

Interviewee: Karen Lorraine

Interviewer: Liz Fitting

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

LF: So, I'm recording now. I'm just going to put this next to you. Awesome, great, so thanks you again. Did you have questions about it? The project? I don't know if I can answer, but I can try.

KL: Right. So how long have you been doing it, and how long are you going to do it 'cause I can think of others that I might forward through to you.

LF: Oh, that would be wonderful.

KL: Yeah, yeah. They would have great stories.

LF: You're the third person I've interviewed [KL: Oh, that's amazing] for this project, and I guess it hasn't, I've been like in, I'm not sure how long it's been, you know, COVID time, it's been a few months.

KL: Okay, okay, nice.

LF: So, thank you again. So, you've signed the consent form [KL: Yes], we've got the recorder going and this is a guided conversation type of interview, so if there's anything you're not comfortable with answering, we can skip over that [KL: Yeah, sure] you know it's really about what you see as important or highlights or what you want to share. So, now, we always start by asking if you can tell us a little bit about yourself. You know, how you identify, what your name is, your age, that kind of thing [KL: For sure]. When you moved to Nova Scotia, or if you're from here. . .

KL: Yeah, for sure. So, my name is Karen Lorraine. I'm 60. Turned 60 this year which was a big deal. It's like moving out of the 50s decade, was like a shock really. I'm a counsellor here at Dal, part time counsellor. I'm originally from New Brunswick, but I joined the military when I was a young person, like about 20. That was sort of, I didn't know if I wanted to go to university, so I joined the military, which was my first entry into, you know, the possibility of, of, you know, having alternate kinds, you know, kinds of relationships. That's actually where I met my first partner, was in the military.

LF: What year did you join the military?

KL: I joined the military in 1981, when I had, I guess, just turned 21. It was illegal then to be gay, or homosexual. You could be kicked out of the military for that, so I was under investigation during that time because of the people that I was affiliating with and hanging out with, and, and it was just a horrible thing, really. I suppose early on I never really thought about how I identified, but I would say likely I identify as being a lesbian, but I've also had some sporadic relationships with men throughout that time. I don't know if I would say I'm bisexual, probably lean more towards the lesbian side of things. But, yeah there even the, even the military police, we knew of some lesbian women, then gay men who were in the military police that were still investigating other people and reporting on them. It was terrible. It was terrible then.

LF: Now when you say, "I was investigated," [KL: Yes] what do you mean by that?

KL: So, the military police actually asked some of people I was, you know, I was a medic, so some of like what, like when I got posted here, like I went to Ontario to do my trades training, came here to Nova Scotia to do my basic training, and then went trades training in Borden, Ontario, which is where I began to meet other women. Old, you know, somewhat older than I was. There wasn't anyone that I knew was out in my platoon, or any of the women that were in my, or guys, that were in my group, medic guys, so, it was actually my instructor who was the first woman who came out to me. And then there were a few other women who were also older medics that there was a group of them, and that were on course there, and so they began to ask some of my crew, you know, if I was a lesbian. So, they were interviewing other people about me which I didn't find out until a little later. I didn't even realize that.

And also, there were things that happened like, I didn't, the woman that I met in the military, [my former partner], she was my instructor, and she was involved with somebody else, but we began to have some sort of relationship at the same time. When I think about it, it was kind of like, it wasn't overt, it was a little on, you know, it was just, I guess I wasn't very sure of myself. I was only 20, 21, and we didn't get together as a, in a relationship, until much later. Couple of years later, so I had a number of, when I left there and came to Halifax, I got posted here, I slept with one, one of my medic friends here. She asked me actually to sleep with her. Like we would, you know, I feel like I have to whisper that [*laughing*]. She, you know we were going out to the bars and all that sort of stuff, and she was, I guess bi-curious, I guess is, you know, is what you'd call it today, right? And so, I actually did sleep with her and then she told everyone at the, like she went and told everyone that I was gay. Right! After the fact. And I was like, whoa, wait a minute, what just happened here? And I had some sporadic contact with

[my former partner], and I also then began to go to the bars here in Halifax. So, there was, there was a bar on Barrington Street, which is way, way, way back. That was, what did they call that, um, did they call it the Triangle? Maybe not. I'm not sure, but I was a—you know that was the way to meet people, was, I really started hanging out in the bars, on my own. Just Tex Park, across from Tex Park, it was like a black door. There was a black woman, big, large black woman named [redacted] who was the bouncer at the door, and it was just like you went in this black door and, poof.

