

Holly Hart

SR 4145, Oral History,

by James Loos & Winter Drews

Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN)

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HART: Holly Hart

JL: James Loos

WD: Winter Drews

Transcribed by: James Loos, ca. 2000; Winter Drews, ca. 2000

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## Introduction

By George Nicola

Reed College graduate Holly Hart had been writing mostly feminist articles for the *Willamette Bridge* in 1970 when her co-staff member John Wilkinson proposed the formation of the Portland Gay Liberation Front. Holly came out as lesbian and offered her extensive political organizing experience to help John and his partner Dave Davenport launch Oregon's first politically oriented LGBTQ organization.

Holly wrote numerous *Bridge* articles urging people to come out. She even wrote some articles under pseudonyms so that other lesbians wouldn't think that she was the only lesbian with the courage to be so open.

Because of this, Holly should be considered the Founding Mother of Oregon's LGBTQ movement in general, and certainly one of the pioneer organizers in the women's community that developed. Holly eventually went to law school and then did considerable legal work for the community. In the mid-1970s, she chaired Governor Robert Straub's Talk Force on Sexual Preference. From that group's recommendation, PFLAG Portland was born.

**Tape 1, Side 1**  
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JL: I'm James Loos and...

WD: Winter Drews

JL: And we're interviewing Holly Hart who owns Old Wives Tale and we want to say thank you for giving us the interview and that we are taping this so if you have any objections you have the right to turn off the tape or throw the tape recorder. So...

HART: Sure, okay and I think we should all know that it's November in the year 2000

JL: ...you got it.

JL/WD: Thank you.

JL: We're amateurs.

WD: We're hoping to get essentially your oral history, your narrative about your life, anything that you think is relative or interesting.

HART: Okay, well first of all what my remarks are going to be focusing on my identity as a gay person in Oregon and — because well in anybody's life there's all kinds of extensive [Laughs] extraneous things that would be of no interest to anybody strictly a biography only of me and that's not really your subject given the course that your involved in. First of all I will start before I arrived in Oregon, which is not a very long period at all in retrospect.

I was in Chicago, Illinois on March 5th, and basically I was pretty much raised in Chicago. And I went to Chicago public schools and at the age of seventeen came out to

Oregon to attend Reed College. And so, I enrolled in Reed in September and for the next three years was a student at Reed, and undergraduate student and was very active in the war protests there organizing. There were a lot of civil rights organizing going on, of course, 'cause that was the mid-1960s — in conjunction with Black rights in the United

The point was that when I was at Reed, I was very much involved in what was then called the New Left, and, in terms of my personal life, at this particular time in the mid-1960s and really until about or 1970, this of course is why you do oral history because it's really hard to imagine nowadays when gay and lesbian issues and people are so out in the middle of everything and everything is so open, but back then the word closet had real meaning. People were completely secretive about their lives, their personal lives.

In fact, when I was in college — even at a place like Reed, which is perceived to be such a liberal place — they, if you were as a gay student sometimes you would be forced to see a psychiatrist or forced to leave school. And there was, actually a lot inconsistencies because there were some, faculty who were kind of like obviously gay, quote unquote, just in terms of, sort of, flaunting way of behaving. I don't necessarily mean effeminate. I just mean you could see that that's what the little sub-culture was, but it was very confusing. It was very confusing as to what you could get away with and who you could be open with and it was just very, very confusing. And so, I was a part of that confusion.

So from the time between when I was about seventeen until I was about twenty or twenty-one, I was closeted. I was sexually inactive in terms of being a lesbian. And as a matter of fact, like a lot gay people during that time and still even today at times, when people are not sure of their sexual identity, I did kind of heterosexual exploration of — in other words, well, I should try this right? It's what you're supposed to do. It's you're — everybody's supposed to be straight right? And obviously, it wasn't who I was. So it was a very confusing time personally, even doing my academic work and I was a very strong leader in terms of different New Left politics. In my personal life, I emotionally was a wreck because that's exactly what happens when you are a gay person and when the surrounding culture is hostile to who you really are and I was not immune to that.

Then what happened was, I took a year off from Reed and went back to Chicago and, oh, did things like going to Cuba with S.D.S., which was a forbidden thing to do then and in terms of federal law.

JL: What was S.D.S.?

HART: Students For Democratic Society — which was the leading, campus based group throughout the United States that was one of the leading organizations in terms of activities and, oh, with pretensions to organized workers. Some of it was kind of like the echoes of the Old Left. And let's see.

So I returned to Reed and to Portland after a year off. That was in the Fall of 1968. And completed my senior year at Reed and then I was finishing my thesis. I finished my thesis in I guess the Winter of, like, December, and then I went to work in a factory Industries. Kind of what you do when you get out of school and you don't have any particular direction and, and just to make some money and maintain.

Well, meanwhile back East — this, the so-called Stonewall riots had happened. In New York in Greenwich Village I guess it is. And so I was working in Portland as part of my kind of New Left activities. I was working on what was then known as an underground paper, counter-culture paper, that was called the *Willamette Bridge*. And I was not identified as a gay person. I was not living as a gay person in terms of my social life. I was still my little New Left self And this of course was also the time when the feminist movement was getting re-started in the United States. It was very much similar timing that feminist and gay movements.

One time I was at the *Willamette Bridge* and the guy who was the photographer down there — was a gay guy — and which, we, everybody knew but people didn't realize I was gay. And he announced that he wanted to start a gay liberation group, that's what he was gonna call it and in fact, people were starting gay liberation groups in other parts of the country. And basically he was wanting to get the agreement of the rest of the staff of the *Willamette Bridge* — that they would give him space in the newspaper to promote the

group and to write articles, gay liberation advocacy articles, whatever, that kind of thing. And so I stepped forward and said I'll help you with that. And so that was the beginning of the what you might call the – don't know if the word is the right word, but the gay movement in Portland and therefore in the rest of Oregon.

There had always been groups like Daughters of Bilitis an old lesbian kind of political group and the is a gay men's group. Those had existed and they had maybe some small numbers of members. But they weren't really, they weren't being very aggressive. They weren't really, they were – I don't know what they were doing in their little quiet way but they weren't doing anything very noticeable. And so not to discount anybody who might have been members of those groups in Oregon.

I mean I – I'm sure they existed but, well, I think its notable that I don't even know who they are — that is, when John, Dave and I — and its John Wilkinson and boy, I've just lost Dave's last name in my mind. I'm sure it's probably in here. But when we started, we were not aware particularly of any other groups that had, that existed. So they weren't, they weren't making an impact on us. They weren't making an impact on the state very much. And so what we did was in July of 1971, July, here's an issue of the *Willamette Bridge* [Holds up an old copy of *Willamette Bridge* with a gay liberation insert section] which had an entire section which was the gay liberation section, which I am showing you guys right now — like a center section multi-page center section...

WD: Wow.

HART: And its gay liberation. And there it is, July 23rd. And what happened was between us. We just wrote all the articles and...

JL: Wow.

HART: Just various articles talking about coming out and how should gay people be able to be open and out and all that kind of thing. And then also announcing what our activities are.

For example, there's an article called "A Place to Go" and a place to go was at the old Centenary Wilbur Methodist Church at SE 9th they had a coffee house that they called the No Exit. I believe it was called. And actually well this says [reading the details of the article] Ninth Street Exit. I think it's been called different names. And we went, we approached members of the church and that congregation was doing a lot of social activist things and so we approached them and they let, were going let us have their coffee house two nights a week, on Mondays and Tuesdays. This was just your typical little kind of hippie kind of coffee house for young people to congregate — no alcohol or anything like that. And so we, I think it was, we decided that Mondays nights would be for men and Tuesday nights would be for women.

And so using that coffee house — it was the first non-alcohol based a gay-bar, place for gay people to congregate in Portland. And we started that up and then we simultaneously gave people our home phone numbers which were the first hotlines people could call if they wanted to talk to somebody about their feelings or questions or problems or whatever the heck it was. And consciousness raising groups were something that the feminist movement was doing in those days. Groups of people would just get together and kind of talk about their social experiences and, and their feelings and things like that and support each other. And so we decided to have gay consciousness raising groups in other words there were a lot of parallels between some of what the feminist movements was doing.

And, in fact, at Centenary Wilbur Church on Tuesday nights, the National Organization for Women, the local chapter would meet on Tuesday nights on the same night as the women's night of the gay coffee house. And I spent so much time running up and down those stairs because I was also working in NOW and I wasn't one of the real founders of NOW. I'm not going to take any kind of credit like that. There were other people that were much more important but that was pretty funny I mean literally running up and

down the stairs, being at the NOW meeting and then running down the stairs and seeing how the coffee house was going — that kind of thing.

