

Interview with Jo Moser
2017

Wendy: It's recording, ok. So, what we're going to do is I'm going to say my name and spell it and then I'm going to ask you to say your name and spell it. So, I'm the interviewer, Wendy Chapkis, W-e-n-d-y C-h-a-p-k-i-s

Jo: And I am W. Jo Moser, W J-o M-o-s-e-r. AKA Wendy.

W: Yes, which is wonderful! And we are doing this interview on May 10th, 2017, in South Portland, Maine. Ok, to start off with could you tell me your age and maybe a little bit about your family of origin.

J: Sure, I'm 69, I'll turn 70 this august. And I grew up, was born in Los Angeles, and my father's parents lived there. Moved to San Francisco when I was 5 and all of my grandparents lived in San Francisco at one time or another. So, interesting history there. My family of origin. A middle class, working family. My father was a manufacturer of women's clothes. my mother was a stay at home not-so-lovely Mom. And I have a sister, and grew up in San Francisco. Went to Lowell High School which was kind of the private charter school, but it was a public school as well. I just happened to be in the neighborhood. And growing up in San Francisco in the late 50s, mid 50s, until I left was just an amazing place to be.

W: And is that where you came out as well?

J: Yeah

W: When did you come out? can you tell me a little bit about that experience?

J: Sure. Well, I don't actually have a day or a time, per say, but I do know that the first lesbian I knew was my best friend's older sister. And I was 10. And so, she was 15 or 16 and her mom caught her in bed with a much older woman and it was quite a... and I was there, and it was pretty intense and I remember thinking about that whole thing and thinking to myself- What do I think about this? And nothing really, I mean in a 10-year-old mind, seemed so weird to me. So, that was my first memory. Then I had my first girlfriend when I was 12 and we were sexual. And then when I was in my late... in high school, I had a boyfriend, I hung out with the girls. Some denial going on. And then when I graduated from high school I went to Europe not with my friends, just on a tour with some intellectuals, and that's when I kind of said "ok, I know this". And then my first love was when I was in junior college, San Francisco college. And then she... she was straight, so that's the way it was. And Nicky, my wife, partner, and I have been together for 43 years.

W: Yeah, I want to hear more about that, but before I move on... so you were coming out... your friend's older sister, that must have been in the...

J: Well let's see, if I was 10 it would have been like '57, maybe '58. It was big. And I knew I had an uncle that was gay. It was kind of out there. I mean there were a lot of gay people in my family, it is hereditary after all. So, that was early. And I know... so when I was 12, that was '59.

W: So, was there anything... was it an open piece of information that your uncle was gay?

J: I wouldn't say it was open, but it was there. And my mother was very good friend with him. And my parents were, I wouldn't say intellectuals. My mother graduated from UC Berkley. My father did not graduate, he was an actor and then went to war and became a salesman basically. But it was not open, but it was somehow subtext, you know. Uncle Alex. And so, we knew.

W: So, did you come out to your family when you came out?

J: When I came out I did not come out to them. When I really came out I would say, I was 21ish. 20. Yeah. And no I didn't, but the woman that I was in love with and I met my mother one day for lunch, and my mother said "Oh, the two Sappho's" and I said "hm". And basically, she knew, but I really wasn't, I wasn't ready. I mean this was now early 70s, late 60s. Early 70s. The woman's movement. I was going to San Francisco State at that point. And I was involved in the black student movement. So, my parents knew I was... I was living at home for a short time, they knew I was pretty political. And they didn't want know and I didn't want to tell them. And then at some point, I think I was 27 and I was already with Nicky. My sister called me and said, "Mom wants to know whether you're gay or not". And so, I faced it and my mother flipped out. Oh, big surprise.

W: Even though she had a brother...

J: Well, a cousin. Well, it was a lot about what things looked like for her. And she, her response when I said "Yes, I am", and I was 27. "I'd rather you be dead or a heroin addict". She literally said that to me and threw herself on her bed. So, it was pretty dramatic. I would say that was dramatic. And then, you know, went out with my Dad a week later, and he said "Well, I don't get it, but... Ok. This is... I don't get it, but." And then fast forward if I should 7 years in, 8 years, we decided I wanted to have a baby. And we went to the sperm bank in Oakland. I was on television because they were interviewing all these cute young women, which I was somewhat at that time. And I was like "no, no" and Nicky was like "Yeah, you're afraid your Mom's going to see it". So, I had to tell parents that I was going to have kids. And that was another big "what?! You're going to what?!" And I basically at that point was strong enough to say, "Look, you can have your feelings about this, but you can either get on the bus now... you're not going to get on it later. I can send you to places where you can get some help with this or we can talk about it" but "No, we're not doing it". And my father said "We have a choice?" and I said "yeah, you really do!" And 6 week later, they said "Ok". Whatever, you know. Not the greatest easy parents. My father was easier for me.

