



Oral History Interview Packet

Rainbow History Project | Summer 2015

Thank you for being part of the Rainbow History Project oral history program. Oral histories are one of the best ways to document and give texture to the life of Washington, D.C.'s, LGBTQ community. We couldn't advance this project without volunteer interviewers like you.

We prepared this guide to offer some structure and tips on taking a good oral history. Don't feel like this is your only resource; we are happy to talk with you and go over any specific questions you have in advance of your interview.

Contents

Preparing To Record An Oral History.....	2
Conducting An Oral History Interview.....	3
After The Interview.....	5
Sample Interview Questions Worksheet.....	7
Tips For Oral History Forms.....	9
Oral History Narrator Permissions Form.....	11
Oral History Volunteer Agreement Form.....	13
Sample Catalog Entry.....	14

Contact Us

Email:

Jeff Donahoe (Oral History Director): oralhistory@rainbowhistory.org

General questions/comments: info@rainbowhistory.org

Website:

www.rainbowhistory.org

Preparing To Record An Oral History

Becoming Qualified

1. Familiarize yourself with the Rainbow History Project website and our oral history program. Some oral history narrators will know about RHP, but not all. It is important for narrators to know that we do this work for access by future generations of our community and others.
2. Read, sign, and return the "*Oral History Volunteer Agreement Form*" (page 13) during your training session. The form establishes RHP's abilities to use your interviews for a wide array of purposes.

Communications With Narrator

1. RHP will connect you with a narrator and provide some background information on that person.
2. You will arrange with the narrator to conduct the interview at a mutually convenient place and time.
 - a. **Place:** Some narrators may invite you to their homes for the taping; others may not. If you'd rather meet elsewhere, don't feel that you have to accept that offer. Be thoughtful in picking a meeting location, as good sound quality is important. Coffee shops can quickly go from quiet to noisy, but if you or your subject feels confident that it would be a quiet space, that's fine. If finding a location becomes problematic, ask us for help and we can brainstorm some options.
 - b. **Time:** Plan on at least an hour to record, and expect that some folks will want to talk much longer.
3. Conduct some preliminary research on your narrator to inform your questions. (Google is a great place to start.) RHP usually can provide you with some information about the narrator or leads to information.
4. Share RHP's pre-interview questions (and any you'd like to supplement) with the narrator in advance of the meeting so she may have time to think about them. Try to cover all the RHP questions in an interview because it helps us to collect similar information from all our narrators.

Preparing For the Recording Session

1. Print a copy of the "*Oral History Narrator Permissions Form*" (page 11) for the subject to sign. You can email the release in advance, but be prepared to discuss the release at your meeting. The "*Tips For Oral History Forms*" (page 9) section provides guidance on using the forms. **RHP can't use the oral history without the signed release, so this is an essential step.**
2. Prepare your recorder. The voice memo function on a smartphone works well enough—better with an external microphone. If you don't have a smartphone, we can supply you with an easy-to-use digital recorder with external microphone.
3. Be sure to try your recorder once or twice before the session so that you are familiar with the process. Practice downloading a file and listening to it on your computer, too. Make sure your batteries are fully charged and you have any cables you'll need to recharge during the interview. Some sessions can go long on time!
4. Review any information relevant to the person prior to the recording.

Conducting an Oral History Interview

Getting Started

1. When you meet the narrator, take a few minutes to get acclimated to the space and comfortable with each other's voices and faces. Most people will be nervous, so try to remain calm and have some fun. A great ice breaker is to simply review the process for the day.
2. Before you record the oral history, please review, complete, and sign the release form ("*Oral History Narrator Permissions Form*") (page 11). It's important that the narrator understand and be comfortable with the terms of the release: a narrator is entrusting her or his life story to RHP and needs to be confident that we will use the oral history as he or she directs. You need to understand the release and its options, and be confident in walking the narrator through the form. **RHP can't use the oral history without the signed release, so this is an essential step.**
3. Some oral history participants will have thought about what they want to say and will be ready as soon as you start recording. Others will want a lot of direction from you. Be ready to read your narrator's cues—or just ask!

