Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory
of
Eleanor Batchelder
Part 1

An Interview
Conducted by
Audrey Dubois
12/08/2021

Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

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LEOHP Interview
Interviewee: Eleanor Batchelder
Interviewer: Audrey Dubois
Date: 12/08/2021

Audrey Dubois 00:00
Okay so today is December 8, 2021 and we are recording an oral history with me, Audrey Dubois, talking to Eleanor Batchelder about her life history. This is a Lesbian Elders Oral History Project interview, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. We are recording from Raleigh, North Carolina and New York, New York. Alright, so hi, Eleanor. To get started, would you tell me when you were born and where you grew up?

Eleanor Batchelder 00:14
I was born in 1940 in Pittsburgh and eventually we moved to a St. Louis suburb where we lived for most of my childhood until I was in junior high school. That was definitely the Midwest. That's the main influence on my childhood, the generic Midwest.

Audrey Dubois 00:24
[Laughs]— sure. So what were your family and your home life like?

Eleanor Batchelder 00:28
Well, they were pretty ordinary I think. A father, mother, two daughters. My father worked in sort of an office job, a technical office job. My mother was a social worker for most of that time. [Note: My father had a PhD and my mother at least a BA then.] So she had— I forget, I don't— maybe I never knew actually. One doesn't know what one's mother does. But she was at home working and sometimes she was away working. So she had a briefcase, my father had a briefcase and so on. We had a little dog, a little cocker spaniel. We lived in a one family house in this kind of middle class neighborhood. The only big thing I can remember about that neighborhood is that there was a famous baseball star who lived on that block. So it had to be an okay block. That was the St. Louis Cardinals in those days.

We went out [note: trick-or-treating] on Halloween; went to all the neighbors' houses. The school was two blocks away, I think. I could walk to school. Later, when I got a little older, I went to the Junior Senior High School, which was a little further away, quite a bit further away. But it was still walkable. It was probably like a half hour's walk. And it [note: the walk] went through the middle of this little town which had all the grocery stores and the ice cream stores and the candy stores and other things that I wasn't so interested in. So looking back on it, it seems very fifties. Very midwest fifties. There were no scandals. There were no hard things the way there are now. The way there has been really ever since then. Hard issues—

Audrey Dubois 02:17
One thing you mentioned was important to you growing up with your Scout troop. Would you talk a little bit about that?

Eleanor Batchelder 02:58
Well, let's see now. That would have been once I got to high school, maybe. Senior Scout. That was the important one. And that was actually not in St. Louis. That was— by that time, we were in Maryland. But I did. I was, you know, I went through Scouts. My mother was the Scout leader for a time. And we all did that. But that was not so striking. But when I was in ninth grade, I joined a Senior Scout troop, which was in suburban Maryland . And that was run by a very feminist, not a dyke actually, very dykey. But she was a very stalwart, wonderful person. I mean, she managed to lead us all by the nose and tell us what to do and not make us feel as though we were being told what to do. But she was quite a feminist. She believed in the power of women. She did ultimately get married a few years later actually. But for maybe 15 years or so, I think she was the head of that Senior Scout Troop. We went hiking and we went camping and we made fires and we made all kinds of things. And then we did service work. We worked— on weekends, we went to a hospital and were nurses aids there. At one point, I guess when I was in my sophomore year, maybe junior, we went on an international encampment in Michigan where they had Senior Scouts from all over the world coming. Each one of us brought things from our hometown, so to speak, to exchange with people who brought things from their hometowns. So that was really very, very interesting. Very enjoyable. I was privileged to be part of that.

Audrey Dubois 04:51
Did you have any impression growing up of what people around you thought of gay people or if they thought of us at all?

Eleanor Batchelder 05:01
I never thought of gay people particularly. I mean, even in that situation— well, I suppose we must have sometimes wondered what our leader Jean was doing. But it was not part of our consciousness that I remember, our own sexuality, and certainly other people's sexuality. I mean, that had not really become even a visible issue yet, I think. Remember, this would have been in— let's see, in 1957 maybe, I graduated from high school. '57 I mean. That's really a pretty long time ago.

Audrey Dubois 05:46
Right. So 1957. That was also when you started at Radcliffe College, which, of course, is—

Eleanor Batchelder 05:56
True.

Audrey Dubois 05:56
The women's college in Cambridge that later was absorbed into Harvard. So what was that environment like? What sort of experiences did you have there?

Eleanor Batchelder 06:09
Well, the main thing about Radcliffe was that people— everybody there was very smart. I mean that was really an intellectual peak, I would say. I'm still in touch with a lot of those women.

Audrey Dubois 06:26
Oh good.

Eleanor Batchelder 06:26
A group was formed maybe, I don't know, 10 years or so ago of the— we call it the Whitman group because it was the Whitman dormitory that we lived in when we were freshmen. And those connections that we made then seem to be much stronger than even connections that were made later. I only stayed at Harvard for two years. The other women, of course, went for four years and then graduated. So they had a much richer experience than I did. But even for them, it seems that that freshman dorm we were in was a formative period. And when later we began grouping, we all seemed to want to include women that we had known in that way, and not include other women. So I can't fully appreciate it because as I said, to strip off for those last two years was taking away a great deal. So I can't appreciate completely the experiences that they had. But even for my feeble little two years, I had a lot of interesting experiences. I was proud of going to Radcliffe and proud of having gotten into Radcliffe and proud of not flunking out Radcliffe. So I mean, I say this as though I was not a very bright person but I was a very bright person. And I considered myself then even more to be a very bright person. So it was partly because I knew that I was very bright and I was not doing well in my classes because it wasn't the right time in my life to be doing that. I couldn't really put my whole self into it. And I finally, at the end of the second year, decided that I was wasting this incredible opportunity. I couldn't stand it anymore. So I left thinking I would come back. But of course you can't really go back in that way.

Audrey Dubois 08:25
Right. So when you left, you moved to New York City. Lived on Riverside Drive at first—

Eleanor Batchelder 08:33
Where else can you go but New York City?

Audrey Dubois 08:36

[Laughs]— can you talk about what was that— you know, why did you decide to go there at first?

Eleanor Batchelder 08:45

Why was it the center of the world? Well, I went because I thought it was the center of the world. I mean, everything was in New York. I can't even remember exactly. I guess I just always thought that was the place to be. And I think I wasn't completely wrong. I lived there, as it turned out, for quite a long time after that. I've always felt it to be the center of the universe. You know, everything worth thinking about, or happening, or doing, or seeing came to New York, which isn't true, of course. But that's what it felt like when you live there. Even if you didn't live there. Even if you just read Life Magazine, which I read. They had a lot of New York in there.

Audrey Dubois 9:30

Now what were your first impressions when you moved there at first?

Eleanor Batchelder 9:39

Well, I found this little room on Riverside Drive. An apartment, studio apartment I guess they called it then. It was a real apartment. You know, it was an apartment building. It wasn't a slum or anything. I mean, it was a nice place. It just was very tiny. I think the rents were not quite as exorbitant then as they are now and the turnover was quite big. So I mean, I only lived in that apartment for six months. Then I left and went on with my life. So I would imagine that other people had the same experience. They were a very easily moving bunch of people. But I did, I worked—when I was living in that little apartment, I was working at *The Village Voice*. I mean, if any place I could have found gay people, that would have been the place. You see, but I don't remember being conscious of them really even.

