

Mazer Memory Project

Interview with Angela Brinskele

June L. Mazer Archives, West Hollywood, CA

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Angela Brinskele

Brinskele (00:08):

So my name's Angela Brinskele, and I'm the Director of Communications here at the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives. I'm often asked how I got to this archive and it's a pretty interesting story. I was growing up in Orange County in Anaheim specifically, and I was I always say I was absolutely sure of two things. One that I was a lesbian and two that I was the only one in the world, and until I was at least 15, I was sure of that. And then eventually I went to Fullerton College to study photography with a phenomenal teacher. I will mention for the first time, Albert Divito. And I was studying photography at Fullerton College and I had just decided to join the gay club and I did. And then the college said we're no longer funding the gay club and they shut the gay club down.

And then the head of the gay club went to the ACLU and they took the school to court and they took the whole community college district to court in Orange County. And the court said, if you find any clubs on campus, you have to fund the gay club. And so the college said, we are abolishing all clubs on campus. We will not fund the gay club. And so I think I was really angry about that when it happened. And I had just realized, only in the last five years of my life that there were other lesbians and gay people in the world, and now they were trying to shut this down. And so I was really upset. And I remember almost subconsciously deciding I'm going to photograph the gay community for the rest of my life. And especially lesbians because I am one, forever after.

And so I did, I actually started going shortly after college. And even during college, I drove to LA often and would photograph gay events. So we called everything gay back then. Now it would be LGBTQ. But in the 80s, when I started doing this, most people were closeted, so I could not photograph most people in the gay community at that time. And so I was really grateful for pride, LA Pride in West Hollywood becoming a gay city in 1984 and really appreciated the gay pride in the Pride Parade because it was the only place I could actually take pictures of people without scaring them and making them think they're going to lose their job. Because if you were in the Gay Pride Parade, you were probably out. So until the early nineties, I really didn't get that many photos. Other than pride festivals and stuff.

So I started taking pictures of the community for oh, now over 30 years, but I kept running into people that worked at this archive. And then at some point I joined a 40+ lesbian group in Long Beach where some women from the archive came and they asked quiz questions about lesbian history and I knew all the answers. So they said, 'you have come work at the archives.' And so when I got here, I was blown away because I used to look at my pictures and think, I love these, but nobody else will ever care about these. And then I came here and found out, not only do people care deeply about this history, but they were preserving it way before I was. And I had no idea that there were - there's specifically a photo with Carolyn and Brenda Weather's from the year I was born where they're on a double date in Mexico in Nuevo Laredo the year I was born, you know, really amazing stuff here. One other thing was I always wanted to be a baseball player all my life and I could never, I was never allowed to play baseball as a girl. And I came here and found baseball uniforms of women who played professional baseball and a baseball contract of a woman who played professional baseball. So I was totally in love with this place almost instantly. And it was a perfect fit for me. So that was late 2006 and I've been here ever since.

Ester Bentley

Brinskele (04:05):

So this is from the Ester Bentley collection and it's a screen that she had put together herself. She cut a lot of her photos and pasted them on here. And this is Ester Bentley here, this middle section right here. These are all her photos, but everything else on here are women she knew, and she kept this in her living room. So a lot of women that come visit from the community who knew her tell us that yes, she had this in her living room and whenever they asked her about it, she said she slept with everyone on this screen.

So she was a baby born in Kentucky, as far as she knew and then she was adopted in Kentucky and she was a lifelong Catholic and lifelong lesbian. At some point I believe she was in an orphanage. And so when she finally did move to California, she became a social worker and in Orange County and she was quite an awarded social worker too where she worked only with children and for places like orphanages and community spaces for children.

Winkleman (05:16):

How did you guys acquire the collection? The screen-

Brinskele (05:21):

We acquired her collection when she actually died. We went to her house, via her executor of her will and they told us we could take whatever we wanted out of the collection. So we picked up as much as we could of her collection and she has hundreds of photos, which is actually quite unusual for one woman to have so many photos in a collection. But clearly, she valued her friends and she would make a lot of photos like this of her friends and make a lot of clothing. She actually made like a blazer that she wrote all her friends' names on and just to celebrate her friends. And one time a woman came in who I gave a tour to who ended up volunteering here and she said, "oh yeah, I knew Ester Bentley and she was--" and I, I said to her, I totally have

fallen in love with Ester Bentley based on her collection here. And she said, 'I was totally in love with her.' She said, 'after one month knowing me, she threw a birthday party for me at her apartment and she was the sweetest person ever.' What's amazing to me about her too is she was a coach and an athlete, and she was like six feet tall. So, in a lot of the photos of her with other people, she's always like absolutely at least one head taller than everybody else.

So I'd like to turn this and show you a very specific picture. Let me see, I might have to turn it all the way around, kind of. So what's really amazing to me is these some of her athletic photos, this is her here playing field hockey, the tallest one of course. And here she's also the tallest one on the tennis team. But this is a really amazing picture. I don't know where she graduated from, but this is clearly a graduation class from 1933 and it is really diverse, which is amazing. I've never seen anything quite like it. I'm sure there's some photos like this in the world other than this one, but it's really unusual to have such a diverse photo of people from as far back as the 30s. And especially like this at graduation class.

