Oral History Interview with Toby Finkelstein

Interview conducted on August 1, 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

Toby Finkelstein in 1980

Toby Finkelstein on August 1, 2018

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Preface

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

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

The artist Tee Corinne, whose papers and photographs also reside in the University of Oregon Special Collections, asserted, "The lack of a publicly accessible history is a devastating form of oppression; lesbians face it constantly." The Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project seeks to preserve a specific and vibrant history that otherwise is lost. This collection of interviews captures a range of engaging and important stories that reveal new angles on lesbian history, women's history, the counterculture movement in the 1960s-1980s, Oregon history, feminism, sexuality, intentional communities, and women working in jobs reserved for men. Looking back over twenty-five - 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 August 1, 2018. Toby was born in 1946 in Brooklyn, New York. She grew up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, Crown Heights. She discusses the constraints of the neighborhood and racial tensions. Toby attended Hunter College from 1963 through 1969. She discusses traveling around the United States and settling on a lesbian communal farm in Missouri. There, she met Clare Kinberg, and together they travelled to the Pacific Northwest and visited Eugene. Toby discusses the City of Eugene anti-gay Referendum 51. She talks about moving to Eugene, lesbian social life, and alternative businesses in town. She discusses her interview at Starflower Natural Foods & Botanicals and describes the difficult consensus meetings there. She describes the butch/femme dynamic in the lesbian community, sexual relations, the practice of non-monogamy, marriage equality, and how women communicated with each other within the community. She discusses her work at Lane Community College. Toby married her longtime partner, Aggie Agapito, and talks about parenting with her. She concludes her interview by talking about aging and about the range of jobs lesbians had in Eugene.

Additional subjects: Baleboostehs; Amazon Kung Fu; Astrology; Butch and femme (Lesbian culture); Class consciousness; Collectives; Coming out (sexual orientation); Communal living; Cooperatives; Dragon Wagon; Gay rights -- United States; Internalized homophobia; Judaism; Lesbian identity; Lesbian mothers -- United States; Lesbian separatism – Oregon; Marriage equality; Mindlin, Myeba; Mother Kali's Bookstore; Ordinances, Municipal -- Oregon – Eugene; Parenting; Racism; Rainbow Rascals (Lesbian parenting group); Same-sex marriage; Shit jobs; Social classes; Spirituality -- United States; Springfield Creamery; White flight; Whiteaker (Eugene, Or.)

Transcriptionist: Rev.com and University of Oregon Libraries

Session Number: 012

Narrator: Toby Finkelstein

Location: University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon

Interviewers: Linda Long and Judith Raiskin

Date: August 1, 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 Toby Finkelstein on August 1, 2018, taking place in the University of Oregon Libraries' recording studio, in the Center for Media and Educational Technologies. The interviewers are Linda Long, Curator of Manuscripts in the UO Libraries' Special Collections and University Archives, and Professor Judith Raiskin of the UO Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Toby, 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.

Finkelstein: Yes I do.

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

Finkelstein: Okay. I was born in 1946 right after World War II, and in Brooklyn New York, to George and Sylvia Finkelstein. I grew up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood called Crown Heights. My early childhood was, well, this is how I remember it. It was in black and white. My early childhood was— it was like we'd go to the country in the summer and it would be in color, and then we'd go back to the city and it would be in black and white.

I went to public school. I walked to public school and friends in the neighborhood, friends in the building even, my world was very, very small. It was a city block.

Long: Why do you say black and white when you got back to your home?

Finkelstein: Oh, because it wasn't a lot of greenery, and everything was concrete and people even were— truly it was black and white in racial tones, too, because it was a white neighborhood, and then at a certain point, there was a whole exodus of Jews, and an influx of African American or Haitian American people who came to the neighborhood. It was one of the sad things that I remember. I was a late teenager when that all happened, but it impacted me. I was embarrassed that my family fled to not live with people of color, but it was what was happening then. But, the people who stayed were Hasidic Jews and then you might have read in the news there

was all that about the Jews— there was a murder or something. It was bad. There was a lot of conflict in Crown Heights.

Raiskin: Sisters, brothers?

