

Transcribe

Coding

Marwa Abdalla: Okay, um, hi. Today's date is November 10th, 2017. Um, we're here at 120 Bedford Street in the sociology building and my name is Marwa, M-A-R-W-A, last name is A-B-D-A- double L- A.

Colleen Fagan: And my name is Colleen Fagan. My first name is spelled C-O-L-L-E-E-N, my last name is F-A-G-A-N, and do you mind saying and spelling out your name for us?

Myke Johnson: My name is Myke Johnson and that's spelled M-Y-K-E J-O-H-N-S-O-N

CF: And, um, okay. Um, while we do the interview you can refuse any questions at any time. Um, the interview- if after the 90 minutes, you want to keep, um, interviewing, you got to, there's like a follow up, and- for like spring and next fall if you want to conduct another interview. Um, and we are going to ask, um, how old you are and if you prefer to tell us the decade and, that's fine to so.

MJ: Okay, I'm 64

CF: 64, Okay. Um, where did you grow up?

MJ: I grew up in many different places.

CF: Okay, cool.

MJ: Yeah, my family moved a lot when I was young so we grew- Um, I was born in Michigan and we lived in a lot of places there, and then briefly we lived for a while in Texas and Wyoming, but then mostly in Michigan.

CF: Mostly Michigan, nice. How many years were you in Michigan for, do you think?

Mj: All but 6 months in Texas and 9 months in Wyoming

CF: Wow, okay. Um, can you tell us a little bit

Names and location of interview

Childhood

<p>about your childhood?</p> <p>Mj: Um, I grew up catholic, and um, I'm the oldest of 9 children. So, um, my dad was a very mystical Catholic, so that part was a good experience, um, but, and while I was growing up that was all fine. Later on I had some challenged with the Catholic Church.</p> <p>CF: Oh, really? Um, what does- can you tell us what mystical Catholic means?</p> <p>Mj: Um, he- it's like he believed in God and would pray to God, and expect God could answer. So there was this sense that we can be in communicated with spiritual beings.</p> <p>CF: Oh, really? That's interesting, cool.</p> <p>MA: Ok, um, can you please tell us, um, when did you come out?</p> <p>Mj: Um, I came out...Ok let me think. So,it was a long process. So, I had never even heard of lesbian or gay people when I was young. In college I met one of my best friends who eventually came out as gay, and didn't even occur to me then that I might be gay. Um, when I was 25 I entered a relationship with a man and then in that year I learned about, um, feminism. I read the book, a book by Mary Daley called "Beyond God the Father," and looked at the kind of intense patriarchal history that I had been living under. And so that kind of opened my eyes and then I began to be involved with a group in Grand Rapids, Michigan called Aradia (?) which was a mostly lesbian community, but was also for all women. So I started to hang out with a bunch of lesbians but then it took about 5 years before I actually came out, so I was- I was, um, I think I was 31 or 32 when I came out.</p> <p>CF: Um can you tell us- you said like, there was hard parts about it- about growing up and then coming out and then, was there any struggle between the Catholic Church and...</p> <p>MJ: So, for me the struggle was more about</p>	<p>Childhood, religion, family</p> <p>Catholicism</p> <p>Religion</p> <p>Coming out</p> <p>Learning about feminism</p> <p>Feminism, religion</p> <p>Lesbian community</p> <p>Coming out</p>
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<p>feminism. So, once I- you know and that turned my life upside down, was kind of like everything- and I was a very spiritual person and so everything that I had learned about became, became called into question. And, but then I was involved with a bunch of women who were saying, "Well let's rethink spirituality," you know, if, if we think of god as male because all these religions have told us that, even though, even though I always knew that was just an image because we can't really imagine what God is, um, you know, so then we would say well let's start to imagine God as a woman. And so I was involved with feminist spirituality for many years and, um, so, so in a way that was the big break, um, for me. And then I think once I came out, it, that part wasn't as hard.</p> <p>CF: Oh, really?</p> <p>MJ: Though, I mean it was hard for my family. I mean, I remember when I told my mother that I was a lesbian, and this was even before I fully came out, but I said, "I think I might be a lesbian," and she, she said to me, um, "I used to think that having one of my daughters get pregnant before they were married was the worst thing that could happen." But that was worse.</p> <p>CF: Yeah, that was worse.</p> <p>MJ: And so, um, anyway. At least at the beginning.</p> <p>CF: Yeah. Um, how were your siblings reacting towards it?</p> <p>Mj: Um, all different ways, you know it's, it's... kind of over time, I mean I have siblings that are very conservative, um, Christians. I had a sister write me that she was praying for me every day because she felt like homosexuality was of the devil. Um, I had another sister, um, and in a way my family is really close, but then in another way there is things we can't talk about. You know, like, now we can't talk about politics.</p> <p>CF: Oh, yeah.</p>	<p>Feminism</p> <p>Spirituality</p> <p>Feminism and spirituality</p> <p>Feminism and spirituality</p> <p>Coming out</p> <p>Coming out, family reaction</p> <p>Family, religion, homophobia</p>
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Mj: But, umm, but I had- so one of my younger sisters, I was present for the birth of her second child- she had a home birth. And so I knew her other daughter and, you know, this one, so I felt kind of close to them, but when her oldest daughter was 7, she didn't want me to stay at her house anymore. Um, because of her fears about abuse. You know, then years later she apologized for that.

CF: Oh, yeah, she did.

MJ: You know, and, people in my family have been very welcoming to my partner. Um, you know, a few years ago we had a family reunion and so, it's this funny mix of them, many of them, being like homosexuality is wrong and yet they also are caring towards me and caring towards my partner and, so.

CF: It's interesting.

MA: So, um, after the time you actually told everyone about how you feel about- that you want to be a lesbian and stuff like that, did you feel like you were a stranger in your own family and circle of friends, did you feel welcome with most of them or?

MJ: Um...

MA: Did you feel like an outsider?

MJ: It felt like, it felt like I entered a different world. You know, so, so, um, yeah. I mean it's- it, I had been involved, really, I been involved in something called the Catholic Pentecostal Movement, and so a lot of my friends from college were very religious, and, so when I came out even though one of them turned out to be gay, but when I became a feminist it was like I was in a different world. I was in a women's community, and, um, and then when I actually came out I was, um, I was in theological school and that summer I went to the Women's Peace Encampment at Seneca Falls in New York, and that was again, it was all women but there were a

Family, homophobia

Family, homophobia, acceptance

Catholic Pentecostal Movement

Women's community, feminism

Seneca Peace Encampment, community, activism

lot of lesbians there who were part of that community and, so it felt like I was- I just entered a whole different community. Like I wasn't really in the world, I mean I still connected a little bit with my family, but not a lot.

CF: So, was that like a, like I read something um, was it like a campout type thing? Like a bunch of women would just come together and hang out and stuff or?

MJ: So, yeah. So, um, in Romulus, New York, there was some army depot called the Seneca Army Depot. And in 1983, I wasn't involved right at the beginning, but in 1983 a group of women decided to create an encampment against the army depot where they believed nuclear weapons were stored. And so they bought a 52 acre farm. So there was like an old farmhouse, and an outhouse and, and then we had tents, you know, on the- all over the different part of the land. You know we had built, um, ramps of wood so people with wheelchairs would be able to get around, and, um we had water- a water system and, so I was there for a weekend in 1983, but in 1985 was when I was there for the whole summer

CF: Oh, really?

MJ: And at that point there were maybe about 30 women staying on the land at any given time. Sometimes people would in for a weekend or, you know, go away but there was a group of us who were there for whole summer.

CF: The whole summer? That's awesome. Um, I heard that a lot of people got arrested at one point?

MJ: Yes. Different, different times people got arrested.

CF: Um, were you one of them or?

MJ: Um, not while I was at Seneca. I was arrested other times.

Anti-nuclear weapons activism

1983, New York State

Seneca Peace Encampment

Arrests for activism

CF: Really?

MJ: But not at that time. Um, yeah.

CF: Cool. Do you have any follow up questions Marwa?

