

Patty Wolff

SR 11439, Oral History,

by David McCormack & Carla Moller

Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN)

2012 February 23



WOLFF: Patty Wolff

DM: David McCormack

CM: Carla Moller

Transcribed by: David McCormack, Carla Moller & Kaylee Trudel, ca. 2012

Audit/edit by: Pat Young, ca. 2012

Reviewed by Patty Wolff, ca. 2012

This oral history interview was conducted as part of the Portland State University LGBT History Capstone course, Winter Term 2012, with Instructor Pat Young.

Introduction

The interview took place on February 23, 2012 at 4PM, at Patty Wolff's house in Northeast Portland. Patty wished to speak about her old partner Maxine L'Ecuyer; the older circles of lesbians in Portland that Max was a part of; as well as the Lon Mabon / Ballot Measure 9 era. We were also treated to a generous amount of Patty's views concerning the world and everything in it. Patty's cat, Olivia, moved around the room perplexedly as we sipped tea and conducted the interview.

Session 1
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WOLFF: My name's Patty.

DM: I'm David McCormack, and I'm here to help out with the interview for GLAPN.

CM: And I'm Carla Moller, and I'm here to help with the interview as well.

WOLFF: And I'm here to tell... My background is I'm a social worker. I'm a retired clinical social worker. I spent half my life, almost all my career in... as a child specialist, a behavior management specialist. And my undergraduate degree is in English. And that's me. And I'm retired.

And I want to talk about the lesbians that lived—that were born 1918, 1919, 1920, '21, '22... Though, the early lesbians that were young in World War II, and the same lesbians that enlisted in droves in the armed services, because many of those lesbians took the opportunity to become pilots, and Max was a marine. She enlisted in the Marines. And she was born in 1923, and she was orphaned first by death and then by the dustbowl, and grandmother who adopted her after her parents died had to put her in Catholic orphanage because they lost the farm and had to migrate west to work in the canneries.

She was a good Catholic girl. She was French-Canadian, raised in a French community in Kansas. Learned to speak English when she started 1st grade. Schools run by Catholics. She grew up very, very involved in Catholicism. Deeply religious family as a lot of French-Canadians... Her family came from Quebec. She was at the orphanage for

about three years and she was expected after she left 8th grade to get a job on a farm or somehow or until she got married. That's what the girls did. The French-Canadian girls...

Well, she'd have none of that, because she had decided early on that she wanted to be a college professor because she wanted to be somebody, and somehow she figured out she was a lesbian. Now, when she was 14, when she was at the orphanage, she not only figured out she was a lesbian, she looked it up in the dictionary. And the nun came over to see what she was looking up! And the nun... The Catholic orphanage, it was in... might have been Abilene... Very kind, very good orphanage, very caring... She was very well taken care of. The nun didn't say anything negative at all. She was probably a lesbian herself! But somehow she had figured it out. So she was not going to marry some Canuck buck! And so she... Her alternative was: "Well then, go get a job." The nuns could find her a job in a farm. You know, working for board and room, and then she could go to high school in... I think Abilene... I don't think it's Abilene but it's something... one of the Kansas cities, middle of Kansas... Well, she kept trying that and every man that she was put into... and every husband harassed her, or was maniacal, chased the wife... One of them chased the wife around with a knife and she fled with the children. I mean it just didn't work. Either that or would try and crawl in bed with her.

So at 14 she got on the train and she came to California by herself. I mean, she didn't have anybody else. She never understood what her... happened to her family... She thought she had been deserted and cast aside, until I insisted that we find out, and that's when finally she understood that they lost the farm, and they did what they felt was best for her, obviously, which it was... I mean, hauling a fourteen-year-old girl, a twelve, an eleven-year-old around on a... to cannery row, which is what they had to do, is tragic. The dust bowl was just tragic for families. But she came here, got a job, put herself through high school, and believed that her homosexuality was a total abomination, because the Catholics taught that and believed it. She believed it with all her heart, and what was she going to do?

So she decided that she would go out with men. So she did, and mostly were older men, I think, that probably sexually abused her. Somebody did something because she, when she graduated from high school, her... somebody had put enough money in her bank account for her to go to college. And she thinks it was... She worked for a pharmacist who wanted to marry her just desperately. She thinks that's the person who did it. She was vague about that, but somebody did have sex with her at one time and felt guilty about it. I don't know what that was about. But she managed...

And then she joined the Marines. And she was still... All her friends were lesbian, but she dated guys. I have pictures, too. I have pictures of her, and all these... And I have a lot of other things, too, I have her... Well, anyway, I'll keep going. So she went back to school on the GI Bill, and she finished. She had already started school, so she was able to get her last two years of her Bachelor's and her Master's on her GI Bill. Put her a little older for her Master's because she had been in the Marines for several years working in Camp Lejeune. She was a projector. She was a movie projector operator. She was the one that freed a man to go to war. She showed the VD movies and the Saturday night movies... Stuff like that. That was her job. And continued to date men, but run around with lesbians.

