

**TRANSCRIPT – TOTAL - RISD Panel - Artistic Expressions from the Wanderground Archive:  
Aesthetic Inspirations for Building Communities**

**Details**

Panel Discussion: Angela DiVeglia (AD), Gail Cohee (GC), Mev Miller (MM), and Leo Lovemore (LL), panelists for Lesbian Artistic Expressions from the Wanderground Archive: Aesthetic Inspirations for Building Communities

Topic(s): development of Wanderground, description of Wanderground’s collections, Women in Print movement, favorite items in the collection, physical vs. digital experiences, archiving how-to, Lesbian communities, community-building, local archives, historical contexts.

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Panel Facilitated by: Angela DiVeglia

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00:06

Angela DiVeglia: Alright. So, first I want to welcome all of you here tonight to “Lesbian Artistic Expressions: Aesthetic Inspirations for Building Communities.” My name is Angela DiVeglia. I'm the Instruction and Outreach Librarian for Special Collections here at the Fleet Library, and tonight's event is sort of a combination of a curator's talk for the current exhibit, which is right behind you, and if you were able to take a look on your way in, and also a conversation between the curator of the exhibit and two collaborators and co-conspirators about the importance of historical materials in building connections and community among Lesbian and Queer peoples. I'm going to start out by introducing our fabulous panelists. Down at the end here is Mev Miller, Ed.D., who's the instigator, and Lesbrarian for the Wanderground Lesbian Archive and Library, and also the curator of Fleet Library's current exhibit, “Understanding and Appreciating Lesbian Lives Through Craft and Art.” Mev has been involved in the Women in Print movement since 1982.

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Her participation included wholesaling, bookselling, editing, writing, publishing, marketing, reviewing, and also collaborating with librarians and educators. She worked as a book buyer at Amazon Feminist Bookstore (*not dot com*) in Minneapolis, Minnesota for nearly 10 years. Mev also founded WELEARN: Women, Expanding Literacy Education Action Resource Network, a national organization supporting women in adult basic education and literacy with access to learning materials centered on women's issues. Now in retirement, her focus has shifted to developing Wanderground Lesbian Archive and Library.

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Next to Mev, we have a table of freebies. [laughter from audience] Please feel free to stop by the table after the event. And then next to the table of freebies, we have Leo Lovemore.

02:09

Leo Lovemore, Ph.D., is the Librarian for History, Society and Culture at Brown University Library, a lecturer in the History, Philosophy and Social Sciences department at RISD, and a volunteer groundskeeper at Wanderground. Leo holds a Ph.D. in Gender and Sexuality Studies from Rutgers University, and is passionate about feminist pedagogies, LGBTQ history, queer time travel and critical librarianship. [muttering from audience] Yeah, now they know what they need to talk about.

02:40

And then next to Leo, we have Gail Cohee, PhD, who was Director of the Sarah Doyle Women's Center at Brown University until her retirement in 2022. Before joining Brown in 2001, she taught courses in British literature, literature by women, and women's studies at several universities. She's a former member of the Governing Council of the National Women's Studies Association and co-editor of the journal *Feminist Teacher*. Gail currently is a lecturer at Rhode Island School of Design and has been an active volunteer with Wanderground for several months, especially cataloging the record album collection and we get to learn more about that.

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So the plan is to start off tonight's event by having Mev give us an overview of Wanderground Lesbian Archive and Library, which just opened its brand-new physical space. Yay! [applause]

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And Mev, I know you have some slides to tell us a little bit about the space and give us a preview of what's housed there.

Mev Miller: Yes, and I just realized, first of all, I feel like I'm 46 miles from everyone!

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And then I realized I've got this and this and this [items in hand and clicker], so, like, a little bit of a juggling act here. So we'll see how this goes. I just wanted to give you some broad overview of--and I can't see where, oh--a broad overview of Wanderground and some of what we have in the collection.

[Slide 2] And one of the questions I've been encountering is people like, "Well, are you an archive or a library or a museum? I don't get it." We're like, "yes, we're all of those things." So

basically, in terms of the archive piece, it's a lot of the things that you would find--letters, diaries, postcards, pictures, things like that, brochures, flyers, organizational records--some of those kinds of things that we're really-- we don't have that much of those items yet, but we are hoping to start gathering them. "Library" in that we have lots of books and periodicals, a lot of audiovisual recordings and newsletters and so on and so forth. And then a museum in that we have a lot of memorabilia, some artwork, Lesbian-made handicrafts, jewelry and so on. And I have to say, we just had an open house this past week, and I realized that all our good stuff is here. So I had to really kind of go scraping around trying to get stuff to, like, display at the actual-- our actual space. But, so, I hope you've been able to enjoy some of our good museum pieces that we have here.

05:17

[Slide 3] The other thing is, is that we are Lesbian-focused. We are highlighting the New England region from 1950 to 2000 and I say that's what we're doing now, because that's what we have the space, time, and resources to do. As we grow and as others get involved, that may change, but for right now, that's where we've landed, and we really want to be a community gathering space. We see ourselves as a community-based archive, so we are open for people to come. You can come in, you can actually see stuff. It's not hidden, like many archives these days, where you have to, like, order it, and they go I don't know where to get it, and then eventually it comes to you. But here you can actually see it and touch it and feel it. So that's one of the-- and we're, you know, trying to do--since we are in New England--we are trying to do a lot of Zoom events so that we can actually reach out to the full region. And also just, you know, because a lot of people still don't like to go places, and Zoom is working out for them, so that's another thing that we've been trying to do in terms of building community, in addition to now being able to invite people to come into our space.

06:25

[Slide 4] The name Wanderground comes from a book that was written by Sally Gearhart Miller [sic], *The Wanderground : Stories of the Hill Woman*. And it was first published in 1978 by Persephone Press, one of the first Lesbian presses in the country. And that t-shirt is "Persephone Press: a Lesbian Strategy," which we do have a copy of that t-shirt--actually, we might have two copies of that t-shirt--in our collection. *Wanderground*, I believe, is out of print now; you might be able to get it on Internet Archive, I'm not totally sure, but Wanderground embraces the creativity, power and insight that women, especially Lesbians, can experience when we gather together in our own creative spaces with open hearts and women-focused energies, which, if you have a chance to read *The Wanderground*, is really what that particular volume is filled with, that kind of energy.

07:21

[Slide 5] And now we have a workspace, as we've been saying. So here we go.

When you walk in, you see this lovely table that's got the little remnants of display materials that we have available to us, some t-shirts hanging on the wall, other graphics around, folks who can come up and actually look at the stuff and not touch it necessarily, but at least get a good look at it, buttons and various artifacts of different types. We have the bulletin board. So we're going to grow the bulletin board with a welcoming space that has brochures and pamphlets and stuff on it. We also have a lot of books that either are out of my library or other libraries, or things that don't necessarily fit into Wanderground per se, or might be the eighth or tenth copy of something that we have. So we're selling those items as fundraisers for Wanderground. So, you know, pick what you like, put a donation in the box, and we're totally happy with that. We have artworks all over the place--this is something drawn by Boudykke.

08:25

[Slide 5] And then this is the hallway that goes back into our main space, filled with artworks along the way. And in between the front room and the back room is a little tiny storage room that ultimately, we hope will be our audiovisual listening/viewing station. And it also has a lot of pamphlets and papers of different people and photograph albums and so on, and a display board. That one happens to be about the New England Women's Music Retreat.

08:57

[Slide 6] This is a panorama of a whole back room. It's totally not to scale, but it gives you a sense of what you walk into when you walk back there. So a couple of the bookcases are actually from-- one is from the real Amazon Bookstore in Minneapolis. They were moving, and they left a bookcase behind, and so I schlepped it home, and then I schlepped it to Rhode Island. And so one of the bookcases does-- is from Amazon. And then there's a couple of bookcases that were from Golden Thread Booksellers in New Haven: all Lesbian-made, real wood, very nice and sturdy bookcases. These are some gals enjoying the pulp novels that we have a few of. We're always looking for more. We have stickers: those all say "A Lesbian Was Here." So bumper stickers of various kinds, and then lots and lots of t-shirts, so this-- that are on display.

09:52

[Slide 7] And then the origin of the collection comes, as you heard when Angela was going on and on about all the things I did. These are my business cards from all those different things I did. So 40-plus years in some kind of book engagement, and then also I was a radio DJ for 10 years. So that's where a lot of the books and the newsletters and the periodicals and the record

albums and the CDs come from. And we just recently received a donation from a Lesbian who did radio in Bridgeport, Connecticut for 20 years, 3000 CDs and LPs, I don't know what we're going to do with those, so. They're still living in, boxes in that middle room. And then our special-- I know, Gail's like, "Aaah!" I think a lot of them are duplicates. Don't worry about it.

