

**Voices of Feminism Oral History Project**  
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College  
Northampton, MA

**ANNE MACKAY**

interviewed by

**KELLY ANDERSON**

September 21, 2003  
Orient, New York

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with generous support from the Ford Foundation.

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### Narrator

Anne MacKay (b.1928) is a retired teacher who has spent most of her life in New York City and Orient, NY. MacKay taught theater at Dalton and Horace Mann Schools and retired in 1992. Her activism began with her first Daughters of Bilitis meeting in 1969. Most of MacKay's feminist engagement has been "community" oriented rather than "political," in her words. A writer, poet, and theater producer, MacKay put together a number of lesbian musicals and published two books: *Wolf Girls at Vassar: Lesbian and Gay Experiences 1930-1990* (St. Martin's Press, 1993) and *She Went A-Whaling, The Whaling Journal of Martha Brown* (Oysterponds Historical Society, 1993). She is one of the founders of the Lesbian & Gay Alumnae of Vassar College and has been involved in other community organizations including the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the Astraea Foundation, and the North Fork Women for Women Fund (NFWFWF). MacKay has been a crucial community builder in Orient, New York, and has been very active with NFWFWF.

The Anne MacKay Papers and the records of NFWFWF are at the SSC. The MacKay Papers include a 2005 interview with her.

### Interviewer

Kelly Anderson (b.1969) is an educator, historian, and community activist. She has an M.A. in women's history from Sarah Lawrence College and is a Ph.D. candidate in U.S. History at the CUNY Graduate Center.

### Abstract

The oral history focuses on MacKay's involvement in the North Forks' lesbian community, including NFWFWF, and her work in community theater production. She also reflects on her childhood, family background, and coming of age sexually. Because this interview is intended as a complement to MacKay's papers housed at the SSC (which include an unpublished memoir,) our discussion of her earlier years is light.

### Restrictions

None

### Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Two sixty minute tapes.

## Transcript

Transcribed by Luann Jette. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Kelly Anderson. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Anne MacKay.

## Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

### Video Recording

**Bibliography:** MacKay, Anne. Interview by Kelly Anderson. Video recording, September 21, 2003. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Anne MacKay, interview by Kelly Anderson, video recording, September 21, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

### Transcript

**Bibliography:** MacKay, Anne. Interview by Kelly Anderson. Transcript of video recording, September 21, 2003. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Anne MacKay, interview by Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, September 21, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 23-24.

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Transcript of interview conducted SEPTEMBER 21, 2003, with:

ANNE MACKAY  
Orient, New York

at: Above

by: KELLY ANDERSON

ANDERSON: This is Kelly Anderson and Anne MacKay on Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup>. Okay. We're in Orient at Anne's home. A beautiful day. And we are going to do an interview for the Voices of Feminism Project at the Sophia Smith Collection. I thought we would start with talking about NFWFWF and the community out here and then we'll weave in some of your own stories from your life before the North Fork. But I wanted to start with the community because that's sort of the orientation of the project. So why don't you just start by telling me some about the origins of the lesbian community here on the North Fork. What year and how did it come together? How did it begin?

MACKAY: Well, I was one of the few people who grew up out here. I mean there were others but we didn't know them or they died off. But I grew up here in the summers as a summer person. And then when I got to teaching-- I'd been in the professional theater first-- but the minute I was teaching I had the summers off.

So, the person I was living with at that time and I said we wanted to be out here. And we rented at first. And then my neighbor got to bugging us about getting your own house, which I did, we did. In 1959 we found this old house and had it moved here. And because I was a theater person I knew idiot carpentry. Although theater carpentry is meant to last a week (laughter) so I learned a lot.

We did most of the work ourselves except for the plumbing and all that kind of stuff. And at first we didn't know any lesbians here. I heard stories about people-- a few people from my grandmother, one person who I'm sure now is transgendered.

(mechanical trouble- a minute or so lost)

ANDERSON: Okay, start again what you were saying about the 70s.

MACKAY: By the mid to late 70s we were beginning to have parties. And everybody fit in the living room, or thereabouts. And we had beach parties. And they were really nice and fun. We were younger and we'd lug everything down to the beach and cook up clams and lobsters and everything. And we sang a lot.

Now one of the things that I think that has influenced our community is a strong feminism. These original people, particularly Dolores Alexander and Jill Ward, were all feminists. I hadn't been part of consciousness-raising. But certainly we were very strong in our feelings about all of this. And people started to come into the community. One of the jokes is the thing they say about certain ethnic groups, "They bring their friends." (laughter) But the friends come and visit and then want a house. [ANDERSON: Right] And we were beginning to get an influx of people.

Feminism also brought in softball games, which we'd never really done before. And my cousin Mary Dorman was a major part of that. I've known her for a long time. She's one of the people who sort of, well, she did and didn't really grow up here. In the summers she'd be here because she was abroad a lot. And we saw her through law school and she's been a very, very strong part of the community and has brought millions of people in one way or another. (Laughter)

We had a few boat parties. And the biggest party-- once the softball had been going, well, this was really in somewhere around '78 when Anita Bryant did her act. On the South Shore, Jean Milar, Frederica Leser, Jean got furious about this and decided to do a huge fundraiser. It was a huge party and then she had another the next year too and brought the South Shore and the North Shore women together. And it was a lot of fun and it did raise a lot of money.

With the second one we brought our softball team over to challenge their softball team. And it was very funny. Leslie Weisman dressed in her prayer shawl and blessed the team. And we even had little tee shirts. And we actually won although there was all this talk about the South Shore having recruited from the bars. Then we had a return softball game over here using the Orient baseball field. And we set up for a very large beach picnic off of my family's beach. And we even had two young girls parking cars everywhere because it was a walk to get to the beach. But it was one of those idyllic days where we sang and Cynthia Beer had the red canoe and gave canoe rides and it was really fun. We had a wonderful time.

ANDERSON: Did the softball teams have names or was it just North Fork, South Shore?

MACKAY: Well, as a joke when we went over to the South Shore we called ourselves the North Fork-- I can't remember--Sailing I think, no, "North

Fork Softball and Cruising Association.” And there was a real tee shirt, which I still have a copy of somewhere.

A later party-- which was after our little parties as we got much bigger, but it's one I will never forget-- was on the North Fork at a much richer house. Most of us didn't have much money at all. And Robin Rayburn-- who seemed to move in wealthier circles although I don't know if she had that much money-- was living with somebody at that time. They decided to have a very large Fourth of July party. And this was on the big bluff in Cutchogue, I think. It's all very elegant. And she had invited Jo Carstairs from the South Shore. Do you know who Jo is?

ANDERSON: No, I don't.

MACKAY: Well, we need a little research on that. Jo was very famous for being rich and independent. Life Magazine featured her at one point. And she usually wore a naval outfit. She owned an island down in the islands. And had her own army or police force there. She was certainly very, very gay. And a very strong presence. And Jo Carstairs, (I don't know if it was Carstairs Liquor but it was something.)

ANDERSON: There was a book.

MACKAY: Probably yes. There's a brief biography in one of those early lesbian books.

ANDERSON: Not Queen of Wale Cay, is it?

MACKAY: Yes. That would be it. I didn't read the book.

ANDERSON: Okay, I did. That's, okay, so that's who that is.

MACKAY: Anyway, she came to this party with an entourage. And they sat under the trees and played poker. And at one point somebody said to Jo, Well now so-and-so is wonderful, would you like to meet some people? She said, There isn't a face here worth meeting. Now by this time she's much older. And she's in total uniform and men's shoes and everything. And Beth, I remember Jane and Beth had brought a guest. And when they got there one of the owners of the house had a daughter. A young daughter was there who they met. And then later on they saw this other group. And the woman said to Marge, I think it's so wonderful, you know, you have your daughter here and your parents. And she was referring, of course, to Jo Carstairs. (laughter) That party was also very funny to me because they set off some fireworks over the cliff. And they didn't do it right and some bushes caught fire... [ANDERSON: oh no] ...a little bit. But the funny thing was to see all the dykes running down

to put out the fire (laughter). Very funny. So that was a different kind of party. Not my idea of great fun but it was interesting from that point of view.

ANDERSON: Did the North Fork and South Fork, socialize much together? How would you characterize the differences between the two communities? Was it all economic?

MACKAY: Well, there's a huge difference. I'm going to get to that in a minute. The problem is, of course, distance. And we would go over there in the days before the current traffic. Well you can't get over there now. But we'd go over once a year and swim and then make friends with a few people. There was a little bit back and forth.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: We also had some boat parties because by this time some of the South Shore had enough boats too and we'd take maybe twelve boats to one of the beaches and have a little swim there and stuff.

But in 1981, Jean Milar and Frederica Leser, in New York, were having a Christmas party. Frederica had also had very wonderful and elegant costume parties. I wasn't invited because we didn't, I didn't, really know her. But they sounded marvelous where people dressed up in various things. For one of them, I think, Sandra Scopitone dressed up as God.

