LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES

Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory
of
Eleanor Batchelder
Part 2

An Interview
Conducted by
Audrey Dubois
12/10/2021

Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

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

LEOHP Interview
Interviewee: Eleanor Batchelder
Interviewer: Audrey Dubois
Date: 12/10/2021
Part II

Eleanor Batchelder 00:01
Okay.

Audrey Dubois 00:03
Alright. Today is December, 10 2021 and we are recording part two of an oral history with me, Audrey Dubois, talking to Eleanor Batchelder about her life history. This is a Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project interview, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives. We are recording from Raleigh, North Carolina and New York, New York. So, Eleanor, I thought maybe a good place to start today would be with your first trip to Japan, which was with someone named LaDonne right?

Eleanor Batchelder 00:40
LaDonne, yes.

Audrey Dubois 00:42
Can you tell me a little bit about that and how it came about?

Eleanor Batchelder 00:47
Yes. Well, I became lovers with LaDonne— I met her at the bookstore [note: Womanbooks] when I was still at the bookstore. She was quite infatuated with the whole idea of being a feminist and having a bookstore and envied me that identity, I guess. But she— I was interested in her. She was a scientist, a biological scientist. She worked at a well known university lab in New York [note: City] and she did things like handle radioactive materials all day. She would come home with a little bandaid on her wrist or something and I would say, "Oh what happened? Did you hurt yourself?" "No, no, just a little bit of radium." She didn't actually get sick. She did later, of course. Died of something connected to that. But I was very impressed that she had so much education and that she was using her education and so on.

She also played the banjo or the— she played the fiddle. I played the banjo. She had a fiddle and she had a whole little [note: women's] bluegrass band that she played with, which I thought was really neat. [note: I joined in on a banjo.] She had a house in the country so we spent most weekends up at her house in the country, which I didn't really like. It was kind of a double life, you know, the city and the country and you never had anything that you needed because you'd

left it in the other location. But she really liked to go there and so we did go there quite a lot. Oh anyway, I know. So the story. She wanted to— there was a very prestigious scientific conference, and I even forget now what the topic of it was actually. But it was one of these international things. They held it at places that people wanted to go to. So they come there if they don't care about this and this was in Hakone, Japan, which is the territory right around Mount Fuji. So I really wanted to go with her and that was fine with her. So I did. She had scientific events, and I went with the "wives group," you know, they had things for the wives to do. They did sightseeing tours in various places, and one night for everybody, there was a Japanese dinner , which in retrospect, I realize was specifically designed to include all of those Japanese foods that foreigners hated. So it really wasn't much fun. But, you know, everybody squirmed and so on. Things didn't look edible.

But I did a lot of things. I had been studying Japanese, of course, and so I went around trying to use my Japanese, but it really wasn't usable yet. I didn't have enough to actually make it usable. But it made it interesting. I knew a little bit about the Kanji, the Japanese writing, so I could try and decode signs and things.

So that was actually my first trip to Japan, which in view of my previous life, in my later life was kind of amazing. I don't know if I mentioned but my grandparents, on my father's side, were missionaries or church missionaries in Japan. Spent their whole lives there. My father was actually, and his brothers and sisters were all born in Japan. And there's a lot of family history that's closely tied to Japan. So I had been studying Japanese. So this was all kind of all to one point.

Audrey Dubois 01:20
Wow. When did you start studying the language?

Eleanor Batchelder 04:24
Fairly late. Now let's see where I have it here. I went to Middlebury. That was my first— no that wasn't my first. At first, I tried studying at the Japan Society of New York City, but because I had been very good at other languages [note: French, Latin, Spanish], it didn't occur to me that Japanese could be any different because a language is a language, right? No, wrong! So for a year or a year and a half, I guess, I went to classes at the Japan Society and I wasn't getting any better. It was weird. I just— it wasn't sinking in. So I decided I had to do something more drastic and I signed up for a summer. They have six weeks and eight week courses, I guess, in different languages at Middlebury College. You live in the dormitory there and you have, speakers, first language speakers, teaching. So that was very exciting. I mean, I was put into barely just above a beginner class because there were a lot of us in that class. It was called a false beginner class, meaning that we tried and failed to learn the language. But it was very rigorous and we had homework every day. We weren't allowed to speak any English, within hearing distance of the

cafeteria, for instance. I met a few people who became friends. So that was really good. And I came out of it, you know, fairly well able to speak Japanese. But as I say, when I went to Hakone, I couldn't do very much. Anyway, I continued and then I went back for a second summer at Middlebury. And that pretty much solidified what I knew. So that by the time I met Fumiko, I could speak a fair amount of Japanese.

Audrey Dubois 06:09
Right. So also in the eighties, a lot of developments in computers. Would you talk a little bit about how that affected you, both at work and just in your own computer hobbies?

Eleanor Batchelder 06:26
Yeah. Let's see here. Yeah, '84, Apple Macintosh. That was the first. It wasn't the first home computer really. There were a number of others. But it was light years away from all the ones that had been before it, which— you know, you actually had to have a screwdriver in your hand with the others, you know, you would poke it. And the Mac was very tailored for the consumer market so that you didn't have to really do anything strange like that. It had lots of user-friendly software that came with it and enabled you to do a lot of things. Anyway, I loved it. I just loved it! I bought one. Well, I bought one a year out. It had already been on the market for a year. But I was really crazy about it and got involved in the Mac user group and was able to do a lot of things with it. Then I kept on and as it got better and better. It came out in color a couple of years later. So you could do color printing and it had a lot more apps and so on.

Audrey Dubois 07:36
Right. What were some of the things that having a computer at home enabled you to do?

Eleanor Batchelder 07:41
Well, for one thing, you do email. Beginning of email really, as far as I was concerned. And you could print out a newsletter. You could design a program that would do whatever, almost, you wanted it to do. I had already been a programmer. So this wasn't completely new. But I'd never been hands on because, as a programmer before, I had to write a program and then put it onto punch cards and then feed the punch cards into a big computer that would actually do something. But in this one, everything was set right at home.

Audrey Dubois 08:16
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 08:17
So it's much more freeing.

Audrey Dubois 08:21

But I imagine that, you know, things like being able to circulate email newsletters and print flyers easily at home was very helpful to all kinds of lesbian organizing, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 08:33
Well, I would think so. Yeah, I mean, to all kinds of organizing. It just— it means you could have your own little industry so to speak for very little effort and very little money. Well, so I shouldn't say very little money. I think those early Macs —Macintosh were maybe $2,000, which was not nothing, you know. I'm not quite sure how I managed that. I must have had some. money but I didn't have very much money in those days. I don't know how I did that.

Audrey Dubois 09:06
You did work at the New York Times from 1981 to 1984, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 09:11
Yep. That's what it says here.

Audrey Dubois 09:13
Right. What was that like in terms of the kind of work you were doing and what it was like there?

Eleanor Batchelder 09:18
Well, again, I was working at a desk for the most part. I wasn't working in front of a computer. I mean, they didn't have— the first time I worked— where did I work in front of a computer? I don't know that I'm going to be able to remember very much about the exact mechanisms. This IBM mainframe environment, [note: is very large], which usually means you don't get very close to it. You have a box of cards. Sure. Yeah. If you put them in and take them out again. But certainly there, I was working with more large systems. I mean, for instance, I did work with the classified advertising system with another guy. And the point was there you had— oh we had to arrange all of the ads. Because as you know, if you've ever read the New York Times classifieds, they're all in order alphabetically. And then right within the alphabet, it somewhat goes alphabetically, but mainly you have the big ads on top and the little ads on the bottom. So there was a computer program for that and it was very clever, really. I was working with two guys there who were quite brilliant and I got to know them well and worked with them in other situations over the years. So that was a pleasure. They were nice people and they were good computer people. So I enjoyed them. One of them [crosstalk]— lived up in— after a while, I worked up in— oh, where is it? On the Hudson. North of Manhattan is where he lived. So he had this office there too. So I would— and that was fun. I mean, every morning, you know, you took a ride across, along the river.

Audrey Dubois 10:58

So then 1986 was when you met Fumiko, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 11:03
Oh my— [laughs]

Audrey Dubois 11:08
And would you say her full name just so we have it on the recording?

Eleanor Batchelder 11:13
Sure. Fumiko. Fumiko Ohno.

Audrey Dubois 11:15
Okay and thank you. So would you say a little bit about how you met and what the beginning of your relationship was like?

Eleanor Batchelder 11:25
Yeah. For me, it was really love at first sight meeting Fumiko. The first time I saw her I said, "oh, oh oh oh oh." She's just the right amount of mannish for me. Just a little butch, a little bit more than a little maybe. But still, you know, sort of a little girlish too, like a lot of Japanese women tend to be. So she had come to New York. She was in New York for six months at that point. She had come with a friend of hers from somewhere Spanish. She's a Japanese friend. Interestingly though, this was a Japanese friend who did not approve of lesbians, so we had to be careful that we didn't try to inform her about any of that, which is a little crazy looking back on it. But that's what Fumiko wanted to do so I cooperated.

Anyway, they came to the women's bookstore, to Womanbooks, which I was no longer working at. But they came to— I think they wanted to get more information possibly on other Japanese women, possibly just on women's events in New York, and they knew that the women's bookstore was a good place to do that. So they came to the women's bookstore and the woman who was working there, Martita [note: Midence], who was a friend of mine and who was at that point the new owner, knew that I was studying Japanese. So when she heard that they wanted to make some acquaintances, she thought that that would be a good match. So she gave them my name and number. I said it was okay, I guess. Then they came over one day. So as I say, she made a big impression on me and I immediately began scheming to find ways of seeing her again and doing things and so on. And so, let's see, what did we do? Well, they wanted to come and cook me a Japanese meal so I said “fine.” So they did that. And then it was time for Thanksgiving and it was time for the Macy's Parade. So I said, “I bet you would like to see the Macy's Parade. Why don't I take you to see the Macy's Parade?” So we did that.

