

Interview length: 53:01
Took place: November 13, 2020
Transcribed by: Andrew Grissom
Interviewer: Ilana "Lane" Goldszer
Interviewee: Dee Michel

Lane: Hello

Dee: Hi.

Lane: Can you hear me?

Dee: Yep!

Lane: Great.

Dee: Can you hear me?

Lane: Yep, you sound good.

Dee: Okay.

Lane: Alright. So, I'm gonna go ahead and read the introductory statement and then we can start with the questions.

Dee: Okay.

Lane: So, my name is Lane Goldszer, and I use they/them pronouns. This interview is taking place on November 13, 2020. I'm one of the American Library Association's Rainbow Round Table Archive Project Ad hoc Committee members, assisting in the development of the Rainbow Round Table's oral history initiative. My group is working on a project with the Rainbow Round Table of the American Library Association to help celebrate the Round Table's 50th anniversary. This work began in 2017 with a group of Emerging Leaders who started to gather Rainbow Round Table historical ephemera and created an archive which will be shared through the ALA RRT webpage when it's complete. This year, we are speaking with individuals who have been involved with the organization now known as the Rainbow Round Table past as well as present and collecting their stories to create a digital archive of oral histories. We will also establish a toolkit so people can continue to contribute oral histories on an ongoing basis. And I would like to note here that when it was founded in 1970, the Rainbow Round Table was called the Task Force on Gay Liberation. The name was changed multiple times over the past 50 years, most recently in 2018, from Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table to Rainbow Round Table. So, we will switch throughout the interview between the former names and the current name. Thank you for sharing your story with us and the ALA community. So, to start, I'd like to ask you your name and which pronouns you would like to use.

Dee: My name is Dee Michel. D-E-E M-I-C-H-E-L. I spell them because they are both sort of unusual, and I get all sorts of versions, misspellings. And I use he/him/his pronouns.

Lane: And can you tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're from, what you do, and/or what you used to do?

Dee: I grew up in New York City, Manhattan. It's that little island in the Hudson next to New Jersey, the one that has all the big buildings. And I was born in 1952. I had lots of different jobs before I had a real career. And after college, I had some jobs where I did set construction, building sets for plays in the theater. And then I got some jobs doing psychology research. And then I worked as a paraprofessional at the libraries at MIT. And it was after that, that I went off to library school. I was a professional librarian for a while. I got my PhD and I was teaching cataloging and organization of information type courses at the University of Wisconsin until 1998. And that was my last real job. I've been retired since then.

Lane: So when you join the task force in 1984, it was called the Gay Task Force. And then the name was changed to Lesbian and Gay Task Force in 1987. How long were you affiliated with the Task Force and what is or was your role in the group?

Dee: Well, it's a long and very complicated story and I'd like to spend the whole time we have explaining that. Let's see. Ah, okay. So when I was at MIT, in the libraries, there was a display for Pride Week, or Month—Pride Month—in Boston back in the early 80s. And one of the books I saw was called *The Gay Academic*, edited by Louie Crew and somebody else. And I picked it up and browsing through it, there was a chapter by Barbara Gittings about what was then called the Gay Task Force. And it just sounded really exciting, the work that she had done and others and I think that was before I was planning to go to library school, but, but... So then I started library school in Champaign Urbana in 1983. It was a one-year, twelve-month program. And I was a big activist, gay activist at that point. I worked as a volunteer for the Gay Community News (GCN). I had done indexing for them and also had a project where I was trying to get GCN on microfilm into libraries. And I had all that stuff on my resume, and I figured if the library school didn't want to deal with it that was their problem, I was a hot prospect with good GREs and they'd be stupid to reject me. But it was, it was a conscious thing to be out at that point, it was much rarer back in 1983-84, to have gay stuff on your resume, but it was totally relevant to my application, so I put that stuff there. And then, I was a gay activist within librarianship. In library school that year, we took one course in information retrieval and we had to create a thesaurus, which was not *Roget's Thesaurus*, but it was a list of controlled vocabulary terms. Most of the library people will know this, but I'm not sure who's going to be listening and watching this. So it's a list of terms to use for subject cataloging, for indexing. And there are links between the terms so that you can see the relationships between broader and narrower terms, and synonyms and so on. And so, a thesaurus is a tool that librarians and information retrieval experts use to help, in theory, make it easier for you to find the information that you're looking for in an online or print database. So I picked gay studies as my topic. So I figured that if I was going to do this huge term project for the course, I might as well have it be useful. And after I finished it, I did market it and got in touch with a lot of gay and lesbian community archives and libraries. And a lot of people were very interested in it. So this was in the spring of 84.

