Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory
of
Amanda Bailey

An Interview
Conducted by
Kira Findling
11/2/2022

Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

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LEOHP Interview
Interviewee: Amanda Bailey
Interviewer: Kira Findling
Date: 11/10/2022

Amanda Bailey 00:00
Okay, got it. Okay, got it.

Kira Findling 00:05
Okay, great. I'll start with the introduction. Hello, thank you for joining us today. Today is Thursday, November 10th, 2022. And we are recording an oral history with me, Kira Findling, talking to Amanda Bailey about her life history. This is a Lesbian Elders Oral History Project interview, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. And we are recording from Berkeley, California, and Mankato, Minnesota. So thanks for being here, Amanda! Excited to —

Amanda Bailey 00:36
Thank you for being here! [laughs]

Kira Findling 00:39
Great. So can I start off by asking you where and when were you born?

Amanda Bailey 00:46
I was born December 25, 1957 at Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Florida. So my family's from the Gulf Coast of Alabama. Pensacola is the big city [laughs]. And so I was born there.

Kira Findling 01:08
And tell me a little bit about your childhood. Where did you grow up? What was your family like?

Amanda Bailey 01:14
Well, my family — actually, the Bailey side of my family — were the first white settlers in Alabama back in the early 1800s. And so my family is generations from Alabama. So I was born there, and because of all the extended family, I mean, I'm very much a Southerner. Although my parents moved us to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1961. So I went K through 12 in Las Vegas. So pretty much grew up there with summers down South, because both my parents worked. So extended family comes in, they ship us down South, and we bounced around from this cousin to that cousin and so on. So it was kind of fun. I mean, I grew up with 11 of us all together. There's 11 first cousins that, you know, were together during the summers having a blast at the beach and working. You know, farm produce businesses is what my family was doing down there. So we

had an open air curb market, we worked in there. It was a great way, really, to grow up. You know, of course, I didn't think so then. But you know, in hindsight, it was pretty, pretty good.

Kira Findling 02:49
And what was the religious background of your family?

Amanda Bailey 02:54
Oh, well, you know, Southern Baptist. And that would be part that wasn't so wonderful. It was a confusing religion for me, at best. But my parents did not go to church. So even though my mother was raised very strict Southern Baptist, she sort of rebelled against that. So I think I was about four when she put me in dance class, which, you know, Southern Baptists don't dance. So that was her little rebellion that kick started my departure from the Southern Baptist religion. So yeah, it was — it was a bit tough, having that religion to eventually shed. But I didn't really do it until much — until about 19, 20 years old. Because my brother and I — even though my parents didn't go to church, my brother and I did. Even when we got back to Las Vegas, we went to a Baptist church there. So it was, you know, fairly well ingrained in our ways of seeing the world. And so it was quite an exorcist process. Because they, I don't think ever changed their view of homosexuality. And so growing up and thinking that I might be gay was kind of frightening because, you know, that's the devil's work and it's a big sin and if I truly am I'm gonna burn in hell eternally. So that's, that's heavy. That weighs heavy on a kid's heart and soul.

Kira Findling 04:58
Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. As a child did you have feelings of "I might be gay," or your sort of gender expression being different than other girls around you?

Amanda Bailey 05:11
Well, I definitely was a tomboy. You know, that was what we'd call it, tomboy. I'm not sure why. But I was definitely that. And, you know, my cousins were boys, most all of them. And then I did get a couple of cousins younger than me came along -- a couple girl cousins. But there was, you know, four boys. And then my babysitter after school had four boys, you know, so it's like my brother — so I was with all these boys all the time, and let me tell you, I was a lot tougher than most of them. [laughs] And that's probably still true today. [laughs] I'm sorry, I forgot the question.

Kira Findling 06:00
Yeah, I mean, you're answering it, basically. Yeah. Did you feel like a tomboy? Was there any sense that you felt like you might be gay or different than other kids in some way?

Amanda Bailey 06:09

Well, I really strongly identified with male culture. And also, I mean, I had the sort of male skills that are valued in the world. And I liked men's clothes. So when no one was home, I would always put on my brother's clothes and you know, dress up in the tie, and — I loved ties. [laughs] But I was nervous about it. I mean, it was a big secret. I didn't tell anybody in my family. They did not know that when I was alone in the house I was wearing my brother's clothes. I think it was around — I didn't even think sexuality much until junior high. And, yeah, I did have some crushes on some girls. But I also had a boyfriend, you know, because that's what you do. You know? But as it turns out, much later in life, I came back after college and discovered that most all of my boyfriends were also gay, which I think is kind of common. [laughs] So I had an inkling that I might be a lesbian, but I also had this religion going on. And so to me, I guess because I wasn't acting on it, I never actually acted on it. I figured I wasn't going to burn in hell, you know. And then it kind of would subside, you know, getting to -- you know, trying to not act on it maybe helped it subside. But then when I got to college — I went to Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, and graduated high school in 1975. I was 17. I went to college that fall in Missouri, at Stephens, at that time, they still had — that was the last year of their formal dress code, where you had to have formal dress for dinner in the cafeteria. So that kind of gives you an idea of what the seventies were like. But there I fell in love with a woman who was a suite-mate, okay, because we had these suites where it was really — it was two rooms with a Jack and Jill bathroom, and then each room had two residents. And so she lived in the other room and I had a roommate, but she moved out within the first month. Never told me why, but I have an inkling she was homophobic. And I think she had an inkling about me, even though I wasn't fully aware. So anyway, I — we went on a trip together, me and the suite-mate. And so she told me on that trip that she was attracted to me. And I said, you know, "Don't worry about it, happens to me all the time. It'll pass." But turns out, she didn't want it to pass. She was taking a human sexuality class, so she was learning a lot. We spent one afternoon under the covers — I had my grandmother's quilt, she would shudder to realize. [laughs] But it was a beautiful sunny day, and the sun's coming in the window, and with this quilt it was almost like stained glass. We were both totally under the quilt with the human sex book, and discovering what all the parts are. It was pretty wonderful. It was, I would say, a great coming out. Even though I still wasn't really out. But I was beginning to think that I might be a lesbian.

