

Lyon-Martin House Interview with Kendra Mon

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SPEAKERS

Kendra Mon, Carla Campbell

ABSTRACT:

Kendra Mon is Del Martin's biological daughter, from Martin's first marriage. She lived with Del and Phyllis sometimes as a teenager and as an adult was in their lives across the rest of their lives. She describes the early decor of the home and her initial impressions of how small it was. She also describes some early parties in the home. Kendra also describes how the house was adapted to Del and Phyllis' needs as they aged. In addition, she notes the archival quality of their home, where they collected photos, news clippings, books related to women's accomplishments, lesbian and gay issues, their own publishing, and records of their lives and activism, stored in the basement and throughout the house. Kendra also discusses how Phyllis' caregiving was funded through community-based small loans against the assumed resale value of the property after she passed. She describes holidays at their home. Her vision for the house is to move it to some kind of LGBTQ "pioneer village" where it would be a tourist attraction with other well-known LGBTQ people's homes.

Carla Campbell

I'm gonna hit record, okay?

Kendra Mon

Yes. Okay.

Carla Campbell

So you were able to get the questions, right?

Kendra Mon

Yes. Okay. And you're just gonna write up a report. Is that right?

Carla Campbell

Yes, basically more of a transcription, then we submit it to Don, our professor and then they're going to turn it into the Friends of Lyon-Martin House.

Kendra Mon

Okay,

Carla Campbell

My name is Carla. I'm an adult returning student at Sonoma State. Basically we were asked to try to get in touch with people and learn more about the house not so much about Del and Phyllis directly, but more like what the house means to the community. They want to have it be a space that can continue on in the community and support the community. So we're basically trying to help show what the property means to the community and historically. So, what was your What was your first memory when Del and Phyllis got the house and you first went there? Like how old were you?

Kendra Mon

I was 16.

Carla Campbell

Okay, so you hadn't gone to their house until you were 16? Did you visit at all before that?

Kendra Mon

I visited their apartment on Castro Street at about age 11, which turned out to be during their honeymoon. Okay. So, but I lived with my dad.

Carla Campbell

Okay. And where abouts did your dad live?

Kendra Mon

He was an Army officer, so we moved around a lot.

Carla Campbell

Okay. So when you went to the house, what did you think? I mean, at 16 Obviously, then you have a lot of opinions. I would assume? I have a 15 year old so. You probably had a lot of thoughts.

Kendra Mon

Well, I don't remember. No. But I knew. (I don't know where I was going here. I didn't know about their relationship One day Mom told me that all the meetings they were going to were about Lesbians and that they were Lesbians.) Before that their friends who visited dressed up in skirts out of respect for my moms. I remember asking why all their friends had boy's names. First of all, you can't help but see that it's a lot of steps to the house.

Carla Campbell

Yes.

Kendra Mon

It's a very tiny house. And it has a great view of San Francisco or it had an even wider view of San Francisco. And there were lots of pillows in the living room. On the floor. There was an alpaca rug that Phyllis' sister gave them. She was an anthropologist in Peru.

Carla Campbell

Oh wow.

Kendra Mon

So she gave that to them. And that it was just kind of it. It was just unusual to me. Seeing a lot of pillows around on the floor. That's where they sat most of the time. They had a couch and that's where I slept when I was there first. Eventually they changed it to a pull out couch. But you haven't seen the house right?

Carla Campbell

Just the 3d just like the tours and stuff, just like pictures and the tours.

Kendra Mon

Yeah, so it's, uhh... we had a trailer in Petaluma that was bigger than the house.

Carla Campbell

Wow!

Kendra Mon

It was very small. There was a basement underneath. Mostly dirt floor. But they have storage down there.

Carla Campbell

Okay.

Kendra Mon

So I think it was built in the 20s. So you Yeah, so that was my first impression.

Carla Campbell

Did you like going there?

Kendra Mon

Oh, yeah. Okay. It took a while for us to get to know each other because I hadn't spent much time with them. So there wasn't a lot of contact until I came to live with them at 16.

