

Mill Valley Public Library
Lucretia Little History Room
Oral History Program

Jane Futcher

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Benja Thompson in 2023**

TITLE: Oral History of Jane Fatcher
INTERVIEWER: Benja Thompson
DESCRIPTION: Transcript, 24 pages
INTERVIEW DATE: June 7, 2023

In this oral history, Jane Fatcher recounts their extensive writing career intertwined with Mill Valley and Marin County communities. Relocating from the East Coast as part of Harper and Row, Jane researched Marin County as part of their travelogue book, "Marin: The Place, The People: Profile of a California County." Through their involvement in spirituality groups and the Feminist Writers Guild, they were introduced to Elsa Gidlow and her enclave of Druid Heights. With The Slant, Jane spoke to and from Marin County's LGBTQ+ community, helping lead the grassroots organization to empower and connect the region's queer folks. As part of the Marin Independent Journal's staff, Jane covered various subjects and excelled in stories about healthcare before relocating to Mendocino County and eventually Sonoma.

Through it all, Jane navigated her lesbian identity and recalls what it was like as a younger person to feel fear and uncertainty, as opposed to the current stability and comfort she feels after years of marriage. Jane's experiences and perspectives share both the incredible progress the LGBTQ+ community has achieved, as well as the personal story of a writer forging their own path towards self-acceptance and connection.

© All materials copyright Mill Valley Public Library. Transcript made available for research purposes only. All rights are reserved to the Mill Valley Library. Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the:

Lucretia Little History Room
Mill Valley Public Library
375 Throckmorton Avenue
Mill Valley, CA 94941

Index

Alcoholics Anonymous...	10
Conservationism...	7, 16
COVID-19...	13
East Coast dance...	5, 6
Feminist Writers Guild...	3, 4, 12
Gidlow, Elsa...	2, 3, 8, 12
Glassheim, Joan...	11
Golden Gate National Recreation Area...	2
Harmon, Bob...	11
Kent Family...	1
Kentfield...	1
Lesbian bars...	24
Marin Abused Women Services...	9
Marin AIDS Support Network...	11
Marin City...	22
Marin Independent Journal...	13-16, 22
McFadden, Cyra...	2, 12
Ministry of Light...	3, 10-12, 21
Mount Tamalpais Railroad...	1
Muir Woods...	1, 6, 7
Slant, The...	3, 9-12
Spahr, Janie...	3, 12, 21
Spectrum...	11
Sweetwater Music Hall...	9
Transgender...	20-21
Watts, Alan...	2
Wright, Ed...	10, 11

Oral History of Jane Fatcher
June 7, 2023

00;00;03 Benja Thompson Today is June 7th, 2023. My name is Benja Thompson and this interview is for the Mill Valley Public Library's Oral History program. Today, I'm speaking with Jane Fatcher at the Mill Valley Library. Thank you for joining me and for contributing your oral history to our community.

00;00;22 Jane Fatcher It is my pleasure, Benja. Glad to be here.

00;00;25 Benja Thompson Thank you. What is your relationship to Mill Valley?

00;00;31 Jane Fatcher My relationship to Mill Valley really comes, primarily - well, let me back up. The first time I ever came to Mill Valley was 1969, and my cousin was dating a guy named Sherman Kent. And his grandfather had been William Kent, who gave the the mountain, the land that is now Mt. Tamalpais. And he was the owner of the Mt. Tamalpais Railroad. And I'd never heard of him, but I soon found out when I visited Kentfield that the Kent family was extremely important in the history and development of Marin County.

So my first connection with Mill Valley - we also visited Muir Woods. They took, he took me to Muir Woods and we went up to Kentfield and met some Kent family members up there. And I was 21 and I just graduated from college and it was my first visit to California and I was absolutely awed and impressed by Marin County and Mill Valley and Toby, my cousin's boyfriend, now her husband, spoke of Marin in these sort of hallowed tones, as if it were this sort of very special, unique, wonderful, spiritual, environmentally beautiful place. So I came to Marin and Mill Valley with these awed eyes. And then in 1977, I moved to San Francisco. And with my partner at the time who worked for Harper and Row. Harper and Row opened a West Coast. Am I rambling too much, Benja?

00;02;47 Benja Thompson No, this is perfect.

00;02;48 Jane Fatcher Okay. All right. Harper and Row in New York. It's now HarperCollins, but it was then Harper and Row Publishers. They decided to open a West Coast office, and I worked in the media department of Harper and, well, and my woman partner, Catherine, was the art director of the paperback department. And they decided that Catherine would be the art director of the San Francisco office. And I had, by that point, been laid off by the media department of Harper and Row, and they moved us both out to San Francisco in 1977...1977... and anyway, the Harper and Row people were all in love with California.

All of us were from New York. We were used to sizzling streets and high rises, and everyone was particularly awed by Marin County and one of the editors at Harper and Row decided that they should do a book on Marin County, and I at that point was a freelance writer. And Catherine, my partner, hooked me up with a freelance photographer and graphic designer named Robert Conover. And the two of us did a book proposal, a travelogue on Marin County, and we spent some time in Mill Valley. And - of course, to do the book proposal. And ironically, Harper and Row didn't publish the book, but Harcourt Brace did decide to publish the book. So I had about a year to write a book about Marin County and that really led to my getting to know

more about Mill Valley. But basically I was still going on my post-college longings through the Kents of Marin, and suddenly I found myself having to research and become very knowledgeable about Marin County and Mill Valley.

Being right across the bridge from San Francisco is one of the first places I came to just like, absorb the vibes. And at that time, well, Cyra McFadden's *The Serial*, which I don't know if you remember that, but it was a comic book serial novelization that ran in the *Chronicle*, I think about Marin County. And so there was a lot of interest in Marin County at the time, and our book was going to be more of a straight travelogue photo book, not showing the funny side, but a lot of the history and profiles of some of the people. So that's sort of how my relationship began. And then a number of years later, I bought a house in Mill Valley. I moved, I moved first to San Anselmo and then to Sausalito, where I lived in a little cottage overlooking Richardson Bay. And then in 1985, I bought a house on Pixie Trail in Mill Valley, and that's when things really got interesting with me and Mill Valley because I was a resident of the town on this little one block long street of Homestead and discovered lots of new things.

00;06;46 Benja Thompson What is something that you remember learning from researching Marin County and Mill Valley for the book?

00;06;55 Jane Fitcher I think... Well, of course I read *The Serial* about the hot tubs and the peacock feathers. And I think Muir Woods was really sort of the awesome natural site and Mt. Tam. I hiked on Mt. Tam a number of times and also this library had many oral histories in its history section, and a guy named Richard Myers helped me considerably by coming here and going through all the oral histories and finding me little excerpts that we used as sidebar material. So also one thing I really missed was, and was interested in, was that the rail from Sausalito used to come right to the depot in Mill Valley, and I guess that closed around 1941 or right after the Golden Gate Bridge opened and people could drive. But the whole railroads have always fascinated me, and the railroads went all the way up to Nevada and beyond. And I sure wish they'd come back. So that interested me.

Also, I was lucky enough to meet the poet Elsa Gidlow in the early 1980s and went out to her little cottage near Muir Beach and I, I used to listen to Alan Watts, who had lived with Elsa, and in that gang out in Muir Beach, which is now part of the, I think it's the GGNRA or maybe National Parks System. Anyway, that was a whole interesting little enclave of writers and poets and philosophers and I was very interested in Alan Watts, who had lived on the houseboat in Sausalito and who had lived out in Muir Woods, and that whole Roger Somers who was an interesting fellow, and his - later his wife became my therapist. But that was years later. Diane Somers was her name. But anyway.

00;09;28 Benja Thompson How did you become introduced to that enclave, as you referred?

00;09;33 Jane Fitcher I became introduced to the enclave and Elsa Gidlow's, what did Elsa call it? Druid, Druid Heights. Yes, Druid Heights. My love here at the time was a very, uh, sort of eclectic, what, I don't know, bisexual. I don't even know what the name - polymorphous. A woman named Abigail Hemmstreet, and Abigail... Abigail became lovers with Elsa. Although Abigail was 30 and Elsa was 84. It was very occasional. In fact, I'm not sure if

they spent a lot of time in bed, but they did have a little sexual tryst, and so I was constantly a little jealous of Elsa, even though she was 50 years older than me. I- she was very charismatic. And all the lesbians I knew in Marin and San Francisco had great awe for her. And she was part of this group that I joined called the Feminist Writers Guild that had just started in Berkeley. And Susan Griffin was part of that and Carol Murray and Valerie Miner and all these lesbian feminist authors. And here was Elsa in her little perch in the middle of the mists of Mill Valley and Muir Woods. And so it was a very romantic environment. And she had all these sort of famous friends. And so that's how I came to know Elsa Gidlow and that expanded my horizons.