W: I want to hear more about the insemination and that part of the story, too. But First, when you were coming out, that was the moment in San Francisco, the summer of love, this is when Stonewall happened across the country. Were you aware of or part of the sexual revolution?

J: Oh, definitely, I mean I would say... I mean I was at the BN in the park. I was a hippy and I was also for one minute bisexual. But I got it, that that just really wasn't who I was. So yeah. I was involved in the Briggs Initiative, and started getting politically involved. And of course, because of what was going on at San Francisco state, I was very involved in racial justice.

W: So, can you talk about those two things? The African American strike at San Francisco State and also the Briggs Initiative, because people may not know...

J: Sure. San Francisco state was the first college in the United States to... we had a student revolt based on the fact that they weren't going to do a black studies program. And it became a big thing, and it became a riot, and there was just a lot going on. And I was a sociology major, so my teachers said "we'll see you when this is over, go out there and do it". You know. So, it was a fight with Hayakawa, who was the president of San Francisco State. And it was just an amazing time for me, because I was really beginning to see how privileged I was and how... not that I didn't, San Francisco is very much acculturated, but people did very much live in their communities. And my parents I didn't feel were terribly racist at all. I mean they were pretty accepting of most people. Sexually maybe not so much but, ok. So, that was that. And that was a very big time, its Vietnam now, and we're talking marching all the time. And then the Briggs initiative, I was a... I have a Masters in Early Childhood, and I was an early childhood educator, and what was happening was that they were trying to get anyone who worked with young children thrown out on their butts...

W: If they were lesbian or gay.

J: Absolutely, and it was really scary. That was a scary time. So, there was a lot going on. And actually, you know, we won in that it was... you know, you can't do this. And so, also a lot of my friends were at San Francisco State. Nicky was in Women's Studies. So, we just... at the full moon. most of my political life was at the Full Moon Cafe.

W: Oh! Talk about that.

J: Oh, the Full Moon Cafe was in the Castro, it was a women's collective, it was a book store and cafe, and I think probably one of the first. I mean we did the bar thing. The bar thing was beginning to grow. But the full moon cafe was a community, the kind of political women... and it just was, it was there I think 12 years.

W: Do you know what time we're talking about?

J: 76, 77... maybe 78, until probably... I don't know exactly when they stopped. So, that was kind of where I got some wings.

W: Talk a little bit more, what went on in the Full Moon Cafe?

J: There was poetry night, there was music night, there was just sit there and drink coffee night. Pretty much a gathering place and a big bulletin board and lots going on in terms of what was going... people were really active. At least the people there were. And it was, so you could just meet friends and have a coffee or whatever. But it was also a book store, and it was kind of the place... Judy Grahn used to hang out there. I mean there were just a lot of really interesting people who were thinking outside. Mostly lesbian but not entirely. But I think thinking outside the box was pretty much San Francisco. Although I think it solidified in ways that weren't always good.

W: Say a little bit more about that. What do you mean by that?

J: Well I just... You know, Nicky said to me, you're the only dyke I ever knew who wore colors. And you know, I did, I wore... and she wore the flannel pants and the, whatever, the she says 'Catholic boy school uniform'. Women in overalls, and just you know, that was... I felt like people weren't able to really express themselves. And maybe because my parents were in theater a little bit and fashion, I had that part of me. I mean I never wanted to wear a dress or anything like that but I knew what I liked and I had my own thing going. So, that was one way. And you know, I think we stuck together. You know, people just, you find your group and you don't necessarily go outside of it when you're in your late 20s, early 30s.

W: Did it perhaps make a difference that you came out of the kind of hippy movement, too? That you had a more colorful aesthetic, let's say?

J: Might be. I mean I was an artist. I mean I was a photographer. And color... I just, what is life without color? I don't know. So maybe, yeah. I mean I definitely fancied myself, and still do, as a hippy.

W: Was there a Butch/Femme thing going on?

J: Yeah, yeah there was. I, oh definitely. And at Maude's and at Pat's, and some of the places there was a lot of costume and a lot of... but we didn't think trans... trans was not something that I was familiar with. I still am learning, too. But, it was, yeah there was definitely some butch and femme.

W: And did you identify with butch/femme?

