

Interviewees: Sue and Nicky Perkins

Interviewer: Jacqueline Gahagan

Date: November 27th, 2021

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

JG: So, just before we get going, I just want to confirm that we have talked about any questions you have before we get started and I'm going to put this in the middle of the table so that I can hear what you're saying. If you want to stop at any point, we can just pause it or stop and that you have provided your consent, and I've signed the consent forms and I've agreed to scan them and send them back to you for your records.

NP: Sounds good.

JG: So, as we said, the purpose of this project is really to collect stories from older lesbians, recognizing the dirth of content in the archive about our lives, so, thoughts on the Nova Scotia LGBT community as you lived it and as you know it now?

NP: So, we met in 1981. Both of us at the time identified as being straight, and I was living in Ottawa and Sue was living here in Halifax. And then I moved back in spring of '83 and we became a couple shortly after that.

SP: Yeah, we met through a mutual friend of Nicky's that I had met at work. So, we went up to Ottawa, I met Nicky and carried on from there – got together in '83.

NP: We stayed in the closet for 13 years.

JG: After you got together?

NP: Yep. So, for some people, when we finally came out in '96, some people were "I knew that" and other people were like "gasp," and some people had to process it. And at first when we came out, we just kind of said, well we're just doing this for close family and friends. We don't want to be political, or anything like that.

SP: Well, what pushed me over the edge was that the government sent out the census and we didn't fit into any of those categories. Straight, married, divorced, widowed. So I made my own little box – same-sex couple, and I ticked it off and I sent it back to them, and then from there we just dominoed –

NP: Again, I think too, part of the thing was that through our 13 years in the closet, there were times when one of us was ready to come out, but the other one wasn't. So, it is very much a two people thing, and we're both very cognizant of the fact that we could lose family and friends, and so you have to be in a place to be able to, do that. You have to be strong enough and say, "Okay, if this happens, then I can move on and live my life in a more honest way," and also acknowledge our relationship. You know, which was really important to us. It started becoming more and more, we felt more, we felt our world kind of shrinking down around us.

SP: And also too, I think the young people at the time, younger than us, like in their teens and early 20s, for myself personally, we were hearing about more suicides and people getting kicked out of their homes, and we felt it was really important for us to be visible so that these kids could say, look it's okay, we're queer, we're gay, we're lesbian and it's gonna be okay. We can live our lives and be who we want to be.

NP: I think the other thing too is self-preservation. There was a very real fear that, you know, we wanted to make sure we had legal protections put in place for ourselves. So, you know, we didn't want to have one of us wind up in hospital and walk in and have parents who said, *[SP: you have no right to be here]* right. Or what are you doing here. You're just, you're just the roommate.

SP: Which could have really happened with my family [NP: Yeah]. 'Cause they were totally in the dark ages, and I knew I would probably lose my family when I came out.

NP: And I lived in fear of losing her because they'd come and kidnap her on me. Yeah, I just, those kind of crazy, irrational things of that you think of, but things like that did happen. Or if something happened to her all of a sudden find I'm kicked out and, and you know, I've got hardly anything.

SP: And Nicky traveled from province to province, and if we did not have anything on paper protecting us, she could have been in New Brunswick or Newfoundland and something happened to her, I would have no legal right to go see her or get her back to Nova Scotia. It would be up to her parents to do that.

NP: Yeah, so, you know, by the time we came out, we had a pretty strong foundation. We always feel that even though it was thirteen years of sort of some deception. We had nobody else to run to and talk to about our problems. We always had to deal with it ourselves.

JG: So, there was no one in the gay community at the time that you could have that conversation with – no?

NP: It was kind of funny, 'cause one of the, just before we came out I took Sue to a Melissa Etheridge concert and she was having a hard time believing there were other lesbian couples around like us [*laughing*] and I had to hold her jaw up at the Melissa Etheridge concert because all she did was, the whole concert [SP: God] was looking around, looking around at all these women there and it was just, it was a real eye-opener for her and I think, you know, that and just deciding it is what it is, we will deal with whatever comes our way with this. The real irony of it is, is that when we came out, we were thinking it was this big, deep, dark secret and something we were ashamed about and stuff, and for a lot of people that we came out to we learned some really, really shocking things about what was going on in their lives.

SP: Things that we probably didn't want to know [*laughing*].

NP: No, and that I think because of the personal level that you're coming down to when you're coming out, it kind of, all of a sudden people were like they felt they could tell us something about what was going on with them.

SP: Yeah, they shared their intimate, personal strug –

NP: It was like, wow, maybe we don't have such a deep, dark secret anymore after some things that we heard, you know. And it was, you know, in some ways it was very sad and in some ways it was very liberating. So, you know –

JG: Can I ask what was the origins of what you refer to as the Shading Factor? What was that?