00;11;30 Benja Thompson I'm interested in, I guess, the idea of how would you-- because you mentioned the Feminist Writing Guild and spirituality groups. Would those be places that you could meet other lesbians, other people of different identities, or how would, like, these sort of-- how would, you know, you find each other?

00;11;50 Jane Fatcher That is a great question. And that was really a dilemma. The Feminist Writers Guild was a Bay Area group, but a number of us from Marin went to meetings. Oh yes, I lived in San Francisco at that time, but it was a great-- a lot of, I wouldn't say that the Feminist Writers Guild were closeted, but a lot of the women weren't necessarily out as lesbians, even if they were famous. Like, I think people kind of knew Susan Griffin was a lesbian, but she wasn't wearing it on her sleeve. Nobody, very few people were in the early eighties so how to meet people in Marin was really a conundrum and that's why the founding of the Ministry of Light was so important. That was Presbyterian funded nonprofit that reached out to lesbian, gay questioning, not as much transgender so much because it, well, it was transgender, but transgender was much more in the background than it is today.

Anyway, the Ministry of Light started in San Anselmo, I think, and Janie Spahr, the Reverend Janie Spahr, who was a Presbyterian minister, started it. And, in the early eighties, and she started a women's spirituality group in Marin. And that group was mostly lesbian and women who didn't necessarily feel comfortable saying they were lesbian, but felt comfortable saying they were spiritual, came to the monthly meetings and they were wonderful fun. We had, we had pagan rituals. We did full moon rituals. We were naked at the solstice at Abigail's swimming pool in San Anselmo. We went to Muir Beach and did drumming circles. We had writing events. We just did, we did death masks. I have a couple pictures that I've given to the library of us doing death masks and plaster of Paris mask. We did all sorts of things and we met for years and there were many relationships that formed. I had a few of them out of that group. There was lots of, there were lots of sizzling lesbian meetings that, that happened through the women's spirituality group. We had a couple's counselor come and tell us how to manage her, her relationship issues.

And so that was it. That was a big source. And another way that we started to connect was through the newspaper, The Slant, which was several years later. And I think, Benja, you you may know what year we started. I think it was '80, '81. Oh, it was '90. Sorry. '90. Yeah. Was it '90?

00;15;05 Benja Thompson I believe so.

00;15;05 Jane Fatcher Yeah, I think it was '90. Okay. And one thing I've learned as I, as I get older, but I knew it then too, is that community is so important. Having, having

organizations and meetings and, and the networking system is so important to survival because I was one of those kids who I knew I was a lesbian from the get go, from childhood, but I was terrified to come out. I had no one to talk to. I went to an all-girls school and was in love with a lot of the girls, but I was terrified to make a pass at anyone, to touch anyone. I was more standoffish than most of the so-called heterosexual girls because I was afraid I would, you know, I would be discovered, even though at this girls school I went to, half the teachers were lesbians and they were couples. Everyone knew that Miss Boyd and the, the biology teacher, Miss, Miss McNamara or something were a couple and that, yeah, there were all these older women, lesbian couples. But-

00;16;16 Benja Thompson -you still felt fear.

00;16;20 Jane Futch Terrified. Terrified to talk to my parents. I was afraid to ask to change my history class, let alone get support for my sexual identity issues. So I ended up writing my first novel, *Crush*, about that when I moved to California because suddenly I was freelance and I had time.

00;16;43 Benja Thompson What was your experience like writing *Crush* and could you describe what the novel's about?

00;16;49 Jane Futch Yes, *Crush* is semi-autobiographical. I wrote it that first year or two. I lived in San Francisco. I was real lonely. I didn't have any community. We lived in a beautiful apartment in Pacific Heights. But Catherine, my lover, and that's what we called our partners at the time, was lovers, even though we were like a married couple. But she was at work all day. So I was at home and it was good because I had time to write. I had no friends except for the beginning of the Feminist Writers Guild, so it was lonely. It was difficult. Oh, someone I met through Harper and Row was in a writing group in Berkeley. They were all older women, mostly heterosexual, but divorced and-- but they were all experience-based writers. And that group really encouraged me to keep going with, with what became *Crush*. I felt a little homophobia from them, but it was more just they had never dealt with this, but they, they were not really homophobic. I was just scared of coming out and being honest.

But, so, and because of, I got an agent and a contract for the *Marin* book, the agent to *Crush* when I finished it and sold it to Little Brown, not as an adult novel, which I had written it as, but as a Y.A. novel to Little Brown in Boston. And it's remained a Y.A. novel that was in print for about 15 or 20 years. And now I've reprinted my own version, not a different version, but my own edition of *Crush*. But it was very hard to, it was very hard for me to come out all along the way. And I remember even after I told my mother, who was very shocked and disappointed because my sister was sort of a lost cause, and my mother really wanted grandchildren. I've never quite understood the urge for grandchildren, but when she-- I had come out to her several years before, and when she finally saw our apartment in San Francisco and she saw the double bed and she said, "You sleep in there with Catherine?" Like she thought I should sleep in in the guest room. And I was like, "Yeah, well, I thought you understood." But anyway, that was what writing *Crush* was like. Scary, but, but very helpful. To me.

00;19;34 Benja Thompson Yeah. And it sounds like a way to process how to, sort of express your own identity through writing it.

00;19;43 Jane Fatcher Definitely. And I think, I think a lot of my writing had been kind of tortured because I didn't feel free to be who I was. I had been in a writing group in New York and it was kind of interesting. I was thinking about this for this interview. I think a lot of the women were lesbian, but no one's writing really reflected their lesbianism. That was in the, that was like '73 to '77. And people were still-- even though the Pride movement had started and there were parades and lesbian bars, but in this writing group, people were very cautious about admitting their sexuality.

00;20;26 Benja Thompson Do you think they may have felt similar fears you had felt?

00;20;29 Jane Fatcher Oh, yeah. They, even though we were all women and it was, it was a safe environment, we were still... right? Still breaking a taboo in our own minds, if not in the society's mind. So it was very challenging.

00;20;55 Benja Thompson If there was this almost hesitation to write these stories, where do you remember, maybe like, your first exposure to, like, another, like lesbian writing about being a lesbian or your exposure to queerness in general?

00;21;17 Jane Fatcher Yeah. Well, I lived in New York and I moved in with Catherine. She knew a lot of lesbians and we lived in the village. That was so important because there-- that was my first experience of a lesbian community. I lived in Philadelphia before that and I didn't have a lesbian community there. I knew some gay men, but once I moved to New York in the village and I met Catherine's friends, there was a restaurant there called Mother Courage, which was woman owned in the village, and lots of lesbians went there and, and Catherine, who was seven years older than me, and she knew many more people and artists and that, that really encouraged me in my identity to come out and... I forget what I'm answering.

00;22;12 Benja Thompson Oh, yeah. I guess first... or maybe a better question would be, do you remember the first person who was out that you met?

00;22;25 Jane Fatcher The first lesbian I ever met was out. Oh, the first lesbian I ever met was out was my sister's best friend.

00;22;39 Benja Thompson Oh, wow.

00;22;40 Jane Fatcher My older sister's best friend. In fact, my older sister, who's known as the Cat Lady in West Virginia, in her little town, who is a hermit and that's another story. I came home once when I worked at the University of Pennsylvania bookstore right after college, and they were in bed together. When I came home from work, my parents were away and they were sleeping in my parent's bed and I freaked out. And I think it was partly because I was in love with Scotty, my sister's friend, too. So I was kind of jealous but shocked that they would do this in front of me. And they didn't even wake up when I got home. And I remember we had a piano and I banged on the piano. In fact, the neighbors called and said, Is something wrong over there? Because they could hear the piano. I wasn't a good piano player. I just, I was so angry. But Scotty was the first person. In fact, she was with, she was, she had a book of matches that were from the Gay Straight Alliance or some alliance in New York that would have been like '72 or 3. And I was so shocked.

