

Oral History Interview: Mari Castellanos

Interviewee: Mari Castellanos

Interviewer: Mark Bowman

Date: November 29, 2012

Mark B. This is Mark Bowman. It's November 29, 2012, and I'm here with Mari Castellanos in her office in Washington, D.C. doing this oral history interview. So Mari, if you would begin by just sort of saying your name and spelling it.

Mari C. Well, the full name is Maria Elena, so that would be Maria Elena, E-L-E-N-A, Castellanos, C-A-S-T-E-L-L-A-N-O-S. But I am mostly known as Mari, M-A-R-I.

Mark B. Good, excellent. Thank you. And if you would just start by talking about where you were born, the location you were born, what that life was like, and we'll just begin walking through your life together.

Mari C. Okay. Well, I was born in the city of Havana in a very traditional middle class family. I guess the most salient aspects of my family history are my grandfather was a general in the war for independence, and a hero of sorts in the history of the Cuban people. And there's a monument to him in the western tip of the island. He was the Cuban revolutionary general that finished what was a march from east to west in the fighting with the Spanish.

That also means that I grew up in, on my mother's side of the family, in a very sort of anti-Yankee kind of milieu, because an old man who had been my grandfather's—I don't know the military term for your assistant or whatever—kept on coming and visiting. He was just a darling old man, and very much of a dandy, always with his suit and a tie. And so we learned stories like that, and that after the defeat of the Spanish forces, and when the revolutionary, the patriots saw the American flag being raised in the city of Havana, what a terrible blow it was to them. And so that was one side of it. And on my father's side, they were a rather, I think you would have said, aristocratic family.

Mark B. They worked in business?

Mari C. They were mostly in...my great-grandfather founded the faculty for oral surgery in the University of Havana. So it's like on both sides I have very old Cuban roots. I think on my mother's side of the family we can trace back to a captain in the Spanish army that married the daughter of a Taino chief. I don't know if any of this is true, but since my grandfather was a patriot, he had a biography made, and this is all written down. There was a woman named Tanina, and the captain was Diego de Varona. So that's the family mythology on my mother's side.

The mythology on my father's side, that also I'm very familiar with, because my grandmother always lived with us. And I can't go back much further than my great-grandfather, but it was an established family,

established Cuban family, Criollo, you know. And I know that unlike on my mother's side, on my father's side, during the revolutionary war, the War for Independence, they went to Mexico. My great-grandfather took his family to Mexico.

And my grandmother had a...what do you call it? The books that young women...autograph. An old, you know, you're talking 19th century autograph that was signed by all the luminaries, the poets and well-known thinkers of the turn of the century, so that was always a wonderful thing. I've always wondered whatever happened to that. I would love to have that. So I grew up. My grandmother was a very strong influence. She was the one that told the stories on her side.

Mark B. The year you were born was?

Mari C. I was born on December 13, 1947. I turn 65.

Mark B. Wow. Good, good. Siblings, brothers and sisters?

Mari C. I have an older sister that I'm very close to, and my sister married the boy that my father used to chase away because his daughter was too young to have courtship. And he was a boy from two blocks away from the neighborhood. And finally when my dad caved in and let him come visit, my father made a point that I would stay out there, because it was on the front porch, you know, old Spanish houses.

And he would always bribe me every single night. He'd buy me an ice cream. We had the ice cream peddlers that went up and down. I got my ice cream and just kind of got lost.

Mark B. Recollections of your early years in Havana, things that you remember that are strong impressions?

Mari C. I think that my impressions are mostly of my school and the beaches and the water. We were on the beach every day in the summer, every single day, in these magnificent, magnificent sandy beaches outside of Havana. Oh, be still my heart. We used to go every day. We belonged to this little club that had places where you could change clothes and take showers and have breakfast and lunch and whatever. And I just remember how beautiful. And just growing up in the water.

I have this passion for the outdoors. And my place of solace and healing is always the ocean, is the ocean. We just went to the ocean for the Thanksgiving holiday. We got a room right on the water. And it was like, oh, yes.

Mark B. Where were you?

Mari C. We were at Ocean City, which was deserted.

Mark B. The friends I am staying with were at Rehoboth for Thanksgiving weekend.

Mari C. Well, no, I don't want to be in Rehoboth at Thanksgiving because they have all the outlets. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. [*Laughs.*] Right, yeah, that's true. You went to Catholic school?

Mari C. I went to Catholic school. And that's another very important piece. I have—I don't think I told you—I'm the youngest of 19 cousins, and we had—no, I'm sorry. I'm telling you wrong. I'm the youngest of 36 cousins, because my mother had, there were like 11 of them. And so there's a school, a girls' school, Catholic girls' school about three blocks away from my house. Beautiful, huge building. It was Our Lady of Lourdes Academy, and it was run by a Spanish congregation of nuns, Sisters of St. Philip Neri.

And I learned to walk there, actually, because my older sister and all of my girl cousins were in the school, and my mom would go to pick up my sister at the school every day at whatever hour, 4:00 or whatever, and she took me with her. And the nuns just picked me up. I was like, you know, the little baby kind of thing, everybody just playing with me. And the sister—do you call it a porter? *Portero*, we say in Spanish, somebody who's the doorman.

Mark B. Porter is one, yes. Could be a door person or a porter.

Mari C. Right, so Sister Porter would take me around, and I learned to walk in the school. And it was a wonderful, wonderful school. Beautiful three story

building with the marble staircases. The kind of building that you just wish you could have all over the place, beautiful, beautiful. And built to last. And it had beautiful grounds. And the school was very central in my life. You know, it was the family and the school.

And I credit those amazing women, those nuns, with my faith, despite all things, the faith, and also my commitment to justice. That and my mother. My mother was a radical justice person.

Mark B. Can you say a little more about that? How did that develop? What did you see?

Mari C. Well, I think that in the school they always made... I mean, we were middle class kids. This was like a parochial school, all right, so we were all middle class kids. But I think that they always made us see the other side, the side of the poor and the struggling. And my commitment to that, it's my mother and the nuns that shaped a lot of who I still am. I'm looking at that sign that says, "I'm a witness for justice," and that is what we were, is like always very committed.

Now, my family was very engaged in the revolution in Cuba. My house was searched in the middle of the night by the police more than once, something that I have blacked out and have never been able to get there. I cannot recall, but I was told by my family, yes, you were there.

And there was once a shootout. There were some students that had some kind of a press. They were making literature against the government, against the dictatorship, and there was a shootout where the students were killed. They were up in a... I have no recollection of that, even though the police were on our garden, on our front lawn. They were shooting.

And I am told that my parents picked up the mattress from my bed and put it on the floor, and I allegedly slept through it all. I have no recollection.

And I have a lot of those spots having to do with the revolution, the earlier things.

I also recall one night where a hundred bombs went off in the city of Havana, and I remember that we were—you know, our next door neighbor, who was a good friend of the family and all that, we were—you know the Spanish houses that have just the wraparound porch, that's what my house was. And we all sat there in these wonderful rocking chairs, and then the bombs started going off.