Eventually, Fumiko and I actually got to having an actual date. We went to a bar that was opening or some kind of a new club for women downtown that I got a notice of. So I said, "why don't we do that?" And she said, "okay." So we did that and this was maybe a month or six weeks after we met and we did our first kiss at that club. And from then on, we started sleeping together and spending— she spent more time at my house and so on. Still having to work around her friend. Is that— I'll have to ask Fumiko about that someday. Why was she so intent on keeping that woman innocent? And it was then it was getting to be, it was December by then and Fumiko was going to leave in January. She had to go back to Guatemala. That's where she had come from. Or she came from Mexico but I think she was going to go to Guatemala. That was her next plan. She wanted to study indigenous weaving techniques. So she did. She left. But then about a week later, I got in the mail from her a ticket! A return trip to Guatemala. So I said, "Oh, okay, okay." So I did. I went down. It was for a week; I stayed there a week and of course, Guatemala and Mexico although, this is Guatemala, were complete mysteries to me. [note: Guatemala!] And then, I forgot to bring my passport.

Audrey Dubois 15:06
Oh my goodness.

Eleanor Batchelder 15:07
I had. But in fact, I had brought my old passport, which I didn't think would make any difference. But apparently an old passport and a new passport are the same thing when you're just using it to establish your citizenship in a country which either one of them did. But I had anxiety, a lot of anxiety on that trip down because I was afraid I was going to be turned away. So then Fumiko met me at the airport and we went to where she was staying, which was abysmal, perfectly abysmal. It was in a garage, basically. So you had this exhaust smell all the time around you and so I was very unhappy about that. But Fumiko was into dirt cheap. I mean trying to save as much money as possible. Because when she ran out of money then she would have to go and do something else. You couldn't have her business there. Anyway, she showed me around and we did a lot of things. We had a lot of fun. We learned a lot of the language. We were both, you know, practically sleeping with our dictionaries because we kept not knowing each other's words. Anyway, after that, I decided that I would move for a year to wherever Fumiko was, which at that point was Guatemala. So I went home and rearranged my life— quit my job basically.

I had a son still living at home, as I remember. Maybe not, maybe not. I forget what I did. At some point, I sublet the apartment to a guy because I wasn't going to be there and I wanted somebody to pay the rent. And Patrick decided, Patrick was off at school, I remember, at college. And summer came, he decided he wanted to come back to the apartment and live there. Well, this guy, I hadn't arranged for him to have anybody living in the apartment except him and he wasn't happy about that at all. So finally, I had to call Patrick and I had to say, "listen, I'm really sorry but you didn't give me any warning here. And I had this other arrangement with this guy

and can you stay somewhere else besides your home?" So I don't think to this day, he's completely forgiven me for that. He's been very upset about it. But meanwhile, let's see, we were in Guatemala, which is kind of a primitive country. I mean, more so than Mexico. You still got a lot of these, you know, Indians wandering around selling baskets and things. I mean, it's very picturesque and then you've got the military, which is ever- present. Gives you kind of a creepy feeling. But there was one lovely coffee shop restaurant run by— I guess she was an American. Yeah. What was her name? I've forgotten. [note: Doña Luisa] So a lot of the expats tended to hang out there and meet people and plan things. So one of the rules about living in Guatemala was that you had to— what was the rule? We had to get, we had to go somewhere else for three or four days—

Audrey Dubois 16:10
Because you were on tourist visas that were for three months or something?

Eleanor Batchelder 18:26
Something like that. Yeah and you had to go somewhere else to do something. I don't remember the details now.

Audrey Dubois 18:32
To be a tourist and not a resident technically. Whatever it was.

Eleanor Batchelder 18:37
Yeah. So we did. We went several different places and that was interesting because we got to see different parts of this other country. And I think finally on the third one, we decided we'd had enough and we decided to pick up and go to Guatemala City. We got a very civilized Western apartment, right behind the American Embassy in Guatemala City for I think a huge $300 a month or something like that. I mean that's what the prices were like at that point. So that was nice. I mean it had a regular toilet.'

Audrey Dubois 19:13
And before that, you'd been living in Antigua, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 19:16
Right, in Antigua. And we had an apartment there but it wasn't a regular apartment. It wasn't a Western apartment. It was like an Indian apartment. You know, it was like— so it didn't have a lot of the things that you would expect. The shower, for instance, was really primitive. It was very colorful, let's put it that way. When you rode on buses often, you'd have chickens sitting on the seat next to you. It's very rural, peasant village oriented sort of. If you go into the city, Guatemala City is a little more modern of course. That was a modern capital city. When I first went there and Fumiko picked me up at the airport, she took me to a Western hotel in the middle

of Guatemala City so we could all have a good shower.. That was before she brought me to the village. So we were in Guatemala City then for the last month and we both got sick with, what was it everybody was getting sick with?

Audrey Dubois 20:27
Hepatitis?

Eleanor Batchelder 20:28
Yes, probably hepatitis or maybe— well, I forget. Something that came in different varieties as I remember. Anyway, Fumiko was sicker than I was and in fact, I think that continued to affect her even after she returned to civilization. She had some trouble with that for a couple of years. But I got over it fairly quickly and that was me. So then we were separated. We were separated for another six months, I guess, at that point. And I came back, had to reorganize my life again, and get the apartment set up for this guy staying there. And I decided that I would make use of this time by taking sort of a journey to see a lot of things and people that I'd never seen, always wanted to see. And so that's what I did. I went to Louisiana as I remember, to New Orleans, I'd never been to New Orleans and I'd always wanted to go. And then where else did I go? I went to Portland, Oregon where I had an old friend that I hadn't seen. Then I went to New York, Washington State, what's the name? Seattle. I'd never been to Seattle. Then I kept going and I went to— right after, that would be in Canada. [redacted] Vancouver! That's what it is. Vancouver.

Audrey Dubois 22:15
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 22:17
A couple of other places, I think, where I had people that I wanted to see that I went to see. And then I believe from Vancouver or possibly from Seattle, I don't remember now, I had a ticket and I flew to Tokyo. In Tokyo, I was met by various members of Fumiko's family, whom I had never met before. They hadn't met me but Fumiko had apparently read everybody the riot act and said that, you know, if anything happens to this woman, you gotta take good care of her. She has to be happy or I'm going to hold it against you and so they all did. They all chipped in and picked me up and took me here and there and told me about the food and took me to restaurantsAnd then eventually I began looking for a job, which really wasn't very hard to find at that point because all you had to do was be a native English speaker. It was easy to find work because there were a lot of English schools of various sorts that were hiring people. So I did that. And that was up north of Tokyo in a— Utsunomiya, a place called Utsunomiya. It was an American, who had married a Japanese woman and had Japanese kids and now he had this school that he was running to make a living. He was not that nice of a man actually but I mean, he had to make a living and he was tired of really pampering all of these foreigners, these kids, you know, most of

them kids. I wasn't a kid [note: I was in my late 40s) but most of them were who had come over. So it basically worked out. He had a place for me to stay. He had a little tiny house, little tiny apartments. So that was mine and he gave me a bicycle so I could ride around which is what everybody did, and he sponsored me, you know, so for whatever I needed, documentation to stay in Japan, he provided that. So that was fine.

I did that and had various experiences. I was in a kimono-wearing contest, which I won mainly because I was the only female to enter the contest and they had to give it to a female. So the fact that I was well over middle-aged at that point was [note: a handicap];— usually they're young [note: pretty] women. But that was very interesting for me to go through all of that and learn how you wear a kimono. I think I entered a speech contest, which I think I won a prize in somehow. So I was, you know, bopping around and doing all of these kinds of things.

And oh, yes, there were a lot of lesbian activities there. I got hooked up with the lesbian community in Japan in general actually. They had a— three or four times a year, they had like a, not a campout really, but come together for a weekend. And they had— there was a big community center that they could use. It was like a hotel. It was sort of like a very inexpensive government-run hotel. So everybody could sign up and get a room. They had a dining area where they provided meals. And it was about half and half— American or European and Japanese. So I met a lot of wonderful people that way. People, lesbians who were in Tokyo, and I still have contact with some of them. So that was interesting because it was so bi-cultural. It was— I mean, all of the Americans worked in something connected with English, right? There were teachers— the more assertive or successful of them had acquired a place in the University. So they had competitive status and a good salary and probably a pension and they were teaching English. Some of them were women who had married Japanese men a long time ago and had children and then got divorced and now were lesbians.

Audrey Dubois 26:18
And what are you— so you did have lesbian community there. Were you and Fumiko out to her relatives who you stayed with for a time?

Eleanor Batchelder 26:30
Well, I don't think we were in the beginning. But probably mainly just because I'm not sure there was a comprehension there. If we had said, we were lesbians, they would have said, “what?” And Fumiko I think wasn't eager to do that. But we must at some point have maybe, you know, created an understanding that we were the equivalent of a couple.

Audrey Dubois 26:56
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 26:57
We were both of the same sex and somehow they managed to get that idea and began treating us that way. [note: as a couple] So there really— I don't think there was any, there was any stress on that point, particularly.

Audrey Dubois 27:10
Right. And at what point was Fumiko able to come and join you?

Eleanor Batchelder 27:15
She came after about six months.

Audrey Dubois 27:17
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 27:18
She came over and she had some plans. I forget now what it was and I don't think it came to anything. But I now forget what it was that she was theoretically going to be doing. It's— this whole relationship, you know, has been in that sense difficult for her because she has to keep making the decision of how much she can and will kind of fit into whatever my current plan is and how much she's gonna go off on her own. She's done both at different times now. At this point, she came over and I think now we were in Japan. Oh yeah, right. So then I was up in Utsunomiya and she was there. After that, I think I managed to get a fellowship or something more distinguished than just teaching at the local English school, which does get old very quickly.

Audrey Dubois 28:25
Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 28:26
I managed to get some kind of a recognition by the NSF, the National Science Foundation here, which translated to getting recognition with the appropriately— the similar structure in Japan. They weren't— I had applied formally for some kind of a fellowship there and I had been turned down originally. And the reason I was turned down, it became clear, was because not only was I female for god's sake but I was old. How old was I at that point? We're talking— actually, I can't remember now what we're doing. [Crosstalk]— I wasn't a college student, you know, so it was a problem. [Bell rings]— so and then I realized what had to be done and I began to deal with the National Science Foundation in the States. I forget exactly what the formalities were but they had to be aware of my presence and they had to second my applications for all of these things, which they seemed to be willing to do for the most part. So once they put their hand, put their finger on the weight [correction: scale], so to speak, suddenly the landscape changed and I was able to get

a good fellowship in a nice place and so that's when we went to the University in [laughs] somewhere up in Chiba. I first got a small fellowship at Chiba University in the middle of a very, very hot summer. God, I don't think I've ever been anywhere as terrible as Chiba in the summer. And then I think I parlayed that one into a longer fellowship. I had a two-year fellowship then in [laughs] — you know, I think I'm mixing things up though. I think I'm— Chambers English School '88 to '89. That was the school by the American guy. Alright, so then the problem with this is not what I actually did. Then I went back to New York and this is when I was working on a PhD.

