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Josephine Carter and Beatrice Lohman oral history interview

Josephine Carter

Beatrice Lohman

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[Transcriber's note: The following changes have been made at the request of the Interviewer: pseudonyms are used throughout the Interview, the use of ellipses indicates that material has been removed by the Interviewer, names of persons not directly connected with the Interview have been replaced with pseudonyms, some identifying geographical details have been removed.]

Jessica Merrick: This is Jessica Merrick. Today is February 25, 2009. I'm talking with Josephine Carter and Beatrice Lohman. Did I say your names right?

Beatrice Lohman: Beatrice.

JM: Beatrice. Sorry about that.

BL: That's all right. Everybody makes that mistake. (laughs)

JM: So, we're just going to be asking questions about the community and what it's like living here and that sort of thing. But to start out—let's start out with biographical things. So, I'll ask you to tell me about yourselves. For example, how did you grow up?

BL: Well, I was born in Cajun country in Louisiana.

JM: Okay.

BL: Near Baton Rouge. I'm the oldest of six. I couldn't wait to get out of Louisiana—

All: (laughter)

BL: —and was fortunate enough to meet a young man from Cape Cod [Massachusetts].

JM: Okay.

BL: And he could speak English!

JM: (laughs)

BL: He said, you know, “Come with me,” so I did. Anyway, he and I lived—his family owned a sailing camp. Gorgeous, gorgeous place. We had a son, who’s now forty. And—dear man, he lived with me for sixteen years. And I was in la-la land, not really knowing who I was.

JM: Yeah.

BL: It wasn’t until after we split that I got my sense, so to speak—developed a little on my own. And I went back to school. I had started out as a biology and P.E. [physical education] teacher, and stopped teaching when [my son] was born. And when he got to be seven, I decided I could go back to teaching. He went to school. There were no jobs. I was interested in reading, because I had met a lot of kids who couldn’t read. And so, I got a degree in special ed [education], and found a job right up the road from where we lived in Brewster, [Massachusetts] in the Cape. And when I was divorced, I took my part of the money and bought a little piece of land and built a little house where [my son] and I lived for—I don’t know, seven years, I think, while I was working in this little special ed school. And then in 1993—in the meantime, I had met her towards—

Josephine Carter: I didn’t meet you when you were living there.

BL: Well, I moved. We sold that house and I moved to wealthy blah-blah-blah.

JC: Yeah, okay. (laughs) Other houses and— (laughs)

BL: Right. (laughs) Had an aneurysm, a cranial aneurysm.

JM: Okay.

BL: Knocked me out completely! Wasn’t sure if I’d walk ever again.

JM: Oh, wow.

BL: And she came every day to the hospital. Every day, all my therapies. Blah, blah, blah. So, when it was time to leave the hospital, I had to have somewhere to go. I couldn’t go live by myself anymore. And she, taking advantage of the situation—

JC: (laughs)

BL: —said, “Come live with me!”

JM: That was lucky. (laughs)

BL: So, that started something very nice.

JM: Okay. How did you meet before—?

JC: We both attended the Unitarian Universalist meeting house in Provincetown [Massachusetts], and there was a group of women—over forty, was it?

BL: Mm-hm.

JC: —who just got together for social reasons, nothing more. No—you know, not out to save the world—

BL: Potlucks, or whatever.

JC: Or do anything of a particular use. Just to have fun! And we were both—

BL: It was actually called The Thirteenth Steps.

JC: Yeah, clever.

JM: It's called the what?

BL: The Thirteenth Steps.

JM: The Thirteenth Steps?

JC: So clever.

BL: Instead of Twelve Steps¹. (laughs)

JM: Oh, okay! (laughs)

BL: And one day at one of those events I saw this little woman with some dogs. She was pretty cute.

JC: (laughs)

BL: One thing led to another—

JM: That's great.

¹ A twelve-step program is a set of guiding principles outlining a course of action for recovery from addiction, compulsion, or other behavioral problems.

JC: (to Beatrice) Rest your voice and let me talk for a while.

BL: I'm done.

JC: And then you can talk more.

JM: Yeah, you skipped your turn! You're supposed to tell me how you grew up. (laughs)

JC: I'm an only child—in the North! How could we be more different?

BL: Opposites.