But, and then the second lesbian I met... well, my first, the first time I... the second lesbian I met was a famous lesbian reporter and writer for the Village Voice named Jill Johnston. She wrote a book, Jill Johnston. She wrote a book called Lesbian Nation, and I was doing freelance writing for a little paper in Philadelphia called The Distant Drummer, and I was a dance critic. I knew nothing about dance, but I was in love with a woman who was a dancer. And she said, "Well, we need to get our company reviewed. So Jane, you should be the dance reviewer for the Drummer." And I got \$5 a review, but I got to see Alvin Ailey and Judith Jamison and all the famous, Martha Graham, all the famous dance companies. Anyway, Jill Johnston came to promote her book Lesbian Nation and the editors asked me if I wanted to interview her. And I said, "Oh, yes." And we spent the day together. And then we spent the night at her hotel. And that was... Jill Johnston was the second lesbian I got it on with. The first lesbian was my gay boyfriend's sister.

00;25;37 Benja Thompson Oh, interesting.

00;25;38 Jane Fatcher Yes, I, I really liked gay men because I could talk about who I was. And he, he would tell me about the guys he would meet in the bars in Philadelphia. And we both kind of wanted to be straight. And so we started dating and it was getting kind of serious. And he took me home to, to his sister in Rye, New York, who is married with two kids and introduced me to Harriet. And we, we did cocaine, which I had never done.

00;26;09 Benja Thompson Yeah. Welcome to New York.

00;26;12 Jane Fatcher Yeah. Yeah. And then, and then Brian, we all went to bed in separate rooms, and then Harriet came down and said, "Let's go for a ride in my Jaguar, but don't put any clothes on." Of course, being cold by nature, I put clothes on. But anyway, she was, she was my first and Jill Johnson was my second, but they were very different people because Jill was totally out making money off of her lifestyle as a lesbian and Harriet was mentally ill and then soon after had a complete breakdown and didn't become a lesbian. But anyway, her children came home the next morning and we all had bagels and lox together. And then I went back to Brian and we got more serious in our relationship. But then I decided to move to New York and, and to come out. For sure.

00;27;06 Benja Thompson Yeah. Wow.

00;27;12 Jane Fatcher But I wanted to say, you had asked me to share some fond memories of Mill Valley.

00;27;18 Benja Thompson Oh, definitely.

00;27;19 Jane Fatcher And one fond, of course, fond memory was seeing Muir Woods for the first time, which was awesome. Another fond memory--

00;27;28 Benja Thompson May I ask you to say what that was like, to see Muir Woods for the first time?

00;27;32 Jane Fatcher I had never seen redwoods. And there, the, the-- I'm looking at redwoods right out here from the library where we are speaking. And just, these are little teeny, like third growth maybe, but to see the huge redwoods and also... with the ocean so

nearby and the, the atmosphere and the unspoiled quality of that part of Marin and all of coastal Marin was, you know, the East Coast beaches where I grew up are all ticky tack.

There's, there's you know, with some exceptions there are some protected lands but a lot of it, there's just take-outs and houses on every square foot of beach. You can't, you know, until they change the laws, you couldn't even get to the beaches through a lot of places on the East Coast. And here was just these vast areas of, of unspoiled land that you could, on the ocean, that you could access. So there was just this atmosphere and this, this sense of environmental protection. I sensed, when I was researching the, the book, the Marin book, which I got the contract for, I read all about the, the plan for the Tennessee Valley there in the Marin Headlands, there was going to be like a city of 10,000 to develop the Marin Headlands all the way up to well through Fort Cronkhite. And it was conservationist women of, of Marin County that stopped that. Do you remember the name of that place, what it was going to be called? Anyway, the, the environmental spirit, which I was told about partly through my cousin's now husband, Sherman Kent. And the, the care about environment was just radiated through Muir Woods because they'd been protected and been protected by the grandfather of the guy who was taking us to see them. So that was very, very special.

But a second really amazing memory I have was much later. To support myself as a writer. I've taken many jobs and one of the jobs I had when I moved to Mill Valley was being a massage therapist at the Physical Therapy Center, which I think has another name, at Throckmorton and Miller, which were a lot of interesting people coming and going from that place. But I was a massage therapist and it actually made the beginning of another novel I wrote called Dream Lover. A woman I had a crush on from the girl school I wrote Crush about, called me and said she was married with three kids and said, "Oh, I'd love to see you. I'm going to visit my friend. Patients and friends, patients and Ramon Zambrano, who live in Mill Valley. Why don't you come and see us in Mill Valley?" And I said, "Okay, I have to do my shift at the spa, but I'll come up after." So in the sort of twilight, I'm winding up Panoramic and patients and Ramon Zambrano who owned that kind of fancy hotel down along... along the freeway.

00;31;23 Jane Fletcher They lived on like five acres right overlooking Mt. Tamalpais. And I drove up to this place and it had one of those infinity swimming pools, and it was just like magic. There was not a light, it was a clear shot right to the peaks of Mt. Tam. And that was one of my most stunning memories. It also began the beginning of an affair with that woman, Louise, who invited me there to meet her friends so that it was all kind of intertwined with erotic associations, too. But I think sometimes the, the exquisiteness of nature and an Eros are kind of combined so that was, that was a strong memory of of Mt. Tam. Mt. Tam is, oh, it's really magical.

00;32;20 Benja Thompson Oh, yeah.

00;32;22 Jane Fletcher When I lived in Sausalito, one of my windows looked over Mt. Tam and it just kind of, it's kind of like a magnet of energy and, and beauty.

00;32;31 Benja Thompson And you can do, you can see like from every direction across the Bay Area.

00;32;36 Jane Fletcher Yes.

00;32;37 Benja Thompson Down to... yeah it just offers so much.

00;32;41 Jane Futch And in Sonoma now, where I live now, we, we can look down from some of the peaks and see Mt. Tam. The sleeping lady. That all got entwined. Sleeping lady of Abigail and Louise and the, the wood nymphs, the lesbian wood nymphs of Marin County and Mill Valley.

00;33;07 Benja Thompson Is that a-

00;33;09 Jane Futch Elsa. Even though I wasn't one of her disciples.

00;33;14 Benja Thompson I am interested to know what your journey as a writer has been. How long have you been writing? As well as shifting through these different modes of fiction, novel, travelogue, and then reporting as well?

00;33;36 Jane Futch Okay. Well, I think I, I started to feel a real magic writing when I was about 12. I remember writing a poem. It was about wintertime and it was very... it wasn't a great poem, but I got really caught up in the rhyme and felt this sort of sense of accomplishment and little bit of magic with the poem. And another thing we had to do in that sixth grade class, we had to give four oral speeches we had on, on topics of our own choosing. And all four of my speeches were just rave successes. I was very good. I was kind of an entertainer at that age and I got a lot of good feedback from my speeches.

And then I, I worked, I was like the eighth grade representative to the literary magazine. I always was involved in the literary magazine writing poetry. And then when I was a senior, I was one of the editors. And I also went to, my parents sent me for fun to the Exeter Academy Summer School, and I took an intensive creative writing, creative writing class, and it meant like 4 hours a day. And that really fostered my identity as a writer. We did different, we did different kinds of writing. Poetry, parodies of New Yorker profiles, and then I took as many writing classes in college as I could. They didn't offer too many. And then I went to, that was Dickinson College. I majored in English and I went, spent my junior year in London, and I traveled a lot, which I think infused, which really got me away from the East Coast and some of the bonds that were tying me down. I still hadn't come out. I was really trying. I was very afraid of drugs, in part because I was afraid they would, my lesbian side would sneak out on drugs.

00;35;58 Benja Thompson It would reveal this...

00;35;59 Jane Futch Yeah. Alcohol, I felt like I control that. But I was afraid that more psych, psychedelic type drugs would release the real me. And anyway, anyway, going to Boston University, their master's program in creative writing that I'm not sure I learned that much about writing, but it helped establish the identity of writer. That you could, I could start saying, "I am a writer." And I think that's one of the good things that writing programs do. They, they-- because when we're young, we're kind of embarrassed to say, "I'm a writer," you know? 'What have you got published?' Well, that's the first question your parents ask. Well, what have you published? Well, my high school literary magazine or my college literary magazine. So that, that process really helped.

