

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
LAVENDER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview  
with  
NANCY TUCKER

By HALEY STEINHILBER

WASHINGTON, D.C.- ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

NOVEMBER 12, 2018

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY:  
LAVENDER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

NARRATOR: NANCY TUCKER

DATE: NOVEMBER 12, 2018

INTERVIEWER: HALEY STEINHILBER

PLACE: WASHINGTON, D.C.- ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

Nancy Tucker is a 72-year-old lesbian woman currently living in Albuquerque, New Mexico with her partner, Lynn. She came out in Washington, D.C. in the late 1960s and was active in many gay organizations, such as the Mattachine Society, the Gay Women's Alternative, the Gay Blade, the Gay Liberation Front, and gay addiction recovery groups. In this interview, Tucker describes her perception of butch/femme identities and her involvement in the DC gay and lesbian community from 1969 to 1992, when she moved to San Francisco, California.

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS

See background journal.

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INDEX TERMS

Washington, D.C., Mary Washington College, University of Mary Washington, Army Times Publishing Company, the Gay Women's Alternative, Mattachine Society of Washington, gay civil rights, Gay Liberation Movement, the Gay Blade, the Washington Blade, Gay Liberation Front, Gay Recovery groups, Rainbow History Project, social life, lesbians, Older Wiser Lesbians, the Furies Collective, lesbian separatism, feminism, the Village Voice, Christopher Street Liberation Day March, Fashion Institute of Technology, Jo-Anna's, Gay Meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, Meetup groups,

Marriage, Relationships, Family, Homosexuality in the workplace, addiction, alcoholism,  
Frank Kameny, Eva Freund, The Eagle, Johnny's

## Lavender Oral History Project

*Transcription of Interview with Nancy Tucker on November 12, 2018  
Phone call between Washington, D.C. and Albuquerque, New Mexico*

Initials of Interviewer, HS: Haley Steinhilber

Initials of Narrator, NT: Nancy Tucker

HS: If you're ready to get started—

NT: Sure.

HS: I have a few questions about subjects about your experiences with the gay and lesbian community in [Washington] D.C., your perceptions about the interactions of butch/femme identities in your lifetime and maybe within organizations, or if you've seen any changes within the community. Then, just generally your own identity and the formation of that—just to have context and be able to link it with other interviews. So, today is November—what day is it?

NT: It's the 12<sup>th</sup>.

HS: Yeah, okay—Today is November 12, 2018 and I'm recording this in Washington, D.C., but you're in New Mexico. This is Haley Steinhilber interviewing Nancy Tucker. Then, just for the record—Do I have your permission to record this interview?

NT: Yes, you do.

HS: Thank you. So, I'm just going to start by asking where you grew up.

NT: Well, I grew up in the military. So, I grew up in a number of different places. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we settled in the Washington, D.C. area. Which would have been 1959. I lived there in the Washington, D.C. area until 1992, when I moved to California. Then in 2004, I moved to New Mexico.

HS: Okay—So why did you guys end up stopping in D.C. in 8<sup>th</sup> grade? What made you stay?

NT: Well, my father was transferred to the Pentagon.

HS: Okay.

NT: I went from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade there and then I went to college at Mary Washington College which is—what was then Mary Washington College, it's now the University of Mary Washington down in Fredericksburg, Virginia. After college I got jobs in the Washington, D.C. area, so I just stayed there.

HS: How do you think moving around may have influenced your childhood?

NT: Well, I didn't like the uprooting, and I think that's one reason I stayed in the D.C. area for so long is because [3:00] it was a single place. I didn't have to move again every 3 or 4 years, or 2 to 3 years, or whatever. I liked staying in one place. Since I left D.C. I have moved twice. But I actually moved to New Mexico because when I was a kid we spent 4 years here in Albuquerque, and I always liked Albuquerque and always wanted to move back. So, here I am now.

HS: That's great. So, what was your relationship like with your family, growing up?

NT: There are pictures of me and my family, and I am sometimes at a distance from the family, or on the outside of the group of people in the picture. I can't say that it was a warm and loving family. My proof of that is the fact that neither of my brothers nor I ever had children. Three of us and no offspring at all. So, it was difficult.

HS: You have two brothers—

NT: Younger brothers.

HS: Younger brothers? Okay.

NT: Yeah, I was the oldest of three.

HS: How was that dynamic with being the oldest child?

NT: Well, I grew up as sort of hyper-responsible and authoritarian, and tried to be the good kid all my life.

HS: Did you ever come—oh sorry.

NT: Typical first born.

HS: Did you ever come out to your parents?

NT: Not to my mother. She died in 1966 at a very difficult time. I was aware at that point that I was gay and showing it—kind of leaking it on the edges of my life. I had a big crush on somebody that I worked with in the summers. I remember my mother screaming at me, "I don't want you to become one of 'those women.'" A few weeks later, she died of a heart attack. Very suddenly.

So, with my father—after my mother died he was kind of bewildered how to raise children. I remember him sitting me down at the kitchen table one time when I was in college and telling me this [6:00] long and convoluted story about a man he used to work with who had led a rather exemplary life, but basically what the story was is the man was

discovered to be gay and he lost his career in the government. But Dad never said “gay” or anything like that. I didn’t formally come out to him until some years later. In fact, I have some relatives that I’m very close with—they were my mother’s brother’s wife and their kids—my aunt and cousins in New Jersey. I did not acknowledge that I’m gay to them until this past Christmas when I sent them a Christmas card and the Christmas card showed my partner and I getting married. So, it’s not something that I screamed from the housetops to my family, but I was open at work. So, I’ve kind of led a split existence there.