And had no lesbian relationships in that time at all. And she... because of her... It's hard to explain how strong Catholicism has on... the draw it has on people... and if you're raised in it, how totally convinced that you're an abomination and it is an abomination. But Max was pretty smart. She went to graduate school. She must have been in her late twenties by then at... She went to the University of Washington in Seattle. She got the rest of her degrees at the University of Washington in English. She by then had begun talking to the priests about her homosexuality, and, you know, what was she expected to do. Well, the Catholics were not judgmental about her homosexuality, but she would need to abstain. And she could be a... you know? Which meant she would have to live

her life celibate. That's how the problem would be solved. And apparently, if she did that, the Catholic Church [unclear] what she was, because obviously they were familiar with homosexuality in the Catholic Church, so on the one hand they were, but on the other... It's like... Are either one of you Catholic?

DM: I was raised Catholic, yes.

WOLFF: Well, you know, on one hand they're really this, but then on the other hand they're really this...

CM: A lot of loopholes.

WOLFF: Yes, I love it. So that was the homosexual loophole, be a good Catholic. So she decided to go into the nunnery. She had become a nun. I mean, now she was like thirty-two or thirty. Well, so she went into the nunnery for two years in Seattle. And she went through that, trying to become a nun, and this is all about the homosexuality and the religion and the whole thing. So she goes, and the Mother Superior, when she goes to take her final vows, Mother Superior has to tell them whether they're accepted for the final vows or not. Well, obviously Max wasn't. These Mother Superiors aren't dumb. So, she wasn't allowed to take her final vows because Mother Superior said she was too worldly i.e. "We know you're queer, honey, and these are all eighteen-year-olds, and you're thirty!" [Laughs] Not that some of the older nuns weren't lesbian, but they didn't want her predatory around the eighteen-years-olds. Because at that time... Now, it's different, but at that time or that convent, most Catholic girls went into convent as soon as they graduated from high school, not when they were thirty or whatever she was.

But she came out, and... She had... She came out of the nunnery, and she continued to date men. I mean, she continued to date men—struggling about this, knowing that she was a homosexual, knowing all that she had tried, everything that she

had done, she continued to attempt to reconcile her deep faith with an irreconcilable condition that she knew wasn't going to change. And, she wasn't willing, she did not... In the end, she did not believe, that as I think many ex-Catholics do believe, that there was no God that she knew that would expect her to live without a relationship her whole life. She didn't believe that God would expect that of anybody. And so she... One day she didn't go to church. She didn't go to Mass. Now she's thirty-five years old by now, and the sky did not fall on her head. Really, I mean, she was sure she was damned and doomed to die. And then she didn't go again, you know, and pretty soon, she shut the door. And it stayed shut. Which is one of the very sad things about being homosexual, and being religious... is when she died, she never opened the door to Catholicism. Even when she died.

She died here. She never was in hospital. She lived at home and she died in her own bed, with me at her side. So she never opened that door again. To the moment of her death, she refused to talk about it. She didn't want to see a priest; she didn't want to see anything. And, she didn't want to talk about anything, either. Nothing. I mean, I have never seen anybody, anything so closed. I don't know how it got resolved, other than closing the door. And that is something that has happened so many times to lesbians. So many... And probably gay men too, but I'm just speaking of the lesbians that their deep belief in religion and that spiritual part of them has to be sacrificed because of the traditions and the beliefs that they hold themselves accountable to, and it's tragic.

I go to the first Unitarian church, honey. I mean, in downtown Portland, there's everything except Martians down there, and there's probably Martians too! I mean, there wasn't anything like that. We're talking about a time when you were not out. If she had been out, she would have lost her job. She couldn't even... there was nothing. So after she came back, she went back to school. And she made a pass at the wrong person who reported her, at the University of Washington. So what did they do? They did what they do, then. They hauled her off to Medical Lake, and put her in a mental institution for six

months. But it was never written down why she was there. They never talked to her about anything. She asked... She was there six months. They never talked to her, they never treated her, they never did anything. You know, the university: that is what they did. They put people there because... to satisfy this woman, who... so she... And they never talked to her. They never... She roamed around observing the patients, and telling some fabulous stories about the patients.

And then finally when the six months was up—there's supposed to be evaluate... or something, she had to go for six months... They asked her if she was ready to leave and she said, "I don't know, you're supposed to tell me that!" And then [unclear] said, "Have you dealt with your anger?" And she said, "You're supposed to tell me that!" [Laughs] Nobody ever mentioned. Then out the door she went, and that was the end of that. As far as she knows, the record never existed, was expunged or something, because it didn't follow her. Word was never mentioned. And if she had that experience, then I'm sure it wasn't unique to her. So, she lived a celibate life until she was fifty-seven. And she of course, being a college professor at fifty-seven, and with her background, which is the old school lesbian which is as I said... Do you understand the difference between lesbians now and lesbians then? Way back? Have you... Do you want...?

