

Interviewee: Sydney Lancaster

Interviewer: Anne Summerhays

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

AS: So, before we talk about what we were just talking about what we were just talking about, about, yeah, everything, I think I'm supposed to start with asking a little bit about your biographic information. Just like your name, your date of birth if you're okay with that, and you know, dates of residence in Nova Scotia – I'm reading off of a list here – other notable places of residence, employment history, and connections to community organizations. So those are all things I'm supposed to ask you about, but the most important is actually just your name and your birthday, and I think the other things we might talk about, and if not that's okay.

SL: Sure. Okay. My name is Syd Lancaster. My pronouns are she and they. I was born April 13, 1962 in Edmonton, Alberta and the daughter of settler, homesteader parents. Yeah, an uninvited guest in both Treaty 6 and Metis Region number 4 and in Mi'kma'ki. So, that's the short form for me. Okay, in terms of connections to Nova Scotia. That's quite interesting, because I was prairie born and raised, and I came out on the prairies, in university and spent, I've spent most of my 59 years out there. But I have lived in the Halifax area, and now I have, now I own a place in Wolfville, but I've lived in, I've lived in Halifax for a year in 2010, and then a half a year in 2013 and then a half a year in Antigonish in 2017 and half a year in Wolfville in 2019 and I've been here in Wolfville since about December – it was December 2020. And I have two kids who live here, both of whom went to school in Halifax. So, my stepdaughter and her husband live in Dartmouth now, and she was born in Halifax, and my biological child was born in Alberta, but came out to here, out to Halifax for school in 2007 I think, I can't remember. Covid, timey-wimey, who knows. The grey just keeps growing in and it's all good.

So, yeah, it's a complicated history, and most of my, my very direct experience within the LGBTQ2S community is, is definitely prairie-based. But I see some interesting, both similarities and differences. And being on the periphery of the queer community in Halifax for a number of years, and certainly through connections through my daughters, has been a very interesting experience because there are some marked differences. Also, I mean, time frames are very, are very important here too because I started my undergrad in like, in 1983, so we were, you know, like it was AIDS crisis was starting on the prairies. Like people were starting to get sick, '83-'84. I was in, you know, I was at University of Alberta and on the prairies, Edmonton has a reputation of her being a lot

more progressive, at least in parts. And left-leaning and open than other places in the province, but I wouldn't know that in the '80s [*laughing*]. Well, yes and no, yes and no. There was a – there's been a long history of gay organizations and clubs and bathhouses and things like that in Edmonton, but the stories that get told are primarily men's stories. You know, when you read the gay history of Alberta, or of the prairies, or Edmonton, it is first and foremost, the history of men. You know, the men getting busted in the bathhouses which led to a big, sort of outpouring of political consciousness in the gay community. The drag queens who have, were, and still are, incredible ambassadors for the queer community. And, and, you know the drag races and, you know, just all the things, you know, and drag – like drag brunch in Edmonton is still a thing. Sunday brunch at, like I mean, of course this was pre-COVID, but there was, there's a place in Edmonton that hosts a drag brunch. And, and, yeah, I think it's once a month, and yeah, so it's, yeah, so you have full on brunch, and you know, champagne and orange juice and drag show, and yeah, and it's incredibly popular. So, yeah, and we had people like Michael Phair who sat on city council for forever and has been instrumental in part of the cataloguing of gay history, queer history in Edmonton. Darrin Hagen, drag queen, the Edmonton queen, drag queen and playwright and writer extraordinaire. Also, very involved in that kind of thing. But women don't get talked about. They don't get recorded in the history and they disappear. They disappear from the clubs, they disappear from the social history, and so it's interesting, I mean we were talking before, before the record button hit, we were talking about the erasure of women from, from queer history and it's insane it is absolutely insane and I think fundamentally there is a difference: there is a huge difference in the way community has been approached historically between the lesbian community or women identifying as queer, lesbian, bisexual, what, you know pansexual, whatever and the men's community in, you know, let's put, let's put flying quotes around those words, "community", because when I came out I was looking for community, and what I found was many, many *communities*, many of which did not really communicate with one another except incidentally in the bar scene.

AS: Is it mostly that they existed completely parallel, is that part of what it is?

SL: Yeah, separate, and parallel. And back in the '80s there was certainly a lot of misogyny in the gay male community. There was a bar called Boots 'n Saddles which was a men's bar, full stop. Women were not admitted unless they were being guests of a male member [*AS: Wow*] and if you went to Boots, you would probably be the only woman there, and there were men who would give you a HUGE wide berth, physically. They would not interact with you, like no, just no. And there had been a huge, like quite a bit of a to-do I understand. That was a bit before my time, but there had been a bit of a to-do about whether woman should be admitted at all. Okay so, that is a very specific part of getting history, gay male history. That still has threads that is not discussed. It

isn't talked about, you know. People will talk nostalgically in terms of getting history about, about, you know, oh Boots n' Saddles and you know, garage burger and they made the best burgers and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But this was a leather bar, this was a "bear" bar, this was, this was, very you know, this was YMCA macho man. Okay, so that extremis of sexual stereotyping as presenting in the gay community was alive and well. So that was Boots 'n Saddles and then there was also, we had a thriving, quite a thriving club scene in the '80s, ah '70s and '80s. I think it was Flashback which was like home for underage drinking.