HS: Where were you working when—

NT: Well, when I came out to my father, I was working for a company that was then called the Army Times Publishing Company. It was a privately-owned company that published weekly newspapers to the military, and a monthly magazine for the military and people who supplied the military that I was involved with. I worked for that company for 29 years. But I was “out” there from the time I interviewed for the job and never had any problems with it.

HS: Were there other gay people working there?

NT: Yeah and they gradually revealed themselves over the years, and in my department we knew who each other were and were friendly. But there was no big deal about it. We just did our jobs. But we were known as gay by our supervisors and the people who owned the company.

HS: And no problems at all?

NT: Uh-huh, nope. Yeah, it allowed me a lot of freedom to be able to be “out” at work. I was able to do gay-related things—since it was a publishing company I was able to use our equipment to do various gay-related projects, like when I was involved the Gay Women’s Alternative. [9:00] I would do the newsletter there at work.

When I was involved in the gay addiction recovery stuff, I would work on various projects at work on the weekends. It was very helpful to be “out,” and for people to be okay with it, they just knew me as I was. But I was not “out” beyond the company limits. My job as a journalist took me to other places and interacting with other people, and I never let them know I was gay. They may have had their suspicions or something, but I never came out there.

HS: Would you—is that a personal choice?

NT: Yes. It just seemed prudent to do that. [audio cuts out] Are you there?

HS: Oh, sorry—yeah. It must have broken up there for a second.

NT: Yeah. And there it goes again. I don’t know if it’s me or you.

HS: I have an average amount of bars—usually the ones that I have. But, I don't know. Can you hear me fine now?

NT: Yeah, maybe my ear is just pressing on the phone. I don't know.

HS: No, I heard it go in and out.

NT: Anyway, it just seemed prudent to not bring my personal life into my business life beyond my immediate office because when you're a journalist you have to be aware of how you carry yourself and not bring your personal life into your business life too much when you're interacting with people. That seemed like the smart thing to do.

HS: Yeah, so you said you were working there for 20 years—

NT: 29 years.

HS: --29 years—oh. Extra decade, there. When did you start there—do you remember what year you came out publicly?

NT: I guess you could say that I came out in 1967 when I had been in contact with gay organizations in San Francisco. Because when I was working in the summers downtown I would go to—there was a bookstore that I would go to. I would pick up gay newspapers from San Francisco and read them and get to know gay life that way. I knew more about San Francisco when I began coming out than I did about D.C. [12:00]

Somehow, I learned that the Mattachine Society of Washington did not accept people into their organization until they were 21 years old. That way they couldn't be accused of recruiting minors. I waited until the August—I turned 21 in the end of March in 1969, and I waited until August of that year to contact the Mattachine Society. When I did, they asked that I come in and be interviewed at their office, which was in a seedy part of F street downtown, so that they could determine that I really was who I said I was, and I wasn't some kind of plant from the police department.

Once I showed up at their offices and got interviewed, I was allowed to come to meetings. They determined that I was who I said I was. That is really the beginning of my coming out into the gay community—was joining the Mattachine Society and getting to know other gay people at that point. People who openly said that they were gay, because things were very very closeted at that point.

HS: How did you find out about the Mattachine Society?

NT: It probably was from one of those San Francisco newspapers. But I don't remember specifically saying, "A-ha! There are gay people in D.C." I don't remember that moment. I remember walking from my—it was in the summer, so I was between years in college. I

walked down the street from where my family lived to a payphone and I called Mattachine from that payphone.

HS: Wow, so do you remember any of the questions they asked in the interview?

NT: No, I remember that Frank Kameny was there and probably Eva Freund was there. There were a couple of other guys who were there, but I don't remember any of the questions—I just thought it rather strange. But then, I expected that they would want to know who I was because things were very clandestine.

I was who I said I was, I wasn't a plant from the police department. But at that point, at the Mattachine Society—that was the only over-ground gay organization in the D.C. area. Turns out there were other organizations, but they were even more closeted. And Mattachine, for all the fact that [15:00] they wanted to represent gay civil rights, had their meetings in a very closeted place. It was at a church—an Episcopal church on Capitol Hill. The meeting was held downstairs, you had to go down the stairs, cross a dirt floored furnace room to a small meeting place in the back of the furnace room, and that's where Mattachine held their meetings. It was underground, literally.

HS: Yeah, wow.

NT: You know, it wasn't like today where organizations have their own public office and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. They were—they hid basically from everybody. Even though they were dedicated to gay civil rights.

HS: What were the meetings like?

NT: Well, they were dominated by two people—Frank Kameny and Eva Freund. Have you heard of Frank Kameny?

HS: Oh yes.

NT: Alright, Eva Freund was his female counterpart.

