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Transcript

Idaho LGBTQ Oral History Project

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VOICE RECORDING

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MADISON LOBEL

Okay, now it's right. I can see it moving.

MARY ROHLFING

Okay.

MADISON LOBEL

Okay, so we'll just do some basic questions. When and where were you born?

MARY ROHLFING

I was born in Philadelphia in 1960. December 15, 1960.

MADISON LOBEL

It's almost your birthday.

MARY ROHLFING

It is.

MADISON LOBEL

Happy early birthday.

MARY ROHLFING

Thank you.

MADISON LOBEL

Are you excited?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. Well, I don't know. I don't care anymore. You get to a place where you don't celebrate it, somewhat.

MADISON LOBEL

You're not one of those people where you're like, "The hallmark"?

MARY ROHLFING

No, no. December, you might as well give it over to Christmas.

MADISON LOBEL

(laughs) Okay. So, what was your childhood like, growing up, with your family?

MARY ROHLFING

I have four siblings. Or, three siblings, or four kids. Grew up in a suburb of Philadelphia, about 15 miles from the city. It was idyllic in some ways, in terms of opportunities we got. We had, the area was still developing, so we had extremely easy public transportation access into the city. I had an uncle in New York City, so I got to hang out there a lot as a kid. But we also had a cabin in the Pennsylvania woods. So we had this really nice contrast of experiences, of being oriented toward the urban life, but at the same time, lived in the suburbs and then had this great wild country access, too. So, grew up with a lot of kids, because I'm a late part baby boomer. So, there were a lot of kids in the neighborhood. We were a typical sort of family in that way, like with a lot of kids and—

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, playing outside?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, and kind of bigger family. You know, four kids.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, that's how mine is.

MARY ROHLFING

And being outside and having a neighborhood that raised you, as opposed to— It seems really different to me now. Like, parents are kind of more isolated, and on their own.

MADISON LOBEL

Were your siblings younger or older?

MARY ROHLFING

Two older. I was in the middle. Two older, one younger.

MADISON LOBEL

Okay. And when were you first aware of your feelings?

MARY ROHLFING

That's a good question. Probably when I was about... It's probably 17 or so. I think I probably was before that. But since I was born in 1960, and I was born at the end of the year, so it was like nineteen. I had boyfriends and stuff when I was in my early teens and teenage years, before college. But I think when I was in college – and I went to New Hampshire, from my hometown of Media, Pennsylvania, is where I was born and raised. I went there for two years, at the end of the 70s, and I think there was probably the first place I was when I started to have attraction to women. But I was burying it, trying to stuff it, because it was just barely, barely becoming acceptable. Barely.

MADISON LOBEL

Did you understand that that's what it was right away, or were you just kind of confused?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

You understood it?

MARY ROHLFING

I don't think I was confused. I think I knew what it was. I just hoped that I could pretend it wasn't going on.

MADISON LOBEL

That it would just go away?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, exactly. That it was episodic.

MADISON LOBEL

And how did you handle that during college?

MARY ROHLFING

Terribly. I was terrible. I thought about suicide, at one point. I started to drink really heavily. And everybody in the 70s did drugs. *(both laugh)* That's what we did, and parents were kind of confused about how to deal with that. I think now, they're much more, you try to steer your kids away from that. At that time, coming out of the 60s, parents didn't know what they were supposed to be doing. So, we were getting away with murder. I was, my siblings, every kid I knew. I mean, I talk to people now – my sister, and her raising her kids, and she'd *never*. She's so strict compared to what we went through. But I look at it now, I'm in recovery. So, I don't do drugs or drink anymore, at all. I haven't for over a decade. But I look at it now, and think there was definitely a cultural permission to experiment with drugs and alcohol. But my use was abusive. And I think it had a lot to do with not liking myself, and not being comfortable in my own skin, when I look back at it.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. How long would you say it took you to become comfortable in your own skin?

MARY ROHLFING

Probably until I was about– *(pauses)* I'm trying to do math here.

MADISON LOBEL

That's fine.

MARY ROHLFING

Probably four years. Yeah. Maybe not quite four. Three to four years. And I didn't really experiment during that time, but I just mentally tried to come to terms with it. I'd had a pretty serious boyfriend in there, between the ages of – I think I was 19 when I came to Idaho. I had a pretty serious boyfriend for about a year and a half. But I just struggled with it the whole time, because I really loved him, and he was a great partner. It wasn't him, it was me. And so, I really struggled with that. And then I finally had to tell him. But it was hard, because I hadn't had sexual experience with women. So, I didn't know what that all meant. I just knew I felt like I was lying to him, somehow, and that there wasn't a future. So, I kind of wanted to cut him loose, and let him go find somebody.

MADISON LOBEL

How'd he take it? Was it a good experience?

MARY ROHLFING

Errr. It was a terrible experience. He flipped out, actually. He was really hurt. And I think, rightfully. If I look at it with the maturity I have now– (*stammers*) because I think he kind of initiated the relationship. It's been a long time ago. But I think I kind of went, “Okay, yeah. That's a good idea,” because then maybe I won't be have to–

MADISON LOBEL

Maybe take your mind off–

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, like be a lesbian. Exactly. And if I looked at that, if I were single now, and were approached by a man now, I would be able to go like, “This is a bad fishing expedition for you. It's not worth your time.” At that time, I was still trying to sort it out. So, I couldn't have done it any differently. I just did it the way I did it. But it was hurtful. It was definitely hurtful for him.

MADISON LOBEL

So, was he the first person you came out to really?

MARY ROHLFING

(*clicks tongue*) For all intents and purposes, yeah. Yeah. I think I talked to a couple of friends like the day I told him, like, “I gotta split, I gotta cut this off.” And yes. Actually, that's not true. I think he was the first person I told, and then I think I told people after. Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. So, what was the rest of your coming out experience, like to your family, and to the rest of your friends, and peers?

