Oral History Interview with Harriet Merrick

Interview conducted on July 23, 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

Harriet Merrick, ca. 1976

Harriet Merrick, July 23, 2018

Recorded in the University of Oregon Libraries
© 2019, University of Oregon Libraries

This material is protected by US copyright. Permission to print, reproduce or distribute copyrighted material is subject to the terms and conditions of fair use as prescribed in the US copyright law. Transmission or reproduction of protected items beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the copyright owners.

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 July 23, 2018. Harriet was born in 1951 and grew up in Milwaukie, Oregon. In her teenage years she knew she as a lesbian. She went to St. Mary's Academy. She describes the coming out process and not having words to explain her feelings. Harriet graduated from high school in 1969 and went to the University of Oregon in 1972. Harriet discusses books she read to help her understand herself. She joined the Gay People's Alliance at the UO. She talks about Randy Shilts, a fellow gay student at UO, who was also an activist for gay rights. Harriet discusses a course she taught at UO. She describes a homophobic threat while walking alone in Eugene. She talks about the anti-gay political measures in Oregon and the difficulties in organizing disparate people in the campaigns. She discusses the devastation of the passage of Referendum 51. Harriet worked in the Business Affairs Office at the University of Oregon for thirty-two years. She describes the lawsuit she and the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon filed against the Oregon State Board of Education regarding the implementation of Measure 8 in the state. She discusses the gay rights group, Right to Privacy/Right to Pride and Basic Rights Oregon. Harriet was co-director of Basic Rights Oregon for a couple of years. She concludes her interview by discussing the ups and downs of the push towards marriage equality, strategizing political campaigns, and why she loves Eugene.

Additional subjects: ACLU; AIDS (disease); Ballot Measure 9; Bean, Terry; Bryant, Anita; Cassady's; Childs, Ted; Coming out (sexual orientation); Crawford, Richard; Davis, Julie; Fidanque, David; Gay People's Alliance; Harris, Jean; Hate crimes; Lesbian identity; Lesbian separatism – Oregon; Mabon, Lon; Metropolitan Community Church; Ordinances, Municipal -- Oregon – Eugene; Oregon Citizens Alliance; Planned Parenthood; Springfield (Or); University of Oregon. Gay People's Alliance; Vetri, Dominick R.

Transcriptionist: Rev.com and University of Oregon Libraries

Session Number: 007

Narrator: Harriet Merrick

Location: University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon

Interviewers: Linda Long and Judith Raiskin

Date: July 23, 2018

Long: There we go. This interview is part of the Eugene Lesbians 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 Harriet Merrick on July 23, 2018, taking place in the University of 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. Harriet, 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.

Merrick: I do. And you have my permission.

Long: Thank you. We'd like to start just with some basic questions. So first up, can you please tell us where you were born, where you grew up, and something about your early background?

Merrick: I was born in Portland, Oregon, and when I was about five, we moved to Milwaukie, Oregon. Way away from the rest of the family, which I'm sure thought my parents were crazy. And so I went to twelve years of parochial schools. Eight at St John's, a Catholic school in Milwaukie, and then four at St Mary's Academy. Those were kind of the early years that way.

Raiskin: Was the high school coed or all girls?

Merrick: It was all girls. There was a public school, but I wanted to go there. My aunt wanted me to go there and my aunt was always the one to apply the pressure. She went to my parents and said, no, you need to send her. So I went, which was great. I really received a great education and honestly believe that a lot of, in terms of the values that were transmitted, that the Catholic background in education was part of who I am and how I got to be so involved with community organizing. Not that they necessarily agreed with that particular bent, but I have to look at both the education and I think some of just the common values and say these are the things what made me the way I am.

Raiskin: When you were young, when did you identify as a lesbian? And then how did your family respond?

Merrick: Yeah, well that was not pleasant. I can tell you in a nutshell, but I would say, what I've said to people for many, many years, there's many— Coming out is a process and a progress and it is different things to different people. And one of the things I've found really early is to ask them what they meant by that. Because I would sometimes talk to people and they were out to five people, but they thought they were out. And also there were so many different ramifications.

I would think that what I would say first is that about the time I was ten and eleven I knew that I wasn't like my sister, she was eighteen months younger than I am and there's only two of us. But I didn't know exactly what that meant. At nine, she knew that she wanted a large family, she wanted to get married and I'm going, what? And then in my teenage years, I definitely knew I had picked strawberries, I went in at nine, got kicked out because of the child labor laws and went back in at twelve and went back into camp counseling at sixteen but worked in the fields for a good while for part of my summer vacations.

I had a lot of friends from the neighborhood and we would go strawberry picking together and then Beatles came around and they were all out of their doggy minds and I was just going like, what is this about? And so mostly I was just confused. And then I recall when I was at St. Mary's Academy, it was downtown Portland. My Dad worked at Portland State University. He was in purchasing and contracting when he first started and became the

business manager. I'd catch rides with him and he thought it was a great idea to teach me to drive when I was fifteen in downtown eight o'clock traffic. That was my introduction to downtown.

But later I would take the bus from Milwaukie and usually there were transfers involved. I'm on the bus and then one day I realized I'm really noticing the women, not the guys. Oh, that's odd. And off I went into some other thinking and it really probably took my first crush was much later than other people. But being in high school and realized I had two groups of friends, those who were in love with the Beatles and the Stones, and this boy and that boy and this other group that never seemed to have those discussions. And it was a matter of noticing different little things and not having words.

And then gradually I found that I was spending more and more time with that second group. And then when I got my first real crush, I was like, what is going on? And finally it was just, I was really slow, you know? Finally, it went through my mind that though the word gay was not really in my vocabulary at that time that I was gay. And I thought, oh shit, I'm gay. Excuse my French again. Because I was going in juvenile counseling and I wasn't stupid. I realize all of a sudden all the other things that didn't have any meaning to me about who's gay or who's not gay, what a homosexual is. But all the stereotypes then rolled in and went, I am in serious dog doo doo. Because what the hell am I going to do?

About my second year in college, I by that time came out. I had a woman friend, my college sweetheart who I'm still in contact with on occasion. And she was going to Eugene for a teaching program and I was going to Eugene for the Wallace School of Community Service and Public Affairs, which then became later on the PPPM. Public policy and community service was my focus. And initially I was going into juvenile counseling, but then I had a run in with children's services division over the very thing I was concerned about.

Long: Can we back up for a second?

Merrick: Absolutely.

Long: What year did you graduate from high school?

Merrick: Sixty-nine.

Long: Okay. And then so you came down to Eugene in the fall of '69?

Merrick: January of 1972 I came to Eugene, was in CSPA for six months, ran out of money, went back to Portland for a year, raised more money, came back down and picked up on CSPA again and then graduated with a bachelor of science from there.

Raiskin: Did you know about the reputation of Eugene as being a lesbian place to live when you came?

Merrick: Not really. I hadn't heard that. But by this time I knew I was gay. My way of dealing with it is there's got to be other people besides

me. The first thing I did is I went to a taxi cab driver because they know everything. Right? So I said, "Number one, are there any groups and is there a bar?" Because that much I knew. And so I got the information I needed and linked up first with one of the women's study groups and from then— so it was taxi cab driver, women's studies groups and then trying to find my people.

Raiskin: Do you remember any books you read at the time?

Merrick: Oh my gosh. Well, once I realized that, okay, this is my orientation, but none of this fits for me. Then I thought, Well then it's just wrong. I read, let's see. Oh my gosh. Well in terms of sci-fi, *The Female Man* definitely was the biggie. And then there were several books in the sci-fi world that explored alternatives. But Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian Woman*, I read a lot of different books from a lot of different angles. So I read pretty much everything along the spectrum that was available at that time.

Later on, I taught a class called gays in a non-gay society between '75 and '79. That was non-credit but it was sponsored by CSPA and was sponsored by Sociology at different times. And during that time we used a lot of those different books like Katz, for the history and different books for different types of reading to expose people to as much variety as possible. I really spent more of my coming out time actually in Eugene and then of course discovered what a bloody big community. It was huge.

And later on went back to Portland to meet up some friends in Portland and their bars and it was like whoa, I've been in this kind of vanilla, neutral Eugene. It's really different than some of the other places.

That was really refreshing because it really brought to me there isn't a community, there are sub communities. And so the sociology, the anthropology, those things really had a lot of meaning to me. Is that when you look at that, you realize it's not about going into another country and learning how they— It's about our own. It's about our own cultures, and how different we are and well isn't that amazing? And sometimes isn't that horrifying? How do we speak to one another and how do we make change?

For me, I always saw things in terms of, I didn't start out to do this. I had a friend who was in a CSPA class who said "My class, my teacher really needs someone to talk to them." Because she was also going in social work and she said things are so screwed up and I can't come out. And so I thought well I'm just doing a favor, a one time class thing and then it just went. Because once you're in someone's Rolodex, you're in their Rolodex for life.

Raiskin: What did you do in that class when you came out?

Merrick: Just talk, talked about coming out, talked about what it meant. Talked about what it didn't mean. Mostly answering a lot of different questions. Sometimes I didn't have the answers and just

telling them I don't have the answers and also trying to get perspectives. When I came back was in fall of '73 and that is when professor Richard Crawford was actually— if you're talking about true founders of what was at one time called Gay People's Alliance, it was Dick Crawford and Ted Childs, who after Stonewall in 1969 put a tiny little ad. They got a group of people in their living room and did it that way.