NP: I, I think, you know, for years we tried to convince ourselves like first you know, I don't know about everybody else, but you know, we went through a time where, okay, we're bisexual. We had to be bisexual, right? And then, and then eventually we finally got comfortable with ourselves. And, but there was still this thing about it wasn't accepted in society, people looked down on it, your homophobic jokes all the time. People said things at work. And even though most of those kind of wisecracks and jokes and stuff were mostly to do with men, it still hurt. It still, you know, there was still some real homophobic nasty things there. And you're thinking, so if I were. If I spoke up, or if I came out, if they knew that I was really a lesbian, what would they – and we didn't call ourselves lesbians for a long time. We were gay. Even the word lesbian was a hard one for us to kind of come to terms with. So, you know, it's funny, you just taking

back words and having to explain to somebody why they can't call me a dyke. I can call my friend a dyke, but you can't because you're straight. And try to get them to understand that language and stuff, and it's just, you know all of a sudden really realizing that we were really were in a sort of minority situation. But, we also traveled under the radar. Unlike a lot of our gay friends, male friends. So, you know, we always felt kind of lucky for that. And even coming out process for us was, you know, totally easier process. I think, than some of the guys.

SP: Yeah. To appease my mother, I would date the occasional guy. Just go out with a guy on a date and, nothing would ever happen, but, look mom, going out with a guy, even though I was living with Nicky at the time [*laughing*]. It was, I was trying to just keep her happy and calmed down, and...

JG: So how old would you have been at that point where you were still trying to date, er not date guys, but –

NP: I came out in my 30s, 35, I was 35, you would have been 36.

SP: We came out, but, so between, early 20's to mid 30s.

NP: Yeah, but we didn't, we stopped dating, stopped – guys [*SP: Yeah*] guys things, probably mid 20's [*Sue: probably mid 20's, yeah*]. We only put that up for a bit, and then eventually, the chatter subsided, and every now and then somebody would say something, but we'd deny.

SP: Deny, deny [*laughing*].

NP: Or laugh it off, or say Oh well that's 'cause we're two women living together [*laughing*].

JG: So how old were you when you got together?

SP: I would have been 24.

NP: Yeah, and I was 23.

JG: And so that was at a time when it wasn't safe for you to be out.

NP: I don't think, you know, I mean if –

SP: We had convinced ourselves that it wouldn't be safe, and you know, there were still a lot of gay bashing going on and, you would hear of people getting fired or not being able to live in a particular apartment building or denied promotion at a job.

NP: And I had just moved back, so there was no community around us. And we weren't like some couples that we know who had their half in, half out crap, you know, one side you're totally in the closet, and the other side you've got your gay friends. We never did that.

SP: All our friends we knew at the time were straight.

NP: We figured they were all straight except for one.

NP: Yeah.

SP: Yeah.

NP: So, you know and then although I kept telling her at hockey practices that there's more than just you in there dear [*laughing*]. She wouldn't believe me until after we'd come out. And then years later, all of a sudden –

SP: But then a lot of those people weren't out either.

NP: No. Some of them were married [SP: – were in the closet –] Yeah.

SP: They were into a man, yeah. Oh yeah! Years later we got together and had a good joke about it, but, at the time it was, you know, shh.

JG: So, in terms of your activism, tell me a little bit more where, where that came from and what was the, what instigated that.

NP: So, we went to Safe Harbour. One of the things that we sat down and talked about it is, is I really miss dancing. So, I'm going to digress just off to the side, 'cause this is a funny story. So, our very first lesbian dance that we went to was at the Civic Club, and we parked the car a few blocks away, and we walked up, we walked in, and we sat down in a kind of a corner. Turns out we sat at the real butch-dyke section. Anyway, it was kind of hilarious, and we didn't know what to expect, or you know, because all of our images of what a lesbian was, was fed to us by straight media. So, we were as scared to go in there as probably any straight chick who'd wander in because that's what we were fed, and that's what we believed. And then all of a sudden we saw all of

these people that looked like us and it was like, oh well, this is kind of cool. So then it took down the pressure and we kind of got into dancing and stuff. The other thing that we did was, you know, especially for Sue, the religious entity was missing, and that connection with an affirming, loving, caring church wasn't around for either one of us.

SP: So, I started looking for churches and, online at the time, which was very limited back then, but I recognized this one name. And so I called the number, and sure enough it was this young lady that I had known when I was in my late teens, and turns out she was now the minister of this church. So, we started going to Safe Harbour. And, that was the Reverend Darlene Young.

NP: I think we can say that [SP: Yeah]. So ah, became very good friends with Darlene, and we started going to church. And stayed with Safe Harbour a long time. And at some point, I think Darlene appreciated that she had people in the congregation who were willing to be out to the media so that she could finally promote the church. And, so that was our first step of activism, was doing media interviews and being there for media and type stuff when it came to the church.

SP: Yeah, I was brought up with a very strict religious family, and of course, when I came out that was, that was it. I couldn't go to my church. I hadn't been there in years anyway, but, I would never have felt welcome in that church every again. And once this opportunity presented itself, and we started going to Safe Harbour, and I felt so much love and caring and community, and then we felt it was so important to share that, so again, for the younger generation to see that, that it was possible to be in a loving relationship and to have a wonderful community around you and supporting you and caring –

NP: I mean, we won't lie. Safe Harbour wasn't all a, a bowl of cherries [*laughing*]. I mean, it had its ups and downs too like any organization, and, you know, had dysfunctional times as well, and you know, eventually, unfortunately after Darlene passed away many, many years later –

SP: When did she go?

