

Interviewee: Paula Arsenault

Interviewer: Sam Ginther

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

SG: Okay, so. I am recording now, so yeah, if you could just say your name, your date of birth, where you're from and...

PA: Yeah. My name's Paula Arsenault. I was born May 5, 1965. And I live in Truro, Nova Scotia. I have – I was born in Montreal. We lived in Pugwash, Nova Scotia, and I've, I've lived just about, many places. I lived in Halifax for a while, which is where a lot of the stories I would have to tell come from. And then I lived in Vancouver for five years, and then the rest of the time I've been back here, in Nova Scotia. So, I've been actually thinking a lot about a conference that happened in the '90s, and I had a coffee cup, that's the only evidence that there was such a conference, and it was funny. It was called the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Conference. And I can't remember the date. I think it was, I had, I went to Mount Saint Vincent for university, and I graduated in '92. I think I was done university. And I worked five years at a retreat centre out near Peggy's Cove. It might have been, so it might have been '93, '94 we had this conference. It was amazing. There was like hundreds, it was like, I think it was an Atlantic Canada. I don't know. Has anybody talked about it? Do you know?

SG: This is the first hearing about it, but [PA: Yeah, yeah] I haven't interviewed too many people, so I, I – please go on.

PA: Yeah, so, that would be, I think, of all of the sort of historical information, I really wish I had that mug. It didn't break. But anyway, what was outstanding for me was, I was a young woman participating in it. I think of it now, it's like, oh my god. I had a lot of balls to do this [*laughing*] but, I must have been part of the planning committee because

I ended up doing a workshop on sex toys [*laughing*]. God, we're talking '90 [SG: Nice] being way before Venus Envy ever probably thought of existing.

SG: *Yeah.*

PA: And then I did a Sunday morning, we did a spirituality thing. So that was a, other than that I think that my mind was just so focused on doing the workshop. Not sure. I don't really remember. But there were workshops there. There must have been like a keynote speaker. Yeah. I don't remember Anita Martinez being part of it. Have you talked with, or know, you must know about Anita?

SG: *I don't.*

PA: Okay. She's the photographic, she's the person who has all the pictures of everything that happened. So, she must have – or, I don't remember her around that time. So anyway, what was amazing was I did this workshop on sex toys. I don't know what inspired me. Maybe it was because there was lack of information in the lesbian, gay, bisexual kind of community about sex toys at that time. So, I did a lot, I remember doing a lot of research. And I actually got like a company – oh damn, I think it was Eve's Garden – and they sent me like 15 or 25 brochures. They had lovely things available, and they had a beautiful brochure, so I had only planned for maybe 15, 20 was hopeful. And it turned out there was somebody else slated to do a talk about, I don't know, sex. Whatever. And they cancelled. So, all the people that were going to that workshop [*laughing*] ended up at mine, so I'm like [in front of] 100 [people], just seemed like a 100 – it's like way more than I had planned for. So, it was meant to be like more of an intimate highlight, oh, you know, we can talk about it. It was like, all of a sudden, like, I was on the stage. I was not prepared for that [*laughing*], but there was. I remember there was two, so I had the materials, and then, like, the paper, and I talked about – two things I remember talking about was, one, the first thing I said was – I got people to think about their name and said you even your name can be a toy, sex toy. So, in my, I was trying to make, anything can be a sex toy rather than actual toys. So, and then I

talked about for people who wanted to think about bondage to use toilet paper, so wrap yourself up with toilet paper. Because you can break out of it, right [*laughing*]. Those were the two, my two takeaways, and I don't have a drawerful now at 56. I don't have anything. It was, it was kind of fun because nobody really was talking about that I guess at the time, and then the spirituality part of it.

