Oral History Interview with Vicki Silvers

Interview conducted on August 3, 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

Vicki Silvers, 1980s

Vicki Silvers, 2019

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 August 3, 2018. Vicki was born in Phoenix, Arizona in 1962. When she was five, her family moved to the Northwest. She grew up in a dysfunctional household. She discusses the culture of the rural area where she grew up near Medford. Vicki was an athlete and a good student. She came out to herself when she was fifteen, but was closeted. She graduated from high school at age seventeen in 1980. She talks about building her feminist identity while in college. She moved around to different places in the West, but wanted to finish her college degree at the University of Oregon, because she was still an Oregon resident. She relates that Eugene seemed small and backcountry compared to other urban places she'd lived. Nevertheless, there was a lesbian focus, rather than a gay male focus, which Vicki liked. At UO, she studied Fine Arts. With her partner at that time, Vicki wanted to establish social connections in the community. They started One Common Thread with a group of like-minded women, a coffeehouse that offered women a monthly gathering. She and her partner and a friend also started IMRU, a women's production company that brought women's music and comedy to Eugene. Vicki describes the Eugene Celebration and the Slug Queen, the Eugene Celebration "ambassador," elected through a pageant process. She discusses the controversies surrounding the Eugene Celebration. She talks about the Oregon Citizens Alliance and the anti-gay ballot measures. Vicki describes being a part of the lesbian improvisation group WYMPROV! Vicki discusses having children with her partner, Sue. She discusses the help they received from the community. She talks about being pregnant with their second baby, and the trauma of experiencing a miscarriage. She discusses the challenges of parenting as a lesbian couple lacking typical civic safety nets that heterosexual couples have, such as spousal health benefits. Vicki describes the lesbian parenting group she and others started, LMNOP ("Lesbian Mothers Networking on Parenting"). Vicki ends her interview by discussing the younger LGBTQ community, the current conservative political times, women's rights, and aging issues.

Additional subjects: Adams, Margie; AIDS (disease); Alcoholism; Artificial insemination, Human; Assimilation (Sociology); Ballot Measure 48; Ballot Measure 50; Bars (Drinking establishments); Butch and femme (Lesbian culture); Closeted gays -- United States; Drag queens; Drug use; Eugene Celebration; Feminist bookstores; Happy Lesbian Couples; Hult Center for the Performing Arts (Eugene, Or.); Landforce, Debora; Lefton, Enid; Lesbian community; Lesbian identity; Lesbians -- California -- San Francisco; Martin, Debby; Mother Kali's Books; Nomenus, Inc.; Olivia Records; Radical Faeries; Riviera Room; Self-

insemination; Sheklow, Sally; Student athletes; Sweet Honey in the Rock (musical group); Williamson, Cris.

Transcriptionist: Rev.com and University of Oregon Libraries

Session Number: 016

Narrator: Vicki Silvers

Location: University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon

Interviewers: Linda Long and Judith Raiskin

Date: August 3, 2018

Long: This interview is part of the Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project. The recordings will be made available through the University of Oregon Libraries' Special Collections and University Archives. This is an oral history interview with Vicki Silvers on August 3, 2018, taking place in the University of Oregon Libraries' recording studio in the Center for Media and Educational Technologies. The interviewers are Linda Long, Curator of Manuscripts in the UO Libraries' Special Collections and University Archives and Professor Judith Raiskin of the UO Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Vicki, 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.

Silvers: I agree.

Long: Thank you.

Silvers: I’m glad I didn't have to repeat that.

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

Silvers: I was born in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1962. My parents moved from there when I was five to the Northwest. We lived in Seattle for a brief period of time, and then we moved to Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, and then moved to southern Oregon when I was in the fifth grade. Even living in southern Oregon, we moved from Phoenix to Gold Hill to Central Point to Medford. I moved a lot. I've lived in a zillion houses. Every two years, we lived in a different house.

My parents owned a business, which was— it created a life that was different than a lot of my friends. They were fairly successful. I lived around a lot of working class people. My family had a little bit more money than they did. That set me aside in many ways, in my growing up in that area. My parents weren't home a lot. They were busy running this business. My father was not a great guy. I lived in an abusive household. That's still hard for me. I'm sorry.

Long: It's okay.

Silvers: That was my life. I always felt like I didn't belong there. Then I remember, at actually a very young age, watching my parents, and thinking, "If this is what I'm supposed to be, I'm not that." I

remember thinking, "I will never get married." I think back on that. I think that's kind of when I realized I was not heterosexual. I grew up in that and felt very different. I liked being at school even though I was different than a lot of my friends because I wasn't home.

I remembered also wanting to go to boarding school. I really wanted out of my house. I was an athlete. I was smart. I was one of the top students in my school and I was an athlete. I came out to myself and some friends when I was fifteen. That set me into a place of hiding. Even though I was popular and I was an athlete— I was a good athlete. I was a good student. I also felt very much like I couldn't be that. I didn't like hanging out with most of the people that were popular and all that. I felt very separate, even though I had a small group of friends. There were a lot of lesbians in southern Oregon at that time, but very closeted.

Long: Vicki, if I could just ask, what year was that when you were fifteen?

Silvers: Well, let's see. I graduated in 1980. I was a young student, so I graduated when I was seventeen, so 1976-ish. I have a horrible memory for dates. I would never be good at history. Let's see. There were a couple of gay men in my high school. They were more out for some reason. It wasn't actually okay but they couldn't hide it. They're super flamboyant.

One guy became my best friend. He connected me then to the gay men's community from the college in Ashland. They kind of lived

in Central Point. I was going to Crater High School, so I hung out with them. It was trippy. Here I was, this athlete. I was kind of butch. I was hanging out with all these gay boys. Brian, actually, when we were graduating, he got beat up. That was kind of sad. He didn't even make it to our graduation because he was in the hospital. He ended up moving to gay men's land. He became a fairy in southern Oregon.

Long: Was that Nomenus?

Silvers: No. What land did he live on? I can't remember. It was in Wolf Creek.

Long: The Radical Faeries.

Silvers: Yes, the Radical Faeries. He ended up dying of AIDS. Because I was an athlete, I expected to go play sports, some college. All of my friends were better than I was, and so I didn't get recruited. I didn't know what to do. My parents didn't have an education. I wasn't really put on this path. I think, also, because my family had money, there was an expectation that I knew what to do. Didn't get a lot of support in terms of college and what I should be doing. I went to a small school in Long Beach for a couple years.

Long: Was that Long Beach, Washington?

Silvers: Oregon. I mean, California, sorry. I had an aunt that lived in Hollywood. My life, even there, was fairly closeted. I spent as much time as I could going to Hollywood. I had a fake ID. I would go to

lesbian bars. I had a friend who was able to fly. She would come frequently and we'd go out. I lived this secret life, and went to school, and started to also build my feminist kind of awareness. The ERA was happening. It was really very superficial for me, but I kind of knew it was happening. I wasn't living in a very political world.

Then I went to Arizona. I went to Arizona State for a year. That's kind of where I found politics but it was— AIDS was just really breaking out. It was still very gay male focused. I joined the gay student union. I made them add L to it. That was even controversial. It was like, "Why? Lesbians, aren't you gay?" It's like, "Well—" I started to build my feminist identity around that. I created a small community there but it was so bar focused, right, so going out and being out all night. I started to become a more separatist, lesbian dyke and wore men's clothes. My mom hated it. "Why you have to dress like a man?" I was like, "Why does it matter?" It was so funny.

I was in Phoenix, first of all, super hot, right, all the time. It was just such a dark, sweaty time. I was also kind of becoming more sexual. It was that. That was kind of my memory of that time. My girlfriend at the time lived in this funky apartment. The swamp cooler was going. We would do our laundry in the— Of course, you never wore a bra at that time. We joke about sweat from our tits. When people say, "Oh, living in Phoenix," that's where I go,

right, to sweating, and sitting in her van, waiting for our laundry to be done. I don't know.

Even though my parents had money, they wouldn't pay for school. I was super poor. I had some financial aid but there was this challenge around whether I was a resident or not. I ended up having to quit because I couldn't pay for school. Then I moved to San Francisco. That girlfriend ended up moving to San Francisco. I lived there for a summer. That's really where I got kind of tuned into, "Oh, there's a lesbian community in this world and not gay male focused."

Raiskin: Did you go to the gay male bars when you were a kid in Oregon?

Silvers: There wasn't a bar per se, but yes. Well, I had a fake ID when I was sixteen. It was bad. In Ashland, there was a bar, or a restaurant bar, that we would go to with the men. What they would do is they'd have parties. They also traveled to San Francisco and they'd bring drugs up. Amyl nitrate, I was doing that in school because nobody knew what it was. They didn't know I was doing drugs. I could do it almost out in the open. They're so stupid.

