

Tacoma Community History Project
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

Narrator: Gloria Stancich
Date: May 6, 2011
Interviewed by: Marcie Pierson
Place: Gig Harbor, WA

Marcie Pierson: I am at the home of Gloria Stancich in Gig Harbor, Washington. It's May 6th, 2011, and my name is Marcie Pierson. Gloria, are you aware that I am recording this interview, and do I have your permission to do so?

Gloria Stancich: I am and you do.

MP: Thank you. I've asked Gloria to help me with an oral history project, which is the focus of a graduate-level course I am taking at the University of Washington in Tacoma. Gloria has graciously offered (and directed me to) several resources that I have had a chance to review [here] before today's interview. The first is the Pierce County Lesbian /Gay Oral History Project, Phase I, which was funded by a grant through the Pride Foundation in 2006 [look to Gloria for confirmation].

GS: It was *published* in 2006.

MP: Yes.

GS: The *grant* was probably around 2000.

MP: 2000. Gloria was not only an *interviewee* in this volume (taken in 2001); she was also instrumental in coordinating the project. [She was the Production Supervisor / Audiographer, as well as one of several *interviewers* and *videographers*. Does that sound accurate?

GS: That's correct. [As a matter of fact, the concept of doing an oral history project was Gloria's brainstorm.]

MP: I also had an opportunity to review a transcript of another interview with Gloria, taken in 2006, which will be included in an upcoming book for the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project. Some of the biographical information gleaned from these interviews is the same; but, I have discovered that each transcript brings something new and provocative to the discussion of a human life . . . that is Gloria Stancich [dog barks]. My hope is that my interview with her today will add to the knowledge about gay and lesbian history and *inspire* future readers and people like me to carry this work forward.

I very much appreciate your taking time with me today, Gloria, my friend.

GS: Good. Yes.

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MP: Because I have read the two transcripts I spoke of before, we probably don't need to go over *all* of your early history. That said, I find some of it fascinating and will refer *back* from time-to-time. Later, I will incorporate the information into a narrative in order to make this a more cohesive piece of writing. I apologize if my questions may seem out of context. Feel free to go with them wherever you will.

GS: Thank you.

MP: Are we ready?

GS: Yes we are.

MP: Let's start with stating your full name, and where you were born, and *when*. It's just good for the record.

GS: Absolutely. Gloria, middle name *June*, because I was born in June.

MP: Yes, June 12th.

GS: June 12th.

MP: I might add [referring to the fact that Gloria shares a birthday with Marcie's oldest son].

GS: Yes. June 12th, 1935, as long as we're going there. June 12th, 1935. My maiden name, as they put it, is Vernon [spelled out]. And I picked up the Stancich name when I married in 1956.

MP: Yes, and have kept it.

GS: And I kept it because a product of that marriage was a *son*, and it's just what women did when they divorced in those days, when they had children, particularly if they had sons, kept the married name.

MP: Yes.

GS: . . . the married name. And many times since then, I have thought about getting rid of it. But, then, that son became fairly well known in his own right, and I am very *proud* to be the mother of playwright C.P. Stancich.

MP: And have the *same* name.

GS: And so, we have the same name. Yes.

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MP: Wonderful.

GS: So, that's the story on the name. Akron, Ohio was my birthplace, and I was born at home.

MP: Yes.

GS: As were my two siblings, and . . .

MP: I have most of that.

GS: Yeah, you do.

MP: Yep.

GS: And I was an 8-pound baby.

MP: Yes.

GS: Chris [emphasis], on the other hand was 5 [lbs] 12 [ozs].

MP: And a scary delivery.

GS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And now I'm little and he's very big [lowers voice].

MP: Okay, so going way back, do you remember what you wanted to be when you grew up and maybe what inspired those dreams?

GS: [pause] My outlook on life and any ideas about the future were pretty much proscribed by the culture in which I grew up, and my dad was a blue-collar worker.

MP: Yes.

GS: He worked for the tire companies in Akron . . .

MP: Right.

GS: . . . and my mother went to work during the war as a pink-collar worker for one of the efforts — Goodyear aircraft actually — and continued to work at Goodyear after the war.

MP: But, as a little girl, do you remember any . . .

GS: I started dancing when I was four years old . . .

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MP: Yeah, right.

GS: . . . and one of my first memories of that — I can still picture the room, the barre, the dance floor, and the class, and we were singing, and the teacher called us to a stop after we'd gone through the song once, and then said to the group, "I'm gonna try it again, and I want everybody to sing louder but Gloria." And so, I learned that I had a very loud voice, apparently [laughs], and everybody else was not so, not so loud, and therefore, in my mind, not so good, [pause] as I was. But, it's amazing how that sticks with me.

MP: But, you like to sing . . .

GS: Yeah, I did.

MP: . . . and it sounds . . .

GS: Yes, yeah, yeah.

MP: . . . like you've taken that . . .

GS: And then I danced for the rest of my life. Dancing was simply something that I did, and so it seemed natural for me as I left high school [to go] on the road with a professional group of dancers, and I don't think I ever thought — I mean I was pretty smart — so I think I *knew* I wasn't going to dance all my life . . .

MP: Right.

GS: . . . and I *knew* I wasn't going to be a ballerina because I was not that good *en pointe* [French for "on the tip"]. So, I don't think I thought about dancing as a career . . .

MP: Profession.

GS: . . . whatever. But, the other professions open to women in those days were teaching, nursing . . .

MP: Right.

GS: . . . and I didn't even know about social work, because you need to remember that in 1935, all of that came into law, as far as social services were concerned, so I didn't know anything about that. I didn't wanna be a nurse, I *knew*, and teaching . . .

MP: Yeah.

GS: . . . was eventually what I wound up doing.

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MP: Yeah. And what can you tell me — you did a little bit — about your family background in the Arts? You had a musical family. I mean, your mother was a *flapper* [emphasis].

GS: Yep.

MP: That's exciting!

GS: She was a *dancer flapper* [laughs].

MP: So there wasn't . . .

GS: Yeah.

MP: And you were a dancer *and* a musician.

GS: No, I wasn't really a musician. No, I took lessons.

MP: But what was the *comedian*?

GS: Well, I married a comedian, and so I became his straight woman. And then I started getting all the laughs, and we used to tell people after we divorced, that that's why we got our divorce, is I started getting the laughs, and he didn't like that.