DM: Somewhat. It would be helpful to hear a bit more.

WOLFF: Well, the lesbians early on, the group that I'm talking about, that came of age during the war years, had a... and before, the lesbians in the '30s and probably in the '20s too. Before that, it was OK for women to have special women friends in the Nineteenth, early Twentieth Century. It was perfectly fine, as long as the woman got married. It was expected, you had your special woman friend, and I mean your "special." It was accepted. They believed that was a normal part... Well then, of course, attitudes change... not so much toward lesbians, but basically the focus has been on gay men who

are more apt to be caught in sexual liaisons behind a barn, behind a shed, or behind wherever that the police could harass 'em and pick 'em up, but...

They were very much into role-playing: men and women. They had no concept. These women had no concept of what a lesbian relationship was. In fact, to tell you the honest truth, I never heard of a lesbian until I went to college. I had no idea a lesbian ever existed. And when somebody told me women could have sex, I said, "You're crazy, honey!" [Laughs] I mean never! I never even heard of it... We in the rural outback of Idaho, we were really [unclear]. But no! I'd never even heard of it. Sounds funny now. Well, they hadn't either, so they chose the roles of men and women. Which is "bull-dyke," is from that period. Butch, femme—butch and femme. Really, there were butch and femme. There's a lot of literature on butch and femmes, but it really did exist. The role-playing and the femme. The butches only serviced the femmes. The femmes couldn't touch the butches because that was un-butchy, or something. And the dress was different and, you know, the whole thing...

So this group of people grew up with that role-playing. When they got older, I knew all of them in their sixties, seventies and eighties. All of the ones that I know are dead, of that age. They're all dead. They were all butch, too. Maybe they live longer. I don't know. But they never dropped it, unless they were pushed, which I did. I said: "I'm sorry, honey. I'm not your generation, I don't go for that." So, she was so good-natured... Gosh, she was nineteen when I was born... "I'm sorry, I don't know what you're talking about" sorta thing, "...but we're not doing it. And yes I like your lipstick, honey..." [Laughs] So, she got dumped by the woman before, when she was fifty-seven. She was a target for the young... This was in the '70s. The young mother with the two children, divorced, who's going to college to get a technical license of some kind and either has to seduce the shop teacher, or nab the old lesbian. This woman was like twenty-eight years younger than Max... So she nabbed the old lesbian until the old lesbian, got her two children raised, and dumped her and married a man. This is not uncommon either. This is

not uncommon during that particular time. These people were easy pickings—these older lesbians, because they had not ever had an opportunity to have any kind of relationship except for, I don't know, one-night stands. All is I'm saying, if you were a professional... Now see, she taught high school before she taught college and you're circumspect if that's your career during that time, I mean you would never work again, much less be a teacher. I mean I don't think people did understand the seriousness. You didn't just waltz off and get another job someplace, because somebody found out you were queer.

So, she moved to Portland in her late sixties, because she had decided... She had retired in 1984. When she was in her late sixties, she moved to Portland, because she decided that she was tired of living among the straights. She'd had it.

CM: And she was still in Washington at this point?

WOLFF: Yes. In Aberdeen, for God's sakes! The Aberdeen, Seattle area: yeah. So she decided that she'd had it. She knew about the Portland lesbian community, which was huge—huge, huge! Still is—huge. It was huge then. The biggest lesbian community probably in this country was here. I presume we're still all... I'm including bi because I'm bi, but, you know... I'm including all of us who either switch, or... So, she had heard about that, and she decided that was it. She was gone. She was going be out and about before she died, and she did. She came and she had more fun than anybody I had seen in my life. She tap-danced. She could dance!

And when she was going to graduate school in Seattle, she got a job of jumping... She had a very nice muscular, sculpted body. She got a job of jumping out of a hat with pasties and a G-string at stag parties, and dancing up and down the bar! Because... well, it's one way to get attention, I guess! But anyway, she was a good dancer. So she... God, that was her deep, dark secret. Deepest... I think I finally did tell our best friends. I've told

people in front of her about these things, unless she shut me up, and then I wouldn't. Yeah, I think that's very clever. But she did it at Hobo's, not nude in pasties, but in dress. But she got up on the bar and did her whole routine up and down the bar. She did the whole routine in the middle of Gay Pride in the early '90s. Her whole little show, herself. 1994, I think. So she had a wonderful... Those years were wonderful for her. Of course, she met me and I was wonderful too, so... [Laughs]

CM: How did guys meet?

