

Marcy Johnsen

Seattle, Washington

December 5, 2000

for

Southwest Seattle Historical Society

by

JonLee Joseph

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Interviewed by: JonLee Joseph
December 5, 2000
1st Oral Interview
Seattle, Washington

JonLee: It's December 5th, the year 2000, this is JonLee, I'm interviewing Marcy Johnsen, at Seattle, Washington.

So since we'll go back to the Log House Museum, but since we're on the topic of being gay, would you talk to me about what it was like growing up in West Seattle and making those small decisions during different times in your childhood and life to go around with different people and to have the courage to keep going around with them, even when you saw that other people made fun of them or beat them up?

Marcy: I think one of the first things that happens, happened with me and I'm sure it happens with many people, is that you have these little awakenings. These little light bulb moments where things occur to you. Where you think and really, you know, take some information and go, "Ah-hah." And one of the first things that happened to me as a very young child, and I'm not sure if I was second or third grade, but we had moved from Beacon Hill to Alki. And Beacon Hill was very diverse; folks from all ethnic backgrounds. Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Norwegian, French, light skinned, dark skinned, blond, dark hair, red heads, you know. And when we went to Alki, *nobody* was of color. And I didn't, I couldn't put my finger on it right away, but I noticed the difference, but I didn't know exactly what it was, until a family that was mixed race came in and they were

darker skinned and I went, "Oh! Duh! That's what's different here. There aren't any people of color, you know, there aren't any Negroes, or there aren't any, you know, black people or there aren't any Filipino people," whatever that was, because we used different terms in those times. That was part of it and I thought, "Oh, well gee, that's really different and why is that?" I didn't get any answers, it's just the way it was. And sometime later on, I can remember my mother talking about a dermatologist that she was taking my sister to and then my older sister and then later my younger sister, who was a black man and that "He was so nice and so handsome."

JonLee: Dr. Brown?

Marcy: His name was Doctor Harris, I think. Yeah, I'm not sure whether he was downtown or in West Seattle. But, he, but it was, you pointed out the color of somebody, you know, and really recognized the difference. Why, I wasn't sure, but it was like, "He's a black a man, but he's okay. He's really nice and he's a good doctor." Like, "Oh, okay, well, gee, why wouldn't he be? I don't know." So, my parents never instilled any anti-Semitism, any anti-gay, any anti-black about people. They didn't really instill any of that in me, that I recall. And I think, my siblings have different recollections. But I didn't see that. So, for me I had a clean palate. And I was just really formulating my own opinions. To my knowledge, I don't remember meeting another, meeting a gay person until junior high school, when I met Lynne. I think there was another girl who was very obviously more masculine and struggling. She was stand-offish and aloof and wasn't somebody that I felt, she didn't approach me and I didn't approach her. I didn't have any classes

with her so there wasn't any connection, but I noticed her. But it wasn't until meeting Lynne that I really felt, or started to make those kinds of decisions, really even thought about people being gay.

JonLee: Well, we didn't know anything about it when we were growing up.

Marcy: Yeah. I suppose if I'd known somebody, who, at a younger time was *really* a tomboy or *really* definitely, you know, leaning one way or another, boy or girl, that I would have had something at the younger age, but I just wasn't exposed to that.

JonLee: Well, what kinds of things kept you being friends with Lynne even when you saw extra cruelty and extra discrimination towards her in terms of, she's different and you said, during the pre-interview that she got beaten up.

Marcy: Oh, yeah, later in high school.

JonLee: So, what kept you steadfast as a friend with Lynne?

Marcy: Well, first of all, I became friends with her before I knew that she was gay, so it wasn't even a subject that was discussed it was only that, she dressed a little, I don't know that she dressed a little more masculine necessarily, because we all had to wear skirts or dresses or whatever. She always wore a skirt. And she liked vests and she would wear a little more tailored clothes as opposed to real frilly. But then, I did, too, I didn't wear real frilly things either. I'm just not a real lacy person. But we became friends. I met Joey, my current partner in junior high school. I didn't meet her at school,

