

Video Title: Ruth & Claudia Video 4

Interviewee: Ruth Sullivan

Interviewee: Claudia Brick

Interviewer: Marcia Schwemer

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Interviewer: I should just go, "Action!" [laughs]

Brick: You've worked for Ryder for too long

Interviewer: I know. So you remember when Nancy got—did you know Marina the Filipina—

Sullivan: Yeah

Interviewer: Yeah, Nancy got her to go to the studio once and they dressed in these bird costumes in a dance room. And they were waiting for like twelve hours or something waiting to dance around in these bird costumes. She came back to work on Monday and she looked like she wanted to kill her. [laughs] It was too funny.

Maybe you could introduce yourselves, and say your name and where you were born, and that kind of stuff. Just—

Sullivan: My name is Ruth Sullivan. This is my wife, Claudia Brick. And we've been together how long, Claudia?

Brick: Seventeen years next month. Married for three.

Sullivan: She picked me up at a bar.

Brick: [laughs]

Interviewer: I was going to ask you. I did not know how you met. If I did I couldn't remember.

Sullivan: I would try thinking of a romantic line, try to tell people a good story, but—

Brick: The fact of it is that I picked her up in a bar.

Interviewer: Yeah. What bar?

Sullivan: It was—

Brick: The Connection.

Interviewer: Oh!

Sullivan: The old Connection, no longer here. A lot of things no longer here. And I'm from Baton Rouge. Claudia's a Bay Area chick.

Brick: Born in Berkeley, stayed in the Bay Area until my Junior year in college then I went to college in Oregon and then I discovered women and softball.

Interviewer: [laughs]

Brick: And that was the end of college for a while. But it took me another 20 years to get my degree. So—Women and softball was definitely worth it.

Interviewer: What did you get your degree in?

Brick: English literature.

Interviewer: Oh!

Brick: Nice useful degree.

Interviewer: I know you love to read. I just didn't—

Brick: Yeah, and the fact of the matter is that after working at the police department for almost twenty years an opening came up in the City Attorney's office, and one of the criteria that they use to separate the wheat from the chaff was, you had to have a degree. And they'd known, they'd all known me for so long because the City Attorney's office works with the police department quite regularly, and they didn't really care that my degree was in English literature because they knew that I was experienced. So the last 4 ½, 5 years of my working life were just a lot of fun.

Interviewer: I was going to ask about your wedding and your proposal.

Sullivan: I guess I could start off by saying that I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, the day before Christmas '08?

Brick: No, '07.

Sullivan: '07. So this was 11—Not too shabby. The numbers are real bad for ovarian cancer today. I did uh, chemo a number of times and it seems to have worked for a while but right now I'm more or less on the decline on my disease and the fight is almost at the end, I guess. So I'm in hospice and we're just um, trying to be comfortable and enjoy the love affair we've had. I've been in and out of hospitals for—

Brick: 3 ½ years.

Sullivan: 3 ½ years. I've had probably twenty different operations and during one of these times things weren't going well for me.

Brick: During one of these times, one of the surgeries they nicked a bowel. And so she developed an infection, but in terms of chemotherapy and side effects, Ruth invented things they've never heard of before. And the nicked bowel ended up abscessing, and her body of course just walled it off, and so she had kind of a systemic infection, but Ruth does not spike a fever, and her blood counts were screwed up anyway from the chemo, so nobody really knew what was going on except that she started to decline mentally. Sitting around babbling, repeating herself, not—could barely write her name. And so the neurologist, on Friday afternoon after continuing decline said, "I don't know what's going on, but we're going to put her in ICU now, before the weekend, because I don't know what's going on and we'll turn it over to them, and at least we'll keep her alive. So, they put her in ICU and the two women doctors in the ICU said, "We're going to start all over again." So they started, they did a CAT scan of her abdomen and found this abscess. And soon as they started to drain the abscess she started to get her brain back. But she was pretty sick. So during that time, she was out for probably about forty-eighty hours.

Sullivan: So more or less in a coma.

Brick: More or less in a coma, yes. And so during that weekend, or couple of days before that weekend I guess was when court decided that we could get married. And so when she came out of the coma, I asked her to marry me. She's like, "We can't get married!" And I go, "Yeah, we can!" And she's like, "Oh, Goody!" And so we're gonna get married. We got married, Ruth was uh, bald and in a wheelchair. We got married in West Hollywood Park.

Sullivan: June 21st

Brick: June 21st. Yeah.

Interviewer: That was the day they did uh, the big amount of weddings.

Brick: Yeah, they did a lot of weddings. They had all these cute little white cabanas all set up all around the park, and they were very cute. And the city of West Hollywood deputized people to perform the ceremonies and stuff. It was fun. I think when we got married, there were only a few others going on in the park at the time.

