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# A Narrative Life Story of Activist Phyllis Lyon and Her Reflections on a Life with Del Martin

Dianna Lee Johnson

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Social Work

School of Social Work
in the College of Community and Public Service

August, 2012

## Dedication

*As we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence actually liberates others*—Marianne Williamson.

This work is dedicated to the women in my life who saw a light within me before I believed it was there. They nurtured that little flame of hope, loved me until I could love myself and led me into the sunlight of the spirit where I can give others permission to do the same.

**Acknowledgements**

A project like this cannot transform from a figment of my imagination into a multi-page document without the support and generosity of many amazing people. First, and foremost, I thank Phyllis Lyon. She has been most generous with her time, her stories and her energy in the lifelong work that she has done for gay, lesbian and women's rights. I thank her with a grateful heart because I do not have to hide my sexual orientation, and it is, at least in part, to the tireless activist presence of Phyllis Lyon. She welcomed my partner and me into her home and answered questions with humility, humor and openness. I am so grateful.

I acknowledge my partner for sticking with me through this journey, for listening to these words while I read them out loud, and for being my San Francisco companion. Thank you for not hating me even though we walked from Noe Valley to Nob Hill. It was good for us. I am so grateful for you. Every day, I love you more.

I thank Dr. Dorothea Epple. I thank her for chairing my thesis committee, for giving me the motivation to finish this paper and for starting it in the first place. Dr. Epple helped give me the confidence to believe that this paper was worth pursuing.

There are two women on my thesis committee that have been important to this project, Dr. Jane Hayes and Susan Odgers. I thank Dr. Jane Hayes for her support throughout my graduate program. She listened…more than once. I thank Susan Odgers for encouraging me to look into the program in the first place, for always cheering me on,

and for showing me that the only barriers we ever face are the ones that we create in our own mind. I thank her for being my friend.

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Thank you Traverse City Cohort 12 for your support, your interest and your camaraderie during our many hours together in and out of class.

I thank my sister, Deborah Toomey, for encouraging me through the fear and offering to read and proofread this paper. She was able to bring the objectiveness and fresh eye to it that I didn't have. I love you, my sister.

I have to thank all of the authors and researchers who have done the work ahead of me. In particular, I would like to thank Marcia Gallo and Martin Meeker for their encouragement to do this project. They convinced me that it was worthy.

I couldn't have done, and redone, this paper without the support and love of some of the best girlfriends that a woman could ever ask for. I thank them for reminding me that the only way to eat an elephant is to do it one bite at a time. I thank these ladies from the bottom of my heart for wiping my tears when my files got corrupted and listening to me yammer on in excitement about meeting an icon. My friends will never know how much I love them or how much they mean to me.

**Abstract**

Phyllis Lyon met the love of her life in 1953. Her name was Del Martin. When they fell in love, homosexuality was an illness that needed to be cured, a sin to be confessed and an illegal act that should be punished. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon are legendary in the lesbian community for originating the Daughters of Bilitis--an underground lesbian social club in San Francisco formed in the 1950s. They spent the next 55 years together confronting society and policy about the inequity of gays, lesbians, and women. In each of these social movements, however, they were the minority inside the minority because they were lesbians. Despite the availability of lesbian and gay history, relatively little has been written exclusively about lesbian history. The depth and evolution of Lyon and Martin's relationship and a depth of the relationship with the cause they were fighting for is missing from the current research. The articles that have been written about lesbian history and about Martin and Lyon, in particular, all report the same facts and tell the same stories.

The attempt of this thesis is to frame the life of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon with the personal stories of their lives together and the challenges of their relationship. In addition, the social context, lesbian history and culture will be thoroughly researched to serve as the setting in which their story takes place. Personally and professionally, it is an attempt to understand the founding history of the Lesbian Rights Movement while learning about the NASW values of service, social justice, integrity, dignity and worth of a person and the importance of human relationships.

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# Chapter 1: The Research Proposal

## Introduction

The history books present the 1950s as a time of economic boom. The standard was two cars in every garage. The country was full of post-war pride and anti-communist patriotism. The Golden Age of television introduced *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *I Love Lucy*, and *Father Knows Best*. These television shows characterized the stereotypical 1950s white, middle class American family. Elvis Presley was shown only above the waist because his lusty gyrating hips so offended the moral fiber of his viewers. The 1950s are also remembered as the beginning of the space race with the Soviet Union and Sputnik's launch.

It was a time of conservatism, conventionality, and conformity. During World War II, women had left their homes to work in the war industries and build ships, aircraft, vehicles, and weaponry. Women also labored in factories, munitions plants and farms. They drove trucks, provided logistic support for soldiers and entered professional areas of work that were previously the preserve of men. In the 50s, women were expected to return to the home and dedicate themselves to becoming good homemakers, mothers and loving wives and make room in the job market for the men. This worked well for mainstream white, middle class, Christian Americans, but it wasn't so easy for those outside the norm.

In the 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum. Rosa Parks refused to stand at the back of the bus (she didn't have two cars in her garage). The Montgomery bus boycott followed and Martin Luther King, Jr. became a prominent

leader. *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* declared that state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students were unconstitutional.

For gays and lesbians, the 1950s was a decade of fear. Homosexuality was considered illegal, immoral and pathological. History books do not teach that the American Psychiatric Association added homosexuality to its list of mental disorders as an illness that should be cured. Until 1962, every state in America declared homosexual sex illegal. The churches classified gays and lesbians as a class of sinners because sex was meant for procreation not pleasure.

Though history books teach about Senator Joseph McCarthy and the power of McCarthyism, they do not report that the Red Scare targeted homosexuals in the State Department, as much, or more, than it did communists.

In 1950, after homosexuals fought in World War II and many lesbians entered the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the United States Congress established the *Uniform Code of Military Justice* which set down the basic policies, discharge procedures and appeal channels for the disposition of homosexual service members. The history books describe the courage and valor of Dwight D. Eisenhower, but they never reveal that he signed *Executive Order 10450* in 1953 which mandated the firing of all federal employees, including the military, who were determined guilty of "sexual perversion". It declared all homosexuals as "security risks", whether they were actually disloyal of not. As a result, more than 640 federal employees lost their jobs over the next year and a half. Many more were allowed to resign quietly. In the 1950s, gays and lesbians generally did not

admit to homosexuality, did not talk about it, may not even admit it to themselves, and certainly were not proud of it.

Despite the culture of fear that was aroused by the Cold War, the Red Scare or the accidental outings of gays and lesbians; despite the traditional gender roles that women were expected to fulfill in the 1950s; and despite the societal, medical and religious beliefs that considered homosexuality illegal, immoral, pathological and perverted; the 1950s is where the activist life story of the lesbian couple, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, took root.

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon moved in together in the Castro district of San Francisco on Valentine's Day, 1953. Today, Castro is considered the first, largest and best known gay community in the world, but at the time Del and Phyllis "did not know any lesbians and spent a lot of time trying to meet some" (Lyon, p. 163, 2002). The only place that Del and Phyllis knew to meet other women like themselves was at lesbian bars. However, “police commonly raided places where homosexuals gathered, to harass them, or to haul them off in paddy wagons to the police station, where they were booked, photographed, and fingerprinted. Newspapers would print the names of those arrested and the notoriety could lose them their jobs or even their families; some were driven to suicide” (Mixner, p. 3, 2002). Del and Phyllis needed to meet lesbians safely and secretly to protect themselves and others.

Martin and Lyon met a gay couple who introduced them to Rose Bamberger. She called Del and Phyllis and asked them to “start a secret club for lesbians” (Lyon, p. 163, 1995; Gallo, 2002; interview with T. Gross 1992). “We just wanted to meet some

lesbians," Phyllis Lyon animatedly exclaimed when asked about the beginnings of the Daughters of Bilitis (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

At the first meeting, someone suggested they name their club The Daughters of Bilitis, an obscure reference to lesbian love from 19th century poet Pierre Louys. "So obscure," says Lyon, "we are *still* explaining what it means" (T. Gross interview, 1992). The eight lesbians "knew that the new group would be shielded from unwanted public attention while subtlety signaling its link to lesbian sexuality" (Gallo, p. 3, 2005). From the beginning, the members "approached the group as though they would a business enterprise…Lyon and Martin were the oldest members; the others often deferred to them and accepted their ideas" (Gallo, p. 4, 2005).

"DOB has significance for lesbians not because it was able to attract large numbers or to succeed in its goal of advancing lesbian rights, but rather because of the mere fact that it existed during such dangerous times" (Faderman, 1991). To conceive of such a group in the 1950s was courageous, risky and yet, so essential to the lives of many lesbian women, including Del and Phyllis.

## Research Questions

Much has been written about Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon. They were co-founders of the Daughters of Bilitis. They were actively involved in the evolution of the homophile movement in the 1950s. As community organizers, political activists, feminists and educators, Lyon and Martin have been high profile political lesbians in California since the 1950s. But who are they? Who are they as a couple and as individuals? What was their relationship like? What are their personal stories of

"coming out"? How do their struggles as a couple parallel their struggles as activists? What is their personal story as a couple and how does it reflect the issues of history, culture, and social standards of the time? What is at the core of their values to be so involved in activism and civil rights? Where did their courage and audacity come from? How did their relationship as a couple evolve during their lives together and was that evolution possibly reflected in their activist causes? Ultimately, what does the "personal is political" mean today, as Phyllis looks back on her life, and is that definition different today than it was to them in the 60s and 70s.

**Short Statement on How Student Came To Study This Issue**

In 2003, my partner and I took an all-woman cruise through the Inside Passage of Alaska. There was a lesbian couple on board celebrating their 50-year anniversary together. The mistress of ceremonies introduced the women, gave a short biography about them and reviewed their status in the lesbian community. The all-female crowd gave the couple a long lasting standing ovation. During the cruise, the documentary, *No Secret Anymore: the Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon* (Biren, 2003) was shown in the ship's theatre. I went to see the film to learn why this couple is so important to the lesbian community.

After the film was over, we were able to meet Phyllis and Del, shake their hands and thank them. I was embarrassed that I had never heard of them, especially after learning that they were pioneers in the lesbian rights movement and that some of the freedoms and rights I enjoy are due, in part, to their activism. "It's extraordinary to step back and see how much has changed and how marvelous it is to see young people

KNOW that they are entitled to be free. They don't feel like they have to EARN their freedom. They are at that spot precisely because of people like Phyllis and Del" (Biren, 2003).

The question becomes, why do a thesis on the life of the Phyllis Lyon when theoretically I could read a book and find out all that I want to know? Three books have been helpful in my quest to understand the contributions of Martin and Lyon. Faderman's *Odd Girls Out and Twilight Lovers* (1991), *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* by Martin Meeker (2006), *Different Daughters: A History Of The Daughters Of Bilitis And The Rise Of The Lesbian Rights Movement* (Gallo, 2006). However, when I began to find stories about the lives of these women, I noticed immediately that: one, there was not a lot of information available and two, what was available seemed to be based on a lot of the same stories or interviews. I also noticed the tremendous emphasis on gay men's history, but the involvement of lesbians in the gay rights movement seems invisible. "Many works have downplayed lesbians' contributions to the movements for sexual and gender freedom in the U.S. in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—from the homophile and gay civil rights movements to women's liberation and the creation of lesbian-feminism. This may be a reflection of sexism in the gay movements as well as in society at large" (Gallo, 2006, p. xxi). Despite the availability of lesbian and gay history today, there has been relatively little written about lesbian history in general.

My interests go beyond learning about Martin and Lyon; I also want to learn about who I am. It is important for my personal growth and social work career to

understand the founding history of this movement, the social change that has occurred and Phyllis and Del's push for equality and justice for gays, lesbian and women. As Vera Martin said in Joan Biren's documentary (2003) about Martin and Lyon, "They can slip away, these privileges, just like the gains made in the Civil Rights Movement, if we don't stay aware of the history and keep trying to make improvements."

## Conceptual Framework

> *"When the dust settles and the pages of history are written, it will not be the angry defenders of intolerance who have made a difference. That reward will go to those who dared to step outside the safety of their privacy in order to expose and rout the prevailing prejudices"—John Shelby Spong, Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Newark, New Jersey (n.d.)*

Several pieces of literature describe the historical significance of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin as the founders of the Daughters of Bilitis and as the mothers of the Lesbian Rights Movement. The available literature portrays their public personas during a time that was not particularly welcoming to gays and lesbians. The activist life story of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon begins in the context of the early homophile movement of the 1950s and spans through gay, lesbian, and women's issues of the 20$^{th}$ century and onto the gay marriage controversy in the new millennium.

Their story spans many equal rights issues for gays, lesbians and women. Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin were instrumental in developing the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) in northern California to persuade ministers to accept homosexuals

into churches. The couple used their influence to decriminalize homosexuality in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their book *Lesbian/Woman* in 1972 was an effort to reach lesbians who were seeking compassion, community, and understanding. *Battered Wives*, written by Del, was a 1970s introduction to domestic violence. Del was the first openly lesbian board member of the National Organization for Women, and Phyllis and Del fought homophobia within the organization. They helped lobby to have homosexuality removed from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual in 1973. They worked to have sodomy laws repealed which culminated in the Lawrence v. Texas decision. The United States Supreme Court ruled state sodomy laws were unconstitutional in 2003. On June 16, 2008, they were officially married in the first same-sex wedding to take place in San Francisco after the California Supreme Court's decision in *In re Marriage Cases* legalized same-sex marriage in California.

Despite the availability of lesbian and gay history, relatively little has been written about lesbian history. The depth and evolution of Lyon and Martin's relationship and their relationship with political activism is missing from the current research. The articles that have been written about lesbian history and about Martin and Lyon, in particular, all report the same facts and tell the same stories. It's as though all stories and articles are based on the same interview and referenced from one resource.

The attempt of this thesis is to frame the life of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon with the personal stories of their lives together and the challenges of their relationship. In addition, the social context, lesbian history and culture will be thoroughly researched to serve as the setting in which their story takes place. This will hopefully fill a small piece

of the gap of written lesbian history and also, the personal perspectives and stories of lesbian activists of over 55 years.

Personally and professionally, it is an attempt to understand the founding history of the Lesbian Rights Movement while learning about the NASW values of service, social justice, integrity, dignity and worth of a person and the importance of human relationships (NASW, 2006). The social activism piece of the NASW Code of Ethics will also be explored.

## Methods

*The Life Story Interview* by Robert Atkinson (1998) is the qualitative research method chosen for this thesis. "The life story as a narrative form has evolved from the oral history, life history, and other ethnographic and field approaches. It is a qualitative research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life. It begins as a recorded interview, is transcribed, and ends up as a flowing narrative, completely in the words of the person telling the story. It uses methodology that is transferable across disciplines and [crosses] from one researcher to another" (Atkinson, p. 3, 1998).

"An individual life, and the role it plays in the larger community, is best understood through story" (Atkinson, p. 7, 1998). Phyllis Lyon will be contacted for an interview. After securing a time and place for the interview, open-ended questions will be asked pertaining to her relationship with Del Martin, her lesbian and female identity, and her life as a founder of the Daughters of Bilitis. The interview will be recorded. A combination of descriptive, structural and contrasting questions will be chosen from a list

of questions (see Appendix A). The interviewer's intent is to facilitate the process for Lyon to create and convey the story through her personal meaning. The interviewer will use interest, empathy, and acceptance to make the interview active and interactive.

Once the interview is complete, a transcription of the taped interview will begin. The goal is to be as accurate as possible in both transcription and meaning. All of the answers from Phyllis Lyon (the data) will be transcribed verbatim by the interviewer. Included in the transcript will be nonverbal cues such as sighs, smiles, eyes directing elsewhere; in essence it will be written as a screenplay. In addition, the interviewer will take notes in a journal describing unusual situations that occurred during the interview, notes on ethics situations or explanations of decisions that were made or why certain questions were asked. Each interview will be listened to a minimum of three times "to make sure everything was transcribed correctly the first time, especially in getting the meaning of what was said originally" (Atkinson, p. 57, 1995).

Once the interviewer has transcribed the data, the interview will be offered to Phyllis Lyon to look over, primarily because it is her story. She may wish to make corrections, deletions, and additions. She may wish to strengthen areas of her story or de-emphasize areas that the interviewer and/or transcriptionist thought were more important than she does.

Because there are several questions and potential answers in this particular interview that are not available in the general research of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, it is important to preserve this interview. Atkinson (1995) suggests that the "tapes and transcripts should be preserved in a safe place, preferably an appropriate archive". Many

of the Daughter of Bilitis' publications of *The Ladder* and several of Del and Phyllis' papers (many collected by the United States FBI) are archived at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Historical Society in San Francisco, California. The GLBT Historical Society will be contacted to archive the interview and transcript with the permission of Phyllis Lyon.

The next step in the methods process is to interpret and organize the transcribed data. "Essentially the two aspects of interpretation are to validate the story itself and to explain the meaning of the story" (Atkinson, p. 58, 1995). Validity and reliability are questioned in a life story narrative interview because no two researchers will record a life story in a completely replicable way, analyze the interview data in the same way, or carry out the interview in the same way, even with the same interview questions. A life story interview is highly subjective and there is no formal framework to check validity, so the interviewer and subject are required to check one another. Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Life stories can be unique depending on who is writing the narrative, their perspective, culture, age and gender in relation to the person whose story they tell. The experience can be life changing for the interviewee and the interviewer depending on the interactions, quality and depth of the exchange. A creative relationship may develop between the two people which can create a richer narrative life story. "Reliability and validity are not necessarily the appropriate evaluative standards for a life story interview" (Atkinson, p. 59, 1995). The person telling the story must be considered the expert and authority of her life which is what makes the life story interview valid.

Meaning making of a personal, subjective, and experiential frame of reference (qualitative) rather than those found on a theoretical basis (quantitative) insists that the interviewer does not judge, makes connections with the storyteller, and finds the relevance of the story. A life story becomes a text; a relationship between the person and environment, culture, relationship and community. Themes, patterns connections and meanings that occur within the story are part of interpreting the interview, to make meaning of the story as a whole and not just a sum of parts.

It is also important for the interviewer to remember that the interview can become highly personal and may become emotional. The story can lead beyond the story to a greater meaning. This is what happens with research, it creates new questions and new ways of thinking about the data. As new questions arise, new questions will be considered. "If a particular life story gives us a new idea about how things connect in our own life, how our own life experience is similar to another's…then we may have taken the first step toward generalizing from one life story" (Atkinson, p. 73, 1995).

In addition to interviews, the papers of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin housed at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Historical Society in San Francisco, California, will be used to fill the holes in the life story research. "The collection mainly documents Lyon's and Martin's writing and activism" (Online Archive of California, 2009). The collection includes "correspondence, manuscripts and manuscript drafts, organizational papers including minutes, constitutions, flyers, and financial documents…material related to the administration and activities of the Daughters of Bilitis…papers from the homophile groups and other organizations that they were involved with in the 1950s"

(Online Archive of California, 2009). An outline of the papers of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin are available in Appendix D.

Once the story has been interpreted and written by the researcher, it will be returned to the storyteller because the storyteller "has the final say in telling the story…because she is the one telling the story in the first place and is the one to determine how it all fits together, what sense it makes, and whether or not it is a valid story" (Atkinson, p. 61, 1995).

The goal is to create a life story narrative that is enjoyable, valid and meaning making for Phyllis Lyon, her family, the researcher, and gays and lesbians that have benefitted from her existence as an activist for gay and lesbian rights. She has an important story to tell and has seen a tremendous transformation in gay and lesbian rights in her lifetime. This interview and the narrative it creates is only the beginning of that story.

## Ethical Issues in Study

The following potential ethical issues related to the interview process have been considered:

1. Anonymity of the interviewee is impossible;
2. Because the interview can become highly personal and may become emotional, some questions may create unexpected grief and intense feelings may arise;
3. The student must be aware of maintaining a balance between subjectivity and objectivity when interpreting the life story to maintain meaning and validity.

While anonymity is a widely-held goal in research-ethics review policies, it is a virtually unachievable goal in qualitative research and in the life story narrative, in particular. In Appendix C, there is an interview release form that gives permission from Phyllis Lyon to the interviewer for any tapes and/or photographs made during this project to be used for public or educational purposes including publications, exhibitions, World Wide Web, and presentations. There is also a clause that allows Phyllis Lyon to restrict the use of any specific stories that may be revealed which she deems too personal for public purposes. This permission contract will be settled upon completion of the interview.

Secondly, because many interview questions refer to Lyon's relationship with her deceased partner, Del Martin, unexpected grief and intense feelings may arise. Martin passed away in August of 2008. Therefore, the interviewer will be prepared to provide psychological support if the interviews cause undue stress.

The student's ability to balance between subjectivity and objectivity when interpreting the life story to maintain meaning and validity is a concern. Personal narratives are by nature subjective and highly personal, for the storyteller as well as for the interviewer/interpreter. According to Atkinson (1995), there are "three important points to consider in analyzing life stories subjectively. First, we do not judge, we make connections…and seek to find the relevance of the story itself. Second, a life story is a text that can tell us the ways in which culture has shaped and influenced that one life…if any part of it connects deeply or clearly with any part of the researcher's experience, we know it is not a unique experience and is very likely one that others share. Third, we are

each other's teachers…the life story has something to say to us about life and about our life in particular, they validate our own experience. The person sharing her life story is the teacher; the person receiving another's life story is the student" (p. 70-71). In essence, validating the story and explaining the meaning of the experiences, memories and life story of Phyllis Lyon while balancing the student's life story as the lens through which it is interpreted will be a challenge.

# Chapter 2: The Literature Review

*"When the dust settles and the pages of history are written, it will not be the angry defenders of intolerance who have made a difference. That reward will go to those who dared to step outside the safety of their privacy in order to expose and rout the prevailing prejudices"—John Shelby Spong, Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Newark, New Jersey.*

American history books present the 1950s as a time of economic boom. The standard was two cars in every garage. The American people were full of post-war pride and anti-communist patriotism. The Golden Age of television introduced *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *I Love Lucy*, and *Father Knows Best*. These television shows characterized the stereotypical 1950s white, middle class American family. Didn't every Dad wear a tie at home, and Mom, a dress? Television showed Elvis Presley above the waist because his lusty gyrating hips so offended the moral fiber of his viewers. The 1950s are also remembered as the beginning of the space race with the Soviet Union and Sputnik's launch into space.

It was a time of conservatism, conventionality, and conformity. But what of those outside the white, middle class heterosexual norm? Black Americans experienced strong discrimination, particularly in the South where Jim Crow laws were enforced. Women were expected to return to their homes to become wives and mothers after they had participated en masse in the war effort. Black women, however, always worked—mostly inside white people's homes. Gays and lesbians were deep in the closet to avoid jail, medical interventions, and condemnation to hell for their immorality.

In the 1950s, women were expected to return to the home after they actively participated in the war effort. Women left their domesticated life during World War II and worked in the war industries to built ships, aircraft, vehicles, and weaponry. Women also labored in factories, munitions plants and farms, and drove trucks, provided logistic support for soldiers and entered professional areas of work that were previously the territory of men (Collins, 2009). A survey taken in 1944 revealed that almost 80% of

women in the war production areas planned to remain in the labor force after the war, and specifically wanted to keep the jobs they were performing during the war (Roosevelt, 2006). World War II also brought serious attention to the principle of equal pay for equal work for the first time (Roosevelt, 2006).

Although women were asked to come out of their homes and take on male dominated trades during World War II, they were expected to return to everyday housework, raising children, and to be loving wives once men returned home. "The central point in the Western vision of sexual differences was that a woman's place was in the home, leaving men to run everything that went on outside the front door. Men provided and protected; women served and deferred" (Collins, p. 5, 2009) Ideal images of (white, middle class) womanhood could be found in newly sprawling suburban subdivisions in which women discovered the joy of cooking while using newly available appliances designed to increase the joy of housework" (Cutler, p. 240, 2003).

For Black Americans, the 1950s was a decade of blatant racism. Many Black Americans migrated from rural areas to urban areas in the 50s and experienced poverty, despite the economic boom occurring in the rest of the country. Black Americans were discriminated against in restaurants, buses and schools, at water fountains and public toilets. The dissatisfaction of inequalities motivated Black Americans to protest and the Civil Rights Movement began to gain momentum. Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to stand at the back of the bus (she didn't have two cars in her garage) because she was tired and wanted to sit down. The very successful Montgomery bus boycott followed and Southern Black Americans walked to work for over a year until the Supreme Court

declared it unconstitutional to segregate people on the bus. Martin Luther King, Jr. taught people to protest nonviolently and became the Civil Rights movement's peaceful leader. *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* declared that state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Schools across the country began to desegregate.

**Homosexuality in the United States in the 1950s**

For most gays and lesbians, the 1950s was a decade of fear. On the one hand wartime "had opened millions to unprecedented opportunities and new life-styles both at home and abroad. On the other hand, the end of war brought pressures to restore the prewar social order—or idealized memory of it—and this restoration sought to roll back new personal freedoms" (Adams, p. 66, 1995). Thus, homosexuality was seen as pathological by the medical community, illegal by the law, immoral by religion, "security risks" by politicians, and perverse by society. Homosexuality was "a perversion, a psychopathology, a crime against nature and a sin against God…crude and disgusting" (Martin & Lyon, p. 30 1991).