ANDERSON: I wonder what that looked like. (laughter)

MACKAY: Well, there was one little video of it. But Olga Lee, who took it, lurched around a lot and the lighting wasn't very good. So, you know, you can't see much. They were wonderful parties. And they created a lot of style as opposed to the bar scene.

So, in 1981, I was at this Christmas party and one of the people from the South Shore said to me, Let's put on a show. I said, Alright. You produce it and I'll direct it because my career was directing theater.

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: And I had also, at that point, done a big college reunion show where four or five classes combined and everybody rehearsed separately then brought it together. We did a big rehearsal and gave it. So I knew it could be done. And she didn't think I meant it but I did. I went home and set up a possible idea of what it could be like. And then got after her. And she realized I was serious and we were going to do it. And the show ultimately was called the Midsummer Revels. And I've got a

whole box of pictures, wonderful stuff on that which will ultimately go to Smith.

ANDERSON: I think I have a tape of that.

MACKAY: Yes.

ANDERSON: Right, at the Collection, yeah.

MACKAY: But the tape isn't very good.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: For various reasons, but the pictures are fabulous.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: One of the things from the very beginning I wanted was, I mean it was a joke, but I wanted to do an opera on the *Well of Loneliness*. Now we had talked about this jokingly among friends and we got bogged down because everybody wanted to play Stephen. And secondly, everybody got distracted about their own program notes-- like Sylvia said she was somebody welcoming Balboa when he came to America. And I was, I think, a flower in the Orient school. But the best one was the person who said she'd been an E in Bethlehem.

Anyway, we sent out a casting call, to the South Shore, North Fork, and this included some New York City people because we knew a lot of people there. And we cast it. And rehearsed it as I planned where each group had to meet with the musical director once. And then the day of the show I locked everybody in the theater over in Southampton College. In the morning we rehearsed specific things. And in the afternoon we did a dress rehearsal. Then in the evening we gave it. And it was sensational. Everybody went crazy. The opera did come off.

Emily Sisely, who has had many careers, (in one of them she wrote *The Joy of Lesbian Sex*, I think, or coauthored it) and she had done this kind of music before because I have a tape with my cousin, (a different cousin) singing. And I said, I want you to write this opera. A fifteen-minute opera on the *Well of Loneliness*. And it was supposed to be for my cousin but of course my cousin backed out. It was incredible serendipity. We were at one of the things in New York, some event, and we met Rebecca Blankenship who right now is a major part of the Canadian Opera Company. And very tall, handsome, gay and she played Stephen. And it was sensational. It was really stunning. And the other role, Mary, Stephen's girlfriend was also a professional and she's died since. So it was a funny, wonderful event. And it was a joke. But at the end when they're singing "Give us the right to our existence," (all the

text came out of the script) everybody just screamed and cheered. It was a wonderful, wonderful thing. And the final thing in the show was the Miss Long Island Expressway Contest with Ms. Yaphank and Ms. Center Moriches. It was silly but fun.

ANDERSON: Was that a fundraiser?

MACKAY: They were all fundraisers...

ANDERSON: For? Which organization was that a benefit for?

MACKAY: Nobody, nobody gets paid. (The Lesbian Herstory) Archives or The (Gay and Lesbian) Task Force. I'd have to look at the program to remember.

MACKAY: The next one was called Cruise and that was in New York, an invitational for the Task Force. And it was sort of a cabaret thing and it was a very difficult one for me and I don't want to talk about it. But, because of that I said I want to do a show that was my style. And so we started work on it and ended up in 1984 with a show called Taking Liberties. This was at Symphony Space in New York, which was chosen because it's the only nonunion space.

ANDERSON: Oh, okay.

MACKAY: And we were, of course, doing all the work. We couldn't pay for union help. We sold out two nights.

ANDERSON: How many people does that space hold do you think?

MACKAY: Over eight hundred, probably eight hundred and seventy-five each night.

ANDERSON: Wow.

MACKAY: And this again was a benefit for the Archives and I'm not sure, I'd have to look, Task Force, something else in there.

MACKAY: And the only person who got paid was the interpreter, the ASL sign language interpreter who turned out was gay anyway but we got her at the last minute. So we had to pay her. In fact that was very funny because the interpreter was there for the first night, Friday. And the cast, this was their first chance to have an audience. And they're singing their little hearts out but nobody's looking at them because in the front row were all the people who needed interpreting so they were all looking over at the interpreter.

ANDERSON: What was the theme of Taking Liberties? What was the...

MACKAY: Well let me go back to the first show.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: Because that was really fun and it doesn't quite come across in that videotape.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: But we have the script. It was the difference between the South Shore and the North Fork. And the North Fork was-- all the jokes were about going clamming and you know, when it's high tide and things like that. And the South Shore was all dressing up your dogs and real estate agents.

All the scenery was flats except for some props and stuff, we used slides-- there was a wonderful lecture by a professor at the "University of Ronkonkoma." And she was very funny dressed up and talking about the difference between the Shores. And at one point we showed a picture of a South Shore house- which happened to be Versailles- and then we showed my little house as the contrast. (Laughter) Everybody loved it.

We started the show with something I had seen back in 1943 in a Broadway show. Take the lights out and play the William Tell Overture (sings) and then we showed slides with the cars coming, leaving New York, and coming out. Well this got everybody right then hooked on the show. And it was very funny. We did many different things in it.

But Taking Liberties was different. We were looking around for a theme and came up with the fact that in a year or two the Statue of Liberty was going to have its birthday. So we were the first people to celebrate this. The idea was that a news team, a women news group, was reporting on all the events like "Martina makes her next million," things like that. And noting that women were pouring into New York City, which, of course, gives you, down at Battery Park, a wonderful chance to interview all different kinds of people. And it turns out by the end that a space ship is coming like Close Encounters of the Third Kind. There's a little musical theme that runs through it and everybody sort of stops and listens to that. But all these women have been called to the Statue of Liberty. And nobody quite knows why but later it becomes very clear that they're all lesbians and the news team gets all excited about this. That's when later on they do a special report-- that was Manuela's (Soares) slide show. Did you see the show?

ANDERSON: No.

- MACKAY: It was wonderful. And her slide show is a fifteen-minute show on the history of lesbians.
- ANDERSON: Oh, fantastic.
- MACKAY: So at the very end the space ship comes with space lesbians in it and Governor Virginia Apuzzo welcomes them. We said that there would be no central character really. That the four or five news team would be the central roles and those were the ones with better voices. And then everybody else got one song, you know. It was a real group endeavor. Which is what I liked. Everybody was part of it.
- ANDERSON: How did you manage to sell that many tickets? Where did you...
- MACKAY: Well.
- ANDERSON: ...did you have a lot of publicity?
- MACKAY: I'm not clear. We put it in whatever papers were around at that time.
- ANDERSON: Right.
- MACKAY: There were flyers around. I don't remember. See I wasn't doing that part of it.
- ANDERSON: Yeah, that's very impressive to...
- MACKAY: Yes, it was. And yet there's so many thousands of people who never heard of it because it's like the joke about you go to a movie and I remember when I went to see the movie I hated, Desert Hearts.
- ANDERSON: Oh yeah.
- MACKAY: And there was a line stretched, you know, around the block. You didn't know anybody. In fact, that's a line in the Taking Liberties, she comes back she says, I've never seen so many dykes I didn't know!  
And it was a wonderful show. And it was a lot of work because I was working at that time. I was teaching. And to me in both of these huge shows the amazing thing was that every single person, over a hundred women you were coordinating, everybody did what they were supposed to at the right time. It was an incredible joint effort.
- ANDERSON: Did you make lasting friendships from those productions? Or how did the momentum from all those people coming together for such a great reason carry on?

MACKAY: Some did. A few little affairs started I think. And mostly I knew the people from before, or from friends, who would run, for instance, the scenery. And they had a group and the props had-- I knew the head people but I didn't always know all the people who were working in...

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: And some of the cast, most of the cast, I'd seen before. A lot I hadn't. And some wonderful people turned up in it. We advertised also in a place like Identity House. And that's where we got the most interesting woman who played the weather girl. And she was a factory worker, you know. And just happened to see this flyer. And she was sensational. Anna Garcia. She was just great. At the end of the show she sent me a little note. And she said, I'm a very simple person. And she said, After the show I feel like Shirley McLain taking her Oscar home to bed with her. It was very moving, you know. So I say it was a wonderful time. And...

ANDERSON: That last show was eight, eighty...

MACKAY: '84.

ANDERSON: And why didn't you do another?

MACKAY: Oh, please.

ANDERSON: Because you couldn't take it anymore?

MACKAY: It was absolutely exhausting. There were people who wanted to because they loved it. But it was just too much work. And it was what it was and that was just right.