WOLFF: We met during the Lon Mabon era, when Lon Mabon... Well, I had been in Maine. I had moved to Maine for my career, for a job that I wanted that I couldn't get here, because it wasn't available, because somebody else always had it. So there was one in northern Maine and my kid was raised; I had no reason not to. So I went to northern Maine and I came back in '91 and Lon Mabon had already been... I had no idea. You know, when I was in Maine, I didn't... Really, I lived on the border, up at the point between Canada, on the St. John River. I had no idea what Oregon was doing.

I got back here, I was stunned. My mouth could have fallen and hit the floor. I kept saying: "What?! What?! In Oregon?!? What?!" I mean, I just... And then I got mad. And I think the same thing happened to ten million lesbians all at the same time. It was like ants. Literally coming out of the woodwork. I mean, talk about poor Mabon. Do you know that he was... He thought we'd all run. There were more queers,.. We filled Pioneer [Square]—we filled everything! I mean, it was just like: "My God, where are these people coming from?" And they came and came and came. And you know the rest. That's where I met her. At that, because we were all involved.

Now, I worked in Washington, lived in Oregon. I was a school behavior management specialist. But, I was pretty sure that in Washougal, Washington, they weren't going to pick up on what I was doing here in Portland, as long as I didn't get

taped on the news show... which I did! Oh God... I wasn't taped as a lesbian. I was actually harassing Lon Mabon. His wife was getting signatures, to have us put to death, I think, on that one, or something... Some terrible thing, we were all... I was up there pretending that I didn't know a thing about it, that I was just somebody coming to shop at this store. They were right in front of this "Big Boy" or some big department store down on 82nd. They were taking these signatures about how we were raping children or homosexuals were pedophiles, and what the hell? I was incensed; I was just furious. So, I was talking to her and she was telling me all about it, and she thought she had a live one. And I didn't know I was going to be on the news. They had my face, and I was looking at her, and my eyes, both of them, rolled out of sight at the top of my head. And then they went down again. I knew why they put me on it. They did, my eyes disappeared when she was talking to me! It was so obvious! So obvious! And there I was, this long... [unclear] as these eyes went up and down. God it was fun, but Washougal didn't see it...

So, that is where I met her and every lesbian that could walk, crawl, and breathe was involved in Measure 9 and the reason I keep saying lesbians is because the gay men were decimated. They were... AIDS had decimated, was decimating... I mean they were... And the lesbians had to pick up where the guys had left off, too... There was, the guys... The lesbians picked up the slack from when the guys started dying, getting AIDS. The lesbians were the ones who organized, got everything way for the guys. Actually, in one sense, the AIDS epidemic, for the first time, created a brother- and sisterhood because for the first time the men became our brothers to take care of. So when I say lesbians, there was like ten thousand lesbians and two men. I mean, I'm exaggerating, but there weren't a whole lot of men. Like, there weren't a whole lot of men there, but there were a lot of lesbians.

So am I done? [Coughs] Oh, I should conclude. Oh, I don't have to conclude. Is that over?

DM: No, no, we can go on. We're at... we're at just half an hour.

WOLFF: We're only at a half an hour? Oh, well, let's see... Elders... The issue around... I think the... The difficulty... We know the difficulty with which women, lesbians, has... I think it hasn't really been examined as obvious as it has been with men, because we know Stonewall—we know, we're aware of that. But women being more circumspect, suffered in silence. A lot of it was the religion, the effect that their beliefs had upon them, when they knew that they were queer. And that's sad. That's the thing that bothers me the most about these people, and I don't hear that now. There are many... It's such a different world today. It's a different world. You know I didn't...

I seemed to miss the whole idea of... I thought, since I was lesbian, since I was I knew I was bisexual. I have a twin brother, so I knew fairly early... It's been proven now, but I knew early on that I had an extra shot of testosterone, which I do. And so we're both bisexual because we were in utero with each other, but: I thought that's the greatest thing since canned milk! I never... I was such an ignorant little girl out here in the... I thought: "Well, it must be pretty wonderful because I'm it..." Not that I thought I was wonderful, but... And I grew up, and I went my way like that, and, you know, nobody ever said anything... My first husband, I told him "I like girls", and he goes, "Well, I can understand that. You know, I do too." Nobody ever harassed me, probably because I kick butt pretty bad when I get mad. Everybody left me alone. I never suffered a day. I never suffered a day from being a lesbian, but that's because I have a big shot of testosterone. And, I'm not kidding,

I'm back to the effects of being a female and suffering, and not ever expressing anything. You know, they tell their story, but it's all smoothed over... She never told anybody she was in a mental institution. You know, I told people, but those things were just left behind. How you got to be so careful about who you hit on, and what you did and what you said, and how your life could be ruined. There was a famous night club in

Seattle during that time called the—there's a book written about it. I don't remember the name of it now, but... "Seattle's bars of the '40s and 50s... gay bars", it didn't have this name, it had some name... It was a cool name too. Regularly raided... Well, I mean, she said she went once or twice, but it's hard to have fun when you were terrified, you know... Your life's going to be over, so... But the guys went. The guys went because... I don't think guys care as much about what other people think as women, I really don't... Because I have to get along with... I have trouble with women because I don't give a rat's ass about that, and, you know, a lot of women do... A lot of things that... And I think, that's why that community is so superficial... [unclear] Somebody talks more about that than what I've done, but it was not an easy life for these women at all.