Winkleman (07:34):

Which one was Ester in this photo?

Brinskele:

She's again, pretty much the tallest one.

Winkleman (07:42):

And so in the tennis one she would be--

Brinskele:

She's this one.

Winkleman (07:44):

Oh, right. She's ducking to be in the frame.

Brinskele:

Yeah, she's kind of bent in half, a little bit there. And then here she's in the stripe shirt. And this is actually kind of an odd photo because she's kind of this dark, tall figure behind all these field hockey women cause she's the coach there, and a lot of her photos like these are from the 30s. She died somewhere around 2004. And so because she was a lifelong Catholic, there's actually some nuns on this screen as well.

Winkleman:

Wow.

Brinskele (08:25):

And then she definitely has a section of some friends here too. So uh I really love her collection for so many reasons. She kept journals a little bit. She also did some recordings on cassette about her thoughts about things. She talked about fighting during the civil rights era. And she would take a friend who was black to a luncheon kitchen somewhere in a very racist area. And if they didn't serve her friends, she would get up and wait on her friend herself. And she talks about that on a cassette tape in her collection.

Winkleman (09:04):

So this collection consists of this amazing screen. And then there's cassette tapes, there's journals. Are there any other materials?

Brinskele (09:14):

There's her awards for being a social worker and a lot of her career paperwork. And then she also has a lot of paperwork about being Catholic. She actually was dying to meet the Pope one day and the Pope came to Los Angeles and there's a lot of information about her finally getting to see the Pope in Los Angeles. Yeah, she again, has some cassette tapes. There's also a VHS tape of her that the center made, the LA Center, where they ask her at the very beginning of it, "did you ever think--" and before they even finish the question she said, "no, I never even imagined there could be a place like this in my lifetime." You know, and she was talking about the Gay Center the-- now it's called the LGBT LA center. But I'm sure she would have felt the same way about the archives. And she was actually interactive with the archives. She did a panel with us. This is a little photo so I'm not sure how well it will show up, but this is a panel Ester's on with Joe Duffy who is the head of the archives at the time in the nineties. And this is another really great pioneer, Nancy Valverde, who's still in the community and lives in Triangle Square.

She was really well known for being arrested for what was called masquerading. The police would arrest her because she didn't have three items of women's clothing on and they did that quite regularly. And it really affected her in her life. And she was a barber in East LA and the last thing I knew Ester to do was she was part of a group called COOL, the Coalition of Older Lesbians here in West Hollywood actually.

Winkleman (11:11):

Was she born and raised in LA?

Brinskele (11:13):

No, she was born in, we believe she was born in Kentucky and she was adopted. So she didn't know a lot of her family history. She didn't know the actual year she was born, and she talked about that on extent, like not ever having anyone document that, so she didn't know.

Weinthal (11:35):

Two other questions. Are there ways that materials in her collection are being used now? And do you have any concerns about the material for future preservation or use?

Brinskele (11:46):

Well, the only thing we have of hers that I know of at this archive now is this screen, actually all of her boxes have been processed and are staying at UCLA now. They were processed through a NEH grant. And so we wanted them to go to UCLA so they would get more public access because they're open six days a week. We're open two days a week. And so that they would be accessible online more easily too. And so that's happened there on the OAC. You can look up Ester Bentley and find out about what boxes in collection stuff, materials she has there. And so we're really happy about that accessibility. We just did not want to have the screen go there because it's such a big, popular thing to talk about at the archives. And also, we sent photos of it instead that went into her collection. So if somebody goes there to research it, they know they could come here and see the real screen.

Winkleman:

Great.

Brinskele:

Yeah.

Brinskele (12:46):

Oh, there are some really old photos here, but I'm not sure. I have a lot to say about them. But one of the things that's so great about our collection is we have all these photos of women as far back as the 30s and as you can see, these are some of those might even be late twenties. I'm not sure. One of my favorite photos is of two women. One of them has her hands on a propeller of an airplane and the other one's pulling the other woman's arm. So like they're getting like, they're pretending they are going to spin the propeller, but it's a great photo and it's probably from like 1939 or something like that.

Winkleman (13:26):

Any last things about this collection?

Brinskele (13:31):

I would just say she's one of those people, I'd say who was what I would consider a stellar citizen and such a good person and a good-hearted person. And she lived her whole life more fully as a lesbian than most women I've ever known. And still, she probably had to put up with a lot of homophobia all her life depending on where she lived, I'm sure. And when, but you know, being born and raised in Kentucky or somewhere like that, even today as a lesbian would be difficult. So I just marvel at the fact that she lived her whole life as a lesbian and as a Catholic and you know, was gone before 2010. You know, I can't even imagine that cause I thought it was really hard being a lesbian in the 80s.