Carla Campbell

So then when you came at 16 Did you stay at the house? Or was it just a visit?

Kendra Mon

I moved in and stayed there in the summers. And came home on the weekends while I was in college at Berkeley..

Carla Campbell

Okay, What did you think of the neighborhood?

Kendra Mon

Well, when I first moved there, it was like San Francisco housing. It was one house against the other. But on their side, there was some separation and there was a house next to them on the east side-that was full of kids and a-single man lived in the small house next door on the other side. Later, the small house burned down.

Carla Campbell

Is that the lot that's next to them that now has a very large house on it?

Kendra Mon

Yes. So how that neighborhood changed there are now bigger houses around this. What they used to call the brick house on the left and the house built on the east side was more recent, and it was after mom died and Phyllis really wasn't umm... she was, she was in the later stages of Alzheimer's. Yeah. so she wasn't really knowledgeable about what's going on.

Carla Campbell

So, when you were there, where did you spend most of your time?

Kendra Mon

Well, like I said, it's such a tiny house. We moved back and forth. between the kitchen and the living room. Later in the later years, well, you're going to ask that later, but in the later years, that they have...I'm going to answer that now -

Carla Campbell

Okay. Go ahead. Yeah.

Kendra Mon

In the middle room there's a lower level living room and stairs going up one level. When they bought the house, there were no closets and no doors except leaving the bathroom door. And that continued to remain the same that there were no doors in the house except the bathroom door. And they added a closet because there were no closets. They added a closet. Part of the bedroom and made a closet and the middle room between bedroom and living room and a kitchen with what they call the den. And that was full of a lot of bookcases and later they added to the desks like computer but before that there was a bar in there, like a homemade bar and they kept a lot of glassware behind the bar. And they would use that for parties. Kind of move it out from the wall. And use that for parties. And when we had more than four or five people to eat. We really did go down to the living room. Later they got a collapsible I don't know how to say it's like a sliding column. But it was a table. So you would slide out and then it would become a double and then slide it out and become a triple.

Carla Campbell

Oh, okay. Yeah,

Kendra Mon

So that was up there for larger meals.

Carla Campbell

Yeah. Yeah, I know the kitchen pictures of the kitchen. Did they just have two chairs at the table? Was there four chairs? Do you remember?

Kendra Mon

There was what they called a dinette bench in the corner and then two chairs. Phyllis always sat in the chair opposite the window. And Mom always sat opposite her.

Carla Campbell

Okay. I mean, that's how it is at my house too. You know, once you kind of have your seat it's like the unspoken rule that that's your seat. The kitchen looks kind of tight, cozy, as well. And so when you would come spend your summers there do you think that their routines changed at all? Or did you just kind of integrate in, like it wasn't a lot different when you would come home versus when you were not home?

Kendra Mon

I really don't know. But when I was home for the summer, they would go off to meetings, sometimes I was invited to come along. Sometimes I worked and both of them worked full time. So then they would have meetings mostly on the weekends or in the evenings and out of the house and may have had meetings at the house when I was gone. I don't know.

Carla Campbell

Okay, so there wasn't like events at the house while you were home?

Kendra Mon

There were a few parties like a Halloween party that I remember very clearly. They were a couple of work parties because they had that big lot next to them would get overgrown with Anise plants. And they weren't not easy to take out so they would have work parties to clear the lot. And service spaghetti and beer and big salad.

Carla Campbell

And so did they do a lot of the work on the house? Or did they hire-

Kendra Mon

No, they had people come to it. They mostly didn't do anything to the house. When, when the fire happened? They went to stay with Jo Daly because the west side of the house, especially in the living room was burned. So it took months for them to do the repairs from the fire. At that time they put in carpeting well they had carpeting put in. That indoor outdoor green carpeting put in the kitchen.

Carla Campbell

Oh?

Kendra Mon

It's white.

Carla Campbell

Okay, so it's like astroturf, but it's white?

Kendra Mon

No. Oh, the Green was in the kitchen.

