



University of South Florida

Digital Commons @ University of South Florida

LGBTQ+ Oral History Project

LGBTQ+ Collections

Summer 7-21-2009

Evelyn Bath Oral History Interview

Evelyn Bath

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/lgbtq_oh

Recommended Citation

Bath, Evelyn, "Evelyn Bath Oral History Interview" (2009). *LGBTQ+ Oral History Project*. 5.
https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/lgbtq_oh/5

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the LGBTQ+ Collections at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in LGBTQ+ Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

LGBT Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: L34-00003
Interviewee: Evelyn Bath (EB)
Interview by: Jessica Merrick (JM)
Interview date: March 2, 2009
Interview location: Undisclosed
Transcribed by: Jessica Merrick
Transcription date: March 12, 2009
Audit Edit by: Maria Kreiser
Audit Edit date: April 24, 2009
Interview Changes by: Christine Toth
Interview Changes date: June 2, 2009
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson
Final Edit date: July 21, 2009

[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, names of persons not directly connected with the Interview have been replaced with pseudonyms, identifying geographical details have been removed.]

Jessica Merrick: Today is March second [2009], and I'm talking with Evelyn Bath. So, to start out, tell me a little bit about yourself. How'd you grow up?

Evelyn Bath: I was the oldest of six children, and I lived in New Jersey and stayed there until I was eighteen. Just a normal childhood, with my father working a low-level government job. And my mother didn't work; she was a housewife. She was really intelligent and she was antsy being a housewife, so she wasn't very happy. We moved into a community that, at the time, was just lots of open land, but it turned out to be a very wealthy community, and we were not. (laughs) So we were at the—we weren't poor, but we were at the low end of the people there.

But it was, you know, just a typical childhood. It wasn't anything unusual. Ups and downs, of course, but my parents stayed married the whole time. My mother died when I was twenty-four, and my father died in 1987, when I was—I can't remember how old I was at that time. After my mother died, my father remarried about fourteen months later, and he moved to West Virginia. By that time, I was married.

JM: Okay. Tell me about your career. Do you still work?

EB: No, I don't work anymore. I worked for about thirty-four and a half years in education, and I taught second grade first. I taught nursery school. I was in the guidance

department. I taught kindergarten for ten years, and I taught first grade for seventeen. I always think of myself as a first grade teacher; that was my favorite job. Then I did IST, which is instructional support teacher¹. And then I taught gifted. So I—

JM: The full spectrum.

EB: Yes, and nursery school for two years. So, yeah, I did a lot, but all up through fifth grade.

JM: That's great.

EB: Yeah, I loved the teaching part.

JM: So, can you tell me about the major turning points in your life? Have there been any points where you look back and you think that they stand out?

EB: Well, one of the major turning points was—I was married when I was twenty-two.

JM: That's so young! It's amazing!

EB: I know! (laughs) It seems like it, but it didn't seem like it at the time. It just seemed—that's what you do. In fact, I was proud that I finished college, because so many of my friends had gotten married before they finished. So I didn't feel like it was young, but it was.

JM: A lot of people are still doing it like that today, too.

EB: Yeah, that's right. And I just thought, Well, this is what all nice girls do, you know, get married. And he was a very, very nice man. Unfortunately, after we were married for about three years, he became mentally ill—through no fault of his own; it just had been in his family. And [he] went through a lot of diagnoses, but probably he's bipolar in some fashion.

So, we were married for twenty-three years. We were married for ten years before we had a child. And in that time I got my master's, and then I got my—I just got my master's before I had my child. And I just had one child. And then, when she was about eight years old, I think, I went back and got my doctorate.

JM: What's your daughter's name?

EB: (...). She's twenty-seven now. So I think probably the biggest turning point for me, really, was—obviously I couldn't have done this without having a child—but she was really bright. And the guidance counselor at her public school said, “You really need to think about sending her to private school. There isn't enough for her here.” So I looked

¹ An instructional support teacher helps educate and train other teachers to assist students who are at risk of failing.

around at different private schools in the area because I didn't want her to board anywhere. I enjoyed her; I didn't want her to go away until she had to go to college.

So, I found a private school after interviewing a whole bunch of different places. I found a private school not too far away called Perkiomen [School]. And it was the best thing I ever did. It was wonderful, not only for her. It was a really good school for her. It was only about 250 kids, five through twelve, so she got a lot of attention, and also was able to do a lot in the school. She was a big wheel in the school. She graduated—she was valedictorian, and all that stuff.

JM: Wow. You must be proud.

EB: She was in everything. She really was good. In fact, I ended up paying—and then she got huge scholarships to Vassar [College]. So I ended up paying more for her to go to high school than I did for her to go to college.

JM: Sounds like you lucked out in that situation. (laughs)

EB: Yeah, yeah! (laughs)

JM: It's worth it.

EB: It really was worth it.

So, the big turning point was sending her to Perkiomen, because not only did she have a marvelous education, and all the way through, and really, then she got to go to Vassar, which—I wouldn't have been able to send her to Vassar if she hadn't gotten those huge scholarships—but that's where I met Carme. Carme was her music teacher. She was department chair. So that was a big turning point, naturally. (laughs) And—

JM: That explains all of the musical instruments.

EB: Yes, yes, all the musical instruments. So she was department chair, and I met her first—I remember her when I went for registration and we had to be interviewed by the teachers and everything, and I remember her doing a presentation for the fifth and sixth grade. And she was standing up there and I thought, Oh my goodness! She was so young, for such an important position. I thought she was about twenty-eight years old, you know. She was this real small, little person with this big bow in her hair, (JM laughs) just really cute. Well, in reality, she's four years older than I am. (laughs) But she looked really, really young at the time! (JM laughs)

And I just met her there. And a couple years later, I realized she had graduated from the same college that I did, undergrad. She had graduated, just—she had graduated in June, and I came in September. But she knew my husband, because she was dating the fraternity president of the same fraternity that my husband was in. So, she knew—

JM: A small world.