There was a lot of alcohol and drugs when I was younger, which consequently led me to stopping. I mean, I didn't become full-blown teetotaler, but I just stopped because I realized there was this kind of loss of control. I would watch people. I'd be like, "That doesn't look good to me." I kind of toned it down and then it became more manageable. Yes, there were a lot of drugs and

alcohol when I was in high school. There are a lot of stories that could be told.

I lived in San Francisco for a brief time that summer, but I knew I wanted to go back to school and finish my degree. I was still considered an Oregon resident. I loved San Francisco, but I knew that I wanted to get this done. So, I came here. I was here for a year. Here I lived in L.A., Phoenix, and San Francisco, and I was like, "Oh my God. These people have no idea what's going on in the world." Eugene felt so small and so back country. Ugh.

It was interesting. The lesbian community was so different than what I was used to. Even in San Francisco, it was a little more— Women dressed. You come here, and it was Birkenstocks and not shaving. I was still considered myself a separatist, but it was such a different scene, right, everything, all those stereotypes that people talk about. It flipped my world from being so gay male focused to lesbian focused. It was such a great, amazing thing.

I moved more towards that. I remember when I got here, the people I knew were actually U of O athletes because they were friends from high school, but of course, not out. That's kind of who I knew and how I got settled. My secret life was going to Mother Kali's and figuring out what was happening. I think within months, I'm pretty sure it was the fall, the first thing I did was I went to a women's encirclement of the Boeing plant in Seattle to protest the nuclear war and all that stuff, the nuclear disarm— Or, they were trying to get them to stop building nukes.

We were going to encircle it. It was this whole Northwest gathering. I met people then that I still know in Eugene. That was '83, I want to say. It was a pretty amazing thing. It really kind of cemented where I was in Eugene. I completely moved out of my friends who were athletes. It was such a different world. I started hanging out with all these political activists. It shifted my whole trajectory.

Meanwhile, I was a student, which was also weird, because I did not have a college experience because my world was so off-campus because that's where all the politics in the lesbian community, in my mind, was. I spent a lot of time then moving towards more separatist, kind of political thinking and feminism. Then from there, just from that, building more community and then having— leaping many years forward, being in a relationship and having kids.

Long: Can we back up for a second?

Silvers: Yes, for sure.

Long: When you came to UO, what did you study?

Silvers: Oh, my gosh. Again, I did not have parental guidance in college around education. My father, I look back and think he probably was illiterate. My mother graduated from high school but never talked about— when I did get a chance to talk to her about it, a lot of regrets that she didn't go to college and she had desires. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what I wanted to be. I didn't

understand college. When I went to Arizona State, I studied business but it was really a weird thing. I had taken art classes and I really liked it. I kind of had an aptitude, so I studied fine arts, which was kind of— if my kid were to do that, I'd be like, "What are you doing. Are you crazy? What are you going to— "

At that time, this program was really craft oriented. There was no promise of work. It was just, I needed a degree. I wanted to do something and I enjoyed it. It took me a long time to finish my degree because I had to work, and do that, and work. Actually, after a year of living in Eugene and going to school, I was like, "I've got to get out of here. I got to go back to the city." I went back to San Francisco and lived for a year, and worked, and played, and hung out.

Also, then it was funny because it was like, "Oh, wait a minute. I am never outside. I can't live in a cement jungle. I need people who know who I am. I want people to just say hi to me when I pass them on the street." I lived in the Haight. I'd get off the bus and go to the same grocery store to get some food for dinner. They acted like they'd never seen me before. I go there every day. I was like, "I got to get back to something a little more grounded."

I still miss living in a more urban kind of environment, but Eugene has— it's become more like that for me. I came back to finish my degree but it took me a long time. I've done a zillion different jobs. I still never figured out what I wanted to be when I grew up and

sometimes I wonder. Yes, I studied fine arts and did a lot of clay and jewelry.

Raiskin: Did you know about the southern— You knew about the gay men's land? Did you know about the lesbian land?

Silvers: Mm-mm [negative]. No, I didn't.

Raiskin: Oh, that's interesting.

Silvers: I'm not sure that I would have been interested. That's that kind of urban, country kind of thing. When I was younger, my father, who was Italian and had moved from the East Coast— I don't know. Some people say this is kind of every middle-aged man's dream. He bought land out in the country. We had many acres and there was BLM behind us. We were out in the middle of nowhere. I'm at middle-school age. I thought I had gone to jail.

I didn't have a car. There were no cell phones. There wasn't a bus that went out there. If I wanted to go someplace, I had to get up in the morning, and go with them to their business, and hang out in town all day long. We would just wander around Medford all day long because I didn't want to be out in the country. It was funny. I look back and I think, "Living out there wasn't so bad."

Long: What was Medford like at that— this was the '70s?

Silvers: The '70s. It's funny because my world was so small, and around school, and all of that. Again, a lot of drinking and partying for something to do. I had so many close encounters with— just, I

think back and wonder how I made it. Didn't get killed in a car crash. I didn't get arrested. I didn't get kicked out of school. There were a lot of things that were in my favor, right, a family with money. I was smart. I was a student. I mean, I was a student athlete. All these things made it possible for me to have this whole kind of bad behavior. My parents weren't barely aware. My mother was super ignorant about what was happening. My brother, he was a pot smoker. I had these weird worlds. This lesbian thing and this athlete thing— my brother was a pot smoker. We had parties when my parents traveled. Oh my God. Parties get busted. It was just this funny, weird world.

Long: Do you recall—what was the feel of Medford, though? Did it have a small town feel?

Silvers: Yes, it did, definitely. Yes, we could walk all over. Also, very working class, super working class. When I moved and had to go to a Central Point school district school—my sister, who's the oldest, was adamant. She's like, "I'm not going to go to a goat-roper school." It was very working class, lot of more agricultural farming, ranching kind of thing. People have lived there forever and they were related.

See, I never lived in the same place for very long so I didn't have those really deep roots. A lot of my friends, they had cousins in school. They'd lived in the same house their entire lives and their parents still live there. When I go back, I don't want to see anybody. I really don't. I don't want to go anywhere. I don't want people to

recognize me. A friend of mine who was a year younger than me has said, "When you left high school, it was like you disappeared."

I did. I did not want to be found. I did have a girlfriend in high school. Oh my gosh. There's so much drama there. It was so bad. We had a coach who was a les— actually, both of our coaches were lesbians. They were super closeted. One of them was not so great. She was having an affair with this girl who was my friend. Then she left. That coach left for the summer. Then that person and I became girlfriends. We spent the summer hanging out. Her parents also weren't around. Her father was a developer of housing. They built a house that they needed somebody to live in, so the two of us basically lived there. Like, I'm fifteen! We're living in this house, “playing house.” It was trippy. Then her sisters and brother would stay with us. We'd make breakfast. It was like “Mom and Dad.” I remember Saturdays was chocolate and biscuits. I mean, it was like the families we didn't have at home. Her parents also had a lot of money. It was trippy. It was— oh my gosh.

Her father was on the school board. He knew that she was a lesbian. He hated it. He made trouble. He actually had that coach arrested because he had them followed. He caught them going across state lines, which is against the law, to take a minor across state lines. He had her arrested and kicked out of school. Oh, the drama.

Long: Do you know what happened to that teacher?

Silvers: Well, then— yes, she moved to Salem. She was an amazing throw coach. She actually was coaching somebody who was an Olympic hopeful.

Long: This was track and field?

Silvers: Yes. Actually, my friend/girlfriend was also an Olympic hopeful and came to the U of O. She was recruited. She was an alcoholic. Lots of drama there. When I left high school, I actually didn't tell anybody where I was going. I didn't leave my phone number with many people because I didn't want her calling me because she was a mess. She had moved to Eugene. She was going to school. She was a year older than I was. She would, alcoholic, call me, "I want— " I was like, "No." Then when she finally found me, I was like, "How did you find me? I don't want you calling me." I just never wanted to see people again. I did not have fond memories of high school, even though there were fond memories. It was like torture.

Long: Was her alcoholism related to her sexuality in some way?

Silvers: I think it was in her family.

Long: Oh, okay.

Silvers: Her parents were weird. Her parents are alcoholics too. She's since become sober and we're actually really good friends. She moved to Alaska. Now she's back in Medford, which I don't understand. She got married to a guy. She's got a zillion kids. We're really good

friends. When I get to see her, we'll spend all night talking. It's really fun.

It was a trippy place, lot of dysfunction. I also kind of remember Medford being super hot. It's funny because the better memories are summer when I had off school. I'd go into town because I had to do that if I wanted to go anywhere. Well, when I got into high school, I had to have a car, so I got a car when I was fifteen. I had a provisional driver's license so I could get to school. Then that opened my world up.

Again, my mom's super ignorant. I drove all over the state at fifteen using her gas credit card. I went places that— I had friends in Portland. I had a lot of older friends. I had friends in Portland and I hung out with them. I had just graduated high school. I remember going to Portland to hang out with a friend. I did not know she was interested in me. She took me to Darcelle's, [Embers] I think that's what it was called, in Portland. It was a gay men's kind of drag club. I was wearing my graduation dress, all dolled up. This guy thought I was a drag queen. I was just like, "How can— " It was so funny. I'm seventeen.

