Oral History Interview with Catherine Harris

Interview conducted on August 22, 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

Catherine Harris, ca. 1985

Catherine Harris, August 22, 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 22, 2018. Catherine was born in Omaha, Nebraska, but grew up in southern California, where she knew from an early age she was drawn to the spiritual dimension of life and also that she especially loved the energy of women. Her father was from Albany, Oregon. She went to college at the University of California, Berkeley in 1966. She protested the Vietnam War and was arrested. After college, she did various jobs, including working on a fishing boat and as a school bus driver in San Francisco, and met some great lesbians. She spent some time in Mexico and Central America, and then moved to Eugene in 1976. She studied astrology and participated in women's spirituality circles. She discusses mystically-inclined women. Catherine became the manager of Peralandra Bookstore, which was on East Eleventh and Alder, and bought it in 1979. In Eugene, Catherine had short-lived lesbian relationships. This was a very rich time in her life. She discusses the cultural character of Eugene. Later, she opened herself up to other possibilities and met a man, Ross. She discusses "hasbians," lesbians who formed relationships with a man. In her case, she felt that identifying as bisexual was more honest to who she is. She discusses the attitudes lesbians have about hasbians. Catherine has been a serious student of Buddhism. She concludes her interview by discussing the Aquarian energy in Eugene.

Additional subjects: Aging; Bisexuality; Gertrude's Café (restaurant); Mama's Homefried Truckstop; Mother Kali's Bookstore; Wild Iris (restaurant).

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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 Catherine Harris on August 22, 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.

Catherine, 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.

Harris: Yes, I do.

Long: Thank you very much. Why don't we just start with a basic question; can you please tell us where and when you were born, where you grew up, and something about your early background?

Harris: Okay. Well, I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, but I don't have any memory of that, in December of 1947. My earliest memories, my family, my mother and father, moved to southern California. And so, my earliest memories are in Inglewood of southern California. And, let's see— both my parents were college educated, which was unusual, but neither one did a college educated job. My little brother was born, he's four years younger than I am, and he had asthma, and my dad had been raised in Albany, Oregon, and wanted to be a farmer again. So, we moved up to the Antelope Valley, which is in the corner of Los Angeles County, where he had a chicken ranch, and we lived out in the country.

And so, I had to take a school bus to school, and I was less than thrilled about that life actually. I was more social, and would have enjoyed being around more children than I was able to, since I went on the school bus. It had to be arranged to get together with other kids, but—

Raiskin: How old were you when you moved to Antelope Valley?

Harris: Well, I was in, probably, the second grade, I think. There I benefited greatly from the wonderful free education that was available in

California in those days. Really great teachers in high school, and then went on to— I spent one year at the junior college there in Antelope Valley, and then I went on to Berkeley. And, for $100 a quarter, and great experiences there. I particularly enjoyed going to political rallies there every day with, Noam Chomsky was there at the time, Michael Lerner was there, Ernest Becker.

Raiskin: What was the year that you started there?

Harris: I started there in '66, and should have graduated in '69, although I didn't. I got a great education, but I didn't complete my requirements. And I moved around from major to major. I really couldn't quite find anywhere—and so, I ended up in history, which actually suits me quite well, but they had a requirement for a thesis, and I just wasn't prepared. My interests were too broad, and it was too big a school, really, at that point. I didn't get the individual attention I would have needed to pull that off. So, that's too bad. I'm sorry about that, but I am grateful for what an interesting education it was, when an interesting time to be there. Of course, it was the Vietnam War years, and the early beginnings of feminism, or the second wave, or as I experienced it at my age, there may have been earlier than that, but belonging to a consciousness raising group with other women.

Long: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Harris: Well, gosh, I was young then, I was probably only, I don't know, maybe twenty, nineteen, twenty. I was just at awe, actually, of the

other women. I have to say that, I felt a lot like I had been raised in the sticks, and to come to Berkeley, and women who are from intellectual Jewish families and leftist families, I was in awe, but whatever, I stuck in there, but I don't remember a lot of those, except I remember women in the group dealing with wanting to leave a marriage, or dealing with infidelity within a marriage, or how they felt about the other women who were in involved in that. I'm not aware that anyone identified as a lesbian at that point.

Raiskin: Were there any women studies classes at Berkeley yet?