Homosexuals were not the only Americans who were fearful. The United States, though a super power, maintained an overwhelming culture and climate of fear. Such fear is a fertile breeding ground for witch hunts and finger pointing. In the 1950s, fear propagated McCarthyism. Though history books teach about Senator Joseph McCarthy and the power of McCarthyism, they do not teach that the Red Scare targeted homosexuals in the State Department, as much, *or more*, than it did communists. More

people lost their jobs for being alleged homosexuals than for being communist (D'Emilio, 1983).

During the early 1950s, after jubilant celebration and pride from winning World War II, there was a fear of communism. There was the fear that if one country became communist, then the surrounding countries would follow. In addition to the American fear that world countries were threatened by the domino effect of communism, there was also fear that communism would upset the capitalist social order in the United States. National and foreign communists would penetrate the federal government and they had to be stopped (Johnson, 2004).

Senator Joseph McCarthy "made the inflammatory claims that 205 card carrying communists were working for the state Department" (Johnson, p. 1, 2004). As his power and influence expanded, McCarthy broadened his witch-hunting to include homosexuals. He charged the "State Department with knowingly harboring homosexuals and thereby placing the nation's security at risk" (Faderman, p. 141, 1991). National policy came to persecute outcasts and recommended that "homosexuals be dismissed from government jobs since they were poor security risks" (p.141) whether their jobs had anything to do with national security or not. The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee recommended that "homosexuals be dismissed not only from the State Department, the military, and Congress, but also from occupations such as caretaker at the Botanical Gardens" (Faderman, p. 141, 1991). This fear that "homosexuals posed a threat to national security and needed to be systematically removed from the federal government permeated the

1950s political culture….it also sparked a moral panic within mainstream American culture" (Johnson, p. 9, 2002).

In 1950, after homosexuals fought in World War II and many lesbians entered the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the United States Congress established the Uniform Code of Military Justice which set down the basic policies, discharge procedures and appeal channels for the discharge of homosexual service members. The history books report the courage and valor of Dwight D. Eisenhower, but they never reveal that he signed the discriminating Executive Order 10450 in 1953 which mandated the firing of all federal employees, including the military, who were determined guilty of "sexual perversion". The order declared all homosexuals as "security risks", whether they were actually disloyal or not. As a result, more than 640 federal employees lost their jobs over the next year and a half. Many more were allowed to resign quietly.

"The widespread labeling of lesbians and homosexual men as moral perverts and national security risks gave local police forces across the country a free rein in harassment" (D'Emilio, p. 49, 1983). It was not criminal to be a homosexual or a lesbian. The sexual acts that same-sex couples performed were illegal. In the 1950s, all forty-eight states criminalized sodomy: usually defined as any sexual act except male-female intercourse (Gallo, 2006). Sodomy and "oral copulation were a crime punishable by up to fourteen years in prison, whether it was heterosexual or homosexual…but very few heterosexuals were ever arrested under these laws" (Marcus, p. 55, 1992). "Every evening spent in a gay setting, every contact with another homosexual or lesbian, every sexual intimacy carried a reminder of the criminal penalties that could be exacted at any

moment" (D'Emilio, p. 49, 1983). "It is the knowledge that one's private life is regarded as criminal that tends to make Lesbians feel guilty. Consequently, many of them plead guilty to charges of which they are innocent. In a gay bar raid, for instance, most of the women arrested plead guilty to "disorderly conduct" charges, even though they are guilty of merely of being on the premises. When they plead guilty, they are really pleading guilty to being a Lesbian, not to any public misconduct" (Martin & Lyon, p. 44, 1992).

If a gay man or lesbian was arrested, not only did they have a criminal record, but they also had the fear that their name would be published in the newspaper or their employer or landlord might be notified. "What scared me the most was the prospect of being caught in a bar raid. Police were the most likely to raid gay and lesbian bars at election time, when officials were promising to "Clean up" the city—meaning, they would rid it of gay people and prostitutes. If the police collected any information, such as home address, place of work, or school, they often notified landlords, employers, principals or deans and family members. Lesbians could be deprived of homes, jobs, an education, or even children without the benefit of a trial, without even having been arrested—all for being in the wrong place at the wrong time" (Jay, p. 24, 1999).

If a homosexual was the victim of a crime, "the law looked the other way or declared publicly that the victims had gotten what they deserved" (Mixner & Bailey, p. 3, 2000). As a result, gay men and lesbians were often the targets of petty criminals. Some men lurked around cruising areas in order to beat or rob their gay victims. Others went home with gay men and stole possessions from their homes. Heterosexual men often stalked lesbian bars and attacked women when they refused their advances. Often the

police would arrest the victims of the crime, if they were called, rather than the perpetrator. Most likely, the crime would go unreported (D'Emilio, 1983).

In the 1950s, gays and lesbians generally did not admit to homosexuality or talk about it. They may not even admit it to themselves, and certainly were not proud of it. Sally Duplaix said in the movie, *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon* (Biren, 2003), "You had to be crazy to: one, want to be a lesbian; two, talk about it; and, three, be proud of it. Many of us had various treatments, including shock treatment."

In the 1950s, the medical community saw homosexuality as pathological which could be "changed through psychoanalysis," because "there was only one sexual orientation—heterosexuality" (Miller, p. 247, 1995). American history books do not reflect that the American Psychiatric Association included homosexuality in its first list of mental disorders in 1952—an illness that should be cured.

The first DSM was forty-two pages long and listed homosexuality with fetishism, pedophilia, transvestitism, exhibitionism, sadism and masochism—among the sociopathic personality disturbances (Eisenbach, 2006). Two psychiatrists of the day wrote, "The greatest importance of homosexuality is that it causes so much unhappiness. If happiness is of any value, then homosexuality should be eliminated by every means in our power" (Faderman, p.131, 1991). Other psychiatrists of the postwar years declared that same sex love was "worse off than being disordered in their character: not merely neurotics, but actually borderline or outright psychotics" (p. 132).

The medical community classified homosexuality as a sickness so "loving families forcibly committed their homosexual children to mental institutions…in order to cure them" (Mixner & Bailey, p. 3, 2000). The cure in the 40s and 50s for homosexuality was electroshock therapy (Katz, p. 170, 1992), lobotomy (p. 175), pharmacological shock treatments to create grand mal seizures (several, 7-10 or more), aversion therapy with nausea inducing drugs (p. 181), and castration (p. 183). In 1953, Homosexuals Anonymous was started and was based on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. The success of Alcoholics Anonymous gave people and families hope that sexual orientation could change through group therapy and abstinence (p. 183). Society needed to recognize that the homosexual, like the addict or alcoholic, did not need to be ignored or punished, but needed to be helped (Eisenbach, 2006).

The view of psychoanalysis in 1954 was that the vast majorities of same sex relationships are "unstable and neurotic, and are sick individuals in need of treatment" (Katz, p. 185, 1992). American psychoanalysts grew optimistic when Irving Bieber, the president of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis claimed that "homosexuality stems from the combination of an overbearing mother and a distant father". According to Bieber, "heterosexuality is the biological norm and that unless interfered with, all individuals are heterosexual. Every homosexual is, in reality, a latent heterosexual" (Eisenbach, p. 224, 2006).

Alfred Kinsey and Evelyn Hooker and their research teams treated homosexuality as anything other than a serious illness. The Kinsey reports of 1948 and 1953 challenged traditional conceptions of homosexuality and offered a view of homosexual behavior as a

natural variation (and a far more prevalent one than had previously been considered). But Kinsey's work was overlooked and did not persuade the heterosexual American public in their attitude toward homosexuality. At the time, information served not to "ameliorate hostility toward gay men and women, but to magnify suddenly the proportions of the danger they allegedly posed" (D'Emilio, p. 37, 1983).

In 1953, Evelyn Hooker, a UCLA professor, received a grant to study the difference in the mental well-being and the psychological adjustment in gay males versus heterosexual males. She found no significant difference. Eventually, Evelyn Hooker's research played a major role in the declassification of homosexuality from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders as a mental illness in 1973.

In the 1950s, religion declared homosexuality to be immoral and sinful. Biblical condemnations of homosexuality in Levitus warned, "Men who lie with men commit an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood should be upon them." Because religions believe that sexual activity is meant for pro-creation and not pleasure, then homosexuality is unnatural and not acceptable. Because sexual behavior should be saved for marriage, heterosexual marriage, and that feelings of arousal outside of the marriage should be overcome with self control and a reliance on God, religion believes that homosexuality is unnatural and not acceptable. "Self image? What kind of self image has the church given the Lesbian? Less than human, sinner, celibate, unnatural, perverse, immoral, graceless, shameful, unstable, unworthy, evil-minded, accursed, wicked, impure" (Martin & Lyon, p. 34, 1972).

Society saw homosexuality as perverse and deviant. People believed that homosexuals were predatory toward children and disrespected sexual mores or boundaries. “Since homosexuality is no respecter of race, creed, sex or social milieu it has become a matter of serious concern in the bringing up of a child of either sex and unless comprehensive measures are employed to inform parents of its dangers, a disintegration of our present code of morality is threatened” (Katz, p. 165, 1992).

**Homosexuality in San Francisco in the 1950s**

World War II had a tremendous impact on San Francisco’s gay and lesbian community. Hundreds of thousands of men and women visited the city during the conflict or came for work in the Bay Area’s war industries, and many decided to live in San Francisco after the war (Lipskey, 2006). “The many men and some women who entered military life also overcame small-town isolation, made new friendships in same-sex environments, and encountered gay life” (Adams, p. 66, 1995). Even though persecution of homosexuals was the norm, those actions brought about publicity of homosexuality that created awareness for gay people who may not have realized that there were others who had the same desires, dreams and thoughts. "Each time the silence was broken--even by the hateful images of homosexuality that characterized the 1950s--more homosexuals who preferred their own gender learned labels for themselves, sought and often found others who shared those labels and came to understand that they might probe beneath the denigrating images that society handed them to discover their own truths" (Faderman, p. 158,1991).

As a result of Dwight D. Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450 in 1953 which required firing those determined guilty of "sexual perversion", many gays and lesbians were dishonorably discharged. As one of the principal administrative centers of the war's Pacific theater of operations, San Francisco became something of a dumping ground for homosexuals fired from military service (Stryker, 2004). Faced with the prospect of returning home in disgrace or remaining in arguably the most scenic city in the United States, many gay World War II veterans opted for the latter. (Stryker, 2004).

To accommodate both the vast influx of military personnel and the quick pace of shore leave, gay and lesbian bars clustered in areas close to the center of town. Queer life, as a result, became much more accessible to both locals and military personnel looking for a good time" (Boyd, 1588, 2003).

"For many homosexual men and women their wartime experiences became the foundation upon which they built a postwar life. Individual decisions not to return home, to settle in large cities where anonymity permitted gay socializing more easily, and to maintain the friendships of the war years helped forge a group existence" (D'Emilio, p. 39, 1983).

Many pro-gay conditions began to take root in San Francisco in the 1950s. Mattachine Society moved their office from Los Angeles to San Francisco. Daughters of Bilitis was founded as an underground social group for lesbians. Pro-gay literature was being published, and challenged as obscene. The Beats were writing poetry, experimenting with drugs, and pursuing alternative forms of sexuality while settling in the North Beach district of San Francisco. Gay and lesbian bars were prolific and there

were plenty of patrons to support them. "Circles of friends and private gatherings were no longer the only ways for women or men to socialize. They now had clubs, bars, restaurants, and for men at least bathhouses. They also now had beliefs about themselves that their country based upon the goals of the war (Lipskey, p. 58, 2006).

The 1950s in San Francisco was a decade of counterculture. Between 1951 and 1955, gay and lesbian bars flourished, especially in the neighborhood called North Beach. North Beach was also the center of the Beat movement which included Allen Ginsberg (writer of the poem *Howl*), Laurence Ferlinghetti (author of *On the Road*), Neal Cassady, and William S. Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*). *Howl* is a poem that references drug experimentation and homosexual love. It was published by Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books, a historic landmark in the North Beach district of San Francisco. *Howl* was the most famous poem of the Beats, partly because the publishing house was tried for selling obscene literature because of the poem's narrative of male homosexuality. "While the territory Beats occupied often overlapped with nascent queer communities, the cultures were distinct…However, the Beat culture legitimized some homosexual life choices (Boyd, 1750, 2003). The Beat culture and the developing gay subculture were separate, but intertwined, especially at the homosexual bars in the North Beach district.

In 1951, there was a landmark decision won by Sol Stouman, the owner of the Black Cat bar in North Beach that affirmed the right to serve alcohol to homosexuals. Within the decision was the right for gays and lesbian to associate in public. This decision overturned the idea that gay bars and taverns were illegal (Boyd, 2006).

However, the "seeds of change were planted in 1954 when William Randolph Hearst's daily, the *San Francisco Examiner*, called upon then mayor Robinson to clean up the city. In an editorial, the *Examiner* lamented the city's "unwholesome" condition and decried the "increase of homosexuals in the parks, public gathering places and certain taverns in the city" (Boyd, loc. 1902, 2006). Following Hearst's demands, the San Francisco police initiated a "clean up" of sexual deviants, prostitutes, and those with illegal or immoral conduct (Gallo, 2006).

"There must be sustained action by the police and the district attorney to stop the influx of homosexuals. Too many taverns cater to them openly. Only police action can drive them out of the city. It is to be hoped that the courts here will finally recognize this problem for what it is and before the situation so deteriorates that San Francisco finds itself as the complete haven for undesirables. The courts heretofore have failed to support the arresting and prosecuting authorities. Without the support of the courts, the police and district attorney cannot attack the problem effectively--San Francisco Examiner, 1954" (Boyd, 1524, 2003).

After 1955, the queer bar culture was disrupted. The law-and-order mayor, George Christopher was elected, the Stouman decision was eroding, and the Alcohol Beverage Control Board was created. The ABC “declared war on homosexual bars in San Francisco” (Boyd, 1928, 2003). Agents went undercover as gay men and arrested anyone who was dancing with the same sex, kissing someone of the same sex, or hand holding with someone of the same sex. ABC agents worked together to snare gay men, promising a sexual interlude and arresting them once they were outside the bar. “Police

commonly raided places where homosexuals gathered, to harass them, or to haul them off in paddy wagons to the police station, where they were booked, photographed, and fingerprinted. Newspapers would print the names of those arrested and the notoriety could lose them their jobs or even their families; some were driven to suicide" (Mixner & Bailey, p. 3, 2002).

It is such a paradox that homosexual communities and neighborhoods flourished in the decade after World War II. "Homosexuals in most parts of the country went deeply into their closets, but not in San Francisco, where some opposed the repression and fought for their rights. Perhaps these men and women who had lived through the war years wished for themselves the freedoms for which the war had been fought. Perhaps their youthful idealism led them to believe they could make a difference. For whatever reason, San Francisco saw the emergence of a lesbian and gay rights movement in the midst of tremendous persecution of anyone different" (Lipskey, p. 61, 2006).

"Only too aware of the climate of repression around them, the first homophile groups typically adopted a cautious approach to social change, hoping first merely for survival and, only then, for an abatement of general hostility" (Adam, p. 65, 1995). Among the homophile groups, One, Inc., the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis were organized.

In 1951, the Mattachine Society adopted a mission and purpose to identify and incorporate two important themes. First, Mattachine called for a grassroots movement of gay people to challenge anti-gay discrimination much like the early grassroots effort of the Civil Rights Movement. Secondly, the organization recognized the importance of

building a gay community. “Officially the Mattachine Society was established to represent the entire homosexual community; though in actuality the membership of the organizations was primarily male” (Ripberger, 2006). Women who were involved with the Mattachine Society began to realize that the concerns of gay men differed from those of lesbian women. For example: promiscuity, relationships, gender, and sexual identity each affect men differently than women (Byers, 2008). One Inc. was an off-shoot of Mattachine and published the first pro-gay magazine in 1953.

The Daughters of Bilitis was the first lesbian rights organization in the United States. It was formed in 1955, conceived as a social alternative to lesbian bars. “Where DOB was different from the mostly male homophile groups was in their emphasis on reaching the individual lesbian—“the variant”—first and foremost. They recognized that many women felt shame about their sexual desires and were afraid to admit them. They knew instinctively that, without support to develop the self-confidence necessary to advocate for one’s rights, no social change would be possible for lesbians. It is the emphasis that distinguishes them from the other gay groups at the time and it is a difference they would continually assert. Educating women to question the limitations imposed by gender and sexuality in Cold War America was challenging enough; to do so openly, as an organization dealing with lesbianism in the cultural climate of the 1950s, was unheard of” (Gallo, p. 16-17, 2005).

**Lesbian Life in San Francisco in the 1950s**

"Because WWII created a need for great amounts of womanpower, popular wisdom about woman's place being in the home or the de-feminizing effects of work was

suddenly silenced as patriotic women took their places in the civilian and militarily work force. Prior to that it was unnatural for a woman who needed to work and had no interest in making a man happy" (Faderman, p. 119, 1992) “During the war years, women had to learn to do without men, and when female labor—in the factories, in the military, everywhere—was vital to the functioning o America, female independence and love between women were understood and undisturbed. After the war, love between women and female independence were suddenly manifestations of an illness. A woman who dared to proclaim herself a lesbian was considered a borderline psychotic (Faderman, p. 119, 1992). “To be a lesbian is to be perceived as someone who has stepped out of line, who has moved out of sexual/economic dependence on a male, who is woman identified. A lesbian is perceived as someone who can live without a man, and who is therefore, however illogically, against men. A lesbian is perceived as being outside the acceptable, routinized order of things” (Pharr, p. 18, 1997).

"Like gay men, lesbians suffered from religious condemnation, the stigma of criminality, and morbidification of the eroticism by the medical profession; but they encountered anti-homosexual disgrace from the vantage point of their gender. The same forces that allowed a gay identity to coalesce from the late nineteenth century onward--the shift to wage labor, the growth of industrialization and urbanization, the removal of production from the home, and the restructuring of the family--affected both men and women, but in decidedly different ways…A commitment to lesbianism demanded a much sharper break from tradition expectations of proper woman hood than did the

corresponding choice for men…it required the ability to earn a living and survive without the economic resources that a husband provided" (D'Emilio, p. 93, 1983).

"American lesbians had to start from scratch to formulate what the growing lesbian society should be like…they had to find ways to exist and be nurtured in an environment that they had to build outside the larger world that they knew disdained them" (Faderman, p. 160, 1991). The only place that lesbians knew to meet other lesbians was at lesbian bars. It ensured privacy and contact with other lesbians. The lesbian bar "became important to many who identified themselves as lesbian to establish a separate society, a subculture, both to avoid exposure…and to provide a pool of social and sexual contacts, since presumably such contacts could not be obtained in the "normal" society at large" (Faderman, p. 160, 1991). The lesbian bar was an attempt to establish the lesbian subculture. "Many young and working class women were thankful for their existence. Bars represented the one public place where lesbians did not have to hide who they were" (Faderman, p. 162). "No matter how closeted a woman might be in other areas of her life, in the bars she took a step out and affirmed her erotic preferences" (DeMillio, p.98, 1983). Some women were willing to take the risk and frequented bars; others looked for alternate sources of community.

**Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in 1950s**

Despite the culture of fear that was aroused by the Cold War, the Red Scare or the accidental outings of gays and lesbians; despite the traditional gender roles that women were expected to fulfill in the 1950s; and despite the societal, medical and religious beliefs that considered homosexuality illegal, immoral, pathological and perverted; the

1950s is where the activist life story of the lesbian couple, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, took root.

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon moved in together in the Castro district of San Francisco on Valentine's Day, 1953. Today, Castro is considered the first, largest and best known gay community in the world, but at the time Del and Phyllis "did not know any lesbians and spent a lot of time trying to meet some" (Lyon, p. 163, 2002). The only place that Del and Phyllis knew to meet other women like themselves was at lesbian bars. But "women needed privacy—privacy not only from the watchful eye of the police, but from gaping tourists in the bars and inquisitive parents and families" (Meeker, p. 77, 2006). Del and Phyllis needed to meet lesbians safely and secretly to protect themselves and others. '"What we were looking for was a safe place, where we could meet other women and dance, talk and play cards,…an alternative to the gay bar scene," Lyon said,' (D'Emilio, p. 102, 1983)

Martin and Lyon met a gay couple who introduced them to Rose Bamberger. She called Del and Phyllis and asked them to "start a secret club for lesbians" (Lyon, p. 163, 1995; Gallo, 2002; interview with T. Gross 1992). "We just wanted to meet some lesbians," Phyllis Lyon animatedly exclaimed when asked about the beginnings of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), "It just evolved from a social club to one that took part in social activism" (personal communication, February 19, 2010).

At the first meeting, someone suggested they name their club The Daughters of Bilitis, an obscure reference to lesbian love from 19th century poet Pierre Louys. "So obscure," says Lyon, "we are *still* explaining what it means" (T. Gross interview, 1992).

The eight lesbians thought that, with this name, they "would be shielded from unwanted public attention while subtlety signaling its link to lesbian sexuality" (Gallo, p. 3, 2005). From the beginning, the members "approached the group as though they would a business enterprise…Lyon and Martin were the oldest members; the others often deferred to them and accepted their ideas" (Gallo, p. 4, 2005).

In 1955, the DOB elected Del Martin as their first President and Phyllis Lyon as their first secretary (Gallo, p.5, 2005). Though the 1950s was a time of racial segregation, the Daughters of Bilitis were not discriminating. The 1956 Articles of Incorporation stated that they welcomed all women, "regardless of race, color or creed." "There were two women of color, a Chicana, and a Filipina" (Gallo, 1991, p. xxii) among the eight original members.

"DOB has significance for lesbians not because it was able to attract large numbers or to succeed in its goal of advancing lesbian rights, but rather because of the mere fact that it existed during such dangerous times" (Faderman, 1991). To conceive of such a group in the 1950s was courageous, risky and yet, so essential to the lives of many lesbian women, including Del and Phyllis.

"Where DOB was different from the mostly male homophile groups was in their emphasis on reaching the individual lesbian—"the variant"—first and foremost. They recognized that many women felt shame about their sexual desires and were afraid to admit them. They knew instinctively that, without support to develop the self-confidence necessary to advocate for one's rights, no social change would be possible for lesbians. It is the emphasis that distinguishes them from the other gay groups at the time and it is a

difference they would continually assert. The prescient "the personal is political" feminism of Lyon and Martin shaped the organization's priorities from its beginnings, and it was articulated ten years before the resurgence of the women's movement. Educating women to question the limitations imposed by gender and sexuality in Cold War America was challenging enough; to do so openly, as an organization dealing with lesbianism in the cultural climate of the 1950s, was unheard of" (Gallo, p. 16-17, 2005).

"Many works have downplayed lesbians' contributions to the movements for sexual and gender freedom in the U.S. in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—from the homophile and gay civil rights movements to women's liberation and the creation of lesbian-feminism. This may be a reflection of sexism in the gay movements as well as in society at large" (Gallo, 2006, p. xxi).

Despite the availability of lesbian and gay history, relatively little has been written about lesbian history. The depth and evolution of Lyon and Martin's relationship and a depth of the relationship with the cause they were fighting for is missing from the current research. The articles that have been written about lesbian history and about Martin and Lyon, in particular, all report the same facts and tell the same stories. It's as though all stories and articles are based on the same interview.

The attempt of this thesis is to frame the life of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon with the personal stories of their lives together and the challenges of their relationship. In addition, the social context, lesbian history and culture will be thoroughly researched to serve as the setting in which their story takes place. This will hopefully fill a small piece of the gap of written lesbian history and also, the personal perspectives and stories of

lesbian activists of over 55 years. Personally and professionally, it is an attempt to understand the founding history of the Lesbian Rights Movement while learning about the NASW values of service, social justice, integrity, dignity and worth of a person and the importance of human relationships (NASW, 2006).

# Chapter 3: Methods

*The Life Story Interview* by Robert Atkinson (1998) is the qualitative research method chosen for this thesis. Phyllis Lyon's life and the role it plays in the larger community are the story and intent of this thesis.

There was one interview, approximately four hours long, at the home of Phyllis Lyon in the Noe Valley neighborhood of San Francisco. The interview took place on November 5, 2010. Many questions were asked pertaining to her relationship with Del Martin, her lesbian and female identity, and her experience as a founder of the Daughters of Bilitis. The interview was digitally recorded. A combination of descriptive, structural and contrasting questions was chosen from a pre-written list of questions (see Appendix A). In addition, the interviewer took notes in a journal on the evening of the interview describing some of her thoughts during the interview and as a result of the interview (Appendix G and H).

After returning to Michigan, a transcription of the taped interview was completed. The goal was to be as accurate as possible in both transcription and meaning. All of the answers from Phyllis Lyon (the data) were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer, including all pauses, exclamations and verbal idiosyncrasies. Included in the transcript were nonverbal cues such as sighs, smiles, eyes directing elsewhere; in essence it was written as a screenplay. The interview was listened to a minimum of five times "to make sure everything was transcribed correctly the first time, especially in getting the meaning of what was said originally" (Atkinson, p. 57, 1995).

Once the transcription was finished, a copy was sent to Phyllis Lyon for her review with a self-addressed stamped envelope. The letter accompanying the

transcription can be found in Appendix F. She did not respond, assumed to mean that she accepted it as written. Once the taped interview was transcribed, the next step was to interpret the data: to find themes and explain their meaning to the story.

