



the
Lesbian,
Gay,
Bisexual and
Transgender

Religious Archives Network

A resource center and information clearinghouse
for the history of LGBT religious movements.

Oral History Interview: Charlotte Doclar

Interviewee: Charlotte Doclar

Interviewer: Arden Eversmeyer

Date: May 20, 2005

Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

Edited: Charlotte Doclar made clarifications and minor changes to the transcript. They appear in square brackets.

Arden E: [Initial moments of interview not recorded] . . .Charlotte Doclar. Her date of birth is April 2nd, 1934. She lives in Houston, Texas. The date is May—[pause—a portion of the tape was erased during copying.]

Charlotte D: --my mother, because she thought that that was what I should do. So I did go to both my proms. But not because I had a boyfriend, or anything like that. So I had to scrape around for somebody to take me. So I entered the convent right after high school. And knowing that I had no desires or feelings for the opposite sex. I had a powerful attachment to my mother, and leaving her was really the most difficult thing I had to do. But when you're eighteen years old and swept up in something as powerful as entering the convent and leaving home, a lot of feelings and attachments were ignored.

Arden E: How did you come to select the School Sisters of Notre Dame?

Charlotte D: Well, I was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame for twelve years.

Arden E: Oh, all right.

Charlotte D: They were my primary basis for—and we all had like a little tiny, you know, there was a nice nun or a beautiful sister that would come along. We all stood outside and made sure that we said, “Good evening, sister,” when they were going to novenas, stuff like that. But that’s the way it was with the sisters. But that’s why School Sisters of Notre Dame. I had thought about the Maryknoll nuns, but the Maryknolls were nurses. And that would have to do with hospitals, and I wasn’t really interested in that. So it was just a natural thing.

Arden E: Had you had any kind of lesbian experience before you went into the convent?

Charlotte D: You know, that word “lesbian,” I didn’t even think about that until many, many, many years later. But in high school I just remember crushes and attachments to young, you know, to friends. And then we would all stick together. And there was a triangle kind of thing. But that was just high school stuff. But no, no lesbian relationship.

Arden E: The word just simply wasn’t used that far back.

Charlotte D: No, it was not. That’s correct.

Arden E: Do you know if any of the nuns had any kind of affectional relationships?

Charlotte D: No, I wouldn’t have known that.

Arden E: You wouldn’t have known that.

Charlotte D: Not as a high school girl, I wouldn’t have known it about the nuns. I wouldn’t have known that.

Arden E: How deeply moved were you by your religious feelings when you were entering into the convent life?

Charlotte D: I hate to say it, but I really didn't have that many really deeply religious—I wasn't religious, in a sense. I mean, I had some friends in high school that would go to daily mass. And you know, like goody goody two shoes and all that kind of stuff. But I never had those desires. The reason I entered the convent, I always say, was that I really didn't know what else to do when it got to be graduation time. In 1952, that was, I graduated.

Arden E: And there weren't a whole lot of choices for women at that time.

Charlotte D: No, there wasn't. You know, and again, I could have been a nurse. The telephone company was a big thing, you know.

Arden E: You could have got married.

Charlotte D: I could have got, oh, yes, I could have got married. But I know I didn't want to get married. And that may have gone back to my history. My mother and father, my mother was married before she married my father. So I have a half-brother and sister. And that whole relationship. So it wasn't a bad marriage kind of thing, but it wasn't, I just never looked forward to married life. And since I didn't have any attachments to boys, what was I going to do?

Arden E: When did you first hear about feminist ideas?

Charlotte D: Oh, God, that must have been later on when I was in the convent. And that skips all the way up to, I really don't—I was in San Antonio at the time, I remember. So I was in my thirties or maybe—well, when the feminist, the whole feminist idea

started getting bandied around, I was at that particular point in my life basically having a kind of semi-affair with a lay person, which was my first lay person relationship. Because I had had relationships in the convent. But my feminist attitude was, you know, I mean, I know I didn't like the patriarchy. It helped when I went up to New Ways and worked with them to get that whole idea of the church being very male-centered. So that's what I would say. But that was later on in my life.

Arden E: So you actually came out as what we'd say today as a lesbian after, right after you went in the convent?

Charlotte D: No. Again, I didn't come out in my own self until, oh, gosh, about 19--about 25 years, no, a little more than, no, less than 25 years after I entered the convent. I did, we had affairs, but we never used the word "lesbian."

Arden E: Right. Right.