MP: Ohhhh.

GS: So, that was kind of a joke.

MP: But when you did your dancing on the stage shows and with him, like the Sullivan Dancers, the Blonde Bombshells.

GS: That was before. Yeah, it was before Tony came along.

MP: What kind of dancing was that?

GS: Well, it was all kinds of — I started [the summer before] I went into high school, and then every summer after that until I graduated from high school, I was with a group that performed at the county fairs, all over the Midwest, and we did the grandstand shows, and we did all kinds of 'character' stuff, like we had a can-can dance; we had a dance where we were the Musketeers, and we had the foils, and I chopped off part of one of my partner's noses with my foil, even though they had the button end on it, I caught her with the side of . . .

MP: [interrupts] What are the foils?

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GS: Fencing foils?

MP: Oh, those. Yes.

GS: Like the Musketeers use. And then we had an act — a routine that we did that was on these big 40-inch diameter wooden balls that were white, so they looked like snowballs, and then we had on these little sleeveless costumes with a Santa Claus hat, and we walked on these 40-inch diameter balls . . .

MP: Balancing.

GS: . . . and made formations all over the stage. And every stage, of course, was different cuz they were put up for the particular fair and for the grandstand show. And so, we had one serious accident with those. One of the young women, whose name also was Gloria, *fell* and cracked her tail bone.

MP: Ouch!

GS: Yeah. And we used to travel from town to town — county seat to county seat — in a school bus, and the band would go with us, and so we had a little piano (spinet piano) in the back of the bus, and sometimes if we were being rowdy, somebody would play the piano. The balls would be rolling around in the back, and . . .

MP: And this is in the 40s, right?

GS: No, early 50s, very early 50s. 1950, '51, '52. So, that was great fun. And, let's see, what were some of the other kind of routines when I started? When I went on the road after high school, we had a routine that we did to the tune of "Goofus." [sings bum, bum, bum, ba, da, dum, ba, da, da, da, da, bum, bum, bum] We were bums, is what we were doing.

MP: Ohhhh.

GS: We had on tuxedos, as a matter of fact, only with short costume pants. And then we did a can-can number. And, at that point, we were working in supper clubs mostly, and so, it was sort of like the stuff that the Rockettes were doing.

MP: Were these gay girls?

GS: No. Well, I suppose some of them were, but *I* didn't know that. *I* was, and *I* knew that.

MP: You knew that. Did *they* know that?

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GS: No. There were a couple of 'em that I tried to get close to, but they kind of slapped me away, but . . . thinking back on it, I can't think of any of them that [were]. One of them, I remember, when we were working in Ottawa, fell in love with a Mounted Policeman and got married in Pittsburg and then moved to the Vancouver area. So, those are the kind of routines that we did. Some of it was tap, but . . .

MP: Yeah, I was just curious about what the . . .

GS: . . . and some of the folk did some acrobatic stuff. Things were very different back in those days in terms of the kinds of things that we did. Some kinds of dancing you would have seen on the Ed Sullivan Show with a group of dancers, where we did formations. You were probably too young to remember.

MP: Was it enough to . . . no, no, I remember that. Was it enough to support yourself?

GS: Yeah.

MP: [barely]

GS: Yeah, yeah. I made fairly decent money.

MP: Okay, and then when you were younger, did you have some role models, like your — any family members, or famous people, or [Gloria shakes head] . . . ? Not really?

GS: No, I suppose my idols were my dance teachers and some of the older kids that were dancing.

MP: Yes.

GS: And *you* must be able to relate to that.

MP: I do — the *older* girls.

GS: Yeah, and teacher, of course, who was wonderful. My first dance teacher did some work in Hollywood. She was a very good tap dancer, and so she did some of the soundtracks from some of the movies — some of the musicals during those times — and her whole family, of course, had hopes that something would come of that, but it didn't.

MP: Wow.

GS: And then another of my dance teachers was from a pretty wealthy family in the area, and she was a very good dancer, but she was not very good looking at all, and so, she starred in all of our dance reviews, of course, with her dancing, which was wonderful, but there was no place else for her to go because ugly people, ugly girls, don't get very far in life [inaudible] with that kind of profession.

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MP: Okay, now this is really out there — skipping around — but I am really interested [chuckles] in your story about wearing your “best black dress” to your wedding?

GS: [inaudible]

MP: Was that because of your mother, to get back at your mother?

GS: Well, my mother wasn't at my wedding.

MP: Right.

GS: I got out here to the west coast. Of course, I had been living in the Midwest. Because I was in school, in college, I was going out on the road and then coming back home and going to school, then being bored stiff because it was nothing like being out on the road. So then, I'd have to go back on the road. While I was in school at Kent State University in Ohio, I was working weekends at various nightclubs, and I was booked into a club in Girard, Ohio, which is near Youngstown. Tony Karloff was the act, and he started wooing me and talking to our booking agent and talking 'em into getting us jobs at the same . . .

MP: Did you say *wooing* you?

GS: Yes, yes, yes, and he was thirteen years my senior, and he was Catholic, and first-generation American, and divorced, and a recovering alcoholic. And my mother, of course, had been — I was, what 19, 20 by then? — had been pushing me . . . why wasn't I getting married? And I think that when I finally married him (there were a number of reasons why I did, because I knew I was a lesbian), part of it was a slap at my mother — not the dress, cuz she wasn't here for the wedding.

MP: [laughs]

GS: But, because all of those things were counts against him.

MP: The *bad* boy.

GS: Yeah, yeah. But, at any rate, he decided to come home to Tacoma to visit his parents; he was an only child . . .

MP: Right.

GS: . . . and he had left home when he was 13 or 14 years old. And so, he came out [to Tacoma], and he said [to me], “Why don't you come out and visit?” And so, I came by train when school was out and when I got here — when I got off the train at Union Station — he met me, and he took me to an apartment that he had rented for me at the

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Washington Apts. across from Central School, and when I walked into the place, I saw his clothes hanging there . . .

MP: Yes.

GS: . . . and I said, “No, no, no, no. This is not okay with me.” So, after some discussion, he took his clothes and went down to the Winthrop and got himself a room. Then he took me to meet his parents, and *his* mother . . .

MP: . . . was delightful.

GS: . . . was a sweet, old, Slovenian woman who was so happy that her son had found a woman that would love him and take care of him and be nice to him, and [pause] as she talked, I became aware of the fact that she thought we were already married.