Audrey Dubois 10:35

Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 10:36

I know there were gay people there but I don't even remember who they might have been. It just wasn't on my radar at all at that point. And I think it probably wasn't on many people's radar, unless they were already aware that they were gay. But *The Village Voice* was also a center of a whole lot of action and events. There was a lot of theater. There was a lot of music in the Village and all of that came through *The Village Voice*.

Audrey Dubois 11:05

Right. When you— had The Voice already moved the offices to Christopher Street when you were working there or was this before?

Eleanor Batchelder 11:15
Christopher St.— let me see. No, it was above a bakery.

Audrey Dubois 11:20
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 11:20
It was like three rooms above a bakery. It was [note:Ed] Fancher and [note: Dan] Wolf and [note: Jerry] Tallmer. I forgot who the other guy was. But they were making culture. You know, they were somehow guiding the way that things went. There was a photographer there, Fred McDarrah, who I still see his name in books. Then he, of course, after the gay thing and everything that happened in the Village, I think he must have chronicled his photographs. So it gave me and still, I have a feeling of a little bit of ownership, you know, that I was there at that time and saw all these people. There was a woman I was madly in love with there who worked at *The Voice*. She had a boyfriend though so, I didn't, I wouldn't have said at the time, I wouldn't have put it that way. I would have said I was fascinated by her because she was quite beautiful and quite fascinating. But I think whatever sexual fantasies I was having at that point, were definitely heterosexual. So— [crosstalk]— all I dreamed about was being with her boyfriend, not sleeping with her.

Audrey Dubois 12:43
Yes. So on that note in April 1960, you were married for the first time. So would you like to give any background about that?

Eleanor Batchelder 12:54
Yes. Well, this was somebody I met at Harvard. He was also working in the theater in Harvard, as I was working in the theater at Harvard. And I didn't know— you know, it's very hard for me to recreate in my mind even the attraction. I can't. I can't re-vivify it, I'm afraid. But he was very tall and kind of non-committal. So you could make up whatever you wanted to about him I guess. He had a rather dominating mother, which turned out to be not a good idea. But he— I don't know that we loved each other. I don't know that he loved me. But I think we sort of hung onto each other, you know, like in a storm or a battleship… or not a battleship, a shipwreck to get through those years. In the end, it worked out okay.

You know, I mean— oh, I know why I got pregnant. I haven't thought of this in a long time. He didn't want to go into the service. That was the time of the draft. And unless you had a good reason to keep you out of the draft, you were going to be siphoned up. And he definitely did not want that. So he was afraid that when he graduated— he was going to Harvard— and when he graduated from Harvard, he would be taken in. So we started trying to get pregnant and we did

get pregnant. It turned out to be twins. So that kind of closed off the Army problem, you know, because certainly, you weren't going to take a father of two into the army. Now, you know, this is at the moment when there's all this about abortion and all. I never considered abortion. I mean, I never even thought about abortion in those days. I guess there was a lot we didn't think about in those days. But I was certainly— I guess I wasn't too unhappy about it. I was just a little curious, you know, and wondering what was gonna come next year. I was really not knowing what to expect. I was only— they were born in—

Audrey Dubois 15:11
'62. Yeah.

Eleanor Batchelder 15:12
What?

Audrey Dubois 15:13
1962 was when the twins were born?

Eleanor Batchelder 15:17
Two ending in two. Yes. And then Patrick ending in four. So I would have been very young. I would have been, what, 22 [note: 24] at that point? But I went through all of the motions and I did okay. I mean, there was nothing so terrible. One time Patrick fell out of the buggy, hit his head. So that was a little dramatic but it turned out not to be anything very serious. Other than that, we had a fairly easy time. I really wanted to go back to work. I wasn't happy not working.

Audrey Dubois 15:54
Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 15:56
At some point when the babies were still young, I hired a young woman from the south. Dorothy Forehand, her name was. She was much more knowledgeable than I was. She was older, I guess, maybe she was in her early thirties because she was not as flustered by all of these things as I was. She worked for us for a number of years. Because I had Patrick, and then once you have a baby and you have somebody come to work for you, you can keep them because they don't want to let go of that baby. That was the way it was with Dorothy. But eventually, when he started to go to nursery school, then she felt that her time had come. She wanted to go do something else. I think then I had a few other people but they weren't quite the same [ringing noise] as Dorothy. By that time we had moved. We moved to another place that was quite different. More slummy, I guess. It was in the Bronx, gone to the Bronx.

Audrey Dubois 17:00

Right. You lived in New Haven, Connecticut and then did Summer Stock Theatre in Rhode Island. And then moved to the Bronx, yes?

Eleanor Batchelder 17:11
Did I— I don't think I moved to Connecticut. I don't think I ever lived in Connecticut. What could we be thinking? What could we be thinking of?

Audrey Dubois 17:20
I might have written that down. [Crosstalk]—

Eleanor Batchelder 17:23
Anyway, we did go into Summer Stock and that was interesting. The babies and the dogs and the cats [laughs]— I did that first summer— I guess maybe it was before the children were born. Anyway, I can't get down into those details. But I did do box office work that summer. I [unclear] at the Little Theater. So that was fun. And then we went back the second year. At that point, we had three cats. Somehow we got three cats, I remember. I don't know how. Still just two children though as I recall. Then we moved further into New York City. We moved and we got an apartment in one of the new buildings going up. The new what they call Mitchell-Lama buildings that were kind of public housing but a little bit not quite. Anyway, we had a very nice apartment. We got a very nice apartment in one of those buildings and kept it for the next 20 years. So that really made life and New York, you know, they give away a lot of stuff. There's a lot of free stuff in New York. It's a great place to live, really. I mean, they have free entertainment all the time. They have festivals, they have— Fumiko— when I got involved with Fumiko, they had free English lessons for foreigners that you could take. I forget what all but it just seemed as though there were a lot of things that we didn't have to pay very much for living in New York. It was a very nice place to live.

Audrey Dubois 19:04
Right and you were there for some pretty momentous events. Like you saw The Beatles at Shea Stadium in 1964. You were working in Manhattan during the Northeast Blackout in 1965. Do you have any stories about those events?

Eleanor Batchelder 19:21
Well, they were both very short, of course. I mean because The Beatles was when they were really very new in the world. You know and it's interesting to me in retrospect that even though I was not a teenybopper by that point anymore, I mean, I was a mother but I really liked to kind of keep up. I always have been wanting to try and keep up with the trends and figure out what's going on in the world. So the fact that this was not really for my age group, I really wanted to see them and I adored them. I just adored them. They were so winning. I mean so almost cuddly, you know, you wanted to go up there and cuddle them. And even though the technology was so

inferior at that time, even in Shea Stadium, you could barely tell what was going on far, far, far away at the other end of the field. And the sound was not very good. But it was an electric occasion. I mean, you know, you've heard about the women fainting and it was true. It was true in Shea Stadium. You would go down the aisles on the way out, and there were women in stretchers—

Audrey Dubois 19:23
[Laughs]— right. Oh my gosh.

Eleanor Batchelder 20:04
—going out because they had just been undone by the whole experience. So that was interesting to me. And then close on after that, there was The World's Fair as I recall, in '64 and we went to that numerous times. By that time, we had strollers and things for the kids so we could take them with us. And that was just fantastic. I became a real World's Fair junkie. I started collecting all the material I could get. I think I must have thrown it out because there were boxes and boxes at one point. But it was so exciting. And that, you know, all of that proved the point that you have to be in New York. I mean, that's where everything is, is in New York so I never regretted that.