HS: She sounds familiar but—

NT: Yeah, she was almost as loud as Frank, almost as intellectual as Frank, and almost as dominant as Frank. She was, in the word of the day, sort of butchy but not trying to pass as a man. The gender lines in the late '60s were kind of blurry. Eva's partner at the time was a woman by the name of Susan Clarke—who I have mentioned to you, and Susan was the person who answered the phone at the Mattachine Society when I first called. Susan is my oldest lesbian friend. It dates from that time in August of 1967. [She was Eva's partner, and the women that I knew—fell on kind of this spectrum from “butchy” to “not-very-butchy.” But still a lesbian. Everybody wore jeans, everybody wore flannel shirts, or t-shirts or something. It was in how you carried yourself whether you would be classified as “butchy” or “Not-so-butchy.”](#)



There was another woman in the Mattachine Society—I never knew her, that’s why I’m [18:00] going to refer you to Susan and I have not—to my shame—I have not emailed Susan yet, but the woman’s name was Marge McKechnie, she was known as “Mack.” She and her partner were in a very butch-femme relationship, and that’s why I want you to talk with Susan. Because she can tell you about Mack.

I never knew Mack, I never met her, I don’t think. She had been in the Mattachine Society, but I think was out of Mattachine by the time I got to Mattachine. [Most of the women in Mattachine were kind of in the middle of the butch-femme scale. And in the Gay Lib\[eration\] movement that’s where most of the women fell. They weren’t gender-identified as male very much at all, ever. It was “butchy,” but not “Butch.” If that makes any sense.](#)

HS: Yeah-yeah-yeah, oh, sorry, go ahead.

NT: Compared to a stereotypical female, you know, a butchy woman would wear fewer patterns, be more likely to wear pants than a skirt. When I first came out, one of the things that I noticed about the women in Mattachine is that they wore loafers and black socks. I thought that’s what lesbians wore. So, I got myself a pair of loafers and a pair of black socks, and then I discovered that not everybody did that. But I did that when I first was coming out because I thought that’s what it meant to be a lesbian. It was probably the tail-end of a fad that I didn’t know about.

HS: I guess that can kind of lead into a next question of—so, did you have any sort of “gay guide” or a role model specifically in the community?

NT: No, not really. Except for Susan, I was the youngest person in Mattachine. Susan is about a year younger than I am. So, to be all these people who were adults out of college or never went to college and were living their lives as adults, were kind of foreign to me. Because they were older than I was.

But in terms of specific role models, no I didn’t really have any. I just mostly kept my mouth shut and just listened and learned about all this Gay Lib stuff. It wasn’t that I was interested [21:00] particularly in gay civil rights, but it’s where the queers were so I went there. It turned out that I morphed into something of an activist through the newsletter that Mattachine wanted to start. They had their own internal thing that went to Mattachine members, but they decided that they wanted an outreach publication for the community as a whole.

I had been in Mattachine sort of long enough to find a girlfriend. Then I left Mattachine, probably after the first year, or year and a half or two. But the people in Mattachine knew that I was a journalist, so when they decided they wanted to have this outreach publication, they asked me if I wanted to be one of the editors. They had two editors—one of them a man who was a member of Mattachine, and me, a female who had been a member of Mattachine and was known to the Mattachine group at that point.

I became the co-editor of the Gay Blade [presently, the Washington Blade], it was called at first. In that context, I got to know more about the different areas of the community that had been invisible to me when I first came out. Things like the drag community and the leather community and the African American community. You know, all of them were sort of social organizations. Mattachine was the only activist organization in the beginning. But they were different slices of the community that did not come over-ground very much.

HS: So, when you were writing about them, did you—in what setting were you interacting with them?

NT: I would. Well, for the leather community, I would go to the Eagle, the leather bar at that point, and talk with people there. I went to some drag functions. It took a number of years before I found out about the black gay community because I was not black, and so I wasn't interacting with it. I'm not sure how it was that I found out about all the organizations within the African American community.

They may have reached out to me, because one of the things that I tried to do with the Blade is keep a list in the Blade itself, of all of the different gay organizations that I found out about. It was important to me that people in the community know what was available in the community. [24:00] To broaden their lives and you know when the Gay Liberation Front came along I met more people and made connections that way. So, it just kind of grew like Topsy, as they say.

HS: You said that you left the Mattachine after finding a girlfriend. Was that typical for members?

NT: No, I don't think so. I don't think it was. Frank Kameny annoyed the hell out of me. In a lot of ways, his bombast was a little much. Although in future years, I actually ended up living in Frank's house for a couple of years. I lived in the basement and he lived mostly on the second floor. He was my landlord for a number of years. I knew him for a long time, it's just that I—Frank was somebody for me that was best experienced in small doses. But no, I don't think it was typical that people would do that.

HS: So, was that your current partner, or?

NT: No, although oddly enough, the woman that I got involved with after I came into Mattachine—she now lives within 25 miles of me. (laughs)

HS: Do you still talk?

NT: No, I have no desire to see her, interact with her. No, that's something I left behind a long time ago and have no desire to pick up. I mean, my life these days is not very gay. The only time I interact with anybody is when I interact with lesbians—not even gay men—Is when I go to a recovery meeting or if I'm going to a recovery round-up. Then I'll interact with some of the men, but not very much anymore.

HS: You were involved with a lot of different activities, I remember from your email. Would you mind just repeating a few of them or just what you were involved—

NT: First of all, it was Mattachine Society.

HS: The Mattachine, yeah.

NT: Then it was the Blade. It was the Blade for about four years. Four about three of those years I ran the Blade pretty much on my own. The male editor helped me distribute it after the thing was in print each month, or then every two weeks. But he didn't have an awful [27:00] lot of input into it. I did the advertising, I did the writing, I did the layout. I did whatever money collecting was necessary. I did the distribution—most of the distribution, not all of it.