Charlotte D: So we had affairs in the convent. I would go to people's bedrooms. And in the beginning it was very, very—it wasn't very overt. It was sitting on the side of the bed doing a little petting. Being there for a person that was a good friend, or if she was having a struggle, she might come to you at night, sit there and talk about it. And you know, a little petting would go on. So the hot and heavy stuff, it depended—my progression, I think, depended on who I was having an affair with at the time. How much they knew about, you know, that particular incident. And then you kind of grew as you had little affairs in the convent.

Arden E: Gradual.

Charlotte D: Gradual. Until it came to the point where I said to myself, “I think I’m a lesbian.” Actually, that was the beginning of the end. Because once I named it and I knew who I was, then everything else kind of went into place. And hypocrisy came in. And I said, I can’t do this anymore. But that was way after—

Arden E: You’d been there a long time.

Charlotte D: I’d been a long time.

Arden E: Tell me a little bit about Gramick’s first retreat for lesbian nuns.

Charlotte D: Oh my goodness. Okay. [laughs] Let’s see. I got the information, actually it was in May of 1979. That’s when it was held. And I got the information, I was in the process of thinking about going to work for Jeannine. And I had come out to my superiors. They had accepted me as a lesbian. They were still a little bit leery about the whole idea that I was saying the word and that kind of thing. But they never really castigated me in any way. They never tried to put me aside or put me out in—‘cause that came before, but anyway, that’s a whole other story. But the retreat, she advertised to the religious superiors, actually, of all the congregations. She sent them, I think it was a little flyer. Told them that she was going to do this retreat in someplace in Washington. Very secretive. Because she was forbidden to do it by the bishops, and particularly by the bishop of, and I cannot think of his name, of Washington, DC, at the time. He was really against us. New Ways, he was against New Ways Ministries, because it was ministering to the gay population. He went so far as to say the Catholic newspaper could not put in their newspaper anywhere any kind of information, the words “New Ways Ministry.” It was like anathema; they couldn’t touch that. So he was really after her to stop that whole situation. So that was advertised. So my superior, her name was, what was her name at the time? I can’t think of her name right now. But anyway, she came

to me and she said, “Well now would you be interested in going to this retreat?” Well, was I going to say no? It was the first retreat for lesbian nuns ever held. And I said, “Oh my goodness, yes. I would be very interested in it.” So the process was put into [action], I was teaching here in Houston at the time. And I was staying at the convent here in Houston, Mount Carmel, a high school convent. And I got this information. So I left from Houston. Now in Houston itself, I had several friends, very close friends, that first of all knew I was a lesbian. And I could say to them, “Hey, I’m going to this retreat.” But it wasn’t many people. So the rest of the convent did not know I was going. They thought I was going to some other seminar someplace up in DC. And you know, people weren’t that curious. You know, you went here, you went there. It was summertime. So you know, if you went up to a little retreat, that was okay. So that’s how I got by with it. Now I was thinking the other day to myself, I don’t know how I got the money to fly there. I don’t remember if it came from my convent there, and why should it have, able to say something to them—but anyway, that’s another thing. But it was just like a little tick in my mind. I said why did I, how did I buy the ticket? So anyway, it was held in Hyattsville, Maryland, at a little convent. The convent was called, okay, it was the Religious of Jesus and Mary. Now that wasn’t our congregation. And this Religious of Jesus and Mary was a very small little convent. I do not think that they knew the nuns that were in that convent, because it was like a bunch of older people, I don’t think they knew what was going on. And I don’t, I really don’t think that Jeannine would ever say to them, “Hey, I’m having a religious retreat for religious, lesbian nuns.” I don’t think that they knew. We held it in their little convent parlor. I don’t remember . . . I would imagine that Bob Nugent must have come. That was the priest that worked with Jeannine. I don’t remember, but I would imagine he would have had to be able to come, say, for a religious ceremony like a mass or something. I don’t remember that. I do remember that there were only five sisters there. Came from all over the country, as far as I remember, but mostly from the

East. I have their names, but I don't have their last names, and I wouldn't say their last names, anyway. It was Bernie and Agnes, Cathleen and Norma. Those are the other four, and myself. And we met that first day. Jeannine met with us and told us the background of how the bishop had been against it, the pope was against it. Anybody who was ever supposed to be against lesbian nuns was against it, but she was going to hold it anyway. So it was like just a weekend. And I remember the most interesting parts of the retreat. And the fact that the five of us, evidently must have had Jeannine's car, or somebody may have brought a car, because they could have come from as close as Philadelphia. They may have had a car. But we went on, and it was the first time I had ever been in Washington. I'd never seen any of the monuments. And we went, in those days before 9/11, you could do anything you wanted at the monuments. Today, you can't. But we went, I remember it was midnight. First of all I went, we all attempted, and it was my first time, I think, to a gay bar.

