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Abigail Carr oral history interview by Jessica Merrick, March 11, 2009

Abigail Carr (Interviewee)

Jessica Merrick (Interviewer)

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Jessica Merrick: Okay, talking with “Abigail Carr.” And I guess I’ll just let you continue before I interrupted about—you were talking about how things have changed since you’ve grown up.

Abigail Carr: Well, let me talk about first of all how I felt about coming to this type of a community—to this type of a retirement community. When one thinks of retirement communities one thinks of mobile homes, (laughs) particularly in Florida—a mobile home park and you know, a bunch of old folks around. Not very active, not doing very much. (laughs) Riding bicycles and playing shuffleboard. I mean, that’s stereotypical, but nonetheless that’s what—in my mind, that’s what automatically pops up in my head when I think of a retirement community.

And the very fact that someone had the wherewithal to establish—to come right out and say, “We are going to establish a retirement community for gays and lesbians,” was a wonderful thing as far as I’m concerned, really. Because in the heterosexual world, couples oftentimes, when they’re asked about retirement, they think, “Well, if worse comes to worse, my children will take care of me. And then, if need be, I’ll be a ward of the state. It’s my children who will take care of me.” In a gay and lesbian environment, there are very few children around to look after their elderly. I mean, they’re just not around. Who will take care of me? Who will look out for me? I hadn’t thought about it for, well—until I retired. And then I said, “Well—!”
How have things changed since I grew up? Well, obviously, jet planes were not a big deal in the 1950s. The Air Force may have had them, but I didn’t know about it. I grew up in a small town in western Michigan, a very rural area. I can remember as a kid watching airplanes go overhead. There was an airplane that went three days a week, from east to west across the sky, where I could see. And I felt one day, “What a wonderful thing to do, to fly.”

I wouldn’t know about a jet plane. We did have a television. (laughs) It was very small. It was—I think maybe a seven-inch diagonal. It was black and white. And the television station broadcast from nine in the morning until eleven in the morning, and then again in the afternoon from five o’clock until eight PM. That was—I mean the rest of the time—

JM: No HD [high definition television] with eight hundred channels.

AC: We sat around and watched the radio. (clock beeps) That was my clock, sorry. Oops.

JM: (fumbles with recorder) Just want to make sure this isn’t turned off on us, or something—

AC: No, it was my clock.

So things really have changed a great deal, even in my lifetime. To think of having a retirement community for gays and lesbians I think required people to have gone through the political upheavals that we had in the 1960s. To even think, to consider, that a retirement community for someone that was not of the mainstream is—I mean, requires a step beyond. I think that people who lived through the 1960s finally said to themselves, “Well, wait a minute. We can do this. We’ve done this kind of thing before.”

When you consider the changes in the sixties [1960s]—San Francisco, the flower power children, Woodstock. Not Woodstock lately, but Woodstock one [1969], out in the mud and the slosh. You know, just living through the political turmoil, as it was. To have a president assassinated [the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1964]. To have a war that nobody wanted. To have another political assassination [the assassination of civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968]. To have yet another political assassination [the assassination of U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy in 1968]. I mean, those were harrowing times as far as just living in this society.

And then not being heterosexual was an added—almost a load to carry around. It’s not at all now what it was then. Very few people—that I was aware of, anyway—were out and about. We really did hide a lot.

So to come to a community like this in my out years, I am very happy to be here. I’m very happy to be here. I’m very happy to be a part of this community and commit time to it, to interact with my neighbors. It really is neighborhood. Oftentimes in cities you can live next door to another in the same building (laughs) and never have any interaction with them—well, you may know their name if it’s posted on the mailbox somewhere.
You don’t know who they are. You don’t know what they’ve ever done. You don’t know what they will do. You know. So it’s a very isolated existence.

JM: Is that like the neighborhood that you came from before you moved here? Was it similar to that situation?

AC: No, because once again, we lived in a small town.

JM: Okay.

AC: In New Mexico.

JM: Oh. I used to live there, too.

AC: Really?

JM: Alamogordo.

AC: Well, we lived in Bosque Farms, which is—if you go from Alamogordo to Belen—if you go from Alamogordo across the mountains up to Belen—

JM: A bit far away.

AC: —and then go north, that’s where Bosque Farms is.


AC: And once again, it’s a small town atmosphere. We didn’t know all the neighbors, because people didn’t live like next and next in this type of a situation. The land was really pretty spread out. But we knew many, many, many people there.

JM: Were you out when you lived there?

AC: Uh, no. No. But if people didn’t figure it out, well, okay. But did we have to tell anyone? No.

JM: Which I feel like maybe has a little bit to do with the spatial arrangements in New Mexico, being so spread out you don’t have to see your neighbor every time you check the mail.

AC: That’s right.

JM: It’s a little bit more private.

AC: But in addition, “Matilda” [her partner] was on the city council, and she didn’t feel that it would be appropriate for us to declare. To me it made no difference. I am so happy
with my life. For the past forty years, it’s been a wonderful life. For the first thirty-five years, probably not so wonderful. But— (laughs)

JM: What marked that shift for you, if you don’t mind talking about it?

AC: Um—finding a voice. Getting settled in a relationship. Mat and I have been together for thirty-seven years. (laughs) Yes! And last September we got married!

JM: Congrats.

AC: (laughs) Well, it was a long time coming, that kind of thing.

JM: Did you go to Canada?

AC: San Diego. And I’m glad we did that. That was the one thing on my bucket list.

JM: And now, what’s your status now after Prop 8? Are you—is it pending, or is it annulled—?

AC: We don’t know. If the annulment police come and serve us papers, we’ll just put it on the back and hide it behind our marriage license. (laughs) According to what I’ve read, the arguments that were made last week before the California Supreme Court suggested that those folks—even if the proposition is upheld, those folks who have attained marriage status will be allowed to retain that.

JM: Okay. I thought—I heard something about the possibility of them being revoked, but I wasn’t sure.

AC: Right, but that’s once again dependent on what the Supreme Court does with the ruling. It has no effect on us whatsoever.

JM: You’re not gonna go break up because of your marriage license. (laughs)

AC: Nor are we going to move to California. (laughs) It’s a moot question. And so consequently, like I say, it was only one thing on my bucket list.

JM: And so how was it? Did you have a big ceremony?

AC: Yes, we did. And friends of ours took pictures and made a video for us.

JM: Nice.

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1 Referring to the 2007 movie The Bucket List; a “bucket list” is a list of things one wants to accomplish before one “kicks the bucket,” i.e. dies.