Harris: I don't think so. I'm not sure. If there were, they were just beginning. And I remember going to the placement center and the counselor saying to me, "Well, if you were a man, we have all these job opportunities, but because you're a woman, we don't." So, I had a very hard time, and maybe this has continued throughout my life, of figuring out where I would fit in. I would say that's pretty descriptive of me.

Raiskin: Do you remember if the Berkeley Women's Health Collective was there yet?

Harris: I think it was maybe just beginning, or maybe began a few years, because I hung around Berkeley then, after I was through with school for a few years. And, yes, it began— I don't remember exactly what year it began, but probably most of the exciting stuff started to happen after I was out of school, and that might be true of that, our consciousness raising group too.

Long: Did you participate in any of the protests against the Vietnam War?

Harris: Yes.

Long: What was that like?

Harris: Well, sometimes it was exciting and invigorating when you were marching up a street in San Francisco and looked down the hill and saw oceans of people there, and sometimes it was very scary, because, of course, the police violence. And, I was there during People's Park, and got swept up in the mass arrest. And, I just have to look back and laugh on it, because I really didn't have much political consciousness, even though I was going to political events all the time, and, in fact, I studied a lot of political science. That was one of the areas that I was moving around in before I ended up in history, because there were some wonderful teachers of political theory there that really interested me a lot. Philosophy, political theory were very much interests of mine. But nonetheless, it was like, "Wait a minute, I didn't mean— can I go home, sir?" "No, you're—"

Long: So, you were actually arrested.

Harris: I was actually arrested, yeah. They entrapped a bunch of us in downtown Berkeley, and we were carted off to Santa Rita County Jail, I think is what it was, and held overnight. And, of course, men had a harder time than we women did, but nonetheless, it was not fun, and it was— and I certainly did not go to a lot of protests where I knew that the male leadership was looking more for

confrontation. I forget, there was something called days of rage, I think, and going to the draft induction center, and— I was careful, but I was very interested, and I would go to peaceful protests that I had reason to think would be peaceful.

Raiskin: Did you have connection with the Haight-Ashbury, Summer of Love? You're there right at that time.

Harris: Not really. I was a little young for that, and still having to go home in the summer, so I wasn't there for that. And, I think I'm not too sorry about that, because that got to be a pretty ugly scene.

Raiskin: Did your parents know you were arrested?

Harris: Yes. Yeah. Right. I remember telling my dad about it, and being scared to tell him about it, but he had gone to Berkeley also, and whatever, he didn't give me a real hard time about it. And somebody's wealthy liberal parents bailed us all out, and that's how that went.

Long: Do you still have a record then?

Harris: No, because they ended up throwing it out. I couldn't go home that summer and get a job or something, and I did need to get a job in the summer times, and I worked sometimes when I was in school, too. I had a job at the Berkeley Sewing Machine Company. I was the button hole lady. And I got that through the placement center at UC, and that was a very happy, long, low wage—

Long: Do you remember how much you were paid per hour?

Harris: Oh, gosh. Oh, it might have been a $1 and a quarter. It was definitely a low wage, but they were wonderful, warm people, and it was fun being involved in just the Berkeley town in addition to the school.

Raiskin: And so, after that, did you come to Eugene from there?

Harris: No, I stayed in San Francisco for a while, and— I forgot to write down. I remember that I spent a little time on a fishing boat. I was always— as I said, I didn't quite have a sense, very well, of where I fit in, and that was exciting and fun, and got me— it was invigorating to be out on the ocean every day. But after that—

Raiskin: What did you do on the fishing boat?

Harris: I was called a puller, and I pulled in the salmon, and whacked them over the head, and cut their bellies open, and dumped their guts, and threw them in the hole. After that, I got a job as a school bus driver in San Francisco. I knew some friends of mine, and that's where I first met known lesbians, and just started to really admire these women. I admired their independence, and courage, and adventurous spirit. That was—

Raiskin: Do you remember any of the things they were doing that you thought were admirable?

