

Interviewee: Christina Toplack

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: Ok, so the recording is starting now. So, yeah. If you could just give me your name, how you identify? Where you're from and what you do for living, or if, what you did for a living if you retired.

CT: Thanks. So, my name's Chris Toplack. How I identify has evolved over the years. I, I for several years identified as a lesbian woman. And now, now I identify as a queer woman. As that, as that way of talking about ourselves has been reclaimed. I identify as a cisgender woman. And by and large, by and large that can shift and change, but let's say female identified person you might say, ok. The, my learning about gender is a social construct has been very useful. And in opening up, just even questioning, you know, well really what, what does gender mean to me? It's not something I had asked myself as a young person because of that compulsory cis, cis tyranny you might say. Yeah.

SG: Cis-normativity I think is one way to describe it, yeah.

CT: Yeah. I try, I try not to use that word, but because it really has been a tyranny, hasn't it, so. Hmm [*laughing*] Anyway, yeah, so I, I hear you, yeah, I hear you. So, I want it also first say, first off I am thankful to live in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people and I am here really by their grace. Also, white privilege, of course, [*inaudible*]. But I'm here very much by the grace of the Mi'kmaq people. To the Peace and Friendship Treaty. And further to that, to where I live, I live in Wolfville in the Annapolis Valley, Sam. Yeah. I live here with my, my partner, my wife, Jackie. And I went to library school. At Dalhousie. Between 1980 and '82. And I think, although prior to that I lived in Toronto, and so grounding as feminist, and in my, my work in Toronto, I was working in the library system in Toronto and really started to meet a lot of people in the queer community, really became interested in that myself, and sort of awoke to that in myself. And when I moved to Halifax to go to library school, I really woke to that, so. Left a relationship. Came out. And got involved in the women's community in Halifax between '80 and '82. Which was, a very interesting time in Halifax. There was the abortion phone line, there was the Red Herring Bookstore, which was a cooperative bookstore, there were a lot of, there was a lot of activism going on. And the Turret was in existence so that's where we go dancing. Yeah.

SG: Were you, prior to like Toronto and obviously your schooling in Halifax, were you from Halifax originally or from Nova Scotia originally?

CT: No. I'm originally from Chatham, Ontario, which is a farming centre, kind of between Windsor and London on the 401, or just off the 401. Yeah. So, it's, it's very, a very flat. farming area, heavy farming area. And yeah. That's where I grew up.

SG: And like when you had your awakening moment in like Toronto and then, and then, and in school like, did it make you like, look back on your life or did you ever think like, like it did it like explain feelings that you had already had or did like new ones emerge?

CT: Both. It explained feelings I had of being other. As a young person and feelings I had toward friends. And certainly, brought up new feelings. You know, for me it was a, it really solidified my commitment to feminism. And so, I was able to live that more fully.

SG: Was there like a, is there like a, was there like a defining experience that you can recall or was, or like a moment or like, like just a moment where like everything clicked. Or was it kind of just creeping in almost like no form, but just like, kind of gradually occurred?

CT: I think it was more of an evolution than a revolution, for me. I did work for several years as a librarian. In Halifax and Ottawa, and then in Kentville. And I had a few different coming out periods. When I went to medical school, I was involved with a male partner again. And, and then sort of came out again. Right. And so it's been more of an evolution for me.

SG: Kind of more like a fluid process as well. Not like, not so rigid like. Like, cause lesbian or, you know, being attracted to women can, as a woman, can sometimes feel like it's a very rigid, just like, or how it seen as very rigid, but it sounds, for you, that it was more, it balances, yeah.

CT: Well Sam, that's a very good point. And I will say there was a great deal of rigidity in myself and in the community at the time. We didn't talk about bisexuality with, in an honouring way, in those days. Right. So, now the, the language and the spectrum, the embracing is much, is in a much different place than it was when I was going through these kind of questions and struggles and, and trying to figure out what, really where I fit in all of that. And, and now I realize you know, fitting can be a very solid thing for some people, and fitting can be something that is fluid, as you say, for people. So. So there's much more permission to embrace all of that now. So yeah, we talk about fluidity now,

we did not, I didn't talk about fluidity in 1980, and I don't remember a lot of people doing that in the move- movement. So, yeah. That's a very good point. My lived experience was more fluid. I, although I didn't have the language for it then. But very good point.