Raiskin: Did you ever feel over your head?

Silvers: No.

Raiskin: No, you were just—

Silvers: I was faking it until I could make it. I was tall for my age. I always appeared older. I was never considered— I just wore that. I just always hung out with people who were older than me. Again, I was always the youngest in my class. It felt pretty normal. Oh, God. I mean, there's just so many crazy stories. Traveling as a athlete, coming up here— Oh, I also played traveling softball.

Long: I was going to ask— Your sports were softball and—

Silvers: When you go to a small school, you have to play everything.

Long: Oh.

Silvers: I played volleyball, basketball. I threw. Then not until my senior year did they have a softball team. I ended up not doing softball in high school, but then I played softball in the summers. That's where we traveled all over the state and sometimes into Washington. Then my last year playing, I ended up on a women's team. They were all the coaches from southern Oregon high schools and they're all lesbians. I had a fake ID. They weren't bothered by that. We would travel. We came to Eugene a lot. They took me to the Riv Room all the time. It was incredible.

Raiskin: Can you describe the Riv Room?

Silvers: Oh my gosh. Then actually when I moved here, that became my haven. I loved to dance. The Riv Room was this wood-paneled, dark, grimy— it almost felt like a basement but it wasn't. Then the dance floor was behind the bar. It was all painted black. It was

almost like they didn't want people to see people dancing. Then there was this other space that was the pool table and bench seating. Oh, it was just kind of gross.

Almost every lesbian bar I'd ever been in was like that so that didn't feel any different. It was just kind of how it was. A friend of mine had worked cleaning one of the bars in Phoenix. She was like, "The smoke on the mirrors was the worst to get off." It was kind of like that, stinky, sweaty, but so fun. It was freeing to be able to do that, and be in that space, and feel like, "Oh, this is where I belong."

Long: Did you meet other lesbians that you continued connections with later?

Silvers: Oh yes. Oh no. No. Oftentimes, we would stay in people's houses because we couldn't afford hotels and stuff. Oh, we'd all go out and then you'd all end up in bed. No, I did not want to stay in touch with them. That was the year after I graduated from high school, the summer after I— then I went to L.A. No, I didn't stay in touch with anybody. No. I would love to find some of those coaches because they were really good to hang out with. Those were the days.

When I came to Eugene, again, found this kind of lesbian community. Then I started— my years back and forth on campus, I ended up, for some reason, started to swim a lot and then I found a friend through swimming. We would work out morning and night. Then she also loved to dance, so the two of us would go to the Riv

Room and dance our little brains out every chance we could get. It was really fun.

So many people kind of floated through my life that I have no idea where they went. I think part of that is from growing up, moving a lot, that it was not uncommon for me to have really deep relationships with people and then move on. It's interesting to—having kids in this town and having them grow up here, to experience that through their eyes? They have friends that they knew when they were babies. That is so different to me.

I also almost lived through that. When Emma was going off to school and her friends were going off to school, I was like, "Do you still stay in touch with so-and-so? Why don't you stay in touch with them? You should stay in touch with them. You're going to wish you had." I'm like, "Where is so-and-so? Why don't you call them? Where are they? How come you don't take care of this relationship?" I have a little bit of that. I watch these relationships. I'm like, "Oh, I missed out on that."

I can remember people but I have no idea where they were, where they went, what happened to them. I don't have those relationships. This project also kind of revived that, like, "Oh my gosh. I met them when I went on this encirclement," or, "Right, we started that organization." Again, they float in and out of your life. You know they're around. You know you know them. You've known them for years. Now through social media, you kind of can

keep up with people and you feel like you have those relationships when you really don't.

As I've lived on in Eugene, my partner at that time and I started what I now call "social service" to create women's community, especially around entertainment. We helped start One Common Thread, which is a women's coffeehouse. That was kind of a roving coffeehouse. I know that there were permanent ones. A lot of women who are older than me talk about them like Baba Yaga's and some other places. That was not a part of my life. I did not frequent those places. Those things kind of died off. Starflower had ended. That type of lesbian community had started to kind of wane. We needed to create something. There was kind of this weird vacuum of— there's nothing here and we need something. There's so many lesbians.

Long: This was in the early '80s?

Silvers: I would say it was more like mid '80s, mid to— '86-ish, '87, maybe? We started One Common Thread, which was super fun.

Raiskin: How did you come up with the name?

Silvers: Gosh, I don't even remember. Then we had a board. Then we started to create this organization. Then it was almost like a nonprofit. That always creates drama. I don't remember how we came up with that name. It was really fun. I mean, we had a good time. We had parties. We did a Halloween party at Westmoreland Community Center. It was just so much fun to create a space that

people came together and could laugh, and play, and see each other because I had also— in San Francisco, there were women's community centers. We didn't have that here. That's what we were trying to create. It became that and it was a monthly thing.

Then from that— I'm trying to remember where it started honestly. Sue and I, at that time, and somebody, Daryl Moore, we started IMRU, which was a women's production company. We brought women's music and comedy to Eugene. Again, a social service— we never made money off of that. It was hugely popular and successful, but it is not a moneymaking venture. That IMRU we came up with. We were trying to come up with something, again, slightly closeted, didn't want to be completely out. I mean, we were out, but you can't be in their face. Why do you have to do this? We wanted it to be a little under the radar. IMRU, "I am lesbian, are you?" Honestly, I can't remember how we connected but we ended up connecting with Olivia Records. I had listened to Olivia artists nonstop.

Raiskin: Can you describe what Olivia Records is?

Silvers: Olivia Records was a women's recording company. It has grown into something crazy. They were an indie label that did women's music, so Meg Christian, Cris Williamson, Margie Adams, and so many other things. They promoted women's music. It was all about lesbians. If you had a Cris Williamson record, it was like, you'd listen to it nonstop because at that time, we had nothing. Nothing.

We didn't have anything on TV. We didn't have anything that represented our lives. That was it.

I had listened to all of these artists and I knew who Olivia was. I had never gone to a women's music festival. Michigan's Womyn's Music Festival is super big. They were part of that, too, those women that started Olivia Records. I knew all their names, Boo Price, and all these people, Judy Dlugacz. I mean, I knew who they were because they were on the records. I'd pour over those lyrics and the pictures. You didn't have the Internet, so this was what you had, an album cover. You sleep with it.

I knew everything about this. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought, ten years later, I would meet these people, literally meet them and be in the same space as they were. I think maybe through One Common Thread, the three of us went to a women's music conference in San Francisco. That's kind of how we got connected to them. I'm kind of remembering. There was somebody who lived here who had a connection with somebody who worked for Olivia, Tam Martin. She helped us promote. We brought Cris Williamson. Meg Christian, at that time, had kind of gone off to the ashram and done her thing. Margie Adams came. We brought Casselberry-Dupree. I mean, we brought a lot of amazing artists here. It was so fun.

Long: Where did they perform?

Silvers: Anywhere we could but we actually did shows in the Hult Center, in the little theater, which was pretty— we had hit the big time at that point. Here's a great story. We were bringing Margie Adams. Tickets weren't selling so great. She was kind of one of those artists that— she did some song about unicorns. Anyway, she was fairly popular but not nearly as popular as Cris Williamson, and oh, Tret Fure, and all those. Cris Williamson came, too.

Margie's tickets weren't selling so well. Sweet Honey in the Rock were performing the week before at the Hult Center. We did not bring them. Margie said, 'Well, tell Bernice that I'm coming and she should announce it from the stage." I'm like, "Really?" She said, "Yes, leave her a note. She knows who I am." I may have even been working at the Hult Center at the time.

I knew where they were staying, so I left a message at the Hilton for Bernice, and said, "If you wouldn't mind, would you please announce this show. Margie Adams will be here next week and we're selling tickets." I went to that show. How could you not? She didn't say anything, which, what am I? The next morning, my phone rings. I answer it. It was in the morning. I'm like, "Hello?" "This is Bernice." I about peed my pants. I was like, "Yes?" It was like the President calling. She's like, "I am so sorry. I did not get your message until just now." I was just like, "It's okay." Like, “uh-uh-uh-uh.” It was amazing.

Disappointed, but that was such a fun thing to have in my life. Again, never in my wildest dreams, when I was a teenager, would I

ever imagine this would be my life. We did that. At some point, we had to quit because it was just costing us so much money. We were ready to have children.

Long: What were your jobs at that time?

Silvers: Sue worked for the City of Eugene doing recreations. She was actually a specialist in specialized recreation, so adapted rec. I was doing a zillion different things. I was still trying to be a student and finish my degree. I had maybe— oh, I know what I was doing. I was working for the city seasonally, and helped put on the Eugene Celebration at that time, and did that for four years.