Finkelstein: I have a sister. Her name's Judy, like you. She was five and a half years older than me, and we had an abusive relationship. She was the older sister and she was cruel to me. I guess, she'll never see this, but she knows it too, and she even apologized. But, both my parents worked. My father was a cab driver and my mother worked as an assistant to a— she was like a bookkeeper. We lived in a one bedroom apartment until I was probably in the third grade, and then we moved to a two bedroom apartment in the same house. Very small, little life.

Raiskin: What were your high school years like?

Finkelstein: High school. Well, let's see. Do I remember them? Well, what I remember about high school is mostly hanging out with friends. I went to Erasmus Hall High School, which is on Flatbush Avenue. It was the oldest school maybe in New York, I don't know. There's an old building in the middle, that was, George Washington, I don't know if he slept there, but he was around during that time. It was very old, but the rest of the building was a little newer, but it was architecturally some kind of something.

But, what I remember is, I would walk, I walked a lot in New York. I think people do, but I took public transportation a lot too, and we'd walk down Flatbush Avenue and walk back and forth. It was

like the cruise or something. If there's any classes I remember, not really. What I do remember about my— I was a B student, but in those days, people took diet pills a lot and so I took diet pills and I remembered how smart I felt when I took them. For every test, I took some diet pills and I ended up scoring really good on my PSATs and went to a free college. It's kind of embarrassing, but it all evolved into my life, because I got to go to Hunter College and went there.

Long: That's in Manhattan.

Finkelstein: Yes it is.

Raiskin: Okay.

Finkelstein: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Long: When did you know you were a lesbian?

Finkelstein: Well, for real, I knew it when I moved out of New York and I was living on a communal farm. It was called Dragon Wagon— no, no, sorry, that's wrong. I knew before that. But, I was hanging out with the women from Dragon Wagon, and I would have such a good time with them. We would sing and dance. And then, I was in a heterosexual abusive relationship and it would be like I'd go back to it and think, "Whoa, this is not fun. This is bad. Oh, this is so much fun," and I went to this festival, women's festival and it was there that I said, "I want to be a lesbian," because somebody said to

me, said, "You're not straight," and I thought it was the best compliment I ever got.

Raiskin: What's this organization that you, this place that you spent a lot of time with lesbians at, what was that called? The Red—

Finkelstein: The Dragon Wagon.

Long: Dragon Wagon.

Finkelstein: Yeah. And then it changed—

Long: It was a bar?

Finkelstein: No, no, it was a communal farm in Missouri.

Long: Oh, okay.

Finkelstein: Yeah, see, I knew some lesbians when I lived in New York. When I left New York with my boyfriend at the time, we traveled around the country trying to find a new home, and we stopped at Dragon Wagon, because I had a friend who I was a welfare worker with, and she sat in front of me, and I visited her and we liked that farm. And then, we broke up, and we moved back there. We broke up and I moved in and spent three years on that farm. And, I came out.

Raiskin: Just to back up to college for a minute, what years were you in college?

Finkelstein: 1963 to '69.

Raiskin: And, what was that like?

Finkelstein: Well, that was the emerging radical time, although it hadn't really hit my school that much, because I was going to an all women's school at the time. First year is when they decided to have boys come to Hunter. And, it was a city college, so that was unusual, but it had the history of being an all women's school. There were very few men there, really. What did you ask?

Raiskin: What your college experience was like, it being all women. Was that interesting to you? What was it like when the men came?

Finkelstein: Oh, you know, it was very minimal. Yeah. Well, it was a city college, so I commuted to school, so it was an hour and a half each way, and I rode the train, so it was really almost like going to high school for me. It was pretty much the same, except I had some really good teachers. I had two instructors that really made an impact on me.

Long: Did your parents encourage you to go to college?

Finkelstein: Well, I think my mother— I was the first in my family to go to college, so it was unusual. My mother probably liked it. My father didn't think it was necessary. He had no education. He didn't even graduate from elementary school, I don't think. I think maybe he had an eighth grade education. And, my mother almost had a high school education. But, she was curious. She liked history. She read a lot.

Long: Were they born in New York? Did you already talk about that?

Finkelstein: No, they were. They're first generation. They were both born in New York or Brooklyn, I can't remember.