MJ: I can say a little bit more. One of the things- So, so we were protesting this nuclear weapons place.

Cf: Yeah

MJ: And, you know, and there were things that happened related to that. I mean, there'd be helicopters that would come over the land and we, we had campfires where women would watch over the night to keep people safe, but it was also like we were trying to figure out how to build a new world, so we, you know, used consensus process, we tried to think about, you know, how can we be different? So, in a way it was like being a different country.

CF: Really?

MJ: In this little 52 acre space. So, so that part I think was the most powerful part of it for me, was women really saying, "How can we change how we are?" You know, so we would wrestle with all different kinds of oppression issues, you know? So we would talk about, you know, economic issues, and disability issues, and racial issues, like all those kinds of things to say, you know, how can we build a world that doesn't have oppression in it? So, so, um, it was, even though the actual, the army depot isn't there anymore, but, it didn't go away while we were there, but I think it was a really life changing experience for everybody who came to it. And then you'd go on to your life and do other kinds of activism.

CF: Right, yeah.

MJ: You know, and- but it was, it was, um, and it was also a great place to come out as a lesbian.

Protesting nuclear weapons

Community, intersectionality

Learning about oppression, trying to create change

Coming out

CF: Yeah, cause there was a lot of women there.

MJ: A lot of women there, great women.

CF: Did they, where did you guys live in? Was it like buildings or?

MJ: Um, we lived in tents.

CF: Tents?

MJ: Yeah, and then the following winter I came back and there were just a few as maybe 4 or 5 who stayed through the winter.

CF: Oh, really? In tents?

MJ: No, not in tents.

CF: Oh, no?

MJ: Then we were in the house with a wood stove. We still had an outhouse but yeah, we weren't in tents during the winter.

CF: Awesome. And did they, did the people at the nuclear place bug you at all or was?

MJ: Um, yeah, you know, there was, you know, we would do, um, like we'd go down to the main gate which was, I don't remember now, if it was a half a mile down the road or a couple miles. You know, and we would do protests, um, every once in a while we had people, you know, little groups of women would go onto the base and spray paint something or, you know, cut the fence somewhere and, you know, so, um there was kind of like this ongoing witness and protesting kinds of things that would happen-

CF: Yeah, just poking.

MJ: You know, not every single day but, yeah.

CF: Yeah.

MJ: Yeah, it was like-

Protesting nuclear weapons

CF: That's pretty cool, I like protesting. It's so much fun. Um, Do you have any, can you tell us about of any other feminist groups that you've been a part of?

MJ: Um.

CF: Or protests.

MJ: Yeah, so yeah, so, in a way for me my whole life as a lesbian has been connected to political movements. You know, so after I was at the women's peace camp, um, I moved to Boston. And um, lived in a women's household there um, different ones, I was there for several years. Um, I was part of the um, March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Liberation in 1987. And then I was on the organizing community for civil disobedience at the supreme court. In fact, I just got a Facebook message from somebody wh- they're going to be having a gathering, um, in Western Massachusetts in February I think, to kind of look at that, that action again and just all of the organizing that happened around that. So, so there where a group of us in Boston, there were 8 of us on this team that set up the, like the documents and the trainings for the civil disobedience at the supreme court. And then I was part of the civil disobedience at the supreme court and, you know, went to jail and um, they, that never appeared on my record because they lost my packet

Cf: Oh, they did?

Mj: Which had the information in it. You know and, um, but I also had been arrested earlier for actions against nuclear weapons, and I have to say the action at the supreme court was probably the most joyful and empowering time I ever did something like that, because, um, we were protesting the supreme court case Bower v. Howard which had said that homosexuality-homosexual acts were illegal, and, um, but you know even if they arrested us, they couldn't stop us from being gay or lesbian.

MA: Right.

Boston

March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Liberation, 1987.

Organizing civil disobedience at the supreme court

Bower v. Howard

CF: That's true.

Mj: And, um, you know, and it was, it was- again an action that took into consideration a whole lot of different oppressions as part of its understanding of things, and, um and I- I'll always remember at that point the AIDS epidemic was really high and so, all of the police would wear gloves, and, and I remember the gay men saying, "You're gloves don't match your shoes!" As a chant. So, it was just, it was just very funny. Um, on the other hand my lover at the time, when they did the handcuffs on her they sprained both of her wrists, and so, you know, for the next several months she had sprained wrists, so it wasn't like it was just easy, you know, but, but there was that feeling, I mean they but little, I don't know, like hospital bands on us and we just ripped them off and threw them out the window, we were on a bus. Um, you know, before they took us to the jail and then in the jail, they never really give you any food to eat, you know, there were like a bunch of women crowded in this one cell, and so we were trying to get a little sleep and we were, you know, like two to a bunk, trying to get some sleep and so, the women I was in the bed with I said, "Well, I guess if we're gonna sleep together we should know each other's names!" Well and it turned out to be Starhawk. Who, I don't know if you're familiar with her work but, you know, she's a famous feminist which and ecological activist so it was just kinda funny to encounter her there. You know, and then eventually, I don't know if it was the next day or the next, gradually they'd bring people to court but then, as I said they, they somehow had lost my packet, so eventually just released me. 'Cause they didn't know what else to do with me.

CF: Did they treat you guys like worse in the jail you think or was it like?

MJ: Um, I think there was probably strength in numbers. You know they, they couldn't, you know nobody beat us up or anything, I mean except that partner at the, you know, so there were subtle things like that, but, um, you know

AIDs epidemic

Police interactions

Arrested for civil disobedience

met Starhawk, eco-feminist writer, in jail.

there were a couple hundred people arrested is my memory of it, so it was hard for them to-

CF: Do anything.

MJ: Do...yeah, yeah.

CF: Um, do you know if Starhawk ever- her papers got released or?

MJ: I don't know.

CF: No, you don't?

MJ: I think there were only a few of us who somehow got lost in the shuffle. So, yeah.

CF: Um, I kinda want to go back to the March on Washington, how was that like for you? Like, were you, did you march all the way to the White House or how was that?

MJ: You know it's hard for me to remember those kind of details, I mean I was, it was, I understand that it, at that time was the largest march on Washington that ever happened. I'd have to...I think I looked back actually to try to figure out the date, you know, there were several hundred thousand people there. So that, and then it was, they also spread out the AIDS Quilt on the Washington Mall, um, you know, so it was, it was very moving. Um, but I don't remember any specific details, like who spoke or how we got where we got or where we marched.

CF: Yeah.

MJ: You know I was just kind of swept up in the crowd for that part. Um, I also, I think the March was probably on a Saturday or Sunday and then maybe the civil disobedience was on a Monday but again, I'd have to check. But because I was involved with the organizing of the civil disobedience I wasn't so involved with anything but just going to the march. But we also did a non-violence training for folks who were gonna be part of the civil disobedience that I was so involved with.

March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Liberation

AIDS Quilt

Non-violence

CF: How did you go about that, the non-violence training?

MJ: Um, I have somewhere, I don't know if I still have it. You know, one- some of the things we did, like, we created a booklet for people and we talked about the kinds of things you might expect if you get arrested and we would have people practice responding nonviolently if someone was harassing them, you know, so we would do role plays during it. And, um, you know, we talked about how the intersection of other oppressions could affect people getting arrested. You know, so, if you were a person of color you might have to be more, we might be more attentive in terms of the arrest situation. So, so basically it was like a day long workshop where we talked about the principles of nonviolence and the details of the action and some of the legal ramifications. And, which I believe in those days were not as draconian as they are today. I think it's become more and more challenging, you know, like it's more and more dangerous for people who get arrested these days. But, um, but, so we, you know, would have maybe 6 hours and we'd go through all these different things of information. We also had a structure whereby everybody was in an affinity group, a group of maybe 8 to 10 people, that they knew, and then they could watch out for each other, and, um, and it was also a helpful tool for, um, you know like, you're not like a nameless person lost in a crowd, it's like you have your group of buddies and some of those affinity groups, you know, people came with them from their towns so they already knew each other and I think that probably helped with, um, you know, if, if there was somebody who had infiltrated and wanted to cause trouble, there was less possibility for them to do that because of that structure.