AS: That was more open [inaudible crosstalk] –

SL: It was a dance club. It was definitely a dance club and was a huge amount of fun. It was just a blast. It was ridiculous. But Friday and Saturday nights it was, it was party time at Flashback and the Roost, which was the other bar, was right across the street, so you would go to one for a while and then you'd across when the other opened and paid your cover and got your stamp. And then you would just bar hop like literally going back and forth across the street all night until things shut down. Usually, things shut down later at Flashback when Flashback was still open so we would be partying until 4:00 o'clock in the morning. And then we'd all go for breakfast, right? And you're all sweaty from dancing and you've had too much to drink, and your makeup is all smeared and you'd go to – where did we usually go; was it a Denny's or Humpty's or something, something atrocious – and then you know, like you'd have greasy breakfast before you went to bed and collapsed for a few hours.

AS: Was that where you made your connections to the queer community was through there? Or was it more along the lines of that you met people and then went there together?

SL: I generally, I met people and went there together. I hung out with some lovely young gay men when I was in high school and a couple of them were experimenting with drag, or you know, just wanted friends to go to the bars with, whatever, so, yes, there had been, there were evenings at home when I was still living at home with my parents where, when [redacted] and [redacted] would come over and [redacted] would be getting ready to go to the club and that meant he was going through my pantyhose. And going through my clothes and looking – damn him, he had better legs than I had, you know so he would be, you know he would borrow clothes from me, and we would do his hair and do his makeup and then [redacted], [redacted] and I would go to the club. Which was great and my parents, I think, although they found it – I don't know what my mother thought, she never thought anything, I don't, she never said anything, but she'd bring us cookies [laughing] which was really funny.

AS: Probably being supportive, eh?

SL: Yeah, it was her way, her weird way of being supportive. Okay mom, bring us cookies, whatever. I think my dad thought it was kind of sweet. And I think he was rather relieved because as far as he was concerned if I was partying with gay men, at least I wasn't going to get pregnant. This was before, but this was before I was out to them for sure, and before I was really out to myself, so this is when I was like 16, 17. You know. And, so, so I had started to make a few connections, but very few women. Very few women. And most of the women that I, that I got to know at that point in time who frequented the clubs were often, were often straight because it was safe for them to go out and dance their asses off all night and have a great time and wear far to less, far too little clothing because nobody, except other women, was, were going to hit on them.

AS: Right.

SL: That said, it was dangerous, like, in the early '80s, fag bashing was a recreational sport, and it was dangerous, so we always travelled together. We travelled in groups. Always. And it was, you know, there were times when, where people were beaten up in the alley behind Flashback. Or threatened or, whatever. And that was frightening. And as AIDS became more a subject of conversation and in the news, and people started to understand a little bit more about it, some of that got worse in some ways. Perhaps less direct physical abuse and assault, but lots of cat calls, lots of cat calls. You know, lots of people going by on the street going, you know, "Hey you bunch of fags, you're all going to fuckin' die of AIDS", you know [*AS: Right*]. Gay, you know, graffiti, gay plague, you know that kind of stuff. So that was going on. Yeah, really depressing, really depressing. And none of knew what was going on really, so people were getting sick and people who were getting, you know – didn't really understand what was going on. That created division. That actually created a lot of division all on gendered lines.

AS: What did that look like?

SL: Well, it was overwhelmingly it was men that were getting sick. There were bath houses, there were – there was a whole culture in the men's community, and this was also part of the fundamental difference, and part of the erasure of women, I think. In a weird way. Because there was a culture of promiscuity in the gay male community and serial – I mean people did eventually settle down oftentimes, but a lot of people did not. A lot of men did not. So, cruising was a thing. And when people started getting sick, that problematized a whole social structure within the gay male community, and it got really weird. It got really, really weird. Because people were scared. But also, there were, there were noises from the lesbian community, the queer female community that, well, if

you just keep it in your pants and settle down, then you probably wouldn't be get— right? That stuff was going on. So, there was this weird split, certainly in the '70s and '80s where women were still – we inherit, we inherit our socialization. It doesn't matter, you know. You could be the biggest frickin' rainbow unicorn in the world, but you still inherit socialization. There's a whole ton of deprogramming that has to take place. Women, for the most part, yeah! When we were young, when I came out when I was, I was 21, Friday and Saturday night, oh yeah, we went down to the clubs. We danced our faces off. Annie Lennox was our hero. You know, all the things, *all* the things, you know – square those shoulder pads, off you go to the club. It was the '80s. It was the thing [*laughing*]. They're coming – I know they're coming back. It's embarrassing.

But, during the week when we were in school, you know, we were all doing our, you know we were doing our classes and women's studies was starting to become a thing at the U of A, so there were a lot of women taking, you know, feminist literature, and women's studies courses and you know, and we would hang, hang around after class and drink beer and you know, stomp the table and, you know, solve the world's problems according to you know, the latest feminist theory. But for the most part there was still a tendency with a lot of women, with the majority of women that I knew, to get involved with one person and stay in a long, a fairly long-term relationship. I knew people when I was in my 20s who had been together since high school and were still together, you know, well into their 30s, right. And it's – there was that, there was sort of a focus more on coupling and permanence, establishing domestic space for queer women that ran very, very much in parallel with heteronormative social structures in a whole bunch of ways. So, there's still that, that sort of, you know, lesbians make house, you know, let the lesbians play house, whatever. But there were, as a matter of fact, a number of women that I knew who were coming out of heterosexual marriages and they had kids. The bars were not a world for them. That is not, that is not their world. They're taking care of kids who you know, are at various ages, whatever, some of them are toddlers you know. So, you know, going out partying Fridays and Saturday night really isn't in the picture. So, it's a very different sort of social structure that was there. There's also a lot of economic difference. Queer women, certainly in Alberta in the '80s tended to be on the low end of the economic scale and gay men were not. So, it's the gay men who had the penthouses, the gay men who have the, you know, the really nice places and they have the white-collar jobs, and they were pulling in the money, and they had the nice car, and they were buying the designer clothes and a lot of queer women were just making do.