Margaret Porter Collection

Brinskele (14:20):

Yeah. So this collage I actually made it from pictures in Margaret Porter's collection. It's-- she was an amazing woman who didn't always have a lot of money. She served in World War II. This is a picture of her in her you know, military uniform coat at one of the military bases. I'm not sure where she is, what base she's out on that. She was a poet. She spoke many different languages. She prided herself on speaking French and translating French even. So she-- so she, her a lifelong goal of hers was to go to Paris at some point and take French from a French teacher in a French school. And she eventually did that, but it took her a long time to save up. She wrote journals for 60 years and we have her journals for 60 years that are amazing because she was a poet. She, even if she wrote about the weather, she would say it's so beautifully that you just loved reading about what the weather was like that day. There's a small picture of her on here where she's in Paris and she's wearing pants. And one of the really unique things about her journals is she wore pants before women were really supposed to wear pants. So you can see she's wearing pants here and all the other women here are in dresses behind her, on the streets of Paris. And in her journal, she would travel around and she would write how people reacted to her wearing pants when it was really not acceptable and she would say things about the children found it amusing. The men found it amusing and the women like scoffed at her or something like that. So she was in the military in World War II and at that time she even says in her journals that she destroyed some of her journals during those years.

And we understand why because she could have easily been thrown out of the military for being a lesbian. And she talked about that pretty freely in her journals, her journals start in 1933 and they go through the 80s when she died. She was a really phenomenal musician. There's a picture of her playing the accordion on her pictures and right here. A lot of these are actually military pictures, but the one of her playing the accordion is from pretty far back. Her best friend was a gay man who was a genius with music and taught at a music school here in Los Angeles. And his name was William Moritz. And he's the reason we got this collection, her collection was probably 50 boxes, 25 of them were books. And the other 25 were her personal collection, her personal journals and her personal papers where she spent her life studying the expatriates at the turn of the century in Paris.

And so we have kept a lot of her books that we've put on shelves that are all about her own studies of those French expatriate lesbians at the turn of the century in Paris. So you can see some of these Gertrude Stein's, Joanna Barnes Natalie Barney. They're all here and she did extensive research, like she was doing it for a living, even though she was not doing it for a living. She just, I think like many women thought, the only lesbians in the world were in Paris in 1920, you know, and so she studied them her whole life and she got really amazing research beyond what I've even seen in some books before, recent times where she would write to somebody's family like Natalie Barney. And get handwritten notes by Natalie Barney sent to her. So those are in her collection.

Winkleman (18:12):

Was she born in California or?

Brinskele (18:16):

Actually she was born in Wisconsin, I think Milwaukee. And so another picture is that picture on here, the pictures not on here, but there's a picture of her with a friend and I'll tell you the story about it. So amazing. She wrote a journal in 1935 where she answered an ad in Milwaukee that said, "we need somebody to drive a new car to San Francisco." So she said in her journal, they probably won't take a woman, but I'm going to apply anyway. And she did. And they did take a woman and they let her bring her friend. So she drove this car all the way to San Francisco with her friend. And they-- there's a picture in her collection where they look like what we would call hobos from a silent movie. And they're literally like holding bags and they have knickers on with those tall socks. And they hitchhiked all over California after they'd left that car in San Francisco where they were supposed to drive it. And in her journal, she wrote about in 1935 hitchhiking with her friend all over California. She wrote everywhere they went, she wrote everyone that picked them up. So she often put their names, she said they were mostly doctors and lawyers because that's I guess, who could afford a car in 1935 and she was outraged in San Francisco when she paid something like a \$1.75 for a steak dinner with wine. And yeah, so that's one of the things that I tell students is so wonderful about reading someone's journal from that far back is you get a really good sense of what their life was like and how much money was worth. Right, cause she was just outraged about that. Another thing she talked about a lot and what made her really unique, in her journals, from very early on, she knew she was a lesbian her whole life and she knew there was nothing wrong with it, but everything in the world was telling her it was a mental illness. She was sick, it was wrong. And she often run in her journals and said, I know this is natural. I know it's not wrong. But she also talked about people that she would try to talk to about it or she thought might be an ally and how disappointed she was when they were homophobic too. And she later in, well actually throughout her journals, she had a fantasy lover that she named Aliys (A-L-Y-S) and that's, that woman's in her journals throughout her journals. And often every night she would go to bed and have sex with Alys and she would write about it in her journals. And I also tell younger people about this because it's so funny, she talks about sex in great detail, but she never used the sexual words at all. It's like, she's like, Oh, did we have a time last night? And you're like, what?