At that time, I think I had, I had sort of a, I had gone to university after doing a variety of volunteer work, and, when I graduated from high school. I went to university to, my intention was to get a Women's Studies degree and then go on and get a, become a United Church minister. Needless to say, after my first course in religious studies I realized no, this is, I can't, I cannot. I, I believe in congruency so definitely the Christian religion is not congruent. So, I then discovered women's spirituality and then, was that – but I also had been exploring shamanism, so with drumming and trancing, so I had, all my life I've been pulled towards a native type of spirituality. I'm not First Nations, but I felt the draw to the Earth-based, so. Plus, I was exploring women's spirituality was a big thing at that time – the Goddesses and stuff [*laughing*]. Anyway, so. Where am I going with that? Damn. So, I was quite involved I guess with spirituality circles and things, and so it, I probably put the idea for us to do this Sunday morning event and was in the – and it was one of the only time. Rumours was the, we did some of the things – it wasn't at Rumours, is was at Dalhousie I think we did most of the stuff. But the Sunday morning thing was in the upstairs part of Rumours, where there was like a boardroom and it was really, it was really nice and kind of special 'cause it was so quiet. It was not a very big, maybe under 20 people. So that was kind of nice. So. And other than that, I had a coffee mug that I had just 'til recently. Yeah, it was my favourite. Anyway, it was a beautiful mug. It had a picture of the universe and it said "We Are Here." Or something like you know, "We're Here. We're Queer", so it was like that a picture of the solar system and there's We Are Here [*laughing*]. I'm curious to know what else, I haven't heard people talk. We haven't talked about that with other people, so I'm curious to know what other people remember about that. There's got to be an agenda or a handout somewhere.

SG: *Yeah. Do you know, remember what, what the, I, I, what the exact name of the conference was, or?*

PA: It was called the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Conference.

SG: *Oh, okay.*

PA: Yeah. And it was, like it wasn't sponsored by you know, the, it wasn't sponsored by a university or, like it was sort of a, and I think it was meant to be Atlantic Canada or, anyway, it was like a wide-reaching event. There was quite a few people there and I, anyway, so that was funny. So, for me, a lot of, I was gonna say that historically we would – I have been labeled lesbian so because that's the label we were given at the time. And now I'm happy to say there is much more fluidity and I would probably label my – oh no, yeah, I would label myself pansexual and, after being a lesbian then I would have said I was "bisexual", like quotes, but I would never, people would never have labeled me that because nobody really knew me. Knew that side. I never had the opportunity to express it. And, let me see, I do have a story about 1985, 1985, I think it was 1985. I was volunteering, you want history, right?

SG: *Please, go ahead [laughing].*

PA: 1985 I hadn't come out, come out. But people around me were forcing me out. Meaning they were saying you're, I don't know, I felt forced. I was just a young slow developer sexually. And I had no real interest, but I was I definitely was in love with my best friend who was a woman. And yet I was exploring. Anyway, I – Anyway. So I, here we go. I was volunteering and living in a community called [redacted]. And I was there for 2, 3 years and it was sort of in my second and a half year there, I was 20 – God, I was young, 21. I was one of the first assistants there and they had one house and then we got a second house. So, I moved to the second house to be [redacted]. So, here I am in charge of three disabled people and two other [staff] plus myself. In retrospect, no, how do we tell the story? Anyway, I was 21 and I had all these people. One of the

[staff] was a man who was a Vietnam vet, who was in charge of carrying body bags. And we didn't know at the time he was a closet alcoholic and was drinking in front of the handicap men. Anyhow, he was constantly undermining my authority, and, what else? And we had it disabled woman that was living with us and she had extreme behaviour problems and so, it was really, it was a very challenging time and she, she, after I left the community, she ends up going back to the institution. That rarely happens, like 97% of the time they do never do that. So, the fact that one of the assistants turns out to be alcoholic and one of the disabled people ends up being institutionalized again just shows that, to me it shows that I did – I was doing the best I could with what I had for abilities.

Anyway, so I was having a mental breakdown. Just dealing with all of that and, the [redacted], her husband was a social worker. He was a professor at [redacted], so he was working out of the [redacted] Hospital in the day program, and the day program was for people with mental illness. You go nine to five. And he was working at the day program. So, I was going through this huge crisis, and they set me down one day and said they had concerns about, look, you know, my work, or what was happening. And the main concern was that I was gay. We're talking, and this – I know it was a Christian community, most of them were Catholic. This one happened to be Protestant. United Church. So. But one of the, oh one of the tenets of the community was celibacy. I know I wasn't going around, you know what I mean, like I wasn't, but I guess, I must have been – I'm stumped. I am so stumped as to what made them identify me as being gay. Right. And so, it was an issue. I may have talk, I have a, I have a, I do have a gay uncle in Montreal, and I do have – I had a lesbian friend, my best friend was lesbian, and she was doing a project with a lesbian professor. Oh yeah, that's what it was. "People in the community are talking." Oh Jesus. So, I was given sort of the option to leave – get out, go away. But it was like this is, this was a place that I had invested my soul in, like this was, 'cause I loved the job. I loved working with people with disabilities. I love the spiritual basis of it. And the faith.

