself being really busy in Hawaii and doing a lot of group things, and helping people, and getting involved in everything Hawaiian.

Raiskin: Is this— you said it was assisted living? What is it? It's a retirement?

Agapito: Yeah. It's called low income senior housing.

Raiskin: Okay.

Agapito: And I qualify. So—

Raiskin: Do you know if there's other lesbians or gay men living there?

Agapito: Well, Diana will certainly be there and she's a very political, wonderful, witchy, lesbian from San Francisco and she always finds— she knows women everywhere. She knows lesbians everywhere. She is a social butterfly and I'll be kind of following in her tracks. So honestly, I'd be fine being a hermit and just walking to the beach and whatever I want to do. But yeah, no, I believe we'll be very involved in the lesbian community on Oahu.

Raiskin: Looking back at your rich life that you've just described, imagine a young person watching this video. Is there something that you would— some advice you would give or something you'd like to say?

Agapito: Well, I'd just say maybe a couple of things. One would be really trust your instincts. And what surprised me is that I became a lesbian at age thirty and it was a wonderful experience. And I also adopted a child at age forty-six, who would ever thought? I mean, I meet young people now in their twenties and they're so sure of what they're going to do and where they're going. And they say they're not going to have children. I said, "Hmm. I said that too, but look what happened to me." I just say experience life for whatever it brings you, and be willing to take the ride, because it's really fun and you never know what's coming.

Raiskin: I'll take that good advice too. Thank you.

Long: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]