10:43

[Slide 8] Our special collection is focused on Women in Print. So when you come in, the bookshelves are actually organized by Feminist Lesbian publishers, not by author, not by topic initially. I mean, there are some topics or whatever that are represented, but we really wanted to highlight what was happening with Lesbian and Feminist publishing. So again, the Women in Print movement happened between 1970 and 2000 roughly. It was a movement of Lesbian- and Feminist- and women-owned independent presses and booksellers, periodicals and so on, and they provided a vibrant resource for Lesbians who were coming out. Those were the days when, you know, you went to the back of somebody's car and they had things in the trunk, and you kind of looked and like, "oh!"

11:35

So it was very hush-hush initially, but then eventually became more and more visible, especially with the bookstores. At the heyday, I would say, at the Women in Print movement, there were probably 150 women's Lesbian Feminist bookstores across the US and Canada, many others around the world. And there were probably 50- or 70-some odd publishers. That has diminished now in terms of Feminist bookstores, I could count on two hands how many are still left that I'm aware of. More are opening, I'm finding but the movement really kind of went--

12:13

[Slide 9] And it started off with print. And I just want to-- I don't know if you can read this quote, I mean, if you can see the quote from there. I do want to read it. So basically, it starts off with the printers, right? "We couldn't get them printed. We couldn't get our words printed. So we started to learn how to print ourselves." So a lot of what was happening with Women in Print, and even with the music industry, which I'll talk about in a second, was we had to do it because nobody else was going to do it for us. "So it started off with a mimeograph machine." And if you don't know what a mimeograph machine is, you'll have to look it up. "In somebody's basement, some women got the idea of publishing a book of poems and drawings by women, because there wasn't anything around like it. They produced the graphics on onion skin, which stuck to the mimeograph drum, so they had to lift each sheet off by hand. And after many hours and lots of spaghetti and coffee, they managed to produce this rather thick book called *Women to Women*, stapled it together and start taking it around in shopping bags to sell it." So that's basically-- a lot of the presses will tell you that, you know, a couple of women quit the

printer that they were working for and started their own-- managed to get the machine and started their own press. And then that develops into an ecosystem. So it's not a straight line, a printer, publisher, books, like, you know.

[Slide 10] It all is kind of emerging, kind of at the same time. It was an ecosystem in which everybody was codependent. So it was the printers, the periodicals, publishers, the bookstores, writers and artisans and musicians, and I'm sure I'm forgetting somebody in that whole list of what was going on.

13:45

But really interdependent. And really, I think the thing that's most important about that that may not be immediately visible, is that we really worked together. The bookstores all across the country used each other as resources, as references, as "Tell me, how did you get that?" "Where did you do--?" "How did you do that?" "How do I maintain my cataloging system?" I mean, we really did work together in a very cooperative fashion, and we called it the Feminist Bookstore Network. So we weren't isolated by ourselves trying to figure it out. And the publishers work with us, and so it was really, you know, the writers would come to our stores and read their poems or their pieces from their novels. So it was really a very integrated movement in many ways.

[Slide 11] Same thing happened with the music industry. Same thing happened with the music industry. Nobody was going to cut our records, so we somehow figured out how to-- we learned engineering, we learned sound production. We learned how to do art for albums. We learned how to make it happen, and then sold our music in the bookstores and talked to community radio stations with Feminist Lesbian-friendly DJs who would play our stuff. And so that's, that's how a lot of that happened as well.

15:00

[Slide 12] And then my last slide is that our focus in Wanderground is to reconnect with our Lesbian heritages, to imagine and support Lesbian futures. And this, if you want to look at that drawing a little bit closely, it is in the exhibit. Next.

15:16

AD: Next! Ha. Thank you. [applause] Incredible overview of Wanderground as a space and also some of the histories that led to its founding. I was hoping that we could kick off this panel conversation by having each of you describe one of your favorite items that's in the exhibit here, and then either tell us what you love about it, or a little bit of its backstory, or both.

Gail Cohee: I have a particular fondness for the Alison Bechdel “Dykes to Watch Out For.” So... So probably that, for me, it's the Alison Bechdel, because *Lesbian Connection* was this-- is this publication that used to come out, and still comes out, I guess, I haven't gotten it for a long time, but it was this piece that just got stapled together with many, many staples and then got mailed out in like a brown

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paper cover so people couldn't see that it said “Lesbian” on it. But whenever *Lesbian Connection* came out, which had all of these lists of things Lesbians around the country were doing, there would be a new “Dykes to Watch Out For.” So every time *Lesbian Connection* came this first thing I read when I got to... when it came in the mail, was the Alison Bechdel. So that's what, you know, that's what I'm fondest of.

16:58

Leo Lovemore: Hi everybody. Alright, so my favorite items-- there's so many good ones over there, and also just sort of like overflowing in the space of the Wanderground. I'm really drawn personally to some of the textiles that are in the collection. I'm a stitcher and a punch needler and kind of a textile hoarder in different ways, and so I love, sort of participating in that lineage of kind of hand-made craft and craft that's deeply text-- you know, textured really, and sort of, you know, creating ways of feeling through time and space. I collect a lot of vintage yarns, and so I think a lot about kind of where these threads have come from, and, you know, which women's sort of stashes am I kind of, you know, repurposing in my art. So there's a lineage there that I definitely feel connected to and excited to see.

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The sort of, like the labrys quilt square over there, a couple of the handmade bags. It's also just kind of the DIY aesthetic of, like, create the thing that you want to see in the world, which I love, and is kind of threaded throughout these collections. So, yeah, I'm here for the textiles and the fabrics, among other things. [laughs]

18:17

[MM]: I don't know that question for me is, like, pick out your favorite child. Like, I don't think I can do that. I want to just respond to what Leo was saying was that one of the bags sits with a deck of tarot cards that are communally drawn by a bunch of different Lesbians, and so some of it's photographs, some of it's drawings, some of it's impressionistic stuff, but the bag...

18:38

[coughs] Excuse me. But the bag was handmade by a friend of mine out of old women's clothing, and it's got this nice little vulva thing, and you can kind of stick your fingers in it. [audience laughs] Luscious. The other thing that I-- it's really kind of badass, but Hothead Paisan is kind of fun.

18:57

And I like her because she kind of cross-merchandised stuff. So she has a button, she has candy bars she sold for a while. She's got the comic book. She's got some other ridiculous stuff, Christmas cards with the Hothead throwing a bomb someplace, I don't know. And I worked with Diane DiMassa for a number of years at Inland, when I was doing wholesale, she was-- she looks like the cartoon she draws, you know, and she was really into cats and so on and so forth. So, so that one has-- and the Giant Ass Publishing. I mean, she just put it out there, you know, like, "Here I am!" You know, she was this big [holds hands showing small size], I swear to God, but she liked her giant ass, I don't know.

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I don't remember it being that big, but okay. And then one last thing real quick-- [coughs] sorry, I'm having a reaction to something. There is a piece in there that is a cookie cutter that I want you to be aware of, because it was actually made by a metalsmith, who was a graduate of RISD, and she did her metalsmithing. While she was at RISD. And the story behind this is that

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I actually acquired that cookie cutter when I was working in Minneapolis, and it had a tag on it of who the artist was, and I left it on there. Even when I made cookies, I'd take the tag off, make the cookies, and then dutifully put the tag back on. It's one of the few things that I actually know who the artist is. Well, I put it away in Minnesota and packed it, moved back here, didn't make cookies for a long time. Pulled out the cookie cutter, looked at the tag, and I was like, oh my god, Thea Ernest, she's a friend of mine! I can't believe it! I actually bought something from somebody who was now-- It was like, you know, it's the same 40 dykes done with mirrors. You know, it's the only thing I can come up with. So anyway, those are some of my favorite items.

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AD: All right. So--

MM: Do you have a favorite item?

AD: Do I have a favorite item? Oh...it's like a trick question. I think they particularly like the poison ivy sign. It's really eye-catching; I can, like, see it from here. Also, it matches Agnes's outfit perfectly. I think you sat in front of it for a good reason.