Harris: I don't, particularly then, but there was just an energy about them that I really liked. And in a way, when I look back, I realize, an early feeling I have is that, I always really loved women. I still, I

really love women. Now, that doesn't mean I love every woman, and it doesn't mean I don't enjoy a lot of men, but there's no question that I sense something about women and their talents and their proclivities that I really love a lot. And I often will say, "I don't want to not be able to flirt with women. I mean, I don't think men should only have that opportunity." And I really admire, something that touches me very deeply is occasionally I run into something in writing, or perhaps in person, of a man who expresses that same kind of feeling, and I always feel really good about that. I think, "That man knows. He understands that there's something very special about women."

Raiskin: Was there anything you were reading at the time that supported those feelings, or encouraged that acceptance?

Harris: Yeah, well, everyone was reading the *Golden Notebook*, although I can't say that book quite ever grabbed me a lot. I'm trying to think when I read Simone de Beauvoir, and— those are things I can— Later, I was involved in a lot of reading groups in Eugene, particularly at Mother Kali's bookstore, which I always considered to have been the feminist-lesbian bookstore. But it's funny, because a lot of people think of Peralandra, and, of course, I'm totally proud and happy to claim that we were— well, everyone who worked there, pretty much, was a feminist, but still, I always honored Mother Kali's, that was who Mother Kali's was.

Raiskin: Well, let's back up to when you came to Eugene, what brought you here, and then—

Harris: There was the school bus driving, a couple of seasons of driving the school bus, and feeling like there was this back-to-the-land movement, and I love the woods and forests and mountains, I did a fair amount of backpacking when I was living in Northern California. There was a sense that people in Oregon really cared about the environment, and that was where struggles to maintain it were going to be happening, and a certain feeling of like, "Wouldn't it be fun to be on a commune?" So that's what drew me here. And, I lived in a household in Berkeley that was fairly communal, and I had some experiences here in Oregon too, although I never did exactly quite that experience of living out in a country commune. And, they were pretty male dominated there. This was before the southern Oregon women had started, and I was wise enough to sense that I wouldn't probably get along really well in that environment.

Long: So what year did you come up to Eugene then?

Harris: I came up in '75, I think. And then I met a young man who was getting out of the Coast Guard, and he wanted to go to Mexico, and that sounded like a great idea, and I had, really, older, wiser people who supported that idea. And so, I went off to Mexico for a while, and had a wonderful experience there. I didn't stay with him too long, but anyway, went had some really good experiences in Mexico. That was politicizing, too, and also being in Guatemala at that time. That was probably— it was '75. Seventy-six, maybe, after an earthquake, a serious earthquake happened in Guatemala. And

seeing the banks with the machine gun national guard there that was really like, "Whoa." And also just feeling myself as a single, independent woman, I realized, "This is not part of this culture." If I want to live more as a more independent woman, I'm fortunate to be living in the United States, because that wouldn't happen easily here.

I think I was actually in a little village in Lake Atitlan when a helicopter landed, and they were nosing out who was there. Later on, the main political work in my life was getting involved with the Central American Solidarity Movement. That was more toward the transitioning out of my lesbian community, not leaving them behind, but moving more in that direction. Then I could look back on some of those experiences I had in Mexico and Guatemala, and realize that they were politicizing.

Raiskin: And how long were you in Mexico?

Harris: I was there about three months traveling around independently. It was a wonderful experience, and some scary experiences too, especially in Guatemala, being— of course, I was wearing pants, and being in a small village in Guatemala, and having children throw stones at me, and call me, "Gringo, gringo." And I would say, "I'm a gringa. I'm a gringa." That was another experience of really coming up against the gender politics. Then I needed to move to Oregon, because I needed to, or I was going to be able to avail myself of some unemployment insurance if I couldn't go back to my job at the school bus company. They actually had laid me off.

And so, I left thinking I would go to a new life, but then they called me back, but if I didn't want to go back, I needed to say, "Oh, I've moved to Oregon." But you had to be in the right-sized town. You couldn't be in, I don't know, Blue River, Oregon, but you could be in Eugene. That was a big enough town that would be comparable to finding a job in California.

So, I did that. And then I did some independent seamstress work. And—

Long: And this is '76.