Audrey Dubois 21:19
So like you said, after you were able to hire childcare, you went back to work. So you were working at a stock brokerage firm, Eastman Dillon.

Eleanor Batchelder 21:35
Yes, I got a job at the— initially, I got a job as sort of like a combination, adding machine operator and secretary kind of thing for a Wall Street firm Eastman Dillon Union Securities. I was working for the utilities analyst [redacted]. He really wasn't a nice person. He wasn't really cool. And he didn't give me more than I could do. He just was strict. And didn't want to have personal relationships, particularly. So that kind of thing. But I did, I learned a lot. I learned a lot about the world of business and how people behaved in the office and what was expected. So that was useful. I did that for a year. And then in that same office— I don't know if you want to hear all of this— but in that same office, there was a young man who was very ambitious and he decided to start up a new… what would you call it? He had his own little area and he did it on the computer. He did a lot of studies and he published the studies and he had spreadsheets and it was very interesting. It was something that I could learn quite easily and that I could do so I was pleased about that. So I can get further away from the secretary business and further into the stock analysis business. So I did that. And then I did some other things like that. And just in general, each job got a little more interesting and a little more serious.

Audrey Dubois 23:13
Right, you became a programmer eventually.

Eleanor Batchelder 23:17
Yes I did.
Audrey Dubois 23:18
What was it like working during those very early days in computers?

Eleanor Batchelder 23:23
Very early days, oh my god. Well, the way I was able to become a programmer was that they had these teletype machines that you could enter a Fortran program on. Type it in and type it in and then you had another key. You pushed it and it would execute it. It was wonderful, it was a whole system from GE as I remember had put this in. They had designed this system specifically for situations like this where you wanted to have some calculations done but you didn't want to have a whole IT department. So I was the little IT department there for that particular place. So that was good. I learned a lot again and got further into it and that was when we had the the lights out, power—

Audrey Dubois 24:14
The blackout.

Eleanor Batchelder 24:15
Blackout. Yes, yes. Yes and we were— at the time, I was working in the Chase Manhattan Plaza building which is the one with the red cube in front of it. I think I worked on the 49th, 48th, or 49th floor or something. On the 50th floor was the partners' dining room. So we were able to crash the partners' dining room and there was lots of food and ice cream and everything up there. So we were quite happy. And then we all just found a little piece of carpet under a desk or something you know and took a nap 'til it was the dawn came up—

Audrey Dubois 24:52
Alright then.

Eleanor Batchelder 24:53
What?

Audrey Dubois 24:57
Were there a lot of women working in that setting at the time or were they a minority?

Eleanor Batchelder 25:03
Well, of course, everybody had a secretary and every secretary was female. So and most of the assistants like me, that kind of low-level assistants were also female. So there were a lot of women there. I mean, they just were women without much consciousness for the most part. And

they were— I would have wanted to become a secretary for a partner, for instance, that was a pretty good job. But the only problem with it was that if the partner left or retired, you were gone. There was nobody there who wanted to see you around. It was assumed that you had been hired by the partner. I won't get to— I mean, not necessarily because of a sexual but because of an ability to get along with each other. That you got along well and so that was why they hired you. It had nothing to do with your skills and nothing was transferable. So nobody expected—

Audrey Dubois 25:52
Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 25:56
Nobody was—

Audrey Dubois 26:00
Versus being a programmer. Were there many female programmers?

Eleanor Batchelder 26:03
Well, yes, there were several females. When I next moved to the New York Stock Exchange, which was another male bastion of course, I worked on some floor there in that building— in the Stock Exchange building. And at that time, when I went into that group, which I guess had some computational responsibilities, I was the only female in the group. But then not long after I started, somebody else came and somebody else came. So it was happening, it was definitely happening. Sometimes it was difficult, I remember. A difficulty was that men like to tell dirty jokes. And when they told a dirty joke, the question was what should we do? What should I, as a female, do? I didn't like their dirty jokes. But on the other hand, I didn't want to seem to be a prude. Prude was the worst thing you could be. So I can't even remember how I resolved it. Maybe I kept changing my solution over time because nothing worked very well. And the best thing was to have as many women in your group as you could and then you could basically avoid it. Because they would stop telling them if there weren't enough men.

Audrey Dubois 27:16
How else was working at the stock exchange different from your previous workplace?

Eleanor Batchelder 27:24
The previous one, yes. Well the previous one was kind of a— it was the research department and as I say, there were women because they were the secretaries and the assistants and so on. And that was in a partnership, I mean, most of those firms like Eastman Dillon were partnerships. So the partners had a lot of power and nobody else had much. Now, at the stock exchange, that was more like a standard company where you had to—

Audrey Dubois 27:55
Yes.

Eleanor Batchelder 27:57
Just I mean, everybody was an employee, practically. I worked for the utilities analyst. I think— am I mixing up my jobs? Maybe I'm mixing my jobs. Wait a minute. Yeah, we had groups. They had little task groups working on different projects. So there wasn't as much politics as there had been at the Eastman Dillon, which was a partnership.

Audrey Dubois 28:27
Sure. So then, in the meantime, 1967 was when you and your husband were divorced. So what was it like to get divorced at that time in the 1960s?

Eleanor Batchelder 28:45
He went [laughs]— he went abroad. He went— he took a job with a touring company abroad. He was in the theater. And so he was gone for, I think, the summer. When he came back, it was clear that he'd been having an affair with somebody the whole time. So I mean, I'm not sure why I cared so much. Maybe I didn't. Maybe I just wanted to take advantage of his being in a weak position at that point. But he— we had never had very good sex. We never slept very much together. And certainly by that time, we weren't sleeping together at all. And from my point of view, if you're not having sex with your husband, I mean, unless he's rich or something, what is the point of being married? And you know, I just couldn't understand that. I rather liked sex and I wasn't— I never did seem to get enough of it. And I certainly never got enough of it with him. So and then it was clear that he still had this, that he had several lovers, maybe. So I think I just got tired of the whole thing. You know, why was I going through this? What did I need him for? I wanted to be free, you know, to live my own life. Even though we had three kids, I was not going to have much of a life. But still. I should be able to be a little more specific about my feelings at that time. But it is a little fuzzier than I would like to say.

Well anyway, we did— We got divorced. I went down to Mexico. Really old story, right? I mean, you can't believe how different things were then. I have not since heard— I mean, in the last 50 years, I have not heard of anybody going to Mexico to get a divorce. But it was still not like the worst situation. It was thought to be not good to get divorced. You couldn't just without judgment being passed on you get a divorce. They made it as difficult as possible. And one of the ways they made it difficult was to get a divorce in the United States generally meant that you had— the one way to do it was to go to— where is that place? Someplace where they allowed it. Most places didn't allow it. If you went to this place and you established residency by staying there for six weeks.

Audrey Dubois 31:00

Oh my gosh. Was that in Nevada?

Eleanor Batchelder 31:05
Nevada, exactly. It was in Nevada. Reno. So I also didn't want to spend six months [note: weeks]. So the other option was that you could by some ruse or another go to Mexico, fly to Mexico, stay there one night, and come back the next day or the day after I forget and get your divorce in Mexico. It was really kind of creepy but I mean the whole thing was creepy. It's creepy like abortions are now because these fake sensibilities that everybody had or pretending to have and that governed the laws and so on. So anyway, that's what I did. I went to Reno. And I got my divorce paper from a Mexican guy. You know, a [unclear] Mexican guy in an office, big office. And purple ink, purple ink, purple ink, and came back and boom! Magically, I was divorced.