J: Well, if anything... well it's kind of hard to say that because in a way butch, and in a way femme, so probably both. And at times, I think in the relationship I feel more like I'm the outside guy, I mean I had the babies but I do the driving and she does the cooking more, and you know, so there's a little butch there. But in terms of style, maybe not.

W: It's more complicated.

J: Yeah, it's complicated. It's a little more complicated, yeah.

W: So, you met Nicky pretty soon after you came out, like within the first 5 or 6 years.

J: Yes. Because my first love Nancy, was when I was 20-22, and then I had a few very quick things happening. Yeah, so probably yeah.

W: Did you know that this was going to be the long-term love?

J: I didn't, I didn't. I was still pining for my first love to some degree. And I lived in a house with all lesbians and Nicky came over to visit somebody there and I caught a glimpse of her and thought she was pretty interesting and then a month and a half later she moved in. So, that's how we connected, and she was getting her degree at San Francisco State.

W: So, you decided to have kids.

J: Well I did

W: And this is how soon after your getting together with Nicky.

J: 10 years. So, we were 20... 26, I was 27 when we met, she was 26. I got pregnant when I was 36. So, it was, we had definitely had our drama. A lot of it was out, and we did a lot of therapy and we did a lot of work. And family of origin and as well as relational. And then I was pretty certain that I definitely wanted to have kids. And nobody was really doing that, and I didn't even know how we were going to do that. But, do you know Rhiannon? A good friend of mine. And her love at that time had just had a child out of a, I think, heterosexual relationship, but they were parenting this little person. And I thought, well if they can do it, I can do it. I mean not as if I'm testing them. But Nicky was less sure about wanting to... she was actually amazing because she said "I don't know, I don't know if I want to make that kind of commitment". Not to me, but to the life of being a mom. And we wrestled with it. And I finally said to her, you know, if I do not do this I'm going to resent you and I have to do it. And she said "Ok, well I will go through the pregnancy with you, and I don't know what I can promise". And that was big, to take it on that way with the not knowing. But um... so... we did... am I talking to much about this issue?

W: No, this is great!

J: So, we did decide that, well we went to the sperm bank. I didn't really feel like that was the way I wanted to do it. So, we lived with another woman, our friend Rita, who is straight, and she said, well we'll think of somebody, let's just think of somebody. And she started rattling off names, and she named one guy and I said, "yeah, he's..." Well we had a donor actually, who bailed out right before we were going to get his sperm. He said "I think it's too complicated for me". So, we were kind of in that... I was in heat so to speak... (laugh) that's terrible of me. But I really was. I mean I was, went to a Chinese doctor, I did all this preparation. It's serious business, you know. So anyway. So, that didn't pan out. So, Rita suggested this man Carlos, and I said "oh, wow, he's cute", and she said "well call him", and I said "I can't call him, you call him!" He had a crush on her. SO, she called him, and he said "Oh, oh okay! Well what do I do?" And she told him what to do, and he said well I'll be there in a half hour. And came to the door, Christmas Eve, with a little package. And said "Here, good luck, hope it works!". And it did. And,

so, we inseminated at home. And my daughter Melina was born 9 months later. And then we heard that Carlos was moving to the East Coast, and Melina was like 14 months. And now Nicky, who by the course, the mother of all mothers, was... the moment she was handed this kid, that's it. So, he was going to move to the East Coast and um so Nicky said, well let's get him before he goes. So, funny story, Nicky and Rita were in an acting class. Rita was the friend who found the donor. And Carlos arrived and I inseminated myself because no one was there, and I wasn't asking him. So, you know. And I got pregnant.

W: Did you use a turkey baster?

J: No, turkey baster's a misnomer. If you use something that big you can create an embolism, actually, because air... no you use an eye dropper. Really simple. Ideally, you're laying back. So, I mean it was pretty amazing that that happened that way. And it was great.

W: And you got pregnant both times with the first effort?

J: Well we did it twice with the second round. So, that night and the next morning. But yes. Yes! And sideline, and this is the... three years after, well when Theo was three Carlos, their dad, called us to tell us that he was HIV positive. Which was pretty big stuff, and didn't know how he had gotten it. And to tell us. And so, we pretty much flipped out for a minute. And then we called our Chinese doctor who said, well you have two choices, you cannot do anything or you can get tested. Either way... So, you know, Nicky said "you have to get tested, I can't live that way". So, I got tested. Fine, everything fine. So, and he did find out who. But, so here he is now, he's 10 years younger than me, he's 59. Never had kids, but he's very connected to Melina, our daughter. Not so much Theo, I mean, it's just different. You know. And he's in pretty good health, so quite a... and we really had no idea, Wendy, then, because it was '82 when I got pregnant. We knew there was a disease, it was not named until '83 when Melina was born. And then we thought, phew, so glad we didn't use this other guy who was clearly gay, we used Carlos who was straight. So, there you have life, you know.