By 1990, our population here was tripled, quadrupled, I mean depending on where you're starting from. And in 1992 we formed North Fork Women for Women Fund. And we have a wonderful tape about that from Lucy Goodman who was the one who started it because Beva (Eastman) had said to her, What if you have one thing you really wanted what would it be? And she said, A health organization for women. And that started it all. Incidentally, Beva and Nancy Dean were the original founders, with some other people, of Astraea.

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ANDERSON: Oh, okay.

MACKAY: But it was their idea. They then pulled out of it after about ten years to start another foundation called Open Meadows. But it's amazing to see how strong Astrea has grown in that time.

When North Fork Women for Women Fund was formed there were a lot of questions at the beginning and we have various information about that. And some of the people doing it, Jan Swanson particularly, who was a very strong moving force, did not want it to be open. So the word lesbian wasn't used at the beginning. She was very cautious and rightly so. She'd grown up with all these brothers and her Christian family. It was difficult thing for her. But things were beginning to get looser and looser. And a lot of the people did want the word lesbian used. At the beginning...

ANDERSON: In the name of the organization you mean?

MACKAY: Well, in the publicity about the organization.

ANDERSON: Okay, okay.

MACKAY: And in the beginning a tremendous amount of work was done on health. Now this is before the Internet so we had a whole library of books and people talked about health problems and issues. And, of course, right now we're an aging community. We have younger people coming in but it's so expensive to buy a house-- you can't be really young unless you have a lot of money.

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: And so that's changing. What I want them to do and I think they will do-- is that now that information's on the Internet, you need to teach people how to access the Internet and get this information.

But they raised money. And they've done a huge job. Most of our community are professional women who were originally based in New York. But there are an awful lot who don't have much money. Local shopkeepers. One in particular, I'll never forget, is Sandy Dee the story I did on Sandy. And she's...

ANDERSON: She passed on a few years ago?

MACKAY: Yes. And she was transgendered. Although no one was using that word at that time. And I met her at one of Jan's parties. This is a fabulous story. And it was an incredible story.

But NFWF became the central force. I think it's really unusual. Most lesbian communities all over the country come around a woman's bookstore or a baseball game. And they're very loosely formed. Very few have a strong central organization. And this has provided social get-togethers and a talent show, (which somebody called the "no-talent" show.) But the music's been wonderful. It's been a time for people to gather and get together with various events.

And my friend Carol Taylor started the Narrow River Singers, which has nothing to do with NFWF, but it's been an incredible community building thing. And my hat's off to her. She's done a terrific job with it. It's still going very strong. And then just two years ago we had the first gay pride dance. And by this time the word lesbian is being used. But it's also including men.

ANDERSON: The gay pride dance was sponsored by NFWF?

MACKAY: Yes.

ANDERSON: Or separate?

MACKAY: Yes, it was.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: And this year- I can't remember. I didn't go. I'm not a dancer.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: So I didn't go. But this year apparently it was very strong. I think it was a fundraiser.

ANDERSON: I heard that it was very successful.

MACKAY: Yes.

ANDERSON: And well attended but...

MACKAY: Yeah, if you like dancing.

MACKAY: It was good. And in 2002 the North Fork president, Leslie Weisman, outed NFWF, got a huge story in the Suffolk Times, our local newspaper, and right on the-- if you open it up on the second page-- big picture, whole story, very good.

ANDERSON: What do you mean when she you say she "outed "NFWF?

MACKAY: Well up to that point we'd never been open or said lesbian organization or anything.

ANDERSON: But she talks about herself as a lesbian? Or she talked about the organization as serving lesbians?

MACKAY: Well, it was an article on the organization.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: And I have it. It was very good, very simple.

ANDERSON: Were there any concerns then about the article?

MACKAY: No. I think people were wondering about what might happen. But nothing happened. Nobody bats an eye. Of course, when we were first here, in the Midsummer Revels there was much joking about local people's reaction to us on the South Shore. What did they say? Is the phone in your sister's name? (Laughter) Or, out here they would get us all mixed up even though we looked no more-- you and I look nothing alike. But, if now we're going back, you know, twenty years, thirty years. And in those days if you're standing up straight and marching around-- a lot of the wives of country farmers do the same thing-- so we sort of got lumped in a category just like Chinese look alike. And blacks look alike.

And I remember the best one was the fish market person said, How was the shrimp salad? And I said, What shrimp salad? Well, you know, the shrimp salad. Well it turned out to be somebody who looked no more like me than the man in the moon. And that was very common. We would be confused. In fact somebody, a famous folk singer, who did not want to be identified as lesbian was identified as one of those people.

ANDERSON: So you were saying that the North Fork was generally very open and welcoming? Or just turned the other way towards the lesbian community here?

MACKAY: Well, it's hard to know. Nobody's going around broadcasting things. They certainly knew we were here but they didn't know how many, you know. And we had one incident that turned out to be, of all things, eleven year old girls. Because what I always worried about was not the people but the parents, the rednecks who then inflicted opinions on the younger people who were free to do things. This was some graffiti was sprayed on a house on Young's Road. They knew they were young because they didn't know what they were spraying-- half of it was about fags which wasn't... And they caught the people and they were girls and one of them I think one was a disturbed kid and everything. But that was the only thing I ever heard of.

There was no question, particularly as more and more of us were coming, that local people knew we were here. And in a small community like this where you have summer people-- remember that Orient and the North Fork is a place that's had a lot of waves of migration. After the white people you had the big 20<sup>th</sup> Century

migrations of Polish, Portuguese, German, mixtures of people coming in and they ended up taking over the farms from the other farmers. And then you had the summer people migration.

ANDERSON: Which is how you came to find a home here.

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MACKAY: Yes. We were a very early one. My grandfather was brought here as a child after the Civil War. Remembered it and came back and built a house. It was about 1910. And then after the summer people, slowly, it's been women. So I think we were sort of lumped in with all those funny summer people.

ANDERSON: Outsiders.

ANDERSON: Funny outsiders. Yeah.

MACKAY: I went to a local school here for one year. And I it was very hard because summer people were the pits, you know. You're really jeered at if you're a summer person and not native. Now they are very few natives. The natives are here but they're mixed in.

And WWII made a huge difference. Because the natives who had never been anywhere in their life go abroad and fight and everything opened up at that time. Communications opened up.

By 2003, by now, there are anywhere from four to six hundred on the mailing list. Not all living here. Some are friends who are in New York and want to know about it. Some are South Shore people. So I don't know the exact number.

But what's interested me is seeing the evolution of a community from a small very cohesive group into a larger group that's then being held together by this health organization. And now in the last fifteen years look at the monster changes taking place in our society. Lesbians are top news all over the place. "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy." Did you see that?

ANDERSON: I haven't seen that. But.

MACKAY: Well, you gotta...

ANDERSON: It's been the summer of gay TV.

MACKAY: Yes.

ANDERSON: And that's one of them. Yeah.

MACKAY: So tremendous change. And everybody's feeling much more comfortable about themselves, about the world. And that has also meant

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that there's not as much need for this organization. It's a very diffused thing. The center doesn't hold unless it's tight. And people will come together for the final event, yet even that is beginning to disperse. That's the big auction, fundraiser, auction.

ANDERSON: But the health needs are certainly there. You mean in terms of fundraising?

MACKAY: Yes.

ANDERSON: And the health needs.

MACKAY: The health needs are there. And we need to find new ways to get money in and they're going to do that because the present ways aren't quite strong enough. But people don't need an organization anymore. When you're, you know-- thirty years ago you wanted to find those people who were lesbian because there were so few and you felt you were the only one when you're growing up. And then it was wonderful to have a community. But then you're busy doing all your-- the newcomers are busy having their little homes and their boats and their cars and whatever. They don't need it, you know. That's okay. But we need them and we will get after them. So I feel a tremendous change. There was a benefit for NFWF at the art gallery earlier in the year. Fabulous. Whole fabulous show. Some were straight, some were gay, a lot were gay. And just nobody batted an eyelash. They were all, you know, very much there.

ANDERSON: Do you feel like there are other things that are replacing NFWF as the center of the community? Are there softball teams? No...

MACKAY: No. It's individual.

ANDERSON: Is there a bar? Is there...

MACKAY: No, no. We don't have bars. It's individual. Well, we have a few bars but not gay ones.

ANDERSON: Right. But is there some other...

MACKAY: It's individual activities. It's your family life. And I think that's really in one way the theme of the last year-- having babies. A lot of lesbians have. And it was interesting looking back on Taking Liberties. That was the beginning of the baby boom. And we have a hilarious little thing in it about mommies, two mommies. No, I think it's individuals pursuing the American dream. And I mean I-- it's been interesting to see it all.

It's going to continue. And it's an important one. It's just different. And it will be different.

ANDERSON: Does it feel like a loss to you?

MACKAY: Well, the first days sure were fun when you knew everybody. And a big problem now is that at some of these events the older folks say, Who are all these people?

ANDERSON: Who invited them?