And really, she talks about having sex with her and how great it was and how fabulous and you really understand, but she never ever says anything overtly sexual. The other thing that's really great about her journals is she has that perfect cursive writing that I, everybody's older than me is complaining is no longer taught in schools today. And you can read every word on every page easily because it's so perfect. And I also tell students about how she's writing one day in her journal and she goes, "this pen isn't working. I'm going to have to send it back to the factory." I'm just like, wow, what was that like? So my other favorite journal of hers was 1950 where she finally got to Paris after she, you know, saved up and wanted to go, her whole life. And so in 1950, she went to Paris and she got enrolled in a school of French in Paris and she learned French from a French teacher and she started doing a homework in this, like a memo book, you know, that you would use for school. And so she's doing homework through the beginning of the book and then she falls in love with the teacher and then everything in the rest of that book is her in love with the teacher. And she'll say things like, "nothing would have made today better than

if it got too warm and she had to take off her green sweater,” you know, stuff like that. And so I just love those journals and read them over and over when I first got here. So I feel like I'm leaving something out about Margaret Porter. That was really important. Unfortunately I have to say that she was quite racist and antisemitic, and that's really typical of a lot of people at during a certain time and an era. Natalie Barney, who she studied in Paris at the turn of century was also very antisemitic. But she will actually write in her journal sometimes that the city was crazy. It was filled with Jews and, and black people or I forget what she, I think she said Negroes, you know, whatever the term was at that time. So that's often something that's in someone's journals when they're from a certain time period. Not always though. Certainly not always. I mean, Ester Bentley for example, was born also around the same time period and was a complete civil rights fierce activist. So I, yeah, I'm not sure if it depends on where you're from or your life experience probably too.

Winkleman (23:40):

Is there anything you want to say about the way that these collections are now being used and are there some of her materials at UCLA?

Brinskele (23:50):

Yeah, so her whole rest of her collection is at UCLA. We have a lot of her photos digitized. All of her journals are at UCLA. It was very hard to let go of those because they were so priceless. But they will get way more access now and they have been preserved properly. And I really want as many people to see those and visit her journals as possible. So, and we do the archives really wanted to get more accessibility to her collection. So another thing that I talk about regarding her collection too is that you don't have to be a lesbian to donate to the lesbian archives. You know, this was donated 50 boxes by a gay man who was her best friend. And so also if you're a feminist, whether you're a man or a woman, you can donate to this archive too. So but I just, I guess I just wanted to say that because it's on the OAC, the Online Archive of California, and it also has the finding aids there, it's very much more accessible than it was when it was originally here. And so that was really important to us.

Juanita Sanchez Collection

Brinskele (25:08):

So this is a photo of Juanita Sanchez. This is a collection we have with the archives. Mostly this collection contains just a couple of photos like this. And then we also have her journals for decades. She actually wrote when she was even in high school. And so some of her high school journals are here. And as you can see, she experienced some racism and other issues when she was in high school that she writes about in her journals.

She actually talks quite a bit in her journals about different struggles. Some of them are simply, she had career-- a career in the military for decades. And she experienced a lot of sexual harassment in the military. And even before she was in the military, she talked about harassment in jobs where she was the only woman and she was working with men all the time. Anyway,

there's a whole bunch of journals. I think she wrote them for at least 30 years. She also became a poet. And so she writes about poetry and talks about poetry. I mentioned Margaret Porter earlier. One of the things both of these women write in their journals is like, it's not a good day if they didn't write a poem today. And Margaret Porter writes that all the time. Like that signified a bad day for her. She didn't write any poetry, so it was a bad day. And Juanita also talks about days when she didn't or did write poems and she writes poems often in these journals. So really her boxes are mostly, and her is mostly represented through these journals, which to me is one of the best ways to get to know a woman because you read and hear about her thoughts on a daily basis for years and years. She lived a lot of her life in New Mexico. She was in the military for a long time. And toward the end of her life she became a very respected and published poet. So she really came a long way from a young life that seemed like she didn't have a lot of resources. This collection was also donated by a friend of hers who knew her a lot of her adult life and was also a fellow writer and she got this into the archives after Juanita died about five or six years ago.

Weinthal (27:41):

Do you remember her name?

Brinskele (27:45):

Yes. Bonnie Lee.

Weinthal:

Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Marie Cartier Collection

Brinskele (27:51):

This is the collection of Dr. Marie Cartier and we have a program that we do together, the Mazer and Dr. Cartier with her classes at Cal State Northridge and we've been doing it for about eight years. One of the classes she has is usually a women's studies and women as agents of social change. And in that class, her class is doing an oral history with a woman who they consider a survivor. An identified woman, they consider a survivor. So the student gets to decide who is a survivor by their own definition. At the end of the semester, they choose, they turn in notebooks and they sign the lid of the box, which we will ask if this goes to UCLA, we will ask that the box, that sides, the lid will go with the collection. These boxes, once they're finished, go into Dr. Marie Cartier's collection.