W: Well that's a good reminder that you were living in the midst of one of the ground zeros of the AIDS epidemic. Did you... I mean obviously, it impacted you directly in terms of the father of your children. But was it also an issue in your community? Even though you were in a very strong women's community.

J: Oh Absolutely. Well, Nicky's best friend, David Allen, is Steve Allen, the comedian's son. And they've been best friends forever, still are. And so, he was in the faerie circle, and he was involved in all the gay men's stuff. So, we were, we didn't go to those events, but we were there. And David lost so many, so many people to AIDS. You know, and we, too, a few people. So, it was huge. I mean, we hung out in the Castro a lot and it was, it was a pretty amazing time. And scary.

W: So, talk a little bit about... you mentioned in your bio notes that you were in San Francisco when Harvey Milk and George Moscone were assassinated. So, talk a little about what they meant to you and to the community.

J: Oh, it was devastating. I mean I remember hearing it, and everybody poured onto Castro Street, just spontaneously. It was so devastating. I mean, I knew Harvey a little bit because he was a photographer and he had his store. And I wasn't friends with him, but I knew him, and I thought he was amazing. And it was so, for me, politics has always been some part of my life. I mean I knew Nancy Pelosi and Diane Feinstein since way way way way back. And I always admired them. And it was Diane Feinstein that day who did all of the horrifying work of dealing with this. So, it was well, for one thing, it... we didn't see it in that moment as a gay... it wasn't a hate crime. It was of course a hate crime, but it was not seen that way, because really, they were going for Moscone. Which is complicated, too, but it I think brought a lot of us together. And I think that the AIDS epidemic was harder for us to come together around, because I think there was more place where women felt like that had to serve men again. I mean, I'm not saying things don't come from the heart, but you know dynamic was there, and not really discussed in a lot of ways. And I don't think that... and besides, who wants to be around a bunch of dying people? But, I don't mean it to be glib, but I think, we were young, a lot of us, and hard to look at, and then also the kind of hierarchy that did seem to be there.

W: You mean a hierarchy between men and women?

J: Yeah.

W: That women still had to do the caretaking.

J: Well it was still, yeah, you're the nurse, or you're the one who brings the food, or... and it was mostly men that we knew.

W: So, did you participate in any of the political organizing, the like the White Night riots after Dan White was basically acquitted, not entirely, but...

J: Well not so much the night he was acquitted. I mean we were at city hall that night, the night that they were assassinated. And very aware, but when Dan White was, I'm not getting my years right. But anyway, I was certainly aware of it. I wasn't involved in that particular piece.

W: So, you lived in San Francisco for your childhood, your early adulthood, and then, was that when you also came to your occupational calling as a professional photographer?

J: Well I actually learned photography as a street photographer in the Haight-Ashbury, that's where I started. And I took a class with Ansel Adams, and I get to mentor with some people. I was never classically trained. But I had a master's in early childhood. And mostly what I was doing was working with kids and their families who were poor and didn't have any parenting skills and the kids didn't have what they needed. So, that's what I did most. And I taught at the

junior college early childhood education. So most of my work in those days was more related to kids and families.

W: but you were taking photos?

J: Oh yeah, oh yeah. The only sadness I have about my photography career is that when we came out here from California one box of my 60s photos got lost. So, I have no... it tells me a lot about vision and memory because I can remember the pictures in my mind, but I don't have them. So, that's loss. But, it's ok.

W: So, when did you leave California?

J: We left in '89. The story behind that quickly was that Nicky wanted our kids to have the seasons. She was born in New York and at 15 was dragged out to Los Angeles and hated Los Angeles and had to be there until she was in her 20s and came to San Francisco. So, she said "I want to move to New York", and I was like, "Why would anyone ever leave San Francisco?" I really had no interest whatsoever, but I also felt like she gave me a gift by saying, you have your dream... So, we took a couple trips out to New York. I found a job, we found an apartment. We packed up the babies and grabbed ourselves and went to New York City, Brooklyn, and we were there 8 weeks. And I could not stand it. It was hot, we had a few friends, but it was.... And, so I said "Can we go back to Berkley?" And Nicky said "Nope". She felt like we, in Berkley, lived in the bosom of everything, and that part of that was great, and part of that was just not real. And we were getting sucked in in some ways. Or that was her sense, and I know what she means. And so, basically, we made the trip to New York and we were there for 8 weeks and she said, no we're not going to go right back. We've got to decide where we're going to be, we got to do a year somewhere. You know. So, we had, I have a friend who lived in Belfast, and she was sending me stuff and we thought, Chapel Hill maybe? Portland, Maine. We were going to go see both. We can here, we went to Old Orchard with the kids, they were 3 and 5, spent 2 weeks looking for work and apartment. Went back to Brooklyn, got a truck and came to South Portland, Cape Elizabeth actually. So, it'll be 28 years this 4th of July.