SG: Yeah, I, I'm just thinking about like all the terms that people can use to identify themselves now that obviously wouldn't have existed in like 1980, right.

CT: Yeah. Oh, my goodness

SG: And, ok, I guess, I guess at the time I'm, I'm sure that even though you would have been no less committed to feminism, that there could have been parts of you that felt like your, how you [went] through lesbianism, or being a lesbian is like, conflicts with your identity as being a feminist, right, 'cause if it, if these two, if the, the rigidity of the community doesn't kind of like accept being bi in any way, then it can seem like well am I being a good feminist, you know, in my, in my doing what's right of me. Like, it kind of, it can maybe cast like a moral shadow onto you, where, on your identity.

CT: Yeah, I think that that, although the communities are, I was involved with were beautiful communities, where we did have a lot of challenge in ourselves, there's much more on the table now is, is, is racist and colonialist underpinnings, you know. That, that I'm really aware of, but we were, we were aware, I think then, the need to embrace the need to be involved in Earth and Activism that had to do with Earth and healthcare and wellness and, and in a broader sense we were not, I was not at a place where I realized how excluding the movement was for many people. Yeah. For many. And, including gender diverse people, and we didn't have the, we didn't have that appreciation and, so there's been a growth that I'm, I'm glad about. It is the necessary. it's been necessary. Growth has been necessary. And I think the people who were ill-treated, not included, have really pushed that, you know, thinking of Marsha P, and thinking of the people who really push. Who really helped us see. So.

SG: So, I guess that leads me perfectly into my next question, and I guess you've already partially answered it, but so like, were you, you were like you were, like, involved in the activist community within, like, Halifax? Like, how many, how long were you involved?

CT: So, in Halifax, while I was at library school, I was involved in women's movement. And that included women who identify across the orientation spectrum. It was a time of confronting sexualized violence in a big way. Yeah. And that, that became very important. There was a group called Women Against Violence Against Women; WAVAW, that I was involved in. Take Back the Night marches. There's some archival

material with, I mean there was some wonderful people who chronicled a lot of that in, in photographs. And there was a magazine for a long time. I'm just, I'm looking, oh wait a minute. I think I do have a copy because I haven't taken them yet to the archivist. Yeah. Calendar. There was Wayves, and a woman's calendar. Because A Woman's Place wasn't in existence at that point on Barrington St., and that was the epicenter for a lot of the organizing that went on, and I, I was part of it. I, I wouldn't say I was necessarily a leader, but I was certainly part of it. While I lived in in Halifax, and I'd lived in Ottawa for a couple of years. Very different experience ff the, of the movement there. There were, we all spoke in Halifax. We all spoke. We all spoke with the media, we, we all did everything. In Ottawa there was a much more formal structure to things. I remember going to the women's bookstore in Ottawa and saying I'd like to volunteer for your ordering committee. They said no. This is a privately owned bookstore. We don't have an ordering committee [*laughing*]. And I thought, I was used to the Red Herring Co-op, so it was very interesting. Yeah, it was a very interesting experience living in Ottawa and then I came back to Nova Scotia.

SG: Was that that back to, was that back to Halifax then or...

CT: I worked in Kentville [*SG: Ok*]. Yeah, with a group of scientists and researchers. So doing sort of medical librarian stuff. And it was from there that I went back to school. I did medical school at McMaster, which was an interesting place to do medical school. Probably the only place I could have survived. Because the structure was quite, quite informal for people who been out of school for some time, like myself. And [it was a very] hard process. And then after returning to Nova Scotia when I was finished residency, getting involved in the community again, and I, I can, came and lived in Wolfville. And was involved from the beginning in sexual and reproductive healthcare. Was an abortion provider and worked with the, then it was called Planned Parenthood Metro Clinic. Now it's called the Halifax Sexual Health Centre. And also, with the Red Door in Kentville which is a, a street clinic for youth.