Arden E: Okay.

Charlotte D: So five of us went to a gay bar. It was called The Other Side. And I remember being so frightened and so scared. Cause really, you couldn't recognize us as nuns. We didn't have, none of us had a habit on. But you know, there were policemen going around. And we were all, what's going to happen if something happens in this bar and we get—

Arden E: Picked up? [laughs]

Charlotte D: Oh, my lord! So all kinds of, and where do they go to the bathroom? Because, you know, it was a unisex bathroom. [laughs] But anyway, we had a great time. And we toured Washington. And I remember screaming out of the car that we were lesbian nuns. Of course, nobody heard us. And we were screaming that kind of

thing and running around. And I saw Abraham Lincoln's beautiful [statue] up there. And I walked up those steps in the middle of the night, at midnight. I'll never forget it as long as I live.

Arden E: The lights. It's beautiful.

Charlotte D: Yeah, it's gorgeous. As I said, there was much more, it was freer in those days to run around and act crazy. But we had a great time. And then again, after that, I think Jeannine had one more retreat for lesbian nuns. But after that, I left the convent right after I left Jeannine, in '81. So I was not privy to that. If she had anymore, I did not know anything more about it. But I do know that I was at the first one. There were only five of us. We had a great time.

Arden E: What kinds of things did you talk about?

Charlotte D: Oh, God. [laughs] I haven't the foggiest idea. That was such a long time ago. We just kind of, I think we talked about basically whether or not to stay in or get out. That was our topic. Of course I had been to other like lesbian retreats. We went to a retreat at Columbia University, I remember. And at that time I didn't realize that there were ordained lesbians in other religions. That was news to me. And I thought that was really cool. But they were having a hard time, too. They weren't totally accepted. But I spent a year in New Ways with Jeannine, and it was a great year. But that lesbian nun retreat was a hoot. And it was more fun, I think, than, just the idea that it was the first one, and nobody knew where we were. And it was so hush hush.

Arden E: How on earth did they get the information to the five of you?

Charlotte D: Through their superiors. She sent it out to the [Provincial leaders], who sent it out to the different congregations.

Arden E: But I would think that once that kind of information got to a superior, it would immediately get put in the trash.

Charlotte D: Well, in some congregations, I'm sure—oh, sure. It was, I'm sure. A lot of them. But if they had, you know, an up and coming superiors, or people that accepted the women as lesbians, I think they [may have passed it on]. She may have gone through Dignity, too. I don't really know how she got, all I remember is the information came to me through my superior. And again, at that time, this was '79. And I went that very next year to work with Jeannine. After I made a, because they had given me a sabbatical to get my head in shape. Because when I was in the middle of this, I was thinking about leaving the convent. And they didn't want me to leave. And so they gave me a whole year to think about it. And I went on a 30-[day] retreat, and I did all the [right things], had a psychologist to work with me to make up my mind. But anyway, I left in '81. So I left just after the year I was [with New Ways in Washington, D.C.].

Arden E: How difficult was it for you to live in the convent as a lesbian? Were you always closeted? When did you come out to them?

Charlotte D: I was always out to myself. I was out to, and you know, the little affairs—the “little” affairs, some of them were hot and heavy—but you know, I don't really think that the women I had what I call “my affairs” with, I don't even know if they knew whether it was like a lesbian thing, or—because I've had nuns come up to me and say, “Well, Charlotte, do you think I'm a lesbian?” And I say, “Well, you know, you just have to, that's something you determine in your own life.” Because convents have changed so much over the years. You know, when we

