

Interviewee: Susan Walsh

Interviewer: Elisabeth Rondinelli

Date: October 28th, 2021

The following interview was conducted as part of the Nova Scotia LGBT Seniors' Archive's Lesbian Oral Histories Project.

ER: Ok, so we're officially recording.

SW: Great.

ER: Alright, thanks for agreeing to do this Susan. I'm excited to talk to you. I'm excited to see what this interview brings. I haven't done any of these before, so, you're one of many women being interviewed for this project.

SW: All righty.

ER: Yeah, so Susan we, I just wanted to start first of all with thanking you for the time, and just some general questions about some logistics in terms of your date of birth, how long you've lived in Nova Scotia, etcetera. So, could you tell me when, what your date of birth is?

SW: June 1955. That makes me 66 years old.

ER: Sixty-six. So, it, actually, it just cut out. Could you repeat that?

SW: June 6, 1955.

ER: 1955. Okay.

SW: That makes me 66 years old [*laughing*].

ER: Okay, great. And how long have you lived in Nova Scotia?

SW: My entire life.

ER: Great. Have you lived anywhere else?

SW: I lived in Boston as a nanny when I was 17 years old.

ER: Okay. Cool. Boston. Okay. And where have you worked in Nova Scotia?

SW: In my lifetime, I have worked more as a full-time mom than for being out in the work world like other people.

ER: Ok, full time mom. How many kids do you have?

SW: Three.

ER: Wonderful. And one of the things that the Lesbian Oral History project is interested in is connections that the interviewee's have to community organizations or any kind of activism or volunteer work that you've done. Has that been part of your life in any way?

SW: So, for me, community when I was living in Pictou County with my two boys, just myself and my boys, I started volunteering at [inaudible] face painting for kids, so that my children could partake in stuff. So, I did volunteer work there. And after I started my business of Sunshine Sue entertaining for young children. I would always make time for volunteering. Oh, okay. So, community organizations I have volunteered over the years at different times. When my children were in school, I would offer to go into the classroom. I'm a singer. I did Sunshine Sue Entertainment when they were little boys, and I would always make time to volunteer in the community, besides, you know, doing paid events, like private birthday parties and that sort of thing. I've also, over the years, since I was a young person, before I ever started doing children's entertainment, when I was living in Dartmouth many years ago, I was always volunteering singing my folk songs, at different places.

ER: Ah, you're a folk singer.

SW: Yeah.

ER: Wonderful. Hence the ukulele tuning.

SW: I'm just learning the uke, so it's kind of neat.

ER: Wonderful. What other instruments do you know?

SW: I play guitar.

ER: Wonderful.

SW: Self-taught [*laughing*].

ER: *That's great. Okay, so I'm just going to test the [SW: Very frustrating] . . . Okay, now that we have that just kind of logistical stuff out of the way, I wonder Susan if you could just tell me a little bit about yourself. Tell me about the wind in your town. Where do you live. Tell me a little bit about your history, your family, your partner. Go ahead with any kind of parts of yourself that you'd like to share.*

SW: Okay. I grew up in Newfoundland until I was 11. And then in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. And I'm from a family of 14. I heard a beep, is that still okay?

ER: *Yes, all good.*

SW: Okay. So, a family of 14, I'm the first girl. There were four boys and there was myself. Lots of layers of dysfunction and challenges and poverty. The list is long. I left home first at 14, then again at 17. I went to Boston to work as a nanny for a year, full-time nanny. Dropped out of grade 8. Came back. Tried to finish school. There was just never any real place to live. There was, I just never felt safe in the world, so, it's just been a long, long struggle and I was married at 21 and had a child— no I was married at 20 and then a year later I had my girl, and, but I left that relationship. It was very abusive. And, yeah, ended up on welfare raising my daughter. I went to community college in Dartmouth. I did nursing program, nursing assistant program. I couldn't really work at that because I injured my back during that time. I picked up my guitar and started singing and writing songs. And I became very involved with a wonderful group of people in Dartmouth at the time. The Harbour Folk Society they call themselves. And we used to meet in Dartmouth and then we used to meet over at, I can't remember the name of the place, at Dalhousie.