So why am I saying, oh yeah. So, and then, you know, Well Woman Clinics around the province. It was a different time then, Sam because the cervical cancer rate was high. The screening rate was low. And there were, there was opportunity for innovation and how we meet people who would, needed screening. So yeah, and so a lot of the, let's say events in the com, in the movement I would attend would be in a city. Like the Pride marches and things like that. And I worked quite a bit in the city, so I lived in Wolfville, and I commuted to Halifax a lot. I did a bit of work in the valley at the Red Door and there were these satellite doors in high schools, which I did, but, and then there was a conference, and I can't remember the year. It was called the Rainbow Health Conference. And it brought together healthcare workers from all over to talk about

health care in the, now we would call it the 2SLGBTIQA etcetera plus, plus community. And that was, happened over three days. I want to say at that conference I re-met, I wish I could remember the year. Was it the 19, late 90s? Or early 2000s. I can't, I think it might have been the early 2000s. I should've researched this for our chat, but, I met someone I was in Grade 1 with [SG: *Oh wow*], and we came out to each other. And as it happens, when I lived in Toronto and worked in the library system, I volunteered at Hassle Free Clinic and I know, I think Hassle Free Clinic is still around. I'm not sure if you're familiar with it, but it was a clinic. It was serving the queer community. Not just queer Community. It was sort of, it was much broader than that, but, cause there were abortion referrals, there were STI checks and a lot of HIV activism that happened out of fear. And I, staffed largely by paramedics, why am I telling you all, oh yeah, I'll circle back to what - staffed largely by paramedics and a few very good physicians, the supportive, aware involved physicians. But largely by paramedics, so it was really neat training for me and it sort of sparked my interest in healthcare further, which I got back to a few years later.

Anyway, at this conference, the Rainbow Health Conference in Halifax, I met this person I went to Grade 1 with who had has— had been working as a paramedic at Hassle Free. It's like, oh my goodness, and I'm sad to say I've lost touch with them again, but that was amazing. And I remember going into the city for this three days or more, and you know it was at one of those big hotels on the waterfront, I don't want to plug any of them so. Big hotel on the waterfront. And you know, as we're walking toward the big room we're in, we're seeing all these people and it's exciting. Because you know this is probably late 1990s, early 2000s, so it's exciting sense of community. You know, we spend the day together and then as I walk away to the parking garage, I feel more and more sad. And I drive back to Wolfville. And I think this is nuts. This is crazy. So, oh I'm just trying to think of the timing of all of this. It doesn't really matter. But decided, you know, it was time to, to explore beginning things in the Valley. You know, sort of queer organizing in the valley. And so, I have to say I haven't been doing that for a while, since the pandemic anyway, I'm so sad to say [SG: *Yeah*]. So sad to say.

But we did things like events or Pride week. We had Pride flag raisings. IDAHOTB [*Editor's note: International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia*] was a spur. I learned about May 17th, and it was like whoa, well! We could do that in Wolfville. And it wasn't, it wasn't just me, it was like a group of people came together. And I remember one of the events we planned was a showing of "It Gets Better" which I worked for a while with Pride Health, with Cybelle Reiber. I don't know if you've met Cybelle. Wow. She was amazing. They're beautiful people who have worked with Pride Health along the way, you know, and Cybelle spear— spearheaded or coordinated this video called "It Gets Better." And so we had a showing of that at the local cinema before

