Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory
of
Kay Turner

An Interview
Conducted by
Allee Manning
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Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

Supported by a two-year Mellon-funded Community Archives grant, LHA is facilitating The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project which seeks to continue the Lesbian Herstory Archives' commitment to collecting and sharing Lesbian stories.

Allee Manning 00:06
Okay, hello. I'm so excited to be here today and having this conversation. This interview is for the Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project interview, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. We're recording this oral history with me, Allee Manning, talking to Kay Turner about her life history. Today is Thursday, April 7th, 2022, Kay is currently in New York City and I'm in Dobbs Ferry, New York, and we're speaking using Zoom. So to get started, tell me a little bit about your upbringing, including when you were born and where.

Kay Turner 00:40
I was born in Detroit, Michigan on November 10, 1948. I'm a Scorpio and I have sort of invested in my Scorpio nature. I think through my entire life, I have had an interest in astrology as part of my lesbian nature, and it's all kind of worked itself out. So I was born in Detroit, in a working class family, an aspirational family. I say this because [note: everything was done to improve opportunities for me and my brother, Jim,] but my mother and my father were also aspirational in their dreams: both had performance interests [note: in music and theater] that they were never able to fulfill. They came of age in a generation–[note: the Great Depression and World War II]– when they really weren't able to fulfill those aspirations. But I think they transferred them to me in a way that was very important.

I was raised in the fifties, early sixties. That would be you know, my childhood and teenage years. And in that period, in Detroit growing up, I had a tremendous amount of freedom that my family gave me to express who I was. I had a very early identification with Roy Rogers, the singing cowboy, and I used to go about in my neighborhood dressed as Roy, and knocking on people's doors to ask them if they would like me to sing a few songs for them. My father taught me a few chords on a little plastic guitar that I carried around with me. I would go into people's homes and, you know, perform for them standing on top of coffee tables and such. And this was kind of the beginning for me of a sense of freedom, that I think is very critical to the way in which I later identified as a lesbian— but not too much later, because I kind of identify as a lesbian who was born that way. Kind of, you know, I came into my lesbianism very early. I was already in that Roy Rogers phase, already kind of identifying my different desires. So the combination of the freedom that my parents gave me with my Roy Rogers identification, with my desire to sing about things, kind of was the nexus of who I became.

So Detroit was a really important home for me. Later, as I grew up, I became involved in a church choir, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Detroit, and then a church camp associated with that church, Camp Westminster.. That’s where I also felt this kind of freedom of expression, because we would go to camp and it was all girls. That was my place to sort of, you know, practice my early lesbian desires and ways of being. Just ways of being free to be who I was. It was very important to me and I look back on it as a very important time, and there's much more to say about all of that. But I would certainly say that by the time I was in my teenage years, I

was doing music and performing music in the hootenanny cycle that was part of the sixties folk revival that began with the Kingston Trio, and Joan Baez, and Judy Collins. Very first concert I ever went to was at the Detroit Symphony Hall and it was Judy Collins. You know, I kind of fell for her in such a big way and wanted to be like her and then got a guitarist [note: named Carl Lundgren] and I played banjo, and we started playing [note: together at school, at church and in little folk music cafes that were springing up in Detroit and everywhere else in the early to mid 1960s.] So my musical career was kind of a combination of church choir and hootenanny. But it evolved later on into other aspects of my performance career that became important to my lesbian identity. So I wanted to mark that [note:growing up time] simply because I don't think I would have done the things I did later and am still doing now if it hadn't been for that period in my life.

Allee Manning 06:26
Great, yeah. So you were already a musician then, by the time you left for college?

Kay Turner 06:31
Yes, yeah. So I was already performing. Yep and doing other kinds of things that were, later on, instrumental. I was at the church camp [note: for 14 years every summer and by the time I was 19,] I was the camp's director of Christian education. But by the time I did that, I was not all that interested in Jesus anymore. I became interested in the Moon, in moon goddesses, and various [note: other female deities] and I had all my charges— my young women campers — we were, you know, doing moon worship and all kinds of stuff. [Note: learning alternate ways of thinking about religion and spirituality.] It's hard to imagine it now but there was a time in which all of this lesbian [note: and feminist] idealism was being born in new information, [note: research into the past that patriarchy had tried to erase.] I call it idealism because it was a real break from the long period in which lesbians had been cursed [note: and dismissed] by the patriarchy. In the seventies, and late sixties, and into the eighties, we started to have a sense of our own power. And, you know, my life was part of that grand illumination, and my performances, and the work that I did with "*Lady-Unique-Inclination-of-the-Night*" and various other projects that I did then and into my graduate career, all figured in this period of great lesbian idealism out of which LHA also was formed. So Deb and [note: Joan] when the whole Lesbian Herstory Archive came into being– that was also a result of this period of extremely positive lesbian identity [note: based largely in reclaiming and pronouncing our herstory in books, publications, art, music, theater, festivals.We weren't just out of the closet personally, we were out of history's closet.]