W: So, you must have liked it.

J: (Laughs) I'll tell you one thing. I think I spend 2 years... I had no idea where I was, I did not like it, I was depressed. I really felt like I'd lost my anchor. So, it was not easy. It was not easy for either of us. Probably not very easy for the kids either. And it grew on me. And you know, they went to school and they had friends, and we created some of a community. And you know, so, yes, and now, not so much. I mean, I love Maine, but I can't do winter. I just, you know, it's tough now. I feel it. Because I don't have that "Oh, I'll go out and get the wood". So, that's the dilemma. But yes, I love Maine, and there's a lot about Maine that's just awesome.

W: But you never moved back to California. You never did the "well we've had our time here and now we're going back."

J: Well, we did go back a lot. My mother had dementia, so for 7 years we went every 3 months to see her. And by the time we would consider it, which was really not until the kids were out of college, and they're 34 and 32 almost. By that time, we didn't, couldn't afford to move there. You know, I mean, it just was different now. So, that's why when we talk about it, we say maybe Sacramento. Which I hear is the new place. So, I mean we don't have the kind of money to do that at this point.

W: So, obviously, you can only speak from the mom side, but how was it for your kids in those years growing up in a lesbian family in Maine?

J: Great question. Well, you know. I would say up until middle school, it was heaven. They had 2 moms who were devoted, we had a lot of fun, we'd drive to Boston just to get Mexican food because there wasn't any here. We'd drive the Boston to get coffee. We'd go to New York. We had a lot a lot a lot of fun. And I think, I'll never forget when Theo asked me, "Mom," he was 5, "when I grow up will I be a lesbian?" And I said, "No, honey, you won't". And he said "are you sure?", and I said "Yeah, I am sure". And at that point I was sure, I'm pretty sure now, too (laugh). But then middle school got dicey for them. Understandably. And Melina at some point said she wanted a ride to the mall with her girlfriends. And we said "we'll take you!" And she said "No, just one mom." So, we said, well I said, "OK, well you have the make the choice." And she cried and she said "I want Nicky to go with me". And I had to make room for that. And Nicky went, and you know. When she was in high school, the first few months she didn't tell anybody. And I finally said "Mel, you know, you have friends, you want them to come over here, you know we're not going to kiss in front of anybody, but you want your friends to know, don't you?" And she said "Well yeah, but not yet." And I said "Ok, well Ok." And then some more time passed and I said "Mel, you really need to tell some of your friends". Not like I'm the big deal, but it's... and she told a few, and they said "Duh!" Like they didn't know. But I think high school was not the easiest... middle school was the worst, and then high school I think was easier. And most of the friends of our kids loved to be here. So, it was... and we like kids, we like kids of all ages. So, it worked for us. So, I think they... Just a backup... when Theo and Christina married, which will be 3 years this year. We had a lot of anxiety about the wedding. We have a small family. We had my gay cousin coming out from California, and a couple friends from New York and a couple friend from here. And then her family. 5 siblings. Her family, and her mother and father have 5 siblings. And we had only met them once, Italian Catholic family. And we were anxious. And, you know... the good part of me was that Theo, he just knew that it was all going to be good, and it was. And so, we felt, that was a time of a little bit... not like we were hiding who we were, but we knew they knew who we were, but then we also knew that their daughter was marrying our son. So, it was, I think for us, that was a harder experience. But mostly, we had the times at the South Portland baseball field, and the woman behind me "Hey, which one of you is Theo's mom?" And we turn around "We both are", "Oh, well, everybody could use more than one mom". You know, I mean, I felt like we really did get an opportunity for parents to see... Hello, yeah, we go to the games, yeah, we root out kids on, yeah, we're not going to miss anything we don't want to miss. And we're just like you. And in that way, that

always felt good to me. Because I felt like there were a lot of parents that saw "Wow, oh yeah". It's not strange to you and me, but I think in little South Portland, Maine, some people just didn't have a clue. And so, we became human. Which is something I know you believe in. You know, that's just what we do. Didn't have to hide it, never did, really.