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And when I first saw it, I just loved that it was a poison ivy sign. I love hand lettering. But then I also loved when Mev told me that that was a sign that was up at a Women's Music Festival, because there were some people camping in the woods who didn't know what poison ivy looked like, and so, you know, there were signs directing you around the festival, but there also was a sign directing you not to touch this particular patch of plants. [audience giggles]

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AD: So my next question for all of you, to take a real left turn straight into the theoretical: Why do you think encountering and handling physical materials is important in a time when so much learning and documentation happens online? Little question, just to get us rolling.

21:49

LL: I can say a little bit about, kind of, the move from digital to the material. So I wasn't there when a lot of y'all were making the worlds and cultures that you were making, right? I was maybe not even born yet at some of those periods, but I, you know, first encountered a lot of these lineages through places like Tumblr in the early 2000s and kind of the aesthetics of the movement, right, were, like, front and center. So memes, quotes, you know, kind of excerpts from zines and things in this very digital moment that was pretty devoid of a lot of the context that I think is really important to this world. So something that I love about the way you both talk about the work that you've done is how rooted it is in place and time and geography, and that was all pretty missing from the ways that I first sort of encountered this stuff as a baby Queer and as someone who, you know, had a sense of excitement about history, but a real lack of connection to those kinds of communities in my own, kind of, daily life. So, you know, I was enthralled and kind of enamored by those places. I went to grad school, and kind of, you know, got increasingly into, you know, feminist theory, and a lot of these thinkers that I had been sort of witnessing in these online spaces, and really, like, starting to realize how much these artists, writers were kind of, like, the backbone and the structure of all the theory that I was reading. And so, I mean, it really wasn't until I started moving into this library world where I'm having the chance to be kind of hands on with this material, and having this kind of romantic connection with the stuff, right. Like, this has been held by people, this has been passed around, this lived in a certain place in a certain time, and it's kind of a miracle that we still have access to it right now. I love thinking about, kind of, affect and emotion and objects and archives and so, you know, coming into contact with things like t-shirts-- I mean, that's such a

different example of, you know-- I didn't, you know-- you can't tactilely engage with that kind of thing online, and so just a deep appreciation and respect for the stuff, for the hands that have touched it, for the hands that made it, because so much of the stuff was also, you know, produced through really obviously, hands-on kinds of production, sharing skills, do-it-yourself. So that all can come through and kind of be communicated through communing with an object, which you know is great in a special collections reading room, but when you can also do it at a place like Wanderground, where, you know, there's a different vibe to the space. Like, you can meet and encounter an object and almost enter this world, you know, in a, in a very, I don't know, specific way. There's something that, like, can't be reproduced through that. So as I work with students and researchers, like, kind of bringing in the materiality of this stuff, it just never gets old. And there's the aesthetic part of it. There's the, you know, lineage and genealogy of this stuff. There's also the people who take care of it and steward it, which is part of the, you know, amazing kind of intergenerational connections that can happen around these objects. So little bit of what I'm thinking. [laughs]

25:21

GC: Yeah, I love that, with the intergenerational part of it with Wanderground, too, because as we've been doing cataloging, putting things on the shelves, we usually have music on the back-- in the background, and then it really has been a pretty good range of ages who've been in there working and to handle something that somebody may be seeing for the first time, or somebody's seen in class, or that kind of thing, it really-- it's very different, because, like you said, then the conversation starts. And it was like this, "yeah, great, I remember that, and that's how this happened." And one of the things too, I was talking about the other day when we were talking is that when people put this stuff together, it's really always easy, I think, to imagine, like, Mev and me always being in our 60s or 70s or whatever, but the people who were doing this, we were 18 and 19 and 20 years old when we were doing this stuff. So touching it, too, is just like, "oh, yeah!"

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GC: The hands that have touched it, people put it together, or places where we were when these things happened. It's very different. And another side that has nothing to do with an archive: my background is 16th- and 17th-century literature. So there's something about material culture that just speaks to me in a way that. you know, to be able to look at marginalia in books, or to touch a page that is so old, or not so old, is just for something just so... I don't know, palpably wonderful about that that you just don't get, you don't get any other way.

26:58

MM: You know, when I was first putting Wanderground together and thinking about it, I did a survey back in 2021 or '22 somewhere, and one of the responses was, "why the heck do you need an archive? Everything is online!" And I'm like, "No, it's definitely not all online."

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And if it is online, it is a different experience. When you're listening to a single song from a musician on Spotify it's really different than listening to the whole album complete with the scratches on the vinyl. You know? I mean, there's just-- you can tell that it's been well-loved and worn thin. And for me as a curator,

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I didn't say this before, but right now, it is true that about 80% of what's in the collection is basically my house threw up in [mumbles]. I mean, like, it's, it's, it's, it's stuff that I've had in many-- much of the stuff has been in boxes or in a closet or underneath of something. And as I was packing things up around the house and looking at things. I was like, "Oh, I forgot all about this!" It's so-- I mean, I remember working in the bookstore or whatever when I was in my 30s. You know, when I was young. I'm in my 70th year now. I know it's a little deceptive, but it's true.

28:18

So I was like, wow, that was a long time ago, but it feels like it was just yesterday. And getting new, kind of, like the new books that come in and have that new book smell, or, you know, that fresh-off-the-press kind of smell and now it's like, when we get things donated, it's fun for me when something falls out of a book, you know, either a bookmark or somebody's laundry list or, you know, whatever, you know. It's just kind of like, "oh, other people had these things, too." And this is really, you know, a lot of fun to be reacquainted and to be reminded, and then also see it in context with some of the newer-- especially like the zines and things that are newer things coming out. It's just, you know, just remarkable. And the ways in which... there's one piece I put in there that was...

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the woman who's lying down, the reclining woman. And when I was pulling things out, I found that *Maize*, that somebody had drawn that. I was like, "wow!" So this piece of ceramic came to me, or whatever it's made of, I think it's some kind of plaster or whatever, came to me from a friend of mine who was moving. And then I look at the publication, and it's drawn by a completely different person, you know, who I just learned last week, just recently passed away. I was like...

29:41

Whoa. You know, it's just, it's just really incredible how these little pieces kind of all connect to each other in some way. It's just really magical, I think.

29:53

AD: All right, so I'm thinking about how all three of you work very closely with historic materials, both at Wanderground, and then also in some of the other work you do, and a lot of the things that you're saving, as I think all of you have, sort of mentioned in passing, are things that people didn't necessarily think, you know, 40 years from now, someone I've never met in a different state is going to be holding this and thinking about it.

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What advice-- knowing that, what advice would you give to young people, and especially young activists, about personal archiving and documentation?

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MM: Put the date on it!

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I was-- in the slide show, you saw the Women in-- for the third conference for the Women in Print conference, and it has the date, and it says it's the third? You have to do some research to find out that was 1985 because they didn't put 1985 on the flyer. So even if on the back, and we talked about this, even on the back, if you find it, put on the back in pencil, 1985,

31:05

so that those of us who are doing the research don't lose our minds trying to figure out when it really was from. And I have found that, even, like, with letters, like somebody will write me, I'll look at some of the letters I have, and it will say, "Saturday night." [audience laughs]

31:21

Okay, thank you. [laughs]

31:24

Fortunately, I still have the envelope that has a postmark on it so I can kind of figure it out. But, you know, so that's, that's one thing I would say. But also I would say, and this is what I say about Wanderground in general: our lives are important. They matter. We matter. What we've

done, what we're doing. You don't have to be a famous Judy Garland or a famous Alex Dobkin or a famous Georgia O'Keeffe or whoever your role model is. You are you and you are important and you matter. So don't think it's worth it to throw it in the dumpster, because there are things that future people can learn from our everyday Lesbian lives, and that's how I look at it. Everything in there is not necessarily from a spectacular person, but it's a Lesbian who lived a real life and had real trauma and real drama and real joys and real pain and real happiness and real work and real everything, and it's important, so don't undersell yourself.

32:29

LL: Yes, mic drop!

I feel like my, my response is a little more existential, and it has to do with, like, the onset of aging and getting older and suddenly seeing your own life in a different kind of perspective. I think I took for granted for a long time that sort of the things that I've done and the things I've accumulated, or just sort of the stuff of the present moment, but like as I'm nearing 40 every day, like that, present moment is getting longer and longer, and I have a different perspective on the me that existed 15 years ago, the me that existed 20 years ago. So like, I've been, you know, in the work of developing relationships with, like, obviously my inner self, my inner past child, but also like my future elder self. And so creating some of those lines in the present moment to the person that you might be someday, the person that, like, is still, you know, in the circle of time, already there, like, that person needs you, that person needs the person that you are right now, and the evidence, really, of the life that you're living. And I think it's so easy to forget that as a younger person who, you know, it's just a sort of accumulation of time thing. I'm on the journey. I'm not that far along already, but I'm starting to feel those...