2 Proposition 8 was a California ballot proposition on the November 4, 2008 election that eliminated same-sex couples’ right to marry, which the California Supreme Court had allowed earlier that year. The proposition passed and became effective on November 5, 2008.
AC: Yes. So they sent us the DVD. It was just very nice. And then when we got back here, the whole community gave us a reception.

JM: That’s so nice.

AC: Yes, it was wonderful. The men that live down the street got married a month earlier, and once again the community gave them a wedding reception as well.

JM: Seems like I’ve talked to a few people who went and got married in California or Canada.

AC: Mm-hm. And people say, “Well, why’d you do it?” Because we could! (laughs) To put it quite blankly: just because we could.

JM: Do you think that’s pretty well understood in the neighborhood? Because I’ve talked to people who’ve had positive experiences about that. But I wondered—do you feel that there’s anybody who doesn’t really—I know that you can talk about how politically some people say, “We’re rejecting marriage. They don’t want us to do it anyway, so we don’t want to.” But others say, “I want to do it because I can do it. I should be allowed to do it,” and that sort of thing. So there’s this dichotomy within.

AC: I’m sure there are some people who say, “Well, we don’t need to have marriage. A civil union would be fine.” And I would say the same thing. If eventually it makes a difference with regard to the federal government rules and regs [regulations], then I would say whichever legal tag—title—that they want to put on it, is fine with me.

What I would like to see—it won’t happen in my lifetime, I’m certain, but at least for your generation, I would like to see gays and lesbians have full protection under the law in all areas of the law, including financial, economic considerations. So the IRS would treat us as spouses.

JM: Yeah.

AC: And treat our children—if we have—as legal dependents. The state of Florida does not recognize the situation where one parent can adopt another’s child. And I find that to be absolutely foreign.

JM: Do you think that’ll happen within—you were saying within your lifetime?

AC: Probably not my lifetime, but I would certainly hope within your lifetime, because so much has changed in forty years. Now, that may be beyond when you have your children adoptable. We don’t know that. But—

JM: It’s really such an interesting moment in history, I think. I don’t know where you are politically, but I’m an Obama supporter—I’m sort of assuming that you are, too. (laughs)
AC: Well, I’m probably to the left even of that! (laughs)

JM: Yeah, I kind of assumed, but it was amazing how, when we found out that he was elected, how hopeful and excited I was. You know, there was just so much energy and everybody—it felt like there really was this spirit coalescing around this. I remember going out—I was in the library, it was midnight. I went outside, and everybody was out in the street. Everybody just came out of their dorm rooms. They just wanted to be out. And there were cars honking and everyone had lights going and there were fireworks. I mean, it was a sight! At the same time, even amidst this feeling of pride, it was this huge disappointment, everything that happened with Amendment 2\(^3\), Prop 8. Across the country, sweepingly, rights being taken away from gay people.

AC: Yes.

JM: And so the way—I mean, I couldn’t wrap my mind around it, so the way I ended up thinking about it is: Well, you know forty years ago, black people, they would say, “Never. We will never see this, it’s impossible.” So I’m trying to think about it as shifting—you know, you were talking about how the sixties [1960s] shifted the way you could think about things. You could think about this as a shift in what is possible. So even though it’s this huge disappointment, especially in light of such hopefulness, thinking that, you know, some people think there would never, ever be a black president. Well, maybe we think this will never, ever happen. And maybe it just takes the right person at the right time with the right charisma, and all these—There’s a lot of things that had to line up for this to be able to happen.

AC: I think in addition it will take not only someone like Harvey Milk\(^4\), but it will take energy—people of your generation. We are—people of my generation, we’re worn out, quite frankly. And I’m also dismayed by the lack of fervor for fighting for—pushing back the barriers.

JM: I think there’s a degree of apathy in most people my age because so much has already been achieved.

AC: Yes.

JM: It’s sort of this idea of like, “Okay, well, we’ve got enough. We’re comfortable enough.” There’s not the need?

AC: Yes, yes. I find that distressing. I really do.

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\(^3\) Amendment 2 was a proposed amendment to the Florida Constitution on the November 4, 2008 ballot, which defined marriage as between one man and one woman and banned unions. The amendment passed and became Article I Section 27 of the Florida Constitution.

\(^4\) Milk was a member of San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors in 1978, the first openly gay man elected to public office in California. He was assassinated later that year.
JM: Me, too.

AC: It’s like I heard a young woman say—it was just recently; I can’t even remember the context right now—but I heard her say, “You know the 1950s? Oh! I just love that!” Oh, my God, dear. You haven’t been there. You have no idea.

JM: Yeah, it was the idealized notion of what it was like on TV, which was never reflective of reality in the first place.

AC: Yes, it was *Leave it to Beaver*. But, man oh man, it was oppressive! It was oppressive for all women. What were my options when I graduated from high school—other than going to music therapy school. (laughs) I could become a nurse, I could become a teacher, or I could become a wife and mother. Now, I leave out secretary, okay. I couldn’t become a doctor. I mean—who? What woman was a doctor?

JM: But you did it.

AC: Well—but I’m not a real doctor.

JM: You are, though.

AC: (laughs)

JM: I’m going to consider myself a real doctor when I get my Ph.D. (laughs)

AC: I heard someone say just last week, as a matter of fact, “Oh, he’s not a doctor, he’s just a Ph.D.!”

JM: Oh, those people drive me crazy. (laughs)

AC: But I did not object to that. I just—you know. I didn’t want to be a teacher, because my mother was a teacher and I saw the hours that she worked for very little recompense. I knew I didn’t want to do that. I didn’t want to get married. I mean, I knew that that was—well, if I got married I didn’t want to have any children. I knew that I couldn’t do that. And that’s when I—

JM: Can I ask you—I wonder about, what do you think it was that made it possible for you to think—at what point [that] this is a possibility? And then here you are sitting today with more than a Ph.D. How did that happen in your life?

AC: Just pure dumb luck.

JM: You think so? I’m gonna give you more credit than that. I’m thinking—there had to be some sort of soul-searching, or—There’s something very radical in you that you were able to achieve that, despite—
AC: I knew when I was a child that I was gay. I knew. I just—I was in third grade and it was like—(laughs) I just—I wanted to run with the boys. I was not ever interested in what, at that time, were little girl things. I just never was. I was the one that took my bike apart and put it back together, and did that kind of thing. When I was in high school I wanted to take mechanical drawing, and I was disallowed because I was not a boy. I had to take home economics.

JM: Where you learned how to bake and sew.

AC: Yes, to do the things that girls do.

JM: I had to take that class. You think that they’d—

AC: Yeah, it’s still like—(laughs) So, the more things change, the more they stay the same. That’s why I find it distressing that there are still people who are happy with—as you say, we’ve gotten so much. We’ve come so far. But the reason that we’ve come so far is people have died for it.