JC: Yeah, I basically grew up in Syracuse [New York], but I was born in Buffalo [New York]. I, too, got married, in fifty-nine [1959]. I had graduated from college for nursing school, and went back to my—where I was living at the time, where my parents were living, outside of Buffalo. I met up again with a guy I had gone to high school with. And we just—I think we were the only show in town, either one of us. (laughter)

BL: Mm-hm.

JC: So we just started dating and, eventually we decided to get married.

BL: (laughs)

JC: And we moved down to North Carolina, where he was going to get his—did get his master's [degree] in English. He dropped out of medical school to do that. He decided he really didn't want to be a doctor.

JM: Mm.

JC: And I worked down there and took courses towards getting a master's degree, replacing—

JM: In nursing?

JC: Yeah, yeah. In education, actually, but with a major in nursing.

JM: Okay.

JC: And then we split after about four years. And I moved to New York City and enrolled in Columbia University Teacher's College. Finished up my master's, got my doctorate, and I was teaching or working. Sometimes I—part of the time I was teaching, part of the time I was working in a clinical setting in a hospital.

And, um—oh, I know how I moved to the Cape! I was having terrible respiratory problems, asthma attacks. I was in the emergency room more than I was out of it.

JM: Mm.

JC: And I was teaching at Columbia University then, because I had already finished my degrees. Finally, after they put up with me for a couple of years, they decided that I had to—I had no choice—I had to take a medical leave of absence. So my doctors recommended that I get out of the dirty air of New York.

The woman that I was with at the time had a house—has a house—in Provincetown. So I went and lived in that house and looked after it. And then we just kind of drifted apart. We hardly ever saw each other.

And I moved to my own place. I bought a condo in Provincetown, and that's where I was when Beatrice had the aneurysm.

BL: Mm-hm. And then we bought a house.

JC: Then we bought a house. Then we bought a motor home!

BL: Then we bought a motor home! (laughs)

JM: Then you're here! Okay. And there's no part-time work or anything now, is there? Or are you still—

JC: Beatrice is doing some part-time work now.

JM: You are?

BL: Tutoring.

JM: Okay. What do you tutor?

BL: English—I mean—no, reading and math. Elementary school kids.

JM: Are those schools nearby here?

BL: Yep, and a couple of homes. Yeah, I love it. They're second graders, third graders, kindergarten kids. It's wonderful.

JC: And, I volunteer a lot. I do the pet therapy. I volunteer at [an organization that trains guide dogs]. And there's a program which—I also am involved with kids, which is fun. It's third graders, in my case. But they have a program—they have them all around; you may have heard of it before—for children who are having a hard time learning to read, primarily, although we've got some good readers, too. You take your dog. It has to be a certified therapy dog. And you go to the school and the children come and they sit—we all sit on the floor. And the child reads to the dog.

JM: Oh, that's great! I hadn't heard about that. That's so cool!

JC: Yeah! They love it! They love it. They've got—my program that I go to is in the school. They do have them in libraries, as well. It's really great. It's such fun for the kids.

JM: It sounds really fun.

JC: And they—sometimes they're hard to keep focused. So, the dog makes an incentive. Because I'll say, "Now, if you read to [the dog] and he pays attention to you, then at the end you get to give him a cookie." I always have a pocketful of dog biscuits. And then, they get a little sticker that says, "Reading is fun. Reading with dogs is more fun." I like their stickers. So, that's fun.

JM: (laughs)

JC: My volunteer activities now focus around the animals, pretty much entirely.

BL: Plus, in this community, if anybody needs a dog sitter—sometimes in this house we have ten dogs!

JM: Yeah. Looks like there's a lot of your neighbors who have dogs, too.

JC: Yeah, we really do. We also have a kitty.

JM: Do you?

JC: Sitting on the chair over there.

JM: That's great. What about—would say there's any sort of major turning points in your life?

BL: Well, what pops right up to me is moving to Cape Cod. That was a major thing. And then having [my son], another major thing. And then that aneurysm. Meeting her.

JC: That was certainly a big one.

BL: Those four things are the major things that come right up.

JC: Mine certainly was coming out.

JM: Yeah? Was that when you and your ex-husband split?

JC: Yeah. I had—there were intimations of it earlier that I didn't really grab hold of.