The transcription was read several times. There were a few obvious themes that Phyllis Lyon seemed to return to during the interview. The transcript was read through for each individual theme. The "text highlighter color" from the word processor's tool bar was used to highlight each theme with a different color.

In addition to the interview, the papers of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin housed at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Historical Society in San Francisco, California, were perused as an attempt to fill the holes in the life story research. An outline of the papers of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin are available in Appendix D.

The goal, then, was to create a life story narrative that is enjoyable, valid and making meaning for Phyllis Lyon, her family, the researcher, and gays and lesbians that have benefitted from her existence as a gay and lesbian rights activist. Phyllis Lyon has an important story to tell and has seen a tremendous transformation in gay and lesbian rights in her lifetime. This interview and the narrative it creates is only the beginning of that story.

# Chapter 4: Results

**Introduction to the Results**

The intent of this thesis is to tell the story of Phyllis Lyon's life and the activist role she played--with her partner--in her community and in San Francisco, and how their activism carried over into the gay liberation movement and women's movement. Contemporary gays and lesbians benefit from her existence as an activist for gay, lesbian and women's rights during the last half century. She has an important story to tell and has seen a tremendous transformation in gay, lesbian and women's rights in her lifetime.

The process began by transcribing the interview and interpreting the data to create a life story. Her story is told with focus on the themes that presented in the interview as the skeleton outline. Also, incorporated into the story are Phyllis Lyon quotes from the interview. There are areas of her history that were not approached in the interview, and though these circumstances are presented in the story (because some would be huge deletions when writing a life story of this subject), there isn't any confirmation from the interview to verify those stories.

"The interpretive emphasis is on accepting the life story itself as a text that has something to say to us about life and about one life in particular. The emphasis is also on identifying the connections, meanings, and patterns that exist in the story itself" (Atkinson, p.64, 1998). There were several themes that emerged from the interview with Phyllis Lyon. The universal theme that encompasses the entirety of the story is a life of advocacy and social and political action. Other themes are mostly micro versions of the macro issues that gay and lesbian individuals and communities have faced. The more

general themes found in the data were: hiding one's sexual orientation, coming out, religion's influence on gay rights and the barrier religion creates for self-acceptance.

Other themes were specific to Phyllis and/or people, gay and straight, of her generation. The most obvious theme that emerged in this category was Phyllis' self-deprecation regarding her age. She was 86 years old at the time of the interview. It was also apparent that her memory is not as sharp as it was even a few years ago for the video interviews in *No Secret Anymore: the Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon* (Biren, 2003). She was unable to pinpoint not only years in her history, but decades. In the interview transcript, the dates that she spoke verbatim are followed by the actual dates in brackets.

Another theme that emerged that may be specific to Phyllis' generation is her naivety about lesbians. She discovered her sexual orientation in the 1950s, one of the most socially conservative decades in American history. There were no openly gay actors or gay characters included in the fabric of mainstream culture as there are today. In interviews with Phyllis and in the interview for this story, she said that "you didn't talk about things like that, we're talking way back in the 50s, you didn't hear anything like that in school, and I don't ever remember hearing anything about *those* people" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Phyllis learned about lesbians after Del told her that she was one. Phyllis said, "Del said something about lesbians and I said, "oh what's that?" and Del said,… and one of us, maybe it was me said, "how come you know so much about this?" and she said, "because I am one" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Themes that surfaced specific to Phyllis Lyon were the stories she told about being in a relationship with Del. Also, she seems to have a disdain for rich, gay men. In the interview she burst out with the exclamation, “You know what, "I HATE GAY RICH MEN." I say that a lot. I think that's my new logo” (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). This subject came up several times during the course of the interview. Of course, whether this is an issue specific to Phyllis Lyon is speculative. More on this topic will be explored in the discussion section.

**Reliability and Validity in Phyllis Lyon’s Narrative Life Story.** “Even though there may be general collecting guidelines for doing the interview, no two people will carry out a life story interview in precisely the same, replicable way, whereas each may present the transcribed narrative and their own unique interpretation of the narrative very differently”(Atkinson, p. 59, 1998). There are two generations between the subject and the interviewer, however, there are many similarities to the stories that Phyllis Lyon shared and the life stories of the interviewer. Particularly in regards to coming out, naivety about lesbians and the oppression from the culture in which they grew up. There are many differences, as well, and it is possible that there would be less if the interviewer grew up with more diversity and culture and was closer in age to the subject.

According to Atkinson (1995), interpretation of the transcript has everything to do with validity and meaning of the life story. There are several important factors that will determine how well the storyteller is able to establish the meaning and validity of the story. First, the quality of the relationship between the storyteller (interviewee) and the person recording the story (interviewer) can influence the validity. Was the storyteller

comfortable in the interview surroundings? Was the storyteller authentic in her stories? Did the storyteller and person recording the story seem to have a cautious relationship? Was it tense or relaxed? Was the storyteller guarded, cautious or protective of her stories or was she open, forthright, blunt and outspoken?

Dave Ford, newspaper writer for the San Francisco Chronicle, described Phyllis and Del as “lovely” and decided that he “would like to marry them” because they were so welcoming and generous with their time and stories (Ford, 2003). Phyllis Lyon has been portrayed as “exceedingly gracious and patient” (Walker, 1984), “loquacious” (Martin, 2002), and “spry and animated” (Hull, 2004). These are personality characteristics the interviewer found in Phyllis Lyon on the day of the interview and during the phone calls that preceded the meeting. She was kind, welcoming, friendly and very talkative. Upon coming into her home, the interviewer was welcomed by Phyllis Lyon as if they were old friends. She seemed comfortable in her surroundings. It has been her home for 56 years. She appeared very authentic while telling her stories. Too, because they were similar versions of stories already recorded in the literature, there is a strong degree of reliability. The relationship between the Phyllis as the storyteller and the interviewer felt relaxed. If anything, Phyllis is humble and may have thought the interviewer was making too much of her story. She said, “I have NO idea what you're going to do with all of this. I don't know that I've made any sense about ANYTHING here” (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

"Because there is no set of formal procedures for determining narrative validity, the process itself is highly subjective. However, there are certain measures or standards

that are very helpful. One of the most important controls is internal consistency. “Internal consistency means "what is said in one part of the narrative should not contradict what is said in another part" (Atkinson, p. 60, 1998). Phyllis Lyon's stories seem internally consistent. She did not appear to contradict herself in this interview, and the stories follow what was found in the research.

External consistency in a narrative life story is that the stories told in the interview and in other interviews, "conforms to what you may already know or think you know about the person telling the story or the topic or issue being discussed"(Atkinson, p. 60, 1998). It is important to remember that the narrative life story is not necessarily about seeking historical facts, but about the person's experience of history and what they remember as having happened (Atkinson, 1998).

Another important element of a narrative life story is simply, what does the story mean? What does it mean to the storyteller? What does it mean to the interviewer? In the case of Phyllis Lyon, what does it mean to the history of the gay rights movement and the gay community, at large? Atkinson says that "in most cases, meaning comes with the telling” (Atkinson, p. 62, 1998). By telling one's story, meaning is created and new understandings of one's life processed. The key to meaning making through telling one's story, according to Atkinson, is reflective thinking. Phyllis Lyon gazed out her picture window as she answered the interview questions, as though she were looking into her past. Often she answered questions while looking directly at the interviewer, making eye contact. However, several times, particularly if she was recalling a memory of Del, she stared deeply and intently through the window. Those were moments of deep reflective

thinking, perhaps because the couple spent so many evenings together watching the lights of San Francisco from their living room.

**A Narrative Life Story and Reflections of Activist Phyllis Lyon**

> *If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. We need not wait to see what others do—Mahatma Gandhi*

On the day of the interview, my partner and I took a taxi from our hotel in Downtown San Francisco to the Noe Valley district, approximately four miles. We were on our way to Duncan Street for my interview with lesbian icon, Phyllis Lyon. We had a very entertaining Jamaican cab driver who was fond of tea. He drove south on Van Ness to Mission and turned onto Dolores. We recognized Mission Dolores Park. In 1999, we were two of the thousands of lesbians that gathered for the Dyke March on the night before San Francisco's Gay Pride Parade. The cab driver was very articulate and I wasn't sure what to expect when he asked us what we thought about the election results. (We arrived in San Francisco the weekend after the 2010 midterm elections). He told us that he sees people that work hard and try to make ends meet. Then he sees the politicians, both sides, working for the guys who already have all of the money. He joked around and said he required a surcharge for the beautiful weather and he would send the bill in the mail. He was clever and funny and a distraction. Thank goodness for the distraction because I was extremely nervous. I was about to interview one of my heroines. She was expecting us at her home.

The taxi stopped at the corner of Duncan and Newbery in front of a moderate looking house set into a San Francisco hill. The house number was on the mailbox at the street. Thinking about the cab driver made me smile as we walked up several steps. Installed on the stairway was a power chair. I wondered if Phyllis used it or if it was installed for Del, her partner of 55 years, who passed away in 2008. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see her sitting in a chair in front of the big picture window. I found out later that not much happens in front of her house without her noticing it. I saw her get up out of her chair and she met us at the door.

The first time I heard the name Phyllis Lyon was when my partner and I took an all-woman cruise through the Inside Passage of Alaska in 2003. There was a lesbian couple on board celebrating their 50-year anniversary. The mistress of ceremonies introduced the women, gave a short biography about the couple and reviewed their status in the lesbian community. The all-female crowd gave the couple a long lasting standing ovation. During the cruise, the documentary, *No Secret Anymore: the Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon* (Biren, 2003) was presented in the ship's theatre. I went to see the film to learn why this couple is so important to the lesbian community. After the film was over, we were able to meet Phyllis and Del, shake their hands and thank them. I was embarrassed that I had never heard of them, especially after learning that they were pioneers in the lesbian rights movement and that some of the freedoms and rights I enjoy are due, in part, to their activism. "It's extraordinary to step back and see how much has changed and how marvelous it is to see young people KNOW that they are entitled to be

free. They don't feel like they have to EARN their freedom. They are at that spot precisely because of people like Phyllis and Del" (Biren, 2003).

Upon coming into her home, we (my partner and I) were welcomed by Phyllis Lyon as if we were old friends. Phyllis Lyon is a small lady. She was wearing a red flannel shirt three sizes too big with the sleeves rolled up, a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt. Her clothes hung very large on her tiny frame. Her infamous oval tortoise shell glasses framed her face. She was immediately engaging and warm and invited us into the living room. In the living room, the floor was covered with white carpet, upon which a white couch and two black leather chairs sat. Behind the white couch was a long piece of feminine artwork. The word "woman" hung above the front door. Five steps led to the next floor where the kitchen, bathroom, dining room and bedroom were.

My first impression of her home was that there were books everywhere. 'Clearly, a love of books, and the display of them in the home, is something we have in common' I thought. The walls were lined with bookcases and art hung wherever there weren't shelves. The living room was enveloped with women-centered books and art and a giant picture window with an extraordinary view of San Francisco.

There were built-in bookcases on two of the four walls in the living room. On the top shelf of one case were two or three copies of *Lesbian/Woman*. Del and Phyllis wrote this book in 1972. There were two quality paperbacks and several mass market paperbacks of *Battered Wives*, the book Del Martin wrote in 1979. It is believed to be the first general introduction to the problem of domestic violence. "I used to read, read, read, read, read,as you can tell probably by the number of books that are around" (P. Lyon,

personal communication, November 5, 2010). Everywhere, there were books. Books and bookcases full of more books. There were even books in the bathroom on the back of the toilet. I had a feeling I was going to like this woman.

Between the couch and chairs was a battered black coffee table that Phyllis has "had my whole life" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). On the coffee table were stacks of books, the urn that held Del Martin's ashes, a candy dish, a candle, the day's San Francisco Chronicle, and a pile of coasters with cat pictures on them. I fiddled with the cameras and recording devices. We looked around the living room and made small talk about the assorted pictures of events exhibited on the wall space that was free of bookcases. There were commemorative plaques from politicians and civil rights groups. A framed newspaper article from the San Francisco Chronicle that commemorated Del and Phyllis' wedding in 2007 hung on the wall. There were many pictures of her and Del on their various wedding days in frames hanging on the wall and in frames sitting on the tables and bookcases. One of the frames was engraved with the quote, "You finally made an honest woman out of her." Some pictures were from the wedding that took place in 2004, when San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom ordered that marriage licenses be given to same-sex couples who requested them. Later that year, the California Supreme Court voided those marriages. In other wedding pictures, the couple was a few years older, wearing the same pantsuits, also at City Hall, after the 2008 court ruling that same-sex couples in California could be legally married. In November of that year, the voters of California overturned the decision and once

again, the same-sex marriages were voided. The issue of marriage equality is still tangled up in the courts in California four years later.

**Phyllis Lyon.** The interview was scheduled five days before Phyllis Lyon's eighty-sixth birthday. Phyllis was born in Tulsa on November 10, 1924 to a traditional American couple, William and Lorena. Her father was born in Brooklyn, grew up in Brooklyn and was college educated. He was a Republican and was raised as a strict Presbyterian. Her father was traveling salesman who "worked for the United States Gypsum Company it seems like all his life" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Her mother grew up in the South, went to finishing school, and was the daughter of a Southern Methodist minister. She was a Democrat. "It was an odd couple," said Phyllis.

Though Phyllis was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, she was raised in Northern California. Phyllis has a sister, Patricia, who is six years younger. To her parents chagrin, Phyllis and Trisha rode their bikes to the stables near their home and rode horses. "It's a wonder they [her parents] let me learn how to ride horses. Girls were precious, they couldn't do things and they had to be protected," (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). "Phyllis became a proficient equestrian and collected many ribbons for horsemanship and jumping" (Martin, 2002). Phyllis graduated from Sacramento Senior High School in 1943.

She received a Bachelor of Arts in journalism from the University of California at Berkley in 1946. There, she was a reporter and editor for the student newspaper, the *Daily Californian*. After graduation, Lyon looked for a journalism job. With a forming

feminist belief, she was determined NOT to be a society writer, though reporter jobs for women were difficult to find. Eventually she applied for a "dreaded society editor" position at a newspaper in Chico, California. Swallowing her pride, she wrote to apply, "but by the time *The Chico Enterprise* received her letter the position was filled—and the only job available was for a general reporter" (Mixner & Bailey, 2000). Phyllis was thrilled that she didn't have to write about weddings and tea parties hosted by Chico's elite.

In Phyllis' living room, there is a floor to ceiling picture window. From her chair, Phyllis has a view of the Twin Peaks, Castro and Downtown neighborhoods of San Francisco. She gazed out her picture window as she answered some the interview questions, as though she were looking into her past. She stared deeply and intently through the window particularly when she reminisced about her late partner, Del.

On the sliver of wall between the picture window and more bookcases is a shrine to powerful and influential women. There is a large picture of Eleanor Roosevelt as the centerpiece. Around the picture of Mrs. Roosevelt are pictures of Rosa Parks, Shirley Chisholm, Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, an early photo of Dianne Feinstein as mayor of San Francisco, a more contemporary autographed photo of Dianne Feinstein, and a picture of President Obama and the first Lady dancing at the 2009 Inauguration.

On the wall opposite the picture window are built in bookcases with many white cover and sun faded books. A copy of the children's book, *Goodnight Moon*, is tucked into the case between the covers of multiple feminist authors and piles of DVD's and videotapes, including the 2004 gay documentary film, *Freedom to Marry*. One of the

shelves is entirely devoted to Eleanor Roosevelt: biographies, autobiographies, books based on her letters, books about her life as the first Lady, a Humanitarian, and a Feminist.

Phyllis had the opportunity to meet Eleanor Roosevelt in Durham when she worked for the *Chico Enterprise*. Phyllis had always been a democrat and Eleanor Roosevelt was one of her heroines. She admired Mrs. Roosevelt's advocacy for human rights and working women. Eleanor Roosevelt was "the most wonderful woman I had ever heard of…Women didn't do a lot of things like she did in those days" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Phyllis, young rookie journalist, and the *Enterprise* photographer met the train that carried Mrs. Roosevelt to do an interview. The First Lady stepped off the train in front of Phyllis. There was no one else around and Phyllis was practically alone with her heroine but became awe struck and froze. She wasn't able to ask the First Lady anything. "I should have begun to ask her questions if it hadn't been that she was my absolute heroine and I was so excited about getting to even meet her that I didn't realize what was going to happen when I did. And I just froze" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). The photographer who was with her managed to capture a picture of Phyllis' back, gazing at the First Lady who was grinning down at Phyllis from the train.

In 1949, "despite a reporting job that enabled her to interview one of her idols, Lyon tired of small town life" (Gallo, 2006, p. xiii). Unusual for women at that time, she became the associate editor for building trades' periodicals published by Pacific Builder and Engineer in Seattle. In 1950, Del Martin moved to Seattle from San Francisco

because she was hired as the editor of *Daily Construction Reports*, also published by Pacific Builder and Engineer. About their jobs in Seattle, Del, always the feminist, said for an interview in 1992, "Big deal. We got titles of assistant editor and editor in lieu of decent pay" (Martin & Lyon, 1992).

**Del Martin.** Del Martin was born in San Francisco on May 5, 1921 as Dorothy Louise Taliaferro, and later became known as Del. She was raised by her mother, Mary, and her stepfather Jones Taliaferro. As a child, Del played childhood games of tag, kick-the-can and hopscotch with the neighborhood kids. Her favorite game, though, was playing house. Del always volunteered to be the husband and the dad because the boys didn't usually play this "girl game." Del loved to dress in her stepfather's clothes. She pulled on his pants, rolled up the pant legs and tightened a belt around the waist. "Then she preened in front of the full-length mirror and strutted around in her child's eye-view of what it meant to be a man" (Martin & Lyon, 1991, p. 26-27).

Del attended Presidio Junior High School (Gallo, 2006) on the northeast side of San Francisco near Lincoln Park and the South Bay of San Francisco Bay. She graduated from George Washington High School at age sixteen as the salutatorian. Del took her first class in journalism in high school and wrote for the student page in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She edited the yearbook and the school newspaper. After high school graduation, like Phyllis, she attended the University of California at Berkley, studied journalism and wrote for the *Daily Californian*. After a year, she transferred to San Francisco State College (San Francisco State University today) which was more affordable and closer to home. There she became the managing editor for the student

newspaper, the *Golden Gator* (Lyon, 2002) and she met the man who would become her husband, James Martin. He was the newspaper's business manager.

"Early on, Del discovered her attraction to other girls but had no words for how she felt. Somehow she knew enough not to say anything about it to anyone" (Lyon, 2002, p. 160). However, she and James had a lot in common and "she was convinced that she was really in love with him, in love with a man" (Martin & Lyon, 1991, p. 28). She married Jim to get away from home too. Del could not overcome society's pressure for women to marry men because "marriage was a decisive way to prove to herself that she could be just like every other girl" (Mixner & Bailey, 2000, p. 11). A husband would demonstrate to herself, her family and her community that she was an average, heterosexual woman.

During her third year in college, Del became pregnant with her daughter, Kendra. "There was no pill and damn little sex education" (Lyon & Martin, 1991, p. 28). Del dropped out of college and had the baby. World War II broke out shortly thereafter.

San Francisco became a major deployment and shipbuilding center during World War II. Unprecedented numbers of service men and women passed through the city. The civilian population also increased dramatically during the war, with jobs in factories and shipyards attracting tens of thousands of people. War production became intense by 1944; the Bay Area led the world in shipbuilding (Lipskey, 2006). Because the population of San Francisco was exploding, housing became difficult to find and expensive to afford. Thus, the growing Martin family settled in San Mateo, a suburb seventy five miles south of the Bay Area. After awhile, Jim and Del's marriage

disintegrated. Jim had a civilian job with the Army at Fort Mason in San Francisco, so he spent a lot of time away from home. Del found her life as a suburban mother and housewife rigid and depressing. "Besides their young daughter, whom they both adored, Jim and Del had something else left in common, they both wanted a wife." Del fell in love with the neighbor next door and knew that it was time to end her marriage (Lyon & Martin, 1992).

Jim and Del divorced and Del got custody of Kendra. James remarried and his new wife thought she would not be able to bear children. Jim offered Del "a persuasive argument that he could offer his daughter a stable, two-parent environment and, better yet, a chance to see the world, since his Army job now afforded him extensive travel" (Mixner & Bailey, 2000, p. 14). Del relinquished her daughter to James because she bought into the concept that the traditional family would be best for her child.

Between her divorce and meeting Phyllis Lyon, Del had a difficult time coming to terms with her homosexuality. In the 1940s, there were few resources that explained sexual orientation. In fact, Del Martin did not even have a word to define her attraction to other women. A perceptive co-worker suggested Del read a book called *The Well of Loneliness*, the classic lesbian novel by Radcliffe Hall. In the book, Del learned that she was not alone and there was a word—lesbian—that described how she felt. Hall's book uncovered the silence for Del and exposed homophobia, internalized shame and oppression. Del found acceptance inside the book. For the first time, Martin was "able to put a name to what she had been feeling", that she was on "the threshold of profound meaning in her life…she saw a glimmering of who she was and who she could be"

(Martin & Lyon, 1991, p. 29; Lyon, 2002, p. 160). She was elated and sought other books from which to learn more about lesbians. Del raced to the library with the intent of finding more information about her new found identity. She had a word, a topic, that she could reference and spent hours looking up the word lesbian. What she found was not what she was hoping to find. First of all, there wasn't much indication that female homosexuality existed. She found a few books about the male homosexual, but very little about the lesbian. Secondly, the attitude toward homosexuality in the late 1940s was not encouraging. What she felt was love, this "desire that for her comes from the purest of motives, was really despicable and degenerate, at least according to the books" (Martin & Lyon, 1991, p. 29).

*The Well of Loneliness* was one of a kind for that time. What Del found instead were "all diatribes on the evils of homosexuality, portraying gay people as pathetic misfits or as sick and depraved" (Mixner & Bailey, 2000, p.13). While looking for acceptance like she found in Radcliffe's book, Del found instead that her new identity was a "perversion, a psychopathology, a crime against nature and a sin against God which was crude and disgusting" (Martin & Lyon, 1991, p. 30). Little did Del Martin know, at that time, that she would team up with Phyllis Lyon and lead the fight to challenge the religious, social, medical and psychological norms that defined her sexual orientation.

**Phyllis Lyon Meets Del Martin.** "Women in the post WWII era were not by and large academics, newspaper or magazine publishers or social scientists. Ideal images of (white, middle class) womanhood could be found in newly sprawling suburban

subdivisions in which women discovered the joy of cooking while using newly available appliances designed to increase the joy of housework" (Cutler, 2003, p. 240). The ideal images of postwar women did not appeal to Phyllis and Del.

Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin met in 1949. Phyllis was the associate editor for building trades' magazines published by *Pacific Builder and Engineer* in Seattle. She had a journalism degree for the University of California at Berkley. Martin attended San Francisco State College and also studied journalism. She was the managing editor of the student paper, *The Golden Gator*. Del was the reporter for a construction daily in San Francisco, *The Pacific Builder*. A job on a similar paper in Seattle opened up and in 1950 she was hired as editor of the *Daily Construction Reports* published by Pacific Builder and Engineer. That's where Del Martin met Phyllis Lyon.

Phyllis recalls how assured and confident Del seemed on her first day in the office (Mixner & Bailey, 2000). "I remember seeing Del…, an attractive, short, stocky woman with dark hair wearing a gabardine suit, heels and carrying a briefcase. It was the latter that caught my attention—I had never seen a woman carry a briefcase before" (Lyon, 162, 2002). Lyon was particularly excited about Del coming to Pacific Builder and Engineer in Seattle because she was also from San Francisco. "It was easy to become friends because we both liked martinis. We'd go out to have drinks after work" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

The first weekend after Del arrived in Seattle, Phyllis had a party to welcome her to town. Phyllis had an apartment that was very close to the office. It was a small place with a living room, kitchen and bathroom and a Murphy bed that pulled down into the

living room. Phyllis invited many of the people she and Del worked with as a "Welcome to Pacific Builder and Engineer" party. During the party, Del spent most of her time in the kitchen sitting with the men. She wanted to learn how to tie a tie. The rest of the gathering milled around in the living room, having drinks and talking. After the party, when most of the guests had gone home, Del and Phyllis were cleaning up and Phyllis asked her why she spent the entirety of the party in the kitchen with the men. Del said, "Well, they were teaching me how to tie a tie…" and Phyllis said, "Why would you want to tie a tie?"(P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

In the interview, Phyllis said, "Well, I didn't know a lesbian from a hole in the ground. I had never heard the word. I didn't find out about lesbians until I found out about Del, and if Del hadn't told us..." (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). One night, after work, Del and Phyllis went out for drinks with another co-worker. They were talking and the topic of homosexuals came up. Apparently, Del spoke with authority and Phyllis said, "How come you know so much about homosexuals?" Del came out to them and said, "Well I am one." As Phyllis recalls it, "we went home and called all the other women we worked with and everybody we knew because it was such interesting news. 'GUESS WHAT? DEL'S A LESBIAN!'" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

In 1952, Phyllis' sister, Trisha, had graduated from UC Berkley and the two of them had planned a road trip around the country. They had planned the trip for a number of years. Phyllis planned to quit her job in Seattle and travel to San Francisco to retrieve her sister for their trip. Knowing that Phyllis was leaving Seattle, "Del came on a little

stronger than she had before" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). It was not too long after Del had come out to Phyllis and "she had apparently been attracted to me more than I was being attracted to her (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Del finally found the courage, after believing that Phyllis was nothing but her good straight friend, to approach Phyllis romantically. Del remarked in a Terry Gross interview, "I made a pass and she completed it. I had to, she was going to leave for good" (Gross, 1992).