NP: 2006. The church had to disband because we couldn't find anybody. She did it basically, I think, out of her, the goodness and love in her heart for what she had created and, MCC really hadn't grown down on the east coast. That's Metropolitan Community Church. So, they, we've had a couple of ministers in, but nothing ever took. Eventually we just said to close it down, but to preserve its name in the end because it could have digressed and gone off somewhere, but a lot of the people who were

supporting the church financially and whatnot, you know, and of course we were among those. It just, it just be, it had lived its time and unfortunately, and we had felt strongly even though probably in the last year or two of its existence we hadn't gone as much. We had realized that there were still gay people out there that really didn't feel comfortable going into mainstream church, even though at that point I would say the United Church had become way more, we had seen affirming congregations and churches and we were kind of actually starting to look around, we actually –

SP: We actually participated in several of those church meetings [NP: Yeah] in the hopes that they would become an affirming congregation. We participated at First Baptist and another church in Dartmouth.

NP: Bedford United. The one in Dartmouth I think was a church that was trying to reach out to its congregation and say gay people are not bad.

JG: What year would this have been?

NP: Ooh, wow. So, this would have been the early 2000s. Probably around the time that we kind of came out as a church and really kind of said “Hey, we're a gay church, we're here.” And you know, I love the church because we did all kinds of tremendous things with really very little money, and brought even the founder of MCC, Troy Perry into a big weekend and conferencing thing here. [JG: Nice] Which was really a major feat really to be able to do that, so. But at the same time so that when, when Darlene kind of, this would have been in 2002 I'm thinking that we, that things really started to open up [SP: –started to take off] take off in the church. Another friend of ours in the congregation who was involved with, [redacted] was involved with [SP: Manna for Health?] No. The other organization.

SP: Oh.

NP: Anyway, they were fighting for same sex –

SP: NSRAP.

NP: And they were fighting for same sex marriage, and we'd gone to a lot of seminars on that in the city. They had brought lawyers in to talk and explain what the difference was, and then, this thing called Registered Domestic Partnership became available –

SP: Because years before we had to, we had to go to a lawyer to get special papers drawn up for medical consent and –

JG: What year would that have been?

SP: Oh my gosh. It would have been late '90s probably [NP: Yeah]. So, we had to go to expense and everything just to get protected as best we –

NP: So, we came out in '96, so it probably would have been '96, '97. We wouldn't have waited too long after we came out to make sure we got our 'l's dotted and our 't's crossed because we knew then that family interference would be really driving at that point if something had happened. So, and where I was travelling –

JG: To either of you - would it have been the same situation if something had happened to you?

NP: No, no. I'm going to say my family was very supportive. So, [SP: Thank goodness] *[laughing]* We knew, we kind of figured [SP: Love my mother-in-law, laughing] – we kind of figured, you know, my mother had been involved with the theatre and there had always been a few gay men that I knew, but I didn't realize I knew some women. I suspected, but I never had the conversation with them. So, but we always wanted to make sure that we had that lined up. So, that would have been '96, '97 'cause we wouldn't have waited a long after that. We might have even done it right as we were coming out.

JG: And then when same sex marriage came online –

NP: So, actually Registered Domestic Partnership came in first, so that was in 2003. June the 4th.

SP: 2001

NP: Sorry *[laughing]* got my dates mixed. June the 4- oh, 2001?

SP: June 4th, 2001.

NP: Okay. So, the stuff at Safe Harbour would have been late '90s [SP: Yeah] early 2000s. And same with NSRAP doing the same sex marriage. So, 2001 they came up with this lovely thing called Registered Domestic Partnership, which really wasn't even to su– it was the courts answer, courts told the government that they had to come up with something because a straight couple actually [SP: Split up] had split up. So, we learned a lot about what was going to be covered under RDP and what was going to be

the difference between that and marriage. So, we decided at that point, we'd seen, the media just loved flamboyant personalities – it loved the drag queens and anybody who had anything kind of unusual about them, but they weren't printing pictures of people like Sue and I. And they weren't interviewing people like Sue and I. Partly because half of people like us probably wouldn't have interviewed because we wouldn't have wanted to be lambasted by the press. But anyway, so when this came about, we looked at each other and said, if we can't come out and be the face of this, then what are we doing? You know, it's been how long since we, [SP: 15 years] 15 years at that point that we'd been together –

SP: 20 years [*laughing*]

NP: So surely, we could do this. Surely, we could go in and be a part of this. So, there were four couples that went down that day to register –

SP: Two male and two female couples got together and said, okay, we're going to do this, and I'll go notify the press and –

JG: How did you find each other?

NP: This was through NSRAP. So NSRAP would wind everything up. Of course, Kim was with EGALÉ at the time. So, Kim [Vance] and Sam [Meehan]. And then of course, Ross [Boutilier] and Brian [Mombourquette] and Sue and myself. [*Editor's note: Kimberly Vance, Kim Meehan, Brian Mombourquette, and Ross Boutilier, along with Ron and Brian Garnet-Doucette, were complainants in Boutilier et al. v. Canada and Nova Scotia, the legal case that resulted in the legalization of same-sex marriage in Nova Scotia*]. And there was another gay male couple. Unfortunately, there was – [SP: He wasn't in the province long enough to get married] – oh, I see, I thought it was divorce, something, there was something, there was something not quite that they could do it.