So for the next — boy, it was such an intense time that I'm always tempted to remember it as a longer period of time than it was — but it was actually for about six months that I was like a full-time gay activist. I think, I think I'm really right about this. Because — well yeah, I think it was for about six months and we did hook up with some people in Washington State. Some of this I don't really remember and I didn't keep a diary or anything like that. But what I do remember was that we started contacting different — it was usually church groups and we would go and speak to sometimes quite large audiences of I mean, hundreds of people at various churches in Oregon and in Washington. And, again promote, basically promote gay liberation, promote the idea that people should be able to be more open and other people should be receptive to being open and this not be something that was viewed negatively and suppressed and etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

We did television appearances and we did radio things. I mean, I can remember that this was, salvation for me. I was used to being an activist and what I haven't said yet is that — the irony was this was my coming out. In other words I had some close friends that knew that I was gay even though I wasn't actually active. I didn't have a lover, something like that. But because I knew how to be an activist in other contexts, I could transfer those skills and my relative comfort level of being an activist. And now I became a gay activist.

And so it's actually, emotionally, there were still aspects of it that were pretty difficult because that's a rough way to come out. [Laughs] Before you yourself have consolidated your own personal social base or emotional base or something like that. But that's the way it happened.

And we did it was a full time thing for about six months and then, no surprise, I kind of pretty much burned out. Meaning that I was just doing incredibly too much all the time and I really didn't hadn't kind of done my emotional homework [Laughs] or, consolidated my social base myself. This is really common when you're the organizer of any kind of organization when it deals with personal issues, nothing particular but all kinds of organizers — is that a lot of times you just really find yourself taking care of everybody else

except for yourself. And other people expect you to do that. And they don't even, it doesn't even occur to them that you have needs of your own or whatever. And my god, I was what? I was twenty-two years old. I mean I wasn't very old either.

So and then, what actually triggered me kind of stepping out of an activist role was that in those days there were all these left organizations tended to have a lot of little factions that got into weird little turf fights and we didn't use the word politically correct in those days but a lot of this was little politically correct up, one-upmanship. And there was this whole strain of people who don't remember exactly the language that they used but they were kind of anti-leadership.

So here I am this, yeah right, self-appointed leader you [Laughs] in gay liberation whizzing around, doing all these things. The truth is that the people who are willing to do the work control things. That's just true. And it was not that I wasn't, didn't want other people to control things, but there was no way I was going to sit and have somebody sit and tell me what to do while they were going off and playing and I was doing the hard work.

And so this particular group of people (I think they were associated with some strange little left splinter group — the Trotskyite the crackpots of America or whatever they were — when the point there isn't even Trotskyite) but the point is they had some strange little political agenda that had nothing to do with gay anything. And they kept kind of like taking pot shots at me challenging my leadership and my response was, "Hello, you wanna? Hey, guess what, I'll stay home and you go to the speaking event! I'll stay home and you run the coffee house." I mean, [Laughs] I was doing things because other people weren't doing them and I wanted to see them done.

So the most humorous thing happened. I know this was shortly before Thanksgiving in Because for example, one time they were — oh yeah — they were going to do that. They were going to go on a speaking gig right? They were going to speak to some group. And I get this call, and I was going like rest that day, right? Wow! It was a day off. Instead of working seven days a week for months at a time, it was a day off. And I get this call from them, could I please go to the speaking event instead of them?



This was a group of women, you – because everybody in their house has decided that this would be a good day for them to all drop acid together, okay? Just to give you an idea of their priorities. And so these people who are savaging me because I'm such a power grabber and everything. Here they are and you can see what their priorities are, their priorities are to take drugs and mess over their heads and so that was the kind of nonsense that I had to deal with.

Not just me personally but in the left you would deal with these people that were more like — what's the word for it? They were just sort of obstructionists. They never really did anything. They never really volunteered. They never accomplished. They just were always criticizing the people who were trying to do things. And so there came a point where I just, I was so tired anyway because I was just way over-extended. And they were doing this kind of weird talking against me amongst other people — most of whom were just course, just sort of like spectators and consumers. They would watch this happen. They would consume the services that I was providing and I was just too tired. And I quit.

I remember it was a Tuesday night and I called somebody and said, well, actually I was living with several women in a collective household and I said, "Not going to the coffee house tonight. I'm not going to all the stuff tonight." And those people thought I was bluffing. They thought, oh she'll show up.

I remember my housemates coming back and saying, "Oh, they figure you're just playing games." And I never went. [Strong exhale]

I completely stopped every, all my gay activities at that particular juncture in my life. And I soon after, just moved out of this collective household, started living with a person who was my then lover and was not involved in gay stuff. And so I can't tell you very much about what happened after Thanksgiving until I returned from law school — which I attended in Berkeley in 1975 and then got re-involved in the gay movement. But I just had a spectacular burn out and pulled out of activities.

And so what I decided to do was I enrolled in law school at Berkeley and attended Berkeley law school from 1972 to 1975 — which again was a very common thing for people that, who were activists, social activists, political activists to do particularly at that time. I

mean continuing to now of course but in that time it was the old, “you’ll get a law degree and you will use those tools to accomplish our goals.” This is fine and in fact, traditionally, there have always been lawyers involved in any kind of activist movement whether its left, right or center.

But and then when I was in Berkeley I wasn’t in – there wasn’t – it was real strange. I was in the Bay Area right? Where it’s supposed to have this incredible gay population — which it does have — but in that law school at the University of California there were very few out gay students, really more of the guys who were out. Gosh, I mean I think I knew one or two other gay women in that whole law school. And this was a law school that was 40%. But so I wasn’t really in any substantial way a gay activist. Actually, we did a little bit of consciousness raising organizing among the law students.

JL: I didn’t ask you earlier.

HART: Sure.

JL: I’m sorry to interrupt but what was your undergrad major?

HART: Oh, at Reed my degree was in international studies, which is an interdisciplinary social science degree and I did a thesis on Latin American Economic Development.

So then I came back to Portland, graduated from law school at Berkeley in June 75. Didn’t even bother to stay in California to take the bar because I didn’t want to be in California. And came, came up to Oregon and studied for the bar that summer. I took the bar exam, passed the bar exam, and was submitted to the bar. It must of been like September off and then I set up a law practice. I just went out on my own. And got into the offices of a bunch more experienced attorneys.

Kathleen Nachtigal, who was a Multnomah County circuit court judge, was one of the people who was then just a lawyer in the same offices that I was in. And she was real supportive of gay people through the American Civil Liberties Union, which she was

associated with. And also, the way I originally met her was she represented my lover whose name is Jane Wundram, who was in a fight to gain visitation rights with her daughter, her young four year old daughter at that time the father was trying to deny her visitation rights. So that was one of the kind of early. It wasn't, it's nothing that got to the appellate courts or anything because – I don't even remember who he, the trial judge was, but he just very summarily, "Yes, of course this woman should have visitation rights." I guess, that's not, wasn't quite as controversial as custody rights — might've been a bigger case.

So I started practicing law and for about four years I just had a small civil law practice. The typical thing that people do when they're out of law school and they're crazy enough to hang out a shingle and practice law which, you kind of take whatever cases that come in the door.

I did do several gay custody cases in those years. One was in Clackamas County and I don't remember the case name anymore, but it was a gay dad who was trying to retain custody of his toddler daughter in a situation where the mother had given up custody of the toddler daughter to the man, so she could move out of state to Arizona or some such place with her new boyfriend, who had also left behind his children from a former marriage. And then when she got wind that her, the father in the case was coming out as a gay man, then having not seen her child in like ten months or a year. I mean a child who doesn't even recognize her anymore, right? This is like a little girl who's like a year and a half. Just on the basis that she's incensed that the father is gay. It comes back and tries to get custody, and it was a great case. I mean, I was relatively new practicing law and this was in Clackamas County and whatever judge we had don't remember — but, it was a total unknown. There had been virtually no gay custody cases in the state and Clackamas County wasn't exactly known, as everybody always assumed that Multnomah County judges and all kinds of things would be more progressive — so we didn't know what we were going to have.

And so the mother put on her case, and the mother's attorney, of course, put her case and then after they finished it was time for us to make our case. The burden is on her, the burden of proof is on her because she's trying to change the arrangement. She's trying

to get custody and change the custody arrangements. So gay, straight, whatever — the burden is definitely on her to show that there is a change of circumstances sufficient to justify a change of custody.