LF: Was that a lesbian bar?

KL: No. It was a, a, an everyone bar. Yeah, and there was, like I say, there was another bar that I went to before I actually went to the Te— I call it the Tex Park because it was across, and the police used to sit up. Yeah, like Tex Park was like a, a tiered, like parking garage, and so the police and the military police would sit up on the top row, and watch people, like spy on people going into this black door, right, to this bar. And I never really, you know what, I didn't really care about that. I mean, eventually [my former partner] got posted here on one of the ships, and we got together. And we spent seven years together. And so that was my sort of first official relationship. And then there was all the stuff with my family too, right. Like I came out to my family, and you know, my mom cried. You know, you're never going to have kids. I remember when [my former partner] and I wanted to make a serious commitment to each other, my mom didn't approve of that. You know, there was just a lot. You know, my dad didn't care. No. He just considered [my former partner] one of his other daughters, so to speak, but it, but, you know, it wasn't seen. Do you know what I mean? It wasn't really seen as a relationship, you know, or validated as such.

LF: When was that, more or less, when you came out to your family?

KL: Okay, so I, the year I met [my former partner], in '81, I had a large – she had given me a picture of her, a large picture, and I remember taking it home during the summer. I was on summer vacation, away, like I got posted here to Stad [Stadacona Barracks], that's where I worked as a medic, and I have this picture of Jan and I showed it to my mom and she found it curious that I had this large, glossy, you know, picture of this woman, and later, during that time, I asked to speak to my parents. I said I had something really important I want to talk to you about, and they were both sitting on the couch in the living room [laughing] looking at me, right, I was across the room from them, and I just, I came out to them. I told them that, that, you know, that I had met this woman and I really felt that, I guess at that time we didn't use the word lesbian. I've since claimed that word, but I guess, everybody sort of said gay. You know it was all sort of very, you know, that's all you ever really said was that you were gay. Which

worked, right, you know, between people. And my fam, you know, my parents, they just said, oh it's just a phase, it's really just a phase. My dad said I thought you were going to tell us you wanted to be a nun. I was like, really! Wow! Okay! *[Laughing]* That's interesting. I had no desire to be a nun, right, but I think they associated being a nun with something like, that I was somehow different. I wasn't like my younger sis, well actually my younger sister has since come out, but my older sister had a lot of boyfriends, and all of that, and I did none of that. So, I think they sort of thought, oh, she's different, and what is it that makes her different? It would have never occurred to them that I was a lesbian. I don't think. Or they wouldn't have wanted to think about that, right.

LF: Were you gender non-conforming in any way, that maybe...

KL: I was, yes and no, yes and no. I wasn't, I mean I never really considered myself ultra-feminine, right, 'cause I was different from my siblings. And I was always identified as different cause I was the only one with red hair, was the only one with freckles, I was, I was physically different from them. I didn't like to wear anything dressy, like dresses or anything too, too much like that. When I went through puberty, I think there was a part of me during that time where I really wanted to be like the other girls. I really wanted to, and I tried really hard too. You know I put myself in dangerous situations with older men and, yet to try and prove that to myself, that somehow, I would, you know, why am I not like everybody else? Like why am I not, you know— so I would kind of think about, you know. I had great crushes on my teachers, you know, my female teachers, and, you know, and I would sort of think about that at night and, you know, I just sort of wanted them to rescue me out of my family, and just, and I could just, you know I would imagine like, you know, that they would just take me into their bed. You know, that was sort of the image, like I didn't, I had nothing to take me beyond that image *[laughing]*. It was just like, oh wouldn't that feel great. Wouldn't that be nice if they could rescue me out of this family. I'll just go and live with this woman, and you know, and sleep with her in her bed and, you know, that sort of thing. It wasn't, I didn't really sort of see it as a sexual thing necessarily at the time. And I was quite athletic, but I mean I wasn't a great athlete or anything like that, but I was somewhat – like, I think that I was androgenous a lot of the time.