MP: [chuckles]

GS: And so, I said to Tony, I think we need to go someplace where we can talk, but he was very silver-tongued — very, very, very, very, very . . .

MP: So, there wasn’t anything real significant about the black dress. You just *had* your best black dress with you.

GS: No, I *wore* it because it was another ‘splendid gesture’ of mine!

MP: I see, okay.

GS: I had a black dress and a black velvet coat . . .

MP: I like it.

GS: . . . and that’s what I wore. We had to go to . . . because he had told people *here* we were married. I mean, how dumb can I get? He had told them *when* we were married, so we had to go to Olympia to get the marriage license so that it wouldn’t be in the paper in Tacoma [showing a different date]. And so, then we arranged [for a church wedding] I can’t remember the name of the church now. I had been attending a church of the same denomination in Akron, Ohio, when I was living there. The reason I was attending that church . . .

MP: Congregational?

GS: Yeah, it was a Congregational [church]. Thank you. The reason I was attending that church in Akron is because the young woman that I was having an affair with all through high school sang in the choir there, so I went to that church . . .

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MP: Exactly.

GS: . . . not because I needed to be a member of the church. But that was the Congregational church in Tacoma, then, that I said, “I can get married there.” That, if we’re going to have to do this . . .

MP: I like it. I think that’s a great story [laughs].

GS: So we did.

MP: Okay [coughs]. And then [pause], this is out of context too, but your educational background. *Extensive!* And, I know a lot of it, and I’ll be using some of that in my research paper . . .

GS: Okay.

MP: . . . but what is it — what is this bit about you being an *interdisciplinary* person, like a *humanities* person . . . and why was that looked upon negatively when you tried to get a position?

GS: Okay.

MP: . . . cuz I’m one of those people too!

GS: Yeah, and Donna and I [inaudible] . . . really, we were just talking about it this morning. She was doing her crossword puzzle, and when she gets stumped once in awhile, she will ask me, and she had a question in the puzzle about a *muralist* whose first name started with ‘J’ or maybe she knew it was Joan. She did. She knew it was Joan. And she said, “It’s a woman muralist, and there’s the letters “i” and “o” in the last name, and I said, “It’s not a woman, it’s a man.”

MP: Oh, really.

GS: And it’s Miro, [spells] m-i-r-o.

MP: Oh, yeah.

GS: And I said, “thanks to my interdisciplinary [education], Dr. Stone [from San Francisco State] would be very happy that this popped into my mind.” And I had just gotten up, so, I said, “my mind’s a little foggy,” and so it took me a minute or two to say Miro. But that’s why I *know* . . . because I had to study. Everything that . . .

MP: Yes.

GS: . . . integrates into a culture and a period of time . . .

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MP: Not just specific.

GS: . . . the art, and the philosophy, and the economics, and the social stuff, and all of those things.

MP: Do you think it was because you were in California and it was just more . . .

GS: Uh-uh. I *chose* that because that's the way I think.

MP: Uh-huh. But, there was something *there* for you.

GS: But I graduated from the University of Puget Sound, took my last year of undergraduate work there, and was madly in love with my professor. She and her family moved to southern California, and it was *she* who told me that I should go to graduate school. It was sort of my — like me asking you, what is Jesse's [Marcie's youngest son] next step — she didn't even ask the question. She said, "Now, for graduate school . . ."

MP: Assumed.

GS: I said, "What are you talking about?" And she said, "You need to know, that's what you *do* now, and I said, "I don't have the money to go to graduate school." "Well, your parents will pay for it." I said, "I don't think so." My parents were not sure why [I was] getting a B.A., but they would never understand a Master's degree, and they never paid a penny toward any of my schooling.

MP: Right.

GS: So, at any rate, I started looking around because Esther said I could, number one . . .

MP: Gave you the confidence.

GS: . . . and number two, that this was just what you do, and so I found the General Humanities degree at San Francisco State and did a lot of research about it, and when I applied, the graduate adviser said to me, "This is not a useful degree as far as employment is concerned, because it's not a strict discipline." And, I found out later — I mean, I understood what he was saying, but I wasn't testing it out. I did end up getting my Masters in a year and a half, and passing my exams, and went south because Esther and her family had ended up in Pomona — Claremont, actually — and she was teaching at one of the new colleges, Pitzer College. And by mistake (which you probably read somewhere), [I] ended up teaching French, which had been a minor of mine. But I had a good accent, and so, somehow I became a French teacher.

MP: Can you still speak it?

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GS: I can, yes. I can read it better than I can speak it, cuz I don't speak it very often, but I still have a good accent when I decide to speak it.

MP: That's great [quietly].

GS: So, I woke up one day and decided I didn't wanna be in southern California. After three years, they gave me my letter of tenure, and the next day . . . I do a lot of these 'splendid gestures,' Marcie. That was another splendid gesture. "I don't wanna be here, so here's your tenure. I'm leaving." And [we] came back up to Tacoma because I love the northwest and began looking for a job. And, as I began looking for a job, I began to understand.

MP: Yes.

GS: My dream when I left here was to teach at Tacoma Community College. It was just starting up at the time. And when I came back there were four positions open, and I interviewed for each one of them, and each of the department chairs said, "I really like you, but your degree is not in psychology, sociology, or anthropology, and those are the positions that are open." And, I'm saying, "But, but, but . . ."

MP: You're qualified.

GS: . . . I'm qualified in all of those." Yeah. And so, then [laughs] I had an interview in Bethel School District for a high school teaching position, and when they heard about my background and where I was from, and where I had gotten my degree, and where I had been teaching, they said, "You are just too sophisticated for this district."

MP: Too interdisciplinary [laughs].

GS: I mean these things that were just . . .

MP: Isn't that amazing?

GS: . . . really a shock to me, to hear that, particularly when the arguments — set aside Bethel; they were probably right. Oh dear [covers mouth]! But, one of the ironies to that is, when I was teaching in southern California, I was teaching at San Marino High School. San Marino was like the west coast headquarters for the John Birch Society, which was totally *far right*.

MP: Yes.