Long: Okay.

Finkelstein: Yeah.

Raiskin: What did you know about Eugene, back when you were traveling around?

Finkelstein: Not much. No, because New York is very myopic, I guess. There's New York and California, and something in the middle, but who knows what that is. And so, that's where we traveled from, New York, and through that we went through Missouri where I had a friend, and then we went to California and I thought I was going to live in California, and then we moved back to Missouri. But, how I ended up in Eugene was, I had lived in Missouri for three years, and it was a great life. We lived on the farm. We ate what we grew and we had animals and each one of us had to go out and make a living every once in a while, but I think the place was paid for or something, and it wasn't a lot of money that we had to conjure up, but it was meager times. And, I thought, Well, I better leave and make my way economically somehow.

My friend, you might remember, Clare Kinberg, so she lived on the farm, too, and so together we traveled in the way you traveled

then, which is you drove people's cars cross country. I don't know. I don't know if they do that anymore.

Long: As a service to get the car from one place to the other?

Finkelstein: Yes, yes.

Raiskin: Okay.

Finkelstein: And so, I guess you paid for gas. I'm not even sure about that. We drove a car, and we had friends in Seattle and then we went down, and her brother was Myron Kinberg, who was the rabbi here. And, when we came to Eugene to visit, the referendum that was on the ballot was 51, which was a Eugene measure that was about— well, the local government said, got it on the books that you can't discriminate against gays in employment and housing, and then some other group, I can't remember the name of it now, I don't think it was the OCA, but it was a little earlier, but they put it on the ballot and that's when I came through. So, it was on the ballot—

Raiskin: What was on the ballot was the—

Finkelstein: To take away those rights. Yes, to take away those rights. You'd walk around and there'd be people with buttons saying "What do gay people want, ask me." And so, everybody was out. You could visibly see them. And, I was so excited, and then you'd walk around and everybody had signs on their lawn. It was just— I thought, "Oh my goodness." I was from Missouri at that point,

where we were the only lesbians living among a very— I don't know, it was very Christian back there too.

They didn't know what to make of us at all. So, here I am, and I'm so excited, and I even got to vote. I don't know how that happened, but you could register and vote. It was an off election. It was May of 1978. I voted and the measure got defeated, of course, as history said. But, there was this vigil and it was at the Eugene Hotel at the time, and—

Raiskin: I just want to clarify that the measure, which was to revoke the rights—

Finkelstein: Passed.

Raiskin: And that the discrimination was revoked.

Finkelstein: Right. The discrimination—

Raiskin: The anti-discrimination was revoked.

Finkelstein: So, discrimination was upheld.

Raiskin: Yeah.

Finkelstein: At the Eugene Hotel, there was a whole vigil and everybody was there. Myron Kinberg was speaking because he was involved in that, and it was a room, hundreds, and hundreds of people who were supportive of gays. And, it was like, wow, so wonderful. And then, we had a candlelight vigil. I think I had some vigils that were at people's houses in the backyard and it was just so wonderful.

So, after I left, I decided to come back after— I came back in December. I come back to the same town and it's winter here, which is really different than summer here, and the measure had passed, failed, whatever, it's so confusing. And so, people were more closeted again. Not too much, but a little bit more, not as much as they were before, and I just felt like, "Wow, what happened?" And, it was winter, and rainy, but I stayed anyhow, and I made friends easily, because a lot of people had been just infiltrating in.

Raiskin: Where did you meet people?

Finkelstein: I met them at the bar, pretty much, I think, or I also volunteered to work at Mother Kali's, which was the feminist bookstore, co-op owned. I volunteered, met several friends there.

Raiskin: What was that bookstore like?

Finkelstein: It was great. It was the hub for people getting together, learning about lesbianism, feminism. It was left wing. It was great. It was a great little bookstore.

Long: Where was it located at that time?

Finkelstein: It was located on Blair and Fifth.

Raiskin: Okay.

Finkelstein: And, next door was an auto shop, and we shared a disgusting bathroom. And then right next door was this place called Zoo

Zoo's, which was a restaurant, a natural foods restaurant, and the whole neighborhood, which is the Whiteaker neighborhood, which has become groovy again. It was really nice, and I lived in that neighborhood as well.