So, my daughter and I finally, when did we leave Dartmouth. I was in a relationship with another man, which was quite lovely actually. Because of my history, the saboteur just came in just punched everything down and I chose to go into a relationship with a very, very mean man, and had two children with him, and left after eight years of very emotionally wounding years. Took my boys. Went to Pictou County and started therapy at the age of 42. Went back to school again, to another community college. Did my, passed with honours. I was quite shocked about that, and pleased. And my mother, I remember her saying, Susan, you don't have to stop here at a community college dear [*laughing*]. And she ended up years later, a few years later with dementia and, so I always, you know I never forgot what she said, so I ended up eventually going to StFX [majoring in psychology with a minor in art] at the age of 52 when I moved in with my

present partner. And I did my undergrad. And then I went to Acadia. And I just finished my master's in counselling, Educational Counselling, a few years ago.

ER: *Wonderful.*

SW: Yeah, yeah. So it's, it's been a journey, but I've done, I've done a lot of personal healing work, like a lot of therapy and stuff like that, and yeah. So now I'm in the helping field [*laughing*].

ER: *So, you grew up in Newfoundland, and then from Newfoundland, I guess the first place you went was Boston?*

SW: No. I, let's see. Ok, I was born in New Glasgow, and when I was three years old, my parents moved all of us children with them to Newfoundland. And I lived there until I was eleven. And then came to Pictou County where I was 14 when I dropped out of school and went, well mom took me out of school when I was 12 because dad had no job. So, I stayed home and looked after children while my dear mother went and worked in the hospital as a cleaning lady, 'cause there was just no money for food. It was awful.

ER: *So, it was a decision your mom had to make between, are you the oldest?*

SW: I'm the oldest girl.

ER: *You're the oldest girl. Out of how many kids?*

SW: Four boys before me and two of the boys were taken out of school that year as well.

ER: *Okay. And what brought your family to Newfoundland? Like did they, did they, think that there...*

SW: My father was a barber [ER: *Okay*], and the American base opened there and they needed barbers.

ER: *Wow. That's really interesting.*

SW: Yeah.

ER: *And where in Newfoundland?*

SW: Stephenville.

ER: Wow. That's a real trajectory Susan. It's like a lot of different places, and a lot of, I don't know, it seems like a lot of searching, a lot of trying things out and, there's a few things that you said that I'm kind of interested in. So, if we could go back to a couple of things. So [SW: Certainly] you said that, so you had a daughter with a first man, and then the second man who you said was very nice, there were no children from that partnership.

SW: No.

ER: And then the third man, who was a mean man, was [SW: Yep, I call him the mean man], the mean man – there were two children from that partnership, is that right?

SW: Yeah

ER: Ok. And so, do you, you mentioned something about a sabotaging. Could you tell me what you meant by that, like what, what does that mean for you?

SW: Oh, for me, it, what I learned, you know after I had been in therapy in my forties, and realizing in therapy that was, oh, so we have this part of our personality that's developed out of trauma, that some can name as saboteur. The person who just, part of us, who is just familiar, or feeling totally unworthy of any goodness. So, and just continued on with the familiar shit [*laughing*] [*ER: Yeah, yeah*], to put it bluntly.

ER: Yeah, and so- yeah ahead.

SW: Oh no. You go ahead.

ER: So would the, I mean, was there, you don't have to speak about this if you don't want to Susan, but is it, is it the fact that there was, when you were a child, was there some kind of, you know, violence or...

SW: Layers and layers of violence and abuse, yes [*ER: Yeah*], yeah. Very much so. I, I write about that. It, it's not written about in, I have a video. I don't think I sent you the video and I don't know if that would help you. If you just want everything orally. But I do have an eight-minute video of my Art of Resilience art exhibit that I would very bravely, courageously put up in our library here in our little town of Antigonish. Eight minutes. And it was my last year of university and I wrote to the dean, and I said I would really like to talk about abuse of children and poverty and, but I would like to do it as a visual

artist. I had no clue what I was doing, but I knew that I needed help. And, a woman signed on, one of the pros, and I worked with her for a year, and I ended up with a lot of paintings that I thought, you know, I should put these up in the library and just make my voice heard. And it was, it was quite an emotional experience for a lot of people, but a lot, you know, a lot of people don't want to talk about child abuse and the layers. But I did. In our little community. And it's on a video, eight minutes.