Raiskin: Can you describe Eugene Celebration?

Silvers: Oh yes. Oh my gosh. We actually grew that event to so large, we were the first— when I stopped doing it, was the first year they gated it. Eugene Celebration was this big event that started more as a community thing through some community activists, Eugene progressives. They just started celebrating the city. It was downtown. I think it had many reasons for beginning. Then somehow the city took it over, perhaps maybe because some of those people were elected at that time. The city took it on. It was many stages across the downtown area. It spanned from the Fifth Street Market to downtown.

I think, at that time, we were really trying to bring people downtown. The businesses were kind of dying. This was in the late '80. Let's see. Emma was born in '94, so it was late '80s, '90s. They

were trying to bring people downtown. They had closed the downtown area to traffic. We were trying to come back from that. We brought artists from many places, a lot of Northwest artists. There was food booths in a parking lot that was empty. There was a huge parade that was super fun. It was hugely popular and controversial, all at the same time. As politics started heating up around gay and lesbian stuff, the OCA, it became even more political, and controversial, and strifed with tension.

It was so fun, but it became so huge. It also became kind of like, "Uh! There's too many people in one place." On the Hult Center Plaza, there were times when you couldn't get through. It was wall to wall people, and you really couldn't get through. As it grew, we had to figure out how to alleviate those problems, and spread it out, and try to limit the— not limit the numbers, but just trying to figure how to manage that.

I was one of the coordinators. There were two of us. We had another staff and a lot of volunteers. I did everything from making sure we had ice trucks, and the street closures worked with Public Works and police, and all that stuff. It was really fun. It was really fun doing it. It was interesting. When I stopped, I didn't know how to enjoy it. I couldn't go and enjoy it. People are like, "Are you going to the Celebration?" "No, I'm not going to go down there." I didn't know what to do because I had always worked it nonstop for the whole time. It was something else. Did you ever go?

Raiskin: I went to the parade.

Silvers: The parade— I just remember, also at the time— here I am, a lesbian, working on this. The OCA thing was super big, anti-gay measures. We'd get calls about the parade. First of all, people wanted to just enter it. It was like, "No, you have to fill out an application." Of course, the people who were anti-gays and anti-anything liberal, they felt like we were doing that just to keep them out. There was this kind of perception that the city was trying to monitor and censor. They wanted— "If you're going to let those gay people in, we should have floats with beastiality." I mean, I'm not kidding you. These were the calls we would get. It was horrifying.

Long: What were those organizations who wanted to have a float like that?

Silvers: Oh gosh. I think the OCA had a lot of baby organizations of just groups of people. I'm not sure that they even had names. They're religious groups, typically. Sometimes I think they were just calling to harass us. They were just trying to make their point. "Why are you letting them in? If they're going to be in, then you should have all these other things."

Raiskin: Then there were the Rickys and the Lucys.

Silvers: Those people tended to be the people— that's where it started. The people who were the Rickys, they were really some of the people who started the Eugene Celebration way back. They were more making comment on more of the national politics or even local political level of anything that was controversial. I think one of the

ones I remember the most was to do with the Pope and the Catholic Church. Honestly, I can't even remember what the problem was. The parade passed the Catholic Church downtown and they genuflected. And oh, my gosh. You would have thought that they had brought out assault rifles or something. It was crazy. Of course, the city, for some reason, became responsible. It was a community event. It was interesting working for the municipality at that time and having these weird conversations.

Raiskin: Can you say something about the Slug Queen?

Silvers: Oh, yes. That was one of the things I got to do. The Slug Queen is this coronation that they— I don't even know where that started. I mean, it started a long time ago. They had a competition, a Slug Queen competition, every year. They had a queen, and it wasn't always a woman. They went through this whole pageant process. That person was basically the kind of the Eugene Celebration ambassador. They had to make public events, and appearances, and all that stuff.

They were funny and crazy people. I mean, just super funny, creative, out there. It was so fun. One of the first things I did is I came onto the Celebration staff, and I got to coordinate that. It was always way in advance because this person needed to be crowned so that they could present at this event. They were in the parade. They'd show up at stages.

Raiskin: Peter DeFazio would clean up—

Silvers: Right, right. Oh yes. Peter DeFazio would scoop up the slug slime. The old queens always were— it got passed onto them to be a part of— to create this pageant. It was so fun working with them and so trippy to watch this happen, this go down. They had— the Slugs typically took on some persona of some popular— some issue that was going on in the world. Whether it was popular culture, or politics, or who knows? It was something Eugene, some controversy in Eugene. That was really fun. It was a really great group of people.

It's funny because sometimes people didn't know who they were in real life but I did. They were so different. It was interesting to kind of be somebody watching that from afar but so fun to work with them. Again, many of those people are still in Eugene. I see them. I know who they are. I run into them in the market. They're, "Oh, how are you?" Eugene is kind of like that. You know somebody from twenty years ago and they're still your friend. That was a fun experience.

Long: What happened to the Eugene Celebration? It petered out.

Silvers: Yes. I think that it— it's interesting because when something gets that big, then people don't want to go because it's too big, like, "Ah. It's too much. I can't get through. Ah, I can't do it. It takes too much time. It's hard to get food." You can't—

Raiskin: It's competing with the football season.

Silvers: Right. We had to move it around because of football. They were doing more games, I think, earlier on in the fall. Then I think one of the last years the city did it, it rained. It was a huge economic loss, huge. It was a very expensive event. That was the other issue. I also worked at the Hult Center. At that time, at the Hult Center, they had a artistic director who brought amazing artists to Eugene. They had all these series. They had a dance series, a jazz series. Oh my God. It was incredible, some of the most incredible dance you'd see in a town this size. It was all funded by tax dollars. It was run by the city. Then the Measure 48 and 50, the tax measures, came along, and it cut all of that drastically. I actually lost my job through that. That was an impact to the Eugene Celebration. They just couldn't subsidize it anymore.

They didn't ever want to gate it to the point where you had to— the cost to get in was prohibitive. The gate fee, when we started, was $2, right, when we started gating it. Before that, it had been free. You could just come. I think we got money from the food vendors' proceeds or rent. I don't remember. It was never a moneymaking venture for them. I think that was part of having to let it go and pass it on to another organization. It's just morphed over time. The last big one, I think, was when they had the rain and it really was a huge— ugh, that was bad. It was really bad. We never had that.

Raiskin: Were there a lot of lesbians involved in the city organizations that were cultural?

Silvers: Nope.

Raiskin: No? Did you feel like you were one of the only ones?

Silvers: Yes, yes, yes. There were a lot of lesbians that worked for the city, but not— no. It still was so kind of this under-culture— because that's why we were doing IMRU and bringing these things because you just couldn't find it. Then through IMRU, and we brought comedy, one of the last shows we did was Karen Williams, who's a comic. In order to make that a little more fruitful for her, we did a comedy workshop the next day and several people came. A lot of what she taught— she called it "Healing Through Humor". A lot of what she taught was improv. From that, we had so much fun that there was group of us that, "We want to keep playing. Let's do this."

Then we started renting space at a community center to get together and just do improv. Some of those folks had done theater in college or this was kind of something they were familiar with. Sally Sheklow at that time was doing *The Sound of Lesbians*. We started doing that. So, all these things were kind of overlapping. One Common Thread was still going. We were doing IMRU and then this happened. One Common Thread was starting to wind down. It wasn't becoming viable. As time went on, we no longer needed to have these spaces created for us because we were becoming more mainstream. Probably by this time, Ellen had come out. Who knew that would ever happen? Rosie O'Donnell.

Things started to become more mainstream and we didn't need to create space. We were able to be out more. Things were starting to

wane. One Common Thread was ending. This group of people were getting together doing improv. I went to a One Common Thread meeting because they were like, "We're closing and we want one last act." We were still doing IMRU. "Do you know any comedy?" They always draw. Comedy always draws. I was like, "Well, I know this group of women who are doing improv. Let me go back to them and see if they want to do this." Well, I did and they scattered. The last standing women were me, Sally Sheklow, Enid. I don't think Debby had been a part of that. The three of us— Then somebody said, "Well, you should talk to Debby Martin. She's really funny." I'm like, "Debby Martin? Like, what?"

I'm not kidding. I'm like, "Debby Martin?" The four of us got together and we started playing. We did this One Common Thread show, thinking we were just going to do it once. Actually, Sally found somebody else who wanted to do it and then she realized we were going to be out. We did not want to be closeted lesbians. She's just like, she couldn't do it. I don't know if you've interviewed Sally, but she probably told this story. We had our picture taken, the five of us, our heads on this shelf. This person was in the middle of the— she's the middle person. Then when we go to do the show, we had to have a promotional picture. I spliced her out, put the picture together for the four of us. What we would say was, this is our first and perhaps, final performance. We were hugely successful. Who knew? It was so fun. Then—

Raiskin: Called WYMPROV!