Allee Manning 08:44
Great, yeah. So to rewind a tiny bit. After growing up in Detroit, you then went on to college, which began your academic career which ended up being really, really important in your life. Could you tell me a bit about those early independent years in college and then when you went on to grad school after?

Kay Turner 09:05
Yeah, yeah. So in college— I went to Douglass College of Rutgers University in New Jersey. And Douglass College back in the day, it isn't quite that anymore. But it was an all women's college associated with Rutgers University. We were an independent college that had been founded by Mabel Smith Douglass, a kind of, you know, rabble rousing suffragist of the early 20th century. A lot of the women's colleges— Mount Holyoke and Smith, and Vassar— many of them were associated with these really rebellious women who took charge of assuring that women would have an education that was as valuable and equal to what men had. Douglass was sometimes referred to as the "eighth sister," you know, the seven sister schools, we were kind of the eighth sister along with a number of other "eighths"— [note: women's colleges]— that were founded in that period. So the thing about Douglass was that [note: in an all-women environment] it gave me a huge opportunity to enlarge my sense of who I was. And it was a great, great experience for me. [Note: The funny thing is I went to Douglass by default when my parents would not allow me to go to NYU or some other place in NYC. My goal in life at that point was to be a New Yorker. And the closest I could get was New Jersey! But in the end, Douglass gave me what I needed to grow in terms of my thinking, my exposure to art and literature, and in terms of friendships and relationships.]

I had my first— well, my first girlfriend was in high school— my second girlfriend in college. We were all kind of closeted at that time. [Note: my college years were 1967-1971.] It wasn't like you had— you know, you couldn't, you weren't really out. I wasn't really out until my senior year in college. But I had girlfriends [note: within the first month of arriving in September 1967.] The thing that was great about Douglass College was that I was able to manifest ideas about being a woman and being a lesbian that were very important to me. [Note: I got very active in making things happen.] There were channels to do that, like I was the editor of the literary magazine, [note: called *Watermark.*] I was also on the Voorhees [note: Chapel] Board that brought different important figures to campus to give lectures— like Margaret Mead and Anne Sexton, and various people like that. [Note: I was also part of groups protesting the Vietnam War. The left–SDS–and the Black Power movement were active in that period. And so was Second Wave feminism and Gay Liberation. I remember getting word of the Stonewall uprising in 1969. So I was part of an early fomenting of feminist consciousness at the college. In 1971 I organized an early–might have been the first–panel at the college on Feminism and Art with participants Lucy Lippard (art critic), Jill Johnston (author, Lesbian Nation, 1973), Miriam Schapiro (feminist art pioneer) and others.] The commencement speaker in 1971 was Kate Millett. So, you know, Kate came. She had just published *Sexual Politics* (1970) and she gave an incredibly rousing speech that was kind of against the grain of everything and anything that had ever been given as a commencement speech up to that point. So, you know, that was a very fertile, fertile period for me.

When I graduated from college, I was part of a great group of lesbians who had found each other in college, and sort of surreptitiously through the machinations of various, you know, there were no LGBTQ clubs on campus or anything like that. You had to find your way to each other. But I knew this great group of women who were my friends, and we became— I wanted to do things, I wanted to express what this revolution had really brought and was bringing. So one of the first things after I graduated from college was founding a women's performance group called "The Oral Tradition." And that was me and Joanna Labow, Paula Schorr, and Nancy Dean. We took Motown songs and songs of the Beach Boys, and we rewrote them with lesbian pronoun, you know, sort of pronouns that made them very explicitly lesbian. We had a great time doing that. We dressed up in these crazy outfits that were kind of proto punk, kind of, you know, ripped off the rack at Sears. We performed in these night gowns that had like the little fluffy things around them that were cost, like $3.99 at Sears or whatever. Anyway, it was like, you know, we performed at parties, and we performed at the New York coffee house, and up in Rhode Island, and in Philadelphia. We had a little circuit where we, you know, performed our crazy lesbian songs and ways that we wanted to sort of promote ourselves.