Audrey Dubois 32:11
Wow [crosstalk]—

Eleanor Batchelder 32:15
I started dating and I did start dating someone after that. Or started maybe fooling around. I mean, I went to bars and— well, I really liked having sex. And it was sort of exciting to do it with somebody in that way because it was a little bit risky. But we didn't have AIDS yet. So you didn't have to worry about that. I don't know what I would have done. I'm sure I wouldn't have done what I did if there had been AIDS around.

Audrey Dubois 32:45
And I mean, being— did your divorce affect things like custody of your children?

Eleanor Batchelder 32:52
No, no. The custody of the children issue never even crossed my mind. Well, he didn't want the children. What was he going to do with the children? It only crossed my mind after I became a lesbian and I realized that some women were having trouble from their husbands in getting, losing custody. And so at that point, I didn't [note: worry]. [redacted] But at one point, after I was already a lesbian, and he knew I was a lesbian and I said something to him at one point about, did he want to have custody? You know, maybe he wanted to take the children. I'd had them now for so many years, maybe he would like to have them for so many years. He said, "No, no, no, no." He didn't want to do that. So I stopped worrying about that. Because it was clear that he had a new wife or he was about to have a new wife and why would he want— no. There still is a custom, I guess, that they [note: the children] go up to his house every two or three times a year. Christmas they always go up. [Unclear]. He married again after a while. So no, it's been— what did he say to me once? He said— we were having lunch at one of our rare lunches; we didn't really socialize very much but we did it a couple of times— and he said to me— he also had a lot

of rehearsed lines. He said to me, "what I like to say is that I didn't make the same mistake twice," meaning he made another mistake. So apparently his new wife was not so wonderful either from his point of view but he never divorced her. He stayed with her and they seem to be an alright couple. And they were both very, very tall. She was very, very tall. And she certainly didn't want children, somebody else's children particularly, so there was no danger that they were going to want to take the children away.

Audrey Dubois 34:48
And just so we have it on the record, his name was William Batchelder and your children are Ned, Sarai, and Patrick.

Eleanor Batchelder 34:59
Right, Sarai. She pronounces it "Sarah." She invented that name. That's her doing not mine. But everybody pronounces it "Sarah." So but it is also in the Bible and I guess when it's in the Bible, it's pronounced Sarah. I guess she didn't like it. I like Sarah and gave her the name. S-a-r-a-h was the way I spelled it. But I guess she didn't like it all that much. So — and she went through a period too where she didn't like me very much I remember. I haven't ever asked her these questions. I should really, if changing her name had anything to do with not liking me. She likes me okay now.

Audrey Dubois 35:42
So I mean in 1969, of course, was the Stonewall Rebellion in New York. Did you have any awareness of that at the time? I mean, I don't know if you had come out at all yet.

Eleanor Batchelder 36:09
I have to look at my notes. That's a good question that I have no idea. When did I— Stonewall. Well, I think I must have been aware of it. What was I doing in 1969? Wait a minute. [Flips through notes]—

Audrey Dubois 36:40
That was maybe while you were still at Eastman Dillon?

Eleanor Batchelder 36:42
[Unclear; flipping through notes]

Audrey Dubois 37:06
Alright. Would you mind repeating the last couple sentences you said? They were, I think, a little muffled because of the turning pages.

Eleanor Batchelder 37:16

[Laughs]— they were. That was an act of God. A few sentences. You don't have a copy of the— do you have a copy by any chance of the timeline?

Audrey Dubois 37:34
I do. Yes.

Eleanor Batchelder 37:36
Could I borrow it? Take a look. '69. What was happening in '69? Give me ‘68, give me 67? I just can't.

Audrey Dubois 37:46
Yeah, '67 was your divorce. And then '71—

Eleanor Batchelder 37:52
Oh—

Audrey Dubois 37:52
—was when you started the stock exchange. So between that—

Eleanor Batchelder 37:59
Where's Karyn?

Audrey Dubois 37:59
Yeah. Not really any other details here.

Eleanor Batchelder 38:02
When was Karyn?

Audrey Dubois 38:06
Karyn would have been around 1973, no?

Eleanor Batchelder 38:13
Well, I don't have any distinct memory as you can see of Stonewall. But I'm a little embarrassed about that because I can't think of where I would have been.

Audrey Dubois 38:26
Oh, no worries. So what I am interested in is, you were in school while working, correct? At Hunter College?

Eleanor Batchelder 38:39

Right. Right. I was. The story I always tell about that is that I went through a long period where I was really proud of not being a college graduate because I was making it anyway. So I was turning it into kind of a point of pride, you know, but at some point, I realized that that was really kind of sketchy. I mean, that was not a really good thing to be doing. To be, you know, getting getting ahead in spite, kind of thing. So at that point, I decided I really should rectify that. It's interesting how I take myself very seriously on some of these things. But so I went back to school at that point and got my baccalaureate. It was mostly—

[Crosstalk]

Eleanor Batchelder 39:27
In math, yeah.

Audrey Dubois 39:28
Right in math and statistics?

Eleanor Batchelder 39:31
Math and statistics, yeah. That was mainly because I didn't want to have to go to a library and do any papers. So this way I could just do homework on the way home or in the subway or wherever I wanted to do it. And the courses I took were not that difficult for me. I guess the last semester probably, I had a couple of courses that were beginning to be really over my head. I mean, it's not true that if you can do this, you can do that. Sometimes they're just— you know, your ability crashes at some point and cannot do some of these higher mathematics things. Well, mine didn't at the last time. I was there, but by that time, I was almost done. And I could, you know, somehow stumble through that course. But for the first time I really, I encountered— the teacher would sit up there and he would say things— I loved that teacher by the way— he would say things that I just couldn't push in my mind. I couldn't imagine what he was talking about to the point of understanding it or solving it. So that was when I knew that that was my limit. Couldn't go beyond that.

Audrey Dubois 40:45
Do you remember that professor's name?

Eleanor Batchelder 40:49
No, I'd have to go look it up somewhere. But I did like him.

Audrey Dubois 40:52
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 40:52

He taught advanced calculus.

Audrey Dubois 40:56
Oh, I see.

Eleanor Batchelder 40:57
That's what that course was, advanced calculus, which is really not math anymore. It's more like philosophy because it's you're dealing with these, non-existent particles and things. But he was really charming and I liked him a lot. So that was a good reason. One reason I guess why I took this course. Also, because I didn't realize that I wasn't going to be able to do it. I wouldn't have taken it if I knew I wasn't going to be able to do it. But if you don't take it, you don't know what your limit is. And so that was my limit.

Audrey Dubois 41:27
Right. So 1973 was when you finished your degree and also when you joined your first consciousness raising group. So would you like to speak a little bit about that? How did you join? What's it like?

Eleanor Batchelder 41:45
From what I've said so far, I didn't have much of a feminist consciousness. I mean, I didn't have much of a woman's consciousness, in fact. I mean, I was sort of observant and I was sort of noticing things but I didn't have anything to tie that all together with. You know, it was just little individual things floating around my consciousness. And when I went into the consciousness raising group, it began to be clear to me that these things were all connected. I mean, that if you studied for instance— well, like we had all these books in the bookstore. You know, we had a book on rape and we had a book on motherhood and we had a book on all of these issues. But if you read any one of those books thoroughly, you could just immediately understand all of the others because they were all talking about exactly the same phenomena in different areas, which was the fact that women were not considered to be full human beings. They weren't given the privileges of full human beings. The things that were important to them and the ways that they looked at the world were considered to be bizarre and not very productive, etc, etc. So that was the whole thing.