MACKAY: Yeah. And the other people say, I don't know anybody here. And that's a big problem when you don't know anybody. And yet they don't want to particularly exert themselves to get to know a lot of people. But that's being worked on.

ANDERSON: How is it being worked on?

MACKAY: Well, NFWF has a very strong board. They're different. The old board is gone. The feminists have gone and it's taken over by people who have been very active in the community and have different-- I'm not on the board, I don't know. But I've talked with a lot of them.

ANDERSON: It's a different generation?

MACKAY: It's a different generation. They're very hardworking people. They're just different people. They may not have some of the bigger picture that we had when we were starting.

ANDERSON: But do you feel like feminism doesn't inform the new board in terms of their decision-making the way that it used to?

MACKAY: Yeah.

ANDERSON: Do you feel NFWF is veering from that?

MACKAY: In the early days, all lesbians had to be feminists although not all were. But you had to, you just were, because of the way you... The only big thing I and Sylvia (Newman) ever did was to go to the DOB for a couple of years, just before it got broken up by that terrible woman whose name I forget.

38:33

ANDERSON: Ti-Grace?

MACKAY: What?

ANDERSON: Ti- Grace.

MACKAY: Yes, Ti- Grace.

ANDERSON: How did that happen?

MACKAY: Well she was divisive, you know.

ANDERSON: How so?

MACKAY: I didn't go to all of the meetings but I went to enough to see-- well, it was being run by a woman called Ruth at that time. Ruth Simpson. And we went to Ti-Grace's first big talk. And that was the year all the baby dykes were there. What do they call them? The radical?

ANDERSON: The Radicalesbians.

MACKAY: They were all little ones and they were all over each other. It's very funny. It's sweet. But by that time the DOB was old fashioned. Ti-Grace zeroed in on Ruth. Became her friend, her dear friend. And Ti-Grace is a very divisive person. And I don't know all the things she did. But she got-- you know, it had been a very cohesive wonderful group in its own way. It split and was probably getting ready to split anyway. But she did a bad thing there.

ANDERSON: But you don't remember what the issue was that Ti-Grace was so divisive about?

MACKAY: It's been a while. And we weren't there for all the meetings.

ANDERSON: Right. But that was the end of DOB New York?

MACKAY: I think so. They had a big conference in one of the hotels. And we did go to that. That was interesting. But just before that The Ladder got stolen. A lot of things happened. I was involved for about two years just as a participant and that's where I met Barbara Love. And it was quite an experience because the DOB was on 38<sup>th</sup> Street, I think, in some really ratty-- it was a men's sleazy bar where the it was sort of decorated in red and pink and stuff. And there were movie, broken down movie seats around the walls. And this was just at the beginning of liberations. And when we walked in and you saw sitting in these movie seats all around women who were overweight, who didn't want to be in the bars. Some had partners. Some didn't. Some were Italian. Some were, I don't know, whatever different kind of thing. But very beaten down women. And there were more active ones running it. Julie what's-her-name from New Jersey. She was terrific.

ANDERSON: Oh yeah. I know who you mean. (Julie Lee)

MACKAY: Very strong woman. She was the reason I kept going because I didn't have much in common with these people who were sort of not doing anything.

ANDERSON: Depressed it sounds like.

MACKAY: What?

ANDERSON: Depressed or?

MACKAY: Yeah, they really were depressed. And that was the hilarious thing when one time Ruth was president and the cops came to (laughter) do a raid. And they walked in and by this time everybody was militant. The change had happened. And they said (to the cops,) Why are you here? What are you doing? And they said, You know why we're here. And Ruth said, What do you think we're doing? And he said, You know what you're doing! And you look around the wall and here are these people that are doing nothing, absolutely nothing. And of course the charges were dismissed the next day. But we had brought a black friend who was hysterical at the thought of police coming in.

ANDERSON: So even the New York Chapter was fairly white?

MACKAY: Fairly.

ANDERSON: But not entirely.

MACKAY: Not entirely, no. That was where I heard my first transsexual. Never even heard they existed before. I mean you sort of felt it but you didn't know. And that was interesting. There were a couple of interesting programs.

ANDERSON: Did DOB feel like home to you?

MACKAY: No, I felt I was doing my bit to help support it. No, I think it was a home for the people sitting around the wall. And there were a few people who were running it who were really concerned and very active in wanting to make it happen. But it was already past its time.

ANDERSON: Yeah. So in terms of an organization or a movement would you say feminism is where you found more of a home than something like DOB?

MACKAY: Yeah, DOB was certainly not feminist at the beginning.

ANDERSON: No.

MACKAY: Only at the end when the change was coming. No, it wasn't a home in any way. I identified-- I felt compelled to be there to add my voice to it. But it wasn't my thing.

ANDERSON: But the feminist movement was?

MACKAY: Oh yeah, though I was never part of the big things. Didn't even get to the march on Washington. No, I'm sorry I missed that beginning. And because we didn't go to the bars, we didn't know about it. We didn't, you know-- but it was fabulous to see it all happen.

ANDERSON: The DOB?

MACKAY: Well, the whole new movement. I remember when we went-- Sylvia and I went to, I think it was the second gay parade, liberation parade or whatever it was called-- and we were driving in. And we said well, lesbian things always happen late. By the time we got there they had already gotten to the Central Park. We missed the parade. But we went to some of the places where people were and we brought back stacks of that Come Out newspaper, which was wonderful at that time. And it was fun. It was even if we missed it. But this was before it really was...

ANDERSON: This was early 70s.

MACKAY: A fancy parade. Yeah.

ANDERSON: So from DOB did you move into the gay and lesbian community or more the women's or feminist community? How would you describe politically what matched up with your ideology and your sentiments and where you felt comfortable?

MACKAY: Well, it's hard to say. One other thing that happened is that I went in 1970, '71-- I was in the process of changing jobs-- and I took a feminist course and a course in videotape. And with the equipment I did taping because they would loan out equipment and I learned enough to use it-- this was for the Video Access Center, long gone, on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue down there at LaGuardia Place. And there was a lot of feminist stuff going on there. And I can't remember their names. But I saw a lesbian group that wanted to be taught editing. And I said, I'll do that. It wasn't hiking dykes. It was...

ANDERSON: Hiking dykes, that's funny.

MACKAY: Well, they were doing hikes when they would think of it. But it was one of the early groups, I can't remember. But that's where I met Blue London. Have you seen that film about her?

ANDERSON: I have. That Joyce (Warshow) made, yeah.

MACKAY: And that was fun. And we I got to know her a little bit. And then it turned out she had been lovers with one of our music directors in the show. And so I guess what I'm saying is where I was comfortable was with the expanding community on the South Shore, North Fork, in the city. And like Joyce, Joyce Warshow who made the film for that. So I was meeting a lot of different people.

ANDERSON: Were you spending summers or weekends out here at that point?

MACKAY: Yes, that's why I went from the professional theater to teaching.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MACKAY: You got the summer off.

ANDERSON: So you were living in both places.

MACKAY: Yes.

ANDERSON: At the time.

MACKAY: In the city and here.

ANDERSON: Right. And you became full time out here?

MACKAY: About eleven years ago.

ANDERSON: The nineties, early 90s.

MACKAY: '98, somewhere in the there.

ANDERSON: Okay. '92 maybe.

MACKAY: Oh sorry, let's go back, '92.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MACKAY: Yes, because that's when I did *Wolf Girls*.

ANDERSON: Right, right.

MACKAY: '91, '92, yeah. And.

ANDERSON: Let's take a little bit of a break because the camera's going to run out in a second.

MACKAY: Okay.

ANDERSON: Okay. Is that alright?

MACKAY: Yeah.

END TAPE 1

ANDERSON: We are on, okay yeah, seems to be working, tape number 2. So let's...

MACKAY: Well, I want to go back on...

ANDERSON: Yes. Let's go back on what you want to go back on. And then I'll...

MACKAY: My mother had been taught by the feminists at Vassar. And by the early feminists. And so she was, I think, everything in her nature was a feminist. But at that time there was no feminism. The 20s had loosened up the world so that women could drink and smoke and drive a car. And she even did have a job briefly. But the basic thing was to have your family and bring up those children.

ANDERSON: What was her job?

MACKAY: Oh, she worked for a professor briefly before she got married. And then she did a little something after her children were grown, but not much. She should of -- she would have been much happier. She was bored. She, you know, she was a very good mind gone to waste as far as I'm concerned.

ANDERSON: But she got a college education.

MACKAY: Oh yes.

ANDERSON: Didn't have opportunity to stretch it, her mind after...

MACKAY: Right.

ANDERSON: ...after Vassar.

MACKAY: No, and she's smart. She there was a lot she could have done but didn't. When Betty Friedan's book came out what year was that?

ANDERSON: '63? Something like that.