After a while, it became apparent to me as I got involved in the gay recovery stuff that I did not want to continue doing the Blade and that's when I did some outreach and other people got involved with it. I pulled away, so I did not stay involved with the Blade beyond that four years and a transition period, for the most part. I was involved with the gay recovery stuff for twenty years in the D.C. area, and much less so since I have moved out of the D.C. area. I was involved in the Gay Women's Alternative. Do you know anything about GWA?

HS: Just that it was about trying to do some more outreach in education for lesbians, but—

NT: Not even quite that. It was an outgrowth of a similar organization, also called the Gay Women's Alternative, in New York City. When two of the women who'd been involved in GWA in New York moved to D.C., they started up a D.C. group. It had two aspects. One was the women who were on the board of directors. They were the officers and members of the board of directors and they did all the planning and all the arranging for GWA meetings.

Then on every Wednesday night at the Unitarian Church in D.C., we had programs. These were educational programs or entertainment programs, it depended. Sometimes about gay topics, and sometimes not. When I came on to the board, and I don't remember—it was like 1987 maybe? '86, '87—something like that—GWA had been fading. It largely attracted a middle-class group of women in their thirties, forties from around the D.C. area. A lot of women from the suburbs to the programs at the Unitarian Church.

I guess the programs had been getting kind of dry and the membership or the attendance—women [30:00] who attended GWA meetings were not members of GWA. Only members of the board of directors were members of GWA. The attendance of the weekly things had fallen, so when I came onto the board I got onto the program committee. I realized two things that would attract women to these Wednesday night

programs were sex and shrinks. Programs about sex and programs from lesbian therapists. We did a lot of programming about that.

I believe that I've given my GWA archives to the Rainbow History Project. So, you can see the kinds of programs that were done, but that increased the attendance at the Wednesday night programs considerably—to the point where there was one program we had on lesbian pornography. Where we were showing videos, where we actually had to lock the doors of the church because we were so stuffed with women in the meeting room that we couldn't take any more. The fire marshal would've had a fit if he had known. So, I was involved with that.

There was a woman—I think her name was Birdie, I'm not sure—who held kind of private dining soirees at her home. That was something they didn't have a lot of publicity because it was held at her home. But it was a way for lesbians to get to know other lesbians. I was involved in that for a while.

There was another social—I was involved in some different social groups. Early on there was Lily Vincent's—she did Wednesday night programs at her house in Arlington [Virginia.] They weren't programs, they were just sort of gatherings of lesbians. We didn't have any intellectual pretenses whatsoever for these social events at Lily's.

There was another group whose name I cannot remember, that did pretty much the same thing. The couple, who had met on an airplane oddly enough—they were based in Maryland. A lot of the things that happened were—these Saturday night soirees were in Maryland. One of the women was Anglo and one of the women was African American. Boy, I wish I could remember the name of that group. That was one.

Then there was the OWLs, the Older, Wiser Lesbians. They were extremely closeted. [33:00] Many of the members of the OWLs were a decade or more older than I was. Many of them had been married and had children. When I came into that group—again, it was just a social group—they always referred to themselves as the OWLs. They would never spell out what OWLs meant.

When I became the editor of the newsletter, I started first of all saying, “the OWLs” and then I would call it “the L word.” Then, eventually I spelled out the word “lesbian” in the newsletter and there was a huge to-do for using the word “lesbian” in the newsletter. Some people were hollering that they could no longer put it on their refrigerator because their children would see the word “lesbian” on their refrigerator. I was denounced by some within the group and so forth and so on.

I think somewhere there's also the correspondence—maybe Rainbow History has that—the correspondence where I was denounced for using the word “lesbian,” and they wanted to throw me out of the group and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. This was like the late '80s. You know, people were still reacting that way. What else was I involved in? I knew the Furies [Collective] tangentially. You know who the Furies were?

HS: Oh, yes, I do. It's escaping me, but I've heard of them. They're—

NT: Rita Mae Brown. They were radical lesbians.

HS: Right, yes—so did you attend any of their events?

NT: I once attended a dance that they threw. It was some kind of Women's Liberation weekend, and they sponsored a dance in an Episcopal church in Northwest Washington. I remember walking into the dance that night—I knew it was being organized by the Furies and I was very flippant, and I said, "Well, who is this Rita Mae Brown person? Where is she?" Well, it turned out Rita was sitting at the table taking entrance money for the dance.

I got to know her, but I never attended—and I went to their commune on Capitol Hill one time. I never got to know or attend any of their meetings. I knew Rita—she and I were friends, but I never hung around with the Furies because they were far too radical for my taste. I just avoided really radical women. So, I knew them, but I wasn't part of them. They knew me, but we were not involved with each [36:00] other. I would put stuff about them in the Blade, but not participate.

HS: Did you publish anything about the OWLs in the Blade or was that too—

NT: You know I don't remember. I think I did—just a contact telephone number or something like that without explaining what the group was. You'd have to look at those old issues of the Blade and I don't have any anymore. I turned them over.

HS: I'll have to spend some time with the Rainbow History Project archives once it reopens.

NT: What, is it closed?

HS: It was during the summer when I arrived here. There's some construction going on with the Washington Historical Society, but that's neither here nor there.

NT: I think that there are issues of the Blade online, but I wasn't able to find them, but you might be able to. I think that they've put them on the internet through the library, or maybe someone at Rainbow History can give you the pointer. [37:05] You could even visit the Blade's offices and they might have them.