were living in a large convent, like 24 sisters, you [found each other]. And if you fell in love with someone and they fell in love with you, it wasn't an easy job to live in a convent and be a lesbian because the little affairs were determined by whether or not you had a [transfer or obedience*], you [might] leave the next year. We didn't determine whether or not we left the convent or left that particular convent. So but then as things changed, women started living together in twos. We were never allowed to live by twos. Because that was again, that was going back to a particular friendship thing. And they were warding off this lesbian [threat]. But I know some nuns that have lived together, two of them, all their lives. Now whether or not that's a lesbian relationship, I haven't the foggiest idea. It's hard to determine. Because they close the doors at night and you don't know what's going on. But when we were like the large convents, and it was difficult to get into, because we went from bedroom to bedroom. And that was, when I think back, it was a mortal sin, if you believe in mortal sin. [laughs] It was a mortal sin to talk, to speak, after night prayers. Because that was what we called "the greater silence." And it was a mortal sin for you to break greater silence. Unless, of course, there was an accident or a fire. [laughs] Or something like that. But it was a mortal sin. And we did it. We went from bedroom to—not from bedroom to bedroom to bedroom, but at evening, you know, after nine, we talked, we spoke after nine-thirty. But we, where was our conscience? I don't know. I mean, it was such a silly rule. All those rules were silly, you know. And so it was, when I think—

Arden E. Well it was an effort for control, I'm sure.

Charlotte D: Oh, definitely! Definitely, sure. They could control you, all right.

Arden E: Tell me about the year that you spent working with Jeannine Gramick.

* [An obedience was a slip of paper telling you of our assignment for the next year.]

Charlotte D: Oh, God. How long have you got? [laughs] Well I went up, I went to New Ways because Jeannine was looking for an intern. And again, because she knew I was out and it was an SSND, I was in her congregation. So she, my congregation, I wrote a, in those days, we could do different things. We could [be] lawyers, you know, studying to be a lawyer. I mean, in other words, you didn't just have to teach all the time anymore. And so I wrote, I remember I wrote a proposal. I had to write a proposal on how it would benefit our convent, well, province, I guess you could say. The Dallas province, and then the Baltimore province. Jeannine was in the Baltimore province, in Washington. I was in the Dallas province. And I heard about the proposal. And this was just after the years of my sabbatical. I didn't know, I wasn't assigned to any particular school yet. And as far as I was concerned, I was finished with teaching anyway. But I hadn't told them that yet. But so I wrote a proposal and I said, showed how it would benefit the Dallas province if I went up and was an intern for Jeannine. So they accepted my proposal. And they supported me financially to go up to, to be with Jeannine. Because she was getting money from me, plus me. So that's, so that was very avant garde to do that. Because it was again a lesbian—and I think they thought that, and I thought, too—I was pretty disappointed. I thought that if I went up with Jeannine and was an intern for a year, I could come back to the Dallas province and be a source for my lesbian sisters. Well, no lesbian sister has ever contacted me. So it didn't work out that way at all.

Arden E: What kind of things did you do there?

Charlotte D: Oh, at New Ways, I was an office manager. An office person. I wrote letters, I typed, I went to—I was with a young man by the name of Rick Garcia. And he saved my life, basically. Because Jeannine and Bob were very tunnel vision people. New Ways was all they thought of. And I'm not that kind of a person. So

when I went up to there, and it was very, actually it was a difficult year because, and of course they had lots of nice things and good things, etcetera. But it was difficult because Jeannine and Bob were very dedicated people. Rick and I, however, were not that dedicated. So you know, we needed breaks during the day. And unfortunately we worked, I worked where I lived. And that's very difficult, because you never get off the clock. And we had, Rick and I, again, he saved my life. He and I would play whenever they were not there. When they would walk out the front door, we'd get up and we'd walk out the back door. And go play around Washington and do our thing. Sit on the square, the circle, and he would look at the boys and I would look at the girls. But it was a fun time in that sense. But it was difficult.

Arden E: How did Jeannine feel about Dignity?

Charlotte D: Well, Jeannine had, actually, Jeannine was part of the founding people for Dignity in Philadelphia. Dignity, Dignity didn't reach the women. It was never a woman's organization. Dignity was ruled, well, they had some, I take that back. They did have some, like the secretary of Dignity and the vice-president of Dignity, was a woman one year. But basically, Dignity was an old queens' organization. They wanted the old mass. They wanted the old songs. They wanted the old, old rituals. They were very ritualistic. And I think that's one of the reasons that Dignity didn't work for the women. Because the women were too forward thinking. And they wanted to change the church, where Dignity wanted to maintain the status quo.

Arden E: Maintain the status quo.

Charlotte D: Of course, they got it in the chops when--

Arden E: Is it still that way, to some extent?

Charlotte D: I have not had anything to do with it—well, I went to Dignity a couple of times here in Houston. And yes, it was. It was mostly men. And it just didn't, now, of course, they can't be in the Catholic churches anymore. I don't know how active Dignity is right now. I couldn't tell you.

Arden E: I know there's a chapter here in Houston.