BL: I know in high school, I was always having little crushes. Just didn't know what to do with it.

JC: I was a counselor at Girl Scout camp, surrounded by lesbians.

JM: And you just didn't know it?

JC: You know, it just—it never really entered my own mind. They didn't bother me. The fact that they were gay didn't upset me at all. I remember one year, one summer, my tent mate was gay, and one of my best friends said, "Oh, my God! You better watch out for her! She likes girls." And I thought, "Eh?" (laughs) "What's the big deal?" It never struck me as a big deal, except when it came to myself and coming out. That was the scary one.

And I finally came out publicly when I was teaching. I was asked to participate in a class on alternate lifestyles. And they had—oh, let's see, they had a nun, and I don't remember what the other people were. But they asked me to represent the gay and lesbian—

BL: (laughs)

JC: Interesting they came to me! You know, that must be significant!

BL: Somebody was perceptive. (laughs)

JM: (laughs)

JC: So, I finally said, "Oh, what the heck, I'll do it myself instead of finding someone," which is how they represented it. Could I find someone to do it? Finally, I said, "I'll do it myself." So I came out to this auditorium full of students and faculty.

JM: Wow. That's so brave.

JC: Yeah, it was a little scary, yes.

BL: Because, that was in—you know, the dark ages, pretty much.

JC: It was in the seventies [1970s].

BL: Yeah. When it was still not very—

JC: Right, yeah. I mean, I came out—not publicly, but essentially—in the sixties [1960s]. And you had to be careful of what you were doing in New York. If you were in a bar, then the lights would blink. Everybody stopped dancing and would sit down. We were just there having a drink.

JM: Wow.

JC: I never got arrested, but friends of mine got arrested. The cops would come in and claim to find health violations, close the place down.

JM: Because they were lesbian bars?

JC: Yeah. Well, I know more men, actually, that went to jail than women. But it did happen to both. Yeah, it was a rough time. And then, of course, Stonewall² happened.

BL: Slowly, but surely.

JC: The beginning of real change. I mean, we were all protesting in marches and things. But we always—you have to dress; you have to wear a nice skirt and stockings and look respectable. You know? You had to look straight.

(clock chimes)

You had to look straight to protest because you were gay! It didn't make sense. Seemed to us it didn't. And I had friends in NOW [National Organization for Women] and the women's movement that were terrified that we'd all be labeled lesbians, and so the women's movement tried to act straight. It's real hypocrisy.

JM: Wasn't there a NOW president that sort of denounced—? And didn't she come out and say—?

JC: Yeah, that we were—well, the “lavender menace”³! I'm not sure if that's where that phrase came from or somewhere else. But that was the general idea; that we were going to bring down the whole women's movement. I don't remember when that was.

JM: Did you feel like you couldn't really participate in the women's movement? You had to more—into the gay movements and lesbian movements, because it was divided?

JC: Uh—it was divided, certainly. I guess after a while you get so used to having split lives that it's just one more. What difference does it make?

BL: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. It's amazing how we accommodate as a—

JM: Yeah, definitely—you know, what you said about the way that you dressed while you're doing protesting.

² The Stonewall Riots, a series of protests and demonstrations that began June 28, 1969 at the Stonewall Lounge in New York City, considered to be the beginning of the gay liberation movement.

³ This was a phrase used by Betty Friedan, then president of NOW, to describe a threat that association with lesbianism posed to NOW, that the feminist movement would be associated only with lesbians. Rita Mae Brown, Karla Jay, and other lesbian radical feminists created an informal group called the Lavender Menace.

JC: Yeah! Here we are, gay people—but see, we look just like you!

JM: Right.

So— I guess we'll shift gears a little and start talking about community. You were telling me earlier about where you lived before you came to the neighborhood. Can you just tell me what it was like compared to—what was it was like living in neighborhoods where you didn't know that your neighbors were gay and lesbian? Or maybe that was—maybe I'm making assumptions; maybe you did live in places—?

JC: Well, we lived in Provincetown for a long time. So, that was certainly totally acceptable.

BL: Yeah. My experience of—I was not out until I lived on Cape Cod, of course. And I never really ever felt uncomfortable. I mean, I'm kind of numb anyway.