You know, I just found my own, my own, but I've had other, you know I've had moments where I've been more feminine. I was certainly involved in the Lipstick Lesbian phase. I had long, long, well my hair is quite long now, but, I had long, long red hair, I wore, you know, makeup, I wore lipstick, and you know it was during that whole – yeah, I'm trying to think what that would have been like in the '90s, where you know, a lot of clubbing then, like Rumours and all that stuff here in the city. Went to Montreal in the clubs, went

to Toronto to the clubs. It was a big deal. Went to Province Town a couple of times to the clubs there, and it was about presenting oneself, at least on my side of things, as ultra-feminine. Like a feminine lesbian, right, at that time. I've since seen that very differently. I think that the older I get like, it's sort of like, you know, I'm not going to be wearing lipstick [*laughing*], that's for sure. You know, like...

LF: What did you, what did you know about gay people, or gayness, you know, as you were starting to process these feelings and attractions?

KL: Well, um, so when I was in, when I was in Ontario and I was meeting some of those women, I just had this sense. It was more like an intuitive sense that these women, well like I knew that there was something. It was like magic. It was like sensing magic in a room. I just sensed that they, they were different, and I could relate to that. Like I didn't know what it was until I guess, maybe [my former partner] came out to me, but no one had ever articulated that to me. I had a gay uncle who was married to my dad's sister, and it came out later that he was actually a gay man, after he had been married, and it was sort of like [*gasp*] shocking, right. So that was my first introduction to someone in the family who was, identified as gay, and then I remember going to Florida. My grandparents had a home in Florida, and, he was still quite involved with my dad's sister's family, but I remember meeting his partner in Florida. You know, we hung out at the beach, hung out the whole time we were there. So, that introduced me to, that's when I was like, god, I was like 13 – 14, but it was the women in the military that I first got an inkling. And then I met, of course, other military women, here, but it was very secretive.

There were women that were involved in relationships with each other, like that I knew were living together and, and involved, but it was never spoken about. It was like nobody ever spoke about it. There was one x-ray tech who was see-who was involved with a civilian woman. Her partner wasn't a military person and she, I remember they, you know, I got to know them, and then I had a brief affair with this older woman who was, like, involved with this x-ray tech. She actually conned me. She told me that her part– that she and her partner had broken up. Her partner had actually been posted to like, an outposting in Green– was it Greenwood? Yeah, Greenwood, Nova Scotia, and so I spent some time over at her place. But then I discovered, oh, she's actually still involved with this other woman. And so that was my introduction too. I went to a number of private parties, and it was just a diff– just a different time then. It was, you know, and I was really young then, so it was like people, I mean, even younger now when I see young people, but I was like 20, 21 and people were like, they wanted to get to know me, like some of these older women right. They were like on me, you know [*laughing*] like really, quite a bit and some of them I had to sort of you know, just – you know, I

basically said I'm not interested, or whatever. You know, I didn't know what the rules were really. Nobody did, but we just made our own rules.

So, I went to a lot of parties, a lot of bars, but again it was, there was a lot of internal homophobia then. A lot. And maybe even still now. I have no idea, an internal shame around it. Like everybody went out, and of course there was a lot of drugs and alcohol. Like we did a lot of that as well. I'm certainly clean and sober now. I have been for, you know, 20 plus years, but that's, that's what we did, I mean, you know, that's what we did. That's how we coped. That's how we lived. And a lot of it was like bar hopping and you know, that was, you know, bathrooms and all that stuff, right. It was really a part of it. Drag shows. All those early drag shows, which I adored, right, loved the drag queens, and I suppose even a lot of the trans community at that time. Like I had a trans friend, when I was, when [my former partner] and I were together those seven years. I, I believe she's still in the city. Was one of the first trans, trans female that I, ah, [redacted] is her first name. I was like 23, 24 and I remember her showing me, you know, we became friends, and I had another friend to who was interested in trans-ing. He was a gay man, but he wanted to become female at that time. So, I had quite a few men, or trans female around me as well. But I remember [my friend] showing me her op— like, she wanted me to see her body, and revealing her body to me. Like, oh I've had, you know like yeah, I've got this vagina that's, that's what I have. And I remember I was kind of shocked at being, you know, at witnessing that, but I could understand. You know, she wanted me to understand that she was fully female, and yeah, so that became important.

