

Margie Adams Interview

By Carla Campbell

Lyon Martin House Project

Tue, Dec 06, 2022 11:56AM • 1:03:34

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Phyllis, Del, lesbian, house, Diane, space, Kendra, living room, community, women, politics, caregivers

ABSTRACT

Margie Adams is a singer-songwriter and activist. She met Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in the 1970s through her partner. She talks about walking up to the Lyon-Martin house as a “pilgrimage” for lesbian feminists of her generation, noting that their picture window looked out on San Francisco and the world. This was symbolic of Del and Phyllis’ expansive view of life and activism. She describes the power of the small house, going to parties there in “shifts,” because so many people wanted to attend, but couldn’t fit inside the house at the same time. Margie was also part of a group of women who took it upon themselves to help Del and Phyllis stay in their home as they aged, trying to get a chairlift installed and arranging for caregivers (or “carers” as Margie describes them). She imagines the future use of the house as an archive or retreat focused on lesbian history, broadly defined.

Carla Campbell: Hello! So this process has become a crash course and how to use Zoom. I promise, I suddenly I'm like, “Oh, I didn't know I could do all those things.” Oh, well. So, you got the questions?

Margie Adams: I did.

Carla Campbell: Okay, so let's start with how did you meet Del and Phyllis?

Margie Adams: My partner, Boo Price, was very deeply involved with lesbian mother custody. She was one, we met each other a law student. And she also was a lesbian mother and had gone through a horrific situation with her ex-husband, by including a kidnapping of her son. And she was very involved with the idea of putting out a lesbian mother custody manual. And she heard that Del Martin had many different cases, all of which had been sealed. So no one knew none of the attorneys that were trying to represent lesbian mothers had any background that they could draw upon to see what arguments worked. And so Boo said, “I would like to put together a manual.” She went to Del and said, “Look, I am aware that you have all these cases and someone said there on the bottom of your desk drawer in your home, and, and so here I am, at your front door, asking if I could possibly take these cases and copy them and then create a lesbian mother custody manual.” And Del said, “I am not letting these things go out of this house. They're really precious.” And so Boo said, “Well, what about if I leave my driver's license here?” So this is a story that I heard, which focused me on the desk, which was in both what's called the dining room of the house, as well as the office in your house. And so this was, I don't know, 1975, that whenever that exchange happened, I'm not sure. But boo and I were together as partners. And she was also, you know, co owner of the record label that we founded together, and my manager, my attorney, you know, connected, seriously connected. And somewhere in that period, Del, and Phyllis said, you know, that worked out really well. That part with Del, holding on to Boo’s driver's

license until she brought the things back having copied them all. And Donna Hitchens had become involved. And Donna was very interested also in putting a manual together. And this energy kind of directed towards what ended up being the Lesbian Rights Project, which then evolved into the National Center for Lesbian Rights. So all of that was happening in the midst of when I was hearing about Del and Phyllis, knowing about them because of The Ladder, I came out when I was 15. And I knew about The Ladder, I knew about their names, I knew who they were, I did a concert for Inez Garcia Defense Fund. And sitting in the front row, were Del and Phyllis. And when I got to the end of my performance, I sang the song about a unicorn. And here were these two icons sitting there, you know, serious, you know?

Carla Campbell: Yes.

Margie Adams: [I was] focused, intentional, and, and suddenly there they were singing along with the rest of the audience seeing is believing in the things you see loving is believing in the ones you love, kind of rocking back and forth, and I thought, I'm gonna love these women, if I ever get to meet them up close and personal. And somewhere in there, they invited us to have dinner at their house. And we walked up the steep path. And, you know, I was nervous, I thought, you know, it's one thing to be on stage and to meet them in the front row. And it's a whole other thing to be like invited to their house and I can gather myself and Phyllis answered the door. And you know, we walked in and I kind of, kind of scanned and then looked out the front window, which was San Francisco, you know, from Noe Valley up on the hillside and I was talking to my dear friend and also someone who's very engaged with the house, Diane Saban, the other day and she said, You know what I remember about the house is that it was so small. And I thought I never thought of it that way because of the energy of the house would walk along one wall. You know, it was Del and Phyllis this house. But when Diane said that I thought, you know, in a way, they just wrap the house around themselves. So that when we arrived that night, the dining room, which I had only heard about as the office, who was telling you about the story of, you know, the lesbian mother custody cases, now that had been transformed into the dining room was a very small house. Okay. It was the same space, but now it was the dining room. And I sat down at the table, I was, you know, just thrilled exciting. And everybody was talking, it was fabulous, just the four of us. I don't know, I was just looking around at stuff at the table, and then looked at the glasses and picked up my glass, and it was a glass of water, but there was a frog ice cube in it. And Phyllis came into the room and she said, "Oh, you notice that?" I said, "Is this a frog?" I saw that she said yes. She said, "I just got to have a look at this". Okay, great. I said, Oh, my God, Phyllis. Here's this, in the midst of these extraordinary fears, fierce, forward momentum, gals, you know, whimsy, right in the middle of it, and delight and, you know, looking to see if others were noticing, you know, the outfits that they put together, you know, that matched, and they would swoop into a space, their home was filled with holy things, in the midst of newspaper clippings, and special plaques and acknowledgments, as the years went by. It was a sweet nest for both of them, you know, and many was the time where I would arrive, and Phyllis would come and open the door and then kind of start going up the stairs into the kitchen. There would be, Del with a newspaper. "Oh, hi, Margie." And then back into it, you know, and the space was such that it was possible to make an entrance. So sometimes I went to parties there. I'm trying to think many an entrance was made from the office, dining room, kitchen area, up of the stairs, it would be more likely to be Phyllis than Del, for sure. But Phyllis would