Carla Campbell

Oh, okay.

Kendra Mon

Plush in the rest of the house that was white.

Carla Campbell

Then when you came in the house or when guests came over, did they have to take off their shoes at the door?

Kendra Mon

no, no, no, no, nobody did.

Carla Campbell

I always think of people that have white carpet and it's always like that's the first rule when guests come over is they're like remove your shoes. You know? What would you say was your mom's favorite place to be in the house?

Kendra Mon

They have a routine of going into the kitchen in the morning, coffee, reading the paper, having breakfast, smoking cigarettes. And when it got warm in there, because the sun would come in since it was like glass walls it would get hot. So then they would move down to the living room. They weren't very active. I mean you know they did the crossword puzzles. Sat in the living room, watch the TV or just sat for a long time and looked out the window at the view, it was their favorite part of the house was the window looking at the view. When they bought that place. They didn't notice that there were no closet space and everything. They took their parents to say hey, wait, wait. Yeah. What have you done? But No they didn't do things to the house.

Carla Campbell

I didn't put it on here on this list, but I was listening to your interview on the tour, on the 3d house tour. And someone said something about asking you about the day that the drapes came down.

Kendra Mon

Yes.

Carla Campbell

And so I thought if that something you wanted to share... it said on there something like ask Kendra about the day that the drapes came down or something like that?

Kendra Mon

Well, I don't actually I wasn't there. Okay, but there was just a thin, thin cloth draped on some rings that were in front of the plate glass window. But she told every caregiver, Phyllis told every caregiver, the story of how the drapes came down. And she and that was a big deal because every one of them because we have had a team like 20 caregivers, each of them knew the story of how the drapes came down so that's all.

Carla Campbell

I think, I want to say it was Marcia Gallo, in the interview that might have said that you knew the story about when the drapes came down. So that's why I was just curious.

Kendra Mon

Yeah.

Carla Campbell

Well, what was the window was their favorite thing. So was there anything that you took away from the house as a keepsake or a treasure of your time and memories there? Like pictures, books, art?

Kendra Mon

We were moving at the time or getting ready to move. So we were paring down our own household. So I took from each of my parents clothes, some outerwear. This is Phyllis' shirt (Kendra had on a weathered blue plaid flannel shirt). I have a shirt of mom and a shirt of my dads, actually sweater of my dads and you said about the last visit. So what we were doing in the last visit, the last I was in the house was three of us were packing up and clearing out and finding new homes, their furniture and their belongings that the GLBTQ Historical Society would not take so we will clear bookcases and papers and we would the three of us stop each other. When we found something interesting, we found love letters and - Papers and those kinds of things. Go to the to the GLBTQ. So that's what I remember. And I remember I took Phyllis' Winnie the Pooh books, which are not first edition but they were close to first edition. And umm, my Mom's bolo tie which had a Buddha on it. I didn't know she had that. And I took her brass business card holder. And I think that's all. I have lots of pictures and recordings and videos.

Carla Campbell

I was reading that they put the lift on the stairs soon after your mom started to get sick right ? On the stairs to the entry into the house. And so, what other stuff did you have to change as their health started to decline? Like did the house change because it's a multi level house which would be very challenging.

Kendra Mon

Mom and Phyllis would go back and forth between mostly they wanted to stay in their house. No questions, but occasionally they would think about maybe they shouldn't. So finally they decided that they would stay. And so a group of us came together at the house and said okay, well, if you're going to stay what are the things that you need? So the first thing was the stairlift. And then Phyllis needed handrails and all the way down. And my husband Eugene put that in and then there was raising the toilet and grab bars, my husband put those in. Umm, but Mom only used that stairlift maybe twice before she died. I'm the one that used it a lot. We were having the celebration at the completion of the stairlift. And I was coming home from work with party supplies, and I got hit head on by a car and so I ended up in the hospital. And so I'm the one who's injured and used the stairlift.

Carla Campbell

Well from the living room, there's like what, four or five stairs to get to the den and the kitchen?