MA: That's interesting

CF: That's pretty cool. Um. Um, so, you said that you look up to a lot of people, Can you tell us a little about, how you like Starhawk and how was she?

Intersectionality, racism

Mj: Um, sure , um, so I'm... When I was becoming a feminist and involved in feminist spirituality movement, she, her books was one of the ones that were important in terms of recreating a religion that could be focused on Goddess. Um, and then she also had other, I mostly knew her through her books until more recently, um, you know she had books about political organizing, and so I loved about her that she combined spiritually and activism. That was something that was important in my own life, too. Um, Later on she's also done work with, um, permaculture and ecological activities, so I actually did a training with her, um, an earth activist training. So, so I feel like I've kind of known her through various parties of my life. As, um, and that's another issue that's important to me is the earth, so, yeah. I always appreciated her um, like her, her, I would say integrity of pulling all those things together.

Cf: Is she Native American?

Mj: No, no.

Cf: No?

Mj: She's Jewish.

Cf: Oh which- which one was did you, um in the packet there's some Native American spiritual thing that you're into?

Mj: Um, kinda the reverse.

Cf: Reverse that

Mj: So, yeah, so, um, so just kind of going through. So I had been in Divinity school in Chicago and came out and when I came to Boston, um, I met a couple of people who were involved with the doctoral program in feminist theology at Episcopal Divinity school so I became part of that program. Um, in the meantime as for my work I was doing psychotherapy with women, and then, I you know, like teaching classes or doing activism, that was pretty much my life.

Starhawk

Divinity School; Chicago

Episcopal Divinity School

Then for a while I worked at a women's bookstore. Um, but, another place that women would get together would be the women's music festivals and again there was you know, all the issues were dealt with but, one of the issues that happened with women and women's spirituality is that many women were drawn to Native spirituality. There were also Native women who are part of these festivals and they said, "that's not okay." And, so I started learning more about that and then some of us started doing workshops about why, um, borrowing from Native spirituality was actually stealing and actually very harmful to Native women and Native people because it took things that weren't really the essence of Native religions and took them out of context and used them for different purpose. And you know, a lot of that was about power relations, you know, so, white culture took everything from Native people, and then now it's gonna take their spirituality, too, and Native religions are part of their community struggle for survival and resilience, um, so all the new age kind of marketing of Native spirituality undermines their own ability to have their connection be honored. So, yeah, so for several years I was doing workshops related to that, and I wrote a, an essay about that that then, um, I'm trying to think, it was posted on a website and it kinda took on a life of its own.

CF: Oh really?

MF: In fact it still has a life of its own. This was in 1995 that I think I first published it, and just last summer someone wanted it translated into French and it was kinda...

CF: Oh, that's pretty cool

MJ: You know, and I know it was in Spanish and you know, some- nobody even told me about that and it's in German you know, so it, yeah, so it was, I guess it, in- it wasn't really the time of social media back in 1995. But then it's in own way it was kinda having its own viral life on the internet. So, so that, so there's different Native people that I've connected with through the

Women's music festivals

Cultural appropriation of Native spirituality

Leading workshops about cultural appropriation

Essay about cultural appropriation

process of that.

CF: Yeah.

MJ: You know like doing solidarity work and-

CF: And that's what they been, did they mention that it's taken away from their people or?

Mj: Oh, yeah.

Cf: Yeah, they did?

Mj: They, I mean, yeah, there's a whole, um, yeah there's a whole kind of body of literature that talks about that, you know, that it's not okay for white people to rip off Native spirituality.

Cf: Right. Just saying... Yeah, I'm Native, well, I'm white, but I'm also like Native American, so it's very, um, interesting about, hearing about that.

Mj: Well, in my life it was confused too because I have Native ancestry.

Cf: Oh, you do?

Mj: Um, and it was because I had become a feminist, when I was doing genealogy, I was curious about my matrilineal descent and it turns out that, that was Native, um to the **Enu** people or **Montu** Native people in Canada so, so, but, I also know, you know like, I, through the process of doing all this work I really learned about being white, but I still honor my ancestors, you know.

CF: Yeah

MJ: Who were Native.

CF: Yeah, that's pretty cool

MA: This one?

CF: Yeah

MA: Um, was there something particular that inspired you to become an activist?

Cultural appropriation

Ancestry

MJ: Hmm, um, I would bring that all the way back to when I was growing up, and I was a Christian, and the way I read the bible was that Jesus was calling us to live a certain way and, and so, I kept wanting to figure out, well how do we do that today. And, so, um, when I was in college there was some people working on um, a boycott for the farm workers in California, and so I got involved with that and then, um, then I just discovered the Catholic Worker Movement. And if you haven't ever heard of that at all, so it's a thing that started in the 1930's but they, the way it was when I encountered it was there were would be houses in various towns and I, and I traveled around and saw, met some of these, but where they would, um, have hospitality for homeless people, but they would live there, too, so, so, the house that I lived in there were, um, five of us who were living there full time, and then we had maybe I think room for up to seven people who were homeless. And, um, and, so then I was in three different houses in the course of my seven years doing that. So, they would do that hospitality for homeless people but then they would also work on issues of peace and justice. And to me that was, oh they're really living the teachings of Jesus. And so it was in that context that then I also encountered feminism and, I wasn't a Christian anymore, but, but that was, you know, but I think even though I, I wouldn't define myself as Christian anymore I still believe in the teachings of Jesus. And that, um, that's still like a connection for me, but that's I think what started me in the path of activism. And then, so then becoming a feminist activist or a lesbian activist. I've been an activist my whole life, yeah.

CF: Yeah, that's interesting, Okay, cool, um, let me just take a look at some of my questions.

MA: Yeah, um, what kind of freedoms or equal rights, um, that you think was different from the time that you become lesbian and today, like compared to today?

MJ: Like the kinds of things-

Christianity, Jesus' teachings

Farm workers boycott in California

Catholic Worker Movement

Christianity and feminism

Activism

MA: Like feelings about equal rights that you wish has been there, the time you became lesbian compared to today?

MJ: Oh, um you know it's, it was such a different world and because I was an activist I mean I think my experience was different from some other, um, GLBT people because I came out into a community, I think, I don't know the comm- it's seems to me that the community might not be as strong now as it was then, at least for lesbians. And so it was, it was not, it was not difficult, if that makes any sense. It was like this thing of oh my god, here we are and we're empowering ourselves as women and we're also empowering ourselves as lesbians. And, so, um, you know so it was only later that, when I was living in Massachusetts that I got involved with, um, the issue of, say, marriage. Um, and at first a lot of us didn't even care about marriage. That seemed very much, like we were more radical and you know, and, so, um, but somewhere in the middle of all that I should say, um, I got involved with Unitarian Universalism and became a minister and was ordained as a minister in Boston, and, so um, then I went to Cape Cod to be a minister at a church out there, and two women in my congregation were part of the lawsuit in Massachusetts for equal marriage. So then our whole congregation was involved with supporting Linda and Gloria in this process. And then in Massachusetts the supreme court ruled that it was unconstitutional for there not to be gay marriage, and so we had about- I think that was in November and then we had about 6 months till may before the weddings could start happening. So I was able to be the person who married Linda and Gloria, and then about 22, I think 21 other couples and that last, I moved to Maine in August of that year so, from May to, is that right? Or is it the next year? Now I can't remember. 2004...no it was the next year I moved to Maine. And, so, during that year I married 22 couples. But my partner and I didn't get married so it was like, because she's disabled, and if we get married she would lose her health care. Um, because she's on, because of being on disability she is also on

Coming out

Women's empowerment

Marriage equality

Unitarian Universalism

Minister in Cape Cod

Marriage Equality in Massachusetts

Move to Maine

Marriage, disability, healthcare

Medicaid, and so a lot of people that got married they said they were able to get health care because now they could be on their partners health plan. So, so um, so it was an interesting thing because I think having lived in Boston there was a very radical community there, and, you know dealing with all different kind of issues and you know I was part of the Women's Theological Center that was focused on racism and feminism. So, there was an intense amount of activism and people being out and you could basically live your whole life and not even see people who weren't gay. And, but on the Cape when I was a minister there, it was a very different experience and most of the, I didn't realize this but most of the lesbians in our congregation were not out anywhere but at church.