SP: I just read that the other day.

NP: Okay [*laughing*]. She's been reading up. So anyway, so, so they couldn't participate. So, in the end there was three of us that registered. And three of us that got interviewed.

SP: Then there was the biggest clap of thunder when we crossed the street to go do that [*laughing*].

NP: Yeah, she remembers that [*laughing*]. Yeah, we met at a hotel and then we went across [*laughing*] and Sue said, oh the heavens are going to get us.

JG: *That's hilarious.*

NP: So that started us down, kind of the being the public, and of course for years after that we got called when, any time there was something to do with same-sex marriage and of course, one of my quotes was to do with, you know, the carrot really was marriage. This wasn't, this wasn't it. We're doing this because we want some protection. [JG: Yes] but marriage, we weren't happy until we hit marriage. And really didn't expect to see that for some time. We didn't think that that was going to come as quickly as it did.

SP: So, then when Harper got into power and we still were not able to get married in Nova Scotia, but in 2003 laws changed in Ontario. So, Ross and Brian were living in Ottawa at the time and Nicky had gone to Carleton and I had connections with Ottawa when I was younger, so we decided that we best go to Ottawa before the laws changed.

NP: Well, so, Harper was running, and we thought Harper was going to win a majority government, so the election wasn't quite there yet [SP: No, no]. And, so we decided, okay we've been fighting for this, we're going to, if we can't get married, if we can married in Ontario and they want to take it away from us, there's going to be a fight. So, we went up to Ontario –

SP: And we had Ross and Brian stand for us as our best men...

NP: So that was November the 10th, 19, no, that was 2003.

SP: You got it.

NP: November 10th, 2003 [*laughing*]. There's too many anniversaries [*laughing*]. Our, we did do, at the church in 1997, sorry we're all over the place here. In 1997, we did a Holy Union.

SP: For us that was our wedding. Our church recognized us as being a married couple, but the government didn't. Which is really backwards, when you think of it [*laughing*].

NP: So, you know, so, the RDP, so yes we had all our friends and family, 'cause we'd been out a year by the time we did our commitment ceremony, and so that was the wedding as far as we're concerned. Then we did the RDP in June of 2001, and then, we

ran away to Ottawa to get married in 2003 because we thought we were going to have a real fight on our hands.

SP: It was our paper wedding [laughing].

NP: And of course, a year later [laughing]. Sue: get the piece of paper) Nova Scotia finally recognized same-sex marriage. So really, it was nothing and of course Harper didn't get in with a majority government. He got in with a minority. So, he really couldn't really tinker too much [SP: Nope]. And I'm not sure how much the political will was there to do that, but it was a threat.

SP: But we didn't want to wait any longer. We had waited long enough for marriage itself. Let's just –

NP: So we decided, we decided that the wedding was the legal paperwork catching up with our holy union that we had done. So that's kind of, and, of course by then all the hullabaloo kind of died down around us. We weren't getting called to do interviews because we didn't participate as one of the couples named for the fight in Nova Scotia for same-sex marriage.

SP: But we went down to the law court that morning. I asked my boss, can I go down to law, 'cause I worked downtown at the time. And she said, oh, yeah, just go, so, wonderful boss and walked down to the law courts and actually heard them read the announcement that same-sex marriage was legal in Nova Scotia. It was a great big roar from the people in the law courts. It was a wonderful day. Yeah.

JG: Yeah that must have been beautiful.

NP: Yeah, and then of course, after that I think things publicly died down for us [JG: *Probably needed* –]. You know I think they did need to talk to people. Like I said, you know I can see over times when we first came out in '96 – we went down to a Pride Parade and I sat way back, and I was looking and –

JG: Was that here in Halifax?

NP: Yeah, here in Halifax.

SP: Stood on Citadel Hill and watched –

NP: Watched it go by. Then the next year we marched in it. And it was a march. So you know, I, this was a march- you know it was “hey, hey, ho, ho, homophobia has got to go” and all that kind of stuff. Marching through the streets with our placards and yelling and screaming and then eventually, through Pride, we would do Safe Harbour ones and we would march with Safe Harbour. And then, over time, you could start seeing the pendulum shift to “Oh, let’s make it a parade.” Because we, we were actually the grand parade marshals in 2003, along with [SP: Joe [Varnell] and Kevin [Bourassa] from Ontario] from Ontario. So, we represented local, and they represented Canada ‘cause they also had fought up there for same sex marriage.

SP: They [Joe and Kevin] were the first ones really, got married in Canada legally.

NP: Yeah, so. So, we were in cars and went through the parade square for that. So, I still remember coming down Spring Garden Road and sitting up there and having a great old time in the back of the car. And looking over on the sidelines, looking at the different people and, I mean, going down Spring Garden Rd. on a float is just phenomenal. In the Pride Parade [SP: Turning from South Park Street onto Spring Garden] because it was a different parade route then, and all these people and the noise – it was just fantastic, and then I remember catching a woman’s eye and she mouthed the word “thank you.” [JG: Aw] You know? Yep.