And I remember after they put on their case, the judge called myself and the other attorney into chambers and basically looked at the other attorney and said, “Is that all you got?” Okay, just the fact that the guy is gay. They weren’t able to say anything about his parenting. He was obviously a really wonderful, loving, nurturing father which is why the mother — if she, assuming she cared at all for the welfare of the child which is questionable — had even, she’d apparently thought enough of him to leave her child with him. And basically the judge didn’t even want to, we didn’t even put on our case. I mean, spent various time rebutting witnesses when they were putting on their case. The judge just said, “You haven’t done” — to the other side. “You have not shown anything, any change of circumstance that would warrant changing, changing custody.” So we didn’t even have to put on a case negate their kind of stuff beyond that, and so it was great. It was a great victory. It’s not, again, you’re not gonna, it’s not, it never got to an appellate court so there’s no great opinion or something like that. It was just a down to earth, wonderful just great! It felt so good! I mean, no.

In other parts of the country there were judges that were pulling custody away from gay parents or denying custody to parents. So it’s not, just because this guy made the right call both legally and morally doesn’t mean that it wasn’t a forgone conclusion because it’s still true to this day that gay parents in various jurisdictions are denied custody because judges — quite aside from evidence in a case — a judge just takes (almost as a matter of what they call public knowledge) that a gay person is an unsuitable parent.

But anyway, so I did a little bit of that kind of gay organizing. The most gay involved thing that I did during that time period was Governor Bob Straub, the governor of Oregon at that time, appointed at the behest of a local group called the Portland Town Council — which was the gay rights group that had been formed when I was off at law school that was trying to be a political actor and get government as well as private organizations to do

kind of pro-gay things. They convinced Governor Straub to appoint what was unfortunately called the Task Force on Sexual Preference.

I say unfortunately because sexual preference it's, well is it a sexual preference? Is it an orientation? Is it innate? Is it chosen? And by the name of it, by calling it the Task Force on Sexual Preference — so right away we were almost giving the — our adversaries, they're, "Oh, this is your choice. You're choosing an immoral life style." Kind of, "It's a preference" kind of thing. "Why don't you just prefer something else?"

But anyway, and so, the Task Force. We had either 12 or 14 members, mostly from the Portland area but we actually had a minister from Medford and from a few other not Portland places. And the purpose was supposed to be to basically identify issues for the Governor — this is like being advisory right? You investigate and make a report and then the Governor and other people in government can, can review this information and decide if there are any governmental policies — either executive or legislative — that they want to undertake, to address any issues we thought should be addressed.

**[End of Tape 1, Side 1]**

**Tape 1, Side 2**  
*2000 November 14*

So the Task Force met for a year. I think it was pretty much every month we met as a task force as a whole and we would decide what our agenda would to be. Dividing up the different topics that we thought were relevant. And there were also individual little sub-committees, and I'll tell you right now — and I have to think about it really hard to remember the different sub-committees and things but — we ended issuing a report that was like about a hundred pages long which mostly I wrote — which is fine. But it was, there is, it's kind of drawing together what the whole task force did. And we made recommendations — boy, again, I'm gonna say roughly maybe twenty recommendations, some of which were directed at state government or local government and some were directed at private organizations. The point being that problems can be ameliorated and some things should be, government policy that should be changed and some things you really need people in the private sector to help with. And there was the report that was submitted to Governor Straub, who of course thanked us for our work and that kind of thing.

And I don't think you could really say that there was anything very immediate that came out of the work of the task force other than being a part of what is still the ongoing process of educating the public, educating people in positions of power and influence. That sexual orientation is not something that should be used against people. That there are all kinds of — there are a lot of government policies that need to be scrutinized to make sure that they do not either intentionally or inadvertently discriminate against people or work against people.

Whether it's — or in private policies too — the good old, the hospital that won't let the persons, the dying persons lover in because they're not blood kin and they're not a marriage relation. Well, they can't be a marriage relation because their gay marriage is not permitted and just to give you one example. And there are a lot of things that work against gay people that are, just are kind of a result of thoughtlessness. It's kind of a lack, it's like you don't exist. Therefore the policies of an organization — whether it's governmental or private — like insurance for the partners of gay, the domestic partners of gay people. Like

health insurance or whatever. Nowadays lots of private companies do include those domestic partners in their insurance. But that was a long time coming. That, first the problems had to be identified whether it was through the reports like ours or through various other efforts that have happened through the years.

So, let's see, so the report of the task force; I guess the report must of come out, it either came out at the end of 1977 or it came in don't exactly remember when. It wasn't exactly a very momentous occasion kind of thing. But that was the way that I was involved at that point. So I was chairperson of that task force. I don't appoint the members of the task force. They were kind of appointed by somebody in the governor's office, kind of scrounged up who that was going to be.

And the fun part of that task force was that the gay members of that task force didn't even know who each other were. We had sort of, it was just decided kind of individually that people thought that they would remain closeted as members of the task force, which kind of tells you the time period because nowadays, of course, that would be like, of course the members of the task force wouldn't be closeted. They would be identified. But in those days the point was, I guess the point we were implicitly making was that it was nobody's business who was who. Who was gay, who wasn't gay. And honestly it was not until that task force had long since concluded its business that I found out who some of the dead gay members of the task force were. And so much for blatant screaming faggot stereotypes of people being obvious in and in their sexual orientation. Honestly it's not true.

But anyway, but it was an interesting experience. I met a lot of people. That's for sure. It was just real interesting operating with that kind of legitimacy of being this kind of creature of the government. We weren't paid or anything like that as a – we just had this kind of like half-time sort of administrative assistant kind of a person that was financed by the government. But boy, basically there was no money. I mean I paid to print that report out of my own money. Because no, there was no money that was really allocated for it beyond this half-time staff person. So, let's see yeah?

Let's see. That was the task force.

So as I had said, I was practicing law all this time, kind of just, just a little civil law practice like bankruptcies and divorces and strange little property cases. The cow got on the wrong side of the fence [Laughs] literally. Things like that. And I wasn't really all that happy practicing law because I'm a very informal person. And I really — although I totally respect and understand why we have this very formal legal system with a very intricate procedures and this and that and the other thing wasn't really enjoying doing that kind of work. And so, I went through a process of trying to figure out what I really wanted to do.

And I'd already, I don't remember where this idea has ever first came about but, at some point it seemed like in my, the various activist roles that I had and this is going to sound very female but I'm not — it's, well, I can't deny that I was raised as female in this society so who knows? Maybe this is the result of being female. Most guys are not the ones that provide the food at social gatherings kind of a thing. But it always seemed that I had — I always, my Jewish background, where food is also given a lot of importance. But at the various political things that I did I would always be the person who would be making sure that there was adequate food and beverages and things.

Like when the *Willamette Bridge* used to have their all night sessions to put the paper together. This was back in the days when you didn't put the paper together on a computer but you literally cut and pasted and glued pages together and then they were photographed and then they were. Anyway, I would be bringing the boxes of food and drinks and making sure that people would had that kind of sustenance. Not exclusively, I wasn't just the little, somebody's good little wife or something like that kind of a stereotype. But that was definitely something I always attended to.

And for example, there was at the of Southeast 39th and Stark, there was a feminist-ran restaurant called Mountain Moving Café, that was some of the people that ran that were people I had known at Reed — both men and women. And it was just a short-lived organization, very wonderful memories of it but only existed for about two years.

But for example, when we were starting to do gay things in the Legislature, the early gay rights bills in the Legislature and I'm not gonna be real good on years here but it must have been, it had to be 1975 to 1977 because that's when the cafe existed. As part of our



organizing to support those bills, we started having Sunday brunches at Mountain Moving Café where I would — boy, I don't even remember where that food came from — oh, no, I mean the cafe, the cafe was making the food but we — but it — point is, it was my idea. “Oh let's have it at a brunch.” People will come to eat and then we will basically solicit them to write letters to the Legislature like which, the bill is in this committee. “Okay, everybody before you leave after eating today, come up to the table, write out the good-old letter, that says the right things and we'll mail it to the committee.”

And so I just was always really aware of people have to eat. And so, that was something I was attentive to. So that came up in various contexts. And so somewhere along the line I became aware that there were feminists restaurants that were, not only in Portland with Mountain Moving Café, and feminists by the way, doesn't just mean for women. I mean, the Mountain Moving Café collective was both men and women. They would have, I think it was Wednesday nights, they would just have women only nights kind of thing at the Mountain Moving Café but the rest of the time it was both men and women customers as well as people running the place. They did have a little children's play in the one large room of the cafe.

And, so but it also in other cities, like in New York City there was a feminists restaurant called Mother Courage. In Boston or some such place there was a, I think it was something called Blood Roots or something. And again, we would find out about these things through the underground papers. There was actually an underground paper press service. I'm not sure what it's called. But like the main line press has or A.P. or something like that. There was also an underground press service. And we would get copies of all these papers from around the country too. If you working one underground paper, you were kind of aware of what was going on in other places.