AS: This could be a leap, but where do you, why do you think that was?

SL: I think a number of factors. I think in the broader culture, sexism was always a factor. Compounded by bigotry against gay people, doubly compounded by bigotry against queer women. So, yeah, it was an interesting environment to grow up in for sure. What I have understood from talking to people a bit about, about queer history out here, on the east coast, is some of the same, but also a much more live and let live attitude in a lot of ways. There's a couple that I know, don't know them terribly well, but I do, I have known them for a number of years. They were both coming from previous marriages. They got together, they're older, and as far as I – they travel, they travel in a whole range of circles but primarily their social circles are not other gay people, or queer people. And the context that I met them in was not at all a queer context. And the level of acceptance and just sort of, it wasn't even acceptance, it's just like, oh this is, you know – I'm not going to name names, right. This is so and so, and so and so. Hi, great to meet you, yada, yada. Right? And it was just never, you know, there wasn't the "are they a couple?" It's like well of course they're a couple – so?

AS: Did you say that's been your experience since meeting them in the last, like, 10 years, or have you also heard that that was the case back in the '70s and '80s too?

SL: I don't think it was necessarily the case back in the '70s or '80s. I think there's definitely been progress made, for sure. I also think the, the geographical and economic history of Halifax being what it is makes it a different environment too. Because it's a port city, because it has always been a port city. Because, it sounds very cliché, but – "in the navy, you can sail the seven seas" – but there has always been a queer community associated with the navy.

AS: I never actually understood that, but I have heard that.

SL: Well, when you're at sea for eight, nine months [*inaudible crosstalk*] some of it is situational, some of it is situational homosexuality. Some of it is simply that people sign up to get away from small towns where they are less tolerant [*AS: Absolutely*] and like any city there are always people coming from little, tiny villages, towns, little, small communities where you can't be who you are. And coming to the city is a liberating experience, complicated of course, but still liberating. So, but generally, I mean, I remember being really blown away coming to live in Halifax for a year in 2010 just by the number of people who were walking down the street holding hands, same-sex couples, particularly women though. And it was like, oh my god, I've come to lesbian nirvana [*laughing*]. Amazing, you know. We could never do that. We could never do that in Edmonton. They can do it now. I see a lot, I see quite a few young couples now when I'm back in town just going about their business, holding hands, walking down the street and I'm like, god love you girls, you know, it's so great that that is, that that is actually a

thing. That you can just *do* that. Although there is still risk, of course. There's always risk. And it is still as much a statement now as it was back in the '80s, maybe even more. Because politically and sociologically there has been this, this real extension of the divide between, you know, the chasm between left and right has been, and radical right politics and, and centre left politics has just gotten bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger in the last bunch of years. That shift back to you know, Beaver Cleaver and the, the heteronormative perfect, perfect family. All of that stuff is truly frightening. And I, I sometimes wonder and sometimes despair, still hold out hope, but it is, it's very interesting coming from that and looking at where we're at now and seeing, seeing younger people just living their lives. And it's just, it's, that's, it's incredibly important. It's incredibly important. Does that mean there isn't a huge amount to do? God, no.

AS: I like to think that a lot of what they're talking about is two steps forward, one step back.

SL: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean when I, when I had my daughter in 1991, I had married a gay man, so, she has two queer parents and she's –

AS: She's doomed!

SL: She's doomed, yes absolutely, totally damned. She's also a really amazing and fierce little advocate for justice and equality and I, I feel like some of that, some of that was probably hard fought, hard won. Because I'm sure she faced bigotry in her cohort in school, and that's, that's tough. That's a tough legacy to, to face as a parent, knowing that you can't, you can't stop children or other parents from being cruel, from being bigots. From being ridiculous, from being hateful. But you know, but, that said, I lost my train of thought, yes, I have lost my train of thought completely. I do that so much. Right, okay. Nineties, child, what was I talking about, what was I talking about Ann?

AS: You had been saying about how much, how – sorry I'm having a hard time expressing myself too – about your experience in Halifax of seeing queer women walking down the street holding hands and how refreshing that was [SL: Yeah, yeah] [inaudible crosstalk].

SL: Yeah. That was. It was incredibly refreshing, because even in, in the '90s, like my daughter was born in '91, that was not a, that was not going to be a thing. That was not a thing. Occasionally, but very furtive, you know, so they'd be holding hands and then if the sidewalk would get busy, it's like, [*sing-song*] do-do-do-do-do right.

AS: That makes me so sad to [inaudible].