MARY ROHLFING

It was pretty unique and odd, because, who picks Idaho to come out?

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, seriously.

MARY ROHLFING

I mean, shit, right? (*laughs*) Like, I grew up near the city – it would have been a far better place. But I was living in Idaho City at the time, actually. And I had moved here to go to Boise State in 1980, but there were student loan issues. And so I ended up moving up to Idaho City, and kind of being in the woods, and doing wood stuff, and hanging out. And there was a pretty interesting, strong alternative community up there, at the time. I mean, there wasn't a lesbian-

gay community, but there was an alternative community in general. There were people who were doing some really interesting artistic kinds of things, and just sort of living on the edge of the wall at the time, if you will. So, it was a great town to come out, because everybody up there was pretty accepting, because they were all oddballs.

MADISON LOBEL

So, fair. *(laughs)*

MARY ROHLFING

So, it was very weird. But I came out pretty openly in that town, and that was a safe place to do that, because of the cast of characters that live there. So, I felt like I had a lot of support. And then, I didn't have a phone or electricity, so I remember standing in a phone booth, and I believe I had written to my parents – who were divorced – I think I wrote to them, and my siblings, if I remember all this right. And then I called them all. But I would have to go, and take quarters, and plug.

MADISON LOBEL

(laughs)

MARY ROHLFING

Such a different time. And call them from not a cell phone, but a–

MADISON LOBEL

Pay phone?

MARY ROHLFING

Pay phone. Yeah, thanks. I couldn't remember what they were.

MADISON LOBEL

Nobody can now.

MARY ROHLFING

I know. *(laughs)*

MADISON LOBEL

“What's that?”

MARY ROHLFING

“What is that thing?” So, I called them, and I think the response was good, for the most part. My oldest brother was a little bit upset about it. But he came around, mostly because he just was really conservative. He was the only conservative in the family, so I think he thought that's what he was supposed to do, was to be—

(overlapping voices)

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. It didn't affect him in any sort of way, but somehow, it did. So, there was some estrangement there for maybe a year, but given that I lived 2,000 miles away, it wasn't obvious.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. Like it isn't affecting that much.

MARY ROHLFING

Not much. Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. That's how my brothers are. They live so far away that, if something happened, it's not really that big of a deal.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, because you're not in each other's daily lives anyway. So, it was pretty comfortable for me, family-wise.

MADISON LOBEL

Were you worried about what their actions might be before you came out?

MARY ROHLFING

I think I was. I think I was really afraid of all sorts of things. I think that was why I started drinking, and smoking more dope all the time, and just trying to be numb. Yeah, because there just weren't very many models. I can't think of any. Everybody was in the closet. So, you could kind of tell. You're like, “Elton John's totally gay. Why doesn't he just coming out here?”

MADISON LOBEL

(laughs)

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, like that. But there weren't models for how I was going to live my life. So, the models were clearly gay people who were closeted.

MADISON LOBEL

So, it wasn't really that good of a role model, because you're like, "Okay, well, it's okay to be gay, but I have to keep it a secret."

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, and if you're really wealthy—

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. *(laughs)*

MARY ROHLFING

Then it's okay. But how does the average person navigate that? And it wasn't clear to me. And, I had an uncle that was gay. I knew it, everybody knew it, but no one talked about it. Never talked about it. And he never brought anybody around. So, there was no normalcy in that way. He had a lover, we found out, for 50 freaking years. But nobody knew it. So, it wasn't obvious how to do it. So, it was a little scary, definitely scary.

MADISON LOBEL

Was there a specific person you were afraid – like maybe your dad or a friend or anybody – that you were afraid that they might not see you in the same light?

MARY ROHLFING

I can't recall it being anybody specifically. It was much more of a general, cultural-societal—

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. As a whole?

MARY ROHLFING

—fear. Like, what could I do with my life? What kind of person could I develop into? What careers might I have? Where would I live? At the time, I wanted to have kids. Could I have kids? How would I do that? How would you pull all that off? And so, I think those were the questions. And, it was interesting. Like I said, I lived up in Idaho City, and I was out. And everybody knew everybody who was gay and out, up there. No one was hiding it. And then I came to Boise State in 1986. And I decided, when I started, that I was going to be out. That – in classrooms – I wasn't going to pretend, or I'm talking about a boyfriend, or whatever.

MADISON LOBEL

Just to clarify, when you came to Boise State as a student, or a—?

MARY ROHLFING

Student.

MADISON LOBEL

Okay.

MARY ROHLFING

I came and I had a really cool experience. My paternal grandmother died and left me twenty thousand dollars.

MADISON LOBEL

Oh, so you didn't even need to worry about the loans, anyway.

MARY ROHLFING

And I was like, "I'm going to school. I'm going to finish." So, I had two and a half years to go, and I did, and I got my degree in communication. And I had a great mentor, who's still here mentoring students. Laurel Trainolitz. And I was totally out with her, and she didn't care. (*laughs*) She didn't care. And no one in the department seemed to care, in the Communication Department. And other students didn't seem to care. It was an open academic environment, so people were, "Meh, big deal. So you're gay. So what? Next question," you know?

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah.

MARY ROHLFING

"What kind of coffee do you want?" So, that was a good experience for me. And then I just went into the profession, and was out. And I was out as a professor when I came back to teach here, too, all through grad school. And then when I came back as a professor, I was out.

