

Idaho LGBTQ Oral History Project

Mary Rohlfiing



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

ALBERTSONS LIBRARY

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This Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) Oral History Project began as a key component of a cross-listed Boise State University course, Intro to LGBTQ Studies (GEN 380, HIS 381, SOC 497). Dr. Riley Caldwell-O’Keefe taught the course and designed the project as an interactive learning tool to help students understand LGBTQ history, with special emphasis on Idaho history, and the impacts of this history on local individuals. In addition to this history and context, students learned interviewing techniques throughout the semester. We discussed ethical considerations and obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the project. Throughout the process, we worked with Boise State Special Collections and Archives librarians, Alan Virta and Cheryl Oestreicher. The culmination and digital release of the collection would have been impossible without them. We are thrilled and honored to offer these first-person insights which help provide a more well-rounded and comprehensive story of Idaho history.

Name: Mary Rohlffing

Biography: Born in Philadelphia in 1960, Mary Rohlffing moved to Boise to attend Boise State University. After graduating from BSU, Rohlffing received a PhD from the University of Iowa. She returned to Idaho and worked in Boise State’s communications department for 12 years. At the time of the interview, Rohlffing hoped to obtain a teaching position at the College of Western Idaho. In 1993, Rohlffing was a victim of a hate crime which never resulted in an arrest. Later, she purchased 8 acres of weedy land and began the Morning Owl Farm. She was excited that coming out is easier for the younger generation.

Keywords: Boyfriend, drug use, suicide, alcohol, Elton John, Anti-Gay Initiative, Your Friends, Family & Neighbors, hate crime, PTSD, marriage equality, Ellen DeGeneres, wedding industry

Interview date: 2011

Interviewed by: Madison Lobel

Interview Duration: 54:29

City: Boise

Time Notation:

00:20	Born
00:45	Childhood in Philadelphia suburb
02:10	First had feeling was gay, college, drinking, drugs, suicide
04:30	Abusive youth, uncomfortable in own skin
05:00	Coming out to first serious boyfriend
07:00	Coming out experiences, Idaho City, family
09:50	Not a lot of models for being gay, models were closeted gays, Elton John
11:00	Societal fear of how to navigate being gay
11:50	Started as out when began as student, employee, and faculty at Boise State University
13:10	Oregon Citizens Alliance, Idaho Citizens Alliance in 1993
15:35	Involvement with gay community, YFFN, Brian Bergquist
17:50	Supportive environment and family

18:45	Hate-crime of physical abuse, 1993, PTSD
22:15	Taught at Boise State, left because of PTSD
23:55	Buying a farm, local food movement, teaching
29:55	Comfortable places in Boise
30:55	Places would avoid, West Boise
32:40	Advice to younger generation, marriage equality, eradicate marriage
35:35	Mass media normalized gays and lesbians, Ellen DeGeneres, straight allies, marriage equality, politics
41:45	Where see Boise LGBTQ community in the future, otherness
45:50	Why said yes to be interviewed
46:20	Meaning of stories, how stories help people
49:45	Family, identity, appearance
52:40	Summary of project and future directions