Recording

- With a signed release form in hand, you are ready to record! At the beginning of the taping (and if you remember, again at the end), please state:
 - full name of the narrator giving the oral history
 - narrator's birth date
 - the date and the place
 - Use location names that will make sense for someone not familiar with D.C. Example: "Bethesda, Maryland," not just "Bethesda"
 - the name of the interviewer
 - that it is being recorded for Rainbow History Project
- Break the ice at the start of the recording with some good simple questions that will get you both at ease (that first 90 seconds). Some great first questions include, "When and where were you born?" "How do you spell your name?" Since RHP is dedicated to local history, a great first question that's easy to answer is "How did you come to be in the Washington area?"
- Oral histories are different than interviews that would be used to build a newspaper article, for example, where the person taking the interview takes the lead. In an oral history, the subject sets the pace, scope and direction of sharing her or his story. Let the interview take its own course. If you have specific questions, ask them during lulls in conversation or at the end; mostly, just let the person tell you her or his story.
- Establishing focus: some narrators will say that they have many many things to talk about. Consider asking the narrator to focus on one topic in the interview, then scheduling another session to talk about another topic.
- Ask for dates, addresses and other clarification: It's okay not to understand everything that your subject is mentioning in the oral history—it's even beneficial. Even if you think you know what the reference is, ask for clarity so

the listeners will know too! Often people might use an acronym for a group, a slang name for a club, or even just refer to someone by first, last, or nickname only. Ask them to specify: "Who is this person you just mentioned?" "What is the name and location of that club you referenced?" "About what year(s) did this happen?" or even "Why was this important?"

- Simple follow-up questions will lead to gems of information. "How did you get to that place?" "What was that neighborhood like?" "What kind of clientele did it attract?" "Where else did people go?" Try not to interrupt the person, but get them to talk; the role of the interviewer is to help the story be told in a clear, linear fashion—not to take over the narrative.
- At the end of the recording, it is helpful to repeat the names of the narrator and interviewer, the date and place, and that the recording is part of the Rainbow History Project. It is great to say "The End" so that researchers will know it is the end of the recording, and not just an abrupt loss of information!

Concluding the Interview Session

- At the end of the session, ask for recommendations of other people we should get oral histories from. Does the narrator know other people at the same or similar events or groups? If so, help them fill out the "Recommend a Narrator" form on the "How to Contribute" section of our website. (This should only take a second.)
- Is the narrator interested in donating any paperwork or documents to RHP for the archival collections? If so, help them fill out the "Donate to Our Archives" form on the "How to Contribute" section of our website. (This should only take a second.)
- Let the narrator know what the next steps of the process look like, and what kind of follow-up to expect from the interviewer and RHP. It is a good idea to harness some enthusiasm and set some reasonable expectations.

After the Interview

Communications With Narrator

1. Send a thank you email to the narrator for sharing her story with you and future generations. Attach a sound file of the interview.

Creating a Transcript (Optional)

1. Can you provide a transcription of the interview for researchers? Oftentimes these are very helpful for researchers (and especially media outlets); since the conversation is fresh in your mind, would you be able to type one and provide it to us?

Transferring Your Files (Sound File and Release Form)

1. Upload the sound file to your computer and verify it is functional before deleting it from your recorder. Keep the original file until RHP can confirm secure possession of it.
2. We strongly recommend that you use a Google account to transfer your file. If you don't have your own Google account, we encourage you to create one for free at <https://accounts.google.com/signup>. If you cannot access a Google account, contact us (oralhistory@rainbowhistory.org) and we will make other arrangements.
3. Go to your Google drive (<https://drive.google.com>). On the left side of the screen, click "new," and create a new folder named "<Firstname> <Lastname>, <birth year>-" (e.g. "Bonnie Morris, 1961-").
4. Enter the new folder. Click "new" and then "file upload" to upload the audio file. Right click on the file and rename it: "<Firstname> <Lastname>, <birthyear>-" (e.g. "Bonnie Morris, 1961-").
5. Scan and upload the signed release, also into your new folder. Rename it: "<Firstname> <Lastname>, <birthyear>- [release]" (e.g. "Bonnie Morris, 1961- [release]").
6. You should now have a folder containing two files: the sound file and the release. Right click on the folder name (toward the top of the page), then click "share."
7. Click "get shareable link." In the dropdown menu, choose "anyone with the link can edit."
8. Type oralhistory@rainbowhistory.org in the box under "People." Make sure that there is a check next to the "notify people via email option." Then click "share" or "send."
9. Wait until you receive an email confirming our receipt of the files. You can then feel free to delete the files from your drive.

Cataloging Your Oral History

1. After you complete your training session, you will be invited by email to create an account at Omeka, our online archiving platform.
2. Once you have your account, login at <https://rainbowhistory.omeka.net/admin/>
3. You will catalog your oral history as an "item" in our archives. To do this:
 - a. Click "items" on navigation menu (left).
 - b. Click "add an item" (top left).
 - c. On the right side of the screen, select the collection "Rainbow History Project Oral History Collection."