GS: And I used to teach subversive stuff in my French classes. Under the guise of French, I was teaching them Civics, which they weren't getting any of, to understand what went on in the real world. One of my students, one day, ten years later, is behind me in the line to pick up pictures at K-Mart on 6th Avenue. And I went to the counter and I said, "You have some pictures for Stancich." And I hear this voice behind me

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saying, “Gloria Stancich?” And I turned around, and here is this [inaudible] tall kid that was one of my students in San Marino, and he was the Assistant Superintendent of the Bethel School District.

MP: Oh, my gosh!

GS: And, of course, this was years after both of those things happened, but that’s the irony of life. I couldn’t teach at Bethel, but one of my students could become the Assistant Superintendent there.

MP: And the students change more than you do.

GS: Yeah. So, anyhow, it was just one of those ironies of life. At any rate, my Masters was from San Francisco State [pause]. Let’s see, I had to take a few more classes before I could get my certification — teaching certification, and so, ironically, I went back to Ohio during one summer and took a couple of courses that I needed there. So, it’s a very checkered . . .

MP: [inaudible]

GS: . . . educational background, yeah, but a Masters was all I needed.

MP: Excellent.

GS: And I did finally get it recognized when I worked for the Department of Social and Health Services. It took awhile for them to recognize it, but I finally got enough verification of it, in fact, I wrote to my graduate adviser, finally, and I said, “Dr. Stone!” and he wrote back and said, “told you so.” But, he wrote a nice letter, and they finally said, “Okay, we’ll give you the extra pay for your Masters Degree,” but they didn’t think it had anything to do with sociology [inaudible].

MP: . . . with what you took. Yes, yes [pause]. Okay, than I have a question about — after the birth of Chris. Now we’re skipping ahead. I think, when he was about three, and you talked about packing him up one night while your husband was sleeping. And when you left (and in that 2006 interview), you said, “I knew he would try to take Chris and run.” And I just wondered, can you explain that a little more — why do you think he would try that? Was it his ego, or your orientation, or did you wanna — were you afraid he would hurt you?

GS: No, no.

MP: [I’ve] just been curious about that.

GS: What led to the divorce, finally — and, as I said, I knew I was a lesbian when I went into the marriage, but I had made a decision that I would do what I could to make it go.

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MP: Right.

GS: What had happened is — and we were married when I went to UPS for that final year. There was not a lot of work out here for a comedian impressionist, and most of the clubs were what we called then ‘key clubs.’ They were Elks, Eagles — the kinds of clubs that you had to be a member in order to get in to, and they were the folks that had floor shows, but you didn’t have regular supper clubs that had shows. So, there were only so many of those, and he just wasn’t making much money. And it became more and more obvious that I was going to be the one earning the money, and I guess I had just made a decision that I was not going to — I wasn’t going to *do* that, and take care of somebody else. So, the last straw was — we were working club dates on weekends, together, and we had a date at the NCO club at Fort Lewis, and we were ‘doubling.’ It’s called doubling when you do two clubs on one night — one back-n-forth. So, we were doubling at a NCO Club in Seattle. Was there a naval base or something up there? [That’s] where we were. I can’t remember the name of it. Anyhow, we were leaving Fort Lewis, and we were on the road, and for some reason he was driving . . .

MP: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

GS: . . . and that was unusual because he didn’t drive much, and he didn’t drive *well* either. But, he was driving — we were on the freeway, and I asked about the *money* that we were getting that night and which of the bills it was going on, and he went nuts, on the freeway, and started yelling, and I finally got him to pull off the road, and I just took over the wheel. But in my mind, that was just the last straw for this relationship. And what happened was, I discovered a few days later, with some phone calls that came in, that he had been ‘kiting’ checks between . . .

MP: Yes, that was new to me. I learned about that . . .

GS: Yeah, he had been kiting checks between Tacoma [and Ohio]. Well, you can’t do it anymore with electronic stuff.

MP: No, I wouldn’t think so.

GP: You just can’t do it.

MP: There’s not enough time, right?

GS: Right, right, right. You would have the time that it took for the mail to get to Ohio to cover the checks that he was writing on that account, etc., and the bank had caught him.

MP: But why did you think he’d take off with Chris?

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GS: Well, because he loved his son, and that's what he had, and I mean, he really didn't — and I knew this — he didn't want to take care of him, but he would see this as a loss as it *was*.

MP: Right, sure.

GS: But it was a loss of a way of living that he had become used to, I guess, and so, I didn't want Chris subjected to the scene that would ensue if we did this in front of him.

MP: Got it.

GS: And [pause] ironically, that happened to him later in his life when I couldn't protect him, but, at that point I did.

MP: Yes.

GS: I simply packed things up. I mean, I made up my mind — I didn't do this very well — I mean, I was, what, twenty-three(?), immature, no support system . . .

MP: That's what I wondered.

GS: . . . and when I went to UPS, we did go to some marriage counseling and were counseled by one of the ministers who taught there (Dr. Phillips), who told us after three sessions — told *me*, he said, "You know, you were put into life with a pencil that had lead on one end and an eraser on the other. It's time for you to use the eraser." And I thought, "you pompous ass, you cannot erase. You *can't* erase. I mean here we are with this two-year-old child!

MP: You can't obliterate it.

GS: Yeah.

MP: It's always going to be there.

GS: Yeah.

MP: That's interesting.

GS: So, at any rate, I didn't handle it well, but I was protecting Chris, I thought.

MP: And, that's what we do.

GS: Yeah, so, I just bundled him up, and then Tony *did* throw his fit, and eventually the sheriff had to come and remove him.

MP: Those are not easy things.

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GS: No.

MP: Never. No. [Pause] And so, I'm not sure that this is appropriate now — because I've read so much about [cough] where things were with you in the 50s and the 60s — you weren't really — did you have the same kind of fears as a lot of women did in the 50s and 60s about coming out?

GS: [Nods]

MP: Okay. And were you trying to blend in the straight community, or were you just . . .

GS: I was. And [pause] I did. I got *married* . . .

MP: Yes.

GS: . . . and I had a child, and I tried to make a go of it, and [dog barks; commotion] when I went to college, there wasn't any reason to be out because I was busy studying. I mean, I was going to San Francisco State; but, during that time, Chris was in a day care — a head start-type program, state-supported.

MP: In California.