So, somehow I got it into my head that Portland — Mountain Moving Café folded right, in about, in 1977. And so I'm casting about for something to do and I pretty much decide that what I want to do is open up a feminist restaurant that could both serve as a more seven-day a week kind of a thing for gay and lesbian people. Unlike the original little 9th Street, yeah it was called 9th Street Exit (that was what the coffee house was called in

Centenary Wilbur), that had only been two nights and all we had was coffee and coffee cake or something. No, this would be a more substantial institution in the community. And so, I decided to open up what has now, of course, become Old Wives' Tales, which opened up in August.

And prior to opening up Old Wives' Tales, the original plan for Old Wives' Tales was that it was going to be a feminist restaurant and bookstore. And that's why it was called Old Wives' Tales. There was already a feminist bookstore in San Francisco called Old Wives' Tales so I kind of ripped off the name from them, which they were kind of pissed off about as matter of fact for several years. But I pointed out to them that it's like the term Old Wives' Tales is kind of like widely used and it's really hard to claim sole rights to what is in fact a cultural kind of an idiom, kind of a thing.

But anyway, so, I decided to open up Old Wives' Tales. I did all kinds of ground work for it. I mean I was still practicing law to a certain extent but I joined the American Booksellers Association. And I went to Colorado Springs to go to there. They have training things, management training things for bookstore owners. I mean, I'd never run a bookstore before or anything or even worked in a bookstore. For a while, there was a bookstore in Beaverton, think it's still there but it's different owners, called Book Vault and I spent a couple of months working in that store after I went to the Booksellers things just to kind of get actual hands on experience. I had legal clients who were then the owners of the Genoa Restaurant and when they heard that I was interested in opening up a feminist restaurant, they invented me to come and work for them. So I worked with them part-time.

I tried to do my homework in terms of preparing before I opened my own place. And then I opened up my own place. And although I've maintained my membership in the Oregon State Bar like I — what's called an active member in the Bar but that doesn't mean I actually practice. It's just means I pay dues and I keep up my continuing legal education credits is what it means. But so I'm still a lawyer but I haven't practiced really in twenty years.

And I opened up Old Wives' Tales. Initially, this was — in there were the highest interest rates, boy, of this century in the United States. I mean the prime rate was way up

in the high teens or something which and then of course, loans — you tack on other points beyond that. So to get money to open up a business. I didn't really have very much money and so, it was, it was turning out to be a little bit ambitious to try to open up the bookstore and the restaurant simultaneously. So I made the pretty-to-me obvious and wise decision to just start out with the restaurant component of it. The theory being, of course, that people spend more money on food than they do on books. However unfortunate that may be.

And so I did open up the restaurant with the expectation that later I would phase-in the bookstore. And then there was more political fighting about the bookstore part of it. Because there had been a bookstore called A Woman's Place, which was kind of a lesbian operated bookstore. And they got all freaked out at the idea that I would open up a bookstore in competition with them. The only reason I was considering doing that was because their bookstore, to me, was extremely inadequate and they were going off on very esoteric policies like not allowing male children in the bookstore and all kinds of real extreme separatist crazy stuff — in my opinion. Which — so my attention wasn't — to me, it wasn't competing with them at all. It was doing what they weren't doing, which was, if I opened up a feminist bookstore component to Old Wives' Tales it would have been open to a much wider variety of people. But basically for both financial reasons and personal energy reasons and from their kind of negativity, I put that off. And then, after a point I realized I couldn't do it anyway, that it was just gonna be way too much to do.

Later, that collective changed and for a while, I gave them some financial support like when they opened up, they had many locations. Women's Place Bookstore had many locations and eventually they had a location on Northeast Broadway, over past Lloyd Center. And there was time when I — for example, they opened but they didn't have an overhead sign, the kind of sign perpendicular to a building so when you're driving down the street you kind of like see, that's there. So, I went and spent a thousand bucks, or whatever it was in those days, and bought them that kind of a sign, because I was trying to help them be a kind of success. I mean the fact that they had, kind of, moved away from their really crazy separatist kind of politics. They eventually did fold, however, a number of

years later. I had long since given up any idea of doing a feminist and of course, nowadays there is another, yet another feminist bookstore town.

So, Old Wives' Tales in the early days, in particular, initially we were in a sense successful both financially and, sort of, in terms of providing community services right from the beginning. For one thing I'd polled different members of different feminists groups on what a good locations for the bookstore would be. Kind of little marketing surveys. Would it be good if it was – there were certain, let's say storefronts, that I was considering. So in addition to the location that in fact we have at and Burnside on the eastside, there was a location at, I think it was, Northeast Broadway that was a possibility, 'cause it was a restaurant that was kind of for sale there. And then there was a place over on Powell and something, I don't remember what. 26th or – I don't even remember. And in any event, it just turned out that the location that I could get and that seemed to be well responded to that people would be able to get to it from throughout the metropolitan, the Burnside location was good. And so, I opened up Old Wives' Tales.

We opened right from the beginning with strong support from the feminist community the straight feminist community, both gay and men, both men and women, and also from gay and lesbian community because again, people had known for months that that this was in the works. Holly Hart was doing this kind of thing. I kind of put out the word on it. So, when we opened up it was a Friday evening, I remember like at about five o'clock in August and there was a line, wrapped around the block. And so, we were very busy right from the beginning.

We started out with a small, kind of a multi-ethnic vegetarian but also — in those days we even had a little bit of red meat, usually lamb for ethnic dishes as well as chicken and seafood. And the space that we had was very big, four-thousand square foot building and our business wasn't really that big in terms of needing all that space for seating. So, we had a rather large children's play room and we had in addition to the main dining room, we had a rear dining room that wasn't released for dining. It was more just used for groups to have meetings. And all kinds of groups. I mean, in a way, the way I looked at it was that even though we were starting out, I was starting out the idea that it would be a feminist

place and in fact the name was Old Wives' Tales Restaurant and Women's Center — which I always find it hard to explain because it was never just going to be for women. And sure enough within, don't know, a year, year and a half we had dropped the name Women's Center because it was kind of misleading. But, and I guess it was almost that it was an expression of my own confusion, that there were a lot of different things that I wanted to be serving, a lot of different communities and we're different things to different people kind of a thing and we always have been.

But even back then, in addition to gay and lesbian groups and feminists, we would get, God Solar Oregon, Hanford Anti-Nuclear, Sierra Club. I mean we would get a wide variety, from center to left activist groups who would not necessarily come in and buy a lot food but we would just, let people reserve the meeting room there was no requirements they had to have meals or something like that. As well as having just the actual restaurant business in the main dining room. Let's see.

And boy, the history of Old Wives' Tales is a long history. It's gone through lots of little meanders. So, let me stop and back up for a second and think of the best way to approach this.

Well, there's — and also I should say that at this time in there were very few restaurants that were bothering to serve any vegetarian choices of food. So, even though I was not a vegetarian myself, I was more from the fact that I really like multi-ethnic food, meaning food from everywhere. And that Portland at that time, again this is very hard to believe in the year 2000 as Portland has more restaurants per-capita than any other restaurant in the universe and every ethnic cuisine. I mean there are certainly places like New York City that in fact, you can find ethnic cuisines you can't find in Portland. But Portland just has a stunning variety of ethnic cuisine. But in those days, Portland was basically American food, a few Cantonese restaurants. I mean, there were no Thai restaurants. There were no Vietnamese restaurants right, because this was after the wars there. There were no African restaurants. You have all these Ethiopian restaurants now. So, and there was no, the whole concept of a fusion restaurant a place that would, where you would use ingredients from different, ethnic cuisine's would be combined in a

particular dish. This was a new concept. And I think, I mean, I had the, I came up with the phrase multi-ethnic to characterize my own restaurant. I just kind of invented it. You know, kind of a thing because, how did you explain this strange creature that had food from different parts of the world? And so, one of the advantages was the fact that since, since I correctly noted that gee, there were a lot of vegetarians — which is of course common in among leftists in particular. That this became one of our sources of our prosperity because, because in fact people would come to us, they'd come to us because they knew we were gay-friendly and they would come to us feminists friendly and we had this playroom.

So if you were a parent, where could you go other than Burger King or McDonald's? You could come to Old Wives' Tales and actually have a sit down meal and we would have a playroom. And people would come because we had the extensive resource bulletin boards where groups could put up notices and then, in turn people would come in and they could read notices and find out what was happening in town in terms of different activists social groups. And let's see.

So, a lot of this was, really an extension of me and of what I very personally what I wanted and what I cared about. And so, so we were successful from the beginning. We started it wasn't financially easy going because I had, I had very nonexistent resources opening Old Wives' Tales. We opened in August because I had run out of money and we needed — I couldn't pay a single other bill. If we didn't start selling food, we were gonna fold before we opened. So it was a total shoe-string, desperation kind of thing and I had, although I had tried to prepare myself as I described before getting some background in the bookstore business and a little at a restaurant business.