Silvers: It was called WYMPROV! We had to come up with a name like that. I think if we had more time, it probably wouldn't have been that, but it became a great name. Who knew? We went on to perform for many twenty-plus years.

Long: Where would you perform?

Silvers: Anywhere we could. At that time, Condon School, which is now— I can't remember what you call it.

Raiskin: Agate Hall.

Silvers: Agate Hall, right, was a big empty gym and they had a stage. They rented that out. Oh my God. It was a horrible place to perform. Even IMRU did shows in there. It was really helpful because it was cheap. We would do community centers. We would do our own shows in community centers. We did WOW Hall. Anywhere we could— Even IMRU did shows at Willamalane Senior Center, so wherever we could find a stage. We actually got hired to do some Eugene Celebration events at the Hult Center in the lobby. Then First Night was happening, so we did some First Night shows, so wherever we could in Eugene. Then we actually did some stuff— we performed in a barn in Bend. We performed in a grange on the southern Oregon coast. We have performed in some funky places. We've performed in living rooms.

Long: Do you have any recordings of your performance?

Silvers: So, yeah, then we wanted to do a— there was an international women's comedy festival in Chicago. Enid was doing women's music on KLCC, on Monday nights? Sue and I had been doing IMRU, so we had all of these Olivia connections. We had been on an Olivia cruise. Olivia Records grew to become this thing that became— doing vacations for women only, which was amazing. We had been on a cruise. They'd invited us to, not perform, but just to go on one after having been at a Club Med, which was so fun in my twenties. Oh my gosh.

Then just to be in an all-women's space at that time was so amazing, so freeing. On this cruise, we went to a private island. Well, first of all, we went to St. Thomas and St. John. We show up at St. John in the morning, early, early, early. It was just us, just these women from Olivia. We got naked, immediately got naked. We're snorkeling naked and hanging out on the— it was a public beach. It was Trunk Bay, if anybody's ever been there.

Then all of a sudden, people start showing up because it was a snorkeling spot. There was a little snorkeling rental shack right there. We're like "Eh, we better start getting dressed." They had a private island off of Nassau. We had rented the whole island so we were all naked all the time. Bodysurfing naked, oh my gosh. To be able to do that at that time was the most luxurious thing you could ever imagine.

Even now, when people are like, "Oh, do you want to go on a cruise," and I'm— I could not go on a het cruise. I just couldn't do it.

It just isn't the same after having experienced that. You didn't have to worry about what you are wearing, and just that whole social norms were so different. Then also having been in Eugene for so long, and being in this world that people from all over the country on the cruise— our table, you get sat at the same table, consisted of women from Boston who owned a restaurant chain, very rich. Here we were, Podunk, putting on IMRU out of our pocket, working for the city. Two women, one was a doctor and one was an anesthesiologist. That was our table. They bought $80 bottles of wine. This was so foreign to us, amazing women.

Also, I always said, "If I saw these people on the street, I would never know they were a lesbian." In Eugene, it was so important to be seen as a lesbian. That was our world. I don't know why they didn't or if they were still closeted. It was so different to be like, "Oh wow. I could be that. I could be a lesbian and be that." I could be a lesbian and wear heels. I could wear makeup. It was so foreign to me because I had been a separatist dyke, wearing men's clothes. Then I came here, and you were wearing flannels, and Birkenstocks, and not shaving. To see that was like, "Wow." It was really different. Also, to see butch-femme couples, really different. I honestly still feel, sometimes, constrained by that in Eugene, still, which is so interesting.

Raiskin: What do you mean?

Silvers: Well, I then moved to the other side. I wouldn't necessarily call myself femme, but I spent many years wearing heels and dressing

up. Partly, I liked that. I went to fashion school. I loved clothes. I had a job that didn't required that of me, but it was okay to do that, and so it was fun. It was like dress-up. I definitely wouldn't wear that to a lesbian event. I would never. Even now, today, I brought my big red bag in. I probably wouldn't wear that to a lesbian picnic or a potluck. It's so funny. I still feel constrained by that. I don't know why. It's an interesting thing.

It might be because a lot of my friends are still from that time and that they still subscribe to some of those kind of values of— dressing up is seen as selling out and you're trying to look pretty. There's this kind of judgment around it. It's interesting. It is an interesting thing to experience that.

At that time, it was like, "Wow." Also, I would also say— I say this to friends, and mostly to straight people. I'm still offended when people think I'm straight, super offended. Yet, nowadays, you never know, right? I just am like, "I'm offended when people assume I'm straight." They're like, "Well— " I said, "You shouldn't assume anything." Then especially when you say you have kids, they really assume that.

I remember when Emma and Callie were little, and I'd be out in the public with just them. I'd be walking around, like, "People think I'm a heterosexual woman, and I'm a housewife. I don't like this! I don't like this!" That was always funny. Even though there are so many years of my life that I was closeted, there are many years where I

was like, "I'm not going to be closeted. You can't make me closeted. I am not— " I really wanted to be out, and I really was in your face.

Long: Can you talk about when you and your partner decided to have children?

Silvers: Yes. It was interesting. When my mother finally came to terms with my lesbianism, it was sadly when I was in college. We were talking about that and she said, "Your job is to have children." And f I was lesbian, I couldn't have children. At that time, it didn't seem possible so that seemed kind of like, "Yes, true, that I can't have children but, it's not my job." Even she admittedly, sadly, that if she had a choice, she wouldn't have had children, which is why I became involved with Planned Parenthood.

I never thought about having kids. Then as I went through school and started working in— I started working in recreation a little bit and working around kids. I realized, "Oh, I kind of like kids." My sister had children young. I ended up nannying for my aunt in L.A. with her kids. I realized, "Oh, I actually kind of like kids and would like to have kids in my life."

Sue and I, we talked about it, but there was still a lot of "not okay" about it and not— we couldn't get married. There were so many things and still needed to be somewhat closeted. My mom knew. My dad didn't. You couldn't talk about it in public with my family. There was just all this stuff that kind of put some pressure on it, like, "Oh, I don't know if I want to go through this."

Also, economically, we weren't sure that it was the smart thing to do. Then we just finally decided to do it. Also, women were doing it in the city. You were hearing more about it. You were seeing how possible it was. Tools became available. Then we were also a part of a group. I can't remember what we called that group. Debora Landforce was a therapist in town and she had created a lesbian support group for— what did she call— I can't remember what she called it. Her idea was, we always support people through breakups. We don't support women, lesbians, or people through staying together. She created this group.

Raiskin: The Happy Lesbian Couples?

Silvers: Yes, that was it, the Happy Lesbian Couples. Thank you. We created this group. There was a cohort. We went through sessions with her. She did sessions about financial planning and the seven-year itch. You know, like relationships ended after seven years, and having kids. All of those things— how to navigate families, and being out or not, and holidays, and all of that stuff. She also had done a big thing around home for the holidays, around being queer, because it was so hard to go home for the holidays.

Long: What was her name again?

Silvers: Debora Landforce.

Long: Is she still in Eugene?

Silvers: I think she moved to Corvallis.

Raiskin: That's such an interesting project.

Silvers: Yes, it was really cool. That group actually ended up— most of those couples— there were two out of all of us that did not, but most of us ended up having children all around the same time. That kind of helped. Having that support, and seeing it being possible, and people having created the networks and the way to do it— we didn't have to navigate finding the doctor and figure out those things. It made it much more possible.

Sue, at that time, had been in her job for a while. I had just started mine so we thought it would be better if she started first. Plus, she's a little bit older than I am. We had decided that we didn't want to have a donor that we knew. Just didn't really want to complicate things, and also— it was also cheapest. To go to a donor bank and it took a lot of time, we were both kind of practical around it, "Let's just do this as easy as we can."

We went to the doctor, and they had a donor bank that they could get to easy. It wasn't very expensive. You just put down some attributes and that was it. We didn't have to pour through catalogs. Are they smart? Was their GPA— all these things, not interesting to us. We just wanted to get pregnant. We watched other people do that.

It's interesting, as our children have gotten older, the fallout— I think, everybody sees some fallout of our choices at that time. I'm not saying negative fallout. You just see what's happening with

that. It was interesting. I would say, also at that time, even though we'd been together for a while, our relationship wasn't great. I think sometimes it was kind of like, "Let's do this like most— " we were just like heterosexuals. It's good to have a baby and maybe that'll help.

You're looking back. You're like, "That was probably not smart." We had Emma. We knew we wanted our kids to be biologically linked. Actually, when Sue was pregnant, because of all of the intervention we did, using a doctor, doing fertility, she took fertility medication, you do a lot of ultrasounds, so you know a lot more than most people do when they're trying to get pregnant, the heterosexuals. We knew right away that she was pregnant with twins, which sent us into a tailspin of tizzy, like, "Oh my God. We're not planning for this. Oh my God. We're not ready. Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. Who has another stroller?"