- d. Click "add item." The item will not yet appear publicly, but you can now periodically save your work. **Save regularly throughout the process.**
- e. To re-enter your item after saving, click on it where it appears at the top of the items list, then click "edit" on the right side of the screen.
4. Enter the "Dublin Core" metadata. This is a list of information that we can enter for all item types on our archives, including oral histories. Stay on the "Dublin Core" tab and enter the following information in the proper boxes:
 - a. **Title:** Oral History Interview with <Firstname Lastname>, <birth year>-
 - b. **Description:** <one sentence summary>
 - c. **Date** [i.e. of interview]: <day> <Month> <year>
 - d. **Rights:** The interview belongs to the Rainbow History Project. The RHP release form was used and all rights belong to RHP.
 - e. **Coverage:** <decades covered> <full summary>

For examples, see the catalog entry for Bonnie Morris at the end of this packet (pg 14). Note that you will leave many boxes empty.

5. We've finished with the generic information. Now we want to enter information specific to oral histories:
 - a. Click on "item type metadata" toward the top of the page.
 - b. For item type, select "oral history."
 - c. Enter the following information:
 - i. **Interviewer:** <Firstname Lastname>
 - ii. **Interviewee:** <Firstname Lastname>
 - iii. **Location:** <location of interview>
 - iv. **Transcription:** <if available> Yes, courtesy of <your name>. <if not available:> No.
 - v. **Original Format:** Yes, recording available (<file type> <file size>)
 - vi. **Duration:** <hours:minutes:seconds>

(The last three pieces of information should be available on your computer; view your file in its folder and try scrolling over its name. Common file types are .wav, .mp3, .mp4, .wma)
6. If you completed a transcript (optional) and have permission to post it, click the "files" tab toward the top of the page and upload your file. Do not upload the audio file.
7. It's time to go live! On the right-hand side of the screen, check "public" and save your changes!

Moving Forward

- Provide us any feedback you might have about the process.
- Let us know if you are ready to conduct another interview and we can introduce you to someone else.

Sample Interview Questions Worksheet

Some narrators won't need any guidance in telling their story, but some will appreciate if you lead them. Do some basic online research for information about the narrator and any related issues or groups. To help with collecting content across all oral histories, RHP provides the following questions for consideration and inclusion.

Remember, start and end each interview by stating:

- full name of the narrator giving the oral history
- narrator's birth date
- the date and the place
 - Use location names that will make sense for someone not familiar with D.C. Example: "Bethesda, Maryland," not just "Bethesda."
- the name of the interviewer
- that it is being recorded for Rainbow History Project.

Then begin with a few questions like:

- When and where were you born?
- How long have you lived in the Washington, D.C., area?
- Were you born into any particular ethnic, national, racial or religious groups?
- What is your sexual orientation and gender identity?

After that, consider some or all of these. Often it is best to just let the narrator proceed with a story and ask questions that arise from your listening:

- What brought you to D.C.? A job? A relationship?
- When/where did you feel comfortable identifying yourself [by your sexual orientation]?
- Are you out at work? Are you out to your family?
- How did you first enter the LGBT community in D.C.? Which social organizations or friends were influential in your entering the community?
- Have you ever worked in an establishment that served residents of a gay neighborhood (pharmacy, hair salon, restaurant, political organization, etc.)?
- Have you been involved with movements related to politics, social change or activism?
- Do you volunteer or have you ever volunteered for an LGBT organization? Which? When? Why?
- Do you currently belong, or have you ever belonged, to any local or civic groups, religious, political or cultural groups (book clubs, bowling leagues)? Local or extralocal?
- What community spaces did/do you frequent? (Spaces include restaurants, bookstores, bars, clubs, places of worship, businesses or neighborhoods, etc.)
- Do you consider yourself part of a community such as the academic, drag, sports, arts, medical, activist, or political community?

- How has the LGBT community in D.C. changed since you arrived? How has it stayed the same?

At the end of the interview, consider asking:

- Do you have a particular message to share with today's youth? Or with future generations of listeners?
- Is there anything I didn't ask you that you wish I had?

Tips For Oral History Forms

Oral histories are people's life stories, and life stories are deeply important parts of everyone's identity. Beyond establishing rights to use the oral history, the release establishes trust between the person giving her or his oral history and RHP. The volunteer and the narrator need to understand the form and what it means. **RHP can't use the oral history without the signed release, so this is an essential step.**

Take the necessary time to discuss and complete the form. Some narrators will want to linger over reading and signing the release, and that is okay. Many of the people giving oral histories grew up in eras when the LGBTQ community was not treated with respect; be prepared, reassuring and patient.