EB: It was really strange. It was a small world. So that was funny. So, we just—I just met her then.

And then a couple of years later, she—well, sometime while we were there—she asked [my daughter] to audition for a children’s honors choir down for Washington, that was going to sing in Washington, D.C. And so she had to practice with [my daughter] to get the music all learned and everything. And I would go up there every Saturday morning to help her practice. Meanwhile, [my daughter] was going to art school, so it was a sort of thing, that I would go up there, and I just started getting acquainted with her. And that’s how we got acquainted, [my daughter] being excellent in music. That’s what it was.

JM: That’s neat. So, can you tell me about—I see you’ve got some—you’ve got a—I forget—

EB: [My dog].

JM: Tell me about everybody who lives in your house.

EB: Oh, okay.

JM: [Your dog]’s definitely on the list.

(dog pants)

EB: [My dog] is. At first when we came down—we came down about a year and a half ago, and at that time I had two little nineteen year old dogs, (...) and (...), and an eighteen year old cat. (laughs)

(to dog) Does that mean you—? Uh-oh. I think that means I have to take him out to go to the bathroom—

JM: Oh, sure—

Pause in recording

JM: So, we took a brief intermission for a [dog] potty break (EB laughs) and we’re back here again, March second, talking with Evelyn Bath. I think you were just telling me about everybody in your house, and [your dog] got excited because he was in part of it.

EB: He heard his name, yes. He’s the most important thing as far as he’s concerned.

And then Carme. Her real name is (...), but up north they either called her (...), or some people called her [by her initials]. And I didn’t really—never really liked the name (...); it sounded like a biker babe. (both laughs) So when we got down here, at the time, there

were three different (...). So, okay, what could we call her? One of her friends up north used to call her (...), just shorten it, so, I thought, Well, how about Carme? And she thought that was cute, so that's we call her down here.

JM: That's nice.

EB: And all the doctor's offices, they still know her as (...). But that's what we call her around here.

JM: So, where did you live before you moved into the neighborhood?

EB: We lived up in a place called Pennsville—sorry, Pennsburg, Pennsylvania. It was about halfway between Allentown and Philadelphia. We lived there—I lived close by in Schwenksville, Pennsylvania.

JM: Schwenksville? (laughs)

EB: Isn't that an awful name? (JM laughs) That's—oh, that's an awful name! And then when [my daughter] started going to Perkiomen and she was in high school, the upper school, there were so many activities she wanted to be involved in that I wanted to move closer to the school, because otherwise I was about twenty-five minutes away.

So, my husband and I were going through—I wasn't going to go through a divorce. I thought, What's the difference? I'm not going to get married again. What do I need a divorce for? But then I saw his mother had written him a letter and he had it on his dresser, and it had the name of five different lawyers on it. And I thought, Whoops. I better do something about this before he does, because I was making—I was the highest paid teacher in the district, because I had my doctorate and no other teacher had their doctorate. So, I wanted to make sure that I wasn't going to start paying alimony or child support or something, even though I was keeping [our daughter]. I said, "There's no problems between us; why don't we just share a lawyer and just get a no-fault type of thing?" So, that's what we did.

So I moved up to Pennsburg in an apartment real close to the school, so she could walk to school.

JM: Were you and Carme together at that time?

EB: We were together—let's see. Yeah, we had gotten together, really, in 1994, and this was ninety-six [1996], I think. No, that's not true. We were together in ninety-four [1994], I know that. I count the days from April 30, 1994.

JM: Very specific! (laughs)

EB: Yes! (laughs) But it was sometime, really, in May that we really got together as a couple, in ninety-four [1994]. And I'm trying to remember exactly when I moved up

there. I know I didn't move up there until ninety—no, that's not true. Let's see. She went to Perkiomen in ninety-one [1991], ninety-two [1992]. It must have been in ninety-three [1993] when we moved up there.

JM: So moving, was that also sort of your coming out?

EB: I was—I didn't come out. In fact, I never came out until I was down here.

JM: Okay.

EB: We were completely closeted, because after a while—I'm trying to remember the exact timing and all. But how we started living together is, I was in the apartment, and my ex-husband had also moved up to the area. He was losing his job and all sorts of things, because he was really not well at all; he really was not doing well. And then he finally got—he got thrown out of his apartment for being too weird, truly; just being too odd.

So, I told him—and by that time, Carme and I were together. So, I just told him, "I'm sure I could move in with Carme." And I let him use my apartment and I continued paying the rent at the apartment, and I just said, "Well, if you're able to keep the dogs here—keep the dogs here, and you can have the apartment." So that's what I did for a couple of years, and then he came into an inheritance and moved and bought a small condominium back in Schwenksville. But meanwhile—

JM: That was really nice of you to do that.

EB: Well, I guess. But he was a nice man. He really was. It wasn't anything like—he didn't cheat, he didn't take drugs, he didn't smoke. It wasn't that he drank; it was just something in his genes. It was just bad chemistry. So I thought, I'll help him out by doing this. And also, it meant that—so, I moved in with Carme.

People didn't know it for a long time, because although she lived in a house that—school housing—she was on the other side of campus, so people just gradually started learning that we were living together. But they just saw us as two middle-aged schoolteachers sharing expenses. That's what they saw it as. I'm sure a lot of people knew the score. But as long as we didn't talk about it, because both of us would be in danger of losing our jobs—especially her, because she was—there's no such thing as a contract at a private school. You're just going year to year—well, there's a contract, but it's just for a year, and they can let you go at any time. While I was there, they let one young teacher go because they didn't like the fact that she was living with her boyfriend on campus. They said, You can't live with your boyfriend on campus.