JM: Absolutely. And I think people tend to forget, also, that progress isn’t linear. Just as soon as we get legalize marriage, someone will try to take it away.

AC: Yes, and we’ve seen that once again. They did it in Massachusetts. They’ve done it in California. They have changed things here in Florida. It’s just—as you say, it’s a constant battle. And those of us who are in our seventies now, we fought those battles. We pushed back so many barriers. We came out when it wasn’t politic.

You know, I see kids running around with real butch number acts going on. Do you know what I mean by that?

JM: (inaudible)

AC: Yeah. Just being—females being very male in their activities, kind of thing. Playing games like they’re going to be boys, rather than working hard to have female voices.

JM: Oh, yeah. Okay.

AC: Which I think is important. I really think it’s an important thing that young lesbians need to be aware of. Really, I do. (laughs)

JM: Absolutely. No, I definitely agree with you. I see a lot of sexism within the lesbian community. It seems—

AC: But I’ll tell you, fifty years ago that was the only way to do it.

JM: Really?
AC: Yes. Yes.

JM: So because you—what was your position in that? You liked to play with bikes, and you played with the boys and stuff like that. Did that situate you with a group of friends that were not interested in finding their voice?

AC: No, I was always pretty much singular. I didn’t really ever have very many friends. Once again, I’m kind of a shy person, so I don’t make friends easily. I will not go out of my way to break into a crowd or something like that. But did I do cross-dressing kinds of activities—you know, that kind of thing? Well, yeah. Because that was how I identified with—this is what a lesbian does kind of thing. I didn’t have any mentors. (laughs)

JM: Yeah, you’re right. There’s a certain script out there: this is what a lesbian is. And if you are a lesbian, then, okay, these have to be consistent.

AC: Mm-hm.

JM: (...).

AC: Right. Yeah.

JM: (...).

AC: Yes.

JM: (...).

AC: That’s exactly.

JM: (...).

AC: Yes, mm-hm. That was part of finding my voice in the 1960s, was finding that I’m a woman that likes women. (laughs) I don’t have to play at being a boy.

JM: I think it’s so neat that you talk about that, and brave as well.

AC: Well, that was part of my growing up, really, coming to grips with who I was in a society that couldn’t have cared less. Or that’s how I interpreted it. So it was an interesting couple of decades, really. (laughs)

JM: Did you have a big coming out? I mean, I know it’s a process. You can’t just do it for one person and then it’s done, but did you—was there something that happened that which enabled you to do it or something that required you to be able to do it?

AC: No, it was just a slow maturation. Change-over kind of thing. And when I look back at it now, I realize, “Oh, what a wonderful experience that was.” But going through it was
not wonderful at all. It really was not.

I don’t know—I’ve never talked about that with any of the folks that live here. I don’t know if anybody else has ever experienced that. Because our past lives are past, you know. We talk about our adult lives quite a bit.

JM: It’s probably difficult for a lot of people, especially people who were married at one point, and that sort of thing.

AC: Yes, I think so.

JM: So do you think it’s something about trying to just—you know, in this place we’re going to be like this and not worry about what that was?

AC: I think that that’s probably a good way to put it. I really do, although again, I’ve never broached that with anyone. I think most of us live now in the present. I mean, we have the baggage, the luggage that we’ve brought.

JM: No need to unpack it at a party, right? (laughs)

AC: Exactly. (laughs) That’s exactly right. There are still things that you’ve put away in a storage cabinet, but you don’t go over there and open it up and look. “Are you still there?” (laughs)

JM: Everything’s intact! (laughs)

AC: But I think most of us are—we live in the present but for the future. As I look around at most folks here, we are very content with just living. But once again, most of us don’t have the energy to be pushing back barriers anymore. We’ve done a lot of that. It’s now up to another group of folks to literally take up the armor and make more changes. Part of that is what is represented by this community, I think.

JM: You feel as though you’re not engaging politically, but from my point of view, I think that living here is almost an act of politics. It does advance. The fact that this place exists—

AC: Yes. Now, Rainbow Vision is another place.

JM: Did you look into living there at all?

AC: Very expensive. And it’s condos, and I didn’t want to do that.

JM: Did you look into—you mentioned you weren’t interested in mobile homes, but did you ever hear about [another gay/lesbian retirement community]?
AC: Yes. The reason that I wasn’t even interested at all in that is I didn’t want to live in a mobile home in hurricane country. (laughs)

JM: True. True. (laughs)

AC: (laughs) That didn’t make very much sense to me. So that was off the books immediately.

JM: How do you feel about the idea of that, though? The idea of living in an all-lesbian community instead of a mixed place?

AC: I don’t think it’s realistic. I really don’t. I think people get too biased. It would be like—probably like what this place was like when it was first developed. It was all boys, you know. And some of them have never given that up. (laughs)

JM: Oh, okay.

AC: No, I shouldn’t say that, but—men and women have different ways of doing. And that’s what the real world is about. Just different ways of thinking, different ways of approaching problems, doing problem solving. It’s not that one group can and one group cannot. It’s not that at all. But I find it very nice to have gentlemen friends. I have always had gentlemen friends. Once again, that’s part of my—what I consider to be my girl voice, my desire to be a woman with men around, but not have activities with them for procreation.

JM: Leave that part out. (laughs)

AC: Right. I’m not interested in that. (laughs) But oftentimes I enjoy their sense of humor. I like to be aghast at the fact that they tell dirty things to each other. (JM laughs) I enjoy being—yeah, you know. Because that’s how men deal with stuff. But that’s also how women have been socialized to deal with men doing what they do. (laughs) You know what I mean?

JM: Yes, absolutely.

AC: It is a socialization process. I would feel very bereft to not have any men around. Really, I would.

JM: And you think that has to do with gender?

AC: Well, I don’t know. I think that’s just how the world is. And why make a false world? You know? Because I think if we do that, we limit our potential to change the heterosexual world. I really do. I think we limit the ability to communicate that we are not that different than you all. We are different, yes. I don’t mean to say that I think everything’s going to be blissful and wonderful—not at all, but I think that we have to be realistic and interact with opposite sex in a community situation.
For example, in your university, how many men are on your faculty? Men versus women? Is it fifty-fifty?

JM: Actually, I think it is about split.

AC: Is it?

JM: There might be more women than men.

AC: Really? In my field, in basic medical sciences, in a medical school faculty—for example, the University of New Mexico, which is not the Harvard of the Southwest by any stretch of the imagination. But nonetheless, out of eighty basic scientists when I joined that faculty, four were women.

JM: Jeez.