But the community Gay People's Alliance became what it was through the work of people like Dom Vetri, Randy Shilts, Terry Bean, Don Powell, and an assortment of other folks. And Crawford was part of that as well.

Long: If I could just ask a clarifying question, was the GPA, the Gay People's Alliance, was that a city of Eugene group first? Or did it originate on campus?

Merrick: No, it never originated from campus. It became the spawn of, and that was Randy Shilts, myself, Sheila Malbrain and a number— Larry Monocle was also a part of that. And so what happened is Crawford and Ted had this little gathering of folks after Stonewall. Sort of like the way that Karm Hagedorn did with Soromundi. You gather a few people and then it starts taking on its own life and more people come in and it starts to developing more and more.

It started there with Crawford. It grew and at the time that I was in Eugene, probably in '73 is about when I linked up with them. It was mostly guys, it was about a hundred a week that would be in

there or it was between sixty and a hundred depending on what the topic. And they had a different topic every time. And after a while, some of us at the university and Randy was one of them, myself and a few and maybe six others decided we wanted an aspect of that with us as a student organization. And then that's when all things— because Randy was all over that red book and so it was a matter of how do we do this? And at the time going through IFC, because there was recognition and then there was money. So, there were two different things.

Long: IFC?

Merrick: Yeah, what would they call it? It was the financial arm of the ASUO. So, and they had what they called the little red book, which wasn't very little. It was, all U of O regulations about how you got student organization recognition, how you got funding, who had different roles, whether the ASUO president do, to what were student organizations responsible for, blah, blah, blah. So, there was that. Are we still good?

And so we operated within the student structure but we operated more like a collective or a cooperative.

Raiskin: So there wasn't a split then between the university community and the—

Merrick: They both functioned. And I would say that Randy had pretty big eyes on making that an official student organization. They both operated and eventually one faded, and the other— what the

student organization then became was very heavily on education and organizing. We did Pride. We had Phyllis Lyon and a variety of other speakers to come to do education. Did films, did lectures, did presentations. We went into a lot of classes. At one point, along with other universities, there was a health book that was horrible, I think it was called *Dimensions*. And it had the old classic stereotypes of what a gay person looked like and was involved with. And it was so horrible that we decided that we were going to organize and basically get the professors not to buy that book. And that's what other universities and Harper and Row after a while sent someone over to the office. To me, he just slammed the second edition down. He says, "Well, I guess money talks." Off he went.

That was his way of letting me know, yes, we made the changes you wanted. Here's a book, look it up for yourself. An out he went. But that was an important lesson. Because what it said to me is, it's one thing if you get targeted as a victim, whether it's being, rolled in the streets or you're encountering discriminations. Another thing to identify as a victim. And the one thing that I, and a number of us were convinced is, we were not going to be victims and so how do we do that? And one arm of that was through education, one arm that later developed even more so to be economics.

That was the start of it. And Dom, professor Dom Vetri in the Law School, his specialty is Constitution. Gave me another one of the better pieces of advice I had. We had been dealing with the administration trying to get nondiscrimination clause for the

university and we got extraneous considerations. I wasn't on too happy about that, the language. And Dom said, he said, "Harriet, it's okay. This is about getting your foot in the door and then you just keep wedging it further and further open." I went, "Okay." And it was a good lesson.

Long: Was that for the campus or for the city?

Merrick: That was for the campus. The city one, that came much later. Well, not much later. It's all condensed. May of 1978. So this is the time period of Anita Bryant and all the variety of, maybe it was at four or five cities, non-discrimination had gone down. There was a group called Voices and Maureen Gobar was the leader of Voices, which is very much the old classic anti-gay of pedophilia, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And then, so we had a fair amount of time. This was the first anti-gay campaign and it was really a referendum because Terry and a bunch of the other folks had gotten an ordinance and so Maureen Gobar and her group wanted to undo that. And the only way to do that was through a referendum.

Long: Maureen Gobar, what was her—

Merrick: She was one of the head spokespeople for a group called Voices, which was the anti-gay group at that time. And so she started out and I think they realized fairly quickly that that wasn't the right approach for Eugene, Oregon. They needed a more liberal, nice sounding discrimination. They brought in a woman named Lynn

Green out of California. And in fact I just looked at a newspaper clipping from May of '78 I think it was interviewing Larry Monocle and Lynn Green was quoted, and I'm paraphrasing here, we don't need Anita Bryant or anything like that because I think what was really going on was they didn't want to stir up the liberal side with all this stuff and the other wasn't really working as well.

She was much smarter about it. She operated from a standpoint of, well this is really about property rights or this is about accommodation, owner rights. It was a brilliant strategy and later on there was a book, post-campaign, that did not have authors attached because it was called, *It Could Happen to You*. And it was about yay big [gestures]. And it was all the post-strategy as to what happened in the campaign. And after the 1978 campaign, we sent everything to Seattle, we sent them everything we had because John Vern Briggs amendment was happening in California. Seattle was fighting. We've shipped Seattle everything that we knew about their strategies and the approaches that could be possibly taken.

And that's where the brakes went on. It was with both the Briggs movement and was Seattle as the West Coast was able to make that stop. And then there was that period of rest and then we got hit with the AIDS epidemic of course.

Long: Yeah. Harriet, I'm wondering if we could back up a bit so we could learn more about what it was like when you were a student on campus and what year did you graduate from UO?

Merrick: I graduated, well, let's see. That's a good question because I took time off there and some of it wasn't transferrable. I want to say '74. January 74 I believe. And I still stayed involved with the Gay People's Alliance at that point for a good while.

Long: Okay. What was it like to be an undergraduate on the UO campus during that time period?

Merrick: Well, yeah, I would say on campus. Well, of course there was no state nor city protections. People, professionals. It wasn't my intention to go this direction, but it was the direction I ended up going. And there were a lot of folks that I knew that really did not feel that they could afford, that we could have a social interactions as friends because people were so scared. And in many cases that fear was well deserved about losing their jobs, or losing their placements. Which happened to me actually. I would say there was a lot of unknown. And so what happened for a lot of people is that their churches or their synagogues were not open. Their families, they either were rejected or were afraid to talk to their families.

What ended up happening in many ways is that a lot of times for people to meet each other, they were funneled to the bars. And what is the bars? A bars business is to sell alcohol, is to sell a drug. We found large numbers of the communities then became also addicted. That was one issue. It was the best of times and it was the worst of times. I would say both. They're both true from my perspective.

The police were part of the problem. They were just as likely to— Chief Kerns and I had a discussion about this, since, because it was intense. It was really intense. The cops would come into the Riviera, which was this 1950s decor, tiny, little. The dance square was probably like yay by yay. The cops would come in, in twos and they had all their gear on and they'd come in like this [gestures] and they go from table to table looking for ID. But always there was a hand on the holster. The message was being transmitted.

And one night I followed— well, there were two different instances. One, they went to the dance edge and again the hand is on the holster and I thought, this is no good. This is no good. And another night they took— the place was always packed. They took a young kid, who got past whoever was in charge of cover. And they were taking him through the back door into the alley. And I thought, this is— I got up out of my table. And I don't think, it wasn't until I went through the door and there was the door I went through, there was the door that led to the alley.

The two cops had this kid sandwiched and they were calling him every name in the book. And it was at that moment that I realized I thought, oh blank, what did I just get myself into? I put my hands behind my back so there could not be any attempt to say that I was in any way interfering. And the cops were going at him and I thought, oh, I was afraid they were going to beat him up. I thought they would take them in the alley and do something to him.

And so eventually one of the officers turned around and he said, what are you doing? I said, "Just watching." And then it ended and, but it was scary as hell.

Raiskin: What year was that?

Merrick: Let's see. So that would be probably 1970— Around '75, '76 and so that was probably, yes, '75, '76. Because in '76, '77 a bunch of us, we decided we were going to get those two cops off the beat. We knew the police were not our friends. We decided not to go to the Sergeant. We went to public relations and we described what happened. And we said, put anyone but these guys, you got to take them off and they did. They got them off the beat.

But on campus, I don't believe there is a way that the movement would have been the movement by itself in isolation. But there was the farm workers movement, Vietnam was going on, civil rights was still hot, women's issues were going on. There was an entire reconsideration of culture and rules. I believe it was in 1972, Oregon's Vice laws were changed. So you no longer became illegal, but you still had the resulting prejudices and cultural biases that you had to deal with at that time.

Raiskin: What were the police ostensibly coming into the Riviera room for?

Merrick: Intimidation. There was really no other reason. We were during a time period there where in that the social place was very pinpointed. The targeting was also very pinpointed. It was very common for people to be— "Roll a queer" was, Friday night,

Saturday night adventure. That happened to more than one person. Oftentimes whether you're male or female, as a female, I never went back to my car. We went in groups together. We did not do that.

One night a guy had come in and he had been brass knuckled and he came in and I think of it in a way that I think of Rosa Parks. Wasn't probably the first time a person refused to go to the back of the bus. But there was something about that night. Wasn't probably the first time in Stonewall that something had happened. But something about that night. I think of it like surfing the perfect wave, the perfect confluence. And that guy came in, he told his story and the next thing I knew twenty people left the bar because they were going to look for those guys. And so I thought I got to go with them because if they find them it won't be one. I got to make sure nothing horrible happens. And the other is the cops will— I know where the cops are going to land and so that's not going to work out really well.

Fortunately, they did not find the people and we all got to go back. But that was a bit of the flavor, that people were in physical danger. Not just in danger of losing their jobs or losing their class, or their major, or not having their profession, or being kicked out of their housing. But it was their lives.