Is there anything else about Mabon, [under breath] the bastard?.. Anything I noticed particularly about that, other than that we came out like ants. Well, they already had come out, when I... they were coming out when I'd got back to Portland. I was trying to think of anything particularly I noticed during that time...

CM: When you were in Maine, did you just feel like you weren't hearing anything that was happening? You kind of said that like...

WOLFF: Are you kidding, honey? I was in Madawaska, Maine—five thousand on the Canadian border. They didn't even have a... No, I... There was nothing that got to northern Maine, nothing... And interestingly enough I was in a French-Canadian community of... a [unclear] community. I was there, I lived there. I lived with these people that were chased out of Nova Scotia in the 1700s and settled in... They either were taken to Louisiana and are the Cajuns, or they came over the St. John River and are in the St. John Valley. I got to be their child specialist, for a while. And these people were more civilized—much more civilized—than what I saw when I came back to Portland. The... A man on the—I'm not making this up—this was in the '80s... A man on... One of the gentlemen on City Council was the bastard son of the mayor (who had a liaison with his

housekeeper)—he lisped and he was an out gay man. Everybody loved him. The fifth grade teacher and her brother were both out lesbians [sic]. Their parents loved them and so did the whole community. If the parents—which invariably the parents did—the parents accepted their lesbian and gay children, and the community accepted them also. And nothing was ever... There was no problem. No problem... I mean, this fifth-grade teacher lived with her... across the street from the school with her girlfriend... I mean, she was a... Do you understand what I'm saying?

DM: Yeah.

WOLFF: And then I come back here and I have the nuts, which is a whole 'nother thing about radicalism, because these people are not functioning cognitively at a very high standard... They are not. Their reasoning is colored by... an ignorance that is hard to... that's genetic. I swear, it's in the genes. Parents like that, honey, I know... You know: Idaho, rural... These people are so goddam ignorant that you... I mean, these people are so ignorant. They have so little, not just my parents but these groups... I'm talking about Southern, Eastern Oregon, Northern I[daho]... I'm talking about the Lon Mabons of the world and it's a nice little spin around [?]. And they've always been there. But they don't think well, they just don't think well, and they never have thought well, and I could tell you why but I'm not because it... Unless that's off [gesturing towards recording device] I can tell you exactly why this is but...

Anyway, those are types of people that we've got an extra dash of in Oregon, that they didn't get in Maine because they didn't come so far... They weren't hauled to Maine to cut timber. They were hauled to Oregon and Idaho to cut timber, and boy are they, they are...now turn that thing off! [Laughs]

DM: Well let's finish up the...

WOLFF: I'm done!

DM: ...let's finish up the on tape stuff and we can chat...

WOLFF: Well, I'm just talking but... What I'm telling you about is the kind of person that we had, and we still have... We have them... You know, they're still around, haven't gotten rid of them... In fact... and then in Indiana the legislature today decided to announce that the Girl Scouts was a radical group and they were training girls for a homosexual lifestyle... And every Republican, other Republican legislator in that entire assembly distanced themselves from him, in mass un-support. [Laughs] Yeah, the Girl Scouts...

DM: That's so loopy [?]...

WOLFF: Well, the scary this is that these people believe it. Don't ever talk to 'em. If you've ever been in mental health and worked with somebody... You ought to get your Masters in Social Work from Portland State. It's a fabulous program. That's where I got mine—it's in the top third, and it will give you... You will have a ticket to anything, literally a ticket to anything with one of those degrees.

Anyway, if you've ever worked with delusional people, forget it. I mean... There's a... You out-legislate them, that's the only thing you can do with these people. That's why we're a nation of laws, these nuts were over there in Europe and, same thing... So, that's the background, since you were not even born when this was going on... I don't know... By the way, Scott Lively worked with Lon Mabon. He's the one that's over in Uganda now, creating... he's got the Uganda Parliament to say... put the death penalty on homosexuals...

DM: I read about that.

WOLFF: Yeah, we Unitarians are over there having a fit. They just... Yeah, they killed the minister that was working with them over there too. We have a Unitarian—they haven't killed him yet—a Unitarian minister over there too, working with him, but he's still alive. But, yeah, pretty nasty, that's from... He [Lively] was the sidekick. Lovely man, huh? Had to go all the way to Africa... Righteous indignation takes you a long way, dear, develop some... [sigh]

CM: We just watched the "Ballot Measure 9" documentary and at the end they were talking about how, you know, the vote was really split. And... but a lot of the votes for the No on 9 were actually... I think the population over 60 was a lot of the No on 9 votes. Which I was kinda surprised about, just because it seemed like such a particular demographic. Why do you think that is?