say something, we would all turn around and there she would be at the top of the stairs. It's not that she was a diva at all.

Carla Campbell: Right.

Margie Adams: But she knew where she was. She knew what she was doing. I mean, and the energy of the two of them in their space. It made it comfortable. And it also was conscious. I was aware when the parties that I went to I was aware that the individuals that would have been coming there would have filled the living room three, four times. But in the lesbian feminist community, it says if we knew that we needed to do this as a kind of a relay. So a group of us would come in the early part of the party and then we narrow and then we'd kind of move along and then there'd be space and another group of us would come and so it would not have been possible for all those of us who wanted to be with Del and Phyllis to all be in their living room. There was there were too many of us, but some way and no one ever said to me, "Hey Marg, would you take the second sitting, you know, we're gonna need to spread this out." It was a one of the intuitional aspects of being in a radical lesbian feminist community that blew up beside these two beautiful women who had a very small, as Diane said, [a] very small space that expanded with whatever was going on there just beyond the physical space into a whole other realm.

Carla Campbell

You're the first person I've talked to that actually went to one of their parties. Everyone else was more like Kendra and then Diane and Pauline were more like, holidays and neighbor type things, not like an actual social function.

Margie Adams: Oh, yes.

Carla Campbell: I hadn't heard that people came in shifts, but it makes sense-

Margie Adams: We never said that. I was thinking when I was talking with Diane Saban, and she's such an important part of this, you know, towards the end and Del and Phyllis living together in that space. You know, there were those of us in the community, including Pan Haskin, as well bless her heart, who said, "We need to get on purpose to make sure that as Del and Phyllis age, their space continues to be accessible." And it was Pam and then Diane Saban who came in and took on the task of the famous chairlift, oh, my God, what a trip! But you know, it, we started out going to parties, and, you know, so when they were in their 70s, I would have been in my 50s, and I was going, "damn, this is quite a little hike going up here", you know, and became clear over time, you know, like, by 2004, around there.... Um accessibility, accessibility is going to be an issue. And Del and Phyllis did not want to move, you know, there was an effort during this period to go out and see, you know, where maybe we could move them into a ground floor someplace, not having it. Maybe we could do this, maybe we can do that. And there were women in the community like Diane Saban, like Pam Haskins who stepped up and said, "I will bring my skill set, you know, to whatever this project is that has to do with Del and Phyllis, in terms of making their last, you know, days, years, whatever it is--accessible, so that they are able to come and go as they please, in this place that they choose to stay." And it was very moving to have these meetings begin around the issue of accessibility 2004, 2006, 2010, 2011, and 2013. And the

community expanded, as these meetings took place, and we came to be more on purpose about what needed to be done, and how quickly it needed to be done as time went on.

Carla Campbell: Mhm.

Margie Adams: But it was very powerful, kind of behind-the-scenes gang, a gals, bunch of alpha females, you know, just moving the scene together. Yes, carers, which came along a little bit later. But also those of us thinking about durable power for health care, and all that kind of complexity that shows up as we get older that need to be, you know, not need to be, but if you can think of it, as we did put it in place for these beautiful women.

Carla Campbell: Yeah.

Margie Adams: Oh and of the parties? Well, let me say about this, Diane was reminding me, I'm not sure if it was a birthday or what it was. But, you know, we were going through. I think that I was there, I think Diane was there. Not all of us were there, as I was saying, but we were we were coming and going. And the door, you know, is a little "bling!". And the door opens, and there's Nancy Pelosi, and she's not there was some kind of crowd. She's there, Nancy Pelosi, and maybe a personal assistant or whatever it was someone in the community. And Nancy held Del and Phyllis in very high esteem. Because when she first got involved in politics, Del and Phyllis stepped forward and said, "We think you're a good idea and we want to back you, we want to bring whatever we can to this first campaign of yours". And, and they weren't off, you know, from up going and raising big funds. They were sitting there with, you know, flyers and stamps and doing the dirty nails work of getting someone elected. And Nancy never forgot that, you know, it was and so she there she was sitting amongst the rest of us. And, you know, a lot of us were doing work in the public in different ways. And it was like, "Great, sister's here!" You know, how great we're all sitting around here. Celebrating somebody's birthday was Del or Phyllis his birthday? Or some? I don't know, could have been any number of things, maybe one of their weddings. Yeah. But think about where she is now. Nancy Pelosi and what happened? And what was fundamental about her, but also her relationship with Del, and Phyllis, and what was fundamental about their perspective, you know, the macro. I mean, they were way down in the micro of lesbian feminism, but they were also in lesbian feminism in the connection of right beyond San Francisco politics. I mean, they sat there in their living rooms with their two Barco lounges, you know, those chairs looking out on not just San Francisco, but America. They made up stuff. They, churned things out. They were involved with the International Woman's year 1977 over in Houston. And there's no question that they schemed, you know that they were schemers! And when they came in to that conference, there were some very, I would say, forward thinking radical lesbian feminists who wanted to move lesbian issues right into the middle of the International Women's year celebration and conference. And Del and Phyllis said, "We owe some of the success within the LGBT community to this one right over here, Bella Abzug. And right now, Phyllis and I are going to be standing behind her, and what it is that she wants to move forward". [Del]. Because we are part of a team, which goes, bring, we bring what we bring, but in the context of a larger movement for social change, which includes Bella Abzug, you know, she may be on a different point of the continuum. And all of that got played out in conversations, right in the living room in their house. And it wasn't like, there were those of us saying, you know, Bella is too straight. She's too conservative. She's too this or that. It's that Del and Phyllis