Audrey Dubois 30:48
Okay. Yeah you had started a PhD. in linguistics—

Eleanor Batchelder 30:57
It was after I got that, that I was able to parlay it into these fellowships because then—

Audrey Dubois 31:01
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 31:02
— I had the credentials.

Audrey Dubois 31:03
Right. I see.

Eleanor Batchelder 31:04
Yeah.

Audrey Dubois 31:05
Yeah. Is there anything else you wanted to say about like lesbian communities in Japan? I think that's really interesting. And something we maybe have less information on here in the States.

Eleanor Batchelder 31:19
Yeah, it's very interesting. There are still those same communities. The problem is that well— and there is some gay people— in the time that we were there, the first time, I think, they were just starting to do something like a parade. A gay pride parade. It was mostly run by the men. It was on again and off again. I think there were groups that were fighting. I never quite got the whole thing figured out. But there'd be Pride for two years in a row and then the next two years, there wouldn't be anything. Nobody quite knew why. Then it would pop up again. So it was— and it was a very small community. The parades that we had were not that big. And I seem to remember, they all had policemen in it. I mean, you had to have this police escort all the time.

There wasn't much contact that I remember between the men and the women. Fumiko had a friend who was a fairly influential gay guy. But for a huge city like Tokyo, I mean, there were just a very small number of gay people that that were out to be encountered. A lot of the gay people, particularly the gay men, were married [note: to women] and so they didn't have full gay lives. They had silent lives. They really, I don't know. But I mean, I don't know so I really shouldn't even be saying that. But okay— it was very backward from our point of view, even at that point. I mean, we had already been through Stonewall so we were, by that time, a fairly liberated society. But in Japan, it was still like the dark ages, a lot of it. It was mostly life in the bars. They had a very thriving bar district in Shinjuku—

Audrey Dubois 33:29
Do you remember any names of specific bars or?

Eleanor Batchelder 33:35
Well, we didn't go to the bars very— I didn't go to the bar very much. I think some of the people who live there all the time did but I don't think we went that much. We were— we were happier in the feminist community, which was—

Audrey Dubois 33:47
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 33:48
Conferences and weekends that we had [note: event]. Weekend ball. We had lesbian weekends, which was really like three days, you know, when you take a three day weekend and they would organize and plan it, I think.

Audrey Dubois 34:04
Do you remember the names of any of the people who organized things like that?

Eleanor Batchelder 34:08
No, no, no. Just the people that I happen to know.

Audrey Dubois 34:12
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 34:13
But they were mostly— there were some— one woman died recently. Ito Tari [redacted] She was a dancer, a very innovative, modern dancer. I also think that probably I leaned on Fumiko a lot [note: for this kind of information]—

Audrey Dubois 34:34
Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 34:34
— rather than generating it myself. So when in doubt, I could always just ask Fumiko. I had a lot of friends who were Americans, who were in the Japanese— [note: working and living in Japan] in the lesbian community there. One of them— this was the square dancing time. We'd go to do square dancing too. Some of my friends are still square dancers. I hear from them from time to time. The lesbians among them loved to do square dancing in the, among the American community, and when they went back to America [note: continued to do square dancing, and] they could dance boy parts.

Audrey Dubois 35:17
So going back to when you came back to New York to start your PhD, what drew you to linguistics and what made you pick City University?

Eleanor Batchelder 35:31
Well, City University, I had already been in. I mean, Hunter is part of the city so I had already been part of that. In much of my contact with it, it was free. Not at the end, I guess. But it didn't cost very much. Now Columbia, if I really wanted to go pro and go to Columbia— very expensive school. I mean, it's an Ivy League school. So why would I do that? I mean, there'd be no reason for me to do that when I could get a pretty good education at Hunter and I just, I didn't really expect to have to make my living in the academic community. So there was [unclear]— I'm sorry, what was your question? I think I've lost it.

Audrey Dubois 36:16
What drew you to linguistics?

Eleanor Batchelder 36:19
Yeah. Well, that's obvious. I mean, here was I, you know, immersed in the Japanese language in the Japanese community and it was very interesting to me to notice differences and some of the differences were linguistic. Of course, not all of them but some of them. And that I found interesting and I was interested in so many things about language. I was interested in how people learn language. I was interested in how languages change over time, about how to bring up a child in two languages. Is that possible? You know, that was of interest to me. How languages developed. Japanese had so many things of interest to me to share. You know, it has a very well developed honorific language so you have a formal register. And when you decide to use the formal register, you've got a whole set of different vocabularies that you have to worry about. When I was living in Japan, I would sometimes run into that. For instance, let's say I was all by myself and I went to a little museum and at the entry to the museum, they had a hostess, a

woman who was greeting people. Well, I couldn't understand a word she was saying because she was speaking to me in an honorific language. So she was using all of these very rarely used word forms. These were rarely heard by me. And I couldn't— I was trying to tell her, "can't you just talk regularly? Just regular. Don't use those words." She had a hard time understanding what I was trying to tell her. So I probably had to give it up. But then I found that interesting; a lot of things about the Japanese language I found interesting. The idea of becoming more fluent in it was very attractive to me.

Audrey Dubois 37:59
And at that point, Fumiko was also taking classes at LaGuardia Community College, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 38:06
No, not yet. She was still in the foreign language classes. The second— which is a second language because New York had a lot of immigrants. And incidentally, a lot of them were Spanish speaking immigrants. So Fumiko, having lived in Guatemala for years was [bell rings]— fluent in Spanish. Well, I wouldn't say fluent but pretty good. So she was very good at communicating with them and she made a lot of friends by going to these second language classes where everybody was studying English. So she had a lot of friends in the Spanish community and she did manage to learn a lot of English and eventually somebody suggested to her that she should maybe go to college. And the college that had a lot of second language learners was LaGuardia. It was a junior college. And she did, she wound up graduating from LaGuardia finally. It was not easy. She I mean, she liked— wait a minute, it's going to come to me— anthropology because anthropology is interested in different cultural questions and so on. And she found that [unclear]— so she was taking courses. One course she took was in anthropology. This big fat book, you know, that she had to try and labor through looking up every third word because it was not easy, but she persisted and persisted. The teachers at LaGuardia— now I forget you don't live in New York— but teachers at LaGuardia were all kind of geared to rescuing people, to helping people who had various disadvantages. So they would try to make things as doable as possible. I don't think they cut corners but they understood where students were coming from and what their difficulties were. So they were very appreciative that Fumiko, who tried very hard, succeeded largely in overcoming a lot of these obstacles. And she got a couple of prizes when she graduated. So that was very good.

Then what was she going to go from there? She's supposed to be great wherever she's supposed to go to. Hunter? Well, I mean, LaGuardia was kind of like a helping place. I mean, it was there to help people, to make it possible for them to succeed. So a lot of corners were cut and mistakes were forgiven. Now, Hunter was nowhere like that. Hunter was, you know, a hard place for everybody. It wasn't easy and people were there to get degrees and be better able to earn their living in the United States. Clearly, they weren't all foreigners so she didn't get the help there and the consideration there that she had gotten at LaGuardia. It was just like she was just another

person. If she was having trouble, well good luck, you know. So she didn't last long there. I think she left after maybe the first quarter.

Audrey Dubois 41:16
During these years during the nineties, Fumiko was undocumented, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 41:21
Yeah. She— yeah, undocumented. Right.

Audrey Dubois 41:25
Right. And—

Eleanor Batchelder 41:27
When she came in, they gave her these cards, you know, and they said, you're going to have to leave. And we waited for them to come and get her and tell her she had to leave. But nobody ever came. I think we got a postcard but that was about it. So we didn't take that very seriously after that.

Audrey Dubois 41:43
Right. How did it— yeah, how did it, her immigration status, affect your lives?

Eleanor Batchelder 41:48
It doesn't seem to [note: have affected us]. Not in New York City because there were too many other people in exactly the same position. And as long as she wasn't breaking any rules or committing any crimes, nobody was going to bother her. I mean, nobody was going to— she didn't have anything worth— what's the word? You know, threatening to tell the police or something. No, I mean, why would the police care what she was doing? She wasn't breaking any laws and they didn't— they had too much to do anyway, like they do now. You know, what are they gonna do? Mess around with a bunch of making-no-trouble immigrants?

Audrey Dubois 42:25
She did return to Japan for a while to run a program for young adults with mental disabilities, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 42:35
Well, the emphasis you're putting on it is not correct. She didn't return to Japan in order to do that.

Audrey Dubois 42:41
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 42:42
She did return to Japan for other more complicated reasons and once there, needed a job. She happily happened to find this job, which was just perfect for her. I'm not sure either she or they knew how well it was going to work. But it worked well enough that it was really hard for her to leave when it came time to leave.

Audrey Dubois 43:00
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 43:02
Yeah.

Audrey Dubois 43:03
What was it like during this period where the two of you lived far apart for long periods of time?

Eleanor Batchelder 43:11
Yeah. Well, we didn't have any fights to speak of. That was nice. Then we got together [note: again], of course, at every point, we began having fights. I think I went over [note: to Japan] a couple of times. I don't think she came over at all but I think I went over. We both had computers at that point so we could do email easily. I think I came over a few times and stayed with her and got to know what her situation was and so on. I don't know, life went on. We both were busy.

Audrey Dubois 43:51
At some points, you actually packed up and worked on your PhD from Japan, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 43:56
Yes, that's true. [note: and a long time before that], Fumiko was at that time, this is a different period. I forget whether it's earlier or later. Maybe earlier. When I did that, she was managing a house. This was a house for men workers who were working at a company or you know, like an office company of some sort, but who did not have their families living with them. They had to come to Tokyo and stay—

Audrey Dubois 44:24
Ah, okay.

Eleanor Batchelder 44:25
— in Tokyo. So while they were in Tokyo, they had this kind of dormitory situation where they had— laundry was done and somebody cooked and so on. Then on the weekends, they would go home to their families. So Fumiko was somebody who did the laundry and the cooking in a

situation like that. So then the weekend she was pretty free because there wasn't anybody there, so I came and lived with her actually. It was not a very big room but I had my computer and I could— I had a modem so I could connect electronically to the computer in Hunter, where I had my dissertation. So I could work on my dissertation that way. And on the weekends, we were free pretty much to go around the house because there was nobody else there. So we did that for a while. Yeah, several different times, you know, I would come and go, come and go.