but I met her, we were taking CCD, Catholic Christian Doctrine classes at Holy Rosary and we were at rehearsal and they lined you up in order of short to tall. And so we were the two tallest and we were in the back. And I'd never met her but I said, "Hi" and she said, "Hi" and as conversations go, "Well, where do you go to school?" And well, we went to the same school. And, "Where do you live?" Well, gosh we lived on Alki. And she had moved around so much that she was always the new girl in school so she was thrilled to meet somebody who lived on Alki, somebody else. She said, "Oh, you'll have to meet our friends, my friends Lynne and Marianne, they live on Alki, too." "Oh, great.". So, the three of them were a grade ahead of me. I was in seventh grade and they were in eighth. But we walked through the park together, but the schools got let out, different grades got let out at different times. So there might be five or ten minutes between bells. But at any rate, eventually one day I was walking down the path through Schmitz Park, which we always did, and caught up with them. She was thrilled. They were thrilled. They were all smoking. I didn't smoke yet, but they were smoking. It was like, "Ooh get in the park and smoke, you know." [laughs] So we just started walking home together everyday and you know, kids talk. Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, that's all you do. Because you're just so eager for information, learning about this, that and the other thing. And we just got to be real good friends. And it wasn't until much later in the year that I learned that there was something different. There was one day we were walking home from school, and I don't, Joey wasn't there, I don't know whether she'd already moved or what, but she wasn't there any longer. And Lynne and Marianne were just, really, head to head, some problem, some, you know, dramatic thing and I said, "Well, gosh, what is it?" "Oh, no, you're better off not knowing,

blah, blah, blah." And I can't stand that. I, you know, [laughs] inquiring minds have to know. And I like to know. If I don't know anything about it, it doesn't disturb me, I'm not concerned about what happens in the world that I don't know. But if I have an inkling about something and it piques my curiosity, well, *then* I want to know. So, I just said, "Come on, you can't, what is it? You know, you guys are you're not," I really just said to them, "Look, you know, we've been friends now all this time and it feels like you're keeping something from me and don't pull that crap about being older and protecting me, that's baloney." So they finally said, Marianne sort of made some gestures about Lynne kissing other girls. I mean, she didn't just come out and say, "Look, Lynne's a queer." She did *not* say that. But she made it very clear through gestures that Lynne liked to kiss girls. And I thought, "Jesus Criminy, is that all?!" I was thinking there was some huge thing like somebody was getting suspended, or you know, some horrible crisis and who gives a rip!? You know, so it's like, *please*. Well, Lynne was worried and she was walking way ahead and then I think it was the next day that we were all talking and I said, "I don't give a, it doesn't matter to me. You are who you are. If you like girls, so what!" It, you know, it got me thinking about it. But it was like, "Gee, I never even thought that there might be a choice." Who knew? So, we were friends first.

JonLee: 'Cause, you used the word yourself, and at that time see, I'm a little older than you, I graduated from high school in 1960, and you graduated in '60 what?

Marcy: '70.

JonLee: '70. So, but at that time, the language was different. Even the word "queer" was what was used at that time.

Marcy: It was used, but I hadn't heard it, really. I heard it later, as I got to be, as I spent more and more time with Lynne and Marianne. We always went in groups. Almost always, you know, packs of kids. And, as we were out more socially together, *then* we heard the epitaphs, the hate crap, and "queer" came up.

JonLee: And how did you survive that?

Marcy: It wasn't easy. It wasn't easy. But, you know, you grow up as a little child learning, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, words will never me." They do hurt, they do hurt. They don't cause open gaping wounds that are visible, but they do hurt. Their intent certainly stays with a person. But I didn't let it deter me in anyway. I just thought, "You know, why do people have to throw around, throw their weight around and throw away," to me it's a form of energy. And a very bad use of energy to throw hate around and to spend time on that.

JonLee: You mentioned your father and something that he had said at that time. It was in his concern for you. Would you repeat that?

Marcy: I will.

JonLee: Not to put him in a bad light, necessarily--

Marcy: No!

JonLee: -- but just to present his viewpoint at that time.

Marcy: My mother and father both were not pleased that I was, they liked Lynne, I can't say that they didn't like Lynne, because they did. She was witty and smart and cute and endearing. She had all of those qualities. There wasn't any reason anybody wouldn't like her, except that she was a lesbian, and they didn't like that. I mean, it was scary to them, I'm sure. Like that is *not* the normal thing, that is *not* what we want our daughter having anything to do with. So when something about that came up and it seemed to me it had something to do with notes that another friend and I had passed back and forth that my mother cleverly found in my drawer underneath all my socks, you know. And when you're fifteen, sixteen, that is the *last* thing you want your mother doing, is snooping in your drawers. But, some kind of conversation, heated conversation came up and in the argument my Dad just said, "Look, I'd rather see you pregnant than queer." And I was stunned. I was absolutely stunned. I thought, "How ignorant." I didn't say that to him. And I didn't necessarily think it right at the time, but as I began to really think about it, I thought, "How ignorant can that be to see a fifteen or sixteen year old girl, pregnant! Excuse me! And pregnant and what, single?" You know, gonna have to give your baby up for adoption, or raise a child from a young age, than *what?!* Being friends with somebody who's choosing to love somebody of the same sex. That just, that just appalled me. I just thought, "There's so much more for people to learn." And I really felt like that was a turning point in my time. That I was beginning to be more of an adult than my parents were, in terms of thinking.