ER: I would love it if you sent it, if you have it in a format that you could email-

SW: I absolutely do.

ER: Yeah, yeah, that would be great.

SW: A lot of people have shared it with others, [*ER: Yeah*] helpful for some people.

ER: So, Susan...

SW: And there's also an article written about my education journey as well in a magazine.

ER: Ok. Yes. I mean the archive, it's an oral history archive, but materials would be great as well, so, [SW: Absolutely, yeah] do send that. I would love to be able to send that along with the interview that we do here.

SW: Yeah, because it's very hard, it's a lot of work I know. Listening to transcripts, woohoo.

ER: Yeah, it's a lot of work [SW: Oh, god]. So, Susan, I wonder if you, yeah, like I find it interesting that there, you know that, you know what this interview is for, right. It's for a lesbian oral history project and so far we've spoken about these three men, and [SW: Yep] and a kind of therapy and maybe a transition that you went through in your forties where you realized that there was work that you had to do, and I'm wondering where the coming out came in, and whether it was something that, whether the coming out or your knowledge of your own sexual orientation was something that you knew. Was something that you realized and then what is the actual moment of coming out and how did that work? So, I wonder if you could tell me that story.

SW: Ok. I'll give it a go. For me, when I think back now, as the person whose lived my life from the age of 42, when I look back as a lesbian, when I look back and see myself as a young person, I always had crushes on girls.

ER: Mhm.

SW: But, I had crushes on boys as well. And, but as I entered therapy in my forties, it was unquestionable. There was just no, you know, there was no question that, Oh, I'm a free human being. I have a soul. I'm allowed, I can choose whoever I want to be with. And just at that time when I was growing into my own self-awareness, freeing myself up from all kinds of energy that was very damaging, I met a lovely woman and we, she had three children and I had my two, and we all moved into a house together for, I don't know, maybe three or four years.

ER: Mhm.

SW: And I was firm on, you know I told my children. I said, you know [redacted] and I, we are partners. And you can choose whether or not to tell your friends at school, but you're also allowed your privacy, and if you choose privacy that's ok, but I don't want you to choose privacy for wrong reasons. And, but I did them that some children would, might get teased. Some children have been teased. That's what I told them. And tormented. And, so they just, they still brought their friends home, they just, every, and then the kids would ask them questions, you know, Is your mother a lesbian? Is your mother queer? How come you don't have a father here. And he goes, how can my mother be queer if she had me, ha, ha, ha. And they would, they were really strategic in how they would answer [ER: Yeah] [laughing] just to keep themselves safe because there was enough bullying going on as it was.

ER: Yeah.

SW: And, so, let's see, it's a long time ago. No, I never, ever, I was determined not to be, to feel any shame. I was completely in celebratory mode. Also, I was very protective of myself and my partner and our children because there were a lot of homophobic, and some very not, very unkind men in the community where I lived in Pictou Country. You know, I heard things happened where [my former partner] and I were out, and you know, terrible like, guys would come up to the table, be really rude, and, you know we weren't demonstrative of our affection back then. That was, you know, 25 years ago. But we also weren't hiding out in the closet either.

ER: Mhm.

SW: I definitely, wasn't. I mean my son made a poster at school and, in grade six, and I went in for parent-teacher, I was sitting there. On the wall in the hall, all these parents were going around looking, and my son, [redacted] he's a singer and a player now, and

he's also back in community college actually, but he, he drew a, he's a really good drawer and he was back then; he drew a picture of his family. 'My Mothers', it was titled, 'My Mothers'. And me, Susan, five foot nine and a half, tall and skinny, and my [former] partner [redacted] was, is five foot one, and a large woman [laughing]. And he drew us standing beside each other and the children all around. And he, he just makes the children all up. They're, you know, he didn't say which one was [my partner's] and which one was mine, they were all, they were just ours. And on the paragraph underneath of it, it said, "I love my mothers. [Redacted] makes me laugh when she picks mom up over her back [laughing] and carries her upstairs to the bedroom." Well, that was really, really funny [laughing]. Because the other joke was the kids were, she would throw me over her back like a sack of flour, or potatoes, she'd whirl me round in a circle and all of the kids would run behind us, and sometimes she wouldn't go up the stairs, sometimes she would just pretend she was, and I'd have to guess where I was [laughing]. But I mean, this one time he remembered her throwing me on the bed and it was really funny. It was on the poster. I wish I had it [laughing].