JG: Well done [emotional pause]. Should we take a pause?

NP: It was right around that time that I think finding the Pride Parade people said, yes, drag queens are part of our community, but you can’t just show the drag queens. And if you want to do interviews, you have to do interviews with, with the people that are there, you know. Not just the flamboyant side of the Parade. They’re great. They’re part of our history, but there’s more to Pride than that. And, you know, by then the families had started coming out, the kids, the people, gay couples with children had started marching in the parades and you know, so some of that is really good. Because, you know, in the initial marches, I still remember coming down, ah, the north end of Halifax and finding buddy from the Rock Church, I can’t remember his name, buddy from the Rock church filmed every Pride Parade.

SP: He’d probably had lots of –

NP: Oh yeah. He filmed every Pride Parade that went down.

JG: Not sure if it wasn’t the Rock Church.

NP: I don't know, anyway. It was one of the evangelical churches; for some reason that just sticks out.

SP: *[Redacted]*. That's who it was.

NP: Was it *[redacted]*?

SP: Yes.

NP: Okay, there you go.

JG: Who filmed all of them?

NP: Yep.

JG: All right. Okay.

NP: Back then at that time, because, you know, these are sinners!

SP: They probably were beautiful films.

NP: Oh yeah. So, this all going down there was hilarious, anyway. But, and they changed the parade route and where you lined up and different things, and I think over time, you know, it's become quite the festive event. I can be cynical and say, yeah, but you know we just gone commercialized, and you know, with this and that now, and you know, they align, then I kind of say, we've been assimilated because in some ways we have. I mean, there was a time where if you asked a straight person to come down and see the Pride Parade with you, it was like "huh". But I can remember making a big deal one time asking my sister one time to come down.

JG: Did she?

NP: Yep. Yep she did, you know. And trying, you know, and then all of a sudden, things got more fun and flamboyant, and you know it, it, and then more commercial, so yeah there's some detractors on that. But on the other hand, families participate, you know. Mom's and dads can take their kids down. It was, it's probably, in my opinion, the best parade in Halifax. So, you know, there's some things I miss for the old days, but there are other things that –

SP: I miss the dances. They were fabulous.

NP: Yes [*laughing*].

JG: *Was that the dances at the Mayflower?*

NP: Yeah, we went to a couple at the Mayflower. Yeah.

SP: There were a couple other bars too. There was the Stonewall Bar –

NP: Oh yeah, we went to one there just before it closed.

SP: That was on Hollis and Sackville.

NP: Yeah.

SP: And then once Reflections opened, that was mostly gay when we were coming out [NP: And that became a –] we partied, hardy that summer [*laughing*].

JG: *What year?*

NP: 1996.

SP: 1996.

JG: *That was Reflections?*

NP: That was the year we came out. Oh my gosh. The money we spent there...

SP: We had a great time though [*laughing*] .

NP: Because of course for us, we were in our mid 30s then and it was like we were in our early 20s because we just came out. And it was like, all of a sudden, and this, when we talked earlier about being ashamed, this was, this was the blossoming. The no more, I'm not ashamed of who I am anymore [SP: We're proud!]. I am, and get over it. And we, you know, when we came out and realized, okay, there are some people we're just going to have to let them go off and digest the news, you know. Thirteen years we've been together. It's really hard to get angry at us when you do that. But there were some people that we had to give space to, and I think out of everybody, I think I can only remember losing one really personal, maybe from our circle of friends –

SP: Yep, one person from our set –

NP: And even Sue's family, it, it melded and changed. And yes, we went through some times and things have come back around this way a little bit now, but, you know, 'cause we've been, we've been together almost 39 years now. So, it's kind of hilarious because out of everybody we know –

SP: We looked at each other today and said, how did that happen? We're seniors now [*laughing*].

NP: But, you know, you kind of think, Wow – there's a lot of straight couples that haven't lasted as long as we've lasted. And you know, I really do go back to thinking, you know, those first thirteen years, they've been brutally hard.

SP: They taught us to talk to each other [NP: But we learned a lot about each other, you know –] but we came through very well [*laughing*]. 'Cause it was that way or the highway.

NP: Yeah.

JG: To survive, yeah. But you had each other through those [NP: Yeah, yeah] times.

NP: You know we learned in there, you know things is kind of, we did an article for a book, can show you in a bit – and one of the things he said at the end, he said, what would you tell other people, you know, about the longevity of your relationship? And we always said, "never go to bed angry at each other." We learned that very early on because it was a quiet week when that happened [SP: Mhm]. And we learned that you can't, you can't hold it in. You've got to discuss it. Deal with it and move on.

SP: Even if it hurts. Get it out in the open and deal with it and move on.

NP: And there were lots of complexities back in the beginning, trying to balance lots of different things. But coming out was kind of a very freeing. It was a real, huge weight lifted off our backs, and that's why I said that summer in '96 was just WOW! [*laughing*]. We chased Melissa Etheridge around the countryside, and you know, we just had a blast, [SP: Yeah] you know.

SP: We met all sorts of –

NP: But then we also, you know we learned some things about the lesbian community because we were considered, I would say –

SP: Fresh on the market.