And then I bounced around a lot in different jobs. I worked at the University of Pennsylvania bookstore, and then I got into-- my first real writing job was writing high school

assembly programs. There was a company in Philadelphia that did live-- sent actors out doing live multimedia assembly programs, and I wrote and produced scripts for those programs. And then that helped me get the job at Harper and Row writing documentary film strip treatments for their science and technology curriculum, which was big. Filmstrips were big in the olden days. But now, now I've thrown out all my-- I wrote thousands, if not thousands, but I threw out all my filmstrips in one of my many moves over the years. But it was I, I, I always was looking for things that would support me while I was writing. And the best thing about moving to California was I got laid off by Harper and Row.

00;38;07 Jane Futch So I collected unemployment and that paid for me to write Crush and help subsidize me. And then I got the book contract for the Marin book, and that helped me. And in 1981, I had two books come out. I had Crush and the Marin book, and I thought, "Okay, I'm set as a writer." Not that I made much money. I had spent any advance I had received, and I didn't get much in royalties. So I was back, in '82, I was back on the streets again. I went, I got a job as a secretary at Marin Abused Women Services, which leads me to another of my pleasant memories in Mill Valley. Before I lived here, which was the boss, my boss, who is much younger than me, a woman named Sally Coombs, used to sing at the Sweetwater on Monday nights.

00;38;57 Benja Thompson Oh, wow.

00;38;57 Jane Futch And I was kind of, had a crush on Sally Coombs. And I go down to the Sweetwater on Monday nights and hear her play, and that was kind of fun. I had never been to clubs much, and that was a fun memory of interesting people.

00;39;14 Benja Thompson And depending on the year, we may have digitized tapes of those performances.

00;39;22 Jane Futch Oh, that would be interesting.

00;39;23 Benja Thompson Yeah, we've been recently digitizing the old recordings from Sweetwater.

00;39;27 Jane Futch Oh, interesting. I don't know what happened to Sally. She was, she was a really good songwriter and a good singer and guitar player. But I've, I've Googled, but I've never found her. But then, so this is how I, you know, how I managed as a writer. Then I wrote another novel that was actually also set and written about a teenage boy called Don't Catch Me I'm Falling, which never found a home or a publisher. And it was about book banning in Marin county. Anyway... I work for The Slant, right. I, I got my certificate and massage therapy and I worked at the physical therapy center. I did freelance massage. And then I decided, well, maybe I should support myself with teaching. So I got a credential or a certificate in teaching English as a second language. And I taught English as a second language, and I taught a creative writing class up at World College West, which no longer exists, in northern Marin County.

But it's always been a challenge supporting myself, a writer, because what I've written hasn't made much money. But another good memory of Mill Valley are the Log Cabin AA meetings and down at the Tennessee Valley Road and Highway 1. Around the time I was going to

Sweetwater, I decided I had a little drinking problem and maybe a little drug problem, and I stopped drinking and, and then that crazy woman who I met at Patient and Ramon Zobrano's-- I actually was sober for five years. But when she broke up with me, it sent me to the log cabin. And being in Mill Valley, which is-- Mill Valley has great AA meetings and they didn't support me since, this is all a question about how my career as a writer has gone. But they left me with a lot more free time to write because I wasn't getting drunk or going to parties or doing much. In fact, that's one of the challenges of getting sober and drug free is you suddenly have more time on your hands. So I could write more.

00;42;05 Benja Thompson Yeah. And I remember looking through all the issues of The Slant. There was often AA meetings held at, I believe, the community church over on Olive Street or Olive Drive.

00;42;19 Jane Futch Oh yeah, there were, there were meetings there. A Metropolitan Community Church. Yeah, I, I, I, I wasn't ever much of a Christian, but I was raised Christian. But I did go to some meetings there and I went to some services there because I was kind of in love with one of the women who sang there. Metropolitan Community Church. That got me into a lot of trouble. They were both in the women's spirituality group. Sandy and Sabina. They've since broken up. But anyway, any writer has to really think about how they're going to support themselves. Unless you just hit the... I haven't managed to hit it. I'm working on another novel right now, but I don't think it's going to hit it. But you know, you never... I'm only 76. You never know. And this may be the one.

00;43;16 Benja Thompson Yeah. There's a quote from Akira Kurosawa, who's a longtime filmmaker, I think he was 80. And he said he's just now realized how to make a film. So there's always, like, more to discover in your craft.

00;43;32 Jane Futch I'm learning. Yeah, I'm learning.

00;43;36 Benja Thompson And then could you describe both what The Slant was as well as sort of your involvement with it?

00;43;44 Jane Futch Yes. Be happy to. The Slant was-- I'll take a sip of water.

00;43;50 Benja Thompson Of course. And if you want to, like, take a break now.

00;43;53 Jane Futch I'm fine, thanks. The Slant was a gay, lesbian, transgender questioning newspaper, and the guiding light behind The Slant was a Presbyterian minister named Ed Wright, and I met him through the Ministry of Light. I'm not sure of the ministry. The Light was Spectrum by then, and I met him at a number of different meetings. And he, he knew I was a writer and he said, "Are you interested in helping create "The Slant?" And always being a believer that community is a great source of mental health and fun and connection and I said yes. Ed was willing to use his garage in Corte Madera as the publishing office. He was willing to really take the lead on gathering the materials, being the address, overseeing the mechanical production. We had, we had paced up in those days and also distribution.

And I, I came to monthly editorial meetings with a woman named Joan Glassheim and Beverly White. And a little later, a guy named Bob Harmon joined the editorial staff. And I think the second year it was during the Gulf War, and I wrote an article, there was a front page article

of The Slant, the second year of The Slant. And I thought it was pretty good. It was autobiographical, just kind of a personal take on what it meant to, for war to be declared. And Bob came to like the next meeting and said, well, he was very serious, he was a good writer and very hard working and, none of us got paid. He said, "I join The Slant because of Jane's article," and I thought, "Oh great, I really inspired him." He said, "It was the worst article I've ever read. I realized they really need some good reporting." So that was kind of it. That was my introduction to Bob Harmon, who went on to write lots of great articles. He was, he was willing to give it probably more time than I was as a reporter anyway. It helped bring the community together.

And a big part of it was the calendar, because, because it was a place, a sort of a central clearinghouse for different events in the county because we had no way to know what was going on. If you lived in Mill Valley, what was happening in Novato, there was a Novato women's group that came out of it, and there were all kinds of-- it really allowed people to connect in a great way. And we used to meet in Joan's house in Mill Valley off... She lived off... I think it was California. She lived up in the eucalyptus trees and still does, I think. And we, we just put out a paper once a month and mostly it was on Ed's shoulders and I, I got to do some of the fun stuff. But Ed Wright really spearheaded that and it really made a difference. It really helped people come together and find ways to meet, places to meet.

00;47;21 Benja Thompson And then what would you say community means to you, or what do you see, like, the importance of something like The Slant, to make community, to be?

00;47;30 Jane Fletcher Yeah, as I say, I think the community came partly out of the calendar. It came out of people being visible, like writers like me, Bob, Joan, Beverly, Ed, being willing to say, "Yes, I'm queer, we're here, we're here to support you. Here are the events, you can see." It was a free paper. So if finances were a problem, if you could find it, it wasn't always available. But we, you know, Ed, bless his heart, he got boxes for The Slant. We had them all over the county, free boxes for distribution. That, that was a tremendous resource. And for the Ministry of Light or Spectrum or Marin AIDS Support Network or any of the groups that were lesbian, gay affirming now had a place to post their event so that people knew about them. And if you don't know about it, you can't get to a meeting. It just made, it just lightened, it lightened the what sometimes seemed the burden of being queer. And I think the straight community could get behind it. And they could see, you know, we weren't, we were small but mighty. We weren't like glossy or fancy, but we were definitely from the community, for the community, by the community.

And I still feel like even as I'm in a new community now, new for me, senior community over 55 at Oakmont Village it's called, near Santa Rosa in the Valley of the Moon. It's, it's kind of like a housing development built in the sixties and seventies. But they have a very strong women, a lesbian group called the Rainbow Women, and that's one of the reasons we came out of the hills of Mendocino, where we lived on this big kind of ranch property is because of the Rainbow Women. There's 5000 people who live at Oakmont, but 150 are lesbians. And they're are some of the most visible or most active, most constructive leaders in the community. They've, they've led the Firewise movement almost any-- there are at least two lesbians, maybe three now on the Homeowners and the Homeowners Association for the entire 5000 people. The gay men got a little, got a little jealous. They asked if they could join them. And the, the board at the time said,

“No, you, you need to form your own group,” because women so often get sort of taken over when the men join their groups. Anyway.