Harris: This is, yeah, going to be '76, '77. And I also had started to study astrology just as I was leaving the Bay Area. And for a while, I really earned some of my living as an astrologer. And I was involved in a wonderful group here in Eugene that was a self-taught, self-oriented, self-organizing study group. And we went on for many years. That was a wonderful experience. I love grassroots education, and things where people take responsibility for teaching themselves, and that was a great— so, I was in that group when this woman came to talk to us, and she had just started this bookstore, Peralandra. And she herself was a science fiction reader, but she had three partners in California who were in on this with her, and they were all more mystically inclined, and realized that there was no, generic term “metaphysical” bookstore in Eugene. And so, they urged her in that direction. She was there at our meeting to see if people could suggest books to her, or what we might be interested in. I went and applied for a job there. And—

Raiskin: And where was it located?

Harris: It was located on East Eleventh near Alder where there is— that building isn't there anymore, but there was an old theater building, the Mayflower Theater, was there. And we were in a beautiful, old, high ceiling building. Later we moved downtown in another theater building, the McDonald Theater building, that is still there, another high-ceilinged, wonderful space. But anyway, after only a year and a half or so, then I became the manager, because she got divorced and needed to really earn some money, because she had a family to support. And, after only about a year and a half, they decided they wanted to sell the business, and I was able to buy it very inexpensively, because she already had accounts established. It would have cost me thousands of dollars. In those days, probably would have cost me $20,000 to have started the bookstore, but as it was, I was able to borrow money from friends and family, and get into it for about $5,000, because I was able to take over her accounts. So I had thirty days to pay for things, and just gradually built that bookstore up.

Long: This is in 1977 then, or—

Harris: Yes, I think that it was, and then I bought it in 1979. And I can't quite remember when my more lesbian activities took place, but I think they must have started, though, before I went to work in the bookstore, because I remember going to Mother Kali's a lot, and also, particularly, I remember the book *Sandino's Daughters*, which is about how women of all classes participated in the Sandinista

struggle in Nicaragua. I think I talked to them a little bit about coming to work there, but that didn't happen, but then when there were this, "Well, a bookstore made perfect sense for me. Absolutely." So, I had started to be involved in the Mother Kali's community when I started the bookstore.

Raiskin: Can you described that community, and what that bookstore was like, and maybe your relationship with Izzie?

Harris: Yeah, well, it had a few different locations, and Izzie wasn't there when I first went there. It was a collective of Ellen Greenlaw, and Devi, a poet, and maybe some other names will come to me, but those were two women who were really involved. Later, Izzie joined that collective, and then I think, as I understand it, that some of those— she just took on more. She took on more work for no pay, and other women were getting really into their thirties, and it became— I remember feeling this very much myself of, "Look, it's been okay to just be living hand to mouth, and on food stamps, and part-time jobs in my twenties, but I can see this is not the way I want to continue. I need to have something more established." Whereas, Izzie then was retired, and she just worked. She gave her life to that bookstore, but the early years were before she was there.

And, we were certainly friends. We participated in some book groups together. And, what else? And then we were colleagues in the sense that we were both bookstore owners. Somewhere around, it might have been '87, I'm not really quite remembering. If I bought the bookstore in '79, it wasn't quite ten years into it when Shirley

MacLaine gave a lot of emphasis to a mystical new age kinds of things. And so, my bookstore was in the position to really benefit from that interest. But then after, probably, another ten or a dozen or so years, Amazon came on board, and it began to be the demise of independent bookstores. And I realized that I didn't want to work so hard and not make much money. And, by that time, I had bought a house with some help from my father, and I just wanted to not work for—

Raiskin: Let's go back to the beginning of your bookstore. Can you describe what it looked like, the kinds of things you carried, who came, the place of it in the community?

Harris: Well, people tell me all the time, will remember that bookstore, and it had a few different locations also. I mean, it seemed like everybody came, but it's interesting, because, I find that men tend to remember it as the feminist bookstore, and it always tickles me, because, as I said, we all honored Mother Kali's as being the feminist bookstore, although we were feminists too, but it's amusing to me that men remember it in that way. There was a lot of exploration. All kinds of people came to the bookstore, from children and young adults, and it was always more women than men. And we carried books on meditation, and the major mystical traditions, and we also had fiction, and political things, and women's studies too. And women's spirituality was really big during that time. And I would say that was a meeting of the feminist and the spiritual, and that was important to me. And met

some wonderful women in those circles, and women that I had lesbian relationships with.

Let's see, what else? I don't know what else. Maybe—

Long: Did you have a partner then?

Harris: You mean a romantic partner?

Long: Yes.