That night, Del and Phyllis had sex for the first time (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010; Lyon, 2002). Del and Phyllis got to know each other more deeply. They went out for drinks after work. Del would visit Phyllis at her apartment. They'd pull the Murphy bed out of the wall and had sex, and Phyllis thought, "That was kind of interesting. It felt pretty good." (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). However, the implications of a woman having sex with a woman never occurred to Phyllis. She did know enough not to talk about it with other people. "You didn't just go around and say, "Oh, I just had the best sex with this woman last night" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Phyllis and Del decided to visit San Francisco together before Phyllis and Tricia left on their trip. Del had family who lived in San Francisco and wanted to spend time with Phyllis. On their way to San Francisco, they made arrangements to stay the night in a motel. By this time, they had slept together a few times. Phyllis made sure that Del requested two beds. "By this time I was afraid that people were going to know

something. There WERE two beds, but we only used one" Phyllis remarked slyly with a grin on her face (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Del went back to Seattle and Phyllis and Tricia left on their trip. After they had been on the road for a couple of days, Phyllis thought of Del and realized that she missed her. “So,” Phyllis giggled, "every now and then I would find a phone and give her a call. Of course, I called collect because there was no other way.” During the early 50s, the modern phone conveniences of cell phones, phone cards or touch tone phones were non-existent. There were phone booths, but they required many nickels. “We’d chat and then Trish and I would go on. And of course, I kept calling Del collect," she smirked. "It took a *L O N G* time before she forgot about that." (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Tricia and Phyllis were traveling in Texas and planning to go to New Orleans. They stopped in El Paso to visit with Phyllis’ college roommate, her husband and their family. It was a hot Texas summer and Trish and Phyllis went swimming. The next day they bid farewell to Phyllis’ college roommate and drove to New Orleans. As they drove East through Texas, Trisha began to feel feverish and achy, as though she had the flu. It took the ladies two days to get to New Orleans and by the second day Trisha was really very sick. Phyllis called the ambulance and they came and took Trisha off to the hospital. She had polio. The polio virus had passed to Trisha through the infected water in the swimming pool. Phyllis was shocked. She wondered why Trish got polio but she didn’t, even though she swam in the same water. Trish stayed in New Orleans’ hospital for a month. Phyllis only had a certain amount of money, so she decided that she needed to

get a job. “In those days it was pretty easy to get a part time job as a typist or a secretary. I was an excellent typist…” (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). After a month, the March of Dimes sent both Phyllis and Trisha home on a train. Trisha’s husband drove Phyllis’ car back to San Francisco. Trisha went into the hospital in Berkley and Phyllis came home to San Francisco and stayed in the sewing room at her parents’ house.

Del still worked in Seattle, but traveled to San Francisco to see Phyllis. Del’s parents lived in San Francisco, so the two of them went out on dates and then went to their respective parental homes. One night, Phyllis took Del “home”, but was unable to get into the apartment building. So Phyllis had an idea, she told Del, “Well, come home with me.” Phyllis was sleeping in a twin bed in a tiny bedroom/sewing room. “I made the mistake of locking the door to the bedroom. So of course, Mother came along in the morning, knocked and “Phyllis, get up!” They quietly waited on the other side of the door for Phyllis’ mother to move along. But she didn’t. Since she heard no movement from Phyllis, she turned the doorknob and the door wouldn’t open. Phyllis never locked the door, something must be going on, and undoubtedly thought Phyllis had a boyfriend in the room. “So much for trying to hide things from my mother,” Phyllis said sheepishly (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

It was time for Phyllis to find a place of her own. “I was going around looking for an apartment and I wanted one that had room enough for two people. I finally found, of all places, an apartment for about $30 a month on Castro Street," she laughed. "It was

not Castro street [culturally, as it is today] in those days" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

In the early 1950s, Castro was a working class Catholic neighborhood. But many of the families were part of the exodus to suburbia and left many houses empty and falling apart. Coincidentally, at the same time, many homosexuals were discharged from the military in the port at San Francisco. In the late 60s and early 70s, the cheap rent and dilapidated Victorian homes of the Castro neighborhood attracted gay men. Consequently, gay bars started to open quietly throughout the neighborhood (DeJim, 2003).

Today, the Castro is considered one of the first and best known gay neighborhoods in the country. It is shrouded in rich history of gay politics, economics, culture, and artistic synergy. Castro Street is where Harvey Milk bought his camera shop and proceeded to become the first openly gay elected official in the country. It is the home of the first gay bar, the Missouri Mule, and the first gay bar, Twin Peaks, with plate glass windows so that outsiders could see who was sitting inside. Ubiquitous rainbow flags are proudly suspended from every light post and the backdrop for the epicenter of gay pride (DeJim, 2003).

Del visited several times and wanted the relationship to become more official. She asked Phyllis to move in and live with her. Phyllis wasn't sure, she was in conflict. The two women exchanged numerous letters debating the pros and cons of becoming a couple. About the time Del had decided it was a lost cause and she needed to move on, Phyllis determined that she would like to give it a try (Lyon, 2002, p. 163). Phyllis was

in the apartment by herself for awhile because Del had loose ends to tie together in Seattle.

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon moved in together in the Castro district of San Francisco on Valentine's Day, 1953. Del and Phyllis' first year together was difficult. For lesbians in the 1950s, including Phyllis and Del, "there were no centuries of customs and mores to incorporate into the patterns they established of how to live" (Faderman, 1991, p. 161,). Because there was very little relationship history as a guideline, the 1950s lesbian had to start from scratch to determine roles and responsibilities. They had to find ways to accept, cultivate and nurture their relationship within an environment that they knew disregarded their relationship as a couple and were disgusted by it (Faderman, 1991, p. 161).

Phyllis explained, "The first year was pretty stormy. While we had been close friends for three years, living together was something else again" (Martin & Lyon, 1992, p. 87). "At some point, a friend gave us a kitten, and I've always said that's what kept us together that first year: We couldn't split up because we couldn't figure out how to divide the kitten" (Lyon, 2009).

They only really had problems the first year. Del would leave her shoes in the middle of the room, Phyllis got irritated and threw them out the window. Phyllis and Del would argue, and Phyllis would leave the room rather than stand up for her position. Del was creating the activist Phyllis would become by teaching her to fight back (Hull, 2004). Phyllis and Del were trying to determine who was the leader, and neither one of them

would relinquish that role to the other. They were trying to model their relationship after the only relationship model they knew—heterosexual marriage.

For awhile, Del and Phyllis adopted the butch and femme roles, reproducing their parents' marriage. But who would be the man and who would be the woman? "What confused us were the concepts of what was masculine and what feminine. Phyllis tended toward more tailored clothes—boy-type shirts and suits—was that masculine? Del was sensitive, emotional and romantic—was that feminine? Both of us could (and did) cook and neither of us like to wash dishes, clean house or iron (so we seldom did)" (Martin & Lyon, 1991, p. 72). Del and Phyllis decided that the roles were culturally and society scripted and that it wasn't necessary to base a relationship on the socially defined roles. What they determined was that they were equals, they both had strengths and weaknesses they brought to their relationship and neither one had to be the leader. "We started acting as people, as ourselves, as women rather than as caricatures in a heterosexual marriage. But it took awhile" (Martin & Lyon, 1991, p. 73). In a way, these women were pioneers in modeling a lesbian relationship for female couples in the future ("Profile of a Pair," 2004).

**Del and Phyllis Find a Home.** Phyllis and Del lived in the little apartment Phyllis had found on Castro for a couple of years. They lived on the bottom floor and two gay guys moved into the apartment above them. "They used to thump around in the evening and the stuff on this coffee table would bounce up and down" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). They decided that they ought to find another apartment. One that would allow two cats because by this time they had acquired another

feline. It didn't occur to them that they could buy a house because they didn't have much savings and the mortgage company's favored married heterosexual couples and men. The single female buyer, or in Del and Phyllis' case, two female buyers were strongly disadvantaged in securing a loan for a home in the 1950s (Lloyd, 2008).

"Del wanted a VIEW, she was born here, and she wanted a VIEW," Phyllis becomes very animated as she says this (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). They started looking at apartments with a view. One place they looked at had a view when you stood on the toilet and peered out the window, but that wasn't quite what Del had in mind. They looked every weekend for a new place to live. Del and Phyllis saw several apartments but none of them had a view. The apartments that *did* have a view were out of Phyllis and Del's price range.

One day, they were driving through the Noe Valley neighborhood, the area south of the Castro District. They saw a modest house perched up in a hill with a "for sale" sign in front. The sign said to contact the realtor and not to bother the occupants. "Well, we didn't pay any attention to that. We wanted to see what the view was like," Phyllis remarked (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). So they parked in front of the house and walked up the stairs and knocked on the door. The owners let the couple inside to take a look. "We walked over and looked out the window and there was nothing we could do. Look at this VIEW!" Phyllis exclaimed about the view through the picture window overlooking downtown San Francisco, its hills and valleys, the Twin

Peaks area and Telegraph Hill (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). The owners wanted to sell the house for $11,000. There was no garage or carport, so Del and Phyllis tried to negotiate a deal for $10,000. Phyllis had some war bonds stashed away and they managed to get enough money together for a down payment. The house became theirs and Del got more than she bargained for with the view. Today, the view alone is worth more than Phyllis and Del paid for the house in 1955.

The real estate guy was really respectful and understood Del and Phyllis' relationship. At the tail end of the deal, he commented to the female couple, "If you have any more friends like you who want to buy a house, give them my name."

Unfortunately, although they had lived in San Francisco—the gay Mecca of the world— for two years, Phyllis and Del, did not know any other lesbians. In *Lesbian/Woman*, they write, "All of our friends were straight and we missed not having any gay friends. Our only tie with the gay world was our sense of "belonging" to each other. We needed to relate to gay people who would understand the subtle differences between heterosexual and homosexual relationships. We needed to know more about the gay life and how to manage in a straight society. Above all, we needed a sense of community with others like ourselves—the feeling of security and respect that a homogenous group affords its members" (Martin & Lyon, 1992, p. 89).

The only place that Del and Phyllis knew to meet other lesbians was at lesbian bars. "We knew there were lots of other lesbians in San Francisco. We'd been to the gay

bars and we'd looked at them, just like all the other tourists on the Broadway bar circuit" (Martin & Lyon, 1992, p. 189).

Broadway is a street in the North Beach district of San Francisco where the height of counter culture was happening in the 1950s. Between 1951 and 1955, gay and lesbian bars flourished. North Beach was also the center of the Beat movement which included Allen Ginsberg (writer of the poem *Howl*). *Howl* was a narrative of drug experimentation and homosexual love and became the most famous poem of the Beats, partly because the publishing house was tried for selling obscene literature. It was published by Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books, a historic landmark in the North Beach district. Other famous Beats were Laurence Ferlinghetti (author of *On the Road),* Neal Cassady, and William S. Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*). "While the territory Beats occupied often overlapped with nascent queer communities, the cultures were distinct…However, the Beat culture legitimized some homosexual life choices (Boyd, 1750, 2003). The Beat culture and the developing gay subculture were separate, but intertwined, especially at the homosexual bars in the North Beach district.

Gay and Lesbian bars were prolific on Broadway. Tommy's Joint, The Paper Doll, The Black Cat, Mona's, and Maud's, et. al, hosted a variety of entertainment including drag shows, jazz, female/male impersonators, Vaudeville type shows and all around good fun. The bars were also known for a cheap meal and expensive, watered down drinks.

Phyllis and Del knew that there were gay people; they just weren't sure how to meet them. Phyllis said, "When Del and I started hunting for lesbians, for ANY

lesbians, we went to the lesbian bars." The couple would go into the bar and see a lot of their community together—talking, playing pool, hooting at the entertainment—and they would sit down in the back, feeling like outsiders. No one came from a welcoming committee, and Del and Phyllis felt uncomfortable introducing themselves to women who all seemed to know each other. "We'd go bar to bar to bar to bar and it always was the same. We were really desperate to meet new lesbians" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010)

"No matter how closeted a woman might be in other areas of her life, in the bars she took a step out and affirmed her erotic preferences" (D'Emilio, 1983, p.98). The lesbian bar became important to many lesbians. It created a subculture where lesbians could avoid contact with those who opposed their lifestyle. The bar culture also included a gathering of social and sexual acquaintances that were difficult to find in the "straight world ". Lesbians did not have to hide who they were in the gay and lesbian bars (Faderman, 1991).

However, the lesbian bar could be a dangerous place if you got caught. The police often extorted the gay and lesbian bar owners, and if they didn't pay out, they and their clientele went unprotected from police harassment. The "police commonly raided places where homosexuals gathered, to harass them, or to haul them off in paddy wagons to the police station, where they were booked, photographed, and fingerprinted. Newspapers would print the names of those arrested. Police would collect information and notify landlords, family members or employers. the notoriety could lose them their

homes, their jobs or even their families without the benefit of a trial. Others were driven to suicide (Mixner & Bailey, 2002; Jay, 1999).

It was not illegal to own a gay bar or to patronize such an establishment. It was not illegal to be a homosexual. It *was* illegal to have physical or sexual contact between same sex couples and to be dressed in the clothing of the opposite sex. Customers were arrested for "illegal and immoral acts", sexual impropriety, "disorderly conduct" or vagrancy (Agee, 2006). "We were lucky we never got arrested. We escaped that experience—once by a night and another time by a week" (Lyon & Martin, 1978). Some women were willing to take the risk and frequented bars; others looked for alternate sources of community.

**A "Secret Social Club for Lesbians."** Phyllis and Del looked for lesbians in the gay Mecca of the world. There was a gay male couple that lived around the corner from their apartment on 19th street. They had obviously seen the two together and decided that they were lesbians. The male couple invited Del and Phyllis to go out. The four of them had a lot of fun because, as a foursome, it gave them the courage to go to bars and parties that they wouldn't have explored alone. One night they all went to an after-hours party after the bars closed. Lucky for Phyllis and Del, the male couple knew where the party was. "Sitting there, I got talking to a L E S B I A N," Phyllis Lyon stretches this word while smiling large with her eyes open wide, "She and I just chatted away and I said that we didn't know any lesbians but were hoping to find more of them and so on…I gave her our phone number" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Phyllis and Del's gay male friends had introduced them to Rose Bamberger. "Rose was a young Filipina who believed it was possible to create a safe place for lesbians to have fun. Rose loved to dance, but was scared to get caught in a police raid at a bar where other lesbians seemed to gather. Besides, lesbians couldn't dance together in bars in the 50s" (Gallo, 2002). After meeting at the party, Rose called Del and Phyllis. Excitedly, Phyllis explained "September of 1955, I was vacuuming *this* living room and the phone rang. It was that woman that we had met at the party and she said would we be interested in joining her and her partner and three or four other couples in starting an organization for lesbians. I said, "OF COURSE." (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). "We just wanted to meet some lesbians," Phyllis Lyon exclaimed.

"Women needed privacy...not only from the watchful eye of the police, but from gaping tourists in the bars and from inquisitive parents and families" (Meeker, 2006, p. 77). From the beginning, the Daughters of Bilitis members agreed with Lyon and Martin's ideas since they were the oldest and quickly became the leaders of the group. In the beginning, the membership brainstormed to set goals and a plan as though it were a business venture (Gallo, 2005). The main idea was to have a space where lesbians could get together to have fun, have drinks, dance, dine and socialize with one another out of the public eye (Gallo, 2002). Mostly, they wanted their gatherings to be safe from police harassment. Another goal was to have all of the things a sorority might have: colors, an insignia, and articles of incorporation, a mission statement, and a name.

At the first meeting, someone suggested they name their club The Daughters of Bilitis, a vague reference to lesbian love from 19th century poet Pierre Louys. The eight

lesbians hoped that by choosing this obscure reference "that the new group would be shielded from unwanted public attention while subtlety signaling its link to lesbian sexuality" (Gallo, 2005, p. 3). "So obscure," says Lyon, "we are *still* explaining what it means" (T. Gross interview, 1992).

Though the 1950s was a time of racial segregation, the Daughters of Bilitis were not discriminating. "There were two women of color, a Chicana, and a Filipina" (Gallo, 1991, p. xxii) among the eight original members. The 1956 Articles of Incorporation stated that they welcomed all women, "regardless of race, color or creed."

In 1955, the DOB elected Del Martin as their first President and Phyllis Lyon as their first secretary (Gallo, 2005, p. 5). Del strongly encouraged women to join DOB not just as homosexuals, but primarily "on the basis of gender identification." Martin's beliefs in women's activism are still inspiring for present day women; in the first *Ladder* she wrote "Women have taken a beating through the centuries. While women may not have as much difficulty [as gay men] with law enforcement, their problems are none the less real—family, sometimes children, employment and social acceptance. It took women with foresight and determination to attain this heritage which is now ours…Nothing has ever been accomplished by hiding in a dark corner"(Gallo, 2005, p. 27).

However, most lesbians in 1955 were hiding in a dark corner of a dark closet. It was difficult for the Daughters of Bilitis to grow their membership. Phyllis said, "The membership was always small. How were we supposed to get members? Put an ad in the newspaper?" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Lesbians were

deeply in the closet. The Daughters of Bilitis were very careful to protect their members' privacy. They didn't require a phone number, place of employment or last name to become a member (Boyd, 2003).

The extreme separation and invisibility of gay women became a primary concern about lesbian social life and safety for the Daughters of Bilitis' membership goals. Many of the members, including Phyllis Lyon, used pseudonyms out of fear that others would know their real name. The lesbian organization had to "continually reassure their readers and membership that involvement in the organization would help, not harm them" (Gallo, 2005, p. 31).

***The Ladder.*** One of the ways the Daughters of Bilitis reached a larger audience was by distributing a lesbian publication. *The Ladder* became the first nationally distributed lesbian "magazine." *The Ladder* started as a small, eight page, and hand-stapled, mimeographed newsletter. It was first published in San Francisco in October 1956 by Daughters of Bilitis. Inside, *The Ladder* advertised the Daughters of Bilitis calendar of events and published short fiction, poetry, letters book reviews, essays and other articles that may be interesting to readers. The purpose of *The Ladder* was to reach lesbians and let them know that they were not alone. Phyllis Lyon, under the pseudonym Ann Ferguson, was its first editor. She later shed the pseudonym in an effort to encourage other lesbians to accept and be proud of themselves as lesbians.

On the inside cover of *The Ladder*, the Daughters of Bilitis' objectives were printed. They were to: 1) educate the variant—with particular emphasis on the psychological, physiological, and sociological aspects; 2) to enable her to understand

herself; 3) to educate the public through acceptance of the individual, leading to a breakdown of prejudices; 4) to participate in research projects by authorized and responsible professionals; 5) to investigate the penal code and promote change in laws against homosexuals (Gallo, 2006, p. 11).

"Where DOB was different from the mostly male homophile groups was in their emphasis on reaching the individual lesbian—"the variant"—first and foremost. They recognized that many women felt shame about their sexual desires and were afraid to admit them. Daughters of Bilitis knew instinctively that, without support to develop the self-confidence necessary to advocate for one's rights, no social change would be possible for lesbians. It is the emphasis that distinguishes Daughters of Bilitis from the other gay groups at the time and it is a difference they would continually assert.

Daughters of Bilitis had a mission to educate lesbians and the general public about female homosexuality and to integrate the lesbian into society (Esterberg, 1990). So, they sent the first issue of *The Ladder* to 100 friends and professionals—ministers, doctors, psychologists, and psychiatrists—people they knew or found in the phone book. Some recipients received the publication gladly, others did not. From the first issue forward, it was very clear that the Daughters of Bilitis were not just planning social events, but also intended to participate in social change. "*The Ladder* quickly became Daughters of Bilitis' mouthpiece and, literally its ladder to public visibility and social mobility" (Boyd, 2003, loc. 2389).

***"The personal becomes political."*** Phyllis and Del participated in homophile activities outside of Daughters of Bilitis and became enthusiastic over the political work

the other homophile groups were doing. They shared the political ideas and actions back to Daughters of Bilitis, excited about a mix of social activities and political activities (Gallo, 2006). "Del and I screwed it up for Daughters of Bilitis, we discovered the Mattachine Society and One, Inc" (P. Lyon, personal communication, February 19, 2010). As a result, Daughters of Bilitis evolved into a "social club to one that took part in social activism" (P. Lyon, personal communication, February 19, 2010).

The Mattachine Society, founded in 1950 by Harry Hay (a communist party organizer), was organized by a group of gay men to protect and promote the rights of homosexuals. In 1951, the Mattachine Society adopted a mission and purpose to identify and incorporate two important themes. First, the organization recognized the importance of building a gay community and strived to unify homosexuals that were isolated from one another. Secondly, Mattachine called for a grassroots movement of gay people to challenge anti-gay discrimination and oppression much like the early grassroots effort of the Civil Rights Movement (Katz, 1992).

Daughters of Bilitis were also beginning to share ideas with the other homophile groups. After reading an article in the Mattachine Review about a lobbying campaign to change California's sex laws, Del and Phyllis persuaded the members of the Daughters of Bilitis to vote about whether they should write their legislators regarding potential changes to the law.

Stress and strain increased between members who wanted Daughters of Bilitis to remain as a social club and members who wanted it to be more connected to the mission of the other homophile groups. By the summer of 1956, half of the original founders left

the Daughters of Bilitis. The fledgling lesbian group decided to redraft their intent and purpose to challenge state laws in association with the Mattachine Society and One, Inc.

The prescient "the personal is political" feminism of Lyon and Martin shaped the organization's priorities from its beginnings, and it was articulated ten years before the Second Wave of the women's movement. "Educating women to question the limitations imposed by gender and sexuality in Cold War America was challenging enough; to do so openly, as an organization dealing with lesbianism in the cultural climate of the 1950s, was unheard of" (Gallo, 2005, p. 16-17).

After almost 60 years, I was curious what "the personal is political" meant to Phyllis Lyon. To me, it seems like an esoteric concept that I was hoping Phyllis would define for me. I asked her, "What does the "personal is political" mean?"

She responded:

> "I think that's when we make meaning of our lot in life…if you are lesbian or gay and you feel like you are discriminated against because of it; it needs to become a political statement. If you are going to go around and say, "Hey, I'm a lesbian," it is a political statement because you should be also working politically for change" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Members of the Daughters of Bilitis, including Lyon and Martin, realized many prejudices of gay and lesbian lives needed to be faced and changed. It was important to change the way the lesbian thought about herself. It was important to change the way the

public perceived the lesbian. It was important to change the ways that homosexuals treated themselves and change the ways society treated them.

***National Lesbian Conference***. The Daughters of Bilitis decided it was time to expose all prejudices toward homosexuals—both internal and external—and take a step toward changing the way homosexuals treated themselves and were treated by society. In 1960, the Daughters of Bilitis held their first National Lesbian Conference in San Francisco. It was met with tremendous success—from women. The theme of the three day conference was the *Lesbian and her Problems*. Its mission was to give lesbian women an opportunity "to take a significant step toward openly embracing a new identity and rejecting the stigma of deviance" (Gallo, 2002, p. 61). The conference included panels of speakers, cocktail parties, a business meeting, a luncheon, and a dinner banquet. Two hundred women attended. The police were the unexpected attendees. They showed up to make sure that the women at the conference were dressed as women and weren't wearing men's clothes which was illegal. What they found was 200 women wearing skirts, heels and stockings (Faderman, 1991).

Because the first convention was so successful and popular, it became a regular yearly event. At the 1966 Daughters of Bilitis convention, though lesbians were front and center, more attention was paid to gay male civil liberties than lesbian civil rights—only emphasizing that lesbians understood and supported their gay brothers who were more apt to face beating and entrapment than women and to be arrested for public sex and/or perceived effeminate behavior (Martin, 2002, p. 174).

***Lesbians and gay male homophiles collide***. The Daughters of Bilitis weren't prepared for the prejudice and inflammatory comments that came from their male counterparts *inside* the homophile movement. Hal Call, Mattachine's president at that time, wrote Daughters of Bilitis a letter that criticized the public relations because the National Lesbian Conference was exclusive and omitted an invitation to men. He remarked that gay men were unlikely to attend because it was a *Lesbian* conference, making the presumption that the conference needed the attendance of the male homophiles in order to succeed. He was outraged that it wasn't called a homosexual conference. However, the head count of 200 people, primarily women, made it the largest homophile conference to that date (Mixner & Bailey, 2000).

"Officially the Mattachine Society was established to represent the entire homosexual community; though in actuality the membership of the organizations was primarily male" (Ripberger, 2006). Mattachine consistently lacked a lesbian presence. Women who were involved with the Mattachine Society began to realize that the concerns of gay men differed from those of lesbian women. For example: promiscuity, relationships, gender, parenting issues, and sexual identity each affect men differently than women (Byers, 2008).