SL: Yeah. It is, it is really, it is really sad. It is really sad. So, I don't know, you know. I think there's a whole lot that that still needs to change. I mean, I would love to think that we could get to a place where people could just be. Full stop. I have always wrestled with the labels. When I was coming out there wasn't an option to be *they*. There wasn't an option to be sort of, you know, whatever shape of rainbow you currently wanted to be on a given day. There wasn't that latitude. Even within the queer community. I was definitely known as a "lipstick lesbian" because I liked nice clothes and I wore makeup. And the – [*inaudible crosstalk*] – oh, big time. Being told you're much too pretty to be a lesbian. What! What! Being told by more stereotypically butch women that I wasn't a real lesbian because I wore makeup and therefore, I was still participating in hetero patriarchal structures. Being told to my face that when I was pregnant I was a traitor. Thanks for nothing. That's kind of when I walked away. Big time. It was like, I'm done, I'm done with this. This is bullshit. I can't, you know, there was no room to be who I was. And I still don't even know if there are words. Gender fluid, non-binary, yes, all of those things. Does it really matter? I'm a human being. I happen to have a particular secondary sex characteristics that are assigned to a category that really is irrelevant to me, as is the secondary sex characteristics of my partner. Irrelevant. Irrelevant completely. I present cis; I present to be in a heteronormative relationship because I am legally married to a man, and it has absolutely no bearing on who we are, or what our relationship is. He would consider himself heterosexual. He does not consi– he does *not* consider me heterosexual, never has. When we met, as friends, I was in a nine-and-a-half-year relationship with a woman. He knew me as a queer woman. Always knew me as a queer woman. Always had a thing for queer women. I don't know why. But, you know, when he was single, he was, you know, it's like inevitably I'd ask somebody out for a date, on a date and she was a lesbian, inevitably. I'm like, you like strong, you like strong women who just live in their bodies. That's what it is.

AS: *Who've been through a lot to get to where they are in terms –*

SL: Been through a lot to get to where they are and he has never, he's always been a very, very strong feminist. And doesn't, doesn't participate in those games. It's like, yeah, you dress how you want to dress, you're not dressing for me. You do whatever. Of course you can do whatever you want, you know, like all of, all of those things that, that's very superficial stereotypical things that inform so much of our social interactions have never been present in his life. So, it's quite a refreshing space to be in. It's quite lovely. He's just, you know, he's a human. He's just a human. I'm a human. I understand and recognize that that identity is an incredibly important thing for so many people. I get it. And I get why those labels are there. I get why the terminology is being generated. I get the need, the very real lived need to be able to say, I am not that. And

this is what that, you want me to be that, and I am not that. So don't [inaudible] this is what I am. And find language for it. But I wish it was more. I wish we could [inaudible crosstalk] had to do that.

AS: I think it's super gnarly when there's not really a term for, when there's not something existing that will help people understand who that person is, like, what you were saying about genderfluidity, it's just. You know most people don't even know what could that mean. They're starting to.

SL; They're starting to, but, but the pushback, the resistance to that is incredible. Because god, it could only, god knows there could only be a binary [laughing] No! No, that is not how it works. But the association of biological sex with gender, I mean, god, can you please just put this to rest. This was, this was an argument that was going on in the late '60s and early '70s, and in the '80s and in the '90s, and like, come on, can we please, can we *please* just put this to rest for once and for all. It's ridiculous. These are social constructions. And our identities evolve in social space over time. So, the person I am now is not the person I was when I was 25. Thank god. But I am, at the same time, still that person. You know.

AS: I guess, yeah, I mean, as, as your life, as society is changing around you and you're changing within it.

SL: Yeah. Absolutely. And, and you know, who knows what's going to happen in the next 30 years, but it's going to be very interesting when you're in your, in your 60s. And you look back, and go, huh! This is what I thought about that then, how much has that changed? Or how, you know, it's interesting, I think one of the things, at least for me, I'm sure if this is true for a lot of people, or everybody, or whatever, but I certainly know that as I age, I become less concerned with definitions and labels. And much more concerned with mutual respect and honouring of an individuals' path in the world. Square peg, round hole. Who cares! You know.

AS: In that way, would you, like I was kind of thinking about this as you were speaking. I'm wondering whether you would say that that is with defining yourself in terms of your queerness in that, like, in what you were saying about kind of detaching from having these definitions and defining yourself by these things? Do you feel like earlier in your, like when you first came out, it was very important to identify yourself in terms of your queerness and less so now, or –

SL: Absolutely, absolutely. It was, it was very much a matter of finding, finding a voice and an expression for a dimension of myself that I was not, I didn't have the tools to

express until I found, I tried that, allowed for at least some of what I was experiencing and, and those ways of knowing and, and it was, it was, it was quite liberating, as a young woman, to also be able to detach from the typical sexism of heteronormative society. At least for a while. And, and so they'd go, yeah, you know, we don't, we don't have to play by those rules. Even though, ironically, those rules got enforced even within the queer community, which was really frustrating and depressing, but you know.

AS: [Inaudible] saying before, yeah.

SL: Yeah. It's, you know, really, really frustrating that, that those gender roles were still in, you know, still in, in full force. And you know, part of that, the economics and the misogyny and the sexism that I was describing early was, it was all part of that. You know. I like to think that it's, I'd like to think that that has shifted a lot. I don't have any empirical evidence to say that it has, but I am cautiously optimistic and hopeful *[laughing]*. Just because even a lot of straight men are a lot less misogynist and sexist than they used to be, so I think there's hopefully more, more queer men and more gender fluid men who are disrupting all of that. You know, I think the non-binary folks under the broad umbrella in which we all live are, in so many ways, the real disrupters, and I love 'em for it. I just, I love them for it. It's great. It's like, look, that upsets the apple cart of misogyny. It upsets the apple cart of patriarchy. It upsets all of the binary norms that limit people, limit their thinking, limit their opportunities for personal expression, all of that stuff. It's like, good on you. Keep going.

AS: As long as people can be on a spectrum, they can be anything they actually are?