33:52

you know, sort of, the-- my own relationship to myself change, and I want younger people to know that that's also something that's coming for you maybe.

34:02

And I'll just say, also, as someone that teaches with archives and special collections, like, we're thrilled about the bits of, like, ephemera that we have from, you know, the 19th century, the 18th century. So just sort of keeping that feeling close and knowing that, like, these scraps of, like, whatever could someday literally be the thing that is going to unlock a new pathway for someone else. So it is about taking each other and ourselves seriously enough to be like, "this, this matters." And it can take resources, it can take space. If you move a lot, you know, there are a lot of kind of extenuating circumstances around keeping this material together. But like, have a little box, do a folder, whatever the thing is. Like, keep-- you know, maybe you have the place you put the important things that you know, you take that with you when you move. It

could be simple like that, and put the date on it. Because I have not been doing that either. Now I'm gonna try.

35:00

GC: I think for me too, it's partly--like finding that thing that Thea made before you knew who Thea was is--you know, I, I'm so grateful for the pieces of art in my house that friends of mine have made that, you know, they just did, you know somebody who passed, because they that's what they were doing right then. Or I have some Take Back the Night t-shirts that were silkscreened by a friend of mine who has since died. And just that kind of stuff is incredibly important, along with letters and books and all that kind of stuff. But just that material, pieces that people, people have made. That, I mean, you all know this, you know how important just those pieces of art that [indistinct] are. And you know, that person is always there when I can see these, these pieces that are in my house that will end up probably in somebody's archive at some point.

35:52

MM: And the other thing I want to add to that, and Leo kind of--

35:56

As, as I'm in my 70th year, and I look back at what I did during-- I don't remember what I did. So I'm glad I kept some of that stuff so I can kind of remember like, heck, if I ever need to put a resume together for whatever reason, you know... But what I really want to say is that, since this is RISD, and I understand that many of you are artists of various kinds

36:17

that, that I think they can be inspirational. You know, as a Lesbian, creating Lesbian art, if that's who you happen to be--maybe you're not a Lesbian, doesn't matter--whoever you are, we get inspired by different things all the time. And so, if you are looking for that bit of inspiration, you know, it could be the oddest thing that will just tickle your fancy or give you a great idea. And one of the things that is not in the exhibit here, but is back at Wanderground, and I'm only bringing it up because there was somebody who did visit Wanderground who had such a reaction to this particular item. And she's looking at it, and she goes, "is that a nail clipper?" I said, "yes, it is."

36:59

And on it, it says, "Go fish." Why do I have a nail clipper that says, "Go fish?" Anybody want to guess?

37:10

Tanvi knows.

37:13

Because there was a Lesbian film that came out that was called *Go Fish*. And one of the scenes in the movie are these two Lesbians cuddled up on the couch, and one of them is clipping the fingernails of the other one and-- with a nail clipper. And so the folks who were putting together the video had this great idea: this is a promotional item! We'll make nail clippers that say, "Go Fish," and then people will know that it's part of the movie! And I was like, okay, and I have like, three of them, because I was in the bookstore when it came out, and they sent us these promotional items and I still have them. Random, right? But think about-- but if that is what like, unlocks the door, this peculiar little thing that unlocks the door for your creativity, whether you be in marketing or design, or you're building a bookcase or whatever it is, that there are some Lesbians who have done those things, and maybe they can inspire you in a way that you were totally not ready for.

38:24

AD: Something that I have heard all of you discuss, if not today, before today, is how much Lesbian history happened outside of New York and San Francisco.

38:36

Can you all talk a little bit about Lesbian community, culture, and history outside of coastal cities? And I ask this in part because I'm always talking to RISD students about how much incredible art is happening in small towns around the country and around the world.

38:54

GC: Yeah, I mean, I spent my youngest Lesbian years in Lexington, Kentucky, which was really kind of fabulous because there were, there was such a good history of leftist organizing and really important civil rights folks. So it has a really good radical history that people on the coasts don't know anything about. And so being a Lesbian feminist in that place at that time just felt like part of the lineage of other kinds of radical work.

39:29

So the community was-- one of the things I appreciated about the community at that point was that I was at the University there, but the community was really not all the university. There was people in the community who had different kinds of jobs, as well as college students. There was so much political activism at that point, with, starting, like with crisis centers and around

women's health, what were called women's shelters at that point, and Lesbians, of course, were central to so much of this stuff.

40:00

So it was, you know, I've been so surprised over the years, I've talked to Mev about this sometimes, that somebody, somebody, will have an obit in the New York Times, and it's like, "so and so, one of the leaders of the feminist movement." I was like, I don't know who that was. But how self-important cities feel to the people in cities, but how much really the hard work goes on... And I really-- what people who do organizing in small towns or rural areas, they're really doing organizing. And that's, you know, it's brave work to do it in those places. So, I'm really... One of my good friends said she was so grateful she didn't end up in New York, but she ended up in Lexington instead, because we could just do so more [indistinct].

40:50

LL: Yeah, I was just sort of thinking about the stakes of community-building in small places and, like, they can-- the stakes are so high, right? It's also about, kind of surviving the place that you are, and the place that you might not be able to just sort of exit on a whim. So there's a real kind of honoring to the like, the specificity, again, of like, the geographic place and the time that this community is kind of coming together. You know, thinking about margins as well, and marginalia and like, we could think of spaces as marginal too, I think. And that's something that, you know, I'm certainly drawn from the margin to the center, as bell hooks tells us, that that's a valuable place to kind of put our energies and to, you know, kind of create futures from those spaces as well. It's been cool to kind of come to Rhode Island and relocate. I grew up in Western Mass, which has its own kind of, like Lesbian, herstory lineage that I was somewhat exposed to, but also really isolated from in my kind of, you know, small farming town, it's kind of right next to Northampton. It's like half a mile away, but I didn't have access to that stuff as a young baby Queer who didn't even really know, you know, that was my-- that was the path that I was on. So it's like, you can even be close to these sites of, you know, much, kind of, cultural production, and know nothing about it. And that's so real, I think, kind of it's the world. So, you know, when it does emerge, it's a beautiful, fragile thing that, like, is also resilient at the same time. And yeah, that those are, you know, histories that we definitely want to honor and lift up at this moment where things can feel so just kind of hegemonic and like, flat, you know. Like that there's different textures of Queer life everywhere, and that like it's not the same in Kentucky, in western Mass and, you know, anywhere else that we could go. So...

42:51

MM: I've mostly lived on the coast, but I have lived in the center part of the country on two different situations. I was coming out, when I was living in Detroit, when there was, like, hardly

anything then, except that we were kind of close to Lansing and Ann Arbor, and there was all kinds of stuff going on there: music, a *Lesbian Connection* was coming out then. And so I did-- well, what I knew in Detroit was the bars, you know, and so I didn't really know anything about... well, I actually, I did know-- that was the lesbian-- like Meg Christian and Cris Williamson, and, you know, those gals were starting to come out with records. So I would listen to records and go to bars. That's what I knew.

43:29

And then I moved back east, and then I moved back out to Minneapolis. And the joke about Minneapolis is because it's *winter, winter, winter, winter, winter*, the artists had a lot of time, a lot of creativity time on their hands, you know. So they'd come up with these, poetry and music and art. And so Minneapolis and St. Paul was really much alive with all kinds of arts. And there was the community radio, so we could be exposed to-- I did my radio show, but there was another Queer show, there was shows in different languages, so that you could be exposed to all different kinds of genres of music and so on and so forth. And that, I think, impacted a lot of us in many different ways.

