

Video Title: Mazer Lesbian Archives True Life Lesbian Oral History Project: Pat & Jennie 51 Years Together

Interviewee: Pat Larson

Interviewee Jennie Meyer

Interviewer: Unknown

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[caption: The June L. Mazer True Life Oral Histories Project]

[caption: Jennie & Pat tell the story of how they met 51 years ago.]

Larson: Well, let's see. We had a mutual friend in the Air Force in San Bernardino and she came down to visit me and she brought Jenny along and a couple other people and that's how we met. She introduced us and I just thought she was the cutest little thing I'd ever seen.

[laughter]

[caption: Jennie]

[caption: Pat]

So that's basically it, then next week I guess we went up to the Star Room, we did something like that. So that's pretty much it. I know when Jennie tells it it's a lot more exciting and longer, but—

[laughter]

Meyer: Yeah, you did kind of simplify it, but I was with these people going up to meet Pat because I was coming off of a really bad experience of my first. And it was a real heartbreaker so I was wanting to run, so I went with these people to meet this Pat, I didn't know who she was, so when we met Pat she was living with a friend of hers, Janet, and I looked at the both of them and I thought, oh that blond one was Pat, she's kind of cute, you know, I said, "Well that's the way it goes," I wasn't talking or wasn't doing anything, I was just kind of moping around. And when we left, Louise, the lady that—the mutual friend—she says, "Hey Jenny, Pat thinks you're cute," and I was just terribly indignant, I said, "Well that's just tough, I'm not interested in any of that sort of thing."

[laughter]

Interviewer: Even though you found her cute?

Meyer: I thought she was cute but that was it. So the next week, Louise tells me again, so we're going up to—we've been invited to a party. And I says, "Oh okay, I'll go with you if Dee goes along." She was another friend of ours—because I didn't want to be a third wheel. So, okay, Dee was going to go with us. We get up to Pat's place, and we walked in, and I said—well, we sat down and she sat down, and about fifteen, twenty minutes later—well, "Where's the party?" and Pat looks over, she says, "I'm it." I thought, what is this? And we ended up going to the Star Room, and she asked me to dance a couple of times, and then she—the music stopped and she—we were standing out on the floor and she says, "Why don't we just stay here and hug?" I was getting kind of interested. So that's kinda how we met.

Interviewer: I would love you to tell me the story, even though you've told me before, about how you went AWOL because of Pat, which she still seems flattered about to this day.

Meyer: I'd gotten out of the service, and I went back to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Wauwatosa, where I was born and raised, and I was bored. I just—this was not for me anymore—I had gone beyond Milwaukee, I wanted something else now. So I reenlisted in the Air Force, and I reenlisted in Illinois, and when I was in, I thought— they told me I was going to be going to Germany. In fact, when I reenlisted, that's what I reenlisted for, I was going to go to Germany. So I was looking forward to that. Because it was going to be several weeks before I was due to ship out, I took leave to go to California to see some old friends. And that's when I met Pat, and that's when this friend Louise had taken me up to Long Beach and met Pat. So by the time I left Long Beach after that second party, I was smitten, so I get back to Illinois and I thought, I gotta go all the way to Germany and I'm gonna be there for eighteen months at least and I know she's going to forget about me, I just know it. But we were writing letters back and forth. There I am at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois, writing love letters to somebody in California. Well, I dropped one of those letters that I was going to mail and I panicked, I thought, if they get ahold of that letter and open it up and read it, I'm going to be toast and my whole Air Force career is going to be shot, plus outing Pat, who worked for Rockwell International at the time, and I don't know if they would have thought too kindly about having a lesbian working for them.

Larson: It wouldn't have mattered.

Meyer: I didn't know that, because I thought it was a very important government job that she had. So I called Pat and I was panicking. I said this is what happened, and I went AWOL. I got on a train and I came out to California, and I had known her for three days in California before I went back to Illinois, and that's as long as I'd known her, and I just left the Air Force like it was nothing. I left Germany—I didn't get to go to Germany, but Pat promised that one day she would take me to Germany, and she did.

Larson: I thought I had a potential husband for her lined up, but that didn't pan out, but a friend of ours in Pasadena—Terry lived in Pasadena. She said, "Oh, I've got a guy who, we'll talk to him," so we went to dinner at her house and she—Terry said, "Lloyd, how would you like to get married to Jenny?" He says, "Sure!"

Meyer: He was a gay guy.

Larson: Yeah, it would have looked good for him, because he was trying, or in a management position.

Meyer: We went to Las Vegas to get married. I went home on the way—of course on the way back, and a couple of days later, I was going to turn myself into the Air Force, because alright now I'm married and I can get out on marriage, you know, so I was going to turn myself in on Monday. Well, Sunday, Pat and I were coming home from somewhere in her little white Corvair, which was very easy to spot, and [siren noise] here comes the police, oh my god. And they stopped our car, and they looked at Pat, and they looked at me and says—they looked right through Pat and looked at me and says, "Are you Virginia?" Oh my god, "Yes?" and he says, "Come with us," and I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, can I go back to the house and get my purse," and he says, "You're AWOL." And I thought, oh my god, you know, this was the Long Beach police that picked me up, and I thought, oh my god, so they took me, they wouldn't let me go into the house, and what they had done is, they've gone to the house because they were looking for me. I had left a letter that I was going to mail to Pat, I had torn it up in Illinois—I had torn it up and threw it in my trash, so when I went AWOL, when I went missing, they went searching through my room and they found this letter. And they found Pat's address, but I had addressed it to P. Davidson so they didn't know it was a woman. Well, so they just traced me right to her address, so when the police came to pick me up, they just took me down to the Naval Air Station in Long Beach.