ER: That's really funny. And it's, it's such a fun, I mean it's a really funny memory to be the one thing [SW: Yeah] that he decides to draw.

SW: Yeah. And I didn't mind. And, you know, I was determined not to feel any shame because I had nothing to be ashamed of, and I spent my whole, my entire life ashamed of who I was because of what happened to me as a child in our house, and as a young woman.

ER: So, when you say that, yes, there's a few things. So, when you say there was a shame associated with, or a. or like a will not to be ashamed, you're not necessarily referring to some inner knowledge that you had that you were a lesbian, but that the shame associated with the trauma that you mentioned early.

SW: Well, I'm not sure I'm clear on what you're saying, but I'll try to respond anyway. I was expected to feel shame about being a lesbian, I think, back then, because how many people were closeted and how many people had a look on their face when I came out. Like this look of just, and even my own sister, one of my other sisters said, you're not! There's no way. You're not queer. You know it was like, horror. You could see it on people's faces, right. And I thought, fuck you, excuse my language but, [ER: Yeah] you know I'm not going down that road in this lifetime. I'm not. And I never did. And I still, you know, I'm just, people. I was just at an election booth here in the country and my partner's name happens to be Walsh. Just happens to be Walsh, from Quebec. She wants to talk to you actually as well. Anyway, so she goes in first, into the, up to the lineup and then I go next, and the woman says, the woman is in her, probably late 70s

or 80s, she goes, oh how nice, two sisters and you live together, and I said, we're not sisters, we're partners.

ER: Yeah.

SW: And the look on her face was like, oh boy. Oh, we have them up here on the mountain? Gee [*laughing*]! Yeah it was kind of funny.

ER: So, Susan there, you mentioned, you know, so when I asked about the coming out, you spoke about, you know, people in the community, but you mostly spoke about your kids and, and, you said, you know, you gave the story of telling your children like "look, [redacted] and I are partners." And, and so I wonder if there was, in your experience, different ways of coming out to different people in your life. Like, were, so, were there different ways? Did you have to decide to tell family members, friends, children in different ways, and if so, which did you find most difficult, or which did you find the easiest, or the most accepting, the most accepting audience?

SW: Different ways. I wanted to come out on my own terms. Whenever I said, whenever the words would come out, I wanted them always, of course, to be on my own term. And one time I was at a very public event selling art, I think it was for Tearmann House or, you know, the house for abused women here in Pictou County. There was one woman there, another lesbian who decided that she wanted to out me in a crowd of people. That she, "Well Susan here, she's a lesbian. She lives with-" and I just looked at her and I said, I beg your pardon. Did I give you permission to give a statement about my personal life? That's all I said. But I can remember the feeling of, of, like, I hope I never do that to anyone [*ER: Yeah*] and, because I felt like something was done to me because it, the, and the feeling reminded me of having my power taken away, which was very familiar. You know, I was in therapy then, and I was learning how to speak up. So that was a difficult moment.

Another time that was really funny, because I didn't go round with a t-shirt on, you know, and I didn't put a Pride flag at my door. Twenty-five years ago, I never thought to do that, and I didn't want to invite any, any kind of animosity, strangers coming to my door, like, I just, I was still in a place of fear back then. I was just starting into my therapy. I was doing a lot of trauma work with my therapist. I was very raw. And I was very happy with [my partner] and the children. And a woman friend came one time, she wasn't really a friend, she was an acquaintance from the Al-Anon group and she said, well I think I should just, I'm sick of men. And she was twenty years older than me. I'm just going to find myself a girlfriend. And I'm just going to, I don't know though. I don't know what it would be like. I don't even know any lesbians. And I said, well, you're talking to

one right now [*laughing*]. Well, she almost dropped her cup, and it was just really funny. And I said, well what did you think I was supposed to look like? Am I supposed to have a, you know, an extra forehead or something [*laughing*].

ER: Yeah, a t-shirt.

SW: Pardon me.