I mean, we literally— I don't know how far along she was but not that far along. We were already trying to collect things. Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. Also, trying to buy a house. These are crazy things. You hear people say, "The hardest things you go through in your life, baby, divorce, buying a house, death, moving—" do them all at once. Why not?

Then not long into her pregnancy, she ended up not— one of those, whatever you would call them at that time, was not viable. She ended up being only pregnant with one, which was both sad and

relieving. It's an interesting experience, to have that feeling of like, "Oh my God. Thank God," and then also know you lost something.

Sue had a fairly easy pregnancy, which was kind of impressive. We had friends who had had babies. We had people before us and people who were pregnant at the same time, which was so amazing to have this support group, have clothes passed on, to have furniture passed on. Economically, it made it so much easier. We did not have to start from scratch.

We had support. I didn't have a relationship with my parents at that time, so I didn't have familial support. I didn't have a grandma around to do daycare. I didn't have siblings around to help out or ask for help. Sue's parents hadn't died at that time, but they were older and lived far away. Her brother was in Colorado, also, so we didn't have that kind of thing that a lot of people do, or seek, or used to.

Having that safety net and experience— it was also very, not isolating, but insulating. We had a cocoon of a community that, when people saw us outside of that, they're like, "Oh my gosh. Isn't this hard?" It's like, "No. Why would this be hard?" Well, other women in this world— lesbians were having babies in isolated areas where they did not have this. You would read stories of women losing their children because they separated, or not, and they lived in states where it was legal to take those babies away. That was so foreign to us.

With ours, when Emma was born at that time, in order for me to become a biological— or, adopted parent, legally, there was this whole thing around— she had to give up her rights as parent because she was really the only parent. We didn't want to do that. Then there was some loopholes that we were trying to work through. I would have to go through an adoption process as if I was adopting a baby that I didn't know.

They'd have to come do this home study. We had an attorney, and we're going through all of this. Well, once in my life, my procrastination paid off. Along comes a second baby. We knew we wanted to have two. We knew we did not want to raise an only child. We decided to have another baby two years later. We wanted them to be fairly close together. We had already purchased sperm from the same donor. It was being held. I started to go through the process. I got pregnant.

Growing up, I had the wackiest period ever, horrible, messy, ugly, always. Started when I was ten, never ended that way, just constant, constant, constant, horrible periods. I knew it was going to be challenging because I had a cycle every eighteen, fifteen days. We went right away, straight to fertility. Didn't do any messing around with that. Why waste time?

I got pregnant right away and actually ended up having a miscarriage almost at the end of my first trimester, which was very traumatic. I was on a plane. We were flying back. Emma was pretty young. I was staying home with her. We got home. I didn't know

what was going on. I ended up spontaneously having this miscarriage and not having to go in to have anything done.

Also, medically, there was no support. I mean, here I was, a lesbian, pregnant. When I called the doctor—emergency—they didn't really want to help. It was really weird. They were just like, "Stay home." Nothing, nothing for pain, nothing— it was horrible. That was hard. Then we had to wait. The doctor we were working with was like, "Well, we'll see if you can get pregnant again." I did. We had our second baby. That was Callie. Emma was this amazing kid, baby. Our friends were like, "Uh!" because she was so good. As long as you were holding her, Emma was so good. Slept, and was easy. We could go anywhere with her, anywhere. We went to music concerts. We traveled. She was amazing.

I was performing. WYMPROV! was performing. She went everywhere we went. We performed all over and Emma went along. Then Callie came along, and it was not quite the same thing. From the get-go, she was a bit challenging. I ended up also having gallbladder surgery two weeks— or actually gallstones, two weeks after having her. For a few months, it was a little challenging. I was sick. They didn't diagnose it for three months. I didn't have surgery until— she was born in September. I didn't have surgery until late November.

She was crying all the time. People would have to come over and take care of her. I was home on maternity leave with a toddler dealing with all of this. I think it was you, Julee, who wished that

we would have a boy because Emma was such a great kid and supposedly, that was because she was a girl. Well, we had Callie. She humbled as parents, for sure. She's an amazing kid, but definitely the opposite of what we were experiencing with Emma. If Emma's like, "Emma, don't do that," and she wouldn't. Callie was like, "Don't do that," "I'm going to do that." She was in everything, challenging everything, pushing every boundary you ever had, and also, just so strong-willed.

I always said, "If she made it to adulthood, she would be amazing. She just might not make it." So we had two kids, which was also unusual. A lot of our friends had one. Still, I mean, that group of people, pretty much had one for a long time. If they had a second one, it was many years later. We had two toddlers. What are they, two years, four months apart? I was home for six months with Callie, which was amazing, and I loved it. I actually didn't want to go back to work, which was kind of surprising because I was way more out there. I was performing and doing all these things, and Sue was a little more quiet. They were like, "Do you really want to stay home?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm having fun."

I went back to work. We stayed together until they were five and seven. Even then, I never worked full-time. I don't know how people did it. It was really challenging to have two full-time working parents. It was expensive, number one, to pay for daycare. Then Callie was just super challenging. Daycare didn't work very well for her. I ended up quitting— or through budget cuts and

stuff, I ended up not working and started working from home. I was doing web development at that time.

That really worked out for us, for me to be home with Callie, and Emma was still going to daycare a little bit. Then when they went to school, her transition was much better. We didn't have a great relationship, but wasn't great for a while. Then when we broke up, we thought for sure it would rock these kids' worlds. Ugh, I didn't want to do that to them. It actually wasn't that— I know it was. I know it was, but it didn't impact them the way we thought it would.

It wasn't easy, but we tried really hard to keep the kids central and not fight over that. There were challenges with that. We did not have the benefit of law. Oh, so going back to my procrastination. By that time, there was a lesbian in the state senate that had passed a law that we could adopt— same-sex couples, same-sex parent could adopt without being a full adoption. It was more like a stepparent.

Long: Second-parent adoption.

Raiskin: It was more like a stepparent than it had been previously.

Silvers: Previously, it was like I was a new parent adopting a kid I didn't know. This was like a heterosexual couple getting married. They were blending their families, and they could adopt if the other parent gave up their rights, or the person was gone, or whatever. I was able to adopt Emma and she adopted Callie, so we were

legally their parents. They were biologically linked. When we broke up, I can't tell you how many people asked us, "Are you going to take Callie? Emma's going to live with Sue and Callie's going to live with you?" I'm like, "What are you talking about?" I was no more connected to Callie than I was to Emma. There never has been a feeling of like, “She's not mine.” What does come into play is when we visit my family, and Emma's like, "Technically, they're not mine." "Technically speaking," she says it jokingly. That is a joke with us, is like, "Yes, technically speaking, I'm not related to them."

We had this thing where it's like, we knew we wanted to keep them central. As hard as our breakup was at that time, it was like, this is not going to happen, but we did not have the benefit of the law. I did not have the benefit of the law. At that time, I was a stay-at-home parent, working from home, barely— I didn't have health insurance. I had it through Sue's work, which was pretty impressive for the city at that time. I wasn't working full-time. If I was, it was contract work. I was kind of in this place of, like many heterosexual women find themselves. I'm a stay-at-home mom, and I'm getting divorced, and I don't have a job. I had not had the benefit of accruing a retirement for many years. I'd been out of the workforce. The unemployment rates were really high at that time. Emma was born in '94 and Callie was in '96. This was, what, 2001-ish, 2002.

We had this house. We'd built an apartment for her mom. We had this huge mortgage, extra two mortgages, because we built this

apartment. It was tough. It wasn't easy financially either because there was no law that protected me. I could have— you so see this with women. I could have pushed for child support, but I knew that would be a fight with the kids. It was fair, but I couldn't do that. We went our own ways and managed through that. We used a mediator. There was no legal proceeding really, except for writing up a custody agreement or how we were going to manage the kids. We had equal custody. We had a schedule, week on, week off, or it changed over the years as they got older.

Over time, in healing, we have become amazing friends and close parents. We parented them throughout all of that. We were their parents. We did it together. It was challenging at times. She was making more money than I was and made decisions around finances that I would have never made. All of those things come into play. All of that has changed. It's kind of gone the opposite direction. It's just— at that point, you have to— water under the bridge. Things just move on and life happens.

There was a time when Sue and I were at a place where we were both kind of in this weird housing place. We were like, "Well, maybe we should just live together." Find a house that was upstairs, downstairs, or— Actually, even at one time, we thought about having a house that we moved in and out of and the kids would stay because it was— they didn't complain about it but it wasn't fun for them, moving in and out. They weren't always good about having something in both houses so they'd have to pack up

all their crap. These suitcases— they'd live out of them. That, I felt bad about. We tried, but they were like, "No, it's just easier this way." Haul their shit back and forth. We were like, "Maybe we should have a house that we share and we move in and out of." Then we were like, "Maybe we should live together."