Long: When you lived here, at that time, what did you do for a living?

Finkelstein: Let's see. I tried to get work. Well, one of the reasons that I moved here is that there were all these co-ops. There were Surata Soy Foods, Starflower, Crescent Construction. There was all these alternative businesses that were small.

Raiskin: Were they women owned?

Finkelstein: Mostly. Not all, but it was a whole explosion of them really. I went the route and almost got a job in most of them, but then I ended up creating my own house painting business, which is interesting, because my partner now does that. I got a few jobs. I wasn't the best house painter. I was fast and sloppy. But, I had a partner who was slow and precise, so she backed me up. So, the people were not unhappy.

But then, I got a job at Nancy's Yogurt, and that sustained me for about three years. I was working on the fruit crew, we called ourselves, because we put the little packages of— we cooked all the fruit, and then we put the little packages of fruit. Three women were doing that two days a week, or three days a week, and it was enough to survive on, because I don't know, I don't know how we

did it, but I guess the economy was different then, and you could do that.

Long: Where did you live? Did you have housemates?

Finkelstein: I did have some house mates and I did move around a lot. I don't know why, but I lived on Elkay Drive in a back house of somebody's— I did live collectively in the '80s in this nice house on Fifth Street. Yeah, I moved around a lot. My mom said she had to put my address in pencil, whereas other people had pen.

Raiskin: What did it feel like to be, for you, in a community at that time?

Finkelstein: That was great. It was so great. It was just, yeah, I just loved it.

Raiskin: Can you describe a typical weekend or—

Finkelstein: Well, there was always events happening, or we'd go to the bar. Plus, I was young and so full of energy. Gee, yeah, it was fun. There was a lot happening. I was involved in kung fu, which was called Amazon Kung Fu and I did that for several years.

Raiksin: How old were you during this time?

Finkelstein: I was in my early thirties. Yeah, yeah, because I came out when I was twenty-eight, part of my Saturn cycle. I don't know if you know about that. But, I really came out pushing and screaming against it. I don't know why. All the evidence proved I was, but I just was resistant because of my own homophobia I suspect. And

then, when I finally came out, I was at peace and it felt right. I felt like I was home. I was home in myself. I was home.

Raiskin: Do you remember what it felt like that— those feelings of homophobia, what you imagined lesbians were, why you didn't want to be one?

Finkelstein: It had a lot to do with men, because I loved my father and a lot of the movement was separatist, and I was a separatist, so I had conflict, because I had two men in my life that were very nice and sweet, my father and an old boyfriend, and so, for me there was conflict about rejecting all of that. But, the positive part was we were creating something new that had values that were much more progressive, and good.

Raiskin: What did you know about the lesbian land in southern Oregon?

Finkelstein: Well, when I visited, I connected with that because I was on lesbian land in Missouri, and they were all connected through these magazines, *Country Women*. Just like when I grew up in New York, my world was very small, my lesbian world was only connected in dots but that was my world. I didn't really even know the rest existed anymore. It was just the world we were creating.

Raiskin: Did you find that there were conflicts in the community at the time?

Finkelstein: There were class conflicts, I think. I think those were vocalized. There was some race exclusion that was talked about. Eugene tried their best, considering the demographics.

Raiskin: Coming from a working class family, how did you experience those class conflicts in the lesbian community?

Finkelstein: I was resentful. I saw them as privileged and not understanding the world as I saw it. I applied to Starflower. I ended up working at Starflower and I got in through a girlfriend, but before that, I applied and— grueling interviews there. They were just terrible. They were.

Long: What did they ask you?

Finkelstein: Oh, they asked you a lot of questions, like who you would hire if you were there. Would you hire men? Would you not hire men? It was just a very difficult interview. I had one interview there where I actually cried, because they said, "Well, what kind of work did you do in the past?" And I said, "Shit jobs." And they said, "We can't hear you." And I said, "Shit job."