JM: So, they definitely wouldn't like you and Carme. (laughs)

EB: No.

JM: Wow. Goodness.

EB: So we knew that had happened, so we just kept it low key. We were just good buddies. I call it our buddy mode. We were out of our buddy mode only two weeks in the summer because we got time shares up in P-town² for two weeks. (laughs) Otherwise, we were just best friends. That's all it was.

JM: It must have been really nice coming here, then—

EB: It was wonderful.

JM: —feeling like you could just be yourself.

EB: It was incredible. It was the best.

So, aside from [my daughter] going to Perkiomen, the second big thing, to go back to your original question—

JM: Okay. Yeah. (laughs)

EB: That was the second turning point. All I did one time is Google in “gay and lesbian retirement,” quite a while ago, and lo and behold, [the community] came up. We came down here and we looked at it, and at the time all they had were the triplexes. They were very small. I don't know if you've been in—I don't think you've been in a triplex.

JM: I don't think so. Is that back here in Phase II?

EB: They're right over there.

JM: Okay.

EB: They are in Phase II.

JM: Not the one that Josephine and Beatrice live in?

EB: No, that's another duplex like mine. But as a matter of fact, you can see a triplex from right in my (laughs) computer room.

JM: Okay.

EB: That's one of the triplexes. So, it's very small, and it's all they had. They had the single-family houses, which are at the other side, but there were none for sale. And all they had were these triplexes, so we said, “We like the place, but we can't live there,” especially—we've got her grand piano.

² Provincetown, Massachusetts, also known as “P-town,” is a popular gay summer resort.

JM: This is a nice, spacious place here.

EB: It really is. This is perfect. So we left, and less than a week later the real estate woman who was here at the time called back and said, “We’re thinking of making duplexes that will be on the same plot, but instead of dividing it into three for triplexes, it’ll just be divided into two.” So, she sent me the plans and we said, “We love it. This is great.” We put down a thousand dollar deposit.

JM: And then—so, they started building it after you—?

EB: Yeah, after, so it was sight unseen. But we had seen the triplexes, we had seen the location, and we had seen the work that they were doing.

JM: All online, or did you drive down and look at it?

EB: No—we did come down. We didn’t drive, we flew down.

JM: Okay.

EB: So, we were down here twice to see it, but we never saw it built until we got here. But what we did, what was really nice, was she said if we were the first ones to buy, and since she knew we weren’t coming for a while—in fact, we didn’t think we were coming until June of 2009—and she said, “We’ll just use your place as the model home and office. And then, we would pay for your condo fee, and we would pay all the utilities.” I thought, Yes! That sounded good to me. So we did that, and then she wrote the contract for a year and a half. She was positive it would be sold within a year. She wrote it for a year and a half.

So, we did have it for a while, and then the economy tanked and everything. But what really happened before the economy tanked is somebody didn’t do their job, and they lost—they let the permits run out.

JM: Oh, no.

EB: Somebody wasn’t watching. It was just really aggravating. They let the permits run out, and it was a long time before they got the new permits. So meanwhile, they had all these deposits that they had to give back, because the place would’ve been sold, you know, if the permits hadn’t run out. That was very, very sad.

JM: Now there’s, what, eight empty places? You think that—because of that?

EB: Up at the other end, there are three empty places, houses. There’s one over here that’s empty, and then there’s a few lots. Yeah, I guess there might be as many as eight homes.

JM: That's the number I saw on the website, so maybe it's (inaudible); it's not updated). Do you think that if that hadn't happened that everybody would be—?

EB: I am certain this place would've been sold out.

JM: That's too bad.

EB: That was really aggravating. It was really, really, really sad.

JM: That's too bad.

EB: But anyway—I forget where I was going with that. (laughs)

JM: Well, you were talking about, when you first looked down here—

EB: Oh, yeah.

JM: —which made me wonder about how—what kinds of things you were looking at when you first came? What were you checking out to make sure they had or didn't have?

EB: Well, they said they were going to have a pool, and so we were disappointed when the pool never happened. And they said they were going to have a pool and clubhouse. So we were a little disappointed, but I think I wasn't as disappointed as some other people here. Some other people were not just disappointed, but angry. They felt like they were lied to. But I'm a little bit more pragmatic. And because our first priority, really, was to live in a small development, and be able to know everybody. That's what we really wanted. We wanted to be able to know everybody. We liked the fact that it was on one floor, that we had no more steps. I was so thrilled to have no more steps! (JM laughs)

And there is the club—I don't know. The big development down the road—it's just [a short distance away]—has a wonderful pool.

JM: Oh, okay. And you can use their pool?

EB: We can use their pool, and it just costs 275 dollars a year for both of us to use the pool—that and the hot tub, and we can use the fitness room there, too. So, I've got—for 270, it would be a lot more expensive—it would go up. Our dues would go up a lot more than 275 dollars a year to maintain a pool and clubhouse, because we are so small. We're not like one of these great big developments that's dividing it with 150 other people. There's—

JM: But you like that. That's what drew you here, you were saying?

EB: I liked the fact—what drew me here, really, was the fact that it was small. I liked that. And when we got down here, the light is different. I don't know if you've ever been up—have you been up north?

JM: A little bit. But it does seem brighter in Florida. (inaudible)

EB: It's bright down here, and it's clean. It's so dingy up there in the north. Plus, we are so happy to be done with ice and snow! I cannot tell you—

JM: (laughs) Especially today; there are some people who are having snow days from school.