Lesbian contributions to the Homophile Movement and reflection of sexism in the gay rights movement are very evident in this comment by former Mattachine president, Hal Call, "In the early days of the gay movement, the women weren't in it. They didn't have any problems compared to what the male did. It's only when the movement got going that the women have come forward…Females didn't count" (Marcus, 1992, p. 41).

Females didn't count. "Like her heterosexual sister, the Lesbian has been downtrodden, but doubly so: first, because she is a woman, and second, because she is a Lesbian" (Martin & Lyon, 1992, p. 7). Critics of Daughters of Bilitis, particularly gay males, had belittled the female organization for being separatist and tended to treat Daughters of Bilitis as a women's auxiliary. Women were welcome at Mattachine meetings—to make coffee for meetings, to take notes as the secretary, and to sit quietly in the corner. Phyllis and Del found the male homophiles to be chauvinistic, patronizing, and acting from their male privileged point of view. The male homophile groups had "an open door policy for women. But it's only window-dressing for the public…" (Martin, 1995, p. 41).

Knowing about this sexist attitude of gay males in the homophile movement, I asked Phyllis about her thoughts on the lack of available lesbian history and the lack of recognition and research and the condescending attitude of gay men toward lesbians. Her frustration and annoyance was palpable. Phyllis and Del have spent a lifetime organizing, fighting and challenging discrimination. Her frustration is rooted in an infinite struggle against sexism *within* the gay and lesbian movement as well the struggle of sexism and homophobia outside the movement.

Phyllis had an edge to her voice when she talked about gay men, whether she was talking about men in the gay rights movement or her next door neighbors. '"You know what," she said, "I HATE GAY RICH MEN." I say that a lot. I think that's my new logo" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

While sitting in Phyllis Lyon's living room, it is obvious that she is proud of her femaleness, her female history and the many women that inspire her. Her home is very female centered: books, videos, artwork, and autographed photos all express her dedication to women. The spirit of Eleanor Roosevelt, Shirley Chisholm, Dianne Feinstein, Nancy Pelosi, Michelle Obama, and Del Martin fills the air. About politics, Phyllis said, "It turned out that we [her and Del] also liked the same kind of activities in terms of getting involved politically. We were fortunately both Democrats. Pro-choice. Pro-women. Pro-sex. Pro-people" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

According to Phyllis, the lack of recognition of lesbians is still an issue. In the 2008 Academy Award Winning film, there was ONE woman supporting character—the cast was primarily men. Anne Kronenberg was Harvey Milk's campaign manager, so she couldn't really be overlooked. "Of all the women that worked with Harvey," none of them receives acknowledgment or recognition of their dedicated time and energy to the movement, "…especially Sally Gearhart. She went with him all over the place speaking with him." Phyllis added, "I don't know anybody but women who have said, 'Where were the women' when the movie was shown" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

In the movie, *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon* (Biren, 2003), two gay men said that the fissure has been closed between gay men and the lesbians because the lesbians came to the aid of gay men in the 80s during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I was curious. Does Phyllis believe that? "We didn't go around soothing

brows, we weren't the nurse types. I don't know. It's true that women did a lot of stuff and a lot of the women did take care of the guys. I guess you expect women to know how to take care of people who are sick.. But, we [her and Del] certainly raised money. I don't know that it closed the fissure, you know, it may have made it a little closer at that time"(P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

**The church, couch, and courts.** Many times in the literature, the story ends there: *Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon moved in together on Valentine's Day in 1953 and helped to start the Daughters of Bilitis, an underground social club in the 1955.* However, they were involved with several other activist activities in San Francisco that changed the course of history for the lives for gays, lesbians and women across the country. "Basically, Del and I got involved [in Daughters of Bilitis] to meet other lesbians and broaden our circle of friends, we had no idea what the future held for us" (Mixner & Bailey, 2000). "We were fighting the church, the couch, and the courts," Del often remembered years later, naming the array of social and cultural forces her and Phyllis confronted (Equity California, 2008). Over the next decade, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, backed by the reputation of the Daughters of Bilitis, methodically challenged the political, legal, religious and medical climate on their attitudes and beliefs about homosexuals.

***Challenging the legal and political views of homosexuality.*** The first institution they confronted was the law. Though, various statutes and sections of California state law affected specific homosexual and heterosexual sexual acts, very few heterosexuals were ever arrested. "Section 286 is having sexual relations with an animal, or a man

having sexual relations through the anus. Section 286 also included a man having anal intercourse with a woman. And section 288a involved oral copulation—copulating the private parts of one with the mouth of another. Oral copulation in those years, oral copulation was punishable by up to fourteen years in prison." (Marcus, 1992, p. 38). Most of the people arrested for this "crime" were men having sex with men.

"There was a lot of animosity and resentment [in Daughters of Bilitis] over the fact that it was the gay guys who were creating such havoc with the police—the raids, the indiscriminate sex, their bathroom habits, and everything else" (Gallo, 2006). For gay men, it seemed as though it were a "giant candy store of sexuality, a giant gay men's fraternity party (Poiner, 1993). Phyllis and Del believed that the laws needed to be challenged, regardless of gay men's sexual practices. They were committed to changing the criminal codes. "We wanted to change the sex laws that made people felons," Lyons says, "we thought that there would come a time, hopefully, when there wouldn't be any laws against our sexuality and we'd be accepted as people by the outside community" (Gallo, 2002, p. 16; Mixner & Bailey, 2000, p.33).

Members from Daughters of Bilitis and Mattachine attempted a dialogue with two assemblymen in the California state legislature about the discriminatory sex laws. Both men were lawyers and could see how unjust the laws were. "While they were sympathetic, they said, 'If we came up with any legislation of that sort right now, we would be considered to be 'for sin' and would be booted out of office; we would be of no help to you then'" (Martin, 2002, March 27). The lawmakers' suggestion was to get the church to support anti-discrimination laws. Religion is the primary opponent to gay

rights laws in the 21st century. Del and Phyllis thought it could never work in the early 1960s. Despite their dim view of organized religion, they agreed to embark on a terrifying venture: they would attempt to educate the church (Mixner & Bailey, 2000).

***Challenging religious views of homosexuality.*** Phyllis and Del made several attempts to open a discussion with religious leaders. They were met with the messages that they expected: "love the sinner, hate the sin", being homosexual was not a sin but having homosexual sex was a sin, and the argument against homosexuality found in Leviticus that "proved" that "man shall not lie with another man." Most clergy in the 1960s still believed that homosexuality was immoral. Then Del and Phyllis met Ted McIlvenna.

The Council on Religion and the Homosexual was formed in 1964 after Ted McIlvenna and Cecil Williams from Glide Memorial Methodist Church, located in San Francisco's rundown Tenderloin neighborhood, contacted homophile leaders to create a ministry for young male prostitutes who congregated in the area. Eventually, the meeting with Ted McIlvenna led to a three-day retreat. Fifteen religious members of the Bay Area clergy and fifteen leaders of homophile groups—including Daughters of Bilitis founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, members of the Mattachine Society, SIR and One, Inc.—met to open discussion. As usual, the Daughters of Bilitis had to assert themselves strongly to make certain that half of the homosexuals in attendance were women (Mixner & Bailey, 2000).

The clergy and homophiles discussed issues such as theology and homosexuality, stereotypes, and attitudes of the clergy and homosexuals towards each other. By the end

of the retreat, the group had formed Council on Religion and the Homosexual (Elinison & Yogi, 2009). Council on Religion and the Homosexual would continue the dialogue started during the retreat. They all agreed that the church had let down the homosexual because they lacked understanding. As a result, the ministers hoped to remedy the situation (Boyd, 2003).

On New Year's Day, six gay and lesbian organizations co-sponsored a fundraiser for the Council on Religion and the Homosexual. Lyon and Martin both served on the initial board of directors of Council on Religion and the Homosexual and played key roles in organizing and staffing the fundraiser. The board members planned a costume ball with a Mardi gras theme. The organizers of the event—lawyers, ministers and homophiles—met with the "sex crimes" division of the police department. The police were told about the ball and informed that it was a private fundraiser for a religious-based organization. The police were opposed to the idea, opposed to an event where gays and lesbians would gather, undoubtedly in drag, and threatened to arrest anyone in clothing of the opposite sex. However, they were reminded that it was a private event and that they could not enforce their morality codes or dress codes upon the party. They reached an agreement and the Council on Religion and the Homosexual was under the impression that there would be no interference from the police.

Fifteen hundred tickets were presold and the Council on Religion and the Homosexual was expecting a tremendous party. However, the police showed up outside the front door on the night of the ball and threatened to arrest anyone who was wearing a mask or a costume. Naturally, since it was a costume party, there were plenty of people

wearing costumes and masks. The police blocked the street, diverted traffic, set up lights to light the entrance, and ordered police photographers to take photos of everyone that entered the ball. Only 600 of the 1500 ticket holders dared brave the police's challenge and went to the party (Boyd, 2003).

The ministers and the minister's wives who helped to organize the fundraiser were appalled at the intimidation tactics of the police and held a press conference the next day. Their outrage at the police for their bullying of the homosexual community gave validity to the story that homosexuals had been trying to tell for years—out of the mouths of straight ministers and their wives! This outrage opened people's eyes in San Francisco. They started to take notice that gay people really were being harassed and oppressed by the police department (Boyd, 2003). Though the original intent of the organization was to promote an ongoing conversation between religion and homosexuals, the mission became to protect homosexuals from police harassment and abuse (McAdams, 2010).

Del and Phyllis then got involved with creating a community organization called Citizen's Alert. This functioned as a hotline for police abuse in the city. The community could call the hotline twenty four hours a day to report police intimidation, harassment and anti-gay violence. The chief of police was required to appoint a liaison to the gay and lesbian community in San Francisco. Also, it forced police to withdraw from the initiative of harassment and intimidation that had, for so long, held San Francisco's gay and lesbian communities in its grip (Boyd, 2003).

Internally challenging my own religion was terrifying; I couldn't imagine facing ministers, their wives and possible congregants. When asked about Council on Religion and the Homosexual and challenging religion and the ministers views on homosexuality, I expected Phyllis to share deep insight about herself or profound discernment about her experience. Instead, she was very nonchalant about her involvement. "Yes, I was involved with that one, just because it got started all around me. And it started when I was working at Glide (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

***Challenging the psychiatric community.*** The American Psychiatric Association included homosexuality in its first list of mental disorders in 1952—an illness that should be cured. The first DSM was forty-two pages long and listed homosexuality with fetishism, pedophilia, transvestitism, exhibitionism, sadism and masochism—listed among sociopathic personality disturbances (Eisenbach, 2006). "We worked to educate the psychiatric profession, and finally Dr. Evelyn Hooker at the University of California at Los Angeles came up with a statement that we were not sick, that some of us might need help, but homosexuality wasn't an illness" (Martin, 2002, March 27).

In 1953, Evelyn Hooker, a UCLA professor, received a grant to study the difference in the mental well-being and the psychological adjustment in gay males versus heterosexual males. She found no significant difference. Evelyn Hooker's research played a major role in the declassification of homosexuality from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders as a mental illness in 1973. "We acted as guinea pigs in lots of research about lesbians. And most of the results showed that we were like other women. The research was used in many lesbian mother custody cases to

show that were not all that different….as a result, more of us came out. The more of us who come out, the better off we are, because people's attitudes change as soon as they realize that they know some of us" (Martin, 1992). Because of the research findings, there was more evidence to get homosexuality removed from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders.

"In 1971, Del traveled to Washington, DC for the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association to participate in a panel of "non-patient" homosexuals. In her speech, Del chastised the psychiatrists and their "science" for thinking of homosexuals only by their sexuality and not as a whole person" (Lyon, 2002, p. 166). In addition, Del and an out lesbian psychiatrist educated women psychiatrists "how to protest against their male counterparts" (Lyon, 2002, p. 167).

For many years, Del Martin was a leader in the campaign to persuade the American Psychiatric Association to declare that homosexuality was not a mental illness and that "by itself, homosexuality does not meet the criteria for being a psychiatric disorder" (Thompson, 1994, p. 85). This goal was finally achieved in 1973 (Equity California, 2008). However, all references to homosexuality were not completely removed until 1986 when the APA published the DSM-IIIR (Miller, 1995).

**Phyllis and Del as Feminist Rights Activists.** In the late 60s and early 70s, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon "left" the gay movement because they felt that the men were running the movement with little or no thought about or input from lesbians (Miller, 1995). The natural step for two lesbian activists who felt condescension from men was to join the feminist movement.

In 1967, Del wrote a “good-bye” letter to the homophile movement. They heard about the advent of the National Organization for Women and immediately joined the promising Northern California Chapter (Lyon, 2002). Del and Phyllis were among the first out lesbians to join National Organization for Women and the National Organization for Women. They sent their check for membership, requesting the couple’s membership fee. They were not exactly welcomed with open arms.

Phyllis and Del had “long recognized that sexual orientation was only one battleground for women, who at the time were denied equal pay for equal work, protection under the law from abusive spouses, lesbian motherhood, and other critical women’s issues” (Mixner & Bailey, 2000, p. 48). For lesbians, the struggle was twofold,…”by her very nature the Lesbian is cast in the role of breadwinner and will be a member of society’s working force most of her life, since there is no male to support her.” Equal pay for equal work is still a vital lesbian concern. (Martin & Lyon, 1983, p. 257).

Phyllis and Del moved from the homophile group where they experienced sexism, and joined the National Organization for Women hoping to find a safe place to confront sexual discrimination. “Like her heterosexual sister, the Lesbian has been downtrodden.” in the National Organization for Women, they realized that discrimination is “doubly so: first, because she is a woman, and second, because she is a Lesbian” (Martin & Lyon, 1992, p. 7).

In 1969, Betty Friedan, president of the National Organization of Women, coined the phrase “The Lavender Menace” to describe the presence of lesbians in the

early women's rights movement. Friedan and some other straight feminists had declared that lesbians posed a threat to the emerging women's movement and were anxious that lesbian involvement would confine the movement's ability to achieve serious political change (Belge, 2009). They believed that the stereotypes of "butch" and "man-hating" lesbians would provide an easy way for society to dismiss the movement and not take it seriously. As a result, Friedan tried to purge the organization of all lesbians and distance National Organization for Women from lesbian causes (Jay, 1999). Friedan also saw to it that the "couple" membership was eradicated and that other decisions from the "Lavender Menace" were halted before they gained any momentum. Lesbians were ignored. By not facing the issues of its lesbian membership, lesbians in the organization and lesbianism became the issue that National Organization for Women and Betty Friedan had hoped to avoid (Martin & Lyon, 1983).

Martin and Lyon state in *Lesbian/Woman* (1983, p. 275), "For those of us who recognize ourselves as Woman as well as Lesbian, the emotional furor our presence has wrought in the women's movement has been both comic and tragic. It has been much like an obstacle race to see who feared whom the most. And those of us who chose to be "up front" Lesbians stood stupefied in the middle of the course as symbols of fear to both sides. Yet to those women who think of themselves as "woman-identified" we have become, possibly, symbols of unity."

Lyon and Martin continued their lesbian activism and challenged the organization about its perceived homophobia. They educated the feminists about the connection of sexism, homophobia and heterosexism and lobbied the organization to believe that

lesbian issues were feminist issues. In 1971, NOW expanded its policies to include lesbian rights. The NOW resolution declared "that a woman's right to her own person includes the right to define and express her own sexuality and to choose her own lifestyle" ( National Organization for Women, 2005-2009).

In 1973, amid the anti-lesbian controversy, lesbians formed a caucus at the National Organization for Women national convention. Del Martin, too, ran for the National Board of Directors, stating that "Lesbians remain second-class citizens of National Organization for Women. During that convention, there was "unqualified support in the fight against lesbian discrimination" and Del Martin was elected as the first open lesbian woman to the national board of directors (Pollner, 1973). Del and Phyllis believed that the women's movement should stand for the rights of *all* women.

"As leaders, no matter how we felt personally, we could not display fear. In the process we overcame our own fears (Martin & Lyon, 1983, p. 266). Del and Phyllis' main goal in the National Organization for Women was consciousness raising.

Martin and Lyon left the organization over concerns about homophobia in 1979, but rejoined in 1988 and participated in that year's NOW Lesbian Rights Conference" (National Organization for Women Staff, 2004).

**Del and Phyllis Write *Lesbian/Woman*.** In 1972, Phyllis and Del wrote a landmark book that describes lesbian lives in a positive, affirming, and knowledgeable way. The purpose of *Lesbian/Woman* was to present a primer on how the lesbian "views herself as a person; how she deals with the problems she encounters in her various roles as woman, worker, friend, parent, child, citizen, wife, employer, welfare recipient, home

owner and taxpayer; and how she views other people and the world around her" (Martin & Lyon, 1983, p. 9). A book like *Lesbian/Woman* did not exist and was almost unknown at the time. Del and Phyllis wrote the book to share their experience, their feelings, and their thoughts and how they "learned many things that led us to self acceptance—and liberation (Martin & Lyon, 1983, p. 10). In 1992, *Publishers Weekly* chose it as one of the twenty most influential women's books of the last twenty years.

Phyllis and Del got a letter from a friend that said that McCall's Publications was looking for a book on homosexuality. Phyllis remembered, "We had talked about doing a book but we hadn't *done* anything about doing a book…which was typical" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). They wrote to McCalls and said, 'There's a lot of stuff out on gay men, but there's nothing on lesbians.' They got a letter back from a McCall's editor requesting an outline of a book that they would write. Phyllis and Del put their heads together to come up with a list of topics they might include in a book on lesbian life and sexuality. They included some of their experiences, a chapter on lesbian motherhood, another chapter about lesbian sex, and the identity struggle that many lesbians had experienced. They sent the outline to New York and the editor was very excited about it. He thought it was a great idea, so Del and Phyllis flew to New York and McCall's gave them a contract and a check for a thousand dollars (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010; Martin, 2002, March 27).

Phyllis and Del flew back to San Francisco and strategized about how they would put the manuscript together. For a number of years, they had rented a cabin in Jenner, near the mouth of the Russian River. The women decided they would go to the cabin and

write the book. Del took her manual typewriter and Phyllis took her electric typewriter. Once they were settled in, they decided what the outline was going to be and each would write a different chapter. Del might start with the first chapter and Phyllis would take the second chapter. They would type, and when they got stuck in their chapter, they would switch. Depending on what the chapter was, one might have written more or written less, but they were always switching.

When they had finished writing the manuscript and had literally cut and pasted paragraphs and used the lost art of proofreading edit marks, they called Sally Gearhart to revise the manuscript. "She took out the exclamation points of which there were a lot" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). They got somebody to retype it and it became a professional manuscript.

There are drafts of the manuscript in the *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000* at the LGBT Historical Society in San Francisco. The draft is typed onto now yellowed onion skin paper and marked with handwritten proofreading marks. Phyllis and Del presumably typed the manuscript on onion skin for a number of reasons. There were no copy machines or computers with printers, so they typed copies by using carbon paper. Secondly, there were no fax machines or email, so they had to send the manuscript by mail to New York. Onion paper is lighter than regular twenty pound paper commonly used in printers and copiers today.

Before Phyllis and Del sent their book to the publisher, they got a letter explaining that the editor that had been so excited about their concept no longer worked

for the company. They were reassured that there would be no change and that they didn't need to worry about anything. So, they sent off a copy of *Lesbian/Woman* and waited.

The new editor was a woman. She read the manuscript and sent Del and Phyllis a letter. It said, "This is NOTHING like we asked for. Apparently you have no doubt about your lifestyle and that's impossible. You will have to TOTALLY rewrite it or send us back the money." Rather indignant, Phyllis said, "So we looked at each other and we said, 'Fuck it. That is not true' (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). They never sent the check back and looked for a new publisher.

They went to see Don Kuhn at Glide Publications. Phyllis worked with him at Glide Memorial United Methodist Church and asked him to publish the book. He was ecstatic. He had encouraged Del and Phyllis to write a book for years and was happy to publish it, bind it and put a cover on it.

Then Glide sold the rights to Penguin which gave the book a wider distribution. They published seven editions of the paperback version with a purple cover. "The purple cover paperback went all over the world," stated Phyllis (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). The authors heard from lesbians all over the world who had *Lesbian/Woman* sightings. "We got letters by the hundreds from women who read the book. It was absolutely amazing the amount of mail we got, which shows how badly something like that was needed" explained Phyllis about the importance of the book (Martin & Lyon, 1992). "Every now and then, somebody will still contact me to say, 'You know, your book saved my life.' We heard that from so many people" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Originally written in 1972 and updated twenty years later with an afterword that records the changes in lesbian culture, *Lesbian/Woman* is a book that women were afraid to check out of the library, *if* the library carried it. Often, women would read it and hide it somewhere in the library so they were sure to find it the next time. The spine would be one of the most broken in the library, but was a book that was hardly ever officially borrowed. The first time I read it, I wished that I had it when I was coming out. Some of the "current events" mentioned in the book are dated, but the positive and affirming themes might have saved a lot of anguish.

**Phyllis Lyon and Glide Memorial United Methodist Church.** Phyllis remarked, "I'm so glad I never got involved with religion" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Phyllis' parents were both raised in strict religious homes. Her paternal grandparents were firm Presbyterians and her father was raised with Presbyterian beliefs. Her mother was raised as a Southern Methodist because Phyllis' maternal grandfather was a minister. Her parents, however, never went to church as adults and didn't require Phyllis and her sister to go to church either. Phyllis wasn't raised with religion and never identified with a religious denomination.

On the one hand, Phyllis never did get involved with her own personal religion. But to say that she "never got involved with religion" is a fallacy and a little bit ironic. She was involved with religion and the church for most of her working life. She worked for Ted McIlvenna at Glide Church from1964 until her retirement in 1987. This comment is also ironic considering her involvement with the Council on Religion and the Homosexual. By 1972 when Glide published *Lesbian/Woman*, Phyllis had been working

at the church for eight years. She worked there in 1964 when the Council on Religion and the Homosexual was created. Phyllis sees the irony, "I got a job at ***Glide*** church, strangest thing I ever did" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). She started as a switchboard operator and ended up being Ted McIlvenna's secretary.

With McIlvenna, Phyllis Lyon founded the National Sex and Drug Forum (1968) and began a career as a sex educator. She was one of the founding faculty members of The Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, a graduate school that granted doctoral and other degrees in sexology in 1976 (Religious Archives Network, 2003)**.** "Ted McIlvenna and I decided that people needed sex information and Ted got some porn films. Well, he was a guy, despite being a minister, and he knew how to get them" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). They started a class on Human Sexuality. Phyllis taught lesbian and gay sexuality and Ted taught heterosexual sexuality. They held lectures, mediated discussion and answered questions that people had about sexuality. Once in awhile they would bring other experts in, "we got some other ministers who were pretty good on sex…you'd be surprised how many ministers know a lot about sex" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

While at Glide Memorial Church, Phyllis continued to take phone calls and started receiving calls pertaining to domestic violence. Del picked up the ball, and researched the legal, historical and social complexity of domestic violence. She wrote a book called *Battered Wives* in 1975.

***Battered Wives.*** *Battered Wives* was one of the first, and some say, the best, general introduction to the extent and seriousness of the problem of spousal abuse.

Domestic violence was not a safe or socially acceptable subject to talk about in the early 70s. Del Martin was one of the pioneers that helped bring the subject of domestic violence out of the darkness and into the light.

In *Battered Wives*, Martin looked at domestic violence on all system levels. Del disputes the belief of the 70s that domestic violence was a result of the husband and wife relationship. She believed that it is not a matter of explosive anger or an impulsive reaction. She also argues that spousal abuse is not a private and personal issue, but rather a larger social issue with a basis in the gender difference and inequality in marriage, a lack of legal protection and a need for social systems to protect the victim.

*Battered Wives* was written before there were systems in place to properly collect data about the prevalence of domestic violence. She examined the role of community police forces, hospital emergency rooms and private social service agencies dealt with spousal abuse. For the most part, she found that the wife was blamed and the husband was vindicated (Martin, 1976).

Martin came to the conclusion that victims of domestic violence needed an safe place to go in an emergency. The most important support for a battered woman, and her children, was for her to have protection from more abuse. Counseling, legal advice, employment, transportation and childcare are all secondary issues that can be dealt with after a woman and her children are safe. Del's solution was feminist run refuges for battered women and their children (Martin, 1976). "I feel like most of what we got out of it, when all was said and done, were the social services for victims" (Martin, 2002).

*Battered Wives* was a "catalyst for the establishment of a movement against domestic violence" and battered women shelters (Kornblum, 2004).

**Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club.** Together with Jim Foster, founder of SIR (Society for Individual Rights), Del and Phyllis founded the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club, the first gay political club in the United States. The club was named after a notorious, feminine lesbian writer and partner of the author, Gertrude Stein. Being a member of "Alice" was code for homosexuals to claim that they supported gay rights, but weren't ready to publicly announce it. The political action committee remains a force in San Francisco politics and is celebrating their 40th anniversary.

The Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club has the following objectives. First, they endeavor to influence policy on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) rights issues and to help educate the public about issues related to public policy and the positions of the Democratic Party. Secondly, "Alice" organizes the LGBT community to work politically to bring about justice for all people, with special emphasis on justice for LGBT people and their rights. Also, they campaign for public and Party candidates and City and State ballot propositions. Members also lobby for proposed legislation. Finally, they generate funds for the support and implementation of the Club's policies and endorsements. The club also campaigns against ballot propositions, policies and endorsements that don't follow their values and beliefs (Alice B Toklas LGBT Democratic Club, 2010) .