Audrey Dubois 45:28
Great. So I wanted to go back to 1994, which was when you first got involved in square dancing. So do you want to explain a little bit about gay square dancing for those who haven't done it before?

Eleanor Batchelder 45:46
Yeah. Well, I mean gay square dancing, I don't think it's too different from regular square dancing. I had done square dancing I guess as a child at some point. I can't even really remember now. I think we all— at that point in history, that was something you did like sophomore year in high school or eighth grade or something. In the gym class, you had square dancing lessons. So I had a little bit of background. I also as a child had often taken dancing lessons and I really like dancing of all sorts. So even though it was gay square dancing, which meant that it was mostly men, still it was square dancing. The music was great and the dancing was great. The guys I just sort of put up with it. But I started doing that in New York, which was down in the Village. So it wasn't exactly around the corner. But I was living in Manhattan so it wasn't that bad. If I'd been in Queens, ah! I gradually got to know the guys. And after a year or two, I started to feel okay about that. But it really was definitely not a plus when I first got involved. But the square dancing, you know, you build up. You have different levels so you go in and you learn and you learn and you practice and you practice and then you can graduate to the next level, once you've done all the stuff in one level. I mean I just love the dancing and I like the music. I liked the callers where we'd go. We had different kinds of events. You know, they would have a— I forget the names of them now— but for instance, a neighboring club might invite three or four clubs to come dancing and then on the weekends or three or four times a year, there would be a further away gathering where you had more callers that you didn't know and more dancing and so on. More people.

Audrey Dubois 47:39
Like the fly in.

Eleanor Batchelder 47:41
What? Fly in. Yeah. But they have the fly in [note: that was more spontaneous] , they would have— yeah, I can't remember the names now. I'm going to ignore that. [Phone ringing]—

Audrey Dubois 48:07
Okay, back to square dancing.

Eleanor Batchelder 48:09
Yes, yes. So eventually, yeah and then when Fumiko was there somehow. I think I got her involved too and she liked it okay. She didn't like it like I liked it. But the thing was, the club loved Fumiko. That's amazing what happened. I mean me ehh, but Fumiko when she finally decided to leave after about six months, the entire club threw her a party. They all got cake for the last session. I was just flabbergasted. She was totally unimpressed so I guess she didn't realize that they didn't do this for anybody. I'd never seen them do it for anybody! But they did it for Fumiko. So that was a lesson for me in stay on Fumiko's good side because she had a lot of charm. But I really liked it and I kept it on. When I went to Canada, I kept on square— in Japan I square danced. Japan has an awful lot of square dancing apparently. Yeah, the GIs at the end of World War II brought square dancing in and the Japanese people just ate it up. And they are now all over the country. There are clubs, they have conventions, various big conventions, little conventions. It's and the women— in fact, it's made for the Japanese because they're so cute. You know, they're like dolls and they'd like to take advantage of that. All of the women had these little clothings, these little dresses, and it matched the men's shirts. You know, they would make them at home. Just wild.

So we would go to conventions every now and then and especially in the gay— we belonged to a gay club in Japan. No, that's wrong. That's wrong. We did it at another time but not at that time. At that time, there were no gay clubs. Somehow later though, there were gay clubs and we belonged to a gay club so we would take them. We would go with them and all the guys who hadn't ever danced with straight people before were very nervous. So that was another kind of adventure in educating the population and, you know, changing the culture. But at this time— no, I think it was just, it was in America. It was just— oh, I know what I'm gonna say. The costumes just the Japanese went wild with these costumes. You know, the women could also and they would make costumes for themselves and then they'd make matching costumes for their husbands and [note:it] was just too cute for words.

Audrey Dubois 50:37
Yeah. So before you got involved in square dancing, had you done a lot of socializing or political action or anything with gay men or—

Eleanor Batchelder 50:52
In Japan?

Audrey Dubois 50:54
No, in the US or wherever?

Eleanor Batchelder 50:57
Yeah, yeah.

Audrey Dubois 50:58
Were lesbians and gay men often pretty separate?

Eleanor Batchelder 51:01
After Stonewall, there was a lot of ferment, you know, and that was pretty much men and women are not always together but side by side, let's say. I became much more aware of gay men and I knew gay men and I talked to them. And I realized that they— excuse me a minute here, I'm getting a brain drain. At that time, when I first got involved, the gay men were very apolitical. I mean, they really knew nothing about it, they had no ambitions to free themselves from oppression or anything. And I think it was ultimately AIDS that radicalized it. They began to realize that they had to do something about that. But in that early period, just after Stonewall, a lot of the gay men were still like opera freaks, you know. I mean, they'd give their money to the opera. They wouldn't give anything if you went through talking about some kind of rescue operation. No, they weren't interested in that. So the women were much more radical at that point than the men were because we had this background analysis and so on. The men were all about bars and fun and, you know, sex. It was really hard, I think, for the men because that AIDS thing just slammed down on them so hard. It was so difficult. It would have been difficult under any situation but the fact that they had, they had come from their own little private fun world, you know, into like this enormous deluge of disaster. So— but we would go around trying to sell tickets for some kind of gay cause and they never would buy any. But then that changed. I think it may have changed after I left even more. So maybe I'm not cued into the whole thing. But I remember going to Fire Island to one of the gay— well, they were practically all gay community there. And, again, people were just having fun a lot. So you know, when it came down, and I can remember a few years after that, going once to a big exhibit, all of downtown New York I think participated in this exhibit [bell rings]— to demonstrate how many artists and creative people had died of AIDS. So everywhere they had little exhibits of the works of these people and it was just overwhelming, really. I mean, every dance company, for instance, had lost three quarters of their members. I don't mean square dancing but like ballet and different kinds of arts, theater groups. Then I was not there, I suppose, during the period— well, I was there but I just then in my head, it magically turned into the precursor of what we have now, which is where there was some cure. There was some hope. There were, you know, resources so people were aware.

Audrey Dubois 51:17
Yeah, a little more understanding and more treatment options. Not a— [crosstalk]

Eleanor Batchelder 54:26

But as as a feminist, as a lesbian feminist, in those early years, I was just disgusted with the men. I mean, I just I kept wanting to scream at them. That they were being so short sighted, they were being so stupid. I mean—

Audrey Dubois 54:45
About not participating in politics as much?

Eleanor Batchelder 54:48
Exactly! Well, not even being aware of what was going on. I mean, I don't think— until they got AIDS, they didn't even seem to be aware that it was around to get. And they didn't seem to be aware— I mean like now, today, we have this pandemic, right? And almost everybody is aware of it. I mean, we keep up with the news and we see where it's going and should we get, you know, da, da, da. I mean in those days, you'd think they would have been doing the same thing, right? But no, they were not! In the early days, they were not doing the same thing. They were just closing their eyes to all of the problems. Anything anybody said, they didn't want to talk about it. And, again, still, they were in their little little cliques and— I remember being very frustrated in those years. Because I was trying— I was more active than most of these guys were and more aware of what was happening. And they were still, like I say, going to the opera.

Audrey Dubois 55:54
They had a really different, different way of handling things. But in the nineties, so you had your fellowship in Chiba in '95 and then from 1998 until 2001, you lived in Japan again, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 56:17
Right. Pretty much.

Audrey Dubois 56:19
And then in 2001, you came back to New York and what made you decide to come back at that time?

Eleanor Batchelder 56:32
Let's see. Well, by that time, I had some credentials, right. I came back, you know, I was working in a lab— which one? I was in [note: Professor] Ohta's lab. Yes, for three or four years, I was in his lab. He had a psycholinguistics lab and a lot of graduate students running around doing his bidding. And—

Audrey Dubois 56:54
That was [redacted]

Eleanor Batchelder 56:56

That's right.

Audrey Dubois 56:57
In Tsukuba.

Eleanor Batchelder 56:58
Tsukuba. Yeah. And the system in Japan is really kind of— what's the word? middle age [note: Medieval] now. A time in history when— anyway, he had a whole bunch of graduate students and the whole point of having graduate students was that they did all the work. I don't know when they were supposed to be studying and learning things because they never had any time for that, it seemed to me. Anything he wanted done— he loved to run conferences. Every year, he would have a conference and he would invite all of his buddies from all over Japan and the little graduate students had to do all the work. They had to plan the program and they had to see the papers and get all the provisions. I mean it was just endless amounts of work. So all of these graduate students did that work. They just, you know, put their life on hold and their studies on hold. And they did what he told them to do, which as an American, I thought was really outrageous. But for them, it was just the way things were because it had always been that way for a long time, I guess. I suppose in a way then, it was so they were paying the University back with their labor for their tuition, for their being instructed. And Ohta wasn't too bad. He was okay. I was trying to do some experiments, which I wasn't very successful with. But I did get them done, I suppose. And I had a student who was— was she a student? No, I think she was just a woman in the community that I met. She was interested in working with me so she helped me because I needed a Japanese-speaking assistant to [note: help] run it. I was running experiments on people, mostly graduate students, I guess, or mostly students from the University were my subjects.

Audrey Dubois 58:49
And then you did come back to New York in 2001?

Eleanor Batchelder 58:54
2001.

Audrey Dubois 58:55
Yes.

Eleanor Batchelder 58:58
Yeah. Why did I do that? It says here, I teach part time at LaGuardia. Oh, right. I did that for a while. Right. Right. And then— oh, I went to— I see, '01 right. So then yeah, I was returning to some kind of life, trying to get a job. So I got a job. I did get a job. And that was actually— sometimes my life sounds like a little fairy story, you know, because when I needed that— I didn't really need that job. The problem was I had always worked. When I worked in computers,

for instance, I worked for a company. I did not make a lot of money. [Loud noise]— I knew I wasn't interested in making a lot of money. In fact, I thought that if I did make a lot of money, then I would be a prisoner of that job; I would never be able to leave it. Because especially if I made a lot of money, not many jobs make a lot of money and so then I'd be caught. And I didn't want to do that. I wanted to have my freedom, so I deliberately stayed away from [note: high-paying] jobs like that all my life, all my career. So this time [note: when] I went back to my old place where I knew people and yeah, the guy who was head head head somewhere above me, whom I knew still— people don't leave the civil service so a lot of the people that I had known 20 years before were still there.