would have us over for, I don't know, maybe a meal, maybe a conversation. And there was a freedom to explore whatever it was that we were working out one generation younger, about the politics of social change in Washington, DC, those of us who believed as they did, and demonstrated in working in reform politics, as well as on the cutting edge, I mean, and their house, the living room shows all that what's on the walls shows both the micro of what they were involved in the most radical politics they were involved in, as well as reform politics, electoral politics, if you will. It was the decorations of their house, on the wall.

Carla Campbell: Pauline, and Diane had like a video that they had taken on their phone. That was like their own personal walkthrough tour. Yeah, they did that. And it, I mean, it was pretty fast, I will admit, I was like, whoa, slow down. But it was they had all the framed all of their awards and their recognitions. And then it was intermingled with hand drawn art, and little things like that. There was a lot that decorated their house, and even all the pictures that you see that were in the paper, or whatever online research doesn't even remotely represent the amount of accomplishments that were hanging on their wall, or the amount of gifts and recognition that were hanging on their wall that I saw a video. So that was really neat to see that level of dedication and being able to see the impact they had made on other people's lives. And that prompted them to give because Kendra had told me that everything they had up in their house was gifts, they didn't like frame a picture of themselves or whatever, I'm sure that everything was all gifts. So that was really interesting.

Margie Adams: Yes, indeed.

Carla Campbell: When you walked in the house you personally whether it's the first time or like maybe every time you came was there something specific that like you looked at or that caught your attention?

Margie Adams: The wall of books. There was so little space, you know, comparatively speaking in their living room, and yet there was the whole wall was books and I think any number of times where I was busy getting comfortable in the space, I would turn around and kind of MUSE you know, kind of gather myself looking at the books and just the diversity of what was there the complexity of reading matter that they saved and I was very always very aware that they were managing a limited space. And so what was in the space was chosen. And and I have no idea what got to stay over years. I never tracked any of that stuff, but I think it would be the wall of books. Also. The table which was the dining room table, which was purchased and stored in the every room, that table that had display items, I would say, you know, a recent award or the famous photograph of the two of them and their second marriage at city hall with the mayor. That was the dining room table. And

Carla Campbell: Like a nesting table, right?

Margie Adams: Pardon me?

Carla Campbell: Was it like a nesting table? I think Kendra described-she said that it would bring it out when company would come and it would like you would like multi-section.

Margie Adams: Yes. Expanded. That's right. That you could make it as small as just two. Yes, that's right. I wouldn't have called that a nesting table. But yeah, it definitely could be shrunken or expanded out. That's right. Yeah.

Carla Campbell: Okay. Yeah. It was in the living room. I thought that it was stored in the you said it was stored in the living room, right? It?

Margie Adams: Well, it wasn't stored. It was used as a kind of display table. So that when you walk, yes. So when you walked in the living room, and walking and living with me and you when the door was opened, you could either go up the stairs to the left, or you could go to the right and right there on the right, was what became I think, over time, a kind of a display area. Right. And so that was always fascinated. There was also an artist, a wonderful, lesbian feminist artist who did a sculpture of one woman holding another that I believe was on the television. It could have moved around. But it was conventional sculpture. And also represent representational. So it was an abstract. It was, I believe, I could have this wrong, but I believe it was one woman holding another. And this was a very well-known sculptor's sculpture. And I don't remember her name anymore, but she was always at the woman's building crafts fairs, and had these extraordinary sculptures. Del and Phyllis, were given one, obviously,

Carla Campbell: I'll go back and look at Diane and Pauline's video because I remember a sculpture that had two individuals with Weick. Like there was three people in it I think..

Margie Adams: I have that.

Carla Campbell: Oh!

Margie Adams: Yeah they gave it to me. Or it was given to me by the those who are, Kendra? I'm not sure who it was.