NP: Yeah, fresh on the market. That's a nice way of putting it. And, you know, all of a sudden this whole, you know, and we've seen this with other friends that we have, we've acquired over time, in that some of them are all, [*whispered*] *it's kind of inbreeding*. We went to one party for somebody that we knew, and they'd all slept with each other. They'd all been girlfriends, over time, like this one had been with this one and been with this one and been with this... It was just kind of really weird, but it was really cloistered. It's one of the reasons why I actually think you're having a hard time getting women who will do this because women shut down and went into their own little groups. And they would have their own, it's like, how do you get lesbians to support a bar? It's really hard because a lot of lesbians will do their own little house parties, 'cause one, it's safe, and two, money! You know, and, you know, so we had to put up with some things that went on that first year. You know that was, so, we had thirteen years of being in the closet, and dealing with people then, and then we came out and then we had a whole other range of things that we never had to deal with before because, you know, I don't think I ever had anybody come on to me when I was thirteen years in the closet. If I did, I was dense about it.

SP: – Or a straight person asking us to go home with them.

NP: You know, like, we had, and I mean we ran into that at Reflections. It's why we stopped going eventually 'cause they were running around looking for thirds, you know. And it's like, okay you know, like come on guys. Like –

JG: What about across from Seadogs, across from Molly's?

SP: Molly's and Men's bar?

JG: Yeah, what about that scene? Did you ever –

NP: We didn't really get into that scene because I think it was men. I really, I felt like that that scene was all about the guys. And they tried hard. They tried doing women's nights and stuff, but by that point we were kind of out of the bar scene, I think.

SP: Did a lot of house parties for sure.

NP: Yeah, I mean, and I mean our world was, we had lots of gay male friends, we had lots of lesbian friends, and you know –

SP: But we got into other groups as well. I remember in particular, we joined up with the lesbian outdoor club [NP: Yeah] and we got into playing golf. We never played golf. We didn't start golf til our mid 30s. It was hilarious. Lots of balls in the woods. But now we quite enjoy it.

NP: Yeah. I think that was our joint sport together, was to golf.

SP: That was our, our older women friends that we met as we were considered still younger. They would have been in their probably 50s –

NP: Yes, they were another ten, twenty years older –

SP: – So, you know, we did kayaking, we did hiking and camping.

NP: Yep, that was good, that lasted, that was like for a summer or so. That was pretty early on after we came out, because like I said, we took a look at what was missing in our lives, because we were really lonely. You know, in the end, that's what drove us out. One of the things that drove us out. We were lonely. We knew, we knew there had to be other people like us. We knew that –

SP: Yeah, we had lots of straight friends, but –

NP: – But, but that world had closed down on us too. So, you know, by doing things like the Outdoor Club and going to the dances and then going to the bar, and then going to church, we kind of, and then over time what we found was, was the stuff that was probably things we would have done in our early 20s started to drop off. So, the drinking and partying all the time dropped off because you know, we've been there done that before and then we've been there done that again. And now we had started having a group, a solid group of friends around us that we could rely on and chat with and do things with, so, you know. And even now you can sort of see it as we get older and become seniors that is kind of happening a little bit again. That, that wider group around that are still working and still doing their thing that it's kind of, we're kind of come down. But, on the other hand, in here, is funny. When I came out at work, I travelled on the road as a trainer and an auditor and every manager that I took on the road with me, I basically felt I had to come out to. Because it was just like, it's just as easy because eventually talk in the car, driving around Newfoundland or driving around New Brunswick or PEI – inevitably comes to your personal world. You can't sit there and talk about work none stop the whole time. And so, eventually I had to almost put myself out there every time I took a new manager on the road with me. So, you know –

SP: What did you do last weekend? And who did you do it with? Right. It always comes up.

NP: Yeah, and here, when we moved in here, we just are, this is my partner.

JG: Great.

SP: Oh yeah, no problem in here

NP: I don't think so, I mean I have no idea.

JG: It's very quiet here.

NP: Yes, thank god.

JG: Yeah.

NP: We moved into a place in Spryfield and it was party central, so –

SP: Brand new building. It was beautiful. And we had beautiful sunsets.

NP: We had large rooms –

SP: But it was just party central. I knew it –

NP: So, ah, yeah. I don't know what else.

JG: Is there anything over there that you want to ... I just noticed that this table is a little bit squeaky...

NP: Yeah, they're all squeaky.

JG: Okay.

NP: You know why? They're hinged so you can tip them.

JG: Oh, that's convenient.

SP: I got to show her the wedding ones first.

NP: Alright.

SP: She'll recognize some of these people [*laughing*].

NP: Really.

SP: So this is Ottawa. So, this is kind of backwards though. See if you recognize Ross in there.

JG: Yes, of course. There's Ross. There's Brian [laughing].

SP: So that was November 2003.

JG: Oh cute. So sweet.

SP: Yeah. So, we flew up to Ottawa and –

NP: I will say that [SP: They were our best men] out of our –

SP: 'Cause we did a lot of things at Safe Harbour with them as well.

NP: Out of our public foray, [*NP and SP sort through pictures*] friends and family don't know about this, but we did get one hate [SP: One little hate mail], hate mail.