And they do an oral history program where they record an oral history for an hour on their phones and everyone in the class has a smartphone and we make sure they know how to use the recorders. I've yet to have a student who doesn't know how to use the recorder on their own. They turn on their whole oral history on a flash drive or a CD that has to be in here. We have a whole check sheet of what has to go into this folder at the end of the semester. And we've actually made this accessible to anywhere the Mazer goes. So any universities we go speak to,

we offer her curriculum as a sheet that they can follow if they ever want to do this project with their classes. At the end of the semester, the student has to donate their oral history to an archive of their choice. Most of them donate it to the Mazer because we're the ones doing the project with them. And we teach them a little bit of tips on how to do oral histories. And we were trained on how to do oral histories by UCLA's Oral History Department. And we have these great documents when they do their oral history that they have the person they interview sign. And those documents were created by UCLA for us where the student has the right to use this interview forever after. But we also have the right to use it too. So they turn in this folder at the end of the semester and anybody who wants to donate to the Mazer puts it in this box. And we do a graduation ceremony at the end of the semester where we play the graduation music and they all come up and turn in their folders and we give them a little certificate that says, "thank you for donating to women's history" at the end. And it has the cover of a book we have here from 1850, I believe called *Heroines of History*. The seal on that book is on the certificate we give them. So it's really a fun project. We do a project with another class of hers, usually queer studies. They are required to do a timeline on LGBTQ history and by the end of the semester they have to create the timeline and they have to always put themselves on a timeline at the end of the semester. So they come up with an art project to have this timeline. I'm sorry I said that badly, but they put the timeline on an art project of their choice and it's really great to see some of the projects they come up with. Some of them will create a whole film reel and each section of the, you know, each frame of the film will be something on the timeline of LGBTQ history.

And then we originally were letting some of them donate those projects into the archives, but then we realized they're not made archivally at all. As far as glue and everything else and they kind of fall apart after a year or two. So we take photos of them and have them in the archives, but we don't take their actual projects because we can't preserve them well here. They're usually all different shapes and sizes and they're put together to not last for very long. So, so we do record them and document them, but then they keep their project at the end of the semester. So those are two projects we do with classes. And we also talk to many of Marie's classes. Whether they do a project with us or not, to let them know about the archives, let them know it's here and let them know they can do research here and they really just have to sometimes pay a little money for parking, but otherwise they don't have to pay anything to access all our resources.

Brinskele (32:33):

I let them know that I believe this is as big of a feminist history collection as is anywhere in the world. And so her women's studies classes are often studying feminist history. And especially in California. And so we talk about that too. One of the things we tell them is how an archive is different from a library. Often students have never been to an archive and they don't know the difference. And the biggest difference we talk about is how archives have things that are one of a kind. So we don't lend anything out because we could never replace it even if it was insured. And talk about how that works. Also we talk about the difference between a grassroots archive and an institutional archive and how they're very different in that you can't touch everything in an institutional archive. If you went to the Smithsonian for example, you probably have to put your backpack in a locker. You might be able to bring a dull pencil and your notebook and nothing else. And when you come to the Mazer that's a grassroots archive, you actually can touch almost

everything here and actually feel what it feels like. And you can see things you would never see in an institutional archive.

And I talk about how we have June Mazer's favorite Birkenstock's here. Something that would probably never be in an institutional archive. And I talk about the collections here, how we have women's baseball uniforms from the forties and fifties and things like that that are really unique to this archive or a grassroots archive. The most important thing I want to tell them though is that this archive is grassroots. And I usually ask them, do you know what that means? And mostly nobody raises their hand when I asked that. And then I like to tell them it means that three women in Oakland in 1981 went looking for lesbian history and they couldn't find it preserved anywhere. So they started this archive. And so if you are from a community that you think has a need for something like this, you can start something like this. And I can see the students' faces and I can see who might do it just by looking at their eyes because it's like a new idea for them. And they're like, oh, you know luckily Cal State Northridge is so diverse that a lot of the students come from every kind of background there is. And at the same time it's really hard because they're very out and they don't understand why everyone in the world isn't just out. But then after class, they'll come up to me and say, I'm in a Catholic family and I don't know how you came out to your Catholic family cause I often talk about my own story of how I got to the archives.

Brinskele (35:11):

And then I talk about being raised Catholic and how that was hard being a lesbian and being Catholic. And they're struggling today to ever come out to their families. And so it's interesting because at one level, as a student with their friends, they're very out. They don't understand why everyone isn't. And then when they go home, they're like, no way am I telling my family. So things have changed, but they haven't changed that much, right, so it's a really interesting experience working with young students. Also a really great project that we do with those students is there are several classes at UCLA, mostly Dr. Cartier's, but also some other social science classes where they require the students to do 10 or 40 hours of volunteer work, adding a nonprofit organization and we're one of those on the list. So we often get students every semester who come and volunteer their time here. And we've had really great results with that where the students are really happy and willing to do a lot of different kinds of work here and they want to come back after they're done after the semester's over. And it's so great for us cause we get young people here to learn about the archives, they care about the archives and then they tell other people. But also we get a lot more work done because we are a nonprofit and we have a very small amount of funding sometimes to get things processed, but they will actually re-box collections when they're shipped to us and they will create the original finding aids. So it's really helpful to us to have them here.

Winkleman (36:45):

And that's Cal State Northridge?

