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Marge Kirchner and Pat Landry Oral History Interview

Marge Kirchner

Pat Landry

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

[Note: There is no formal start to this interview.]

Marge Kirchner: —When we said that, Pat and I really weren't together. It was kind of in the “should we, should we not” stage. And it was suggested that maybe I become involved in a group called New Century Singers, which is a group of singers that—it's made up of friends and members of the gay and lesbian community, GLBT community.

It was an organization that when it started—it started in my church. It was my minister's partner who started it. She had an extensive musical background, very, very gifted woman. We gave a hundred dollars to the cause. They asked several people for a hundred dollars to get them started, to buy music. Anyway, they asked me to become involved because they knew I was really lonely. So I became involved in it, and eventually it became a big deal and I became president of its board.

We had a lot of outreach that way, because I would have to find venues for us to perform in. I mean, I'll never forget when we performed in that Catholic church, that huge Catholic church, and just talking to the minister—the priest, excuse me—and everybody there was saying, “This is who we are, and this is what we present.” At the time, they were only really doing spiritual kind of music, but they have branched out and now do—they do a lot of music from around the world, really, from different cultures, but spiritual stuff. They have African stuff. They have Asian stuff. They have—

Pat Landry: Latin.

MK: —Latin cultures, from the Israeli culture—just all kinds of things. I can remember at one of those meetings in the beginning, (...), the director, artistic director, said, “Ah, someday we’ll sing in Carnegie Hall.” And they did about two years ago.

So, that was another way to see more of the community. Again, it was a teaching thing. When I went on the board of the Parish Resource Center—the Parish Resource Center is a place near us on Long Island. There are four or five of them in the country, not a big, big deal. But they provide consultants who work with people who are in churches where they need direction. How can we have a Bible school class where we can—what’s the best way we can get across this message? What can we do for Vacation Bible School for little kids? What can we do to bring more people to church? How can we get people to contribute more? All of this kind of stuff. And these consultants really work with people to help them to get the best information that they could have. And they also give lots and lots of workshops, and this and that.

I became somewhat involved, and eventually went on their board. I was the only lesbian on their board, the only gay person. And as a matter of fact, I never let it not be known. From the beginning, this was it. So, here I was in this religious capacity.

Jessica Merrick: That’s fantastic. You infiltrated!

MK: (laughs) Yeah. Yeah. And I just, you know—but this is who I am. It really—and then (laughs) they also—we got involved with their thrift shop. They have a thrift shop to help them with their financing, cause they really have a difficult time with financing and buying things and so forth. They pay rent of a dollar a year, because the building that they’re in was the original Congregational church of—a very large Congregational church.

JM: And they still have money problems? That’s a huge (inaudible) there.

MK: Well over a hundred years old. This building that they rent, and rented to them—

JM: A dollar.

MK: A dollar a year.

JM: How could they have money problems after that?

MK: Buying supplies, paying the bills for heat and electricity, and paying their workers.

JM: Okay.

MK: It's just all kinds of stuff. Anyway, so they have the thrift shop. And Pat and I decided, "Well, let's go to the thrift shop. Let's see what's around." Well, these people had just a bunch of junk all over the place. Remember that? And we went in and Pat started building shelves and all of this kind of stuff so that they could put their things on. We got—then I got involved with a Boy Scout troop, and a couple of Boy Scouts were doing their Eagle Scout project. We got them to do built-ins. I mean, (laughs) it became a major thing. And it was never, "This is Marge Kirchner." [It was] "Marge and Pat," "Marge and Pat," "Marge and Pat."

So, if we do anything, we feel very strongly that we educate, and that's what we want to do.

JM: That's fantastic that you do that.

MK: Yep.

JM: I think it definitely makes a difference. I think it's about changing one person's mind at a time.

PL: Yes, I really think that. Even though movements are important, sometimes movements can be turn-offs, too, depending on how they approach a situation.

JM: Right. Right.

MK: I have a cousin, (...), and she was born about a year and a month after me. And we were close as kids, but then we just really went separate ways. I'd see her at funerals and things. I very, very rarely saw her, although her mother—that's my mother's youngest sister—is a very dear aunt. She means a lot to me, and also to Pat. And as a result of spending a lot of time with her mom and helping her out financially and so forth, we got to know [my cousin] again.

Last year, we actually had a cousins' weekend, where (...) and [my cousin] came to our home. And [my cousin] really comes from a pretty straight background. I could see her father sitting there talking about the "spics" and the "yanks," you know and all of that kind—he was unbearable. And, "Those niggers live around the corner." Oh, God, it was horrific! And that's what she grew up with. And then she married. Her first marriage, that guy was just as bad as her father. I don't really know about (...). I think (...) was more accepting, but whatever. And then he died last year. But anyway, she has completely turned around.