MADISON LOBEL

So, you never felt like being gay or hindered any career opportunities, or maybe education advancement?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. I was scared, actually, when I got back here. I started in (*stammers*) August – I’m sorry – of 1992. January 1993, the Oregon Citizens’ Alliance came into Idaho and created something called the Idaho Citizen’s Alliance. And they made an announcement at the state house in January. So, now think of this: I had been teaching for six years. I really didn’t have a tenure track position yet, because I was ABD. I was working on finishing my dissertation that year. So I was on a one-year contract, thinking I would get done and turn that into a tenure position. But nothing’s done ‘til it’s done. And so, these guys came and announced they were gonna create this anti-gay initiative, and fight to get it on the ballot, and get it to pass. And I just was like, “I’m gonna be part of the effort to stop that, and if it means I lose my job, I lose my job.” I don’t want to live in a state where I’m going to lose my job over that. I don’t want to live in a state where, as much as I was going to bat for my own rights, it was very much an anti-education, anti-first amendment proposition. It targeted gay and lesbian people, but it would have had dramatic effects on where we are right now. The libraries, and the funding of libraries, and sort of censorship, and policing of the materials.

MADISON LOBEL

The type of books we have available to us.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, magazines. Like, what if a magazine had Ellen DeGeneres–

MADISON LOBEL

On the cover?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. On the cover, or something.

MADISON LOBEL

Would it not be allowed to be displayed in the library?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, it was bizarre. It was really far-reaching, and crazy, and fascist. And so. (*stammers*) It was scary, but I went to an initial announcement of the Idaho Citizens’ Alliance at the Idaho state house in January 1993. And of course, that was on the news. There weren’t that many of us that were protesting. And it was in the rotunda and... (*laughs*) I can remember the cameras and thinking, “This is not good. This is going to be bad.” But what happened was, the faculty I worked with at the time, no one said anything at first. Because people used to watch the news,

then. We weren't all online all the time. So, it's kind of like everybody saw the news. Everybody read the news with the *Idaho Statesman* at the time. And it was clear, but people just sort of ignored it.

MADISON LOBEL

Would you say that that event was like your first step into becoming a part of the LGBTQ community?

MARY ROHLFING

Definitely was on that day. Yeah, for sure.

MADISON LOBEL

So, what were some of the next steps you took to becoming more involved with the community? Or what were some projects you were specifically involved in?

MARY ROHLFING

I had two really close friends, who were very good organizers. John Hummel and Brian Bergquist. And Brian's deceased, and there's a room over in the Union named after Brian, because he—

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, Bergquist Room?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. They were two of my very closest friends. And they had organized an organization called Your Family, Friends and Neighbors. And they had actually started that while I was away in Iowa at grad school, because I was gone from '88 to '92. And then I had the good fortune to come back to Idaho and live here, and teach, and start my life here. But they had begun that organization. And they just assumed that I would help them. (*laughs*) And they were correct. I was interested, especially in the media piece, the media analysis. Because, having a PhD in communication, that was really interesting to me. And we were lucky. John was an attorney, Brian and I worked for Boise State. Brian and I didn't think we were gonna lose our jobs. As long as it didn't pass. If it passed, we were gonna go. We were gonna get cut. But we felt like, from our position of academic and first amendment freedoms, that we should be pretty safe to work out and openly on the issue. And so, I don't know, I was on-board. And I did a lot of things. I did a lot of media for them, was kind of one of the women spokespeople for it.

MADISON LOBEL

Were there a lot of other faculty members at Boise State, with you two? Or was it basically you two, and maybe a couple others?

MARY ROHLFING

Gosh, I don't remember many. There were a couple, sort of, usual suspects from the sociology department, who were heterosexual—

MADISON LOBEL

But allies.

MARY ROHLFING

But strong supporters. There were a lot of closeted faculty and workers. And they would say “thank you” quietly.

MADISON LOBEL

Did you kind of resent them? That they weren't—

MARY ROHLFING

Nah.

MADISON LOBEL

No?

MARY ROHLFING

I understood. I mean, I was lucky. I had a family that supported me.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. Not everyone has that.

MARY ROHLFING

I had a partner who was out, and able to be out, and had a supportive family – her side. We were in a loving environment. We had good jobs, we had safety. There are people who, they're not safe to be out. They're still not.

MADISON LOBEL

I understand that.

MARY ROHLFING

So, I wasn't resentful at all. It was fine. It was okay. People need to do it in their own time, in their own way. And–

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah.

MARY ROHLFING

You just try to make it safer, so it's easier for people.

MADISON LOBEL

Not everyone has the same kind of environment. You're very lucky that you have the one you have.

MARY ROHLFING

Totally. It's really lucky.

MADISON LOBEL

So, did you ever have any type of violent act towards you?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, I got the crap beaten out of me, actually – in what was deemed by the FBI as a hate crime – in Stanley, Idaho on October 9th, 1993. So, it was just later that year, after becoming sort of an out activist. It was an odd event, because they never caught the perpetrator. They never were able to say we were targeted – my partner and I were targeted – because we're lesbians. But we were in a hotel room, in a cabin. It's a hotel-cabin kind of thing, up in the middle of Stanley, Idaho called Danner's Cabins. And we were in a room, and had rented it for the weekend in October. I had passed my dissertation in August, and we had been running non-stop. I went to Iowa, I defended, I came back and started to teach like three days later. So, we finally had carved out this long weekend in October. We were going to go celebrate and kind of relax for a couple days.

And the first night we were there, somebody came into the room – had a key – wearing a full-on mask, and started to beat us up with a piece of (*stammers*) a log from– What am I trying to say? For firewood. It's a piece for firewood, basically. And we were able to defend ourselves. We sustained some relatively minor physical injuries. For me, major psychic injuries. Major psychic injuries that still plague me. I still kind of set off post-traumatic stress disorder, in my life, and that's been something I just have to work on every day. And luckily I have, again, good tools, access to good therapy.

MADISON LOBEL

Good family, good support.