So that was, I got to know, you know, the community. You know, lots of Gay Pride things. That was always was exciting. There was always this excitement element to it, because, people lived their lives very secretly, very quietly, and I think I even notice and witness that now. Like, COVID, of course we couldn't celebrate much, but it's like everybody would come out for the Gay Pride parade. Everybody would come out and then they all disappear again. And they disappear into their quiet lives, or whatever. Like you just don't, we just didn't see a lot of people out, really out. And there were some that were really out then. Let me see, when did I go to Provincetown the first time?

So, I left, like I actually left the military after five years and I started going to Dal and I got all my education. I'm a social worker, right, counsellor. And, but I took time away and went to the Art school. I got a Fine Arts degree as well. And, because I'm really interested in art healing all areas of one's life, right. And I used art in a big way around my sexuality, around all of that stuff too. Recovery, all of those things. So, I would have been in art school when I went to Provincetown the first time, so it was around '91, '92, and I remember how shocked I was. Like, it was, I remember being in Provincetown and

you could walk around holding hands. You know, you could be demonstrative. It was just such a moving experience and such a relief, and then coming back and realizing how much strain that placed on me, like how much you held back. How much you held yourself back, right, that you just didn't feel free to, to be yourself. Right. Other than when you went out to the bars, and even then, everybody was a bit stoic until they got, you know, somewhat in the bag, right *[laughing]*. You know, everybody is sort of like all standing around, like theatre, staring at each other from corners in the room, like it was sort of, you know, then it was, you know, until everybody, you know, got somewhat trashed and was on the dancefloor. And, you know I just remember all the gay guys with their white t-shirts and tight jeans and whistles and loved it. It was amazing, and just the dancing, right, which has been such a huge, important piece of the gay community was, you know, just that wonderful dancing and music. And that was really important.

So, I got to know the gay community based on not just the people, but also the events that took place around, you know, the gay community. And how, just how amazing that was. Like the drag shows and you know, you know all the dances, I went to like tons of women's dances here in the city, and they'd be in these little dreary, awful places *[laughing]*. Like the one, there was a legion, and it was like you know, this awful little dark space just off Gottingen St. There's another, there's a church on North St. would have women's dances. Veith House had women's dances. I actually preferred the clubs myself. I don't know, I liked the sophistication of it, I liked getting dressed up and all that stuff, but, you know, I did go to the women's events. Since then, ah, the milit—the Stadacona, there, they have a, a hall there. They've had women's dances there, I believe. That's late, like the last, you know, in the last decade really. Also, the old Holiday Inn on Five Corners there at Robie St. They had women's dances there. Christmas time, you know, they'd have those.

And then all the women that I spent my life with, right, like all of those women, like I've had significant, so after *[my former partner]*, I was with *[her]* for seven years. I'm trying to think. I've actually done the count, but I can't recall what it — *[laughing]* I really have to stop and think about it, but, I mean, I wasn't super promiscuous or anything like that, but I was more so with men. I took more risks with men which I think is very much a part of my denial around my sexuality, like very much so. I lived and had a relationship with *[a former female partner]* for ten years. I had a relationship with another woman after that for about five years, which really wasn't very good. Oh, no, I had a two-year relationship while I was in art school. That's the woman I went to Provincetown. That was just a scene. They were crazy people *[laughing]*. You know, a lot of drugs and alcohol around that particular relationship. So, you know all of those women were significant in my development as a woman. Right. They taught me how to look after myself. They taught me how to live, how to function, how to work, how to, all of it, you know, like, and there

were also a couple of other women, like, you know, I had lots of issues from childhood and stuff.