SL: Right! And on a given day, you can be at one place on the spectrum and on another day, you can be on another place on the spectrum, and that is totally okay, because that is who you are. You don't have to be the same thing because we're not from one day to the next. We're not. None of us are. We're all different people every day. So yeah, potential, potential, potential. I have this little business card *[AS: Nice]*, okay, yeah. It's actually from a, from a wine marketing company, but I just thought, okay, this is great, this is, so, this lives on my desk and I look at it every day *[Sydney shows a dark brown card with cream text that reads "KNOW THYSELF"]* Right.

AS: And then drink a glass of wine!

SL: No. Just coffee. The other one is a, is a post card from a William Kentridge print, which is also interesting.

AS: Measures of self deception.

SL: Yeah. Making assumptions about yourself, and who you are and not living, not living an examined life. How easy it is, how easy it is. And how, how often it is that people don't examine their biases. Particularly within the context of minority, marginalized communities. It's very interesting. Now we can be in a queer community and be a raving racist. You can be in a queer community and identify in a particular way and be a raving misogynist, or you can be a man-hater, or you can be a TERF, you know like come on, please. So, I don't know. I, I know I feel comfortable here, being here, in a way I have never felt in Alberta.

AS: *Even in recent years?*

SL: Yeah, [AS: *Interesting*] yep, yep.

AS: *What do you mean by that?*

SL: I don't have an answer for that yet.

AS: *I did the [inaudible].*

SL: Yeah. It's hard to define. I think my experience has been that overwhelmingly I have encountered people [in Nova Scotia] who are just live and let live people. It's like I don't care who you sleep with. I don't care what you do for a living. I don't care how much money you have. I don't care about any of those things. Are you nice? Are you kind? Are you interesting to talk to? Hey. Cool. Right, so that has been a big shift. I think out west, because out west is so young, and you know the province was just formed, like was just established in 1905, right. And, and in the Maritimes, there are, there are – your European settlements dating to 1604 and of course, our indigenous peoples have been here for millennia, and also have completely different conceptions of, of gender and sexuality and all of those things. But it's, it's just, it's just different out here. And I think part of that is the history. Part of that is the longevity of settler culture. I also recognize, and I've got to, you know – I'm white, I'm middle class, I'm so fucking privileged. It's ridiculous. Would I be saying the same things to you if I were black in Nova Scotia? No. Would I be saying the same things to you if I were Mi'kmaq? No. So even within the context of spending most of my life in a queer community, you know, of one sort or another, or identifying as queer, for most of my life, two thirds of my life at least, I have been, I have always inhabited a place of incredible privilege. And that is something I think it is, is, starting to be more in the screen of awareness in more people, and I think that's important. Economic and political privilege have always been much more front and centre in social structure and social awareness and community activism

out here than it has, than has been the case out west. And that might be a very interesting intersection point between what I am seeing as a more 'live and let live' kind of attitude out here, because there is just always been a greater recognition that everybody walks their own path. So, yeah, it's interesting. Interesting.

AS: [Inaudible] I'm curious where you've gotten that impression from. Is it from talking to local queer people that you know? Or just generally your sense of the culture?

SL: Generally, my sense of the culture, and the fact that I certainly, many people who have privilege, certainly, economic and social privilege, out here I see them actively contributing in positive ways to communities on an ongoing basis that are, have less privilege that are that are less, you know, whatever, whatever shape of marginalization that may take. I'm also very conscious that there has always been a, there's been a longstanding social justice movement, both in the, in the black community in, in Nova Scotia, in the Mi'kmaq community in Nova Scotia, but also amongst the settler community, particularly with respect to housing security and economic security. And it's been, been much more organized, so much more vocal for much longer. I think out here, at least that is my perception, I might be really wrong. But that is my perception. I'm certainly seeing a level of organization and sustained commitment to social justice issues out here that I have not been seeing, that I have not seen on the prairies. For sure. And that is just more accepted as part of the fabric of life out here, than, than it is out west. Right now the political situation and my, the province of my birth is sort of such that, you know, yeah, it's right way heaven right now. Oh, my goodness.

AS: Well, you fled to the right place, especially if your impressions on social justice here are true.

SL: Yeah, I mean, I would like to, it's going to be interesting really digging down and, and establishing roots that I want to establish here. This is, this is forever home, so it's going to be, it'll be really interesting to get involved. And I would, I would love to, I'd love to connect with more social justice initiatives out here and I guess I'd really love to discover some queer seniors out here. Yeah, and we could have a social justice coffee klatch, and you know, like, I don't know. Figure that out, but it would be, you know, I, I think it's, I think it's going to be interesting. I don't have any illusions either. I mean, everybody is, everybody's got their own, their own saying and there are a lot of privileged people out here. Specially in Wolfville. There's a lot of money here. And there are definitely people here who are not engaged and are very happy in their privilege and would very much like to see any indicator of anything other than White wealth and prosperity just get quietly swept under the rug. Those aren't my people. They aren't the people I'm socializing with. You know. So.

AS: I wonder whether you're, whether your experience with the art community and the queer community, how much those – how do I put what I'm trying to ask? How much you've been finding that that's the case within those communities that you're engaged in and what the community has been like that you've come across in Wolfville so far.