The first ALA that I went to was January, Midwinter of 84, in DC. And I was really excited looking forward to meeting Barbara Gittings. And I think I might have even gotten in touch with her by phone before getting there. I'm not sure. But I should really back up. I'm going to be saying some negative things about Barbara Gittings, and I want to put them in context. I acknowledge and totally celebrate that she was a really, really important person in our history. She was one of the founding foremothers of the modern lesbian and gay movement. And she was out in the 60s, picketing the White House and an annual picket she also did in Philadelphia, around Fourth of July, and she was on TV, and she was incredibly brave. And so I don't want anything I say to take away from that. But I, what I'm going to be doing is painting a broader picture. There are a

lot of things at the time I met her in 84, where she, she was difficult to deal with and very rigid. So, but I just want to say that I really respect the things that she did earlier in her career. And I'm not trying to trash her by any means. I just want to explain this whole time period when I had this huge, two-year struggle with her to make the Gay Task Force more democratic. That's what my tale is really about. And I'm really happy that the Round Table at this point is doing the oral histories. I had been in touch with them over the last few years, about the oral histories and other stuff and there were a lot of communication problems. And the proposal for a conference program we had to do, looking back at our history, got nixed. It was not approved and then COVID happened, so we didn't even have an in-person celebration. So anyway, I should have said that at the very beginning. Okay, so here I am, Midwinter. Actually, I've got some notes, let's see, before Midwinter... Okay, I called her, I guess, when I got to DC and asked if there's anything I can do to help for the Midwinter Task Force meeting and she said no. So then when I got there, I really wanted, I was so excited, I was this big, gay library activist and I really wanted to do something. And Barbara said, there's nothing I could do. And finally, I was really sort of nagging and she said, okay, you can help me set up the chairs for the meeting. And it was a very short business meeting. I don't know if that, at that point ALA had officially said that you couldn't have programs, but soon, in a year or two, I know there was this thing, there was this rule that you couldn't have programs in Midwinter, but Barbara always had programs anyway. So this was both a program with a quick, really quick business meeting. And it was just exciting to meet other gay and lesbian librarians and chat with them informally. But there really wasn't any time to do that officially. There wasn't really any social time or anything built into this, the program. So at the end of the meeting, I invited myself to the dinner that Barbara had with the other panelists, because I just wanted to meet other people. And so that was a little weird. I mean, I was very pushy and I think I annoyed her there by, by sort of intruding on what was going to be her and the panelists. But I just wanted to talk to them and everyone else dispersed at the end of the meeting, and I just hung around there. And so I managed to make that happen.

So, it was hard to figure out how, what my role would be because Barbara basically did everything. She planned the programs, she ran the meetings, and she was the head of it, year after year, without any elections or anything. It was, I don't really know what it was like at the very beginning. She wasn't the first coordinator. It was Israel Fishman and someone else. And she, in the second or third year, she became the coordinator. And I think she just was it. She was known as the Task Force. It was her identity, she did a lot of great stuff. The other thing about Barbara is that she wasn't a professional librarian. In fact, she had never even worked in a library. She was just a gay books activist. She really wanted to get gay books into the library, passionately, because she knew how important it was. It was a lifeline for many kids and adults, the first way to find out about homosexuality is often in the stacks. And so that was her big crusade. And gay visibility was also part of that. And she didn't use the word 'lesbian.' I remember asking her about that once. And she said she identified as a gay woman, she didn't see the need for these organizations adding "lesbian" to their name. So it was frustrating because I came out of a collective experience. I was in the 70s in Cambridge and GCN was a collective that, even though I was just a volunteer, I went to the collective meetings and got to vote about stuff. And I was in a bunch of other collectives and groups. We talked about our feelings and talked about group process. And for Barbara, talking about group process was very negative, "navel gazing" was the negative term for it. But it was, it was what I was used to, what I expected from radical groups. And when Barbara ran this whole thing single-handedly, it was very frustrating for me. And, you know, I had this thesaurus that I wanted to talk about so it wasn't just about meeting other people and schmoozing. Which is a good reason itself. I mean, part of why people go to ALA: just to talk and chat and network. And the fact that we were a minority within the profession, GLBT, was another reason that socializing was important. Coming from sort of the consciousness raising era, just talking to other people and sharing our

personal experiences would have been very important, but there was no vehicle for that in the Task Force the way it was run by Barbara.