Raiskin: And you say it was the best of times, too?

Merrick: It was.

Raiskin: Can you describe that a little bit?

Merrick: It was a hell of a lot of fun. Yeah. There are all these things associated, for example, with the bar. But the bar was also a place with a lot of— how would I say? Of being with a group of people that are all having a really good time for the most part. Just having a good time and being free. And being free. And so it was that, it was the being able to make a difference. And so was also another part. I can still see Randy walking down the sidewalk with his little Afro thing. They would have called him a twink at that point in time because he was extremely flamboyant. He settled down later, but he was extremely flamboyant and very about Randy.

Raiskin: Randy Shilts?

Merrick: Yeah. Randy Shilts.

Long: Can you tell us more about what it was like to be a co-student with him on the UO campus? And more about what he was like?

Merrick: Oh my God, he was all ego. I love Randy. Let's see, how do we do this. It was interesting in that segment of the seventies, you end up with a lot of writers. Will Roscoe, in '77 he developed some logos. He went on to writing. Carol Queen, she was one of my teaching assistants for my class. She was fresh from Glide. She was seventeen, way too smart, and very advanced. Randy was actually a student in my class. I almost flunked him. But fortunately for Randy, I had told my teaching assistants, and I think I had maybe four at that time, to help, because we'd break out. I had probably

way too many textbooks for all of them. Had way too much work, and then they had discussion groups. I said, "Okay, you can participate in the grading." I was ready to fight because he wasn't showing up for class, he wasn't doing his coursework. Just like any other student, but they were horrified at the idea that Randy wouldn't get a good grade, because he was Randy.

It was a compromise. Later, with one of his books, Randy came back. He wrote in my book, he says, "You know I deserved an A." Carol Queen happened to be there, too. Carol and I were just beating up on him. Just throwing him stuff, because there was no way you could dent his ego.

He was that, and he was also fearless in many ways. He was just absolutely fearless, and fun. He was a fun guy to be around. In small doses, because he was still Randy.

Long: Did his bravery rub off on you, then, just being associated with him? Did that give you courage?

Merrick: No, not at all, because Randy was, for the most part, in his own world in many ways. I admired him the way that I might admire anyone who was out there, but I think those of us who were doing the more functional parts, the education stuff, and setting—[032:38] we were way too busy, and not really thinking about, really, what the consequences might be. There were consequences.

I think the thing is, is there isn't any one person. To me, that is the reality of history. It's everyone. If we had a movement and we're

missing a chunk of anybody, it wouldn't be the same movement. That was true of Randy, it was true of myself, it was true for Terry, or any one of us was missing, it would be a different world because each person, and each group, and organization brings something.

While I wasn't involved very much— I made a conscious choice, because there was the war movement, there was a women's movement. A lot of women went and worked on the women's movement, but mostly the guys were handling, at that time, the gay/lesbian thing. I thought, "There's got to be some strong women with this, or it's going to go down a road we're not really going to want it to go down."

Raiskin: What road would be—

Merrick: Keeping in mind that the gay community, how I look at it, is we all grew up in, more or less, the same culture. Guys were still guys, still believe they're in charge of everything. There are still racial issues. There were still women's issues. There were all those things.

I looked at Randy as a peer, and I looked at Terry the same way. I've known Terry Bean since the '70s, and we're still in touch.

Long: Was he a student, too, at the same time?

Merrick: He was in Eugene. He actually, and Don Powell, were both in Eugene.

Long: They were not—

Merrick: He had a bar called Cassady's.

Long: I see. Okay.

Merrick: He was in real estate. When the AIDS epidemic happened, everyone— people went to take care of people in other places. They went other places to get better medical help. They went to be with friends. That really changed a lot of the complexion for a long time.

Eugene really got hit pretty hard because the politics— the personal is the politics, as well. It just went rampant everywhere. I probably lost, I think, half my male friends during that really brief but intense time period. I don't think we looked at each other that way. We looked at each other more, I think, at that time, as doing different parts of the same movement. Doing different parts and having different kinds of jobs, for the most part. I looked at Randy like I would if you and I were working on something together, and we all have really good strengths, we have different weaknesses. I looked at Randy— there was nothing I couldn't say to Randy. I could sic him. I could say, "Randy. Over there. Get him." Or I could say, "Randy, you nimwit. What were you thinking?" It was more that kind of relationship, which is the best types of relationships to have.

Long: Did you keep in touch with him after he went to San Francisco?

Merrick: Oh, my God, no. He was way too big, and he had moved on to other things. I was so busy doing what I was doing, I really didn't have time to— I had, a couple of times, as I was saying before,

where I connected with Randy. I had a little bit more connection with Carol Queen because I would see her a little bit more frequently. Because, by this time, Randy is now doing some real serious work, which I absolutely did admire. I know that not everybody agrees with everything in his books, but he was doing a big lift. He was, by that time, really not the young man he was in college.

Long: It must have been so tragic when he died.

Merrick: Yeah. It was really sad. It was all sad, in many ways, and it was— in many ways, I thought, when that was happening, and there were so many other deaths, I thought, "We're really getting exposed to what is typically end of life." Like when your parents are saying they're losing their friends one by one, except it all happened in a very condensed time period. There was a real sadness about it, but there was also real beauty. Some people had beautiful deaths, and that's all I— at that time I was with Metropolitan Community Church, and I was a bishop's assistant for a while, and I was doing lay pastoring. I was at a number of bedsides.

Raiskin: How old were you?

Merrick: Let's see. I was born in 1951, and something started going awry in early '80s. Not all that old, but at that time I remember that— I was working with some folks. Our church district was five, six states. We got ahold of an immunologist in Eugene to speak, to talk about this disease, which no one knew anything about. They didn't know

anything. He didn't even know anything about it. He says, "Whatever this is, it's going to be a long time, if ever, before we have a vaccine. We don't know how it's moving along."

In my class, which was '75 to '79, I spent like a week on health and a week on literature, and just your variety pack. Talking with students at that time, and I can think of several different people at that time, was talking about health and STDs. Most of the guys said, "I'm responsible. I go down to the health center once a month and I get checked for syphilis and gonorrhea." Just, my science head says— I didn't foresee AIDS, but I know, just basic science, that sooner or later there would be something on the horizons.

Raiskin: This time that you're talking about, did your circle connect with the women on the lesbian land? Or Starflower, or these other—

Merrick: I had people that I knew. I had people that I knew, but mostly I did not. This was where I found separation was not my path. I felt that, for what I wanted to see happen and accomplish, to me that meant I needed to be interacting with all genders, and walks, and types. Also, I found, in some cases with some subgroups, that it was a little judgmental, and it was more than I could— I just couldn't go down that path. I understood why they were on that path, but I couldn't do that.

It was somewhat limited, though I did have friends in a variety of different subgroups, and enjoyed them. In many ways I went— When I lost my internship, I then realized I was not going to be able

to do the juvenile counseling I thought I was going to be able to do, because I was going to stay in Eugene. I had burned that bridge.

Raiskin: How did you lose the internship?

Merrick: It was during that time period, because '74, '75, '76, '77, it was during that time period that we were doing Pride Week. I and a number of other people were organizing Pride Week, so we had people— I needed a week off. I had gone through— I was at— there was a group home that Children's Services Division was over.

At CSP, you all had advisors. She knew that I was gay. She says, "Whatever you do, do not come out." I said, "I've got to make a decision." This was a pivotal point for me. I had to make a decision what I could live with for the rest of my life.

I told Anita, I said, "Okay, look, as long as no one asks me a direct question, I can do avoidance and be okay with that. But if someone asks me a direct question, I'm not going to lie. That's what we're going to have to live with." Of course I'm always—

We had the third interview. We were down to the place, "Looking really forward to having you." I said, "Great." I said, "I need one week off. I've got some things to do. Would that be a problem?" "Oh, no, that won't be a problem. What are you going to be doing?" I thought, Oh, here I am. I just took a deep breath and told him what I was doing. He said, "We'll get back with you." I thought, Okay, we know what this means.

I got out the door and got some place where a payphone— because we don't have cell phones at this point in time. I called Anita, I said, "Better find me a different internship." This is the wonderful thing about CSPA, was all the wonderful internships as an undergraduate that you were availed.

Sure enough, about three days later, the director of the group home got ahold of me and he said, "I had a conversation with the board," and I found out later this was the Children's Services. He says, "I just want you to know that we're not worried about you, but it's about public relations and funding. We can't have you." That was okay, because Anita had already found me a placement with the Johnson Unit.

I thought, He needs a liberal dose of salt. I am going to pour salt in his wound, because I know that this is bothering him. I'm going to really rub it in and make it hurt for a little bit, because I want something out of this. He says, "Do you want to come and talk to the staff and the clients?" I said, "Yes, I do."

I talked to the kids, and the kids thought I was being hired. Eventually after we finish, we had a really good discussion about homosexuality and et cetera, I was able to get in there. One of the kids turned to me and said, "But why weren't you hired?" I turned to the director and said, "Why don't you tell them why you didn't hire me?" I let that be the story. He told them, though. I thought he was sinking further in his chair. I thought, "The poor man's going to die. I got to pull him out of this."

I turned to the kids and I said, "The important thing is your integrity, who you are, and honesty." These are street kids. I could tell them pretty much anything, which I did. I said, "You're not going to get the milk and cookies, but you're going to be who you are. You hold true to who you are because that's what really counts in this world."

I left at that point. I still feel good about that at this point in time, because if I had sugarcoated it for those street kids, they never would've boughten that. They would never have respected me.