But really I didn't know what I was doing financially and I was borrowing money at these ridiculous interest rates that were existing then in the economy and so, it's an utter miracle that here I sit twenty years later with a very prosperous business, that is supporting myself and my child well, kind of thing. Because man, it was some heavy slogging, difficult times the first couple of years.

And it really is the kind of thing where other people have come to me since then and then people will say, "Well, I'm thinking of opening a restaurant and da-da-da." And

I'm always telling people get years of experience working for somebody else. Not just a few months here and a few months there. Make your mistakes on somebody else's nickel, kind of thing. Because, boy, if I had known what I know now then we would've done much better financially. I mean I learned everything the hard way. I really didn't know anything about running a restaurant substantially.

And, but fortunately I am a high-energy person who, does not, once I start to do something I have trouble getting myself off that track. I tend to follow through even if I hate it. Even if it's excruciating. I still stay with it, which I think it's sometimes benefited the community here in Oregon more than it's benefited me personally. But anyway, it's like people will say, "Oh, you were so courageous." No. The word is foolish.

But again, I lived to tell about it and I can even laugh. So, let's see, more about Old Wives. There some funny stuff connected with, gay stuff with Old Wives' Tales because, for example, on my staff as well as in the community outside of Old Wives' Tales. Again, there were these lesbians who were lesbian separatists. Actually, when I stop to think about it some of these women weren't even lesbians, they were even straight women who were just really kind of, very negative towards males. But it was mostly lesbians. And these women didn't like the idea that from the get-go Old Wives' Tales had been for both men and women. And it was kind of a replay of what was, what some of the bookstore stuff was like where I'm, I know what I want to do. I know what I'm trying to create. I know who I'm trying to serve a broader community. And they have a much narrower vision. And they are pissed at me because I don't agree with their vision. And, my position on that was so go and open up a separatist restaurant and leave me alone. But I'm not here to, to do what their political goals are. I mean here to do what my political and social and personal goals are. But I did have some energy went down that drain of wrangling with these people.

And there came a point, and I'm, it was just, the restaurant had only been open for like, it must of been just a little over a year. Couldn't have been very long at all and some of these people were just pissed at me because I wasn't willing to be a separatist and have Old Wives' Tales be a separatist. And so, one morning I come to work and the signs outside

the building — originally said Old Wives' Tales and Women's Center — and I came to work and Women's Center had been spray painted out in a vandalistic kind of way, kind of thing.

And also in the gay newspaper at that point, there was a newspaper *Just Out*, which still exists — and these people were again writing some of their pro-separatist, anti-Old Wives' Tales, anti-Holly Hart kind of stuff. And I was responding to some of their stuff in that media, but without much success because you can't — the fact is there is no reconciliation here. I mean, it's just two different views. It's not, there isn't a middle ground. And so, they, they called for a boycott of Old Wives' Tales and I can't even remember the exact rationale for the boycott, but again it was that I was hideously politically incorrect for various reasons. And here's the irony; the irony is that although their spray painting out Women's Center if you really stopped and looked at it you'd realize, well that's it's like graffiti. It's like not, it's isn't graffiti but it isn't, it's just not anything, it's not this neat painting out of something.

This intentional obliteration by management to sort of like change the name or change the description. But at the time they're calling for a boycott, our business jumped and it jumped, I mean it's just astonishing to think about it even now. It jumped because all those people that used to drive by Old Wives' Tales that had never stepped foot inside before, because they thought that we excluded men by saying Women's Center, started coming in because they'd been curious about what we were! Okay? And they started coming in and our business — at the time that the lesbian separatist community called a boycott against Old Wives' Tales, our business jumped 25% that spring, okay? And I will tell...

**[End of Tape 1, Side 2]**



**Tape 2, Side 1**  
*2000 November 14*

WD: Right beside this first tape.

HART: Okay.

JL: Yeah. And I'm just gonna forward this a little bit 'cause it's sort...

HART: Okay. Well, anyway, so again ironically, the separatists actually, well the net result of the separatist activity was for more men than ever to come to Old Wives' Tales, and for more women than ever to come. Women who had stayed away because they had thought that the men in their lives were not welcome, and they didn't want to go to a place where that was the case.

So, Old Wives' Tales kind of continued on the trajectory, because I was responsive and paid attention to my customers, my very wide range of customers, and what do they wanna eat and that kind of thing. Became more and more successful just from the standpoint of being a successful restaurant. But we have always maintained our identity, kind of, as a social activist place. We do lots of contributing food for benefits and mail endless, the kind of, the gift certificates that, hundreds, literally several hundred gift certificates a year we donate. That a wide variety of organizations, not only leftist or, progressive groups, but a wide range of churches as well as synagogues and all kinds of community groups use to help in the fundraising and the activities of those community groups.

And again this kind of reflects my, very much, my personal convictions. Which is, I do believe that a healthy democratic society, a healthy society needs a wide variety of volunteer groups. I mean voluntary association groups. And so that, for example, even though I'm Jewish, most of our gift certificates go to religious organizations, go to churches or to the archdioceses, which their office for years was up the street from us. And it's just because I never, I had a narrow, real narrow vision.

It was never for me just a question of, of promoting leftist things, although those were my personal priorities for many years, gay rights and women's rights, civil rights, anti-war, that kind of thing. But, oh, disarmament, nuclear disarmament, those kinds of things. No, those were maybe the things I had been the most involved in. But as our customer base expanded, then we got more and more solicitations from a wide range of community organizations, and I feel about that. Because I really, I love pluralistic America. I love pluralistic Portland. And I think that it's a heck of a lot healthier to have all these vibrant groups in our community, even though sometimes, obviously, their politics I disagree with.

I mean, the Catholic Church is against abortion. So here's Old Wives' Tales on the one hand, sending out gift certificates for the of various parish churches and various Catholic social organizations, social service organizations, at the same time that I'm sending out gift certificates to support NARAL. Because, at some, at some level, first of all I mean I don't think you withdraw your support from organizations that do good work just because you disagree with them on one issue or limited issues.

WD: What's NARAL?

HART: National Abortion Rights Action League. And, and in fact the advertising for Old Wives' Tales largely consists of the publicity that we get, where we don't, from these kinds of gift certificates and from this kind of benefit work that we do. That is we don't run ads in the newspaper, we don't run – those kinds of things. If you see a print ad, it's going to, typically for Old Wives 'Tales, most commonly, although we have a few print ads in actual, things that we pay for like in the programs for the local Children's Theater Company, because of course we have a children's playroom. But most of the print mention of Old Wives' Tales is gonna be an acknowledgement that we provided food or gift certificates to a non-profit group in the publication put out by that non-profit group. And I love that! I think that I'd much rather give money to a non-profit group in support of their activities or, or give food, which then they raise money with. Because typically it is more that we're giving food and gift certificates rather than direct financial donations. I'd rather do that than give

money to *Willamette Week*, or give money to the *Oregonian* or something, those kinds of things.

I mean that's sort of an illustration of how vastly different my view is from the separatists. I just don't – even when I was an activist with S.D.S., Students for a Democratic Society I wasn't one of those narrow fanatic S.D.S.-ers. I just wasn't. I'm just not a dogmatic person that way. Well, I'm certainly not professing to be the Buddha here and saying I'm not a dogmatic. Obviously I have some strong opinions and values and things. But, what I'm trying to say is that, again, I really I like pluralism, I like diversity, I really believe in our democratic society [Laughs]. And in the vibrance of the many different groups that make up that democratic society. Old Wives' Tales, at least hopefully for the foreseeable future, will continue, basically as a successful restaurant that continues to support community groups in various ways.

Meanwhile, after Old Wives' Tales had opened up in terms of my personal life, I decided, I'd always assumed I would have a child. And for a long time what I assumed was that I would end up in a relationship with some other woman who had a child. Since there have always been gay women that usually they would have children from a previous heterosexual marriage. That was historically when I was first coming out the most common situation. But when that didn't seem to be panning out, and I was approaching thirty years of age – or, no I was, I'm sorry, I was approaching thirty-five. I mean I opened up Old Wives' Tales when I was, what? Thirty-three or thirty-two or something like that. And, after starting to sort of get publicity, that it was an option.

And that in fact the, at the Oregon Health Sciences University, which back then was under a different name, it was the University of Oregon Medical School. They had a, a regional sperm bank there, and, in fact they were inseminating, they would inseminate gay women. Which again has not always been true in different jurisdictions in other states, sometimes women would have to prove that they were married and have their husband's permission and on and on and on. So I decided that even though I was single at that time, that I didn't wanna wait, that I wanted to have a child. And I, for about six months I tried to get pregnant, and then on September 28<sup>th</sup>, was inseminated. And within two weeks

realized I was pregnant. It may sound, seem, most people cannot identify the date that, the day that they were inseminated. Of course this is easier to do when you're doing this in the form of artificial insemination. I was, just for the public record, for history echoing down the ages.