SP: Which we can chuckle over [*NP: Wow*] now. What!

NP: Yeah. I just took a copy of it before I gave it to the police, 'cause we did pass it over to the police. This was a, this was on July the 11th, 2003.

JG: And what did the police do about this?

NP: Don't know. Never really ever heard back.

JG: And so do you know who did this? No.

NP: Oh, there was a follow up in August, from a sergeant, and asked, all he did was ask if we had any more suspicious letters.

SP: But then we saw another article that had the same wording in it [*NP: Yeah*]. And it was to do with a Jewish person, I believe [*JG: Lord*], so it looked very similar.

JG: This was in Tantallon –

SP: But, that's going to happen [NP: Yep]. There's always a few. You know when you think it takes a lot of, I don't know. It takes a lot of courage to come out back, back then when we came out, because I really felt that I would lose my family and I did lose some of my family. Particularly a sister with young children, that we used to have the kids come over, stay over, and build forts for them and have a great time. Sleep over with them and that didn't happen anymore.

JG: What was the rational? Because they were worried about –

NP: This is the sister that gave her the bible.

JG: Oh, right.

NP: [*Laughing*] We already had five of them at the house [*laughing*]. But, yeah.

JG: Those are lovely photos.

SP: Thank you.

NP: So, this is a book; they were looking for couples who had been together for, think fifteen years or more.

SP: Yes.

NP: This was done round 2000 because it's pretty soon after we moved into our new house.

SP: You can check the date it was printed.

NP: Yeah.

JG: 2002.

SP: There you go.

NP: 'Cause I know it was early.

SP: Yeah.

NP: We're on page 44.

SP: We had just built our house, so it wasn't too long after that.

NP: No.

JG: Awww. Sweet.

NP: So, it's just a collection of gay and lesbian couples that had been together for a while and...

JG: Who introduced you two to each other in 1981?

NP: A friend [SP: Yes], a high school friend of mine.

JG: [Someone] you're still friends with?

NP and SP: Yes.

JG: That's amazing.

NP: It is because we nearly lost her.

SP: She took a hiatus from us when we came out. She was quite upset.

NP: But she was, she came to our commitment ceremony, [SP: She came around] she came to our holy union.

SP: Yeah, came 'round.

JG: Oh, that's a lovely photo.

SP: Thanks.

NP: So, the book they publish a picture of, that's probably one of the very first pictures of us together as a couple.

JG: So how old would you have been in that photo?

NP: Early twenties. Yeah.

SP: 24, 25 –

NP: Yeah, somewhere round there.

SP: Just little babies.

NP: Yeah [*laughing*].

NP: And we were still in the closet.

SP: Oh big time [*laughing*].

NP: But it was okay back then to do things like that, you know.

SP: I don't know who did that picture.

NP: Sears.

JG: You're touching, you're touching. There's hand, there's hand [NP: Yeah] touching. Well, there's hand touching here –

SP: Sears photo.

JG: Really! Seriously.

NP: Seriously.

*JG: That's wild [*laughing*]. How did they find you, I mean how did they –*

NP: Wow. I don't, was that through the church?

SP: It might have been through Bob, maybe.

NP: Somebody, I think somebody was saying that they'd heard, or we'd seen some information about looking for, you know, it still might have been Ross. It could have been Ross or Bob. Either one of them looking for couples that had been together, like I

said, for fifteen years or more and were willing to come out and be part of this book that was, you know, celebration of gay relationships basically.

JG: That's really lovely.

NP: And of course, they get a lot, they were looking for women. You get a lot of men. Like you guys with this project, you'd get a lot of men. Women tend to not –

JG: Why is that?

NP: I don't know whether it's the fear factor that, I think, as women that sometimes we have –

SP: Or when we don't–

NP: And then gay women on top of that.

SP: Or women don't have to put it in their faces as much, I don't know. Because men want to say, I'm gay!

NP: Get over it. [SP: Women are like –] Get used to it.

SP: You know, we are who we are [*laughing*]. We don't have to spread it all around. [*laughing*].

JG: There's also the assumption that gay guys are fighting for queer rights in a way that gay women are not. Or not as much. That's lovely. And I'm not sure if that's true. I wonder what your thoughts are on that given your own lived experience.

SP: Hmmm. What was that again?

JG: Gay men in front of the float. Everywhere, advocating for LGBTQ rights and the assumption that lesbians have a sort of quiet, invisible supporters as opposed to the ones who are actually advocating and fighting.

SP: I think women advocate behind the scenes more. They don't want to be in the forefront for a lot of, lot of – I don't know why that is.

NP: You know, I think the, is that, it just sort of looking and watching, if you're an effeminate man, you've been pushed around probably most of your life by straight men

and I think it's just, a reaction to – I'm here and I'm safe in my crowd of people and I'm going to be out there. You're going to have to look at me and I'm gorgeous. There's that one component, but there's also lots of other guys that would never do it, never be out in the front. We knew lots of men, even especially, even in the church. Like it was controversial when we decided to do stuff with the church and go out in –

SP: We had to be careful, like who was taking a picture, and who was going to be in it, and did you have their permission and [JG: *Oh, right*] did they want to be in this picture [JG: *Oh, right*] and all that, right.