So even though, so community just keeps, you can't keep alive if you don't have support and the, the support I received here in Marin from the Ministry of Light, the spirituality group and then in the Bay Area from the Feminist Writers Guild really kept me because I was a suicidal teenager. I was really, I didn't tell, but I had thought through different methods to take my own life. I had considered, considered suicide. I thought I was the only one. And it's that feeling that you're the only one and very isolated. And in Marin, when I first got here, it seems straight. Cyra McFadden didn't write about the queer-- she wrote about the rich people in Mill Valley in their hot tubs, and they were getting divorced and they were maybe neglecting their kids, but it was well, she wrote, I mean, there was on countrylane and all that, that was... But, but a lot of it was very straight and Marin was very straight. And until I'd say Janie Spahr started kicking butt.

00;51;52 Benja Thompson Yeah. And then all these communities that would form around and then--

00;51;57 Jane Futch Spin off.

00;51;58 Benja Thompson Spin off, and then be able to gather because of things like The Slant, because things like Ministry of Light, back from the Spahr Center.

00;52;06 Jane Futch And Elsa Gidlow really did a lot, even though she was sort of behind the scenes, but she lent her name to various groups and-- but even Elsa was, she needed the community, too. She was isolated out there in Muir Woods. She was very excited when all these women would come to meetings at her house and sort of sit at her feet, worship her. So we, we all need support.

00;52;38 Benja Thompson Yeah. And it's so interesting how often there's someone who experiences what it's like to be queer, also then focuses on like activism and support and community work where maybe it's because of that sort of isolation that someone feels then that motivates to help others.

00;53;01 Jane Futch Yeah, the, the extreme suffering and pain. In my case, in many cases. Oh, if it doesn't harden your heart, it makes you more compassionate and want to help others like you. Remember *Catcher in the Rye*? You want to, you want to catch them so they, not everybody has to experience the same pain. It's no fun being on the fringe and feeling like, I mean, it can be fun being on the fringe as you're, as it's coming up. But to be...

00;53;40 Benja Thompson In the margins.

00;53;41 Jane Futch On the margins can be very, very scary and isolating so, yeah, thank God for all these organizations that spun off others. And I don't know what's it like now, you know?

00;53;58 Benja Thompson Yeah, it's--

00;53;59 Jane Futch Here.

00;54;00 Benja Thompson It's so interesting in terms of it's hard not to immediately talk about the impact of the Internet in terms of, like, in both that it's almost impossible to feel alone and that you can reach anyone anywhere, like at any time. But also there's an inverse of, like, that itself makes it feel isolating at times. It's because everyone is in their own bubble, right? And the bubbles can connect, but it's still like a distance in a way.

00;54;37 Jane Fletcher Yeah, I felt that from a lot of the Zoom meetings that started happening with COVID. It's like you just want to reach through the screen and, yeah.

00;54;47 Benja Thompson Be present with people.

00;54;48 Jane Fletcher Yeah, it's, it's complicated how we have more ways to connect, but fewer, it seems like fewer face to face connections.

00;54;58 Benja Thompson Yeah, yeah, it is interesting.

00;55;02 Jane Fletcher Yeah.

00;55;03 Benja Thompson But I suppose to the point of visibility and representation and education, it's been tremendous where someone can access a whole history and community that they wouldn't be able to find otherwise as well as express themselves in a certain way. So I think that's something that I'm seeing as I'm talking to like a younger generation and they are so well versed in this history and it's really inspiring.

00;55;38 Jane Fletcher Really?

00;55;39 Benja Thompson Yeah. Yeah. Which is so good because it's easy to see maybe someone be inundated with an overload of information.

00;55;50 Jane Fletcher Yeah.

00;55;51 Benja Thompson So it's very heartening to see how many young people are able to, you know, handle all of that because it can be overwhelming. And I'd like now maybe to talk about your experiences with the Marin Independent Journal. The IJ.

00;56;15 Jane Fletcher Yes, I think it was 1995 or the end of '94, beginning of '95. I was hired as an editorial writer at the IJ. I was teaching English as a second language part time and the IJ had always been this strange, in my mind, this strange kind of right wingish news, the newspaper of record of Marin, but for real reporting and the kind of trendy stuff everyone read The Pacific Sun. You didn't read the IJ to, to be cool, hip or whatever, but you had to read the IJ to know about local news. And I have to say, I read the Marin Journal, Independent Journal a lot when I was researching the Marin book, but there had been a large gap in my regular reading of the Marin Independent Journal. But as always, I was looking for ways to support myself as a writer and I thought, okay, it's community. It's because I as a writer, most of what we do is alone, very quiet, isolated. I used to, when I was writing in my, in Pixie Trail in Mill Valley, for my big treat after writing, there was a grocery store where Whole Foods is, this real weird kind of funny grocery store, half empty. I used to go buy ten Red Vines and a Coke and go kind of celebrate my writing day. But anyway, that's, that's beside the point.

00;58;02 Benja Thompson That's a good celebration, though.

00;58;03 Jane Fatcher

Yeah. I mean, so that was my idea of a good time as a writer. So I took the job and I really liked it. I didn't necessarily write liking editorials, but I like the community in that those days it was at Alameda del Prado, the big building right by the freeway, and they, and the Gannett, it was part of the Gannett newspaper chain, and they printed the USA Today right next door in the printing press and I, I, they had no place to put me because the editorial editor didn't have a desk near him. So they put me in the feature, features department which was which the IJ calls lifestyles and I was surrounded by these wacky, really good veteran reporters.

There was a guy named Paul Liberatore, who might still write for the IJ. Beth-Ashley, who's kind of famous for writing for the IJ for years, and she wrote a book on Marin. Pascal Drewlac, who is the cooking food editor. Becky Larson, who was a kind of a conservative Republican who became one of my best friends, who did home and garden. And then my desk bumped up to Rick Polito. And he wrote this, this thing called The TV Guy. And he wrote funny, funny descriptions of what was on TV that night. And they were real TV shows. But he was a comedy writer, really.

And he, when I went to the IJ, the big, one of the big hot issues was, who should be allowed to go on the Marin trails? Should it be hikers, bikers or horses? And the horses and the bikers were really fighting because the bikers said their bikes didn't make as deep grooves as the horses' hooves, especially when it was wet. And then the hikers didn't really want anybody but the hikers on. And Rick was a biker, and one of the first editorials I had to write was about the bikers. And I, I, for whatever stand I too, Rick disagreed, and he was really nasty to me. And he, and my boss said, "Now, don't listen to Rick." You know, 'just calm down.' He's, you know, we've told you what to write because we have these editorial meetings and the, the publisher and the newsroom editor and my boss, the editorial page editor, would decide what the paper's opinion would be and I'd have to write their opinion. And I would have to base it on the articles that the reporter had written about the issue. So they didn't want me to do my own reporting. So I'd go to reporters and ask them what they thought. Well, Rick, I, he just didn't like me at all. But anyway, we became really good friends.

And that, that whole-- I realized I could write. I didn't have to have complete silence. In fact, Beth Ashley, who was much older than most of us and very hard of hearing, had an extremely loud voice. She was so loud that when she did a phone interview and most interviews really are done by phone, the whole newsroom, I could hear sometimes when she'd get off the phone, the whole newsroom would clap because she'd done such a good job with whoever she was interviewing. So that was really fun. In fact, I had I wrote a memoir about moving to Mendocino County, and some of the best writing, I think, is about working at the IJ. It was such a, it was such a diverse group. I, there was Pam Moreland, who is black, who ended up sitting next to me, who was constantly-- she called me, oh, what did she call me? She had a nickname for me. Uh oh. So I'll think of it. It was like writing. Was she, she was always saying, 'Now, if you want to get along in the newsroom, you have to do this. You have to dress different. You have to look busy.' Oh, she always wanted everyone to look busy. And so it was just funny.