Sullivan: It was hot.

Brick: Yeah, it was hot. We invited a few friends and my cousin, and got married.

Interviewer: Oh, I was gonna ask Ruth something that I remembered. [laughs] Ruth and I worked together and I had an extra room in my house and so she rented the room. And she's from Louisiana as you know.

Sullivan: I was poor. Working for Roger Korman, he's like a king of B movies. He doesn't pay enough to rent a closet. And so Marcia really came through for me and helped me stay in California.

Interviewer: Well, I remember when Ruth first came she was always worried about earthquakes. She came from Louisiana worried about California earthquakes. So what happened when she was living there? The Northridge quake.

Brick: Ooh. You were living there when—And did you lose your chimney?

Interviewer: Yes, well, part of it. We had, actually I called it the 100 brick toss. [laughs]

Brick: [gestures toss]

Interviewer: Went up on the roof with Cindy Crogan, my contractor friend, and she dismantled it and I threw the bricks off the roof but when the quake happened, personally I did not get out of bed but Ruth was all like, "Get on the floor! Get on the floor!" [laughs]

Sullivan: Well I thought the ceiling was coming down. [laughs]

Brick: Yeah! [laughs]

Interviewer: It seemed like it! And personally I covered my head with the blanket and said, "I'm not coming out!"

Brick: I had three German Shepherds trying to dig their way through the mattress to get under the bed.

Interviewer: Oh, my. It wasn't but—Ruth and her girlfriend at the—went to all the neighbors' doors and checked, to make sure that everybody was okay.

Brick: What a good woman.

Interviewer: Yes, she is. But one thing I wanted to ask you about this is what I remember, you telling me when you used to do something in the Mardi Gras parade with friends, where you would do these funny things. Was it the Mardi Gras? It was some parade there in—

Sullivan: It was a Mardi Gras parade in Spanish Town which is a subdivision of Baton Rouge near the downtown area, and it was known as the gay area to live in at the time. And they had this parade kind of like the I guess the DooDa parade here, and—Had a thing about Elvis. That was the theme. The first year was called Mow-randa—

Interviewer: [laughs]

Sullivan: —and what happened was, we would get the lawn mowers and have lawn mower drill teams and [laughter] push their empty lawn mowers around, and have little drills, dress up as Carmen Mow-randa. Then they would have to do Gracelawn, and—

Brick: But it was always the lawnmower drill team.

Sullivan: There was a highlight of the parade. They had some floats, but that was always the—

Interviewer: The lawnmowers were the, the bomb? [laughs]

Brick: Sort of like the, now they have the librarians have the library card drill team.

Sullivan: Yeah.

Brick: And they have competitions! One of the women in Santa Monica actually has you know "Member of Santa Monica Library Card Drill Team" as part of her signature on her email.

Interviewer: [laughs]

Sullivan: One of the things I'm happy that I got to do was lead the LA parade one year. You know, Dykes on Bikes.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah.

Sullivan: Me and Claudia both had motorcycles and it was like the time to do it, so again, it was summer what do you expect but being on those bikes it was brutal. But it was a blast. If you can [unclear] lesbian on a bike, that's one of your top ten—

Brick: Motorcycle gang

Sullivan: Top ten things to do.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that comes to mind, you want to—

Brick: Golly. You know I, Ruth and I celebrating a 17-year love affair, and in that respect we've been really lucky. So this winding down of disease is kind of a slow, and dramatic process. But we're still not in, we're in pretty good shape for the shape we're in. You know? We're plugging along, Ruth gets up still, and still wouldn't have it any other way.

Sullivan: [unclear] The lucky part is, after I met her, I knew—that I'd found my mate.

Brick: Yep. Yep.

Sullivan: And the worst thing about being lesbian is, you get one bling, you have to get another one.

Brick: I still don't have mine on because I was playing golf today. That's true. You can't buy one ring, you gotta get two. You know—

Interviewer: So, you have a few other little members of your family here. I don't know if I can, maybe I can turn this thing and see if—yeah, pick up—

Brick: Come here Peabody. [shows dog]

Interviewer: I'm gonna try and come a little closer here and see—

Brick: This is Ernest Peabody. A little squirmy. Which is funny because he rarely moves when he's sleeping. And he sleeps all day and he just doesn't move. So—

Interviewer: Yes I actually brought over some kelp powder for Peabody—

Brick: Ooh, lucky dog

Interviewer: I thought he might need a little thyroid support there. Last time I was here he didn't move at all.

Brick: Downright wild today.

Sullivan: Every year we take him to the vet, spend a lot of money on bloodwork, have him fast and do all this stuff. It's just the same every year.

Interviewer: He's just lazy.