44:13

Being in a coastal town in New Haven is a little different than New York and Boston and San Francisco, I might say, but it's definitely a tension between town and gown on some level. But one of the most magical things that I have, still from New Haven is, a bunch of us--I didn't start it—but some lesbians started a publication called *The Newsletter: A Lesbian Position*, and they were very clear that was “A”, not “*The Lesbian Position*.” But it came out monthly, started in early the 1980s, came out every month. I have every issue from whenever it started until it ended in 1993. So about 10 years' worth of this publication and letters. It was self-created in that, you know, we didn't-- toward the end, they kind of started taking things out of other more publications. But initially it was letters to the editor. We all wrote articles on various things. The therapists were advertising, the dykes who were cutting hair, you know, the car mechanics. I mean, you can really feel what the community was like, in terms-- with all its bumps and bruises and warts and everything else, in terms of what we were angry about, who was fighting, what we were mad at, you know I mean, but what we were very happy about, and things that we did. So I just, I just find that reading it from cover to cover now, 40 years later, is really instructive in terms of what it meant for me coming out or being involved as an activist Lesbian in the community then, and what was the turmoil *then* of what we were really talking about as we were building our politics and our emotions and our sense of identity and who we are. You know, because the butch/femmes were mad at the S&Ms who were mad at the feminists who were mad at the... you know. So it just kind of went on like that.

46:04

AD: Every time you guys answer questions like, I love this part even better than the last part!  
[laughs]

46:17

Something I would love to hear from all of you, because you spend so much time and effort just really carefully collecting and caring for all of these materials about Lesbians, and I know you just, like, you love this *stuff* so much. I can say this is, you know, someone who's trained as an archivist, the stuff I work but they just love it so much.

46:37

Why do you think these materials are essential, even for people who aren't Lesbians?

46:49

MM: Myth busting. Because I think that it's easy to have a misunderstanding of... and this isn't true only for Lesbians, I think it's true for everyone, that, "believe me when I say who I am; don't listen to the garbage that's put out there by other homophobes or women haters or whatever."

47:19

So I think that there's a way in which we become more real and more humanized, and also, like, maybe, maybe I know this Lesbian, and so my whole understanding of who Lesbians are are based on this one person.

47:40

That's a mistake, okay? Because we are as diverse as everybody else. So you can-- it's just like, you know, you have your one Black friend, and that's what you think African Americans are? No! Like, we're very multi-faceted, multi-cultural and very diverse people. And so being exposed to the things that are in an archive where you hear different voices and get different-- even if, even if we're talking about the same topic, if you read five different Lesbians talking about that same topic, you're going to get the kaleidoscope of views. And I think that's the other thing that's really important, is that you get the kaleidoscope.

48:20

LL: Yeah, I'm thinking about, like, political education also, and the sort of, like, deep dive that you can do into a politics that came out of a time and place that was responding to the pressures of the current moment, but also historical kind of, you know, accumulated traumas, right? And that there's something exciting about,

48:44

you know, sort of witnessing the way that politics comes out of community, the way politics is threaded through art. I think, like these things happen in other places, but these materials can really show what that looks like. And sort of the... the slog of it, as well. And the sort of, you know, the ability to move through challenge, and kind of, you know, come out the other side with either a more nuanced political identity or a different idea about what community is. Like, there's so much that we can learn from the kind of spaces that people were dedicated to and were dedicated to, you know, forging, despite the other stuff that you're also kind of raising up.

49:28

So yeah, that-- that's something for me that's ongoing whenever I encounter, you know, a piece of this world, it makes me think about, what are the contours of the... you know, what are the challenges? What are the moments of creative joy and witnessing that is like part of being human also.

49:49

GC: Well, lesbian history just gets lost. So, you know, we get a lot of [female?] history sometimes, particularly from the '80s for obvious reasons.

50:00

But also I feel like sometimes it's been like the straight women feminists like Gloria Steinem and everybody got a lot of print, and then the gay men, and Lesbians just got lost. And also, sometimes the straight feminist responses to Lesbians wasn't so great either. So it's really important to see those things. I mean, we were the lavender [haring?] of the movement.

50:25

And just, you know, so there was a lot of-- lot of not-so-great stuff happened. It's really important history, to sort of be able to pull different strands of politics out, as you were saying, Leo, too.

50:39

MM: And that also reminds me, too, that as, as I've been even like curating this exhibit, thinking about the diversity of Lesbians, and also thinking about, like, in the '80s, when we were-- like, if we were going to create an event, all right, we had a checklist, and I find that a lot of that stuff is lost now. Like, we're gonna have this event, you have to walk up six stairs. Back in my day, uh-uh.

51:08

If it had stairs, we weren't using that venue. It had to be accessible. It had to have an accessible bathroom. The entrances all had to be accessible. We wanted our sisters who were in chairs to be able to access the space. That-- you know. Or okay, we're going to offer food. It's even more of a trap now than it was back in the '80s, because now we have to think about gluten-free and nut allergies and so on and so forth. But whenever we offered food, we always made sure that there was vegetarian options. You always made sure that there was something for everyone to feel like there was one thing that they could enjoy with everybody else and not feel like, I can't eat anything."

51:49

Or being very cognizant of whether or not the space had alcohol in it. You know, so Wanderground had an event recently at a distillery, and I felt very uncomfortable about it, because there is a long history of alcoholism in the Lesbian community, and most of my friends are sober, and so how do we do that? And it wasn't until I realized that they serve mocktails, and it's not a bar atmosphere. It is a place where-- and they restrict the number of drinks, so it's not a bar scene where people are going to get sloppy drunk and nasty, you know? It's just not gonna-- so, so anyway, so all I'm saying is, is that there's ways in which trying to really be mindful of... and it's exhausting, but it's worth it to have an opportunity for anyone to feel like they can come into an event or a space or whatever and feel represented. And it's not just about politics. It's about really understanding, you know, the differences that are-- you know, like there would be folks who are really allergic to scents, you know. And so we'd say this is a scent-free environment, because we knew it was going to trigger somebody, you know. So those kinds of things that I think of as, as lesbians, have moved forward in the communities, I feel like a lot of that is lost. And for me, I just took it for granted because that was part of our community consciousness. So, and you'll find arguments about that in different publications that are in Wanderground.

53:28

AD: I want to make sure that we leave time for Q&A at the end of this, so the last thing that I'm going to have all of you talk about as a panel is: if someone is really excited about the materials that they see here in this exhibit, or they love the things that they're seeing these slides, how can people see more stuff like this, either at Wanderground or at other places that are in southern New England?

53:54

MM: Oh, that's mine. Well, we just opened. We just had our open house. So we don't have real hours yet. So right now, we're saying "open by appointment," because I'm the person who's

retired and most flexible and most able to be there most of the time. So... and I, you know, like I say, I'm pretty flexible. If you have a group--I know there's a group that's thinking about it--if you have a group that you want to have come, you know, we could arrange something, have you-- be there, spend time. We are hoping at some point to have some events, but we're trying to make it as open as possible, so that you can touch things and hear things, so. We don't have the audiovisual stuff yet, so don't get excited about the CDs or the music just yet. Right now, I'm playing stuff on Pandora, just to kind of keep my brain clear, but... So, otherwise, I think the Providence Public Library has a special collection, but they are Rhode-Island-specific. So that's LGBTQ, Rhode-Island-specific, and you basically have to go, and I think, make an appointment or something, right? You know more about that than I do.

55:00

AD: I do, I do know more about this. [laughs]

MM: I thought you did.

55:03

AD: So the Rhode Island LGBTQ+ Community Archive is housed at the Providence Public Library in their Special Collections, which I'm trying to [cut you free ?], so I think they call themselves the host of the collection. So, in order to access it, you go to the Special Collections at the public library, which is downtown on Empire streets, about a 10, 15 minute walk from here. And then also, if you're coming from RISD, there is also some really incredible women's materials and gender and sexuality materials at Brown that I know, that both of *you* know a lot about. Can you talk a little bit about what those are and how people get to them?

LL: Yeah, I was gonna sort of mention the John Hay Library, which is Brown's Special Collections library. It's the place that I work at part of the time at my job, and I am super invested in kind of breaking down the barriers to get into that place. So it's open to the public. Like, I will say again, it's open to the public! Anybody can go there. You-- there are, kind of, processes like Mev was indicating earlier about requesting materials, making appointments. There's a lot of logistics that are involved, and so part of what I do on a daily basis is just kind of talk to people, talk them through the process of how to get your requests in, make your account, you know, sort of do the logistical stuff in order to see some of these materials. And I really like to encourage that, like, this can be a practice space. Like, it's an intimidate-- it can be an intimidating space if you're new to, you know, kind of, Special Collections reading rooms, but it's also a place to kind of practice that experience. So, you know, some-- we've a bunch of collections, we're sort of developing this "global lavender voices" collecting direction at the John Hay library. Yeah, so I'm teaching a class tomorrow actually using a bunch of these,

56:51

like, LGBTQ periodicals from Japan in, like, the-- from the '70s, '80s, '90s, kind of up through... That's one of the collections we have. We also have the records of the Gaylactic Network, which was a kind of like Queer sci-fi fanfic community in the '80s and '90s, so both, like, their ephemera, like this cool, like, UFO triangle t-shirts and banners, as well as the actual fanfic that they were writing at the time. So I find that to just be, like, endlessly fascinating. But the records of the Sarah Doyle Center are also there. I just taught a class where we were looking at material from the Women's Escort Service, the sort of, like, abortion accompany accompaniers in the '80s, and that material is just kind of endlessly fascinating and very Rhode-Island-based. Plus Feminist Theory Archive is another big part of some of the collections that we have there. But I'm totally excited to talk to anybody about any of this stuff at any time. So email me. You can meet and kind of look at the lay of the land.