Carla Campbell: And then, then Diane and Pauline had a framed piece of art. There was a woman embracing another. Yes, we they were dressed and it's a black and white photo was hanging in their living room? Yes. Wow. Yeah, they did have some really nice art. Like I said, The tour was pretty fast. There was a lot to see.

Margie Adams: can you slow [the house tour video] that down? Are you going to end up being able to use that for your project?

Carla Campbell: I haven't tried. I was trying to watch it before I met with them so that it was like fresh, so that I could ask them about things and when they would describe things. But it was like with the bookshelf. I was like, trying really hard, like read the titles. And I was like, the only ones I caught was like Bill Clinton and Spock. And I was like, that's an interesting combination of biographies. And so, you know, I just I was trying to scan my recognize the covers of Harry Potter. But other than that I didn't recognize, covers and couldn't read fast enough that I was like, I didn't have a chance to go back and finish it. But the same thing with the awards, I mean, a lot of the congressional awards to it to a person

who's not necessarily up on that kind of stuff. That's why we didn't read them fast enough, more than anything, I would identify their names quickly. But then I couldn't read like, what it was for, like, what were they awarded for? Yes. And so there was definitely a lot to see in the video. And it was really, it was really interesting, because it covered a lot of the topics that we have talked about in our project of like, what do you imagine was on their bookshelf? Or like, you know, we had not seen anything of their bedroom. We had only seen pictures or things of the living room, obviously. The duck in the kitchen. Yes, a little bit of the office. And then I went to the house myself and felt like a total Trespasser and was like creeping up the super steep stairs and trying to look in the windows and trying to like envision everything that we had talked about, you know, without looking like I was going to do something bad to the house. So I was like someone's gonna come over here.

Margie Adams: “Hey, girl, what are you doing?” [Laughing]

Carla Campbell: Yeah, those were very steep stairs, I have to say that once I got there and I was videoing it for my project partner while I was climbing it, and I thought, wow, these are really steep. So to be older and to be climbing up there, or like I can't even imagine because of living in Sonoma County, you would not have to climb that many stairs just to take their groceries or their trash out. I am spoiled that I live on ground level.

Margie Adams: Right, well, it was an interesting confrontation, I think for those of us who were able to step up and engage the issue of accessibility, it was how to sustain our deep respect for Del and Phyllis, while also being really realistic about the situation that was becoming dangerous, right? Yeah, I would say, you know, and I don't think that they ever were happy with that chairlift and I actually went through the paperwork. You know, Diane was fierce to try to get what it was that we had committed with them to do that people that, you know, installed the thing, and it was, it was a real unfortunate, unprofessional encounter on their part on the part of the people who did it, and they did not make it right. You know, and there were some serious, fierce exchanges. And you know, as is sometimes the way not only in terms of gender, but also aging. Del and Phyllis were taken advantage of, you know, and-

Carla Campbell: You mean that people that installed the chairlift?

Margie Adams: Yes. Okay. Yes. And, and, you know, and and I think this group of women who stepped up to engage, and to support Del and Phyllis, as they were moving into old age, as I mean, they were old, as Del and Phyllis would say, you know, I would go, you know, is there a particular language I should, by younger self serve a particular language that you would like me to use, when I'm referring to Del and Phyllis and, you know, dealt old use the word old? Oh, okay. Old. She said, Yeah, we need to claim that word in our own. You know, our, our personhood we're old Margie get, you know, that's, that's where we are, okay, old. Now that I'm old myself, I think, oh, yeah, thank you, Del and Phyllis as so many things, you know, they, they gave us language, they directed us towards a reality that was without kind of softening the edges. You know, they were blunt when they needed to be really uncomfortable and difficult. When they were not going to take it, you know, they were not going to take a smooth edge off of something that was really an edge. And, you know, I think navigating with them, their autonomy, and personhood in the midst of aging was really an extraordinary experience

for all of us who are involved. And Kendra, you know, expanding her heart, wider enough to allow us in there to also be a part of helping extraordinary what a what an incredible daughter, for Del and Phyllis really.

Carla Campbell : With most of you that would go to do help or whatever. I mean, like, we're a lot of you around the same age, like we'll say 20 years or so younger.

Margie Adams: In the organizing part in the like, I think Diane and Pauline. I think they would all be in their 70s now. Diane, Pauline, Kate may be a little bit younger Kate Kendall, I'm not sure but like how much younger five years? I don't know. Right? We never checked our cards. How old are you? [Laughing] You can be in the gang? I don't think I think there was probably a 10 year span difference among us but I don't think more than that, and then the carers that came in, they were they were like 20 years younger or more, you know, which was delightful. What a gift for giving,

Carla Campbell: The generational height, like instantly. And it also, I would assume makes it a little more the stories of the caregivers would tell, like believable in a sense, yes. These are much younger people that are wanting to come learn from her be mentored from her, all those things. Yeah, I think the stories, the stories about the caregiving, I love just being a caregiver myself, and really, just the way they went about it.