I wanna say that I loved being pregnant, that I was so incredibly happy. If my daughter was sitting in here and listening I would not be permitted to say any of this, because of course as an eighteen, now eighteen year old, she's embarrassed for her mother to talk about her or anything like that very much. But, anyway so on June 26, I gave birth to a healthy baby girl. And to this day, I mean people at Old Wives' Tales, I mean I walked around pregnant, I was as big as an elephant there for a while there toward the end. So everybody knew I was pregnant. And the baby's, my daughter's birth, I announced by a sign in the restaurant, with photographs of my infant daughter and, with much, fanfare in that forum. And her first birthday was a party at the restaurant.

To this day I get people coming up, maybe somebody who's been, moved out of town and they'll back to town, wanna know "How's your daughter?" I mean people who've never really knew her but, her birth, she doesn't really realize this, but her birth and her infancy was kind of a public event, at least for some chunk of the Portland community anyway.

Like they say about Gore, who as, as we speak, we do not know if Al Gore is going to be president of the United States because this is a point in history where there's this great vote-counting debate going on in, in the state of Florida between Al Gore and George W. Bush. And to see who's going to be our president. But they say that when Al Gore was born, his father, who was then a senator had it put on the front page of the main Tennessee paper that his son was born.

Well, I didn't attempt to get it on the front page of the *Oregonian*, but I made damn sure that anybody walking into Old Wives' Tales knew that I had this gorgeous baby girl and her name is Pier. She doesn't have a middle name. My life for the last eighteen years has been running Old Wives' Tales and raising my daughter. And, pretty much been a

single parent the whole time, there was a couple years when I when I was involved in a relationship, but pretty much been a single parent, and so it's just been the two of us.

There is kind of an interesting aspect, that's come up recently, connected with my child. My daughter happens to be straight but she attends Catlin school where she's a senior. And at Catlin there's a group called SAFE which is something like Students And Friends for Equality or something, that's the acronym. And it's a gay, it's basically a group for it's a sexual diversity group it's to represent the interests of kids who are not straight. But my daughter has always had friends who were gay, who were members of this group, and so she's kind of, like, tagged along with this group.

And, last year the leaders of the group pretty much graduated. And when they kind of looked around to see who they were gonna, kind of pass the leadership to the other gay kids that remained at Catlin which of course is a very student body, small student body, there's only about 240 kids in the high school at Catlin. And there wasn't really, there didn't seem to be any gay kids who were, who wanted to really assume that kind of leadership responsibility. I mean in any event there's not very many gay kids at a small school, and there's not very many out kids. They kind of turned to my daughter and asked if she'd be willing to be the leader of the group. So strangely enough my straight daughter is leader of the gay group at Catlin Gabel School this year. And this has been kind of an important year because there was a state ballot measure in this last election. About ballot measure 9, which was an attempt by an anti-gay group to block discussion basically, they call it sanctioning or whatever of homosexuality related issues in the public schools. Which fortunately was defeated. But the point is it is important that at Catlin Gabel this group continued.

I guess, and in fact my daughter worked with the No on 9 committee locally going down to their office and making phone calls to voters and that kind of things. And she voted! This was she turned eighteen so she voted in this election. And, so what's funny about it is, is my daughter hasn't really known me as a gay activist particularly.

When she was much younger – there is a lot I haven't told you now that I think about it. When she was young prior to her being about eight years old, I did continue to be a gay

activist in various respects outside of the restaurant. I organized a group called Women with Women and Children, which technically was founded by somebody else. Then I took over major responsibility for it, and, and yes we used to have Sunday brunches at the Northwest Service Center. Even, while Sunday brunch is running at Old Wives' Tales restaurant I'm carting food from Old Wives' Tales restaurant crosstown to the Northwest Service Center, so that the lesbian mothers group could get together. There were several dozen women every week with their kids. In support of lesbian mothers.

Oh man, it's almost funny there's been a lot of different groups that have had mostly usually pretty kind of short lived, just a few years, that I've founded over the years. Because again it just at least when I was younger it was, it just seemed tremendously easy to start a group. "I know how to do that!"

And I mean there was a group called Women in Academia, there was a group called the Lavender Literati a book group a lesbian book group. Honest to god I'm sure I really will never remember all the little, little groups, most of which were pretty short-lived and just addressed the interests of, of relatively small groups of people. But that was definitely, for years that was something that I did a lot of.

But in any event, my daughter when she got to be about seven or eight, I really decided I – it was in kind of another one of those decisions that I was like over-committed and that I really just needed to stop all the activist stuff. And just focus on the restaurant and focus on her. And so that's what I've done for most of the last over ten years. I haven't really been involved in any gay organizations, really haven't. And almost no organizations at all.

I've been much more involved in the Jewish community, and I guess that also reflected the fact with my, having my daughter and then I was raised in a Jewish neighborhood in Chicago to a secular Jewish family. Here in Portland, you have to go a little bit more out of your way to get involved with the Jewish community. I mean there isn't a Jewish neighborhood as such and so once my daughter started getting to be six and seven and that kind of thing I started looking around for a Sunday School for her to attend.

And she ended up attending at Neva Shalom which is the conservative congregation and we –.

The house that we are sitting in right now, I mean the reason I live in this house is because it is within walking distance of the Jewish Community Center and that synagogue. I up until this house, the entire time I've lived in Portland. And I'm 53 years old and I've lived here basically since I was other than the three years in law school, so most of my adult life. I've lived in somewhere in either Southeast or Northeast Portland. So we live over here because of our Jewish affiliations.

And so, yes, in recent years my involvement is much, been much more with Jewish organizations. Even this morning! I'm a part of a, there's a adult study-group that meets every Tuesday morning for two and a half hours, at Beth Israel in Northwest Portland that I've been doing for the last couple of years.

So, do you folks have any questions? I mean I'm sure I'll think of all kinds of I mean, in 53 years [Laughs] eventually you remember all kinds of things, but I don't know if there's something I haven't, some thread that you'd like to ask me about. Put you on the spot?

JL: I have a couple...

HART: Okay, sure. Go.

JL: I was just wondering of any of the groups that you were involved with, do you remember or is there anything you could tell us about the, like class or racial mix of the people? Just out of curiosity.

HART: Yeah, right. Well, take the group Women with Women and Children. Lesbian mothers, although they're more and more common, I mean when my daughter was born they were not common. And then in those early years, there weren't that many people, but generally it's been very, relatively diverse in terms of both racially and class-wise. And it's that kind of a thing about, that gay people are such a relative minority that people tend to,

there's been more cross-race, cross-class coming together of people so that particular group. Wow, I mean there were a lot of working class women, as well as, as middle-class women in that group. On the other hand that particular group wasn't getting a whole lot of more professional gay women but that isn't even true. Because they, even there, there were professional women in that group but they were more counter-culture professional women as opposed to lesbians who were more conventional in their dress and conventional in their, I don't know [Laughs], in other social dimensions. And then in terms of other groups, is there anything particularly you were wondering about or...?

JL: Not necessarily. I mean, Portland, at least in the past has been kind of a white town. A lot I mean, seems like it at least for, sort of a, I don't know. Maybe that's the wrong perception, but I grew up in a pretty white, suburban.

HART: Sure, yeah. Well, and I mean that's just a fact. I mean you can't have a lot of Black lesbians showing up at an organization when there are not a lot of Black lesbians in Portland. But, boy, it seems to me I mean certainly at Old Wives' Tales, Old Wives' Tales itself, we get a relative diversity of people. Although, by the way not so much working class, but it is more of a middle class place. Of course, middle class America is a wide definition. But I will give you an example.

I mean there's a Black men's group that hangs out a lot, meets a lot at Old Wives' Tales, a kind of informally. A man named Josiah Hill just passed away, who, he had an enormous memorial service, hundreds and hundreds of people attended last weekend. And he was a regular at Old Wives' Tales. He is the one that founded a lead-screening program for children in Northeast Portland that meets once a month at Old Wives' Tales. We supply the food that is used to feed the volunteers that are involved in that lead-screening program. At lunchtime, during the course of the Saturdays when they're screening all these children, we feed those volunteers. And I originally knew him because he had a child at the Portland Waldorf School at the same time that my daughter was at the Portland Waldorf School.



So, I mean, in a lot of ways I always feel like Portland is a small town. And you meet people in one connection, and then, again, there's my restaurant. And so then they, for various reasons people come into the restaurant and for [Laughs] some kind of support for whatever, kind of, what their political push is or their social push. So personally I tend to see a, quite a lot, a diversity of people from different social groups that in fact do come to the restaurant. Yeah that's [Laughs] about the most I can say. Yeah. Yeah?