58:02

GC: And Sarah Doyle itself has a nice library that RISD students can certainly use. There's a doorbell; just ring to get in. But there are lots of great-- there's another great zine collection, but also lots of books and lots of other things and other materials that the librarians at Sarah Doyle [indistinct].

MM: And I put the pictures back up of Wanderground. Unlike, unlike John Hay, our space, you come in, it's all right there. It's-- you might need some guidance in terms of where things are, because sometimes I don't really know where they are yet. We're still setting up in some way. We have, I want to say we're about 60% cataloged. There's still a lot that's *not* cataloged. So if cataloging is your gig, and you really like, you know, doing stuff like that, we could always use some hands on help for that. We actually have some decent catalog systems. It's just that they're not complete yet. So, so some of that is some, some things that could happen, but, but the only restriction right now is that we don't have regular hours, and I'm hoping to adjust that sooner as opposed to later.

59:14

AD: And I just want to give a shout out to Queer.Archive.Work, which is in Providence. Their website is queer.archive.work, easy to remember, and they're in the Valley neighborhood, and it is a reading room, zine collection, radical publication collection, and they share a space with Binch Press, which is an awesome, communal, radical press.

59:37

Very special place. I think they have open hours for their reading room on Sundays right now, and it's always listed on their website. And it's a really special place; if you haven't been there, you should visit.

MM: It's kind of a maker space too, isn't it?

AD: Yeah.

1:00:00

LL: I just wanted to give one plug for kind of the possibility of skill-building by volunteering at Wanderground, so, sort of, like, getting the cataloging skills. There's so many ways that that, kind of, can-- can pay forward in your life. If you're interested in library and archive work, having that kind of very specific experience, processing a collection or cataloging materials, like, that's golden. So just to kind of give a plug for, kind of, doing a couple of things together at that, that space.

MM: Well, and I wanted to add on to that is the cataloging system that we have, especially for the ephemera, allows us to put stories in there. So if you're interested in, like, blogging or doing research and you want to do a deep dive on a particular topic, I think there's ways that we can reflect that into our cataloging system. And we're also right now working on a grant that we've got from Rhode Island Humanities called Exploring the Archives: Building Communities. And we're actually interviewing Lesbians about the materials that we have, so that we have real-life stories connected to the things. So you're not just looking at a flat object, but you can you hear the story of Thea Ernest's goddess cookie cutter, for example, or the nail clipper, or the... you know, a lot of things about Lesbian-- you know, a Bloodroot Restaurant in Bridgeport, those kinds of things.

1:01:14

AD: All right, on that exciting note, do we have audience questions for our panelists?

1:01:33

[audience member]: So a question I have is, as elders of the Queer community, what is the best piece of advice you can give for, you know,

1:01:42

Queers that are going into a new election? You've seen a variety of different life experiences.

1:01:52

What is something that you can share with me?

GC: The advice I always give everybody is: a whole lot of community. You know that's what's going to get you through, because...just build, build your own good community. I know I was just saying to somebody a little while ago, because I'm teaching a course at RISD this spring, I don't even know what books I'm going to teach yet, because it depends on the election.

1:02:19

So but, but really just surround yourself with, with some good folks who can help you keep your sanity. Because I just, you know, this is just a personal story, this past June, I went back to visit friends from college, from my old Lesbian community, and we sat around and gossiped! You know, one of my friends said, "Oh, my God, even 50-year-old gossip's still fun!" You know, like, we said, "well, I slept with her," "oh, I did, too!" "really? did you?!" Just that kind of a thing.

1:02:50

So, you know, kind of keep your people close, I think, is always my advice.

1:03:02

MM: I don't know, because I'm still shaking in my shoes. Actually, I said to Gail on the way over here, I said, so you have to understand, in the '80s, I was a real protester on many, many things, anti-nuclear, anti-war, blah, blah, blah. And I said to her today, I said, I can't believe that I'm saying, "believe the generals."

1:03:24

What?! Like, I don't know if you've been following, you hear all the things about what Kelly and some of the other generals are saying about the orange menace that... you know. So I think there's, there's-- and then there's another part of me that's like,

1:03:39

we've been through worse. I don't know how bad this could be. It's going to be bad, but holding our-- holding-- and building connections with many different people, I think it's, it's our intergenerational, it's our interdisciplinary, it's a multi-faceted world, it's our word that I can't think of right now, that people use all the time, that begins with an "i..."  
[someone]: Intersectional.

MM: Intersectional, thank you.

1:04:09

Oh my God. You know, that word. It came out from the Combahee River Collective. They would never use that word, but that was the theory they were talking about, you know? But I think that coalition-building is really, really important.

1:04:23

And you just gotta dig deep and find courage. And try to sleep.

1:04:32

AD: I feel like the three of us are having a conver-- the four of us were having a conversation earlier this week, and we were talking about how community-building is really annoying sometimes, but I feel like that also is very relevant in a time like this, because we were talking about needing to find people who have shared goals, and having to work towards those goals together, even when you hold a lot of other differences with people, like even when it is very annoying. And I feel like that's a really important part of this also.

1:05:00

MM: It, and it is a skill, and it takes practice, and that-- the other-- to add to that is, you have to be willing to make mistakes and own them and say, "You know what, I screwed up. I apologize. Can we get over this? I don't want to walk away from you. I don't want you to diss me. I don't want to diss you. I think we really need to figure out a way to work through this and come together, because together we have more power than an army of one."

1:05:27

And you know that old button, an army of lovers cannot fail. Thank you, Rita Mae Brown.

1:05:35

AD: Other questions from the audience?

1:05:41

MM: I want to know what was *your* favorite thing in the collection. [chuckles]

1:05:46

AD: Yeah, question over there. Do you want to ask from there, or do you wanna come up and use the microphone?

[audience member]: I can ask from here. [indistinct]

1:05:55

MM: I can't hear you, I'm sorry. I'm old and I'm losing my hearing. Can you come speak in the mic, please?

1:06:03

Sorry. I really want to hear your question, but I can't hear you.  
[audience member]: Thank you.

1:06:08

It's a simple question. I was just hoping to ask where you guys were located again.

1:06:14

MM: Where Wanderground is located?  
[audience member]: Wanderground, yes.

1:06:17

MM: Wanderground is located on Park Avenue in Cranston.  
[audience member]: Cranston, okay.

1:06:22

MM: *(address deleted- when you make an appointment, we'll give you the address)*

AD: I can verify it's easy to get there on the bus.

[audience member]: Okay, awesome.

AD: I just did it on Monday.

MM: And we have a parking lot.

1:06:31

[audience member]: I heard you guys say "New England," and I was worried it was, like, further.

MM: No, no, we're here in town, in Cranston. It's the rest of New England that's far away.

[audience laughs]

1:06:43

AD: Other audience questions?

1:06:49

Yeah!

[audience member asks question, too quiet to transcribe]

1:07:17

AD: Yeah, the first question-- I, like, listened to the second part of your question and forgot the first part.

1:07:24

Yeah. So the question is, how Wanderground manifests online, including how your collections are represented online, and then also talking about the RISD materials that are part of this exhibit.