JM: Really?

MK: Yeah. Hasn't she?

PL: Oh, yeah.

PL: Well, look at Aunt (...)!

MK: Oh, Aunt (...), please! Every time I call—she’s in a nursing home now—“So how’s Pat? How’s Pat?” So, every once in a while, Pat calls her. She’s going to go up there—

PL: And then her older uncle, Uncle (...)—

MK: Oh, my Uncle (...).

PL: When we got married, Marge wrote in—the local newspaper on Long Island is *Newsday*. And back—almost every year, it gets a major award for, like, the country, cause it’s an excellent newspaper. Marge decided to write into *Newsday* and send them a picture, because they have a married—uh, thing, comes out once a year, where they have—once a year—

MK: It comes out once a week.

PL: —where they show all newlyweds. Well, we were on the newlywed page! (laughs)

MK: And then my uncle sees it, and he calls and he says, “Marge, congratulations!” (both laugh)

PL: He sends us a copy of the article, and— (all laugh)

MK: Yeah. And he was just ninety years old, and I have not seen them in years and years. And we went to the party, the big family party. Everybody was very accepting, loving, caring, and “So thrilled to have you here.”

PL: Cause sometimes, it’s certainly not the—

MK: And these are people who (inaudible) know.

PL: —older generations who don’t accept it. Sometimes it’s the younger generations who don’t accept it. Sometimes—again, as we’ve found for ourselves—as you get older you get more accepting of things, instead of the opposite.

MK: Yeah. I would definitely agree.

PL: Since we’ve taken up half of your day— (laughs)

MK: Yeah, right, right.

JM: Well, now I just thought of another question I wanted to ask! (laughs) Is that okay?

PL: Sure.

JM: I was wondering about words, which words you like to use to describe yourselves. Cause there are so many words—and this might be a generational thing, but nowadays, people will be using the word “queer” as a positive thing, and there’s all different kinds of terms that people try to pick up and re-appropriate sometimes. I was wondering what words you usually use when you talk about yourselves?

PL: If I’m talking about myself, I say I’m a lesbian. Marge is my spouse, and—

JM: Do you say “wife” now that you’re married?

PL: No, cause we don’t use “wife”—

MK: No. And, as a matter of fact—

PL: People have a hard time with that.

MK: Even when we were getting married—remember, the minister asked, “What terms would you like during the service? What would you like?” We decided on spouse. We felt that that was a good one.

PL: People have a very hard time with the wife and wife thing. Again, I think that’s another way of educating people.

MK: And I don’t like it either. It’s too, um, heterosexual for me.

JM: Really? Does it make you think—

MK: Yeah. Although we do buy cards that say “To my wife.” (laughs)

PL: It was a big thing when we started doing that. (laughs) So, I use “lesbian,” and Marge is my spouse. I think it was very interesting, especially with the insurance thing. Now you’re doing all of these medical forms, and they ask if you’re married, and now we put yes.

MK: Yes.

PL: You know? Your partner—name—spouse, and it’s Marge. And I find—like, I talk to people on the phone sometimes who are calling me about insurance things, cause I got so many medical stuff. And I say, “My spouse, Marge, she.” And they’re “All right!” People have gotten to be amazingly accepting of this whole thing.

MK: It’s so—

PL: Just—it’s—

MK: I mean, what we have seen—when you think about it. All right, we're in our sixties. We're separated in age by seventeen days. (laughs)

JM: Wow!

MK: But when you consider that we graduated high school in 1960, so we consider—really, the end of the sixties [1960s], the seventies [1970s], the eighties [1980s], really like our time. And the difference is just astounding in everything.

PL: Mm-hm.

MK: Even credit cards. Well, you know, yeah. She's also on the account. Why? Because she's my spouse. You know, that kind of thing. Even (...) in New York, for heaven's sakes, he'd rather talk to you than me, because I'm such a stickler about how much he charges. That's the guy who takes care of the property. (laughs)

PL: And I say, "Marge, for the work he's doing, this is a good—you know, he's all right." (laughs)

JM: What about you? What words do you usually—?

MK: Um—you know, it's kind of hard to say, because I'm not usually in that situation, although I do see—

PL: Yeah, we're not.

MK: Because we're so out.

PL: But when you use a word—

MK: Then I use "lesbian." For years I wouldn't use it, because it had such a horrible connotative value. And I can remember when I was a little girl, probably seven or eight years old, and my dad and I were taking a walk. We were around the corner, and there was a woman standing out on her front stoop. And I said to my father, "Who is that?"