Margie Adams: Yeah, and that was a design that was not by accident that actually unfolded, there was an evolution of how, again, to balance out autonomy, personhood, deep respect, along with memory loss, you know, physical impairment, all of that stuff. I mean, and, and a lot of us, you know, had never had that experience before. Some of us had parents who had, you know, gone through all of that and had some experience, but not with Dell. And Phyllis. No. And they were like, their own unique selves.

Carla Campbell: Now, when you sort of you started going there with your partner than it would be in this 60s, you

Margie Adams: The 70s.

Carla Campbell: So then you DOB had already had already gone to their own like location, right?

Margie Adams: Yes.

Carla Campbell: Okay. So yeah. I think the DOB was still around in the 70s? But I don't think they [the meetings] were in the house. No,

Margie Adams: Oh, no, no, I yeah, it evolved. And I think also, my recollection is that Del and Phyllis represented a part of DOB that wanted to become more engaged in the world, and to do political work as well. And DOB had been founded as a social organization. And there were a number of any number of women who really just wanted to have a place that wasn't the bars, right, you know, to be social, to engage, you know, and to have culture to the extent that there was a growing culture within this community, but not politics. And Del and Phyllis were like, they represented a, a number of women

who understood what it would mean, for lesbians to get involved with politics and what it would do for the gay and lesbian community at that time that they were, they were in it, and it did create a parting of the ways. Oh, it's not negative, necessarily, but definitely, you know, different way. energies.

Carla Campbell: Yeah. That makes sense. Do you? Do you know the story about how the curtain came down?

Margie Adams: No, I don't. I've never heard of this. What is it? Totally.

Carla Campbell: It was well, I don't know. So it was on the 3-D tour that was done. There was a 3-D tour that was done by a company that catches the house is empty. So I can send you the link. It was by this company called when I say they're called size RCY AR K. And so it shows it takes you want a three-dimensional tour of the house with historians and Kendra, I think Marcia Gallo, I know that my professor [Don] speaks on there, but you're staring at an empty house. So like they're talking and they're talking to you through the house, but it only shows kind of like the main rooms. And then it said, if you ask certain people it said something about and then Phyllis likes to tell the story about how the curtain came down. So I keep asking who I interview. Do you know the story of how the curtain came down?

Margie Adams: And is this in the living room? Yeah. And the curtain that used to spread over the whole window which once it came down, they never put it up again?

Carla Campbell: Yeah, but I guess like the day that it happened, there's like a story surrounding like, all and then I like Kendra's, "like I don't know the story". So-

Margie Adams: You're on a quest!

Carla Campbell: I am! I keep putting it in my question because I'm like, somebody's got to know the story because they said Phyllis told the story over and over. And people had heard the story a million times. So I kept wanting to hear, like if there was this big like, reveal, and you know, there was like something to it. But everybody's like, I have no idea. And I'm like, Okay, well, I just thought I'd ask because I just am curious.

Margie Adams: And have you talked to Kate?

Carla Campbell: So, yeah, my project partner, talked to Kate and Marcia.

Margie Adams: Joyce Newstat?

Carla Campbell: They didn't—we didn't get a hold of her.

Margie Adams: Diane, not Diane, Pam. Pam Haskins. She passed. She already passed, though.

Carla Campbell: Um, no, just, uh, just Yeah. And then I've only talked to Kendra, and then Diane and Pauline. Uh huh. I was potentially supposed to talk to Celeste Chan, who was one of the caregivers, okay. She's in the process of moving. So her and I have been playing like tag for like a month. And so she's been trying to squeeze it in, and then we agree on something. And then she I don't hear from her. And I guess she's moving like, across states. So I just kind of been like, okay, that's serious. Yeah, yeah. So I don't want to bug her too much. And we're in the holidays. So that's the only people that I've talked to so. Okay. Yeah. Um, let's see. So then, do you remember the last time that you went to the house?

Margie Adams: I'm not sure it was the last time I remember taking a lunch to Phil, and the two of us sitting and having lunch. In the living room. Yeah, I did that several times, just kind of like camping out in the living room. We went for drives, I think more than just sitting, not because it gave her an opportunity to kind of, you know, talk about whatever she saw. So I had some of her favorite songs on my laptop, which I put in the backseat of my car. And I would come and pick her up. And and this is, I would say part of what evolved in the small circle of women who were caring for Phyllis and also who were coordinating the care as well. I have my laptop in the back and I said, Oh, you want to listen to some radio? And she said, Oh, yeah. And so I hit the laptop. And here was "Secret Love" and "Tenderly" and "Best Friend," "The Unicorn Song" and Sarah Vaughan singing this thing. And so and so singing that thing. I would turn it off. And then I would turn it back on again. And she would sing kind of driving along talking about the trees went over to Marin Headlands drove around there. It was a--we tried to go to I took her out to a restaurant once with Joyce. And it was a mistake. It was as the space was too random. The people, the people moving around was too overstimulating. So I think the house was a place that was completely manageable, or a car, you know, where Phyllis would pretty quickly become comfortable with the beginning, middle and end of the cab of the car, you know, that kind of thing? So yeah, and I don't have any date for any of that. It's just figuring out I think, as we did, how to how to continue to interact with her where she was, you know, not using history or memory, but using presence and just being there with her, you know?