But when you start the consciousness raising, you're not talking in those terms, right? You're talking in terms of one woman's life and what she has gone through and the decisions that she has made. And so but the thing is, you're doing it in a group of women. So each woman is talking about it. And gradually over time, you begin to see that they're all saying basically the same thing. That they're all— but they all think that they're the only ones. They're all coming from their own little worlds, which they think is— it's just because their father was this way and their mother was this way and then they went to this school and that school. Yet the result is that

everybody has the same problems and the same inability to comprehend them. So it was just really, what powerful revelations that was. It changed my whole way of looking at the world and thinking about things. And still is that way. Later, I met Evan, whom I was lovers, sort of lovers with for a while but that was— we were mainly friends. She was a very big thinker. She really is. So I studied under her for a number of years after that and was able to understand even more about how the world was working.

Audrey Dubois 43:02
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 43:12
But this and I've encouraged women to go and do consciousness raising, you know, because you don't know what you're missing until you get in there. And then it's a whole different world.

Audrey Dubois 44:40
Sure. I mean, that first group you joined, where did it meet?

Eleanor Batchelder 44:45
Well, we all met in each other's homes. That was the way it was.

Audrey Dubois 44:48
Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 44:48
We didn't— everybody that was in it— you know, we'd rotate around and you had to have discussions about refreshments because otherwise that would turn into like a contest of who could do the best, which— I mean, there were, I don't know, 10, 12 women maybe. None of us knew each other before we started. And we're very different backgrounds and different problems. And it didn't hit everybody quite as hard as it did me. Some people weren't so affected by it, although I think all of us were affected to some extent.

Audrey Dubois 44:59
Do you remember how you found out about the group and decided to join?

Eleanor Batchelder 45:37
Oh yeah, I think it was radical feminists who were organizing groups. I mean, they had an organizing team that kept a list of all the women that wanted to get into groups. Then when they had enough in a certain area, they would form a group and they would set a date. They would come to the first one or two, a leader would come the first one or two sessions to get people acquainted and off and running. And then they, she would leave and they would have their group.

There was a little booklet, you know, of what topics you could do and how to conduct yourself and so on. There were rules. Some of the people of course, as you would expect, dropped off early on and we never saw them again and other people stayed around. Most people though, I think, stayed for at least eight months probably. So it was somewhat of an experience for them. But boy for me, it was a really really big experience. I mean it just, it sort of like— it was getting a book that explained the universe. That's how I felt about it. Of all the things that I hadn't been able to understand, that I thought were weird and crazy and so on, it gave an explanation for those.

Audrey Dubois 46:51
Right. And were all the decisions like whose house to meet in, who was handling refreshments, were those decisions all made collectively? Or was somebody leading?

Eleanor Batchelder 47:06
No, there was nobody in charge. Just you had discussions and you did it. I mean, it's interesting the way those groups work. You know, sometimes there are a few very strong-minded women and they care more about the outcome of those decisions more than anybody else in the room. And so everybody says, alright fine, let 'em do it her way; I don't care. But other times, there were conflicts and people had to have arguments about it. It's the full, what's the word, spectrum of human difference and variability. So occasionally [crosstalk] there were groups that couldn't, that didn't succeed. You know, where there was too much discussion or too much dissension.

Audrey Dubois 47:54
Sure and do you know how you first got in touch with the feminists who, you know, signed everyone up for the group?

Eleanor Batchelder 48:06
I think it was published somewhere. It was— I actually, the first time I heard about, I think the first time I heard about consciousness raising was when I was, it was before I was through with college. And I went to the Radcliffe club of all places. The Radcliffe club had an event, what was it called? Damn. Seven Ages of Women. That's what it was called.

Audrey Dubois 48:36
Okay.

Eleanor Batchelder 48:37
It was an all-day event and they had seven speakers talking about different ages of women, and they touched on the problems of that particular period in a woman's life. And the last speaker was an older woman talking about old age and she said something that, she said, "you know, older women, I mean, they always are complaining they have—" and I said, but she said, "but

you know why… because they have a hard life! They have a very difficult time and that's why they're complaining." And I was really impressed by that. Because usually, you know, women complaining, it's like almost like a trope. You know, nobody pays, they talk— but she says, "we have a lot to complain about." Older women. So I was very impressed with that. And the fact that this was Radcliffe was odd because I didn't think there was that many feminists in Radcliffe. But in this particular Radcliffe group, apparently there were and they— every single speaker was talking about a different age and the problems with that age and I mean, I just came out, having lost my breath practically with that. And that was when I decided to go because they talked about consciousness raising in that. And they said, that's what needs to happen. So as soon as— I made a mental note— and as soon as I had my last class at Hunter, I looked up consciousness raising and I found that there was this group that was organizing. And that was [unclear]—

Audrey Dubois 50:11
Fantastic. Now, of course, another big impact that the consciousness raising group had on your life was that that was where you met Karyn London.

Eleanor Batchelder 50:21
True. That's true.

Audrey Dubois 50:24
So you became a couple? What was the beginning of your relationship?

Eleanor Batchelder 50:28
It took a while. It took a while. I mean—

Audrey Dubois 50:31
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 50:31
I'll tell ya, the first time that I realized, because I was not looking for a lover, certainly not a woman lover. I mean, I had— I won't say I'd never been with a woman. I had been. But it was not very salient, particularly in my life. And what happened was that I— we came out of the group and it was a cool evening and I was standing on the sidewalk or something and suddenly, I found myself shrieking at Karyn. Shrieking at her. And I said, "What! What is happening here? What is going on here?" Anyway, I went home. We left, you know, and I kept thinking about why, why did I do that? That just seems so bizarre. And then it dawned on me, I said, if Karyn was a man, you would know why you did that. You would understand where that was coming from. It's just the only thing is she's a woman and so you can't figure it out. And so that was when we begin, or at least beginning to begin a relationship, a sexual relationship.

Audrey Dubois 51:37
Were you the, were you the only gay women in the consciousness raising group? Had you talked about [crosstalk]— before?

Eleanor Batchelder 51:47
She had come out as being a lesbian. And there was one other woman in the group who was also a lesbian. But the rest of us were all regular, straight women.

Audrey Dubois 51:55
[Laughs]— sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 51:59
At that time, you know, that was pretty exotic to be a lesbian. Oh goodness.

Audrey Dubois 52:05
Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 52:08
But anyway, I began, we began talking on the phone and then gradually one thing led to another, to another. I can't remember all of those steps in between. But and then so she taught me a lot about being a dyke. About wearing pants and not carrying a pocket book. You know, all kinds of things that were important at the time. And she was, she was difficult. She was very young, of course and she's a difficult woman anyway. So it's a— I think she still lives up in that neighborhood.

Audrey Dubois 52:53
Yes. So another thing that happened around this time in 1973 was you started working at the Human Resources Administration.

Eleanor Batchelder 53:04
HRA, yes.

Audrey Dubois 53:06
Where you worked until 1977.

Eleanor Batchelder 53:09
They're now paying my pension, you know? The HRA.

Audrey Dubois 53:12

Oh, wow. So there you go. So what did you do there and what did it teach them about the city and about poverty?

Eleanor Batchelder 53:24
Oh, yeah. Okay, so right right. So that was— I worked there several times, didn't I? At that time, right. You know, there are these— this was the welfare department.