JonLee: You're remarkably clear-headed.

Marcy: Well, I've had a lot of years to think about it, too.

JonLee: This is some reflection and some--

Marcy: Yeah. Yeah. Cause as I say, I don't know that I thought about it in those complete, you know, as articulately then. The feelings, those same feeling were there. And some of the thoughts, but not quite just, it was very clear at the time that there was a separation of parent and child and I felt that the tides had been turned. I thought, "I am my own person. I'm making my own decisions." And I did. I continued to.

JonLee: Thank you, thank you for that.

I want to go back now to your use of Schmitz Park. Because I never, I was raised in West Seattle, and I had been around the world. Alone and with friends and with people I met. I have never been to Schmitz Park. It was not considered a safe place for a girl to go. As an adult woman, I will not go alone. I will gather some friends one day and go on a picnic there.

Marcy: You need to, it's wonderful.

JonLee: I interviewed Janet Scadden, the granddaughter of Ferdinand Schmitz, who donated the park, so I'll gather a group of friends and we'll take a picnic lunch. But would you tell me how the park was, as a child?

Marcy: Well, when we moved there, it was off limits. But when we moved there I was in first grade. But it was off limits to my brother and

sister who were five, no four, and nine years older than me as well, because there had been some assaults. And I don't remember if rape was part of it, but I thought so. So, it had a bad reputation at the time. Somewhere along the line we either, that either calmed down a little bit, or, actually, I was in Brownies and we had some Brownie expedition into Schmitz Park to look at leaves and trees to identify, you know, nettles and different berries and bushes. And so that was like, "God, there's this gorgeous place." So that was probably third or fourth grade, that we were in there in the park. And I thought, "Wow, this is great!" And so, gradually the park was getting more and more use. And my childhood buddy, Peggy Murray, who lived across the street and up a little bit on 61st, why, we were on our bikes and up and down through the park constantly after that. So, it, you know, as the problems diminished and the memory of those earlier problems diminished, then the park got to be used a little bit more.

JonLee: And you used it later on when you went to Madison and high school for a short cut, right?

Marcy: Oh yeah, sure because Madison was right up at the top of the hill after you came out of the pathway from Schmitz Park. So, if you missed the bus, the fastest way to get to school would be to run through the park. Now, it wasn't greatest thing to do alone. But we did it and I've done it alone as a kid, seventh or eighth grade. Didn't really like it, but then you're running, so, you think you're gonna outrun [laugh] --

JonLee: It's easier than being late.

Marcy: It's easier than being late, right. Yeah.

JonLee: Being late or tardy and sitting in whatever it is after school. Now, would you at this time, too, talk about coming to West Seattle, your family? What made them to decide on West Seattle and what made them decide to buy the Log House?

Marcy: I can't say exactly what made them go to West Seattle, except that my mother and grandmother had lived in West Seattle when they first came to Seattle, which was, my mom was about sixteen. They had come from Oklahoma. My grandmother's sister, my Aunt Ida, lived here and worked at Frederick's, and so, the two of them came out and they lived someplace in West Seattle, down south of the point. Somewhere off of Beach Drive. They lived there first and then they moved to Queen Anne and then, you know, they did several things. But I can remember before moving there, coming, especially with company, coming over to Alki and clamming or just rock hounding, or you know, we'd take Sunday drives and come over.

JonLee: Where did you go clam digging?

Marcy: Uh, somewhere off the beach. I don't know whether we got anything but we were digging around. We have home movies of my cousins from Kansas City with crabs and clam shells and different things. Shoving them up the camera lens to get a good view. My cousin Dan, he was the mad scientist and he would take samples of everything and pickle them once he got home. But, it was at least a three, four day drive between here and Kansas City, Missouri, so, some of the things in the trunk were pretty ripe by the

time they got there, which was not good. [laughs]. But he tried. And then, you know, they must have just decided to come looking in West Seattle to see what they could find. And my mom liked antiques and she liked special things. And I can only think that she just saw this house and thought, "Wow!" And really saw the uniqueness of it. And, because there was another log house on the opposite corner, 61st, 62nd and Stevens. It wasn't as big and it was in, well, it wasn't for sale either, but, it wasn't in as good shape as the one on the corner, the Log House. So, somehow they bought it. I was too young to really know what was going on necessarily, but, oh, we were like kids in a candy store. Here's this great log cabin house we were going live in, that had cubby holes that you could play in and then a block from the beach. The beach! We grew up on Beacon Hill where there was wonderful Lake Washington and we would take trips to the Lake, and, you know, in the summer and have a great time. But to live a block from the beach, was a whole different story. That was, boy, independence city when you were down there.