Brinskele:

Cal state Northridge. Yeah. And we also do have students that come from UCLA. We have a really good relationship with all different places in UCLA. Grad students really, we've only had grad students work here from UCLA since I've been here. And they've been phenomenal for us because they're really well trained. I mean this very sincerely, they're really well trained and they certainly know more than I do about archival studies and archival practices. I am not an archivist, I'm a photographer and even though I've worked in an archive a long time, it's a grassroots archive. So I learned so much from them. We, our board, learned so much from them and we get better and better because of those grad students. And they also sometimes provide grant money that pays for that student, which helps us because then we don't have to come up with the money to pay for that, that student to work here. So it's a really great relationship.

Winkleman (37:41):

One quick question about going back to the oral histories, where are the, those, where do those live right now? Like the files themselves. Are they here on that hard drive?

Brinskele (37:52):

That's a really good question. They are not on one hard drive. They are all different semesters. And so Marie Cartier donated her collections here way before I even got here. So we had a couple of books she was working on, one she had published, we have her personal papers and in some of those boxes were some of these projects from classes that already went to UCLA and have already been processed. Then every semester we get a new box. So as we can we donate those boxes to UCLA to add to her collection.

Winkleman (38:28):

And so do those include, so there's like paper documentation and these folders, but is there an actual sound file history?

Brinskele:

Yes. The students turn it in on either a flash drive or a DVD or a CD. And then also they're required to put photos in here, four photos. They have a very specific requirement based on the books they read during the semester. They'll often read *Gay LA* and a, I'm going to mess this up cause I don't know the author that well, but a woman named [App Thicker?] who talks about art tells a story like nothing else can and they have to provide photos that show each sample of each of the books from each of the books they've read and the concepts they've learned in the class. Yeah. Did I answer your question?

Lillian Faderman Collection

Brinskele (39:15):

So this collection is really near and dear to the archives and to me as well. This is the collection of Lillian Faderman. She is a scholar and I would say she is the leading, the leading scholar in the world on lesbian history. I don't think anyone comes even close to her as far as studying and researching lesbian history and also interviewing people for lesbian books. She's written about

lesbian history, but also LGBT history. And her newest book I think is called *The Gay Revolution*. She has said that she spends five years on average writing each book. So I know she does a ton of research. I also know by her collection. So her collection that we have here was donated more recently, but her original collection boxes are at UCLA already. They've been processed and they're available for research. And those can also be found on the OAC, the Online Archive of California which you can Google and easily find at the top of the Google search.

One of the most impressive things to me about her collections is exactly what I was talking about, which is her amazing amount of research on LGBTQ history and especially lesbians. These tapes represent hundreds of tapes that are in this one box of interviews with different lesbians that she did for four different books. We have her research for *Gay LA* and another book called *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*. And probably some of the beginning research that she might've used for *The Gay Revolution*. She was a student at UCLA and she wrote a biography that talks about being a student and a lesbian in the fifties in Los Angeles. We have all of her books. Her, some of her other titles are *To Believe in Women* and *Surpassing the Love of Men*. Her autobiography is called *Naked in the Promised Land*. She talks about being a pinup girl when she was going to UCLA and that's how she could actually afford to pay for school. So it's priceless.

Brinskele (41:31):

Yeah, so her collection is really a treasure. We're very lucky to have it. And a lot of researchers love to use her collection and the content because she's done so much research that it makes their work easier, I'm sure. And again, I believe, and I could be wrong, that she has more interviews of lesbians, certainly than anyone else in the world, but she may also have the most interviews of LGBTQ people in general than anyone else in the world. I'm not positive about that, but she definitely rivals a lot of those types of collections. Let me see. I wanted to talk about. The other things in our collections that are really fascinating is when she was writing books and doing research for those books, she actually got a different people that were writing her letters and sending her photos. So within her collection we also have lots and lots of photos of lesbians in their real life, black and white shots from the fifties, the forties, sometimes the thirties, that they sent her in a letter. And those are in her collection. And those are really a treasure because we often will have-- there's two things. We have lots of photos in the archives that have absolutely nothing on the back of them. So there's no information about where they were taken, who the women are or who took the photo or nothing. It's blank. And one of the things that's great about the photos that come in these letters are often the people are identifying themselves obviously with the letter and telling her about those photos a little bit too. So that's a really unique thing. And we love having photos in the archive that actually have information attached. So that an archivist doesn't have to guess the time, the date, the place, and who's in those pictures. And again, I don't know if an art archivist could ever say who's in the picture unless it's somebody famous anyway. So it's really great to have that kind of information and kind of unique in some instances. Lillian Faderman is now retired. And she was a professor at UC Fresno for many, many years since the 70s, and she only recently retired in the last five years. But she was on the Mazer board at some point before I got here. And she also has been a donor of her work ever

since. And let me see. Sorry, I'm trying to think of what else I'd like to say about her. Do you have a specific question?