At the same time, I was in love with a woman named Nancy, who had been— she had been raised in Mexico City, and she and I worked at a bookstore in New Brunswick, New Jersey, called "Gramercy Books." I was the book buyer and the manager of the store and of course I hired my girlfriend to work with me. And the day came when our boss— who was the owner of the store, but had been formerly a shoe salesman, who knew very little about books— so he was like, "You guys, you run the store." So that's what we did and we had a great time doing that, and then one day, he said, "Well, you know, you've been working so hard, you should, you can have two weeks of vacation." And so we were like, okay, and so we took two weeks of vacation, and Nancy said to me, "I want to take you to Mexico to show you where I grew up in Mexico City."

So this was a life changing trip for me. I'd never been out of the country. We went to Mexico and I just fell in love with Mexico and Mexican culture, and it became a real pathway for me into my future as a folklorist. But also, into my future, I think of trying to understand my difference in relationship to the difference of others, you know, of Mexicans, of Catholics, of old women. I mean, I became very interested in ideas of difference and how important they were, why it was important to be different marginal, you know, anomalous, ambivalent, all the things that you know, kind of capture what it means to be a lesbian, in our culture, in that time, and also, today. So that was a very important time for me.

We went to Mexico, we came back. I started a journal called "*Lady-Unique-Inclination-of the-Night.*" I'll show you some copies of that here. Here they are right here. This was the first one, right here. The important thing about this is that this was my original connection to LHA, which is that LHA took the original copies of this journal, which are still at LHA. Joan really wanted them, and she told me. She said, "I really want copies of *Lady Unique* to be in the

Archive," which was many, many years ago now. But yeah, I sent her I think these copies that are in the Archive now, I think they were originally at the apartment, you know, at Joan and Deb's on the Upper West Side. So it was kind of that long ago. I'm not really sure about that, you'd have to test that herstory. But yeah, she really, she wanted this journal that was a journal of the Goddess, and the image of the Goddess as important to women. But it was all done by lesbians. I mean, it was, you know, it was a feminist, this was in the— [cat meowing]—no. Oh, so here comes Bella. I've been trying to— no, hold on one second— I'm gonna get her [meowing]— no. No. [Laughter in background]. Oh golly, I've been trying to get her drugged, basically, drugged on cat food to try to get her not to come into our interview for the past three hours, but no.

Anyway yeah, this journal was important. So at the same time that we're talking about now, in the early seventies, mid seventies, early eighties— you know, when I'm doing *Lady Unique*, doing The Oral Tradition, you know, doing all this stuff, going to Mexico— this is a very, very fertile time for me as a lesbian. Because everything about what I'm doing at this point in time is kind of funneling lesbian culture into feminist culture, not the other way around. It was very much about funneling it in a feminist, in a feminist world that was coming into being, was taking lesbianism and really funneling it through. And lesbian culture, you know, not just relational feminism, ah, lesbianism. So it was about saying that there were cultural— you know, sort of there was a bedrock of lesbian culture that also needed to be accounted for in ways that lesbians would think about the world, that would be different. So everything that I did in that period, Oral Tradition, *Lady-Unique-Inclination-of-the-Night*, you know, the trip to Mexico, and then the bands that came out of that. Oral Tradition, and then into the bands that we did in the mid and late seventies— Mothra, Slip of the Tongue— these were all like, you know, bands that we did in New Brunswick. And, you know, went around to various— we had various gigs with various New Haven Women's Rock Band, and Meg Christian. This was also a very formative time around women's music and we were part of that as well. So, all of this was like, you know, in terms of your question about that period, the period of coming from college into that early period, post college in New Brunswick, which was about 10 years. I mean, I came to New Brunswick to go to college in 1967, I graduated ‘71, and then I left in ‘77 to go to Texas to go to graduate school. So all the stuff I'm talking about right now, all happened in that 10 year period.