I didn't get that job, which is interesting because later— [oops, this is moving—gestures to the tablecloth], because later I ended up, my job at Lane Community College was training people how to interview, and get a job. I might have even told that story, how not to do it, but that was one thing I experienced. But anyhow, after I got rejected, yeah, I'm getting back there. After I was rejected, I wrote a scathing letter to them all. It was all about class, because I

was very outraged. I said, "You're like the sorority girls on the hill who were rejecting me" and they posted it on the wall. And I don't know how I ever got a job there later, but I did.

Long: And, what year was this, when you first applied to Starflower?

Finkelstein: That would be '80, something like that, '80, '81, '82. I think I finally started working there in '83 or before. And, I started as a packager of herbs, which was very fun. I liked doing that. I like manual labor. But then, I became in the sales department. For some reason, I've always been fairly good with computers and we had this big, old, ancient mainframe. We did sales over the phone. People ordered, co-ops ordered and businesses ordered.

Long: So, what was it like working in a feminist co-op, largely lesbian, organization?

Finkelstein: Well, a lot of people remember it as wonderful. I remember it as grueling. I enjoyed the atmosphere, but the meetings were horrible.

Long: Why?

Finkelstein: Because we were built on consensus and so they would belabor things to death. I say they and not we, because I couldn't do it. I just hated the meetings. But, I loved all the people there.

Long: And, my understanding is that as a co-op, that everybody got paid the same wage.

Finkelstein: Perhaps, at one point. At the end, that changed. We had a hierarchy of management and workers and supervisors, which might have been part of its demise. The demise was political because it was during Reaganomics and our vendors were starting to get more corporate rather than— help me. Rather than small, small businesses. And then, those vendors didn't want to give us leeway, or whatever that is, lead time, because we were a middle— we purchased from the distributors, the growers or distributors, and then sold to smaller businesses. And so, the exchange of money would come when they paid us, and then we'd pay them. Something happened and that got disrupted.

Long: What kind of products did Starflower distribute?

Finkelstein: Natural foods, we did bulk grains, cheeses, and the herb department, boxed things. It was all natural or organic, and it was early in the time before they were at the big supermarkets, and so that was the only way that people actually got that kind of food. We had our own truckers who were mostly women who drove to— oh I don't know if they drove to Seattle, because Seattle had its own thing, but down to California, either to pick up product and then bring it back, or drive to the stores.

Raiskin: A lot of women were doing non-traditional work for women, and what was the attitude about butch/fem in relationships and about taking on more masculine occupations. How did people feel all the aspects?

Finkelstein: Yeah, that was a fact. We bought into butch/fem and it was a reality.

Raiskin: Could you describe that more?

Finkelstein: Well, one thing is that butch was considered better than fem. And so, at that time, I was all into flannel shirts and trying to butch it up as best I could, but I realized that I wasn't a butch. I am a very capable person, and so that part I can do. I can fix things, and I'm interested in how things work, and I never drove the truck. I really was not that comfortable in non-traditional work, except for the painting. So, most of the things that I did were a little bit more traditional, like sales, marketing, graphic design, a little bit more mainstream, regular for women.

Raiskin: It's interesting at that time about butch/fem performance and identity, given the feminist lesbian separatism.

Finkelstein: Yeah, that's true.

Raiskin: I wonder if there's some conflict or issues in the community about that, how to think about that?

Finkelstein: I don't know if there was conflicts in the community. It was the values. Some people didn't want to identify as butch and fem, and they weren't. So, there you go. But, some did and there was a—yeah, I would say that that was an existing thing. And, a lot of people, even when I moved to Eugene, because on the farm we didn't talk about butch/fem, and with thought that was an old

concept. And then, coming here, we figured out that we were negating our history if we discarded that.

Long: I'd like to ask about your social networks, just even within Eugene.

Finkelstein: Oh good.

Long: How would you communicate with other women to organize a gathering, plan an event, what have you. Did you mainly use the telephone, the landline to call people?

Finkelstein: I think we did, but we did a lot of fliers and posters. I think that was a big communication thing, putting them up all over the place. In fact, that's what I brought in my book some of the fliers that I created for different events or for— yeah, I think it was a lot of word of mouth.

Long: Word of mouth.

Finkelstein: But, probably telephone or just in person, maybe at the bar, you'd communicate. It was way before cellphones, Internet and any of that.