Kira Findling 10:54
Yeah, it sounds like a very formative relationship, to go through that experience together.

Amanda Bailey 11:00
Yes, because we both were virgins prior to that. And we have remained very close through all the years. The relationship as lovers lasted, I think maybe four years. Three and a half, something like that. But the friendship has lasted a lifetime. We talk every week now, and we have stayed in communication since college. So we're really soulmates, we're really soulmates.

Kira Findling 11:51
That's so awesome. I love that. At the time when you were in college, did you meet her family or anything like that?

Amanda Bailey 11:58
Yeah, so she was graduating the year I met her. Because she was only getting an Associate's degree there. So I dropped out of school to be with her, and then moved to New England. Her family was in New Hampshire. And I paid room and board, $20 a week to her parents. And we lived in her parents' house while while we were getting jobs and getting a place of our own. Yeah, and that was funny -- during that time living in her parents house. I mean, her dad and I got along really well. I just really loved him. But he said to me one time, "You're awfully man-like, for being a woman." And, you know, I was 18 and I just remember being really confused by that. I said to him, "Well, okay, but I'm a woman. So obviously, these characteristics that you're talking about must be feminine, right?" You know? So — Yeah.

Kira Findling 13:15
Did —her parents didn't know that you were together? Or did they know?

Amanda Bailey 13:21
I'm pretty sure they knew. Okay, we didn't have a conversation about it. I don't think we ever really needed to. Her parents were very -- I mean, pretty much okay with it. I don't think they had any — well, they weren't Southern Baptist. [laughs] You know, so a little bit different for my parents, they had a real struggle with it. Well, I didn't come out to them for several years, because I first had to come out to myself. In the beginning, I was saying, "I might not be a lesbian. I just happen to be in love with someone who just happens to be a woman. And so maybe I'm not really a lesbian," you know? But then, I did notice that pretty much since I ever thought about sex, more than 90% of it was around girls and women. So I was becoming pretty certain that I probably am a lesbian.

Kira Findling 14:38
So when did you decide to tell your parents? It was a few years after that point?

Amanda Bailey 14:44
Yeah. It was after my girlfriend, my first love and I split up actually. But during the time that we were together -- that's when I really did come out to myself, was while we were together. And then I really wanted to be out. But still, with my parents and my family I wasn't ready to be out with them. Because it seems silly — because it didn't seem fair. Like if I were straight, I would not call my parents and say, "Hey, guess what, I'm straight." You know? And also based on my experience of my parents at the time, like, they don't really want to know something until they're ready. And when they're ready, they'll ask. So that was my plan. I just lived my life. And I talked

openly about what I was doing. I mean, most people are not gonna talk to their parents about their sex life anyway. So I did talk about all the things we were doing together. They knew we lived together. I mean, I talked freely about what we were doing in life. So I figured, eventually, I'm just going to be honest. And eventually, somebody's gonna ask, and then I'll know they're ready. So that's how it happened. My mother called me. This is back — I went home to Las Vegas for a little while after I had split up with my first love. And my mother called me and said she wanted to talk to me about something. I said, "Okay, great." She came over. I was staying at my brother's house. And I mean, I've pretty much figured she was wanting to ask me that, because it felt like that. And she came over, we talked about this and that and walked around the house straightening and all the pictures. And then she says, "Well, I think I have to go now." And I was like, "Wait a minute. Wait, I thought you wanted to talk to me about something." And she said, "Well, I did. But now I think maybe I don't." And I said, "Oh, I think it's a good idea. I think you should." [laughs] And she said, "You act like you know what it is." And I said, "Well, I might." And she said, "Well, why don't you tell me what you think it is?" I said, "No!" [laughs] So finally we sat down, she asked. So that was the actual coming out. And I knew it was going to take some time. And fortunately, my mom — she likes to read. She's a reader and she's educated. She got her degree, her college degree, in Las Vegas. So she did a lot of reading about it. Because I remember when I did come out to her, of course she had the response of, "Is it something I did? What did I do wrong?" You know, that sort of — "Do I know why?" And so I remember I said to her, "Well, I'm pretty sure I was born this way. But if you want to take credit, that's okay." But she did research and came around. And she was already not as Southern Baptist oriented as she had been. She had her own personal revolution, too, you know, with that religion. So I think that helped. And my father is just a little slower to grow. And his bias, I don't think has really anything to do with religion. He's not that religious. I just think it doesn't feel right to him, you know? But they're both still alive. I'm going to be 65 next month, and I still have my parents. It's amazing. They're — My mom's 85 and my dad's 87.