And I remember our neighbor, it was like you'd think she was sliding into first base. She just took off and made a slide into the living room. So that's funny, because I've always remembered that, have that image of our good friend sliding into the living room.

Mark B. So you're about ten or 12 years old around this time?

Mari C. Yeah, about ten. And so there was a very feared man by the name of Captain Ventura in Havana who was the one that sought out and imprisoned and tortured all the people that were suspect to being revolutionaries, and he's the one that came to my house because he was looking for my cousin, because he said that my cousin was behind all of this. One of my many cousins. But then, of course, he was.

And so my—oh, this is another little cameo here—my cousin Pancho, the one that the policemen were looking for, my aunt, who lived with us, went over to a congregation of nuns that took care of the sick in your home when you had somebody who was suffering and was sick. They would come over and spend the night so the family could sleep. Unfortunately, we don't have those nuns anymore. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Yes. You can pay for that service.

Mari C. Yeah, but it was wonderful. And we had a very close connection with that congregation of nuns. It's not the ones from school. This was another congregation of nuns. Because they had taken care of a lot of folks in my family.

So my aunt, who was the gem of the family—she never married and she was an outstanding socially engaged person—so she went to the nuns and got a habit for herself and one for my cousin. So she went and got him and dressed him up with a habit, and then she and he walked into the Brazilian embassy.

Mark B. Wow.

Mari C. And that's how we got him out, saved his life. Saved his life. So this was all going on. This is my childhood, okay? This is my childhood. So then, of course, the fall of the dictatorship and the coming of the revolution, the dreams and hopes that everything was going to be wonderful, that we were going to have peace and justice and all these things.

And then the deep, deep disappointment and betrayal that a lot of middle class families like mine felt when they realized that this was not what we had bargained for. We had wanted a democracy. We wanted to get rid of the dictator and have a social democracy, and instead we got ourselves another dictatorship.

So at that point, I must have been 11 or 12—well, 12, I guess, when I started really getting engaged into the student movement, which was being very vocal against the Castro regime. And I remember one time there was a gathering of Catholic students at a well-known Jesuit school in Havana where, incidentally, Fidel Castro had gone to school. And at that point the religious community was being portrayed as treasonous.

Mark B. Antirevolutionary.

Mari C. Anti-revolution. And there was a very courageous Cuban bishop in Havana, Monsignor Boza-Masvidal, who spoke to the students. And there was a lot of—in those days we still thought that we could turn things

around with civil disobedience and with democratic kind of expressions. And I remember that after we had this big rally at the school that we got back into our school buses from our home school, and then people outside started rocking the bus. And the nuns made us all just lie on the floor of the bus, and it was kind of very dicey, a very dicey moment.

Mark B. So you were at Lourdes, the same school, through this time?

Mari C. Through this time. And things just went downhill. And I remember when the rumors started spreading that they were going to take over Catholic schools, the government was. And I was one of those kids that hung out in the school all the time, and I was one of those that was troublemaking all the time. But in an innocent kind of way. But I was always kind of this mischievous type.

But also I was the kid that hung out in the sacristy and helped polish the chalices and the candlesticks, so was just really rooted in the Catholic women spirituality in my childhood. Because those nuns were absolutely amazing women. And so I was there. We already knew—my other friend Tania, the two of us were the big troublemakers, but we loved the school.

And so we were to assist this nun that we both idolized, Sister Hortensia, and we said, well, if they're going to come take over the school, we wanted to take as much of the things that we thought were holy or something with us before the soldiers would come in. And we would load up.

We loaded the crucifix and all kinds of stuff that you wouldn't know, unless you were going to open a religious store or something, you know, wouldn't know what to do with it. But we just wanted—we didn't...you know, the idea of desecration. We did not want anyone to desecrate all of the icons that we had. And, you know, Catholics, we have a lot of icons.

So I was there. It was on a Saturday afternoon, and we were loading my girlfriend's aunt's car when out in the gates started the rattling of the gates. And I went to the gate. And through the gate the militia was there. I remember it was a woman that was demanding to be let in, and said we're the militia, this, that, and the other. And I said, "And I'm a student at this school and you have no business here," and I locked the door and wouldn't let them in.

And that was it after that. They forcefully came in and took over the school. And of course we were not allowed in except to see the poor nuns. There was like one hour a day where they could receive visitors.

And I remember some of the older, particularly one girl that I knew who was older, that they were sneaking in communion hosts for the nuns, because they were not allowed to have mass. And nuns had daily communion, daily mass. So the girls had one of those [pixes] where they put the host and would hang them, and put it under their blouse so that they could give communion to the nuns. So I remember that very, very clearly because that was so important at the time.

And I remember when the government forced all of the foreign-born clergy—which was most of the clergy—this was like, in the United States, evicting the Irish clergy 50 years ago. That would have been it. So that's what the government did. They evicted all of the foreign-born clergy.

And all the nuns, even the nuns that were Cuban, they were put in a ship, all of them together, called the Covadonga, a Spanish ship, and they were sent to Spain. That was it. All of a sudden, that's it, they're gone.

They're gone.

And I remember we went, my mother, my sister and I, we went to the harbor. There were all of these people waving handkerchiefs and saying good-bye. I mean, I get really emotional just thinking about it, and we're talking how many years ago? Because it was literally taking away the ground that you stood on.

And then, at that time, then, I started getting involved with some of my cousins who were in a boys' school that was just up the hill from the girls' school. The nuns would let the girls out at 4:30 so that the brothers would let the boys out at 5:00, and they wouldn't meet. But of course there was an ice cream shop on the street where everybody met. And the two schools were, you know, this is where marriages were made, in school.

And one of my cousins and his friends started playing revolutionary, and then I got to play revolutionary with them. And we used to have this anti-government propaganda where we'd mimeograph and put it out. And, I

mean, it's like children playing revolution. Until the Bay of Pigs invasion took place.

Mark B. It's in '62?

Mari C. Sixty-one.

Mark B. Sixty-one, okay.

Mari C. Sixty-one. Sixty-one? Yeah, '61. And when the news of the Bay of Pigs invasion spread, the government started picking up everybody that they could conceivably have a doubt, anybody that would be suspicious that they thought. So all the boys that I was doing revolution with got picked up. A lot of people we knew got picked up. And they were all taken to a stadium.

And I start hearing this, and I go...I had stacks of papers and stuff at home, so I go in the garage and lock myself in the garage and I start burning all the papers that I had on a tin can. And my mother sees that there's smoke coming out—she probably saved my life, you know—and made me open the door. And then my father comes in and—no, no, then I went over to my neighbor's house, and then my father, who never came to pick me up, came to get me, summon me to come home.

And then he started asking if I knew these other boys, and whether I had been spending time with my cousin Sergio. And I said, "Yeah, of course I spend time." "And do you know this boy?" "Yes, I do. Of course I do."

“Do you know this boy?” And of course I knew all of them. He said,
“Well, they’ve all been arrested!”

And so that night they shipped me to my aunt’s house on the other end of Havana, just to get me away. And that kind of sealed my fate, because that’s when my parents decided we’ve got to get her out of here. And my parents did save my life because a lot of the people that I knew from Catholic Action wound up spending their lives in jail, and some of them died, you know, were killed. So that, you know, that was that. And then by September—

Mark B. Do you want to talk about that experience, your leaving and everything, and how that developed?