And he says, "Oh, you don't want to go near them."

And I said, "What do you mean?"

And he says, "Well, the women that live in that house are just different." I never knew what that—I've never even told you that.

PL: No, never.

MK: Just flipped into my mind! And, so, that was one thing that was way, way back there.

Then, we lived next door—when we lived in Brooklyn [New York], we lived next door to (...), who was such a wonderful woman, and her son, (...). And [her son] never married. There's a picture of—[her son] was older than my mother, and he was holding her when she was an infant and all of this stuff. When we were—I guess I was in sixth grade or so, I guess [the neighbor] had died, and [her son] had friends coming in and out. Well, one time there was a little fire in the yard, and my father tried to get whoever was in the house. And there was nobody there, and he put out the fire—my father was a volunteer fireman. And he went in the back, and here's all these women's dresses and everything. (laughs) And I can remember him talking about it!

So, I know that that was in my mind, also, that there were gays around me, and my father never talked badly about it. I don't know why he did about those women, what bothered him about them. Maybe because it was women.

PL: Because it was women.

MK: Maybe, yeah. I don't know, unfortunately.

JM: Do you think people have a hard time accepting women's sexuality?

MK: I think. One of the regrets of my life is that I never came out to my parents. I wasn't really sure who I was back then. You know? In the couple of years that my dad lived after my mother died, I certainly knew this was where I want to be. And he certainly was a part of my partner's—we were all together all the time. But I never said anything. I'm sure he knew, but I just never was able to get it out of my mouth. And I really regret that terribly, because we were extremely close, and I always felt like, "How could I not be this honest with him, this person who knows me so well?"

So, yes, I would use lesbian. I use spouse. I don't like the word "wife." Again, I don't like this heterosexual concept, that—

JM: Do you think "wife" is sort of, like, an exclusively heterosexual term?

MK: Yeah, I do.

JM: Because "wife" also denotes "husband," which is a hierarchy situation, isn't it?

MK: Mm-hm. Yeah.

JM: Makes sense.

PL: Also, one thing (laughs)—I'm thinking of being in the little—going back and forth to the airport one time, and that driver who said something about the two of us, and Marge said, "We're partners." And he said, "What business are you in?" (all laugh)

JM: What kind of cowboys are you?

PL: So Marge said, “No, we’re not in a business together. We’re partners.” And he’s, like, thick. This guy was absolutely thick!

JM: He’d never heard of it. Wow.

PL: So finally, we said, “We’re in a relationship together.” (laughs) And this was last year or something.

MK: It was a couple of years ago.

PL: So we don’t use “partners.”

MK: We don’t use the word “partner.”

PL: And it’s funny, because my brother, who’s very accepting of this, and we used to—he was always jealous of my girlfriends. (all laugh) In fact, that’s how I came out to him, because he was coming on to one of my girlfriends.

JM: Oh, jeez. (laughs)

PL: And I said, “We’re going to go for a walk, (...).” He’s six years younger than me. And we’re on the beach walking, and I say, “You know [a certain girl]?”

He says, “Yeah! She’s really hot!”

I said, “Well, she’s mine.” (all laugh)

He says, “Oh, that’s cool.”

But he has a business partner. They’re in a sign business. [His business partner] is very straight. He’s accepting, certainly, accepting of all this, but came from a very Italian, straight, macho thing. (...) is—my brother is one of—people see him and they think he’s gay. He’s not swishy at all, but he’s just—he’s very sensitive. He’s very emotive.

MK: Cries all the time.

PL: Talks to women all the time, knows all about women’s issues, hysterectomies and menopause and all this stuff. But he’s so secure with himself guys kid—they call—the guys in his motorcycle group, they call him—

MK: Gwendolyn!

PL: Gwendolyn! (laughs) But he is just the most secure straight guy I’ve ever met, and everybody falls in love with him. But, anyway, him and his business partner, (...), are

really good—they're very close friends. They'd be going out, and [his business partner] does all the—what can I say?—the procuring jobs for them, clients for them, signs and that. And my brother does all the manual labor in regard to that.

MK: Big signs, like hospital signs, stuff like that.