MARY ROHLFING

Good support. Capacity to read and do research on it, and understand it. So, I'm, in that way, so lucky. And we survived it. But it was really damaging for a long time.

MADISON LOBEL

And how old were you at that time?

MARY ROHLFING

Let's see. 1993. So, I was 32.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

And is that the only act of violence—

MARY ROHLFING

It's the only act of violence based in that, yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

And they've never found the person, or—?

MARY ROHLFING

I don't think they wanted to. They didn't seem to want to be terribly motivated to find him. It was an inside job. The thing is, is the access to the room—

MADISON LOBEL

They had the key. Yeah.

MARY ROHLFING

Had the key. It was watching us. It's kind of a log cabin set-up. And so, we realized later — because we heard sounds outside, but we thought it was a cat—

MADISON LOBEL

Something else?

MARY ROHLFING

–but we realized later, it was him. Yeah, exactly. And it was him. And so, just because of the way he was dressed, he hadn't been outside in the cold for long, and it was like 20 degrees that night. So, it was an inside job. You can go crazy spinning that out, trying to figure out, how inside was it? Was it a crime of opportunity? If so, what kind of world do we live in? That someone's sitting there, waiting for that opportunity. Or was it planned? Or what was it? We were so in the wrong place, at the right time.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. So, you taught at BSU for 12 years, correct?

MARY ROHLFING

Mnhmm. Yeah, '92 to 2004.

MADISON LOBEL

So, what made you leave?

MARY ROHLFING

Well, partly is PTSD, to be honest. At that time, I was not treating it very well. From that time, of the attack in '93, up to the time I left. I kind of started to treat it – really started to get good treatment – in about 2003. Part of it was, I can take any job and make it stressful, because I do the perfectionist thing. So, there were a lot of things. If I'm really honest about, in part, it was that. It was partly the PTSD. I was stressed out teaching.

MADISON LOBEL

What made you wait so long to go seek help for it?

MARY ROHLFING

I actually had sought help. I just had sought the wrong help.

MADISON LOBEL

Oh, okay.

MARY ROHLFING

I just hadn't gotten the right help. (*stammers*) There's been some development, and there continues to be, in the treatment of post-traumatic stress. So, even 10 years later, from the time I was starting to be treated for it, there's been huge advancements, now. In the early 90s, there wasn't a whole lot available to us to treat it. There just wasn't. And so, I think partly, it was that. The other side of it was that there were some shifts in— I had bought a piece of property. I lived in the North End, and then I bought a piece of property in the late 90s. My farm, my current, where I farmed eight acres. And it really needed management and attention. And so, I had taken a couple classes to learn, what do you do with this? Because what do you do? I was a suburb kid. I didn't know what you do with eight acres. So, I got intrigued by the idea of actually managing it, to make it into a farm.

And so, I started to kind of pursue that and research that, and I just got fell in love with the idea of doing it. And the whole local food movement was pretty new at the time – like in the early 2000s – just sort of starting to take off. And it just felt really right. But, at the time – the guy who was the dean at Boise State, and in the College of Social Sciences – I went to him and I said, “What I really want to do is be a part-time farmer and part-time teacher.” And I was a good teacher. I was an okay researcher. I did enough to get tenure and get promoted. I could do it, I've just never been terribly motivated by academic research, because you spend a lot of blood, sweat, and tears on it—

MADISON LOBEL

And no one really appreciates it.

MARY ROHLFING

No one gets it. No one really gives a damn, really. It's just something professors do for each other. And you can assign a book that you wrote, and make 200 students read it, or something. But other than that, no one gives a damn. So really, I felt like what I wanted to do was connect with students, and be good at that part. And especially here, because at the time, we had a lot of first generation students. I think we still probably do. And it was really important to me to help them navigate the system of higher education, and to be available. But there was no reward for that anymore. It's just not what we were supposed to be doing. We're supposed to be doing research—

MADISON LOBEL

And writing papers—

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, going to conferences. So, I went to my dean and I said, “Here's what I want. You can have my tenure. I want to be paid well. Not as well as I'm being paid now, but I want to teach. I'd like to teach. And I'd like to create a position where I can teach. And then I have time to farm.” And his answer to me was, “You work too hard at teaching. You already have tenure. We can't take that away from you. Why don't you just stop giving students so many papers? Give them more standardized tests.” In other words, “Just stay here. Just coast.” And I was horrified. It wasn't okay to me. I got my degree from here. That—

MADISON LOBEL

To coast. To coast, you found it unacceptable?

MARY ROHLFING

—the dean was telling a professor— Yeah, what was that saying about my degree? And what was it saying about what we were doing for our students, who were supposed to be so important to us? So, I decided I was going to leave. I just went, “Okay, wow. I guess I'll just go farm,” because I'm not cut out to be at Boise State anymore.

MADISON LOBEL

And was restarting your career, was it difficult?

MARY ROHLFING

It was scary!

MADISON LOBEL

Were you scared?

MARY ROHLFING

Shit. Yeah. It was really scary, because being a professor is cushy as hell. I mean, it's the only job where they don't fire you if you screw up.

MADISON LOBEL

(laughs) Yeah.

MARY ROHLFING

And you really have to screw up to lose your job, if you have tenure. And I had health insurance, and retirement. And it was a hard job. I worked really hard at it. But at the same time, relative to everything else in this society and culture—

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, good benefits.

MARY ROHLFING

Pshh, it's cushy. *(laughs)* It's really cushy. Don't let any professor ever tell you it's hard. They're bulshitting. *(laughs)* But, it's a pretty cushy thing. So, yeah. So, I don't have any of those things now. I have health insurance, but I don't have retirement, I don't have days off. *(clicks tongue)* I can't give standardized tests, as it turns out. But I think I'm kind of turning it around, it's actually cool. I'm going to do a lot of teaching for CWI, I think.