EB: Oh, awful, awful! We are so happy to be down here where it's warm. So, the weather drew us down here, the size of the community, and we just did not know how wonderful everybody turned out to be. This is just absolutely fantastic, just wonderful. You know, I said before we had to be closeted up there. And so even though we did have friends, we couldn't tell our friends anything. We did have one lesbian couple that lived back in Schwenksville. But even then, you know, we still had to be a little bit tiptoeing.

JM: Did they know?

EB: Yeah, they knew. They were the only ones. But everybody else where we lived—our best friends we had to be closeted from.

JM: That's so hard.

EB: And—yeah, it really is very, very different.

And then we came down here, and when Carme got sick, you realized how the community just surrounds you with love. They're so helpful. Everybody wants to help. I've gotten food. People bring over—without me saying a word, they just bring over food. Or, people are always asking me, “Can I walk [your dog] while you're at the hospital?” Or, a couple of times—I don't drive at night, so people drove me over to the hospital at night and then picked me up a couple of hours later. Everyone is—and they just want to know— Another neighbor over here, she made Carme two hats that she can wear, since she has no hair now from the chemo[therapy]. So she made hats for us. People are just so good.

You know, that whole box is filled with cards.

JM: Oh, wow!

EB: Our next door neighbors, Rock [Wales] and Max [Wales] over here, every week bring flowers and send a card. Every week they send flowers over to the hospital. Just—people are just so incredibly kind. They're just wonderful. Someone—over there, (...),

who is a really great photographer, she took all of these photographs and an album of a bunch of other photographs, because I said that we—

JM: Oh, that's a great picture. She's playing the piano.

EB: Yeah, and the one that's over on that table over there.

Because I said that we didn't have any photographs of us. We didn't have anything. And so she came over, and she's a really wonderful photographer, and she took a bunch of photographs. And then—they're just wonderful, really. And then, (...)’s partner had some operation on her foot. (...) hates to cook, so people made up a schedule, and every two days they brought a casserole to (...) so she wouldn't have to cook. So—

JM: Who started the schedule?

EB: Well, she happened to say—(...) actually said, “I want casseroles!” (JM laughs) You know, I think she was half kidding. So Katherine [Kline], one of the girls on the other side, decided she'd get together and start making a schedule. She made a schedule and sent it out. “Who would like to do this?”

JM: Email?

EB: Yeah, just emailed, “Who would like to sign up for casseroles?” So, people wrote—made up a list of stuff. People do things for each other all the time. There's two women over here, (...) and (...), and they're much older than we are, and they really don't have the resources to do very much. They grow tomatoes on their front porch, and (...) gave me three tomatoes the other day. That's something that they can do.

JM: Those are the best, fresh tomatoes.

EB: Yeah. People are just so wonderful. They are just incredible.

JM: It's so nice to hear.

EB: I'm so glad we're down here. I left teaching two years early. I sort of had it up to here (laughs) with—I think this No Child Left Behind law³ that they have for teaching is the worst thing that ever happened to public education, the worst. And it just means that all you're doing is teaching to the test. You're teaching for a test or whatever. That just got me fed up, so I left teaching two years early and took a 6 percent cut in my retirement fund, but it's the best 6 percent I ever spent. And we came down, and I'm so grateful we're here, with Carme being so sick. I'm so grateful we're here instead of up north, because I know even though people would [say], “Oh, I'm so sorry to hear about your friend,” you know, it's a different support.

³ No Child Left Behind was passed in 2002, and requires schools to administer a state-wide standardized test to all students.

JM: Right, right. It's much different when people say she's your friend, as opposed to everybody knowing who she really is to you.

EB: Yes. Yes. And then we joined—well, I never did join, but I go to the Unitarian church down here in [nearby location], not very far, and I joined the choir there. So I really enjoy that. And of course the Unitarian church is very open, too. Most the people there—there's still a couple of people that are, “Well, how is your friend?” but most people there know. I think they're older people that just can't bring themselves to say any more. (laughs) But they go to the Unitarian church, so they know! (both laugh) But that's really nice.

And she was hoping to become the accompanist, because the accompanist who is there right now is eighty years old, but he's really failing. He's not really able to do the—to accompany anymore, so that's what she was hoping, to be able to do the accompanying. But I'm not sure she'll be able to do that, even if she gets well this time. I just don't know whether she'll feel as if she can commit to something, because it's practicing two times a week.

JM: Yeah, that's a lot.

EB: She loves playing. In fact, whenever I get any new music, she always makes copies so that she can play the music for me and help me practice and all. But I don't know about actually committing to accompanying. But she was hoping to do that, that's what's disappointing. That's why she quit the band, which she really, really loved, too. (sighs) I just want her to come back well.

JM: Yeah. So, when you came for your first visit down here, did you meet some of the neighbors then?

EB: Yes, we did. As a matter of fact, the woman who—(...), who was the real estate agent down here, she was really, really good. She took me around to meet some of the women.

JM: Does [she] still live here, or—?

EB: She doesn't anymore. It's too bad, because she was really good. But she was a very strong woman, and at the time the other woman who was the trustee here was a very strong woman, too, and they just butt heads. So (...) left. But she was really good. I am certain that everything would be sold if [she] were still here. She was really good with marketing and everything, but she's gone.

But she took me around to meet some of the people, and that was really fun. At the time they weren't having parties, and it was only the houses up there. In fact, I'm not sure if there was anybody—I don't think there was anyone living in the triplexes at the time who is still here. I don't think there was anyone, because (...) and (...) came after that. And

nobody lived there; that house over there was the guest house, so people who just wanted to see the community would come and stay there.

JM: They could stay the night and stuff?

EB: Yeah, they would stay.

JM: Was that what you all did?

EB: Yeah, that's what we did. That was nice.

JM: You said there were no parties yet? When did the parties start up?