There were two women who were a couple. I was involved with groups with them, and they pinch-hitted and, you know they counselled me. I had counselling with those two women, so they were wonderful. They were wonderful sort of mentors really in my development. You know, my maturity, my emotional, sobriety really. So those people, those, you know, those women were really, really important. And the gay men too. I have one, one gay man in my, you know a couple of gay men actually. One less so, the other, but since Covid we really haven't, you know, gotten together much. I'm not, I'm not— I had a, had a, like about a ten-year relationship, weird relationship with this older man that I ended like about a year and a half ago. No, about two years ago. And that kind of screwed me up. I haven't really been – you know I'm single, I haven't been with anyone. I've really been putting a lot of time into myself and just looking after myself. And, but there is a retreat that happens every year; not since COVID of course. It's like an LGBTQ2++ recovery retreat that happens every weekend in August, and I've been going to that for years. So that was another community. So here was a community of sober, you know, sober people. So that became, because at some point, I just stopped going to the bars. I just, you know, what was the point, really. I mean I just stopped going. It didn't feel like anything I really wanted to do. I didn't really want to meet somebody that way anymore, you know. I'd had my share of that. So that almost became another, you know, just another support possibility for relationship. I got close to some of the women there, and also, like, a lot of the gay men that were a part of that. It was always a small retreat, but we were very, very close. Very, very close. And I miss them. I miss that the last couple of years. They haven't been able to, you know, some come from away, travel to come, so it was quite lovely. And there were couples, you know, wasn't really seeing anyone throughout that but, yeah, it's, yeah so. I don't know if there's anything else you want to inquire, a specific inquiry about.

LF: So, when you were being investigated, did anything come of that?

KL: Well, they were investigating me for like drugs and alcohol, like drug and alcohol use as well. There was more something that came of that. I think they just had their eye on me, and every area of my life [*laughing*], right, you know, here's, this, we better keep an eye on this woman, right. Young woman. And so, I was doing a lot of acting out, for sure. And during that time. And I did, you know, the military did try and reprimand me around, you know, I remember I got strip searched and I remember, you know, all those sorts of things. I don't have any criminal record or anything like that. It was all done within the military. I was, you know, interviewed and you know, they'd searched all my, all my space. I was still living on base then, I think, and they searched my locker at work

and, yeah, I just remember how humiliating that was all about. But they never asked me about my relationships at that time. They were more concerned about the other stuff. And they sent me on a like, a drug and alcohol like course. It wasn't like a; it wasn't treatment or anything like that. It was more you need to learn about this, or whatever.

LF: And did you know anybody that had been, you know, kicked out?

KL Yes. Yes, I did know a couple of people and I think a couple of them I met here. Here in Halifax. [Redacted], I think her name is [redacted]. [Redacted] was one woman, I guess I shouldn't be saying names, but, I mean, like I think she's been very vocal about it. Yes, there were a couple of other people that I knew of. And then there were also people who just like didn't feel comfortable being who they were and got out. Like, just, like for example if I had stayed in the military, geez, I would be fully retired and living on a pension at this point, you know, having done travelling and all that stuff but. [My former partner] was a career, she stayed, she was a career, career military woman. She stayed in. I'm still in touch with her. She lives in Winnipeg with her wife. But, yeah, there were some that just never left. Or left, rather, never stayed because they couldn't be themselves. Right. And I left too. It was a good thing for me. I just wanted to get away from home. That's why I joined the military. Really. And I wanted to do something different. Like, non-traditional I suppose, like, yeah. It seems weird to me now. People have always said to me, Karen, I can't imagine you in the military [*laughing*] and that's probably true.

But I think I was seeking all that other stuff too and didn't know it, right. I also, there was another woman who was significant in my life too. She was the mother of a school friend, my brother's school friend, and she was an older woman, and I just loved her. Oh, my god, I spent a lot of time there when I was a teenager because her house was a safe place and my house wasn't a safe place, and so I spent a lot of time there. And she came out to me after I came out to her, in the military. When I was, I had come back, I was, like I say I came out to my family and then I came out to her. And she said that she had met a woman when she was, so sad about all that. She met a woman when she was like eighteen, seventeen, maybe they were in high school together and they were really, really in love and they spent a lot of time together. And then they just went their separate ways. They just figured they, you know, this, we can't make this work, you know. And they both got married and lived false lives, I guess. I never got married [*laughing*]. That wasn't anything, I wasn't, you know I didn't, I never wanted to. That wasn't part of my fantasy, to get married. I mean, I see, I understand why, you know, the gay community want to do that now. I, you know, I'd definitely make a commitment now in that regard, for sure, but there was something really lovely about not having that as a condition. Right. There was something really freeing about not being, you know,

not feeling like you had to get married. Right, or have children. Never had children. Right.