Mari C. Well, my aunt, the one that they sent me to, her son was already in the United States, and then she came over to the United States. I had a couple of other cousins that had already left. And my cousin sent for me. This was something that the CIA and the Catholic Church put together, which was the Peter Pan air transfer of children.

That’s what they called it, because it was a flight, so they called it Peter Pan flights. And what happened was that an enormous number of Cuban children—I mean, not little, little ones, but my age—were granted what was called a visa waiver and were allowed entry into the United States.

Mark B. Were you allowed to leave Cuba?

Mari C. Yeah. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Because—well, let me tell you about this, the visa waivers and all of the Peter Pan flight. There were just lots of kids that I knew that were being sent abroad. Now, consider the parents. These are folks—my parents thought that this was not going to last. This was not going to last. I didn't think it was going to last.

So when my parents talked to me about coming to the United States to stay with my aunt and my cousin, I thought it was like going to camp, you know? It was like, oh, yeah. And also because there had been a procession in Havana on the Feast of our Lady of Charity, which is the patron saint of Havana, and it really was getting bad, because the people that were in the procession got beat up, and so things were really deteriorating rapidly.

And I thought it was going to be fun, because all these friends that I had were already here. And my cousin, one of my other cousins and his wife had allowed me to smoke cigarettes with them, so I said, hey, you know, this is going to be fun. I'm going to be hanging out with all of these cool adults, these cool people. So my mother was not persuaded that this was the right thing to do, but my father was really adamant to get me out of there.

So on September 14, 1961 I boarded a Pan American flight out of Havana, and I never saw my father again. I never saw my father again. And my dad and I were very close. I was a lot closer to my father than I was my

mother. I went everywhere with him. If there was any possibility that whatever he had to do could include me, I went along. I mean, we were very close. He taught me how to fish, how to fly a kite. I mean, is there any—I mean, just imagine. This is what my father made, you know? He got me a BB rifle. [*Laughs.*] So it was...

And my mother was not...they tried to leave Cuba and they were not allowed. They were not allowed. Because my family historically had been a politically relevant family, and a lot of my cousins were in jail—in prison, not jail, in prison. And it wasn't until after my father died that my mother was actually allowed to leave. And by then I was a woman of 19.

So I came to the States and stayed a couple of years in Miami with my aunt and my cousin. And my sister came to the States and married the boy that my father had been chasing away. And they just...gosh, they've been married now, oh, who knows, like 50 years or something.

Mark B. You went to school in Miami?

Mari C. I went to school in Miami for a couple of years, and then when my niece was born, my sister and my brother-in-law went to Boston because his brother, who had just graduated from MIT, was there and was helping them find a new life.

So my cousin that I was living with decided to join the army, like all the Cuban boys did, because they were going to go and fight in Cuba. That

was what they thought they were doing. So there was a Cuban brigade in the army, the best and the brightest of Cuban youth that all went into the army. My aunt was totally out of control. I mean, she was just flipping out. And I said I've got to get out of here.

So when I went to Boston on summer vacation to meet my niece, my newly born niece, I packed everything, and when I got to Boston I said to my sister, "I ain't going back. This woman is nuts. I am not living there." So that's that. I stayed in Boston and graduated from Brighton Senior High and went off to Northeastern. And at Northeastern University I met my first female love. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Okay, okay.

Mari C. And—well, this gets convoluted. My life is such a... My life would make a wonderful telenovela.

Mark B. Yes, it would.

Mari C. So I was at Northeastern, and it was a great time. It was a great time. I guess I thrive on social conflict because I grew up in it.

Mark B. This is the mid 1960s. The civil rights movement and...

Mari C. Yeah, we're talking—I was taking an exam at Northeastern when the news came of Bobby Kennedy's assassination. I mean, I blanked out. I just blanked out. Because we had been involved in the civil rights things in

Boston because my first lover was an African American woman who kicked my butt about racism. And very engaged in the civil rights movement. And we were at Northeastern. We worked at a bookstore together. And we just became close.

And I distinctly remember we were—there was a whole bunch of us that were friends, because we were from this crème d’ university, but also it was the bookstore crowd, and we all became friends. One of the boys was graduating, and there was a big party at his girlfriend’s house. You know, one of those New England houses where there was like basement and house and then several layers. And I remember, of course, we had our share of beverages, and it got stuffy for me. For somebody who grew up in the tropics, I don’t deal well with stuffiness and heat, and it must have been Boston.

And I went upstairs to where there was a balcony, and the next thing I know I’m just sitting there, it’s like a chaise, one of those that you put in balconies, and Ginny comes up, sits on the side, puts both hands around me, just leaning, and she said—oh, I forgot, though, she was from the Bahamas, so she’s not African American, but was very engaged, and she spoke with kind of a British accent—so she says to me, “Well, darling, is it love?” [*Laughs.*] How can you forget that?

Mark B. Yes, uh-huh.

Mari C. Just like that. “Well, darling, is it love?” So that was the beginning of a wonderful relationship—well, not really wonderful. It was, you know.

Mark B. Did you have a sense of attraction to women before that, or this was like a first time?

Mari C. This was the first time. This was the first time. I’d been dating boys. And this was like, oh my god. It was like, oh my god, now what? There was no place to go. It’s what I always said. For god’s sakes, Rita Mae Brown had not written *Rubyfruit*. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. [*Laughs.*] Yep.

Mari C. So it was like what do you do? What do you do? And I remember we—oh, to make matters more complicated, she was a married woman. She was married to a civil rights lawyer. Okay. Oh, you have no idea what complications I have.

Mark B. [*Laughs.*]

Mari C. Like the other side, because there’s another side to this, okay?

Mark B. Okay. This is good, this is good.

Mari C. Yeah, so it’s Ginny and I. And so we go to—I don’t know where she found out this information that there was a lesbian bar. And we get there and both of us are as femmy as could be, our hair down here kind of stuff. And we get into this bar, and they had a women’s band, but these were all

women that really looked like men, with crew cuts. And we looked at this and we said, “What the...?” This was just not anything that we had ever experienced. It was this club with all these women with tuxedos. And the other women very, very femme, you know. This was the 1960s.

So then we found a not so extravagant bar that was a lot more what later on we would become, or I would become more used to, places where people just, you know, some people looked butch or femme, but there were no stereotypes that were that intense.

Okay, so here is Ginny, who’s married. But then I had had this ongoing relationship of very close friendship, very close sense of mission with a man who was a Jesuit priest. He was also a professor of physics at MIT. And we had become very good friends. He had led a retreat at a retreat house that I went to, and we just really developed a very, very wonderful relationship.

He was a young guy. He was like 32 or something like that. And so even though I was a lot younger, but I was always very old. I was a very old young person. And we just spent a lot of time together. And he just listened to all my tales of woe or whatever.