GS: Yeah, in San Francisco, and then he started kindergarten mid-year, because in those days they were doing those mid-year things, so, in January of '62, I guess, he went into kindergarten, and I was very much attracted to his teacher. And, I mean, I had had these attractions all along [inaudible], but this one — she came to dinner, I think, and I was taking her home, and I made a pass at her. I didn't do anything physically, but I said that I was attracted to her, and she freaked. And that was the first time that I had made *any* approach to anyone for a long time, so I backed way off again, and then when we were in California — when we moved to Claremont — was when I had my first adult affair, with Tina, who then became part of *our* story . . . [Gloria expressing awareness that I knew of Tina in those days].

MP: Yes.

GS: . . . part of *our* connection. And being out in Claremont was a good thing and a bad thing. It was good because it was a good place to be out to people who knew, and those who didn't, didn't really know anyhow. But it also destroyed my relationship with my professor from U.P.S who was also living there, because, when she discovered what was happening, she withdrew. She had a child, who was two years older than Chris, and they were very, very dear friends, and that was the end of any visiting there.

MP: That hurts.

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GS: It was a stressful, stressful situation for us.

MP: But you weren't ever really living a double life, because when you were married, you were married . . .

GS: That's right.

MP: . . . like some people who had to . . .

GS: Right, right.

MP: Yeah.

GS: I never had that opportunity come up, and it wasn't something I would be able to do, I don't think.

MP: In describing your identity, do you use certain terms. I mean — I know you say "lesbian." Have you always said lesbian? Or, back in the 50s, 60s, did you . . . ?

GS: Not back in the 50s and 60s. I don't ever remember ever describing myself in any kind of terms. None of this really happened — my being out and involved didn't happen until I got sober. I was forty-five when that happened.

MP: Yeah, cuz reading about some of these other elders has very much to do with the context. Even my own mother didn't use the word lesbian. It was homosexual, then it was gay, and then it was . . .

GS: Uh-hum.

MP: She never got there.

GS: I mean, there were people who never — who are lesbians — who still don't use the word lesbian. It's not uncommon. "Dyke" is another one.

MP: Yeah.

GS: I embrace them all!

MP: Yeah, there you go.

GS: Even "queer." I'm queer, you know.

MP: [Chuckles]

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GS: But when I came out, I came out. And I had been in a number of relationships before that, but I wasn't wearing a badge. First of all, I taught, and you just . . .

MP: Teachers have to be careful.

GS: . . . and then I was a social worker with children, and so, it's just not the kind of thing that you're flagrant about. But I certainly had lots of lesbian and gay friends, and I was involved in many activities before I got clean and sober. But I didn't get really active as a lesbian activist until I was forty-five.

MP: And then, when you came out to Chris — do you remember — can you tell me about that, or how old he was, or . . .

GS: Uh-hum, and that . . . boy, is *that* typical! In fact, you can probably tell *me* what happened. I said to *him*, "Chris, I'm a lesbian." And, he said, "I know that."

MP: Ah.

GS: And, of course, he should have . . .

MP: [Interrupts] How old *was* he?

GS: . . . because he was . . .

MP: Had he already experienced that time with Tina?

GS: Oh, yeah, and through a number of different women, to begin with.

MP: Comings and goings, a little bit.

GS: Yeah, yeah.

MP: How old do you think he was when you actually said it?

GS: He was probably about thirteen or fourteen.

MP: And, did you feel supported by the straight community in raising him, or the gay community — either one?

GS: The lesbian community [dog barks], in those days, and to a certain extent, I think it's still true, didn't like boy children.

MP: *Why?*

GS: They didn't like children to begin with very well.

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MP: In general.

GS: And having them around. They didn't want them at meetings. They just didn't have any way to deal with them. And boy children, after the age of six or seven, were especially not welcome.

MP: Hmmm, that's interesting.

GS: So.

MP: Fearful maybe, of . . . ?

GS: Separatists, separatists . . .

MP: . . . because these are lesbian women.

GS: Yeah.

MP: You're not talking about your gay friends, your male friends, then, because that's another story.

GS: Yeah, but the gay community, in general, simply didn't do well with kids back in those days. Things were very, very different from what it is now, but it's because of what *we* have gone through — you, and me, and Chris, and *your* kids, knowing about — learning more about homosexuals and the fact that we don't bite, and we don't carry diseases, and all that sort of thing, that it's become okay for people to talk about children . . .

MP: . . . bring them in.

GS: . . . to [ask], "Are my kids welcome at this kind of event?" type of thing, to the point where Tacoma Lesbian Concern (TLC) now advertises family-friendly events, and they mean, not only kids, but brothers, uncles. Bring your family. If they can deal with us, we can deal with them. So, that's very nice to see that they would do that.

MP: It is. We've come somewhere.

GS: Yeah.

MP: That's right. Your work environment, like when you were in social work — were you out in your work environment?

GS: Not to everybody. My boss knew.

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MP: A couple people, trusted people?

GS: Right, yeah.

MP: So, you didn't really have any kindred spirits at work?

GS: I did. I was in a relationship with one of them for a long time.

MP: In social work.

GS: Yeah, but we don't talk about that either. Actually, three of my relationships were with women who I worked with. And there were other people in the office who *knew* about those relationships.

MP: And, in ways that helped, probably?

GS: Yeah, right, yeah.

MP: Okay, and there were certain jobs — well, I think you did it in teaching. Did you consider that some jobs were safer because of your orientation than others?

GS: I never had one of those jobs, but, yes, there were certainly jobs where it would have been safer to be a lesbian. There were certain jobs where it was expected that you *were* one if you were a woman in a non-traditional job. You were branded as a lesbian whether you were one or not.

MP: Yeah, I was reading about some of these women — that they would test (well, in the military) how you held your cigarette, and that would be the stereotype. You must be.

GS: Yeah, you must be a lesbian.

MP: And they probably *were* [laughs].

GS: Yes. And that was the catch-22 for women who could *be* out and could pursue a non-traditional career; but then it was their *womanhood*, not their lesbianism, [because] then they were women, and women don't do these jobs. So, I refer to those things now as multiple oppressions. Multiple oppressions is one way to [explain] that. Add racism and classism to those things, and there were so many lesbians — and *are* so many lesbians — who have all of those issues in their history and too many of them have it still in their present lives.

MP: Yeah.

GS: So, the oppressions multiplied.

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MP: [Recognizing time] Getting close. [Pause] What does the term “family” mean to you, and who do you include in your family?