CF: Oh, really?

MJ: And, so, for them the marriage campaign was this whole out bursting of joy, you know suddenly they could talk to their doctor and their neighbor and be out! And so, so that was just a very joyful time, too. 'Course then I moved to Maine and suddenly we were in the middle of, um, a people's veto campaign against equal rights for gay people at all and I got involved in that.

CF: So It's like kinda going backwards.

Mj: Right it was a little bit of a oh my gosh really? And then, and then in 2009, I was involved in the, let me think now, in the equal marriage campaign here that failed, by 2012 I didn't get involved. I actually wasn't very involved in that one, I was a little burnt out from all the other stuff, but you know, I think it's that basic thing of, you know, nobody should be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and identity. And, so, um, you know in the 2009 campaign and the 2005 campaign here, um, I was part of, um, organizing clergy in support of that because the, the other side had very fundamentalist Christians and Catholics, and so we organized. I think we had about 200 clergy who was signed on to our clergy statement in support of equal marriage, so.

Women's Theological Center

Intersectionality

People's veto campaign against equal rights in Maine

2009 Marriage Equality campaign

Faith leaders supporting marriage equality

MA: Can you explain what's clergy?

MF: Um, ministers or rabbis or imams, like anyone who is serving professionally as a, as a religious leader.

CF: Interesting, um, I would like to just back track on something. So, when you were doing those marriages, were you and your partner, like, discussing about getting married or was it never like a...?

MF: Um, we talked about it but we just financially couldn't do it. And I think the other thing so, my partner and I got together, um, when I was 40, so we've been together now 24 years, but, um, but she had been a lesbian in Boston for many years and you know we both had been out for a while, and I think in the feminist community for a while it was sort of like we didn't really care about marriage because it was seen as this patriarchal institution in which women lost their rights. Um, you know, I think probably that's the most threatening thing about equal marriage for gay people was that it undermines the paradigm of men being above women, because if you have two partners, who's in charge, you know?

CF: Right yeah

MJ: Nobody

CF: Nobody

Mj: It's more equal. And, so um, but we didn't really care about that. And we didn't have children, um, you know I think if things change as we got older maybe we would get married for the, if it seems like we'll have more legal protections by getting married versus not getting married. And it's been kinda like a tradeoff. I mean, we've have to go to the lawyer and get legal documents um, you know, for, um, so that if one of us dies the other person has the right to say what happens to their body, and gets to inherit our house, you know all those kinds of things we had to consult a lawyer to see how to

Thoughts on Marriage

Marriage

Legal protections for unmarried LGBT couples

protect ourselves, and, but, um, but we didn't, we didn't really feel compelled to do it just from our own personal, " Oh I wanna get married!" feeling. That just wasn't something that wasn't important to us.

CF: Yeah, that's understandable. Um, so, do you think a lot of lesbians in Cape didn't really come out because of the, was it like a conservative type place to be at or a lot of religion in Cape or?

MJ: It was a little more conserv- I mean Massachusetts in general isn't as conservative as parts of Maine, but I think that Cape, I mean sometimes it's hard to remember that in fact anywhere you came out, you were at risk. I mean maybe that, because, because so much of my time as a lesbian was in the gay community, in the lesbian community, that I didn't have to deal with those people who didn't like us. But, um, you know, but on the other hand it was a dangerous thing. Um, and you know, so people I think, also there where teachers and social workers and, you know, so in a lot of those kind of, um, jobs were they could risk losing their job if they came out. So, yeah, so that's my sense of it, you know, and It's just that it was something that was considered private so that you wouldn't put yourself at risk losing your job.

CF: Yeah, um, were you ever feeling like losing your job or?

MJ: Um, I'm trying to think, um, so I, I always had alternative kinds of job and, so, um, you know, so when I was in the Catholic Worker Movement that was all volunteer but then we got our food and, you know, like we got what we needed, but... and then um, when I was a therapist, I was a therapist to women in the women's community, so even like the feminist newspaper was where I advertised, so I wasn't worried about that. Um, yeah, so, so I haven't ever chosen to have a job in which I would be at risk for losing it because of who I am because so much of my life I've chosen, and I think been privileged to work on behalf of what I believe in. You know, and the other side of that, I was never- never got paid a

LGBT community, seperatism

Fear of losing jobs if people came out

Employment

Privilege

lot, but yet I was able to manage to do it.

CF: Um, do you know anyone who, any in your circle who's gotten fired because they were out or?

Mj: Sure, yeah. Well, um, the person who is coming to my mind was, you know, fired from her job as a teacher, you know, I, I know there were women who were at the peace encampment who, um, lost their children because there were lesbian. You know, and there was a whole movement of trying to, um, you know, assert the rights at lesbian mothers who were divorced to have custody of their children. Um, yeah, so, um, I'm trying to think if my partner, my partner when she was working, um, before she was disabled she was working as a, um, she worked for the railroad company as one of the first women in that so I don't, I don't know if people there knew that she was a lesbian. I mean she got a lot of hassle for being a woman in a traditional male place of employment.

CF: Interesting.

MJ: The other thing that I notice is that some of the people that I was an activist with stay at the peace camp, so, maybe we're friends on Facebook now, and it feels like a lot of those people, you know, struggle financially now. Because they were in alternative kinds of careers. And I think for me what happened was, about the time when my, when, you know, my plan and what I cobbled together in my entrepreneur work wasn't working out so well, that was when I decided to become a minister. And so then I had in a way more of a traditional job, except the Unitarian Universalism supports, by then had already supported gay and lesbian ministers and feminist ministers. So, um, you know, that didn't have an effect there, and I was able to have that kinda secure job.

CF: So, your job now is like Unitarian, how do you pronounce it again?

Mj: Unitarian Universalist minister.

Lesbian women losing their children

Financial struggle in the LGBT community

Cf: Yeah so that's like, everybody is excepted type deal or?

Mj: Yeah, yeah, it's not always successful. You know it's still, like one of the things are the denomination is really working on right now is kinda structural white supremacy. Cause it's a mostly white denomination and, you know, it has people of color in it, and they're sort of helping the denomination get its act together. But you know it's, and you start out with a white organization, or organization that's mostly white doing that kind of work, it's really challenging. So, but for the most part they've been, since I've been involved, they've been very supportive of gay and lesbian and transgender and bisexual rights. Um, I would say that the generation before me, you know, carved that out, but I really wasn't part of that.

CF: Interesting. Um, So Maine's equal...So were you like, when you came to Maine and stuff like, you were part of like the equal rights, did you work on trying to pass anything or?

Mj: Yeah, so in 2005, as I understand it the legislator had added sexual orientation to the human rights laws, and then there was a people's veto that undermined that, or that was trying to undermine that. And, so then the organizing had started before I got here but then, um, in that September and October I was involved with the group that was trying to say no to that people's veto. Um, so people at the church where involved, too. I mean it was, we were trying to organize the clergy also and um, yeah. So people at my church made bumper stickers that said, let's see what did they say? "our church believes in equal rights for all." Or something like that. So, um, yeah, it was pretty exciting when we won that one. You know, but it was um, and it was great, I got to work with some of the folks that, like, that worked at that time at equality Maine, and, um, ACLU and, um, you know, just- GLAAD, so It was really neat to meet the activists that were working on those kind of things.

Trying to dismantle white supremacy in the church

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Maine people's veto

UU Church response to people's veto

CD: Did you like zone in, or like, were you inspired by any particular person in any of this groups? or so, just like?

MJ: Um, I was inspired by how smart they were. Like in that, and I'm kind of putting that together with the one, the marriage campaign too, and just how many skills they had for, you know, organizing and figuring out which senators and state representatives were in their side, and which ones could be swayed, and then they would organize people, like they had this huge mailing list and they would organize people to talk with each of their representatives, you know so it was just very, I was impressed by the skills they had and that kind of organizing. And then, you know, in the following one realizing where the hold out was that they organized people going door to door having conversations with people, so.