And in the middle of all of my emotional, romantic telenovela, I am talking to Bob, and he was just being his wonderful, understanding self, just totally wonderful, understanding self, and gentle and supportive. And I don’t know what I was talking about, and I remember that I just said to

him, “You know, Bob, you just have to stop being so wonderful, otherwise I’m going to wind up falling in love with you.” And he turns to me and he said, “Well, that wouldn’t bother me at all, because I’m in love with you.”
Ta-tan! I mean, you can play the music in the background, okay?

So all of a sudden I’m involved with a woman and I’m involved with a Jesuit priest. And all this stuff is going on socially, which is what really juices me up. I really think that my passion is going to be social activism. So this guy took off for Chicago when the trouble started with the Democratic Convention. And I’ve got this woman who is smack in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement.

So then I’m going hanging out in all the black nightclubs in Boston, where you had the best jazz in the world, the best music, and then I’ve got this man who is... I think in a lot of ways that he and my father are the two most wonderful men I’ve ever known, and that there was probably a little bit of Dad-connection, because I had such closeness with my dad, and I always thought my dad was such a good man. And I think that Bob was that kind of a man. So this gets convoluted, and this just goes on, and it’s a soap opera and all of that until, at one point—my family had moved from Massachusetts to—

Mark B. Your sister?

Mari C. My sister and my mother, who was here now.

Mark B. Your mother was there now?

Mari C. She was here now, and the kids, and all that. They had moved to Vero Beach, Florida because my brother-in-law is an aeronautical engineer, and he got a job working with Piper, so they had moved down. I'm like...

Mark B. You're still at Northeastern or had you graduated?

Mari C. I'm still at Northeastern. And I'm saying, oh, man. I mean, I was really a mess. I was really a mess as far as I didn't know what to do with myself. So I finished the semester at Northeastern, I packed my bags and I moved to Florida. I said, "I can't deal with this." I have a married woman—

Mark B. You left both relationships?

Mari C. I left both relationships. I have a married woman, I have a Jesuit priest. Neither one of those is going to work. And I left. And I never saw Ginny again. Oh, because the melodrama, I forgot to tell you. Part of the melodrama is that she couldn't think of anything better to do but to tell her husband about us. And the husband said, "I'm gonna kill her." [*Laughs.*] That was an incentive to leave.

Mark B. Yes.

Mari C. Because this was a guy who, you know, had a lot of people around him that would be very eager to do whatever. So I said, oh, my god. So I got the heck out. And Bob came to Miami many times to see me. But soon

enough, with time, it was like, look, this is just not going to work. And I can tell you, of all the people that I have loved and that have loved me, that man will remain as one of the greatest loves of my life. It's too bad I was a lesbian, you know? It's too bad I was a lesbian. I mean not too bad. In the end it turned out differently.

Mark B. So you moved to Miami?

Mari C. So I moved to Miami. And I get there and I'm dealing with the fact that I'm a dyke, oh, my god. I don't think I would have used the word dyke at the time. So I go back to Miami and I have a lot of old friends, a lot of people that I have kept in touch with through the years. I mean, I got there with a lot of relationships. I was renewing relationships.

The two women who would be my best friends my entire life, we kept on going back and forth. They come to Boston to visit, I come to Miami to visit. To this day they have been my best friends my entire life. And so I went and stayed with them with their family for a while, which was outrageous. Her mother just couldn't believe it. They had a big room and she said it's just like a den of opium. [*Laughs.*] That's what she said, an opium den or something, because we were—

Mark B. This was the late 1960s, uh-huh.

Mari C. I know, I know, because we had...we were not doing opium, obviously, but we were smoking and drinking wine and all of this, everybody, all the

friends. And then I just kind of settled in Miami because my family, I had all my relatives there. I had good friends. I had roots, real roots there.

Mark B. You finished school? You went to work?

Mari C. Finished school. Well, I did both for a while. I didn't finish school till later. I was going, you know, just kind of taking courses here and there. And eventually—

Mark B. What kind of work were you doing?

Mari C. Well, I was working at a lab. See, my father had a laboratory and I had grown in the medical world. That's where I grew up, in the medical world. So I was working in a laboratory, and then I moved to what was my first career, which was in medical research. Then I finished my bachelor's at Barry. Barry is a Dominican university. And I came out as this is who I am.

Mark B. To all your family and friends?

Mari C. Not necessarily my family for a while, but all my friends. All my friends had started getting engaged in the community, and that's when, what I wrote on my activism list, that's when Anita Bryant happened. And I blew the doors of the closet at that point because it was...

And I don't know if I shared this with you or in the notes that I sent out, that there is an intersection in Little Havana that every time when I go

back—and I have to take that because that goes back to my church, to my niece’s house, and every time I have to stop on the damn red light I remember taking that left turn when there was a meeting of queer people at a bar called the Stonewall.

And it was a daytime gathering where people were going to talk about the referendum and what people were going to do. And I knew about it, and I’m on the left lane, and I’m watching the lights go on, and I’m saying—it was the moment of knowing if I make this turn, something’s going to change. And of course it changed my life. I became an activist.

Mark B. Do you want to talk a bit about your activism? What did you do in that campaign?

Mari C. In that campaign I was very involved, and I was involved with the few Latinos who were out and willing to distribute literature and to go to meetings and all this kind of stuff. And one of those people had his car blown up, so this is not things that most of the people that talk about those days know about. There was violence involved in that referendum. There were queer people getting beat up. And then that was a horrible defeat. A horrible defeat.

And then I just...from there I was just wild party girl. It was like, you know, the whole Miami Beach scene for quite a while. For quite a while. And I had some relationships that were very superficial, but I was very young.

Mark B. Very young, yes.

Mari C. I was very young. I had a string of relationships. Then I got involved with a woman who I'd known forever. She was my—oh, Jeez, no, I cannot possibly record this. *[Laughs.]*

Mark B. Okay. That's fine.

Mari C. There was this woman that I had known my whole life, and we developed a relationship. The only problem was she was a married woman, and that didn't work out very well. But that was one of the significant, very significant relationships of my life that probably messed me up a lot, but also I think I grew a lot out of that relationship. And then I discovered Dignity. *[Laughs.]*

Mark B. I was going to ask that. How did that happen? Tell us about that.

Mari C. How did I ever discover Dignity? Good grief.

Mark B. You can just start with what you do remember.

Mari C. I do remember going early, very early. I think it must have been in the gay newspaper that I heard about this Catholic group. And I remember when I got there it was a very small group of some older guys, mostly, and I said, oh, my word.

Mark B. Were they in a church?

Mari C. They were meeting, actually, at a Catholic school.

Mark B. A Catholic school, okay.

Mari C. Yeah, at a Catholic school. But, you know, we kept on going and—

Mark B. Were you the only woman there the first time?

Mari C. Yes. I was the only woman. But the guys were very nice. So I kept on going back.

Mark B. What was it that drew you back?

Mari C. I guess it was a safe space, a place to meet with people who, you know, we shared a sense of spirituality. There was a Jesuit priest who was wonderful. Me and the Jesuits.

Mark B. Were there other Latinos there?

Mari C. No.

Mark B. No?

Mari C. No, not a one. Not a one. And then one day my partner walks in. Yeah, I mean, with time, with time. Because we had changed the place we were meeting at, and the group was really growing. I eventually became first vice president, then president, and we grew the group.