Carla Campbell: Yeah, I can see that. Was a challenging for you to get her down from the house?

Margie Adams: Um, no.

Carla Campbell: You didn't use the lift, right?

Margie Adams: No, no. It was too high. I mean, it was it was a terrible set of missteps and poorly designed machinery with a business that was had limited commitment to meeting their agreements. Okay, said, yeah. No, we walked but I think for those of us who accompanied Del and Phyllis. It's just a different rhythm. So it wasn't difficult. It was just fine moving at her pace rather than mine. You know, knowing that that that we would get from point A to point C, and that that was the part of the visit, you know, so we would move along and look at the garden and talk about you know, the view and whatever it was that came up to her that would be engaging. Yeah.

Carla Campbell: Did they have a garden in the front? In front of the basement.

Margie Adams: Yeah. And it had been kept by the son of one of Del and Phyllis' political and personal friends. And he had, I think, started being a gardener for Dylan Phyllis, when he was quite young, and then went on for some period of time after he graduated from high school and continued to be their gardener, even though he was doing something, you know, like being an attorney or a law student, or whatever it was, but just, uh, there were many I think, associations like that, for those of us who started one place, and just went on, you know, as we evolved, you know, and continued to be connected to both of them.

Carla Campbell: Right. Like, slowly being intertwined in the world? And taking on different roles.

Margie Adams: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. Yeah.

Carla Campbell: If you were a docent for a tour of the house, how would you start the tour?

Margie Adams: At the bottom of the stairs? Okay. Well, I think for many of us, there was a certain pilgrimage quality to visiting with Del and Phyllis. And there was a certain way in which parking the car and then coming to the bottom of the steps and then making a pilgrimage, literally, you know, physically climbing up the stairs, and then up the path to their house was in some ways, like moving from one realm to another, moving from ordinary time into this space, which was, you know, my 15 year old self going, Oh, my God, you know, I remember *The Ladder*, I was reading *The Ladder* and going, This magazine is about me, I'm 15 years old, you know, and, and I, I belong here in this and it wasn't like, there was literature out there, then there were, you know, it was so. And there's Del's name, Del Martin. Phyllis Lyon, you know, after she was "Anne Ferguson", of course, but, you know, it was never common. It was never common. visiting them. That's what I would say and starting at the street level, and going up to their level. Yeah, that's where I would start it. And, and I would start, if I was a docent, talking about what Del and Phyllis meant to the lesbian community in the 70s. In the 80s, and the 90s. What it meant to be active on the barricades with them next to us what that felt like. Yeah, yeah. I mean, they were, they were our Martin Luther King. I mean, they were, you know, unique as leaders and as wide open students. Also, they kept saying "Bigger, bigger, expanded bigger," you know, they envision ourselves in the context of this large thing starting to be called social change. I mean, they they got it there wasn't like, they were trying to keep up. No, that's not my experience of them, which was remarkable. As they got old. I was keeping up with the physical thing, even though even the mental thing was it was not it. I mean, there was something else. Yeah. The spirits of these two women.

Carla Campbell: Wow. So Phyllis passed in 2020?

Margie Adams: Mhm and Del passed in 2008.

Carla Campbell: So a long time to be apart from your partner...

Margie Adams: Yeah. Yeah. And I think friends of Phil, the Angel fund. You know, there were different groups that overlapped of women, not all of whom are lesbians. You know, not all of whom are

women. that came together, you know, after Del died I think by 2010, I think we were working on a calendar, where we would have among us we would sign up and make commitments about will visit this, you know, to the extent that our schedules will allow, you know, and trying to manage, so that Phyllis wouldn't be lonely. Right? You know, and that evolved to something much more on purpose, which was the caregiving, right. But the impulse was the same, which was to, to keep Phyllis connected, for the rest of us, for us to stay connected with her, you know, and certainly, there were those of us who, at some point, couldn't go any farther. It was too sad. Oh, it was really uncomfortable for some of us, that she reached a point where she didn't recognize who we were, right. And there were those of us who were able to say, I know, she feels me. And I know, she knows I belong to her and I, and she belongs to me, I know that's going on. And so the specificity of it is much less important. And, and there, you know, as with memory loss with families, that some some of the adult children can deal with it, and some can't. So, and that that certainly was true, but without judgment.

Carla Campbell: How would you explain the significance of the house in their lives?