They were all, and they were, there'd be like ten conversations and you could hear them all and at same time write your article. So I did that. I was glad when I got off the editorial page. Mike Townsend, the editor, I think he decided he wanted this guy named Brad Breithaupt. Brad

Breithaupt, who used - he went to Cal and he was a journalist - he used to cover Mill Valley and he knew all Marin County politics. He knew all the, the town politicians, the mayors, the board of Supes. And I used to come in and Brad would just be shaking his head. He was always the first in the newsroom. And he'd say, "Jane, you really blew it on that editorial." You know, I really didn't know that much about Marin politics. I was just doing what the, my bosses told me to write using his articles or whoever. So anyway, Brad would-- And so the editor after a few years, oh, sometimes Rick would write my editorials because when my boss would go away, I'd have to pick the letters to the editor and write the editorials and then review the paste up, because then we were doing paste up. It wasn't all electronic and I wasn't very good at catching typos. So the, the people in the paste up side hated me because I had too many errors in my copy anyway. Polito, Rick Polito would say, "Oh, I'll write a couple editorials for you." He could write them in about 10 minutes. I would slave over these things and spend hours and he would just zip it off and they'd be great. So I would put, run his editorials and so that, that was it. That was a really great job. I moved... So I think Mike decided Brad Breithaupt should be the editorial page editor, and my boss left and I got to move to a, I would have police reporting, but not really reporting. It was the lowest job. I would go to the different police departments and pick up news items.

01;04;23 Jane Futch They had never run a daily like cop shop, they call them, where you run items from each town and you try to pick ones that are interesting or funny or weird. So I did that and then they then, finally, they decided they'd give me something real and I became the health care reporter and that was a great beat because there was all kinds of politics going on around here in general between the District Board and Sutter Hospital and the district board wanted to take over from Sutter, and those meetings down at Marin General were just wild and I really enjoyed that. And then I actually won an award. Healthcare Reporter of the Year from the Marin Medical Society, which I don't think has ever been given again, but they created it for me. And then, I think that, yeah, I think they did. I've never seen anybody get it. There was a guy named Larry Bedard who's a, he was an emergency room doctor at Marin General, and for some reason he liked me and he kind of created this for the, from the Medical Society.

And then I also covered Novato schools, which was kind of interesting because they had a big controversy over a book. It was in the family life curriculum that included gay and lesbian parenting and some information. It's a lot like what's going on in Florida and Texas but it was going on in Novato and the, these right wing people would come to the school board meetings and yell and scream and complain about the curriculum. And I think finally it was changed. They basically won, but not completely. But I was covering that too for some reason, just Novato schools and healthcare so it was, it was a very fun job and I, even though the politics of the paper weren't necessarily mine, the people were all just regular, crazy writers. I'd never-- a roomful of like 25 writers. It was really fun.

01;06;29 Benja Thompson Yeah. And so different maybe than your previous writing experiences of, like, yourself in a smaller space--

01;06;36 Jane Futch Isolated. So isolated. So that was really fun.

01;06;42 Benja Thompson Okay. And then you had written a memoir about your move to Mendocino County, is that correct?

01;06;48 Jane Fitcher Yes. We left and we bought land up in the country in Mendocino County in 1999, 162 acres in the middle of nowhere in inland Mendocino. And my partner and I, my wife and I, now, we've been married twice. Once was, once was, what's it called? Not absolved. And it was, became illegal, when, in San Francisco and then once in, I forget the dates-- anyway, we're married. For now, if, you know, someone doesn't try to take it away, which is always a possibility.

01;07;33 Benja Thompson Yeah, it's a fear.

01;07;35 Jane Fitcher A fear. Yeah, so we moved up to the country and I continued to do freelance. I wrote. I still did some profiles for the IJ and I started writing for some of the local papers up in Mendocino County, mostly about cannabis, which was a hot topic. The legal move to legalize was happening and everybody we knew was growing pot and we were growing some pot. So that led to me being the host and producer of a radio program on KZYS, which is an NPR affiliate called The Cannabis Hour, which, which I did for about three years. And that was a lot of fun. And it was, sometimes when I want to say Marin, I say Mendocino. And when I say Mendocino, I say Marin. Because the two have kind of been imprinted on my mind, although they're very varied, very, very different. But there are some really great progressive people in Mendocino County, and they remind me like of some of the old Mill Valley political action types, some of whom preceded the activists. You know, when Mill Valley was still a hippie town and there were so much great music and environmental action coming out of-- although, you know, the women, the women, established women of Marin County did a lot for conservation. The Women's Conservation League, I think it was called, Marin Conservation.

Anyway. I am rambling. It was a good move out to the country, but I did it kicking and screaming because I didn't have community. I was isolated again after being in the IJ and being in the thick of it in Marin County politics in a newspaper environment. That was fun. I was suddenly back on my own writing again alone in my room.

01;09;46 Benja Thompson Yeah.

01;09;47 Jane Fitcher And my partner was working all day as a nurse. Oh, by the way, another happy memory of Mill Valley. I met Erin, my wife, she had an office at 333 Miller. She was a home birth midwife, and she ran Labor Of Love, Midwifery Services. And she had the largest midwife homebirth midwifery practice in the Bay Area. She had offices in Mill Valley and later Berkeley and San Rafael. So... but she, she worked at 333 Miller. So we were supposed to have our first date at the book depot, but she had a birth or something. So we met, our first date, it was in Novato, but yeah, so we moved to Mendocino County and now, as things became... the drive to town, even to get mail-- oh, we could never-- that was a big shock. We couldn't get a newspaper because we lived six miles on a dirt road. So every-- fortunately, we could get electronic. That's, what a difference that makes. Oh, so, we couldn't-- groceries were 40 minutes, newspapers, mail, doctors, friends, everything was a 40 minute drive and often an hour. So, we decided to pack it up and move to Sonoma. One reason we left Marin was the traffic.

01;11;22 Benja Thompson Oh sure

01;11;22 Jane Fletcher Because we lived in Novato and coming down to Mill Valley, you know, Mill Valley, East Blithedale area, and couldn't stand getting to her office in Mill Valley anymore by the time we moved. Anyway.

01;11;39 Benja Thompson I just-- it's so interesting to think about, I suppose when you were young and growing up, afraid to, like, afraid to come out, did you ever think that you would later in your life be married to--?

01;12;00 Jane Fletcher Never. That's a good question. I never thought I could be-- in my mind, in fact, one of the first short stories I wrote for a lesbian erotic anthology, a lot of the short stories I published through it, the only venue for publishing a lesbian short story was the erotic anthologies that Allison Press did. Allison Publications, and then some others did them. So I wrote regular short stories and then I added some erotic to make them qualify. But in one of my first short stories was fantasizing as a little girl about being married to my first grade teacher, which got controversial because someone said it was like exploitation of a child. But anyway, I'm not responsible for my imagination. No, just kidding. But I never thought I'd be married legally to a woman ever in my wildest, even this recent, you know, even in 2000. I never thought then. I mean...

01;13;09 Benja Thompson Do you remember your feelings around those like, rulings of, I think it was 2008, 2013 maybe? Which seems so recent to say.

01;13;21 Jane Fletcher Yes. 2008 was much more exciting because we went down to, we drove down from Mendocino and we, Mendocino County, and we went to City Hall and my cousin who lived in Pacific Heights, had a reception for us afterwards and there was such excitement in City Hall and I mean, there were cakes left by large donors for everyone getting married. It was really exciting. And... and it was fun having the reception and we threw a bouquet and nobody wanted to, the only person to catch it was straight. And he did get married not too long after. That was really, really exciting and all of our friends were doing it. And then when was overturned by the Supreme Court, the State Supreme Court or the U.S. Supreme Court, I think it was State, I can't remember. Anyway, that was disappointing. But it was sort of like, "Agh." And then when it came back and we got, and it passed that was exciting all over again, that was the U.S. Supreme Court, right? And we, the first day marriage was legal, in 2016 was it, did you say?

01;15;02 Benja Thompson I think was '13?

01;15;04 Jane Fletcher '13? We went down to the city, to the Board of Supervisors in Mendocino County, Erin and I did. And there were four other lesbians there. I don't think there were any gay men that day. It was the first day and we ended up knowing all four and all four are now divorced. But we're still married. But that was very exciting. As Erin said, she went to see her sick mother and I went to the dump afterwards. So it wasn't, we didn't have a party. It wasn't, it wasn't-- But one thing it really did was she immediately went to her employer. She was employed by Adventist Health as a nurse, and they would not give health are benefits to me as a domestic partner, but they would as a married woman. And so she took the marriage certificate immediately to Adventist Health. And that was an economic benefit I got right away, which is health, healthcare through her employer.