Audrey Dubois 1:00:25
At the Human Resource Administration?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:00:27
Human resources [note: HRA], right, right. So, they offered me a job, whatever it was. Something that I could do and enjoy doing. But they offered it to me for a fantastic amount of money. For like, almost five times as much money as I had ever made in my life before!

Audrey Dubois 1:00:44
Wow.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:00:45
Now this was the going rate from their point of view for a consultant. I would become a consultant and they had a whole pay scale for consultants. And so I said, “okay.” Ben recommended it and I trusted him and so I took it on. So for about a year, I did that. I worked maybe a year and a half and it was the same work, it was just a different pay scale because I was on the consulting staff now. And I didn't spend very much, I just put it all in the bank. All went into the bank and I didn't change my lifestyle. And Ben came and talked to me and he said, “well, it looked like the wind was turning and consultants were gonna be let go of.” So it was getting dangerous for me to stay in a consultant's job. So he had a job that didn't pay quite as much, but still paid a lot more than I used to get. And he would recommend me for that. I said, "Fine. That would be great. I'd be happy to do that." So I changed and I went into a line job, you know, a regular job, not a consulting job. So that entitled me to credits toward retirement, which I hadn't thought about. And I remembered I had worked there some years before and I had accumulated some credits for retirement then, which I never thought I would be using. So I worked a few more years, a few more years and then I retired and I had a good pension. Talk about landing on my feet. I mean, it was just unbelievable.

Audrey Dubois 1:02:12
And yeah—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:02:15
I stayed there until I retired in 2007.

Audrey Dubois 1:02:19
Right. And during that time, you were also caring for your mother, right, who had her apartment in Manhattan?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:02:32
When did I do that?

Audrey Dubois 1:02:33
From like 2003 to 2007.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:02:36
We went to Canada. Next is Canada— Gee,, you see how I lose track of these things? But it's a crazy life. I mean, who can remember all of this? Yes, my mother, my mother. Yes, it was a number of years that I looked after her. The thing was she was a tiny little woman but very, very with it. As she got older, she got a little more forgetful, but basically she was still functioning, and she still— my father had died some years before, so she lived in Manhattan and had a one-bedroom apartment in the Upper East Side of Manhattan. She had friends and she had activities. She was running several committees for the Ethical Culture Society, which is what we had been brought up in and Mom was very active in that. She worked on a lot of their committees. And as she started to decline even more, I began noticing the lengths that she had to go to mask this from the world, which she did. I mean, she ran committee meetings for God's sake. Somehow, I don't know, I guess it just— she managed to seem like she wasn't capable of hiding anything, but I think she did.

Anyhow, at one point, she called me up and she said that she'd gotten this call from her tax guy and he said it was time to start with the taxes and she didn't have any idea what to do. So I realized that she was losing it, you know, that she was not able to keep this up anymore. So I called [note: my daughter] Sarai, who took over the tax problem and dealt with the guy. And I began, you know, seeing what else she needed in her life to get by. At one point, we were supposed to go to a concert together and I had the tickets and I said I would meet her at the theater and we'd done this many times and Mom is a great— always going to concerts and theater and all over the city. Well, this time she got lost. She didn't know where she was supposed to go because I had the tickets. So nothing was written for her about— I didn't know anything was necessary. She wandered around for a while and finally I guess she managed to find her [note: way] home. She got to the bus or somehow and got home. I can't imagine how but she did. And from then on, I realized that we had to deal differently with this problem, that this was

becoming serious. So, I began— I took over and I hired people to work with her, for her. You know, I had one woman that came every day to do dinner and a little cleaning. Then we realized we had to have people stay overnight because Mom couldn't be by herself at night. So I hired— mostly I didn't get trained people. I figured come on, [note:it] doesn't take training. You know, if you're a reasonably together person, a young woman, particularly, you know what to do. So that was much cheaper, of course, than hiring trained people. And I never had any problem with that. I mean, I never had any reason to regret that. It meant that there could be a lot of service on a very small budget. These are mostly students, you know, these are like part-time jobs for them. So I did that and then I had to take her to all of her doctor's appointments and then she had a full set of false teeth. She was going to a day program that didn't notice very much and they managed to throw them in the garbage. So then, we had to go through getting a whole new set of dentures made which was— I don't know— five or six appointments which I had to go with her to. Various sundry things, but she was very lovable during that period. Only very occasionally when she had a bad temper, which they're supposed to get when they get Alzheimer's but she didn't much get [note: like] that [note: much]. She was always [note: usually] very amenable and easy to deal with. I felt very close to her during that period. It was really a privilege for me to be able to do all of these things for her. But then I had to leave. What did I have to do? Oh, we were going to go to Toronto. Right. Right.

Audrey Dubois 1:06:59
Right. So 2007, she moved into assisted living in Boston?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:07:06
No, we took her on the train to Boston and moved her into this place. This was a hospital, I think really, or a large care facility and it was very near where my sister Margie lived. In fact, Margie had been volunteering at this place so she knew it pretty well. And we managed to get her in. It's not a piece of cake to get people into these places, you know? Anyway, so we filed and we eventually got approved. And they said, “okay, you can bring her.” So we packed a little suitcase and we went on the train to Boston, Fumiko and I, and took a cab to the place and dropped her off there. A lovely place, really. I don't know, I guess Mom got along all right there. She was there for about a year. She never did remember where her room was. Somebody always had to take her to her room. She couldn't figure out which way to go. And then, you know, we would come and then she would complain. She'd say, "you know, there's never anything to do here" and a passing nurse would say, Vicki, "remember we had a concert just this morning?" "Oh, right. I forgot about that." Because, you know, as she was living her life, it was getting erased behind her. That was the thing. My daughter got married and Mom [bell rings]— was looking forward to going to the wedding. and she had the announcement on her breakfast table. And we went to the wedding and it took all day, etc. and Mom had a good time. But the next morning, she'd forgotten all about it. She said, "When is Sarai’s wedding?" So that was very sad that she missed a lot. I mean that you can't— it's hard to enjoy things if you know they're going to disappear the next

minute. And she got a new [correction: great]-grandson, [redacted] Willie. [redacted] I think he was born as she was dying.

Audrey Dubois 1:09:01
Her great-grandson, your grandson?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:09:05
Yes.

Audrey Dubois 1:09:08
Right and your mother understood that you were a lesbian and that Fumiko was your partner and everything?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:09:14
Oh, yes. No problem with that. My mother was one of the most liberal women and adaptable women. As fast as history got made, she was part of it. You know, she wanted to be right in there. She was also very political. She'd been in [note: the League of] Women Voters. She'd been in all kinds of different groups and always was interested in things. She was a little bit— I thought of her a little bit like a teflon mind. You know what teflon— it occurs to me that maybe [crosstalk]— but as quickly as she would glom on to a new idea, she would forget it. I mean it's interesting that I think people didn't notice that about her because she was so warm and friendly and interested in whatever anybody was saying. She found it just charming. Nobody came to give her a test afterwards to see how much she remembered. But yeah. [redacted] She died actually just a little bit before she would have had to go on Medicare [correction: Medicaid]. I was so grateful because I'd heard terrible stories about what it takes to get people on Medicare [correction: Medicaid]. I mean, you have to look back [note: financial lookback of] five years or something and it's just— so but no, she still had some small amount of money. You know, I don't know. I don't even remember how much. Enough for a very small amount for [redacted].

Audrey Dubois 1:10:43
Right. So what was behind your decision to move to Toronto?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:10:48
Well, Fumiko could not legally live in the United States. That was the thing. I mean, she still didn't have a green card and she thought she was never going to get [redacted] [Crosstalk with Fumiko]— [note: Gay marriage wasnt legal in the U.S. until June 2015].So where are we? [note: Same-sex marriage in Ontario was legal from June 10, 2003]. Oh yeah, Toronto. So she was illegal [note: in the U.S. until gay marriage was legal] here and it really was much better for her in Toronto. I mean, actually, in Toronto, we were accepted as a common-law couple.

Audrey Dubois 1:11:41
Right, because—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:11:42
They have treated us as though we were married.

Audrey Dubois 1:11:44
Like 2005, they had same-sex marriage all over Canada, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:11:51
Yeah, probably, I guess. I don't know. It wasn't there in 2005. But they did by that time. And so she had a lot of the same privileges I did in Canada.

Audrey Dubois 1:12:01
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:12:04
I can't think of any specific example of that but I know we didn't worry about it anymore. And that was why we went to Canada. We thought we would stay there forever. We didn't know we were going to be coming back. I just assumed that that was it. [Crosstalk]—

Audrey Dubois 1:12:24
You moved everything there.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:12:25
The piano I sold. I decided we wouldn't move it. So I gave it to somebody who was willing to pay the shipping.

Audrey Dubois 1:12:25
Yeah, so you lived in Toronto for nine years. So do you want to talk a bit about how life was different there and what kind of activities you got involved in?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:12:48
Well, Canada is in many respects not very different, okay. After a while, you begin to see more of the ways in which it was different. But in the beginning, it certainly didn't seem very different. It was— I mean, practically everybody in Toronto was an English speaker. We deliberately did not go to Quebec [bell ringing]— [unclear]. The climate [note: in Toronto] is very much like New York because it's right on the lake. They talk about lake effect. So a lot of the cold cold cold that you hear about all the time in Canada did not affect the land around Toronto. It's very much the same as New York: sometimes it was cold, sometimes it was raining, you know. The people

understood a lot about the United States there so you didn't have to be constantly explaining yourself. We learned a lot about Canada and how Canada is a little bit different. I got all involved in other things there. I got involved in politics in Toronto, which I had not done very much before in the States. But as a newcomer, you know, you have to learn everything. So I learned about their politics. And there was a lot of theater, which I liked very much. New York and Toronto have a lot of theater so we didn't miss anything there. And the same kinds of shows that we would get in New York, they would get in Toronto.

Audrey Dubois 1:14:11
Yeah, you were a big fan of the Toronto Fringe, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:14:15
Yes, yes.

Audrey Dubois 1:14:16
Do you remember any—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:14:18
I was a fan of the New York Fringe too.

Audrey Dubois 1:14:20
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:14:21
The Toronto Fringe seems easier [note: to access] somehow.