PL: Or signs for—like, he does the signs similar to the one out there that you see that says [the community's name], sandblasting signs and that. So anyway, [my brother's business partner] started introducing them as, "My partner, (...)." And finally—and a couple of times people would look at them funny, and [my brother] finally had to say, "(...), you can't use that term anymore, because you have to say business partner if you really want them to know what you're at!" (all laugh)

JM: That's funny. Well, there you go about breaking stereotypes, huh?

pause in recording

PL: —said a little earlier that it's not just the aging thing. It's really the being gay and lesbian. There are a lot of people here who are very closeted, et cetera, but there are a lot that aren't. So it's not a matter of fact that we only interact with ourselves. Many people here—and I'll be one of them as the (inaudible)—are doing things outside the community. Like Josephine [Carter] does so much with the guide dog group, and Rebecca [Heart] does a lot of stuff with the church, and so does—up front—

MK: Allison.

PL: Allison. People are involved in different levels with the community at large. So we're not just this isolated group that only interacts with each other. Each of us are doing something outside, besides. But it's just so nice to be able to be here. And the comfort is the family feeling, as I said before. You know there's always someone to count on.

MK: We lost all of our friends when we decided to be a couple, because I had been in this relationship for a very long time. Pat had been in her relationship for thirteen years. It was a big struggle.

JM: You left your old relationships to be together?

PL: Yeah.

MK: Yes. And that was it. So until we moved here, really—it's a testament to our relationship. We had no friends. We knew people, and I certainly knew people because of my organization and stuff, but as far as—

PL: We'd go out to places. I was still working and going someplace else for my employment, and Marge had a lot of groups she was involved in. But that's different than close friends.

MK: So until we came down here, we didn't really have that.

PL: And actually, the interesting thing is that part of being down here has reconnected us with some people up north that had kind of taken a hike when we first got together. There's a couple that have been together for fifty-two years.

MK: Next week, fifty-two years.

PL: And they rent down here in [nearby location] every year for two months. We connected with them, I guess, a couple—

MK: Maybe two years ago.

PL: Reconnected with them, and then, through them, reconnected with some other people up north that we had known earlier. So, it's interesting that we have made some connections here that have brought us closer to some of the people up north. But it's still very different. It's very different having friends that are three hours away, two hours away, even an hour away. You just don't easily—you don't drop in on your neighbor, or say, "Well, let's go to breakfast this morning," or, "Let's have a card game." When you're all living in the same area, it's much easier to do that, even though schedules can be wild, and getting people all together at a time can be difficult. But it just makes it so much easier.

MK: What's so bizarre is that we "lost all these people," in quotes. And yet, we've been able to maintain relationships with our former partners. It took a while. Well, it took you a little less than me. It took a long time for [my former partner] and I, but we're very close friends. She moved down to Florida. She lives at [another community] and we visit over there. I don't know if they're coming here for Easter this year, but it's a yearly thing. So, that has been nice.

PL: So, it's a great place to be.

JM: Gosh, I think you covered all my questions without me even trying to ask them. (MK laughs) One thing I was going to ask about that we sort of touched on, but I was wondering about how (...) and her husband, the straight couple, had moved in right next door, and—or as a part of your building, right? So, I know that in Florida laws are you can't have, like, an exclusively "you can't move in" policy for straight people.

PL: I think it's federal. I think it's a federal law, isn't it?

JM: Okay.

MK: I think pretty much.

JM: So—

PL: But Florida's very conservative, as you know. (laughs)

JM: But at any rate, you can't officially say, "Gay and lesbian people only." So, what do you think the community does to preserve at least its majority, or the—you know, there's not five straight couples moving in as opposed to one, and that sort of thing? And how do you think people generally feel about it who live here?

MK: There was a straight couple that lived up front. But they bought the house because their son was gay.

JM: Okay. So, they bought it so that he'd be able to meet people?

MK: Yeah, but he really didn't hang out very much, or whatever, and eventually they left. We had no clue as to how this happened, and began to realize that—the realtor here, (...). I don't know if you've met him.

JM: I haven't.

MK: Okay. He would do anything for a sale. (laughs)

PL: Even though he would tell [people this was a gay community], and all of our brochures, like when you go up to the sales—

MK: Office.

PL: —office, they give you a brochure that does say that it's a gay and lesbian community. And (...) would mention it, but never made a big deal out of it. But [he] didn't sell this house, the other realtor did.

JM: Oh, I didn't know that.

PL: Yeah, (...) didn't sell this house. But—

MK: They were aware, but it didn't bother them. I think that for them, the things that we gleaned over the period of time—and he's wonderful. He helps out everybody. He's really good. She is somebody you see less of, simply because she works, and when she comes home, she's exhausted. He's a (...), and she is a teacher-mentor for kids that are pre-school that have all kinds of difficulties. So, she travels from school to school. She gets home, she's wasted, but very friendly. Very, very. They come to parties. They gave a barbeque a couple of years ago.