Cf: Like canvassing?

Mj: Canvassing, yeah. Which I wasn't involved in that part but it was just need to see people who really know what they're doing with, how to make a specific change in the law.

CF: Yeah, that is really cool. Um, let's see, can you ask about?

MA: This one here? Um, okay. Can you tell us about any public figures you are inspired by or look up to? Mary Daly, Audre Lorde, or Susan Griffin?

MJ: Yeah, so, so Mary Daly have kind of a mixed feelings about her, she, she was the one wrote that book that turned my life upside down and woke me up as a feminist, the book "Beyond God the Father," and then I read other books, um I actually took a class from her when I was living in Boston, and she reminded me a little of the way my dad could just be, "what I believe is right." So, um, so it felt like she had this great idea but wasn't always as good at listening to the critique. And Audre Lorde probably is my favorite, like the person I'm most inspired by, she

Marriage campaign

Mary Daly

was an African American lesbian woman who, um, she actually wrote an open letter to Mary Daly to challenge her about, you know, like guess now we would say you know creating more intersectionality in the analysis. Um, but we had a conference in Boston that Audre Lord came to speak at you know, and so, so her political writings and her poetry, just always were very grounding, you know, and how do we honor all of who were are and deal with all the different structures of oppression. Um, one of the things that she said haven't seen it written anywhere. but only she said, must if been in the speech was, "You use what power you have to work for what you believe in," and that was always so empowering to me, because you might not have a lot of power in situations, but if you have just a little bit you can use that to work for what you believe in. So, um, yeah so she is one of my main heroes. And, um, Susan Griffin wrote a book called "Women and Nature" and she made a lot of the connections between the oppression of women and the use of the earth as a resource and you know that sort of ecological view points. She also wrote a book, it's called "Rape, the Power of Consciousness," and I think about it lately with the, "me too" campaign that's been on Facebook, are you familiar with that? You know and that, one of the things I remember from that book was just, you know, because rape exists, whether we've been raped or not, like we are all affected by that. And even our relationships to the earth is affected because if you are a woman and you are gonna go walk in the woods you always gonna be a little bit cautious.

CF: or like down the street.

MJ: Yeah. Yeah, that you can't you can't find solitude or you can't, you know like, so, so she really just made some of those strong connections and um, Carter Heywood who is in that list, um, was one of my teachers at Episcopal Divinity school and she was one of the first women in Episcopal Church to be

Audre Lorde

Susan Griffin

People's relationship to to earth, feminism

ordained and then she also, um, is a lesbian and so, she was one of the first, you know, out lesbians in that context. Um, the, when I was in the, the program, um, she was my adviser when I was in the Doctoral program at Episcopal Divinity school. So, what I basically did was create a lesbian liberation theology, and I don't know if you familiar if you have heard of liberation theology.

CF: No, can you-

MJ: Um, the basic idea of liberation theology comes out of mostly the Central American context, where Christian people started saying you know, God is on the side of the people who are oppressed and fighting for their liberation. So, so, um, you know, so that- that sense that God is not with the rulers, God is with the poor people. And, and so, that then became basis for Black liberation theology saying you know that God is- like that Black is beautiful, that God is with us, and also for feminist liberation theology, you know, that God is Goddess, you know, that our Liberation is like a grace filled movement, and so thinking about that in terms of lesbian liberation theology is kind of what if God is a lesbian? You know like, how do we imagine the divine spirit working in us so that we can choose to be liberated and, so, um, yeah, so I just kind of explored all the different avenues of that, and how people would making meaning about what it meant to be a lesbian. And I mean it's totally changed now. Like, 'cause it keeps changing. You know like, there was not, um, when I first did that there was not really transgender movement, there was not...we used the word "queer" in that sense of everybody being queer, but I think now there is a much stronger queer movement. So, you know, so it keeps on folding, but I think people would even say that that's part of what's sacred about being queer is that it's a focus of changing and transformation. So, yeah, so, um, so Carter was my advisor and was just very supportive and helpful. And Paula Gunn Allen is a Native American lesbian who, um, had written a lot about, um, actually she's probably one of the

Episcopal Divinity School

Liberation theology

History of liberation theology

Lesbian liberation theology

Modern day queer movement

Paula Gunn Allen

people that, that that put that idea into my head about how change and transformation are sacred moments.

CF: Oh, really?

MJ: Yeah, yeah, so, that's what I can say briefly about those folks. There are many other folks, but those are the ones that came to my mind when I was trying to do it.

CF: Does anyone else come to your mind though, or like currently?

MJ: Oh, that would be too hard to figure out.

CF: That's pretty cool, um I had something, um, do you have anything to add to that?

MA: Yeah, it's um, it's not connected to this but I guess, so, um that time like, when women, like you said 'cause when you worked as an activist there was mostly white women?

MJ: Um, I would say probably mostly but not all. Like there were a lot of ways, um, especially in Boston where women of all different races came together, so, like, um, you know, but it might be that there were just, say, one or two women of color in a group of eight. Or, and at the Women's Theological Center in Boston there was maybe more conscious focus on that, so there was, um, what they did there they had, um, special kinds of empowerment groups for women of color.

Who

I believe mostly were African American women, um, and then we also had women's groups for white women in terms of undoing racism and that is where Margie and I actually met. Got to know each other.

MA: That is the question I was gonna ask for like the African American women they are struggling to prove we are American we have the right to be here or something and we are citizens, but then how does it work when they come out and say we are actually lesbians? So now it's like you're black and you are a lesbian,

Race and activism

Women's Theological Center; Boston

which is more challenges?

MJ: You know, um, a lot of the women that I learned about how all the intersections came together were black lesbians women, because I think because of that experience, they knew about how everything intersected, you know, and so, um, and I think there was a lot of that kind of consciousness in that early lesbian political community, um, because of- because maybe because we had, you know, even if we were different races, we had that common bond of being lesbians and so we were outsiders in a certain way that um, and we were lovers, you know, so there was a whole connections that we had where those issues became important because women we loved were dealing with them.

CF: Alright, yeah, so cool, um, so I can do, um were you part, like, when like, this time- this election, like were you part like the women's march at all?

MJ: I was not

CF: No? Oh.

MJ: Did you go to it?

CF: Yeah, I went to the one in New York it was just like, kind of like the same thing, all women coming together fighting for different things like there was like race, race um advocacy, and like women, and like immigrants, there was just a whole kind of what you were talking about, like coming together and it was really cool. Is there is like a reason or like are you still into, like the politics?

MJ: I'm still an activist, um, well one thing is like I'm preaching most Sundays, so going away for a weekend is like more challenging.

CF: Right, yeah.

MJ: Now that I have this very, very full time job. Um, and I think that the other thing for me is that

Intersectionality

Lesbian community

recently I've become more concerned, or like the place focusing had been our connection to the earth and, um, being concerned that we are wiping out our habitat and we might not have any place to live any more, and so so those kind of things have occupied some of my attention. You know, so my partner and I moved into Portland, I mean not in the peninsula, but in Portland's proper and in a small house and we put solar panels on our house and we have a garden in the back and then, um, you know, talking about, um climate change, and um, yea. So, in, you know, it's like - with that sense that each of us can only do so much, I think I've tended to focus more locally, you know so, so I've gone to demonstration in Portland but I haven't gone to Washington D.C for quite a while.

CF: Oh, yeah.

MJ: I have gone to Augusta, you know, but-

CF: What kind of work have you done with, like, climate change, have you?