1:07:37

MM: Again, another process. I am not a librarian, I am not a historian, I'm not an archivist, I'm an old bookseller who likes to collect things. And so part of the challenge has been over the last several years, is to try to find a catalog system that would work for us, which has been a real challenge, because library stuff, it's all about, you know, libraries and circulation and, you know, they'll take this, but they won't-- the systems don't hold that, you know. And then the museum systems hold museum stuff, but they don't hold the books and periodicals, you know. So it's been a challenge. So we actually have cobbled together a three-prong stool. We have a book catalog, we have a music catalog, and then we have another museum-sort-of-based catalog that's called CatalogIt, and that's the one where we're gathering a lot of stories. What I've been finding is, is that there's-- right now, the challenge for me, and this is where a researcher could really help us,

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there's a lot of stuff we don't have to digitize because somebody's already done it. I just have to find it and say here in our catalog, "Oh, you want to look at all the past issues of Hot Wires? They're already online, somebody's already digitized them. I don't have to do it, thank you very much." So right now, what we're working on is trying to identify what's already been digitized and giving people directions there. In terms of how you can see our stuff, our website, wanderground.org, very easy. Wanderground.org; there's a button that says collections. If you hit on collections, it will show you the various aspects of our-- what we have. And that's in redevelopment right now, because we don't have CatalogIt in there yet. We've just-- we've only had CatalogIt for about four months or so, so it's really still in the building phase. The bare bones of it is there, but eventually, we're-- right now, our web designer is working on

connecting that to the website so you'll have more visibility. We had been using AirTable for a while; I don't recommend it. Please don't use-- I mean, I think it's good for some things, but for archival cataloging, not so great.

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AD: I'll also say what Mev is not mentioning about CatalogIt as a tool is that it was designed by people who-- what did they collect?

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MM: They collected pottery.

AD: They were pottery collectors, but it's designed so that you can put photographs of the objects into the catalog record, which is shockingly rare in library catalogs, or if it's done, it's done in a very strange way. And so I think it actually has some really incredible functionality. And so even if something is not, you know, like, a fully digitized periodical, you can often-- especially for the things that are more three-dimensional, artifactual--through the underground catalog, you can see an image of what it looks like, which is really amazing.

MM: Yeah, we have a lot of the t-shirts in the CatalogIt part. Once it gets connected, it'll be more visible. But, like, we have all the t-shirts photographed. I mean, we're trying to build, you know, like the dates it was made, who made it, what the story is behind it, where it was made. So the-- CatalogIt has a lot of...

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a lot of stuff that you can put in there. It's a little overwhelming almost, you know, but, but eventually, as we get it built, there'll be more and more stuff that you will be able to see online. Which, on the other hand, it's like that whole conversation we started off with, you know, the digital and whether or not you want to hold the item. You know, it's great to have it in the catalog, because people far away can kind of see what we have. And as we build the catalog, they'll be able to see the stories. So why the hell would they come to Wanderground? But I'm hoping that is not what's going to happen.

1:11:23

AD: I mean, the good news is that, in my experience, digital archival collections get heavy use, but they also bring people in who want to see the physical object that they viewed the digital surrogate of online. Hopefully, that will happen for you, too.

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And then for the second half of your question, [Emma?] yes, there is one case in this exhibit that has items that are from the RISD archives that I selected to be in conversation with these five other cases of incredible Wanderground materials. They're in the low case that's currently kind of obscured by grapes and cookies, [laughs] but you can still see what's in there. Some of the materials there are from our Special Collections, and then some are from the RISD Archives, which is the historical collection that documents RISD as an institution.

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It was really fun for me to put that together, actually, because I work in Special Collections, which shares storage space with the Archives, but I don't actually work with the archival materials almost ever and so it was a really great opportunity to start to take a deep dive into more of that, because also, a lot of the materials that are in the RISD archives-- it's vast! There's a lot of stuff, everything produced by the institution, and a lot of it is unprocessed, which means that, you know, the box might say, like, what office it came from on campus, but we don't necessarily know what's in every folder in that box or it's labeled on the folder, but there's no digital finding aid for it yet. So I was able to dive into some really exciting stuff. And I think probably the thing that I found that was most interesting and most surprising to me is that the RISD Office of Student Affairs, which does exactly what it sounds like for those of you who aren't part of RISD

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in the '80s and early '90s, started really collecting a lot of information about what was happening nationally, both politically and on other college campuses, and then also what was happening politically in Rhode Island in terms of the LGBTQ community, and also in terms of the AIDS crisis, because those were things that students had questions about, were learning about and needed support around. And so we have like two full records boxes of folders that are just things related to, you know, what was happening around the struggle for marriage equality in Rhode Island, what was happening around, you know, how safer sex education was happening on college campuses across the country. Just some really amazing resources where, clearly, someone was just like, "oh, we might need this to support a student--throw it in the folder!" But it's pretty well organized, really, interesting stuff. And then another thing I found that I did not put on exhibit, because this is such a joyful, fabulous exhibit, but I do encourage people to come look at, if it's interesting to you, is that someone in the Office of Student Affairs saved all of the flyers for LGBTQ events on campus and events related to AIDS activism on campus that people wrote hate speech on, so they would get pulled down. And then this office was saving all of them, and I was crying looking through it. It's like several folders, and it's really hard to look at. And also, I'm really glad someone saved that, because I feel like that tells us a lot about

the climate on campus in the late '80s and early '90s, in a way that's like, not nice to look at, but tells us a lot about the environment in which a lot of this student activism is happening. And I think seeing that in a folder next to-- for instance, there's some stuff in there from a RISD student who was a young Lesbian who was testifying at the State House a lot in support of marriage equality. It was talking a lot about some of the experiences that she had had as a young Lesbian living in Providence, and I feel like that person's bravery, like, shines, seeing it next to all these like flyers with horrible things written on them.

1:15:19

You know, because, as you were saying at the very beginning, Leo, I think when we think about archives, we think about the context that is built by having all of these materials together with each other. So if you just saw any of those things by itself, it-- you know, you would have an emotional reaction to any of them. But I think seeing it all together started to give me more of an understanding of what things were like in Providence and on campus at that time, because all of these are in conversation with each other. There's a news clipping from the *Providence Journal*, there are student flyers, there's information about what's happening in the State House...

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Yeah. And so I feel like starting to build out that context was really interesting. And if you want to see anything else cool at the Archives, [Emma?]'s a really great person to talk to, who can help you find it.

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All right. Any other questions? I see more hands!

MM: Could I just respond real quick to something that you said?

AD: Please!

1:16:16

MM: I think one of the important things too, when-- when you're looking at things in archives and old stuff, you have to take off your current glasses so that you can put yourself in the context of the time. Because if you're trying to see something that was happening in the '80s through the lens of what you're experiencing now, it can kind of distort, you know. So that's why, why you just sort of have to suspend your current...

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It's just sort of like, the reverse of that is, as an old person, I sometimes have to, like, really listen to what young people are saying to me, so that I can really understand, because I'm through my own lens, you know? And so I think that understanding that we have different glasses for different things is really important to keep in mind.

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AD: Yeah, that's a really great point. All right, more questions. Can you come up to the microphone? I don't think my string is long enough to get to you.

1:17:23

[audience member]: So, thank you so much, Mev, for this amazing presentation. It's always interesting to-- and great to be exposed to, you know, this counter-archive, as opposed to, you know, you learn in a lot of courses, especially in MCM [?] at Brown that you know, the archive is this hegemonic, knowledge-producing thing that colonial, etc., [audience laughs] but it's fantastic to see, you know, real, real, [encounter?] discourse work.

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What I'm really thinking about is the fact that, you know, we're talking about context, historical context, and then thinking about Lesbianism, right, as a historically constituted subject. How do you kind of produce a Lesbian archive when the term "Lesbian" itself isn't something pure, isn't something static, that has changed even across the time periods that you're dealing with?

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MM: Oh, that's hurting my brain. [audience laughs]

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I can say what it means for me to be a Lesbian, and I know it flies in contradiction to what often gets defined as "Lesbian" by others. For me, being a Lesbian means being a woman who loves other women and who cares about what happens to women, and that women, for me, are a priority.

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And I'm trying to remember what somebody said, it's not that I hate men, they're just not important in my life right now, you know? I mean, I don't, it's not who I give my energy to.

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So for me, putting together an archive means anybody who said that they're a Lesbian and has written stuff about being Lesbian, regardless of what our point of view is, in our in our context between 1950 and 2000, because that's where-- what our range is...