JC: (laughs)

BL: You know what I mean? But I never felt—and so many times people referred to me as Mister. You know? That didn't really bother me. If that happened, that's the most I ever encountered, to tell you the truth.

JC: Well, I got some name-calling.

BL: Did you?

JC: Yeah, even in Provincetown. I remember once I was walking through Dougherty's parking lot and I was walking the dogs. I always carry a plastic bag to pick up after them. And the guy said, "You're not supposed to be walking through here with your dog!"

And I held up the bag. I said, "I always pick up."

"I don't care, you dyke. Get out of here!" That was about the worst—in Provincetown, of all places. Although at the same time, I felt safer. It wasn't a big deal there. He would have been in the wrong, not me.

JM: Yeah. It makes a big difference, knowing how your neighbors would be supportive. So how did you find out about [the community]? You were saying you found it on the web, right?

JC: Well, I had heard about it from a gay camping organization, just in passing. So, I knew something existed. I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know its name. I didn't know where it was, except that it was in Florida. So, I found it on the Internet. I just did a search for "gay retirement in Florida." So then, we got in touch with the guy here who was selling the property.

JM: Was that (...)?

JC: Mm-hm. (...) called him and emailed him—we were in California at the time. We came back east, and went back to Provincetown for the fall. I think we came down—yeah, we came down here in October. We moved in November first.

JM: Okay. What year was that?

JC: That was aught-six [2006]? Yeah, aught-five [2005] or aught-six [2006]. I think we've been here three or four years now.

BL: Yeah. It will be three, coming up.

JC: No, I think it was already.

BL: Oh, maybe this will be the fourth. I mean, in the—

JC: So, we've been here since November first, aught-five [2005].

BL: Mm-hm.

JM: So, what kind of questions did you have when you were first moving in? What did you want to make sure was—?

JC: The first question was, “Are dogs allowed?”

JM: Right, yeah. They probably figured out right away that was important. (laughs)

JC: That was the first thing. The second thing, I think, was, “Could we plant things? Could we grow things in the ground?”

BL: Yeah.

JC: And that was also a yes, as long as you take care of whatever you— When we got here, we found it's a little more complicated than that.

JM: Oh, really?

BL: Yeah. Well, in this part of the community we don't own the property.

JM: In the back part here.

BL: Yeah.

JM: Okay.

BL: We don't own the land. We only own—

JC: The inside.

BL: The house. So the land part belongs to the community. And whatever you do with it has to be approved by everybody else. And before we got here, nobody had planted anything outside of their houses.

JC: They put in hibiscus. All the same in every place. And we thought we could do better than that.

BL: We shook 'em up. We continue to.

JM: (laughs)

JC: There are four couples that moved in at the same time, just about; within a month of each other. We sort of became the young Turks. One of those couples is actually straight.

JM: (laughs) Okay.

JC: The other three were lesbians. And yeah, we kind of shook things up. They weren't—well, they'd been living here for years without any opposition. They were in charge. It was the way they knew it. They liked it. They weren't—

BL: They were very comfortable.

JM: How many people were here before you all and those four couples got here?

JC: Well, let's see. (...) was here—well, he doesn't own; he's a renter. Ernest [Marc] and Max [Dare]." (...) and (...).

BL: (...).

JC: (...). (...).

BL: (...).

JC: (...) and (...).

BL: And (...).

JC: And (...) also was a renter. So— I'd say (...) and (...) Ernest and Max D were the ones in charge. (...) was president—had been president. Ernest was treasurer, had been treasurer, and in fact still is, because nobody else wants to do it and he's good at it.

So, yeah, people always resist change anyway. But when you've been—you know, the people in charge, the people everybody came to ask stuff, and all of a sudden these people move in and just do what they want!

JM: Hoodlums! (laughs)

BL: (laughs)

JC: Whoa!

JM: So, did you come for a visit—you must have come for a visit before you moved here, right?

JC: We were staying in a campground just up the road a little way.

JM: Okay, okay.

BL: The minute we saw this house, though.

JC: Yeah, we stood right there in the kitchen and said, "We'll take it."

JM: Oh, that's great.

BL: I love those skylights. It's what got me.

JM: I didn't even know that was a skylight. It looked like—

JC: Yeah, I know! I kept trying to turn those lights out! (laughs)

JM: It's nice and bright in here.