Kira Findling 19:37
That's great. Wow, so your relationship can continue to grow and change over the years, you know?

Amanda Bailey 19:41
Yeah, it really has.

Kira Findling 19:45
So if you're ready to move on from that topic, unless there's more you want to say there? Yeah, so did you go to Phoenix after that point, or where did you go?

Amanda Bailey 19:56

Oh, right — to be honest, I did this pit stop in Vegas. See, 'cause when I was in New England still, I moved around a little bit in New England after my love and I split up and then I decided that I needed to get out. Because one night I looked around the table, and pretty much all these women have been with each other, you know. So it felt like it's time to move on. So I threw a dart over my shoulder, okay, at a map, and it landed in Arizona. So I thought, "Okay, I'm moving to Arizona." And, you know, Vegas is pretty close. So I stopped into Vegas, on my way, and I stayed in Vegas for a few months. And then ended up in Phoenix. And Phoenix was pretty exciting by that time. That would be about 1980 that I moved there. And so what was I then — 1980, I was in my early 20s. And really, I fell in with some really interesting women. And we did some great things. We did it. I met these women — they started — there was a feminist newspaper called *Women's Weekly.* And I got on board with that group, and then met a bunch of exciting women from there. And we started — a group of us, about five of us, started the first Gay Pride march that Phoenix ever had. And I have this clipping, but it's pretty tough to see. But this person right here is me. I trained the security. Marshals, we were called. And I did some research and learned how to be a peacekeeper, basically, is what we were doing. Because, you know, it was Phoenix, which was extremely conservative in the early eighties. And also, too, there was so much — like, there was Jerry Falwell happening at that time, you know, the Christian Family Coalition was going on — Anita Bryant. I mean, there was a lot of anti-gay stuff happening at that time as a backlash to Stonewall. And Phoenix, because they had never had a Gay Pride, was absolutely not progressive. And we were concerned because there was talk of snipers, you know. There was a lot of Christian Family Coalition people talking about setting up snipers. [laughs] Yeah, that's so Christian. So we had our own security plus, you know, we had a lawyer on our crew and Dianne Post, she got the permit. And so we had the police as well. But sometimes you worry about the police, you know, you can't — you don't know how that's gonna go. So anyway, we had about — I remember going to — there was a social group called Amigos Del Sol. Friends under the sun, or friends of the sun. It was mostly men, and I went to that group to talk about coming to the Pride March, invite everybody to come. And so I did my whole spiel and then immediately following that the president of their group got up and told everybody not to go, because it was going to be riots, and it was going to be snipers, and that they were likely to be killed if they went. So I was a little nervous myself, you know, I mean, you just don't know what might happen. So about 50 of us showed up to do it, to do this march. And if you could see this picture, I mean, we had a lot of great signs. And we had a march and we had a rally. [shows program to the camera] This is the program from the event. We had some great speakers and stuff. And —

Kira Findling 24:44
Sorry, just to interrupt — Would you mind describing the photo and describing the program? In case people are reading it as a transcript.

Amanda Bailey 24:53

Alright, so the photo, —Oh, this says 650 demonstrators in the caption. It says 650 demonstrators lead Patriots' Square for the State Capitol in a Lesbian and Gay Rights March Saturday. And it was called the We Are Here March, and it was after a song that Bill Holt wrote and performed at the rally later that day. So the March, it says, it stretched one and a half blocks. Boy, it sounds a lot bigger than than I remember it. I thought we were about 50 people. And then it ended on the east lawn of the Capitol where marchers heard speakers, Leonard Matlovich and feminist Harley Scott of the National Organization of Women. Those were the keynotes. There were some other great folks there as well. So there were no snipers. There was no gunfire. But there were a group of Christians throwing tomatoes. I know, and eggs. But you know, I'll take an egg over a bullet any day. [laughs]

Kira Findling 26:18
Wow, it's moving to think about just how much effort and bravery that took. Can you talk a little bit more about why it felt so important to you? And what propelled you to do it despite so much opposition?

Amanda Bailey 26:36
It's because of the opposition. It was mainly because of the Christian Family Coalition, Jerry Falwell. It felt like we were being attacked. So I would say that was my main motivation. I mean, it just always seems so ridiculous to me that other people would be all up in arms about who I choose to love and have relationship with, you know? I mean, it's never made any sense to me that other people would want to legislate my personal preferences like that. I mean, how can you make love a crime? You know?

Kira Findling 27:40
Yeah, absolutely. It's just, yeah, totally ridiculous. So what else were you involved in, in Phoenix? Is there anything else about your time there that you want to talk about?