“Edie and Thea, A Very Long Engagement,” which is a story of two women who have been together since the 1950s, both activists, especially Edie who died in recent years. And just their process of being together through all of the, you know Edie [worshipped Thea] [inaudible]. They were at the marches together, it was like “oh my goodness.” Like, so, so that was an event and we, you know, we had like concerts and stuff like that and, I’m just trying to think. So, the inspiration was thinking we could do this here in Wolfville. We can do this here. We can do this in the Valley. And you know there’s been Pride flag raisings in Kentville and Greenwood. Yeah. And the, the other, the other thing near and dear to my heart, I hope she’s spoken with someone from the Women Next Door and Halifax Gay Men’s Chorus, perhaps, I don’t know. The Phoenix Youth Centre Choir, maybe even Scott Jones. That was, was singing. I love singing. And it was like, wow, can we get together and sing? So was, was sort of coordinated this Rainbow Chorus, which was 2SLGBTIQ+ people and allies. And you know, again, one of the great heart breaks of the pandemic has been not getting together for, we did you know, a bit on and off. And when there was a break in the action last, was it last spring, there was sort of an opening, got together and, that was like, yeah. So, it’s that, and I went down with another person in the chorus to The Woman Next Door in Halifax Gay Men’s Chorus Event at the parade ground for Pride, which was so lovely, you know. To be singing again. And of course, it’s been really; is this, is this what you’re needing Sam?

SG: No, it’s good. It’s all good [CT: Is this ok?]. Yeah. You’re great. You’re good.

CT: Yeah. I just have to say it’s been a great heartbreak to not, to not be, to not have the ability to continue with that. I mean, I don’t know how to do that. I know some groups had been practicing online. I’ve got no smarts for that. I mean, I just. And you know we’re, we, we would vary in size. There was a one year where there was a lot of people, and it was wonderful. My goodness we, you know, it’s just so fabulous. Oh, I’ve got something else to say. And, then you know we would, we would shrink in numbers, swell, shrink, and anyway, I didn’t have the wherewithal to do the kind of fancy practicing that some choruses can do, so. I’m glad that they’re, you know some are continuing.

I was gonna tell you, I was part of a woman singing group. When was that, oh well gosh, that would’ve been when I moved back to Nova Scotia in ‘93. We were called the Persisters. And very, really neat, neat women who were part of the group. Some of my dearest friends, all of them very sweet, wonderful musicians. And we sang at a, gosh what was it even, it was like a queer night gathering at the student union building at Dalhousie. You know, in that big room, I don’t, I forgot what it’s called... [SG: *Yeah, I know. I think it’s that auditorium... yeah, yeah.*] The auditorium, you know. There’d been IWD things there and stuff like that and, anyway, I remember, I don’t know if, anybody’s

spoken with you about Michael Weir? Michael was the first, I worked with him at Planned Parenthood, Halifax Sexual Health Centre now, then Planned Parenthood Metro Clinic. And Michael was the first anonymous HIV tester in province. Mike was this marvelous, marvelous human being very talented, singing, dancing, acting. And Michael did this, he wrote this version, this song to, set to "Doe a Deer, A Female Deer" from *Sound of Music*, Gay A Name I Call Myself. Have you ever heard that? [SG: *I have not*] Have you heard Women Next Door sing it? It's brilliant. It's brilliant. And he, you know, "Queer a name I call myself, gay the way I like to be, fruit the thing I eat for brunch, fag a cigarette was tea, dyke a Danish dental dam, poof like magic, here I am, Queen Victoria's a man that will bring us back to queer cocoo." And that was the first time I'd heard someone, again, this is '93. Now maybe I was completely out of touch, but use queer and I thought hmmm. And we were all like with each other, 'cause we were singing at the same event, hmmm. Queer hmmm. Really. Is that ok to say? I mean, what does that, it's like wow. [And names] reclaiming all these words. Whoa!. You know, and it's like very interesting. Very interesting. So, it was part of, part of the journey of learning. The opening, the reclaiming, the, you know, hopefully decolonizing, hopefully anti-racist. You know, it's, it's part of that process, right? Very interesting. Anyway. Just wanted to share that I don't know if anybody has spoken with you about those.

SG: No, it's really cool. I honestly, I've never heard any of it before.