Charlotte D: Oh, yes. There used to be over at the Rice University Newman Center. But I think they have a place now of their own. But I've gone to Dignity masses where I was the only woman. But she was active. She tried to work with Dignity. But she had her own thing. So she was doing her New Ways. And we knew of all the mess that was going on in the Church at the time. Charlie Curran and John McNeill, you know, because some priests were talking out against the strict censure of gays and lesbians. And of course back then, you get it from the top, and you don't do that anymore.

Arden E: Who was John McNeill?

Charlotte D: John McNeill wrote a book. I can't think of the title anymore. But it was the first books about Catholic and gay people. And oh, God, I used to have a copy. But [not] anymore. But it was really, it knocked the church back a couple of steps when he came out with that book. And he was censured and told he couldn't do that anymore, that was bad. Charlie Curran was up at Catholic University. You cannot preach pro-homosexuality, because the Church will not let you do that. You have to go according to what they believe. That you can be a homosexual, but you cannot be a practicing homosexual. You have to be celibate the rest of your life if you want to be a Catholic. And that's why I cannot understand how

any lesbian can go to a Catholic church. But that's another whole, that's another hour-and-a-half.

Arden E: Yeah.

Charlotte D: Cause I have friends that do that. And I say—

Arden E: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I know women who do that.

Charlotte D: I don't know how they do it.

Arden E: How was the Conference of Catholic Lesbians formed? How did that come to pass?

Charlotte D: Okay. I can give you a little insight on that. Jeannine and New Ways Ministries sponsored a women's retreat in Yardley, Pennsylvania in 1980 when I was up there. I was an intern at the time. I think about 20 women came. Yardley, Pennsylvania, first, was a gorgeous place. Some retreat house there in Yardley. But about 20, I would say about 20 to 25 women from, basically the east. We didn't have that many people from like far away. Philadelphia, New York, basically Washington. So we had this retreat. Bob was there, Bob said the masses. I remember that. And because we sang all the good old lesbian songs. But they were knocking around the fact that Dignity was not for women. And somebody—of course, I can see them in my mind's eye. I cannot name names anymore. But a bunch of people, a couple of people from New York and Philadelphia decided that why not start an organization for Catholic lesbians. And that's actually where the germ came from. Conference of Catholic Lesbians started in northern Pennsylvania. They went back to their places where they were and then started to work into that and (set it up with Jeannine. And it actually was a very nice and a very active organization for actually about, I don't know how long it lasted.

About five to seven years. I wouldn't give it ten. I don't think it was ten years. I went to several of the meetings. We met in the Poconos. We met in a camp right outside of Yosemite National Park, up in California. We went to the Estes Park in Colorado. We went to a little college outside of Boston. And it was very well attended. It was a great organization. I loved it.

[30 minutes]

[End Side A. Begin Side B.]

Charlotte D: --it was very good. I mean, it gave you a good feeling about yourself. They had lots of seminars. They got different people in to talk about things, different topics. It always gave you a nice place to go to. I remember the place at Estes Park. Oh my god, it was gorgeous. So it thrived for a long, long time. A long time. I don't think more than ten years. Then it broke off into, it got to the point where nobody wanted to travel to the east coast or the west coast, so it broke off into sections. And I remember we had a, we went to a meeting in Phoenix. There was a chapter there. And I'm sure there were chapters of this conference. And then it got to the point, I think, where nobody wanted to come anymore. And I think, too, what killed it was the fact that women, as time progressed, and we got into the Eighties and the Nineties, whatever, there were more opportunities for bonding for women than there were back in the Eighties. It had served its purpose. And I do remember, I was with Jeannine, I guess it might have been for the parade. And we went to a little restaurant someplace outside of Baltimore and met with basically the women that had started it. There were a few of them there. And then talking about the fact that they wanted to get the name "Catholic" out of there. But that was the whole basis for the thing to begin with. So I think that's when it kind of went out. Now of course, it could still be, but I don't think it is, no.

Arden E: And two, breaking into regional groups diluted your leadership.

Charlotte D: Oh, sure it did. Yeah.

Arden E: So sometimes that proves fatal.

Charlotte D: But it was a great little organization when it was active.

Arden E: Tell me about your reasons for leaving the convent.

Charlotte D: My reasons for living? Or my reasons—[laughs]

Arden E: Leaving it.

Charlotte D: My reasons for living. No. Why did I leave the convent? Duh. You'd think I could have stayed in, because I was accepted as a lesbian.

Arden E: Right.