And like I said, one day Diana walks in, and I thought she was absolutely adorable. And she was going off. She was going to join the Navy. She had a master's degree already and she just said her family had all been in

the military, and she had just divorced the guy she'd been married to, and this just seemed like a good thing. But she had been with this, particularly hanging out with the gay men's crowd, and she had had some very fleeting relationships kind of stuff. And she was going to go in the Navy. And then she didn't. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. [*Laughs.*]

Mari C. She didn't. And I think I had something to do with that. And she had already taken the physical exams and everything. She just hadn't signed the papers. Otherwise she would have been a goner. And so we entered into a relationship that has been just incredible.

Mark B. It was a big change for you at that time.

Mari C. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, it was a big change. It was a big change, I think, because Diana believed the same things I did, you know, the foundation. And it wasn't just a pretty girl. I mean, you're talking somebody who really had a great deal of depth. A great deal of depth.

And so we got very involved with Dignity. Eventually I was chapter president. We moved the chapter to...at that time we were meeting at the cathedral. We were at the very well-known Dignity convention in Seattle.

Mark B. Do you remember the year of that? We can find it if you don't remember.

Mari C. Seattle when Hunthausen opened the cathedral to Dignity, which cost him his job. And the people outside praying the rosary and all of that, and they wanted to re-consecrate the cathedral after that. And it was just, oh, powerful. It was so powerful. And so this goes on, and I'm trying to get my years. You will be able to trace.

Mark B. Yeah, we can go back and find it.

Mari C. We can go back and figure the dates. Dignity Convention in New York was '85. In 1985 my friend Jack Jacnick, who was one of my beloved friends from Dignity—he was in Dignity in Virginia, but he had been, you know, he was like the regional director or something, so we became very good friends. We used to drink bourbon and smoke cigars together. It was wonderful. I adored Jack Jacnick.

And Jack Jacnick died of AIDS. He was the first person that, to me, it was like... And I was in medical research, so we were all talking about what is this thing. Nobody knew what the hell it was. So by 1987, when it's the next...it's the Dignity convention in Miami—I hope I'm not messing up these dates.

Mark B. We can fix it later. That's fine.

Mari C. Yeah, okay. So we have the Dignity Convention in Miami, and of course I was chapter president. And yes, it had to be '87 because I remember

talking about Jack. Everybody loved Jack and I remember talking about him from the podium.

And then we had the letter from the Vatican where we were...the one that said what is it, what are we? "Inherently prone to moral evil." Which, you know, at this point, I said, this is heresy. It's absolute heresy. How can anybody be innately prone to moral evil? That is sacrilege. I mean, this cannot...this is just very bad theology.

And then they started, the archbishop of Miami, with whom I had met many times, in his own home, okay? He had been very supportive. But boy, they got that letter from Ratzinger and everybody just, you know. Everybody just filled in.

And so I led our chapter out of the church. I said nobody's going to kick us out. We're leaving. We're leaving this institution. And that was a monumental moment in my life. Because I said this is not Christ's church. This is just not a Christ church. So walking out.

Mark B. But that had been so much part of your life.

Mari C. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark B. Yes, for...

Mari C. Yeah, but, you know, I still held on. I was involved in the... I don't know if you're aware. There was a Task Force on Sexual Ethics that Dignity

started. Dignity had a Task Force on Sexual Ethics. It came out of the Seattle Convention. And Diana and I were both a part of it. There were like seven of us, I think, that worked pretty intensely for all those years, and we had this document that was published. It was a pretty solid piece of reflection on sexual ethics from a queer Catholic perspective. And so after that was published and...

Mark B. At some point there was a new congregation you helped start in Miami. Did that come later?

Mari C. No, that was later.

Mark B. That was much later? Okay.

Mari C. That was much later. Because then I was—okay, this is what happened. I was still in medical research, but feeling the need for something else. That this had been a very good, safe place for me. Actually, it's been such a good, safe place that they're going to be a very important part of my retirement from all that money they put away for me years ago. But I went back to school and then I got—one of the people that I had done a lot of work with was quite a character, a guy named Grant Ford, who had been—do you know who Grant Ford is?

Mark B. He's an MCC pastor, right?

Mari C. MCC Fort Lauderdale. And he and I had done a lot of work together. And he called me one day. He said, "Hey, want to have dinner with me?"

I said sure. And he offered me a job. And I came home and I said to Diana, "How would you feel about my taking a pay cut of about \$18,000?" And she said to me, "Can we live on that?" And I said, "Well, it won't be the same. We might not be able to travel as much." And she said, "Is it going to make you happy?" And I said, "I think so." And she said, "Well, it's what you always wanted, really." So I quit my job and I went to work at MCC Fort Lauderdale.

Mark B. What was your portfolio?

Mari C. I was the program director. Now, what happens is HIV-AIDS all over the place. All over the place. This was the church. We were just burying people right and left. And I...I mean, I was not a clergyperson, but I was a member of the staff, and everybody was doing AIDS work.

And I remember going with my little Episcopal Book of Prayer to a VA hospital in Miami to see my first AIDS patient to do a pastoral visit. And man, I just...I did everything you could possibly do to a human being who is sick from a religious perspective. I prayed, I blessed him, I anointed him. I just didn't know what to do. And I kept on going back to see him. And he's the person, this man really taught me about how you take care of the sick and dying, because he was in that.

And at that point I had finished my bachelor's at Barry, with a concentration in religious studies, and I started on the road to ordination with MCC. This is where facts just bump against each other.

Mark B. I understand.

Mari C. I cannot swear to the veracity of all these things as far as chronology and what came first. So I wound up...for a while I was just doing HIV work and became—

Mark B. For Sunshine Cathedral?

Mari C. Well, just for...that was even before it became Sunshine Cathedral. It was MCC Fort Lauderdale. Because I never liked the cathedral. That was very much grand.

Mark B. Yeah, okay.

Mari C. That was grand. And then I was working with, oh, Jeez, a religious healthcare kind of thing. If my life depended on it I can't remember what it was. But it was another MCC, former Catholic minister, Lou Kavar. He's written a lot of stuff. He's got a lot of stuff published. I became good friends with Lou. I was working for—it's not hospice, but I became kind of the chaplain for this AIDS home, and I got involved with... I mean, there was so much.

Mark B. So much. I remember.

Mari C. There was so much. So much to do and so few people to do it. So that took—and those were the AIDS years. And it's like, you know, watching

people die, and bury people, and comfort people. So I knew that MCC was not the best fit for me, that I didn't want to do just queer ministry.

Mark B. I understand.

Mari C. And even though I have nothing but the greatest respect for the work of our colleagues in MCC. And I went back to school. I went back to school and back to Barry to get a master's degree in theology. Me and the Dominicans.

Mark B. Dominicans and the Jesuits.

Mari C. Yes, the Dominicans and the Jesuits. So I went back to Barry. After the first semester, the head of the department of theology asked me if I would be his graduate student, so I got a free ride. And he was a Catholic theologian, a Bible scholar, and I learned a lot. I learned a lot because I was hanging out there with him all the time. John O'Grady, the Bible scholar.