So over the next year or two, I slowly got in touch with various people. There wasn't really a membership of the Task Force per se, people just showed up at the meetings, which were really programs, both the Annual and the Midwinter. And Barbara had a mailing list to let people know about that stuff but she also plastered the town and the conference with flyers about the programs. So it was really wider than just ALA members who came to the programs. So for the next few years, I tried to get in touch with people, I talked to people who gave me the names of other people who would come to Task Force meetings and then dropped out because they were frustrated. Women more than men, I actually talked to them. Another thing about the beginning is that the Book Award Committee, which was sort of the most high-profile part of the Task Force, was people that Barbara just picked because she knew them and liked them. They were friends with her. They weren't—many of them, if not most, if not all of them weren't ALA members. And I talked to some of them. They were friends with her, from Philadelphia and elsewhere. And there were other things about ALA rules that she didn't really follow. I discovered that she passed the hat, which was a big “no-no.” You're supposed to get your budget from ALA. We paid our membership dues and it went down to the various units. And we were, the Gay Task Force was, part of the Social Responsibilities Round Table. And there was a whole way it was supposed to happen to submit your budget to SRRT, or “sert” it was called. And there was a SRRT Coordinating Council that sort of governed their various task forces. We had the Feminist—Feminist Task Force was there and a bunch of other ones. So Barbara passed the hat and sort of had her own money for copying and photocopying or whatever needs she had and didn't go through the regular channels. And there were other things too. And again, I'm not saying this to trash her because I'm angry at her, which I was at times, but I'm just trying to set the context. And I have very mixed feelings about criticizing her because she was an important person and also pulling out the fact that she didn't have a Master's in library science and hadn't worked in a library. It was a double-edged sword. I felt guilty about it because my politics was that it shouldn't matter. On the other hand, people went to ALA because they had professional concerns. And the programs Barbara put on often weren't really directly about librarianship. One later one in Chicago was about gay images and art that a friend of Barbara's, Marie Kuda, put on, and it was in a big auditorium, and lots of people came, who weren't part of the conference, and that was sort of a great way to make a bigger, make the Task Force more visible, but it didn't really deal with library issues.

And over the next few years, I also wrote up sort of a manifesto about all these gay issues that we could talk about, we could support librarians in censorship cases within their libraries, we could look at the cataloging and classification tools for homophobia, the Dewey Decimal System and the Library of Congress Classification, as well as the Library of Congress Subject Headings and Sears Subject Headings. Back then, there were a lot of problems with them and this seemed like a perfect thing for the Task Force to work on. I was also active in the Subject Analysis Committee within ALA, which was doing the same sort of thing at a more general level, but the fact that we were experts on gay oppression and knew the language, it seemed like such an obvious thing to do. There were also reference issues too about how do you best provide reference to people who might be closeted or not. And the public service people might or might not be comfortable with an out LGBTQ or queer person. And so, in a whole other issue could be like sensitizing the profession to be doing better jobs at reference and sensitizing them to good reference sources for gay issues, whether the person doing research was gay or not. So there's a whole world out there that I was, wanted the Task Force to deal with, and it was just not Barbara's thing. So in addition to making it participatory, now the big goal is to try to get it to focus more on gay librarianship. So then we got to Annual in Dallas, and Barbara wasn't there.

And I called her beforehand. And I just discovered then that ALA annual was the last weekend in June, which is often where Pride marches are, not always—some cities, you know, negotiate to make it two weeks before so that they don't overlap with nearby, like Boston and New York, and so on, and San Francisco and LA. So, but the Pride march was in Dallas that year. I thought, oh, this would be so cool. We should be marching. Barbara's big into gay visibility. She did not understand why I brought that up on the phone. She just thought, she just, it was like we were talking two different languages. Her attitude was "Like why would we want to do that?" And I was just shocked. Because in addition to being part of gay visibility in the Pride, we would let people know that they were gay librarians, (I'm using gay instead of the blanket term, queer, whatever). And also, it would be a way for us to get to know each other better if we were hanging out in a social situation, which wasn't part of any of Barbara's agenda. So she just didn't understand why we would want to do that. And I wasn't that articulate about why I wanted to do it (have members of the Task Force march in the Pride Parade in Dallas) at that point. It was looking back that I had all these analytical reasons for it. But she also couldn't make it to the conference. So she sent in, sent somebody who was a friend of hers to run the Task Force meeting then. Which was even more frustrating.