W: So, you didn't have a lesbian community with kids, though, it doesn't sound...

J: Well we did in Berkley, that's part of what was so hard to leave. And most of the women that we knew here didn't have kids. We were kind of, a little bit ahead of that curve a little bit. So, we had lesbian friends, and I got involved with Equality Maine and whatever. I met Frannie, I was on the board for a short time with the AIDS Project here. That was so cool. But anyway, no. What really happened is we gravitated towards people that either we met through the kid's school or something like that or in the neighborhood, or we did meet quite a few people. Jane Raye, Penny Rich, some of the old girls... Barb Wood. Those folks, we hung out with to some degree. But mostly we had young kids so our life was more about raising those kids, you know, and we weren't... we did our partying. I mean, we did sommmmmme partying. So, I don't know if that answered the question.

W: Absolutely, absolutely. So, I get that your kind of first priority as a parent has to be getting your kids through to adulthood, but it sounds like you were also involved in some queer political things if you were on the board of the AIDS Project and involved... were you involved with the anti-discrimination campaigns that were mounted? Do you want to talk a little bit about your involvement politically?

J: Absolutely. Sure. Well mostly in Maine my involvement has involved my camera. Because I've chronicled wherever I am if I have my camera and I have something political that I'm interested in I do take my camera. So early on I started working with Betsy Smith and I started doing pro-bono. And then for a while I did some paid stuff during the campaign for advertising. And I just loved being a part of that. And so, that's a lot of my photography the last 20 years has been gay and lesbian. And then about 43 weddings in the last 4 years, 4 or 5 years. So, that... that was so great.

W: Yeah, I want to talk a little bit more about the marriage and the marriage equality thing, but before we do. So, did you stop doing your early childhood education stuff when you moved here? Or did you do both?

J: No, I was doing both. I began doing photography like, well I was always doing photography, but I started putting an ad on the Cape Courier and I started working with families photographically. but I worked for Parents Anonymous. I worked for CDS in Brunswick for several years. Child Development Services, doing home visits with families who, a lot of kids with problems, and a lot of issues. So, I did that, I taught at SMCC, early childhood. So, I kind of cobbled it all together and threw in photography where I could. So, that's kind of kept me going. Oh, and I worked for DHS for 7 years as a contract therapist. Best job ever for me. I would have maybe 6-8 clients and I could see them up to 6 hours a week. And again, parents

whose kids are going to get taken. And that was 6 years and then they bailed out on that program and bailed out on me, but it was my work. It was just what I love to do. You know, working really closely. You come in, they don't want you there. They don't want you to see their shit. And somehow being able to connect and say you know, I'm not judging you, and you want to keep your kid. We got to work together and do this and you know, a lot of people really could do that. And a lot couldn't. But that was amazing work for me. That I loved.

W: So, tell me a little about, so you got married

J: Well, this is still a question. We got married when Theo was 10, when he said "You girls can't get married". So, we had a ceremony on the Saco River with our two older lesbian friends, who are now gone, who were chaplains. And we had a big ceremony, and we had people come from California and we had a great time. So, it wasn't legal. So, then we got married, well we were going to get married in San Francisco and then they called us up the week before and said "it's off, we're not doing it". So, then several years later, when they were, we were going out and we decided to do, to get married there, and we did. Our kids were so pissed because we just did it spontaneously and they weren't there. And the funniest story of is all that we were there, we got there and they said "where are you witnesses?" and we said, "well they're coming, it's an hour away". And they said "No, it's now!"> And so we had to grab two women off the street "would you please..." it was amazing, it was sweet. But, we never have actually registered our marriage. And we are still hoping that in some way. Because we have some conflicts about it.

W: Say more about that...

J: Well, you know, I think that marriage historically comes from property, and property of the man. And hierarchy and we've lived our life quite well without having it. And you know, there are also sometimes entanglements that financially would not be to our benefit maybe. And it's not like we have a lot of property to have to deal with... And so, we are married, but we actually legally are still not. And I would say that anytime we decide... it feels... we're married, you know. Part of me is like, "You know, it's none of your business". On the other hand, I will tell anybody I am... But you know what I mean? I don't want anybody counting me that way.

W: It carries a lot of baggage, marriage.

J: Yeah, it does. And so far, 43 years in, we're pretty unencumbered by that baggage.

W: So, 43 years is a good long stretch to be partners. So how do you explain that you've been able to survive 43 years together? Many marriages don't.