EB: There might have been parties up front, but I don't know about them. There weren't any at the time.

JM: Are parties mostly sort of official, like on a website, or are they more, you know, word of mouth? So and so is coming?

EB: I'm the social committee chairperson of this end, (...), so even though we're one community, we have two separate documents. For instance, the single family houses up there are not allowed to rent. They have it written up in their documents that they can't rent. But back here, we're allowed to rent. Also, we have different sets of rules, so that if—we get insurance with our condominium fee. So we have a higher condominium fee, but with that comes all the insurance. If anything—if there's a fire in the house, we're responsible for the contents, but the community is responsible for the outsides and everything, and the roof. So, if the roof starts caving in, the community has to pay for it, whereas they don't have that insurance up front.

So, we have two different sets of documents. Although we're sort of separate, we're still one community, so most of our parties are together. We just have lots of different—at the drop of a hat, you know, we have a party.

JM: Seems like it, yeah.

EB: Yeah. We have one for Mardi Gras. We're going to—Max [Dare] and Ernest [Marc] are having one for St. Patrick's Day. Then we're having one at the picnic grove for Cinco de Mayo.

JM: Oh, wow.

EB: We'll have—we're having something in April called a mini pearl, a petite prix. It's like we're going to the cul-de-sac up at the houses and we're having those toy remote control cars! (JM laughs) We'll have a race around the cul-de-sac! (both laugh) It's just an excuse to get together. We have the regatta, toy boat regatta, every summer. We'll have something for Memorial Day, I'm sure. We have something for—last Labor Day,

we had a continuing—we had a picnic out there between Rock and Max W.'s, our next door neighbors and us. We had picnics out there.

So, we just have all sorts of things. (...) and (...) always have the big one at Christmas time, and they had Carme play. (...) used to be a professor of music up at West Chester [University of Pennsylvania], but he's eighty-five with bad arthritis so he can't play anymore. So, he asked Carme to play Christmas carols, and we sang and had a big thing.

Most of our parties are all potluck; everybody chips in and brings stuff.

JM: Yeah, otherwise it'd be so expensive.

EB: Yeah. And sometimes there are some private parties where we have smaller things, like we had something at Christmastime. It was just a few people. And New Year's, just a few people, and maybe a group had their own small private parties. But most of them are everybody. And everybody's always asking each other for dinner, (both laugh) all the time. I went over to Rebecca's house for dinner last night. We've had Josephine and Beatrice over I don't know how many times; at least a dozen times. (...) and (...) have us for dinner.

JM: So who's the best cook? (laughs)

EB: Let's see. (...) 's a great cook. (laughs) She's a really good cook. But everybody—let's see. Marge [Kirchner] and Pat [Landry] have breakfasts. They've had two or three breakfasts. Rock and Max W. had breakfast one time for a bunch of us. And we go out to dinner at restaurants. You know, a group of us will go out.

JM: How's the city? Is this a fun place to be?

EB: Yeah, [nearby location] is really large. It's so spread out. I think it's about fifty-three thousand; I think I looked it up on the web. There's a lot of restaurants. And we're close to the hospital—we're only [a short distance] from the hospital, which is really great for us, and [a short distance] away from the Unitarian church that I go to. And then down a ways in [nearby location] there's an MCC church, a Metropolitan Community Church, so I imagine maybe a few of the people go to that around here.

JM: Sounds like you like the [local] area.

EB: I really do. I really do! And we're so close to the Gulf [of Mexico], so the [nearby beach] is about [a short distance] away.

JM: Not bad at all.

EB: Yeah. It's great, it's really—I feel like I'm on vacation every day, honest to goodness. I mean, when we go—when Carme was well, we would go to the pool every single day. And she'd be in the pool—even if it was seventy degrees, she'd be in the

pool. Me, I'd be in the hot tub. (laughs) So I'm just sitting there looking at the palm trees, there's an alligator on the other side of the fence—

JM: Here, in this lake here?

EB: —the gulls— Not in this one, but where we go to swimming, you know, there's an alligator on the other side. He's out there sunning himself, and the gulls are going around and the egrets are looking for scraps, and I'm thinking, This is paradise. This is absolute paradise. I love it.

And I think the people who've lived here all their lives don't know. (both laugh)

JM: How beautiful it is.

EB: Yeah, yeah. When you come from dirty— (laughs)

JM: Cold.

EB: Smoggy—and cold, yes. We still kept one of our scrapers. It was funny, because a couple of weeks ago, there was actual ice on the windows, and when we got up it got cold enough. No one could scrape their cars that they had left out overnight; they didn't have a scraper. (laughs)

But [I] love it down here. I just want Carme to get well so we can enjoy it again.

JM: So, do you think that the community has changed at all since you moved in, whether it's, you know, the community here in the neighborhood, or in [nearby location]? Maybe it's gotten bigger in the past few years?

EB: We haven't really lived here long enough. We came down in June of 2007. So we really haven't lived here long enough to see any changes in the larger community. In this community, some people have moved in, which is really, really nice. There have been a couple—with the economy doing so bad, so poorly, there have been three houses—of the single family houses—that have foreclosed, which is very, very sad. No foreclosures back here, partly because we can rent. So, there's—

JM: Has anybody done that yet? Have they needed to rent them out?

EB: Yes, we had two—(...) and (...) bought here, and I guess they must have either bought for either investment, or thought that they would move down here at retirement and never have moved down. But they did rent out their place, and then their renter died a few months ago.

But there really haven't been any changes. We've gotten, I think, more social things, just because more people have moved in, and we have the changes of pets. When we came down here, I started a pet directory. So, I went around and I got the pictures. People sent

me pictures of their pets, and I put that on and I put a little blurb about each one of them. So we have a pet directory. And people are—

JM: Is it up on the web?