Amanda Bailey 27:50
Let's see, the feminist newspaper, the Pride March -- Oh, well, you know, Dianne Post and I bought some land together, up in the White Mountains of Arizona. The government opened up some sections, and we bought a 40 acre parcel up there. And we did a lot of activism stuff in the Phoenix area. And as part of that, you know, we would raise money to support that, and musicians would would do a lot of concerts for us for fundraisers, and they were donating their time to the cause. So we thought that after we bought this land, we thought it would be good to do one big concert up there on the land. Like a weekend type concert, and have all of these musicians that have helped us throughout the year -- you know, have have that as a concert show, and then we'll just give all the proceeds to them as a thank you. And so that's what started a little Arizona Women's Music Festival. And I remember the first one we did, we had Slick — she was a comedian in the Phoenix area — and Jamie Anderson, who has since become really pretty well

known, but she was just a kid starting out in Phoenix. She put on a good show. So I don't have any of those programs right in front of me, but quite a few of these folks went on to do many wonderful things.

Kira Findling 29:46
That's great. Gosh, so cool. And you were only in your early 20s during this time, right, when you were putting this together?

Amanda Bailey 29:52
Yeah. So this was 1981, so I was 24. Well, I turned 24 in December of that year, so on the day of the March I was 23.

Kira Findling 30:10
Wow, yeah, that's awesome. And so when did you decide to leave Phoenix?

Amanda Bailey 30:17
I love Phoenix, I think around '83. I think it was 1983. I was an investor in an apartment complex in Reno. Okay. So I went up there to manage those apartments. And up there, I eventually got involved with the Women's Center. But that came about by — first I did Take Back the Night March. Dianne Post was up there with me. We did a Take Back the Night March. And to raise money for that, we put on a play of Susan B. Anthony's trial. And it was pretty great, because we had some of the key players in Nevada government playing the parts. We had, like, a real judge playing the judge. [laughs] It was pretty good. And it was a good fundraiser, it got a lot of publicity, we raised quite a bit of money. And we put on the first Take Back the Night March that Reno ever had. And then shortly after that, I did get involved with the Women's Center at UNR. I was continuing my education. I was bouncing around the country going to different schools everywhere I lived, you know. I was working toward that degree. It was going to happen eventually. Here's a picture in the paper of us at the Women's Center. [Shows newspaper clipping to camera] Okay, and so this one, we're over here. That one is me. Can't really see it too well. But this article is about an oral history project that we were doing at the time, which was a really fun project. We interviewed some of the early settlers in Reno. So all the women we were recording, because the men they get all the history, we were specifically recording women's history. And then we also started this picture, which was part of the article as well. [Shows newspaper clipping to camera] We started a women's music radio program in Reno, Nevada, in 1985. So that was pretty phenomenal. Because, as you might guess, Reno was also an extremely conservative environment. We were close to the Bay Area, so we would take a lot of trips over and interview. I interviewed with the — well, there was a Bay Area Women's Philharmonic at the time. Okay, that was pretty exciting. They had a whole symphony orchestra of women. [laughs] And I remember doing an interview with Nancy Vogel. I can't remember who [unclear] we did a lot you know, Redwood Records, Olivia Records, we interviewed a lot. Those just had started up,

I think around the end of the seventies. I'm not exactly sure. '77 seems right for Redwood, but I'm not exactly sure. Anyway, so that was really fun going over there and interviewing and then bringing it back to the show. And then also too, we put on concerts and benefits and stuff. We didn't have too many local folks in in Reno, we didn't have too many women musicians in Reno. So a lot of ours came from the Bay Area.

Kira Findling 34:32
That's great. So you would play music on the radio and do and play your interviews that you had done?

Amanda Bailey 34:37
Right, because women's music is its own genre, really. And we just wanted to be clear about that, because we did different — like we would do theme shows. We do blues, we would do folk, we would do jazz. We would do different music genres, to be clear that women's music is not — a music— it's not folk, like a lot of people think it's all folk and it's not. And then we had the symphony, you know, it's classical music. A lot of women wrote classical music, too. The Bay Area Women's Philharmonic was doing women composers, symphony — it was really amazing to get all of this realization about how much women have done throughout history and never been recognized for having done it.

Kira Findling 35:45
Totally, yeah, I love hearing about that. Yeah. At that time, did you have — you know, I remember in our pre-interview, you talked a little about having some transgender friends during the 1980s. Do you want to talk a little bit about what that was like that time?