WOLFF: That's the Greatest Generation. That's the World War II generation. That's the generation... I'm sorry, they went to war, they fought for the Four Freedoms... Come home, keep your mouth shut. They raised their families... and now their kids were out there going against all of the parent's values, the values they ever had... And boy did those parents had a fit and fall in it. And that's it.

The older group there was very resentful. You know, that war was not a fun war, and we very nearly lost. And... they were—they were fighting for the Four Freedoms, and when they came home, they didn't expect their children to grow up and act like that they did. So when this came along, they were not educated at all. They didn't know anything about it. They didn't know a homosexual. Had heard... Probably didn't know about lesbians.

I don't know how much Mabon talked about lesbians. He had them in his face all the time, he must have talked about 'em, but... We were never accused of child molestation or anything. In fact, we were damn well ignored, which was kind of insulting.

But, these people are dead. Most of 'em are dead. You know, the World War II generation are almost all gone now. That's my parents. And that's the way it was. They became educated. Many of them became educated because it was like the critical mass... I think everybody... There was a critical mass in Portland, Oregon, when Lon Mabon showed up. The termites came out and they had to put up with us because we never went back. So a lot of people found out that their daughters and brothers and husbands and... All sorts of people were gay. And they... they became educated; the rest of them died off. But they had ignorant children and... When you're rural, and you're conservative, and you're raised in a conservative religion, you have no opportunity...

You know, I never saw any... I lived for eighteen years in Lewiston, Idaho, and I never saw a face other than a white one. Do you know why?.. Why?.. 'Cos they chased them all out or killed them! Unless you were white. That's why. There were none. There hadn't been any since the '20s, when they burned down the houses down and chased them out of town. So that's the environment I grew up in. So... And these people still exist and there's still ignorance. We still have it. But it's in the minority.

You know, you can't... It's so politically incorrect nowadays... It is so politically incorrect to even say things.... I mean... To show how far we've come, a Republican in Indiana: he makes a statement. This statement is just like every other statement that these people have ever made. You know, it makes just as much sense. In fact, it's the same statement. They just added [a] different group to it. This is a... And all the other Republican legislators run the other way. I mean, this is a new... They don't even want to have anything to do with him.

So, see, you have a shift. The Republican Party wants nothing to do with the people that are running. They don't have anybody. They're fit to be tied. I mean, the main guard, can you imagine? They have Gingrich and Romney and, San... what is he?

Santorum, who is probably playing both sides of the fence... But it's not kosher, honey, any more to bash... Are you guys queer, either one of you? You are, you're not...

DM: No.

WOLFF: Well, it's not kosher any more to bash us, is it? You know, it's not nice, and they can do it behind your back, but you don't find too many in the bigger cities but now if you went to Lewiston...

I did go to Lewiston, and took a friend who... just for fun, because I didn't want to drive alone. He's a man in his 30s who is a drag queen, cross-dr[esser]... He's a gay man, but he's a fright. His hair is dyed, his [unclear] it might be pink and... He has piercings all over, and he dresses in these god-awful outfits, and puts on makeup on... and he'll scare the shit out of you. I mean, he thinks he's pretty, but... He goes down to one of the bars and picks up men, I think...

But anyway, so he went. I made him. Lewiston, Idaho. I made him... The ear plugs came out, the [unclear] came out, the things... [unclear] came out, the [unclear] came out... and he dressed in cargo pants and a very normal top. Today, when I went... I mean, two years ago when I went to Lewiston, I stripped this guy of all of his self and made him go look like that, because he wasn't going to be with me the whole time, and God knows, you know... Not up there in Lewiston...

And you know what happened? I cleaned him up just enough that all the girls thought he was a rock star! [Laughs] And he was just... he was fit to be tied, he was fit to be tied. But then I could see that because there's a show on TV with Taylor... was his name Steven Taylor? [Probably: Steven Tyler, lead singer of Aerosmith] Somebody that is the lead singer in one of these famous rock bands... The guy is as old as I am, but he's attempting to look much younger. He looks preserved, but, um... [pause]

I lost my train of thought. That's the first time I've done that. What was I talking about? You've lost my train of thought, too... Hell, we've both lost... I've been talking...

DM: If we're jumping around, maybe you could talk a tiny bit more of...

WOLFF: I'll just talk until you either shut me up or redirect me, or... Honey, I could talk in front of millions!

DM: I'm interested in a tiny bit about the lesbian scene of Max's generation. In Portland, you said there were circles of people that...