MACKAY: Something like that. I got a copy maybe the next year. Read it. And was galvanized. And I went to school to one of the faculty meetings. I said, If this is true we're teaching all the wrong stuff. Nobody would listen, you know. It that was very depressing and discouraging.

ANDERSON: You talked to other women faculty.

MACKAY: Yes. Well the whole faculty was mostly women.

ANDERSON: This is Dalton?

MACKAY: Yeah, Dalton.

MACKAY: And there were a couple of men, a token man. And I just felt very sad about that. People didn't get it. Or wouldn't even read the book, you know. Because it was very strong statements of what's wrong.

ANDERSON: Did you find other people to talk about the book with or did you feel like you were kind of alone with that information?

MACKAY: Well, the person I was living with felt that way. And there were a few others, but we were pretty isolated then. We didn't go to bars. We didn't have a large social group at all in New York. I mean there was nothing for us. But, in about 1969, when all the liberations were happening I remember vividly just sitting in the dining room there late at night and saying, This is what I want to do.

My liberation had to do with my college. I wrote a letter to the alumni association about being gay. And it was returned saying we don't print anonymous things. But at the very end I had said I'm happy to give my name but my partner didn't want her name printed. That letter is reproduced in *Wolf Girls at Vassar*.

2:58

ANDERSON: Yes.

MACKAY: So that was the main...

ANDERSON: Why was it important to you to write to Vassar at that time?

MACKAY: I loved my college. I loved everything about it. It was the essence of feminism and-- or it wasn't really because they were all, you know-- most of them weren't feminists. In fact, my college was very bad about the ERA. They wouldn't even support that.

ANDERSON: Yeah. The cat... (cat is crying to come in)

MACKAY: Okay, let's...

ANDERSON: We're going to pause on that. Maybe put another cat outside.

MACKAY: Yes, I want to get her upstairs is the thing.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: Open the door and let her in and then we're going to grab her. (tape off)  
So just the Vassar thing.

ANDERSON: No you were in the middle of talking about your mom and Vassar and your letter that you wrote to the college.

MACKAY: Well that's it I think.

ANDERSON: Can you say a little bit more about your mom being a feminist? Do you feel like she got that from Vassar? Or was it some...

4:10

MACKAY: Are we on?

ANDERSON: Yes, we're on. Is there something?

MACKAY: Yes, there's no question that two things: Her father influenced her-- he was a very wonderful, extraordinary man. And her being taught by those feminists, I met one or two of them, they were no nonsense women. They were, you know-- and she would go and visit one a lot who was a friend of hers. They had a very strong sense that women could be anything or do anything. It's just, she didn't -- well, wasn't on the right path for it. Didn't have a chance. [ANDERSON: Right.] But all her remarks-- I mean, when I'd hear things they were feminist remarks.

She loved men. And she loved literary men. Always wanted to talk about books and talk about things like that. And I think one of the saddest things for her is that she didn't have any real literary friends around. Her best friend at college, she wrote to every week. And all those letters I have I gave to Vassar. She was a very good letter writer. Not about world events but just about life. She had a nice phrase. She wrote well. Except to me when she'd correct all my spelling errors. But at that time I didn't know it was a little bit of dyslexia.

ANDERSON: So you would say that you were raised by a feminist mother.

MACKAY: Oh yeah.

ANDERSON: But how does that translate into the way that she raised you to think that you could go on to do anything that you wanted, that you were strong?

MACKAY: Well, the problem about going on was that I had the sense I could go on but there were no goals given. You were free to do these things but there was no goal set. And that was too bad. No direction. I suppose in the back of her mind was the vague presumption that you would get married and have children. My father certainly presumed that. And she... I've lost the track on this, she...

ANDERSON: Okay, that's okay. We're just talking about how her feminism influenced the way that she raised you or the kind of messages she gave you.

MACKAY: Oh, okay, the other thing that I was going to say. She was tall and about my height and she did not have a “feminine appearance.” It certainly wasn’t a lesbian appearance at all. But she, I think, had never known how to buy clothes or what would have been appropriate and that got communicated to me. That she hated going to the department store. Didn’t know what to buy. And I didn’t know either. But she was perfectly happy to have me be sort of casually dressed. And I was. When I had to face going out dressing up with boys or people it was very hard. I didn’t feel comfortable or secure in that at all.

ANDERSON: But she allowed you to be tom-boyish...

MACKAY: Yes.

ANDERSON: ...because she didn’t have strict ideas about girl’s clothing.

MACKAY: No. In fact my uncle once said-- I must have about 10 or 11, 12, and she was having a big meeting at the country house-- and he said to my mother, Get that child dressed in something decent. She did have certain-- she knew what some things I should be wearing although we didn’t get there. And I’ll never forget my senior year at college I visited a friend in New York. I stayed at her house while I was working on a thesis, and I was wearing my sneakers. This was a time when the change had happened. You could wear pants or sneakers or whatever. I came back and she saw me and she said, You peasant. (laughter)

MACKAY: But at the same time she wasn’t doing anything to change it. No, I certainly I would say, well, my model was sort of androgyny when I was growing up. But she certainly was helpful in not having to be feminine. I mean silly feminine.

ANDERSON: Right. And when you say your model was androgyny how did you know androgyny? Did you have other women in your life who dressed that way besides your mother so that you knew what this was or was it something you made up on your own?

MACKAY: Well, you get a sense of people. You see some now and then. There was one person who did not wear the clothes I would have worn-- she was more on the western style. But I recognized-- and she never was a lesbian, though she should have been, as far as I know-- but I recognized that there was something about that that was deeply appealing. The independence and the free style.

And gradually at school-- I just wrote a poem about 10<sup>th</sup> grade or so, a girl in the class above me came to school in a white men’s shirt, sleeves rolled up, neck open and this was new-- I mean we were forced

Names spelled correctly?

to wear these horrible little blouses and nothing fit and your little skirt. It was really horrible. (laughter) But we all looked at this shirt and we said, Sexy. Because that was the word, my mother was horrified, don't use that word. But to us it was a wonderful slang at the moment. But looking back it was sexy in a way. This was something that was very appealing although the girl herself wasn't. And it's funny. She's a cousin of Marian Seldes who's an actress who's in my class. There were two great people in my high school class, Marian Seldes and Helen Frankenthaler, the painter.

But gradually I began to get a feeling for the kind of image I wanted, the clothes I wanted. Then I got to Vassar and now everybody's dressed in ... (a gesture). And they looked wonderful. Absolutely wonderful. And boy's shirts are the style for everybody. And it was terrific.

ANDERSON: In your memoir you say you always felt different. Or remember starting to feel different around adolescence. Was that because of the style thing that we're talking about- girl versus feminine/masculine? Or was it about some sort of sexual attraction that was starting to become known to you that you...

11:20

MACKAY: It's very hard to tell. I gather, I mean, I think I've just been comfortable and crazy about girls and women from a very early age.

ANDERSON: You remember feeling that that young?

MACKAY: Well, my mother tells me about being in this little play group and I wouldn't let this young woman who was -- later it turned out I knew who she was—but I wouldn't let her take other children to the bathroom. I had to be with her.

ANDERSON: (Laughter)

MACKAY: I don't remember that at all. But the attraction really started, I guess, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Yeah. And which is also the time I menstruated, although I had felt something before. Yeah, it's hard to pin down. But at that point I guess I felt different before because I didn't like boys. I had a cousin, a male cousin who was wonderful. And I loved him. He was a year ahead of me. But he wasn't there all the time. I think if he'd been there I might have been a little more comfortable in whatever role women were supposed to be at that time. But I felt sort of in limbo I think. It wasn't one thing or the other really. Images of women weren't very attractive. And I was certainly didn't want to be a man. I didn't want any of that equipment or any...

ANDERSON: Right, right. You didn't have a language at that time.

MACKAY: No, I didn't. I didn't. And then by age 12 I began to be very attracted to women.

ANDERSON: Did that scare you?

MACKAY: No, it felt good. (Laughter) But the taboo wasn't that strong at that point.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: In this book we're doing now, my poems, I'm reprinting a poem I put into the high school magazine when I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. It's a big lesbian poem. But I didn't know about it, you know. I didn't know what I was saying. I understood that loving women who were older than you was not encouraged. It was considered childish. Then gradually I began to find out that there are other implications. But then I had no-- I was very late in coming to sexuality. I mean I knew what you did and how you did it, male and female from age two. Mother had instructed me in that. But nothing related to me. And it didn't seem particularly interesting. And my family sex life we didn't even want to think about. And here she was producing a child when I'm in 10<sup>th</sup> grade-- which she made clear was a mistake.

ANDERSON: Oh God.

MACKAY: Yeah, it was hard. And hard on him too.

ANDERSON: Yeah. So it wasn't until college then that you kind of knew what your sexuality was?