EB: It's just a PDF [Portable Document Format] file, so I sent it to whoever wants it. You know I hadn't even thought of putting it up—I wouldn't even know how to put it on the web! But, we're in the process of changing the website, because we really—the webmaster that we had before really wasn't doing a very good job of it, because she was ill. So, we're taking it over now ourselves, and we're in the process of changing it. So it will still be [web address of community].

JM: And then there's a dot-org [.org], too.

EB: There's a dot-org, and that's mostly for the other houses, the single family houses. And it also, on that website, has the houses that are for sale up there. So that's really a good one, that's the marketing tool for them. But we go to there because that's where we can get the newsletter that we have, and the calendar that's on there. Like Allison [Hershey], who lives up front, she has a lesbian spirituality potluck every month. (laughs) So, uh—

JM: So what, do you pray; do you meditate?

EB: I haven't gone to it, (whispers) cause Allison's a little weird. (both laugh) But, yeah, I think they do meditations, and they do some sort of—and I guess they do prayers and things like that. But she has one.

JM: So, it's open to all religions, then?

EB: Yeah, yeah.

JM: How about—I was wondering, for the renters around here, are there rules about who's allowed to move in, about—I don't know, 'cause you said there was a straight couple that lives here. So I wondered if—

EB: Yeah, yeah. In fact, there was another straight couple there, in the single family houses. They bought it originally because their son was gay, and they thought he might inherit it when they were gone.

JM: Oh, okay. Was he young when they bought it?

EB: I don't think so. I never met them, but from what I understand, even though they thought they would be able to fit in the community, and the wife was pretty good with the community, the husband really was not very comfortable. He would say things like, "Well, I know all about you folks," that sort of thing.

JM: “You folks.”

EB: Yeah. He was a military man, so that explains it all. So, they did move out even before we moved in here, and they let their house go into foreclosure. It’s a cute little house, you know; it’d be great. It’s a nice little house.

JM: Other than the dad—or the husband—having some—

EB: Issues.

JM: —issues, did anybody—did the other neighbors, the people lived here, have issues with them?

EB: No, no! Now, I must admit the people who live back here, [the other straight couple], are wonderful. They are really wonderful. In fact, they went to look at a nearby development and then they just saw this and they came over and then liked it a whole lot better. And we told them right up front, “This is a gay community.” “Hey, we don’t care!” They’re just fine. We just love them. They are wonderful.

Now at first, their next door neighbors were not real pleased about them being a straight couple. But they’re the only ones. And now they—“Oh, if everybody is—if straight people like (...) and (...), that’s fine.” But they were nervous about that. They felt like, We moved into a gay community, and this is what we wanted. But nobody else feels that way. Everybody else—so that’s one, one couple who feels that way.

JM: Has that evened out at all, or is it still pretty tense?

EB: No, they’re fine; they’re fine with it now. Sort of like a straight couple learning that their next door neighbors are gay, and then eventually getting to feel that they’re okay. It just had to go backwards. But they’re great. (...) is wonderful with landscaping and plants and everything, so he helps his neighbors nearby and he does all this planting. And his wife is still working—they’re both still working. He’s working for (...), and she’s a teacher.

JM: Are they younger?

EB: Uh, not much younger—yeah, I guess [the wife]’s younger, but [the husband]’s around our age. Maybe he’s in his middle fifties. So they’re all ages. I guess the oldest person who lives here is eighty-five, and then there’s—I guess the youngest is around fifty.

JM: Okay. Was the rule that one person has to be fifty-five?

EB: It is—I think it might be at the other side. But we are not a retirement—I think we don’t go under those guidelines. And we wanted to change, but it costs money to change, to be an actual fifty-five and older community where one person has to be fifty-five. It

costs money to change it, and then you also have to get agreement of the taxing board. Means the school district would have to approve us being able to be a fifty-five and older, which means they lose money.

JM: Oh, right.

EB: And in this economy, I am certain they are not going to be—

(dog pants)

JM: He [the dog] wants to be interviewed, too.

EB: Yeah, he wants to eat your recorder! (both laugh) Sorry.

JM: That's funny.

EB: Sorry.

JM: So, I think you might have touched on everything already, but just in case you have anything to add or talk about— What do you think about all the things that—what do you find the most important about living here? You talked about community; is there anything else?

EB: The people.

JM: Yeah?

EB: Because—it sounds like a marketing term, but we really emphasize the community and the neighborhood here. Because you can definitely buy less expensive homes, you know, in the area with more amenities, maybe even a home with a pool, if you wanted to. But these are extremely well-built homes, first of all, which are really nice, because when a—some guy came to see if we could get a mitigation for our wind insurance, and he came and was doing the building inspection. He said, “These are really well-built; they’re like bunkers.”

So it's really well-built, but most of all, it's the community. They are just—everybody is just so wonderful. And what I'm really pleased to find out is there doesn't seem to be any backlash anymore for us being a gay community. I think there might have been a little bit of vandalism a few years ago, but there hasn't been any since we've been here in June of 2007. So I think that has gone away, because we stay fairly low-profile. Although we have a big rainbow flag, it's in the back now, and we're not flying it from a big, you know, pole.

JM: Did you have to move it because of something—?

EB: No, they just have it in front of the office, where the office is. So that's where the office is. And nobody is walking around like Wigstock⁴, you know. I really think that's what they expected, [that] we're really weird, and we're not. We're just—I like to call us picket fence lesbians, you know? (laughs)

JM: (laughs) Picket fence lesbians?

EB: Well, you know how everybody wants the suburban [lifestyle], with the white picket fence sitting around? You know? We're just like everybody else, paying our taxes and everything.