Margie Adams: It was their nest. mean, it's, it's what they came home to. They did a lot of traveling, you know, they, they were really involved. They got involved to conferences and conventions, and, and the ones that they didn't get invited to, they went and made a space for themselves. You know, they went into now, early now, they went into the National Women's Political Caucus, and, you know, women in psychology and all these various things and said, "Where's the lesbian room? Where's the, you know, how come you're offering, you know, memberships to husbands and wives, but not wives and wives or couples? How can I, you know, let's, you know, we gotta get somebody on the board here, that's a lesbian so that she can represent, you know, a whole community of women that's in this organization that has no representation, you know, or respect given." I mean, they just and, and Del and Phyllis would say, you know, to those of us who are organizers, "We're gonna be over here, or you guys by any chance gonna be able to come over there and be with us." So it wasn't just that they did it. They also whipped others into a frenzy. And their home was the nest, their home was, like, like I said, it was as you know, Diane kept referencing it. When I was talking with her Diane Saban. She said, You know, the house was so small. And yeah, in a way, it was like their cloak. You know, it was a protective space that they that they lived in. I mean, it wasn't like, everything around the house was beautifully, you know, trimmed and you know, the back of the house was kind of overgrown, and it was that they were living up in a not exactly a forested area, but in a kind of a nestled area in shrubbery. And I think they could have turned it into a lovely little back area of whatever and as far as I know, they never did. Right just let it be. Some people might call it overgrown I would just call it organic

Carla Campbell: I will say that that about my backyard right now.

Margie Adams: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, it definitely was a It definitely was a little bit overgrown.

Carla Campbell: I did hear that the ladies were saying that there was a bench back there and I was like thinking like where were we was there a bench? And so because it isn't it didn't even seem like when I remember going back there there seemed like there was like a small sidewalk paved here. Yeah, it against the house. immediately went up. Yes. So I was like, I mean, I know that the bench have been Yeah, right. Right outside the door. Like, you know, it's hard I would imagine with the how homes that

are on an incline like that. I can't really imagine what you would do. But at the same time, if they had chosen to do something with it, it is very, like, it is a very like, inclusive space. It's very, to me, it's still very private. So like if they were able to and had wanted to, you could still make a small space where you wouldn't all be tiny confined into the tiny living room.

Margie Adams: They could have done that. Yeah, they could have expanded into the lot next door because they owned it. Yeah. And that was, I would say minimally tended,

Carla Campbell: Right? Yeah.

Margie Adams That wasn't the thing. The thing was not looking out the window into the garden. The thing was looking out the window into San Francisco and through to, you know, America.

Carla Campbell: They had bigger fish to fry.

Margie Adams: Yeah, yeah. And, you know, and certainly, I don't remember there ever being a curtain there. I'm sure there was. But I think I would sometimes stand there and think, you know, there are people that I mean, you could look in here, right? On the other hand, they had nothing to hide. That's—

Carla Campbell: They created a safe space that other people could hide until they were ready. But they themselves had no desire to hide.

Margie Adams: No.

Carla Campbell: But that made it I feel like that made it easier for them to create a safe space. Because they could be seen. They could represent those who came to their house.

Margie Adams: Yes, that's right. Absolutely. That's absolutely true. No, and they and they were I think it's almost glib to say fearless, but they were and...in my experience, what's the word? They were not performative.

Carla Campbell : Yeah, very authentic. That was something that was vocalized by other people is their authenticity. And they were limitless. Like, in everything was, it's not like, well, we can there was never like they never saw a roadblock.

Margie Adams: That's right. That's right.

Carla Campbell : That could also be in to that comparison with that window as well. Because you can see totally, you can see the city but—

Margie Adams: And you can see beyond or That's right. That's right.

Carla Campbell: At the end of the tour, how would you sum up Del and Phyllis' legacy for you personally?

Margie Adams: Self-acceptance, freedom a fabulous mix of ferocity and tenderness. That's what comes today. Yeah.

Carla Campbell: No, those are great. Those are great words to describe them. If there was no limit on funding, what would you imagine is the best use for the Lyon-Martin house in the future?

Margie Adams: I think a kind of archival place, that's what comes to me right away. Having come out, you know, in 1963, I've had the opportunity to watch the ebb and flow of interest and visibility for lesbians. And right now we're in one of those places where LGBTIQ, absorbs queer women absorb, language, again, is being constructed-that in some way, diminishes the woman loving reality of what is embodied in the word *lesbian*. And so, to have space that is unapologetically celebratory in naming a lesbian landmark that has to do with a lesbian presence in the world. And, and a lesbian presence that was *always* inclusive. Always seeing itself Del and Phyllis seeing themselves in the context of civil rights in the context of human rights always bigger. And but right in the center, not off to the side, trying to not take up too much space but taking up *their* space in the midst of the *whole* picture. That's what I would say. Archival, historical. And also what's happening right now with with the lesbian presence in the world. What's happening now? Where are lesbians now? That would be great. Yeah. Continuum. Past, Present Future. Yeah. In the larger context of social change and social justice.

Carla Campbell: Yeah, yeah. Some people have talked about, like, artists in residency-

Margie Adams: artists in residence in which?

Carla Campbell: That was something that they've suggested happening, like the house being used for with to keep it within the community.

Margie Adams:Uh-huh.

Carla Campbell: Well, that's the main thing like that I've heard from a couple of people, and just to be able to like to keep it within the community, but like having it represent lesbian artists and lesbian, you know, just with the community itself. And then ideally, bringing back some of their archival things or their award things. That were, we're shown I know that one of the instructors, the history instructor for this project, said that he is actually used their historical archives, like he borrowed them, and he said, they're the most extensive information are on women's history that he has ever seen.