Anyway, so it was, it would, it was – I couldn't leave, so they took me out of the house that I was in as the direct, [redacted] and they brought me back to the main house, and they sent me to the psychiatric day hospital. And, when I think, you know, people talk about, you know, we, we're talking '85, '86, like that might seem a long time. It's not, it's not really that long time ago when you think about in history, and luckily it never came up as part of the program. It did come up as a part of the intake process. I remember them asking, you know, like, why are you here, and I was like, fuck! [Laughing] You try and manage what I was managing at 21 and, who at 21 doesn't have sexual frigging feelings and desires? Hello! I was still a virgin at 21. Anyway, and all around me people were getting busy. And I just wanted a little bit for myself, so. And I remember, part of it, like it was just, it was just a waste of time to go to this thing, but it was kind of horrific because every day I had to take the bus out to the goddamn hospital, nine to five, and I sat in a circle with like 20, 15, maybe, 10 - 15 other people having mental illness episodes. They were all drugged up in here I was not on drugs. Thinking I was there because I was gay, and I was burnt out. Anyway.

SG: How long did you have to do that for?

PA: Oh god. I think it was at least three months.

SG: Oh boy.

PA: Yeah.

SG: That's like 3 months, that's like – and obviously, like, there's nothing wrong, right? Like there is just, like...

PA: No. I probably needed, I probably needed a vacation [laughing]. And a good old fashioned sexual experience [laughing]. Yeah. So. Yeah. So, that kind of, that was a pretty, you know, I hear people, well I've been in, you know, I've been at places and talked with, I have yet to experience, talk to a woman who's had psychiatric

hospitalization or treatment for being lesbian or being sexually deviant. I've heard stories from men in our community who've had electric shock and things like that. That's interesting. I'm just realizing I've not talked to women about that. Well, I guess we didn't talk about mental illness very much in those days.

Oh, my goodness. So, I survived, obviously because I'm here. So that was '85. What happened next? Then I, then I was very blessed to go spend time in northern Canada, Ontario. I did stay with an Ojibwe community. And there, I was the exotic pet of the month 'cause I have green eyes. I don't know if you can tell, anyway. [*Inaudible*] native and so the men there just ate me up for lunch, and I was happily, happily, not a virgin anymore. And then, near the end of the time, my best friend who I had mentioned before, was at, studying at Acadia. She met with me in Toronto and basically sexually assaulted me because she thought I should know what it was like to have sex with a woman before committing to life with native men. Needless to say, was not a happy experience, yeah. So that was my first experience with a woman. And you know, I had thought of her previously, but then, you know, it was not – that's not what I was thinking of her anymore. It's like, she's my friend. Anyhow so.

What other, oh, the other part, some of it is, I went to Mount Saint Vincent University. I graduated in '92. So, I experienced, I experienced the Montreal Massacre. And Women's Studies at that time, sadly, disappointed me. I did a speech – I did a monologue in this year, last April, and it's called *My Uncomfortable Hoodie*. It was for a collection of stories that were done. I had, there's about 20 minutes, 25-minute YouTube thing. I have, I have the link up. I'll probably send it to you because that goes into far more detail about my experience at the Mount. Was pretty traumatic, and I, I forget that young people today don't even know what the Montreal massacre is. Right. And so, I talk a bit about, I ended up going to Montreal and walking through the hallways of École Polytechnique and it was, it's not, necessarily a lesbian story, but it's a story of women and academia and I guess, and it compounded with how I was feeling at the Mount. The assumption was Women's Studies, we were probably all lesbians and all feminists, and this and that, and Women's studies, really, at that time was just adding