HS: These are good tips. Writing them down. Thank you. You mentioned how finding one of your girlfriend's through the Mattachine Society. Where else did you meet people?

NT: Well, let me digress a little bit about that girlfriend that I found, because it may address your interest in gender issues. Her name was Martha. I had gotten involved with someone when I was in college, but then when I went to the Mattachine meeting, I met Martha and I kind of jumped from one woman to another. Which was awful of me, but I did it.

Martha and I actually looked a lot alike. We had a similar physique, similar height. We both had short brown hair. When we went to our first Christopher Street Liberation Day March, we had these identical short-sleeved sweatshirts. One of the sweatshirts said “Butch,” and one of the sweatshirts said, “Femme.” During the Christopher Street weekend, we periodically would change shirts. We thought that was very funny because we looked so much alike.

There was a picture of us, me happening to be in the “Femme” shirt at the time, and Martha in [39:00] the “Butch” one, that ran on the front page of the *Village Voice* after the Christopher Street weekend. It was very interesting what they did with the picture. They altered the picture. First of all, they made both of us wearing dark lenses on our eye-glasses, and because I was in the “Femme” shirt, they lengthened my hair. Altered it for the photo, so that I looked more femme. Thereby directly messing up the whole joke Martha and I had.

HS: Wow.

NT: Yeah, yeah. I probably still have a copy of that issue of the *Voice* if you can't find that online. But it would've been in 19—probably early July 1969 [it was 1970] because it was after the first Christopher Street March. Was it '69 or was it in '70 that year? '69, I think.

HS: I'll check them both.

NT: Yeah.

HS: What was your reaction when you saw that?

NT: Well, you know, I was—I wouldn't say outraged—but moderately outraged I guess would be the thing. But not outraged enough to reach out to the *Voice*. The same photo also ran in one of the Sexology magazines of the day. They were—I don't know what to call them—they were a magazine about sex, but they would have this veneer of intellectualism and academe. They also ran with the lengthened hair version of the photo.

That's what people did then. They wanted us to live up—down—to their expectations. It didn't make sense at all to them that a butch and a femme would look alike. Then more than that, I didn't really play butch and femmes roles per say. I mean she was older than I was so if there was any butch-ness going on, it was probably more her age than it was—well, she was a little bit more interested in mechanical things than me. She was a draftsman—she did mechanical drafting. But it was not a hard line at all. [42:00] It was more natural interest than it was, “I'm the man,” kind of stuff.

HS: How would you describe—at least with what you saw—and characterize butch versus femme identities?

NT: Everybody then, most of the women that I circulated within were on—I would say, “butchy.” In the Women’s Movement, that’s sort of how we would identify each other. On the street it was a more plain style of dressing. It was a more relaxed way of walking, upholding oneself. It was a way that was not set to attract a man’s attention. To make oneself a little bit less visible. The women’s movement—It was a lot of that sort of gender blurring going on. A lot of women wore overalls, flannel shirts—it was the age of the “male clone” and there was sort of a female version. There was a wonderful exhibit—in fact you might want to look that up. At the Fashion Institute [of Technology], I think it’s called, in New York City.

HS: The Fashion Institute?

NT: Something Fashion Institute. They had an exhibit a number of years ago. Like in the last 10 years maybe, 12 years—on lesbian identity and fashion. If you can get ahold of those materials, they are located in 18-20<sup>th</sup> street in Manhattan—In that area. It’s not the Rhode Island School of Design. I want to say Fashion Institute—if I had my computer in front of me, I could find it. But it was an extraordinary exhibit and I remember the one that they had specifically for the Women’s Lib period. It was a pair of overalls and I think it was a flannel shirt as sort of a regular sort of dress.

HS: Okay, there’s weird going on with your audio. I’m not sure if you can hear it.

NT: No. [45:00] I can have you call my cell phone. I can put it on speaker and that might be clearer.

HS: Okay, yeah.

NT: Call me back at 505-459-1790.

HS: 1-7-9-0, okay.

NT: I’ll put you on speaker when I get the call.

HS: Okay, thank you.

[break in audio]

HS: Okay, can you hear me?

NT: Yeah, much better actually.

HS: Okay.

NT: How about me?

HS: Yeah, this is perfect. Everything was going perfect and then you started mentioning the Fashion Institute and then for some reason it started breaking up and getting really like “ehhhrrr.”

NT: Yeah that happens with me and phones. I tend to move them away from my mouth sometimes.

HS: Well, that’s okay. Thank you so much for your patience. I’m sorry—we were talking about the Fashion Institute and then the Women’s Lib period.

NT: Both Lynn and I just broke up totally when we saw that outfit. They even had some going back into the late Victorian or Edwardian period of what lesbians would wear in that period. You definitely want to get a hold of that organization. If you can’t within a couple of days, let me know and I’ll try to look it up.

HS: Okay, I have stars here, will look it up. This is a lot of great information, thank you. I know that you were in a lot of recovery groups, so I was hesitant to ask if you also were involved in some of the night life around D.C.

NT: Yeah, I was. We would go to the bars—I went to Jo-Anna’s, which was the first lesbian bar that I knew of in D.C. There was Johnny’s across the street, literally across the street. They were both believed to be owned by the mafia. Then there was—I think it was called the Plus One [misspoke: Phase One]. All three of these were on 8<sup>th</sup> Street near the marine barracks.