ER: Yeah, I know I said a t-shirt. I was referring back to what you said earlier.

SW: Yeah, and another funny thing that just happened, probably only about seven years ago now, I went to a hairdresser here in Antigonia. And she'd never met me before and I'm tall and considered slim by some people. Anyway, so, and my hair was really short. I had my head shaved so it was growing out, and I just didn't want it to be as short anymore. And so, I sat in her chair, and I said, so, I said, I guess I'm just kind of tired of looking like, I don't know, I said, I just want my hair longer. I didn't even finish the sentence. But she finished it for me. She said, you don't want to look like one of those butch lesbians, do you. And I said, well I am a lesbian, but I've never been called a butch, and anyway, so, she almost dropped her scissors. She just, she didn't, she couldn't stop apologizing for like 25 minutes, and laughing. Because her aunty, who is now deceased, was a lesbian, I think. One of her aunties, no, not the one who's deceased. But anyway, so anyway she knows all kinds of queer people, put it that way.

ER: Yeah.

SW: But she just said, "Oh my God, I can't believe I put my foot in my mouth". But it was the way she said it, yeah you don't want to look like one of those blah blah blah. But she wasn't saying it to be mean or anything but, it was my comeback when I said that to her. She was like, "Oh my God".

ER: Yeah.

SW: And, and other things like other times people have expectations like, because I look the way I do, people, many people just make the assumption that I'm not a queer woman [*ER: Mhm*]. They have a certain look that some people, I guess, have a certain, not speaking for everybody, but, some people their mouths just go [sound] when, you know, I introduce **Diane** as my partner or when I say, no, no there's no mister, you know, especially old people. Like I don't, I don't, I don't bother sharing my private life when I do anything with the elderly. Like I'm a storyteller. I go into these nursing homes,

and I do stories with elders. But I don't share my private life [ER: Mhm]. You know, it's inappropriate. I don't know if I've answered the question.

ER: You have. Yeah, you have. And would you say that it, rela- you know, given the time, the way that I'm hearing it is like there, there's yeah, it's not a dramatic coming out with these kinds of tangential people like, these kinds of acquaintances. You drop it in, and just in a kind of normal way, but the way that you narrated coming out to your children, was there more of sitting down, taking the time, yeah, like how did you negotiate the, the telling of the kids?

SW: I'm trying to remember that. That was a long time ago. I think it was just sitting around the table. I do remember one conversation [my son] had with me. He was in grade nine then. And he said, he asked me, he said "Mom, I don't get it. I know I can ask you anything so I'm just going to ask you. How come you went with Dad if you're a lesbian?" You know. And we had that talk. And it was very clear to him afterwards, and I said, "You know [redacted], I think if I was growing up now in your day, that I probably wouldn't have you sitting across from me right now because I probably wouldn't have gone anywhere near men." And I know that sounds really bizarre to some people, they don't get it, and they don't have to get it. But it's my truth, I'm thinking. Oh, ok. Yeah, not, because I really prefer the company of women [ER: Yeah]. Except for my boys. I love my sons.

ER: Yeah, yeah. So, Susan, you were 42 when you came out, is that right?

SW: Yes.

ER: Do you think that the, the age at which you came out, I mean the, one of the questions that we're thinking of asking is like what, what experiences you've had as a result of your lesbianism, as a result of your gender or sex orientation? And it's important that you came out at 42 and not 22 so, I wonder if you think that your experiences have been shaped by this, you know, by this sexual orientation and what kinds of experiences you've had as a result of coming out at 42 and living with a partner, with a woman for the last 20 odd years. Can you speak a little bit about these what these, what these experiences were like for you?

SW: You mean after coming out?

ER: Yeah.

SW: Well, my first partner, [redacted], and I, we were together for approximately four or five years. And the experience of us being together and working through therapy for both, we both found, found each other through the Women's Centre. And were both in a workshop together, and ended up, you know, totally, totally have so much in common. She played guitar, I played guitar, we wanted to, we wrote songs together, we have children. We moved in. We did therapy. She had her therapist; I had my therapist. We worked through so much healing together. It was like we fast forwarded to therapy. Experiential. Just in living together and working through so much trauma. She went to court. I supported her through court. You know she brought her abuser to court. It was a really, really hard time. But it was also filled with joy because I never felt so allowed, to speak, to say what's on my mind. I felt my funny person. I was allowed to be funny. I was allowed to sing well. I was, you know, that's what it felt like I was allowed. Oh, my god. There's nobody telling me what to do. No man here. I know there's good men because my brothers are good to their wives, and I know all kinds of people with lovely, lovely husbands. That was my experience.