Larson: Terminal Island.

Meyer: Terminal Island, yeah.

Larson: Terminal, that sounds bad.

Meyer: Yeah, but that was quite an experience because I was really shook up and really afraid. I didn't know what was going to happen to me, and when the police dropped me off they just said, "Okay, she's in your hands," and this is the Navy, and I didn't know anything about the Navy. And the guy looks at me and I says, "Well if you would just call Norton Air Force Base and call—and ask for Sergeant Copeland." I says, "She's my former NCOIC" and I says, "she's a friend of mine." And they said okay, they would do that, so they got on the phone with Sergeant Copeland and they says, "Well we have one of your airmen up here and she's threatening to jump out the window."

Larson: One-story building.

Meyer: Yeah, I thought oh that was mean and hateful, you know, but they got ahold of Sergeant Copeland, and I got on the phone with her, and she says, "Jennie, what did you do?" and I go "Oh, Sergeant Copeland," and I started to cry, and she says, "I'll be up there to pick you up," so she came all the way from San Bernardino to Long Beach to pick me up. And they had me in a room with a guard to make sure I didn't run away, and I thought, you know, you guys must've been crazy. Where am I supposed to go? So when she came into the room I took one look at her, and I just ran into her arms, I says, "Sergeant Copeland," and she says, "Come on." She says, "Jennie, we'll take you home," so home wasn't really Norton Air Force Base anymore but she was so cool because she never made me talk, she never asked me any questions, nothing. She just took me back to Norton and we made arrangements for me to go to Illinois and face the consequences. But she was a really cool lady.

Interviewer: So Jennie, when you got back to Illinois, what ended up happening? Did they court martial you?

Meyer: Yes, they did. The thing is once—when I was with Sergeant Copeland she says, "Jennie," she says, "you have to go back to Illinois." I says, "Yes I know." She says, "Do you want somebody to accompany you or do you think you can get there on your own," and I says, "I absolutely can get there on my own." So I talked to the commander in Illinois, and he was very nice, Christiansen, and he says, "Are you sure you can get back here on your own?" and I says, "absolutely." So when I got back to Illinois, I had to report into him and I says, "Airman Darrin," he says, "Airman, let me ask you one thing. Are you pregnant?" And I says, "No sir, I'm not." And he says, "The next thing is call your mother." Because when they were looking for me, that's what they did, they called my mother, and my mother was as innocent as me. She says, "Oh my god she's AWOL! Are you going to shoot her?" And he's laughing, he says, "Mrs. Meyer, we haven't shot anyone in a long time." When I went to the court martial board, there were a bunch of stuffed shirts up there that—these were really military guys, you know, the real tough macho ones, and they wanted to throw the book at me, which meant I was going to do three months of hard labor, a forfeiture of six months' pay, dishonorable discharge, they just threw the book at me and I thought, oh my god, what have I done? You know, dishonorable—not a dishonorable but undesirable—dishonorable you practically have to kill somebody. Undesirable, and I thought, I don't want to do that, I just didn't want to do that. What choice did I have? But they knocked it all down to a general discharge which is almost like an honorable discharge. A general discharge, forfeiture of one months' pay, no confinement, and I could go right back to work. That was wonderful. I don't know why they did that. At first I says, "Can I talk to the chaplain?" Because you know, the Catholic chaplain, you can spill your beans to them and they can't say anything to anybody. And that was kind of a interesting thing to tell them.

Interviewer: You did not tell a Catholic chaplain that you were lesbian and you went AWOL!

Meyer: Actually, I did. Actually, well, I didn't say I was a lesbian, I didn't use those terms. I just told him that, I says, "I went AWOL," I says, "to be with a woman." And he looked at me, and he says, "You're dismissed." And that was it. He couldn't, he knew he couldn't say anything, and I knew he couldn't say anything. I thought, oh, well that was easy enough. But it relieved a lot of tension in me, you know.

Larson: I thought he was, you were saying, he was interested in who did what or whatever?

Meyer: Yeah, he did, he asked, he says, "Well, who's the aggressor?" and I looked at him and I says, "What does that matter?" And that's when he told me, "Well, you're dismissed."

Interviewer: You're not going to tell me anything.

Larson: No details, but I want details!

Meyer: So that was it. But they did discharge me, but it was a general discharge, so I was there from February to August, and in August 9th, I was discharged.

Interviewer: So from February to August you actually worked in the Air Force still.

Meyer: Yeah I was in the Air Force, in fact they let me go right back to work, which I told them, "Please let me go back to work," because I loved my job. I loved being in the Air Force, and if I could have had both I would have been in seventh heaven. But I did choose Pat over the Air Force, and I have never been sorry.

[laughs]

[caption: Very special Thanks to Jennie & Pat]

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[caption: The June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives West Hollywood, CA "Where Lesbians Live Forever"]

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