Allee Manning 21:50
So though you were living in New Brunswick, you were spending a lot of time in New York City, which was how you—

Kay Turner 21:56
Yeah, yeah. Yes. So I was also, I mean, I guess the thing that— yeah, I wrote a note here to myself: be sure to say that a lot of my lesbian identity hinged on an identity that I had with New York City, from very early on. Probably from TV, but I, you know, I got some idea very early on that going to New York would be the place for me. That would be a place where I would be

accepted, where I would be known for what I was and who I was, right. So when I was 13 years old, going on 14, my mother asked me what I wanted for my birthday. And I said, "I want to go to New York, let's go to New York." And so she was— she had never been to New York, my aunt had been, her sister, but she had never been and she goes, "Oh, that's a great idea, Kay, we'll go." So we made a plan to go to the New York World's Fair in 1965. We got on a bus from Detroit and we traveled the three of us, my aunt, my mother, and me. We went to New York, and honestly, I never looked back. It just was like— it was everything that I wanted. And I, you know, even all those years that I was in Texas, which were 21 years of being in Texas— but they were, that was a great part of my life, too. But I was always going back to New York and New York was always as it still is, I think, a place where everyone comes. All freaks come to New York, you know, it's just what— if you feel freakish where you're born and raised, you come to New York, and then you feel better.

Allee Manning 23:58
Definitely. And did you find that community and that welcoming the culture being what you wanted to?

Kay Turner 24:06
Yes. Oh, I definitely did.

Allee Manning 24:08
Yeah. I'd love to know what your social life was like, any political life that you had there as well, in addition to your performance, or perhaps those things are—

Kay Turner 24:17
Well, I think the performance was really the essence of it. But there were lots of, you know, by the time I'm in that period, in the seventies, there were— just a lot of the politics was being done through making things. You know, making the culture was a much, you know, much important kind of thing at that time. So making *Lady Unique*, making Oral Tradition, making the bands, you know, standing for a lesbian culture that really had been hidden up until that time, right? It had not really been, you know, it was not in evidence, you know, not in a way that women consciously said, “I'm gonna make this culture, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna make it happen and you're gonna see it. The world will see it.” Right.

So, I think that that was really important in that period. It was post Stonewall. Stonewall had happened in ‘69 and Gay Liberation Front had sort of— that had a lesbian and gay men's, you know, sort of wedge that was pushing politically toward much more visible identity. And then people like me, you know, in New Jersey but very identified with New York, we were also doing our work in the way that we were doing it, right? We were doing it through making culture. And that's the thing that I have done most importantly, I think, throughout my career.

Allee Manning 26:08
So the next step in your career, which really furthered a lot of your work was, as you mentioned, moving down to Texas for grad school.

Kay Turner 26:17
Yeah.

Allee Manning 26:18
Yeah. A bit about that decision, and what that experience was like for you?

Kay Turner 26:24
Yeah. So that trip that I took with Nancy, Nancy Dean, back in 1972, and then in 1974, we went back to Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, in pursuit of— I wanted to do a biography of this Mayan moon goddess, Ixchel, who was always appearing in the footnotes of the academic literature about pre-Columbian, Mexico. And, you know, she was never kind of— she was always like identified as most important goddess figure, you know, controls all birth, death, life. And I'm like, oh, why is she in a footnote? So we went to Mexico and did this project that, you know, ultimately gave birth to *Lady Unique*. But then I wanted to go further with that. I wanted to go to graduate school, and I found a program at the University of Texas in Austin that would allow me to do that. It was a program in Folklore and Oral History [correction: Folklore and Ethnomusicology] at the University of Texas. And I wanted to be close to Mexico because I was pretty sure that I wanted to continue doing work on Mexican and Mexican American culture, women's culture. So that's what got me and Nancy to Austin in 1977. I was there until 1998, when I moved back to New York. And in the meantime, in that period, I got my PhD in Folklore and Anthropology at the University of Texas. My dissertation subject was Mexican American Women's home altars.