MADISON LOBEL

Oh, very cool

MARY ROHLFING

And, hoping that might turn into a full-time position. And then, I've got a young guy who's in his mid-20s who, he and his wife are looking at moving to one of the houses on the farm. And he would probably take over most of the field work, and I would do the marketing outreach, bookkeeping—

MADISON LOBEL

And PR, or something?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, and get to do the teaching again. I'm pretty stoked.

MADISON LOBEL

Do you ever regret leaving Boise State and pursuing your dream?

MARY ROHLFING

Ah, no. No, I don't. I liked it here a lot. When I come to campus, I still have this really warm, nice feeling about it.

MADISON LOBEL

Remembering it?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, it's my alma mater. And I had good years teaching. I still have great relationships with some of my ex-students, and keep up with them on Facebook. And I definitely had an impact on some people's lives. and a lot of people here had an impact on mine. There's no question about

it. But I am excited by the idea of possibly teaching, as I am now about to be 51, and I would love to spend the next 15 years teaching again, because I like it. I'm kind of good at it, too. And I think ideally, it'd be a really fulfilling sense of ability for me, to feel like I started this farm from a weed patch—

MADISON LOBEL

Nothing. *(laughs)*

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, weed patch. And, that it might carry on after I'm gone. And Dan, who's my farmer partner, might be able to kind of take it over. And he's got his business degree from Boise State, but he loves farming. That's what he loves. So, maybe he'll be able to keep it going, and create this position that he wants it to be for him. So, if we can do all that, that'd be really cool.

MADISON LOBEL

It seems like it would be a good balance.

MARY ROHLFING

But I don't know. It'd be a great balance, yeah. So, I'm hopeful.

MADISON LOBEL

All right. So, Riley wanted us to ask a couple questions, specifically. One of them was, as a lesbian, what or where is a place you feel most comfortable in Boise?

MARY ROHLFING

As long as I'm in 83702, 83712, 83716, 83706, and if you leave those, you're on your own, if you leave those zip codes.

MADISON LOBEL

So, 83709's a little too far?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, I don't even know which one that is.

MADISON LOBEL

I just know that's the far one.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. That's out by Kuna, and Meridian.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. It's the edge, the boondocks of Boise.

MARY ROHLFING

No, definitely not comfy out there. Where do I feel— Wow, yeah. I don't know. The nice thing about being in a place a long time, it's like I know a lot of people, and so they know my story. And I feel like I walk around town, I just know people everywhere, and so I feel pretty comfortable in Boise.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. Are there any specific places that you would avoid...

MARY ROHLFING

Being an out lesbian? Being an overt lesbian?

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah.

MARY ROHLFING

I don't know, man. I have dreadlocks, so I call attention to myself anyway. Yeah, west Boise is still like a different century.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. It's a little bit far.

MARY ROHLFING

It's still pretty freaky out there, yeah. I think they have this fantasy of themselves as some sort of 1950s family—

MADISON LOBEL

On their high pedestal, and—

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, it's just a big strip mall. A bunch of busy roads, and probably a lot of crazy stuff going on, and beating those big McMansions out there. But yeah, Idaho's complicated. Like, I love it and hate it.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. I'm from southern California, so moving out here was just a whole different world. But I love it.

MARY ROHLFING

I love it too. There's so much that, I mean, everything—

MADISON LOBEL

It's so different

MARY ROHLFING

It's amazing—

MADISON LOBEL

And just the combination of all the different types of people. There's so many different types here, and everyone seems to get along, and everyone's very nice.

MARY ROHLFING

For the most part, they do.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. Especially coming from where I'm from, everyone's just kind of like cliquy. And here it's just like, *(friendly voice)* "Oh, yeah! It's just down that way, and you turn right, and—"

MARY ROHLFING

(laughs) Like, really?

MADISON LOBEL

Everyone's so friendly.

MARY ROHLFING

Where were you in southern California?

MADISON LOBEL

Orange County.

MARY ROHLFING

Oh, yeah?

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. So I mean, there were some rude people.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

Definitely.

MARY ROHLFING

Definitely. But we have a lot of Orange County people here, now. *(sighs)*

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, but it's a lot less of them.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, they all went to west Boise and Meridian. It's okay. Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

I live at 83712, if that makes you feel any better.

(laughter)

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, there's definitely a vibe along the foothills. It's different.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. So, what advice, if any, would you give to the younger generation of— *(stammers, laughs)* gays or lesbians?

MARY ROHLFING

Well, I think one thing that I see that's different – I just actually wrote about this on Facebook. I don't know. Have you seen that ad? The one where the—

MADISON LOBEL

I haven't watched the video, but I've seen the clip of it, and I just haven't clicked on it.

MARY ROHLFING

It's really good. It's really good.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. We were talking about that in class today–

MARY ROHLFING

It's a great little ad.

MADISON LOBEL

–that we needed to watch it.

MARY ROHLFING

It's an Australian ad, but it doesn't matter, if it's the same one. “It's Time”? It's the marriage one?

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, yeah.

MARY ROHLFING

That one. And then there's the other big one that's viral right now, like two lesbians raised–

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, I saw that one too.

MARY ROHLFING

I haven't watched that one yet. But the one I was thinking about, that just kind of hit my radar in the last week or two, was the “It's Time.” And it's a marriage equity advertisement, which just makes me cry every time I watch it. And it's funny, because I'm not really that into marriage at all. I actually think the more radical and smart thing to have done would have been to fight to eradicate marriage, and demand that everybody have civil unions.

MADISON LOBEL

This is so it's so interesting that you're saying that, because this week during class, we – or last week, actually – we went into the ILC, and each of us had four questions, and it was: “Everyone should be able to get married,” “Only men and women should be able to get married,” “There should just be no marriages, period,” and “Everyone should be allowed civil unions.” And it was interesting to get the replies and see what people thought.