MACKAY: Even in college the sexual aspect wasn't there for me. It was an emotional thing and this is where I got trouble for me the first week of college I get seduced emotionally by this young woman across the hall who was not somebody I would have chosen to love or be with. And she lived in St. Louis. Who knows where St. Louis even is. But after a week she was very seductive, not sexually but emotionally. And by the end of that week I was in love. And then three weeks, two, three weeks later she started to go somewhere else. And it was devastating at that point. It affected my whole time at college. But it was not a sexual thing. Close physical a little bit, but not sexual.

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: But she might have known enough to feel it was for her. And the sexuality-- I didn't become personally sexual until probably 24. It was all emotional and wanting closeness. Yeah, I never really had a close

friend. I thought what this person was beginning to provide was a real closeness, intimacy. And in high school I had friends but no close friends. And...

ANDERSON: So, the first, I remember something in your memoir about the first lesbian couple you ever met. And I don't think you named them. But you talked about a lesbian couple you met I think in '51. And that you had some sort of moment of recognition...

MACKAY: Oh gosh.

ANDERSON: It's not ringing any bell for you?

MACKAY: I don't remember. I must have. Yeah, I'm blank.

ANDERSON: I guess I'm just wondering if there was a-- it seemed like from your memoir that that might have been a moment where you recognized these two as, oh that must be what or who I am. This feeling of difference or an understanding of what lesbian meant. Was there a moment like that for you? Or do you feel like it was more of a gradual process?

MACKAY: No, it happened-- I get out in 1949 and I have one year off Broadway. And then over that summer I get a job that lead into Theater Production Service. Now it's at that point you're being surrounded by theater people who talk theater talk. They're very loose. You know, everything is said. And gay and they're very open at that point. More or less. And it was during that year that it begins to become clear to me that this is where I fit in. [ANDERSON: Right] And even though I still wasn't feeling any sexual feelings very much but I recognized that's what I was.

ANDERSON: Right. These are my people.

MACKAY: Yeah. Although I wouldn't have chosen those people.

ANDERSON: (Laughter)

MACKAY: I'm sorry I don't remember the exact couple. (Tharon Musser, famous lighting designer, and Mikey Kinsella)

ANDERSON: That's okay. Okay. Let's get back to the North Fork community a little bit since that is a place that is your people.

18:26

MACKAY: Yeah.

ANDERSON: I'm interested in you describing the original women who formed this community as feminists. Talk a little bit more about what that meant. Does it mean that you guys had a common understanding or language around feminism?

MACKAY: Yeah, it was understood.

ANDERSON: Were you politically active? Or how did that translate?

MACKAY: I wasn't politically active although I was starting to be active as a lesbian. But Dolores (Alexander) was the main one. And then Jane Chambers was very much. So I don't-- she was just busy writing plays-- I don't think she was actually marching or doing stuff. But it was certainly a huge understanding that this is where we were and this is what isn't happening in the world for women.

ANDERSON: Right. So does that mean your conversations when you would get together would be feminist in nature? You say that feminism helped bring you together, helped solidify you as a group.

MACKAY: No I didn't, I don't mean it brought us together. We just were therefore it was an underlying assumption.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: Which I don't see now in most people. I mean they're sort of generally feminist but they're not that specific.

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: Of course some of the battles have been won.

ANDERSON: Yeah, well I think that's true. I think women in my generation can take things for granted and not have to think about it as much as your generation.

MACKAY: And then the other thing was that Jill (Ward) and Dolores (Alexander) started the restaurant.

ANDERSON: Mother Courage.

MACKAY: Mother Courage.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: And what a terrible thing for them—you work your butt off to even make a living out of it. But it was a very important thing in New York at that time. And a lot of people went there. And it was also a time when we were meeting people and Bea Kreloff-- that was when she decided to do her “Heads of Feminists.” I don’t know if you know about these-- she took construction paper or whatever and a pencil and drew everybody. She’s a pretty good artist. Unfortunately, these all started to look a little bit alike. And they all have a glazed look on them because as Bea would drone on and you’re sitting there (laughter). But there’s whole bunch of them and I think Smith probably ought to have them. They’re all of people that were around at that time in the city. And I’m sure they’re rolled up somewhere. And it would be good to get hold of them.

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: This was Bea Kreloff and she will be back from Italy or wherever she is at some point.

ANDERSON: She’s in the North Fork or the city?

MACKAY: Well, she’s North Fork in a way but basically the city. She’s never had a house out here. Although she stays with some people a lot. She’s now with Edith Titlebaum. But Dolores knows how to...

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: ...find her. She’s been trying to find her. We want to tape Bea. But those-- I think you’d be really interested in those portraits. They’re all larger than life. I mean if this was your face they were like this (gesturing) and she put them all up in the restaurant. There weren’t a lot of them up in the restaurant. And they had this funny glazed look. She was a talker.

ANDERSON: So, feminism is something that you feel has been lost with the growth of the lesbian community out here.

MACKAY: Well, it’s you know, it has to do with the world’s view. So many battles were won. Not all of them, far from it. But the next generation just accepts all these things.

But we have a couple of young people who are fierce about it. Here’s one over the hill, Sherry Thomas, younger than I am but has been through a lot of this. And some of the lawyers come up against it all the time. But it’s certainly a less-- oh and the sports people do. Donna Lopiano, she’s the head of the women’s sports organization. She’s always being quoted whenever there’s an article about women not

getting in there. And she was out here for a while, with my friend Jan. And so a lot of people got involved in that.

But some of the things that we talked about-- like Lucy Steele is our athlete. So she's now 60. And she went to Harvard, Radcliff. And you know she would talk about how women were nothing there. Anybody who went there in those early years, you were nothing. You were an adjunct. You weren't allowed to use the gym. You weren't allowed to do this. The male professor- you had to get his permission to be in his stupid class. It was terrible. But when you go to a women's college you don't think about that as much.

ANDERSON: Right. Are some of the younger generations who are out here now--do you feel like they're taking on some of the leadership roles?

MACKAY: Yeah.

ANDERSON: Are they doing their part in NFWF or in other ways caring for the community or?

MACKAY: Well, NFWF is, at the moment, is the community. But yes, I would say so. Although there is this drift off into your own life.

ANDERSON: Right, right.

MACKAY: And a lot of them I don't know. I mean who are all these people?

ANDERSON: Right, right.

MACKAY: That come in.

ANDERSON: Was the community in the North Fork somewhat isolated from the other gay enclaves like Fire Island or Provincetown or was there some connection back and forth?

MACKAY: There was a connection. But Fire Island as a community was earlier.

ANDERSON: Much earlier.

MACKAY: And that was in the 50s into the 60s. And we had people who came out of that here, Frederica (Leser) had been there for a year. Vonnie (Elfrida Von Norcroff) had been there. A couple of other people. Ronnie Bamburger had been there. But they preferred this. And, of course, Fire Island was ninety percent men. So the women were harder to get together. They did have a community.

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: And that's been written up in some book which I haven't read.

ANDERSON: Oh right, in *Cherry Grove*.

MACKAY: So when I started to know about it, it was already fading away. At least from our point of view it was fading away. Though I had some men friends who went there and they would talk a bit about it. Vonnie had participated in some of the shows there with men. And I want to say something about that too. Because I like men. I just don't like men who don't listen to you. And I had an awful lot of those guys at the school I worked in, particularly in the second school. All perfectly nice people but they would pay no attention to you because you were a woman.

ANDERSON: Any gay men in this community out here? Or is this really a women's community?

25:58
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MACKAY: Yes, there's always been some. But they've been more hidden. And I learned a very interesting thing last year. One of the gay men here was approached by some local guys who must have felt he was gay and invited him to go out on their boat. I can't tell you the whole thing. But it became very clear that out on the boats is where male stuff happened. And these are probably all men who are married or-- but I never heard that before. Anyway, there've always been some gay men. But they don't have a community the way we do. And there're been more and more coming as men don't want to be on the South Shore or don't need to be...

ANDERSON: Can't afford it.

MACKAY: ...in bars. And as they get a partner and would rather be quiet. So just on this little hill here we now have one on, two on the other side, two on the top, two over there. So that's six men that are gay. We have some straight people. And then we have a whole bunch of gay women.

ANDERSON: Do they come out and support the NFWF events? The gay men?

MACKAY: Some did. I think if you're a dancer...

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: And want to..

ANDERSON: Right. But there was the gay pride dance a couple of years ago. But not so much overlap between the women and the?