After coming into myself and saying I loved being around women, and I was so, because I was still in my shame place not having an education, right, and I was so fascinated by all these brilliant women, you know, had degrees, there were, I met women who were carpenters, I met farmers, I met people, women that were never with a man ever in their life and never wanted to have children. There was no, no limits on our conversations. Everything was lovely, safe and, until one night I heard, [my former partner] and I had gone to a picnic, a huge picnic where a lot of women were, gathering at a carpenters' couple, two women, both carpenters built their house. Apparently, they would have a picnic every year and there, it was somewhere outside Pictou County, and my sister's friend came to me, and she said, I just want you to know that I know a couple really, like really awful guys and they said that they were following your car and they were going to go and crash the lesbian picnic. Cause trouble. And I, that really frightened me.

ER: Mhm.

SW: So, you know, and it really, really frightened me. Like I thought, oh shit man, people. We would never have known that if it hadn't been for my sisters' friend telling me. And so that kind of, kind of made me feel like, ok, be careful, just be careful [*ER: Mhm*]. And, but, the experiences of going back to school and feeling support, going to community college. I was never in the closet. I was just, you know, yeah. I, I don't know, there were always positives, positive experiences. I think I got lost.

ER: Yeah. And so there's, you mentioned school, you mentioned, you know, being in the community and kind of receiving, I like how you said, you know, you were around these women who had always been out and the kind of experience that meant for you. Like seeing what kind, I don't know, I guess, like, that must have been kind of an amazing experience to think like...

SW: It was amazing.

ER: Yeah.

SW: And I was in my forties and yet I felt like I, I felt like a nine-year-old [*laughing*], felt like a nineteen-year-old. It was exciting because these were *strong* women and I never felt like I was a strong woman. You know. I never felt that I had anything worthy of listening to. It was, it was always, I was always doing what I was told, basically, and that's how I learned. That's how I learned to grow up and that's what I did for a lot of years. And it was pretty scary at times. Not after though. I haven't had, you know I have, I have to say my life has been rich and really, a lot of, well I've met, of course, people are people. You know, I've met people who are, been really annoying, and nosy and inappropriate. Just for saying, I've met women who've been beaten up by their women partners, you know, I've just, and being a psychotherapist now, it's like the stories there are, are unnerving, I guess, sometimes, but you know, over all being with women has been the most comfortable place for me and I'm always interested in women's stories, just a, yeah, I don't know what else to say [*laughing*].

ER: So, you mentioned a few things and I wonder if you can speak about your experiences with interacting with the lesbian or queer community in Nova Scotia. So, I'm not sure if you would categorize it as just being involved in personal relationships, like developing a network of friends, or if you've sought out community groups, or even have done activist work. But if you have, could you speak about those experiences?

SW: Well, there was a group here in Antigonish. I cannot remember the name of the group that was started. Oh god, I wish I could remember. My partner probably knows but she's upstairs teaching. We did workshops for people to introduce them to, so that they could ask questions. You set up a, it was a workshop, with a complete booklet and everything and I cannot remember the name of it. And, yeah, so, different people in the community would gather together and we'd sit in this room, and we'd have different people coming in. Especially from the Coady Institute at StFX. People from, I remember a woman from Ghana, just totally. And another, oh and a woman from India, a nun, and they were asking us questions. And I said you're welcome to ask me anything you want. And I did that. You know I was very comfortable in that kind of thing. We did workshops

with young people in the schools, like at the high school. I remember going in a few times just to talk and listen, but there was always someone else who was facilitating that group. That's back years ago when I first came here, so, yeah. I haven't shied away from doing anything like that and it hasn't been a whole lot, you know. I went to Gay Pride in Halifax years ago when I was doing my Sunshine Sue Entertainment. I played on the Pride stage, and it was great for all the kids. I mean, I just didn't shy away at all. And, I guess, I'm not an activist, I'm not quiet [*laughing*] [*ER: Mhm*]. I think an activist is a person whose actually active out in the world doing the work.