I think a lot of the '70s, it's funny, is, meeting people where they are was the important part. That also entails, when I think of all the panels that we did, and there were hundreds, it's not only about saying who you are, but it's about also listening. If you want to have a interaction that might lead to change, you can't have people afraid, being defensive, because that's when they stop hearing. They're not hearing.

To me, if I was dealing with a Christian, I would ask them questions. "Do you believe that you're saved by grace, or you're saved by works?" Because that told me, as a Christian, exactly where they were coming from, and I could talk to them on that level. I think that sometimes that's the piece that can get lost sometimes when you're trying to create change, is that you need— The political world is a whole other animal. You gather those that think like you, you pull the ones off the center, you pull off any of the fringe that you can. That's how you win. But if you want to

change— Campaigns, you can change hearts and minds. That's not where the real change happens. The real change happens, I believe, is on the one on one. That to me was always why coming out was so important, because the campaigns did what they did, but the true interaction is with your family, is with your friends, and et cetera.

There was a real cost for a lot of people, which is also why I never felt like anybody needed to be forced out. No one should ever be forced out because the consequences are personal, and you don't have to live with those consequences.

Long: Harriet, in early June of 1976, there was a lot of anti-gay activity around Eugene. For example, paint was spattered on the walls of the Riviera Room. Eggs were thrown at patrons leaving the bar. Different horrible things like that. Then in June of 1976, there was a big rally at City Hall, and then the march over to Washburn Park. Can you tell us about the anti-gay activity and that big march? Because the march seems to surface as a major turning point.

Merrick: I think marches are something that can have a major turning point. Certain marches were part of the Vietnam era, too. People got used to that. It was a way for a lot of people to feel identity and to feel they weren't alone. I think a lot of people felt very isolated.

A march at that point in time was, I think, not only for the intended purpose, but was also a way of saying no to their fear, and saying no to the closet, because it was very risky for a lot of people. It was

risky for people that, in their early years of Soromundi. Any way in which you came out was risky, and you didn't always know who was going to be your friend or who wasn't going to be your friend. Or, even if you didn't lose your job, how much garbage you had to take.

To come out, in a sense, in a march like that was not only about solidarity, but it was something you said to yourself, and something you said to the person next to you, and something you said to the person not in the march, but knew you were in the march. To me, that was my big takeaway with that.

Long: It must have been very exciting, though, to have such a big event happen. A lot of energy.

Merrick: I pretty much look at marches in the sense of, "Don't do one if it's not going to be sizeable," because it just appears weak. You don't want to appear weak. I think that's true. I think the gradual awakening and hearing from people from the— because Stonewall wasn't the start of the gay movement. A lot of people get a little stuck on that. I used to refer to it more as the pre-modern start of the movement.

The '50s, the Mattachine, and all the rest of it, you can go back to Germany and Paragraph 165, and the rest of it, is that we all build on one another. We build on the legacy that we have. Sometimes history doesn't just go forward, but it goes backwards as well, and

it gyrates sometimes. I think that those kinds of things are important.

That time period brought up— we cut our teeth on some ugly times, as you were saying, with the vandalism and people being beaten up. I had a situation myself with three people during that time period. I was walking at night by myself to a friend's house. We had about four or five people that were getting together. I was walking down the street, and this car started to follow me. They were calling stuff out. My mother was wrong about a lot of things, but she was right about some. It was an awakening to find out the police were not who I thought they were for everybody, because we're in the same time and space, but not in the same world. My mom said, "If you just ignore people, they'll go away." Mostly that was correct. Most of the time. These guys were not going away. Then they started calling out about, "Faggot." I thought, Oh, I'm in trouble. I'm in real trouble. They're confused, but I'm still in trouble. I think I might've gotten tired and realized this wasn't going to be over, and I said something back to them. God knows. I said, "You need to figure out what a faggot is." At that point then they realize a woman— it was just as bad. It wasn't any better. Then I was gay on top of that. They kept coming.

One of them got out of the car and he grabbed me by the arm. I looked at him, and— Am I mad? I thought, "I can take you." I think he thought that too, because he looked scared, but he had two

buddies in the car. I thought, I do anything to this guy and they'll be on me like flies on rice, so I'm not going to do that.

I saw an LTD bus coming, so I pulled away from him, pulled myself in front of the LTD bus, thinking that they would stop. They didn't stop. Then as I was getting past the LTD bus on that corner was this beer party on a lawn. I started yelling for help. Nothing. I thought, Okay you are really on your own on this one.

They had sped up, and burned rubber coming to a stop. I realize I'm not going to get any help from anybody. I've got to figure this out myself. I did the one thing that I would never recommend to anybody, and I always preface this. I got in the middle of the street. I started moving my hands like this, to say, "Come on. Come to me. Come get it."

Their brains left the room. By the time it took them, they reversed so hard, they were burning rubber. I was already gone two blocks, but they were so angry and so upset that they weren't thinking. That was how I got away out of that one. I have had death threats. I've had other situations one on one. That's just not— they didn't know who I was, but that's just what those times were like.

I knew another woman who worked on Take Back the Night, and she was hurt by an officer. After the campaign, the '78 campaign, we worked in different parts of the community. I was working at that time with Looking Glass at a night call, and I had a cop who wanted names and numbers, which I wouldn't give to him. Then I

called back the police department and said, "Do you have officer so-and-so on duty?" "No, he's not on duty at the moment." I said, "This officer, and this is what just happened. Go take care of your business," and left it at that.

That was a point in time that was not very pretty, but it had those other times which were full of joy, and were about coming together, and about “a shift in the wind” is how I would describe it.

Raiskin: You talk about history not being linear. It's back and forth in terms of progress. That's certainly true in Oregon. You've been involved in a number of ballot measures and legal charges. I wonder if you could talk to us a bit about your involvement in those.

Merrick: Sure. Right. First, the city ordinance, No on 51, this was the Anita Bryant little thing. At that time I was a co-facilitator, and then became facilitator for the steering committee for that campaign. That campaign was crazy, because we had everything from Marxists, to socialists, to lesbian separatists, to whatever I was, to the Terry Beans of the world. It was like herding cats. I could only begin to tell you. It was nuts. Half the work was just keeping those very different points of view on track.

Long: Could we back up for a sec?

Merrick: Sure.

Long: If you could just explain— This was 1976, the fall of '77, there was the gay rights ordinance for the City of Eugene.

Merrick: Yes. For the City of Eugene. It was non-discrimination on the three points, public accommodations, and—

Long: Yeah. That passed.

Merrick: Yes. I'm always having to explain, what I've learned on measures is that "yes" and "no" gets very confusing for people. Yes, it did pass, and it passed by a big margin that I truly believe the Lynn Green strategy was the right strategy for Eugene at that point in time.

It was also that we weren't organized. We were in this mostly in the '70s. We were doing a lot of education, but politically— one of the national trainers from Victory Foundation had read the book and the rest of it. He says, "You guys really were the start of some of the most early organizing." He was looking at it for more than that standpoint.

Basically we took what we learned. What do we do differently? How we went forward was gradually learning, how do you build power? How do you change hearts and minds, but how do you build power? It was also about how you build power.

Long: The Referendum 51 was the anti-gay referendum.

Merrick: It was the anti-gay referendum. It passed.

Long: And that passed.

Merrick: It passed.

Raiskin: What did that feel like, knowing that you live in a city where the majority of the people voted who voted?

Merrick: It was— we had three people who had the role of campaign manager. We had any number of people who are communications, and none of them could speak that night. We had fortunately had enough depth of field that we had it figured out how we were going to speak, but a lot of people were completely devastated. I thought, "We're going to lose," but I think there was only, on the steering committee, probably a couple of us that thought that. I think the rest really truly thought that people would do the right thing. I wasn't sure people would do the right thing. It came down to that.

For the most part, for me personally, I was not surprised. I was annoyed, and I thought, "This isn't happening." That was my sense of it, is that we're going to keep on this road. The defeat, this is temporary. As I tell people in different campaigns, this is a snapshot in time.

Raiskin: Did people leave Eugene at that time?

Merrick: There were a number of people who left Eugene. Also there were other— keep in mind we had recessions, and so we had one of the, probably the largest— I went to a Holly Near concert with a thousand people. We had a really large lesbian contingent in Eugene. When the recessions hit and other things happen, it wasn't like there were other good places to go. People— Pocketbooks, they

went to Portland, they went to Seattle, they went to a variety of different places.

I think with each campaign, not only the '78, but the '88, the '92, all the other ones, we would lose different people. We would gain different people. Because some people, and understandably, it would be the campaigns were so hard that they just couldn't do another one. I would almost refer to it as post-traumatic stress for a number of people. "Don't ever put me on phones again." "Okay. We can find you something else."

Part of it as a volunteer manager, just trying to find the right place for the right people. You can't put someone who wants to verbally rip someone's face off and have them talking on panels, because that isn't going to work. You find them something else to do. The important thing is making sure everyone felt they had a place and that they had a voice.

Long: Around this time, the late '70s, early '80s, what work were you doing at that time?

Merrick: I was working for the University of Oregon. I had lost my placement. I had gotten other internships. I graduated. I realized by this time there was no going back to whatever I thought I was going to be able to do.

I took a job that would pay the bills so I could do what I really wanted to. My avocation. It's not really any different than if you're a musician or you're in the theater. A lot of people, you just go find

something that's going to pay the bills so you can do what you really want to do, what you really love to do. I had a good time.