01;15;57 Benja Thompson Because beyond the very, you know, the massive importance of equality for, you know, being able to be in that comfortable, like, situation of, like, being married to somebody, there was a very, like realistic, logistic thing of recognition by employers, recognition for, like, a federal governmental level. So it's, and that's something that might not be talked about as much as, like, the cultural and, like, personal effects of being able to have, like, legalized marriage.

01;16;42 Jane Futch Yeah,

01;16;42 Benja Thompson Like there were all these loopholes and problems.

01;16;47 Jane Futch Yeah. Well, as we were getting older, we were thinking more about advanced directives, and if one of us got sick, you know, would Erin have the right to, to make decisions about my healthcare? Final, final exit? You know, there were, we did think a lot about what the legal advantages, I mean, but yeah they're, they're important which when you're younger, you-- I don't know, I didn't think that much about that. But I do, I do still find myself having trouble like saying my wife, like, like we just were in Washington, D.C.. We toured the, we got a tour of the White House through our congressperson. You, if, if you ever want to see the White House, you have to write your congressperson. And they get you tickets to the White House, which, even though I grew up 40 minutes from Washington, I've never seen the White House. But I, like saying, "Oh, my wife and I have tickets," or "My wife and I," saying to someone I, I assume is straight, could be a false assumption. I found that difficult and I, some, and I see sometimes they look at me and go, "...your wife?" I mean I still, I get sometimes people say sir to me and that takes me back. It takes me, you know, it takes me back, is that the expression?

01;18;22 Benja Thompson Taken aback.

01;18;23 Jane Futch Taken aback. I'm taken aback by that. I get it-- one time in France, the French call me 'monsieur' and Erin used to call me 'Monsieur Jane,' but that-- those words kind of stick, Stick a little. I try to use them just to, as we have done throughout our lives, try to educate people and be out there and not in the closet and not be ashamed, but it, it is a stretch for me to say my wife. And I, and it seems to me, because I've never been, you know, most of us weren't really into marriage because the only model was heterosexual. And it was like, "Why would we want that?" But now when we see the benefits-- but it, those words are, are still hard to say. Unless I feel really comfortable. I'll say it in front of lesbians. But... what do you think? Do people, do people kind of...

01;19;34 Benja Thompson In terms of...?

01;19;35 Jane Futch Well, do you think... I don't know.

01;19;39 Benja Thompson Well, what I've found, like the current sort of approach seems to be partner across the board. And this is, I guess, less marriages and more so, like, relationships. And that's like, regardless of orientation or gender. Like cis het people may still refer to, like, their boyfriend or girlfriend as partners and that's been an interesting shift to see happening of, then it's regardless of--

01;20;15 Jane Futchter Right. Well, we always did refer to each other as partners, but now it seems almost like a political statement to say wife. Because, because it is so shocking. I mean, to a lot of people. They... do you know what I mean? It's almost like--

01;20;40 Benja Thompson I could certainly see for someone who might not... for someone where that would be a rare, I guess, experience or exposure to hearing like a woman talk about her wife. I guess that makes me think of the importance that that exposure and experience happens, right, to further, like introduce it into the world and like normalize it in a way.

01;21;11 Jane Futchter Yes.

01;21;13 Benja Thompson So it doesn't feel like a rare thing.

01;21;17 Jane Futchter Yeah, I know there are all these wife, 'my wife' jokes and you know...

01;21;23 Benja Thompson It's weird.

01;21;23 Jane Futchter Yeah, I I'm going to think about that. Maybe I'm going to go back to partner. I've been saying wife because, as you say, make it more... to maybe, to make it more...

01;21;37 Benja Thompson And I could see it being like a celebratory or like something to feel proud of. The fact you are able to, like, that you have a wife is something incredible.

01;21;50 Jane Futchter Yeah. And not so much that I'm capable of having a partner, but that legally, I have a wife. And, and maybe it's, 'I want to rub your face in it.' I don't know. There, there might be some revenge motive, but I don't know. I have to think about that. Maybe I'll stop. I don't know.

01;22;17 Benja Thompson If you're asking me personally, I certainly would encourage. I would encourage, affirm, motivate to, like, use 'wife.' But just because then the partner thing does, like, using partner if you are married then might make it seem less, I don't know, official.

01;22;43 Jane Futchter Yeah, that's part of the-- right.

01;22;45 Benja Thompson For only being able, again to talk about how recent this history is. Like 20 years ago 'wife' wouldn't have been applicable.

01;22;56 Jane Futchter No, it's, it is so new. Erin, my wife, says spouse more. And spouse is also a little shocking, but not as shocking.

01;23;07 Benja Thompson Yeah. Spouse is good in that it's, again, like a gender neutral term.

01;23;12 Jane Futchter Right, it's gender neutral, but it's, it's definitely, kind of a married or very, more, almost more than partner. I don't know what the definition is, but my father used to say 'spouse' referring to my mother, and I kind of hated it. Um, he was a doctor, and it always sounded sort of like, "This is my specimen."

01;23;37 Benja Thompson Clinical.

01;23;38 Jane Fatcher Yes.

01;23;39 Benja Thompson Interesting.

01;23;40 Jane Fatcher Yeah. Like an application: 'spouse.' So I haven't gravitated toward spouse, but, anyway.

01;23;50 Benja Thompson So I have a question about, how do you think culture has changed around queerness? Whether it's awareness or, because now that it's, it feels much... yeah, I suppose I'll let you answer.

01;24;11 Jane Fatcher Well, I think there have been huge changes around lesbian and gay awareness. I, I'm still struggling some with transgender and beyond awareness. Not so much... I want to remember, I think it was in 19, around 1982, it was a women's march, a women's building march in San Francisco. And it was marching with a young woman who said she was a lesbian, but she wanted to have... change her gender identity to male. Oh, no, no. I got it wrong. She, she was attracted to men, but she wanted to change her gender to male. So she could be a gay man. And that absolutely blew my mind at the time. I just thought, 'Why not just, why not keep your femaleness and be with a man?' Because to me, to be even then, to be queer is like, that's, that's so challenging. Then you're going to change, you know, go to all the trouble and expense and trauma of a sexual change in order to be with, you know, and I realized that was, oh, now I go back to that conversation and I think, 'Oh, this is what, this is what the transgender thing, it's like, it's not... it's the same discussion that now we're having over trans, we're having this discussion over transgender now, and it's... Lesbian, gay stuff is like, it's like dark ages. And I.. I understand being a butch woman, which I think I am, but I don't... some of the, some of the transgender and gender issues, I, I don't, I don't get and I haven't, and the, the 'he, she, they, what pronoun do you use?' I haven't, you know my friends who are writing in academic journals and stuff, they, they all say that. What pronoun they use. And I, I have, you know I, I don't write for any... one of my best friends... anyway.

01;27;47 Benja Thompson It is like, yeah, it is something that hadn't been part of a lot of the movements in the eighties and previously. So to hear that you had that interaction in '82 is so interesting that now you can look back on of, like, oh, that's exactly sort of where we are now in the current moment of-- and it does seem like something that's changed is, this awareness, not only of the spectrum of sexuality, but the spectrum of, like, gender identity with the whole, like, breaking of the binary, and things like--

01;28;25 Jane Fatcher Right, right. Yeah, I mean, I, I remember at age ten regretting that I was getting breasts and, you know, not so much that I wanted a penis, but I didn't really want to become a woman. But then I think, well, then would I... you know, none of these things were even like, I didn't think they were options. Although my father was a doctor and he worked at Johns Hopkins, and Johns Hopkins had one of the biggest, first sex, gender identity and change units in the country, if not the first. And he used to tell us about that. And it was just like this other thing that some people did. But anyway.

01;29;16 Benja Thompson And like something that was othered.

01;29;19 Jane Futch Yeah.

01;29;20 Benja Thompson Yeah.

01;29;21 Jane Futch And we always say, oh, the “L-G-B-T” But, and, ‘Q’uestioning. And now Janie Spahr, who was, started... started Ministry of Light and did so many, many great things in Marin County, is, is now a chief fundraiser, and I don't know what her position is on the board, for Trans Heartline, which I send money to because it's Janie but I can't say I really understand gender identity issues anymore.