Charlotte D: But that's that dichotomy. And when I went up to Jeannine to work with Jeannine, I rubbed elbows with a lot of women who were lesbians who were living more like an authentic life, because they were out in the world. I was living behind a façade. And it was very easy for me. Nobody thought I would ever, you can't be a lesbian and a nun, (you know how careful I would be?). So I was living off of that, I wasn't paying my dues, basically, what my thought was in my mind. I was being a hypocrite. And I got to meet a lot of great people, great women. Washington, DC, was a great experience because it was when women first started saying mass. I went to many, many women-held masses. And breaking the bread, and all that kind of stuff. And for me, that was very, very exciting. Because back in Houston, Texas, they weren't doing that kind of thing. []. And so then I got to

the point where I thought well, came back to, from Jeannine's whole situation. Liked being a lesbian, an out lesbian, in that I didn't have to be, you know, closeted. Came back to the convent, actually, and thought well, you know, I'm going back in a closet again. So I thought well, why not just leave. And I took what they call an ex-claustration. It's a year off. You still have to report to the bishop to tell them that you're working in their archdiocese or diocese. But you can have an ex-claustration for three years. You can renew it, in other words. But I had one year. And then the beginning of the second year to renew it, I thought, you know, we're not kidding anybody; I'll never go back. So you write to the pope and you tell him you're having trouble with chastity. And he thinks they're attracted to the man, but anyway. So he lets you go real quick. But you have to write to the pope. And I was thinking the other day, I don't even know where those papers are anymore that I signed. But then it's, then you're done for good. They let you off the hook. Because you took vows, and so they have to let you off.

Arden E: Are you excommunicated, then?

Charlotte D: Oh, no. No, no, no. And of course it was much easier to leave in 1981 because if you left back in the Sixties, in the Fifties and in the Sixties, you were, basically not excommunicated from the church, but the nuns couldn't have anything to do with you. They couldn't talk to you or call you. And you hear some horror tales of these women that left the convent without any clothes. Just a habit. And they had to call their friends or call their whatever to get them clothes to bring to get out into the world. So it was a harder time. '81, there were even, well, Sixties they started leaving like a lot of people. And now, of course, it's a dying institution.

Arden E: Have you participated in any kind of religious work since you left?

Charlotte D: Well, not religious work. In a sense, when I left in '81, I started looking for a church. And knew I didn't want to be in a Catholic church, because the Catholic church doesn't speak to—well, first of all, it definitely doesn't speak to lesbians, and it doesn't speak to single women, either. It's all married women. You have to be married []. I went to an Episcopalian church. I went to a Methodist church—Bering Memorial. And it was still too patriarchal. And so I got a hold, I don't know how I heard of the Unitarian Universalists. But I went to the church there, the one I'm attending now, and I'm a member of. The preacher, Bob Schaibley, who just happened to be, and not on purpose or anything, but happened to be a gay man, was preaching that Sunday on The Color Purple. And I had just read it and I thought well that might be interesting to go hear. And I went to church to hear him. Marvelous preacher. And it kind of came to me, well, maybe I should be-- it's a very open church, it's a very accepting church. It's what's they call welcoming congregation. And if anybody in that church does not know I'm gay, it's certainly not my fault. So I'm accepted for who I am as a gay woman. And they really accept lots. Basically what you're looking for is community.

Arden E: Right.

Charlotte D: And it's a great community. They're helping out with my, when I've been laid up, etcetera. It's a good place to be. Not that many rules, okay? And I think I was coming away from all those rules the Catholic Church puts on you. You know, that kind of thing. I never did well, I did not do well with rules.

Arden E: Easy to break them, huh?

Charlotte D: Oh my goodness, yes. Always [seemed I was always breaking the rules].

Arden E: You were interviewed and participated in an anthology on lesbian nuns.

Charlotte D: Yes I did.

Arden E: Lesbian Nuns Breaking Silence.

Charlotte D: Yes. Uh huh.

Arden E: Did you have any experiences behind that?

Charlotte D: Actually, the only thing I can say about that is it didn't go over as big as we thought it would. We thought it was going to be ground breaking and world shaking, etcetera, etcetera. But it wasn't as big as we thought it was going to be. The book came out in '84. And the editor's, I mean, the publisher's name was--

Arden E: Rosemary Curb, wasn't it?

Charlotte D: No, no. That was the editor. Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan.

Arden E: Right.