AC: One was at the associate professor level, one was at the assistant professor level, and two were at the lecturer level.

JM: Yeah, it’s amazing. We always talk about how even though actually women are beginning to rise above the number of men with degrees—with higher degrees, especially, even though it’s sort of tipping that way, it’s still the case that when it comes to jobs, whew!

AC: And if you look at the hierarchy—

JM: There’s no correlation between education and salary.

AC: Exactly. And if you look at the hierarchy, the top positions are not women.

JM: Right.

AC: They’re not. And there’s a mythical stereotype that says if a woman does get to that position, the only way she got there was to become more male-like.

JM: Absolutely. And the fact that there is one woman in a powerful position tells a group—signals to everyone else. “Oh, we don’t need this feminism stuff anymore.”

AC: Right. Yes, yes.

JM: “There’s no more sexism. She’s up there.”

AC: There’s one there. Oh, okay.

JM: (laughs) Tokenism is incredible.
AC: Yeah. And that I always resented. But, I always enjoyed working with male counterparts, so long as they worked as hard as I did. (laughs) So long as they worked as hard as I did.

JM: That’s interesting. I enjoy working with guys, too. I don’t have a problem with it. The one thing that bothers me about gendered behaviors in the workplace—or in my case, in school—is just when I see women act differently in front of men.

AC: Yes.

JM: It kills me.

AC: Yes. No, I’m totally in agreement with you. That’s something that I think is—that’s a socialization process—

JM: (to Matilda) Oh, thanks! Thank you so much! Did you make these? Isn’t that great?

Matilda: Have one.

AC: These are called pignolis.

JM: Wow! Is that—

AC: They’re Italian cookies.

JM: Okay. Sorry, I dropped—

AC: No, that’s okay. They drop all the time.

JM: They look (inaudible). Thank you.

AC: Have you been to (...)?

JM: Mm-mm [no].

AC: Wonderful place. It’s an Italian deli restaurant.

JM: Oh, okay. So these are from—I’ll have to go get them. These are really good—(laughs)

AC: Yes, (laughs) they’re in there. They’re in their—cookie place.

JM: They’re really good.

AC: Yeah, they have a wonderful bakery there. (...) is top notch.
JM: I’ll check it out. (…).

AC: Yeah. It’s in [nearby location] on—(…). I don’t know. Exit (…), right? Is it (…)?

JM: They’re so tasty.

Matilda: I think it’s Exit (…)—

JM: Okay.

Matilda: —but it’s (…).

JM: Okay. I’ll have to check it out. Actually, I have a friend in [from] out of town this weekend, so I’ll have to take her there. I was looking for somewhere nice to go.

Matilda: Oh, it’s good. Yeah.

JM: All right.

AC: Um— They close at two on Saturday, though.

Matilda: Six. Oh, Saturday, two o’clock. They’re not open on Sundays.

JM: Two in the afternoon?

Matilda: But if you go to the end of the exit on (…), turn left, go down nine blocks and turn right, it’s right there.

JM: Okay. Thanks.

AC: That’s if you’re coming from this side. Good place.

JM: So tasty. I’ll have to go there.

AC: (laughs) Pine nut specials.

Matilda: They have a bakery, they have a deli, they have a cheese shop, they have a wine shop. It’s just—I was brought up Italian, and that has to be one of the nicest Italian markets I’ve ever been in.

JM: Who knew, for [that city]? It’s great.

Matilda: Mm-hm.

JM: I really will. I’ll go there Saturday.
Matilda: Okay.

JM: With my friend for brunch! (laughs)

Matilda: If you go for lunch, better get there a little early.

JM: Okay.

AC: Yeah, I don’t know on Saturday. We’ve never been on a Saturday. But during the week, everybody from all over [that city] goes there for lunch because they have sandwiches, either hot or cold. Big sandwiches, for five bucks.

JM: Oh, nice. I was thinking this would be kind of expensive, so I like it even better now that it’s not so expensive.

AC: Those are expensive.

JM: Oh, okay.

AC: (laughs) Those are expensive.

No, I agree with you. I think women have been socialized to—yeah, to act differently.

JM: I used to—well, I don’t want to transcribe this, so I’m okay to say this.

AC: But I don’t think lesbians play that game, for the most part.

JM: No, I don’t see that.

AC: Yeah. I mean, I think they deal with men counterparts as, “Oh. Well, you’re here, let’s deal with it.” They’re not looking for a mate. And I think sometimes women go to college to increase their chances of getting a worthwhile mate. I really do.

JM: Have you heard of—now it’s such a big joke that they call it the M.R.S. degree.

AC: Oh. (laughs)

JM: Yeah. But—I don’t know, I think the way that I relate to men, if anything, is sometimes I err on the side of being precautiously formal, or—maybe whereas with a girl, I’d be more willing to joke around and stuff, and not worry about how it’s received.

AC: Yes.

JM: Like a guy oftentimes will be more—until I get to know him better, you know, I don’t want to be friendly, and that’s construed as flirtation.
AC: Yes. Yeah. And I think that’s something that one could fall into—or just being misinterpreted. Mm-hm. And that could be a dangerous situation, it could be, and I can tell you back forty years ago absolutely would have been.

JM: Sometimes I kind of feel bad about it. I wonder if I’m too formal, or less friendly or something—not unfriendly, but you know, just—sometimes I feel like it’s—you know, maybe it’s not warranted or fair, but then it’s just easier, sort of. It’s more efficient for me to do what I need to do than trying to get to know each individual person. I guess in a way it’s stereotyping, in a very—in an unfair way.

AC: But it’s also self-protection—

JM: Yeah.

AC: —because it conserves your energy.

JM: Yeah. (laughs)

AC: Well, it does, (laughs) to not have to deal with that.

JM: If it becomes a problem, it’s something you have to worry about.

AC: Mm-hm. Right.

JM: Did you ever have any issues with that, working in a male-dominated department area?

AC: Not really. I had one time, one issue, when someone was promoted before me, but that was when I was getting ready to get out, so I just said—

JM: Let it be.

AC: Yeah. “I don’t need this.” Didn’t need it. (laughs) But other than that, no. As I say, I do demand—did demand—that they do as much as I, for the same recompense. When I was very first going to work full-time, in 1957, I went to a job interview for a chemistry bench position, and there were people on both sides of this hallway, sitting in chairs, lined up, waiting for their turn to be interviewed. I went into this huge, big office. Behind a huge, big walnut desk was a little frump of a guy (laughs) that was interviewing everyone. And he—you know, we went through the interview, back and forth and back and forth, and blah-blah. And he finally said, “Well, you know if you take this job, the man right next to you is going to be making fifty dollars more than you, because he’s married and has a family.”