CT: I wish I could remember what it's called you know. Yeah, I don't. We sang at another thing. It was for International Women's Day. And, as it happens, Cathy Jones and Mary Walsh were there doing their little skits. They hadn't yet become super famous right. It's like very interesting. Very interesting. We did Bread and Roses. And then there was a Woman Next Door had a gathering. Now this is probably a good 20 years ago. Is that right Chris? I hope you've spoken with some of those people. That's sort of a gathering of, of choruses around the province, and it was, it had a place in Dartmouth, I think maybe it was Alderney Landing. That was so [inaudible]. And they sang. So a bunch of different groups sang, which was marvelous. Yeah, so singing's been, singing and activism I think go hand in hand. So would love to get back into that. Into that rhythm. Soon. A place to come together.

SG: Did you, 'cause you mentioned, that you kind of first heard like queer, like in a reclaiming sense, you know, like 93. So, was it, was it something that like, did you start using it or did you start like identifying yourself as queer like in the 90s? Or did that come a bit later?

CT: Much later, much later. Let's see now. I can't remember the exact years I worked with Pride Health. I'm so sorry. I should have [SG: *Oh, that's ok*] at my fingertips, but

Cybelle and I went to a community meeting, and we were asked to introduce ourselves. And it was the first time I thought, well, I can see that. So that would have been 2000 and, somewhere between 2004 and 2014 maybe.

SG: *Ok.*

CT: Yeah. And so that, yes, and it's been an interesting process to come to feel comfortable with that. In myself.

SG: Was it something when you would identify, I, 'cause like I don't know the whole chronology of, you know, how the word queer passes through time or anything like that, but like when you started identifying yourself as queer, within that time range, what did, would, would people give you looks or was it something else kind of like really accepted, it's kind of like it was understood immediately as there was a term of reclamation.

CT: Yeah, it depends on who I was talking with. Some of my colleagues would be like me, hmmm. Oh, K, you know. They'd be in a different place in their awareness. Right. If it was sort of the, the youth in me rainbow chorusing it'd be like falling off a log in, you know. Very easy, right [*laughing*]. In fact, I would learn so much about language, you know so much about, about spectrum, continuum, it'd be just marvelous. So, it would really depend with whom I'd be talking. Yeah, yeah. I'm so curious what the library schools like now.

SG: [Laughing] I, I mean I am, anything I'd say could obviously be interpreted, so I'm bias obviously. But I personally have found it to be pretty queer friendly. And I do specifically mean like queer friendly and in that like it, it just seems like the broad sense of like the spectrum, you know. And it forms my identity. So, yeah, it's been, it's been interesting, I think. But. Yeah. I was gonna ask you too, about, like, being like in the 80s and in Halifax. Like if your experience with going to Dal or being part of the department back then was, if it was kind of more of a different, or if it was more of a, maybe shall we say conservative outlook on gender identity or sexual orientation?

CT: It was, it was conservative. Of course, the women's movement was present, and there were people teaching. And alumni who were activists. So much people teaching, but alumni that were activists. For example, I don't know if you might have spoken with Lynn Murphy. Lynn was a working librarian in Dartmouth at the Dartmouth Public Library, and she was, oh wow, she was amazing. Lynn is one of the activists in Elderberries. And I don't know if you've had an opportunity to speak with anybody in Elderberries.

SG: *I don't believe so, no.*

CT: Lynn has been very involved in organizing and continuing with that group. Keeping it going. And Lynn was a, a definite influence on me in library school. Because she was a feminist working openly in the public library system. Saying stuff. And I, I'm, I'm sad to think there were other influences as well. Barbara Adams, [inaudible]. They were all working in the library system, and they were all activists. And vocal. Involved in different hearings. Yeah. And so that was part of my, part of the part of the culture.

SG: *So it's safe to say that you didn't feel discouraged or like you had to hide parts of yourself. It was very...*

CT: Oh, I definitely did. [SG: *Oh, you did, ok*]. I did, I did. Yes. Very, oh, I was raised Catholic. What can I tell you? [Laughing] I was not comfortable. I have moments of discomfort nowadays, thankfully, and I'm comfortable. In those days I had moments of comfort. It was very different, yeah. No, I can't say that's I've felt free to be who I was. I was discovering who I was, you know.