And we had a civil union up in Vermont when that first became possible back in 2003. But a couple—a few couples here actually went to California—

JM: Really?

EB: —before Proposition 8⁵ came, and they got married out in California. But we didn't do that, we didn't go to that extent, because it didn't really matter legally. That's what's really disappointing is the fact that the biggest thing is healthcare. We have to pay so much more in healthcare than a straight couple. It's really aggravating.

JM: Really? Okay. Well, you'd know all about that, especially now.

EB: Yeah, yeah. We have to pay twice as much.

JM: So—I mean, it's not on your school—?

EB: Not on mine, no. She has—her school was kind enough to allow her to stay on their policy. And I was in a public school, so I'm getting a pension from public school—which is the only way we're able to live here, is my public school pension and her Social Security. I'm not old enough for Social Security yet, but she is.

JM: So, how would you describe the neighborhood as a whole, in terms of the kind of people who live here? Are they—you were talking earlier about age, saying you knew about eighty-five to—

EB: Yeah, that's the oldest. There's a man who's eighty-five, who lives up there. There's nobody—I think the oldest person here at this end is seventy-eight. Describe it? Kind. Very bright people, you know, they're all professional people.

JM: I noticed that. A lot of people I talked to, you know, I was describing what I was doing for my thesis, and they said, “Oh, yeah, I wrote my dissertation on this, too.”

⁴ Wigstock is an annual outdoor drag festival that began in the 1980s.

⁵ Proposition 8 was a California ballot proposition on the November 4, 2008 election that eliminated same-sex couples' right to marry, which the California Supreme Court had allowed earlier that year. The proposition passed and became effective on November 5, 2008.

EB: Oh, really?

JM: Yeah, people were very—when I go home to talk to my family, you know, I have to talk about it in sort of a different way, cause they—because nobody in my family went to college, but—

EB: Oh!

JM: —coming to this party here, everyone's like, Oh, yeah, we've been there and done that. I teach college (laughs).

EB: Absolutely. Everybody—

JM: Amazing.

EB: Well, when you look at it, you realize how much it costs to buy—to purchase a home here—and that that makes sense. Very, very bright people. Very caring people, even though you have differences in this and that. And we've had little squabbles—mostly because somebody wants to do some landscaping and somebody else doesn't like the landscaping. That's been the biggest problem, which is crazy. They are really crazy.

But people here are just—stand behind one another. It's just wonderful. Now, we do have one man here who just wants to live here. He's gay, and I've never—(sneezes)

JM: Bless you.

EB: Excuse me. I've never even met him. I've never even seen him.

JM: Wow.

EB: And I think I saw him once. And he works down at (...). He does something backstage there. But he just lives his life; he doesn't come to any of the meetings, cause we have a meeting once a month, a business meeting. At the other end, they only have it once every three months, but we have one once a month. I think it's more like a social thing than anything else.

JM: Business.

EB: Yeah, yeah. I mean, we do do business. I'm the secretary, I take minutes; we do all that stuff. We have a regular treasurer's report and everything.

But people are just incredible here. That's all I can say, is the people. They mean everything. They are an extended family. I'm lucky because my daughter is definitely okay with me being a lesbian. She was thrilled.

JM: Really?

EB: I think it's more like, "Ooh, you're cool, Mom!" (both laugh) When she found out, she was really thrilled.

JM: How old was she?

EB: She was a freshman in college when I told her.

JM: Is that when you moved here, or—?

EB: No, that was way before I moved here. She was absolutely thrilled. And her husband's family is thrilled. We're like the stars when we go there. They all want to play *Newlywed Game*⁶ with us. I mean—(laughter) they just think we are the coolest people around. You know, ultra-liberal and all that.

But not everybody feels that way in their family. They are many people that are estranged from their family, because they're upset. (inaudible)

JM: Sounds like it's really important, then, that—you talked about how it feels like a family, that people can come here and feel that way.

EB: Yeah, it is. Really, truly.

JM: So, you were telling me about all the different parties and events you have. (EB laughs) Are there ever different events for women and for men? Are they mostly always together?

EB: We—well, Allison with her lesbian spirituality thing, that is just for women. And often—

JM: Do you think the guys feel left out?

EB: No. They don't feel left out at all. (laughs) Also, Rebecca, again up at the other end, she has—every Saturday night, she has movie night, and she just gets Netflix movies⁷ and just a bunch of us go over and just watch a movie. And so far, it's only been women. But it's not—

JM: Not officially women? Okay.

EB: Yeah, it's not. And Rock and Max W. had us—had women over for breakfast a few ago, and it was just the women, but then they turned around and had one for just men. So, Max D. and Ernest had a dinner just for men the other day.

⁶ *The Newlywed Game* is a game show in which newly married couples are asked questions to determine how well they know each other. It first ran in the 1960s and continued intermittently through 2009.

⁷ Netflix is an online DVD rental service.

But most the time it's women who get together, and it's not because we're exclusive. It just so happens—like, there's a bunch of us who go out to breakfast every so often, about once a month or so, and we just go out. Max W. asked the other day whether he could go and we said, "Yeah—remember there's going to be nine women, but you're welcome to come!" (both laugh) 'Cause his partner was going to be doing something else, and he didn't want to be by himself. And we said, "Yeah, you can come." And we go out to dinners sometimes, and it happened to be just women. So maybe the guys go out to dinner, and we don't know about it. But it's not exclusive. We're not saying, "Okay, women!" (laughs)

JM: Yeah. Because you were mentioning before about how you weren't really interested in living in an all-women's community, because you like—

EB: No, I like the diversity. The men add a lot. They really do. I would hate to have—not have known Rock and Max W., who are just so wonderful. I'd hate not to know them. Yeah, there's some really terrific guys here.

