Abstract: In her 2022 interview with Pat Calchina, Mary Waitrovich details her life in Madison, Wisconsin. She spoke of the time period 1978 to the present. Mary talks about her process of coming out as a lesbian, playing intramural sports, her job as a public defender and after retiring from the law, her work making music and video on computers. Mary also talks about her lifelong interest in music and her avocation as a singer/songwriter. Additionally, Mary discusses her time performing in Flaming Dykasaurus, a comedy group, as well as volunteering at WORT, and Apple Island, a women’s space.


Interview Session (2022): Digital File

TIME KEYWORDS
00:00:00 Start of Interview/Interviewer’s Introduction
00:00:38 Mary came to madison in 1978 at the age of 24 to attend law school after a year as a public school teacher.
00:02:20 Mary talks about her process of dealing with her internalized homophobia and dating both men and women. She states: “I didn’t really look like a lesbian.” She credits The Coming Out Stories as her epiphany. “Oh my god, I’m a lesbian! I finally understood myself.”
00:05:05 Discussion of playing intramural sports and later, city league sports, “trying to infiltrate the lesbian community.” She describes a Ferron concert where she saw two women holding hands and credits that with the start of her “love affair with lesbian culture.” “I was suddenly free to be whoever I was.”
Mary talks about her job as an Appellate Public Defender and the importance she felt of being out at her job and showing people “who we really are.” By 1999 she was burned out from her work and retired from law. After retiring, she got a job at Sonic Foundry, a tech company in Madison, Wisconsin. Additionally, she had her own job making videos independently.

Discussion of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival and her experiences taking workshops from Rhiannon, an accomplished lesbian musician. She considers her first experience with Rhiannon as one of those “life turning moments” and after this experience she began “calling myself a singer.”

Discussion of her band, “On the Verge” playing at the first Galvanize march and picnic and of her second band, “Her Face”. In 1996 she made a CD of original music (in archives). She states that “music is the thing that has the most constance in my life.”

Discussion of Mary’s twelve years as a part-time host of Her Infinite Variety, on WORT, community radio.

Mary details her discovery in the 1990s of stand up comedy and her meeting with Emily Jones, Lynda Finn and Abby Hill (who became her partner for 16 years) and the formation of Flaming Dykasaurus. Discussion follows of the various productions that the group put on, including a full length musical comedy, Oblivia, a comedic take on the lesbian business, Olivia Cruise. She says: “One of the most fun things I’ve ever done in my life.” (examples in archives).

Discussion of Mary’s volunteer time at Apple Island and how she learned technical skills from Roseann Sheridan and ultimately became the “tech guru of Apple Island.” She says of her switch from law to computer work: “I was hanging around the planet waiting for them to invent computers.”

Mary talks about “The Lder Word” a take on the popular lesbian sitcom, The L Word. She states that The Lder Word is still on Tube.

Discussion of the Lesbian Variety Show which Mary thinks she performed in every year and at one point, hosted with friends.

Lesbian (gay) bars played a small role in Mary’s life, she talks briefly about The Cardinal Bar and Lysistrata, which burned down shortly after Mary started frequenting it.

“How would you define your political activity?” Mary talks about the ideas in the Constitution being at the core of her belief system. She was very involved in stopping the gay marriage ban in the State of Wisconsin and was “personally hurt by people’s hate.” She has been a strong supporter, of Wisconsin’s now Senator, Tammy Baldwin, who is a lesbian.

“What does it mean to you to have a [life] partner? Discussion of what it means to Mary to be a lesbian and that for her, it was a choice. She also talks about her awakening as a feminist.

Discussion of the changes Mary sees in today’s lesbian world. “How do you see your role today?” Mary talks about lesbian land and her joy that it is still viable today. She says that this is what lesbian culture means to her today,
Back to a discussion of Mary’s birth family, who were not initially supportive of her lesbianism. “Did your family’s acceptance of you being a lesbian ultimately change?” Mary’s mother died when Mary was 11 and her father died when she was 21, so her family was her five siblings who initially were not supportive. She says “there was a lot of homophobia in my sibling group.” Ultimately, it faded. She says that she “gave them a break” and didn’t hold it against them, since she ultimately had to deal with her own internalized homophobia and understands that they, too, had a process to go through.

Discussion of Mary’s life now, her year split between Arizona and Madison, her love of pickle ball and karaoke, walking in the woods and trying to stay fit and healthy. She says, “It’s perfect for now.”

End of interview (approximate)