Amanda Bailey 36:07
Yeah, so I did have a friend named Steve, who was a trans man. And when I met him he had just started taking hormones. He was just starting to get a little bit of facial hair. And so he, you know, he felt certain that I was trans. And this has happened to me quite a bit with trans friends. So I didn't really think so, but, I mean, I don't know, everything's worth exploring, I guess. Anyway, but he kept encouraging me to go out as a man in public. Because it is weird — I just felt like, wow, I don't think I can do that. You know, because I don't think I'm a man, so I think I couldn't really pull that off. I mean, that would be acting. And it was also kind of scary, because, you know, I'm in Reno. You can't pull that off. It could go way South, it could be very bad. So anyway, he made some good points. He kept saying, "Well, don't people call you sir already?" And, yeah, about half and half all my life. People think I'm a boy, or they think I'm a man. And so, yeah, that was all true, and certainly people definitely read me as male a lot. Ultimately, I decided to try it. And I went to the MGM Barber, you know, the MGM Hotel, to one of those fancy barbers. And they got real human hair beard that matched my own hair and had the guy trim it up so that -- I mean, it looked real. I mean, I was impressed. I was like, wow, you know, I

thought I'd make a good looking guy. So I went out with him. We went to Carson City, because there was no way I was gonna go out in Reno and maybe run into somebody I knew. Because even while I look like a man, I still look like me. They would recognize me, you know. So we would go to Carson City. And I'll tell you, it was an amazing experience, because of the difference in the way I was treated. And I realized, too, that a lot of times because people think I'm a man, I do get a lot of privilege, because I'm mistaken as a man. For example, I smoked then, so we stopped at a convenience store. I had to get some cigarettes, right? So I go into the store, and there's a woman just finishing her sale. And there's another woman behind her in line. And I walk in, and just right when I walk in, the clerk says, "Can I help you?" And I said, "Yeah, I need a pack of Camel," and waited on me ignored that woman completely. You know, I mean, I had to go with it because I'm a man right now. [laughs] But it helped me get into character real quick, you know. So it was an interesting experience going out in the world as a man, for sure, and really thinking of myself as a man. And then on alternate weekends, I would go out in Reno to heterosexual bars dressed as a — black cocktail dress with spiked heels and be oh so feminine. And guys would hit on me. Anyway, it was so interesting to play both extremes, because neither one really felt like who I am. Because they just were too far out there for me. I mean, I think I'm just the integration of both. I'm just not far out on either extreme of gender or whatever. So it was an interesting process. I mean, I haven't really ever talked about it. I'm telling you now. I've told, I don't know, maybe two, maybe three people. And I didn't tell anybody until well beyond my 50s. Because I think at the time, I remembered being afraid that there might be something mentally off with me. And I didn't want anybody to know that I could crossdress like that. So it's interesting how much of your culture influences your way of being. It's amazing.

Kira Findling 41:55
So is that a pretty like, contained period for you then of, as you said, crossdressing, or did it happen again later in life? Or was it more just at that time?

Amanda Bailey 42:04
Well, it's interesting, because I just did a poetry conference last weekend. I'm the president of the League of Minnesota Poets, and we had a gala event. And I was cross dressed there because it doesn't — it's not cross dressing anymore, hardly. But I was wearing a tie and a vest because it was a formal event, and I'm not wearing a gown. [laughs] So, yeah, I think I've mentioned to you in the pre-interview of how hard we had to fight just to wear pants in junior high. We had to revolt, we had to walk out. And then one day — first we had a walk out over it, and then we all wore pants to school. And then we got suspended and — all of this and it ended with oh, we could wear pants on Wednesday. Yeah, I don't work that hard to wear a gown to an event. [laughs] But interestingly, later — because when I left Reno to finish my degree at Antioch, in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and I met a woman there, we did a project together. And then when I graduated, I moved to Seattle, and she moved to San Francisco. And we were in real close correspondence, because we had email by then. And so we would write to each other, almost

daily. And she was transitioning. She started transitioning to be a man. And so we have a couple of years dialogue between us about this whole process, because it's such a difficult, really difficult process. And toward the end, he started a trans group, and he invited me to be in the group. And I said, "But I'm not trans. So it doesn't feel right." And he said, "Well, just come, just write your —" 'cause it's an email bulletin board thing. He said, "Well, just write your introduction of yourself and see how people respond, and ask if you should be in the group or not and see how people respond." So I wrote an intro about trans as a prefix, and as a prefix it means beyond. And so in the sense of beyond, I would say that, yeah, I'm probably trans because I feel like I'm beyond gender definition. I wouldn't identify as male any more than I identify as female. And so like today with the pronouns, you know, everybody's gonna put that name tag with their preferred pronouns on, and I just put no pronoun preference, because I've never had a preference. You just — however you read me is how you read me. I know who I am.

Kira Findling 45:56
Yeah, I really appreciate that perspective. And the history on it, too. It's — yeah. Do you want to say anything more about that right now, or keep going?

Amanda Bailey 46:05
No, I'm good with that.

Kira Findling 46:07
Okay.

Amanda Bailey 46:08
That's probably the most I've ever said about trans.

Kira Findling 46:11
I appreciate you talking about it. Yeah. So what was it like when you move to Seattle? What was — how did that feel?