Brick: Well, that could be. We got him off of the streets so it could be he put in his time of being active when he was outdoors. Hasn't felt the need to continue with that.

Interviewer: And we won't even try to pick up this one.

Brick: Oh, I'd pick her up but she's you know, she would scold me.

Interviewer: Yes, let's see if I can—I don't know how to use this thing of course. I'll just pick it up [shows cat]

Brick: I can get her a rubber band and put her in action.

Interviewer: That's Button. And she was very curious about the bag for the tripod.

Sullivan: Can we go over and take a picture of her.

Interviewer: Yeah, can we get that? Maybe you can bring it over. And I also want to get your wedding certificate. We can—

Sullivan: [points] Want to get it off the wall?

Brick: It's on the left as you go through toward our bedroom.

Interviewer: This is Ruth and Claudia's wedding picture. Let's see if we can get a good shot of it. [shows photo] There, we got you all in I think. Yeah.

Brick: It's very simple. We wore white shirts and had leis and khaki shorts because it was so hot and then we went out, we got married and went out to dinner. That was the whole big deal. Was very inexpensive.

Interviewer: Well, let's see if I can adjust this a little.

Brick: And the city of West Hollywood made these really cool. [shows certificate]

Interviewer: It says West Hollywood Marriage Certificate. This certifies that Ruth Sullivan and Claudia Brick were lawfully wedded on the 21st day of June, 2008 in the city of West Hollywood, under the laws of the State of California.

Brick: Woo hoo!

Interviewer: Yee haw!

Brick: Which leaves us still married.

Interviewer: Yep, so far.

Sullivan: Actually we put the—

Interviewer: Let me get you both back in there. [laughs] You moved on me Claudia.

Brick: I'm sorry. Yes I did. I moved on ya.

Sullivan: —put in for taxes. Of course we file separately for Federal, but State sent us a check, both one check, with both of our names on it. And I never thought I'd see that in my lifetime.

Brick: Never thought I'd see the day.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm floored still.

Brick: Yeah, I'm floored that we've reached the level of acceptability even that we are. Considering the dark ages from which we've come.

Interviewer: And, just as a side note that was not Peabody barking. [laughs]

Brick: That's the neighbor dog. Enough mouth for everybody.

Interviewer: Just don't expect Peabody to bark.

Brick: He barked once. He was mad at me because I didn't give him a cookie in time or something. Something important.

Interviewer: Ok. Well I really appreciate you sharing—

Brick: You're welcome. And I appreciate your willingness to maintain the archives and add to it with things like this. It's—This I wouldn't have expected either. It's a wonderful thing.

Sullivan: Yeah. Do you usually edit these?

Interviewer: I have no idea. I'm a novice.

Brick: Well you can practice—

Interviewer: I guess there's probably a way, I personally have no clue. [laughs]



Brick: Well you just download em and leave em be? That's—

Interviewer: Yeah, it is you know, it's real, and—

Sullivan: Because I might ask you to come back and just do it again because—

Interviewer: Yeah, we can do that

Sullivan: You know, we get—We can edit all this to get a little bit more—

Brick: We can go all the way back to the Lavender Menace, thirty-five years ago, when Maryetta and I played softball in Portland on a team called The Lavender Menace. And you had to be a lesbian to be on that team. Only most everybody on the other teams, even though they were also lesbians, they weren't out. And so we made everybody really nervous.

Interviewer: [laughs] I bet! Hey, ah, now wait. Is that the team you were on when you made, what's it called when you do something—You have a ball from that, right?

Brick: I don't have a ball from that, I have a ball from Joan Joyce, who was and another one from Chris Mazuca. No, maybe I didn't have a ball from her. Maybe I just have her [unclear]

Interviewer: Didn't you do something kind of spectacular in softball?

Sullivan: First of all, not only did she bat a perfect 300, she played outfield a perfect—

Brick: Well, I had a couple of really good games. [laughs]

Sullivan: Anyway the score was 1000—

Brick: I went, when that Tournament of Champions game my fielding was 1000 percent.

Sullivan: That's what I'm talking about—

Brick: And my first all-star on the 4th of July tournament in Portland I batted like 670 or something.

Interviewer: Woah. Even I know that's good. [laughs]

Brick: And Maryetta kicked my ass.

Sullivan: When she was in high school, there were no women's sports. There was men's soccer and Claudia started playing that

Brick: I was in college.

Sullivan: Well, there were no women's sports in college. So Claudia started playing soccer, and she played with the boys and actually as a—you could get out the newspaper ad showing, you know—

Brick: Do you know where that is?

Sullivan: I thought somewhere—

Brick: Because one of my girlfriends' mothers got crazy one time and burned up a bunch of stuff of mine.

Sullivan: [makes cutting gesture]

[END OF VIDEO]