Kendra Mon

There was seven. So that was another thing there was a huge stair railing put in for Mom. Phyllis used to, you know she, she acquiesced to that mom needed it. Yeah, then it was already there, then she could use it right?

Carla Campbell

Right. So then as Phyllis progressed, did she primarily stay in one part of the house versus the other? Or because it was easier or she just continued to still go wherever?

Kendra Mon

Yes, she continued to go wherever wasn't until the last month, until she became too weak.

Carla Campbell

Okay

Kendra Mon

I'm currently in -I don't know how to... I don't know if anybody's interested in this but I think there are lots of stories about the movement there in that house. About the book there. They wrote many chapters and many books and they got many awards and Mom... Phyllis- was a... computer person. They had Apple Mac, she kept records of every book that they had, every CD that they had.

Carla Campbell

Oh wow.

Kendra Mon

And she also took a lot of pictures. Put them in albums There were 30 albums. Mom clipped everything out of the newspaper that had to do with LGBT issues, or first women and umm...first woman in space first woman to be elected to, the first lesbian elected to office, the first woman elected, you know and

on and on. And there were I think probably 60 boxes down in the basement and umm... probably 10 boxes in and around the living room of clippings and files that mom would note in the date and the newspaper and, and put them in files because of all the things that she was interested in. She was interested in the battered women, she was interested in all of their friends and their books and..and then all these first events. And then religion in a homosexual and politics, the files, she would fill up a box and then start another box because then she didn't know where to find the file that she had.

Carla Campbell

Right? So she would just make a new one!

Kendra Mon

Yeah, and so and the GLBT people did not want the newspaper clippings. So I went through every box...At first Phyllis was interested in doing it but she was quickly tired with that. So I did that afterwards. I would find special things in there. But like anything they had written, was wanted the GLBT Historical Society, so I would find those things and make copies for myself and hand them on.

Carla Campbell

Okay.

Kendra Mon

But what I started to tell you (laughing) and politicians would come to get their endorsement. You know, because they were people looked to them for leadership. So their support mattered a great deal, and they would sometimes put a feminist woman ahead of a lesbian woman. You know, because...and they supported Mayor Feinstein at that time and they supported Nancy Pelosi and so when Phyllis' 80th birthday?? I don't know. Nancy Pelosi came up for Phyllis' birthday and gave a tribute. And you know, that meant a lot to me, but what I still think of telling you, because I think you're interested in those things. But what I'm interested in is this incredible story of taking care of Phyllis. She - I don't remember the date of mom's death or Phyllis' death or anything - but she was alone for a long time. And she was fiercely independent. And we pulled off an incredible job of building a team that took care of her in spite of herself. They all thought that, she thought, we would hire an agency and she would reject them. Maybe? Yeah. She thought that each of these caregivers that she had ultimately chose by meeting with them and deciding whether she's going to invite them over again. She thought they were all wanting to hang out with her. They were her friends and they eventually became her friends. But the house paid for the team. So I that's my story. The house. It was, it became they bought it for 11,000 something and it was worth millions. And so we used that and Pam their friend and fiduciary, who was not paid figured out that we could recruit investors into the house or would not be paid back until, with interest, until Phyllis died. And so...I don't know of any other story like that. And nobody else I know, knows of a story like that.

Carla Campbell

We listened to a podcast and it's from one of the caregivers and it tells the whole story about the team and how she would reject people and what they would come to the door and say and you know how all that kind of thing. So I personally loved that because I've been a caregiver for my parents. And

so there's so much of it that you're talking about and that was in that podcast about caregiving that really resonated for me, because I've been through it. And I too have my dad's flannel shirts...I have many of his flannel shirts, because that was something that he always wore, and I think the story of the caregivers. I really really enjoyed it being a caregiver when my dad was ill and he did not want to be taken care of so I thought your guys's approach to getting people in the home that Phyllis was comfortable with or like she enjoyed but didn't realize like, what their job was? Was just really amazing. When you were there taking care of her like as she progressed did she do you remember her kind of having things about the house that maybe were more meaningful to her or like jogged her memory more? Like if she sat in the living room and looked out the window then would it prompt her to like, jog more memories of things that they did in the house? Or she'd go in the kitchen and...