Amanda Bailey 46:20
Seattle. That was pretty, pretty fantastic. Seattle was the first actual liberal place I lived. And it was a city, and it was 1987. I moved there at the end of 1987, two weeks before my 30th birthday. I had just graduated from college. Because I took extra loads, because I wanted to finish before I turned 30. So, did it. And my first job in Seattle was at Tugs in Belltown, which was a very popular gay bar. And I just stumbled into it really, I mean, so many people wanted to work at that bar, because it was so fun. And I was down in that neighborhood one day. I love mid- century furniture, and there was a store there with mid-century furniture. I went in and just was flipping over all the stuff she had. Got in a conversation with her, we really clicked, hit it off, and told her I had just moved there and was looking for a job. And she said, "Have you ever

bartended?" and I said, "No. But I used to deal 21." [laughs] Anyway, she said, "Well, would you want to work at Tugs?" And I said, "What's Tugs?" And she said, "It's a gay bar that my roommate owns." And I said, "Sure, that sounds fun." So I got the job, and it was a great way to get introduced to Seattle. But it was interesting times, because the eighties was really HIV —overshadowed by HIV. And Tugs, definitely — I lost a lot of people. I made a lot of friends and then very soon lost them. There was also, at the time I moved there, there were three lesbian bars. And there's still one there today, which is very unusual. Most lesbian bars have disappeared. But at the time there were three and I remember doing a DJ gig at one of them. It was called No Madonna Mondays. [laughs] So it didn't last too long. They wanted Madonna. [laughs] But I think Seattle was more about enjoying life. Whereas prior to that, my political activism felt so necessary. But in Seattle, I wasn't in an oppressive environment. And so the activism didn't feel as urgent. Plus I turned 30, so — you know, you can't trust anybody over 30. [laughs]

Kira Findling 50:08
So was a lot of your community there around these bars, the gay and lesbian bars?

Amanda Bailey 50:13
Yes. Yeah, for sure. Which worked out okay, because I've never really had a drinking problem. I know it's really bad for some folks that have to deal with that. Lesbian and gay culture has always been centered around bars, and it's unfortunate for a lot of people, but I don't have that particular problem, so it worked out okay for me. Plus, too, as a bartender — well, you might drink a little bit, but not nearly as much. Because you're waiting on everybody, you've got to serve them. And it worked out pretty well, too, because I'm actually — believe it or not, I'm actually pretty shy. So it was a really good way for me to meet people, because they would approach me. [laughs] They had to get their drinks. So it worked out well that way.

Kira Findling 51:25
That's great. Yeah. And you were in Seattle for a while, right? Through some changing times, I guess, in the LGBT community.

Amanda Bailey 51:36
Right.

Kira Findling 51:37
You talked a little bit about language changing in our pre-interview.

Amanda Bailey 51:40
Oh, right. I remember. Because, well, my friend in San Francisco, the newly trans man, was part of — gosh, I still can't remember the name of that organization. It was very —they started — oh,

heck, sorry. Anyway, I gotta stop thinking about it. Maybe it'll come. [laughs] But about every 10 years, so much of the language changes. I think what I mentioned is like, queer started to become a better word for a lot of people. They preferred to be called queer as meaning gay, or the umbrella for lesbian and gay. Back in the seventies and eighties a lot of women would call themselves gay women, because they didn't like the word lesbian. I was never bothered by the word lesbian. But I know back in the eighties, many of us lesbians, we took the word dyke. You take a word that's used in a derogatory fashion against you, and you start calling yourselves by that name. Then it loses its power to upset you. So we started calling ourselves dyke. And also too, it would have -- it gives you that power. The power that they were trying to use against you, somehow it builds you. So to be a dyke is to be really strong, you know, it felt that way. So, a lot of us started calling ourselves dykes. And in fact, when I was still in Reno, my youngest brother — when I came out to my mother — there's a 10 year gap between me and my younger siblings, and I did a lot of their upbringing. And so my mother didn't want me to tell them that I was a lesbian until they were 21, she said. And I said, "I'm sorry, but I can't promise you that." I said, "What I am willing to do is I won't tell them until they ask. I'm not going to mention it until they ask, but I can guarantee you they're going to ask before they're 21." So he was coming up. He was 16 and he was coming to visit me. He might have been 14. Anyway, I told my mother, "I think he's going to ask me if I'm gay." And she said, "What makes you think so?" I said, "Well, because he's already asked my older brother and my older brother told him to ask me." So anyway, I decided to not de-dyke the house. That's what we called it back then. You have your things that you love around you, and then somebody's coming and you don't want it to frighten them. So you'd de-dyke the house and remove all of these telltale signs, right? So I decided to not bother with that, because I knew he was going to ask and I figured that could be a conversation starter. So he's in the door, like, less than a minute, he puts down his bag, and he beelines -- he like focuses in on this little tiny button. You know, like button that you'd were in a parade or something. This little tiny button that's got a spiked heel on it, and it says "Killer Dyke." And he's like, 'You know what that means?" And I said, "Yeah, I know what that means. Do you?" And he's like, "Yeah, I know what that means." Anyway, that was the icebreaker for our conversation. So back to queer. So back in Seattle, now it's the nineties. And queer is becoming really what dyke was for me in the seventies and eighties. Because gay was, to my younger men friends, gay was something they equated with Liberace. And they didn't want to be thinking of themselves that way. So queer to them felt stronger, and more appropriate. I thought of it as basically an umbrella for the whole LGBTQ, and that's when we added the Q. So at first it was L G, or actually, I think it was Gay and Lesbian at the very beginning. And then when we brought in Bisexual and Transgender, then we put the women first. So it became LGBT. And then we added the Q, LGBTQ. And now we have the I, A, and the plus sign. Maybe we can stop with the plus because [unclear]. So as I say to my friends, we can remember which decade it was by how many letters there were in the gay alphabet.