WOLFF: Yes...

DM: Could you tell me a bit more about what that was like..?

WOLFF: Every lesbian of that age that I knew came from some place else. None of the ones that I knew of that generation had—and I knew quite a circle of 'em—had actually come or lived here. They had heard about it. They had... Many of them had been married and they had had children, and they had lived in small towns and they were like Max, and had not been able to have a relationship, and never been able to be out, or they had just...

Back then, women didn't figure out early on that they were lesbian. A lot of these women didn't know until they were in their forties, or they... If you can understand how a woman would have never heard of a lesbian, which like... I was twenty when I... and I was stunned. Well, these women... How were you supposed to know? If you had never seen one, no one ever says the word... In fact, no one even cared about lesbians. I knew about gay men, but I don't think anybody else knew about lesbians. If we were... Nobody just

gave a hoot about lesbians. It's just, to think, we were totally wiped out. So, nobody... we didn't exist. Even in my generation, I mean: many, many women my age had no clue about what a lesbian was. Never even heard of one—why would they hear of one? Nobody talked about it because we women aren't important. Who cares? As long as they get married, who cares? Or didn't flaunt it, or whatever...

But... These women had in many instances been married and had children. They came to Portland because of... Now, these people who live in Portland now who seem to think... You know I've been in Portland since I was eighteen, and that's a lot of years ago. Portland hasn't changed, honey, in all those years... Believe it or not, we were weird back then. We weren't any different. Portland hasn't magically just spawned itself into this place. Portland is like it's always been. These tooties [?] that have come here from some place else: "Oooooohh! It's really weird!" Well, you're weird, honey—the rest of us are normal. We're like it is. Nobody's ever given a damn in Portland. Ever, back then... They came. Didn't care about if you were a lesbian, didn't care what you were. And besides, you could find each other really easily. And...

So, that's why they came. They came from someplace else, to live a life that they'd been denied. And they lived it to the hilt. And many of them, including my love, died of lung cancer because in their youth, the only place they could meet people was in bars. They all smoked and drank like fishes. Really. I can... You wouldn't believe the number of this core that died of lung... died of cancer from smoking. And... She did. Two others in that article [article in *Just Out*, Vol. 16, No. 22] died—they died one right after the other, actually—because that is... A bar was safe. Even if you went to a regular bar, two women, you know... You could sit and drink. Nobody would think anything about it. Or two women living together, as long as you didn't... You know, you were really careful and stuff like that, which... But they came to have an open life, and to live and love how they wanted, and...

Now, Lee Walters, who was the same... who was one year younger than Max and who died the year before, she picked herself up a girlfriend, the love of her life, who was thirty five years younger. I didn't even set up an interview with her. I'm not kidding! When Lee turned seventy, Gina was thirty five. They loved each other like you would never believe. It was the love of both their lives. I wish it could have gone on forever. No, these were smooth operators. You have to realize: Max, all five feet of her, got me, nobody else did! I mean, these were smooth ladies, my dear! When they took... Oh, they could sweep you off their feet. That's another thing, the lesbians now: they totally lack this ability to be, whatever these old... I mean they would, these.... Man, you would go to these dances, this Measure 9, Measure 11 dances at Cordial Hall [?] to raise money for the campaign against Mabon, and you'd be asked to... at a dance by one of these older ladies. These women, they danced like a dream. The whole... They'd sweep you off... So a lot of them came here and got younger girlfriends, and died in their arms! Which I think they all deserved. But that's why they came. And they did well, and they died young. So... and they...

Many of them quit smoking before but, you know: you gotta quit... There's a point at which: don't bother. And they reached that point. Fifty... if you smoke fifty years you might as well forget it. You're dead or alive, but you're not going to undo anything, so... But... and they came from all over... So, anything else about that?

DM: Not about that, but you were saying that Max was involved with the Archives, so if you could...

WOLFF: Well, Max volunteered for the GLAPN when it apparently... Well, see, since she was... She was retired when I met her, and I worked until after she died. So, what her life was during the day, I heard about, so I can tell you what she told me... But I know that that started, and it wasn't very fancy at first, and then it got a room... They got a building or something. It started small, and then it built up. And they had all this collected and

stuff, and nothing was categorized. Everything was piled in just unfiled, un-everything... She took it all, and organized it into years, and from what I understand... She must have put it... And they were already articles of ephemera, you know... She must have put it in... well, I don't know... She probably got these books, they were probably like photo things, where you know, clear, and you put it underneath. Well, she must have spent a good year—because she loved to do that, she [unclear] good. And when she was done, she went on to something else. Went over to our house, I think. And that's all I can tell you. But she's the one... and then I don't know what happened to it afterwards, because I was never connected, but somehow it ended up in the Oregon Historical Society, is what I understand...

CM: That's where it is now.