MJ: Um, because- because I'm at the intersections of spirituality and activism I think for me, like, one of things that- scientists could solve the problem of climate change if we wanted to. But people don't want to, like, with the greed that is going on with our leaders at this point, you know. They are just trying to make just as much money as they can and they don't care. And to me there is spiritual component to that, because like, when I think what I learned when I was a child. You know we kind of learned that spirituality was separate from earth, you know, and, and heaven was up somewhere else and earth, you know, earth didn't matter as much and I think, for me, it's like as a person of faith and as a theologian, you know, it's like how do we bring those back together? And, you know, so I wrote a book last year called "Finding Our Way Home." You know, how do we reconnect with the earth in our spirit and our bodies, like so that the earth is spirit and we are spirit like, we're not, it's not separate, you know, that we are all into connected, and, so. So, I think for me this

Environmental activism

Climate change

Intersection of spirituality and activism

Wrote a book; "Finding Our Way Home"

past year has been more that kind of, um, spiritual work of kind articulate that and name it, and, you know, like, yes we are all connected as people, and we are also all connected with the birds and the flowers.

CF: Right, everybody. Oh go ahead.

MA: Was that your first book that you wrote or?

MJ: Um, yes, it was my first book that I wrote.

MA: Interesting.

CF: Was it was it published?

MJ: It was, yeah.

CF: Where is it sold?

MJ: Um, you can find it on Amazon.com

MA: What is the name again?

MJ: It's called, um, "Finding Our Way Home." And then the subtitle is, "A Spiritual Journey into Earth Community."

MA: That's pretty cool.

CF: Did it took you a long time to write the book or?

MJ: Yes. Yeah, no, I, well some of it started out as sermons, but then it probably took me about four years between, you know, like actually trying to turn into a book, and then revising it. And I self published it, you know, so is like its a print on demand book.

CF: Oh

MJ: But you can get it through Amazon or sometimes I have copies around, that I carry around, so, um, yeah, so- so some of that last year was like me trying to see if other people would publish it.

CF: Oh, really.

MJ: Eventually, I just thought, "You know what, I'm just gonna do it."

MA: How was your experience, you think it was successful, writing your first book? Do you like it?

MJ: Um, I think it's, it's a lot harder than you think it's gonna be, um, I love the book and, um, I haven't done as much as I might promote it, so, but I just have to trust that I will have the chance to do that.

CF: Do you have like, do you wanna keep writing books or?

MJ: Maybe, um, one of the things that's happening in my life now is that at the end of this church year, so next July I'm gonna actually retire from my church. And then, um, and I'll be 65 and my health has been somewhat, like I just don't have as much energy as I used to. And so, um, so I'm gonna kinda go back maybe to a little bit more entrepreneurial, you know, like what can I do in terms of activism and teaching, and so maybe I will, you know I was doing a blog for a while, I haven't for a few months, that's related to the book.

CF: Really?

MJ: You know, so, I see all those things that I would do more of once I'm not working full time, so.

CF: Awesome.

MJ: And I, you know the thesis for my lesbian theology was sort of a book but it never got published.

CF: Oh, really? What was that all about?

MJ: Um, what was it about? So it's called "All of the Magic in our Hands, Lesbian Theology of Liberation," and now I can look back, so my

Retirement

Lesbian Theology thesis work

teacher had a connection with someone at Harper. And so the manuscript got sent there and she sent back suggestions. But it was just so hard to then find time to actually do it. And I think would've done better if I picked- like talked to some lesbian publishing house, or lesbian and gay publishing house and tried to just have them do it. Because I think trying to make it fit a mainstream audience.

CF: Right, especially during that time of?

MJ: Yeah, you know, it just, it just somehow I couldn't make the translation, so, and now it's kind of out of date, so. We have to put it into the archives here!

CF: Cool.

MJ: But I like to write, so I will probably definitely keep blogging.

CF: Do you like free write sometimes? Like, just like little-

MJ: Oh like, so, I'm always journaling,

CF: Journaling, yeah.

MJ: So I have like 5 file boxes full of journals for my whole life, yeah, and then I'm writing sermons now, so that is for a lot of my writing energy goes these days.

CF: What are sermons?

MJ: Oh, sermons are, so at church, um so Unitarian Universalists came out of, like, protestant Christianity but they're not christian exactly anymore, they are more like into interfaith community. So, we have Unitarian Universalist Christians, or Jews, or Buddhists, or even a few Muslims, you know, like and then people who are just UU's who don't even believe in God, so, but they tend to be, um, you know, somewhat liberal, politically, and we join together by our ethics. So, when you have church

Unitarian Universalists

it's a little bit like what you might find if you went to any sort of Protestant church, you know, there's hymns and there's maybe readings, and then the sermon is like a 20 minute talk that the minister gives, and it's not quite like a lecture because it's meant to be inspiring.

CF: Inspiring?

MJ: To lift people up is some way. So, that's, so I'm, so three weeks out of the, or four weeks out of the month, like, I have one week off every month, but the other times I'm, I'm getting ready to, like I'm writing that talk.

CF: Oh, yeah.

MJ: Yeah.

CF: What kind of things do you talk about?

MJ: Well, this week, this week is kind of like, we, we have a lot of freedom to choose what we wanted to talk about, this week I'm talking about good and evil in British Mysteries, so. I was watching a lot of British Mysteries this summer and I thought, they have some interesting things to say what is good and what is evil, and what people are like, um, the week before that I was talking about those scientific solutions to climate change. And the week before that I was talking about death, you know, so, so we kind of just grapple with, you know, those big questions. You know like, what is death? What is our life mean? And then also the questions we're dealing with in our society, and, um you know, or in our families so.

CF: Yeah

MJ: Yeah

CF: Do you guys ever get, like, political or?

Myke: Yes, I mean we, churches aren't like, we don't, um, endorse candidates who run for office, that kind of political, but you know but, so, for example my church, as a whole church, came out in support of gay marriage, or,

Sermons

um, against climate change, you know, kinds things um, and you know, or working on, um, how do we resist white supremacy, you know, so those kinds of political things we do in our church.

CF: right

MJ: Yeah, yeah, so it's been great because it does kind of combine activism and spirituality.

CF: I like it. I like how inclusive it is, too. Cause some churches are like, I just like I feel, I've never been inside a church before but I feel like some of the, like, the really, like, Christian, you have to do this way or go down there, or like, I don't know, those- have you, like, talked to any kind of those churches before?

MJ: Yeah, so, in my family, you know I have siblings who are religious conservatives, you know, who maybe are more in those kind of beliefs.

CF: Yeah, so they probably go to like the really...?

MJ: So, you know, so it's more like fundamentalism, you know, where they have a certain interpretation of the Bible that they say is you know, the only one, and you have to, you know, do these certain things, you know, or you will go to hell.

CF: I feel like a lot of different religions have, like those, that has, like that kind of interpretation, and then there's these people who, like you guys who are like inclusive, this is the way you should, well you should interpret, or you can interpret what you want but it's like-

MJ: You know I think, I think what you'll find is almost in any religion you have people who interpret it very fundamentalist-ly and then people who are more, um, expansive, you know, with it, um, so, yeah. So you have, you know, very ultra radical right-wing Jewish people, or ultra right-wing Muslim people, but then you have the

Resisting white supremacy in church

Family

Fundamentalism

Religion, variations in religion

opposite as well. So, yeah, so I think, like, in Portland there is a lot of very liberal people who are Christian, or Jewish, or Muslim, and we kind of get together and to support what feels right, in the sense of human rights, as opposed to, you know, you shouldn't be gay, or you shouldn't get divorced, you shouldn't have an abortion, or you-like those kinds of, like, there's just really different moral perspectives that people bring to it.

CF: Nice, is there anything... um, do you guys do anything like Planned Parenthood or, like, those places- do you?

MJ: Um, I would guess that most people in our church would support Planned Parenthood.

CF: Yeah.

MJ: You know, we haven't done, I don't, anything recently that I'm remembering that specifically I've done, but yeah.

CF: Because I see like on Fridays or they used to do it but, like, protesters in front of Planned Parenthood a lot, they had like graphic images and it just, like, makes me uncomfortable, but, yeah.

MJ: Yeah, I think right now a lot of folks in our church, um, are, say, teaching English at the Portland Adult Ed or-

CF: Oh yeah.

MJ: You know there's that, that's been important to people. Yeah, yeah, so...so, I think you know I think churches can be either liberal or conservative.