But when I found out, I was absolutely livid. (laughs)

JM: I think it makes sense, since you move here with the expectation that—

PL: They can go anywhere—the straight people.

MK: That's what I'm talking about.

PL: That's our point. They can go anywhere. We can't. They can go anywhere and make community. We have to really work at making community. So, I think we've gotten on [the realtor]'s back a lot. Whenever I see anybody looking around, I always let them know, if they look like a straight couple or anything else, and make it clear that this is a very involved community. This is not just someplace you live. So, if you want to be here, you need to be part of the community, and this is a gay community.

JM: Have you ever had any adverse reactions when you said that to somebody?

PL: Um, no. Not really. I think now—obviously, in the past year or so, there's—people haven't been looking for homes. (laughs) So, everything has slowed down. But I think we're really on [the realtor] more and more to just express that point. You can't keep them out if they really want to move in, but you know—

MK: But you don't have to make it attractive.

PL: Mm-hm.

JM: Okay. So, I take it there was no policy where they asked anybody first, “How do you feel about these people moving in?” They just said—

MK: Well, he supposedly always said that he would ask them, but I'm not so sure he did. He might have said, “This is a gay and lesbian community.” And he might have said, “How do you feel about living here, knowing that?” But I don't think it ever went any further, because one of the statements that I made at a meeting wasn't, “How did they feel?” How about us?

JM: Exactly.

MK: How do we feel?

JM: That's what I wonder, really. They wouldn't have moved here unless they were comfortable, but—

MK: Mm-hm. Yeah. And the fact that [there] are so many people who are—they're all out in this community. They're not out when they leave. And how do they feel about it? So, that was a big issue for me. I don't think that—you know, in retrospect, they're wonderful neighbors. So, it's not like “You'd better move out” kind of thing. I don't feel that way at all.

JM: Do you think it shifted the dynamic, though, when they moved in?

PL: Not really. Too many of us, you know.

MK: Not only that, but that was the last building.

PL: Yeah. Well, no—

MK: Did they have the other building? Oh, yeah.

PL: The other building was done about the same time.

MK: Yeah. Where (...) and (...) are.

PL: And then (...) and (...) live there.

MK: But that's where the office was then, and the office went down there. But we were the last occupied building.

JM: So they were sort of at the end, anyway.

MK: Yeah.

JM: Okay.

MK: And there's such a big space between us and across the way. Yes, I don't think it changed the community at all.

PL: I think if another straight couple moved in, then—

MK: Yeah, then—

PL: —then we may be up in arms. Uh-huh. And now I feel like this bigot— (PL and MK laugh)

JM: That's all right. I think it's reasonable to feel that way.

PL: —who's in a community and a black person moves in. "Oh, my God. You gotta move out!" You know? But it's just—it's different.

JM: But you're right. You have been marginalized in certain ways that they're not. This, for you, is an experience that they don't need to infringe on, in a way. So I definitely think you're reasonable in feeling that way.

PL: As I said, they've been very friendly, and everybody's—no one has shunned them in any way. Quite the opposite, I think. They've been friendly, we've been friendly. I just wish they were gay. (all laugh) And who knows?

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

PL: New York. (laughs)

MK: Right.

JM: Just one house instead of two.

PL: Yeah. Absolutely.

MK: Yeah, there's—

PL: 'Cause as I said, we didn't buy a house, we bought a community. And it happens to be a lovely home and a great place to live for all different reasons—even just the area, et cetera. But we bought it for the community then. And it'd still be a home. I'm wondering how we'd ever get a community. (laughs)

MK: Probably.

JM: So, Florida's sold on you a little bit now, huh?

MK: Yeah, although this will never be my only home.

PL: She hates the heat. I would move down here tomorrow.

MK: I really can't tolerate it, I mean. By the time May comes, I know I'm going to be, "Oh, God. When are we going home?" You know, that kind of thing.

PL: And she loves our home in New York. The home we live in, Marge owns. Her and (...) lived in it, and she bought it from [that person].

MK: No. I bought it from us. (inaudible)

PL: Yeah. You bought it from us. The dog owned it. (MK laughs) So it's been Marge's home for many, many years.

MK: Thirty-something years.

PL: She really loves it up there. I mean, I love it, too. It's a lovely place and a lovely home, but—

MK: Wonderful property. We've got—when I retired, as a gift Pat had a koi pond put in, in the back yard. So when you look out our sliders, you just see this big pond and all these gardens.

PL: Waterfalls.

MK: It's a five—I guess it's now a six-level waterfall. It's just beautiful.

PL: There's lovely plantings, and—

MK: And another thing is that in New York it does get to be horribly, horribly hot, but it doesn't last. You might have a week of that horrible heat and humidity, but then you'll have a reprieve for a while.