GS: Well, I love to sing “We Are Family” [chuckles]. And I guess what *that* describes for me is the gay and lesbian community. Personally, I don’t think that’s necessarily true, that we’re all family-family, but it’s the family that I feel comfortable with. My biological family is — they live in Ohio except for Chris.

MP: A lot of ’em are gone too.

GS: And a lot of ’em are gone, but I have a niece and a nephew, and grand nieces and nephews.

MP: That’s *right*.

GS: . . . and great grans, and all of them know I’m a lesbian, because I’ve made that clear to them. I have one grand nephew who is gay, and his relationship within the family is tenuous. They love him, *but* . . .

MP: Have you been able to help with that?

GS: Well, I was the one who was called when they first discovered that he was gay. David courted a young woman and actually married her, took her on a Caribbean cruise for their honeymoon and couldn’t consummate the marriage and came home, and [pause] nearly killed himself around all of this . . .

MP: Ahhh.

GS: They called *me*, and we had not talked about *my* lesbianism. But they *knew* that I was a lesbian, so they called me. “Can you come and help?” And I did.

MP: Maybe not the way they thought you would?

GS: Well, no, I just said, “You need to face this.” And he said, “I’m not gay, I’m not gay, I’m not gay.” He was in denial, and it took him quite awhile to . . .

MP: Interesting.

GS: . . . to really be able to admit to himself that he was gay. But, at any rate, the nice part was that they were married in the Catholic Church and so she was able to get the marriage annulled, and that was fine, and then when David *did* come out to himself and to his family, his father said, to me, “I know I’m not supposed to talk to you about this, but why does he have to bleach his hair like that and wear those bright colors?” And I said, “Because he’s got a lot of stuff that he’s gotta get out, and that’s one way of getting it out [laughs], okay. Just leave him alone.”

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MP: Ohhh.

GS: So, that family — I have never felt — I mean I left there because I didn't feel that I was part of that family, and I am grateful that I found the Pacific Northwest.

MP: . . . and that you have Chris.

GS: Yeah, and that I have Chris, and Donna, and that I have a family here, and we refer to that in the literature and in our conversations as our families of choice, and that includes *you*, and lots of other straight people, but people that I feel comfortable with and that I can be me, and not have to gather up my books when they come in my house [smiles].

MP: I know. [Response from a pre-interview conversation with Gloria in which I told her about a recent experience of hiding my gay and lesbian research books in the closet, of all places, because the cleaning lady was scheduled to come over.] I'm not doing that anymore, ever [laughs].

GS: [Laughs] But I understand that because I've been there and done that, so . . . and felt that I've had to when people from work were coming over, or from when I was in social work or in teaching. I think I had students who knew that I was a lesbian, but they were cool about it.

MP: And, parents maybe?

GS: Probably. Yeah, probably. So, actually all of us in the foreign language wing at San Marino High School were queer except one . . . and one of those was in a relationship with a female counselor at the school too, so I don't think it was something that was — I mean, we never talked about it to other people, but I'm sure it was something that must have been known by the students and parents as well as administration.

MP: Yeah.

GS: . . . but don't talk about it.

MP: When we talk about your activism — your gay and lesbian activism — you say that it mostly started when you were about forty-five?

GS: Uh-huh.

MP: But I've wondered, if your father was a coal miner, and your mother worked at Goodyear Tire and Rubber, were you at that time witnessing labor issues — things that stayed with you and inspired some of your activism in later . . .

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GS: Absolutely. I remember being in the soup line when my dad was on strike.

MP: Yeah, and watching that. And so those were some of the values that you grew up with — political values that you grew up with?

GS: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

MP: Wow, it sticks with you, doesn't it?

GS: Yeah. What it does is give you an understanding — I mean, I'm not a firm believer in, "You can't understand it unless you've been there," because I believe that you can extrapolate from situations, and *understand*, and maybe not empathize but you can understand how that situation can be — what it can do to you emotionally.

MP: Yeah, cuz I wouldn't have even . . .

GS: But . . .

MP: . . . have connected with the Goodyear Tire and Rubber, but I've been reading . . . *Black Workers Remember* that Mike Honey wrote, and they were all so affected by working in that environment, and then the labor issues, I figured you had to have experienced some of that.

GS: . . . and, being raised in Akron, Ohio, in a WASP family, I heard from my father, constantly, because it was simply the way people talked about the dagos and the niggers and the spics, and the — all of the words, the derogatory terms that were used for people who weren't white. And, I remember from a very early age, Marcie, five, six, seven years old, thinking . . .

MP: This isn't right?

GS: This isn't right. And then I remember challenging my dad when I was about ten or eleven, because he was spending time at the hospital with a friend who had been burned in the rubber mill and had had his arm, I believe, caught in the mill, and was in intensive care, and dad was there with him, and one day he was ranting about all of these people and was talking about Black people, and I said, "Dad, your friend Jim is Black." "Well, that's different," he said. And so, then I began — I mean that was just one more bit of information that helped me to understand how we behave one way in one situation and maybe personally in another situation, we feel very differently, because he was *clearly* concerned about this man who was his friend, and the fact that he was Black had nothing to do with these people over here that he *hated*, and because that's what he was supposed to do.

MP: Interesting.

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GS: And I think I was able to draw from that understanding when I began to hear about gays — about homosexuals — and how terrible they were, that there was a difference between how people were perceived as a group and how we were perceived as individuals. And that was a big, big learning thing for me, I think.

MP: Yeah.

GS: And I thought, maybe I'm just trying to excuse my dad, but I wasn't. I understood . . .

MP: . . . where he was coming from.

GS: . . . where he was coming from, and I also understood that it was *wrong* to be doing that. You *can't* just throw people in a category and say, "Because he's bad, all Black people are bad, or because he's bad . . ." And so, that all fed into my need for this interdisciplinary study — to try to understand why people are different and why we perceive them differently and why humans have this need to think of people in . . .

MP: Categories and boxes.

GS: . . . in closed little groups, when we're not.

MP: No.

GS: And, of course, where I go with that, often in my thinking and talking, is that we are all such — we are all so individual that it's amazing that two of us can talk to each other and think that we have actually communicated, because our understandings of words, of gestures, of body language, are all different, and so what we think we're conveying to somebody may be perceived as something entirely different by them.

MP: Sometimes.

GS: So, it's good to be able to think about that when you're trying to be clear with somebody.