women. So, I took a course, Women in Anthropology. We studied a woman in Africa. You know what I mean. We were not, it wasn't a feminist perspective on women in anthropology. Some of the professors perhaps taught from that perspective, but it was not – and I guess that's what how things have kind of ended up. There's no longer women studies, it's just, that's everything. So, it's kind of, it was kind of an unusual place to be. And then to have come from my experiences, I wanted to do university to become more active, an activist, anyway. And that's not what it was about. Any activism I was doing was in my own time and took away from my studies so, it would, yeah. I feel kind of – I did, I was the main planner for International Women's Day 1991. I should've got a credit for that, but it was just something I did in my spare time. So, I was involved with those events and those were always fun. The International Women's Day before they kind of got taken over by the Union, which is fine 'cause that's where it should be as well. That's what it's about. What other kind of stories? Oh. Hopefully someone has a better story to tell about Wild Women Weekends. Woohoo [*laughing*]!

SG: Oh, do go on.

PA: This is, so we're leaving, leaving the big city. We're going to the rural.

SG: Alright.

PA: Pictou County has been famous for its activist, feminist lesbians. So as a young woman in my 20s, oh it was like, it was like I looked to these women as role models, 'cause they were possibly being, you know, they were – there is a lot of activism. We had a group, yes – hopefully this will get marked down and researched. It was called the Women's Health Education Network, W.H.E.N. And we would have conferences once a year. So that was a big, yeah, women's health was a big thing. So those were things that happened that were sort of, I'm not sure who organized it, but there was a core group of women doing that. In Pictou County, what else. Oh. They planned these Wild Women Weekends, which were a camping – we camped up on a mountain in New Annan, which is outside of Tatamagouche. It was a weekend, gathered together by

these women that were from Pictou County and then some Colchester County women. And, well, it wasn't as wild as they are these days. These days wild women are like, they're, the young lesbians are quite different than we were. It was not ball playing and drinking beer. It was sitting in circles talking about changing the world. Yeah. So, we would do workshops. There was ball playing, of course. Women always gotta play their baseball. We always had dancing and rarely, on occasion, there might have been toplessness. It was kind of the Nova Scotia version of the Michigan Women's Festival where it was kind of like the pilgrimage everybody wanted to make to Michigan, to the Women's Festival. Anyway, I never made it there, but I did get to the Wild Women's Weekend and there was some lovely logos on t-shirts so. I had made a wonderful quilt with a W.H.E.N. T-shirt with a, Wild Women t-shirt and I gave it to my – I ended up, I did end up having a partner for a couple years when I was at university, and I made her quilt with these t-shirts. Anyway, that quilt has since disappeared. That would have been a great piece of history, but anyway.

So those are kind of, and then the other thing – okay, so that was country stuff. But the other thing before I leave the city was Veith House was instrumental, instrumental with the lesbian community. There was women's dances. And it's funny how the word women kind of, women wink, wink, nod, nod. It was a women's dance so women could go. But you went with the expectation that it was lesbians gonna be there. And it's so funny when I think of how, it's – so much is changed when I look at the world today, 'cause segregation doesn't really, like, there seems to be less push for lesbian only things and gay only things. It sort of seems to, I think maybe it's because our sexuality is become more fluid too, it's like, I will, I know, it was still separate events, but there seems to be a lot more where you can just go and be whatever you are. Like you don't have to self-identify as anything. Where was I going with that? Shit [*laughing*].

Ohh! Women's only. Oh yes, here we go. There was another fun thing I was part of. It was called Pandora. Pandora was a women's newspaper [*laughing*]. Lynn Murphy, who I know, I think is involved with this, your history project, and Anita, they would have far more stories to tell. I still have a Pandora T-shirt though. And it's getting all real ratty

looking. I've been thinking, what am I gonna do with that? Now I can donate it in the Archives. Anyway, Pandora was a feminist, lesbian newspaper that we would put, I think it was a monthly publication. I'm kind of telling gossip now.

SG: Okay [laughing].