SG: *Right. But like it' wasn't like, or maybe there was, like external pressures from outside or from Dalhousie or like just people or people like in Dalhousie, you know, or like the kind of culture to...*

CT: Yeah, not so much. I don't think. Not so much. Yeah.

SG: *Yeah, but I can understand internally. Obviously if you have more conservative background, you know that it can kind of, as you're saying like it has its own effects [CT: Yeah]. Even if everyone around you is accepting.*

CT: Yeah. I, I could be, you know what happens with memory? I, my hunch is, though I can't give you specifics circumstances, that there were difficulties in feeling accepted and in fact being accepted in, that's my hunch. And, but you know, I remember we organized is showing of *It's Not a Love Story* and I'm not, I don't know if you're familiar with that documentary. It was on pornography. And it was again, trying to really bring into the conversation sexual exploitation and sexualized violence. And that was, we, we showed that. That was a library school initiative if I remember correctly. To educate ourselves. And it was either that or we were able to use the space at the library school to show it. But I think it was a library school initiative. And, so there were, again, you know there was this, this very active group of activists, you know. It sort of had this kind of infiltrating, infiltrating, right? [SG: *Yeah*]. Yeah.

SG: *Definitely like the, oh sorry, go on.*

CT: Librarians as a group are such delightful people, you know. I mean I, I really enjoyed my time working in libraries.

SG: *I think I find, feeling the same way you know. Well, I, I want to be a librarian, so naturally I want to think that way myself too. So.*

CT: What draws you to it, Sam?

SG: *Oh, putting me on the spot now.*

CT: I don't mean to.

SG: *Oh, no. I, I actually honestly, I, I think there's an element I'm not, oh I won't be ashamed to admit, that was, I felt like it was a bit like an autopilot, you know? Like, I want to do this because I wanna stay involved in like academia in some fashion or something like that. 'Cause I did my undergrad in History, and so it was like, ok, well-being in a library would be like, peripherally still a part of it. And I think I took a course that was more on the community focus that libraries have, especially public libraries, and I kind of, I got drawn into the kind of like, area or field of like libraries as spaces of like security and safety and like, it isn't just about like books or, you know, the Dewey Decimal system. It's about like resources of aid for help and things like that, and it was like, OK, I think I can see more myself wanting to like, I feel more like confident in pursuing like a, like something with that's like more public or more forward facing. And 'cause like I just, I wasn't, I thought I got tied up in so many different directions. I don't know if that was a similar experience to yourself, but I don't know, I always find it's a process. It's a continual process of just finding out who you are and finding new things and changing and so I, I don't think self-discovery ever really ends.*

CT: I completely agree. I completely agree. Yeah. Some of my teachers are 90 and still exploring and I think that's a really good way of putting it. Discovery never ends.

SG: *And I was going to say to, like 'cause it just kind of occurred to me as, as you were talking, but like, I think you briefly mentioned it but in just kind of like in how we label ourselves and how we view ourselves going from say like, identifying as a lesbian woman to identifying as a queer woman. If it came with like broader understanding of like Identity itself, you know, like if it's not just like a, it's not just you're reclaiming a label necessarily, but you're kind of expanding your worldview. I'm, I'm kind of curious that you felt that way at that time.*

CT: This is super, super good question. Yes, really good questions, Sam. So, I'm just trying to put into words.

SG: *Yeah, take your time.*

CT: Just trying to find the words for this. Yes. What it, what it has done for me, what, what I feel is a sense of connection and belonging to community. Which is all important. I've done some work on Intersectionality, the greater determinants of health, minority stress and health effects of that. Which are significant. And the need for pride in belonging to, to deal with the effects of minority stress. And I would say that shift in my, my own identification has opened up more sense of belonging or sense of connection. Which has been really important and again a source of heartache during pandemic, to you know, people that we would gather with regularly. I don't see it as often. And, and the effect on I think on the queer community, on the 2SLGBTIQA+ community, I hope many are much more adroit with all of the technical ways, and I know there's a much more ability with connecting digitally or virtually than I have. More inclination to do that than I have. You know, to me, I just love that face to face. I love the, that connection. I, it's that feeling of disconnection, I think is so difficult right now. And we connect the way we can, can like I, I just want to show you something. [SG: *Sure.*] I don't know if, have you seen this puzzle?