Harris: The longest I had a lesbian relationship was a couple years. Usually they were pretty short lived, and some of them were just almost one night stands, which shocked me, but it happened. And, it was after a while back, I just felt like I wasn't really having a good lesbian relationship, or an ongoing lesbian relationship. And I just felt like, I don't want to limit myself to that. I don't want to exclude that. And it was so important to have a lesbian community, and that lesbian modeling. I mean, a word I liked a lot was "woman-identified woman." We were really living our own lives, and people were doing Starflower, and Gertrude's Café, and other kinds of women owned businesses, which of course, I was also participating in that way. And then, just the sense of camaraderie, and the music we shared, the dancing we shared, it was very rich, and I'm really grateful that I had it, and was a very rich, rich time in my life.

However, for me personally, I wasn't finding what I wanted to find as a partnership. And so, I opened myself to that possibility, and

then I got more involved in the Central American community, and that's where I did meet the man who is still my partner, Ross, and he made it easier for me to stop the bookstore, too. I mean, he was going to help give me some support, because I didn't have a lot of savings. But nonetheless, I did all right, because all the money I had made had pretty much gone into the bookstore when I finally did liquidate it, and I had to close it, liquidate it. I didn't sell it. I tried to, but the bookstore business was not that great at that time. I did have a bunch of savings as the books were sold off. I was always felt like I got out of something, the fact that Izzie died before I told her I was going to close the bookstore, because I felt like she would have felt like that was really selling out. Because she was going to hold on, no matter what. And, she did wonderful things there.

Raiskin: We're talking about Izzie Harbaugh—

Harris: Yeah. In Mother Kali's bookstore.

Raiskin: —who actually passed away in her bookstore.

Harris: Yes, that's right. Well, yes, that's right. That's right. She had a stroke, and they took her to Sacred Heart, which was nearby, and miraculously, were allowed to take her way, and so that she could die on a couch in Mother Kali's bookstore. That was really a very meaningful event for all of us in the community.

Long: That must have been in the '90s then.

Harris: Yes, yes. Right. I closed the business in '99. I think she passed in '98, I think, as I recall, because I know she used to— sometimes when I would say to her things like, "Well, I'm going to the booksellers fair—" and a convention, an occupational convention, and you can write that off on your taxes. And she would just look at me like, "What a sellout that was." It was just how you do business. So, I was really, as I say, I was relieved that I never had to look her in the eye and tell her that I was going to close Peralandra, because I knew I was thinking about it in the last days of her life. And feminist book fairs were a really important thing too. During those years, there were the International Feminist Book Fairs, and I took my first trip to Europe, out of the country, other than going to Mexico, to London, to a feminist book fair, and I later went to one in Barcelona that was just more fun than you should really be allowed to have, I think.

And, the final one I went to was in Amsterdam. And then they stopped— I mean, I know there was at least one in Australia that I didn't go to, but those were really exciting. There were a lot of women's publishers; Aunt Lute, and Spinsters Inc. I could remember probably others of them, but— *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Women of Color*, very, very exciting, intellectual time. When I was with— *Gyn/Ecology*, Mary Daly's book. I was definitely in a book group at Mother Kali's around that book that Izzie participated in, too, and her partner, Lorraine. They were very stimulating rich years.

Raiskin: When you partnered with Ross, did you feel that you had to leave your women's community?

Harris: I was very nervous about that. I was very afraid of it. Well, for one thing, I didn't really say to myself, "Well, I'm really going to be with Ross." It was like, "Well, I'm just going to have, maybe, an affair." But my community really surprised me in a happy way, really. By that time, and this is '90, there was more understanding, I think, within the women's community that, not all lesbian relationships were happy, and not every feminist woman was— was that necessarily the right road for her? And there were other, then, lesbian women who— we later called ourselves the hasbians. So, me, Jan Eliot, and Laurie McClain, and it wasn't such an unusual experience. Although, I did feel especially from some of the women I hadn't really known as well, personally, but more just community members a little, understandably feeling a little bit betrayed by what we were. After all, we could pass, and we could pass and get more acclaim, or more support in the community than lesbians had at that point, but I always had a lot of lesbian friends, and felt like was important for me to speak out as a supporter of lesbians, and to acknowledge that I'd been a lesbian, and to really not identify as a heterosexual woman. That didn't feel right to me. And that was a concern, actually. Okay, I'm fine with Ross, and we have a lot of nice lesbian friends, and maybe there's a man here, or a man there that I like but, eh, I don't want to really be in the general milieu of where it's expected that you would be heterosexual. So, there were

some difficult transitions there, but, overall, I felt supported by the lesbian friends who I was close to.