ER: And I mean, you did kind of answer the question about personal relations, like you met these women in the community who, I don't know, they kind of boggled your mind, and opened it, and, in a bunch of ways.

SW: Yeah. And we have a group. We have a group of women, and we meet often, you know. Not, not since Covid, but if anybody needs wood put in, if anybody needs anything, there's always a phone call and you'll have about, there's, there used to be five or six couples, and, you know, few, one relationship, she passed away, and I think another one as well over the years, but these were Diane's friends before I came here and they very, very connected, not on each other's doorsteps, but always, always know that you can call on anybody in this group.

ER: And is it a group of older women?

SW: Yeah.

ER: Do you think that that's an important part of it? Is it that, does the, you know, relying on women who are, or a group of women relying on women at the same stage in their lives?

SW: Well, these women, like these women met each other 35 years ago. So, these women are 30 years older now. They've just got all, they've all worked and lived in this area and one, you know, it took a woman apparently coming from Vancouver and moving here and doing her education degree and saying, where are all the lesbians in Antigonish? I'm looking for, she actually put an ad in the paper [*laughing*].

ER: Hmm, wow.

SW: Funny. Diane knows more about that than I do, but yeah, but her sole relationships have always been very strong.

ER: Yeah.

SW: Very important.

ER: Susan, have you donated, this is kind of a logistical questions, but have you donated any materials to the Nova Scotia LGBT Seniors' Archive?

SW: Have I donated any material?

ER: Yeah. So, this is part of the, the archive building. We talked about you contributing this video and, the newspaper article that had been written about you but, have you contributed anything else, or donated any kind of physical or audio material to the senior's archive?

SW: No, I haven't.

ER: Okay.

SW: No one asked me.

ER: Okay. So, when you spoke about this video that you wanted to donate, or offer to the archive, what made you think that that would be a good resource to have?

SW: Oh, I didn't think of it in that- I don't know. Just for you [*ER: Yeah*]. For information [*ER: Okay*], for you to, that's a very good question Eliza. Why would I want to share my eight-minute video with you?

ER: Yeah, I mean, I forget the context in which that video came up, but it was, you know, it was, we were talking about your past, we were talking about the work that you were doing on yourself, and this thing that you had done. You had contacted the dean at your time at, at, Acadia, was it, no not at Acadia...

SW: No, I went to Acadia to do my after-

ER: Right, yeah.

SW: It was St.FX.

ER: It was St.FX. That's right.

SW: I think, probably the reason I would want to naturally feel called to share that video with you is because of the depth of the work, of the healing work that I did, and I feel that with the opportunity to grow and understand myself, who I am as a human being and soul on this planet, with that opportunity, came this beautiful flower. This beautiful opportunity to share my life. Share myself. Talk and get to know other women and not, not be feeling that I don't fit. Because I always felt I didn't fit when I was a kid. I never fit in with the other girls, and I think that's what separated me, now that I'm thinking about it. Altho- no I knew it because I wrote about it in my journal. I never felt worthy to fit, to stand in a hallway with other girls. They were always dressed better, they, we were very clean on the outside. My mother was a clean freak, but, you know, she said you could be poor, but you don't have to be dirty. But anyway, little did she know how dirty I felt on the inside. But my feelings of sharing this eight-minute talk, I guess it's another opportunity to invite a person in, if you're asking me questions about who I am, then it takes you in a little bit of the journey of the healing part, of finding, finding my way out of a deep, thick fog of trauma.

ER: Mhm.

SW: That held only messages that I grew up with in that men ruled the world.

ER: I'm glad you got out of that Susan.

SW: Oh, I'm really glad [*laughing*].

ER: I'm glad for you. I'm glad that I'm, yeah, I'm glad for you. I just wanted to say that.

SW: Yeah. I have this song about growing up at 42, it's not an easy thing to do. I know I'm set in my ways, and my ways have not been good since the day my childhood ceased to be carefree [*ER: Wow*]. And the core of it, [*singing*] "*it should never happen, back there in our world. It should never happen to any little boy or girl. A house full of angry people, one child alone. It should never happen, in a place we call home.*" Doesn't go exactly like that. Finger picking on the guitar is missing, but there's another whole verse. It's, and these songs just flowed out when I was doing therapy.