JM: He was testing you. What’d you say?
AC: I knew if I didn’t accede to that, I wouldn’t have the job. And to this day, I resent that. Doing the exact same work—and fifty dollars in 1957 was a lot. It really was a lot of money. But then I thought about all those people sitting out there in the hallway, and I said, “Well, I deserve it more than they do.” So I said okay.

JM: Yeah. That’s a shame that you—Marxism—[Karl] Marx always talks—you know, in sociology, one of our big founding fathers, Marx. And he talks about, you know, that very problem where the workers are always—they have absolutely no (inaudible), because there’ll always be somebody—

AC: That will exploit them.

JM: So, you know, you’re willing to be exploited, or you’re jobless.

AC: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

JM: There’s not much room to sort of rise up, unless everyone does it collectively. It’s a problem; no one will do that. Someone will always go take that job.

(Sound of something thumping)

AC: That’s right. That’s exactly right.

JM: At McDonald’s, they treat their workers horribly, you know. But they’ve got a stack—at all times, it always says, “Now hiring.” Always.

AC: Mm-hm. Yes.

JM: Just because they want to keep the stack about that high of applicants. It doesn’t matter what the turnaround is—

AC: Right. Because—

JM: —and that’s why they don’t train people to be proficient at anything. All they have to do is know how to flip or package or hand. Right? Nobody’s skilled. There’s no reason to keep workers. I mean, it’s—it’s a big problem. It feels like it’s getting worse.

AC: I think we will, in this next two years, we will see more of that.

JM: Yeah.

AC: More exploitation.

JM: People are desperate for jobs right now.

AC: Absolutely. Mm-hm.
JM: It’s even becoming more competitive just applying to Ph.D. programs, because so many people have lost their jobs, and I guess they’re trying to go to school. So now there’s a whole influx of applicants that were never sort of in the same pool before.

AC: They were never considered before, or they didn’t consider it before.

JM: So it’s harder for people trying to get their Ph.D. It’s harder for everybody.

AC: Mm-hm. My nephew works for a company in which he has risen through the years. He’s risen to the top of his category. To go further into management position, he has to have a college degree. And he said, “Aunt Abigail, what good is that piece of paper going to do for me?” And I said, “(…), you’re absolutely right. You are at the top. But, as a manager, you will have to talk with other managers—”

JM: That will be college educated.

AC: “—who are college educated, and you must be able to say, ‘Here’s my paper. Here’s my paper.’”

JM: Yeah. It’s almost like a social proficiency above anything you learn in class.

AC: Yes.

JM: It’s having the wherewithal or the right. I feel it’s like a call and answer thing. People test you culturally or socially. You’re expected to know certain things, but you don’t know what those things are unless you know them. Right?

AC: Yeah. And how do you know them? They were passed down to you—informally—through family connections, going to school, other connections, and so on and so forth. Yes.

JM: You know, my dad was—he’s retired now, but he was in the same situation when he was in the Air Force. Very poor family, one of eight children, a single mother who was a waitress—that sort of situation, that was my dad. And so he joined the military. It was the only thing he could do—

AC: No other options.

JM: —aside from continue working at the gas station he worked at in high school. So he joined the Air Force, was in for twenty years, and he rose as high as he could without a degree, which was a master sergeant.

AC: Non-com [non-commissioned].
JM: Somebody my age, who just got a four-year degree from it doesn’t matter what university, joins—he’s a master sergeant, they’re an officer.

AC: Right.

JM: Twenty years down the drain. I mean—I think that’s incredibly—I always felt bad for my dad about that. He just couldn’t go to college. Probably could, if somebody paid for it. He probably would have done okay. But he wasn’t able to do it.

AC: Yeah, it took me nine years to get my bachelor’s degree.

JM: Really?

AC: Yeah. We didn’t have Pell grants. (laughs) So the way you did it was you either worked part-time—but you know, at the wages that you were paid at that time, you couldn’t afford to live and go to school. You just couldn’t.

JM: (laughs) It’s kind of a similar situation now.

AC: Yeah. Well, especially as a T.A. But I mean, if you were out working, okay—not at McDonald’s, but somewhere, you know—

JM: The problem is jobs that are—jobs that pay more than ten dollars an hour won’t hire you for part-time work.

AC: I know. Mm-hm.

JM: So you really—

AC: Or, they’ll hire you for thirty-two hours, so you don’t get any benefits. Okay. (laughs)

JM: I’m lucky to have my T.A. stipend. I’m also transcribing these interviews at the library, so I’m getting paid to do that as well. So I’m really lucky with the situation. But I know most people who go to school don’t have any help.

AC: Mm-hm. Yeah. I’m glad I persevered in that. I am, because along the road, I learned a lot. I really did. I learned all kinds of things. (laughs) Once again, it’s like—you know, as you were saying. How did you know that? Well, I don’t know. I just did. How’d you know that you had to do that, or you had to take—That’s why my answer was it was pure dumb luck. I mean, because I don’t know.

JM: And keen observation to the little things that are happening, right?

AC: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Yeah. You just have to live the best you can, and survive. That’s another thing. I am a survivor. I haven’t gotten beaten down—far—you know, very often.
Gotten beaten down, but not to the point of despair. Close, a couple of times. (laughs) But once again, I’ve had a wonderful, supportive life partner. And I can tell you that having a life partner does make for longevity, because it gives you something to live for, something to live with, something to do for. Which is, I think—I think it’s—I can’t remember the basis for it, but I think there’s a sociological study that’s been done on people who have stayed together the longest have lived longer.

JM: [Peter L.] Berger and [Hansfried] Kellner describe marriage\(^5\)—and partnership, obviously, would be included in this—it’s not just, you know, within the past year you’ve been married. They talk about marriage. Anyway, Berger and Kellner talk about how partnership is a nomos-building activity. So that would be the flip side of anomie, where everybody’s living in complete chaos—

AC: Yes. Mm-hm.

JM: —the destruction of society and that sort of thing.

AC: Right, right.

JM: So, when two people come together, you’re both constructing your reality, actually. So maybe you have a mutual friend that you’re sort of indifferent about. Maybe Matilda really hates him. Pretty soon, you’re going to hear her talking about it over and over again. Pretty soon, that’s gonna sort of become your reality, that includes you as well. So collectively, you have an opinion towards somebody that maybe individually you wouldn’t have really thought about.

AC: Yes.

JM: So you solidify, whereas perhaps before it was just sort of this—not that every person is just floating in this (inaudible)—not that idea, but that where something was a possibility, it sort of closes and fixes—

AC: Yes.

JM: —things in your life. So it constructs this reality, in a new way.