It was at that time, Emma goes, "Are you guys crazy? No." She's like, "No. That would never work." I'm like, "Why?" "Oh my gosh. You guys are so different. That would never work." I think partly, because they didn't want us being close, because I would influence her and she'd influence me. They got away with a lot more in her household than they did in mine. Then we might figure out that they needed to do more, do more chores. Over time, we just figured that whole thing out. I think it was you guys that said, "You guys are the poster parents for breaking up."

I got healthy. I was training for triathlons. I was probably the most fit I had ever been. I was happy. I had time to myself. Going into it, I thought, "Oh, there's no way I could imagine." I had watched other, mostly heterosexual couples divorce in that the mom having to not have her kids at times. I'm like, "How do you do that?" You just do. You get used to it. There's a couple of days of transition of, what do I do? Who am I? I'm not tethered. They tether me. They keep me— they give me purpose. They give me structure.

Over time, it became like, this is amazing. I have time. I have time to read. I did a lot of this when they were little. I don't know how I did. I went to graduate school. I got my graduate degree, all these

things, when they were little and I was single. I honestly don't know how I did it. A lot of coffee.

Long: Can you talk about LMNOP?

Silvers: Yes. Through this—

Long: What does that stand for?

Silvers: I was trying to remember. Do you remember?

Raiskin: Lesbian Moms—

Silvers: Lesbians, Mom—

Raiskin: and Other People.

Silvers: Oh, "N" Other People. Part of that, Happy Lesbian Couples groups— we kind of, after we had kids, we started this group. It expanded to other people that we knew or had kids and kind of filled that hole of IMRU and One Common Thread. We went from being single or coupled women with no kids doing all these women's things and now we're doing parenting things. We had holiday events.

Raiskin: Halloween.

Silvers: Halloween. Oh, my gosh. My memories are really Easter and being at community centers, and especially at Hilyard Center, and it being sunny, and being outside, and having all these kids come together. It's funny because I don't think the kids knew what we

had created. They were just kids. They didn't know we were any different than any other group of kids that came together to do a Easter egg hunt. They didn't know what we had created.

Raiskin: How many kids, would you say, would come together?

Silvers: Oh my gosh. Twenty, thirty, forty— I mean, there were a lot of kids, kids we didn't even know. Oh, which was so fabulous. Also, when women moved into town, this was a place where— that was the other thing. How do we find each other? We didn't know how to find each other. This was an opportunity for that, which what One Common Thread was, and so was IMRU, and so was WYMPROV! It was a place that there were activities and events that women could find each other because at that time, women's bookstores had kind of gone away. The bars had kind of shifted to being more mixed. There wasn't a place that was ours where we could find support and we still needed support. We still were not completely mainstreamed. We still were not— we had a neighbor who was actually a friend of somebody I knew. This person knew we had somebody in common.

She had a little boy who was Emma's age. She lived across the street from us. She would not acknowledge our existence if we walked by. Yeah. So, we still needed that support. We still needed a place where we were okay. Even as out as we were, it still wasn't completely accepted. The kids, I know— I think, even to this day, they don't know what we created. They just never knew anything different. I do remember, when we would travel, having

experiences. Sue's family lived in Durango, Colorado, which is a super, super, small, little town. They were really poor and they lived in a campground. We would stay there. We'd be at the playground. I remember one time, a little girl— some of these experiences happened. The little girl said, "Where's your dad?" Emma looked at her like, "What? What? Dad?" We're like, "Oh, how's this going to go down? What's going to happen here?" because we had built this little bubble in Eugene of comfort and protection.

Even then, people are like, "Don't you think that's wrong for your kids? Don't you think that's wrong and they won't know what to do when they're out in the world?" I'm like, "That is fine with me. I'm not worried about that." In those moments, we'd be like, "What's going to happen?" We'd be like, "She's doesn't have a dad." "Well, why don't you have a dad?" Emma was kind of like, "What's a dad?" I mean, she knew dads because her friends had dads. It was kind of funny. She was like, "Why does that matter?" Those were interesting.

Oftentimes kids didn't understand, but sadly, they came with this weird assumption, bias because of what the only thing they had experienced, that their world was this. Even then, I was always kind of like, so many kids don't have dads and it's not because their moms are lesbians. Why is this weird? We had created this space for our kids that it was perfectly normal to have two moms. They

didn't know anything other than that. I mean, they went to school. They went to public schools. It was not weird to them.

Raiskin: How was it for you as a lesbian parent in the schools in Eugene?

Silvers: Well, it depended on what school you were going to. South Eugene, super liberal, progressive, way more— a lot of more progressive, liberal people sought— we have open enrollment, so they sought South. They sought South Eugene elementary schools or other schools. It wasn't weird. I never experienced anything and I don't think the kids did. They went to Spencer Butte. I had experience at Spencer Butte because I had gone in as WYMPROV! to teach improv to some of the classes. People had experience with us that way. It was not foreign but it certainly wasn't the same in all high schools. I think that at, maybe, a Bethel School or North Eugene, it would have been different for them.

It definitely affected our decisions in house buying. People either moved to south Eugene school district or when you were looking to move, you sought housing there. Unfortunately, it's expensive and so that was also a consideration. You had to have the means to do that. Economically, there was disparity in that. It's not cheap to get pregnant as a lesbian at that time. It's interesting. I don't think they ever had experiences that were— if they did, they didn't tell me. Where I was more challenged was more around politics.

I've thought about this project and thinking about our kids. I'm super politically aware. We were super politically active. We

knocked doors. We marched. We did all kinds of things. I did this encirclement. I was on the board of Planned Parenthood. I went to D.C. I lobbied. I'd done all those things. Emma was a part of Planned Parenthood at one time but she was— she did her part but neither of them are all that politically lit. I'm like, "What happened? Why aren't you a feminist? What did I do wrong?" It's almost like we thought they would get this by osmosis.

I think Lynn Pinckney said this. We never told our stories. We thought they knew them by living it. Because we had created this space that was so normal to them, they didn't know it was different. They didn't pay attention. It wasn't a story. It was their story, so it wasn't a story to tell. It was so interesting to look back at that and then watch Emma. Politically, I'm the one taking her to these things. You're a millennial. Get your ass out there. She's living in Florida. I'm calling her, "You got to get on some phone banks. You and your friends need to start calling Marco Rubio. You have to do this." "I know, Mom. I know." I'm like, "Seriously, here's their numbers. What happened? This is your life I'm fighting for." It's so interesting.

I was recently in Alabama. Emma and I went and did the civil rights thing. Went to the museums, went to Birmingham and Montgomery, did the Equal Justice Museum. I am just— it’s intense. She's doing the drive-by museum walk. Some of it, we talked about it. Some of it, they're learning, especially in the programs that's she's in. She's doing higher ed administration.

They're learning much more about diversity and historic— what historically has happened around student, and equity, and enrollment. She's been in the South. She's getting more and more understanding of that. Living outside of Eugene, what an eye opener.

We know racism. We know it's there, but we don't know racism until you go to the South and you see that. Some of it, she gets through school. It was so inspiring. I'm like, "I'm going to go home and I'm going to— " I have an Airbnb. "—I'm going to go home and put up posters." She's like, "That doesn't sound like a very good business decision, Mom." I'm like, "Oh my gosh. What happened? What happened? Walk your talk." She doesn't like to make waves.

While they were growing up, that was probably more challenging for them, were my politics, just in general, not necessarily around queer identity. They had gone to private school, first year in public school. They come home, and they're like, "They make us stand for the Pledge of Allegiance." I'm like, "What? What?" They're like, "Yes." I'm like— "We don't know what we're saying," because they had done minute of silence, and say a prayer for peace, conflict resolution. This whole Pledge of Allegiance and standing for the flag was news to them. "Mom, don't say anything." I'm like, "No." I said, "You don't know what you're saying, right?" I said, "Have you asked?" "Oh no. We're not supposed to talk about politics at school." I'm like, "Oh, no you didn't. They're making you say the Pledge of Allegiance. That is political."

Long: What school was that?

Silvers: They were up at Edgewood. That's where the being political was a little uncomfortable for them. Then I tried to do as much as I could in the schools, and do things, and participate, do field trips. I remember, at Spencer Butte, going and watching presentations. One of the girls goes, "Oh my gosh. That's so gay." Emma's like— She puts her hands on me. She's like, "Mom, don't. Just don't." I'm like— I am— "No, Emma." She's like, "Mom." I'm like, "Okay." I was like, "So—. " I can't remember her name, Rachel. "So, Rachel, when you say that, what do you mean?" Emma's just waiting. I know she's super tense. What's going to happen? What's going to go down here? I'm not going to attack her but at home, I do. Ar, ar, ar, ar, ar! She thinks that's what's going to come out.

I'm like, "When you say that, what do you mean? That sometimes doesn't feel very good to everybody. I know that's something you all say." That part of what we created for these kids as they were growing up is probably what I feel is my biggest disappointment or resentment. I'm like, "What did we do? We missed this opportunity to raise these kids." I know that's not true for all kids but I do kind of watch. "What happened? Why didn't you get this?"