SL: So far it's, so far it's been, it seems to be, fairly small but mighty, and there tends to be a lot of intersection of, of creative practice and, and just sort of general acceptance of, of, of people and, and certainly a certain degree of social consciousness. It's different out here for sure in that regard. With respect to the creative community, because it's much more, it is much more fragmented out here. Edmonton has this, it is a small creative community, but it's really, really tight. Really tight and really interdisciplinary and there's tons and tons of collaboration that goes on all the time. I think part of it is because it's a small community and, um, we have to share resources and prop each other up as much as, as, as anything else that happens. There's more entrepreneurial spirit out here. And more and definitely more, in some ways, more opportunities for that entrepreneurial spirit to grow.

AS: Interesting because I don't think people necessarily think of Nova Scotia as like, a place for opportunity.

SL: It is in some ways. In many ways it's, it's, it's a very well-kept secret. It'd be interesting to see how it how it all develops over the next ten to fifteen years. It's going to be, it's going to be very interesting. But yeah, I mean generally, as certainly artist run culture in the Maritimes in general, but for sure in Halifax, has been absolutely, absolutely at the forefront of intersectional politics. So, making sure that there are safe spaces for queer folk of, of whatever stripe, and, and, and trans folk and, and people of colour and black people and, and Indigenous people. A lot of, of that, a lot of those understandings, a lot of those needs for making space within what has historically been an environment of white privilege in the art community, is certainly being actively disassembled and in, in artist run culture here. And that's wonderful to see. That's something that's not been right across the country. So, it's like, yes. That is a good feeling. That is a really good feeling. So, it's going to be interesting. Yet another –

AS: Oh, sorry, didn't mean to interrupt you.

SL: No, go ahead.

AS: I'm curious about more about your, about your interactions with queer communities versus queer people here. Because I know you've mentioned you know, having some

queer or trans friends or, you know, [inaudible] like that, but I'm curious whether your experience with the queer community has been similarly fragmented here compared to Edmonton, same way as the artist –

SL: Absolutely, yeah, it has been, very much so. Yeah, it has been. I think in some ways I've gotten to know more queer people and, and sort of a queer community of sorts, ironically, by going to Glitter Bean [*laughing*] because it's, because it's queer run, right, and, and, and, and what a lovely welcoming bunch of, of, of unicorns they are. I love them all. I really do. But we've had like, I've had fantastic conversations with folks there. And got into, you know, got into politics, and got into talking a bit about history and things like that. I was clearing out some bookshelves a while ago, and on one of my trips back, I dropped off a bunch of, a bunch of books for their, for their queer library. It's like, here you go. Yeah, oh yeah, absolutely. I had a whole bunch of, there were there some, there were some great, couple of great lesbian feminist run book shops in Edmonton in the 80s and I have all of these very, and they're very dated now, but it's very interesting to look at them as historical artifacts. Poetry chat books and, and, and essays, and some early writing on, on lesbian feminist theory and things like that that, that I, that I, that I dropped off and it's like, yeah, I think, I'm not necessarily going to be re-reading any of this stuff, but that doesn't mean that other people shouldn't have access to it. So here you go. So that was kind of fun to do. And I think I added into the mix a copy of Vivek Shraya's *I'm Afraid of Men* because Vivek is quite amazing. There are, are you familiar with her work? Okay. Vivek is a trans, nonbinary, poet, creative writing instructor, performance artist, performer, hopefully wants to, wants to be a pop star – [AS: *Oh*] Seriously, they want to be a pop star. And they're beautiful. South Asian. Lovely, lovely person. And, their book, *I'm Afraid of Men* always, really, that was a really good read. It was really interesting because it was an exploration of growing up nonbinary, queer, trans in a biologically male, South Asian body. So, there's a whole constellation of stuff that's going on there that is so difficult and painful for an individual to parse. So, it was, it was a really good read, and it was a good, was a good wakeup call, is one of the many wakeup calls that I've have over the last few years. About the level of privilege that you can inhabit just in having a body that presents in particular way. Or that you're comfortable presenting in a peculiar way to the world. So that's important. You know, it was really important, but it's, it's neat. It's a neat book. It's worth a read. You might find it there if you go for coffee.

AS: I was just going to say, if they, if you donated it to them, I'll have to go round the corner and check it out. I live at little –

SL: Yeah, there's lots of little chapbooks that I donated and stuff so if you feel like reading some, some lesbian poetry from the '80s and earlier then you don't have to [inaudible] [laughing].

AS: *With that I'm curious what other, like what kind of literature you would have from back then versus now that was queer. Is that something that has been a shift as well in terms of –*

SL: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I think those, those intersectional conversations that really opened up the floodgate for some really interesting writing. There are a lot of, of really amazing writers like Vivek Shreya, who would not, you know – Billy-Ray Belcourt, I, there's, there's tons – a lot, of a lot of people exploring intersectional experience that, that didn't have the opportunity to have their voices heard. Even, even five years ago, 10 years ago. So, a lot of it, a lot of it was, a lot of the, the writing that was available certainly in the 80s tended towards the sociological, the political. So, what if it was, you know, and, and then there was, there wasn't a lot of personal narrative, a lot of biography, or a lot of autobiography, that was in any way providing a more intersectional view of, of what was going on in the world, or that offered a lot of hope. I mean, there was the, you know very much [inaudible] there is still a lot of the, you know, the trope of the tragic lesbian. Yeah, you know. Virginia Wolff. Whatever. You know that, that kind of thing and you know, when the role models are Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, that's not really, you know offer you an awful lot for, you know.