Two early victories gave the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club faith that the gay community was an effective political force. In 1972, the board of supervisors passed an

ordinance prohibiting discrimination against gays by city contractors. The bill was sponsored by Dianne Feinstein (Shilts, 1982, p. 64). In the early 70s, gay men were still being harassed and jailed after raids on gay bars and cruising spots. If they were arrested on "moral charges", they had to register as a sex offender, even if the sexual activity was consensual. In 1975, "Alice" facilitated a major victory by endorsing Willie Brown's AB 489. Willie Brown wrote a law called the Consenting Adult Law that passed and decriminalized sodomy in the state of California.

"Del and I had full lives. We were both Democrats, and from the time we got together we were involved with the Democratic Party here in the city. We used to sit around with Nancy Pelosi (former Speaker of the House and present Minority Leader of the US House of Representatives) and stuff envelopes. And we knew Phil Burton (U.S. representative from California) and his brother, John Burton (current chairman of the California Democratic Party), and Phil's wife, Sala, who took Phil's spot in Congress when he died." (Lyon, 2009).

In the early 1970s, a man named Harvey Milk was among the influx of gay men that moved to the Castro district of San Francisco. He was a charismatic man with a colorful approach and vibrant speech. He is known as the first openly gay man to serve as an elected official in public office. Though he had a somewhat "antagonistic" relationship with Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club during most of the 70s, they came together as a force to be reckoned with in 1978 when Proposition 6, otherwise known as the Briggs Initiative, was proposed. If passed, this law that would make it mandatory to fire teachers for being gay or lesbian. Phyllis chaired the San Franciscans Against

Proposition 6 (the Briggs Initiative). The proposed law energized gays and lesbians to organize, mobilize efforts for more gay rights ordinances, and rallied closeted gays and lesbians to come out rather than stay safely in their silence. Harvey Milk was at the forefront of that energy, and debated Briggs "taking on each of Briggs' inflammatory claims" (Adam, 1995, p. 113). The bill was defeated by Californians by more than a million votes.

Harvey Milk and mayor, George Moscone, both gay and lesbian allies on the San Francisco board of supervisors, were assassinated by a disgruntled former board member named Dan White. White had resigned from the board. After two weeks, he asked to be reinstated, and was denied by Mayor Moscone. On the day that Mayor Moscone was going to name White's replacement, Dan White walked into his office and shot and killed him. Then went to find Harvey Milk, ran into him in the hallway, asked him to step inside White's former office and shot and killed him, too (Shilts, 1982).

White's trial consisted of white middle-class San Franciscans who were mostly Catholic; gays and ethnic minorities were excused from the jury pool. The jury was clearly sympathetic to the defendant: some of the members cried when they heard White's tearful recorded confession, at the end of which the interrogator thanked White for his honesty (Shilts, 1982, p. 308). White was acquitted of first degree murder and served a five year sentence for voluntary manslaughter.

Phyllis remembers when the two men were assassinated:

> "God that killed me, that was SO awful. I just LOVED George and I was a good friend of Harvey's. It

> was unbelievable…so awful. Just unbelievable. I heard it on the radio, I think; I couldn't believe what they were saying…," Phyllis gets very pensive as she looks out the window. "Just…" she sucks air through her teeth, "Stupid man." She heaves a big sigh. "He [Dan White] was a very bad man, I never liked him. I was glad when they didn't get him back on the board, but little did I know" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

**Old Lesbians Organizing for Change.** Del and Phyllis continued their activism in their later years by co-founding and getting involved with Old Lesbians for Change. It is a "national network of Old Lesbians over age 60 working to make life better for Old Lesbians through support networks and by confronting ageism in communities and the country using education and public discourse as primary tools" (OLOC, 2012). Phyllis' latest issue is "ageism and advocacy fo an invisible constituency. Her generation of lesbians and gay men are still mostly in the closet, making lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender elders a most underserved population" (Martin, 2002).

**Gay Marriage.** In their book, *Lesbian/Woman* Martin and Lyon conclude with the following, "We want equal rights and full citizenship—whether in relation to marriage, joint income tax returns, inheritance, and property, adoption, job opportunity education or security clearances" (Martin & Lyon, 1983, p. 283). Perhaps when the couple first wrote this in 1972, it seemed like a pie in the sky expectation. In 2009, Phyllis said, "We never even thought about getting married back then. It didn't become

an issue for a long time -- in fact, it never was much of an issue for us. We were feminists, and a lot of the feminist movement was opposed to marriage because the institution gave men power over women. We hadn't really thought about marriage, and we'd certainly never thought about getting married ourselves. It wasn't an option" (Lyon, 2009). Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon (once again) were in the middle of the struggle for gay and lesbian equality. This time the issue was same-sex marriage, an issue that challenges the beliefs of society, religion and the law. They had become very comfortable and effective with a challenge such as this.

In 2004, San Francisco mayor and city officials concluded that to withhold marriage licenses from same-sex couples violated the California Constitution. Kate Kendall, the executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, telephoned Lyon and Martin at home. 'This will hopefully be the last thing the movement will ever ask you to do, but do you want to get married?" (Hull, 2004). Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were first in line. Between February 12 and March 11, 2004, four thousand gay and lesbian couples were issued marriage licenses in San Francisco (Lambda Legal: Making the Case for Equality, 2009). Conservative religious legal groups filed two lawsuits against San Francisco to demand the court order that marriages be stopped. On March 11, the Supreme Court of California, headquartered in San Francisco, issued a stay ordering the County of San Francisco to stop performing same-sex marriages pending court review on the legality of the matter. On August 12, 2004, The Supreme Court of California ruled that Mayor Newsom had no authority to bypass state law and voided all of the same-sex marriages. "Del is 83 years old and I am 79. After being together for

more than 50 years, it is a terrible blow to have the rights and protections of marriage taken away from us. At our age, we do not have the luxury of time" said Phyllis Lyon on the day that their marriage was voided (Hull, 2004).

At that time, six couples filed a civil lawsuit seeking to overturn Proposition 22, the existing California law enacted by voters in 2000 that limited marriage to opposite-sex couples. The lawsuits were combined into *In re Marriage Cases*; one of the six plaintiff couples was Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon.

Arguments were made in the California of Appeals which ruled that California could continue to bar same-sex couples from marriage. The California Supreme Court received a written request to reverse the Court of Appeals decision in November, 2006, which unanimously agreed to review the decision. Several briefs were filed. Each brief explained why denial of marriage for same-sex couples was unconstitutional. In September 2007, an array of civil rights, religious, community, and professional groups, bar associations and leading legal scholars filed an unprecedented 30 briefs on behalf of more than 500 organizations supporting marriage equality. Three hours of oral arguments were presented before the California Supreme Court in March, 2008. In May of that year, the California Supreme Court ruled that preventing same-sex couples from marriage violated the state Constitution—an enormous victory for same-sex marriage. Conservative religious groups asked the court to delay the decision until after the elections in November, but the California Supreme Court denied the request for delay, ordering that the marriage ruling take place at 5pm on June 4, 2008. *In re Marriage Cases*, the California Supreme Court struck down the state's ban on same-sex marriage in

a broadly worded decision that would invalidate virtually any law that discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation (Dolan, 2008).

Phyllis and Del were legally married on June 12, 2008; at that time they had been together for 55 years. "Their secret? 'There is none, its persistence and doing things together, and love. If we had a secret, we would have written a book and made a million dollars. We love each other, we have similar interests" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Del Martin passed away on August 27, 2008. She died two months after the California Supreme Court decision legalized same-sex marriage. She had been with her partner for 55 years and was officially married to her for two months before Del passed away.

Del got up in the night to go to the bathroom and when she went back to bed. She started to run a little bit to get into the bed and she slipped. That's when she may have broken her arm. Phyllis said with her heart heavy, "I called Diane and Pauline in the middle of the night and they came over immediately and they knew what to do. I was totally out of it, in a way…" Phyllis paused and took a big, long, deep sigh. "Del was not in a lot of pain," she paused again and gazed at San Francisco through the window. "BUT (big sigh), she always had somebody there." Some stayed all night. Many friends and admirers were there. The hospital was full. They moved Del to a larger room and then offered another room so everyone could visit. "How everybody found out about her being in the hospital was amazing to me," sighed Phyllis. Phyllis was exhausted and was transferred back and forth from the house to the hospital. "It seemed like she was in the hospital forever, but it wasn't, it was only about maybe three days?" The couple had

long ago had made arrangements with Neptune to be cremated. "I don't know who made the final arrangements because I was just like this…" she tilted her head, her eyes wide open and looked catatonic. "Well," she sighed, "I wasn't expecting her to die, either."

Phyllis, Del's daughter, Kendra, Diane and Pauline and others took Del's ashes and scattered them at the mouth of the Russian River, near where Del and Phyllis rented a little house (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). "Ever since I met Del 55 years ago, I could never imagine a day would come when she wouldn't be by my side," Lyon, 83, said in a San Francisco Chronicle interview. "I am so lucky to have known her, loved her and been her partner in all things." (Hull, 2008, August 28).

When asked what she misses most about Del, she said, "Having her around. It's hard; there are so many memories of her around. Just her. Not any specific movement or whatever…just her being here. Sitting down, getting up. Talking, talking, talking, and talking. I miss that. I talk to her, but she doesn't ever answer back. I think it was mean of her to have left me behind…" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Phyllis shared some of her fondest memories and things she admired about Del. "Anyhow, Del was wonderful, you know. She was a bookkeeper, she was good at figures. She kept track of our checkbooks. I finally figured out how after she left. It was very strange, but I can do it now. She was a great speaker and a GOOD writer and all kinds of things. A wonderful person, very loving. We were madly in love, of course, for years and years and years and years and years. After awhile we got pretty used to each other. We managed to enjoy the same kinds of things. Martinis. We also did about ten or

twelve Olivia cruises and we liked to travel. She didn't mind driving around…as long as I was driving. We liked movies; I mean we liked a lot of the same kind of stuff. It turned out that we also liked the same kind of activities in terms of getting involved politically. We were fortunately both Democrats, and so on. We had a lot of fun together. We ALWAYS talked politics. We were always together on politics. I don't recall anytime that we were ever apart on politics… Pro-choice. Pro-women. Pro-sex. Pro-people" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Phyllis will turn 88 years old in November. About getting older she says, "Well, I'm glad that I'm getting older. Seems like it's a little bit more interesting than not. I can't complain…oh, I could too, I can always complain…" She still manages the steps in front of the house. "I can't run up and down the stairs anymore, but I CAN go up and down the stairs. I can still carry my groceries up if I'm not lucky enough to have somebody spot me when I'm coming back from the store" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

Phyllis was asked what person, group or organization had the most impact on her story, she said, "I must say that I would have to add Del in there at some point…but also, Daughters of Bilitis. We were both involved in getting it together. It also opened up a whole new vista of other organizations and other gays and lesbians who were in other places" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

The interview time had come to an end. Phyllis had a hair appointment for an upcoming birthday party. She signed a copy of *Lesbian/Woman* and accepted some

birthday and thank you gifts. We had decided to walk, at least to Castro and 24th Street, and as I walked, I thought something similar to this quote, “By taking risks during a period in which it was clearly dangerous to be lesbian, they increased the possibilities for lesbian organization and acceptance today” (Esterberg, 1990). I also thought about the power that one individual has, and how that power grew exponentially with the combination of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon. I thought about how mind boggling it must be for Phyllis Lyon to look back over their life together, reflecting on the progress this country has made in its respect for gay and lesbian people and the changes that have been made because of the energy and work they have done for the gay and lesbian movement. Del Martin identified their legacy in 1984 when she said that their most important contribution was "being able to help make changes in the way lesbians and gay men view themselves and how the larger society views lesbians and gay men." Del and Phyllis had the courage to be true to themselves when the world offered only condemnation for lesbians. The couple showed all of us how to have what they called “self-acceptance and a good sense of my own self-worth.” Del and Phyllis never backed down from their insistence on full equality for all people and kept moving all of us closer to that ideal (Equity California, 2008).

# Chapter 5: Discussion

The intent of this thesis is to tell the story of Phyllis Lyon's life and the activist role she played--with her partner--in her community and in San Francisco, and how their activism carried over into the gay liberation movement and women's movement. In this section, the author will discuss the limitations, the method chosen for this project, and defend the validity and reliability of the data. In addition, these questions will be answered: what prevented the interviewer from collecting the data that she intended? What are some of the suggestions for further data collection and as a result, a more complete narrative life story? Finally, the author will share the surprises she had during the interview.

The life story interview, described by Atkinson (1998), is the intended method used for this thesis. It is a qualitative method that is an account of a person's life told by that individual that is recorded for another person to edit and present. The editor extracts themes from the interview to tell the story of the subject's life. In this way, it is different from a biography.

A biography is a life history that has been written in the context of history together with the aid of various artifacts and is bigger than the individual's life story. "A Narrative Life Story and Reflections of Activist Phyllis Lyon" took on a life of its own, and crept outside the boundary of the life story. The story of Phyllis Lyon needs to be told in the context of an extremely homophobic culture and history in order to understand her courage and to comprehend her significance to the gay and lesbian community. Thus, it became a life story with elements of a biography.

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study regardless of the method chosen. Life stories can be unique depending on who is writing the narrative, the writer's perspective, culture, age and gender in relation to the person whose story they tell. The experience can be life changing for the interviewee and the interviewer depending on the interactions, quality and depth of the exchange. A creative relationship may develop between the two people which can create a richer narrative life story.

Qualitative research is not just a "free-for-all" research method. There are important controls that are necessary. One of the most important controls is internal consistency. Internal consistency means "what is said in one part of the narrative should not contradict what is said in another part" (Atkinson, p. 60, 1998). Phyllis Lyon's stories seem internally consistent. She did not appear to contradict herself in this interview, and the stories recorded in the interview are consistent with the stories in the research. Some of her stories were similar, with less detail, during an informal phone conversation on February 19, 2010.

Another control is external consistency. External consistency is when the stories told in the interview and in other interviews, "conform to what you may already know or think you know about the person telling the story or the topic or issue being discussed." It is important to remember that the narrative life story is not necessarily about seeking historical facts, but the person's experience of history and what they remember as having happened (Atkinson, 1998).

Personal narratives are by nature subjective and highly personal, for the storyteller as well as for the interviewer/interpreter. According to Atkinson (1995), there are "three important points to consider in analyzing life stories subjectively. First, we do not judge, we make connections…and seek to find the relevance of the story itself. Both Phyllis and the interviewer are extroverted flirts. There was conversation for four straight hours about the past. The subject and interviewer made a significant connection. As for the relevance of the story, Phyllis Lyon and her partner, Del Martin, have lived a life of activism and changed the attitudes of several institutions in order to make this country a safer and more equal place for gays and lesbians.

The second point to consider when analyzing life stories is that a life story is a text that can tell us the ways in which culture has shaped and influenced that one life…if any part of it connects deeply or clearly with any part of the researcher's experience, we know it is not a unique experience and is very likely one that others share. The single most commonality between the researcher and the subject of the paper was that both were very naïve about lesbians, even after dating and having sex with men. Both were raised to believe, in Phyllis Lyon's words, "I didn't know there were any other options for me" but to be with men.

Third, we are each other's teachers…the life story has something to say to us about life and about our life in particular, they validate our own experience. The person sharing her life story is the teacher; the person receiving another's life story is the student" (p. 70-71). In essence, the story and explaining the meaning of the experiences

is validated. Phyllis Lyon's memories and life story validated the researcher's memories and life story.

Phyllis Lyon's life and the role it plays in the larger community are the story and intent of this thesis. There are a number of variables that are missing from this paper that could be considered weaknesses.

The first variable that could be considered a weakness is the motivation behind the questions that were asked in the interview. The researcher asks whether the interview questions that were asked were chosen because of her own experience with coming out. Though the researcher is two generations younger than Phyllis Lyon, the same macro themes seem to be relevant. Those themes are: religions affect on self-acceptance, the coming out process, and hiding or being closeted. However, it is difficult to tease apart the micro themes of Phyllis Lyon's life from the macro themes. These themes appear to be general macro themes for all gays and lesbians. Certainly, the stories that Phyllis Lyon told about her personal life are framed in reference and perspective of history and culture, specifically, the micro theme of her life with Del.

Ideally, the interview would have been transcribed, the themes would have been established, and then Phyllis Lyon would have been contacted for subsequent interviews to ask more questions about the established themes. As a result, there would be a deeper understanding of what her story means to her. Unfortunately, because of the time and financial constraints, this was not possible for this project.

Another way to gain more insight into the meaning of Phyllis' life, and ultimately, her impact on the gay and lesbian community would be to interview others: members of

the Daughters of Bilitis, Barbara Gittings, Barbara Grier, Billye Talmadge, Kay Lahusen and Stella Rush, et al.; San Francisco and California democrats especially House Minority leader Nancy Pelosi, Senator Dianne Feinstein and former mayor of San Francisco and current California Lieutenant Governor, Gavin Newsom; and, founder of the AIDS quilt, Cleve Jones, among other influential people in the gay rights arena. Finally, it would be exceptional to interview her group of closest family and friends to create a more complete biography of Phyllis Lyon. Others that could be interviewed are Phyllis Lyon's sister, Patricia; Eugene and Kendra, Del's son-in-law and daughter; her two neighbor women that shuttle her around, Pauline and Diane. The ministers from Glide Church, where Phyllis Lyon worked for a decade, Cecil Williams and Ted McIllvena; Feminists Gloria Steinem; and authors Marcia Gallo, Martin Meeker, Lillian Faderman and John D'Emilio.

If someone will continue this research, or the author decides to publish a biography of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon with the additional interviews, it is important to attend to the interviews sooner rather than later. Phyllis Lyon and her contemporaries have recently turned 88 years old. Phyllis Lyon's sister is also in her 80s. Members of Daughters of Bilitis are also in the final trimester of their lives. There's a rich supply of information that may follow these potential interviews to the grave.

Another rich source of research that was not available to the writer is the data in the LGBT Historical Archives in San Francisco. The researcher was able to visit the archives for a short time. Though the table of contents is available online, one must physically visit the archives because the data is not available online. Some of the items

in the archives include letters, rough drafts of *Lesbian/Woman*, thank you notes, cards, photos, copies of the Daughters of Bilitis publication, *The Ladder*, and the business records of Daughters of Bilitis. "Also included are drafts and notes for numerous other articles, chapters and speeches by Lyon and/or Martin on topics ranging from domestic violence and lesbian mothers to the history of the lesbian movement. Lyon and Martin's extensive research and clipping files further document the range of topics and issues that caught their attention over the years. The collection mainly documents Lyon's and Martin's writing and activism," (Online Archive of California, 2009).

Phyllis Lyon loves to talk and tell stories. This is apparent in the research, particularly in video footage, and during this interview. When the interviewer asked a question, Phyllis talked on and on remembering details of her life. This was a fabulous gift and because of this, she shared much data that would eventually add to the richness of the narrative life story that would eventually be written. However the interviewer was not the only one asking questions during the interview. The writer had specific questions picked for the interview to find out details to fill gaps in the research. The interviewer did not want to be redundant by asking questions of which she knew the answer. Time was limited. Unfortunately, the interview did not go as planned. The interviewer brought her partner to the home of Phyllis Lyon. Her partner became so excited about being in the presence of this lesbian icon, that she began asking many questions that the interviewer had deleted as redundant with the literature and research. Though the interview was four hours long, many of the stories were unnecessary because the writer knew the stories and information from the literature and the time went extremely fast.

Many of the stories that Phyllis Lyon shared in the interview were almost word-for-word copies of those compared to other interviews that she's given. Phyllis Lyon's memory of details and specifics was vague (on dates and sometimes even decades). The author wonders whether the stories that are in the literature and in the transcript are stories that have been reinforced over and over in their telling. As a result, those are the stories remembered and thus, the stories that are retold. The researchers hope was to avoid the stories that are familiar and learn more details of Phyllis and Del's life together. However, there were two powerful barriers that prevented that from happening: Phyllis Lyon's memory and the redundant questions.

There were three unexpected findings in this data. First, it was surprising how vehemently Phyllis Lyon seemed to "hate rich gay men" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). She has surely had her experience with them, both professionally and personally. Though she is a strong assertive woman, even at the age of 87, she got fired up while telling stories of her rich gay men neighbors who tried to manipulate her into cutting down her trees. That response seemed to come from hurt and possibly from a history of disregard. Phyllis has a lifetime history with rich gay men who discounted her attributes and disrespected her input.

Another unexpected finding was how absolutely generous and kind she was with her time and her stories. The research suggests that Phyllis is kind, welcoming, friendly and very talkative, but it was not expected that she would be SO kind, welcoming and friendly. Since the interview, the researcher has watched several interview video clips of

her and Del, and the setting for those interviews is often her own home. When trying to negotiate where the interview would be held, she said, "Well, why not my house, dear?"

Another thing that surprised the researcher was this line from the interview: "I was fucking guys and had been doing so for quite awhile" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). She used this term on a couple of occasions to describe having sex. Another time, when describing her and Del's reaction to the first contract for *Lesbian/Woman*, she said, '"So we looked at each other and we said, "Fuck it. That is not true, whoever she is… what the hell."' She used these words with such conviction. It did not occur to the researcher, during the interview, that Phyllis Lyon was 86 years old, especially when she let an occasion expletive slip.

Finally, the researcher was surprised at how comfortable she was in the interview, having a conversation with one of her "she-roes". Phyllis Lyon is just that humble. She is not only welcoming, but she is warm and made her guests feel equal. She did not present as someone who was going to spread her wisdom to underlings. In fact, when she was asked about words of wisdom that she would share, she commented, "I don't know, honey, I'm not a philosopher or sage or whatever. I think that you are probably doing a great job at it, looks to me like it (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010).

The results of this interview and life story are extraordinary. The life lived by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, two women who "just wanted to meet some lesbians" in San Francisco, evolved into a lifelong endeavor to improve the lives of gays and lesbians. They did this by challenging the beliefs of religion, psychiatry, society and the law. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon have seen changes in the ways that gays, lesbians, and women

are viewed and treated, and changes that still need to be made. They have also seen some changes in the way that lesbians and gay men view themselves. As a result, they have received "self-acceptance, self-esteem, self confidence" and "a good sense of their own self-worth" (Online Archive of California, GLBT Historical Society, 2009). Ultimately, they have had their hand in changing every micro and macro issue that gays and lesbians have faced in the last 55 years.

# Chapter 6: Implications for Social Work Practice and Conclusion

The intent of this thesis is to tell the story of Phyllis Lyon's life and the activist role she played beside her partner, Del Martin, in their San Francisco community. However, their activism was not limited to the Bay Area or only in California, their activism affected the gay liberation movement and women's movement across the United States. Both Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were formally trained as journalists. They both began their careers writing for newspapers and journals. After that, they were free lance writers and book authors. However, if one were to look at the National Association of Social Workers code of ethics, the names of Del Martin and/or Phyllis Lyon could replace the phrase "social work profession" or "social worker" throughout the Preamble, Ethical Principles and Purpose of the NASW code of ethics.

According to the first paragraph of the preamble in the NASW code of ethics (2010), "The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010).

Del and Phyllis' mission to enhance the lives and well-being of the LGBT community is apparent in their actions from the time that they visited the Mattachine Society in 1956. Del and Phyllis convinced the membership of Daughters of Bilitis that their club should be one of political and social activism rather than just a social gathering.

From that point to the present, Del and Phyllis have lived their lives as though the "personal is political." Their 55 years of activism has empowered women and lesbians, has empowered older lesbians, has empowered gay and lesbian couples who want the right to marry, has empowered women in domestic violence situations, has empowered the lesbian in the heterosexist National Organization for Women, and has empowered the gay and lesbian community by getting homosexuality removed from the DSM. Their political activism has encompassed every gay and lesbian issue in the last 55 years.

In order to make the argument that Phyllis and Del have worked to "enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable and oppressed" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010), it is important to defend the idea that gays and lesbians are and have been "vulnerable and oppressed".

The Webster's dictionary defines oppression as a "type of injustice; the inequitable use of authority, law, or physical force to prevent others from being free or equal". The verb oppress can mean "the feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically, by authorities, society, or institutions".

In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, gays and lesbians were most defined by the medical field and psychological field as having a mental illness, a behavioral disorder and a physical "degenerative sickness". Homosexual sex acts were criminalized. Religion claimed that homosexuals were "immoral sinners." Gays and lesbians were beaten and harassed by police. People lost their jobs if their boss found out that they were homosexual. Lesbians lost their children. Many gays and lesbians lost their families.

Indeed, gays and lesbians have been "heavily burdened, mentally and physically" by the courts, doctors, psychologists, police, society and religion. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon worked tirelessly to change this oppression in all institutional realms.