JM: But New York has that horrible, horrible cold that does last. (laughs)

MK: Right. And we have been—we're very, very lucky, and we're very blessed. There's just no two ways about it. Financially, we're blessed. As far as our relationship, we're blessed. We're blessed with the people in our families that we do have, and the friends that we have here. But beyond that, we have a cleaning woman in New York, and I hire her in the winter. And two days a week, she comes into our house and makes sure that water gets run and the toilets get flushed and—

PL: If it's freezing up, or—

MK: Yeah. The guy who takes care of our property in the—during spring and summer and fall—

PL: The summer, you know, mowing and—

MK: —I contract with him to plow the snow and all of that stuff. So, the house never looks like it's empty. And then down here, we have Josephine and Beatrice to flush and run the water and stuff.

PL: Everybody who lives here has a house-buddy, where whoever it is—it doesn't have to be the person who lives next to you, but someone who has the keys to your home, and if you go anywhere, they're always the one who can check up on the house and make sure it's okay, or if you want mail brought in, or whatever it might be. (inaudible)

MK: Yeah. If there's—some people that when they service the air conditioners and stuff like that, they just let 'em in, and that's that. That was something we felt with Josephine and Beatrice immediately, 'cause we weren't here for a very long time.

PL: And then, also, the other thing that happens here for us, people who go back and forth, is someone in the community will pick you up at the airport. Someone in the community will drop you back off. There's always someone to—that's going to be helping you one way or another.

MK: We have one car that stays down here, and we have two cars in New York. And I really have had a difficult time with having only one car, because I'm very—

PL: 'Cause this is a place you don't just walk to things, too. You have to ride.

MK: Right. And I'm very independent. I want go out to lunch by myself, and I want to do this and I want to do that. So this year, I had my car shipped down. I'll have it shipped back when we go back in June. And it's great. We love it! It's something that we'll continue to do. We considered just buying another car, and then we thought, "Well, it'll be kind of stupid to own four cars." (laughs) Kind of, like, a little embarrassing. (all laugh).

JM: Well, these guys [pets] need cars. (all laugh) One car per family member.

That's pretty much all I have. Is there anything I haven't asked or mentioned that you want to talk about?

MK: What do you hope that this study will bring about?

JM: I hope that it brings conversation to the needs of people who are ready to retire, gay and lesbian people who are retiring. And I feel like there's such a need for places like this and, that if attention—and especially positive attention—and I don't hope to skew the story, but a lot of people just naturally, it seems, have positive things to say. And so my expectation is that what I end up saying will also reflect that positivity, and then bring—hopefully, you know, people will see that this isn't just a place to live. This is a place—like you said, it's about community. You didn't just buy a house, you bought a community, and that this is extremely important. And it's, I think, a place—I don't know—I think—just the short time I've spent here and the few people I've talked to, I feel like it's done—being here, it's done really good things for people and enabled people to live in ways that they otherwise can't. And I just think that's so incredibly important. So, I think attention needs to be drawn to it, and—

PL: Well, I think it's great that you, as a young person, are interested in looking into this now and realizing how important it is.

MK: How did you come across us?

JM: Through the web, actually. The same way you did.

MK: That horrible old website.

PL: The web—

MK: Thank God it's changing.

PL: Look at it soon, because it's going to be a good website. (laughs)

JM: (...)

MK: One of the things—you mentioned the dogs. These are our children. We don't have kids. These are our kids. You know, when I talk to my cousin, she'll always say, "How are the girls?" You know? My nephew [will say], "How are the girls?" (laughs) It's just—they're just accepted, because they are a part of our lives, a very, very important part of our lives.

PL: It's interesting, because when you see—usually when you see straight couples, they're talking about their kids all the time. And as you know, animals are so important to gay couples because the majority don't have their own kids. But even now—who was that big star who just lost his dog?

MK: Oh, the guy who was in that wrestling movie¹?

PL: Yeah.

MK: I don't remember.

PL: It was on the Academy Awards. That dog was like his child. And there are a number of straight couples, especially those who don't have kids, who feel the same way. But you find it more in gay and lesbian communities, I think. And this is such an animal friendly place, besides.

JM: Absolutely. Everybody's got dogs. It's amazing. I think that's how I lucked out meeting people was I just sort of got out of my car and started walking around, and—

PL: Everybody's walking their dogs. (laughs)

JM: —people are walking their dogs. (laughs) I said, "Hey! Can I talk to you?" Worked out really well.

MK: So that's what you did? You just came in one day?