JonLee: Cause you could go play there, right? Your mother could stand on the corner and--

Marcy: My dad whistled. My dad would whistle on the porch and everybody in the neighborhood knew that whistle.

JonLee: Knew that whistle and if they'd seen you--

Marcy: Oh, and you could hear it for blocks. We could be at the elementary school, Alki, and hear it. [laughs] I forgot about that!

JonLee: Would you tell what the log house looked like when you lived there.

Marcy: You know, it looked almost the same as it does right now. Prior to the renovation there was a different kind of railing and the pictures show that they were a little more lateral railings, with a plank on top. And so, that plank, we would walk on that plank, or sit on that plank, that was kind of nice. And we would also use it to hang the Christmas decorations, we would stand on it and curl around the logs and hang the lights, and so it was very functional as well. The living room is exactly the same, but the video room was the kitchen and so the opening to the kitchen was not where the opening is now. In the corner, what would be the southwest corner, there's a display case and that's where the opening to the kitchen used to be. You can tell by the logs if you look closely.

JonLee: And where was the dining room? Where did you sit around the table?

Marcy: Well, there was enough room in the kitchen for a family, for a kitchen table as well. The kitchen had beautiful Birdseye Maple cabinets. And yellow Formica, ugly yellow Formica, countertop. But my folks always had a big stove and a little thing next to it. And it was a very efficient nice-sized, 'cause there were always five or six of us there. And it facilitated us eating as a family in the kitchen.

JonLee: Okay, and you mentioned there were two chandeliers in the living room .

Marcy: In the living room right in front of the front door, which is the same of course, there were, in a line, two chandeliers which were probably not period necessarily. But they were two crossed logs and hanging from them were kind of conical shaped bulbs. And the light switch was next to the front door. So, it wasn't something that we used very often because they sort of lit the room rather garishly, really. But they were nice to look at and of course they added charm to the living room. But, in the living room was then just a living room and it was *really* nice because of the size of the room. You could change your furniture around any number of ways, which we did. It was great. My folks liked to dance, too, so the hardwood floors were great. They would just roll up the rug and they'd have, you know, *parties*. In the '50's and even into the '60's people had house parties. At home. And so my folks would invite folks over and they would invariably dance at some point.

JonLee: And put on the record player.

Marcy: Yeah. Or the radio, or if my folks didn't have a piano, but other places if they had a piano, somebody would play and they'd dance. And, of course, they'd all had a few drinks, too, to lube everybody up. The fireplace is almost the same. It's had a couple of transformations. In 1965 there was an n earthquake in Seattle, remember?

JonLee: I wasn't here.

Marcy: You weren't here. 1965 big earthquake, well it was 6.5 that's how we remember the year and the magnitude. And it did a lot of damage to a number of homes on Alki. Our house, the structure of

the way it was, it just shook like an orange crate. They, one of the surveyors that came, it was flexible and it just, it wasn't going to go anywhere. He said "This place could withstand, you know, a stronger earthquake and it's not going to anywhere." What it *did* do is it completely wrecked all the plaster walls inside. So those all had to be replaced, but also the fireplace was brick above the mantelpiece and below. And the bricks above the mantelpiece disintegrated. I mean, they just fell through. And in the restoration after the earthquake, my folks chose to have it be a fire, some kind of fireproof wood, instead of putting brick back in. And put a cabinet on the side, south side of the fireplace. That little nook was where our dining room table was. So to have a cabinet there was really nice because my mom put her good dishes there, then.

JonLee: Had that fireplace originally been cobbles?

Marcy: Not when we lived there. It was the same brick that's there now. Yeah. And the other side of the fireplace, there's another, equally as large an area and my mom usually had a desk, which I have now, a desk and a chair and a knickknack shelf and, you know, some. It was a place, a little play area, my little brother would play there after he was born. He was born in '63. That's where we always put our Christmas tree in that nook, 'cause then it could be seen from the street. People peeked in.

JonLee: When you go back to the Log House Museum now, is it like looking at ghosts? I mean, do you see the exhibit and then do you see, as you climb the stairs, do you almost expect to see your brothers and sister, your one brother and sisters someplace?

Marcy: I did at first.

JonLee: It seems to me you would have a kaleidoscope because of your personal history with the building.