So on that trip to Mexico, we met a woman in Guatemala, a woman named Virjinia, who was a butcher in the marketplace. In Quetzaltenango, which is the second largest city in Guatemala, and she took pity on us because we were trying to stretch our trip, and we had no money. We were living on a dollar a day, and she would occasionally sort of give us some chicharrón, or some, you know, little bit of chicken or something like that to take back to our little apartment that we had in Quetzaltenango, to do keep us, you know, fortified. But one day she invited us to have dinner with her and she took us to her altar room to say a blessing on us before we had the meal that we were going to have with her. And at the, you know, at the dinner table— I mean, I had never seen an altar room. It was beautiful, was pink, filled with flowers, statues of the saints, and Mary, and photographs of the family. I'd never seen anything like that. I was raised Presbyterian so we didn't have any, you know, we just didn't have stuff like that. But I asked Virjinia at our, you know, at our dinner, "Why do you have an altar in your house?" That was so

new to me. And she said, "Because it's a beautiful necessity." In Spanish she said, "It's a beautiful necessity." And, you know, I think if she had said anything else like, "Oh, it's just something we do," I probably wouldn't have cared but that phrase stuck with me. And then I became interested in domestic altars, and did my dissertation on that subject matter and eventually founded a business called Texas Folklife that was a nonprofit organization for presenting folklore and folklife in Texas.

Then on the underbelly of all that, I was also doing all this kind of lesbian positive stuff. And I founded Girls in the Nose, the band that became kind of the rock punk band that I think I'm probably most famous for, in terms of my musical career. Because we wrote a lot of very lesbian positive songs like "Medusa," and "Honorary Heterosexual Lesbian," and "Two Altars Two Lovers" and, you know, "Come and Die." And all these kinds of songs that were very much a part of the Austin music scene of the nineties, of the late eighties and nineties. So the band became a very strong focus for me. I quit my relationship to the business that I founded, "Texas Folklife Resources," and took the band out on the road and toured from 1991 until 1996. So for that five years, we were out on the road. We did two albums, did a lot of shows, and in Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, bunch of festivals, lesbian music festival up in Northampton and Provincetown, New York City, California, Seattle. We traveled all over the place. So that was that.

In that period, I was also doing a book on lesbian love letters called *Between Us*, the British version of which was *Dear Sappho*. And the thing about this book that I bring to you is that's important is just that my first goal in doing this book. The first place that I decided I would go to do research for the book was to LHA. So I went to LHA in 1995 and I met Polly Thistlethwaite. I had written to her and to Désirée Vester, who was associated with the Archive at that point. I wrote to them, I said, "Hey, I'm going to do this book on lesbian love letters. I want to start at LHA. I want to see what you've got." And so I, you know, I made a trip to LHA in 1995. I met Polly and she, you know, back in that period, they just kind of gave you carte blanche, you just came. And you opened up boxes and looked through them to see if you could find what you were looking for. I spent the first day not finding much at all. I did find some wonderful things like the— I think it was a collection of gym shoes from a lesbian softball team from Brooklyn somewhere. But I didn't find any love letters. But on the second day, late in the afternoon, I opened a box and in the box was a cache of letters that was surrounded by a red ribbon tied with a bow. And I was like, oh these have to be love letters. So I pulled that little bow to open it and sure enough, it was beautiful, beautiful love letters, and then I found a bunch of others and went on with that project. But that is probably, aside from the fact that I wanted *Lady Unique* to be represented in the Archive, and that Joan and Deb wanted Lady Unique to be in the Archive, my deepest connection, I think, to LHA is in that moment when I opened that box and found those love letters. That encouraged me. Then I knew that what I was doing with that project was valuable and that if I went forward with it, over time, which I did over the next year, I went to

different archives and gave readings at colleges and coffee houses, and collected letters, vernacular, you know, sort of love letters from just everyday lesbians. I collected them and made the book.

Allee Manning 35:59
What was it about the letters that you found at LHA that enabled you to know that you were really onto something? Do you remember?

Kay Turner 36:06
Well, they were really, they were really beautiful love letters. They were from the fifties. I wasn't in the end able to publish from that collection because we could not get permission from this. The sender was gone and we could not obtain permission. So unfortunately, that collection is not represented in the book. But it was an encouragement. It meant that these kinds of letters did exist, and that if I went out into the world seeking them, I would find them. And I did.

Allee Manning 36:49
Wonderful. So that you said was in the time that you were living in Texas, primarily, but traveling a lot.

Kay Turner 36:56
Yeah. Right. I finished my PhD and I was doing these other projects. I was touring the band. I did a book on Madonna that preceded the book on— I did a book on dreams that women had had about Madonna, the pop star. So that was a book that preceded the lesbian love letters book. Yeah. So I was working on letters, and dreams and, you know, kind of a very intimate, expressive material that related to women's love for each other.