Audrey Dubois 53:39
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 53:39
This was, therefore it was all about poor New Yorkers and struggles that poor New Yorkers had. And I had, part of my job caused me to go out to the centers, the welfare centers, and talk to the workers there, who were the ones that talked to me. [redacted] And it was, from a point of [unclear], it was interesting because those people that, the workers there, that worked with the clients and that worked with the systems that my group had designed and was maintaining, they knew what those systems were doing far better than we knew. I mean, we knew what they were supposed to be doing. And we assumed that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. But the actual workers knew that they were many times not doing what they were supposed to be doing. They had a whole other. So that was very interesting to me. And I began to have a lot of respect for the people, you know, that were at the not very important end of the line, right? We were supposed to be the important people and they were supposed to not be but they knew what was going on much more than we did. So that was another awakening.

Yeah, so they were one of those poor— and I had to go out to the centers a lot for one thing and another. Everybody at the centers had a hard time. I mean, the people who were poor and were looking for benefits had a very hard time. I mean, they were going around with practically—what do you call them— briefcases. You know, they had to carry all their papers on them at all times. I mean, if they had any records that they wanted to have anybody take note of or be apprised of, they had to have them all the time. We didn't have any little, you know, tiny copies or anything, you just had the original papers. So most of these women carried all that stuff around with them all the time in case anyone of these guideline people wanted to see them. So they had a hard time but then the workers had a very hard time too because they were given a system, which often did not do what it was supposed to do. And yet, they were told that it was going to do that and so they had to try and make that fit somehow. Deal with those totally different realities. I mean, very different realities. I mean, if you've ever been in one of those centers, it's just, it's not really a prison but it has a lot to do with a prison. You know, there's all of these sad, poor, probably sick, probably hungry, probably tired people sitting around the room waiting to be called on. Waiting to have the chance to go and have their case heard. And then you have the workers themselves who don't have many ways of helping these people. In fact,

they're— it's very restricted. They have people on top of them who are governing what they— I mean, it's and yet, presumably, that's what's holding it together. You know, I don't know what it's like now. Maybe it's better, maybe it's worse. Because the systems— I mean, the general way that we have of dealing with poverty is pretty much the same it seems to me. It's better than nothing at all, I guess, because people do get some money but they get [note: some of] what they need. They get food stamps, they get medicaid. But it's not a place that you want to be spending every day in.

Audrey Dubois 57:00
Right. So in 1975, while you were still working for the HRA, you started Womanbooks with Karyn and with Fabi Romero-Oak. Fabi, right? Sorry. So how did you decide to start the bookstore? And what did it take to make it happen?

Eleanor Batchelder 57:28
Well the way I remember it, it was all my idea. But I suppose it may be the same with each of them. So I can't be quite confident. But I think that I had more ideas about the structures of things and how to actually physically go about it than they did. But I'm not even sure of that. We had a lot of arguments about things but it was fun in the beginning too. It was exciting because all of us felt that we needed another bookstore in New York City. Because the one that was here was just terrible. It was— did I speak about this before? This was Marisol. Marizel or Marisol? I forget. Anyway, she was kind of a plump Latin woman. She didn't like men at all. She really hated men. She was a dyke, I guess. But she wouldn't even let them, they wouldn't come into the store. This one woman— I remember one day I was there— she was there and touring New York with her father and Marisol would not let the father come in. He couldn't step into the store. The woman had to come by herself. Well this was not our idea of a woman's bookstore.

Audrey Dubois 58:30
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 58:32
So and she also— there were a lot of books that she refused to sell. And some of them were books that we really wanted to see, you know.

Audrey Dubois 58:41
And her bookstore was the one in Greenwich Village?

Eleanor Batchelder 58:44
It was.

Audrey Dubois 58:45

It was called Labores or something?

Eleanor Batchelder 58:50
Labyris.

Audrey Dubois 58:51
Labyris. Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 58:52
Labyris is an important word. Labyris was, you know, from ancient times. A women—

Audrey Dubois 58:58
Right, the ax.

Eleanor Batchelder 59:00
Yes, yes. Labyris. I haven't heard that word in years actually. It used to be very popular. There used to be all kinds of things called labyris.

Audrey Dubois 59:09
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 59:12
Yeah, so we started and we were very idealistic. But, you know, and then we rented a space which was not where it turned out to be later but that space was on the other side of Broadway as I remember. And it was a very cheap boarding house [ringing noise] is my recollection of it. That's who lived there. More poor people. And there were floods. There'd be floods. People would leave stuff soaking in the sink and not turning the water off. And, you know, that was not good for books; that was not good for books at all. And then the other thing was a lot of potential customers, it turns out, would not come there because it was— you had to go through the lobby, where there were these raffish kind of people sitting about. But they did come. A lot of people came. I was just reading my write up here from that time. Did I give that to you? I should give that to you. I should get rid of it. But anyway, maybe I'll send you a copy. Because I'm— it really is a wonderful piece to have. People came! That's what I say in this write up. Everybody came!

We had gone to the distributor. The distributor is the ones that, you know, the wholesaler for the books. We'd gone in there and taken a shopping cart. You know, three little ladies like this. Ladies that– and we'd gone along picking one book here, one book here, one book here, one book here. I mean, they laughed at us, the people that work there. They had never seen such a thing, housewives coming in and buying one. Big seller was three copies, we took. So that was for the first opening. And but the women all came and whatever we had, they bought. So then,

that was probably Saturday and Sunday. So Monday, bright and early we took an inventory and then we went and we replenished all the ones that people had bought with a couple of extras and bought some new ones. And this went on, you know, for a few weeks. But it was so exciting to us. I mean, we were visible. We had actually created something that hadn't been there before. And it was all, just came out of our heads and some of money. Fabi had money and I had money so we could put a few thousand each into it. So then, but the store, the physical space was not good. And it wasn't very long, it seems to me, before we replaced it. I don't remember exactly when. But then we found this empty store, a hardware store, up on Amsterdam. Just a block and a half away and fixed that up. And that was beautiful. The first one was beautiful too. It had a big woman symbol on one wall, big eyed woman symbol. Somewhere there's pictures of that, I guess. If you go to the Archives again, or you don't live here. [redacted]

Audrey Dubois 1:00:37
Right. It's different.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:02:25
Same place but we're not in the same place. You're thousands of miles away. Where are you anyway?

Audrey Dubois 1:02:32
Oh, I'm in Raleigh, North Carolina. But I do get up to Philadelphia sometimes. I have a little gaggle of friends there. Yeah, yeah. But anyhow.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:02:43
Well, it's just that the Archives is in New York. So—

Audrey Dubois 1:02:46
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:02:47
If you were here, you could look at some of the pictures in the Archives.

Audrey Dubois 1:02:50
Right. So I mean, Womanbooks was a bookstore, but also really kind of a women's community center.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:02:59
Oh, yes. Very much. And that's not accidental— we knew that.

Audrey Dubois 1:03:03

Right. Of course.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:03:04
We planned it that way.