AS: *Perspective too.*

SL: Yeah. Perspective. I mean, there's always been, there's always been queer writing in Canada. A lot of it has been coded, but it's, it's less, I think, I think I just, there's a lot more out there now. A lot of the models were either European or, or American, and that makes a difference too. It's a slightly different political climate. Things I read: a lot of Adrienne Rich, a lot of her poetry growing up. And, and her critical writing, her prose. And she still has some really interesting things to say. Toni Morrison has some interesting things to say. And there's, there's lots of, lots of stuff out there, but you know, so I mean, a lot of, a lot of the early writing, reading that I was doing was sort of, of that sort of sociological - political bent, and then there was this whole, because I, because I also write as a poet, I was reading a lot of poetry as well, and, so yeah. Weird, slightly schizophrenic reading that I was doing at the time. I've been reading like the last bunch of years, it's been – actually the last twenty years probably, has been predominantly non-fiction – so I've been reading a lot of, basically doing a lot of research on various things, so, that has also, that's also going to shift and in my, my personal way of moving

in the world and just sort of going okay, I'm just gonna find it for myself rather than listening to other voices, and that's, so that's kind what I'm adjusting to.

AS: [Inaudible] a shift in terms of what kinds of things were important for you personally to be reading?

SL: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And, and shifting, I think in in some ways from finding trying to find role models or trying to find, reading for escape. And now I tend to read more to do research, to actually look at things with a really critical eye and, and make my own decisions about how I'm thinking about these things, so a lot of that has just been time in; sort of a process of gradually finding my own voice and, and, and, and my own sense of empowerment to a certain degree. And some of that has been, a lot of that's been a personal journey of continuing to unlearn a lot of things, right, around, around privilege and around, and all that stuff. So that makes you read wide, read far, read long.

AS: [Inaudible] you were saying about the misogyny in, in the queer community, especially back in the 80s and how it's kind of, it seems like there's just layers that people have to unravel of societal baggage. [Inaudible] you move from that, yeah.

SL: Oh yeah, absolutely. And it's still, you know, it still, it still sticks to you like a bad smell, you know *[laughing]*. It's still, it's still around, right. It's still, you have to deal with it on occasion, you know. I mean, that's been interesting going into hardware stores in small towns in Nova Scotia.

AS: Oh, hey, tell me about that?

SL: Oh my god.

AS: I haven't done this except for in Halifax.

SL; It's like, you know, like just, you know, most of them are mostly okay, but there's the few odd guy, you know, there's the odd old guy was like, who has done everything but just pat me on the head. Like *[laughing]* I live for the tool corral. My partner lives for the paint department. Like what *[laughing]*! It's just, it's really, yeah. So that's, you know, it's, it's there, it's there, it's there. It's always there. And you just have to find the way to navigate it.

AS: [Inaudible] gradually shifts away from that.

SL: Yeah, yeah, exactly. You know, what I mean, it gets back to, you know what I say it's like can we just get past all of that. Can we just get past all of that, please? All of that. ALL of that!

AS: The more self-actualised you become the less patient with society being immature.

SL: Oh yeah. Oh, abso— for sure. And there's, there's something, it'd be interesting, I, I don't know whether it'll come up in, in, in other interviews, but particularly for older women, for women who are who are post menopause like me, there this certain liberation again in, in becoming the Crone. Because in weird ways, on a social level, we disappear. We don't register. We cease to register as sexual beings. For a lot of people. Gray hair equals granny and granny's definitely not a sexual being. Which is fine. That's fine. But older women have this incredible power and incredible energy. And a lot of it comes from just not giving a fuck anymore. So, I have put up with your BS for decades. I don't have to do that anymore, so I'm not going to. Have a nice day, you know? And it's, and, and that level of empowerment can be very threatening. It can be very threatening to people. But, and maybe that's, that's maybe that is the root of some misogyny and just, thinking out loud here, instead of putting, connecting some dots, because I mean queer women exist out of, in some ways, outside of that heteronormative way of being in the sense that their validation comes from elsewhere. It doesn't come from exclusively from the male gaze. It doesn't come from exclusively being seen as desirable in some way, in, in that world. And for people who are very invested in that power structure that can be very threatening.

So yeah. I know a lot of the like, certainly when I was younger, a lot of the, the most threatening situations I had ever been in were with young straight men who were extremely threatened by my being a queer woman. You know the “Keep your hands off my girlfriend, you filthy dyke.” That couldn't [*inaudible*] that kind of stuff, right. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh. Wow. Wow! So yeah. But there's some of that for older women too. You know, there's nothing like getting a herd of woman of a certain age together in a room with a couple of bottles of wine and let the stories go. It's like, holy crap. The things that, that, that accumulation of worldly experience that you eventually just learn to sit with. And you let go of a lot of things that used to make you feel insecure, in one way or another about, about some aspect of the [*inaudible*] experience or, or the validity of your voice. So, I think there's, there's great, there's great merit, great wisdom in hearing the voices of older women. For younger women, and younger men, you know, [*AS: Absolutely*] to start taking some of that stuff apart. So, yeah.

AS: And also, kind of mutual support as well.