RHP and Researcher Use of Interviews

- All interviews are described in our online catalog for people to see what kind of materials we have collected. See the example catalog record for Bonnie Morris's interview in the appendix and online: <https://rainbowhistory.omeka.net/items/show/4939292>
- The actual interviews or transcripts may be also be posted online (RHP website) and made available over the Internet. Narrators may request that we refrain from public online posting (see Section II of the Oral History Narrators Permissions Form).
- In most instances, a researcher discovers RHP as a resource and requests assistance and permission in using materials, sometimes about a specific oral history listed on the site, or for information on a particular topic (event, publication, person).
- The RHP member that receives the request can send materials, identify other resources, provide a copy of the interview, and assures that any usage restrictions (see below) are met.

Oral History Volunteer Agreement Form (pg 13)

We ask that all volunteers who interview on behalf of RHP, or help us to transcribe or summarize existing interviews, complete an agreement form prior to conducting their first project; it is not necessary to do so with each interview.

This agreement clarifies that RHP holds copyrights to the interview materials (as set forth by our agreements with the narrators) and demonstrates that our trained volunteers have been authorized to collect recordings on our behalf.

Section I of the Oral History Narrators Permissions Form (pg 11)

RHP is a not-for-profit organization with a cultural and educational mission, incorporated in the District of Columbia. In order to further that mission, we collect materials in order to share them with researchers, doctoral students and members of the community interested in learning more about Washington's LGBTQ history and culture. Having the rights to share materials we have allows us to dedicate our

time to expanding the collection and helping researchers one-on-one, rather than constantly negotiating permissions for interviews we've agreed to preserve.

We take our custodial responsibilities seriously and agree to include a narrator's story in our archival collections. That we have this material, however, does not in any way prohibit a narrator's ability to tell the story in any other way! Some of our previous narrators have gone on to give speeches, write memoirs, or even participate in public panels. By no means does recording an oral history end the person's process! Rather, we hope it will help to ignite in the narrator some passion to get more involved in telling the story to more people.

Section II of the Oral History Narrators Permissions Form (pg 12)

Both the narrator and RHP are interested in preserving the story for its historical value and to teach future generations about our history. Therefore, most narrators do not place any restrictions on RHP's ability to use the interview in programs, share with researchers, and use them for educational purposes, since any such restrictions would affect future projects. For instance, if the interview "cannot be reproduced" no filmmaker would be able to include it in a documentary about DC.

RHP would like to receive the oral history with as few restrictions as possible; however, some narrators may want to place restrictions on the access or use of the interviews, their deeply personal history. And that is ok. If the narrator wants to restrict the use of the oral history, RHP must clearly document how the history is to be used. Some more common restrictions include:

- restrict the use of her or his surname, or identify with an initial;
- set a time period before which the content can be used;
- allow use only for educational, not-for-profit projects;
- request to be notified by individuals who want to use it.

In addition, we ask narrators to state (subsection C) whether they would like their oral history to be made publicly available online. If they give permission, we may post the interview on our website for anyone to hear/read. Otherwise, we will make the interview available by request only (though it will be described and catalogued online). Make it clear to the narrator that either option is okay; there are benefits to both models of access!

Rainbow History Project members will make every effort to understand and comply with the narrators' wishes--after all, we have the same goal of preserving our community's memories.



ORAL HISTORY NARRATOR PERMISSIONS FORM

The Rainbow History Project (RHP) is a non-profit District of Columbia corporation dedicated to the preservation and study of LGBT history in Washington, DC. The term "LGBT history" refers to the activities of persons and organizations in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans community. The term also refers to legal developments and other events which have affected that community. The Rainbow History Project is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a Section 501(c)(3) organization.

NARRATOR (Person providing the oral history). Please print name:

INTERVIEWER (Person authorized by RHP to interview the Narrator and to represent RHP in connection with this agreement.) Please print name:

I.

- A. The Narrator agrees to an oral history interview. The Narrator agrees to give RHP all of the rights, title, and other interests (including copyrights) that the Narrator has in the audio, video, and other recordings that are made of this interview, including all transcripts and summaries of the interview.
- B. RHP agrees that RHP will use and preserve these materials for scholarly and research purposes, as well as for other purposes that are consistent with RHP's educational mission.
- C. The Narrator has the right to receive copies of the recordings, transcripts, and summaries of this interview and to use them in any manner that the Narrator sees fit.
- D. The Narrator continues to have the right to recount and publish the Narrator's biography and LGBT history to others. RHP's rights extend only to

the items relating to this specific interview, as set out in paragraph (A), above.