SG: *I have not. No, this is all new to me.*

CT: Well, I hadn't seen it either. We went into the Home Hardware in Windsor. And we were looking around at, this is a Pride puzzle. I'm serious. It's a Pride puzzle. It's like what! Isn't that marvelous? So, we got as many of them, we bought them out [*laughing*]. Gave them away to friends for Christmas and, yeah, would love to offer one for [values] project. I'm not sure that there, I, I will do that. I don't, I don't know when they're gonna be meeting in person again. Anyway, yeah. So why did I, the sense of connection is, is really, it's, it's difficult to find right now.

SG: *Yeah. It, it seems like identity and community kinda have like, are kind of [inaudible]. It's not just a solitaire individual experience. It's, you're drawing from the experiences of others to broaden yourself, right, and you're separated from that community, it's a little, well, for all of us, right, it's you know, obviously isolating.*

CT: It is obviously isolating, yeah. Yeah. I worry about that quite a bit to tell you the truth.

SG: No, I do too. I don't like to have to go into lock down or, you know, near lock down for the, the new variants that are popping up. Obviously, it's all very understandable that you have to do that, you know, for everyone's safety. But yeah, I was just thinking about like it, it takes away from the, for everyone's safety, you know you, you lose, you have to separate yourself from the community in that way. And it's, it's a bit stressful.

CT: It is, it is, isn't it. Yeah. Are you going to school virtually right now? Is your [SG: Yeah] face to face.

SG: Dalhousie kind of, well since the Omicron was like [CT: Yeah] so recently kind of like almost, you know, came out of nowhere like, Dalhousie decided, alright, we're going to make a split-second decision. We're going to put the campus; we're going to close down the campus. Why can't, I don't, can't entirely close down. But like the courses are going to be all online for a month [CT: OK]. So, hopefully things look good at the end of January. That's the idea. Hopefully. And then, you know in person classes can resume. I think something that professors are very cognitive of, is something about their students' needs as well, so if let's say a majority of students wanted the course to remain online, then I think the professors would like, acquiesce and, and go with that. But you know it's, it's, I think it's probably different, I think it's probably different by, per professor, obviously. I hope, sincerely that I can go back to being in person soon. That'll be nice.

CT: I hope so too, Sam. Yeah, yeah.

SG: It's. Yeah, it's a, yeah, I, I think we're all kind of saying it's, it's, it's difficult during Covid but it's especially being difficult being queer and with Covid. [CT: Yeah. Yeah] I haven't been able to see my girlfriend for quite some time. Because of like restrictions [CT: Oh dear] like travel, things like that. So it's, yeah and when I think about something like that, I'm very kind of, I know I'm very insular, but like, that's one of those moments where I feel, you know very romantic. And if, it's like I can't have that and it kind of, it hurts, right, so [CT: Of course]. Course you know, you can do things virtually and things like that, but you know it's not the same. You know it, it never can be the same, but you try to make best of it what you can and hope that this way just dissipates, goes away, you know as quickly as it came, right? I, I try to be an optimist about that. I feel very optimistic that things will return to normal soon. It's just really like, time will tell. Time will, time will vindicate me so.

CT: I prefer that optimistic route as well. Yeah. I'm with you.

SG: It's like prepare for the worst, but hope for the best, you know, so, that's the attitude I seem to have which, you know, you gotta mix a little bit of pessimism, maybe pessimism disguised as realism and then, but you always tell at the end try to have the mindset of, it will get better. Otherwise, you're just going to succumb to depression and things like that, and that's not good for anyone [CT: Beautiful]. I notice that we're already at, well nearly 10:00, so I, we can keep going on for, if you want to for a little bit. I do have to leave in an hour, but it's really up to you. I want to put that in your court.