Yeah, so that woman, she, and I had, even though I was a teen mostly when I knew her, and then when I went to the military and left, and then came back, I mean she was probably 20-25 years my senior. I remember we had this night where she wanted to, you know, let's have a bottle of wine together, or whatever. And she, I remember that she made this move on me, at, which was really scary, you know, because she was my safe place in a way, but yet I still loved her. Like, I was attracted to her in a weird sort of way at the same time and, it didn't work out, like it was a disaster really. It was just this one night and, but I felt for her so much because she hadn't experienced anything for her whole life other than this other woman that she had been in love with, so, she just like... And I found that then too, and I don't know if it's still like that now. If you found out somebody was gay, or like I'd say lesbian now, you didn't really ask or try to get to know them, whether you liked them. It was just the fact they came out to you and sure enough you were going to somehow have a relationship [*laughing*] with them because they were the only other gay person you knew. Or it was so, you know, limiting, getting, you know meeting people. It's still like that. It's still hard to meet people, I think. That's why when students like, counsellor at Dal, when students call me and tell me that they're, you know, in, you know, somewhere in that rainbow, I tell them right away, I am too. I am too. And I tell them, you know, I don't use a lot of self-disclosure, but I just immediately want them to feel safe. That they can talk about anything and everything, and I actually have quite a few students that do come back and talk to me about, you know, their lives and what's happening and, yeah.

LF: You came out during, basically, the AIDS crisis [KL: Yes, yes] and I am wondering if that affected your experience of being gay in the world?

KL: It absolutely did. Yeah, it absolutely did. And there were a lot of men who, who, you know there were some that I knew who died. I think there were others that committed suicide too. There was a, I remember a man here in the, in the city, and also, friends of friends. So, any of the parties or social gatherings that I went to like, a lot of their friends, their gay male friends were dying. And, and there was just this whole threat of, and fear. I also worked as a – I did street work for four years. That was sort of my first community social work job, front line social work, so I worked with prostitutes and sex trade workers. And so, there were a lot of, and that was back in '90... I was there from, let me think – '88 to '92 or something, yeah. And I also worked in public housing. And it was a big hush-hush, no-no, even though we did the gay male stroll. And a lot of the sex workers, you know, they likely, probably a lot of them were involved in all kinds of different relationships, but it was like, it was, yeah, so the AIDS thing at the same time,

the threat of that, and also, the gay male stroll here in the city. And then the women's strolls at different points. And that's when women were actually on the street and present. We strolled three nights a week. We connected with them face to face three nights a week and, you know, we weren't about hauling anybody off. It was more about make it safe. We gave out condoms then. It, you know, and we would go and do speaking engagements, and people were like shocked that we were actually working with, you know, working with sex trade worker and gay male workers and giving out condoms and passing a bad date list and, meeting with pimps and, yeah that, but I think that was a part of my coming out too. Very much so. And it was, and I wasn't out on the street. Like it would be like, I remember some of the women would come up to me. I don't know if they sensed something. And they'd like open their, whatever they had on [*laughing*] right. Like, I remember this one woman, she was always up in my face, always up in my face and she would come, and she'd just like, and she'd always have this like, lingerie stuff on, and she would like just throw open whatever she had on and just give me the full, the full view, right.