I was working for the Business Affairs Office. Worked there about thirty-two years. I spent about half my career working with federal loan program, and the other half I was the purchasing and contracting person for them. When I was with the federal student loans, I had a boss that was— we knew how to work with each other. We did it well. I could do what I needed to do. I was really circumspect about my time, and how I used my time.

That was also— the '88 came along, and that was the Oregon Citizens Alliance. That was the statewide measure—

Raiskin:: The anti-gay measure.

Merrick: Another anti-gay measure, only on a bigger scale. And the consultants for that campaign were trying to take this in a direction that probably a number of us in Eugene thought was an error, which was "Don't clean it up." Don't try to clean it up. People need to meet people and tell your personal stories."

But, it's a really tough job. You have to win five counties in Oregon, or pretty much have to win five counties. And if you want to win, you have to focus it that way. And they did the best that they could with what they thought was happening. And then that's when ACLU and Dave Fidanque, when we lost that, a few days later, I got a call from Dave Fidanque and we were just chatting, because I had worked with him on the campaign. We were just chatting. "Oh,

we need to do a lawsuit." "Yeah, we should do a lawsuit." "Oh, we need to get the right plaintiff." "Yeah, you need to get the right plaintiff".

Raiskin:: And he was the head of—

Merrick: He was the head, the director for the state ACLU. Executive Director. We were just talking about what this person needed to look like, what would be the right combination. I was a babe in arms, compared to Dave. I had no idea what he was up to. I was just going, "Yeah. Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]" and next thing I knew I was, you know, a plaintiff and so—

Raiskin:: What was the name of the case?

Merrick: And that was the Merrick-Education, so it was to overturn—

Long: Can we back up for a second?

Merrick: Sure.

Long: So in 1987, Governor Goldschmidt issued executive order 8720 banning discrimination in employment by the state on the basis of sexual orientation.

Merrick: Correct.

Long: And then in reaction to that, the Oregon Citizens Alliance filed petitions for a referendum. It would overturn that order.

Merrick: Correct.

Long: And that was Ballot Measure 8.

Merrick: Correct.

Long: So the work you've just described is for—

Merrick: Right.

Long: Against Ballot Measure 8.

Merrick: Yeah, it's a, I mean, it all like led to it. It was all coming together that way on both, on all sides on all sides. In 1988, a lot of people participated and a lot of people were like, you know, it was really very, very difficult. But with each one we were learning something about it. So, which then led to the court case and the court case decision, which overturned the '88 measure. Also in 1992 we were fighting another measure. It was, you know, just an intense time period.

Raiskin:: Can you tell us what your involvement with the case and—

Merrick: Oh!

Raiskin:: And that was like for you and—

Merrick: That was probably, it was a lot easier than campaigns. It was the, for me personally, it was a, well first, once I realized what Dave was up to, no, it was like, "Oh, okay." We kind of talked about it a little bit and—

Long: So he engineered he effort?

Merrick: I would say so.

Long: Okay.

Merrick: He's not here to defend himself, but I love Dave, but it's like, I'd still say that he laughs we've talked about this before. God, I was naive, you know, just didn't even occur me. I thought he was talking about somebody else, you know, he was just, he was just put out his fishing line and you just reeling me in. And so because we were both going, "Well, this is not over. We got to— what are we going to do next?" So, a good colleague, a good friend, a hard worker and a longtime ally. So yeah, so the front piece of it was about going to my boss and saying, "Look, this is what's going to happen. They're going to mess around. They're probably going to spend the first year or two trying not to have this case go forward." They'll try to kill the case first and then it'll go through who knows what period of time. And I thought, actually after a while I was starting to think I'm going to get Social Security before this case has ever run for, because in fact it took, I guess it was about four years, took about, it took a while.

Raiskin:: What did it feel like to be such a public person?

Merrick: Well, I had already been such a public person that there was at a point in time when I was probably just about had enough in the ‘70s because there had been so much public exposure. We would sometimes make jokes of those of us who did speaking and say it's like "rent a Dyke" or you know "gays on display." So we had our

own ways of dealing with that. There was, you know, with the campaigns, there was TV, there was radio, also did a lot of radio, did radio thing down in California because they couldn't get anyone out of Redding, California. They wanted to black out our faces and it was like, "No, you blackout our faces, we walk off your studio set," you know, because this is, this is what this is about.

So, it was a little bit more, because I actually kind of had gotten to a place where I felt like, you know, little personal life, you know of, and it's so it kind of brought things back up again. It stirred things up. So that part I've— radio's my friend. I love radio. TV? I'm not so thrilled with TV. I don't like TV. It's not my friend. And I actually enjoy being a little bit more in the background when I can. For me when there was a speaking thing I can do it but it's not my favorite thing to do. And so it's just a matter of getting the job done.

Raiskin:: So, the legal case actually worked for you, in terms of the kind of—

Merrick: It was really easy because I wasn't the one doing the heavy lifting. I was, I looked at it pretty much in the way that I look at this little piece here I was table setting. I met certain qualifications that were needed for this case. I was the right plaintiff. They knew I wasn't going to run on them, that I'd already been battle weary and I wasn't going to drop out.

Raiskin: Can you tell us what your claim was in that legal case?

Merrick: Yeah, it was, it was interesting. It was basically about the chilling of the freedom of speech. You know, because one of the things— I

remember getting an interview from the *Register-Guard* and he was— by this time I already had learned a long time ago how to stay on message, and was staying on message. And he got frustrated and he said he sputtered out and he said, "Lon Mabon said if you just shut up, if you just be quiet, then everything would be okay." I said to the interviewer, I said, "Well, that sounds to me very much like the attempt is to chill our freedom of speech, which is one of our constitutional—

I just went right back to message, but it was like, I think it really took that moment for me to really take in at another level what this was really about. And I thought, "Oh my God, that is really what this is about." And it became something bigger. It wasn't just about, not to minimize it at all, but it wasn't just about gay rights. It was also about something more, even more fundamental, which was our constitutional rights of protection and assembly and association and speech. It kind of— it was kind of more like, wow, this is something bigger that I haven't really appreciated before. It was a lesson for me.

Long: And when the case was going on, there was meanwhile a lot of anti-gay activity happening on campus.

Merrick: Yeah.

Long: What was that like?

Merrick: No. Well, you know, I was in a pretty good situation that my boss had this very anti-gay secretary was always stirring shit. I got a call

from HR at this one point and they said, "She said you're just hiring gay people." And I said, "Really? Does she know something I don't know? Because if I am, I don't know who she's talking about." And so, you know, there were, and it wasn't just for me. My way of coming out in the business office was when I was a student, and the easiest way to have people stop asking me questions about who I was seeing was just to tell them I was gay and go to the biggest gossip I could find in the business office and say and make sure she knew. And I knew she would take care of everything for me and she did.

So I got rid of it all at once. I tell you if I'm going to go through this or I'm going to lose my job, I'm going to do it right now. And it's going to, I'm not going to be invested in it. But you know, there was, and I can't remember the date for this, it was down the road, but there was a study done at the university and it was about perception and it had identified, it was identifying your orientation, all the various little demographics they needed for about how safe do you feel on campus. And there were as not surprisingly, it turned out to be a really large difference between those who identified as heterosexual versus those who identified as homosexual. And approximately, I want to say 46 percent somewhere near half had had some experience of discrimination at some level or harassment.

And so, that's what I meant by, we live in the same time and place, but we live in different worlds. And the thing for me personally

that that really opened up is that when I had these run ins with police and et cetera, it opened my eyes to a larger degree to people who are black and people who are brown and you know, driving while black or Brown or the things that they go through because it caused me to rethink it. This has happened to me and has happened to many others that I know. What about this? What about the other? And so it caused me to really look at our world differently.

Long: Were you involved in any way with the task force that UO President Miles Brand established?

Merrick: Oh.

Long: That was in December of 1989, it was the Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Concerns.

Merrick: Honestly, I cannot tell you. I remember Brand. I remember a particular evening conversation with Brand and I believe Vetri was there and several others. And we were having a conversation about where things should go. And there was a difference of opinion about what the outcome of that meeting was, in terms of what we believed was promised. And, but I've been on so many task forces and committees, I can't even, they're all kind of like mucky-merge. So I really couldn't honestly tell you on that one.

Long: Okay.

Merrick: Yeah.

Long: So the decision, Merrick v. State Board, that decision came down in 1992.

Merrick: Right.

Long: In your favor holding that, the measure was unconstitutional.

Merrick: That was so funny.

Long: What was it like when you heard the news?

Merrick: Well, I know exactly where I was in the Business Affairs Office on the floor plan. I remember being at the desk and I got this phone call and it was reporter. I had not heard from ACLU. I had not heard from my attorneys, I had not heard from anyone. And there was this very excited reporter at the other end. She says, "Have you heard? Have you heard?" I said, "Heard what?" She said, "You won, you won." I said, and so I said, whatever stockpile thing that I thought I should say. I got off the phone. I went across the hall ‘cause my boss was on the other end and I left my desk and I went to him.

I said, "Everything's going to come down in about two seconds." And I told him real briefly what happened. I said, "I think for the sake of the Business Affairs Office and your sanity, we should put my phone off the hook. I need to leave." And about two seconds later I got a call from an old friend and he called and he said, "Harriet, do you need a press conference put together?" I said, "Go call the ACLU. I'm going over the ACLU's office right now." So I

got in my car, I left work. I had told Jim and got across town to the ACLU office. I got out of the car and I don't know, I was in high heels and I don't know what else. And all of a sudden I heard this tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. And I looked behind me and Susan Casteel and I'm going and I'm walking faster, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap.