And the faculty was just wonderful. Great, great, great people. So I got a very solid background in everything from liturgy to all of the foundations of the church. And one of my professors had been very involved in Latin American liberation theology, had been in Peru and all of that, so that really... I was also engaged with this center, this Catholic center where there were a lot of liberation theologians that were coming down and doing lectures, so I was totally immersed in liberation theology.

Mark B. Were there other women in the program with you?

Mari C. Yeah.

Mark B. There were other women at that point?

Mari C. Yeah.

Mark B. Okay, good.

Mari C. Because it was not an M.Div. A master's in theology. And then I didn't know where to go, what to do. I was searching and searching and searching. And through my social activism and community work, I was at this meeting of religious people about some issues in the city. I can't even remember what it was about.

But there was this man who I was sitting next to, and he was talking to this guy who was on his other side, and apparently something had happened in this man's family, the other man's family. And this minister, this guy was speaking to this person with such gentleness, love and concern. And he just said, "I just want you to know my wife and I were praying for you last night," and it was such... And I was so deeply touched just listening to him minister to this other person.

And we just talked, and I said something like...he invited me to go to his congregation one night. "Why don't you come to my church sometime?" And I did. I said to Didi, "We've really got to go. This is the cutest

church in the world in Coral Gables. It's the cutest church in the world.”

And we went to Coral Gables Congregational Church and never left.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Mari C. My love is that church. So I went there. I had already finished my master's. I went in the in care program at the congregation and then I went back for my doctorate at this very interesting, experimental seminary that was interfaith. And they were multicultural.

Mark B. In Miami?

Mari C. In Miami. It's since been taken over by St. Thomas University, but they were trying to be interfaith at the time. I said I've got to get a degree. Oh, because they told me—that's when I decided to go into the ordination track with the UCC, and they told me I needed an M.Div. I said I'm not going to go get another master's degree.

Mark B. Another whole master's degree, right.

Mari C. I said what about if I get a D.Min.? And they said, yeah, we'll ordain you with that. And I said, fine. If I'm going to go back to school, I'm going to get a doctorate. So I went at the seminary and had a phenomenal time. This was—I just cannot get away from them. The president of the seminary was a Catholic priest. Everybody else was Protestant.

So he paid for my education. I never paid a nickel for that degree. I did a thesis on issues of culture in ministry and multiracial, multicultural church, which I have not been able to use at all because nobody wants to have a multiracial, multicultural church. They all talk about it.

Mark B. Yes, yes. We should talk about that later on after this interview. I'd love to talk with you more about that.

Mari C. So I served at that congregation.

Mark B. At Coral Gables?

Mari C. At Coral Gables. I served at Coral Gables. And while serving there, I met Bernice Powell Jackson, and totally fell in love. I mean, it was not the love of another woman. She's incredible. And it was entirely mutual. We really clicked. And when there was a... You know, she was the head of Justice and Witness Ministries.

And I had also met Ron Stief, who was the head of this office. And we had clicked. He was a wild man. The two of us just got along awesome. And then when this job opened up, somebody called me and said there's a job in Washington, D.C. that has your name on it. And I came to Washington to work with Bernice and... And then they both had the audacity to leave.

Mark B. Do you remember the year you came here?

Mari C. It was ten years ago. And then Diana was, at the time...well, she decided she wanted to go into ordained ministry, and she was working for hospice and going to seminary. But then she finished here at Howard, got a phenomenal—she got a residence at Johns Hopkins, and now she's been working at the NIH. She's a chaplain at NIH. So here we are. And then we just got married.

Mark B. Yes, talk about that. You got married when?

Mari C. When did we get married? On our 30th anniversary.

Mark B. Thirtieth anniversary, yes.

Mari C. So it was two years ago.

Mark B. Where did that happen?

Mari C. At First Congregational Church. Well, it actually wound up happening in a Lutheran church because our church had been torn down and was being rebuilt. So my congregation, the one that we're members of, was meeting at this beautiful little, beautiful, absolutely gorgeous little Lutheran church, and we got married. And Diane Neu married us.

Mark B. Oh. I know Mary Hunt, yes, and Diane.

Mari C. Oh, Mary Hunt and Diane Neu are very, very good friends. We usually spend all the holidays with them. Yeah, very good people. So when it came to getting married, I said I cannot choose any of my colleagues,

because which one do you choose, right? And I said but to me it was like, what about Diane Neu? This would be the perfect person. So Diane married us, and that's that.

Mark B. A bit about your portfolio, your work here. Your work focuses on?

Mari C. My work focuses on domestic issues.

Mark B. Mm-hmm, okay.

Mari C. [*Laughs.*] I know, it's the portfolio from hell. But obviously we choose whatever is critical at the time. I've been doing a lot of work on immigration. I've also done a lot of work on climate change. The National Council of Churches has an office next door and they have been an umbrella for the environmental work of all the denominations. And there is the Eco-Justice Working Group, and I served as president or whatever, chairperson, whatever it was of that group. I have phenomenal colleagues in that group.

Around here it's the issue du jour. Like when healthcare was happening, even though we have a person dedicated to healthcare, but everybody was working on that. So right now we have the immigration push, in a lot of ways, so we'll see what happens with that. I think Obama has to do something about it.

Mark B. I also know that you play a significant role in the ecumenical LGBT religious movement. You preached at the WOW conference—

Mari C. Yes, I did.

Mark B. —and spoke at other kind of events. How do you see your role in this larger movement? You are a recognized leader in a lot of ways.

Mari C. Well, it's been kind of curtailed, except for my work at PSR now. And that's where I've channeled a lot of that energy, the work at PSR with the Latino.

Mark B. How did that come about?

Mari C. Dear Bernie, bless his heart, called me one day and he asked me if I wanted to be on the board of the center, all right? This was, I don't know, several years ago.

Mark B. This is UCC seminary and you're a UCC leader.

Mari C. So he calls me and I said, "Bernie, thank you very much. I'm honored that you asked me, but I don't have a lot of free time, and whatever free time I have, I am just really dedicating to the Latino community. When the seminary decides that they want to do anything with the Latino community, you call me."

And he did. Bless his heart. When they started thinking about doing Latino Roundtable, they invited me, and lo and behold, the other person they invited is Orlando Espin, whom I've known most of my life. So this

was just tremendous. And I just get so frustrated. I think I have been very radicalized, as a Latina, since I moved here, because in Miami we rule.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Mari C. You know, Latinas rule. You cannot move—I mean, you have the mayor and senators and everything else. So moving here and then seeing how the Latinos here are treated, working in a place full of these gentle, poor, undocumented people. We have the largest, or the second-largest Salvadoran population in the world. You've got San Salvador, Los Angeles, and the Washington, D.C. area.

They are the unseen. When everybody goes home, they work. And I've been deeply touched by their situation. I always talk about that in here I'm the pastor of the basement where all the cleaning people come. I mean, I've gone to court with their children. Whenever there's been, if they need translations, anything else, they always call me, and I'm very, very glad to be of help.