"A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). A historic and defining characteristic of the lives of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon was their focus on the individual's well-being in the oppressive social context of their time. Whether they were lobbying politicians to change the sodomy laws or picketing the Federal building about homosexuals in the military, Del and Phyllis challenged society for the wellbeing of the gay and lesbian community as a whole, and ultimately, the individual within that community. During their 55 years of activism, the sodomy laws in every state have been overturned, non-discrimination policies have been put into law, homosexuality has been removed from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and homosexuality has been normalized by a large segment of society. On the backs of Del and Phyllis, equality for homosexuals has become more of a possibility.

Some segments of society would say that these changes in laws and attitudes about homosexuals are not for the "wellbeing of society". However, those segments of society do not guide their lives by the NASW code of ethics. Generally, those segments of society do not honor diversity of sexuality, religion, or culture. Instead, their perception is that ending discrimination and oppression means "Granting homosexuals special rights. It sends a strong message to society. It says that people who make this

lifestyle choice deserve the same legal status and protection as someone who is born black or female or handicapped. This helps to validate the claim that homosexuality is not a choice but a predetermined characteristic" (Elhage, 1999).

"Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). Daughters of Bilitis and Mattachine Society were trying to lobby the policymakers in San Francisco to change the attitude toward homosexuals. "We wanted to change the sex laws that made people felons," Lyons says, "we thought that there would come a time, hopefully, when there wouldn't be any laws against our sexuality and we'd be accepted as people by the outside community" (Gallo, p. 16, 2002; Mixner & Bailey, p.33, 2000).

The lawmakers "knew they didn't have even a remote chance to introduce a bill to revamp those laws. Their only suggestion was to get the church to support changing the laws. It was almost impossible to believe that it would work" (Mixner & Bailey, p. 35, 2000). In both ways, Phyllis and Del were attentive to the environmental forces that created and contribute to the problems for homosexuals, but they were instrumental in changing the attitudes of those forces.

Del and Phyllis "promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). Their work to promote social justice and change began with Daughters of Bilitis. This can be clearly seen in the objectives and purpose of the Daughters of Bilitis which were printed on the inside cover of every issue of their

publication, *the Ladder*. These objectives were in place to promote the integration of the lesbian into society. The first objective, on behalf of individuals, was to "educate the variant[lesbian], with particular emphasis on the psychological, physiological, and sociological aspects, to enable her to understand herself and make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic, and economic implications" (Gallo, p. 11, 2006). This was a tall order in the 1950s, but the Daughters of Bilitis believed that change started with the individual.

The second objective, promoting social justice and change, on behalf of individuals, groups, organizations and communities was the "education of the public at large through acceptance first of the individual leading to an eventual breakdown of erroneous taboos and prejudices through public discussion meetings and dissemination of educational literature" (Gallo, p. 11, 2006).

The third objective, promoting social justice in lesbians as a group, was to participate in "research projects to promote further knowledge and education about the homosexual" (Gallo, p. 11, 2006).

The fourth and final objective addressed social change and social justice on behalf of all gays and lesbians and the injustice that they, as a group, were facing during that time in history. "Investigation of the penal code as it pertains to the homosexual, proposal of changes to provide an equitable handling of cases involving the minority group, and promotion of these changes through due process of law in state legislatures (Gallo, p. 11, 2006).

Del and Phyllis promoted social change and social justice long after the Daughters of Bilitis dissolved as an organization. Phyllis and Del have promoted social change and social justice at the macro level. They have confronted powerful social and cultural institutions when homosexuals were treated as immoral, mentally ill, and illegal. Even fifty years after the founding of Daughters of Bilitis, Phyllis and Del were still promoting social change for gays and lesbians on the marriage equality issue. They were among the original plaintiffs in a series of lawsuits, *re Marriage Cases*, that led to the court's declaring same-sex marriages legal in 2006. Later that year, voters approved a gay marriage ban that is still tangled up in the courts in California.

The objectives of the Daughters of Bilitis to advance social change and social justice for the homosexual, also meet the criteria for the NASW's standard that "social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, research and evaluation" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010).

Del and Phyllis strived to end discrimination, oppression and other forms of social injustice. Indirectly, but advocating for battered women and lesbian mothers, they strived to end poverty in these groups, as well. However, their legacy to end discrimination, oppression and social injustice in the legal system, the patriarchal system, the medical system and society in general during the last 50 years can be seen through their work with

Daughters of Bilitis, Council on Religion and the Homosexual, and National Organization for Women, Old Lesbians for Change, and re MARRIGE CASE.

"Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). By writing the book, *Lesbian/Woman* in 1972, Del and Phyllis sought to enhance lesbians to address their own needs. *This landmark book* described lesbian lives in a positive, affirming, and knowledgeable way almost unknown at the time. In the interview for this work, Phyllis said about the book, "I've heard from lots and lots of people… a lot of letters that people wrote at the beginning when *Lesbian/Woman* first came out. We used to meet people and they'd say, "Your book saved my life". So many of them said that" (P. Lyon, personal communication, November 5, 2010). "Anyhow, it was just absolutely amazing the amount of mail we got, which shows how badly something like [*Lesbian/Woman*] was needed" (Martin & Lyon, 1992).

"Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems." (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). Del and Phyllis sought to promote the responsiveness of Daughters of Bilitis after they went to a Mattachine meeting and witnessed their political involvement. Del and Phyllis came back to a Daughters of Bilitis meeting, and despite the possibility of losing members in a fledgling organization, "promoted the responsiveness of the organization." After getting the buy-in from some of the members of Daughters of Bilitis, they were able to promote the responsiveness of

the gay community and other social institutions—the courts, the medical institution and religious institutions to consider the needs and social problems of gays and lesbians.

**Social Works Core Values**

"The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers—and Del and Phyllis—throughout the profession's history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). The core values are service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

**Service.** The first core value of social workers, service, also appears to be a core value of Del and Phyllis. Their goal throughout their fifty years of activism has been to help people in need—domestic violence victims, the gay and lesbian community, victims of police harassment, or victims of tragic medical interventions to cure homosexuality—and address the social problems that each community has faced.

According to the NASW code of ethics, social workers draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems. Social workers are encouraged to volunteer some portion of their professional skills with no expectation of significant financial return (pro bono service) (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). "The Sixties were probably our busiest years (as activists), we were still working and we wonder how we held down jobs and still did all that stuff, but at that time we were still young, Phyllis said, chuckling" (Ford, 2003).

“Social workers challenge social injustice” (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). Del and Phyllis spent their life challenging social injustice on behalf of women and the gay and lesbian community, challenging discrimination and prejudice. As leaders, Phyllis and Del challenge the discriminating laws that threatened the gay community. They confronted the prejudice in the churches. They were leaders in opposing homosexuality as a mental illness and fought to have it removed from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual.

Even though Phyllis and Del, like most lesbians, did not necessarily agree or participate in public sex or promiscuity like their male counterparts, they were committed to changing the criminal codes which were discriminatory and prejudicial. “There was a lot of animosity and resentment [in Daughters of Bilitis] over the fact that it was the gay guys who were creating such havoc with the police—the raids, the indiscriminate sex, their bathroom habits, and everything else” (Gallo, 2006). But Phyllis and Del believed that the laws needed to be challenged, regardless of the gay men’s sexual practices.

Service “seeks to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity” (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). Like Mattachine, DOB viewed educating the public as the means by which the lives of lesbian and gay individuals could be improved. According to Del, their most important contribution was "being able to help make changes in the way lesbians and gay men view themselves and how the larger society views lesbians and gay men" (Equity California, 2008).

**Dignity and worth of the person.** The social work value of dignity and worth of the person is evidenced in several areas of Del and Phyllis' activism. The purpose of *Lesbian/Woman* was to create a primer on how the lesbian "views herself as a person; how she deals with the problems she encounters in her various roles as woman, worker, friend, parent, child, citizen, wife, employer, welfare recipient, home owner and taxpayer; and how she views other people and the world around her" (Martin & Lyon, p. 9, 1983). Lesbian/Woman was written from a positive perspective which was unheard of at that time. Del and Phyllis wrote the book to share their experience, their feelings, and their thoughts and how they "learned many things that led us to self acceptance—and liberation (Martin & Lyon, p. 10, 1983). They wrote the book in 1972 to emphasize the dignity and worth of the lesbian to the lesbian and to the lesbian's community and to her world. It worked. Many lesbians wrote them and thanked them for the book because they had finally found a piece of literature that affirmed how they felt.

Secondly, Del and Phyllis did not necessarily agree with the sexual practices of gay men—promiscuity, public sex, public cruising and flamboyant style of dress. There was a lot of loathing on the part of lesbians because the men were the ones wreaking havoc with the police. Regardless, Phyllis and Del believed that all homosexuals were ill treated despite their behavior. They believed in self-determination of gay males and that the unjust and discriminating laws were independent of gay males' behavior.

Daughters of Bilitis, led by Phyllis and Del, also respected the "dignity and worth of the person and are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). While Daughters of Bilitis had

larger concerns of changing the attitudes of society as a whole by "dispelling myths, misinformation and prejudice" (D'Emilio, p. 103, 1983), the organization primarily acted to address the needs of lesbians and to provide such women with an "environment that was safe. It helped lesbians get their lives together and begin participating in larger society by offering friendship, support, acceptance and help. It was an organization that served women. Thus, the organization was concerned with issues such as motherhood and the problems faced by married lesbians" (D'Emilio, p. 104, 1983). They were cognizant of their dual responsibility to educate the lesbian in her personal life and to educate the lesbian and the larger society.

**Importance of human relationships.** Early in their relationship, Phyllis and Del were looking for lesbian friends. About starting Daughters of Bilitis, Martin said, "We were so starved for socializing with other lesbians" (Lyon & Martin, 1992). They had no idea that the friends they met in 1955 would work together to as an important vehicle for change. It was the importance of human relationships that was the driving force for Phyllis and Del to sit down with three other lesbian couples. They needed friends.

Phyllis and Del worked with many gay male organizations throughout their involvement with the gay and lesbian rights movement in the 1960s. In the 1970s, they were involved in National Organization for Women and had to pave the way for lesbians to join that group. They have worked with churches and psychiatrists, medical doctors and lawyers to promote and advocate changes for gays, lesbians, and women.

Daughters of Bilitis was able to "bridge the gap of geographical separation that had previously isolated queer communities across the United States…Through press

releases, monthly publications and the effective use of social and scientific experts to speak on their behalf, Daughters of Bilitis and other homophile organizations projected themselves as the voice and public representation of homosexuals in the United States" (Boyd, loc.2284, 2003). Del and Phyllis sought to strengthen relationships among gay and lesbian people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the wellbeing of gay and lesbian individuals; families with gay or lesbian members; organizations like Daughters of Bilitis, Mattachine, One, Inc. NOW and Council on Religion and the Homosexual; and gay and lesbian communities across the country.

Human relationships are a vehicle for change. The relationship between Phyllis and Del was a catalyst for many changes that several gays and lesbians take for granted today. The importance of human relationships is also apparent in the history of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's relationship with one another.

**Integrity.** The social work value of integrity was not only integral to Del and Phyllis' activism and social action, but was also on a micro level—integrity was important to their relationship. In order to be in a relationship with another person for over 50 years, one must act honestly, responsibly and ethically.

As activists on a macro level, they were very methodical and approached each "fight" with courage and honesty. Many people in the gay and lesbian rights movement trusted them as leaders. Following those years, community, government, political and charitable causes appointed them to various committees and boards.

**Competence.** The core value of competence in relationship to social work is the only core value that does not fit for Del and Phyllis. Although they functioned as social

workers and met most of the criteria explained by the NASW code of ethics, they were not *trained* as social workers. Thus, it is difficult to defend that Del and Phyllis practiced within their areas of competence.

They developed the ability to lobby politicians and challenge social institutions, but not because they were trained social workers, but because they were women with "extraordinary courage, persistence, intelligence, humor, and fundamental decency, who refused to be silenced by fear and never stopped fighting for equality" (Equity California, 2008). Del and Phyllis continually strived to increase their knowledge—they were both voracious readers—and skills and to apply them in their activism.

**6.04 Social and Political Action**

The most appropriate ethical standard in the NASW Code of Ethics that applies to Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon is social work's ethical responsibility to the broader society, particularly that of Social and Political Action**.**

**6.04 Social and Political Action, part a.** Del and Phyllis "engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop full…and be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010).

The list of their social and political action is long. Most notable are their successes to challenge misconceptions about gender and sexuality. "We were fighting the

church, the couch, and the courts," Del often remembered years later, naming the array of social and cultural forces her and Phyllis were involved with during a time when homosexuals were treated as immoral, mentally ill, and illegal (Equity California, 2008). But they also challenged Anita Bryant & the Briggs Initiative in 1978. The initiative would have banned gays and lesbians from working in the California public schools. They picketed the Federal Building in San Francisco in 1966 for equal rights in the military. "In 1966, we had our first national demonstration around the armed services issue. We demonstrated in front of the Federal Building in San Francisco and Los Angeles" remarked Phyllis Lyon in a 1992 interview (Boyd, loc. 2186, 2003). It wasn't until 2011 that gays and lesbians can freely and openly serve in the military.

The couple was active in the marriage equality issue. Phyllis and Del marked another success in social and political action when they became the first same-sex couple to officially get a marriage license in San Francisco on February 12, 2004. Gavin Newsom, mayor of San Francisco at the time, ordered that marriage licenses be given to same-sex couples who requested them (Gianoulis,2004). Phyllis and Del's license, along with those of several thousand other same-sex couples, were voided by the California Supreme Court on August 12, 2004. Del and Phyllis were married again, in the same outfits, on June 16, 2008 in the first same-sex wedding to take place in San Francisco after the California Supreme Court's decision in *In re Marriage Cases* legalized same-sex marriage in California. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, with six other couples, were plaintiff's in that case.

**6.04 Social and Political Action, part b.** In the NASW code of ethics under social and political activism, it says that "social workers should act to expand choice and opportunity for all people, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited people and groups" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). Del and Phyllis, with the support of Daughters of Bilitis and other gay and lesbian activists, have spent their life to expand the choice and opportunity for gays, lesbians and women. "Homophile activism worked to integrate themselves into mainstream institutions, seeking acceptance and understanding from outsiders. Underlying this assimilative program was a firm commitment to individual civil rights based on the right to privacy rather than the right to public association" (Boyd, loc. 2258, 2003). They fought against the illegality of homosexual sex acts and the discrimination of the laws applying only to homosexuals. They educated and had discussion with religious leaders about homosexuals by creating the Religion and the Homosexual Committee. Del was instrumental in the crusade to have homosexuality removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. It was removed in 1973. Homophiles were able to "insert what it considered positive representations of homosexuality into mainstream culture" (Boyd, loc. 2313, 2003). "Daughters of Bilitis saw themselves as advocates of lesbian empowerment, and as a result, positioned their political struggles within the realm of mainstream American politics" (Boyd, loc. 2509, 2003). Del and Phyllis challenged the heterosexist culture of the National Organization for Women. They advocated for battered women in abusive relationships and continued their activism in their 70s and 80s, confronting ageism.

"They have both been political creatures for the entire length of their relationship. The partnership has worked for 50 years. I don't know anybody else in political life today—lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered—that has that kind of rich long political life where two people look at each other and there's still that glint" Kerry Lobel, a community organizer (Biren, 2003).

**6.04 Social and Political Action, part c.** Under 6.04 *Social and Political Action* in the NASW code of ethics, part c, it says "social workers should promote conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity within the United States and globally. Social workers should promote policies and practices that demonstrate respect for difference, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate cultural competence, and promote policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). Though Del and Phyllis were not trained social workers, they seemed to have the innate sense to educate the public and encourage respect for cultural diversity.

When the Daughters of Bilitis wrote their objectives, it's as though they used this part of the code of ethics as a framework. The objectives of the Daughters of Bilitis were to educate the lesbian about the different aspects of being a lesbian so that she could understand herself. Another objective was to educate the public about lesbians to create social acceptance and breakdown of prejudices. They felt that it was important to participate in research projects by authorized and responsible professionals to create evidence to show that lesbians were different but also the same as other women. Finally,

a goal of Daughters of Bilitis was to investigate the penal code and promote change in laws against homosexuals (Gallo, 2006).

**6.04 Social and Political Action, part d. "**Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical disability" (National Association of Social Workers, 2010).

Though the 1950s was a time of racial segregation, the Daughters of Bilitis were not discriminating. The 1956 Articles of Incorporation stated that they welcomed all women, "regardless of race, color or creed. There were two women of color, a Chicana, and a Filipina" (Gallo, 1991, p. xxii) among the eight original members.

Del and Phyllis, after their involvement with Daughters of Bilitis, spent the next forty years working for the elimination of discrimination based on gender, age, and sexual orientation. They lobbied and educated politicians, medical professionals, and church leaders about homosexuality. They helped to dispel the myths that gays and lesbians are immoral, illegal and sick.

**Other Implications**

Aside from the social work code of ethics, the author also considers the implications of their activism in her life today. Because Phyllis and Del have done the work they have done, thousands of people's lives have changed. As a substance abuse counselor that primarily serves the poor, homeless, and addicted, the author considers the

work of Del and Phyllis by believing that she can make a difference in her clients' life on a micro level. Despite the institutional barriers that seem overwhelming, she has hope that her clients can overcome those barriers. One person can make a difference in the life of another. She believes that she can be the change she wishes to see in the world because she has Del and Phyllis as role models for that belief.

On a mezzo and macro level, Del and Phyllis were the change they wished to see in the world by influencing and educating the people in their families, their neighborhood, their community and eventually their country and the world. As a team, they wished to see change in the ways that gays and lesbians were treated, looked at, discriminated against and regarded. In their 55 years of activism, they saw many strides in those goals. Del and Phyllis never backed down on their insistence that gays and lesbians be treated equal, and even in their 80s, these women took steps to move the world closer to that goal.

A lot has changed in attitudes toward gays and lesbians since the 1950s. Granted, there are still ways in which gays and lesbians in the United States can be more open, freer and more equal. Real change never happens quickly. It is, however, extraordinary to step back and see how much *has* changed since the 1950s because of the activism of people like Phyllis and Del. The author now understands that her openness and freedom to be a lesbian comes in part from the work of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon.

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# Chapter 7: Appendixes

## Appendix A

Potential Questions for Phyllis Lyon Interview

Interview Questions (adapted from *McAdams ,1995 and **Atkinson, 1998)

I. *This is a Life Story Interview, think about your life in terms of chapters or stepping stones. Give each chapter/stepping stone a name and a brief description including the main characters, the setting, and the plot summary (30 minutes to 1 hour).

II. *Significant Occasions

A. The Highest High point of your life—"the best, highest, most wonderful moments of your life"(McAdams, 1995)

a. What happened?

b. Who were the major players or characters?

c. When did it happen?

d. Where?

e. What were you thinking and feeling?

f. What impact did this have on you?

g. What does this experience say about you as a person?

B. Low Point Experience—

a. What happened?

b. Who was involved?

c. When?

d. Where?

e. What were you thinking and feeling?

f. What impact did this have on you?

g. What does this experience say about you as a person?

C. Turning Points—"episodes through which a person undergoes substantial change" (McAdams, 1995)

D. Earliest Memory

a. What happened?

b. Who was involved?

c. When?

d. Where?

e. What were you thinking and feeling?

E. Important Childhood Scene

a. What happened?

b. Who was involved?

c. When?

d. Where?

e. What were you thinking and feeling?

f. What impact did this have on you?

g. What does this experience say about you as a person?

h. Why is it important?

F. Important Adolescent Scene

   a. What happened?

   b. Who was involved?

   c. When?

   d. Where?

   e. What were you thinking and feeling?

   f. What impact did this have on you?

   g. What does this experience say about you as a person?

   h. Why is it important?

G. Important Adult Scene

   a. What happened?

   b. Who was involved?

   c. When?

   d. Where?

   e. What were you thinking and feeling?

   f. What impact did this have on you?

   g. What does this experience say about you as a person?

   h. Why is it important?

H. Another Important Scene

   a. What happened?

   b. Who was involved?

   c. When?

d. Where?

e. What were you thinking and feeling?

f. What impact did this have on you?

g. What does this experience say about you as a person?

h. Why is it important?

III. * Life Challenge—describe the single greatest challenge in your life

A. How have you faced this challenge?

B. Who has helped you deal with this challenge? What happened?

C. Who was involved?

D. When?

E. Where?

F. What were you thinking and feeling?

G. What impact did this have on you?

H. What does this experience say about you as a person?

I. Why is it important?

IV. *Positive and Negative Influences on your life story

A. Positive—describe how a person, group, organization, system has had the greatest positive influence on your story

B. Negative—describe how a person, group, organization, system has had the greatest negative influence on your story

**Growing up**

- What was it like?
- Describe Mom. Describe Dad.
- How was your relationship with your parents?
- How did you find out about sex?
- Describe your parent's marriage. What were the best part and the worst part in your opinion?
- Did you get into trouble? What was the worst thing you did? Most embarrassing.
- What was your sister like growing up?
- What did you look like?
- How would you describe yourself as a child? Were you happy?
- What is your best memory of childhood? Worst?
- Did you have a nickname? How'd you get it?
- Who were your best friends? What were they like?
- How would you describe a perfect day when you were young?
- What did you think your life would be like when you were older?
- Do you have any favorite stories from your childhood?

**Firsts**

- How old were you when you had your first kiss? Who?
- How old were you the first time you had sex?
- How old were you the first time you thought you were in love?

- Who helped you figure out how to ask someone out on your first date?
- Do you believe in love at first sight?

**In the beginning…**

- What was the first thing that attracted you to Del?
- Which one of you asked the other out for the first time?
- What was your first date like?
- What were you thinking about right before you kissed Del for the first time?
- Was there anything that you were worried about the first time we were about to become naked?
- **How did you know that you were in love with her?
- Describe the moment you and Del decided to commit as a couple. Who's idea was it?
- Do you have a favorite incident from your courtship that was funny in the ordinary way or embarrassing then, funny now?

**Going to the Chapel and We're Gonna Get Married…**

- Did you have a symbolic wedding or commitment ceremony before the ceremony that Gavin Newsome performed in 2004?
- What was your wedding like?
- What was the most vivid memory of the day?
- Where and when was it held?

- What gifts or tokens of romance were parts of your decision to make a life commitment?

**Maintaining a relationship**

- What maintains a long term relationship?
- What is the one thing that would be a relationship breaker for you?
- What is the one thing that Del did that made you crazy?
- What lessons have you learned from your relationships?
- The literature says that you wanted to "stick it out for a year"…what were some of the issues that you, as a couple, had to work through and overcome in that first year?
- What irritated you the most?
- What did you love the most?
- I read Lesbian/Woman and I loved how you described the love of women and the intimacy that is so important. How would you describe intimacy today? As a widow?
- What was the most enjoyable activity in your life together?
- When you look at a woman, what is the first thing you notice?
- Do you think it's ok to keep noticing another woman after you are in a committed relationship? Did this ever change?
- How often do you believe it is normal to want sex?
- What advice do you have for young couples?
- What was the best advice you were ever given about relationships?

- Did you ever think of getting divorced?

**Remembering Del**

- Tell me about Del.
- What is your first memory of Del?
- What is your best memory of Del?
- What is your most vivid memory of Del?
- What did Del mean to you?
- Are you comfortable/ can you talk about Del's death? How did Del die?
- What has been the hardest thing about losing Del?
- What would you ask Del if she were here today?
- What do you miss most about Del?
- How do you think Del would want to be remembered?
- Can you talk about the biggest obstacles obstacles you overcame as a couple.
- Was there anything you and Del disagreed about, fought over, or experienced some conflict around?
- What about Del makes you smile?
- What did Del look like?
- What did you find most appealing emotionally about Del?
- Do you have any stories you want to share about Del?
- Is there something about Del that you think no one else knows?

- How are you different now than you were before you lost Del?
- What is the image of Del that persists?

- Do you have any traditions to honor Del?
- What has helped you the most in your grief?

**Children**

- Did you and Del ever consider having more children besides Del's daughter?

**Identity**

- How did you learn what it meant to be a woman?
- What is the best thing about being a woman?
- What is the quality you find most appealing in women?
- Do you remember when you first heard about homosexuality?
- How old were you when you knew you were a lesbian?
- What was the most difficult thing about coming out?
- Who was the most difficult person to tell that you are a lesbian?
- Who was the easiest to tell?
- How did your family take the news?
- What are your thoughts about whether you are born gay or make a choice to be gay?
- What is your favorite part about coming out?

- **How different is how you see yourself now from how you used to see yourself?
- **What values are most important to you?
- What about your family of origin created your power and courage?
- **What beliefs guide your life?

**Macro Centered Questions**

- What does the phrase "the personal becomes political" mean to you?
- What is the most important thing THAT YOU THINK you have given to the gay community?
- How do keep from burnout? How did you find balance?
- How did you "pick your battles"?
- The literature is full of ways that you and Dell stood up against issues, was there ever a time when you stood down? What happened? How did that feel?
- Were you an activist before DOB?
- Is there any political or social issue that has changed your mind about since 1950?
- What were you thinking when you created the Council on Religion and the Homosexual in 1965? (Considering religion considered homosexuality a "crime against nature".)
- Who were the 5 most influential people in your life and why?

**Spirituality**

- **Do you believe in God?
- If you had one day to live, what would you do?
- **Can you tell me about your religious beliefs/spiritual beliefs?

What is your religion?