Raiskin: Now we're 1990-ish. I'm thinking the next big thing that happens in the community is Measure 9. And, I'm wondering what that experience was like for you, and who you were with at that time.

Harris: I was with Ross at that time, and I'm sorry to say I wasn't more active in that campaign. A woman who worked for me, Laura Philips, was active in that— and many of the women I knew were more active in that campaign, and also in AIDS work at that time. I was more into Central America at that point, but I do remember Laura was— I had wonderful women who worked for me, and Laura Philips was right up there at the top. And, particularly, I imagine you have been told the story of when Lon Mabon, the leader of the proposition 9 thing, when we have the Eugene celebration and the parade, which was such a big thing in the '80s and '90s, how she got everyone who wanted to, to turn their backs on him, and his group as they— which was just such a really powerful, and not violent, or antagonistic way of dealing with it, was just to turn your back, and that was the statement. It was an important— I'm sure I went to fundraisings and various events around that.

Raiskin: But this is also the time that people were ferrying people from Guatemala to Oregon as Sanctuary.

Harris: Yes, that's right. That's right.

Raiskin: Were you involved with that?

Harris: I wasn't, but Ross was, Ross and his mother, and their church, the Central Presbyterian Church here in Eugene, were very active in the Sanctuary Movement. I wasn't particularly involved in that part.

Raiskin: And it's interesting that Holly Near's music was following your trajectory as well.

Harris: Oh yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. And Cris Williamson was really important, and Alix— Dobkin?

Raiskin: Dobkin.

Harris: And some wonderful comedy, including Laura Philips had a wonderful group called Girls Like Us, that was just so very, very funny and original. Oh, and, let's see— The comic book writer. Oh boy.

Raiskin: Alison Bechdel.

Harris: Alison Bechdel. I mean, Allison Bechdel was so important. And, of course, a lot of her characters, they were in bookstores, they ran bookstores, and there was such a gamut of characters. And they're doing her play. The musical is being done here in Eugene in October, I think. And I actually went to Portland to see it. Fun House [*Fun Home*], and I read her books. Again, just such an independent spirit, and outspoken about the talents and powers of women.

Raiskin: So what have you done since— So, you sold the store, bought a home, and then, what other involvements were you in, in Eugene?

Harris: Ah, well, I wish I could say I was involved in a lot more, but the Central American work died down, the Iraq War happened, and I didn't want to learn a whole new, what, political history of Middle East. I mean, I'm basically informed, but I was much more informed about Latin America, and I didn't want to put in that kind of energy again. What else can I say about that?

Raiskin: Did you keep up your sewing, or any craft work?

Harris: No, not particularly. Just for my myself. I began to study singing again, and I am a participant in the Eugene Symphony chorus, and I love that. And I also taking private lessons and singing classical music, and I love singing jazz, and I love singing folk music. I really love singing and dancing a lot. And—

Raiskin: Did you ever sing with Soromundi?

Harris: No, I never did. I think by the time Soromundi got started, I think I was singing with the Symphony chorus, or maybe with the Eugene Concert Choir. One thing that works better for me is when it's a really a limited amount of performance work, because I just like to have a little more freedom to come and go and do things I want to do, than to— and Soromundi had a more regular performance schedule. And also, I would say, for a group singing, I prefer more classical music.

Long: Did you do any work for pay, or how did you support yourself?

Harris: No, I lived off my savings, and Ross also gave me some assistance. And then, took an early Social Security.

Raiskin: What do you think are the attractive options for aging as a woman, or a woman who loves women in Eugene?

Harris: Well, gosh, I guess just that there's so many active single women everywhere. Anywhere you go, you can go to events at the library. The libraries are wonderful, the public library. That was great when that got built here, and it took quite a few votes before it finally got passed. And I just think it's such a beautiful building, and, again, they bring wonderful speakers. And then the university, until recently, I don't find it so as much anymore, but the university was a very rich resource. There used to just be all kinds of visiting people come and giving talks here. I used to come to talks at the university really often. Probably, at least once a week, I would say. I came to hear a guest lecturer or something going on, the center for women's—

Raiskin: Center for the Study of Women in Society.