MP: [Pause] When we speak of major historical events in your lifetime, what events were significant to you and why? And I'll just name a few of 'em. World War II. You don't have to go in depth. The McCarthy era, Red Scare, Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of JFK and MLK, Vietnam War, the Hippie era, and Stonewall.

GS: Yeah, they were all significant . . .

MP: *All* of 'em were.

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GS: . . . in their own way. Yeah.

MP: Affected by all of them.

GS: In different ways, but [pause] . . .

MP: You lived through a lot, Gloria.

GS: Yeah. Stonewall, I suppose — although I barely remember [pause] Stonewall *itself*, actually happening . . . in fact, did you watch the special on PBS the other night about Stonewall? [Referring to *Stonewall Uprising*, now on DVD]

MP: No, but I heard. Mike Honey told me it was awesome.

GS: It *was* awesome, and if you get a chance, watch the TV guide . . .

MP: I've looked, and I can't find it.

GS: . . . and see if . . .

MP: Okay.

GS: . . . or just go to channel 9 and see if you can find out when it's going to be shown again. But subsequent to that — that happened just after I went to work for DSHS, up here after I came back from California, [I] couldn't find a teaching job and finally found this job at DSHS on a temporary basis, and that was in '68, and Stonewall was in '69, and in 1970, DSHS and a whole bunch of other state government entities supported a conference that was held in Seattle, and I was. . .

MP: Yes, I have been trying like crazy to find that.

GS: Yeah, me too. There are some people around who do know, who do remember it, but . . .

MP: There's gotta be some literature somewhere.

GS: Yeah, yeah, I know, and it happened at the . . .

MP: Langston Hughes Center.

GS: . . . Langston Hughes Center. And that was the most impactful event . . .

MP: And you thought '70.

GS: . . . and I was *sent* there, as a straight person, but as a social worker, to that event.

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MP: (Gotta be able to find something.)

GS: And then, subsequent to that . . . there was another conference held in Parkland at the Nunnery.

MP: Oh.

GS: Maryhurst, is it? [Marymount] Whatever, it's out in Parkland . . . that I was also sent to, and it was a conference on LGBT people and issues.

MP: Interesting.

GS: And those [events] both happened subsequent to Stonewall, and I'm sure the impetus came from what had happened, and things just went *wham* all over this county in terms of people coming out . . .

MP: Yes.

GS: . . . and becoming active. So, those were very impactful for me. The war from my standpoint — where I come from — in terms of being a pacifist and knowing that peace is not really possible in this world.

MP: Vietnam War, are we talking about?

GS: Yeah, yeah. [Dog barks] But it did not make sense to me, didn't make sense to most everybody that I knew, and I think that was the beginning of my understanding of the fact that we, as human beings, are warriors. We're going to have wars. And we're never sure what it is we're fighting about, but we don't seem to be able not to do that — get involved in other people's stuff, for no good reason, and ignore what's happening in our own country. And day by day that gap increases in this country, where we have hurricanes and oil wells blowing up and floods and tornadoes and earthquakes, and we don't take care of our own . . .

MP: Mother Nature and human nature.

GS: . . . and even without those, people are so poor that they don't know where their next bite of food is coming from.

MP: Yeah.

GS: Even in this country, and yet we're spending billions of dollars on war. And, I do understand a little bit about the economy — the economics of war. That's part of where our money comes from, but it doesn't make sense to me that — particularly when I study other civilizations and cultures, and know that there *can* be peace.

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MP: Yes.

GS: And for years I blamed Descartes and his dictum that “We think, therefore we are” . . .

MP: Yes.

GS: . . . led us into this, but now I know a little bit more, and I know that’s probably not true. But when we started down that path of automation and scientific studies — things to make life supposedly easier for us — we began to move away from things of the heart and the soul and the spirit, and depend upon the mind, and it has brought us to a very painful place.

MP: Yes. [Pause] Well, on that note, I know you need to get down for your nap.

GS: I’m okay. I’ve got a few minutes.

MP: Why don’t you tell me just a little bit about your up and coming regional gathering of the Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, because that is something no one else will have in their interview.

GS: That’s right. [Marcie laughs] This is going to be wonderful. In 19 . . . whatever year I was — must have been 1991, I was a member of Tacoma Lesbian Concern, and we found out about this national lesbian conference that was going to happen in Atlanta, and three of us from TLC went down to Atlanta for this conference.

MP: Was it the first one?

GS: It wasn’t an OLOC Conference . . .

MP: Okay.

GS: . . . but it was the first and *only* national lesbian conference that I know of. And these women were flooding in from all over the country — actually all over the world — and there were thousands of lesbians, and part of that conference — during that conference this group of old women in white dresses, with purple ribbons across them that said “OLOC” [spells] marched into this conference and took over the stage, and began talking about ageism — ageism within the GLBT community, ageism within the society, and then they had a plenary session. I mean, they left everybody stunned in the audience, and then they went off to their own plenary session where it was just old lesbians, and you had to be sixty years old in order to get into this, and I was not sixty; I was fifty-six. And the speaker for the plenary session was Barbara MacDonald who wrote *Look Me in the Eye*, which if you haven’t read it, you must read it.

MP: Thank you.

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GS: *Look Me in the Eye*, Barbara MacDonald.

MP: [Makes note] Okay.

GS: And I wanted to hear her because I had heard about the book. And they had sentries at the doors, standing with their arms crossed, saying to people who were trying to get in, “How old are you?”

MP: Women?

GS: Uh-hum, and I said, “I’m fifty-six.” “You can’t come in. You’re not old enough.” And I said, “But, I really want to hear her, and I’m almost old enough.” “You can’t come in. You’re not old enough.” And that woman who was keeping me out was a woman named Shevy Healey, who was one of the first organizers of OLOC and became later on my mentor. But, at that moment, she was my enemy because I wanted in that room [chuckles].

MP: [Laughs]

GS: Finally she went and sat down, and I was able to sneak in the back and listen to Barbara’s speech. But, at that point, one of my driving focuses, *foci* in life, was to be old enough to join OLOC, and so I became a supporting member and was able to get their newspaper — newsletter. So, the minute I turned sixty I applied for — there isn’t membership, you just subscribe to their . . . because in the olden days folks didn’t have memberships because they would be public record and then people could find out who was a member of that and then you would be outed, so, they don’t have memberships — *still* don’t have membership twenty years later. Anyhow, I became enamored of OLOC and what they were doing and why they had formed a group because nobody else was listening to them as old women, as old *queer* women. And they were beginning to make an impact; they had to fight in order to get into the White House Conference on Aging in the mid-90s because they weren’t inviting lesbians in, and to get into the LGBT community national groups, they weren’t being invited to come to the table when everybody *else* was being invited, but the old people weren’t being invited, and . . .