Charlotte D: They were on *Donahue*. That was a big to do. But after that, it just went down the tubes. I'm trying to think of the editor of the book that had the rights to it. Barbara. Barbara Greer. Barbara Greer was the editor. And she sold the rights to that book to *Forum* magazine. *Forum* magazine is a cousin of *Playboy*. *Playboy*. She got it in the chops from the feminists, because it was a travesty. She kept claiming—now she's an editor of this book company. I mean, she's the editor, etcetera. She said, "Well, I didn't know *Forum* was a pornographic magazine." And there were some nuns that were included in that, *Forum* picked up a couple of them. And the only nice thing about that was, as far as me, she also sold the

rights to *Ms.* magazine. *Ms.* magazine, and when I heard that, it was so funny, because when I heard that they had sold the rights to *Ms.* magazine—now, I was working at a high school at the time. And I knew that they got *Ms.* magazine. And I thought, now what if it comes out in *Ms.* magazine? So I called Nancy Manahan and I said, “Nancy, if there would be any way—“ Because I thought they’d picked up a couple of them. I said, “If there’s any way that you possibly could kind of keep me out of *Ms.* magazine, because I’m working in a high school, etcetera. She said, “Well, Charlotte, I hate to tell you this. But the only story that *Ms.* magazine wanted was yours.” So it’s in *Ms.* magazine. And I have a copy here, and then I also have a copy framed. But it was kind of a feather in my hat that I thought. But it’s very great. It says, “Lesbian Nun: Charlotte Doclar’s Story” on a whole big page. So anyway, I’m out in *Ms.* magazine. But no—

Arden E: Did it affect your job?

Charlotte D: Oh, no, no. Not at all. Of course. Nobody saw it. No, it didn’t affect my job. It didn’t—actually, I did not receive one negative remark from anyone. People called me and wrote me in support of it. I got, I’ll tell you the strangest telephone call was from a little young navy guy out in San Diego. And he called me thanking me for doing this and thanking me for putting it in the book and thanking me—and I never did understand that call. But anyway, he was very, very appreciative of the fact that I had come out. Got some letters from *Ms.* You know, like, “Charlotte Doclar, where were you when I was struggling—“ But no negatives. I thought I’d get it from the holy rollers, definitely. But none. Nobody ever said, “You’re going to go to hell because you were in this magazine,” or whatever. One of the interesting things, too, I was reading in some, it must have been a kids’ magazine. But it said that, it was an article on Madonna. Just one line said that Madonna was recently seen reading a book on lesbian nuns.

Arden E: Oh. [laughter]

Charlotte D: I thought that was pretty cute. So anyway, whether or not she really read it—it's an interesting book.

Arden E: What kind of work did you do when you left the convent?

Charlotte D: Oh, I didn't want to be a teacher anymore, but it was all I could do. So I left the convent and got into the public school system. Knew a friend of a friend. I'd taught the girl. She was a senior in high school at Mount Carmel. And her mother was a supervisor in HISD [Houston Independent School District]. And she said, "Sister"—she still calls me sister—"Sister," she said, "if you're going to leave the convent, I want you working as one of my teachers." And it was \$19,000 a year. That's what I started with. Now coming from zip, \$19,000 is a lot of money.

Arden E: A whole lot of difference on what you had to do to take care of yourself, too.

Charlotte D: Oh, yeah. Sure. Because now you know, unfortunately you don't get a retirement.

Arden E: Yeah.

Charlotte D: The nuns don't give you that retirement that you may have been accruing. So at 47 years old, I was at zero.

Arden E: You were starting from square one.

Charlotte D: So when I retired, if I had been in the public school system for forty—I was in the classroom for 47 years when I left. I mean, when I retired. So if I had been 47

years in the public school system, I would be on easy street. But I wasn't. I think they gave me \$3,000 severance pay.

Arden E: The convent did?

Charlotte D: They were not giving that much at the beginning. I don't think they gave anything. But then it was like 25 or 50 or 25 dollars per year or something like that. So the \$3,000 was—

Arden E: At least fed you till you got something going.

Charlotte D: Yes. It got me, my dad, I remember, signed for the car, because they wouldn't take, I had no credit.

Arden E: Right.

Charlotte D: And my first credit card was a Texaco gas card. So the first year I was out, I had money everywhere, you know. Paper money. Because I had no credit. I said to the guy that was selling me the car, I said, "Look, I'm 47 years old." He said, "It doesn't make any difference. You don't have a job, you don't have any income yet." I had the job when I got the car. But anyway. What do the young people do? Well, maybe their fathers sign for it.