- MACKAY: Depends. Individual friends, your neighbors you will. But they don't have a group and I don't think they're interested in groups.
- ANDERSON: And then with Provincetown really no back and forth in terms of people...
- MACKAY: No.
- ANDERSON: ...who were part of both communities?
- MACKAY: No, I don't think so. Everybody knows somebody there or a few people will go to an event. Manuela (Soares) went up to one of those events, a lesbian weekend or whatever.
- ANDERSON: Right, right.
- MACKAY: I visited once. But not, you know, not part of the community.
- ANDERSON: Right, right. And you would say that most of the women who make up the North Fork community have come from New York City or other cities as well?
- MACKAY: I would say the city, Brooklyn, Jersey.
- ANDERSON: Almost all Manhattan?
- MACKAY: ...is the main thing. Though usually people the route is often through from Ohio to New York.
- ANDERSON: Right, and then out here.
- MACKAY: Yeah. And quite a few of them live in Brooklyn rather than Manhattan.
- ANDERSON: But almost exclusively New York it feels like.
- MACKAY: I'm one of the few rare people who was actually born in Manhattan rather than Brooklyn.
- ANDERSON: (laughter) And you described the group as mostly professional. Can you talk a little bit more about, you've also joked about the difference between the South Shore and the money and the North Fork being a little bit more modest.
- MACKAY: Now there are...

ANDERSON: But there are also some...

MACKAY: ...modest people over on the South Shore.

ANDERSON: And there's some people with money on the North Fork.

MACKAY: Yes. Now particularly we're getting more of that.

ANDERSON: So how's that played out?

MACKAY: But the professional people-- I mean, we don't have statistics because they didn't ask for this. But we've got about seven or eight doctors. We've got nurses. We've probably got seven or eight lawyers. We've got bankers. We've got everything out here. But they're-- when I say professional, they're mostly people who are earning their living in the city. Got quite a few teachers. Artists. A lot of artists now.

ANDERSON: Not very many working class?

MACKAY: They're there but they had to struggle because today the prices are so inflated and ridiculous they can't-- unless you were here before or bought your house earlier-- you can't afford it. And that's a problem. I think it's too bad.

ANDERSON: Your real estate has gone through the roof out here.

MACKAY: Yeah.

ANDERSON: It really has. Which would prevent some of the younger generation from living out...

MACKAY: Save money or come out through somebody else...

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: No, I would say they we have almost no people in the 20-25, range. We'll start in the 30s.

ANDERSON: Are you talking age or salary?

MACKAY: Age.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: Salary I don't know anymore.

30:30

ANDERSON: And the different class levels in terms of some people having rather large homes or salaries out here-- there's a fairly democratic mingling and mixing socially? Or are there some different subgroups within the community?

MACKAY: It tends to form in location groups like Greenport. They get to know each other more. Or Orient, we tend to-- although we don't all like each other, I mean, we're not all friendly with each other. Or Southold I think has some. It's all mixed up now.

I mean, more wealthy people are coming in. I have a hard time with people who move in that field of money because they speak a different language, you know. They're whole consciousness, Pucky and Tommy (Thomas) I like them very much. Pucky is Ellen Violet. She's written novels. She was one of the first-- I want her to leave her papers to Smith-- because she was the first major woman television writer and she's done so many scripts. And she used to work for the New York Times as Ellen Violet. And Tommy's a terrific painter. And I don't know who has the money and I don't care. They're in a slightly different world. They even enjoy name-dropping. I mean they knew all this-- you know the book that was just done? The book about the women mystery writer? Okay, it will come to me.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: Mary Jane Meaker has written a book about her because she had an affair with her. But it's unimportant.

ANDERSON: Okay.

MACKAY: They know her. They like to name-drop. They know all these people. I like them but I don't always like the conversation. But it's much more of a mixture now.

ANDERSON: Are there other ways that subgroups get divided? Some of them are because you live in Southold, some might be age?

MACKAY: You get to be friends with people. Yeah, age definitely is a-- I'm more comfortable with my age group. But, at the same time, this summer I sold my boat to two people who I thought knew how to sail and it turned out they didn't know how to sail. So I had to teach them how to sail before I dared give it to them. Now, they look younger but they're actually I think 50 or just before 50. And I was perfectly comfortable with them. That's not a problem. But I guess you like your old friends best.

ANDERSON: And you're not worried about NFWF surviving as an organization even though things are changing?

MACKAY: No, I think it's because it's important enough and I think that these people are earnest enough. They need an infusion of new ideas, which I'm trying to help get them. Because these people over my hill here really know how to do some of the fundraisers and things. So I think it'll happen. It's just going to occupy a slightly different position.

I wish we had more events that were appealing to everybody. Then this dance is probably the closest thing we're having. The auction could have been but it's sort of wearing off and the talent show is what it is. But the Narrow River Singers brings in a large audience and mixes up people a lot and there are a lot of friendships made through that. Carol's done a wonderful job with it.

ANDERSON: And the health issue still feels like the right issue to organize around out here. I mean do you feel like there are other issues that are as pressing as health issues that other organizations might form around?

MACKAY: I don't know. I think the health's very important.

ANDERSON: As the population is aging.

MACKAY: Yeah. We really are. There was a joke the other day, somebody said-- I think apropos after the Narrow River Singers-- somebody said, Where is so and so or who is so and so? And she said, Oh, she's right over there-- short, gray hair, glasses.

ANDERSON: (Laughter)

MACKAY: Everybody.

ANDERSON: You've had a lot of losses in this community over the last years.

MACKAY: The what?

ANDERSON: A lot of losses in this community.

MACKAY: Yes.

ANDERSON: I mean I was very struck by that in the scrapbook you put together.

MACKAY: The list of the ones who died.

ANDERSON: Yeah. And the obituaries and memorial programs...

MACKAY: Yeah. That's a time when a lot of people come together for things.

ANDERSON: But there must be a lot of voids in things like leadership.

MACKAY: I miss them, some of them. I'm sorry Jane went so early. Jane Chambers. She was a very vital force in some way. She had a lot of troubles. She never had enough money. And I remember one day going to see her. She says I'm full of the wants today. The "I wants." But they never had enough money. She had to do a lot of pornography because-- should I tell about her working in the porno factory?

ANDERSON: I don't know about that.

MACKAY: Well she was desperate to make money so she went to the porno factory where they sit you down with a typewriter or electric fancy thing. And on the wall are a list of dirty words and a list of dirty acts. And on every page there's got to be five of each or something like that. And when you get to page a hundred fifteen it stops. It doesn't matter where you are, what you say, it stops and it's all fed directly into the printer. She could only stand it for the week I think. But it was a funny story. I remember a dinner party we were having. And Mary Dorman said, Jane, you know, what is it like writing this stuff? And Jane just stood up and talked it out. She could just reel it out and it was so-- we were laughing so hard, you know. It was like this totally different thing, but when Annie sprinkle was out here with Mary she..

ANDERSON: I saw a picture of the two of them together in the scrapbook.

MACKAY: She sent her video to my cousin Nancy MacKay, who's also gay.

ANDERSON: Something in the water in your family huh?

MACKAY: Yeah, I think on my father's side there's too much testosterone, I really do.

ANDERSON: Really?

MACKAY: Of the two aunts, one-- this is the Zigfeld girl-- she never married. She was probably heterosexual but she never got married. The other one should have been a lesbian. And in my family, my sister's the only straight one and Nancy and I are gay. And the men are all heavily men. I mean you just know there's testosterone, and my brother got it too. Just testosterone running all over the place.

ANDERSON: Amuck.

MACKAY: Yeah.

MACKAY: But there was something about...

ANDERSON: You're talking about your cousin, Nancy Mackay. Well I've lost it.

MACKAY: I've lost it too. Well, it'll come back.

ANDERSON: I've lost your train of thought.

MACKAY: I want to say just one thing about this change in community.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MACKAY: When we started the Vassar Organization, Lesbian Gay Alumni of Vassar College, the first couple of years were terrific. And what I was concerned about was reaching alumni who'd been, you know, tortured by Vassar or thrown out or whatever. And it was interesting to me: We never got one person who was willing to tell the story of being thrown out. We could not document-- everybody said people down the hall were thrown out. But partly I think because those people were called up in front of very powerful women, the president, the warden of this and that, and threatened and they just left. They didn't give them a chance, you know, they didn't even-- but the bitterness towards Vassar was immense. So we did reconnect with quite a few of those people. And that was wonderful. And it's been a very warm, loving, happy group. However, times have changed. And it's not needed anymore-- it's starting to do the same thing as NFWF has done. Not collapsing. It has a function it will do. But it the all the activities we've been planning nobody has the time and energy to do them. So it's...

38:30
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ANDERSON: And you don't find the younger more recent graduates aren't interested in this kind of an organization?

MACKAY: Well, there's an interesting problem there. We can't get them as part of it because the age difference has meant a tremendous style difference and consciousness difference. They're in a very different place. And they're much more sexual. You should see some of the things that's going on. I mean, I admit I'm of an age where I'm not interested in talking about a lot of stuff that they talk about all the time. And so they consider us, I think, a little on the fuddy-duddy side. And then also the gay high school stuff, what's it called? Gay Straight Alliance.

ANDERSON: Gay Straight Alliance, that's right.