I can hear her walking faster, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, and I'm trying to get— and they had to go up these stairs and I'm just trying to beat her out. I got in the door and Fidanque says, "In this office." He shuts the door. We did a major press conference to handle it all in one shot. It was very, it was very exciting. It was a little stunning because it was like no warning. I think Charlie Hinkle was in Bend at the time. Katherine McDowell was another one of the attorneys on the case and reporters had just got to me before anyone else did. So it was fast. It was exciting, though. Yeah.

Long: And then that same year that OCA filed another statewide—

Merrick: Oh yes.

Long: —Ballot measure, Measure 9.

Merrick: Yes. Yes. By this time I'm looking at Lon Mabon and going, you're apparently my best buddy. I might as well really enjoy my time with you. And so—

Raiskin:: He was the head of Oregon Citizens Alliance.

Merrick: Yes, he was. Yes. And his wife Bonnie. It was, I think their, their livelihood. And what I learned out of all of that is what I've told all

my volunteers in any campaign, never let someone be your enemy. Never think about them as the enemy. Think about them as your opponent because it changes you. After '78 I found that I was really, really angry and it was probably the first and last time that I was really in that position. I thought this is taking you over. You've got to change something. One, you have to have balance in your life. You've got to think of this as a marathon, not a sprint. And you have to find a way to wrap your head around this, that it does not destroy you.

And I was able to do that. So, but the important thing is not to look at the other person. And the other thing I tell people is you always leave a back door or window open for your opponent. You have to be able at the onset, to be able to say that if you get what you really want, if that mind does change, you've got to be able to take him in. And that's the hard part. That's the hard part for some people because more so for some than others. But I grew to enjoy them in a really twisted way.

And there were a couple of radio conferences, and I truly believe it. As I would thank Lon Mabon and I say, "I want to thank Lon Mabon for what he's done for us." And while there's a bit of humor around that, it's also true because without, as horrible as it was and for the pain that he caused and all of those things are real, it's also true that it caused a chain reaction in our society of many people, we gained far many more allies and it got various issues and topics to be talked about. So, you know, it's both, it's all of the above. But

you have, you have to leave your opponent a way to come home. If you don't believe in reconciliation, how can you possibly think you'll ever win?

Raiskin: Hmm.

Long: Were you involved in Right to Privacy?

Merrick: Oh God.

Long: As I understand, it was Eugene born and then moved up to Portland.

Merrick: Yeah, that would be Terry Bean.

Long: Can you explain more who he was, cause he comes up a few time in your—

Merrick: Yes. Well, Terry is his own force. I would say that like very, very different people, but I would say like Randy is his own force. Terry Beans, his own force. And Terry helped found larger mechanisms like the Portland Town Council, like HRC, he was a part of that. I won't say he did it all by himself, but he was a force to be reckoned with and he worked a lot more with more traditional structures as well. He is also a person, there are things about Terry that I'm just kind of like, "Oh for God's sakes Terry," you know, and they're just like with Randy and there other things on going like, "Oh, God bless you."

Yeah. He was a part of Right to Pride, Right to Privacy, to explain who Terry— to give you a sense of how he integrated parts of his life. When we would have, when there would be different campaigns we'd opened up his own bar for people to take— at that time, we had paper ballots— take their ballots in and do their work in his bar.

Long: What was his bar again?

Merrick: Cassady's. It was on Thirteenth Street. Thirteenth Street. And yeah, he created Right to Privacy, Right to Pride with others. I was on their board, both boards multiple times and then later Basic Rights Oregon, ACLU and Planned Parenthood. So yeah, we at the peak period our dinner was around 1,200 so, and again this is all is about creating movement. It's about education. It's also about creating power machines, to create machines to get to where you want to go.

Part of that process within the movement was the political aspects, not just defending, or trying to create a positive measure, but it was also around candidates. And that's where that came in. It was the reality after thirty years to get a nondiscrimination bill, including our friends. It took forever. Most of my work at one point became state rather than local. And now I've gone back more to local, but it was trying to get a nondiscrimination clause for the state of Oregon and just took bloody forever. And part of that was about having those conversations with candidates and trying to get them to

realize what a law can do and what a difference it can make in people's lives.

Long: Were you involved in the organizing the Pride Day celebration?

Merrick: On campus?

Long: Well, maybe, I guess there was the Pride Week on campus, an annual thing, but then in Eugene, in spring of '92, several women coordinated the Pride Day celebration at the community center.

Merrick: At the community center. I did— was not involved with that per se. Certainly attended a variety of different things along that line. I was involved with Pride Week on campus and later became involved with the pride celebrations as I was chairing what was called the Equality Foundation. And, so in later years, let's see, BRO picked me up from the Equality Project in '98.

Raiskin: And that's the Basic Rights Oregon?

Merrick: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They didn't have contacts down in Eugene and we had been running, the Equality Project, had been helping organize the City Pride for a number of years. We had the contacts, we subcontract, Basic Rights Oregon subcontracted with Equality Project to pull off their first garden party in Eugene. We did that and it was after that then that they recruited me for their board in Portland.

Raiskin: Am I jumping too far ahead to talk about the Basic Rights Oregon work on marriage equality?

Merrick: No, I don't know. Wherever you want to go is fine because I can go back forth with, my mind is a jumble, you know, it's all these—

Raiskin: Just because here we are talking about Basic Rights Oregon.

Merrick: Right, right, right, right. I was co-director for Basic Rights Oregon for a few year— couple of years and let's see, how do we want to do this?

And then when I finished with BRO then I wanted to pay back ACLU and Planned Parenthood. I went on both of their boards at the same time, which I would never recommend to anybody, ever, to do. It was stupid, but I said yes to one and I couldn't say no to the other one. There I was, so that's how that happened. I stayed in touch and I did things for BRO as requested, for certain types of things. It was more like we need you for X, Y, and Z, that kind of thing. Because I was pretty much had my hands pretty full because I did six years with both. Then got breaks and of course with the ACLU, then I kept going back on take a break, go back on, take a break.

When it got to marriage, that happened in several— we had— there was the one measure, first one on marriage and I thought this isn't going to fly, but it will, you know, we'll till some soil but it's not, nothing's going to happen with that.

Long: And what, what year was that?

Merrick: Well, I'm trying to get, keep them straight because then BRO asked me to be part in an advisory group, which I can't talk too much about because I signed nondisclosure statements. But I can tell you basically that BRO looked at going back after another statewide marriage measure and I can tell you the outcome, which was the outcome was we're not ready. We can be a few points ahead, but when you go into a campaign with the OCA or anything like that, it gets so ugly that it doesn't matter if you're up slightly head because you'll be behind.

So we knew, I think most of those of us who had were on that advisory committee were people who had been in a number of these kind of campaigns and we took the information and was like, we don't believe you're ready. We don't believe we're ready yet. And that was very upsetting for a lot of people to hear. They were not too happy about that. And then of course the final was everything was happening and they didn't have a choice on—because the sodomy laws had changed, I think it was in Texas and a number of things were happening. It was either put your hands on the steering wheel or watch the car veer off the highway. So they were in a hard play. BRO was in a hard place with that.

Long: Can you tell us what it was like to work with—

Merrick: I think it was 2011, I think it was the advisory committee, I think. I think that's right.

Long: Who is the first director of Basic Rights Oregon? Jean—

Merrick: Well, this is really, I know this is really interesting because Julie Davis— so there was a measure, was it 13? Julie Davis was involved and it was sort of the baby steps of what would become BRO and Jean Harris— there some internal politics of all of this that's like, "Oh my God, I don't want to go near this."

Jean Harris— Julie— and right now, I believe that BRO is talking about Julie Davis as the founder. Sort of true, sort of not. Somewhere between Julie Davis and Jean Harris is what happened. It's kind of like going back to GPA. Richard Crawford and Tad were probably— it's like the fetus, the zygote, you know, that was the zygote. But you get to Larry Monocle and Terry Bean and Randy Shilts, they really created and brought the child up. I would be hard placed to say, which was what, but Jean really raised BRO's, but she was sort of like— she was a former Deputy Mayor of San Francisco. Harvey was assassinated, the mayor was assassinated. They got someone else there that's kind of like so-and-so run or we'll never, you know, do X, Y— it was San Francisco politics. It might as well be talking East Coast politics is genius to say where the left eats the left.

And so she was a deputy mayor, which basically, I as much as I could see means an assistant or strong arm for your supervisor. She comes up here, but she had a way about her, Jean could be really, really good or she could be really, really bad. And she made really good friends and she made really good enemies. She kind of had an East Coast style, which didn't exactly work with the West Coast.

She eventually went back to California. But she was a pretty— she really built up the Fair Workplace Project. I think I still have video tapes of their initial drafts of that project, which was a c3. So, and then Right to Pride was really coming apart and BRO absorbed Right to Pride.

Long: Who'd they bring in after Jean Harris?

Merrick: That would be, Jeannie Jeannie, blanking dammit [Jeana Frazzini]. We'll fill that in blank. And that would be— oh wait, no, that is not correct. We— after Jean Harris, we did a national search and we didn't have a whole— it wasn't a big pool, but we got a guy out of San Francisco, not someone that I would have personally chosen, because I took one look at him with "They'll eat you for lunch," you know, and, which is what happened. There was another individual. He didn't last very long. He was a really sweet guy, but it's a tough business. And we had people that really wouldn't even consider applying as a candidate because of Oregon's reputation. I went to New York with Harris to look for money. We were going down through Midtown and Financial and there the way they looked at Oregon is like, Oh my gosh, we're not that big, we're not that strong.