JM: Yeah. Yeah. I was really—I was sort of nervous to do that because I didn't know if people would just shut the door in my face. "We don't want to talk to you!" I don't know. It would've been fine, and I would have done something else. But I think that's why—it may be also the letter I sent out. Maybe it was confusing, because it was meant to be—and maybe I should have reworded it—but it was just meant to sound like, "This is your choice, this is your—I'm here to do this, if you want me to."

MK: Right.

JM: But if anybody's unhappy with it, I'd rather just not do it.

¹ Referring to Mickey Rourke, who starred in the 2008 movie *The Wrestler*.

MK: Who did you talk to first? I mean, when you came in here, did you come to meet—well, you didn't meet (...), so did you—

JM: I called—

MK: —just see somebody on the street?

JM: I went to—I came back here to the leasing place, and I grabbed a flyer and I called the number for—cause [the realtor] was in the office, and [he] said, “Oh, I don't want anything to do with that. Go talk to Beatrice.” I didn't know who Beatrice was. (PL and MK laugh) I didn't know where she lived or anything.

PL: (laughs)

MK: Good old (...).

PL: Good old (...), yeah.

JM: I don't want to get anybody in trouble, here.

MK: No, no, no.

PL: That's okay. You can't tell us anything about (...) we don't know. (laughs)

MK: Plus, Pat is on the board of [one of the community's organizations].

JM: And—oh, actually, before I called him, I—maybe it was—I forget. I don't know which point it was, but I wanted—oh, maybe I—gosh, I don't know. 'Cause somehow I knew which place was (...)’s. I must've asked somebody, “Hey! Do you know where (...) lives?” Maybe I knew that he was the person, but I didn't know—I must've called (inaudible). But, um—so he said, “Oh, yeah, by that red car.” So, I went down there and he wasn't there, but I had my car parked there. So I was just kind of—had gotten into my car, and then I saw this car pull in. And it was (...)’s—or (...) and (...)’s car out there?

MK: Yeah. We really don't know.

PL: Yeah.

JM: And so—I mean, I was such a weirdo. Basically, I just waved at 'em and they waved back. So, I kind of walked up to 'em (JM & MK laugh) as they were pulling in their garage and I said, “Hey! Can I talk to you?” From there, they talked to me for a little bit, and he said, “You know, you should go talk to Juliana and Katherine, our neighbors. And I went and talked to them. And that's pretty much how it went.

I ended up just—after that, there were a couple more people with dogs that I ended up talking to. What happened was then I was around here and I saw (...)—that must've been

when I called (...), because I had my car parked there. And (...) saw me. So he started saying, “Hey! You looking for a house?” I think he was disappointed when I said no, but he said, “Oh, okay.” So, I talked to him about what I wanted to do. He said, “Well, let me introduce you to some people,” while he was walking his dog. And so, he introduced me to the couple on the corner. I don’t know their names.

MK: (...) and (...)?

JM: I think it’s this one, this couple.

MK: Oh, (...) and (...).

PL: Oh, (...) and (...).

JM: So, I met them, and then—

MK: (...)? Which (...)?

JM: He had three dogs, three little dogs, I think. I forget—it wasn’t (...) who’s with (...). It’s a different (...).

MK: Oh. (...) and—

PL: And (...)?

MK: (...) and (...)?

JM: I didn’t meet (...), but I think it would be.

MK: Oh, okay.

JM: And so—yeah, so he introduced me to them, and he was walking back up and he said, “Oh, and by the way, that’s Beatrice’s house. That’s who [the realtor] told you to talk to. And I said, “Oh, okay.” And he goes, “Well, go on in there.” And I was, like, (MK & PL laugh) “I don’t want to knock on the door. What if she—” And he goes, “No. Just go. They’re really nice.” So, I did that, and I talked to Josephine. Beatrice wasn’t home. So, I asked her—

MK: Oh, Josephine’s great.

JM: Yeah. So, I asked for her email. So, I started emailing Josephine, and Josephine didn’t email back. (laughs) So a couple of weeks ago, I thought, “Well, here we go again.” So, I came down. I just knocked on their door again, and I said, “Hey! Maybe you didn’t get my emails. Maybe I’m just bugging you, but I thought I’d ask one more time.” And they were so nice. They said, “Yeah. We’ll give you an interview right now.” They invited me to their party, and that’s how I met all these people. So, I just got really lucky.

MK: So, who do you have that you're going to interview, or who have you [interviewed]? Just curious.