Harris: —of women's society. They brought a lot of wonderful people here. It just doesn't seem to quite happen the way it used to. Also, with more book selling going on online, there are fewer bookstores, there are fewer traveling authors. There used to be more traveling authors. So, I guess I'm indicating, it's always was more the intellectual studying realm that interested me most. But I will say,

when I go to any of these kinds of events, and now, perhaps, it's more at the library than somewhere else, there are a lot of single women there, and you strike up conversations with one another, and have a sense that women are living good lives here, older women are. And, I think a lot of older men are living good lives here too. You see people, or to me, to be able to say, "Come to an inexpensive concert at Beall Hall, or go to an event at the library. Come to something occasionally at the university." I still can hear a great talk at the university. That still happens. Not as frequently, I would say, as it used to, but—

Raiskin: Do you feel a sense of community with your long term friends here?

Harris: Yes, although a lot of people have moved, and I would say, that's maybe a hard thing in Eugene. And also, as we get older, we do go out less. I mean, I always went out a lot. Not everyone I know went to all these events at the university or at the library. And, it seems like people go out less as they get older, and, of course, people have some limited physical things. I am aware of a group in Eugene that's trying to explore more options for older people to live together. Aging in Community, I think, is what it's called. And, I think in terms of my neighborhood, and think in terms of my house is all on one level, and being able to age in place, and catch the bus to get around. I think there are good resources here, but could always use more.

Raiskin: You've had such a rich life, and continue to have such a rich life. If you were to tell a young person, give advice to a young person now, was there something that particularly you would say?

Harris: It's funny you should mention that, because I have a friend who's doing a video project, and she asked me if I would be wise old woman and everything. And I said, "No. The thing that attracted me here was because it was about the community, and because that was so important in my life." But I'll scratch my head now and try and think of something.

Raiskin: Well, I'm just thinking about young women who are growing up at a time, a different feminist time. It's not that they're not feminist, but it's different than ours.

Harris: Yes, it is. And such technological differences, such popular culture concerns me a lot. Young women who feel a lot of peer pressure from how they have to appear on Facebook or something, or a sense that young people are growing up without maybe a sense of, that they have a right to privacy, or that they can really find an independent life for themselves. I always felt like I don't quite fit into whatever the category is. I don't quite fit in. And to find independent ways. And, I don't know how that is for young women. I mean, certainly, I guess the advice I think of is to find something you really love to do, and get really good at it. I think that's seems to be, over time, a really good suggestion, and I've also heard people say find a place where you really want to live, and I feel really good about the choice of Eugene. And, I like that the

mountains and the ocean are accessible here. I like that Portland, a major city, is not that far away, and San Francisco isn't that far away. And, I appreciate those things about it. I don't know more about— sometimes I just feel like I don't know what their world is.

Raiskin: Did you follow the Axemen debate at all in the high school?

Harris: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. I can't say, is I had a really strong—

Raiskin: It was interesting to hear young women's attitude about being called Axemen?

Harris: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Raiskin: They didn't seem to mind. And most of them didn't mind that.

Harris: Right. That's right.

Raiskin: That would have been something central for us, I think.

Harris: Yes. I think that's right. Yes.

Raiskin: And have you maintained a group, or a particularly spiritual interest?

Harris: Yeah, I have actually been more of serious student of Buddhism in recent years. And, there was a wonderful Sangha here in Eugene, led by lesbian lamas who have a center down in Ashland. And they were both women who were community participants here in Eugene. In fact, one of them was a manager at my bookstore for a while. So, I love to say, "Oh, yes, my lama." She used to manage me,

is what I would say about that. Now, they're old enough that that wasn't really working well for them. They need to move more toward retirement, although they still are active in Ashland. And so, they don't come to Eugene on a regular basis anymore. But I have been participating in a small Zen group that has a woman teacher, and a very fine, fine one. I would say I'm personally struggling with some of these issues at the moment about, "Gosh, I'm not as politically active as I used to be, or I want to be.", or, "I'm not quite having what new kinds of friendship circles when I make."