It's just very sad, all of these people who are... I really get so offended by the term "illegal," illegal aliens. That is the most offensive term I have ever heard in my life. And so that just makes me very angry.

And so doing anything that I can as just an out, queer person with some experience in leadership that we can do. I think the work of the Roundtable can be, the resources that we've put out can alleviate a lot of

the tension with our queer sisters and brothers that are Latinos. And I'm working with Orlando, so I have a lot of fun.

You're not going to believe this. This is so funny. Diana and I are going away on vacation on Saturday. We're going off to the Yucatan. Without talking to each other, Orlando and his partner are going to be in the same area the same week.

Mark B. [Laughs.]

Mari C. We had not discussed this. It is hilarious. We're going to get together in Cancun or somewhere.

Mark B. Good. This is a great story. Thank you so much for your time. Is your mother still living?

Mari C. No.

Mark B. She died, okay.

Mari C. No, my parents are both gone.

Mark B. Any other stories or recollections you want to add, or as you look back over just that whole journey from Havana and what's brought you to where you are today?

Mari C. I think for me it's about justice. And whether it applies to the undocumented immigrants or it applies to the queer community, that we're all children of God, and that we all have...that we're entitled to a life of

integrity and truth and opportunity. Whether it is passing immigration reform or same gender marriage, inseparable. Inseparable. This is about having the fullness of being a child of God, and being able to internalize that, and be able to live out as a child of God, not as somebody who's less than. And I've had, as you can see, I've had a very rich life.

Mark B. Yes, uh-huh.

Mari C. I've had a very rich life. I'm sure that I have forgotten stuff because, you know. I mean, you know, I can tell you—oh, the most important thing in my life, how could I not tell you? My spouse and I are absolutely, absolutely silly bird watchers.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Mari C. We have a passion for nature. I think my passion outside of justice issues is nature. When I need restoration, I never go to a church to pray or anything like that, I go to the ocean, I go to the mountains, I go to the river. That's where I get spiritually fed.

And I don't know how many years ago I just got curious about birds. I was still in the lab, because I remember asking one of my colleagues, who was very involved in the Sierra Club, and I kept on hearing stuff about nature, and that and the other. And I just asked her, I said, "You know, I want to learn about birds." I don't even know where I got that. I want to learn about birds. Birds interest me. They're so beautiful.

And I said, “Where can I go to learn?” And she said, “Well, you just get yourself a copy of Peterson’s *Field Guide to the Birds*.” And I went and I got my... No, I told Diana for Christmas this is what I want. I want a copy of Peterson’s *Field Guide to the Birds*, which was the book then, and I said I want a pair of binoculars. So that’s what I got on Christmas morning.

And we had a townhouse—this is Miami—that was on a little lake. And I got my binoculars and my field guide. I went to the lake. My god, I saw an American Coot and an Anhinga, and I was able to identify them, and I have never put down my binoculars. I think our life list is 700 and something. So we go, when we go, like Mexico, we’re going to go birding.

Mark B. Wonderful.

Mari C. We’ve gone to Peru. We’ve gone to Argentina. We’ve gone all over the country. We’re very, very nature people. We’ve gone all the way to Patagonia, seen the pelicans—I mean, the penguins in the ice floes. So we’re very...this is what I love more than anything. My passions in life are the people that I love and nature.

Mark B. Nature. Good. Thank you.

Mari C. You’re very welcome.

Mark B. Thank you, Mari.

Mari C. You're very welcome.

Mark B. You're wonderful. Good. It's an hour and a half. Whoops.

Mari C. That's okay. Don't tell me it didn't record.

[Part 2.]

Mark B. This is Mark and Mari back here again, and Mari just wants to talk a bit about a couple of important parts of her life and some associations with some significant people who played important roles in her life and also the larger LGBT religious movement.

Mari C. Okay. After MCC we had sort of a group of women who gathered mostly at my morning service on Sundays. We had an early morning service, and it was—

Mark B. At MCC Fort Lauderdale?

Mari C. No, at MCC Miami. And it kind of grew and grew. And at some point...oh, we had a lot of wonderful things, and one time we put together an Audre Lorde memorial. Talk about people who have influenced us. Oh, be still my heart. Be still my heart, Audre Lorde.

And so we did an Audre Lorde memorial event where we invited as a guest—I don't know if you've seen, in I think it was in one of the *Before Stonewall* books, that there's a wonderful picture of Audre Lorde with another woman by the name of Maua Flowers, who was also a very

important person in our history. And I was called by some other people in the community that were not part of MCC, or they were not part of what emerged as a women's community that we had. Oh, no, I need I need to talk to you about the community first before this.

Okay, so we had this Audre Lorde memorial that we were doing to collect funds for women's health issues and things like that. And there was not a lot of support from the men in the group. And that kind of started a little bit of a rift. And eventually that led us to start something new.

So we started and I led what was called Holy Wisdom Interfaith Community, and we became a 501(c)3 in the state of Florida, and took a warehouse space in Miami, and totally transformed it as a gorgeous place for gatherings and for worship and all of that. And we put together—we wrote...well, actually, a phenomenal woman by the name of Ana Garcia, who is one of the funniest human beings, and one of the most amazing minds that I've ever met—we remain very good friends—wrote a play that was called “Que Pasa, Miami?”

And “Que Pasa, Miami?” was a coming out comedy about this Cuban girl coming out to her family. Well, this was, I mean, it was hilarious. I remember doing the rehearsals, and we could not control just breaking out, because it was so funny. And it just kept on getting funnier and funnier. And we presented “Que Pasa, Miami?” to sold out audiences in a theatre in Miami Beach. We presented it two years in a row, several

performances each. It was amazing. Even the BeeGees were there.

[Laughs.] And so we got a proclamation from the city of Miami Beach.

We got all kinds of...

And it didn't last because it couldn't last. It was just too much of energy, not a structure thing. But we went on for about three years when I started really drifting into I need to do something to formalize my clergy status.

But Holy Wisdom Interfaith Community was one of those Camelot moments in my life. And the people there, the women and the good work.

At that time we wrote a grant for, which we received, and we put together the first ever senior prom for LGBT youth in a hotel in Miami Beach all together with tuxedos and gowns, and whichever gender wanted to wear whatever was fine. I mean, we had some really, really—we did some wonderful work.

Mark B. This is early 1990s?

Mari C. I can't remember.

Mark B. We can go back. We can always add it later.

Mari C. I mean, I have all these things. But part of what—I was just trying to make the Audre Lorde, you know, mention Audre Lorde, because this woman, Maua Flowers, who was Audre Lorde's best friend—they lived upstairs from each other in New York—and one of those insights that, you

know, I'm glad to be recording this because I don't know how many people know that.

And Maua told me that they used to have this breakfast. On Saturday mornings they would get together and go to each other's apartment or whatever and they would have breakfast and chat and stuff like that. And they were having this conversation about their culture, and the African American community, and going back to slavery, and the fact that as individuals and as people the African American community were not meant to survive. At which point Audre Lorde goes upstairs to write and comes back down with the most amazing poem that she ever wrote about we were not meant to survive.