BL: We just loved it. And the pond.

JM: Yeah.

JC: Just a little—

BL: Dry.

JC: It looks like a big puddle right now. But if we ever get any rain, it fills up.

JM: Were you able to meet some of your neighbors when you first visited, too?

JC: Actually, the first ones we met were Ernest and Max D. We met them at church. We made a habit of going to different UUs [Unitarian Universalist churches] when we pass through different parts of the world. So, we went to this one down here in [nearby

location], and we spotted them and they spotted us. (laughs) Sure enough, they were our neighbors!

JM: Wow. That's cool.

BL: Yeah.

JC: But, yeah, we all made friends quickly, very quickly.

BL: Remember the first—

JC: I feel like I've known (...) and (...) forever.

BL: I was just thinking about the first time we met (...). We were barbequing something in the back. And the smoke was—

JC: It was coming up the screen doors.

BL: And she came running over. "What's the matter?" or something. "Are you okay?"

JC: To make sure we weren't on fire.

JM: (laughs) That's funny. So, has your view of the community changed since you moved in?

JC: It's more realistic, yeah.

BL: (coughs)

JC: I don't think it's all peace and beauty and rose-colored glasses, but we love it. There are times when I get mad, it's whatever's happening—which you would in any community.

JM: Right.

BL: It's like living in a very big family. I mean, a condo association—

JC: Yeah. A very dysfunctional family, I might add. (laughs) But yes, basically we all get along fine. And it's especially true that if you're sick or having some kind of a problem, the community is right there with you.

BL: It really is amazing, though.

JM: Is there any time where you all were ever sick and they came to look after you?

JC: Mostly they would—you know, walking dogs for you and stuff like that. And there's

a woman across the way who has lymphoma and getting chemo[therapy] and has been really sick. And so people have taken food.

JM: Okay, that's great.

JC: Yeah. There was a—(...), we mentioned before—

BL: We've had a couple of deaths, yeah.

JC: He got lung cancer. And we all took care of him until he finally had to go to hospice. But people are just wonderful that way.

BL: Yeah.

JC: Helpful and supportive and caring.

BL: And you know, actually, in terms of the community at large—you know, the greater community—I think people have. I haven't heard any horror stories about—you know, encountering any kind of prejudice.

JC: No, that's been interesting.

JM: You mean in the city? In [nearby location] and [nearby location]?

BL: Or [nearby location], yeah.

JC: Yeah, I'm just—I'm very open. I'll say, "My partner."

BL: Me too.

JC: Nobody ever looks at me like, "What?!"

BL: The only thing I've got the "What?!" about is when I tell people they're in America's first gay and lesbian retirement community. (laughs)

JC: In [the town where the community is located]!

BL: [The town where the community is located]?! (laughs)

JM: Is that how you describe it when you meet other people that don't live here?

BL: Yep.

JM: So, how would you describe the neighborhood as a whole? Just in terms of the kind of people who live here and the feeling that you get from it?

JC: I'd say we're not terribly diverse in terms of background. I think we're pretty much an upper middle class, pretty well educated group of people that live around this part.

BL: That's right. No minorities.

JC: No minorities. That's one thing that does bother me.

JM: Okay.

BL: And the area, in general, is so heavily Hispanic. I mean, the school where I teach, the receptionist speaks Spanish continuously on the phone to all the—you know, everybody speaks Spanish. It's the language.

JM: Nobody here speaks Spanish, huh?

BL: I don't.

JM: Not too much.

JC: I don't think we do have anybody that speaks Spanish.

BL: No, uh-uh.

JC: Because—you know, we have the yard maintenance crew is Hispanic speakers. And everybody says, "Oh, well, you can't talk to them anyway because they speak Spanish," and we don't. There's nobody saying, "Oh, well, so-and-so can speak Spanish."

BL: We need to start teaching that language in school.

JM: They don't teach it at—? Well, your school is for younger kids. So maybe in high school.

BL: Maybe so.

JM: I took it in high school.

JC: Probably as an elective. You could have taken a different language.

JM: Mm-hm. Yeah.

BL: Yeah.

JM: Um—so, you were telling me about your neighbors. Can you tell me about the kinds of things you usually do when you get together? Maybe tell me about the last event you attended and what it was like.