MARY ROHLFING

What'd they think?

MADISON LOBEL

The “no marriage” one wasn’t that popular. But my group personally, we had the “everyone should get married, and it just doesn't matter.” Just, “everyone has the right to get married.”

MARY ROHLFING

Mhmm.

MADISON LOBEL

And we had 17 yeses and 2 noes. And the 2 noes – one of the reasonings was, “It's just tradition. That's just how it is.”

MARY ROHLFING

“I don't want to think about those.” Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

And the other one, it was interesting, because it related to the article we’d just read, that for gays and lesbians to get married is just assimilating them into the religious culture that they're trying so hard to fight against. And so, that was his reasoning, and it was–

MARY ROHLFING

So, it wasn’t that he was...

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. Just interesting that someone that – he was not gay, he didn't really know anybody, he wasn't taking the class – he knew that that’s a big reasoning.

MARY ROHLFING

He’d thought about it, yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. So, it was interesting to see what people said. And then everyone else was like, “It's their choice.”

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, “Who cares?”

MADISON LOBEL

“Who cares?”

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. For young people now, I think the train is so out of the station. And it happened so fast. And I am so grateful to mass media for that. Because really, mass media normalized gay and lesbian relationships – and gay and lesbian people – in many, many ways. And did the work that, no matter how many times we would have walked up and down streets carrying signs, we could never have done it – if it hadn't been for Roseanne kissing Marielle Hemingway in the 90s, and Ellen coming out, and different gay characters that they started to kind of play with in the 1980s on TV, and it just transformed stuff. You would see it in weeks – you'd see it change in the culture. And you'd think, "Oh, my god. What are we doing, traditional organizing? This is so stupid. We should just get in media industry."

MADISON LOBEL

The commercial.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, exactly. But, I think using straight allies. I wrote a thing on Facebook the other day, after I watched that "It's Time" ad from Australia. And I just said, you know, "I'm really sick of being asked to be treated like a human being. I'm really tired of fighting for my rights. It's time for you to do it." So, what I really wish I would see, in my life – and it would be great – the quickest way we would get marriage is if straight people would stop getting married. Because then that industry – which, it is just a big fucking industry – would be crippled, and they would fight so hard to like–

MADISON LOBEL

Get anybody to marry.

MARY ROHLFING

Exactly. So, if you had straight people of conscience start to say, "I'm not getting married, because everybody can't." It's kind of like, it took white people to stop using their privileges to start to change it. You can't just ask the oppressed to do all the fighting. The oppressors, and the people that benefit from those privileges, have to start to fight with us. And I think on the marriage issue, we have had very few straight allies. And I think it's time for them. They have nothing to lose. It really should be their fight, not mine.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. You have everything to lose. That's why they're "the oppressed."

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. So, that's what I would say, is just like, cultivate that. Really try to talk to straight allies, and say, "This is a privilege you have, and you should think wisely before you use it, because I can't use that privilege, and how am I better or worse than you?" And I think if we can transform that thinking a little bit – and I think this is a good generation to do that with, because they're already pretty pro-equal rights. They don't really care about it, they don't really think about gays and lesbians – it's not an issue anymore, like it was.

MADISON LOBEL

It's not gay and lesbian, it's not racism, hate crimes are so much more rare now. And just, why? Who cares?

MARY ROHLFING

People are just trying to make a living, trying to have their own life.

MADISON LOBEL

Trying to have their own life, and careers, and families, and—

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, that whole thing's falling apart. So, that way you're controlling people. But I would just say, keep pushing on, don't give up. Try to find allies, because we sit here and say it's all good – it's not all good. We still lose a lot of teenage kids, who decide to commit suicide rather than live as an open gay or lesbian or transgender person. So, there's still a lot of work to do there. I wish I could say, as glib as I am, I'm really not when I think about what's still to be done. But you know, just continuing to do outreach. That "It Gets Better Campaign," I thought that was awesome. It was really good, and true.

MADISON LOBEL

Until he killed himself.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

It's amazing how cruel people can be. I can't imagine bullying somebody so much.

MARY ROHLFING

Yes, there is still issues.

MADISON LOBEL

Oh no, I am not saying there's not. Kids are mean. I will flat out say that.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, they are mean.

MADISON LOBEL

They're assholes.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, they can be awful.

MADISON LOBEL

So, in realistic terms, do you think that straight allies relinquishing their right to be married, do you think that might be something that happens in the next 20 years?

MARY ROHLFING

I think we'll probably have civil unions within the next 12 years.

MADISON LOBEL

12 years?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. It's obviously not going to be a campaign issue, this time, in the 2012s. But if Obama gets in again – and he probably will – this is my guess. My guess is that about 2014, he'll probably get the House and the Senate back to democrats, because people will realize the republicans are a disaster, and know better. And the American voters are just fickle. They're just, "Here, you have it for a while. You have it for wh—" They don't even know what they're doing.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, they just kind of check the box.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. (*laughs*) So, I think that they will move back to democrats. So I think some things could start to happen there, and depending on who the candidate is for the democrats in 2016, I could see it happening around 2012 or so. I could. Or 2020, I mean. 2020 to 2022, I guess. So, I think it could happen. Just kind of looking politically ahead, my guess is, how the demographics will be in the age of people coming into voting, and the dying off of the people who are probably the most against it and keeping it from happening.

MADISON LOBEL

Do you think media will play another huge part in all of that, and getting it through?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, I do. I kind of keep thinking, I wish Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, when they were popular, would have done more. They did a lot, but they only used their own example. They didn't try to politicize that in a broader level. And it's kind of too bad they didn't. But I think it'll happen. I think people will suddenly get that that's how you do this. You just boycott the institution.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, and people will listen. And where do you see the LGBTQ community, specifically in Boise, in maybe five to ten years?