II.

A. The Narrator is aware that RHP intends to identify the Narrator by name. The Narrator may ask RHP to withhold his/her name and to use a pseudonym for a specified period of time. If you have a preference in this regard, please print it clearly in the space below. (Otherwise, print N/A.)

B. The Narrator may ask RHP not to make the interview public for a specified period time. If you have a preference in this regard, please print it clearly in the space below. (Otherwise, print N/A.)

C. Please indicate your preference regarding online publication:
___ I give permission for my interview to be made publicly available online, subject to the restrictions stated above.
___ I DO NOT give permission for my interview to be made publicly available online. I understand that my interview will still be available for website visitors upon request, subject to the restrictions stated above.

D. RHP will use its best good-faith efforts to comply with any written instructions which the Narrator has set out on the lines above. In the unlikely event that RHP, despite its best efforts, is unable to comply with the instructions, the Narrator agrees that no legal action will be taken against RHP, its directors, its officers, and its agents.

~~~~~

The Narrator and RHP agree to all of the terms set forth above.

Narrator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

RHP By Interviewer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



*Preserving Our Community's Memory*

## **ORAL HISTORY VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT FORM**

Agreement between the Rainbow History Project, Inc., and the Volunteer named below relating to the production of oral history recordings and documents.

1. The Rainbow History Project (RHP) is a non-profit District of Columbia corporation dedicated to the preservation and study of LGBT history in the Washington, DC area.
2. The Rainbow History Project (RHP) authorizes the Interviewer named below to conduct and transcribe oral histories on behalf of and as the agent RHP. The oral histories shall be taken of those individuals who are designated by RHP.
3. The copyrights (and all rights, title, and interest) pertaining to the interviews and to all recordings, transcripts, and summaries of the interviews shall be the exclusive property of RHP, and the Interviewer shall have no rights, title, or interest with respect thereto. The Interviewer shall have the right to access and use these materials only to the extent expressly permitted by RHP.
4. The Interviewer shall keep all of these materials confidential and shall not make them available to or disclose their contents to a third party unless otherwise directed by RHP. Any authorized use of the materials must name the Rainbow History Project as the source and the copyright holder.

The **Interviewer** and the **Rainbow History Project** agree to all of the terms set forth above on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_:

The name of the **INTERVIEWER** printed: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

The **RAINBOW HISTORY PROJECT**

Name of Officer or Director printed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Officer or Director: \_\_\_\_\_

*[Form 2014-0709]*

## Sample Catalog Entry

*This is a sample catalog entry for an oral history, available online at <https://rainbowhistory.omeka.net/items/show/4939292>. We encourage you to consult this and other catalog entries (<https://rainbowhistory.omeka.net/collections/show/31>) as you create your own.*

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH BONNIE MORRIS, 1961-

### Title

Oral History Interview with Bonnie Morris, 1961-

### Description

AU student Rebecca Day interviews Dr. Bonnie Morris, a long-time resident of Washington, D.C. who identifies as a lesbian woman and works as a professor and writer.

### Date

06 April 2015

### Rights

The interview belongs to the Rainbow History Project. The RHP release form was used and all rights belong to RHP.

### Coverage

1960s-present

Dr. Bonnie Morris is interviewed by Rebecca Day. Dr. Morris describes her childhood and family life, her education, her family's geographical history, and her coming out experience, describing both her intellectual and sexual awakening. She speaks about various LGBTQ spaces in Washington, D.C. - bookstores, women's groups, concerts and festivals, bars and clubs, et cetera. She discusses feminism, women's culture of the sixties, seventies, eighties, and nineties, the era of the woman-identified woman, and several landmark events in women's, LGBTQ, and civil rights history. There are various accounts of her education and her career - including work as a professor, writer, speaker, performer, and working with institutions including Michigan Women's Music Festival, Olivia Cruises, and Semester at Sea. Dr. Morris speaks to various movers and shakers in the gay rights movement, and landmark media and publications. She additionally describes her personal life, including several girlfriends and lovers. Dr. Morris speaks to themes of intersectionality, racism and homophobia, progressive politics and the effects of technological advancements, and the erasure of her generation's era in the modern LGBTQ dialogue.

## Interviewer

Rebecca Day

## Interviewee

Dr. Bonnie Morris

## Location

George Washington University

## Transcription

Yes, courtesy of Rebecca Day

## Original Format

Yes, recording available (.wav, 1.38 GB)

## Duration

2:08:53

## Files



## Collection

[Rainbow History Project Oral History Collection](#)