PA: I think it might have been around 1990, '91. One is the people involved with the paper; how did it go? She was a, anyway, she was, her husband was a professor. At the Mount. And sociology professor. And he was taking the paper to court because they were women-only. It's like, image it now. Now you'd be all over having a women-only paper, anyway. So instead of fighting it, 'cause of course we had no money, they disbanded the paper. And it was unfortunate 'cause it was – I wrote a couple articles. One was on women getting body art. Woo! If, this is before tattoos. Everybody had a tattoo. It was like a big deal. When I graduated from university in '92, I got a ring from the Mount, but it was silver, and it turned my finger black? So, I turned it back and I got a tattoo instead. But nobody had tat– anyway, so, I wrote an article on that, and I wrote an article on self-help, the self-help group in Halifax, so it was newsworthy kind of, anyway, newspaper. Wasn't hurting anybody, but whatever. So that was another thing. Gosh, I didn't realize I had so many stories. Gosh. Yeah, 'cause my kind of history stops '92 when I moved to British Columbia, so, yeah.

SG: And how long, how long were you in British Columbia for?

PA: No, wasn't '92. It was '97 we moved to Vancouver, and we were there for five years. And, it was like, we lived right downtown. When I think of it now, yeah, I mean, nowhere near what it was like, what it's like now that – anyway, it was pretty wicked coming from Halifax to Vancouver. The plan was to go to northern, northern Canada to work, but we got stuck. Lots of jobs in BC and Vancouver, so, but then it was like the urge to be back, back in four seasons and more rural, and we missed, like, I remember standing at a street corner waiting for the light to turn and thought, the amount of cars passing by me while I'm waiting for this light to turn is the amount of cars I might see in the whole year,

you know, in the country. So, it was like dirty and smelly and loud, and anyway so, yeah. So that was part of what, and then family was here, so came back. So, I guess in this – so, my, my mother always knew I was queer, I guess, is the best way to put it 'cause I was also very artistic. I'm very creative. I was always, I think queer is the best way to describe how I felt, 'cause, yeah, when I wrote this thing for *My Uncomfortable Hoodie*. My mother's from Pugwash. She went to Montreal and married my father. My father is Acadian from Prince Edward Island. So, when we moved back to Pugwash, I didn't know, but my mother told me later that people said she had married a "darkie". So, you can see how dark I am. We were dark for Pugwash, so never felt part of fitting in 'cause of the way we looked. So, always judged for that. And, being creative and just not fitting in – I mean, my high school, we graduated 60 people like, you know, what do they say? One in 10 is gay. But, it was – obviously I was one of the queer people, but it was hard to find your people when I was in high school. And I am so happy for social media because I can find my people, 'cause I, that's where, my people are not all in one place. So, I feel much more affirmed, I guess. Right now it's like, okay, there's other queer people. I don't have to try and figure out what box I fit in. I kind of, I kind, I haven't quite come to terms with the assignment of my gender or the assignment of my sexuality by others. Yeah, I was never really given the, well, we're not given the permission to find our own voice in that, and to find your own voice you have to be pretty strong and resilient. And have a good support network.

And kind of, here's an example of it as now over 50 was, I discovered recently, although I've had it my whole entire life that I had polycystic ovary syndrome. Which is why I have facial hair. And, and I've had – I've let it grow for many reasons, like, why the hell not, if you can grow this [inaudible]. So, I was at – lesbians still do potlucks in the country. Once or twice a year. It's very exciting. We get together, gossip about all the exes and make all the connections, anyway. I was sitting out with one of the women who works in a hair, beauty salon. She looks at me, she goes, well, why – they're very curious – why you growing a beard and you can't get it off, you can't get laser treatment 'cause your hair's white. It's like yeah, I'm too old to bother doing that. And she was you're not transgender though. It was like, so the assumption, see the old school people still are

assigning people. You're like, I would say, I am not transgender, but I am not, 'cause I don't wanna be a man. But I don't wanna be a woman either. So that makes me nonbinary. Thank god we have a term for that.

SG: Yeah.

PA: And I've always expressed that. Like I look, you know, in the pictures, I've always felt more comfortable being less of a woman, more manly, but yet it wasn't meant to be more manly. But that's the only clothing or identity that was given out there, so I'm kind of glad that I can embrace that part of being human. So, I can't say that I've found that in the lesbian community. I felt I found in the lesbian community, very, very rigid roles. Like, taking it back to the Veith House dances, I had a friend, she liked to wear skirts. Oh, you don't do that in the lesbian community. That's not the uniform! So, she was, not ostracized, but it was like – it drew negative attention, I guess, right? It was like, well then what, you know, what, what are you? What are you doing here? Like you're wearing a dress. So, and, and I think that's kind of my experience. I had a, my cousin was a, is a lesbian, and she was very happy with that. She embraced it. And, what's the word? Kind of like Jehovah Witnesses [*laughing*], prophesized it, whatever that is.