Marcy: The more I'm there the less so it happens. I felt very odd, you know, eerie almost, the first few times I was in the house. I'd been in it a couple of times since my mom sold it and that was in '72, I think or '73. '73. I'd been back a couple of time because various people owned it and we'd say, "Oh, we used to live here" and you know, we'd go in and see what changes they'd made. And that was always fun to do. A lot of people do that with, I still drive by the house on Beacon Hill every now and again to see what it looks like. But, yeah, it was really emotional, a few times. Peggy came back and my older sister and my younger sister and I have been there together and it really has been emotional at some times. But for the most part because I'm on the Board, and I'm there frequently enough, it's, I've gotten past the "Gee, all these people are really talking about this house like it's theirs. It isn't *theirs*, it's *ours*. You know, it's not *mine*, it's *ours*. It's the whole community's."

JonLee: It's gone from private to public.

Marcy: Yeah, and I had to make that transition. I had to, you know, let it go in my heart. And just to say, "It's okay. These people *really* care about this place! They wouldn't have raised all this money to *buy* it!" And as were growing up as children we thought, "Boy, this would be a neat place for a museum." Oh, people said that. And it wasn't just us because we lived there. Other people said it and I'm sure that that contributed to because those are the same kind of

people that gave money. Those are the same people that live in West Seattle and maybe they don't live in West Seattle and they gave money! I don't live in West Seattle and of course, I'm connected because I lived there more than anything. But I think there are people who have moved from the area who still feel a fondness; that just feel connected. So they gave money to buy it.

JonLee: Oh, that's lovely!

Marcy: Oh, it was a great dream come true, really. I wish my mother were here to see it, she would, well, I think she knows. I have that spiritual sense that this is not the only life we live.

JonLee: Thank you, thank you for that. That's wonderful. I want to go back too, because in the pre-interview we talked about going to Alki Elementary. And you know, I just did an oral history chapter on Marguerite Parlotto and you talked about her as a teacher. Would you talk a little about her and what kind of impact you think she had on her students?

Marcy: Well, I think there were at least two teachers for most of the grades, each of the grades that were there, and so you kind of, you know, you'd hear things or you'd hear the teacher and you kind of think, "Gee, I hope I get so and so for, you know, next grade, or whatever." So, I think that, and her daughter was a student there too, I'm blanking on her name. Her daughter, I can't believe that, well anyway, it'll come to me. So she was just somebody that you hoped you get as a teacher. She just exuded personality and charm and warmth and enthusiasm. And so I was lucky enough to be in her class and I was so thrilled because she just, she didn't

seem to ever favor any child in particular. And she just seemed to bring the best out in everyone. Praise, but not undue praise, I mean, she didn't just go, "Good," you know now it's like overly done sometimes. "Good job, good job" you know, falls on deaf ears. No, she was genuine in her praise for people and in constructive criticisms and she was a delight to have as a teacher and *absolutely* has stuck with me. I don't think you remember the names of the teachers who were insignificant. Yeah. And she definitely made an impact on me. Things just sort of came into, I don't know, bloom.

JonLee: Now, did she teach art there, too?

Marcy: Well, she may have, but I, it's funny, 'cause as, I was thinking about color, because I can remember coloring in her class. And I, so I'm not sure that we actually had, we must have had an art time. You know, you had different periods of the day where you, you're with the same teacher, but you, "It's time for social studies now, it's time for reading, time for this time for that." Yeah, I can remember being in her class. And some of my classmates coloring or making things. She was excellent.

JonLee: Thank you.

Marcy: They had good teachers at Alki, I think. They had good teachers. And I think that, you know, those are the formative years. You're really just like a little sponge and you're just slurping up all that good stuff, or bad, if it's bad. So, if it's good, that's better for the kids. I was lucky. I think I was lucky to be at Alki.

JonLee: Thank you very much.

Marcy. You're welcome.

JonLee: Is there anything else you'd like to add that you think would be important to say?

Marcy: One of the reasons that I live in Ballard is that it has the same sense of community that I felt when I lived in West Seattle. You just felt part of something, you felt part of the community. Even if you don't interact, there's something about it. And I don't know whether it has to do with what's been here before, as opposed to what's been in other places. I've lived in Shoreline, I've lived in Lynnwood, I've lived in North City. Those places don't have that feeling for me. I had never lived in Ballard. I had family that lived Ballard. But when I moved to Ballard for the first time in 1978, I just thought, "Wow! This is really cool!" And I think it has a little bit of the same kind of history, not that it was the birth place, but, you know, they're a little bit further from the city, access is a little harder, but people come and they stay or they come back. And that's how, you know, I have a real fondness for West Seattle and Alki. And, I don't know, some day I might move back. But right now I'm happy here because.. [tape stops]

End of interview