Kira Findling 57:48

You can chart the history like that. Okay, so we're in the nineties. Anything about the nineties or the early 2000s? Any stories that stand out to you?

Amanda Bailey 58:12
Not at the moment. Were you thinking of something particular?

Kira Findling 58:17
No, not really. I know you were in Seattle, and then you ended up leaving Seattle, right? But it was in the early 2000s?

Amanda Bailey 58:26
Right. In Seattle, I was involved in video production, as well as the bartending. And then from the video production I started with egghead.com, which was really the first retailer without a brick and mortar storefront. They were doing all online. And at the time, I knew HTML and I was one of the few people who did have that skill at the time. So I wrote all the copy for their online catalog, and uploaded it and then I started taking on other customers. So after doing this for a while and being paid really well, I realized that if I left Seattle and moved to like Mobile, Alabama, I could virtually double my income. I could still work for the same people and get Seattle pay and live in Mobile where the cost of living is half. So I thought I should do that, because Seattle is kind of dreary. I had been there 17 years, the longest I've lived anywhere, and I felt like it's time to move on. So I got into that idea. And then one day I woke up and I said, "This a great plan. The only problem is, then I'd be living in Mobile." I mean, I love Mobile, but you're back to the same oppression and it's a politically not a great place to be necessarily. By that time I had lived in every region of the country. So I thought, "Well, I'll just move into a motorhome." Because every place has got its pros and cons. I love all these places, and then there are times that I don't love them. So let's move into a motorhome, go from place to place, be there the best time to be there, and then move on, and eventually I'll land somewhere. So that was what I ended up doing. I think it was 2004. Well, it was actually before that. Anyway, it was the year that Ivan hit the Gulf Coast. Because I had sold the house, got the motorhome, I sold everything. I had a 3000 square foot house, downsized into a 200 square foot motorhome. So that involved a lot of selling of stuff. And then I was doing sort of a shakedown on this house sitting for a friend in a northern suburb of Seattle. And I remember that it was right after Hurricane Ivan had hit the Gulf Coast. And I was on the phone with my cousin, who was now living in a FEMA trailer because everything got wiped out. And so much of my family lost their homes and everything. And I was saying, "Well, maybe I should come down there, because I'm totally self contained. I can come down there and help." And she was saying, "I don't think you can get down here with the flooding and everything. You can't drive a thing down here." But I remember at the end of that conversation, realizing that I'm living in a little teeny trailer, and she's living in a trailer, and I said to her, "Isn't it interesting? We're physically both doing the same thing, but yours is a tragedy, and people are congratulating me, because they think it's so great that I'm now

jobless and homeless." [laughs] So I took off into the wild blue yonder. It was interesting, I had a really cute little GMC, 1976 GMC motorhome. Sort of a little hot rod of classic motorhomes, like a classic car. And it was nice. It was a really nice motorhome. And I ended up moving around some and then there was a couple of lesbian RV parks down in Arizona. And I spent a little time there, usually in the spring. While I was down there in February of 2008, I met a woman from Minnesota. And she was doing the same thing — she had left, she sold everything, and she had been on the road for a little over a year. I'd been on the road for a couple of years, a few years. And that's where we met and fell in love and started traveling together all around the country, and had a marvelous, marvelous time. She has a son, and so eventually grandchildren. And that's what brought us to Minnesota.

Kira Findling 1:04:10
That's great. So you've been in Minnesota for — ?

Amanda Bailey 1:04:22
This is November, so exactly 10 years. 10 years, I can hardly believe it. It's great, the first grandchild was two when we came, she's now twelve. For me, it's really fabulous to have grandchildren without ever having had children. I got to skip that all together and move right on to the best part. [laughs] So I have her and two grandsons, an eight year old grandson and a toddler. He's three now. And so that's been a lot of fun. And then also, I got involved right away with a number of things. I was a theater tech for the community theater here. We have a diversity program Greater Mankato Diversity. So I go to the schools, and we spend with each class an hour, a year with K through 12, go in and do a diversity training really to sort of help younger people understand diversity. So that's been rewarding. And I got involved with the League of Minnesota Poets, and have been writing a lot more poetry and sort of been focusing more on poetry than I have in the past. I have been writing really all my life, and did publish some works back in my Phoenix times, and then got busy. I've published a lot of things over the years, but not what I would call my creative writing. And so that's what I wanted to focus on now. And that is poetry.

Kira Findling 1:06:35
And I think you told me you perform poetry too. Is that right?

Amanda Bailey 1:06:38
That's right. Yeah, I did. I do spoken word and I did win third place in a national contest of spoken word, the BlackBerry Peach. That was the year of COVID, so I was slated to perform that in Kansas City, at a big convention, but it was canceled because of COVID. But now I'm out and about again. I recently was selected for a poet artist collaboration in Red Wing, Minnesota. And ended up reading up there. So yeah, I'm getting out. I'm doing some great stuff.