Long: There must have been parties, people—

Finkelstein: Lots of parties.

Long: Was there somebody who was an organizer for those events, that you would look to as organizing, or was everybody involved in creating that?

Finkelstein: No, there were some organizers, but I can't remember who they were. Sally and Enid were big— we had this community of Jewish lesbians and we called ourselves Baleboostehs, and we would do events, Passover Seders, the Hanukkah parties, whatever. And so, they were maybe leaders in that area, and some other areas too. There was music and entertainment, but I think there was some people who did production. I can't remember who did that, maybe Laura Philips, I'm not sure. Yeah.

Raiskin: We haven't heard a lot about music.

Finkelstein: Oh no?

Long: Yeah. Do you remember women's music or concerts or—

Finkelstein: Yes. Yes. There was. There was women's music on KLCC and that was once a week.

Raiskin: That's the local radio station?

Finkelstein: Local radio station, thank you. And, I think we brought people to town and yeah.

Raiskin: Enid did a women's music night.

Finkelstein: That's right. Yeah. Right. And, we had dances. I think mostly it was parties. And then, they became fundraising parties for some cause or another.

Long: There are different levels of being out.

Finkelstein: Yes.

Long: So, within your community, you're out to your friends and coworkers, but then just generally in Eugene, did you want to always announce yourself? How was that done?

Finkelstein: Right. For me, that was still kind of an issue. When I worked at Lane Community College, I was out to all my coworkers, but I was not always out to my students, and I was teaching a class and I decided to come out, which was always a scary thing. And, I was received very positively.

Raiskin: What were you afraid of in coming out to the class?

Finkelstein: That they would not like me or that they would judge me. The times weren't all that supportive, even though we were supportive of each other, the times were not. Once, we had a float in the Eugene parade and I was nervous. But, as we were going down the streets, there was some applause for us, because we were just a minor group. It was really before it emerged as a presence, I think.

Long: What was the float about though? Just being a part of a gay organization? Or was it one of the ballot measures?

Finkelstein: Well, it could've been, but the one I remember doing was more like we are everywhere. We're historians. We're activists. We're this, and I think we pretended to be different things in history.

Raiskin: What was your job at Lane Community College?

Finkelstein: I was an advisor for a program through the workforce network, which gave scholarships to people who were unemployed or between jobs.

Long: Was that the Women in Transition?

Finkelstein: No, they were just women and we were the unemployed of Lane County. Yeah. But, this, sometimes they mixed. But, we gave scholarships, so we helped pay for some of their training or their education, and I advised them on job search and how to write a resume and taught classes in computers, just to upgrade people's skills. It was a good job. I did it for almost twenty years.

Raiskin: What about, how was sexuality understood in the community and what kind of relationships were you having at this time?

Finkelstein: Oh. Well, non-monogamy was a big issue. That was one of the big issues, not to be a couple, to explore that. There were people who said, "Your friends should be your lovers, and your lovers should be your friends," so, there was a lot of sexual exploring. Let's just say that. And, there was also a brief movement of SM that came through the community that, I didn't really want to do it. Having been abused, it didn't appeal to me. But, it appealed to some people, and so they did that, but sexuality was open. And then, people gradually became couples. This is a pretty couple-y town now, I'd say. Yeah.

Raiskin: And, why do you think it's more couple-y now?

Finkelstein: Now? I think people grew up. I don't know. I don't know what the younger generation is doing, but they look pretty coupled, and now that there's marriage equality, lesbians, gay people are getting married. I just got married in December of this year.

Long: Congratulations.

Finkelstein: Thank you.

Raiskin: How was that, and why did you decide to get married? And who did you marry?

Finkelstein: Well, I married Aggie, Aggie Agapito. We've been together twenty years. We had a daughter we raised and we did our lives together and we suddenly decided, "Yeah, let's get married." We didn't run on the bandwagon of the people who did it first, as soon as it became legal, but it seemed like we want to do it, and then I was glad we did. It actually brought us closer. It's interesting.

Long: Did you go down to the courthouse?