01;30;07 Benja Thompson It is, even as someone who's, like, partaking in that, it's very confusing. It's like, and it's always changing too. So, and I, I think it's very interesting that even without fully intellectually understanding it, you're still supporting that organization just in that like you, you trust the people behind it.

01;30;32 Jane Futch Yeah. I mean, if Janie says give, I give. I don't give to too many organizations anymore. Well, I give to a few. But yeah, if she says ‘This is where it's at--’ and I don't give a lot but, you know, I have to, I have to give to anything that she supports because she helped save my life. And if she's helping save others-- and I'm sure I could sit down and say “oh, explain to me.” She would. She's so busy, you can't get hold of her.

01;31;07 Benja Thompson Yeah. We'll see.

01;31;08 Jane Futch You'll get her. She will talk to you.

01;31;13 Benja Thompson Okay. And then I was wondering if there's anything you hope to see for Mill Valley or Marin County in the future?

01;31;22 Jane Futch Yeah, I wrote something down. Let's see. What do I hope to see? ...I think of Marin now as this bastion of wealth. It's always been sort of there. But when I first came to Marin, there was-- and I don't even know what I'm talking about because I haven't lived here in years. I moved out of Novato in 2004. How many years is that? Almost 20 years. I see Mill Valley as really an enclave of the rich. There's a, there's a net-- Apple TV series that's running right now. It's a mystery. It's supposedly set in Sausalito, in the houseboat community. And the houseboats they show are these mansions. Forget where Alan Watts lived on the Issaquia ferry or something. So I see that a lot of the issues in Marin today, in Mill Valley, are issues of economic disparities and equal-- you know, I don't know how, I don't know how we cope with economic imbalances because, you know, we come down here and we shop and if we go to Whole Foods, we're like, ‘Oh, this is really different from Whole Foods in the Santa Rosa’ or our little grocery store we used to use in Willett, that natural grocery.

So, and I don't know how you, I don't know what, what's going on in Marin City, if it continues to be, you know, this sort of enclave of low income people. And then there's the rest of Marin. I don't-- but I do think some of the economic issues are huge. But one, one reason Marin has survived and stayed intact, all of West Marin and all the national seashore and stuff has been because of a lot of them, advantaged, wealthy environmentalists like my cousin's husband's grandfather. He was very wealthy and he left Mt. Tam and part of Muir Woods. And now a lot of rich people do good things. So I guess I'm just grappling with the disparity between rich and poor and what you do about low income housing and how you make the community affordable

to the people who work there. I don't know. Have you, have you ever looked at housing in Marin, would you want to move to Marin?

01;34;35 Benja Thompson In terms of the environment? Absolutely. But to the point of being able to live where you work, it doesn't feel accessible.

01;34;46 Jane Fletcher I mean, that's been a problem when I was on the IJ editorial board of, you know, can the, can the police and the firemen and the nurses and the support person, maybe nurses can because they have a union and maybe unionized jobs might, but-- I mean, my little cottage in Sausalito that I rented-- it was a little cottage that a big house on Santa Rosa Avenue rented. She rented it to me for \$350 in 1981. That seemed like a deal then. I don't know there's too much housing you can get for \$350 here. And I've never managed-- I got my little house in Mill Valley, it was the cheap house in the expensive neighborhood. It was called the chicken coop house on the street because a bunch of hippies had built some houses and they look like chicken coops to some of the.. So I'd like to see, I'd like to see some LGBT and questioning housing. Hmm. I think housing is a big issue. I was just listening to KQED, driving in about the housing issues for low income in San Francisco and unless you want to have all, a completely homogenous society... We're usually, LGBTQ, we're usually close to the bottom. So we need some support. And the other thing is community. You know, that, that's really one of the, one of the main lessons I've learned in my life is you, we have to have a supportive community, organizations. Whether, you know, whether they're around your gender or your sexual orientation or maybe you like sailing. It's nice to have a sailing org, you know.

01;36;57 Benja Thompson Mmhmm, yeah. Ways to gather.

01;37;01 Jane Fletcher Yeah. And I mean, the Internet, as you say, accomplishes a lot of that, but it's not face to face.

01;37;08 Benja Thompson Not so often or atleast--

01;37;10 Jane Fletcher Not so often.

01;37;10 Benja Thompson Even when it does facilitate that, it can often feel like people have, you know, subscribed to their echo chamber so deeply it's hard to then reach outside of that, if that makes sense.

01;37;23 Jane Fletcher Really? No, I mean, I've heard that. Yeah. Well, I know I, I, I can't reach too far out of my chamber. Over to the, those people.

01;37;41 Benja Thompson May I ask, might you have any advice to share for this new generation of queer folk?

01;37;53 Jane Fletcher Well, I place a very high value on creative liberty and access, your own, accessing your own creativity and other-- in order to be free. Because what we really all crave is, is to be free, to be released from our shackles, whether they're in our mind or whether we're actually in them. And to, to, and to, to... what's the word, to max-- to, to be fully ourselves. And for me, creative expression has been a source of liberation. So if you're struggling with an issue around gender, sexuality, I think using your creativity to express it. And also I'm a great advocate in therapy. I mean, I've gotten so much help from therapists along the way, from

couples' therapy and my relationship to trying to come out in New York. And here. I just told one of my best friends who's having trouble with her daughter and she's heterosexual, "You know, you need counseling on this. This issue is too big. And I feel a lot of people are still really afraid of therapy. They think it's some kind of black magic or some admission of defeat.

01;39;37 Benja Thompson Yeah. Yeah.

01;39;39 Jane Futch I just feel like it's a, it's a path to liberation. Or it can be. You, you might have to go to a few people and test it out, although a lot of it now is, I've been told, people are doing it on Zoom and that's, again, that's a step removed.

01;39;57 Benja Thompson They even have apps with AI that you just talk to like a robot.

01;40;04 Jane Futch They're supposedly having some cure successes, right, or some improvements?

01;40;09 Benja Thompson I don't know, but I just, it doesn't feel, yeah, just in terms of, like, more disconnect it's like then, you're not talking to anybody. But if, if people find use from that, right? Because it's whatever sort of practice provides.

01;40;34 Jane Futch Well, yeah, I can see that. I mean, I know some therapists I've been to just say "Yes. No, no." Well an AI could do that as well as a person, but um, yeah, so I'd say therapy, expressing your creativity, try to connect. And I think I waited too long. I waited till I was 26 and had to wait for my boyfriend's sister to seduce me. That was just too damn long and I hate for anyone to have to wait that-- I know many people who came out after that in their lives, but waiting... that much repression, it really, it really formed my personality, repressing myself for that long. You know, I think in pre-puberty, was pretty free, you know, the usual problems. But from, from like age 11 to age 26, that whole period of adolescence and post adolescence, I was living in it, living in a, my own prison. And I wouldn't.... What is it? How sad is that? And so many of us do. So I don't know.

I always say, I used to say sometimes in AA shares, I think alcohol helped me come out. I'd still be in the closet if it hadn't been for drinking. You know? And there was, like, this bar called The Duchess in New York and Sheridan Square in the Village. And that was like, thank god, thank god for alcohol. And the Duchess. Now, there's no, there are no lesbian bars anywhere, practically. In fact, there's a new book out about the-- did you read that? But there's, there are no more lesbian bars. almost in the whole country. And some woman wrote a whole book that just came out. I can't believe it, anyway, why that is. So those are my suggestions. Try to... What's it, what's it? 'If you want to be free, be free.' What was it from? Oh, the movie about the kid who kept trying to commit suicide. It was a funny movie. Oh, a black comedy. Harold and Maude, have you ever seen that?

01;43;15 Benja Thompson I mean to.

01;43;16 Jane Futch It's really great. So I think that's about all my advice.

01;43;23 Benja Thompson Yeah. And that sort of touches on what I'm so humbled and grateful and, like, honored to be able to be doing this project of... for so many generations, it was

something that was not allowed to be expressed or had to be like, yeah, shadows. So now to be hearing people from all different generations, both those who had large portion, portions of their life in the closet, as well as someone who may have been able to be out from the age of 12. It's been just so wonderful to be able to sort of start like celebrating some of this history. If not celebrating, being able to reckon with.

01;44;13 Jane Futch Yeah.

01;44;14 Benja Thompson So thank you for joining me and sharing your story.

01;44;19 Jane Futch Well, thanks for inviting me. I really enjoyed it.