Winkleman (44:13):

Maybe more about the materials? Is, so we have the audio tapes and we have her books. And are there any other materials in the collection that are of note?

Brinskele (44:24):

Uh yeah, actually she has an unbelievably unique in some ways, collection of periodicals. And I'm not sure how she acquired those, but she definitely has some news clippings and subject files, but she also has very specific periodicals. And in this particular case, I would say a lot of them have to do with lesbians. So it probably was for a book on lesbians at the time, but there's some, we have hundreds and hundreds of periodicals here that span LGBTQ. But these are some we actually might not even have. And that's really hard to do actually. We really have a great span of that whole alphabet in the periodical section. And so she has some that are very unique and she has some that she has learned more about than we even know about the same periodicals. So even if we have them, there's information about them in her collection that we didn't know about those collections we might already have. So that's another unique thing in her boxes. Another really unique thing because she's an author, she got letters from people thanking her or talking to her about her books and different facts in those books. And those are really unique things too. So a lot of correspondence usually from other people either thanking her or maybe even talking to her about a very specific topic in her book that she brought up. Maybe they were part of a history that she mentioned and they give her more information or they just verify that what she was talking about was correct. Something like that. Those are in her collection too. And those are really fascinating because they're you know, primary source material, right? They're written by the people who say, "hey, I was at that riot and here's what happened when I was there." You know, and that's really amazing. But I think that's the kind of research she had to do to write the books she's written. Kind of get that primary source material. So that's really valuable to us as well.

Yeah. I could go on forever about Lillian. So I think I'm stuck, not on how, you know, I don't have enough to say that's not it-- It's really that there's so much to say about her, and she's done so much work in this field beyond anybody that I've ever even heard of. That it's hard to know what to focus on. But I think that's the, actually the bulk of her collection is her research papers, correspondence, cassettes a lot of photos maybe. And then that's pretty much the bulk of her collection. But the most impressive thing is the hundreds of interviews with lesbians that I have never heard of anywhere else.

Mary Lucy and Nancy McNeil Collection

Brinskele (47:13):

This is the collection of Mary Lucy and Nancy McNeil. They were both in ACT UP which is a really significant AIDS activist organization. And, and just my own personal reference to that as

a photographer is ACT UP was phenomenal to photograph because they would do things like light things on fire and they would lay down dead so people couldn't get by and couldn't not notice what they were protesting. And one of the reasons this collection is so significant is these two women who really made their mark in this organization and as AIDS activists and they very specifically fought for the whole world to know that lesbians could actually get AIDS. And it was a really hard fight in the beginning because doctors everywhere were saying that lesbians could not get AIDS. And so lesbians started getting AIDS because they thought it was not possible for them to get AIDS. I mean, that wasn't necessarily the reason, but it obviously inevitably happened. And then a lot of women were outraged. A lot of lesbian women who got AIDS or who knew women who got AIDS and anybody else in the lesbian community who knew this was a complete misnomer was, me speaking for myself, I was very grateful to these women for making it clear to the world that hey, lesbians can get AIDS and they do and you need to stop telling this false thing so they feel safe when they're not safe about that. And they were in ACT UP early on in the 80s and were really fierce activists about it. I was told, and I'm not positive about this, that one of them kind of fought against AIDS in a more private way through her work and the other one out on the streets a lot more. I think they both were on the streets at some point, but one of them was on the streets a lot more. And we have pictures, photographs in this collection that are also really priceless of some of the activism, women specifically did and a lot of the ACT UP members. So there's actually some pictures I can never forget of a lesbian woman topless at a protest march and holding signs about lesbians and AIDS. Some of these women actually went to psychologist's offices and actually one-on-one talk to them and said, you have to stop spreading these false rumors and stop saying these things to your patients even about AIDS and lesbians. So that was like, to me, one of the bravest things I can imagine doing is going to doctor's offices and saying, you need to stop saying this cause it's not true. And why do you keep saying it? Even after we've told you. And these are the kind of women who did that kind of work. Also, in their collections are some really interesting periodicals that are all based on some of that same activism. Oh gosh, something just fell out. But I'll pick that up. So yeah, these are just a couple examples, but there's a lot of periodicals that one thing I like about the collection is the periodicals really go with what they were doing at the time. And you get far more of a story, of their story, when you read some of the periodicals dated with their photos. And for example, they'll have photos of a specific protest and then you'll see a news article about that same protest. So, you get a couple of different perspectives on the same kind of protest at the same time.

Other than that, the materials in here are, that's most of it, is photos and some personal papers of letters they've written. But mostly it's their photos of different activist times and different activism they've done. And then periodicals that back up, some of those things. They also have a great deal of information about the police and how they reacted to AIDS activists during that time. And so, this is a collection that's extremely valuable to researchers because it's some people talk about it like it's almost complete. It has newspaper articles and these various things I've talked about but then it also, they have some personal testimony commenting on how the police treated everybody, how the news talked about the police as opposed to how they viewed the police at the time. And that's really, really fascinating, and a lot of researchers want to know about that.