Audrey Dubois 1:03:06
Right so what were—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:03:08
Remembering is that all of the, after a while, the women from the suburbs came in and they all were just dying to leave their husbands and come to the city. But after a while, when we saw what was happening to some of the women that did that, I mean some of them, they lost their marriages, they lost their children. They couldn't get jobs; they weren't trained for any jobs, you know, they really had not thought this thing through. They just figured they were going to liberate themselves. And so after a while, I at any rate, began really cautioning women who confessed this to me that they were going to leave the suburbs and come in and I said, "I wouldn't do that right away. Just give it some thought." Because then they would come, you know, and they were having a very hard time and they'd come and tell us these sad stories and sit around the table and talk about it. Their husbands were very powerful, a lot of them. I mean, even just being men, they could take custody away of the kids. You know, if they say, "the woman left home and , no excuse, what does she do? She's just a crazy woman. You know, she didn't have any reason to leave home but she just decided to pack up and go." And then we had foreign visitors that came in. Our favorites were the German women who always seemed to eat up our lunches. We would have lunch on top of the— I think they have a different, they have a different custom in Germany, you know, it's on the refrigerator, it must be free for the taking. So we had—

Audrey Dubois 1:04:33
[Laughter]— that's funny. Yeah, what kind of groups would meet there or what kind of activities did you have?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:04:46
We didn't have groups meeting that I remember. I mean, I don't say never. But that wasn't really a phenomenon. It was, at least what I remember is, I mean sometimes you'd have people coming in from a class because a lot of the Women's Studies teachers wanted to help the store. So they would publicize to their classes that the books could be gotten at Womanbooks. Sometimes they could and sometimes they couldn't. But they might come in, you know, and sit down and have a chatter. People would bring people in to show them. You know, a part of it is that it was also a lot of work running the bookstore. So a lot of our time was spent on that undertaking and not paying much attention to what was going on in the bookstore. I mean, of course, we would talk to

people and do things but we didn't have— you couldn't really just all of a sudden stop what you were doing and have this great chat. At least you couldn't do that very often, and the work wouldn't get done. So we used to have these little sales books. Little sales books that had carbon. So every time you sold something, you would write out a little sales ticket, and then the carbon would stay in the book so to speak, and the original would go to the—

Audrey Dubois 1:05:25
Of course. Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:06:07
So and then you would take those sales books at the end of day and walk around the store and check every book that was listed to make sure there were still, at least one copy still on the shelf. Or what was the situation. If there were supposed to be 10 copies and there was only one, then you'd have to go to the back and get nine more copies and refresh it and so on. So that was a regular thing that happened every day. And if it was a heavy sales day, then you had a lot of books to be shuffling about. And if you didn't have any more copies, you had to put them on the list of the books to be ordered from the wholesaler. And somebody that had to make up an order for that. I mean—

Audrey Dubois 1:06:47
[Crosstalk]— what kind of books do you remember?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:06:53
I couldn't, I couldn't. Sometimes I couldn't stop and talk to somebody, even if I wanted to talk to them. They're just—

Audrey Dubois 1:06:59
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:07:00
— day and it just will have to wait. And so sometimes, the customers would talk to each other and help out each other. You know, if we were too busy. They could see us talking and helping another woman and then they would realize what was necessary and so sometimes they would help themselves, which was very much in the spirit of the store so I'm glad they did. We had a second [note: area in the] back, which was for children's books.

Audrey Dubois 1:07:24
Oh, wonderful.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:07:25

We tried to make that in the front of the store so it would be very visible. We were very concerned about women who might be too afraid for various reasons to even enter the store. So we kept all the lesbian stuff in the back, way in the back room where it wouldn't scare them and put the children's books right up front and some of the periodicals we would put up front. Poetry. Poetry was way up front. We had no— it was crazy how many women wanted poetry. I just— none of us could understand that. All of us hated poetry. So we bought, I think, three poetry books then gradually, we had to keep buying more and more and more because they kept going and people kept requesting it. Sorry, you were gonna say something— [unclear]?

Audrey Dubois 1:08:04
Well, you mentioned, speaking of poetry, you mentioned poetry readings happening at the store and being pretty popular.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:08:12
Very popular and we hated them. We just hated them[laughter]— you know if there had been one of us that liked it, that would have been great. But no, all of us hated to do poetry readings.

Audrey Dubois 1:08:22
Yeah. Do you have any memory of which poets came and read there?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:08:27
Oh yeah. There was— well, Adrienne Rich was a big favorite. There was a girl named — oh, damn, I'm not gonna remember her name. She was a younger one who'd just come along. But she was very popular. I mean, there are many, many, many women poets and there were even young women poets, you know, that had just been coming out and just had been discovered. I can't remember their names though. [note: Olga Broumas] You know, we had a book list. [Chuckles]— yeah, I guess that was a project of mine. Periodically, we would make up a list of books that we had that we thought would sell and make up— it was very pretty. Gee, I wish, I don't know that I even have any copies of that left but they’re in the Archives.

Audrey Dubois 1:09:17
Oh good.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:09:19
And then we would send it out to our mailing list and we would get mail orders. People would mail in. So that was another way of making money and also getting the word out because a lot of these women didn't have anywhere to go to get this stuff. So they didn't even know what to get. So yeah, I think I must have done, I don't know, maybe 10 of those lists over the years. And then I had one for drama. That was another interest of mine. So I made up a list of women playwrights, and—

Audrey Dubois 1:09:47
I would love to see that. Yeah, besides poetry, were there any books or genres that were especially popular?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:10:02
They all were. I mean—

Audrey Dubois 1:10:04
Right—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:10:05
Over the course of the, over the life of the bookstore, of course, it wasn't just the bookstore that was growing. But the whole readership, women, and feminist readership was growing and spreading. And there were bookstores opening in other cities. There were publishers publishing books that they wouldn't have dreamed of publishing a few years before. So I mean, it was just like this great flowering going on that we happened to be right sort of in the middle of. We didn't do it but we profited by it. In the beginning, there weren't very many— for instance, women's sports. You can imagine how popular women's sports would have been. They were very popular but nobody was publishing books on women's sports. So little by little, some publishers got wind of this and then more came out. So we began to have more sections than we had in the very beginning. In the beginning, we maybe had three or four books on women's sports. Biographies were very popular. It was— everything was popular. Plays, as you said, plays were popular. Every woman who came in had her own interests and she would want to see them reflected there. So— except for sexuality. I don't know how much there was on sexuality.

Audrey Dubois 1:11:25
So then in 1977, that was when you— you by then were working there full time— and then you and Karyn broke up. So what changes did that bring about at the bookstore?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:11:41
That was disastrous. I mean, it first of all, it became very difficult to work in the bookstore anymore. So eventually, we had to lock Karyn out. And then just Fabi and I worked there. And we had some women who worked for us that worked there. That was, of course, a terrible thing. And she— we all got lawyers, we all had lawyers up the wazoo. And Fabi was planning to go back to wherever it was, where did she come from? You probably remember that now better than I do. [Crosstalk]— anyway, she and her husband and her child had made arrangements to return to where they came from. For whatever reason, I don't know. And so eventually, she did and then it was just me and Karyn, which was ridiculous. So according to the stuff that I've just read here because I didn't, I don't have a lot of memories of that. I just we decided, I decided no, I guess we

decided. They paid us each some money which, when I wrote I said it was probably under $10,000 each. And then we went out of the bookstore. Then it was just Karyn.

Audrey Dubois 1:12:55
Sure. So then one thing that happened in 1979 was that you were involved in the publication of Heresies #7, issue seven. So do you want to talk a little bit about what Heresies was and what was the importance of that issue in particular, and then the role you played in it?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:13:21
Well, Heresies was, it was a magazine published by women, by a collective it was called. And the way it was structured was that they had a senior collective and overarching collective that supervised the whole thing. But then each issue formed its own issue collective and women who were interested in that issue came and took part in it. And it took time. It took at least a year to create these issues. And so the collective would meet on a regular basis, as I remember, until it was done. They would start— it was fascinating to be part of it. It was supposed to be a lot of artists. Some of the women were artists but not all of them. We would start with talking about the subject of the issue. It always had a theme. And people, women, would usually join it because they were interested in some aspect of that theme. So I think the first few meetings were discussing what kinds of articles could be in there and what kinds of art could be in there and maybe somebody else would want to invite their friends to come because she did dadadada. And then people would begin writing or doing photographs or whatever and manuscripts would come in and then we'd have to read the manuscripts and make suggestions and changes and dadada. And it took a year. And eventually there was a finished product.