MARY ROHLFING

Well, probably pretty integrated, and I guess that's okay. I don't know, sometimes I miss an "other" culture, in a way. *(laughs)* It's sort of the whole marriage thing. It's like fighting for an institution I probably wouldn't take advantage of if I were heterosexual. It's kind of dull and uninteresting. And I think there were some good things that came from otherness, in a way – in our culture, and our sense of humor, and our different kind of capacity and culture. The influences that we've had, in terms of writing and music and art, came from otherness, in some ways, came from a position of otherness. And so, time will tell what integration will bring about. I hope it doesn't bring a dumbing-down of the LGBT culture, but it probably will. *(laughs)* Watering it down.

MADISON LOBEL

Do you still feel like you have that capacity of otherness? Even though you said everyone accepts you and everything? Do you still feel somewhat separated, depending on where you are and–?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, there are definitely times. Like, I'm going to go to my nephew's wedding in a few weeks, and it's a big "thing." He and his fiancée, it's like a big deal. It's really odd for our family. We're not–

MADISON LOBEL

No huge weddings, no big celebration, no–

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. Everybody's like, it's really not why you get married. It's not the wedding, it's because you love someone, and you're willing to go through hell with them, because that's what relationships involve, really. It's not an easy thing. But they're doing like a big deal. And they're friends on Facebook, so I have to be so careful right now what I say, because I don't want them to think I'm talking about them. But just, yeah, there's this whole thing. I know I'll be at the wedding just going, "First of all, this is a colossal waste of money. Secondly—"

MADISON LOBEL

"How much did those flowers cost?"

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. It's like, "Really?" You got suckered in by the industry. And then secondly, just that whole thing of... Yeah, I don't know. Even if I could do it, would I want to do it? But it doesn't matter, because I don't even have that choice. So, it comes up now and again.

MADISON LOBEL

Do events like that still make you semi-nervous? Like, I know you said you've had acceptance and everything, but—

MARY ROHLFING

Well, then I have to meet the bride's family—

MADISON LOBEL

Maybe because there are other people there that you're not quite sure.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, I think it'll be okay. The thing that's nice about being older is that, when you're younger, seriously, you think—

MADISON LOBEL

You don't really have to care what other people think.

MARY ROHLFING

Well, you think everybody's normal except you, and then as you go through life, you realize—

MADISON LOBEL

Everybody's crazy.

MARY ROHLFING

Nobody is normal. No family is perfect, they all have these huge skeletons in their closet. And I was talking to my niece about that recently. She married into a perfect family, on the surface, who are wacko behind the scenes. And, ours is clearly flawed. But she's like, "But we're so much more easy to deal with, because it's out there," instead of this whole facade thing. So, I don't really feel nervous, because I just don't care. I just don't care. Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

You realize. You're like, "I don't really care what you think."

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, I just don't.

MADISON LOBEL

"You have issues, too. I don't know what they are, but they're there."

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. But I want to support my nephew, who I adore, and his fiancée, who I don't know very well yet, but I like. And yeah, wish them lots and lots of love and luck, as they go forward, just like with any other couple. But yeah, I think there's some loss to the culture when you get it too integrated and assimilated.

MADISON LOBEL

This is just kind of from my personal, whatever – what made you say yes to this project?

MARY ROHLFING

Well, I think Riley – your professor that reached out – is a little airbag professor, doesn't want to talk about herself (*laughs*).

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. She sent me an email, she's like, "I mean, I'll do it. (*pauses*) But I doubt that anyone's gonna want to hear my story."

MARY ROHLFING

I don't know why anybody would really care that much, to be honest. Mostly because I was a professor, and I know you're a student trying to finish a project. So, it's why.

(*laughter*)

MADISON LOBEL

Do you think that everybody's story, even though they're so different – like, you had a good coming-out experience, some people have terrible ones – do you think that everybody's story, collectively, will help somebody through a hard time?

MARY ROHLFING

I've been told that my story has helped some people, and I definitely know other people's stories have helped me.

MADISON LOBEL

That everyone has the capacity to be a mentor.

MARY ROHLFING

Yes, yeah. I think so. And it's my path. All I have is the story. And the rest, it's all we have. That's what life is, a bunch of stories that are told, and retold if you're lucky. And hopefully retold in a way the you (*laughing*) told them initially.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. That's what the voice recorder's for. (*laughs*)

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, but I mean–

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah, I know.

MARY ROHLFING

When you're living in a reality that others will–

MADISON LOBEL

Have their own perspective of?

MARY ROHLFING

Well, they'll support it. We have a lot of people running around telling stories that no one agrees with. You're like, "Really? It didn't happen like that." So, yeah. The whole act of storytelling is really important to me, and I guess I'm at a place in my life, too, where it's good to reflect. I didn't want to think about having been an activist at one point. I just was like, "Eh," did it, was supposed to do it, it's what you should do: You're an American citizen, you fight for civil rights. But it probably was a bigger deal than I gave it credit for.

MADISON LOBEL

You didn't realize what a massive role—

MARY ROHLFING

It probably mattered more. Yeah, probably mattered more than I... I don't want to sound like an egotist. *(laughs)*

MADISON LOBEL

You're not.

MARY ROHLFING

But there's some distance from it. We were kind of crazy to do that, to think we could beat it, and we did.

MADISON LOBEL

Even like you said, like, "I might lose my job," you know? Now you think about it, you're like, "I was gonna lose my job."

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, yeah. Maybe. Like, "That was dumb." I don't know.

MADISON LOBEL

Like, "That was dumb of me. I don't even know what was going through my head."