The Plus One [Phase One] was the first bar in D.C.—or believed to be the first bar in D.C. that was owned by gay people. It was a group of gay men—what I used to refer to as the [48:00] “fuzzy sweater crowd.” That’s sort of what distinguished them from the other kinds of gay men who might be more effeminate. The “fuzzy sweater crowd,” were professional guys, or guys who dressed like professionals and the fad at that point was V-neck sweaters with slacks. So yeah, I went to the bars. Did my share of drinking in the bars, you know, socialized just with my friends in the bars. I never was very good at meeting people in bars, that’s for sure. Either drinking or sober.

HS: I mean, understandable. Do you remember any instances where you tried?

NT: No, I was always pretty mute. I mean it worked for me to meet friends there. I remember running into my high school drama teacher at a gay bar one time. He cautioned me to silence and said that it always irritated him when I was in high school. I was a member of the Thespian’s Society and he always chided me for calling it “thes-bian” like “les-bian.” But I didn’t continue to hang out with him. I think it was just that one time we met in the bar and that was it. Mostly I just hung out with my friends, who in the beginning were members of the Mattachine Society. Later, my friends were people in recovery.

HS: When did that transfer happen?



NT: 1972.

HS: And correct me if I'm wrong, you helped with the startup of that right?

NT: No.

HS: Oh.

NT: There were four people who started out the Gay Groups of AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] in Washington. There were two men who I had met in Gay Liberation Front named Bob and Cade, C-A-D-E. Then there were two women, one of whom whose name is Blanche. Then the fourth member, her name was Gerri, G-E-R-R-I. Bob, Cade, and Blanche were all sober, and they were trying to help Gerri get sober. They had met Gerri [51:00] in regular meetings of AA, and they realized that it probably would be easier for Gerri to get sober if she had a gay meeting of AA. So, they started the first meeting—the Gay Meeting of AA. Cade, who I had earlier met in the Gay Liberation Front, he told me about this meeting of AA because he knew I was editor of the Blade. So, I immediately gave publicity to this gay meeting of the AA in the Blade. Then about a year after the meetings started is when I started going to recovery meetings.

HS: What made you—is it just the fact that it was there, or was there another—

NT: I was very depressed and this woman, Martha, that I had been involved with—she had moved off to New York City. I had this fantasy that she was going to move back to D.C. and we were going to get together again. But I was talking to her on the phone one time and she said she was moving back to D.C., but she was moving back with her new girlfriend. That just pushed me over the edge of depression. I thought that, “Well, my friends who were in AA seemed to be mentally healthy and admirable people.” And I thought maybe I could use AA to treat my depression and my mental health problems. So, I went off to my first meeting and discovered that “Ehhh, yeah I had a drinking problem.” That’s how I fell into AA.

HS: That’s a fun story, I’m sorry to hear that.

NT: Well, it’s 46 years later and I’m still sober.

HS: Congratulations, that’s amazing. So, how did you meet your partner, Lynn?

NT: Well, I had seen her around and been impressed by her because unlike a lot of people that I knew, she was capable of speaking in full sentences and full paragraphs. That impressed me—somebody who was well-spoken and thoughtful. It turned out that I ended up answering an ad that she placed in the Blade, looking for somebody to do things with. By the time [54:00] we had our first date, I had realized that I had met her before and been impressed by her before. So, when she brought her mother to our first date, I

was sort of nonplussed. Basically, we officially met through the Blade, and we date our relationship from that first date.

HS: So, why did she bring her mother?

NT: (laughs) We were the only people I've ever known who had a mother on their first date. I lived in Virginia, Lynn lived on a boat down at the marina in Southeast D.C. and her mother lived in the county down—Lake of the Woods near Fredericksburg—and would periodically come to D.C. and stay in an apartment that the family had in the Dupont Circle area.

Lynn and I had talked on the phone a couple of times, and arranged to get together for a first date, and then Lynn called me a couple of days beforehand and said, “Uh, uh, would it be alright if my mother came to the dinner we're going to have next week?”

I was a little taken aback, but I thought to myself that it would be a good story to tell people how this woman that I was having a date with brought her mother to the date, and for the last 30+ years it has been a very good story to tell. I found out a lot about Lynn by meeting her mother as it turned out. We arranged for our second date, which was solo, as we were walking to the car after the first date.

HS: That's so sweet. So, her mother knew that she was gay at that point?

NT: Sort of, kind of—Lynn said that her mother was interested in the fact that Lynn was meeting somebody for dinner and Lynn hemmed and hawed and said, “Well, you know that publication that you see on the corners in Dupont Circle? The Blade?” And her mother said, “Yes.” “Well, I met Nancy through the Blade.” “Oh,” said her mother, reflecting a moment, “Oh!”

And that's sort of how she came out to her mother. Her mother, knowing what the Blade was and figuring out things. I got to know Lynn's family and everything, but we never made a big deal of it. Her family was kind of progressive in that way. I don't know if Lynn [57:00] ever sat down and had a conversation with her family about being gay. It was just sort of, we were gay.

HS: Yeah, wow, what a story. I actually wanted to ask how would you describe your identity in your own words?

NT: Today?

HS: Yes, today—back then as well.