SL: Absolutely. And it, it does become, I think for a lot of older women, it becomes a place where you, where you just recognize that everybody's got their own shit. Everybody. Singular to make a little bit more space, it would be a little bit more generous. A little kinder, a little less quick to go. To judge, except when it's just completely ridiculous and you know that it's like, this is bullshit. You know, like when you're dealing with misogyny, or you're dealing with sexism, that kind of setting. You know, there's just you, you, it just comes with, with the turf, with the time in that, that you also recognize that you still got a lot learn. You don't know a lot. You still don't know a lot, and you've still got a lot to learn. So, listening to somebody else's story and how they handled it is part of that learning. You know. Something that's settler culture really needs to rethink. Because under capitalism, we have certainly learned to devalue our elders, because as soon as we're no longer productive, as productive, economically as cogs in the machine for a shareholder. Or whoever the boss is, then, then we have less value in our life. We're not heard or even get, you know, and get warehoused. A lot of people get warehoused. But it least traditional, in indigenous teachings, valued the elder, valued the wisdom, valued the understanding, value that the life experience of the older person, particularly the older woman, and often the older two spirit woman, as a source of learning and understanding and, and knowledge keeping. So, you know, I think queer women rule so you know. I think we should *[laughing]*.

AS: *[Inaudible] [laughing] I mean, what you were saying about, about older people being threatening or you know, I guess not threatening even, like useless to capitalism. That definitely brings me back to what you were saying about being an older woman in particular because it's a confluence of being useless to patriarchy and useless to productivity or whatever.*

SL: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, exactly. I'm, you know, I'm, you know, I'm, I'm one, I mean, the twilight of my productive years for a shareholder and I can no longer produce offspring so what use am I?

AS: *It's obvious. Your decades of experience with dealing with this shit [laughing] Goodness, nothing in wisdom, is there?*

SL: Nothing, of course not. Because, because you know, in in, in the accumulated life experience there might be some nuggets that could help other people learn how to challenge those systems even more. Heaven forbid we have that happen *[laughing]*.

AS: *Like, we can talk about that all day. Oh my god [laughing].*

SL: Yes. Absolutely, absolutely.

AS: I'm curious, it looks like we are, yeah, we've been talking for a while and I didn't want to take up your whole day, but I did want to ask if there is anything else you wanted to talk about. For instance, about, you know, your experience with the LGBTQ+, etcetera, community here in Nova Scotia, or anything else about your experiences –

SL: No, I, I think, I think, we pretty much covered all the bases. I mean, yeah, I think what I wanted to really express was just that, that trajectory, and how that is a very, you know, it's definitely a personal path for me. And, and how gender norms have impacted my understanding of both who I am and the cultures in which I find myself. So, it's going to be, yeah, I think it's, I mean, for me it's very much a limited experience that I have out here, so, I mean, I hope that there's some stuff in here that will be of use for researchers in thinking about queer communities in the Maritimes and in Halifax in particular. And I'm looking forward to finding out more, you know, over time. And then seeing scenes galore. And getting a whole bunch of different perspectives on that, so yeah, I think that's about it.

AS: I'm very curious whether your, your impression of the Maritimes in Nova Scotia, particularly of being very live and let live. I wonder if that's going to hold up to your, to your further experiences here. I know you've had, like, experiences over many years of Nova Scotia, although I thought that you had lived here, maybe not lived here, but did you not travel here quite a bit before you ever moved here? Yeah, I was thinking, quite a, like long history with Nova Scotia.

SL: Yeah, yup. I think the first time I came to Nova Scotia was like 2004 and we've been back virtually every year since then. Including long stints where we've been here for sabbatical for a half a year or, or a full year, or whatever. So. Yeah, and, and having the kids, you know, having the kids, having our daughters go to school out here. Choose. You know, there's, there's a certain mirroring that goes on there and seeing them change, broaden, and adapt and settle into life here. And their understanding of who they are being shaped by this environment has, has made a difference to, but yes, I agree with you. It will be very interesting to see how much, how much my rose-tinted glasses get [*mimes breaking glasses apart*] [*laughing*].

AS: I hope not.

SL: I sincerely hope not too. I mean, I am under no illusions. I know if I, I know there would be many, many, many, many places in Nova Scotia, in any, anywhere, anywhere in this country or any other country where it would not be okay for me to be who I am. And I cannot articulate fully, in any way, my feelings about who I am or living in the

world, or how I love and who I love. So, I have no illusions about that. I'm just hoping that it's a little, that those sharp edges are a little bit wanted out here. So far that's what I'm seeing. Remains to be seen, you know. If I ever feel safe after Covid to go back to a club, I might go to, I might go out to a bar one night and just go like, okay, this is just going to be interesting. I'm going to be a fly on the wall. See what this is like. It might be, might be really thought –

AS: Yeah, but you have magical powers for networking. I bet you like [laughing] I think you're going to commute, like communicate and connect with this community way like, way more than you've even said that you have so far, and I know you have –

SL: Oh yeah, well, I kind of hope so. It'd be interesting. I mean, there's, there's gotta be, there's gotta be, there's gotta be more people like me out there, right? Which is the ultimate, which is the ultimate question for every queer person who's trying to find a community, there's gonna be more than me. You know, somewhere. There's got to be more than me. So –

AS: In my experience it's very disjointed. I know – and I'm friends with many queer people, but I've never had quite the, like, this is a community sense. It's been more like, yes, you happen to be queer, cool, me too, or whatever.

SL: Right, and that's what I'm talking about. It's like oh, you happen to be queer. It's like, that's just sort of, one of the, and is way down on the list of the things that, that, that actually matter when you're getting to know a person. That's the difference out here, is that *it's way down the list*. And I love that. I love that. Because it speaks to other things that are valued, instead of being, you know, the labels: I'm queer first and then I am this and then I'm this, and then I am this, and then I am this, right? All these. Here's the little boxes for, just going to stack them and this is the order of priority. I'd rather see the order of priority go flatter, so yeah. Yeah. Anyway. Yes, I guess I should get back to work.

AS: Oh, fair. Well, I'll turn off the recording.