So then, let's see, then the next thing that happened was like to amass these names, and I wrote to people on, this was way before the Internet, and I sent postcards and tried to get phone numbers and call people on the phone. And let's see. Then, yeah, as I say, I started to find out about all this stuff, like the fact that her friends were on the Book Award Committee, like talking to all these other people. And Barbara and I corresponded quite a lot. We talked on the phone, and also got lots of letters. And I have a lot of this correspondence, which I might give to the gay archives or to the Round Table, I don't know, I've got a lot of duplicates of stuff that I can certainly give you. I'm not sure what I'm gonna do. I'm also planning on writing all this up, but that was what I was doing this Spring. So I've got it, we'll have a printed version of this with documents and things. Here's just sort of one example. After I wrote back and forth with Barbara, this is from Linda Pierce, who was on SRRT Action Council. She said, "Barbara's letter was defensive and almost hostile. I thought you answered it very well. It is apparent that the issues you've raised will not resolve themselves without a major confrontation." So the issues were participation and making it more democratic and also focusing on gay library issues. "I thought she was extremely condescending when she was talking about her relationship with conference arrangements and I disagree with this strongly about the importance of..." The logistics that Barbara did. She waited until the last minute. It was timing of, there were problems with the timing of when information went out about when the meetings were going to happen. I wanted her to make, commit to time sooner so that we could publicize our meetings to other people. And it was... anyway, there were a lot of problems about that. She also really didn't want to talk about her feelings. Whenever I talked about being frustrated and stuff that was just like, didn't compute.

So, but, for, a year later in June of 85, she let me put on a program. And because I've been badgering her, and it wasn't really a program, it was really a business meeting the size of a program. But I called it something like, "What Can You Do for the Task Force, and What Can the Task Force Do for You?" And she agreed to let me do it. And what I did was, the people that came, there was dozens and dozens of people. This was in Chicago in June of '85. And we got around in a big circle. And everybody introduced themselves and said what they wanted from the Task Force, what kinds of issues that they had. And I was keeping track of the themes like on a blackboard or newsprint or something. And certain themes that developed, emerged, one of them was governance. So we then we broke out into theme groups based on what came up. So I sort of assigned, picked, came up with the themes and we had rooms and stuff where different people went. So one of them was sort of governance and that became the Bylaws

Committee. Another one was sort of social aspects of the Task Force and I think that became for a while the Social Committee. There were a bunch of different themes. And so I think it was called a forum or something. That was we called it, this sort of cross between a business meeting and a program. And I went to the Bylaws Committee meeting as much as I could, but I was also running around overseeing everybody and telling them, the small groups, when they had to come back to report to the big group. So that's the standard model of small group workshops. And when people came back and reported all these amazing ideas for political activism, and things to do, and restructuring, and this and that. And a couple of committees met, or kept in touch with each other in the course of that year. And the Bylaws Committee came up with a proposal to have—oh, sorry, it was called the Structure Committee, the Structure Committee. And so they looked at the structure of the Task Force, and they had this recommendation of having elected officers and bylaws. Those were the two main things. And then there was a subcommittee, the Bylaws Subcommittee that actually came up with bylaws.

So, do we have to keep to an hour and we're halfway through? All right, okay. Well, you don't want it super long. I'll try to speed up.

So, so by December of 85, or 85, the Bylaws Committee held elections. And oh, one other thing that happened in the annual conference of '85 was that we marched in the Pride Parade for the first time. This was my idea, it was a big push. And we had a meeting listed in the conference calendar, it was in New York then. My mother lived in New York. I was living in Princeton, NJ. Yeah, so I came in for it. And I thought we could have a social that would be a banner, it was a banner painting party. So we created the first banner for the Task Force. And we had, I had different ideas for the logo. And we voted on, we agreed on a logo that was sort of two, there was that symbol of the ALA international symbol of a library, that's a person with the book, and so we came up with this logo of two of those two of those icons holding hands and put that in the middle of, we sort of made two looking like guys and two looking like women, somehow by hair length or dresses or something, and painted this great banner, which was used for many, many years until it fell apart and a more professional one was created. But people that I met at the banner painting party and then marched with—Barbara didn't attend either of those things, I don't think. She might have come to the Pride Parade March. I'm not sure. I shouldn't say that she didn't. And she might have shown up briefly at the banner painting thing just to say hi. And she did like Pride and marched in Pride and I ran into her in other Pride parades. Anyway, the people that I met at those two events became lifelong friends: Cal Gough, Paul Weiss. Weiss especially, we bonded.