California wasn't real well organized, but when Jean went back to California, she reformed part of the statewide California group as well. Oregon has a tendency not to really look at itself in the ways sometimes that other states looked at it at that particular point in time, and I'm not sure I would say that is true for right now, but at

one point in time, Oregon had done so much of this work in so many of the campaigns that it really had a model down for other parts of the country.

Raiskin: So to clarify. How did they see Oregon?

Merrick: I think they saw Oregon, kind of like, I'm afraid to apply for that job. I'm afraid of what—

Raiskin: Because?

Merrick: Because I don't feel qualified. So, which was—

Long: Does Oregon have a good reputation then for spearheading efforts?

Merrick: Yes. Yes, it did. Because we had partially as much for— Oh, and there was Roey. Roey is another executive director for Basic Rights Oregon. I was going to miss that in a sec. But we had a reputation for being able to stop bad things. What we wanted was good things, but the OCA was very, very good about just keeping it going. We got better about when they started doing their petition signing, we started shifting the campaign, not just to be the campaign but shifting it to the initiative petition process.

Raiskin: Well, because when we stopped 9 Colorado didn't stop 2.

Merrick: Right.

Raiskin: Because it was simultaneous.

Merrick: Right.

Raiskin: Yeah.

Merrick: Yeah.

Raiskin: So.

Merrick: I mean there were things we were all learning from each other, or trying to learn from each other, but not every situation is the same. And it also in part depends what your bedrock is like. And so in that way that some things were not similar either. For a while there Oregon really did have a leadership role, but Oregonians don't perceive themselves that way. They think, "Oh well New York," or some other place. But I think that might be true for a lot of places, that you have a tendency to think the grass is greener somewhere else. San Francisco of course was its own force.

Long: Then the director of Basic Rights Oregon, at that time— what year would that have been?

Merrick: Roey Thorpe. And then there was—

Long: During the marriage equality effort?

Merrick: Marriage. There were several of them, so there was the 2011— I think the 2011 was the advisory committee. I can probably solidify some of these dates because I'm kind of like mushy on the dates right at the moment. Because there were a couple of different— let's look at this and see if we can do this versus let's do this.

Long: What I'm thinking of particularly is when the City of Portland was, or Multnomah County, was issuing marriage licenses—

Merrick: Oh, oh.

Long: Was that in 2004 maybe?

Merrick: Yeah, I think that was 2004. That was devastating for a lot of people. Really, really devastating, and—

Raiskin: Do you want to just describe that for—

Merrick: Yeah, well I think of several friends who went up to Portland and got married and you know, when they were there, they felt very supportive and it was very celebratory and they felt very loved and very affirmed, and look where we have gotten. And then it all came apart, which left, I think different people came out of it feeling different things. Some felt like "I can't trust the next one," because look what happened. And some, it wasn't trust. Some was my heart can't take this, I can't do this.

The interesting part at times with this was how some self-identified heterosexuals who were married, who would say, "I had no idea we had this many rights." They didn't know, and some [inaudible 1:36:26] talking to you, if you talk to a divorce attorney, they are able to tell you that married couples sometimes don't know what they signed in the first place. You know? So yeah, I think it was because it was so personal. It's not that the discriminatory measures were not personal, or didn't have personal impact, but you know,

making that kind of commitment was deeply personal and I think it was harder.

Raiskin: Were there something like 3,000 couples?

Merrick: Yes, like 2,500 something like that. And of course they had all the supports of course, since they'd done this before we kind of knew how we needed to do that the next time, you know, and to support people. But we did have people, and there were a number of people who were going like, "We don't know what this means. What happens around domestic partnership? What does this mean if I already have a domestic partnership? What if I got married in a different state? Some people were looking at getting married in Canada. I said, "You need to talk to your attorney before you do that because Canada law on divorce is a little different. You really want to talk to an attorney first." And I think for other people it was like, "I already did this, I don't need to do this again." And for other people it was like, "Well, I'm not sure if this— what if this one doesn't take?" I think everyone had to struggle with it in a different way.

Raiskin: Would you say that if you think about Oregon gay politics that Eugene has a specific strength that perhaps Portland didn't?

Merrick: Well I'm prejudice of course. I think so I think they have different, I think they had different strengths during different time periods. I think one, there were a lot of people and people from Portland who may have taken Eugene for granted politically like, "Oh it's really,

really liberal. It's really, really progressive. This is going to pass." And trying to talk to different people and saying, "Do not take this for granted. It is not the liberal bastion you think it is. If it were, you wouldn't have these kinds of numbers." It was more in the sense of trying to reality check at a time in '88 I think, a number of people in Eugene believed because of that— because we're a small city, I think it's less easy to avoid groups than it is in a larger city.

You can be with just your own people and not be exposed, but it's a little bit more difficult in a smaller town. You're at least aware even if you choose not to interact, and I believe that in '88 there are a number of us who believed no, you need the personal stories. You don't need the sanitized version. You need the personal stories. We need as many people as possible to come out, and so I'm not sure I would put a judgment on that campaign per se, but I think their ears were not completely open. I would say that. I don't know that the outcome would have been different, but I know what the political consequences were and that after '88 there was a quite a bit of leadership who felt like we're not going to follow Portland. We're going to do our own thing. And so the 1992 campaign was all over the place.

Raiskin: Measure 9.

Merrick: Measure 9. The first Measure 9, yeah. It was just everywhere. It was every form of campaign that you want to call, it was like herding ducks, you know? So, to a certain degree. But the reality is also that in order to reach as many thousands of people as you're talking

about, you have to have money, and you have to have big money, because TV is expensive, radio is expensive and you're competing because the markets go up and down. You are competing not only with the pricing that they're giving you, but with whoever else is trying to get that TV time. Whoever else is trying to get that radio time. When you have a measure that is coming up, when other people are running for office or when there are other measures, you're competing. It's the demand and supply. And so early money is also the better money and sometimes people come on to campaigns later when the time— the money is needed earlier.

Those are just some of the little practical things about campaigns. So what that means is sometimes big donors. That changed some of the complexion of this home style Eugene— Yeah, it was grass-grown, home fed, and we were learning as we went. And then what you see is the transition of organizations, of not volunteers of paid staff. What you see is the amounts of money needed to run a campaign successfully to get— if you cannot meet individually with people, then you have to touch them in some other way and you have to touch them more than once. And so that might be print, it might be radio, it may be TV, and all that starts costing money. And then you start seeing organizations chasing donors.

Raiskin: And did it for the most part feel like defensive work?

Merrick: For a long time it did. And then of course we had the AIDS epidemic, in the '80s so it was really a lot of work did not happen in the same way that had been happening in the '70s because there

was so much else going on. We had a government that was not paying attention, that didn't want to do the work that needed to be done for a public health crisis that was that big. And so then you also had anger and resentment that was going on, but also not as prepared in some ways for the 1988 Measure that we might've been because people's resources were distracted. It's not to say that work didn't happen, but things were split. We were dealing with a crisis situation.

Long: Do you know what happened to the OCA and what happened to Lon Mabon?

Merrick: Well, for a while I had both Scott Lively and Lon Mabon's mugshots on my computer. That doesn't really help. Not winning doesn't help. There was one time when, I heard this through another means that Lon Mabon was really upset with his people and basically, in his own way, doing a left handed compliment about talking to how committed the other side was. And so he was a little annoyed, but we were also trying to find people inside to find out where things were at at times. And misflops on petition gathering and you know, just personal, I think, issues that were going on, they collapsed from within was my personal feeling about that.

Long: So they had been arrested?

Merrick: Well, I had the mugshot. Well, they had been involved with a couple little different things. Scott Lively was much more

dangerous than Lon Mabon ever was. Lon Mabon deserved the notoriety that he got, but Scott Lively was a much more deadly form, and he's the one who went to South Africa, where we saw the laws changing with regards to homosexuals and their lives being endangered. It was not good. I tried at one point to get BRO to use the mugshots. I said, "I can make sure there are no fingerprints. I know who to give this to." Do not do it, Harriet. And that was around '88 and I said, "I'm a good soldier, I won't do it." But I really wanted to do it, really badly.

Long: What were the measures that came after the defeat of Measure 9?

Merrick: My God, there was so many. In Springfield, everywhere. They were popping up, little “Sons of 9” were everywhere. It was more than I could even imagine.

Long: Was there a Measure 13?

Merrick: Well, that was even before they were lots of little measures before even 13 but look how it is, like Springfield, you know, little— I don't want to say Podunk because that has a connotation I do not want to give it— but they were popping up everywhere. And so—

Raiskin: And then another measure came around that was called 9 again.

Merrick: Yeah. There were ones that didn't make it, which were always felt like wonderful victories. But it did feel very much very defensive for a really long time. We tried to do our affirming work as much as possible in the legislature and get done what we could get done

there. And we had successes there. We eventually did get non-discrimination, we eventually did get the bully bill, though, never really felt like we really had the teeth for it.