Finkelstein: No, we did it at our house and Tova Stabin, she officiated. We just had a few close family around. Maya was in town so— Maya's our daughter, and so she was here with a friend and that was pretty much it. But, it was really sweet. It was really sweet. We had fun planning it, and then we had fun doing it.

Long: I want to ask you about parenting and—

Finkelstein: Oh yeah, that's right.

Long: And, I'd like to go back to, just for a second, to some of the early years in Eugene. I'm wondering if you could describe, or if you recall at all what some of the conflicts might have been in the community? Were there some— I don't want to say trouble makers, but were there some people who were at odds maybe with the overall group of people?

Finkelstein: Inside the community?

Long: Yeah, in the community.

Finkelstein: You know, I don't recall a lot of conflict.

Long: Okay.

Finkelstein: Yeah. There might have been, but I don't really recall a lot of conflict.

Raiskin: Since we're back in the earlier years, what do you remember about the ballot measures, 13, 9, 8, 9, all the anti-gay ballot measures?

Finkelstein: Well, I wasn't super involved in the ballot measures, but of course, I voted and I supported it, and we'd always have a table at the events, like the Eugene Celebration or even Lane County Fair or something.

Raiskin: Was it emotionally troubling to you to go through those times, or it didn't impact you that much?

Finkelstein: It didn't really impact me. It was sort of the roller coaster. Okay, we have some rights, no we don't have some rights. It did bother me

that that was happening. It didn't feel good, but there were victories and so that was good.

Raiskin: So, about parenting in Eugene as a lesbian. Can you tell us about that?

Finkelstein: Well, I met my partner when she had just adopted her daughter, who, at the time we met, I think she was, well, she was an infant. And so, I was part of the parenting community, but I was a little periphery because I kept myself there. I was afraid to commit to being a parent. I wanted to be an auntie, but I ended up being a parent. And, the groups were very supportive, because it was important to have other people like you. In fact, Maya, who's our daughter, I think she thinks about all those other kids from the lesbian families as siblings— she grew up with them—or cousins, or something— something close to family. And, she still has relationships with them. I think it was really good. Really good that that support was there. And, it was there a few times. There were several parenting groups.

Raiskin: How were they formed and how many people were in them? What were they called?

Finkelstein: Oh, okay, well the first one was called LMNOP, Lesbian Moms da, da, da.

Raiskin: Lesbian Moms 'N Other People.

Finkelstein: And then, sorry, I keep doing that [gestures to tablecloth]. Is this close enough though?

Raiskin: Yeah.

Finkelstein: Okay, and then, the group that we were part of was called the Rainbow Rascals and I think we met, maybe once a month I'd say, maybe more often, but once a month for a potluck and the kids just ran wild and played and had fun in different people's houses. There was always some agenda to talk about, get involved with. There was camping.

Long: The Labor Day annual camp out.

Finkelstein: That's right. That's right. At Honeyman mostly, and just different activities for the kids. Going on the pumpkin ride. Just different things that were fun for them.

Raiskin: When you say there was agenda items for the parents, what kind of things did the parents talk about, about parenting?

Finkelstein: I don't know. I didn't go to those. But, you know how it is to just raising a kid and doing it respectfully. A lot of the kids were adopted. Not all, some were biological. Gee, I guess there is issues raising kids, and you had support for it. Maybe some of it was about being lesbian, being out.

Raiskin: Were you involved with Maya's school at all?

Finkelstein: A little bit. A little bit. I taught one class on cooking for her French class, and that was really fun to do.

Long: We did want to talk about the topic of aging in the lesbian community. Let's just open that for discussion.

Finkelstein: Okay. We are aging. That is true. And, also some of the parts start breaking down and people have surgery, illnesses, some have died, and so it is an awareness. Right now, I think I like to be supportive of people who are going through some medical issue, be there for them. I do have a background as a CNA in one of my shit jobs as I call it. I do have that caregiving aspect to me, and I like to help out, because it's a burden for either the partner or if there is no partner, that's even harder. I think we're aware of it. I'm on Medicare now, and so there's something called Silver Sneakers, or Silver and Fit, which is part of some insurance plans on Medicare, and so I see a lot of women at the spa, doing exercise classes to try and maintain some form of agility.