And the other thing, there was the anniversary of the Statue of Liberty then, a hundredth anniversary of something. And the, it was called then I think, the New Members Round Table, no, the Junior Members Round Table, which later became New Members. Junior Members, talk about a condescending term! But they had a huge social at a really cool event in the East Village and somebody was dressed up as the Statue of Liberty with stilts and a huge thing. And the Task Force members were all dancing in a circle together. And people joined in and we were sort of like the spark that changed the atmosphere of the whole dance. And it was just amazing, because we were all so tight. And the dance was just this amazing event that we all had. And then plus the Pride Parade. So a lot of people were bonding through the Task Force for the first time, as far as I know. It's not the sort of, people chatting with each other during the programs. So it wasn't like it was a total awful thing beforehand. But it was just, this was a more thoughtful, unstructured way to have social time. And soon after that, we started having regular socials listed in the conference calendar.

Okay, so we had the election, and Barbara didn't want to run to be an officer. She just sort of never put her name in for co-chair. And I didn't want to be an officer. It wasn't my point. I wasn't like trying to have a coup or to take over. I just wanted it to be more democratic. But nobody, I mean, male and female co-chairs was part of the bylaws for the elections. And nobody put their name in to run for male co-chair. And everybody said, "well, Dee, you're the one that's doing all this work, you should be the male co-chair." And I said, "well, if nobody else is, I'll do it." It's not really, wasn't my idea. And it was by '86, I was going to be in LA and a starving student in the PhD program in library science at UCLA and it would have been hard to get to conferences and so on. But I put my name in and no one else did and I ended up getting elected as male co-chair. And Ellen Greenblatt, who was a colleague of mine at Princeton at the time, and I was sort of her out gay role model, she got to be a lesbian activist sort of quickly. And she ended up being the female co-chair. So we knew each other very well, at that point. The idea was to have staggered terms so that everybody's two years and you'd, we were elected at the beginning but then it was like this so that you could have an old and a new person. Then when they started having trans people and the rhythm got disrupted at some point. It got more complicated and at one point, anyway. That's not my thing. I mean, it was after my era. So, we had elections and the Structure Committee, bylaws committee people, Karina Ricker, was the chair of it and she informed me that I was elected. And so I took office, Ellen and I took office, Midwinter '86 in Chicago. Is that right? I think so, I've got to look back at some of these dates, because...no, no, we took office in '87. The election was in the winter of '86. Yeah, it took us, the Structure Committee met for a year from '85 to '86. Right. So, it was, and annual '86 was in New York. Right. That was when I was talking about with the...right, Annual '85 was the forum in Chicago; annual at '86 was in New York, where we marched and the Structure Committee met again and worked on the bylaws. That's right. And then by the Fall of '86, we had the election, and January '87 Midwinter was when Ellen and I took office, and the bylaws actually took a lot longer to be created after that. So, one of the things that bylaws, I think, also recommended was changing the name to Lesbian and Gay. So that's when that happened. And I then became a PhD student at UCLA. And I couldn't, I went to the first or second ALA meetings that I could but then I didn't have the money to travel and there were some communication problems between me and Ellen [Greenblatt, my co-chair] about that.

And so that's the main part of my history in terms of the transition. And once more, to make it clear, Barbara didn't run for office. She didn't stand for office, she also stopped attending the Task Force meetings. She just dropped out. Which again, wasn't my intention, it was just—I would run into her at other gay events and she was friendly and cordial. More than I was, in fact, you know, I still had a lot of bitterness and anger about this two-year struggle. I mean, I haven't really, I just quoted you one little letter. But we had long letters back and forth, where I was trying to persuade her to do things in a way that were not, that were contrary to her nature. She would never answer in that level, she wouldn't say, this is not my style. She just, anyway, she just sort of did her own thing and accommodated me when she could and then just sort of dropped out.

Lane: And that was the—so, how long was your period where you were the co-chair? Was that one year? How long were the terms?

Dee: My office was supposed to be for two years, but I think I'd stopped after a year and a half, or a year because I couldn't go to the conferences, and it didn't seem fair. But I was doing a lot of, remember, I have a lot of documentation where I was still corresponding with the other officers of the Steering Committee and doing a huge amount of organizing—again, pre-Internet—with the various officers. I'm not sure exactly when I officially stopped or stepped down.

Lane: And would you say, how would you say that your experience with the Task Force and your role there? Did you continue to be involved after? Would you say that had an impact on your professional career afterwards? Or?