MACKAY: That has had tremendous effect. And it's gotten up to the college level now. But even before that they were just interested in different things and living in a different way. And we had a little fight way back about bisexuality because the people who'd fought to be lesbian and gay didn't want bisexuals there. [ANDERSON: Right.] Well, the students were embracing that-- then the transgender issue comes up which I'm thrilled with. But it was all-- they didn't want to lose our name. And they didn't want to make a bi-gala out of it. Anyway. So there were changes. And no we don't—younger graduates will sometimes turn up at the big reunion, when they're reuniting anyway and they come and drop in and see who's there, you know, meet some friends.

ANDERSON: Right, right.

MACKAY: But it's just a different generation.

ANDERSON: Right. So the alumni association you're still involved with but...

MACKAY: I'm the newsletter editor.

ANDERSON: So you're very much involved with it.

MACKAY: I became the newsletter editor because I knew that if the organization was going to succeed it had to have a strong newsletter. And I'm retired and I could do this and I did it. And it was very interesting. We put together a lot of things, a list of gay Vassar authors, poets. It's so interesting the number of poets who are lesbian. And various things.

ANDERSON: Do the younger students seem interested in your experience at Vassar at that time?

MACKAY: The younger students-- I don't know right now, but ten years ago or five years ago they wanted to know that you could make it in the world as a gay person. So they're much more out. They became out very early. The biggest fight we had-- not fight but-- is that they're now teaching some queer studies. And I don't know what you know about queer studies but while the idea is okay, there's a lot of clap-trap that goes with it and a lot of stuff like you don't have to be gay anymore, you don't have to tell your parents that you're gay because you're not gay. You're anything you choose to be at that moment—which we know is not going to solve your personal problems at all. But they feel it does at that moment. But there's a lot-- I feel very negative stuff goes on. There was one other thing in there.

ANDERSON: About the students being interested in the history.

MACKAY: Oh, they want to know they can make it in the straight world.

ANDERSON: Yes, yes.

MACKAY: And so a lot if them felt it was very good to know you can make it.

ANDERSON: You're survivors.

MACKAY: Big survivors.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MACKAY: And then twice we've taken the original Wolf Girls up to-- they have a gay student house. Gave the whole house to gay students. And it's not very big but it's big enough. So twice they've come up and they're hilarious people. They are just wonderful. And so they tell the story of their time at Vassar. Now they're in their sixties now. And the kids adore them. They're wonderful.

ANDERSON: Do you feel like a role model for younger lesbians? Is that important to you?

MACKAY: I don't know.

ANDERSON: Well it seems, you know, you being a teacher and the...

MACKAY: I think that's been there. I've run into one or two difficult students. And when I was at Dalton-- this would have been '52, 3, it had to be '53 or 4-- two students were brought to our apartment because they were friends. They'd been to the camp of this person. They were all very friendly. But they get to the apartment. Well the next day it's all over school that Ms. Losee and Ms. MacKay have a double bed, you know. And I said, That's it. I don't want anybody involved in my life. Because we're talking the 1950s now.

ANDERSON: Yeah, sure.

MACKAY: And everything was so horrible.

ANDERSON: Yeah, right.

MACKAY: So at that point I really shut down. Everybody knew I was gay. But I didn't want to talk about it.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MACKAY: And you're very vulnerable in schools and I was never that strong a person. A couple of the men were stronger in coming out and it was good. But the one student was real crazy. And you have an instinct to stay away from certain kids who were bothered. I think I am a role model to these two younger people I'm teaching sailing to.

ANDERSON: (laughter) Well, they're the next generation.

MACKAY: Yeah, well, 50s.

ANDERSON: (Laughter)

MACKAY: Anyway.

ANDERSON: We have about 10 minutes left. So is there anything else that you want to add or talk about that we haven't gotten to?

MACKAY: I think some of the things I'm proudest of are like doing that newsletter because I knew it would make the organization survive. And I really believed in it. Now I don't care that it's all going to fall apart. That doesn't matter. I'm very proud about doing the house. I mean doing all the work. My father called it a "testament to faith." But I had enough skills to be able to-- it took a long while to get it done. I'm proud that I made a dulcimer.

46:05

ANDERSON: Your books.

MACKAY: And the books. Yeah, it's funny because you don't, well-- I think I put this in the memoirs, but-- I was very shy with teachers when I was young and with older people. And thought of myself as extremely shy. And then in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, I guess, this classmate wrote this story about a theft that had happened, a joke. I mean it was a silly thing. A theft that had happened. They were going to have a trial about the underpants that were stolen or gym panties or something that were stolen. Various people would testify. She wrote, "And then Anne got the floor. She'd already been given one for her 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. But you know Anne." So that said to me you are not a quiet shy person.

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: At least. And I have had to recognize in the last years that I have been a leader though I never thought of myself that way at all. I mean I was president of the student government at Vassar. But I thought that was an accident because of the person who-- because I sort of ran in on the coattails of somebody else. And I know that the big thing in my life at college was - it changed my whole life- was directing the sophomore

show. And I had come to be noticed because we had a first meeting of freshmen and I'd always been interested in technical things. I suggested some stuff and I obviously made myself known though I don't remember that. But it must have been based on that I was a stage manager for the freshmen play. And based on that they chose me to be the director. I knew nothing about directing. But they were right in a way. And it set up all these theater things that happened afterward.

I had much more fun in the theater that wasn't academic. I went through the academic theater program. And I learned certain things but I hated some of it. And I really hated some of the professional theater. I loved the people who are funny and wonderful and the shows can be really interesting. But you have to know everybody and you have to drop names and you have to do this. It wasn't-- I like community theater. I like people.

ANDERSON: So you're an accidental leader.

MACKAY: Yes, an accidental leader. (Laughter) But I have to admit that I can do it.

ANDERSON: Yeah, right.

MACKAY: And I enjoy it too.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MACKAY: And, as I said to somebody about teaching these people sailing, if you're a director and you have nobody to direct, a big chunk has been taken away.

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: So I'm happy to direct.

ANDERSON: Right, right.

MACKAY: Your friends don't want to be directed. So--

ANDERSON: Right.

MACKAY: I enjoyed teaching a lot. I was very lucky to have those two jobs where I didn't have to teach grammar or anything like that. It was all theater. And I was very good at it. I was very good at-- not the artistic thing of theater of making something absolutely unbelievably new-- but to take kids from here to there and make the play move along and make it interesting and fun to do. And some of my friends who went were very enthusiastic. So that made me feel good.

ANDERSON: Lots to be proud of.

MACKAY: Yeah, I feel that. Yeah.

ANDERSON: What would you have done differently?

MACKAY: I don't know. Might have done-- the poetry was stopped in college by a lousy teacher who didn't tell you how to do it right. And I knew I wasn't doing it right. And I'm sorry it got stopped. I would have liked to have been able to do it along the way. But I didn't know and I thought I was no good and didn't go on. But the last five years have been terrific. And we're going to have a little book out.

ANDERSON: That's exciting.

MACKAY: I'm pleased about that. Very pleased.

ANDERSON: Are you publishing that this year?

MACKAY: Yes, it'll be out in, Manuela and Karen (Braziller) are doing it. You'll meet Karen.

ANDERSON: That's great.

MACKAY: She's wonderful. So, I'm paying for it. But it's like putting out your own CD, you know.

ANDERSON: Yeah, right, right. And that's how you did *Wolf Girls*, right?

MACKAY: We started that way-- we got loans to do it. And then St. Martins took it over. But we paid back all the loans.

ANDERSON: Yes. Yeah, so that could happen with this. You could get a press to pick it up and...

MACKAY: Maybe. Nobody buys poetry, nobody reads poetry, you know. It's okay. It's alright. I would have wanted, would have liked to have been a woodworker. There's some people, lesbians I met back in 1951, '50, that might have been the people-- one was a very famous, now a very famous stage manager, Tharon Musser and she was living with a person I didn't like very much-- but Tharon was doing woodwork. And I would love to have been an apprentice to her. It's a good thing I didn't because I don't think I am as accurate. I mean I'm kind of sloppy on the edges. But that was one thing I would have liked to have known a little bit more about. I would have liked to have been friends with her but it

didn't work out. Yeah, that was really the first couple I met. They're probably the ones you're talking about. I think that's all.

ANDERSON: That's not too big a list frankly. And because you've been so important in helping to build this community and community is something that's so important to you, are there lessons in that exercise and this project that you would like to pass on to the next generation? What do you know that you want us to know?

MACKAY: What I know is that I think the most important word is "let's." Let's do it. Let's try. Let's go. And things don't happen because people don't imagine them. And if you can imagine something you can get everybody to help you do it. And that's what happened about the shows. While I wasn't in on the formation of NFWF, I was certainly very much a part of it and part of things that went on. And I've just seen over and over again-- like Carol Taylor, she was a little bored and wanted to do something. Well she said, Let's do this. And she made it happen. Because most people just don't think enough to do it. Or have the imagination to do something. And that's all.

ANDERSON: Okay. Good thing to keep in mind. Okay Anne, we'll let you off the hook now. We'll turn that off.

END TAPE 2

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