AC: Right. It can be something as simple as buying a rug.

JM: (laughs) Really?

AC: Yes.

JM: How so?

\(^5\) JM is referring to Berger and Kellner’s 1964 article “Marriage and the Construction of Reality,” which appeared in Volume 12, Number 46 of *Diogenes*. 
AC: You’d be amazed.

JM: Is there a story about the rug? (laughs)

AC: (laughs) But I mean, it’s just something simple like that. It takes—it took the two of us hours.

JM: (laughs) To pick the right rug?

AC: And I’m—well, I have to say it probably was not a mutual decision.

JM: (laughs)

AC: But I paid the bill, because—And so, I think it’s becoming more acceptable. (laughs)

JM: (laughs) That’s funny.

AC: Yeah, because those colors, I love, and those probably are not the colors that Matilda would have chosen for that particular place.

JM: (laughs) It’s a nice rug. The doggies like it.

AC: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It’s—I mean—But that’s the kind of thing that, when you do it together, it can take a long time.

JM: (…).

AC: Well, yes.

JM: (…).

AC: (…). But, by the same token, you have to find something that you contribute, you know.

JM: Yeah.

AC: And sometimes that’s difficult to do. Once again, when you’re academically inclined, you tend to not be home a lot.

JM: Yeah, I’ve been guilty of that lately.

AC: Or when you are home, you tend to be engrossed in—

JM: What’s your advice on that? You know how to deal with that. (laughs)
AC: Take your cue from your partner. Really. And just—it can cause a lot of dissension if you don’t listen to them and their needs, really. You have to take a break from it. You cannot—I mean, one of the reasons that we go into academics is we’re pretty much self-focused. I mean—it is. It’s a selfish life, it is. I can’t get away from that. Going to graduate school is a very selfish activity. You know. Well, okay. But once you’re committed to that, you can’t just give it up and say, “I’m not doing this anymore.”

JM: You can’t do it halfway. You sort of have to—

AC: No. Exactly. And Mat and I met during my first year of graduate school. Well, I already had my master’s degree, so I was beginning my Ph.D. work. And so I was already committed. In anatomy you can’t stop at the master’s level. I mean, you’d never get a job. (laughs)

JM: What was she doing then? Was she in grad school, too?

AC: No, she’s in management. She’s a manager, a business manager.

JM: Oh, okay.

AC: And so, I was away a lot. I was just so focused that there were times when it was very—the first—Well, I have a saying: the first five years is the hardest. Then, after that, the next five years is the hardest. And the next five years after that. It was—well, that’s usually where the breaking point of heterosexual marriages occurs, is between ten and fifteen years. And then, after that, the next five years becomes a little bit more difficult. But once you get to the next five years, it becomes easier.

JM: So after about twenty years, it settles down?

AC: (laughs) It does.

JM: Okay, I’ll just set my clock to that. (laughs)

AC: (laughs) Well, no, it does!

JM: It’s some ways away.

AC: But I mean, if you look at groups of people, you know, they have that kind of up and down type of situation. The first five years, you’re going uphill, because you’re learning new things about your partner. You’re learning new things about the world, because you look at the world differently because of your relationship, you know.

JM: Mm-hm. And that (inaudible) construction of reality is now dependent upon somebody else. You used to be all self-centered, as you say.
AC: Yeah. I mean, you just have to accept the fact that they have to—if they love you enough, they have to give in a little bit. But by the same token, if you love them enough, you also have to give. So it makes for a very interesting first five years. (laughs) It does!

JM: (inaudible)

AC: But by the time you reach thirty, it’s—it’s not that it’s cut and dried, because it—because you still are learning. You’re still in new situations. You’re still—but the emotional content is a little bit decreased. It’s easier to say, “I give up,” because you look in the long term, what have you invested, and what do you want to have occur in the future? So you just say, “You know, I’m upset about it, but it doesn’t matter that much. I’ll pout for a while, and then it’ll be okay.” Okay.

JM: That’s good to hear.

AC: (laughs)

JM: It is!

AC: But the same thing is true in dealing with long-term relationships outside the partnership, you know.

JM: I guess I’ve never really known that, just being a military kid.

AC: You’ve been all over the place.

JM: Yeah. I don’t have friends since kindergarten. I don’t know where I was in kindergarten half the time, you know. So—yes, I’ve had a series of short-term friendships. It’s different to think about really spending time with the same person for—for envisioning that, it’s something new.

AC: I know. But look at your parents.

JM: I don’t have any reason to be faithful in that idea, because my parents married and divorced each other twice, actually.

AC: Really?

JM: Yeah. When they were married, they were back and forth.

AC: Oh, oh. Mm-hm. So they had a difficult first five years. (laughs)

JM: They had a difficult anytime they were in the same room, (laughs) no matter what time it was.

AC: So you didn’t have any mentors?
JM: For positive relationships?

AC: Yeah.

JM: No.

AC: See, now, I did. And Matilda did.

JM: That’s good.

AC: Both of us had parents that were together—many years, fifty. My parents would have been together fifty-five years; her folks would have been together fifty—fifty-six or fifty-seven years. Now, that doesn’t mean to say they didn’t have estrangements and so on and so forth, not in the least. But they did, you know, stick together and work through problems, work through—little irritations as well as big awful things.

JM: Yeah. It seems like the most important thing is the (inaudible).

AC: Mm-hm.

JM: I guess we got way off topic. But thank you for that. (laughs)

AC: I don’t know. We’re still talking about community.

JM: Yeah, that’s true.

AC: (laughs)

JM: Let’s see. What are some of my real questions from the sheet here? Um—so, I was wondering, how did you find about this place? Was it online, or in an ad or something?

AC: Friends of ours, that we’ve had for—once again, forty years—it’ll be closer to fifty years pretty soon—live over on the east coast of Florida. They’re men. And they have friends who live in [nearby location], who told them about it. They came over and looked at it when it was first getting going, back ten years ago. And they decided that they weren’t ready to retire yet. They still haven’t retired. (laughs)

But anyway, we were visiting with them a couple of years ago, and they were going to look—come over here and look, see, you know, if anything—what the west side was like, because we have property over on the east coast of Florida. And so they told us about it. And then we looked on the Internet. “Oh. Well, let’s go visit over there.” So we did. And there were two places for sale, and we thought, “Oh, okay.”

But anyway, the community was having a potluck dinner the night that we were going to be here. So they invited us to the potluck dinner, so we went, and—yeah, everybody was
just so accepting, so open, so—really, just friendly. We thought, “Boy, that’d be nice.” So we just made the decision: we’re going to do this.

JM: So you sort of were sold after the potluck, huh?

AC: Mm-hm.