Dee: Yeah, well, let's see. I was in the Ph.D. program, and I went to ALA when I could if it was nearby. And then I had funding to go when I was a professor from '92 to '98. And so I ended up being more involved with this Subject Analysis Committee and less with the Task Force. Through ALA, I would go to the socials and I went to some of the committee meetings after I was no longer the chair. For a while we tried to have a committee about the thesaurus. It didn't really work. In terms of how it affected my professional life. Well...

Lane: Did you ever get pushback professionally for involvement? Did you experience any kind of—

Dee: Yeah.

Lane: Yeah?

Dee: No, no, I didn't. At Princeton, when I was a cataloger there from '84 to '86, they were very good. I mean, it was, you know, being an officer counted as a professional thing and so that gave me a little more funding. The fact that it was a gay thing didn't seem to be held against me, as far as I know. And I, they let me come in after hours to work on a project I was doing, a chapter for Ellen, actually, about gay aspects of cataloguing. I came in and used the resources after hours, which was nice.

Lane: And so, and you are also coming into your work with the Task Force already being involved in activism, and that can be, different communities around that. Did you, how did you see like the impact of AIDS and AIDS activism on the Task Force? And was there overlap there? Were there people trying to push the Task Force to focus on that? Or was that already a focus or what?

Dee: AIDS...I mean, AIDS sort of just began '83-'84. So, in that period, from '84 to '86, it wasn't really a big focus. I think there were some programs a little bit later, and quite a few books about AIDS got the Book Award. Cindy Patton's book, I think called *Sex and Germs*, I remember she got the Award one year. You know, I don't remember AIDS, in my era, really affecting it that much. It's funny. I've noticed that in my life, I often was in denial about AIDS in a bunch of different ways. I mean, I used to think that I didn't know that many people who died. When I stopped and made a list, it was dozens and dozens and dozens, like 100 people even. But I sort of kept it at bay, even though I was an ACT UP and I helped found the ACT UP in LA after the '87 March on Washington. But yeah, sort of it was, we kept it at bay somehow. So there might have been more concern about it within the Task Force that I just forgot about or didn't remember, blocked out.

Lane: Do you see that—have you seen a change in the way that the profession of librarianship has changed over time and with regard to LGBT people? Did you notice within your, you know, professional life? Like a shift?

Dee: Well, when it was happening, no, but there were people like Sandy Berman. Sanford Berman was the head cataloger at Hennepin County. He was straight, but an incredible ally. He was doing more work on homophobia in the library profession than anyone else. I was in touch

with him a lot. And he was always hammering away at the Library of Congress and sending them letters, to get them to change subject headings, not just gay stuff, you know, all sorts of things. One of his things was to get the nomenclature to match the way people describe themselves. So, for example, Inuit is the proper term, that they call themselves, "Eskimo," is not a word that the Inuit use. The same for gypsies. And that turns out, we use that growing up, but it was really a derogatory term. And the Romani is the term that is preferred by the Romani. So Sandy was doing a lot of stuff with that. There were other really good straight allies. And I think there has been a shift in the generations. There were lesbians who were the head of ALA who weren't out and then they were more out. I was, they were never out as much as I wanted them to be. But we librarians in general, were sort of discreet. A little bit of that bun-wearing stereotype that...now there's the other counter stereotype of the inked, punky librarian who's like totally in your face about everything.

But I think what was frustrating is that the gay librarians that I met, the queer librarians that I met, were not gay activists. They didn't really, they came, over the years after I was an officer, it was much more about social. That's where a lot of people came together over the programs. But I really was pushing for all these political projects, and I wrote up various letters and bulletins, and tried to get articles in the newsletter, when we had a regular newsletter, about these other projects, like censorship and catalogs, and so on, and people didn't really pick up on it. And it was, it's been frustrating to me over the years, and even now, the Round Table, it doesn't really, that's not its function. It doesn't see itself as a political thing, the way the other units within the Social Responsibilities Round Table. The feminism, the Feminist Task Force, was working on feminist issues. And it was originally called the Task Force on Gay Liberation and at the beginning it was about gay visibility with the kissing booth, and the gay bibliography that Barbara was masterful at distributing. But most of the people in the group come to socialize, which is great. I mean, I think I was pushing Barbara for us to have social events as part of the suite of things that we did. But it's always been frustrating to me that the gay librarians for the most part have not been gay activists. There've been some, some, and often they would be at Council along with other ALA activists. But it's just always been a very, very small group of people that were interested in the intersection of LGBT activism and librarianship. The way I was. Trying to get GCN on microfilm into libraries. And there's one friend of mine now works on in some big, gay research database that she's trying to publicize.

Lane: Was it Gale, or no? Like the Archives on Sexuality and Gender? Or?