Kira Findling 1:07:27
That's awesome. Wow, that's really great. One question that's important — this is by the Lesbian Herstory Archives -- is your connection to that Archive, and to archives in general. I know, you told me a little bit about your own kind of record keeping of your history, and maybe you could talk a little bit about your plans for where you want all that to go and how you relate to archives.

Amanda Bailey 1:07:54
Okay, yeah. So I'm a big believer in archives, for sure. I did show you this group with the oral history project we did in Reno. That was a video archive. And I also was into my family genealogy. And I did a lot of research there and discovered that there's a college in Birmingham that had several boxes on my family, which was — I didn't even know anybody in Birmingham, right? But these were my motorhome days. So I thought, "Well, I'm going." So I drove my motorhome to Birmingham, and went to that college. And I was so thrilled by how much information was there. This is a distant ancestor of mine who — the Bailey's were the first people to live in Birmingham. There's a Bailey Road, there's a Bailey River. They were one of three. There were three families that came down. And so this man, back in the 1930s, was part of my family, and had done all this research, and had given it to the college there. And there were maps and it was incredible. I was ecstatic. I spent three weeks there scanning everything. [laughs] Everything that was there. And I was so grateful to that man, to have done all of that work and collected all those materials and put them all in one place where I could come along decades after he had died and discover it. And I just remember being so excited about it. I have been collecting — I mean, I started as a child, saving all the letters I got. As time went on, I started also photocopying the letters I was writing so that you can have both sides of the story. And I started putting them all — I got these binders, put everything in a sheet protector. And then back when I was bartending, first of all, I just threw it all boxes. I don't even know why. It was not even a conscious reason. I just kept it. Because somebody took the time to write this and send this to me, I don't feel right about throwing it away. But eventually, as life goes on, you feel like a hoarder. You got all these boxes of stuff,. When I was bartending, I had two lunch shifts that were really pretty slow. So I started at home, and I went through these boxes, and I put brown paper bags all around my living room with a year on it — 1971, 1972. Okay. And I just started throwing things in those bags. I started sorting it all by year. And then I would work on one bag, I would grab a whole bunch, put it in my backpack, take it to work. And during my shift, I put it all in sheet protectors. So it was a really long process, but I got it all together, and then I put it all in binders. And then and then I was going to burn it all. I was actually going to burn it all when I was moving into the motorhome because it seems so — I don't even know why I had it all. So friends came and took it and left a note, said it's been held ransom until I come to my senses. [laughs] It was pretty great. So a friend put it all in her attic while I was out motorhoming and stuff. And then when I landed here in Minnesota, I said, "Hey, do you still have all the —" And yeah, I wanted it. She was right. I wanted it.

Kira Findling 1:12:50
That's a good friend.

Amanda Bailey 1:12:51
[laughs] That's right. Yeah, so I collected it all and now I have it all here with me again. And I would like to get it all into an archive. I haven't approached any archive yet. But I was at this OLOC convention, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. And they were saying that you should keep it local. But I'm not really sure that Minnesota is local for me. I've been here 10 years. I'm not really sure where local would be for me. I've moved around quite a bit. There isn't one here in Minnesota anyway, that I'm aware of right now. There's not a lesbian archive. I specifically want a lesbian archive. And so I'm not sure that New York would want my information, my stuff, because I'm not East Coast, really. I'm much more West Coast. But maybe. I'm hoping to get it into somebody's lesbian archives. There seem to be more popping up. There's quite a few people leaving money to get them started. So I'm hoping.

Kira Findling 1:14:27
Yeah, I'm so glad that you've saved it all. It's such a rich resource.

Amanda Bailey 1:14:35
And it's very personal. Because of the correspondence. There's all this correspondence between me and my friends over the years. And in a way that's what I appreciated the most when I was doing the family history. When you can read people's letters, you will become so intimate. You have such an intimate understanding of who they are. It's so much more than — most genealogies you just get the facts, the birth dates. That's just not as interesting. That's why I was so grateful to this guy. Will Frank, I mean, there had been a pastor that had done a lot of interviews with my family members. So there was a lot of rich information that fleshed them out as human beings, and we can really know their personalities. That was spectacular.

Kira Findling 1:15:41
Yeah, that's amazing. And that's hopefully what we're doing with oral histories here, too.

Amanda Bailey 1:15:45
Right. Right.

Kira Findling 1:15:48
It seems like we're coming to the end a little bit. Is there any story from your life or topics that you'd like to share that we haven't covered?

Amanda Bailey 1:16:00

Not that I can think of, it feels pretty thorough. It's 65 years, almost — [laughs] But I think we did a good job with the bouncing around. You're just gonna get some highlights from each decade. No, I think I'm good. But you know, as soon as we're finished, I'll think of a lot.

Kira Findling 1:16:34
Of course, that's how it always goes. Well, thank you so much, Amanda. Then we'll stop the recording if you feel complete, and yeah, thank you for doing this.

Amanda Bailey 1:16:45
Thank you, Kira.