JM: That's great. So, are there any negatives to living here, or anything you'd change if you could?

EB: I think the only negative is the fact that I'm so far from my daughter. That's the only thing. She lives in Pennsylvania, where we came from. She's coming down next week.

JM: Maybe you'll show her the weather, and see—

EB: Yeah, they've been down here a number of times. In fact, they've been at—every time they come, there's a party going on. They always go to the parties, so everybody down here knows them, (laughs) knows who they are. But [my daughter's husband] can't stand the heat. [My daughter] would move down here in a second. She would love to move down to Florida. But [her husband] doesn't like it so hot.

So, that's the only negative. But when we lived up there where they were, she was on the other side of campus. I wouldn't see her much more than I see her now, because she was so busy. So even though I—that's the only negative, is missing a few of our friends up north. But other than that, no. No negatives. This place is great.

(talking about dog) Oh, he's just playing with it. (JM laughs) Those are his bags that I take out.

JM: So do you do anything outside of the neighborhood? Are you involved in any sorts of organizations or clubs?

EB: Well, we were in the community band, as I said. And I still am in the church choir, the Unitarian church choir. I still do that. But those are the only things that we're involved— For a while I was involved in more things. I was involved in a program where

I took a dog from the [guide dog school], and took him to an elementary school on Thursday morning and would read to the kids—

JM: I think Josephine does that, too.

EB: Yeah, that's who got me started on that, so—

JM: That sounds like fun.

EB: Yeah, that was fun. But then when Carme got sick I had to stop because I had to take her to too many chemotherapy things.

JM: And then, I was wondering—what kind of words do you use to talk about yourself, or living here? Whatever—what do you normally say, “gay” or “lesbian,” or what kinds of words do you like to say? Or do you just not use those kinds of words?

EB: No, I don't use the words. I guess because we're here, we don't need to.

JM: Don't have to talk about it?

EB: I probably don't make a deal about it, unless people already know that we're lesbians. And then I would say, “We live in the first lesbian—gay and lesbian retirement community.” So, I'm really proud that that's true, but there are so few of our friends that were open to that, you know, I just—keep quiet. We just live down in [this neighborhood]. That's all it is. It's just where we happen to live, and some people might not even notice.

Like, my ex-husband and his sister came down just the other day, as a matter of fact. They came for dinner, and they probably didn't notice that all of the couples are the same sex. (laughs) They probably didn't notice. And my family came down here, and I'm closeted to most of my family, too. And they came down for Thanksgiving, the first Thanksgiving we were down here. And I'm not sure they noticed anything, because I have a couple of Bible beltters that are in my family. Didn't make a big deal about it. So if they know, they don't talk about it.

JM: So if this place didn't exist, where might you be living instead?

EB: Oh, dear. (JM laughs) Well, we used to talk about that before we came down here, and I don't really know. We probably would have stayed up there, just because we didn't know any better. I knew I couldn't try to follow my daughter around, 'cause I never knew where she was going to be. And when I first told her we were moving down she said, “Mom, Florida! That's so stereotypical!” (both laugh)

JM: But it's nice!

EB: It is; it's beautiful!

JM: That's why everybody does it.

EB: I am so thrilled that we live here. So I am so thrilled that [this neighborhood] exists. It is the greatest. We used to have timeshares up at P-town, but when we moved down here we gave them up, because what do we need to be in P-town now? We did P-town for, like, nine years, so we know P-town backwards and forwards, and prices were going up. And just—we don't need it anymore; we're down here.

JM: How long do you think you'll live here, then?

EB: I don't envision leaving.

JM: Okay. You're set.

EB: We're set. We're set. I'm pretty much of a—we're pretty much homebodies. Carne used to—she did travel before I met her; she's gone to Europe a few times, and everything like that. So, she doesn't need to travel anymore. I'm pretty much of a homebody that doesn't really like to travel very much. We want to go to Disney World.

JM: (laughs) Not too far to travel.

EB: Isn't that hokey?

JM: Disney's nice, though; you've got to go.

EB: Yeah, yeah.

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

EB: Gosh, I can't think of anything.

JM: Okay. Do you have any questions for me?

EB: No. I don't think so.

JM: Okay. Well, that's all I have, then.

EB: Not on the record; it would just be like, "Oh, my God, do you have any pets?" (both)

JM: Okay, I'll take it off the record, then. (both laugh)

pause in recording

JM: So—something's very cool. (laughs)

EB: This is very cool—you know how I said that my in-laws—my daughter’s family all thinks we’re really great? Well, my daughter’s husband is a sperm donor for two lesbians who live in Philadelphia.

JM: That’s really great.

EB: And he’s done it twice. So each of the women is named (...). One is (...) and the other is (...). He was the sperm donor for (...), and she had a baby. Name is (...); he’s about three years old now. And then he was a sperm donor for (...).

JM: And they’re a couple?

EB: They’re a couple. ’Cause (...) couldn’t get pregnant a second time, because they tried, and so now he’s sperm donor. So, these babies will be half siblings.

JM: Yeah, that’s really neat.

EB: [My son-in-law] will be their father. So, I think that is so cool. That is really—

JM: It probably has a lot to do with him knowing you, you think?

EB: Mmm, I don’t know, he’s pretty—he was a theater major, so—(both laugh). So I think he was this liberal to begin with. I still think that is so cool that my son-in-law did that. I think that is really great. [My daughter] was a little bit hesitant. “He has two children, and we don’t have any yet!” (both laugh) But it was just more like, “Oh, darn it,”—like, she wasn’t jealous or anything. They go down, and so they’re godparents for these kids. I think that is so neat. So that was what I wanted to tell you.

JM: Thanks for telling me to turn it back on! (both laugh) That’s good.

End of interview