Dee: More specific than that. Can't remember. And one of the things that we, I tried to do was try to get the Task Force to coordinate with other similar groups, like the Society of American Archivists had a gay round table or something. And it was the Canadian Library Association and some gay unit within that. And I was, you know, trying to get us to be in touch with them. That was something that nobody else was ever interested in. I couldn't do all these projects myself, I was just getting them out there. So, yeah I don't, that aspect of it I don't think has changed. You know, people are into having a big dance for the celebration, the history for the Round Table, rather than looking back at the history and learning from it.

Lane: Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you would like to talk about more, or talk about at all?

Dee: Should've had more of an agenda. Gosh, and I guess, I think that the Round Table has gotten really bureaucratic. There's so many subcommittees, and the communication...I started talking to them two years ago, in 2018, when I knew that the big centennial, or 50 year anniversary was coming up. I just got this huge runaround from people, everybody was passing

the buck or didn't know who I should talk to. I was sent to the wrong person again and again. That was incredibly frustrating. The website, I had all these suggestions for how to update it and improve it, the timeline for documenting stuff. Again, nobody was responsive except for the professional archivist at the ALA archives. She is the only person who was really responsive. There was a list of Task Force co-chairs that was, appeared in the Book Award program over the years that was wrong and had Barbara listed as the female co-chair or something. That made it look like we had always had male and female co-chairs, which is not true. And I sort of thought that was a fairly important mistake and to get people to take responsibility for that and change it. on the timeline on the website and add the fact that we had elected officers at a certain point, December of '86. That was a pretty important milestone and they had this timeline that Cal Gough had started and it was on the website and it also appeared in the program, the Book Award thing, and the various big tenth and twentieth anniversaries. And it was riddled with problems and corrections and whenever I tried point that stuff out, it was like nobody cared. And for librarians and archivist-minded people, it was particularly surprising and frustrated that they didn't wanna get, to set the record—I won't say straight—correct. Corrected, you know. And I wasn't, I don't think I was being too blamey in saying this is wrong. I was just saying this is information that can get added to it. And I would often be humorous about it and try to defuse my own annoyance.

And so, I go through waves of this and then just give up because I just found my people and I had to let go, which is not my strong point. I mean, the opposite. I'm like a bulldozer that keeps his teeth in there and doesn't let go. And that can be, you know, good and bad for your mental health. Sometimes you need to pick your battles wisely and decide which ones you're likely to win and then not fight every single battle. It's been a hard lesson of mine over the years and that applies to ALA stuff, absolutely. So I'm still hopeful that at some point, whatever becomes of the fiftieth anniversary, we'll take a look back. And I had this idea for a panel where people were representing different decades or different issues or aligning with the decades.

Oh, I know a whole other thing that I forgot. I don't have time to say... Anne, Anne Moore, has been very active in the Task Force in an era after mine. She lives sort of near me in the Pioneer Valley here in Massachusetts. And she took a year off, a sabbatical and her research project was the history of the Task Force slash Round Table. She came over to meet me and I gave her this huge box of documents and she set up a really, a contract sort of like the things I signed for you about, you know, who's got responsible for this and everything. I had all this correspondence with Barbara and flyers for the programs and the forum and all that stuff and copies of the bylaws and everything. And I talked to her for hours about this, the saga I told you. And Anne said that she would send me a copy of the article and her history that she would write and would get it when it got published. Never heard from her, never heard from her, never heard from her. Then I found out years later that she did write an article. And I tracked it down and got a copy. And all that I talked to her about was boiled down to one sentence, without mentioning my name. It just said, when the Task Force decided it wanted to have elected offices, Barbara decided to step down. That was the one sentence. And it wasn't so much that I want, was tooting my own horn and felt that my name should be there, but I felt that the struggle of the transition and the fact that it took a lot of political organizing. It didn't magically happen, was my main point. And that's what I wanted to talk through, to summarize this. It was two years of me getting in touch with people and pushing Barbara and communication and having open meetings, to make the change. And I wasn't the only one, I was just the major person involved. And people on the Structure Committee and then the Bylaws Committee did a lot of work too. But Anne just completely ignored that. And you know of course stuff has landed on the cutting room floor. You're not going to have, interview people and not everything gets into what you write. I understand that. But I think she [Anne Moore] was embarrassed about it which is why