MP: Wow.

GS: . . . the American Society on Aging was not recognizing us as a group, and so we were fighting our way into all of these organizations to have a place at the table. And that was OLOC’s mission — was to be heard on the issues of aging and ageism and how it impacted old lesbians. So, I joined and became a relatively active member in terms of going to these conferences. Last year there was a conference in Cleveland, and we formed a — we have formed a Puget Sound area group, and we call it a chapter, but it’s hard to be a chapter of something that doesn’t have members, so all of that is very nebulous; we really don’t know what we are, but we call ourselves a chapter. We were

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asked if we would hold a regional conference in the Pacific Northwest, and so we were very cautious in terms of saying “yes,” because . . .

MP: How many is “we?”

GS: Well, actually there are four of us who are doing the work right now with some help from other volunteers, but we have — I mean we started out with a very small group of twenty people a little over four years ago, and we now have about 300 people on our e-mail lists, and many of them come to our meetings. We have 25 or 30 that will come to any one meeting. But, at any rate, we finally said, “If you will stay off our backs and not try to tell us every five minutes what to do, we will take it upon ourselves to . . . and if you will respond when we *ask* you for help and advice, then we’ll go ahead and do this.” And we’re saying this to the steering committee — the governing body is a steering committee of five or six old women who live all over the states, who talk on the phone, who have meetings quarterly. Four times a year they get together for two or three days and try to develop policy, etc. I mean, it’s just chaos. It is total chaos. But internationally, we have all these people who are out — all these old lesbians — because the minute an old lesbian hears about a group, they wanna join because they know they have been left of so many things. So, at any rate, we agreed to do this, and it has just snowballed. We started out thinking we would be lucky if we had 65 women from the area, and it’s *regional* so that means Alaska, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, northern California wants to be a part of us, and Washington. So, we thought maybe 65 people. Well, we’re still almost three months out from the conference, which will be at the end of July — the fifth weekend in July — at La Quinta Inn in Tacoma. We have 85 registrants, and we have almost three months to go before the conference. We’ve run out of hotel space, so we’re trying to find alternative housing for people. The oldest of us are clamoring to get here because they’ve decided this is a time for a reunion for the old, old lesbians. So, we have many octogenarians who are coming. We have two, at least, nonagenarians who are coming, and everyday we hear that these oldest of us are out recruiting *more* of the oldest of us to get here because they’re looking at this as one last time for a great reunion because we’re losing people, of course, everyday . . .

MP: Ah, it sounds . . .

GS: . . . because of age. And we’ve got Lillian Faderman who is the foremost lesbian historian / author / academic person who has really done some marvelous research and publishing on old lesbians, and particularly her book — what did I say it was?

MP: *To Believe* . . .

GS: *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America*, which really is an explication of how much of the social movement in the 1920s and 30s was done by lesbians who were free to do that because they were free to organize because they didn’t have obligations to families, and they didn’t *need* money because they came from money, or they didn’t need money because the women who came from money would support

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them. And so they were fighting their way into colleges and into politics and into social movements, and it's just fascinating reading. At any rate, Lillian's going to be our keynote speaker; she's coming with her partner, Phyllis Irwin, who is 83, and Lillian is 71 — both of whom taught for years at Fresno State University, of all places, I keep thinking, but apparently, it's a great place. Our major entertainer is Lucie Blue Tremblay, who is a French-Canadian singer — women's music — and she's going to talk somewhat about the women's music movement and how integral that has been to the LGBT movement, particularly the lesbian movements in the last thirty years. Then, we're gonna have all kinds of panels on all kinds of things on living and dying and what happens in between, and so, it's just going to be marvelous!

MP: It sounds like it.

GS: Yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

MP: I know you are. I hope there's room for me.

GS: Yeah.

MP: [Laughs]

GS: Yeah, well, we will just hang chairs from the ceiling.

MP: Yeah, okay.

GS: We will have a blessing that will happen, because we'll be on native land at La Quinta, and we have a Native American woman who will come to do our blessing as we open on Thursday night. We have a big celebration for the oldest elders on Thursday.

MP: Did you organize all of the speakers, Gloria?

GS: Yeah, most of the speakers. Well, I knew Lillian and I know Lucie, and so those were my first two, and I really expected to be turned down. But, you know who the people are that have turned us down? They have been the local people who I thought would be — because we wanted to showcase our local folks. Greta was too busy. Charlene Strong is too busy. Marsha Botzer is coming, and that'll be interesting . . .

MP: I don't know any of these people.

GS: . . . because Marsha started the Ingersoll Gender Center in Seattle, and she's one of the first transgender people — male to female — and she's been living as a lesbian with a partner for many, many years.

MP: So, she can come.

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GS: Yeah.

MP: You just can't go the other way.

GS: Yeah. Some of the OLOC elders [Marcie coughs] aren't sure how they feel about that because they're kind of stuck where they are. I mean we have lesbian separatists who don't want *men* around either, and we do our best at the OLOC conferences to have all women waiters, and everybody who does everything, simply because . . . I mean, it's the same thing with the reason they tried to keep me out of hearing the speaker in Atlanta, because that's for *old* lesbians, and we want our own space, and I understand that. So, who else locally? I think those are the two majors that we really thought would be here with us, but they're busy so . . . anyhow, we're gonna have a great time!

MP: You are.

GS: Yeah.

MP: And Gloria, this has been fabulous.

GS: Well, you . . .

MP: I could go on and on

GS: . . . yeah, we could, but you've got most of my life in the other transcripts.

MP: Thank you for welcoming me in your home and . . .

GS: Oh, you bet, you bet. I enjoyed it.

MP: . . . and in your arms [Gloria's welcoming hug] — and your honesty, I'm thrilled — thrilled that you are the one.

[“The one” refers to the fact that Gloria was the one I chose to interview for this project.]

GS: You, you're the one, and you are the one, and you are the one [singing lyrics from a song?]