Allee Manning 37:42
Great, can you tell me a bit more about your professional career from that point on as well as—

Kay Turner 37:47
Yeah, so sure. So I, as I said, I think earlier in that period, late eighties, in Texas, while I was working on my PhD, founded with Pat Jasper and Betsy Peterson, an organization called Texas Folklife Resources, which was a nonprofit for presenting folklife and folk arts of Texas. So I curated with Betsy and Pat. We curated these major shows on Texas folklife at the San Antonio Museum of Art, at Laguna Gloria Museum in Austin, shows that traveled around. We did major musical shows highlighting traditional music in Texas. So all of that was kind of what I was doing for, you know, the money side of my life, in that period that I was also doing these books and touring the band, and that kind of thing.

I was also writing. I was writing a book based on my dissertation called *Beautiful Necessity: The Art and Meaning of Women's Altars*. So that book came out in 1999, and at the same time, a year later, I published a book called *Baby Precious Always Shines: Selected Love Notes Between Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas*. That was a project that I did that kind of came out of the lesbian love letters project. I was given access at Yale University. I was one of the first people to be given access to these notes that Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas had written back and forth to each other at home. They're very personal notes they shared with each other just on a day to day basis. Because you know, Alice rose early in the day to get things going, and cook, and do the kinds of things that she did, and Gertrude went to bed late at night and wrote into the night. So they had a system of writing these little love notes to each other. I was given access to them by the curator at the Beinecke, named Tim Young, who gave me access to them to put together a book. And then I came back to New York [Laughs]—

Allee Manning 40:36
Yeah. These days you live between New York and Texas. Can you tell me a little bit about that decision?

Kay Turner 40:43
Yeah. Well, that decision is all about my girlfriend. So in the— you know, what I haven't talked about is my love life, which is that in 1981, I fell in love with Mary Sanger of Texas. And we are still together. We just celebrated our 40th anniversary last November. We did have a little bit of a bumpy ride in the sense that I really did not want to stay. I mean, I stayed in Texas a long time but I just really always wanted to come back to New York. And I needed to do that. And so, you know, we've worked it out over the years. I came back in 1998. We've had a long distance relationship since then. We lived together in Austin for 17 years before that so we established a very strong relationship. And yeah, there's just that part of going back and forth, is also is mostly about Mary, and mostly about my connections in Austin, my friendships there. But I also have a working relationship there with various artists who I still work with. We still do projects together there. Austin is a very fertile ground for doing different kinds of projects. And the Austin lesbian and gay community has evolved in very interesting ways over the years, and I'm still very attached to it. So yeah, I have— it's primarily a personal thing, but also a kind of arts community thing.

Allee Manning 42:48
You mentioned the LGBT scene in Austin having changed a lot in your time there. I'd love to hear you reflect on that a little bit.

Kay Turner 42:59
Well, I think that the main thing is that when we were coming up in the late— I arrived in Austin 1977. There was a lot of, there was actually a lot of lesbian and gay bar activity at that point.

There was a great bar called The Hollywood that we all went to and it was a real meeting ground. But it was kind of, you know, for that era, I guess you would say that it was, it was typical, it wasn't very political. You know, people went there to meet each other, and meet girls and find love and sex and that kind of thing, all of which was great. But the nexus of lesbian and feminist life in Austin at that time was around BookWoman, the women's bookstore, that is still owned and operated by a woman, a very old and close friend of mine named Susan Post. So Susan was still always kind of, you know, making room for a kind of dialogue about lesbian feminism. The other point that I think would be important would be an organization called Women & Their Work that was founded by a woman named Rita Starpattern who died in 1995. But she was a radical lesbian artist who founded an organization there that between BookWoman and Women & Their Work and The Hollywood, we had, you know, core areas; an arts venue, a performance venue, a bookstore where there was a lot of circulation of ideas and performance and politics. That was very important. And then The Hollywood kind of went away. Then there was a new bar called Chances that was run by a woman named Sandra Martinez. And Sandra had this bar that she wanted to be a kind of generationally, you know, cross-ethnic, cross-generational place, straight, gay, Mexican, Black, White, and it was all of that. So that became a very important focus in the eighties and nineties. That's where our band Girls in the Nose, that was our home. That was our home turf, this bar called Chances, and we performed there regularly, you know. So there was a real scene there, a really great scene of, you know, kind of lesbian, lesbian and gay politics. Then I think— I mean, I came back to New York, things morphed and changed. Sandra, you know, left the bar. It became something else. It became a straight bar for a while. There wasn't any lesbian bar of note. Gay men's bars still proliferated but they, you know, there wasn't a central place. But now there's a really active gay and lesbian community, and trans community in Austin that circulates around a reincarnation of that bar Chances, which is now called Cheer Up Charlies. It's run by these two lesbians, a couple, and there's a festival in Austin now called OUTsider, which brings together queers and trans and lesbian to do performance works of all kinds in February every year. So they're, you know, there's been an evolution for sure.