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. Maybe that was stupid. I don't know. But it just is. It's the way it was. I just seriously walk around Boise now, and I will go to events now, LGBT events. I'm like, "I don't know 80% of the people here. I used to know everybody." Or I'd seen them. And now I'm like, "I don't know them! This is great." Or I see these high school kids—

MADISON LOBEL

Do you get a little bit proud? You're like—

MARY ROHLFING

No, I'm just glad. I don't know if it's proud. I don't take pride in it. I'm just excited and glad about it. And then, I'll see high school kids who are lovers, kissing on the street, holding hands, hanging out at the Flying M, obviously, getting those gay, and bisexual, and transgender kids. And I'm thrilled by that. Yeah, wow.

MADISON LOBEL

Just to see, especially so young, just to embrace it.

MARY ROHLFING

And just being themselves. From the start. They don't have to go look for that, figure it out, how to be themselves. They already are.

MADISON LOBEL

They just know, and they accept it.

MARY ROHLFING

And that's probably idealistic. They have their own troubles, I know. But that's a good thing.

MADISON LOBEL

But to be in public, and just not care.

MARY ROHLFING

Well, I look at my uncle – who's 83, I think? I think he'll be 84 in January – who was the closeted gay uncle I had. Who when I came out, came out to me. My nieces and nephews were just raised with me out. They knew my lovers, they knew me as their lesbian aunt, they didn't think about it. That's kind of amazing, and in a short span of time–

MADISON LOBEL

That's how it should be.

MARY ROHLFING

–relatively. So, then I think about: now, kids, that could be their first choice, when they are becoming sexual beings. They don't have to, maybe, stuff it.

MADISON LOBEL

And it definitely depends on how you were raised. If your parents raised you saying, “That's bad, that's bad.” My parents were like, “What's wrong? So what?”

MARY ROHLFING

“This is our daughter. So what?”

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. “Who cares?”

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah, yeah. And that's exciting, because then you can fight with other things, not your own identity. That's pretty cool.

MADISON LOBEL

You don't have to worry about it, and—

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah.

MADISON LOBEL

Being young is hard enough, trying to figure out your identity.

MARY ROHLFING

Oh my god, how true.

MADISON LOBEL

“What do you want to do with the rest of your life?” when you're 18. “You gotta know.” “I do?”

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. It's kind of cool now, too. Because kids, they really look different. It used to be you're like, “Ah, that person's totally gay,” or “That person is.” And now it's like, you don't know. It's not as obvious. Not always obvious, and that's a good thing. That's a good thing.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. You can't judge a book by its cover anymore. It's not black and white. There's tons of colors in between.

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. It's a good thing, because sexuality is so important to us, and so important to our emotional and spiritual development. If you're killing that part of yourself, whoa. It's damaging.

MADISON LOBEL

And there's no way just to say, “I'm a lesbian, that's my only identity.” You can't say that.

MARY ROHLFING

Not anymore.

MADISON LOBEL

Nobody has one identity. Tons of varieties, different layers.

MARY ROHLFING

We're so lucky in that way. Or, you are so lucky in that way.

MADISON LOBEL

I'm a student, I'm a daughter, you know?

MARY ROHLFING

"Oh yeah, and that's right, I got a girlfriend too. It makes me a lesbian, doesn't it?"

MADISON LOBEL

You're like, "Oh yeah. Oh, that thing? Yeah. I also play sports." It's just a part of who you are. There's no, "You start to hide it now."

MARY ROHLFING

But it used to be the only thing that mattered to most people.

MADISON LOBEL

Which is really sad

MARY ROHLFING

It is really sad.

MADISON LOBEL

That that's all you see, and you don't even, like, see it, you know?

MARY ROHLFING

Yeah. Someone usually has to reveal it in some way.

MADISON LOBEL

Well, that's all I've got.

MARY ROHLFING

That's what you got? Great.

MADISON LOBEL

Thank you so much for being a part of this.

MARY ROHLFING

You're welcome, and I'm really honored to be asked. Thank you very much. Good luck.

MADISON LOBEL

It was really great meeting you.

MARY ROHLFING

What are you guys doing with all this?

MADISON LOBEL

What she's going to do is, her and – I don't know if it's the Sociology Department or the Gender – they're putting all the audio together, and they're going to make a play out of it.

MARY ROHLFING

Oh, wow.

MADISON LOBEL

So, it'll be the people kind of acting it out, and then you'll hear the audio recording at the box. And it's just each student in our class – there's probably around 30 of us, maybe 35 – and we each interviewed somebody. And everyone got someone different. There's someone who was interviewing the owner of The Balcony. I think one of them was a gentleman from Idaho Falls that, he got arrested. And then, had to fight for custody over his kids. And one was a police officer. And it's just, everyone has the different backgrounds.

MARY ROHLFING

Oh wow. That's crazy.

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. Like, people had people in academia – like I did, obviously. And then, just everyone has a different background, which changes their story.

MARY ROHLFING

What a cool thing. So, you're all doing them right now? Trying to get everything down?

MADISON LOBEL

Yeah. We have our audios due on Monday, and then we have to do a reflection paper.

MARY ROHLFING

So you have to think about what you–

MADISON LOBEL

What we talked about, and how it made us feel, and changes our perspective on life. And I'd never really thought about the marriage, how you said that straight people are the ones that need to change it. And I never really considered that, but it makes perfect sense. And it's like, you never really consider certain things until somebody opens your eyes to them. And hopefully this project will open tons of students' eyes at BSU and even further.

MARY ROHLFING

Thanks for doing all that.

MADISON LOBEL

No problem.

MARY ROHLFING

We really appreciate it.

MADISON LOBEL

Thank you so much.

MARY ROHLFING

Okay, now we're gonna do a mundane thing. I have to go buy a refrigerator, so— (*audio cuts off*)

END OF TRANSCRIPT.