SG: Prophesized, yeah.

PA: Yeah, and she said, "Ah, lesbians love you. They don't care if you're purple with pink spots!" and I was like, "Well then why have I been single?" Right! I had to go and recruit a first-time lesbian. That's who I'm married to. Twenty, over 25 years. She was not in the community, so, and I didn't even meet her in the lesbian community, so I was never – I, yeah, I can say that. Well, yeah. Yeah, I never had, never had a date. I never got asked to dance. So, my feelings about being a lesbian in the past are kind of sad. And there were occasional, perhaps opportunities, to be more active, but, or more, you know, have more encounters, I suppose, but I never took advantage of, but, yeah, it's almost more sad than my experiences with men, 'cause when I – with women I feel very powerless. And, you know, as a feminist, it was always like, oh, you know, women are

the underdogs. So, we have to give them the benefit of the doubt. Needless to say, I wouldn't call myself a feminist anymore, but I am a feminist. Like, I'm not the North American definition of feminist because going to university, it was like, I am not one of these women. And just sort of rarely, rarely I would catch glimpses of French feminist theology or philosophy, or, you know the token, token and I fit more in the – I don't fit in a group. I sit more in the shadows and, and at that time we're talking like even like the Internet was just beginning. So, yeah, it was really hard to find role models. Find you know, someone to say you're ok the way you are. Like don't try and fit in or whatever. So. There is the sad side to the story. I guess that's the sad side [*laughing*].

SG: It's, it's interesting in that way to like, just to, just hearing it, is that there's a lot of uniformity and, well like obviously in the straight community, and then there's just like that same level of uniformity, but in the lesbian community.

PA: Oh yes. Someone once described it, it's like the church pew. There's the – what was it, yes – or just like how you can feel pushed off the edge in the street. Just sort of white middle class kind of community. It was exactly the same in the feminist lesbian community. If you didn't fit certain parameters like, you know, the uniform, the, the way you talk to people you associated with, it was suspect. Then, oh yeah, there was a lot – okay, that's what it is. The feeling of suspicion 'cause when I, I did a paper on bisexuality at university and that was controversial [*laughing*].

SG: Wow, yeah, yeah.

PA: It was like you're a fence-sitter. You know, it was like, you're betraying your, not even betraying your gender, was like betraying your sexuality by being a bisexual. It was, when I think of it now it's like, Wow. I'm kind of, yeah. Its good things have changed up, but I wonder what it's like being a young person now. Is it harder or easier? I don't know.

SG: I would hope that it's easier. I think just because you have the Internet right, you have so many tools at your disposal to like meet people, so, [PA: Yeah] like, yeah.

PA: Society as a whole is a lot more accepting, I guess, like [SG: Yep] it's not unusual, like being gay or lesbian, it's not a big deal, but the, I know there's big deals with trans gender and all the other fluidity, but...

SG: It's, it's, it's, it's just, it's the same shit, different story, you know. I find that, I really, it's, it's like a, the, like sometimes the rhetoric that's used against, like – you know I'm a trans woman, right – so like, some of this rhetoric, I see is against us. It's like this is the exact same rhetoric that would've been used against like gay people be '80s like, but it's just rehashed. And then like, just tweak a little bit and then they go, and it's like really, like these same arguments haven't died? Like, okay [laughing].

PA: Yeah. So. But I found, here, here's some little thing I found by on social media. There's a group called BIPAN and they do a journal, a magazine for Turtle Island and it's for queer people. So, I'm start, I joined it and it's like I'm the old lady. It's awesome. And there's these young people from all across Canada. And we work on zoom. And they do a free magazine. For people to, it's on the Internet, cool. So, I wrote an article. I wrote an article called *Is Pride Passe?* Right, you know, do we still need pride? And it's like, no, we still need it [SG: Yeah], 'cause people still need to know, like, we still need to, not nec– I don't think it's, I hate Remembrance Day. I don't think we need to do this grief-based mourning for the past. I think we need to say, what did we learn and how are we moving forward and what you just said about how we're rehashing the same rhetoric, it's like instead of, like what did we learn that didn't work? I like to look at, I guess that's the creative part of me is like, what worked and what didn't work and can we keep, can we, how do we [reinvent] what worked? So, I don't even know what I just said, but it made sense [laughing].