NT: Back then I was a gay activist. I mean I called myself a gay activist. I was not a feminist. I felt like feminists were too shrill. I always avoid people of any type are too far gone in any direction. Women's Lib at that point was very shrill. Gay Lib became very shrill, and I just don't like that style in anything. [I don't like people who kind of go over](#)

the edge—a friend of mine once described it as—these people that I call shrill, they're like the point of the knife. To get anywhere, you have to be able to stick the point of the knife in something. Then the knife broadens out and I'm back further in the broader area of the knife. I'm not in the front of the knife, the point of the knife. I'm a little bit further back. Temperamentally. Where was I going with this? What was your question?

HS: Oh, just asking—

NT: Oh—how I describe myself. Well, I'm pretty much “out” in all aspects of my life now. You know, I talk about my partner who is now legally my spouse. I don't like the word “wife.” I prefer “spouse” if I have to do it at all. I prefer partner—is the word that like to use.

But everybody sort of knows, and it's no big deal. I'm known here in Albuquerque less as a lesbian than a person who collects historic picture postcards. Because the niche that I occupy now is a local history person. That's where I'm most comfortable is doing local history research and coincidentally I happen to be a lesbian, but that's no big deal.

For the first few years that I was out of college, I was a lesbian and that was the biggest deal. Then I was a person in recovery who happened to be a lesbian for many many years. Then when I moved to San Francisco, there was so many damn lesbians and gay men that I was nothing. I occupied myself with other things [1:00:00] and did not particularly have any gay identity when I lived in San Francisco.

I didn't do very many “gay” things. We didn't go to dances and the like—I think I went to one gay bar. One or two gay bars, once or twice the whole eleven years that I lived in San Francisco. It just was not part of my life. I lived with my partner. We knew some other gay people, but we didn't make our sexual orientation the focus of our lives. Lynn was into Zen Buddhism at that point, and I was into other things. So, we just happened to be people who were coincidentally gay and were also other things.

HS: Okay, yeah, I enjoy how the identity shift kind of—that process. I'm sure mine will definitely shift over time.

NT: I think it was natural that I was very gay-focused when I first came out. I mean I was trying to find other people like myself. When I was a young single person trying to find a relationship, and so it makes sense that I was hanging out a lot in gay circles at that point. But as I am more comfortable in my sexual orientation, other parts of my intellectual life have come to the fore, and it's not the only thing that I am anymore.

HS: That's very true, okay. [pause] I'm sorry.

NT: For the record, I'm 72 years old now.

HS: Okay.

NT: So, we're talking about things that were 50 years ago. So, it's hard for me to remember sometimes.

HS: You have an amazing memory though, to be able to recall all of those—although I've heard that you're able to recall better stuff from your youth as time goes on. We've made it through a lot of my questions, I was just going to ask a little bit more—probing deeper into your personal relationships, if that's alright. [1:03:00] How have most of your partners present? I know you said Martha and you kind of presented the same, but—

NT: I would say, my partners—Lynn is something of an anomaly. Some of my partners have been butchier than I. Some of them have been shorter than I. Lynn—I mean if you were to see the two of us going out, Lynn would look more feminine, simply because she's more interested in clothes than I am. But she's not a femme, if that makes sense.

HS: Yeah.

NT: She likes hats. She likes new clothes. She likes shoes. I, on the other hand, would be very content to wear uniform most of my life. I have a basic uniform. It's a pair of stretch black pants and some variation on a t-shirt with no buttons. That's how I dress on a daily basis. It's very plain, simple—people could recognize me a block away because I almost always dress pretty much the same way.

But it's not a butchy look. It is a look that doesn't have a lot of decoration. I tend not to wear a lot of patterns. I prefer un-patterned clothes most of the time—sometimes I have patterns, but not often. Lynn will wear more jewelry than I do. I wear my wedding ring and that's basically the jewelry that I wear. She wears the wedding ring and she'll wear bracelets and sometimes necklaces.

But does that make her a femme? I don't know. I mean on a scale of butch to femme she might look more femme, but we don't play any roles that are femme—I mean I'm the better cook for instance. She's better at money. I'm the travel planner. She's the one who's the Buddhist. Are these “gender” things? I don't think so.

HS: Yeah, it's all about self-identity.

NT: Yeah, she's a gardener—I kill plants. Not deliberately, but I do kill them. So, it's—I don't know, I don't what to say. [1:06:00] But I dress more plainly than she does, but I'm not a butch.

HS: You're allowed to be whatever you want to be. (laughs) I guess, how did you see the butch/femme culture shift throughout your time in D.C.?

NT: Well, there was a woman—and I don't remember her name. I think I probably wrote an article about it for the Blade—who wanted to have an organization for women who identified as butch and femme. I remember talking with her about this because it mystified me, and I wasn't interested in it personally.

I did point out to her that it appeared to me at the time to be more butch/femme identification in the African American community than in the white lesbian community at the time. I know that she had a couple of meetings for this group, whose name I do not remember and don't know if they ever had a name.

She specifically wanted to focus on attracting women on the butch and femme ends of the spectrum. Again, there might be something in the Blade about it because if she wanted to publicize it, I would have publicized it for her. But I do not at all remember what her name was or what the name of her group was. I know they had a couple of meetings and then I kind of lost track of her. This would've been maybe 1971—72? Something like that.

HS: Okay, and so at that point it had—the butch/femme roles at least in the white community had kind of dispersed into what you were talking about earlier?