CT: Well, I just wonder if there are any other questions that you have, Sam.

SG: I'm thinking, I think that you've answered them. There's nothing that like immediately pops to mind. I guess, well, this might be a bit like, this might sound like a bit of a self-interested question, but I'll, I'll go with it. I'm just kind of curious too like about, cause one thing I've heard from some of the people I've interviewed is that over time they've expanded their identities and how, who they are, but also like they've also expanded their idea of, you know, what a woman is. And I'm kind of curious if you could talk about like that kind of process for yourself. Like how that, like how that came about? Or like just kind of like [editor's note: recording freezes]

CT: Sam? Sam. It froze for a minute there and this is way too important [SG: Oh, so sorry] So how my....

SG: I'll, I'll say that again. My bad, my Internet can be terrible, but I was going to say. I was just gonna say like, how has like, you're like identify like, how has like your like your understanding of, like, womanhood changed just in acknowledgement of like, queer and trans distances and like how you identify? I was just kind of curious if you could just speak a little on that. Because I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm always interested to know like how people see themselves in the, in a growing, a more inclusive environment.

CT: Yeah. Yeah, good question, good question. Well, my, my, I'd say my appreciation of woman has to do with people who identify as women. Period. Yeah. So that I challenge myself to, to use you know neutral pronouns until I'm, until I have the opportunity perhaps to ask someone, what pronouns they use. So, the, yes, I mean this is very, a very beautiful thing to be talking about, you know. It's complex and its sort of non-binary, which is, which is really where we need to be. So, so my appreciation of gender as a social construct is really blown a lot of things out of the water. Yeah. So, talking about parents and children and human beings and all that, you know. And also really celebrating the gender journey for people. Through everybody. So having the opportunity to really, you know, embrace, more embrace my gender than, than feeling I was at a disadvantage because of growing up. So more than embracing and then really

being with people as, as they are embracing gender, you know, and gender journey is, is, is something that's really helped me shift gears and shift my thinking and shift my areas of blockedness. Yeah. I don't know if that's an answer to your question, Sam?

SG: It's, it's as good as any, I think. I was, oh, was it kind of a new thing as well, or, I guess maybe because you're maybe more involved into the you know queer community, queer activism that I imagine that some of those concepts might have, you might have heard about a lot sooner then, like [when entries] like the mainstream culture, right?

CT: Yeah because of my work in sexual health care. Yeah, and even working as a librarian. Now I realize there were opportunities to learn. From a long time ago that I my growth. Being privileged enough to have people share their journeys with me has been really important in understanding the need for support in celebration and honouring and respect, and activism, and confronting the, the confronting the structures. Limiting structures around so, yeah. So, a lot of my work at this point in time, not all, you know, has more, has been, been, been working more with people who are engaged in gender journeys. And that's been very important part, has become a very important part of my [life]. Yeah. So.

SG: It's great. I think that's really beautiful [CT: Yeah, yeah]. Yeah. I think that is just like a little bit of an indent, addendum I wanted to cap it off, you know. It's interesting.

CT: Thank you. Thank you for asking that, Sam.

SG: But, yeah, I think that's about everything for me. And there's nothing after like kind of comes to mind. I think we covered a lot of bases, so. If you feel like you don't, if you feel like you have, or feel like you wanted to say it, then we can just conclude the interview, I can stop the recording.

CT: OK. I, I'm not sure what else I would, would say, unless you have any other sort of questions that could help bring that out.

SG: I think I'm OK. I think we're good. I think we covered a lot of ground, so [CT: Ok. Ok.] So, I'll just end it right now.

CT: Thank you, Sam. Thank you very much. I, I'm, I'm grateful to, to the people who, to yourself and the people who are, are doing this gathering of information. That's lovely.

SG: I think it's lovely too. I'm going to end the recording now.

CT: It's important. Thank you, Sam.