SG: No, I think I got what you're saying. So, yeah, like, just like 'cause you want to keep the ball moving forward, right? [PA: Yeah] You always want to be pushing that next

boundary and not feel like spinning your wheels. Right? So. That's really interesting, but like. You know, like you've just kind of kept up with involvement with, with, either with like your community or now it would be more online, but like, still like with that activist's attention still writing and things like that so.

PA: Yeah, I've, I've – oh now, here's some names. I need to name names [*laughing*]. There's stories that really are important and I don't know who's who like, there's a woman, she died. She lived in Tatamagouche. Her name was [*redacted*]. And she was instrumental in the lesbian feminist activities. She was one of the people that planned the Wild Women Weekends, but she did a lot of work in her later years with the Union. She worked for the VON doing community care and there was a lot of work done around less, like 'cause people would discriminate and say, no we don't want that woman coming. So, she did a lot of awareness about that. She did a lot of work. She did huge work with the environmental movement. And she was involved with the Green Party. I know there's been some people working on putting her story together, but. She's – I have a ten-page article written by someone from the Green Party about her life story, as she was, she was born in Westville, Nova Scotia, and lived most of her life in Tatamagouche.

There was another woman. Pictou, in Pictou County. Her name was [*redacted*], and I'd just, I wish I'd managed to write down some of the stories because she, [*redacted*] she was a bus driver, but she traveled the world. And she was working for, I don't know. something social agency, and because of her lesbianism was fired or terminated. And it was – I think there was big, like this must have been '80s, I don't know – so I don't even know her story, but I know there was a story there. And I don't know who might know her story 'cause, I don't know. She didn't have a partner at the end, so. I do know some people here who might know about her so I'm going, I've tried to pass around the history project information 'cause I think there's other women. Like [*redacted*]. She. She lives in Pictou County. She ran the [*redacted*], that was a gay and lesbian campground. And in the, we're talking about, like this is the generation before me. They have great stories.

There is a big movement of women from the United States. From sort of middle, middle to upper class families, and maybe it was during the hippies, right. They sort of came up during the hippie and the granola cruncher time and a lot of them were farm, did open, start farming. And had farms. So, up in Pictou County, Colchester, there was quite a community of these women. And, at one time there was a lesbian commune in Tatamagouche [*laughing*]!

SG: *Oh my goodness!*

PA: It was called Maggie's Farm. Now this is real awesome. It was called Maggie's Farm and the women would get in trouble 'cause they would go to town with their overalls with nothing underneath [*laughing*]. All the old crotchety [*inaudible*], anyway, they'd go to town, and steal things. Bad women. So, they were really bad. And people would go to their parties, and they would slip them acid. God! [*Laughing*] I remember, and they had a bed roster. It's like, oh what!!! So, this week you're sleeping with Anna, next week you're with Mary [*laughing*]. I would love to hear more about this commune, but the women that tell the stories about that are few and far between and probably don't want to talk about it, but that's pretty amazing that we had a – and there was a woman, she actually owned land, the land that Maggie's farm was on, [*redacted*], and she's still alive. She's in Wolfville I think Anita might know her.

And, oh yes, back to the [*campground*] woman. Yes. [*Redacted*]. She ended up being a professor at, what you call now Dalhousie here in Truro – the agricultural part of it. She taught – so, there was a lot of lesbians involvement in the farming communities here in Nova Scotia, which I think would be a whole other interesting study, like what, what influence had they had because, [*redacted*]'s thing was on ethical, I thought it was like on how do you keep your cows so they're happy, basically, but you know what I mean, the ethical raising of animals for eating. But the gossip was lesbians came out of Jane's basement [*laughing*]. So, at one time she was very active, we should say, but not so much now, she's married. But there was – it's funny how they, yeah, there's been some characters for sure, so she would be another one. I'd love to hear more of her story and,

who else? There was one other person, darn it. [Redacted], [redacted], Maggie's Farm. Just like, as a young woman, I remember hearing the stories and thinking, you know, fascinating.