We had the Fair Workplace Project, which was your c3 and involved the corporations. Jean Harris really grew that. I mean, Julie started it, Jean grew it and the strategy was pretty simple. You get ten, thirteen heroes, you get Nike, you get Northwest Natural, you get PGE, you get vice presidents or whoever we could get out of these corporations to sign that piece of paper. Next thing we knew, we had Nike, Adidas wanted to come on. It was also about leveraging and that was part of the power. It was about educating and showcasing and see what a good guy you are and you know what a great niche market this community is. And that we remember our friends and we remember our enemies. And so that helped. One of the things that Jean had said at that time was, because I was talking about backfill. The bigger companies will have templates they can give to the smaller companies, so they don't have to have the staff in order to make this happen. They can steal, they can take from that. But she said, because once people know that they are safe, they will form caucuses, and when they form a caucus, then that corporation of employees of natural affiliations, it will get stronger within the corporation. She had a kind of a belief that by even doing what we were doing, we have to trust you've thrown the bread on the water and you trust that there will be a harvest in each of these places. And then that's kind of

how she saw that and how she operated. But she also knew how to burn a good bridge. So, a little of everything.

Long: And then what about you? Eventually there's marriage equality. Can you tell us a little bit about your personal experience?

Merrick: Yeah. Well, definitely friends. But for me, myself, when we finally got marriage I was there on the day, I was down in the Davis area because Davis had given us room. We had people stationed at the courthouse and we had preachers and ministers and rabbis down at the Davis to help people get through it all.

Long: What's the Davis?

Merrick: The Davis is a restaurant off of Broadway.

Long: In Eugene?

Merrick: In Eugene that opened its place, because we were all like "How fast can we move and how fast can we put this all together and how many can we can get through the doors who want to get through the doors?" Because you just don't really know. And at that time I was with somebody, but I thought, "We're not ready for marriage yet." And I talked to different reporters and other people about that as well. It's like, as wonderful as this is I and this other person, we're not ready for this yet. I'm not getting married yet. You know, I will get married if it comes there and it's the right thing to do, which of course we did and it was lovely.

Raiskin: You've given us such a wonderful narrative of your political work. Could you say anything about your personal life in Eugene? What life you're living in Eugene as a lesbian.

Merrick: Yes. Yeah. Well I love Eugene. My family tried to get me to come back for seven years and I just kept going mm-mm [negative] mm-mm [negative] because I think I'm just naturally, I'm not really a big city girl. I came to Eugene for a specific program that had undergrad internships that were not easily available across the nation. I came for a specific purpose. I came because my college sweetheart had a program down here. I came because my family life, and then the whole thing of I'm being gay was horrid, and so there was a run away aspect as well. And yet it was close enough because I maintained as, despite what it was like, I maintained those ties, all for decades. I put my mother on a five year plan and it was not long enough. It was never going to be long enough.

I got to see my father after my mom died. The last three months she kind of shifted of her life and that was both a wonderful thing and kind of a sad thing at the same time. My father— I was raised in a Democrat-Republican household. My father doesn't even like to say he was ever a Democrat. About the time in '92 things really started the first big shift, and I came home, I was visiting my father and mom, and my dad said, "Who's that man? Who's that black man who's running for president?" Jesse Jackson? I'm getting ready, I'm thinking, "Oh God, I'm going to have to talk to my father about Jesse Jackson." He said, "I want to vote for that man. That's the guy

I want for president." I thought, "Oh my God, is this my father? Who is this man?" Then I thought, "Let that go immediately, this is my new father."

Raiskin: So you say he never wanted to admit he was Republican before.

Merrick: Well, he doesn't like to admit he ever was Republican now, but when I was growing up it was a pretty— so I was always really comfortable and it helped me in the state legislature. I was always really comfortable. I knew "Republican-speak," I can talk to anybody. I grew up in a very mixed religious neighborhood, I could talk to anybody, I loved talking about religion. Oh please. You tell them you're a dedicated anti-gay Christian? Oh, let's talk creed. Let's talk about the Bible. I like talking about this stuff. But Dad, Dad and I became— my father and I can talk about any kind of politics. He's dying right now, and he's in transition, so that's not happening at the moment. Up to about two months ago. The last thing he says is not repeatable. But yeah, I think as a vet out of World War II and Korea, he's appalled. He's just totally appalled.

But why I live in Eugene, I live in Eugene because we're an hour and fifteen minutes from skiing. We're five minutes away from the river. We're an hour and fifteen minutes from the coast. I like the small town feel. I love the beauty of Eugene. I like the people of Eugene. I actually like mixed groups of people, so I loved my time at the University of Oregon. I'm a double-Duck, what can I say? My employment at the university allowed me to do what I loved, what I wanted to do. My work with ACLU, with BRO, et cetera, were

always a means to a movement, there was always an end goal. Which doesn't mean I didn't love and enjoy the work and still do enjoy the work, but it just means to me it's always been about shifting culture because it's always been back to sociology and anthropology. It's about how you shift, how you make a shift.

Raiskin: One of those kinds of questions, which, it's not really in the same narrative here, but how you have felt things as a lesbian in Eugene, things like health care, how you think about aging, how you've been treated not as a political person, but as a lesbian in these other realms.

Merrick: Well, very interesting was— well number one, I've been part of Soromundi for a long time. I tell—

Raiskin: Say what Soromundi is.

Merrick: Soromundi Lesbian Chorus of Eugene has been around forever, I don't know what year we're on. Are we on twenty-five or are we in the thirties? I don't know.

Raiskin: We'll be talking with Karm.

Merrick: Well, you talk to Karm, Karm will tell you everything. But here's my personal thing, and I've told Karm this, is my personal feeling is that change happens in those spaces in between, and what I've told some researchers is that when you talk about the largest LGBT group— it's a hundred women who meet every week, every bloody week, whether you're want to or not. Music and I believe theater, I

believe books, the campaigns and lobbying are only one way to get to where you want to go. It's not life. It shouldn't be your life. You should have white space on your calendar. You should have empty spaces for recreation, for love and for everything else. And I try to maintain that for myself, but I believe that something as simple as when they were starting their early years and I was not with them during those early years because I came in the early 2000s, saying that you're a lesbian did deliberately put it into the language of your organization by itself is a political statement. And that's a big one. Going in and singing to the Rotary Club, you know, to talking and being in places that don't have the same exposure or to be able to go someplace where people do not feel safe. And it hasn't been that long ago we were up in Washington doing with tour and Karm can talk to you about this, but when you know you have people in that audience who do not have still feel, because geography still matters as to whether you're safe or not, whether you're in Portland or Eugene, you may have an incident, but geography still matters. If you're in Roseburg, Glide, your world is different. If you're in Burns, your world is different. And sometimes what people want and need and what quenches their spirit is just having something like that where they can just kind of rest their soul for a little bit.

I think that all of those different ways, whether it's theater and someone is talking about a subject with people who may not be exposed and is bringing a point across, I think all of those ways are ways home.

Raiskin: Do you think aging as a lesbian will be different than if you weren't?

Merrick: I think it's a big concern. I think it's a big, big concern. I know that AARP has dealt with this. Soromundi was at— can't think why Soromundi came in through my mind. I was thinking of AARP and I was thinking about, we are talking about aging and being in residential homes. For example, end of life when you or your partner or your friends are no longer able to keep you at home. I look at my father as my father is dying and finally having to bring in 24/7 because our backs don't work the same way they do because, when it goes on for a while you can't. When he's not mobile, and I think a fear for a lot of people, how will I be treated? Because when you're strong, when you're powerful, when you have certain positions, but when you go into a situation, a facility where the people who are being paid such low wages and or may not have the same level of education as others, how will I be treated in that environment? Will the programs reflect anything about me? And the answer is probably not.

The AARP had a film, Soromundi went to that, did a little singing. Place was packed, AARP did not have enough seating and that was at the Campbell Center, the senior center, and it brought up a lot of stuff. They had films that were addressing this and they've done this before. I think again, but it is an issue and I really don't know what the answer is.

Raiskin: Have you thought for yourself your own plans?

Merrick: Well, it's funny, it's interesting. A friend wanted to get kind of— Well, I was disdainful at the time and I thought, Oh God, I don't need a rap group. I was in so many rap groups in the '70s. I am so done with rap groups and potlucks, I don't have any room in my life for another one. And Pat wanted to, she said, "Well, it would just be like ten of us and we could talk, oh, here's a book." And I'm going, "I'm not that girl", and I didn't want go for an amount of time. I finally reluctantly went and of course we talked about everything other than whatever the assignments were, which was really good. But we're talking about— it was really put together to talk about things like aging and to talk about what our experiences were. And that has run for about one year. Wouldn't you know, the person who brought that up just died suddenly at her computer. Just pop. And I thought, Wow, does that not bring something home?

I know Karm, her own mom had passed, my dad is passing. All these things are poignant and cause you to be thinking about, Well, what will you do? We have a support system, but in the very end you might not be able to rely on that because there will be people who've passed before you. There will be people that you may think are your support system, who will no longer be able to do that. Not because they don't want to do that, but might not be able to do that. So yeah, it hangs out there.

Raiskin: Is there something that we haven't touched on—

Merrick: Oh, my God.

Raiskin: That you would like to—

Merrick: No, this has been really been very interesting. I would say never give up on people. I always believe that you can close your eyes, you can't close your ears. Plant the seed, and let it be. Trust that other people who are doing different work than you are doing what they need to be doing and that it will blossom also on its own time. Just do your own work.

Raiskin: Do you have any particular advice for young people who might watch your interview?

Merrick: Oh, gosh. Be true to yourself. Keep your integrity. Find something that you believe in. Do it. Make safe spaces for yourself. Have fun, be life, it's not all work. It's a marathon and it's okay to say no and it's okay to change.

Raiskin: Thank you so much.

Long: Yeah, thank you. This was really great.

Raiskin: Thank you, it was fun.

[END OF INTERVIEW]