JL: No, that's great. I also have another question. Did...

WD: No, go ahead.

JL: I'm sorry, did – well, one thing I've noticed, I was in high school in the late 1980s – graduated in 1988, and it seemed like there were more men that were coming out at that time, at least in my perception, than women. It's – but it still seemed dangerous for the man. Like, I know my best friend was coming out and there was a lot of violence against anyone. Most people thought that I was gay in high school and so there was a lot of violence or hatred directed towards me.

HART: So you were aware of that. Right.

JL: Right, but I've noticed that, at least in my perception, that people today are a little bit more out, with a little less danger. Maybe that's a wrong perception.

HART: Well, you see from my standpoint, there's no way that I know this. Because [Laughs] because for example I'm not a male and I'm not a gay male and I'm 53 years old, I'm this pretty obviously gay female, just because I don't wear make-up and dress in good old blue jeans and sloppy shirts for the most part. And don't do the mannerisms that women, very self-consciously heterosexual women tend to acquire in our society. So I don't, I've been me for so long. [Laughs] I mean, I certainly do have a sense, now, that in Portland it's just

much easier to be gay, you just don't even have to worry about it and you can hug your girlfriend on the street. Whoever you are kind of thing.

I mean but will really confess that I don't really know what the experience of, is directly for young people nowadays or, or even not so young people other than myself. And I'm just kind of I don't know. [Laughs] I've been out for so long that it's – which doesn't, by the way, mean that I'm always comfortable being out. I mean there, I can certainly have moments of "Oh, boy, am I going to be accepted?" and stuff like that. Like, when I first enrolled my daughter at Catlin Gabel, I didn't know what, exactly how that community was gonna respond to a lesbian mother. And what I was, my focus was on what I wanted for my child. And so then it was gonna be, "Well, gonna happen" kind of thing. But, for example when I at one point I moved into Irvington with my daughter when she was younger, because I felt like that was like a safer neighborhood to be gay in. Yeah, that is it's a kind of a neglected neighborhood, it's a multi-racial neighborhood, it's...

JL: That's right.

HART: Yeah, yeah, exactly. So there are certainly neighborhoods that I think it's much more uncomfortable to be gay in, kind of thing. But this neighborhood that I live in now is a very conventional kind of a middle class or upper, really upper middle class, more, neighborhood. And this is not a typical place where you would expect to find gay people, although like everywhere else there are gay people sprinkled throughout here. But I have no idea who they are! In other words I don't have any gay neighbors. I'm not living in the Hawthorne district where you can, where obviously there's gonna be a lot of gay people. There's just certain other neighborhoods where there's gonna be a lot of gay people. But again that wasn't my agenda. My agenda was to be more connected up with the Jewish institutions in this neighborhood, is what drew me here. So I, yeah I don't know that I could, I don't know that I really have an awareness of the kind sequence of the different [Laughs] chunks of time in Portland, and how that's been different for gay people.

What my daughter does say about, even at a place like Catlin Gabel, is that, I forget exactly how she puts it. But basically what she says is that nobody would ever think of making a racial comment in Catlin Gabel right? Or pretty much a class comment or something. But that still people will make comments, I guess one idiom is to say, "Oh, that's so gay." Which, I don't know if you're aware of that idiom. And she'll point to different off-hand comments that people will I make. Where they're not even necessarily trying to slam gay people, but they don't even stop to think about that what they're saying is derived from things, which could be interpreted as slamming gay people. Just the way you or I could say somebody "gypped" somebody else without realizing it meant gypsy, and it was associated with gypsy, you – it's actually in origin a racial slur, kind of thing. And so that, again, is one of the reasons why she was interested in making sure that that group has continued until eventually, of course, there will be future gay leaders of the group at her school. Because that's still not a done deal in terms of [Laughs] of, of total acceptance and total comfort.

And, I mean, there's there are still kids struggling with coming out at Catlin Gabel. Not necessarily, of course, because they're gonna be greeted by anything hostile from anybody. But simply because it's still not as easy to be gay and to be sure that the people around you are going to accept you, as it is to be straight. Where it doesn't even occur to you that this is anything that you should conceal? So, what else you got for me? [Laughs]

WD: I was wondering if you could tell us, or if there was anything you thought you should tell us about your experience in the Jewish community as a lesbian and as a lesbian mother?

HART: Well, the Jewish community, the American Jewish community, tends to be politically liberal and socially liberal. Jews, of course, tend to, as a result of the discrimination that we have suffered and the ostracism we have suffered as a group within the Jewish community, particularly the more secular Jews, the less religiously observant, you tend to be much more protective of the civil rights and the human rights etc., etc. of anybody. [Laughs] And

let's see, so that even though, let's say in you can point to things in the Torah, there are passages that forbid homosexual activity. Actually, male homosexuality; it's silent as to female's homosexuality activity this, the ancient prohibition. But that's not really the social that doesn't really dictate the feeling among, I think most Jews in Portland and the United States. Being more welcoming and I hate the word tolerant, but tolerant and that kind of thing.

Now, the Portland Jewish community is a terrific Jewish community. Even just within the community itself, in terms of the different denominations, orthodox conservative reconstructionist reform, first of all there's a tremendous amount of cooperation between these groups. There was a – all the local rabbis team-teach an introduction to Judaism course, I mean it's not in other cities, sometimes you'll I hear more about people being very kind of jealous of each other's turf or something like that. But here the Portland community again it's almost like the gay community it, it's a smaller community and therefore people realize that it's...

**[End of Tape 2, Side 1]**

**Tape 2, Side 2**  
*2000 November 14*

HART: Okay, sorry. Okay.

JL: No, no, it's great.

HART: Okay, anyway, so, like the Tuesday morning class that I'm involved in the Jewish community, it's a program called the Melton Program it's a worldwide program with about thousand students in a zillion different communities. And here in Portland there's, oh, I'll pick a number out of a hat. I think there's about 150 students involved in this. Again these are all pretty much mature adults, not even college age or whatever. And first of all, in this group there it brings together people from all different congregations or any, also secular Jews. And it's meant to do that, it's not sponsored just by one synagogue even though it's located at Beth Israel this year. Last year it was at Shari'Torah. Just space considerations, whatever. So it's a very cooperative Jewish community.

In terms of being a gay person in the Jewish community, when my daughter was about eight or nine, that's when I first decided that I really needed to deliberately kind of get her involved in Jewish contexts in Portland. So I started taking her to the Jewish Community Center. You know for just things like swimming lessons or ceramics lessons or just things that weren't really religious but just the idea to, to take her there, and have her do those things there and meet other Jewish kids, and be in a Jewish milieu. And I started, boy, I can't even remember some of this. This is hard. There are different times when there're, when we've gotten Jewish lesbian groups together in Portland. And so at some point there we used to have regular monthly Jewish lesbian brunches, or something like that. This was probably, again, about ten years ago. And but at one point we decided, it was almost like testing to see what the Jewish community, how they were gonna respond. So we wanted to have some kind of an event at the Jewish Community Center. And so I went to whoever booked rooms at the Jewish Community Center, blah blah blah and there was no problem. There's just no problem at all.

I mean you for one thing, I'm the owner of Old Wives' Tales. I'm an attorney. I'm kind of a known person in the community. And so people see me. They don't just see me as a lesbian. They know I'm involved in a lot of different things. And so even at that point where maybe I would've, I can remember being hesitant, because at that point I wasn't really familiar with the Jewish community here. I hadn't been involved with the Jewish community before; the formal Jewish community. But I can remember just, there's never been anything negative, there's just absolutely never been even a hint of anything negative.

And this Melton class that I'm in on Tuesday mornings there're literally, there's about half a dozen gay women in this class. I mean this class, it's sort of ironic, it's about 5% gay women. It's, it's like what you're supposed to expect from the general population. And that percentage is, is represented in this Jewish Studies course.

And no the Jewish community here is totally terrific. It's great. Yeah. I mean one of my teachers she's the wife of an orthodox rabbi, and we're obviously gay women. To me, I assume it's obvious to other people we're gay women just again in terms of dress, conventions and stuff like that. Although obviously some of the gay women are more feminine in their personal grooming and dress than I am. Accessories, so to speak. But, yeah really, but I don't think it, I would be really astonished if most of the people, both teachers and students didn't realize, well almost, who almost all the gay women were in the group. Maybe not everybody, but, eh! It isn't a big deal.

JL: That's good.

HART: Yeah. So, anything else? [Laughs]

WD: I was wondering if you could tell us about the materials.