BL: A lot of it has to do with food.

JC: A lot of food! We all—a lot of food. Last week there was a concert at (...)’s house.

BL: We do have one major event, an annual regatta.

JM: Regatta?

JC: Toy boat.

BL: In the pond.

JM: Oh, fun!

JC: And this year we’re starting a new one, it will be toy cars. A mini-prix.

JM: Okay. Car races or something?

JC: Yeah.

BL: The thought for the regatta was that we were going to race our boats across the pond. Every boat reacted to every remote.

JC: All remotes were on the same frequency! (laughs) It was total chaos. It was fun!

BL: Absolutely! It was marvelous.

JC: And we’ll do outings. We’ll go various places. Out to dinner, of course, is very popular. But we’ve done other things too. We went to the port—the Port of [nearby location], is it called?

BL: Maybe so.

JM: What do they have up there? Just watching the boats come in and out?

JC: Yeah, they explain how the port works.

BL: Is that where you get to see the manatees?

JC: No, that’s [nearby location], where the manatees go when it’s cold, because the water’s heated around the power plant. Um—of course all the holidays; there’s always an excuse for a party.

JM: Yeah. So, what was the concert? Was it everybody playing an instrument here?

JC: No, it's some fellow, I guess, that (...) knew. An older man, a pianist. I think maybe he was here for some real concert. And he was good enough to go and play (...)’s piano for people here. We’ve had others of that kind of thing in the past.

JM: Cool!

BL: And the young woman who has lymphoma is an excellent pianist.

JC: She’s an excellent pianist, yeah.

BL: She has a piano. And her partner is an excellent musician, as well. When we have the regattas, they put on little band uniforms and sit out on the lanai and play, serenade us with incredible music.

(clock chimes)

JC: Yeah, they have a keyboard, and I guess they put in background music.

BL: They have drums and trombone—

JC: And Carme plays her euphonium, and Evelyn [Bath] plays the drums.

BL: Who else plays that amazing instrument? What is that thing called?

JC: Oh, that—

BL: Dulcimer?

JC: Not a dulcimer.

BL: It’s a stringed thing.

JC: I can’t think of what it’s called right now.

pause in recording

JC: It wouldn’t work for something like that; it’s wired.

JM: Sorry. I’m just checking to make sure—when it made that beep early and it made me nervous. But I think we’re okay. Maybe it was something else beeping.

JC: Is there a tape in there, or is it a—?

JM: It’s digital.

BL: That’s so incredible.

JM: I know, it is, isn't it? Okay, February twenty-fifth, talking to Josephine and Beatrice.

pause in recording

JM: So, um—one of the other questions I was interested in was, is it mostly men and women at the same parties and functions? Or, are there ever events for women and events for men?

JC: Yeah.

BL: Occasionally.

JC: Yeah, we have all of the above.

BL: Yeah.

JC: And sometimes it'll just be Phase I or Phase II, depending on what it is. Like sometimes going out to dinner to a place, depending on the size of the restaurant, maybe it'll just be one part of the community, 'cause it isn't big enough for everybody.

JM: If you had a choice, would you rather live in an all women's community. Or are you pretty happy with this set up?

BL: I like this set up the way it is.

JC: Yeah, we chose this. We could have gone to [another retirement community]. We have friends down in—

JM: The one in [nearby location].

JC: Yeah, and we have stayed there in our motor home in the past. But I—no, I really don't want to live there. Wouldn't want to live there.

JM: What was your impression of it? Why you wouldn't want to live there?

JC: It seemed to me there were too many rules and too much restriction of men on the property. I don't think we'd have felt comfortable having [my son] come to visit us, 'cause he wouldn't have been able to go the clubhouse except at certain times.

BL: For me, that's too extreme.

JC: It's repressive.

BL: Some people need it. They can have it.

JC: That's fine. You know, there's not one type of living to meet everybody's needs. And that's great. This is better for us.

BL: Absolutely. I think [the cat] is getting into your briefcase.

JC: (laughs) (to cat) Hey, (...)! What are you doing? He will nibble on the edges of paper.

JM: (to cat) (...)!

JC: He's going to lie down on it.

JM: That's all right.