And, but it was very homo— it was very homophobic on the streets. Because it was all about, I mean this was then, you know, white men ran the black men, and the black men ran the white women on the street. That's part of how that worked, right. They ran the drugs; they ran the prostitutes. The gay men had their own thing. Of course, men always do their own thing. They had their own thing and they functioned; they didn't need to be protected on the street. The women did, and so that was the whole buy in with these pimps. They weren't all black, but a lot of them were, and these women were wives, you know, they called themselves wives, or sister wives, so there would be like three, or four or five of them living together with one, you know, with one pimp. They had their child- they had their babies by them. And it was all very, very homophobic. If there were any, there were a few women who talked about maybe sort of bisexuality, and even my street partner. She was sort of bi-curious. I remember, you know, but it was, it was very hidden. Yeah, you weren't allowed to talk about it there. Like it was sort of like, disgusting or something. Like, because we've just serviced, we service men. Like we're not going, like why would you, you know, why would you have sex with women, right. It was all about men. And being addicted to the man and being addicted to the money and addicted to the life.

So, that was a huge part of my, my coming out and transformation, because I was again, in a sec— you know, secretive. Same in public housing. A lot of those women very conservative. Living in poverty with single parent women, absent fathers. I remember, they used to, out of a lark, used to go to the gay bar. They'd get ripped and, and go to Rumours, and I remember they saw me there one night. I was there. That's, you know, where I went, right, to socialize. And I remember that was like [*whistly breath*]

they went back and told all the other women and I remember at that point I did come out. I just, I said yeah, of course I go there. My partner's a woman. And you know. But I was like forced to come out in a way or outed in a way. A couple of times I've been outed, but, yeah, some of those really ultra, like conserve- they, it surprises me, because they're living this, I know there were some women who were bicurious, absolutely, in both those, like on the streets, in public housing. I knew of them, but it was like very shameful, or like we're not living up to what we're, you know, this is about the man, having kids, his kids, all of that stuff. Real buy-in there. Right. And that was not my reality. At all. When I think about that now, like sometimes with new people that come into my life and they don't really, you know it's hard, it's hard to explain. Well, how come you're not married Karen? Or, how come you have no children, or, you know then you have to start, you know, you're always coming out. Right. It doesn't matter. Like you're always, always; I've been volunteering at the senior's centre, and I was sitting down talking with one of the members at the senior's centre and she's talking about how she met a new friend, this new man online and I was *[laughing]* she's like, oh my god, you would do so well, she said. You know, like blah blah blah and I was just sitting there, and I thought, okay, do I say anything? Do I come out to this woman? It was just like right there, you know, right there, and I just thought, well, not right now. Let her just go on and on about her thrill about meeting this, you know, this man. Yeah, so, yeah. I guess I should be conscious of your time too.

LF: Well, I'm just, as a last kind of question wondering is there anything else you think you would want to say to like younger people, younger queers about [KL: Right] the experience of, you know, coming out and being out, [KL: Yeah sure] being gay, lesbian.

KL: Yeah, yeah, for sure. That's a very, very important question. I noticed there's a new site called Pairing, Pairing something. It's a mentoring, and I've been seriously, intentionally thinking about, do I want to mentor a young person? Because I mean I love the students at Dal, and they're young, and I get to mentor them, but I thought maybe this would be nice. It's important to find safe people. Safe people, right. I realize that, through, probably throughout my own history, there were times when it probably wasn't very safe. I would say take care of yourself really, really well. And don't override those noes. There's a difference between yes and no. Don't override the no, you know the no that you feel in your gut, right, like really important. And don't be desperate. Right. Desperation just leads to bad decisions, right, which you may regret, and we all need to learn those things, but, if you can avoid it *[laughing]* right, like if I go, if I could just go back and start that time over, like, wow. I would so do it differently. So, maybe, maybe but, I would do things differently, yeah. But try not to act out of desperation, which is hard. Young people, you know, their brains aren't fully developed, and their executive functioning isn't always, you know, there and, you know, of course we'll be impulsive

and all of that, but try not to override those noes. And try not to use self-harm as an expression of whatever, you know, frustration or pain or suffering or shame, or whatever it is that you're, you know. Find healthy, creativity, art, music, drama, dancing, you know, art saved my life. Right. So, I think it can save other young people's lives. Poetry. You know, it is a safe way where you can throw all that stuff at it and it won't hurt you, it will not hurt you back, right. And I think art is a great intervention or tool for all kinds of healing, but specifically for sexuality and coming out and all that, yeah, so.

LF: Great, wonderful. I feel so honoured to be listening to these stories.

KL: Oh, I'm sure, eh?