Audrey Dubois 1:14:25
And Toronto also has Buddies in Bad Times, which is the gay theater there. Yeah, out of all the theater you saw in Toronto, do you remember any particularly interesting shows or particularly controversial shows, anything like that?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:14:45
No, no. I guess I don't think of it that way and I'm not sure unless I went back through my records at all. [Crosstalk]— with playbills.

Audrey Dubois 1:14:59
But it was a really vibrant— lot’s to see.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:15:03

Like New York except it was smaller than New York so it was easier to get around. You could see more stuff without having to take taxis and things.

Audrey Dubois 1:15:15
And you had some involvement in women's book clubs there.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:15:22
I ran a lot [correction: a couple] of them actually. I did join a couple but also the ones I joined, I wound up taking over because people wanted to get out of [note: running] them. I wouldn't say that was so successful. It did keep me in touch with women and what women were thinking but it was stressful.

Audrey Dubois 1:15:42
Right and you were trying to read like feminist titles or all kinds of things?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:15:51
Well, it was supposed to be a feminist book club but I'm not sure that a lot of the women in the book club, I'm not sure they knew what it meant to be a feminist. We didn't harp on that too much. We tried. We had several people who were feminist. The woman who took it over from me, thank God, before I left was a real hardline feminist in my experience. And so, I'm not sure how people fared under her. But she did manage to keep it going so that was good. But there were a lot of people who were very fuzzy about the idea of feminists. They figured there was a lot of women, it must be feminist, you know, that kind of thing. So how the plot went or what the philosophy of the book was, they didn't always notice and judge it in terms of feminist or not feminist.

Audrey Dubois 1:16:36
Sure. And then also on the subject of books— so Toronto is where Glad Day bookshop is, which is, I think, the oldest continuously open gay bookshop in the world. I don't know if you went there very much but do you have any thoughts on that, you know, as someone who ran a gay bookshop yourself?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:17:00
No. It was run by a man for one thing and it was up— I'm remembering it now. It was up like three flights of, two flights of stairs. So it was a very different milieu. They didn't have a lot of women's books as I recall. So I'm not sure that I went there so much. Every now and then. Sometimes there'd be an event there that I was interested in.

Audrey Dubois 1:17:22

Right. I know a few years ago, they raised money specifically to move into a space with less stairs because it was making it so inaccessible. I remember that. But yeah. So if you'd like to talk a little bit more about your political involvement in Toronto. You worked on putting together a pamphlet about income inequality?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:17:47
Oh yeah. Yeah, they had a— I ran across it when I first got there. A study by a university professor there on what had happened over the past 10 or 15 years in Toronto. He had some interesting graphs and diagrams that showed that it [note: the city] used to be fairly evenly divided [note: by income]. And by the time he had finished his study, it was like, everybody who lived in this area was poor and everybody who lived in this area was rich. There were these really glaring differences in areas and not much fluidity— you know, [note: the city had] just had solidified into these territories. So I was really shocked by that and I felt that probably it was the same in New York and the States. I mean, it wouldn't be different there. Just that nobody had been running a study. So I— it became my cause for about a year or so and I got copies of the— he had done not only a study but he created a pamphlet, a small pamphlet demonstrating the process. So I got hold of those copies and began distributing [note: them]. I would go to conferences and I would stand there and distribute [note: them] at the door because I wanted everybody to hear about this and to know what was going on. So yeah, that was that. Then there were other things. I mean, things were more black and white somehow in Toronto. Maybe just because I was new to it. But they had the— what do they call them? The liberals and was it conservatives? I forget what they were. But I lived not far from downtown. So I got going to some of the city council meetings that they had [note: that were public]. They had a nice room in the main city building. And when there was something that they were doing that I was interested in, I would go take a seat and listen to it. And that I liked.

Then there was the— there were several gay groups and I had a hard time with some of them. One of them was— there was a woman involved that I must have had a fight with or something because it became very difficult. I remember something that really drove me out finally at the end, which was that I had— I was not watching what was happening in this speech and I didn't realize that [redacted] had become so taboo. And at one point, I used the term [redacted] to quote somebody who had used it. I hadn't learned that you're [note: not] supposed to say “n word”, you're not actually supposed to say the word. So I said the word and I figured I was quoting somebody, right? I thought it was being purged of all of its nastiness under those circumstances. No, it was not and I was— they almost had a star court therapy [note: session] to kick me out for not being willing to apologize for that or to do something, I'm not sure what they wanted me to do. That was a terrible woman. That was near the end though before I left. [redacted] But there was that tendency in the gay community or maybe just in Toronto, I'm not sure, to be drawing these hard lines, you know, throwing out people who didn't meet these criteria. So I didn't— I had to stop going to almost everything gay at that point because it was just too stressful. And I

had a good friend who was a German and a pastor. Anyway, we formed a friendship, which was very strong and talked about a lot of things and agreed on a lot of things and so on. But [note: he disagreed with me on that] [redacted] so I lost that friend too. This was near the time that I was leaving. Anyway, I guess all of that helped to push me out.

But what really pushed me out [note: of Canada] in the end was the tax situation. [redacted] I [note: knew I] was going to have [note: to pay tax on my possessions and that the longer I stayed the more I was going to have to pay because my stocks kept going up of course.] [redacted] mean, that was just going to get worse and worse the longer I stayed. [redacted] all of those things, I guess, and the fact that I'd been there a long time already— I mean nine years, that's a long time. I had also gotten myself into several projects that I didn't seem able to get out of. You know, I started this very successful seniors club. Did I mention that?

Audrey Dubois 1:23:29
Yeah, it was a neighborhood senior coffee hour, right?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:23:32
Right. Right. Well, that became the center of everybody's life in about— you know, there were about 30 people involved in that and I was running it. I hadn't managed not to run it. So before I left, I had to arrange trying to set up so that it would keep going and I was successful in doing that. It did keep going and it still is going today.

Audrey Dubois 1:23:55
Which is great. Yeah how did you manage that transition?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:24:01
Everybody knew I was leaving and I guess they also knew that I was in the position of making all the decisions for this group and managing any problems, figuring a way around them, etc, etc. I was the boss and nobody minded that at the time but they realized that there was going to be a big vacuum when I left. So I got a few people together and I suggested that what we could do is to set up a governing committee to take my place. And that this governing committee would [bell rings]— be able to make these decisions. I keep getting these brain freezes, goodness. So they nominated people to be on that committee and the same group of people today are still on that committee. They make whatever decisions are necessary to make, although not a lot of decisions need to be made because as long as everybody knows who would make them if they had to be made, which was what I was doing before. So apparently, yeah, and a lot of the customs that we had set up— we used to have lunch, a ceremonial lunch twice a year— and they still do that. They just kept doing it but without, without a visible strongman so to speak, apparently. I was afraid it would just crumble and it didn't. It stayed there.

Audrey Dubois 1:25:22
And you were also pretty involved in the Junction Residents Association?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:25:27
Yes, yes. That was— I first got there and I met some people from that and that seemed like a good place. The guy especially who ran it was somebody I really admired. He was a very nice guy and very organized and just a really good person. So I didn't— I was motivated to try and work closely with him and to do whatever he was doing. So I ran the, I did the— and there was a computer thing coming again because I did the newsletter because I knew how to use the computer and I knew how to set up a newsletter and have it look good and keep a mailing list. And you know, all of these things, which today God knows, I could not do but I was able then to do it. And yeah, we had meetings I mean for a number of years and then there was a little social group involved in that one too and people would get together and have a cookout or something. So that was part of our life in Toronto.

Audrey Dubois 1:26:27
Yeah. So something else that happened in those years was you— in 2012— you went to the US and Fumiko and you got married.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:26:38
[Giggles]— yeah, go ahead.

Audrey Dubois 1:26:41
So at that point in 2012, right yeah, that was legal in Massachusetts, but Windsor v. US hadn't happened yet so it wasn't quite the law of the whole country.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:26:56
I never heard of Windsor v. US.

Audrey Dubois 1:26:59
Yeah, that was the Supreme Court case that got same sex marriage to be a federal law in the US. But anyway, so 2012 was when you were married after being together for obviously much longer than that. So yeah, why was getting married important to you at that time and how did it make your life different?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:27:28
I don't think it did. I mean, I know why it was important. Because that would hold still. I mean, that was not going to go anywhere. The different other things that we had were not so sure that they would hold still. That those might be slippery and disappear under our feet. But, you know, as an American marriage— and I don't know how Fumiko felt about that. I mean, I don't know if

she knew that it was going to be true in Japan or not. Maybe she didn't care, I mean because we were going to live in America. That was the plan. We'd been in Toronto a long time now already, right, without splitting up again. So I guess we figured we were safe for the future. And I didn't think this common law business was gonna cut it in the United States, you know, not that they cared about. And sure, it's been very easy here, you know, because you're just yeah, we're married and they— I'll have to go into the dusty attic to get the certificate. I could do that. But I don't know that I've ever had. They just take our word for it.

Audrey Dubois 1:28:44
So you move back to New York in 2017. What was the reason for finally making that move?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:28:56
Well, it was mainly saving—

Audrey Dubois 1:28:58
The taxes.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:28:59
Taxes. Yeah.

Audrey Dubois 1:29:04
And Fumiko was able to get her green card a few months after you moved back here.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:29:12
No. She had it. Well, I came back in January of 2017. I moved everything.

Audrey Dubois 1:29:21
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:29:22
And put it in this apartment somewhere. Then it took another six months before Fumiko got the green card. She was still in Canada. She couldn't leave Canada without the green card cause she'd already applied for it and it was supposed to be coming any minute any minute, any minute, you know. And she had that terrible winter in Montreal when it was very, very cold. She was miserable. She didn't know anybody. She caught some kind of— not caught it or just it was a nervous reaction but she had a lot of physical problems and kept going to doctors and she couldn't speak to them because they all spoke only French. It was just a miserable, miserable time for her. I kept trying to help but there really was so little I could do. I didn't know anybody in Quebec either and my French was certainly not up to the test. I had a little French but long, long, dusty. So eventually spring came and whatever was bothering her body stopped doing that

and she got better. Then she just had to wait a little bit. But in the spring, she didn't mind so much because the weather was nice. It's a beautiful city and she had a lot of things. In fact, she kept herself quite busy— I think at that point— exploring Quebec. Then she came back in June when she had the green card.