JM: Yeah, definitely. I interviewed Ernest [Marc] and Max [Dare], and I interviewed Evelyn [Bath]. (...) and (...) said they might, but we don't have anything set up, so, I'm waiting to hear back from them. I'm going to be talking with Rock [Wales] and Max [Wales] on Sunday, and I talked to Juliana [Sabine] and Katherine [Kline] yesterday. I talked to Josephine [Carter] and Beatrice [Lohman] that first day. That's all I've got. I'd be happy to talk more people, but I'm not sure who to ask or how to—

PL: Matilda and—

MK: Matilda and Abigail [Carr].

PL: Yeah, I would think that they would—

JM: Oh. Actually, I did—Abigail said she might be interested, but Matilda doesn't want to.

MK: Really?

PL: That surprises me.

MK: That's a surprise. Rebecca Heart.

PL: Yeah. Have you interviewed Rebecca?

JM: Is she the Rebecca who used to be a nun?

MK: Yeah.

PL: Yes.

JM: I don't know if she was—I didn't—I guess maybe the problem was— (phone rings) Sorry. At the party, maybe I was a little bit nervous, and I didn't want to be too aggressive if people weren't interested.

PL: I'll mention it to Rebecca.

JM: If you want to tell people, I'd be so happy for it.

PL: She's living by herself, up front. She's one of the people that's having a hard time financially, trying to keep—especially with the market and the way things are. But she's very active in a lot of things that go on in the community. She's a retired nurse.

(MK speaks on the phone in the background)

JM: Yeah. I'd love to talk to her. I'd really love to talk as many people as possible, but it's just a matter of—I want it to be comfortable. I want everybody to feel good about it, and if people don't, then— But you know, it might help if you said, “Well, I did it, and it wasn't too bad,” (laughs) or whatever, I don't know. Whatever you think.

PL: I'll mention it to Matilda, and Abigail, too, 'cause I think—

MK: Yeah, and Rebecca, definitely. And what about (...) and (...)?

PL: Uh— I don't think so.

JM: I got (...)’s email, and I have it—I wrote it; I have it in my backpack.

MK: It might be that you just interview (...), of the couple, because (...) works a lot, but also, (...) is very private. Extremely.

PL: They're both very private, but (...) even more so. (...)’s kind of more reclusive in some ways.

You know, I think that's the other thing about—well, it's something about getting older. But it's also, like, with living in a community, you really get to see—when you first meet people, you get an initial impression, like we all do. But after you get to meet people, you find out, “Oh, there are things that I really don't like about them,” and things you do like about them. And I think part of getting older, at least for me, is beginning to accept people for who they really are. This is—(...) won't answer the phone or won't come to the door if she's home, because that's just her thing. Well, that's [her]. And I like [her], and when we do things together, we really enjoy her. But everybody has—and I think, as you get older, people have more quirks, too. So, it's kind of getting accepting of that kind of thing, too, that's part of community.

MK: But also, we should mention this to Allison [Hershey].

PL: Yeah.

MK: And to (...).

JM: I did meet Allison. I hope I'll be able to talk to her. I've got her number.

MK: Okay.

PL: She'd be a good one. She's been here a long time. She lives by herself.

MK: Allison, she's the one who has—

PL: M.S. [multiple sclerosis].

MK: M.S. She walks with a staff, and she's a trip. (laughs)

PL: She's a trip.

JM: She was the one that was all decked out, right?

PL: Yes.

MK: Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

PL: She is—she does more things than everybody else in the community combined, as far as activity goes. So, she can tell you—

MK: She's had M.S. for thirty-nine years. Thirty-nine?

PL: Mm-hm.

MK: I think. I mean, it's just astounding. And she's just—

PL: Doesn't stop her.

MK: That's all? “Yeah, I fell. I couldn't get up, so I figured well, eventually somebody'd knock on the door.” (all laugh)

JM: Wow. It's good to have a good attitude like that.

PL: Yeah, sure.

MK: Yeah, she's really amazing.

I don't know that you would ever get (...) and (...) (MK and PL laugh) to agree to an interview. (...) and (...)—they're an elderly couple that live in one of the triplexes. (...) was president here, and she was the person who fought every single thing that we wanted to do. And yet, she and I have a good relationship. (laughs) But I don't know that they would ever— they're very private.

PL: Yeah. I mean, that's private not because you're an outsider, but that's just how they are in general. They're private with us.

MK: Right. Nobody ever goes in their house, except when I bang on the door and say, “I have to talk to you about something. I can't believe you did this.” (MK and PL laugh)

PL: I would think that any of the non-responsive people have nothing to do with you in any way, but just—they're just people who don't want to talk about themselves.

JM: They're quiet.

PL: Yeah.

MK: Did you meet (...) and (...)?

JM: No.

end of interview