JM: What kind of questions did you have before—I mean, were there things that you needed to check out and make sure about before you committed?

AC: No. We would have checked a few things out, if we had thought about it longer. But we didn’t, so we didn’t. (laughs) Would we have done it differently? I can say that we definitely would not have gone down south, but we might have just purchased a house over here somewhere, or a condo over here somewhere.

JM: What do you mean, in [the local town], but not in this community?


JM: Oh, okay.

AC: The reason for that is it gets cold over on the east coast in the winter. I mean—they have snow in Daytona, occasionally.

JM: Yeah. It’s crazy, huh?

AC: And I don’t need snow in my life anymore. (laughs)

JM: Had a lot of that in Michigan.

AC: (laughs)

JM: Were you seeking out, though, a gay and lesbian community?

AC: Not necessarily.

JM: Just sort of—you heard about it and you checked it out?

AC: Yeah. Just curious. That’s exactly right. I mean, we knew about Rainbow Vision because of the one up in Santa Fe.

JM: (talking about a pet) I’m concerned if she jumps off she’ll, like, hurt herself.

AC: No, she just—she’s okay.
So, we knew about Rainbow Vision in Santa Fe, but it’s pretty expensive, so we decided no. And Santa Fe is a very expensive city.

JM: Yeah.

AC: How long has it been since you were in Alamogordo?

JM: Oh, gosh—

AC: Many years?

JM: I was there when I was fifteen, and now I’m almost—so it was nine years ago.

AC: It hasn’t changed a bit. (laughs)

JM: (laughs)

AC: I can tell you—I have a friend who has a physical therapy business in Alamogordo.

JM: Oh, okay.

AC: And I almost went there to—when that big company put me out of business, I almost went down to [my friend]’s and got a job down there.

JM: It was pretty, but it was a nothing going on kind of town.

AC: Yes. Mm-hm.

JM: But I liked the landscape a lot.

AC: Yeah. It’s pretty, it is. But yeah, it’s—I mean, if you have to drive two hundred miles to go to anyplace— (laughs)

JM: Go to a movie.

AC: Yeah.

JM: Well, actually there was a very small movie theatre in the mall. (murmurs something to pet)

AC: What else?

JM: Um— So what do you think are the most important things about living here, then?

AC: Comfort. Being comfortable around people of like ilk. Um—just, you know, the atmosphere, I like.
JM: (referring to pet) Sorry, she’s tickling me. (laughs) I’m not laughing at you.

AC: (laughs) Would I change anything? Oh, probably, but it wouldn’t be a major shift. Yeah, I would change something. I would change—and it would be a major shift. I would have a reorganization of the political structure, such that the front and the back were one.

JM: Right, okay.

AC: I would change that, if I could.

JM: In that—do you think the political structure impacts the social dynamic?

AC: Yes, it does. Yes, it does, definitely, because in Phase II, people are very active, doing things all the time. Up here—rare.

JM: Yeah.

AC: Very rare.

JM: It seemed like there were more—at Beatrice and Josephine’s party, there were more people from Phase II.

AC: Yes. Yeah, there are. Uh-huh. Once again, I think that’s because of the dynamics of how the community was started. That’s what I think, because people here just don’t interact at all. They don’t interact here.

JM: Okay. And what are those—what were those dynamics like, what made that—you think influenced that?

AC: It kind of started out as an all-boys club, that kind of thing. I think that’s really what—how it started. Most of the houses were built by men. A few were built by women, but they were later on. And I think that it was like the boys made the rules—you know, it was like a gentlemen’s retirement club, I think. I think that’s how initially it got started.

JM: Back then, were they just calling it gay—instead of gay and lesbian?

AC: Yes.

JM: Oh, really?

AC: Yeah. Mm-hm.

JM: I didn’t know that.
AC: And I think that—even now, you hear people’s—people who have either moved away, or have known somebody who used to live here or something, say, “Well, are there any more women that live there now than used to be?” Well, yeah, there are. And I think that that, once again, impacts how the community gets along. It’s kind of like—more like an old folks’ place than in Phase II; you know, people are more active and they interact more frequently and so on and so forth. We just don’t do that up here that much. So we go to the back a lot. Well, you know—

JM: Not too far away.

AC: Yeah, we don’t have to pack a lunch! (laughs) So I would change that, if I could. I don’t have the energy to do it, so we’ll just wait and see what happens. Maybe it’ll change over time. Mat and I have been here two and a half years.

JM: Okay. Has it changed—have you seen a change within those years that you’ve been here?

AC: Well, we’ve had—here in the front, we’ve had one, two, three houses become empty—

JM: Oh, jeez. Yeah.

AC: —out of twenty-one. And a fourth is now on the market, as well. That’s twenty percent of the group, and that’s—that’s just not good. The one across the street is empty; they went to Panama. So it could be five, out of twenty-one.

JM: Wow.

AC: Yes. It impacts all of us.

JM: Yeah.

AC: And it also—for a community to thrive, you need to have full membership. You really do. For example, this coming Saturday we have what’s called our annual election for the homeowner’s association. We have three people on our board of directors. We should have four. Actually, it would be better if we had five. But two people from the same household cannot be on the board at the same time.

JM: Oh, yeah. I thought you were saying two were, and then—that’s pretty, uh—

AC: And so we have three people. So there was a call for nominations back in January. Nobody stepped forward to volunteer, even, to take on any of the responsibility for—as a homeowner’s association or a condo association, by statute, we must have a board of directors. Certain things have to occur. Okay? You cannot collect homeowner dues to have things done, unless you have a board of directors. So you can dissolve the statue things. You could dissolve the board. And each homeowner would be responsible for
what the community now bears. We provide for lawn maintenance. We provide for washing of the houses, power washing of the houses, which is important in this area—and particularly with the trees, the roofs have to be washed as well.

JM: You probably get a discount for doing so many, right?

AC: Yes, uh-huh.

JM: (inaudible) expensive that way.

AC: The community—and this is all paid for, once again, by the condo fees. The community provides for paving of the inroads and access areas, for television—for basic television. So, I mean, all those would go away. And everybody would be responsible for, you know, what they—it’s like—it ain’t cheap. How do I know about things like that? Well, I stepped forward last year and became the treasurer. And with people like—that empty house, that empty house, and this empty house are not paying condo fees. So that has a long-term effect.

JM: But you’re still cutting their grass and chopping their trees.

AC: Yes, right. So now we’re looking at—look at this fence. It’s been here for ten years. Pretty ratty. Well, we need a new one. If you don’t have that amount of money coming in from those places, can you afford to do that? Well, mm-mm [I don’t know].

JM: You don’t want to pay for the whole fence yourself.