ER: Susan, I would love if you included that song in the materials that you're going to send.

SW: Oh, okay.

ER: I mean, given what you've told me that, at 42. Forty-two is the big number.

SW: It is.

ER: And it's the, yeah, that's growing up at 42 is not, is hard to do. I don't remember the lyrics exactly, but that's beautiful.

SW: Yeah, and I sang it at a lot of different women's events. I would sing it at healing events. If I went to workshops. And people always just groaned, you know, it was catharsis.

ER: Yeah, yeah it is. Yeah, if you could send the lyrics or even an audio clip of that song, that would be really welcomed.

SW: Oh, ok. I'll do that.

ER: So, Susan there's not any other questions that I wanted to ask, but I wonder if you feel that's there anything that we've not covered, that you want to have on record.

SW: What a good question. Geez, how long did it take you to come up with questions. It must have been a hard thing to do because questions have to be succinct and just, you know, 'cause you could go all over the map.

ER: Yeah.

SW: Well, one thing I want to say is that my mother, even though she was in her 80s when she died, I remember growing up and before my sister ever came out or anything, but I just remember my mother coming home. She was cleaning at the hospital. And I was home with the children, the little boys, I was twelve. Instead of being in school, I was home looking after two little boys, and she would come home and talk to dad, and she would say, I don't know why people have to be so ignorant. Why can't they leave those women alone? Because apparently there were two women who worked in the hospital, and she would hear, and they were partners, and she would hear different people talking about them, sneering at them and she was always, always talking on their behalf. And as an older woman, she stated to us, this was shortly after I came out to her as well. She stated to us that, I'm going to Antigone to a family group and they're all parents of "lesbeens" *[laughing]*.

ER: Lesbeens. Wow.

SW: And I said, Mom, maybe I can come with you. I'm a lesbian. And she goes, no, you're not coming with me. I'm going there by myself to be with the group dear. And it was just so adorable.

ER: Yeah. And very, like, enlightened, no?

SW: Oh yes. I mean this is a woman who had grade six education, but let me tell you, and seventeen pregnancies. Lived in poverty her entire life from the time she was a little child. Grew up in New Brunswick and, honestly, so human love, I mean she just loved. She had so much love and fairness in her. Just so much.

ER: That's ah, so that sounds like it was not such a hard coming out story. Coming out to your mother.

SW: Not for me.

ER: Yeah, yeah

SW: Oh my gosh. It's never been hard for me, and I often say that to people when I hear them sharing their stories. I go, awe. That is not my experience.

ER: I'm glad to hear that.

SW: It was harder for me to tell people that I was hit in the head as a child. That had more shame in it than anything about ever being a queer woman.

ER: I wonder what your mom learned in that group, or what she shared.

SW: Yeah. I, I don't know. But I just remember her saying, she said, she just really liked the group of people, she liked going.

ER: And that group would have been here in Nova Scotia.

SW: Oh yeah. It was in Antigonish.

ER: Wow.

SW: The name of, oh gosh, there's two things that happened here in Antigonish. Damn I can't remember the names right now [*laughing*].

ER: If you remember the names later Susan, I know you said that your partner knows them better, if you remember the names that would be great, because I think that's something that they're trying to figure out, like the network of support systems and social systems in place in Nova Scotia.

SW: Yeah, and I know that you're going to talk to, I don't know if you are but somebody going to be talking to a friend of mine, Sue Adams, and she, she probably knows the name of the group as well. Not the family one, but she does know the name of the group that met at the Coady. We would put on workshops for people at the Coady [inaudible] high school, stuff like that.

ER: Ok. Wonderful.

SW: Yeah, okay.

ER: Thank you so much for sharing Susan.

SW: Oh, you're very welcome, and I'll see if I can pull out the guitar and play that song.

ER: That would be wonderful, and you have my email address so you can send any material that you think is relevant and I'll pass it along to the project.

SW: All right Eliza.

ER: Thank you, Susan. Have a good day.

SW: You're welcome, dear. Okay, bye.