Kendra Mon

It was a combination of photo albums and the caregivers questions, but she would talk about that curtain being gone.

Carla Campbell

Oh yeah?

Kendra Mon

Because they were living openly. And she would look at the portrait of Eleanor Roosevelt and tell the story until she's forgotten. How she interviewed Eleanor Roosevelt at the train station in Chico. She was a newspaper reporter

Carla Campbell

Wasn't it Fresno? No...

Kendra Mon

No, It was north of Sonoma.

Carla Campbell

Oh it was North? I was gonna say or possibly Folsom? For some reason, those two stuck in my head. Ok.

Kendra Mon

So- so she entered she interviewed her and she was very excited. And dumbstruck, awestruck And the photographer who was sent by the paper was trying to get a picture of her and Eleanor. But she kept her back to the camera (laughing). And so she's never gotten a picture with Eleanor. Just this picture of her back with Eleanor.

Carla Campbell

Was the picture of her and Eleanor in the house?

Kendra Mon

No, just the portrait of Eleanor. She would tell that story. But otherwise the, when all of the caregivers would take out an album and just go slow with her.

Carla Campbell

Ok. Did they have pictures, like I saw in some articles I looked up like there was pictures of them as a couple or whatever around, did they have pictures of them with friends or them with you or with their parents or other pictures besides just them?

Kendra Mon

They had a picture of me. Umm...I think most of the pictures were given to them. You know? No. It's not that. Yeah, Phyllis, she put all the pictures in the album. And she took a lot of pictures but the pictures on the wall are mostly given to them. And yeah, and that's why we put them on the walls.

Carla Campbell

Oh? Okay.

Kendra Mon

Yes

Carla Campbell

Because they were gifts...Oh, that makes sense. Do you remember the last time that you went to the house like the very last time that you were here?

Kendra Mon

That's the one that I told you about. Where we were going to do the papers. Yeah. I wanted to go back and umm...the things that changed in the house were the pillows they gave up on. Sometime in their 40s or 50s. They decided that that they weren't going to sit on the floor. (laughing) And they had a large LP and then that switched to cassettes, and then that would switch to CD.

Carla Campbell

(laughing) Okay.

Kendra Mon

They would go to the women's Music Festival National Festival in Indiana. They would go on the Olivia cruises and they... so they got to know many of the women's music singers.

Carla Campbell

Okay.

Kendra Mon

Yeah. And they followed them.

Carla Campbell

Hmm...Did they like to dance?

Kendra Mon

Umm... slow dancing,

Carla Campbell

Okay no fast dancing?

Kendra Mon

No. I never saw them dancing fast.

Carla Campbell

Did you ever go there... Were you there for any holidays?

Kendra Mon

Yes

Carla Campbell

Did they decorate a lot? Or put up a tree?

Kendra Mon

They had a tree. I don't remember other decorations, but my family would go there for Christmas and birthdays and so on. And her sister would come over, Phyllis' sister would come over from Berkeley. But she's post-polio, so she couldn't even—if she got to the house - She couldn't go up to the bathroom. So...Yeah, that didn't work.

Carla Campbell

Okay. If you were leading a tour of the house, where would you take visitors and what would you say on the tour?

Kendra Mon

I always tell people the tour is such a miniscule thing. But always make a point to tell people that they were not extraordinary people. They were people that did great things. Like persistence, and Phyllis would always add "we had fun doing it." And I just thought that was great. I think people doing any movement are so serious and determined. But I think that's important to have the fun doing it.

Carla Campbell

Yeah. It like brings out the happiness and makes it more meaningful.

Kendra Mon

They always seemed to have time for us when we lived nearby, When we visited we will play cards or whatever. Never seemed like they were in a rush to be anywhere.