Allee Manning 47:34
Very cool. You still remain active in your—

Kay Turner 47:37
Yeah, I still remain active. Yeah, I was just— I've done projects for OUTsider Fest. I have a project now. I've been exploring the witch figure over the past number of years. And I have a project called "What a Witch." It's on Instagram. And also in this little book that I've done, called "*Before and After: What The Witch's Nose Knows*" and, you know, in various performances that I've been doing over the past 10 years or so. So this has been kind of a multi-tentacled project. But I've done some of my performances as the What a Witch performances have been done at OUTsider. And "Girls in the Nose," we started once I retired from my career as a folklorist in Brooklyn. I didn't really talk about this but my career as a folklorist in Brooklyn took shape as I

became the folklorist for the borough of Brooklyn, at the Brooklyn Arts Council. So I was there for 14 years. And I taught at NYU for almost 20 years in the Performance Studies Department as an adjunct in performance studies. So that— I was doing all of that here in New York once I came back.

Allee Manning 49:09
Would you like to talk about those years at all? Anything you're particularly proud of, or that really stood out to you in those years?

Kay Turner 49:17
Well, I think the thing that was really important for me about my work at Brooklyn Arts Council, was that as a lesbian working with traditional communities and cultures in Brooklyn, I always felt that doing that work was a way of bringing all of us out in a way that was really important, that the art world in New York is very— it's very straight, in the sense that it only wants to approve of that, which is kind of, you know, avant garde, new, contemporary, whatever that might mean. It doesn't, you know, it can mean many things. But traditional artists have always gotten kind of a short shrift in the art world in New York, just the way that lesbians have gotten a short shrift in the world at large. So I always felt like doing that work was important work in terms of, you know, bringing forward marginalized communities that have art forms that are very important and very significant aesthetically. So I did that work— I did many projects, Black Brooklyn Renaissance, Brooklyn Maqam, Folk Feet, Half the Sky, you know, Harbor Lore. I mean, I did these major projects that are now housed at the new Brooklyn center, the new Center for Brooklyn History that's part of the Brooklyn Public Library. And all of my archive from that work has moved over there. So for anyone, that's my other— I have archives in different places. So yeah, so that all that work is there.

Allee Manning 51:32
Great. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about before we start to wrap up?

Kay Turner 51:38
Well, I think we've done a pretty good job, Allee. I think that I would like to say that I do feel this project is very important. I think it's very critical to capture the eras in which lesbian culture has risen, and then diminished, and risen again, and diminished, and you know, sort of to capture moments in the cycle, in which lesbian culture has been more or less important in terms of our understanding of culture, politics, and ways of being. And it's not, it's not over. It's not over until the fat lesbian sings, you know. It's like, it's just the way that. It's still important for lesbians to speak out about the cultural and sexual and personal differences that we manifest as humans. It's a human cause, you know, it's a human way of being, to be a lesbian. So it's very important to have this history and herstory captured. You know, for us it's a herstory, for the rest of the world is the history and both are important.

Allee Manning 53:22
Yeah, absolutely. I think that is just so well put. I really appreciate your taking this time to share all these [crosstalk]—

Kay Turner 53:31
It was great, really a lot of fun. I hope I've helped the project along and I think it's a very important one, so yeah.

Allee Manning 53:43
I think so too. Alright. Thank you again.

Kay Turner 53:46
Okay, great Allee. I'll see you on the other side.

Allee Manning 53:49
Yep. [Laughs]— bye.