CF: Really? Or in between maybe.

MJ: Or in between, yeah.

CF: Yeah, that's really cool. So, you wanna take a look at this?

MA: So, you said something about retiring next year? I mean from, like, church work? How do you feel about that?

MJ: Um, a little bit mixed. I mean I'm a little relieved because, um, being a minister is, is really busy, so I've been really, really busy, and I've been at my church 12 years. And, so, um, but on the other hand, I will miss the connections and the people and all of that, so.

CF: Do you think you will still, you would still go, like, to Sunday church?

MJ: The way we have is that the, when a minister leaves a congregation we're asked to stay away, at least for a few years, so that the new minister can build relationships with the people, because if we're there people would just wanna come to us.

MA: Because you are connected, oh-

MJ: Because they know us already so, you know, so I'll probably took a few years off and then decide.

CF: Oh.

MA: It's gonna be hard.

MJ: Yeah, but we are gonna stay in Portland so, you know, I'll still probably run into people at Monument Square.

MA: Do you have any plan, like, what you wanna do, like, or try something else?

MJ: Um, I think more writing, and maybe a lot of gardening, and then I'll see.

CF: Yeah. Are you guys, like, into, like, the organic gardening stuff?

MJ: Yeah, permaculture. We're making a little orchard in fact.

CF: Oh really? That's awesome

Retirement

Plans for retirement

MJ: So, we've done some preparation work.

MA: I hear something.

MK: Oh, that was a phone I think. Oh, that was my, you know what that was my, that was a little thing in my phone. Sorry about that.

CF: That is fine.

MA: It's okay.

CF: A lot of information, interesting. Um, we hit on a lot of the, most of these questions that we had, um, do you plan on doing, like, any travelling or anything or you, do you guys like to travel?

MJ: Hard to say.

CF: Hard to say?

MJ: Whether we'll be able to afford it to travel.

CF: Oh, yeah. Travelling is expensive.

MJ: Yeah, yeah. I'm trying to think if there was any other- being an activist your whole life means is kind of, like, hard to even remember.

CF: Yeah.

MJ: Different stuff that you've done. Um, I'm just looking to see if there's something else that came up.

CF: Do you have any advice for people who want to do, like, activism type work or?

MJ: Um, you know, Audre Lord talked about, um, how, she talked about the power of the erotic, and what she meant all the life energy that's in us, and so the things that we are passionate about are the things that we can do most easily. You know, and because there's so much in our world that needs our attention that it's good to focus on the passion that you have. Um, she also said, you know, you can't dismantle the master's

Audre Lorde

house with the master's tools. So I think, I think I've always been a little bit more on the edges, you know, not -I mean I vote and I call my senator but not so focused in on that as how do we create alternatives, you know. So, um, yeah. So, I think for me right now I love the alternative of permaculture and the community that sprang up in Portland, I mean there is like a meet up group of, like, I don't know over 400 people, maybe, maybe many more than that, but, you know and people get together at different events where they help, like, so people came to our house and helped us set up rain barrels, and make compost bins, and made planting beds for our future trees.

CF: Yeah.

MJ: And then we've gone to other people's houses and done similar things, so that way that we can help each other out, so, so I think that sense of how do we model, how do we live the values that we have while we're in midst of trying to change the world.

CF: Right, yeah. Yeah, I think that was like the message given after, like the whole election that happened last year, or 2016, yeah, 2016 election was like how do we do that and just, like, come together as like a community and help each other and then maybe go on to, like, bigger aspects about it, but...

MJ: So have both of you been involved in activism of various kinds?

MA: Yeah, I did a lot of community work, yeah.

MJ: Yeah.

CF: I have been to like a couple, well not totally activism, but I've been to like couple of protests for like the um the Dakota pipeline, which unfortunately got put in, I think, and um the Women's March and the ban on, um, immigration, just local ones, but...

Permaculture

MJ: Yeah, what about you?

MA: Yeah, um I did a lot of like, I don't know if you heard about Save Darfur? Yeah, in Washington D.C., so I did a lot of marching there, like, talking about Sudan and the war in Sudan and how they can help to stop the war, and in New York, too, we did so many rallies.

CF: That war still going on is it?

MA: it's still going on, yeah.

CF: I heard is still getting a little-

MA: We did a lot of work involving that.

MJ: Yeah, you know, the, um, the Standing Rock protests against the pipeline, in way it's similar to what I experienced at the women's peace camp, that even though theoretically the battle was lost, but all the people who came together were so empowered and transformed by that experience. I don't know if you had that experience with the organizing that you were doing around Darfur to, is like something about coming together is very powerful.

MA: It is.

CF: Yeah.

MA: It's not easy in the beginning because, like, in Sudan you have so many different tribes, trying to bring everyone, like support what's happening in Darfur, it wasn't easy. Having people coming from, like, different states, and just getting the message out, yeah. And the media is helping with that a lot, if you have an event coming or a rally.

CF: Oh, do you know if, like, anything is going on, like, political, like or is, like, demonstration helping the war at all or?

MJ: Um, not a lot with the organizations that like going in to, like, help with like food, medicine and like, yeah, stuff like that, but the war still

going.

CF: Yeah.

MA: That's what we wanted, like, we wanted the war to stop and um we don't see that working yet. Maybe it takes process I guess.

MJ: Yeah, well and that's all connected to climate change too isn't it? Cause of ,like, drought, that exacerbates the situation for people.

MA: Exactly, yeah.

MJ: Yeah

CF: Well, we have about, um, 10 minutes left, is there anything else you'd like to mention or anything new that you thought about while doing the interview?

MJ: Um, what can I say? So, one of the things that I didn't mention in terms of the process for me, coming out, um, it was very significant to go the Michigan Women's Music Festival. And I know in later years there became controversies around that, but the first time I ever went, I wasn't a lesbian at that point, I was- I almost became a lesbian that week. It started beyond the path, but I think it was more this sense of not being afraid, like being in a place where I wasn't afraid.

CF: Where you didn't feel like an outsider.

MJ: No, where I didn't feel like I might get attacked by a man, 'cause it was all women, and then it was also- women had built all the stages, women were doing everything, so it was very empowering to see women can be something different than what we've been, always. Um, you know, that, and then it's like, after I left there I walked differently. Like, I wasn't holding the same fears in my body, you know, or what was beautiful, like, like, it would- a lot of women didn't even wear clothes or anything, you know, so you saw all these different bodies and everybody's body was beautiful, like, so that whole sort of, um, way that Hollywood says

Michigan Women's Music Festival

Michigan Women's Music Festival

Women's liberation

women are supposed to look like this, like I got free of that, you know, so, so it was, so that was a part I think the process of me coming out and being more confident and being a person who, you know, had things that I could do for the world as opposed to, you know, I would look back and think, like, when I was in college I had a lot of friends- I was at a Catholic college, I had a lot of friends who were studying to be priests, and I remember thinking once I should, I wish they could married, I would love to be the wife of the priest. And it never occurred to me, well maybe I wanna be a priest!

CF: Oh, yeah.

MJ: You know, and, and, and, so the fact that I ended up as a minister, you know, it's like, it's just interesting to me how when I was growing up there was such a strong, invisible connotation that women should orient our lives around men. And, so I think that was the thing that- the biggest shift for me was to say, "Wait a second, you know, I can be in the center of my own life," like, I don't have to have a man in the center of my life. And, and so then everything started coming from that, you know, if I were in the center of my own life then I could love a woman, there doesn't have to be a man there.

CF: Right.

MJ: And, um, you know or, yeah, so it was, you know, this profound sense of, um, what do I call it, like worthiness as a woman and so, um, so that was, that was I think part of, for me, like what helped me to come out, was to just honor my own being as a woman, so.

CF: That is pretty cool. Um, yeah, it's weird that like, people are, like, taught to be like, I don't know...well some families are like, no you're gonna have to, like, marry a man so he can, like, take care of you and stuff, but in reality, it's like women can take care of themselves.

MA: Exactly, it's similar to my culture. I was talking about that, you remember?