There was even a point at which Callie— Callie was like me when I was growing up. Somebody finally pointed this out to me, that I never felt like I belonged in my family. I remember reading a book about a girl who found her adoption papers and then it all kind of made sense to her why she always felt so different. I searched for

my adoption papers my entire growing up, right, because I was just like, "I don't belong here. These people are so weird." I think Callie felt that way. She felt very different. She never wanted to be like us and she's still that way. As much as she loves family, and family's important to her, and she wants to know who her donor is, she still doesn't feel like she belongs.

There was a time when she was in middle school and they were having to do debate, maybe? She was debating that abortion was bad, anti-abortion. I was like, "What are you talking about?" She bought it, hook, line, and sinker. I was so upset. I was like, "How do I handle this?" I didn't know what to do. I tried to talk to her, not an easy thing with Callie. I just tried to explain that one of the challenges with people that are giving you this information is they're not giving you both sides of it. Oftentimes, they are also the people who don't want to provide birth control, which is really what prevents the need for an abortion. If you promote birth control, then fine. I get that you don't think abortion is a good idea. I don't love the idea of abortion, but it's necessary.

That was super hard for me, to have this kid of this kind of ideological difference, so different. It would be different if she was like, "I want to go to church." That was hard enough when Emma went to church with friends. This was like, I don't know if I can do this. I'm not prepared for this as a parent. That ended. She went to school in Kansas and she flipped to the other way. She was around all of these, in this red state, when Trump was elected. She has

come around in some ways, but no, not active, but her ideas have changed.

We created this environment of comfort and sameness that was good but it also has its— the flip side of that is they don't understand the struggle or why it's different and why they need to keep fighting for it. Same thing with Roe v. Wade— they don't know anything about Roe v. Wade and they can't imagine that it would ever go away. They don't know if they're not tuned in.

Raiskin: Do you imagine yourself staying in Eugene?

Silvers: Interesting, I never thought I would. I wanted to leave so badly for so long. Then kids came along and I knew I didn't want to move them. I moved a fair amount when they were little anyway. I sold this big house we had, and rented, and I didn't have an income that I could buy a house for a long time. I moved a fair amount and they didn't like that because they were moving back and forth, too. When they got older— I wasn't going to move and I wasn't going to leave them. I didn't think it would be fair to move them away from Sue and she was certainly not going to move.

I stayed. Then when they finally were done with high school, I was kind of ready to go. I thought, "I'm going to leave. I want to go live in a city. I want a different opportunity," but I got a job that I really love, and so here I am. Also, as I've gotten older, I thought, "It's not easy to start over, finding friends, and creating a community."

Raiskin: Being recognized at the grocery store.

Silvers: Right. I'm kind of happy. Eugene has changed in a way that I think is— fills some of my needs. My needs aren't the same anymore. I like being in my house by myself without the kids.

Raiskin: Is there any story, or question, or theme that we haven't asked you or that you haven't covered that you thought ahead that, "I really want to say this"?

Silvers: I just think it's so important, when talking about the lesbian history.— for me, coming here was really my awakening. Even though I had been out, and I had girlfriends, and I had been going out to bars and stuff, I still was fairly closeted. My world was very either those people or it was gay men. It was so small. Coming here opened my eyes in ways that I had no idea was happening. It became very lesbian focused. Even to this day, I don't have many male friends.

The men I know are from work, even gay men. I know they're here, but it's not nearly the same as the women's community. I know coming into this community was hard for some women after it became so kind of cemented. What a amazing gift we had at that time, that Eugene had that energy of women's community, and happening. Also, the OCA tried so hard to make us go away, and it actually brought us out. It gave us a purpose to come together.

Raiskin: Do you see a lesbian community now or has it dissipated some?

Silvers: No, no. I do, because I have one. It's interesting. My world is work and my lesbian friends, really. I have friends, even though they're

lesbians, most of their friends are straight. That is so foreign to me. Sorry. It's so foreign to me. It's also still uncomfortable, even though most of the people I work with are heterosexual and I'm out. It's not a big deal.

Raiskin: Where do you work now?

Silvers: I work at the city. I'm very out. I'm out politically. It's still super weird for me to hang out with straight people. I much prefer being with my lesbian community. It just is. Yes, I have a lesbian community, but if you walked into this town, I think it'd be hard to find. If you moved here, it would be hard to find. Maybe that's my perspective because I don't need it. It may be out there.

Raiskin: Those cultural spaces are really different.

Silvers: Yes, yes. Campus is different, very different. That experience is really different, to see—

Raiskin: Do you know younger lesbian, gay kids in town?

Silvers: That's an interesting question. I don't. I work downtown. I see queer kids, trans. I mean, you see the gamut. It's kind of one of those things. Back in the day when you saw somebody that was like you, you made this acknowledgement. I'm like, "They don't know me. They don't acknowledge me." It's kind of funny. It's weird. I'm not sure that they need it, but I think they do because we hear it. There's still this thing of, it's going to get better. It's like, "Oh, I'm here. Hello?" You walk by and you're like, "You're holding

hands. Hello." Again, I'm like, "God Damn It. They think I'm straight. I’m wearing my heels." It's funny.

I think— it’s interesting to hear that there's still this struggle. It's so sad when you also see such outness, such outness. How is it possible that kids are still queer? Emma had the experience. She went to the U of O. She had the experience where the men she met ended up coming out to her in college. She was like, "Mom, I don't know what I'm doing to them." I was like, "Well, maybe that's because you get it." A lot of young men came out to her for the— that was their coming out, which I thought was super cool, but also sad that they still weren't out to their families. How is this possible today?

It still happens, even if there's so much outness. She joined a sorority. Was not something I would have ever thought would be something I'd be okay with. Not that I would tell her no. I went to a lot of events and hung out. Such a different experience. I actually felt comfortable in that environment, which I never thought I would. I can pass pretty easily, though. I can pass with moms way easier than Sue ever could. Kids play sports. At the end of the year, or even when you go to games, she was like, "I hate going to those games. I don't know what to talk to— " She's like, "I can't talk to the moms."

I pass with moms all the time. I also could pass with dads. I could back and forth. I loved doing dads weekends at the sorority. Oh my gosh, so much fun. I could do the dad thing. They had lesbian

sorority members. Her sorority, nationally, is the first one that had a trans member pledge. She was so proud of that. Things have changed a lot but there are still challenges. I don't know personally. But I know through her, I get to experience that.

Raiskin: Anything you would tell a young person having lived through your time?

Silvers: Well, obviously the struggle's still not over. Be thankful for what we did. Don't take it for granted, especially in these times. In this time of Trump and this administration, we are so going backwards. That really scares me. What scares me is that it's such a slow drip. There's this weird progression but what we're seeing is this backward progression in ways that I'm not sure the younger people are paying attention to or see. Maybe they do, but that's—

Raiskin: Like what?

Silvers: I think the anti-abortion is a huge one. When I was on the board and I was the president of the board of Planned Parenthood, I had amazing experiences. I met Nancy Pelosi, Cecile Richards. I mean, I did all of that, super amazing. You didn't see a whole lot of lesbians in that world but there are some. People would be like, "Why are you such a champion of abortion?" I'm like, "It's women's rights. This isn't about abortion. This is about women's right to define their destiny." It's everything. They support lesbians. They provide health services for everybody, but this is really about— they're providing empowerment for women.

The abortion thing, a whole women stuff, everything, every sexist, everything— that is our future. I don't think people understand that going backwards in that way moves us— giving men power, it shifts the balance. We haven't even created balance and it shifts it back. This whole thing that's happening underground, not necessarily, but in a whole other world, it will be impacted by it. While you may not need an abortion, you need the right to define your future.

Long: Have you thought about aging in Eugene, what that is going to be like?

Silvers: That's funny. We're not aging [laughs]. It's interesting. I see friends who are retired. Again, a lot of my friends are a little bit older than I am. I'm watching them retire, and I'm like, "I can't imagine doing that," but then I can. I watch them more thinking about their aging. I don't think about it much because I feel super healthy. I'm still super active. I run. I'm physically fit. I do lots of things. I don't feel like I'm aging like I see other people age, so that concern isn't there yet. Watching them, I watch it, and I think, "What's going to happen? How is this going go?" They don't have children, so they would say, "We have that, our kids, to fall back on." I'm not sure if that's true.

I haven't really thought about that much. We joke about it. Oh, we're going to buy a house, or everybody's going to have a trailer and move on the land, or I don't know. I don't know. I don't think

about that. My mom's going to be eighty. She's super healthy and truckin'. I'm like, "I don't have to worry about this for a while."

Raiskin: Well, anything else you want to—

Silvers: I don't think so. I said a lot.

Raiskin: All right.

Long: Thank you so much.

Silvers: Yeah.

Raiskin: Thank you so much. It was great.

[END OF INTERVIEW]