This was a – you know, where we came from – oh yeah, the farm women were always interesting. There was a couple called [redacted] and [redacted]. I don't know whatever happened to them, but they had a beef farm up here, and, and I guess part of the – then I have to pay homage to [redacted], because I did interview her once to put an article in Waves. I don't know if it ever got in, but anyway. And of all of the issues that we experience today, she said classism was for her the one that still seems insurmountable. In her obituary, she did say she died of a broken heart because of the way we treat the world – environment. But for her classism, and I think that rears its ugly head in our lesbian history books because I mentioned there was quite an influx of middle-class, well-educated women into Nova Scotia, like, they would have been in their twenties, thirties. That must have really shook things up, you know. Like, they came sort of during the hippie times, so you got people like [redacted] who grew up in dire poverty, and you got these wealthy women that can come in and buy land and start, you know, an experiment like Maggie's Farm and then go walk away from. But then the lesbians that were born and bred here are left with the residue, residual societal fix.

Yes, and okay, here we go – there's another couple in Truro. I'm gonna have to reach out to them. They may be five years older than me, and they were one of the first lesbian couples to adopt in Nova Scotia. So, they, they had – and they grew up in Tatamagouche. So, they might know some of these stories too. So, I'll have to make them get in touch as 'cause I'm really, I'm really, I guess I'm anxious that, not anxious but like I just I just, I believe, like [redacted] did, classism is a huge, has a huge effect on society and history – it's written by the winners, but it also gets written by who has the money. And I pay homage to my Acadian roots 'cause I am Acadian and my culture and everything was taken away and so, and most Acadian people are poor. I have yet to, the only rich one's lobster fishing in Shediac 'cause, by fluke, they ended up there when

they came back from their being expelled, but anyway. Now I'm just gonna start running off. I have no more stories. I've got lots more stories, *[inaudible]* *[laughing]*.

SG: Well, I mean, it's, I think like we've a kind of reached an hour since we started talking, so like that's like really, it's been really enlightening.

PA: What do you have to do with all of this now? You gonna have to transcribe it or just paraphrase?

SG: Someone at, someone else's eyeballs will be transcribing, so someone else can get to hear about Maggie's Farm and all that.

PA: Yes. We should have a T shirt. I survived Maggie's Farm *[laughing]*. I dropped acid at Maggie's Farm *[laughing]*. Oh my god they had fun back then. Anyway. I'm so glad they're putting these together and I have to say I, when I, after I found out about the project, I started looking in the archives so, it was like, ok, that's cool, cool, cool. Because, there's the other name. Anne Fulton. Anne Fulton did, and she had a HUGE impact on the lesbian community. Did I say huge large enough? Yeah, and when she died, she had no partner. So, all of her stuff was gonna go to her family. And it's like I was, like, in a big panic because all these lesbians, like *[redacted]*, kept their newspaper articles. They would have, you know, personal effects that would have told the history, was going to go to her family, who she'd never really come out too.

SG: Yeah.

PA: So, luckily other people in the community, I know Dan MacKay got involved and another old time, Tuma Young. I don't know if you ever heard of Tuma? He's awesome. He's a Mi'kmaq man who's now teaching at Cape Breton University. He's got a doctorate in law. He's amazing, but I remember him from the days going out dancing at Rumours. Anyway. So, they managed to get in touch with the family and the family said, oh, we didn't know she was so important. Sure, you can have all this stuff. So. That's

why I think you know, there's some really, and [redacted]'s stuff, where did it go? You know, things were people end up passing on that may have had some important history. Yeah. 'Cause I guess I've been the collector of my family's history. I'm the last one of a bunch of lines so. I just know how, you know, and eventually different generations pay attention to their history. Or wanna know what made this happen this way or, you know. I think it, I remember being a young person and organizational meetings and you'd have the old crotchety women there. Oh, we're not going to do that. Never worked before. And I remember thinking, yeah but what if we tried it again? So, if we have the history, then at least we can see if we've tried it again and what would happen. Yup. So anyway. I don't know what else to say.

SG: Well, I think that's good. I think I can just, yeah, I think I'll just end the recording, so...

PA: OK. Thank you.