she never told me or gave me a copy of the article. She felt a little bit guilty perhaps, I don't know, I've never talked to her about it. So I wanna publish something that's gonna give my side of the story, at some point. In the Covid shutdown in the spring and summer I was working on my version. Not my version of the history but my part of the story. But that was very, very shocking to me that so little of it got into that article about the history of the Task Force. It just seemed like disproportionate. And I think the reason why, and again this is just a theory, Barbara, Anne was a good friends with Barbara and her surviving widow, Kay. And Anne got their personal library for UMass special collections. The papers, their papers went to the New York Public Library. But other things of theirs got given to Anne when Anne transferred from circulation to special collections, I think. So that was a project really dear to her heart. And I think—again, since I haven't talked to her I don't know—but my theory is that she didn't want to publish anything negative about Barbara. Because she was friends with her and cared about her deeply and also didn't want to alienate her survivor, Kay. So, you know, being, trying to fit into her shoes, I can see why it ended up the way it did. I think that communication could've been better. She could've written me directly, which people don't do, and say "I'm sorry, I've left this stuff out because I didn't wanna paint any kind of negative stuff about Barbara." People are not that direct. They avoid conflict. They don't want to deal with another person's feelings. And I sort of came out of that Cambridge thing where I was trying to do it in a mindful way. But I, people, it's the same thing with dating sites on Internet, you know. If you say you're interested in someone and they're not interested in you. Rather than saying "I'm sorry you don't seem to be a match," they'll just ignore you, which I think is really rude. And their way, but I think it comes down to avoiding conflict. They don't want to have to have, sounds negative and feel that there's some kind of pushback and it's just easier to walk away. That's become the norm, you know, in Internet dating and hookups. And I'm one of the few people who will respond to anybody who's nice to me. I'll say thank you for your compliment or whatever and try to up the politeness quotient on Scruff or OK Cupid or Match or whatever. But I think it's related.

Lane: So, I wonder if there's anything else that you feel like it would be important to cover before we close. You know, we didn't go over every single question but I think that you did go over a big part of the history at the point that you were most involved and I think that that is what you primarily wanted to talk about. So I'm not sure there are, were there any other questions that you felt like you really wanted to answer, or?

Dee: I don't really remember but if you're looking at the script in front of you, if there's any ones you wanna ask, I'm happy to give you.

Lane: I wonder if there were people...you mentioned a couple, you said Cal. And if there were other people that you met during the course of your time with the Task Force that you continue to correspond with or that you...?

Dee: Yeah, Sherman Clarke was an art cataloger. I got to be good friends with him from the very first meeting. Didn't bond with him in deeply as...Cal and Paul and I were involved in all sorts of projects and for years we would have Thanksgiving together, the three of us. Sue Searing and Christine Jenkins, we also met very early on and I became very good friends with them. Sue put me up when I was moving to Madison looking for a place to live. And then Christine was very sweet throughout the years. The two of them have been very supportive. I met them originally through the Task Force. Roland Hanson has a very different style from mine, but he's a very sweet guy who was treasurer and then ended up being chair a couple of times. These are the main ones.

Lane: Well, I think that is that, I think we covered a lot of ground. And I'm very grateful for you for taking your time to talk about the Task Force and also I really appreciate your commitment to direct communication and accuracy, you know. And I'm gonna read our closing statement unless you have any other tidbits you wanna...

Dee: Yeah, I can't think of anything now.

Lane: Ok.

Dee: But you know, what's going to happen is, you know, later, tomorrow come up with all these great things that I could've said or should've said.

Lane: Of course, yeah, that's always how it is. But maybe there'll be a second round. Who knows? So this has been an interview with Dee Michel, done as part of the oral history project of the fiftieth anniversary of the Rainbow Round Table, formerly the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table of the American Library Association, and also formerly the Lesbian and Gay Task Force, and also the Gay Task Force of the American Library Association. This interview took place on November 13th, 2020. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us. I really appreciate it.

Dee: Oh, I just thought of something. It's not about librarianship, but it's Friday the 13th today, right?

Lane: Yeah.

Dee: Thirteenth is my lucky number. I have, my name, Dee Andy Michel, has thirteen letters in it. On my birth certificate it's Andy, not Andrew. And when I was thirteen, it was Friday the 13th and I went around and did all sorts of unlucky things. And so I often pick thirteen as a lucky number to bet or as a part of my password—oops, I'm telling you that. So it's an auspicious day, Friday the 13th, for me.

Lane: Happy lucky Friday the 13th.

Dee: Thank you. It's also been a delight working with you, Lane, and talking about good communication.

Lane: Thank you, Dee. I appreciate it. Bye!

Dee: I look forward to the transcript.

Lane: Oh yeah. We'll send it. Ok.