AC: Yeah, I don’t have five thousand dollars to do that. And so on and so forth. That’s what a community entails, is you take something that’s quite expensive, and you spread the cost throughout, then everybody has a better life. More comfort. An easier way of doing things.

JM: So it sounds like, while you feel pretty happy with the social aspect of community, there’s other parts that are—

AC: Yes. It’s just like belonging to any organization, to belonging to any neighborhood, to belonging to any city, state, nation, and so on and so forth. (laughs)

JM: How do you describe the kind of people who live here?

AC: Hmm. Most of them are very affable, relatively easy to make superficial relationships with.

JM: Okay.

AC: I would say—I don’t know anybody other than superficially, except for my partner.
JM: Why do you think that is?

AC: Mostly, I don’t want to. I don’t want to form any deep attachments. That’s the kind of person I am, maybe. I don’t know.

JM: Do you think that if you were interested in that, there would be receptivity?

AC: Oh, yeah. Yeah. For example, Matilda is much more at ease with forming relationships, much more so than I am.

JM: It’s almost surprising to hear—I mean, yeah, I guess (inaudible). It’s surprising to hear you say that, because you’re so fun to talk with.

AC: Oh, well, once again, that’s—

JM: I’m surprised that you describe yourself as shy.

AC: Yeah, well—and that’s part of my shyness. If I put myself out, I endanger myself for getting hurt, for getting rebuffed, for getting—

JM: Right. That’s true.

AC: So it’s easier to not do that, for me. Now, if somebody comes to me, then that’s, “Oh, okay.” You know—

JM: Yeah, I could see that.

AC: Okay. (laughs)

JM: It’s definitely a lot easier to one-on-one than in a big group, to feel like you’re being more than superficial—a connection—

AC: Oh, yes. Yeah. Mm-hm. Yeah. Now, that doesn’t mean that I wouldn’t do for—not in the least, because I would. But I really don’t go out of my way, because of my—once again, I’ve had seventy-one years of fear of being rebuffed, and I don’t need to do that anymore. As a younger person, I would, because I needed to. I needed to put out tentacles, I needed to be in touch with people, and so on and so forth. I go golfing, for example. I know their names, and I know them. I can joke and so on and so forth with them. But they don’t know who I am, either—but I don’t want to know anything other than “Mm-mm-mm,” because it just takes a lot of energy that I don’t want to expend.

JM: Sounds like you’ve reached this really comfortable place with who you are.

AC: I have! (laughs) That doesn’t say that—I mean, that’s not to say that I don’t have occasions when I feel like—left out, or something like that, because I do. But once again, it passes quickly. (laughs)
JM: That’s good to hear.

AC: I’m not one to get depressed. When I do, then I have to just work myself out of it. And I manage. Survivor instinct, I think. (laughs) I don’t know if this is helping you with your—

JM: No!

AC: —project or not.

JM: It’s okay. I’ve given up on trying to stay on subject, because it’s too much fun to talk about the other stuff. It is!

AC: Okay. Lead on.

JM: Uh— I was wondering about—I’ve heard that there’s a straight couple who lives here.

AC: Yes.

JM: I wondered how you felt about that.

AC: Do I know them?

JM: Or just how you feel about—

AC: Oh, it’s fine with me. I have the same feeling in that regard that I have relative to [another gay/lesbian retirement community].

JM: Okay.

AC: You have to have some differences, okay? Do I care that they’re straight? No. I don’t care that they’re not gay. It doesn’t bother me. Now, if each of these houses becomes straight, then—and legally, that can happen, because of the 20 percent rule.

JM: Right. Twenty—wait, I don’t know about that.

AC: Twenty percent of the community may be non-gay, because of the discrimination clause.

JM: I thought—oh!

AC: It’s a homeowners—condo-owner association, and that’s by statute.
JM: I thought you couldn’t have any provisions stopping anybody from living here. I didn’t know that—

AC: No, no.

JM: —it stopped at 20 percent, and then no more straight people could move in.

AC: Right. Yeah. And once again, that would bother me, because then it’s no different than living in a heterosexual world, which I don’t want to do anymore. I want to be able to walk down the street, not close the blinds all the time. I want to be able to stand and give a hug, I want to be able to—and so on and so forth, and not be—I hate to use the word “spied upon,” but it’s kind of how I would feel.

JM: You reminded me of—have you heard of Foucault? Michel Foucault? He’s a theorist that I looked at a little bit. Not a sociologist, but it’s pretty widely cited. He talks about this idea of a panopticon. He relates it to—this panopticon was originated as a type of prison security, in which the guard would be on top of a tower, where the guard could look down in all directions around and see the prisoners, but the prisoners could never look up, because of the way that the rooms were situated. So the prisoners could never look up, but they always thought that they were being watched. So, in effect, even if there’s not somebody in the tower, people act as though they’re being watched.

AC: Yes. Mm-hm.

JM: So it’s sort of a self-surveillance that’s enforced by the idea of people watching. So I think I understand what you mean.

AC: Yes. That describes it exactly. And I lived my life for forty years—well, not forty, thirty-five years that way. And I didn’t like it at the time, so there would be no reason for me to be fully open to that in the future. If I have to, I will. I mean, if I have to go live in straight society again, I can do it, you know. I can. It doesn’t matter to me. Where we have property over on the east coast, everybody in that neighborhood knows that we’re gay, and that we are a couple. So, I mean, everybody is very accepting, but—

JM: But it took work, to meet those people and to feel comfortable.

AC: Well, yeah. Yeah.

JM: It’s not—you don’t get an immediate—like a straight couple would, you wouldn’t be necessarily immediately—

AC: That’s right. Yes. Yes, that’s right. And I think that’s once again—you know the part about being the non-conformist.

JM: Yeah.
AC: So, I can imagine that they feel comfortable where they are, even though they are the non-conformist. But nobody is looking down on them and picking on them, too, which is something that we have experienced—all of us have experienced in our—that’s part of our past baggage.

JM: I’m wondering about how it is living in this small town. You’ve got [nearby city] nearby, which is pretty gay-friendly. There’s a lot of gay people who live in [that city]. I’m not sure how—[another nearby city], I think, is better also, but in [the local town], how is it? When you go to restaurants here, is it like that? Do you have to change—?

AC: You don’t go to restaurants here. (laughs)

JM: Oh, okay.

AC: No, I mean—we go to a couple of different restaurants. Yeah. I would presume that most of them just assume that we are spinster sisters.

JM: Okay. So you think they just don’t even—not even on the radar.

AC: Yeah, right. Whatever. But we don’t give them any reason to worry about it, either. I mean, we don’t hold hands in public, and—

*end of recording*