Carla Campbell

If money were no object, what would you imagine the best use for the Lyon-Martin house in the future?

Kendra Mon

Well, if money were not no, object?

Carla Campbell

Yes.

Kendra Mon

I would take the house off of its support and put it in a place that people could visit. And I would, I would. The East in the Midwest, they have pioneer villages. I would build a pioneer LGBT Park and have the houses of the people or their rooms or whatever. That people could go in and around and visit and learn more about them and the people that were there.

Carla Campbell

Is the Pioneer Village like a I don't want to say tourist attraction. I'm trying to think of like where they would set it up exactly. But then you could go into a house or a property but then just not touch anything. Is that like what a pioneer village.

Kendra Mon

Well I don't I don't think so. Even in our small town in Indiana where we did, they would take log houses and move them over to an area and then take a log schoolhouse and you know, businesses. So you could go in and out and find out by looking partly at the display, what kinds of tools the pharmacy or the dentist office or the church.

Carla Campbell

Ah ok.

Kendra Mon

The school house. There was a park in Illinois, Dearborn Park I think it's where it's called, where they had a house that belonged to Daniel Webster, who wrote the first American Dictionary and maybe Henry Ford,

Carla Campbell

okay

Kendra Mon

the inventor Thomas Alva Edison. They had a number of those houses, and then you would go into the house you would learn about it.

Carla Campbell

Yeah. Hmm. I think that would be really interesting. I mean, that because that hopefully they'll figure they'll find they'll the I don't know what the plans are for the house. But I think if they could create a space and like I said if they were able to bring back some of the things like you're talking about, like the

photo albums or the articles, I mean, things that Del and Phyllis really found that were meaningful to them. I think they would be meaningful to a lot of other people too, be able to display them and things like that.

Kendra Mon

So we managed to give, I meant to say that something that Smithsonian would use that the GLBT people wouldn't and that was the Rolodex.

Carla Campbell

Oh, uh huh.

Kendra Mon

They had a huge metal Rolodex and then they paired that down to plastic one and one of the things that would happen, umm... is if they would, you can see, for instance, on somebody's name, where their address was and what happened then how it was changed and how it was changed again. I just thought that was pretty neat.

Carla Campbell

You probably could tell. I was gonna say you probably could tell which ones were used more like because they were more worn or more dirty, as well.

Kendra Mon

Yeah.

Carla Campbell

Oh, that's really interesting.

Kendra Mon

Smaller white one is at the Smithsonian, nobody would take the metal one.

Carla Campbell

Mm hmm. How interesting. Okay, do you have any anything else that you would like to share? Or?

Kendra Mon

Umm, I think...Oh, I just wanted to say their routine was when they were retired. They would go up into the kitchen. Umm..they gave up cigarettes at some point. And they would listen to the news, read the newspaper and Have the coffee and then somebody would fix breakfast. And then the other point, in the end of the day they would go down to the living room. Watch out of the view, listen to the TV and they always liked to listen to the convention. One lends into another, and that used to be on a radio or televised game. They also liked the Giants games.

Carla Campbell

Do you think they went to any games?

Kendra Mon

Yes. Think they went to games until it became..It got harder. And one of the couples..,their friends. Susan and Nancy, from Sausalito, they will meet and go to the ballgame. Phyllis's friends got their names on a plaque near the new stadium. Gave them a baseball that had all of the signatures on it.

Carla Campbell

Aww, that's really neat. How long ago did you move away? A year ago? Do you like it there?

Kendra Mon

I do. My husband does it. So we were on our way to try to find out where he would like to live. Where's the last adventure because as you know, having been a caregiver, I've learned that if you want help from family, you better be close to them and not put them through all that travel. Yeah, you know. So we were wanting to find a place that he liked for at least a good year before we settled down near LA

Carla Campbell

I appreciate your time today. I'll let you go. Thank you for everything and thank you for meeting with me.

Kendra Mon

Thank You Carla, have a great day.

Carla Campbell

Have a great rest of your day. Bye.