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And I want to say historically, again, with the lens and the whatever, I mean with Gail-- what Gail and I were talking about earlier, too, is that, back in the day, when Lesbians were coming out, and we had a lot of conversation about Butch/Femme and what that meant, and some of it was about class, some of it was about misunderstanding, you know. They weren't using the word

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"Lesbian," they were "gay women," you know, or they were butch/femme, but they weren't Lesbian, because "Lesbian" had a feminist, political connotation to it. So there was even a lot of energy around whether or not, in the '80s and the '70s, you could use the word "Lesbian." Now, I know the word is "Queer." I don't like the word Queer. It's not a word I use. I will always call myself a Lesbian, because in my generation, "Queer" has a different connotation, and that's not what I'm into, you know. And so I think it's just, it's a matter of understanding that there's a weaving-- a weaving thread, you know, that kind of comes around and goes around, comes back again, and twists and gets knotted and gets untangled. Does that make...? Gail, bail me out! [audience laughs]

1:20:44

GC: [indistinct] been teaching gender studies for so long, so I think we work within the context of gender studies a lot of times too, And a change of language changes, the context changes, things do, you know, because we certainly weren't the first people who were Lesbians or Queer women. So it was just everything, and everything was in its historical context and, and language changes, and then it comes back to not changing. So...

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I mean, that's what I love about teaching gender studies. I've been doing it for so long now, and just watching the changes in language and watching the changing context and watching the changes in identity is just wonderful. You know, it's just wonderful. It's fascinating, and it doesn't undo what somebody else did before, and it's going to be different 20 years from now. So it's, you know, it's like, it's sort of like, we can't-- we may have a job we can't even imagine because it doesn't exist yet; I feel that way about the language and the way gender works. It's changed remarkably in 20, 30, 40 years. It's going to change remarkably again in the next 20

years. So that's one of the things too, is kind of keeping, keeping open to what's-- what's going on and listening. This is the wonderful thing about getting to listen to very diverse communities about what's going on.

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MM: And I want to add to that too, that sometimes we say “the Lesbian community” as if there's only one, but there isn't. I always use, I always try to use the word “communities” because there's the bar dykes. Their experience is different than the softball dykes. Their experience is really different than those artistic dykes, which is really different than the musician dykes, which is really different than the sound engineers, which is really different from the carpenters, which is really different from the farmers. Okay, all of those are “Lesbians” in their way, and they may or may not have any commonalities, because then there's also the poor dykes, there's the disabled dykes, there's the fat dykes, there's the highly religious dykes and the woo woo dykes, you know? So it's-- you have to understand, it's, it's... “Lesbian” is very broad. It's not a monolithic thing. And I think that's the thing that, in the end, we're not a monolith, just like anybody else.

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GC: I want to plug a new book. It's not my book, but a book that came out recently called *A Place of Her Own* by June Thomas. It's about bars, bookstores, *softball*, which I thought... various places where dykes and Queer women, which is the term she uses, gathered. So, it's pretty good. [laughs and audience muttering]

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AD: I really wish that you were asked to review the book, and there'd be a quote on the cover that-- with your name that says, “it's pretty good!” [laughter]

1:23:59

We just have one more question over here. Can you come and ask your question into the microphone?

1:24:06

[audience member] Thank you.

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I'm really glad the last question ended in relation to place, because I think I have a question related to place I'm going to speak “in draft” here, because I'm not entirely sure how to phrase this question, but I think a lot of community-building, especially based on the things that all of

you were describing, is really based people that are gathering in a space. And, like, speaking about archives, and, like, physical material archives is like touch and the importance of physically being together.

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Um, as a college student and also as an immigrant, someone who's traveled from place to place and is very uncertain about where I would call home or where I would feel most at home, joining a community and being a part of community feels like sometimes I feel like my relationship to it, especially as a college student, to the local Providence community, can be kind of wild because I'm here as a tuition-paying student at an institution that has a not-so-great relationship to the rest of the city, to the rest of the state.

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So, I guess I'm asking for advice for how to better be a part of communities as someone who maybe feels more like a traveler or feels more like is moving between place to place.

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GC: [answer indistinct] ...I think it's also where archives and places like that are useful because that's where, just going to a place you're going to find people, because they're-- those people are in that place too, and they're not RISD students or just Brown students, but they're folks from... I

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mean, I love to [indistinct] working in the archive with the people I wouldn't have met otherwise because they work different places, they were in different schools, they're just part of a different town in Rhode Island. So that's the importance of finding places you go.

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Take the bus and come over to the archive and do a little volunteer work. You're going to meet somebody who's a librarian in Massachusetts, and... it's just-- it's those-- it's so important.

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This is one thing I don't think college students have as much opportunity to do as we did used to do, is know people in-- in the community. Plus, I went to public university, so it's very different from going to a private school. [indistinct] But yeah, find those other places to go that, there may be just a few people that are working. that's, that's, that's my kind of social advice, but it's a question I really like to think about some more.

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LL: Yeah, I was just thinking about, sort of trusting that, like, what you bring to a space may be, what somebody there is looking for or needs, and sort of, like, we can pre-think what our impact will be, but we don't actually know what that will be until we put ourselves in those spaces. It's hard, though. I hear you. Like we're, you know, relatively new to Providence, too. It takes energy and guts and bravery, and it's, you know, never simple, especially with our kind of inner dialog. But I think an element of just, sort of, trusting that, like, your desire to be in that space might be enough to, sort of, connect with it and to, you know, find some thread to pull on that resonates with you.

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MM: And I would say, be persistent and keep showing up and have a sense of who you are. I'll tell you this funny story that kind of resonates with what you're saying, but in a different way. So when I first moved to New Haven, I was actually a student at the Yale Divinity School.

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I was a Roman Catholic student going to an interdenominational seminary to become a priest, a Roman Catholic priest. It was a political act, because I knew damn well I wasn't going to get ordained. But the strategy was, with the Women's Ordination Conference was that we were going to go and get our divinity degrees so that when the Pope said, "Okay, women could be priests," we'd all be ready to go. That was 1980.

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Just saying. I went into Divinity School as a Roman Catholic and graduated a pagan witch. But anyway, that's not the story. The story is, I was really wanting to get into-- I was coming-- I was, I was a baby dyke. I was maybe out, maybe a year or two, and really wanted to get involved in the community in New Haven, besides just being at the Divinity School, because, you know, there actually, at that time, there was a lot of LGBTQ folks at the Divinity School and we found each other, and we were very supportive of each other, but I wanted to get into the community and really kind of spread my wings and kind of get to know what was going on. So as-- I met somebody who invited me to this party.

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I went to this party full of dykes, got to meet people, and there was this one woman there, I said, she goes, "who are you?" I said, "I'm Mev, and I'm at the Yale Divinity School." [she said] "Lot of closet cases up there at the Divinity School!" And she turned around and walked away from me. I was like, "but I'm here!" What the Hell?

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So, so all of that is just just to say, is that you have to, like, eventually, I kind of did become pseudo-sort-of friends with her, not really, but she was somebody I did communicate with pretty regularly in the community, but it was just such a bizarre... [laughs] What?

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So I think, you know, like be persistent, I guess, because I kept going back, you know, and eventually did-- was able to find those with whom I could be in community with in some way or another. And more than one community, because, like I said, there was the softball dykes and the political dykes and the feminist dykes and that-- you know. So I was a little bit in all of those communities. That's the other thing. Don't look for *a* community. Look for some diversity in different ways.

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AD: I feel like I'd like to add something as someone who also has moved around a lot in my life to some very different places, and I think no one's ever mad if someone shows up somewhere and says, "How can I help?"

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Like no one's ever met about that.

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And I think, the other thing I would say is someone who also kind of comes from a popular education background is just, you know, no matter who you are or where you come from, arriving in any space that is not yet your space, recognizing that every single person who's there is a vast body of knowledge. It might be knowledge that they gained at a university. It might be knowledge that they gained by driving a semi-truck around the country for 20 years. It might be knowledge they gained by raising five kids, which I don't know how to do, and I think just being with people and learning about how they've lived and what they know. And this is not that different from, you know, what Mev was saying about collecting materials in an archive that are just from people having lives.

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You know, understanding that all of the people that are in this space with you have had a life that is probably really different than yours, and you don't know much about them, and they also don't know much about you, and you have a lot to learn from each other. And I think approaching that,

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thinking that all of you are kind of coming in on level footing, like, we're people, we're getting to know each other, and each of us just has a vast body of knowledge, and it's all super different. I think that approach brings you in with kind of a... humility is not quite the right word, but like, yeah, I don't know. So humility, but also just like, respect for yourself and respect for every other person in that room, in a way that I think is kind of the foundation of being able to build community with people who are really different than you.

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MM: The more real and authentic you are helps.

AD: It helps.

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We are over time, because you all have such wonderful things to say, but thanks to our incredible panelists, thanks to all of you for being here. I want to leave some time for you to get some more grapes and cheese and maybe meet each other.

1:32:44

And thanks for all being here!