J: No, they certainly don't. Well, I think that we both, there's a lot that we share- poetry, working with kids and families, art, music. We, when we met it wasn't immediate. We grew slowly and for a while a lot of pushing away. But mostly, I think Nicky is a master first of all at giving people space and not being a judge of anybody. Which has been... I am not that way. So, you know, we have learned over the... and a lot for many many many many years we worked separately and I worked in LL Beans when we moved here, I worked 2 shifts and she had the kids. And we did a lot of this back and forth. And actually, when we sold out business, our

Greenlight business, it's been a big transition, especially for her, because she's used to have the house mostly for her... I mean not for her, but to herself. And now I'm here all the time and make a mess wherever I go. So, I mean, I do. Because that's just how I do. And it's a pain the butt for her I know. Because I am right now doing a (inaudible) business, which we'll talk about another time, but so I'm doing a lot of cooking right now. So, I think it's about honoring the other person, I think it's at this point in our lives, we're pretty contained. I'm not trying to change her anymore, I don't think she's trying to change me. I think we spend a lot of time trying to do that. And we basically really like each other. And I can just say "Can you just not talk to me right now?" And she's not going to get offended. I will if she says that to me. I'm not saying she's not sensitive, I just think we have different talents. I'm the outside person. I make a lot of connections, and Nicky tends to be much more solitary, and that has worked for us.

W: Well tell me a little bit about what the shape of your community involved is now. So, you're in your late 60's, your kids are grown, you're thinking of leaving this community. What does the community look like for you?

J: Wow, that's a good question. I'm not sure. Because, really, I think right now my adjustment is internal about really seeing that my children who are extremely successful and happy in their lives really don't need us at all. And that we have been focused on their needs for so long and to let that go and to know when I see my son, my little boy with his little boy, I know that most of my life is behind me. So even though I don't feel like I'm near death, we are starting to think about- What is going to the best quality for us? I mean we can't, we go to Boston every week to see this baby, and if they move to DC we won't be doing that. So, community is important to me, I think that now maybe being in the lesbian, gay, whatever our community, isn't as important for me. I connect with who I connect with. And if I find a great lesbian friend I am really happy to have that, you know. But I don't think, I still have my political work that I feel I need to do. And some of it is around this government right now. So, I'm not sure. And then there's that thought of going back to California and you know, where would we go? I mean we think about maybe a small mobile in a senior community, but then you're starting all over again again. But maybe if we did it for winter. Because we're not ready to let go of all this yet, I don't think. So, we're kind of trying to figure out. And then there's the money piece, and I've never been good at the money piece. So how we would get there and do that and live in two places.

W: I get the desire to not be old in the icy cold place.

J: It just gets so hard.

W: I think especially for those of us who are Californians, too.

J: I didn't know! Are you... Where did you grow up?

W: Born in Southern California, lived most my life in Northern California. Um, so photographer. As this point, that's how I know you. And I love your work, have you, are you doing exhibitions of your work? Have you done that?

J: I have done some. I was. I still have in my heart this book, The New American GLBT Family, that I probably have enough images to do. And I did do a Kickstarter that didn't quite succeed. I'm right now. It's an interesting time for me. I know Pride is coming up, I always go to pride. I would like to put something together still. Because I really feel like I really... You know I am so sad about the pictures that I lost. But I saw such a world change from 1960 when I was 13, to now. And I still think that, I mean I would like to... I don't think it's as important as it was a few years about, because I think people have really made a lot of adjustments to acceptance. But, it could just be a body of my work, it doesn't have to be totally a political reference per se. But it would be fun to do that. So, I think, as I slow down and if I can keep this other business I'm doing in keeping me solvent to some degree, then maybe I can really work on that more. I'd like to.

W: I'd love to try to plan a public presentation of your work sometime. You know, either an exhibition, or a talk where you show slides.

J: Oh, my god, I would totally love that.

W: Oh fantastic, well let's make that happen.

J: Ok! I would love that.

W: So, anything else that you would like to talk about, that I didn't ask you about?

J: Hmm, we're great, we're great. You know, I can't think of anything. You know, I, maybe this is an aging piece, too. I know how important it was to me for so long to identify. Identify as a lesbian. Identify as a mom. And now I feel like my work is to dis-identify. That as we get older, I do feel that there is a shedding of some of that and I don't know if you've experienced this, but I do now. That a white haired somewhat overweight older woman is not visible. And part of that is really great for me. Because I don't really care about being visible. I mean, I want to be heard, and I am amongst my friends. But I do see the way that there is kind of, in a sense, it's a free pass. And on another level, it really makes me angry, too. Because I'm still here, you know. And I feel like there's some kind of dismissal... and not always at all. So, that's interesting to me. So, I feel like that wave... I identified as a hippy, I think that was the first, most important piece for me. And seeing that I really didn't have to be who my parents were. And all of that. And then a lesbian and then a lesbian mom and then... So now, I don't know who I am. And I think that's ok. I think that's really where we start out anyway. We don't know and then we have to define ourselves, we spend our whole lives defining ourselves.