I certainly have a feeling of political work of wanting to do more that is national, or is in my town, like issues of homelessness interest me a lot, and I follow them. But then there's a tug of war between, "I don't have the energy to go out to meetings the way I used to, and I don't know if even they have meetings the way they used to, or if a lot is done on email." I find that email is handy. There are things it's good at, but I don't really want to try to express myself on it. And, as I say, a lot of friends have moved away, and starting to be, friends have died. And then things shift anyway. Even if they haven't moved away, people's interests and energies shift. And I think, certainly, the current political situation is— I am one of those people of whom there are many I know who just try to keep our head above water, try not to just be so very discouraged about what's going on.

And of course, there are things to be encouraged about too, and not to give up, but it's sad. I think it's very sad to feel like you struggled for a lot of things that, all those political meetings, and all those issues, and it just seems like they're being eradicated, and especially scary to think that the Supreme Court would become a really right wing faction, because it's been really supportive. It felt like things were getting better in a lot of ways. Although I think we also have to look, and I thought this at the time too, that we aren't looking enough, that we, liberal, left-wing, progressive people, aren't looking enough at the working class people who are really being left out of what we consider the progress that's going on.

Raiskin: Why do you think Eugene has been a magnet for people like you and other women, other lesbians, and people who are politically minded?

Harris: Yeah. Well, there was— I mean, things got started here, so that there were co-ops, and Jackrabbit Press, and *Women's Press*. So, I think when women arrived here and saying, "I'm going to move from California," or, "maybe I'm going to move from the West Coast, or from the Midwest." There were things to plug into here to get involved with, so that— what was the name? Northwest Working Press wasn't particularly feminist, but it was definitely lefty, and— I don't know. There was a certain Aquarian energy here, from an astrological point of view, of people who like to— I don't know. By the time I got here— I know people tell me who were here earlier; that it used to be a very sleepy little town. But by

the time I got here, it wasn't really very sleepy anymore. There's so much culture here for the size of it. I think that still is really true. And the university was an important part of that.

I always felt like I can't imagine that I would live in a town that didn't have a university, even though I've been disappointed in the direction this one has gone, and the things that they don't offer that they used to in terms of humanitarian and cultural, exciting cultural things, more emphasis on sports and business. But, I don't know exactly— but nonetheless, when we arrived here, we felt like, "Oh, there's people here like me." And, certainly, its proximity, as I mentioned, to Portland, the ocean, the mountains, you get a lot more when you're in Eugene from those things too, other than just what's here in Eugene. And still an amazing amount of theater, and music, and experimental art, and all kinds of— it's still a wonderful place to be, I think.

Long: Was there anything you wanted to talk about that we haven't ask you yet?

Harris: That we haven't. Yes, that is a really good question. Let me see if I've got anything written down here. I felt like we covered the areas, the things that I had thought of. I think I've talked about the highlights that I had thought. Well, Gertrude's Café became another cafe after a while, didn't it? It had another name.

Raiskin: Can you describe where it was, and what it was like?

Harris: It was on Lincoln between Eleventh and Twelfth. And the building is still there. It was a big, beautiful, big front porch, white building. It was a little before my time, in that, I came in a little bit on the tail end of it. That, and I didn't have a lot of money to go out for meals in those days. But nonetheless, it was a women's café, and I remember Mother Kali's being around the corner in one of their incarnations. I think they must have been in a space on Eleventh Avenue. But it seems like it became something else after it was Gertrude's; the Wild Iris. It became the Wild Iris. And—

Long: That was a feminist café, though, too, wasn't it?

Harris: Yes. Right. Yes. Yeah, definitely. Yeah. Just had a different name, different owners.

Raiskin: Did you use to meet, there, other people and eat, or—

Harris: Sometimes, yeah. As I say, maybe there was more going out at that point to the truck stop, Mama's Homefried Truckstop in this university neighborhood. A little more hippie element was probably— those cafés felt a little bit expensive for what we could afford. Went over— Zoo Zoo's was another collective café that we went to, the Kestrel Café. And of course, Saturday Market, going to Saturday market. I met wonderful friends at Saturday market. And always, women were a good part of the participants there.

Raiskin: Well, you've painted a really nice picture of that time. So, thank you very much.

Long: Yeah, thank you very much.

Raiskin: Thank you. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]