Ours was on, what was it on? Working together I think right? For obvious reasons, we were interested in what other collectives' experiences were. Because as a collective, we had a lot of problems. I mean, it's not easy to work as one. And the fact that, you know, we had a sexual partnership in the middle of it, that wasn't helping, but I think that probably wasn't unusual for women's projects at that time. It's probably a very common occurrence. That in the passionate period, you know, you'd all get very excited about it. And then ooooh, it would go downhill. Some people got thrown out and some people [note:8] got pushed in. So but for me, it was very interesting that whole process of how it went. And there were some, in every collective, I think there were some actual artists, you know, women who had been working as artists in the women's community for some years. So I was very impressed with that, what they had to offer and suggest and so on. And how other collectives work together was useful. Now [bell rings]— I'm gonna forget her name— there was one woman that I worked very closely with. We did that survey together. There was a survey that we designed. Linda, Linda, that's her name.

Audrey Dubois 1:16:07
Is her last name Marks?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:16:09
Yes, Linda Marks.

Audrey Dubois 1:16:11
Linda Marks.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:16:15
So she and I worked on that together and had a lot of differences too. But everything comes to an end[crosstalk]— [laughs]— you think when you're going through it, particularly stuff like this, I remember thinking, this is never gonna be over ever. I am and it's over. So everything—

Audrey Dubois 1:16:35
And that survey you mentioned was, "Creating Alternatives: A Survey of Women's Projects"?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:16:42
I guess so. Yeah.

Audrey Dubois 1:16:43
I have that title written down here. So another thing I wanted to ask about, of course, was so Womanbooks was founded in 1975 and then the Lesbian Herstory Archives were founded in 1974. From the very beginning, was there any kind of relationship between those two?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:17:09
Oh yes. We became friends. Well, they were right down the hill from us. I mean, they were like across, where exactly were they? I don't know, like a block, if a block even. Very close and they had their property there. You know, they had this great apartment here that they were putting their collection into, which was another amazing thing. So they would come to us, we would go to them. We became very close. Even though we were doing completely different things.

Then I went out to their summer house. They had— Deb had a summer house. Her family had a summer house in— I don't remember where. I don't remember where. I was trying to quit smoking at that time. I was [bell ringing]— go out there and I would try and— but I drove them crazy. Of course, I couldn't manage to quit smoking. I just minched and minched about it all the time. So it must have been a terrible strain on them. But anyway, at that point, I didn't. I did later quit. But anyway, I'm still friendly with Deb. Joan, of course, is living in another continent somewhere. Where is she living? Australia, I think. But I see her on the screen. Sometimes she does these events. She seems to be well. Deb and her partner live in New Jersey. I don't see them as often as I would like. Every time I think I call them up and get together, you know, they're on the road or they're somewhere else. It's very difficult. But we used to, in the last few years, we

used to run into each other, you know, at various conferences and meetings and so on. But now there have been no conferences or meetings for a long time. So nobody meets anybody.

Audrey Dubois 1:18:56
You also, of course, have donated a lot of materials from Womanbooks to the Archives. Would you talk a little bit about that?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:19:04
Donated, I guess you call it donated.

Audrey Dubois 1:19:09
Access or whatever phraseology they use.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:19:13
Yeah. Well, my papers, a lot of papers that I had, I gave to them, I remember. And [bell ringing]— I don't know what more I can say about that. I haven't looked at that in a long time. 20 years. And so I don't know quite what's happened to them. But I did. I guess partly I needed to just get it out of my life. You know, it was just so painful. So I sort of buried it in the Archives.

Audrey Dubois 1:19:54
Sure. I mean, yeah, at that point in time. Yeah, what do you— I mean, do you have any thoughts on the impact of the Archives? The impact of them existing at that time?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:20:15
Well, I mean, as far as I'm concerned, Deb and Joan, together and separately, are angels. You know, I mean they're like the patron saints of lesbian feminism. Their patience and perseverance and foresight is just remarkable. And, I mean, I never even appreciated it until it was done. You know, I mean, I knew they were trying to raise money, everybody tries to raise money, that's no big deal, right? But that they would buy the building? That's just incredible. It never was a possibility in my mind and I'm not sure it was even in theirs and particularly in the short time that it took them to collect all that money. It was, what, 10 or 15 years maybe? And they had bought the building. Then they have this whole, you know, army of young women that are going to inherit it and so on and are going to continue the projects and it's just amazing. I mean, when I knew them in the beginning, they were doing slideshows. That was their main project because they had made up these slideshows. They'd gotten things given from people around them and they've kept it up.

Audrey Dubois 1:21:31
Okay, okay. Yes, the slideshows.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:21:36
Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, I saw those slideshows a number of times. That was the Archives at that point. I mean, I know that they had a collection somewhere but I don't know that they had a place to really display it. It was in Deb and Joan's apartment on the Upper West Side, right down the hill from the bookstore. So you couldn't really go in there and look at much. But they did have these slideshows and they took them all over slideshows. And every slideshow, of course, they had a plea to please give them materials. You know, give them your old photographs, your Ph.D thesis. I mean, whatever you had that expressed and demonstrated your life as a lesbian. And lot's of people did that. They gave them money and they gave them things, T-shirts, all kinds of things. Movies. Deb and Joan took very good care of it. I mean they, what's what's the word? Curated, they curated. Eventually, they realized that it's going to keep growing and keep growing and keep growing and they needed more space.

So they went to Brooklyn and they found this house. I didn't like it that they'd gone to Brooklyn because they used to be in our neighborhood but you can't have everything. Then they got to Brooklyn and then they bought the building. They began putting up all kinds of things. They have one kind of a moving staircase or an elevator or something like that in there. I mean, they just have amazing— I think they're going to run out of space if they haven't already. I think they may have had to get some additional place to put all of the stuff. But and now they've got this project. Just amazing. So I'm hoping that when Deb and Joan die, as we all are going to do, that there will be people there to keep it alive. I guess there probably will be. It's such an example. I'm assuming they're taking good care of the money so that there will be money to do all of the things that they want to do. I think people still keep giving them money. So it's, I think, the most successful women's project, lesbian project certainly, that I've ever heard of. I mean, it's just amazing. And again, that one was— I mean, Deb and Joan, of course, were lovers when it first started. But the Archives has survived a break up of both of them. And recoupling. And even it somehow survived Joan's moving to goddamn Australia [laughs]— which I think is also on an account of love, right? I mean, the woman that she wanted to be with is in Australia. Joan had a lot of health problems at that time. [redacted] But apparently she's okay now. [redacted]

Audrey Dubois 1:25:11
I'm going to pause the recording for just one second. Okay, thank you so much for giving me your time this evening, Eleanor. We're, I think, going to go ahead and pause this here. So thank you so much.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:25:32
You know, ask them, if you would, when I'm looking at you [pause]— we can not record this. I'll just tell you.

Audrey Dubois 1:25:44
Alright. So that's where we're gonna stop things for tonight. So again, thank you so much and good night.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:25:53
Thank you. Bye bye.