Brinskele (51:52):

And just again, my own experience with photographing this community for 30 years or more. One of the biggest changes in my life during that documenting was the police. The police used to be fierce and they used to come always in riot gear. And as the decades passed, they started actually becoming out gay people, or LGBTQ people. And then they started recruiting at Pride when they used to be threatening to arrest us at Pride 20 years before. So that is a really big difference. But I will say that my friends who are AIDS activists and particularly in ACT UP, don't like police, whether they're gay or straight or LGBTQ or anything, they think police are brutal. They have been injured by police and often crippled for life with a billy club or something else. And they don't even like my photos of gay police officers because they don't like police on any level.

They have not been treated well by them. And when you really think about it, if you're doing something that's civil disobedience, I don't ever, my mind is boggled by why you need to brutalize somebody who's doing civil disobedience. They're usually, I mean, again, I did say that ACT UP people lit things on fire, but usually it was in the middle of the street in a pretty safe place where they would, for example there was a protest I'm sure they've covered it in here of AB 101, which was a gay rights bill that Pete Wilson was-- he campaigned on. He told everyone in California, if you vote for me, I will sign a gay rights bill in California. And then gay people voted for him and then he refused to sign that bill. So, we went up and marched on the Capitol and ACT UP was there and they burned an effigy of Pete Wilson in the middle of the street and so they're some of my favorite photos. Right. And so they did it very safely, if you will, and nobody got hurt and it made great photos and it was great activism. So again, do they need to be arrested and put in jail for months for that? Not really. And do they need to be brutalized. You know, it's a matter of opinion. But anyway, so that's kind of things that are in this collection. And I defy anybody to look through these women's papers and photos and say they're not heroes really cause they're absolutely amazing and really brave. So, it's a really impressive collection. And I have people already, we've only had this collection a few years and I already have people that write me from New York and all over the country asking to see this because these two women were so pivotal in their activism.

Winkleman (54:40):

Can you say their names one more time?

Brinskele:

Yeah. Mary Lucy and Nancy McNeil.

Winkleman (54:45):

And how did you acquire the collection a few years ago?

Brinskele:

Uh actually on our board we have an AIDS activist who was also in ACT UP who was friends with them. She herself was arrested 11 times for civil disobedience, Jerry Dietrich, and her wife also Marsha Schwimmer. And Jerry had talked to them about their stuff and they decided that they wanted to donate it into the archives. So, she got it from them and brought it to the archives.

Mazer and UCLA Partnership

Brinskele (55:18):

So, our relationship with UCLA started a little before I got here. We had created a relationship with the Center for the Study of Women and that started when a student actually recommended us as a nonprofit for the Center for the Study of Women to work with. And they got a grant that was I think \$75,000 and processed some of our collections here that stayed here at the archives. But after that the Center for the Study of Women recommended, we also work with them and the UCLA Library. So, we started working with both those departments at UCLA and eventually UCLA, the Center for the Study of Women applied for a grant, the NEH grant, and got it for \$330,000. That eventually processed over 90 of our collections. And those are still at UCLA now after they were processed. And that was a really hard agreement that we created over a year's time. And luckily we have a board president who's a-- a city employee, retired and also a retired librarian. And we went every month and changed a sentence or a word in that contract. And I'm so glad we had her as a board president because I was like, this is crazy. I could never do this. But after a year we had an agreement that basically stated that those collections, could stay at UCLA, which was essential to UCLA, cause they said they could never spend public money on collections they did not own. So, they had to own them. And we were like, we don't want you to own them. And they said, we have to. So we came up with an agreement where if those collections are ever not accessible to the public, we get them back. If those collections ever were to leave Los Angeles, we take them back. And if they're ever made to disappear, and that was really specific language from a marginalized group of people, right. If these collections were ever be made to be disappear, we would get them back immediately. And so those were some of the conditions that we made with UCLA about keeping those collections at UCLA. What it did for UCLA I think was provide them with grassroots community collections they would have never had access to, potentially. And also it provided us with far more access to those collections that we had had here for years. We're only open two days a week and our hours varied over the decades we've been here. And we always have struggles for space and funding as any nonprofit does. So, the access it would provide for students and researchers around the world was just phenomenal compared to what we could provide here.

But we have always maintained our independence status as the Mazer Archives here in West Hollywood. We're in a city building, we've been in it since 1989 and we likely wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the support of the women's community, the LGBTQ community, and also especially West Hollywood, who has provided us with rent free space here since 1989. So that's how our relationship started. We still have a really good relationship with UCLA. All the different departments now, archive departments, the UCLA Library, we still have some relationship with the Center for the Study of Women. And that's ongoing. We still have collections that we transfer over to UCLA based on the funding. As soon as they get grant money for a specific type of collection, they let us know and we have collections still go there. We also

have collections that went there that now we have new boxes of, for example, Lillian Faderman or Dr. Marie Cartier and those will be added to their collections at UCLA as they come in.

CREDITS (59:09)