- What was the most profound spiritual moment of your life?
- Do you believe in the after-life? What do you think it will be like?
- When you meet God, what do you want to say to Him?
- How important do you believe spirituality is in a couple's

relationship?

**Getting Older**

- Do you think about dying? Are you scared?
- How do you imagine your death?
- Do you believe in an after-life?
- Do you regret anything?
- How do you look at life differently in your advanced youth?
- How has getting older changed you? What have you learned?
- How do you want to be remembered?
- How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?
- What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?
- What are you proudest of in your life?

**Closure questions**

- Are there any words of wisdom you'd like to pass along to me?
- What does your future hold?
- Is there anything that you haven't told me but want to tell me now?
- What is something you would like lesbians to know that is not found in the general literature or research?
- **Do you feel like I have covered the "picture" of your life?
- **What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered

**Appendix B**

Student Research Protocol Checklist

1. Answer all of the questions below about your planned research protocol.

2. Review this checklist and your planned research study with your faculty research advisor (may be different from your academic advisor).

3. Together you should be able to determined if you research study is (a) **not covered research** as defined by the federal regulations and will be approved by your research advisor, or (b) **covered research** and you will be instructed to register on IRBNet (www.irbnet.org) and submit a formal protocol review application to the Human Research Review Committee.

**All items answered in the affirmative (yes) should be explained in detail**

| | **Question** | **es** | **o** |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Is this a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge? *Phyllis Lyon's story speaks to the broader social experience of lesbians and women coming of age in the 1950s, 60s and 70s and creates a symbolic framework for the Women's Rights and Gay and Lesbian Movement in the early part of her life and Gay Marriage Equality in the latter* | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *part of her/their life.* | | |
| | Will you obtain information about living individuals? *Phyllis Lyon, age 87, and her deceased partner Del Martin.* | | |
| | Will you interact or intervene with these people? *The intent is to interview Phyllis Lyon face-to-face.* | | |
| | Is this a graduate level research project? *It is a master's thesis proposal.* | | |
| | Will you present the results in a public forum (SSD, poster abstract, etc)? *This thesis will be available at the Grand Valley State University library and may be the beginning of a bigger project—a book or dissertation.* | | |
| | Do you plan to publish the results as a part of a Capstone project, Master's thesis or Doctoral dissertation? *It is definitely planned be published as a Master's thesis.* | | |
| | Does your professor plan to use your data in a future publication or presentations? | | |
| | Will you audio or video tape or digitally record research participant responses? *All interviews will be digitally recorded.* | | |
| | Does research involve members of a protected population, e.g, children, prisoners, economically or educationally disadvantaged individuals (homeless, participants whose native language is not English, etc.), and pregnant women? | | |
| 0 | Will data be collected and stored in a manner such that participants may be individually identified directly or indirectly? Because it is a life story | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | narrative, the subject of the project cannot be anonymous. | | |
| 1 | Is this research supported by grants or external funds? | | |
| 2 | Are you supported as a student by grants or external funds? | | |
| 3 | If so, are these federal funds? | | |
| 4 | Is there any potential that questions, discussions or interventions may cause discomfort (mental or physical), anxiety, or tension in participants? *This has been addressed in the section of the paper on ethics. Because many interview questions refer to Lyon's relationship with her deceased partner, Del Martin, unexpected grief and intense feelings may arise. Martin passed away in August of 2008. Therefore, the interviewer will be prepared to provide psychological support if the interviews cause undue stress.* | | |

## Appendix C

**Informed Consent Document**

1. **TITLE** A Narrative Life Story of Activist Phyllis Lyon and Her Reflections on a Life with Del Martin

2. **RESEARCHERS** : Dianna Johnson, MSW student; Dr. Dorothea Epple, Student Advisor, School of Social Work.

3. **PURPOSE**: Master's Thesis

4. **REASON FOR INVITATION** Master's Thesis proposal is to write a life story of Phyllis Lyon and her reflections on her life with Del Martin

5. **HOW PARTICIPANTS WILL BE SELECTED** Participant selected is life story subject

6. **PROCEDURES**

- Student is expected to travel to San Francisco to interview Phyllis Lyon, time and date not known at this time
- Time required for interview is expected to be no more than 4 hours.
- No out of pocket expenses expected for subject

**RISKS** Anticipated risks include possible undue harm caused by unexpected grief and intense feelings that may arise due to personal and emotional questions regarding the subjects relationship with now deceased partner, Del Martin. Therefore, the interviewer will be prepared to provide psychological support if the interviews cause undue stress at the time of the interview, or at any time following the interview.

7. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU** The interviewer's intent is to facilitate the process for Lyon to create and convey the story through her personal meaning. Life stories can be unique depending on who is writing the narrative, their perspective, culture, age and gender in relation to the person whose story they tell. The experience can be life changing for the interviewee and the interviewer depending on the interactions, quality and depth of the exchange.

8. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SOCIETY** The life story of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon deserves to be told. They are mothers of the Lesbian Rights Movement, pioneers of the Homophile Movement and leaders in the Gay Rights Movement. In 55 years as a lesbian couple, these women became community organizers, advocates, political activists, feminists and educators. As a result, contemporary gays and lesbians benefit from freedoms and civil rights fought for by Martin and Lyon. "More life stories need to be recorded of women and members of culturally diverse groups…life stories of gay men

and lesbians would also contribute to a more complete understanding of the issues related to change in people's lives" (Atkinson, p. 19, 1998)

9. **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION** Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may quit at any time without any penalty to you.

10. **PRIVACY and CONFIDENTIALITY** While anonymity is a widely-held goal in research-ethics review policies, it is a virtually unachievable goal in qualitative research and in the life story narrative, in particular. This particular Master's Thesis' goal is to interview Phyllis Lyon and write her life story. The Master Thesis, upon completion, will be published and filed in the Zumberge Library at the Grand Valley State University campus.

11. **RESEARCH STUDY RESULTS** If you wish to learn about the results of this research study you may request that information by contacting:

Dianna Johnson

NMC University Center

2200 Dendrinos Drive, Suite 101

Traverse City, MI 49684

Email: johnsodi@mail.gvsu.edu

Phone: 231-883-3085

***12.* PAYMENT: *There will be no payment for participation in the research.***

13. **AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE** By signing this consent form below you are stating the following:

- The details of this research study have been explained to me including what I am being asked to do and the anticipated risks and benefits;
- I have had an opportunity to have my questions answered;
- I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research as described on this form;
- I may ask more questions or quit participating at any time without penalty.

PAL (Initial here) I have been given a copy of this document for my records.

Print Name: Phyllis Lyon

Sign Name in ink: Phyllis Lyon

Date Signed: Nov. 5, 2010

**Note**: minors (persons not yet 18 years of age) may not enroll in research without their parent's documented permission unless a waiver has been granted to the researcher in writing by the HRRC. Minors between 7 and 18 years of age are required to assent to participation. Documentation of minors' assent is permitted, but is not required. Minors under age 7 are not required to assent to participate.

14. If you have any questions about this study you may contact the lead researcher as follows:

NAME: Dianna Johnson

PHONE: 231-883-3085

E-MAIL: johnsodi@mail.gvsu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the **Research Protections Office** at Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI Phone: 616-331-3197 e-mail: HRRC@GVSU.EDU

## Appendix D

Outline from the OAC (Online Archive of California)

**Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 1924-2000**

**Descriptive Summary**

**Title:** Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers,

**Date (inclusive):** 1924-2000

**Accession number:** 93-13

**Creator:** Lyon, Phyllis (1924-)Martin, Del (1921-)

**Extent:** 203 Boxes

70 linear feet

**Repository:** Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

San Francisco, California.

**Abstract:** Papers of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin covering their extensive activism in the Homophile, Gay Liberation, Lesbian and Women's

Movements. Materials include extensive documentation of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), and the books *Lesbian/Woman* and *Battered*

*Wives*.

**Language:** English.

**Acquisition Information**

Materials were sold to the GLBT Historical Society by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin in March 1993. Additional material donated.

**Access**

Collection is open for research with restrictions.

The Daughters of Bilitis records will be restricted as follows: Names of correspondents (and organization members) will be withheld from researchers for the lifetime of the correspondent or, in absence of evidence, for twenty-five years after the date of the document. Researchers may read correspondence so long as names are effectively masked. Un-expurgated documents may only be viewed by the GLBTHS Archivist, or staff members specifically designated by the Archivist, Lyon, and Martin.

**Publication Rights**

Copyright to unpublished manuscript materials has been transferred to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Historical Society.

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 93-13, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

**Phyllis Lyon**

Phyllis Ann Lyon was born November 10, 1924, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and raised primarily in Northern California. She graduated from Sacramento Senior High School in 1943 and went on to the University of California, Berkeley, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism in 1946. She later (1976) earned a Doctor of Education in Human Sexuality from the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality (IASHS). Lyon served as a police-beat reporter in Fresno and as a reporter at the Chico Enterprise-Record during the 1940s. In the 1950s she served on the editorial staff at two building trades magazines in Seattle (she is listed as Editorial Assistant in a 1951 edition of

Construction News Bulletin). After returning to San Francisco in 1953 she worked at Glide Urban Center. She served as a professor at IASHS from 1976-1987. San Francisco Mayor George Moscone appointed her to the San Francisco Human Rights Commission (HRC) in 1976, and she served as Chair in 1982-1983. She also was chair of the HRC's Lesbian/Gay Advisory Committee. Lyon has lectured and written extensively on human sexuality, censorship, and the Lesbian and Feminist Movements. She also co-founded the National Sex Forum and served as associate director and then co-director for 19 years.

**Dorothy L. (Del) Martin**

Del Martin was born Dorothy L. Taliaferro in San Francisco, California on May 5, 1921 to Jones and Mary Taliaferro. She was salutation of the first graduating class of George Washington High School (San Francisco). Martin studied journalism at San Francisco State College (now California State University San Francisco). Her last name became Martin during her four year marriage to a man. She latter officially changed her name to Del. This marriage also resulted in a daughter (Kendra Mon ) and eventually two grandchildren, Lorraine and Kevin Mon. She was the first "out of the closet" lesbian elected to the National Board of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1973. Martin became a nationally known advocate for battered women, and was a co-founder of the Coalition for Justice for Battered Women (1975), La Casa de las Madres (a shelter for battered women) founded in 1976, and the California Coalition against Domestic Violence (1977). She is the author of *Battered Wives* (1976, updated 1981) and numerous other articles and book chapters on the subject. She lectured and taught at colleges and universities around the country. Martin was also a founding member of the Lesbian

Mother's Union, the San Francisco Women's Centers, and the Bay Area Women's Coalition, and has served on many boards. She was appointed Chair of the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women in 1976 and served on the committee until 1979. She also served on the Women's Advisory Council to the San Francisco Police Department, the California Commission on Crime Control and Violence Prevention, and the San Francisco Human Rights Commission.

**Lyon & Martin**

Lyon and Martin met in Seattle, Washington in the early 1950s, while they were both working for building trades publications. They were platonic friends for two years before becoming romantically involved. They returned to San Francisco together in 1953 where they continue to reside. In 1955, they were part of a group of eight lesbians that founded the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). The group was founded to counteract the loneliness and isolation they felt as lesbians, creating what was to become the first national combined lesbian organization and support network. Martin served as president from 1957-60 and Lyon was president in 1962. DOB began publishing the monthly magazine The Ladder in 1956. Lyon was the first editor (1956-1969) with Barbara Grier joining Martin and then taking over as editor. Together Lyon and

Martin were among the founders of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) in 1964, and, in 1965, Citizen's Alert (a citizen/civil rights group dealing with police brutality complaints). They also were among the founding members of the Alice B. Toklas Lesbian/Gay Democratic Club. They jointly authored the groundbreaking book *Lesbian/Woman*, and they both attended the International Women's Year

Conference in Houston in 1977 where they helped get a lesbian rights plank into the national women's agenda. In the 1980s Martin and Lyon helped found and lead Bay Area Feminists Against Censorship. Besides their individual careers and recognitions, Lyon and Martin, have received numerous joint honors: in 1980, the Lyon-Martin Clinic in

San Francisco was named after them, and they have served as Grand Marshals or special guests in Gay Pride marches across California and the country. They received the Earl Warren Civil Liberties Award from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1990, and an Outstanding Public Service Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality in 1996. Lyon and Martin are also partners in LyMar Associates, a San Francisco consulting firm started in 1972. In response to a 1984 questionnaire, distributed by the Advocate, asking what was their most important contribution to gay causes, Lyon and Martin both answered with variations on the statement: "being able to help make changes in the way Lesbians and Gay men view themselves & how the larger society views Lesbians and Gay men." To the question:

"What is the most valuable thing you've gotten from your involvement with gay causes?" They replied, "Self-acceptance, self-esteem, self confidence" and "a good sense of my own self-worth." In the self-identification section, they also both crossed out "gay woman" and wrote in "Lesbian."

**Scope and Content**

This collection documents the joint and individual work lives of life-partners Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, from the Homophile movement of the 1950s to the end of

the twentieth century. The collection is strongest in materials connected to Lyon and Martin's involvement with several major organizations, and for material from the 1960s and 1970s. There is only a scattering of personal information or materials from the 1990s. The collection includes: correspondence, manuscripts and manuscript drafts, organizational papers including minutes, constitutions,

flyers, and financial documents. The collection contains significant amounts of material relating to the administration and activities of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). There also is a large quantity of material relating to Lyon and Martin's various involvements with the National Organization for Women (NOW), various San Francisco city commissions, and a wide variety of other important organizations ranging from early homophile groups (1950s) and the gay liberation groups of the 1970s, through the pornography and censorship debates and other concerns of the 1980s and 1990s.

This collection contains detailed materials relating to Lyon and Martin's groundbreaking book *Lesbian/Woman*, and Martin's book *Battered Wives*. Also included are drafts and notes for numerous other articles, chapters and speeches by Lyon and/or Martin on topics ranging from domestic violence and lesbian mothers to the history of the lesbian movement. Lyon and Martin's extensive research and clipping files further document the range of topics and issues that caught their attention over the years. The collection mainly documents Lyon's and Martin's writing and activism, though there is a small personal papers series that includes materials ranging from Lyon's High School and College Yearbooks, horse-related scrapbooks to materials concerning spiritualist activities, some family correspondence and papers.

**Arrangement**

The collection is divided into 20 series, several of which are further divided into subseries and sub-subseries. The ordering of the series represents the somewhat random condition the papers were received. The series are:

1. **DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS (San Francisco Chapter)**
2. **DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS (National Organization)**
3. **DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS (Other Chapters)**
4. **HOMOPHILE and GAY LIBERATION ORGANIZATIONS**
5. **CORRESPONDENCE**
6. **WRITINGS**
7. **POLICE OVERSIGHT**
8. **ORGANIZATIONS, COMMITTEES, COALITIONS**
9. **RESEARCH FILES**
10. **LESBIAN MOTHERS**
11. **BATTERED WOMEN**
12. **CONFERENCES**
13. **MANUSCRIPTS BY OTHERS**
14. **CAMPAIGNS/DEMOCRATIC CLUBS**
15. **COPYRIGHT/PUBLISHING**
16. **EPHEMERA**
17. **PERSONAL**
18. **PERIODICALS, BOOKLETS, BOOKS**

19. **CLIPPING FILES**

20. **PHOTOGRAPHS**

**Separated Material**

One carton of clippings on individual lesbians and gays has been added to the GLBT Historical Society's Vertical Files. Newsletters for a number of feminist and lesbian organizations, as well as two mental patients' rights organizations have been added to the GLBT Historical Society's Periodical Collection.

## Appendix E

January 21, 2010

10656 South Timberlee Drive

Traverse City, MI  49684

231-883-3085

huntgoddessdianna@yahoo.com

Dear Ms. Lyon:

My name is Dianna Johnson and I am a Master's of social work student at Grand Valley State University in Michigan.  I am working on a research proposal for my research class and have decided to write a narrative life story about you and Del to fulfill my requirements.  I wish to write your "life story" in the context of the oppression of the 1950s, the civil rights movement, the homophile movement and the women's rights movement including your membership in DOB, NOW, etc.  I am thrilled to be learning so much about you and what you have done for the gay community, especially women and lesbians, in this country.  I had the honor to meet you on the Olivia cruise to Alaska. That was the moment when I wanted to know more about what you have done for gay and lesbian history. I have found it extraordinary.

I have a couple of questions that keep coming up....

How did you and Del make a living or find time for work during the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s while doing all of your activist work?  How well did *Lesbian/Woman* sell?  (love

the book...it is amazing how contemporary it feels when reading it) Were you and Del involved with getting homosexuality removed from the DSM? I read somewhere that Del, specifically, was involved, but now that I am writing the paper and have to reference everything, I can't find the reference. I understand that your work with churches and health care professionals in the 60s provided the foundation to get it removed, I just wondered if you two were involved in the early 70s when it was in debate. Also, there seems to be a huge gap in the literature after *Lesbian/Woman* came out about what you two were up to...can you fill in any of those gaps for me?? I so appreciate your time...now as you read my letter, and, all of the time you have given as an activist so that my life as a lesbian is more protected, more "normal" and more understood.
Awaiting the Prop 8 Trial Update...

Namaste,

dianna

## Appendix F

January 10, 2011

Dear Phyllis:

Happy New Year!

First of all, I just want to tell you what a fabulous time we had in San Francisco in November. Thank you so much for the time that you spent with my partner and me. We enjoyed our day with you immensely.

Enclosed you will find the transcript of the discussion in November. I have painstakingly gone through the conversation three times and hopefully I have captured the essence of the day. If you are so inclined, if you could take a look at it and either accept it as written or make changes. Then drop me a note in the enclosed envelope, I was so appreciate it. If, while reading the transcript, a story or memory is triggered and you would like to share it with me, I would love to include it in my paper.

Again, I so appreciate getting to share an afternoon with you. It is a day I won't soon forget.

All My Best,

Dianna Johnson

## Appendix G

Journal Entry: November 6.

Wow, what a day. We started with breakfast at a diner for pancakes, eggs, and bacon for me, some turkey toss for Sheila. We walked from our hotel at Van Ness and California to Market, then up Market to Castro. We walked past the City Hall, where everyone waited to get married. The steps do not look nearly as big in person. It was pretty quiet at 9 this morning while we were walking. Not much car traffic, not much foot traffic. As we got closer to "Gay Mecca" it was pretty obvious. The rainbow flag welcomed us and we began to see same sex couples walking together, not many, but some. When we reached Castro Street, things were starting to liven up. The bar on the corner of Castro and Market, Twin Peaks, was already open, 10ish, and serving patrons. We met our host, Kathy Amendola, at the flagpole at Harvey Milk Plaza. For the next two hours, she showed us around the Castro and told us some history of the San Francisco, how Castro became the gay "Mecca", and explained the fog. It was an excellent tour and I learned a lot. It was also nice to be able to see some of the places that I have heard about. We met a man, who, with Harvey Milk, got the Coors beer brand taken out of all of the bars in the Castro because of the right wing politics of the owner of Coors.

And then the archives….I decided that even though I hadn't received an email back from the GLBT Historical Society about whether or not I could come and look and Del and Phyllis' papers that we would go there and see if they would let me look. The door was locked and required to get "buzzed in". Drat, surely they wouldn't ask me in.

Ha. I called them and they buzzed me in and told me how to get to the Archives. The historical society was closed, but a nice boy named Eric, let me in. I went into a room with a table and a notebook with the index of the Martin-Lyon papers, a large three ringed binder. I had to wear white gloves to protect the documents and could request a box at a time, and in each box were anywhere from 5-15 folders, depending on how many papers were in each. Vast. Immense. Massive. There were hand written letters and articles and type written articles of the same with many corrections and normally there were also the final drafts. There were cards and manuscripts that have never been published and articles that have been. There were notes on index cards and scraps of paper. Huge amounts of paper. I looked mostly at their personal letters—letters from Nancy Pelosi and Dianne Feinstein and Jerry Brown. There were the draft chapters of *Lesbian/Woman* and boxes totally devoted to *Battered Wives*. I only scratched the surface of what is there. I saw a few editions of *The Ladder* and Phyllis' high school yearbook. But Martin Meeker, author of the book was right when he said that there was definitely a book there. I was just bummed I only had a few hours. And I would get distracted by this or that. I made over 20 dollars worth of copies and don't even know if I got the best of it. I could spend weeks sifting through the papers. I completely ignored the DOB papers, other than I wanted to see some issues of *The Ladder*, because someone has already sifted through that stuff and it has been written about in Marcia Gallo's book, *Different Daughters*.

## Appendix H

Journal entry: November 9, 2010

The things that I want to write about are how I felt about touching down in Detroit after being in San Francisco. There was a comfort and acceptance in SF and I could feel a guard go up as we approached Detroit. It's weird, because I really try very hard to live as authentically and openly as I can, and yet there is a feeling of protection that I could feel encroaching on my space. There is so much diversity in SF and also the fact that there were times when we were not in the minority. There is something very powerful about feeling in the majority. I didn't even realize the freedom that was available to me in San Francisco. I can't really understand how this can be so because I really live out and proud. I don't try to hide who I am. I guess that the difference is that I didn't really feel like I was any identity there, I just was me. Perhaps it's about what the tour guide told us about the sexuality in the Castro is fluid and wherever you are, there you are. I guess I feel like maybe I am this or I am that at home and I feel like I have to protect that.

I love how everything worked out over the weekend. Especially how the schedule worked out. I love how the "appointment" at the LGBT Historical Society Archives worked out. After we went to the historical walking tour of the Castro, and learned a lot of things about Gay and Lesbian history and the history of the gay population in the Castro, I convinced Sheila to ride the subway, the Muni, down Market Street to Montgomery and see if we could get into the Archives. What I read online was that I needed to make an appointment, and I tried to make one by email, but never heard back. So, I figured that we could go and see if they would let us in, the worse that could happen

is that they would say “no.” We got to the historical Society and the door was locked and we had to be buzzed in after calling. I called and told them I would like to look at the Martin and Lyon papers if possible. They buzzed me in and told me to come to the third floor. The historical exhibits were closed, they are getting ready to open a new show in the Castro, but the Archives were open. We sat in a room with a table and he gave me the index to the Martin-Lyon papers. Over a two hundred boxes with several files in each box. There were the incorporation papers of DOB and several of the minutes, financial reports, membership files, etc. of the DOB. There were the manuscripts of *Lesbian/Woman* and *Battered Wives*, in long hand, rough drafts and then final drafts. Several letters, notes, cards. Bound copies of *The Ladder*. Phyllis’ high school year book, scrapbooks and autograph books. There were several things written on onion skin, typewritten in different fonts. There were newspaper clippings. I had only 3 hours and a copy machine, but didn’t have time to read everything that I wanted to read. I decided that because the DOB papers had been researched pretty thoroughly by Marcia Gallo for her book, Different Daughters, I would leave the DOB papers for another time. I found myself getting distracted and going on a tangent, and had to keep redirecting myself to find stuff that showed insight into Del and Phyllis’ relationship and their relationship to themselves. I’m not sure that I succeeded, there was so much to sift through and such a short amount of time. I found myself saying,” Oh My God” several times just because the collection is so immense and overwhelming and I could literally only scratch the surface in the short time that I had. If this project goes further, I will definitely have to sit and spend some time with those papers. Whew.

## Appendix I

**Phyllis Lyon's Service and Activism**

1955—co-founded the Daughters of Bilitis

1964—co-founded the Council on Religion and the Homosexual

1967—joined the Northern California Chapter of the National Organization of Women

1968—co-founded the National Sex Forum

1972—cofounder of Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club

1972—published *Lesbian/Woman*

1974—Keynote speaker at National Organization of Women Convention

1974—appointed to the Human Rights Commission by Mayor George Moscone

1978—cofounded the Lesbian Lobby

1978—cofounded the San Francisco Feminist Democrats

1978—chaired the San Franciscans Against Proposition 6

1980-1983—served on California State Commisssion on Crime Control and Violence Prevention.

1982-1983—chaired the Commission's Lesbian and Gay Advisory Committee

1983—served on board of advisors for Senior Action in a Gay Environment

1987—co-founder of OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change)

2004-2008—plaintiffs in *In re Marriage Cases* for marriage equality

2008—was legally married to her partner of 55 years

## Appendix J

**Del Martin's Service and Activism**

1955—co-founded the Daughters of Bilitis

1964—co-founded the Council on Religion and the Homosexual

1965-1966—Served on Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike's Diocesan Commission on Homosexuality

1967—joined the Northern California Chapter of the National Organization of Women

1973—elected the first openly lesbian to the board of direction for National Organization of Women 1971—challenged the American Psychiatric Association which in part revoked the listing of homosexuals as mentally ill in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

1972—cofounder of Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club

1972—published *Lesbian/Woman*

1976—appointed as first open lesbian to Commission on the Status of Women

1976—published Battered Wives

1977—elected delegate to International Women's Year Conference

1978—cofounded the Lesbian Lobby

1978—cofounded the San Francisco Feminist Democrats

1980-1983—served on California State Commisssion on Crime Control and Violence Prevention.

1983—served on board of advisors for Senior Action in a Gay Environment

1984-2001—served on the Advisory Committee for Gay and Lesbian Outreach to Elders

1987—co-founder of OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change)

2004-2008—plaintiffs in *In re Marriage Cases* for marriage equality

2008—was legally married to her partner of 55 years