JC: You don't mind a little cat hair? (laughs)

JM: Uh—are there any negatives to living here? Is there anything you'd change if you could? You talked about maybe a pool and that kind of thing.

JC: Mm.

BL: I would love to be able to use the land more.

JC: Yeah, it's a lot of wasted land. We tried to get a dog park in, which is—you know, a dog run. And the road blocks that were thrown up were impossible. So what we did was just by accident. We were all across the street there, that big open area, and just happened upon this little enclosed part of that area with trees and bushes that kind of kept it private and away from everybody else. So, we've adopted that informally as our little secret garden dog park.

BL: But, you know, those things have nothing to do with the gender aspect. It's just the condo living.

JM: Yeah.

JC: If you live in a condo, there are always rules that are for everybody's good. Sometimes you bump up against them or wish they weren't there. But I think that's the nature of living in a condo or a community, where—there could be the same thing just in a development that's not a condo, but just a community that has a lot of rules.

JM: Right.

JC: Like, I wouldn't mind seeing clotheslines out in the backyard.

BL: Absolutely.

JC: But they're not allowed because they're unsightly.

BL: A vegetable garden.

JM: You're not allowed to have vegetable gardens or anything?

BL: I mean, you can have a vegetable garden but it has to be—

JC: Well, supposedly—it says in our bylaws no farm crops. So you can get around that by planting tomatoes in a container, something like that. Yeah.

BL: Yeah, and I definitely wanted to have chickens. I mean, we could put a little cage right there. We had chickens in Provincetown.

JM: (laughs)

JC: We had chickens in Provincetown. It was neat.

JM: You had fresh eggs and stuff?

JC: Yeah.

BL: Oh, Lord, yes!

JC: Fortunately, our next door neighbor liked the chickens. Remember? He used to come and—

BL: Our next door neighbor? Two legs or four legs?

JC: Two. The guy that owns the restaurant.

BL: Oh, (...).

JC: (...) and—

BL: I can't think of the name, either.

JC: I can see them both—(...). (...) and (...). They loved the dogs. We put in a pet door, but it went—the bedroom floor was high up from the ground, so we had to build a little platform with steps going down so the dog could use it, with a fence around it. So, this guy—the guy who built it for us got very elaborate. I mean, it was really like a dog patio! (laughs) And of course, we didn't even think about it, but we didn't have a permit. So, our neighbors could have complained, but they loved having the dogs out there. They'd always have biscuits for them when they came by, and he'd whistle for them. So we got away with that.

JM: I was wondering—is there any kind of process for who’s allowed to live here? Like, do people get together, if somebody wants to move in, do you get to audition them or anything? Or anybody’s allowed to come in?

BL: Not to my knowledge. As long as they can—

JC: Usually we— Well, not really. We get to meet people.

BL: At this point, if somebody’s got the money.

JC: Yeah.

JM: So maybe that’s changed? Maybe it used to be different, though?

BL: I don’t think so.

JC: I don’t think so. Although the president has to sign a form saying that people are permitted to buy here. But that’s just a formality, really. I mean they’d have to be pretty horrible. (laughs)

JM: So, [the president] has never told anybody, “No, you can’t move here.”

JC: We were told that he did tell somebody they couldn’t move here because they were too young. But I don’t know. That’s just a rumor. I don’t know if it’s true.

BL: It might be.

JM: Is there an age requirement?

BL: One member of the household has to be fifty-five.

JC: Yeah.

JM: Fifty-five. But it’s okay if the other person’s younger.

BL: Right.

JC: It’s really not officially a retirement or over fifty-five community; it’s not with the county. It’s not official.

BL: Which is a problem, because we’re being taxed.

JC: Well, it’s a one-time tax that goes to new homeowners for school use.

JM: So, you get taxed for school, even though—?

JC: Yeah, when you buy a piece of property there's a school use tax that you have to pay, unless you've had a waiver saying, "This is an over fifty-five community where no children are allowed." Well, we don't really officially have that status, so— Well, I know I'd hate it if somebody with six kids bought in and had their kids running around the place. I'd hate it; you'd love it!

BL: It takes all kinds. (laughs)

JC: Yep. (laughs)

JM: So, earlier you mentioned that there's a straight couple who lives here, right?

JC: Yeah. Right—one house in between us, attached to this house next door.