Raiskin: How are older women in the community doing economically? A lot of people had, as you call, shit jobs or lower wage jobs. How are they doing now as people are retiring?

Finkelstein: Most of the people retiring and doing quite well, that I see. My partner, not so much. Well, because she didn't join the bandwagon soon enough to get a good retirement, but yeah, I don't really know about the people who aren't doing so— some are just stuck on Social Security, and that's not enough. But, a lot of people have

planned ahead, and some people who didn't have PERS or something like that, which I do, but not a great PERS, but it's a good enough one, invested money. I think that there was a whole era after our whole lesbian community, where we realized, "Uh oh, we better start planning for the future," and got jobs that were better paying in positions of responsibility, like in the city or different places.

Raiskin: It's interesting to think about the lesbians of the community, having jobs in the city, and running in part Eugene, the city. What kinds of jobs did people have?

Finkelstein: Oh. Let's see. Well there was the college, and there was people at the college in all areas, and in the city, there's the county, and there were people in high positions of personnel, whatever.

Raiskin: Being a librarian.

Finkelstein: Librarians, yeah.

Long: Did you ever experience discrimination because you were a lesbian, or did you ever find yourself in a situation where you felt like you were in danger?

Finkelstein: No.

Raiskin: No?

Finkelstein: No. I guess I didn't put myself out there that much. I checked it out to see if it was safe. Yeah.

Long: But, you had a sense to protect yourself.

Finkelstein: For sure. For sure.

Long: If you needed it, you had to protect yourself.

Finkelstein: For sure, yeah.

Long: When you think back about your life in Eugene and the lesbian community, what would you say has been your greatest joy in that experience?

Finkelstein: I think building this community of values that were social, economic. The whole thing being inclusive, having fun. It was, I think it was good. It was good. It was very full, lots of people in it.

Raiskin: Looking to the future, do you see that community thriving as everybody ages? Staying as a Eugene lesbian community?

Finkelstein: I don't. I don't.

Raiskin: Why?

Finkelstein: Well, because we've isolated ourselves in smaller, tinier groups, couples pretty much, and so the community base is still there, but not as utilized as it's been and there's always been talk of maybe we should do tiny houses and live in community again, but lots of us have been in community and it was stressful. That was a stressful thing when people lived in community and they didn't agree on how to live, how to do the dishes or how to clean, or whatever, money. So, there's resistance to that, but there is hope that we'll

take care of each other somehow in our aging, and I don't know that there's a structure for that. It would be nice. So, there's talk, but no action.

Raiskin: What haven't we asked you about that you would like to tell us?

Finkelstein: Let's see. Did we cover all of the things that were happening?

Raiskin: What was this comment you made about Myeba's backyard?

Finkelstein: Oh yeah. Well, that was the witchy aspect. There's a lesbian spiritual aspect to the lesbian community that some participated in. We had a thing in her backyard. The night before the vote or something like that, one of the votes, and so that was nice. That was a meeting of the other lesbians as well.

Long: About the ballot measures?

Finkelstein: Yeah.

Raiskin: Yeah. What kind of rituals did you do?

Finkelstein: Oh, just— I don't know. Open the circle, close the circle, wish for something, drum, create energy. Well, I had this experience when I was at one of the Baleboosteh meetings, where there was a peace agreement in the Middle East, a temporary peace agreement, and then we went around the room to say how we felt about it, and everybody had a slightly different perspective, but together, it was so powerful about how we all want to see peace in our lifetime, how we all wanted to see peace in the Middle East, how we all

wanted to see people being able to live together well. And, that was the essence of what we were trying to do in the lesbian community.

Raiskin: If you imagine a younger person watching your— talking about your life, is there something specific you'd like them to know about Eugene, or about how to live?

Finkelstein: Well, I would say— let me think for a sec. I don't know what to say to a younger person, except be true to yourself, be loving, be kind, reach out to others, don't isolate. Create what you would like to see in the world, however you do it. One of the things I remember, some people were political. Some people were spiritual. Some people did this, and it's okay, whatever path you take, just as long as you do take a path that goes somewhere.

Long: Thank you so much Toby.

Finkelstein: You're welcome. That was fun.

[END OF INTERVIEW]