Women's liberation

CF: Yeah, I do remember.

MA: Like, men are like the dominant group, you know? You have to rely on a man. Even if he's abusing you, you can't go anywhere because where would you go? He's taking care of you so you just have to...

MJ: So, it really was a change, and it wasn't even that my dad was such a bad man, though he thought he was the boss of the family, he was the boss of family, you know I, so, yeah.

CF: I think my mom is the boss of my family. When I think about it I'm like, yeah, my dad's kind of, you know, whatever.

MJ: Yeah.

MA: Is time for women.

CF: Oh, yeah.

MA: Men have been dominant for so many years. It's time for us to come out.

MJ: Right right, how do we get away from that

MA: Exactly, it's still challenging is not easy, but we courage to say, hey we women, we have the right, we have the voice, yeah.

MJ: I think for me in my life, for a while I was maybe in a more separatist community where it was just women that I was relating to, and that was very empowering, you know, not anymore I don't- I think ultimately we all need to live, learn to live together. But to be able to take a break from that- the people that you learn to differ to, and just say okay we're just gonna be with ourselves, and not like it was perfect, either, but it, yeah, it was very, it was transformative and-

MA: Um, do you believe that today people are more, like, open minded about like lesbian and gay accepted like- long time ago like it was something like, people don't usually talk about it,

Family structure

Seperatism

like now people, they can actually talk about it?

MJ: I think in a lot of places, yes, but I think probably there's still, um, you know, like I think about my family and how, you know, if any of my nieces or nephews are gay, how they might have a really hard time because of their parents. On the other hand, they have their aunt Myke, you know, so it's not invisible anymore, I mean, the fact that I didn't even know it existed, you know, growing up. Like that, I think it's gotta be better, but um, but then you never know how things will go, too, so I don't take it for granted.

MA: It's funny how like in our circle of friends, we always talk about, like, what would you do if your son come one day and he say he is gay, or daughter, she want to be a lesbian, what would you do? Like, we joke about it even though it's true, that could happen and some people are like oh, really I don't know how I would react to that. Yeah, especially like, I'm Muslim, 'cause always the light is, like, on me, I'm like, no, no don't, is not about the religion like you say, 'cause some people are Muslims, and they um-

MJ: I have a friend who is a gay Muslim.

MA: Yeah, exactly.

MJ: Yeah.

MA: It's just in my country, because it's not open yet, like, you're not supposed to, like, do that or say that. Here in America is different.

MJ: Oh, yeah.

MA: I'm sure we have it is just because it's still in the closet.

MJ: Yeah.

MA: Yeah.

CF: It must be very harder over there to come out.

Family

MA: Oh, yeah, big time.

CF: Big time.

MJ: You know and one of the things that was really empowering for me was, um, at some point um, and I'm, Oh Simon Nkoli was a gay, Black, South African who came to Boston to speak and he had been part of the resistance there, and he wanted to be openly out so that people would know that gay people were part of the revolution, and you know, so he was in prison and had a lot of issues that, and problems, but then when he came to speak it was like he was just, it was like- he was a very sweet gay man, and it was kind of made me realize, oh this is not just an American thing, this is international.

MA: No, it's a human thing.

MJ: Yeah, its human and, you know, um, and we have all of our different challenges around the world, but there is some common themes.

CF: It's like, I feel it's generational, too, like your grandparents or, believed in this belief and then pass it to mom, and then maybe it's like, kind of weaving out now, like, um and now you can really think what you wanna think.

MA: Or maybe you never know it's been there, but people just didn't know what is that, right? 'Cause I hear like different stories from people like, oh, we've been married for like forty years and we have kids, but now that I don't feel like that anymore. So, I'm like, it's been there it's just people didn't know what the feeling was.

MJ: And I think about, right, if I had never met anybody gay, I would have just probably gotten married and had kids, and it just wouldn't have occurred to me.

MA: Yeah, I was watching a video in YouTube yesterday, and the lady, the girl she's like Egyptian, she's 25, and she is like I don't feel anything like, toward boys, she is like, I like girls. And the people are like commenting down, oh

Simon Nkoli

my God, you're like, a Muslim that will go to hell or something, you're sinning, and I'm like, people calm down.

MJ: I mean there's so many ways that people can really hurt each other. That to say that who you love is a sin...at some point, you know it's like, that's not really the sins I'm concerned about.

MA: Exactly.

CF: Yeah, there's worst things.

MA: Yeah, it's sad, because she was like, I cut my hair like a boy because I feel like I supposed to act like a boy, but she still wrapping the scarf, and she is like, so why are you doing that, and she was like because is not accepted yet, like people call me, are you a boy or a girl? Like my family don't like, it's like my family do not like it and they wanna marry me but I keep telling them no, I'm not, I just, I don't feel anything toward boys. And I felt her struggles, and I don't know what will she do this girl? She's in Egypt.

CF: She is in Egypt? it's probably tough.

MA: Yeah, it's really tough.

MJ: Yeah, and I imagine there's places in the U.S. there are more conservative than they used to be now.

CF: Like probably in the South, do you think or um?

MJ: You know any place rural.

CF: Or Maine, too, I guess? But yeah, some places.

MJ: So, but, yeah, at least on that, it does seem, I mean, I know that in Maine, Michael Heath, who is the guy who was fighting against gay right the whole time, he tried to start another mission campaign and...

CF: Recently or?

MJ: Yeah, this year.

CF: Really?

MJ: And he couldn't get signatures for it.

CF: Oh, yeah.

MJ: And we've done that, we're not doing it anymore, we're done.

MA: Where were you?

CF: Yeah, yeah, it's crazy... still trying to.

MJ: I know.

CF: Wow, is he like a politician or something? Or was he...

MJ: I don't even wanna talk about it.

CF: Oh, okay we don't have to, it passed. It's just crazy that, like, I know we're pretty far along with like, gay rights now and there's still people trying to like, go backward. It's just like, can't we just live all together inclusive, and you can keep your religion and, and we can let these people get married, and, you know, all inclusive stuff, but some people are like just trying to push back.

MA: You don't have to like, but accept it with respect, that is how I understand it, just don't go there.

MJ: Right, because if we, if we are open to each other then there are so many wonderful things we can learn from all different kinds of people and cultures, and yeah.

MA: And it makes no difference, like if you've been talking to someone for, like, many years and you didn't know even they were gay or lesbian, when you find out, what's the difference? Like, it's the same person. Yeah, there is no difference.

CF: Yeah, like if you're like talking, let's just say, like, there's just really like, I don't know how to explain this but, there is like this person who believes this way and they're talking to another person and they, like, get along and then, like, this person says, by the way I'm gay, and then that, like, why would, like the other person be like, oh, can't be friends with you or can't, like, you know what I'm saying?

MA: Like, yeah, I don't know what the problem? Like, what would that do to you? Like, nothing.

MJ: Yeah, and hopefully more people realize that they know people who are gay, and then, like, my family. So, they don't really like the idea of it, but then they meet, they know me or they know my partner, it's kind of of like-

CF: Like there is nothing wrong with it, like, type of... is that what you're trying get at?

MJ: Yeah, I don't know whether they actually believe that there's nothing wrong with it, but I'm sure that the fact that they know someone who's gay, somehow has an affect on them. You know, so, we don't talk about it. So, it's not that much of an effect, you know, because I don't, we, sometimes in my family we just try to connect in the areas that we know we can connect on, and leave those other ones aside.

MA: So maybe people need to talk about it more, to accept it, right?

CF: I don't know, it depends.

MA: Or, you know that lady is a lesbian or that guy, is a guy, a gay and, okay, they just like

CF: Or like, like, republicans and democrats they should just, like, talk and not like, talk to each other as much, but yeah, cool. Um, is there anything else you'd like to add or?

MJ: Um, that is all. It's been really fun chatting

with you.

CF: It's been very informative. Um, we will be sending you an electronic copy of the interview by email and then we have somebody who's like, transcribing it, and so we'll send that to you and, um, thank you so much for your, sharing your story with us.

MA: Thank you so much, we learned a lot