NT: I think it was a phenomenon of women who were older than I am. [1:09:00] I was talking with Lynn about this the other day and she said it was her impression that women who were—Lynn is four years older than I am, so she's 76-77 now. Four years? No, she's 78 now.

Anyway, she said that she was under the impression that it was women who were a half-generation to a generation older than she who did a lot of gender role playing. She said that she believed that a lot of it was as a way to be accepted in the world. That if they did have what looked like a traditional sex role relationship, that straight people would be less likely to hassle them. I did not at that point know—when I came out, except for the people in Mattachine, I did not know a lot of people older than me. The Mattachine women were not very much like that.

There was the one woman named Mack who was very butch-identified. I never knew her. I had heard of her but didn't know her. So, it's woman who would now be in their 80s probably. Who came out in the '40s and the '50s and maybe the early '60s who would tend more to the butch/femme identification than the women who came out later—which was the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement—those women tended not to be butch/femme identified.

HS: Okay. I know you said you're not as involved with the gay community right now, but I was just going to ask for one of my concluding questions, just what you would see as the future for butch/femme identities?

NT: I think there will always be women who either identified as one or the other. There was a woman in my local recovery group—as it turned out, a black woman—and her partner was butch. That was real clear. The woman who was in the recovery group was kind of butchy herself. So, I don't know if that [1:12:00] is still going on in the African American community or not. Whether there is more gender-identified roles or not.

In the Anglo community, in the white community—as best I can see, it’s kind of a very tiny slice I see of gay life these days—it doesn’t exist much anymore. Lynn, here in Albuquerque, is one of the chairs of a lesbian Meetup group. So, I’ve been to a couple of the Meetups. All of the women that I see at these Meetups are what I would call butchy—in other words, I would notice them on the street—but I don’t know that straight people would particularly notice that they’re butchy. It’s just I notice because I know what to look for. But they’re not butches, they are women who are wearing slacks and maybe button-down shirts. They carry themselves, their bodies more loosely than straight women do. So, it’s butchy, but not male-identified. If that makes sense.

HS: Yeah, I can picture what you mean. That’s all the questions that I have for you. Are there any questions that I should’ve asked, or that you were expecting?

NT: Good question. That’s actually a question that I used to ask people when I interviewed them, “Is there something that you thought I would ask and that I didn’t?” And no, there isn’t. Yeah, I think that after you have a chance to ruminate on all of this, you may want to call me again or get in contact with me again. And that’s fine, I don’t mind at all—any kind of follow-ups if you have any. I would urge you to try to make some contact with women in the black community to probe them about this because I think you might get some different answers.

HS: Yeah, we have—so I’m actually in a project—in a group kind of project that we’ve all been working on. I haven’t interviewed any black lesbians, but I know that one of my project members has and she’s kind of tapped into that community. At least, through this one woman that she found through—I think it was a lecture series. So, hopefully with time—

NT: I think there’s a group called Sapphire Sapphos, that you might tap into.

HS: Yes, I’m not sure how active they are currently, but I have heard of them historically.

NT: That’s fine. I’m not active either and the groups that I was part of—none of them exist anymore. But that doesn’t mean that they don’t have historical memories, so do pursue through the organization aspect to find the individuals who can talk with you. The organization doesn’t have to be in existence to get use out of it is what I’m saying.  
[1:15:16]

HS: Right, right.

NT: So, push that. Don’t let yourself ignore that, because I think that they will have some very very good things to say, and useful information. Reach out to what is left of the feminist community in D.C. If NOW [National Organization for Women] still exists, you might be able to access some of that information. Eva Freund, is E-V-A F-R-E-U-N-D. She’s probably in the phone book in the D.C. area—although which part, I don’t know. She was very involved in the National Organization for Women and she was also a

member of Mattachine. If you could find her and tell her that I suggested you call her, she might have some interesting stuff.

HS: Okay, yeah, actually—I was thinking with Debbie Richards—do you know who is? Eva Freund—is she also the photographer? Or is that a different name?

NT: No, that's somebody different. I don't know Debbie Richards, but there was Joan Byron.

HS: Oh, that's who I'm thinking about, Joan Byron.

NT: Joan Byron might have some interesting stuff. She was in the feminist movement too. She was more part of the radical part of the feminist movement. She goes pretty far back—not as far back as Eva does. I know that Eva is somewhat involved still because a couple of years ago—maybe it's more than a couple now—when I was in D.C. for the Rainbow History Project, they had a presentation some Saturday morning on the Gay Liberation Front. Eva showed up to that when I talked. That's the last time I saw Eva, and she's still within the D.C. area and still active in some things—still interested in gay history because she showed up to the GLF presentation.

HS: I'll definitely look her up in a phone book or online.

NT: Yeah, she's very articulate. I admire her a lot, but I don't want to be around her—if that makes any sense? Because to me, she's a little too sharp end of the knife for me.

HS: Right, okay—kind of like how you were described Frank Kameny.

NT: Yeah, yeah. To me she's like a female version of Frank.

HS: Right. Well, thank you so much for all of this information.

NT: You're welcome. Haley—if you think of any more questions, feel free to get in contact again. I am going—Lynn and I are going on a cruise. We are not going on a women's cruise. We are going on a regular old cruise from about 10<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. I will not much be available then. Only intermittently on email. But you can send an email to me and I'll get back to you within a couple of days if you have any more questions.

HS: Okay.

NT: The best way to reach me for the next 6 weeks is going to be by email.

[End of interview]