BL: And they are adorable.

JC: They're fabulous. We love 'em. Yeah.

BL: It was convenience for them. The location.

JC: Yeah, as far as their work was concerned. He works in [nearby location] and she works in [nearby location], so it was very handy. They looked across the street; there's a development over there. And they didn't like it. So the real estate agent brought them over. Prices, I guess, were about the same. Maybe a little higher here, I'm not sure. But they liked it, so they bought over here.

JM: Do you think anybody has problems with—?

JC: People had problems with the idea. And then they got to know the people.

JM: And now they like them.

JC: It's all fine; they love 'em. Yeah, yeah. Hell, some people—the people whose house is attached to theirs—"Well, I didn't move down here to be next door neighbors to a straight couple!" (laughs)

BL: Ridiculous.

JC: And once we got to know each other, it was no problem.

BL: As a matter of fact, their boat in the regatta was one of the stars, because it had a Barbie doll in it.

JM: Oh, boy.

JC: A Barbie doll. And her hair kept getting the way, so they gave her a haircut! (laughs)
They chopped her hair off. And they won the “gayest boat” award. (laughs)

JM: (laughs) Okay. How about—I don’t know; maybe this is a tough question, or maybe it’s an easy one. But how do you identify? Do you use words like—do you say “lesbian”? Do you say “gay”? Do you not say?

JC: It all depends on what we’re talking about. Sometimes you’ll refer to somebody as an old dyke or something. You know, just all in the family kind of talking.

BL: I’m personally more comfortable using the word “lesbian” than “dyke.”

JC: Well, yeah!

BL: The connotation for dyke has a little rough feeling for me.

JC: (laughs) It is a little rough.

BL: But that’s the only thing.

JC: Yeah, I think it totally depends on the context. What we’re talking about, who we’re talking to.

JM: Okay. If this place didn’t exist, where do you think you might be living instead?

JC: Probably up in The Villages⁴ with—

BL: Maybe so— Oh, God, no. We couldn’t live there.

JC: Well, we didn’t know. It was our first thought of where we would go. We have two dear friends in The Villages.

JM: The Villages?

BL: You know that?

JM: Uh-uh.

BL: It is an enormous place comprised of villages. Really and truly.

JC: Artificially made little villages all under the umbrella of The Villages.

JM: Is that in Florida?

JC: Oh, yeah, it’s in the South.

⁴ The Villages is a large retirement community in central Florida.

BL: North of here.

JC: In horse country.

BL: Yep.

JC: Inland. That was the first thing. I thought, “Inland? Who wants to live—” But they have nice pools there.

JM: Tradeoff.

BL: This couple we knew from our RV-ing days. They’re from Vermont, dear friends. And they have developed a little gay community in The Villages.

JC: Yeah. There’s quite a network of lesbians.

JM: So The Villages isn’t gay, but they have a little area that is?

JC: There’s a big group of lesbians—probably gay men, although I don’t hear them talk about that.

BL: Right now.

JC: (laughs) In The Villages. They all know each other, and they have different kinds of clubs. Play golf and go canoeing, kayaking.

BL: It’s a huge place.

JC: Oh, that’s another we didn’t mention. One of the things we do is go kayaking.

BL: Wonderful places to kayak. All the rivers.

JC: Yeah. There are lots of wonderful rivers in Florida.

JM: There’s one up by the university. It’s only five dollars to rent a kayak with your student I.D., so I go all the time.

JC: Oh, yeah, that’s great.

JM: So, what about plans for the future? How long do you think you might live here?

BL: Forever.

JM: Yeah?

JC: Until they carry me out in a pine box.

BL: I mean, we will take little trips, hopefully. But moving? I wouldn't leave here. I see no reason to leave here. We haven't begun to explore what there is to explore around here. And the beaches? Oh, God, the beaches are just unbelievable.

JC: I love it here in the summertime. It's the best. I love—I'm in or around the water.

JM: All right. Is there anything I haven't asked or mentioned that you want to talk about?

BL: I'm just very pleased that you're doing this.

JM: Great.

BL: I think it's great.

JM: Do you have any questions for me? That's all I've got.

JC: I don't think so. Did we tell you what time the party is on Sunday?

JM: No.

end of interview