Audrey Dubois 1:30:48
Right. And did the two of you being legally married make a big difference in her finally being able to get a green card?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:30:59
Oh, no. I don't know. I don't know that for sure. I'm not sure that— would they even know that? I don't know. I mean, would the government ask if we were married or not? I don't know. It was mainly just the green card. The green card and the marriage I don't think were connected. Certainly not in our minds, I don't think they were. They were two separate things.

Audrey Dubois 1:31:33
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:31:35
When you get married, they don't ask to see your green card, right? I mean, it's just— and then they don't ask to see if you're married. So I don't know; maybe.

Audrey Dubois 1:31:46
Great. So you were back in New York for the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, were there any kind of commemorations for that that you remember?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:32:00
It was just all the time, all day, all night. I mean there was nothing but Stonewall 50. It was very exciting. And we had been there, you know, for Stonewall 25.

Audrey Dubois 1:32:12
Right

Eleanor Batchelder 1:32:13
Just before Fumiko left to go back to Japan. That's why she stayed. Even though we were fighting like cats and dogs, she stayed that extra month or so so she could go to Stonewall and then she left to go back to Japan.

Audrey Dubois 1:32:29
Yeah, how did Stonewall 25 and Stonewall 50 compare?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:32:34
Well, what I remember of Stonewall 25 was that it was very— I mean there were people all over the city. That's my recollection if I'm remembering that right. But there was— I think we had the games, gay games or something—

Audrey Dubois 1:32:50
Ah, I see.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:32:51
— that year. So everywhere you'd go, there were like gay guys and women too, I suppose running on their— you know, and the subway everywhere to go to this event or that event and the other. Everybody was having a memorial this and a congratulatory that.

Audrey Dubois 1:33:16
And then Stonewall 50.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:33:19
Stonewall 50, yeah, I don't remember as vividly. But I have no reason to think it wasn't equally as celebratory. And again, this— well, now we see now— yeah. Stonewall 25 we were living in Manhattan, I believe. And by Stonewall 50, we were living in Queens. I think that was a big difference.

Audrey Dubois 1:33:43
Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:33:44
Not as much fanfare going on in Queens. But there were a lot of things going on and it was good to have being gay be a good thing everywhere you went. So that was nice.

Audrey Dubois 1:34:01
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:34:04
Fumiko had stayed that extra year around the 50th. We were already planning to split up because we were having such a hard time and she stayed that extra time, an extra month maybe, because of Stonewall. She wanted to see Stonewall and we were in the parade going down First Avenue.

Audrey Dubois 1:34:27

Right. In 1994 or around then.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:34:33
First one, was that 1994? Yes. Okay.

Audrey Dubois 1:34:35
Yeah, yeah. And then, right, so then Stonewall 50 was in 2019 and then that brings us to 2020 and the coronavirus pandemic. So yeah, how has that affected you living in New York? What kind of— you know, has your experience witnessing this been like?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:35:06
The first problem was that all culture died suddenly.

Audrey Dubois 1:35:10
Yeah.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:35:11
February of 2020. I mean, we'd had very busy lives going here and there and doing this and that and so on and suddenly everything just shut down and we couldn't even remember what it was we used to be doing. Fumiko also had some illnesses at that point. She had another series of unexplained— some of it we think was probably the virus, maybe some of it. Twice was the virus, I'm not sure. And she would— unfortunately I'm a sort of person that doesn't remember other people's illnesses, terrible thing. But I'd have to go back and ask her but I know she had a lot of problems and so she became very weary, you know, of going anywhere doing anything. Well we both did because it was— and there wasn't much to go anywhere and do anyway. I mean, everything got canceled. It was just amazing how, you know, the ground flattened out on you. People— it was harder to go on the subway but then we didn't have anywhere to go except maybe a dentist appointment now and then so then it was the television. And you know, I don't remember what kinds of activities there were. Nowadays for instance, we have this women's event once a month here in this neighborhood. We have a small women's event.

Audrey Dubois 1:36:39
Now, what is that called?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:36:41
It's called a brunch [laughter]— that's what it is. There's a couple of restaurants up on Northern Boulevard, up here somewhere and the people who plan this event, Karen and Karen, got to know a little restaurant up there, which they liked. We usually go to that restaurant.

Audrey Dubois 1:37:06

Now which restaurant is that?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:37:08
I'm sorry?

Audrey Dubois 1:37:09
Which restaurant is that?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:37:10
I didn't say. It's— let's see, what is it called? Just a minute. It keeps changing its name. I can't remember it now.

Audrey Dubois 1:37:22
That's fine.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:37:24
It's sort of a ways. You have to keep walking there. But it's okay. It's not very crowded. It's pretty inexpensive.

Audrey Dubois 1:37:33
Okay.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:37:34
Food is pretty good and they apparently like it, like to deal with that restaurant. They're easy to deal with. There's other, more crowded, more whatever, but they like this one. So it— one advantage or disadvantage is that it seems to take them a long time to get these meals together. So I mean, we're never there for less than two hours. What am I doing? Where did you go? But the food is quite good and as I say, inexpensive. I like to go because you know, I'd have interesting talks with the women that are there, feel like I'm keeping touch. But I think that that started after the pandemic hit. That was something— yeah, I think it must have been, maybe a year ago it started.

So during the pandemic, there really was nothing. Nothing. Nobody wanted to go anywhere or do anything and there wasn't anywhere to go. Even before they had the little— what do you call thems? These restaurants that aren't restaurants lining all the streets. It was— we're talking about a period now that winter of 2020 before we even had those. Those were kind of an answer to not being able to go anywhere without getting infected but they didn't even exist yet. They must have popped up that winter sometime. So we just kind of everybody folded in on themselves. You know, they stayed home and read books. They just started doing a lot of Zooms. I discovered Zoom. A lot of Zooms, a group called OLOC, which was you know OLOC, like the older— or

that's what sponsoring this. Older lesbians, something. I can't remember what OLOC stands for but it's a lot of older lesbians. You have to be 60 or older. And they have a lot of Zooms and I even worked with them for a while on some of what they were doing. And then Lesbian Herstory Archive has things but there are other groups too that are interesting. I mean the Queens library and some of the other libraries have a couple of gay history projects that they do presentations or tours. They have a tour of Greenwich Village in Greenwich Village, a gay history. It's just a lot of different things. A lot of theater groups even in the height of the pandemic got so frustrated, they began doing Zoom plays, which is really unrewarding, ultimately. But if you have nothing else, you know, it passes. So I watched a lot of those. Fumiko, I think, has art classes that are on Zoom. But it's been hard for everybody and even I think still, a lot of people don't want to go out or they don't want to— I don't know. Most of the people I know go out now but I don't know, I suppose with this new new— what's it called? The O thing?

Audrey Dubois 1:40:50
Omicron, I think.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:40:52
People are starting to pull their [unclear]— again.

Audrey Dubois 1:40:55
Yeah, yeah. When you look at how things have played out with COVID-19, how does it, I guess, compare to other major crises you've witnessed in your lifetime like HIV, like other, you know, major world events?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:41:17
Well, HIV was not general. HIV was just gay people and basically just gay men for the most part. I mean, I know that there are women that were ill too but it wasn't it— I mean it was called the gay cancer, right? And that's really what it was like. But I never, I never felt personally in danger because of it myself. Whereas this I did feel personally in danger and worried about all the people I knew that had to be worried about, you know. Most of them did not have to be worried about AIDS. My mother never had worried, right— my mother didn't live long enough to worry about this either. But this was really— and then that it— I can't even remember where it came together. But it became combined with this terrible, terrible period we're going through now of polarization and craziness and insanity. Really, I mean, that one hardly knows how we're going to survive it. I mean we don't yet know if we're going to survive it. So that sort of compounds everything. I mean, that's what led me now to this obsessive newspaper reading that I've been going through, you know, that I get *The Times* and I read *The Times* every day, then I listened to three or four hours of that TV on *MSNBC* every night. I mean, it seems as though half of my life now is spent obsessing about the world's events. But it's really worrisome and I like to

know what people are thinking about it. Yeah. Sometimes they're happy, sometimes they're not. I mean, sometimes I feel better after I listen to them and sometimes I feel worse after I listen.

Audrey Dubois 1:43:14
Sure.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:43:15
But Rachel especially is one of my—

Audrey Dubois 1:43:17
Rachel Maddow?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:43:19
Yes, she's one of my saviors. She always manages to make me feel as though we can all live another day now, somehow.

Audrey Dubois 1:43:30
Yeah. Yeah. What is— I'm reflecting on everything you've talked about. We've talked about — what is— I don't know— I guess some things you take away or that you think are important for anyone reading or listening to this to know?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:43:53
Oh what, for me? That's a question? Well, I think about that actually, lately. I always had this fantasy, you know, of writing a book about my life. And I still, to some extent, think about that. It's beginning to seem less and less likely that I will ever do that. But I might. There are so many pieces to it, you know, that it's hard to think of it in a straight line. I mean, the only way I can think of it is by little blip, blip, blip. It's been in so many pieces. I'm not quite sure why that is. It seems to me that's somewhat different from most other people's lives. I mean, for instance, the women that I knew at Radcliffe, whom I still am in touch with, their lives are much more all of a piece than mine. I mean, most of them have, you know, they've been married once and they have one child or two children or whatever and they lived in the same place for years and years and years and had one job, one kind of a job. But they're all, you know, very intellectual and pretty much upper class, upper middle class at least. No, I guess I bore easily, maybe that's the question. So I kept finding new things to get involved with or think about and to throw myself into. I guess the one thing is, I've always pretty much been like a busy person, you know, like doing lots of things except, of course, for these last two years when suddenly I have not been a busy person anymore. It's interesting to think about why that is. Part of it, I suppose, is the accident that I had that keeps me from participating in various ways.

Audrey Dubois 1:46:00

Right. And so we have it on the recording, what happened with that?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:46:05
Oh, yeah, the beginning of April, I fell on the street. Tripped on something and broke my fall with my hands. So I didn't damage my head. That's the good news but I mangled this wrist. So I had to have surgery for that and that was complicated surgery. The guy had to take an X-ray of all the little bits and pieces of my hand that were inside the skin there. Then he had to make a little map of how he's going to rearrange them and then he had to cut me open and rearrange them and put in a plate to keep all of the little arranged pieces of bone in place. So apparently, I mean, part of it was the trauma of the break, I guess. But apparently a lot of the thinking problems—there's another word for it— have to do maybe with the— let's see, anesthesia that I had.