So it's like these amazing things. I've had, at times, not the easiest of life, but I've had the richest of life, which has to do about the people that I have known. And for me, I have to say, a dyke my age that was not impacted by Rita Mae Brown was just not reading. And I got dragged all the way to Georgia to hear her at a women's event because I had read her stuff. I said, oh, my god, this is really...it was so vital for us all to have somebody like Rita Mae Brown. So you have these people that really impacted us enormously.

And then that happened to me reading Carter Heyward. And reading Carter Heyward, I was already an AAR geek. I just love theology. And everybody at Holy Wisdom was reading Carter Heyward, because I just

said you've got to read these things. And I called Carter at EDS, and she didn't know me from Eve, and I just said I'd like to talk. And she was so gracious, just ever so gracious.

So we agreed to meet at the AAR, because it must have been coming up or something. So we met at the AAR. We just had the best time, and we became very good friends. She and Bev did one of those summer programs at PSR on feminist ethics, and I said I have to go to that. I absolutely have to go to that. And I remember that after I got to—you know the beautiful space in PSR where you look out and you see the bay?

Mark B. Right, right.

Mari C. And I got there and I called Diana and I said to her, "I think I just died and went to Berkeley." And that's always been—I always say, you know, whenever I go to Berkeley it's like, oh, this is wonderful, I'm going to Berkeley. I love it there.

Mark B. It's beautiful.

Mari C. It's just gorgeous. And so that's when I became more of a...closer to Carter and that's when I connected with Bev. And Bev has been such a mentor.

Mark B. And we mean Bev Harrison.

Mari C. Beverly Harrison. Bev has been so good to me, so generous with her time, with her love, with her gifts. I mean, I have more gifts that Bev has given me. I mean, you know, I just absolutely love her with all my heart. I said, you know, how incredibly fortunate for this little Cuban girl to have had the opportunity to meet people like, you know, somebody like Beverly Harrison, as a disciple, obviously, but also knowing that I was very loved. Beverly showed me that kind of love. And she's not Carter. She doesn't gush like Carter does. But she's so solid. I have felt this remarkable woman really, really loves me.

Mark B. You said she did the charge at your ordination?

Mari C. She did the charge at my ordination. She came down to Miami. And I remember she said, "Mari, it is now public." It was like now what we all have known everybody knows—who you are, you know. I mean, she was just wonderful, absolutely wonderful.

And it was amazing because Beverly was there, and then Bernice Powell Jackson preached at my ordination, so it was a feminist powerhouse. I know. It was amazing. And I had all of these Protestant ministers plus the president of the seminary, who was a Catholic priest. He was there laying hands on me. My best rabbi friend was there laying hands on me. I said this is a whole ecumenical community. It was wonderful. Okay, so there was what else?

Mark B. Mary Hunt.

Mari C. Mary Hunt. I met Mary Hunt in New York at the Dignity Convention in 1985, where she got up and she gave the most amazing keynote address. It really woke up—because there had always been this little tension with the men and the women in Dignity, and that the men were not understanding.

Mark B. Little? [*Laughs.*]

Mari C. Understanding the women's issues. And, I mean, she just kind of blew the roof off the place. And then she went and did a workshop on feminist liberation theology, which was monumentally important to me. Monumentally important to me. She then went on to record a series on feminist liberation theology.

That and also some recordings from Rosemary Radford Ruether became my...I used to work in a laboratory at that point. There's nothing more boring than to work in a laboratory doing experiments, so I listened to all this feminist stuff constantly. And I learned. The foundations of feminist theology I learned from Mary Hunt, and liberation theology, because that's what she was doing. And listening to Rosemary.

So it's quite a wealth. What a wealth of human beings. And Mary and I, through the years, have become the best of friends. And Mary and Diane Neu, who is just a lovely human being, and such a gifted, gifted minister in her own. And when we moved to Washington, the most important thing that I knew is that Mary and Diane were here.

Because we worked together on Women-Church Convergence. And that's when I became friends with Diane also, because I started the friendship with Mary first. And Mary, Diane and their beautiful daughter Min are a real joy in our lives. We spend holidays. We spend the most fabulous meals. We have like who is going to outdo who cooking. It's just one of those fantastic things.

Mark B. There was a piece with the Conference of Catholic Lesbians.

Mari C. Yes, yes.

Mark B. The early leadership in that group.

Mari C. Yes. Yes-yes-yes-yes-yes. After Dignity—and again, there was always this tension with Dignity and the needs of the lesbian community. And Karen Doherty—it must have been Mary Hunt, because she's usually the initiator of all my troubles, that must have given my name to Karen Doherty, and I think somehow I got talked to Karen. And a group of Catholic women that had been, you know, we all met at my house, we went to a CCL gathering up in the mountains close to—

Mark B. Where, in Pennsylvania?

Mari C. No, no, no. Not the one in Pennsylvania. This was in California, close to Yosemite. And it was a phenomenal gathering. And Karen and I just absolutely hit it off. Karen is such a wonderful, bubbly human being. We just absolutely loved each other at first sight. And I was invited to—and

time, I don't remember what the time frame was—to be part of the leadership of the Conference for Catholic Lesbians, which was, again, those are golden moments.

You talk about some of the best times in Dignity, the best times at CCL, the times at MCC, the times at Holy Wisdom Interfaith Community, and they're like Camelot. We've had a lot of Camelot moments, and which I think is what has sustained us. Has sustained us for the incredible obstacles that we have faced. And we have overcome. We have. And this is just incredible. In my lifetime we have done this.

Because from the moment that we had the uprising at Stonewall until the marriage movement, it's a blink in human history. And we have done it. I think that we will always be indebted to all of those drag queens and all those dykes at Stonewall who got up and said, "I ain't gonna take it no more." And the movement has been probably one of the most successful movements in human history, because we've done it in...in a lifetime we have accomplished all of this. We have ordained queer people. The UCC, God bless them, passed the same gender marriage.

And I remember we were in Atlanta at Synod, and we were right next to CNN, I mean, the press. John Thomas had to face with the press when we came out and said this church has agreed that they're going to marry queer people. And I remember that I went. There were people taking

testimonies right before this passed, and there were a lot of us that gave testimony.

And I just got up in there and said, “I’m a pastor at a church where a lot of people like to get married because we have the cutest church in town.” I said, “I cannot tell you how many people I have married. But my partner and I cannot be married. What’s wrong with this?” [*Laughs.*] You know? Here we are, we’re both ordained ministers, and we have married a whole slew of people, but we ourselves cannot be married.

And it was just whether you choose to or not. I don’t think that anybody needs to get married. Mary and Diane will probably never get married. They have a principle on it, with the institution of marriage, even though those are the two most married people you could possibly find, they’re so committed and devoted to one another. Which shows you you don’t need the ceremony. But for some of us it’s important.

So this is the amazing achievement of a generation. And we have changed the world. We have changed the world. I mean, there are still places in the world where people are oppressed, but there is the evidence, the witness of a generation that says we are not gonna take this anymore, and we have succeeded.

Mark B. Yes. That’s great.

Mari C. So we can end with that.

Mark B. That's a great way to end. That is perfect. Thank you so much.

[End of recording.]