[Phone at house rings]

WOLFF: Is there a GLAPN headquarters yet or anything...? I did meet the... just a second.

[Answers phone] Hello? Well, darling, why don't you come in? Oh poop! Come and meet these guys. We're talking about old dykes. For God's sakes, honey... Besides, they're probably anxious to leave. I've talked their arm, leg and [unclear] jaws off... Bye, sweetie, come on in. [Hangs up]

[Back to conversation] So that's all I know about it. That's all I know about that. I don't know... And I do know that even back then they had students involved, because somebody interviewed her. Now I don't know why students are involved, I don't know why you were involved... I don't know anything about this. So you probably know more about it. But that was her part in it.

Also, I need to find out... Max received a medal from Barbara Roberts. Barbara Roberts gave... Max represented the Marine Corps many years ago, when Barbara Roberts was governor, and Barbara Roberts during Veterans' Day recognized one gay person from every branch, in this big ceremony. Every branch of the armed services, and Max represented the Marine Corps, and she got this big honkin' important thing... Governor... well, what the heck am I supposed to do with it? If the GLAPN... if the Archives would like to have it... I'd be delighted to pass it to the Historical Society. But I don't want to just pass it to...

CM & DM: Well, we can talk to...

WOLFF: Would you do that? Because it's very nice. In fact, I could get it... This is Olivia [the cat]... She's probably tired of you sitting there! [Laughs]

I'm going to... Before I go get it, I'm going to open the door, because these people... how they knew that you were still here, I have no idea...

I'll show it to you, it's quite impressive....

[Later] I don't know where the hell it is...

I don't seem to be too bright right now, about figuring out where I put it... But it's here... It's very nice...

CM: We can ask Pat...

WOLFF: Governor Roberts, and she'll remember. She was probably there, because I met her. She was around then. She remembered me when she saw me. Damn, what a memory!

CM: Yeah.

WOLFF: Can you imagine? That was years ago.

CM: And how do you spell Max's last name?

WOLFF: Capital "L," apostrophe, capital "E", C-U-Y-E-R...

CM: C-U-I-E..

WOLFF: Y...

CM: C-U-Y-E-R...

WOLFF: I think. You know, she's been dead so long... I'm just realizing today... how the hell did she spell her name?... [Picks up old Just Out] Yeah, L, apostrophe, E... L, apostrophe... Capital "L", apostrophe, here [passing paper] she was very picky about that too... It's "L" with a capital "E" and then small "C", C-U-Y-E-R...

CM: [Looking at photo in Just Out] That's cute.

WOLFF: [Pointing to photo] She's sitting in this house here.

CM: How long did you guys live in this house?

WOLFF: I've owned this house eighteen years in January. Before the neighborhood turned all glitzy...

CM: My old house, it was down there, and he's owned it for thirteen years, and he always says that too...

WOLFF: Your old house?

CM: Yeah, I just moved, but my landlord has owned the house for thirteen years and he lives there, and he always says "before the neighborhood was nice"...

WOLFF: Oh... yeah... where, where? Which house was it?

CM: He lives on 7th and Prescott, yeah...

WOLFF: Well, okay... Alberta, not up here, not at this end, but Alberta down further—not that much further, either—was and had been the most blighted street in Portland, one that I never believed would be resurrected. But you know who did it? We gays and lesbians and bisexuals, we marched over here because we could afford the houses. And then, guess who started the businesses on Alberta? For the first... They were crawling with... They may be all still gay and lesbian, but for a few years there wasn't anybody who wasn't queer around here.

In fact, the owner of the Cadillac Café does and has lived just across Killingsworth on 32nd, the next block... The two men who lived Cadillac Café, they lived there long before I ever moved here, and I've been here eighteen years. So, it was the gays and lesbians who came in and decided that we didn't like the gangbangers, and chased them out. Nothing works quite so well as a dyke who wants her own way.

DM: So it seems like we're wrapping up if there's anything...

WOLFF: I'm done...

DM: Anything that you want to make... anything you want to have on the recording...

WOLFF: Well you know I've said everything I want to say right now, but I have... Well, just... You can always... Do you need pictures or stuff like that? I have some...

DM: Let's have a look.

WOLFF: I have so much more stuff, that... But it's not for some... You're not doing an in-depth... You have to realize that I have diaries and all sorts of things, but this is more if somebody who had been wanting to do, write a much broader picture of that period of time, like a book. She was going to write a book, she never...

CM: Well, the Archives, too, they have a lot of.... They have someone's... like diaries, and a bunch of other stuff...

WOLFF: Well, if I could find out... Well, I would. I've got her medals from World War II. I could send them to the Women's Memorial, but I would like to give the Historical Society the Barbara Roberts... Let's see, I think that might be in the file... I'd like to send that to them because I think that belongs in Oregon.

[End of Session 1]

[End of Interview]