Audrey Dubois 1:47:09
I see.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:47:10
Nobody knows that for sure but that's the common hypothesis. Yeah. So that's been getting better over time. In other words, when I first hurt myself, I was just like a different person practically, and so but I'm still cognitively somewhat challenged. I mean, my writing is still peculiar and I've forgotten so much of what I know about a computer that it's just embarrassing. I'm not sure that I'm ever going to be able to recover it because it takes a long time and it's boring. Reading little computer menus all the time. But, you know, the TV— I have problems with the TV machines in general, I seem to have problems with now. But I'm getting much better now. I think if I didn't mention it, probably nobody would notice in most situations. What was the question?

Audrey Dubois 1:48:13
Oh, just—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:48:14
Oh, yeah so—

Audrey Dubois 1:48:15
Reflections looking back at everything all together.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:48:18
So that's very different now. In other words, I'm not as busy now even though I could be. I could be busy again. I could be making— I'm somewhat busy because I still have a calendar that has lots of Zooms on it. But that doesn't require the investment of time and energy that stuff I usually do does. And I have long lists of things that I have to do or want to do or something that are not

making much time with. But I'm otherwise— I'm looking like I'm gonna live a while, you know, there's nothing wrong with me. I mean, unlike most of my peers, the wrist is really the only problem I have. So that's fine. I have a lot of people to take care of me so that's good.

Audrey Dubois 1:49:08
To kind of tie everything back to the Lesbian Herstory Archives, which are obviously something you've known about since the very beginning, how have you seen them change over the year and what do you think of where they are today in the work they're doing now?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:49:27
And by they do you mean the whole operation or do you mean Joan and Deb?

Audrey Dubois 1:49:32
Both? Both, and, either, or—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:49:34
Joan and Deb, of course, were lovers, longtime lovers when I first met them and when they started the Archives. And now they— I don't think they meet more than once a year and they're an ocean apart. Very different lives, I imagine. But the Archives that they started is very much alive. I mean, they must be very proud of that because again, and they were a model that I used when I was in Toronto wanting to keep this alive and trying to figure ways that would work. They found a way that worked for them to keep the Archives alive and growing and changing. So that's a tribute, you know, because a lot of things don't. A lot of women's things especially don't, which is interesting. I watched yesterday they had a Zoom— by Ginny Berson, who used to be with— do you know that? She's come out with a new book apparently about give me the name [laughs]— I can't think of the name. Olivia, but that means Olivia then. It isn't called Olivia [unclear]— it was—

Audrey Dubois 1:50:49
Oh, Olivia Records?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:50:51
Right, Olivia Records.

Audrey Dubois 1:50:52
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:50:53

She gave a whole talk yesterday, which was so interesting about how that happened in her life and so on. So that was very interesting. I was gonna go somewhere with that but I'm not sure now where I was gonna go.

Audrey Dubois 1:51:12
Yeah. So you keep up with the talks and events and things at the Archives?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:51:21
Another case where how things change, you know, and that has certainly changed and yet it's still there.

Audrey Dubois 1:51:29
Right.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:51:30
That's the thing about women's works. If you can manage to keep them alive, then that's the biggest challenge. Very few of these groups have stayed alive. You know, there are lots of groups that used to be here and aren't here anymore. So [rustling noise]— has to that extent.

Audrey Dubois 1:51:53
Could you repeat that last sentence? There was a little noise disruption.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:51:57
Oh the clock. Mother be quiet. It's my mother's clock. About all of these things, Olivia Records and the Archives— not Womanbooks you see— Womanbooks did not manage to stay alive. But the real challenge is to see if you can make something that will continue to grow and change instead of just going away. So those are two cases where they succeeded. You know, we hope that the United States is another case that will succeed, although it's beginning to look less and less sure that that will happen. So it's not just women's events, I guess, that are under stress, under siege. But it's good to be able to— I don't know why exactly it's good but it feels good to be able to not have to keep tearing down and starting again, to be able to keep going and have it wave in the wind rather than break and fall and disappear. So I think that Joan and Deb managed that. They had a lot of trouble too at that time as I may have mentioned once, that they— their relationship was by no means looking like it was going to last forever for a while. So they had to both apparently go through big changes. I mean, for Joan to now be living in a very foreign country, living with a totally other woman. I mean, it's interesting.

Audrey Dubois 1:53:36
Yeah. So I think we are kind of coming to a stopping point. Are there any topics we didn't get to or things you want to go back to that you want to make sure we have on the record?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:53:56
You're thinking now— I can't think of anything that we didn't discuss. Although I'm sure there must be a few things. We never talked much about my children, I guess. I mean, one would think they weren't very important but they were very important to me. So maybe I'll give a little goodbye here to them. I had them all— I had three, you know, within I don't know what? Two years maybe, less than two years. So it came all of a sudden and then it stopped because I started taking birth control pills. They all managed to grow up pretty much okay without any particular incident. They all took a while— well, they didn't all. Ned—[laughs]— I hadn't thought of this before but that's right. Ned went off to college. He went off to the University of Pennsylvania right in Philadelphia and immediately met Susan. The first day he was on campus, I think. I'm not sure about that. But very soon he met Susan and they were sweethearts all the way through college and the minute they graduated, they got married. Eventually, they had children. They didn't have children immediately, I think. And they have, you know, had a nice life. I mean, but it's all been of a piece, I think, pretty much. I mean, Ned went into computers and is still in computers and Susan started as a writer and then she had an autistic child so she wrote about him. Now she's writing about other things. And then Sarai also went through changes. There was a period in Sarai's life of some years, as I recall, where we did not speak. We were officially enemies I guess. So I've never asked her— one of these days, I should ask her about this. And she was a lesbian for a while. She had a couple of lovers and then she wasn't. Then she met the guy that she finally married late in life and they had a child. So now, she had— kind of her second or third life. And then Patrick, I don't know about Patrick. He seems to be doing great. They just have moved to a new apartment. He's married to a Japanese woman by coincidence. And yeah so that's sort of amazing to me too. You know, that I've got this whole little, second, third generation running around here that is partly me.

Audrey Dubois 1:56:57
Now, how many grandchildren do you have now?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:56:59
Not that many actually, I've— Ned has three, gave me three grandchildren. And Sarai one. So only four grandchildren. We'll see what they'll produce. There are two of them who might presumably produce children. Two boys. Well, actually counting Willie, I guess three. But Willie isn't anywhere near that stage. He's only 13 but the other two are in their thirties.

Audrey Dubois 1:57:35
Yeah.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:57:39
But it's odd, you know, as a woman I must say that my children have come into this so little.

Audrey Dubois 1:57:47
I mean—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:57:49
They might be insulted actually.

Audrey Dubois 1:57:53
Yeah, I'm glad. I'm glad we got to talk about them a little bit now. Yeah I—

Eleanor Batchelder 1:58:00
They're still and they're still a great comfort to me. You know, I mean, the— and I suppose I to them. We're definitely a family. It's too bad that Ned has to be up there all the way in Boston because we don't get to see very much of him. But the other two are right here in New York. Sarah comes over. She found my tax return the other day. I couldn't find my tax return so she made it a point to come over and we hunted— we tore everything apart and we found it. She's a therapist.

Audrey Dubois 1:58:33
Oh, neat.

Eleanor Batchelder 1:58:35
She does. So whatever I need— if I need computer advice, any advice, I can get it from my children.

Audrey Dubois 1:58:45
Yeah, do you— yeah, on the subject of children, is there anything— I don't know— that you would say to young lesbians or young feminists today, things you think young people should know?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:59:08
You can do anything you want to do if you try to do it hard enough. There are no— I mean, even in a day now where we have sex change and we have sex ignore— that used to be still, you know, a barrier for some people. Now even that is not a barrier. I mean, you can create yourself into anything you want so it's no excuse for failure.

Audrey Dubois 1:59:45
Yeah, alright. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Eleanor Batchelder 1:59:48

Nope, nope.

Audrey Dubois 1:59:51
Just I think we can find everybody's names. We talked earlier about LaDonne. You don't remember her last name, do you?

Eleanor Batchelder 2:00:03
Schulman? It just came to me this minute.

Audrey Dubois 2:00:06
LaDonne Schulman.

Eleanor Batchelder 2:00:08
Schulman. I can think of her husband's name when she had a husband.

Audrey Dubois 2:00:09
LsDonne Schulman. Yeah, just so we have names on the record, you know, I think it's helpful to have first and last names for people so that anyone doing some kind of research can find this. Alright, yeah, I mean—

Eleanor Batchelder 2:00:30
Well, if you have any questions—

Audrey Dubois 2:00:31
Yep. Right. And there will also, you know, is going to be a transcript of this and we can correct and also add notes to the transcript if there's—

Eleanor Batchelder 2:00:42
Oh god, I'll have to live it all again.

Audrey Dubois 2:00:45
Yeah.

Eleanor Batchelder 2:00:47
Maybe it will be a while.

Audrey Dubois 2:00:48
I'm a little intimidated by the thought of reading my own words back but will do it [laughs]—

Eleanor Batchelder 2:00:55

How dare you— what about me? Goodness.

Audrey Dubois 2:00:58
Oh my gosh.

Eleanor Batchelder 2:00:59
Not about my words but my life.

Audrey Dubois 2:01:02
Yeah, wow.

Eleanor Batchelder 2:01:04
Yeah but maybe it will take a while for that transcript so we have a little breathing room.

Audrey Dubois 2:01:09
Yeah. But yeah anything that we read back and go— wait, that's not exactly what happened, we can put a note in the transcript.

Eleanor Batchelder 2:01:20
And change it?

Audrey Dubois 2:01:21
Or like put a note that, you know, this is not correct. That actually happened in 1971 not 1972. Whatever the thing is. But yeah, I mean thank you so much Eleanor. This has really been a pleasure and so much great information on such a variety of things.

Eleanor Batchelder 2:01:45
Thank you for—

Audrey Dubois 2:01:46
I'm going to sign us off and stop the recording now unless there's any last things you'd like to add?

Eleanor Batchelder 2:01:54
Well, I'd like to say you put a lot of work into this and I appreciate it.

Audrey Dubois 2:01:57
Well thank you so much.

Eleanor Batchelder 2:01:59

— focused me.

Audrey Dubois 2:02:01
Alright so that is it for our recording today.