Arden E: That's right. That's exactly right. Can you think of anything else that you'd like to add about living as a lesbian nun?

Charlotte D: Oh, gosh. Well, yeah. It wasn't easy, you know. It wasn't easy being a lesbian. Making friends, making attachments, and then having to leave. I think that was a

big thing. You had no say in that. So if you were madly in love with so and so and she was transferred, well, that was your hard luck.

Arden E: You might never see her again.

Charlotte D: Oh, no. It's true. And I do remember I would get in trouble. I got in a lot of trouble. I got in a lot of trouble because I was very affectionate. And that was, again, frowned upon. But I remember when I was younger, you get these guilt feelings. But after a while, they go away. You know, you say well, the world doesn't collapse. I didn't get struck by lightning. And I was having a good time and enjoying myself. It was a struggle in the sense that again, these attachment and unattachment kind of thing. I do remember being very honest with my superiors. Because right before we took vows, we took first vows for three years. And then we took vows again for three years. And then we took vows at the end of six years forever. And each time you took vows, it was a special summer and you went in and part of the process was you knelt down and you had this panoply of religious, you know, the bigwigs. And you, they called it a chapter. And I remember being very honest with them and saying, "I have trouble with my affection." You know, "I have trouble." And I remember once somebody said to me, a religious superior, "Now, Charlotte, you know that you're a Southerner, and Southerners are more romantic." And I'm like okay, look, I'm trying to tell you. [laughter] If you're not going to listen to me, that's fine with me, but I'm trying to tell you now. So it wasn't that I kept it back in any sense. And I was always, I was just always getting into trouble, again for breaking silence after night prayer. So it was quite a life. It really was. But it was a good life. And they gave me my education. I can't complain about that. But it was a hard life in a sense that—and it was my fault. Because I was, I used to wear my heart on my sleeve. And it's always sad.

Arden E: Get it broken all the time.

Charlotte D: Oh, get it broken all the time. But anyway. I think I said it in the book, but it's true. I'm more celibate now than I ever was in the convent. Because I live alone, I'm celibate. And in the convent, I really wasn't celibate. And I would get in trouble because people would know it was me walking up and down the halls. And I do remember getting sent to California because that was like Siberia. And I remember having to walk past one elderly sister's room and I know she told on me. So it was, they sort of kept me in California. I would still probably be in California, I mean, I would not have come back to the Dallas province, but my mother was still alive. And it was far. And she was the one that was paying the price. You know, mothers always pay the price for your vocation. They really do.

Arden E: Did your mother know about you?

Charlotte D: No. My mother didn't know about me. Nobody did. I'm going to say no, my mother didn't. The only one that really knows about me is my sister. And I had to come out to her because the book was coming out. And I knew, she's a voracious reader. So I knew she might pick up on it. My niece knew. I called my niece and I said, "What do you think I ought to do?" And she says, "Aunt Charlotte, tell her. Because if she sees it in a book, she's going to die." So I went home one Easter and came out to her. And of course, we don't get along. We're not close at all, my sister and I. But she said the thing that really does, whenever anyone comes out to you, what you don't say is, "Oh, I knew it all the time." That's the biggest put down you can say. So that's what she said to me: "Oh, I knew it all the time." But anyway, "I knew it all the time." That's really a put down. So I'm out to her, and I'm out, now of course I'm not out to nieces and nephews. She would not allow me to tell them. Except my niece Gail that knows. But my sister keeps a lot of secrets. And I'm one of the secrets. [laughs]

Arden E: You're the family secret.

Charlotte D: Well she did, she's pretty well accepted me. And her husband did, too. So it was nice. I was able to (?). [] I live here alone and [spend time] around with the Unitarian Church. And feel accepted over there, and have a lot of good friends, straight friends and gay friends. I could be more active in OLOC [Older Lesbians Organized for Change]..

Arden E: Well, we'd love to have you.

Charlotte D: I know.

Arden E: Well I really do thank you.

Charlotte D: You're quite welcome. And I can't think of anything else. The book we talked about. The retreat. Yeah.

Arden E: Okay.

Charlotte D: So I think it was a very nice interview. I really do appreciate you coming over and doing this twice now.

Arden E: Well, it's fun.

Charlotte D: I know it's fun. Well, you're used to doing it, that's why.

Arden E: Okay. Thanks again.

Charlotte D: You're welcome, darling. [tape shuts off, resumes]

Arden E: This interview was done as a part of the project for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Religious Archives Network.

[End interview.]

[52 minutes]