HART: Oh, well I just grabbed a few things one was this issue of the *Willamette Bridge*, which was the, the original issue where we launched Gay Liberation. And my only problem is, this is my only copy, so it's...

WD: Oh, no, that's okay.

HART: Not anything I can send into the, into the stratosphere, so to speak, of history. But yeah, go ahead.

WD: Oh, we heard something about you writing a whole bunch of different letters with different names. Is this the issue?

HART: Well, yeah the penny, well the funny, now you have to understand it's kind of like you've heard of poetic license, and then there's political license. [JL laughs] And so what happened was when I, just to reiterate, when I started this group, I was the only gay woman I knew. You know I didn't even know anybody else who was gay. And so what I did in one of these articles, which it's in here somewhere; well I decided that it would be more encouraging to other people. And if they only thought there was one woman in his budding group, that wouldn't be very reassuring. So this is all, it's not a big deal: I just tacked on a bunch of names. Which, of course, I mean, somewhere in the world, somewhere in Portland, there are gay women with all these names. [JL & WD laugh]

But these women were not known to me. These were just a bunch of names kind of thing. And this was, this particular article was entitled "We're Coming Out," Portland gay liberation, and it was just [Laughs] strange little article actually when you read it. But to me it's – I'll give you an, an analogy. That if you're at a counter-service restaurant and there's a tip jar? You never put out an empty jar at the beginning of the day. You always put out with a dollar bill and a bunch of quarters or whatever, because if you put out an empty jar, it will stay empty. Or, and you will get very little. If you seed it, then that gives people the idea, matter of fact, and that's why you put the dollar in, not just pennies. You put pennies, you'll get nickels! If you put a dollar you might actually get quarters and dollars, ok? And so it's kind of the same, it was the same logic. On the other hand it was not exactly, stuffing a ballot box, I mean it was nothing, what I mean? I don't feel it was some gross

misrepresentation some sort of immoral thing, but rather just, by way of morale boosting encouragement. And, in short order in fact there were many, many people.

Many women coming to this group so it had it's a desirable effect. And I just, for what it's worth, again, I would kind of need to get these back. But this is a demonstration, this is, I think I was actually, this was probably a little bit before gay liberation. I think this was more back in my Reed years when I had long hair, I think, when I had long, I don't remember when I originally cut my hair. Which again is more like, because it's easier to take care of, but anyway.

But here's an old picture of me and a, I had a dog for 14 years, and Angela Davis was a Black activist that was jailed at one point for supposedly being involved in a, oh, it doesn't even matter. She was jailed and so there was a kind of a campaign to get the authorities in California to release her from jail and not press charges and blah blah blah. And so I put a sign on my dog saying "Unleash Angela." [JL & WD laugh] Which I thought was an appropriate way for a dog to express political opinions, was to say to unleash, unleash somebody. Anyway, and... [Laughs]

WD: That's great. It sounds like we should stop. You seem to...

HART: Well, if you, I'd be glad – I mean you're going to run out of tape, and you don't really want to listen to too many more hours of me talking. But anyway, I will be glad to answer anything that you have. Respond to anything.

JL: Can I ask just a couple more? I'm sorry.

HART: Please, go right ahead. Great.

JL: There's a couple of things. One is that you were talking about the separatists and how they were challenging what you were doing on some levels. Did you ever have any



problems with the right-wing community or with people that were just purely, whether or not they were right-wing, anti-gay, that either harassed you or assaulted you in any way?

HART: Well, the only, I have never really had much in the way of any personal confrontations, okay? You know when I've done speaking or whatever, I mean, mostly you're speaking to people that are coming because they've gotta be open to what you're saying or they wouldn't even bother to show up?

JL: [Yes].

HART: But the church across the street from the restaurant, the Portland Foursquare Church. When we originally went in and they sort of realized that this feminist, gay-oriented thing was going in, they actually called my landlady and tried to sort of dissuade her from doing business with us. Which was, at that point, too late; we'd signed a lease. But this woman who is just a, oh, a local woman, I don't really know very much about her to this day. But she certainly, she didn't know I was gay or anything I don't think. I mean, who knows what somebody infers. But she called me and she didn't exactly say, she didn't say exactly what they said. But she said, "I received a call from somebody at the church and they're trying to tell me that you're not the kind of people that I should be doing business with or whatever." And she told them – well, by this time I'd been renting from her for a number of months and she said, well, I was the first restaurant that had managed to stay in business and pay rent regularly on time. So that that was what, all she was interested in.

Now obviously I think she has to be a, somewhat if she was really totally homophobic or whatever, then that wouldn't have been her response so at some level she also, um, we have to assume that she's [Laughs] an open person who believes in people's civil and human rights. [Laughs] But that was my only experience. And if you really think about it, I mean that could have turned out differently. In other words what if she would have been somebody who would've somehow been homophobic. Then the church taking

that kind of an action, it turned out differently. The one month my rent was late some – people use that as an excuse or whatever.

But generally, as a lawyer, I don't know. I've been fortunate. It may be because the settings in which mostly I encounter people they do tend to be more educated people who are even if they're homophobic are sensible enough not to acknowledge it. But I don't know as both a Jewish person, as a gay person, I don't know. Again this has been a very comfortable community to live in and I've –.

I can remember, well I can remember having hostile comments from audiences. From people in an audience challenging things. Ugh, I remember one time we were at the Legislature, and I don't know who this legislator was, but he was really anti-gay. And he was kind of like snide and he was kind of demeaning, and in talking. But he was kind of isolated. In other words the other legislators, the other people in the room were not joining in. It wasn't this whole crowd clamoring for your blood, kind of thing. And I think that's the important thing for people to do is not notice the loud obnoxious people, [Laughs] anti-whatever people. But instead to look around and realize, "Whoa, there's a whole people there that you can call on for support, and you can assume there's, there's support." And in general that's always the way I look at this unfolding process of social change and social acceptance of gay people.

In let's see in 1976 or 1977 or 1978, somewhere along there in, there was some kind of an anti-gay thing going on in Florida. And Anita Bryant was the spokesperson for orange juice or something. And she was doing some kind of anti-gay stuff and it was in Dade County actually. And Dade County had some kind of, it was some sort of a civil rights thing that was gonna be on behalf of gay people. To forward, to affirm gay civil rights, I don't remember the details of it. And it failed. It only got forty-some percent of the popular vote, so it failed.

Well the initial reaction of people here locally, like I remember Jerry Weller who's a big gay activist then and now, and I can remember Jerry being, oh, he was just so demoralized, he was so sad. And I said, "Jerry, unh-unh." And he was supposed to talk to the Portland newspapers, right? There was the *Journal* back then as well as the *Oregonian*.

And I said, "Oh, no. You're talking, this is a big victory for gay people today. The idea that in a southern state, over 40% of the population in a county voted for gay rights is a victory! It's not a defeat, it doesn't matter that the thing didn't pass, that's a victory! That's a building of public support!" And I don't think that's just putting a spin on it. I mean you could look at it like I'm just putting a spin on it, right? I believe that.

I mean, just now the No on Measure 9 was defeated by a narrow margin. But even if it was passed, and it would be very bad if it was passed. I would still say what if numbers were reversed and the pro-forces got and the defeating forces got 49. I would say, "My god, statewide 49% of the people in Oregon, in those, backwater counties where people are still anti-Black, there, some of those people are voting for gay rights?"

The way I look at it is like the half-full, half-empty, only the point is this: However full the cup is, look at how full it is! However much support you get, look at that support, focus on the support, be encouraged, be heartened by the support. there is no way this is gonna go in the other direction, it may be two steps forward to maybe one step back, but it's forward! The basic momentum is forward. And I really believe that may not be true everywhere in the world or everywhere even in the country, I mean there may be, I can't, I can't think offhand of where, I don't think that's true. And I just think that it's social change takes time. And it's just silly to be demoralized.

I mean it's not silly. I should take that more seriously. I mean, if it was, for example, that we, all of a sudden we found ourselves with a law prohibiting essentially the mention of homosexuality in our public schools, that would be very onerous. That would be problematic. That would be quite a challenge. That would be very disheartening, frightening really to teachers and students as well as parents and the rest of us. But so I'm, I'm not saying that you can't have setbacks that are very demoralizing. But you just have to look at it more in a historical perspective.

And I think history is on our side. I mean, God willing, I mean, I don't know what's gonna happen in a thousand years or five hundred years, or what weird things can happen but...

JL: [To Winter] Do you have any or, do you have some questions?

WD: I'm not thinking of anything.

HART: Okay. It's hard. You wanna turn this off for a minute? Why don't we take a break. And that way if you think of anything or whatever. I mean I've talked my head off, so. I won't assume that there's any more. Okay.

**[End of Tape 2, Side 2]**

**[End of Interview]**