W: And now you're Jo.

J: And now I'm Jo, yup. Oh, that's a funny little quickie. When we came here I was 41. I just didn't want to be Wendy anymore. I'm Jewish. My mother named me Wendy, what the hell? I never felt like Wendy, it was never me. And so, I said to Nicky, you know I'm going to go with Jo, and she was like "Oh, cool!" And Theo, always my little Buddha "I'm never going to call you Jo,

it's too plain. It's just plain!" And so, I was Jo. And so most people here have only known me as Jo, but Jane Raye and Penny Rich knew me as Wendy. And so, that's funny, isn't it? We're both Wendy's.

W: It's one of those 50's names.

J: yeah, but Jewish?

W: Well my family is Jewish, too!

J: Yeah, Chapkis (inaudible) (Laughter). But yeah, it is so weird. But I, life and death, you know now that I have a grandchild I have that feeling of wanting to see where that goes. And seeing 70, I'm going to be 70 in a minute. And if we have a great, if I have, if Nicky has, we both have, another good 10 years where we're physically pretty able to do our lives, that would be thrilling to me. So, I don't know.

W: I know, it's all so fast! 10 more years.

J: I know, my really dear friend lives in San Francisco, and she just turned 96, and her husband 18 years' younger died 3 months ago, suddenly. And never did she think that would... and she's a wreck. Time goes fast, time is a jet plane, it really is. How old are you?

W: 62. I know, and each decade it feels like it goes faster. But I losing a parent makes it. My mother was only 20 years older than I am, so seeing, "oh, 20 years, hm".

J: How old was she when she died?

W: In here 80's, 81.

J: My mother died the day before her 84th birthday. 81 to 85 is really tough, and if you get through that you might live longer, but I'm not sure I would want to. So, she was 20 when she had you, are you an only?

W: No, oldest. There's 3 of us. But over 15 years she had 3.

J: Yeah, so yeah time is a very interesting thing. I felt this winter like time was... I felt like winter was so long. It's very interesting. And I am an out in the world person still. I like to get up and get my first cup of coffee in town. My Cheers. You know, so to speak.

W: So, lets end then with a little reflection then, on the world as it is and the world as it was... You've had a good long stretch now to be doing political work, watching change. And here we are under a trump administration. And so, it's not been a complete linear line to progress, but you see a lot of changes.

J: Yeah, I see a lot of changes and I think right now what's going on it just... it's not new, it just sped up like a TV gameshow. And I feel some fear, not so much for myself in this moment. But I feel, even to say we're a democracy is a joke. And I keep trying not to want somebody else to

do it for me. But what can we do other than be on the streets, as we do? We can't do anything legislative. I think that this is a horror show. And I think there is just such a divide between the educated and the uneducated, the poor and the rich, and now always in that form. But that there are so many people who do not care about how the world works. And don't know about how the world works, not that I pretend that I do. But in some way, we have lost our ability to have critical thinking. And that's what scares me. That's really scaring me. I don't want my kids to move to DC, I feel fear around that, and I'm not generally fearful of going most places. But I do. I don't know. I do think, my daughter said it so well, she said "Mom, this had to happen, it's so polarized that it has to all break down and be rebuilt". And how that's done is not going to involve me very much. Because those are the guys that have to do it now, and I think it's true, I think she's right. We have to tear this one down, because it's not working. Citizens United. So.

W: Any last remarks?

J: This was so fantastic for me, what a pleasure. I so appreciate it, really, and I mean we have to have some coffee when you're not crazy working. By the way I'm a Lyft driver and I drove someone the other day, and we got to talking (I love Lyfting, I don't make money per se, but it's interesting), and I said "So where are you going?" "Oh, I'm going to class, this final, blah blah blah..." "well what are you studying?" "Well this and this and this and sociology" and I said "Oh that was my field" and he goes "Oh do you know Wendy Chapkis?" and I said "Yeah!" I can't remember his name, he was such a cute guy "She's been my mentor". Glasses anyway, sweetest man, it was just the sweetest thing.

W: I am so lucky to be a teacher.

J: Right, and that's where your love pours, right? One of my friends just asked me if I would be the photographer at his wedding this summer. And I said YES, and you just get to see so much change in people.