Margie Adams:I believe it. They were really on purpose. They really were on purpose, boy. Yeah. And they knew what it would mean.

Carla Campbell: Yeah. Leaving a huge footprint in the world.

Margie Adams: And that's right. Yeah, that's recognizable, so that you could you know, see it. If you wanted to know, you could go and go over there and find something. Treasure Trove. Yeah.

Carla Campbell : Yeah. Yeah. I think like them being able to do it without. They did big things without having to be a big thing themselves.

Margie Adams: Yes.

Carla Campbell : I think— ordinary people that did extraordinary things, but they never wanted that extraordinary title.

Margie Adams: No, that's not it wasn't what they were in it for. And and what incredible role models as a result, like you don't have to be all that in order to make a huge impact. Exactly. And they they were absolutely role models in that regard. Yeah.

Carla Campbell: Do you have any other like stories or anything else that you want to add about the house? Oh wait—I have another funny question for you. Okay, so you went there you said in the 70, did you guys ever sit on the floor in the living room?

Margie Adams: Yes. Sure. I mean, when there were parties? Oh, yeah. I mean, I think as part of the rotation thing—

Carla Campbell: That was one of the things that Kendra had said when I asked her what are some of your memories or what struck you about the house? And she goes, “They always sat on the floor”. Until they got older. They sat on the on the living room floor.

Margie Adams: Oh you're talking about Del and Phyllis sitting on the floor?

Carla Campbell: Yeah, but did you sit on the floor as well? As sat on the floor, I guess until they just physically couldn't do it anymore.

Margie Adams: Yeah, I don't remember them sitting on the floor. I remember them being in their Barco lounges, though. You know, big, big chairs. Yeah. Yeah, I don't remember them sitting on the floor. But no, I think the limited space was such that we were jammed up in every little conceivable space. I mean, you know, people, perched on the stairs and yeah. Hanging off the up where the dining room office area was, and, but not really hanging off, I mean, just engaged in and, yeah, so of course, we sat on the floor. Yeah. Because if we could get more people in. Okay. Yeah, yeah. [Laughing]

Carla Campbell :That was that gives you an opportunity like, you think of, maybe this isn't the best comparison but students sitting in front of their teachers. So you guys are sitting there listening in a way I mean, you're engaging in but they were mentors in some ways.

Margie Adams: There's no question of that. Although, if either one of them felt they were being interviewed, if in their home in their space, if they were, if, you know, what about back in the day, you

know, how was it before we got into more androgynous and Jainandrus? You know, lesbian feminism instead of the old role playing Butch femme thing, blah, blah, they would go, no, no. They get, you know, it would be very clear. They were not interested in talking about whatever the topic was. Yeah. So trying to get them to teach us, per se, it was more like, Come on, let's do this. And we'll show you if you don't know something. But it was not nearly ped— It was not pedagogical. It was that they just did not hold forth like that. In my experience, that's not so sitting with them in the overstuffed chairs and us on the floor. I don't remember that. If someone got them going. That would be different, but then they will be going with others. Yeah... no, they did not hold forth, in my experience. And maybe there are others that had that experience. I just didn't have it. But I was over there with the frog mold, you know? [Laughing]

Carla Campbell: Yeah, I think Pauline said that. That Phyllis had a--she liked to cook and she had a lot of gadgets. That's what she said.

Margie Adams: Yeah.

Carla Campbell: I can't remember what else what she had an example of, but there was some kitchen gadget. Oh, I know what it was. It was like a single like muffin or cupcake holder? Yes. Favorite or something. And she's like, she had the funniest little odd things that she would pull out of her kitchen. Like the weirdest little gadgets for like very specific things.

Margie Adams: That sounds right. Okay. Yeah. I mean, I only got as far as the frog mold for the ice cubes. But I'm, yeah, I recall things being lined up on the kitchen sink. that weren't necessarily. Yeah, some of them were gadgets. I just don't remember what they were. Yeah. All right. There's a lot of that kind of Yeah. So I think that's it. I think that's what I can tell you.

Carla Campbell: Okay. Well, I appreciate your time today. Yeah, it's nice to meet you.

Margie Adams: Yeah, you too. Carla. Good luck with this.

Carla Campbell: Thank you, I'll edit the transcript and then send it over to you look at it before I submit it. Okay. And then that's it.

Margie Adams: Yeah. So I assume that the editing will just be you'll take what works for your project and just let the other part go?

Carla Campbell: Yeah. I mean, well, when it transcribes it, you definitely get some errors. So you got to go in and kind of make it. Yeah, take out the extra arms or like where it just didn't fit correctly. Some interviews are definitely different than others. There's a lot of bums and some are or weirds, where they doesn't recognize if I'm speaking or if you're speaking. So going in and kind of tweaking little things like that. And then I'll send it to you and that'll be it.

Margie Adams: Great. All right.

Carla Campbell: Thank you so much for your time, Margie.

Margie Adams: You're welcome. Good luck with this, really. Thank you. Thanks for your service. You have a great day. Okay, bye bye.