JG: *Yep, right. Well, you've got quite a collection of things there.*

NP: Yeah. And I think I have to go through it now [*laughing*].

JG: *And don't get rid of any of it.*

NP: I won't. Nope. I'll, I think what we need to do is go through and find out what we can give you and then what just stays in our collection until we're gone.

JG: *For sure. And so, we can set up another time to get together and then go through your file folders and you can describe what's in them and tell us a little bit about them.*

NP: So, there's a little context. So, this should be a date at the top there too, I was going –

JG: *Ah, January 11, 2003. Oh, there's Ross, and Brian –*

SP: So that's the year we would have been the Pride Parade marshals and [NP: *Yep*] we got married in Ottawa.

NP: *Yep.*

SP: Oh, and there's [a well known local organizer] too.

NP: *Yeah.*

Sue: Oh, you know [this organizer] too! Right on.

JG: *I think I met [him] through the Youth Project, maybe.*

NP: Yep, could be, yeah. Him and [another man] were very active for a long time.

SP: Oh yes. They looked after the food bank at the church for years. [NP: Manna for Health] Manna for Health.

NP: Which made its way over to ah –

SP: St. John's United.

JG: And also, it was at Aids Coalition Nova Scotia.

NP: Yeah.

JEG: Cool, lovely. Fantastic [looking through pictures].

NP: Ross and Brian. Sweet. Yeah, so maybe what we should do is, is, have to go through, like I said. I haven't thrown this out. We've made a couple of moves and we, you know – you can have that.

JG: Oh, don't throw things out.

NP: No. I have lots of copies of that one.

JG: Great. And so, that the, the way the archive works is if there are materials that are printed materials or other ephemera that are donated would be part of your fonds, so would be [NP: Fonds?] the Sue and Nicky fonds; and then this would be digitized using their glorious process in keeping with the natural standards for archival stuff.

NP: So, as you can appreciate, so we have three anniversaries. So that's our RDP folder...

SP: which we don't celebrate.

NP: We don't bother with that one.

JG: Registered Domestic Partnership.

NP: Yeah, which is now null and void because we got married.

JG: Aw, look at those.

NP: So that's Sam and Kim. They're no longer together.

JG: Right.

SP: I found this from 2003. From the parade.

JG: Oh, sweet.

NP: Yeah. We never had a picture of us riding in the car together.

JG: Oh, that's great.

SP: We did a search one day and found them.

JG: That's beautiful. That's in front of the Khyber I think, [SP: Yeah] on Spring Garden [Correction: Barrington Street]...

SP: Where the pink sheep of the ...

NP: Oh yeah, that one, yeah. I loved holding some of those signs.

SP: Yaeh.

NP: That was before the church had started marching. Eventually churches started marching with us [JG: Yeah, yeah] So, you know, it just, just took time.

JG: Along with police and everybody else. I mean, people were upset about the police being there in their, yeah; [redacted]. This is great. This is, don't get rid of this [NP: No], keep all this. That's really fantastic [SP: Mhm]. That's a great photo.

SP: [*Laughing*] Oh we were so excited that day. Nova Scotia was finally doing something positive for us.

NP: And then we just saved printouts that we had. So I got to go through that and organize it a little bit more.

JG: Aw. Cute. Your cards. That's lovely that you kept that. I'm not going to read all the messages, but that's lovely.

NP: So, for the wedding, Sue's co-workers gave her a big memory box, so we went to Ottawa, we got a bunch of stuff stashed in the memory box [SP: They were so sweet] and then, of course, so we've got –

SP: 'Cause when I came out with Nicky, I went to each of my co-workers and I took them to coffee individually, explained to them what was happening, and they were all, oh yeah, we knew that [*laughing*].

JG: You should have said, all right, we're all going to coffee and I'm going to stand here with a bullhorn and tell you the news.

SP: That wasn't me though. I had to do it one at a time.

NP: And then in here we have [SP: Holy union] the holy union.

JG: Oh geez.

SP: In '97.

NF: Geez these tables –

JG: Yeah, I just realized it's going to pick that up on the recording so I'm trying to keep my elbows off the table.

NP: So this is just all the stuff that we saved from...

JG: Sweet. Oh, that's lovely.

NP: And then our, our pictures [*JG: Nice*]. So, this is all wedding time [*JG: Yeah*] and then people who came over and stayed –

SP: Beforehand we didn't know if my parents were even going to show up.

NP: They did though, they did [*JG: Yeah, where are they?*]. They didn't take coming to the pictures, but they showed up.

SP: There's my mom there.

JG: Aw. Nice.

SP: Yeah. This was our, best, one of our best –

NP: We had two gays and two straights.

SP: Two gays and two straights came for us [*laughing*].

JG: A Noah's Arc.

NP: My sister and [her partner] and then [*redacted*] who was Darlene's partner and [another woman] was the good friend.

SP: So there's the Safe Harbour banner there.

NP: And we got to our first anniversary, I kept some [*inaudible crosstalk*]. And we had 20th anniversary. So, we consider ourselves a couple as of May of 200- er 1983. So, we count from there. Straight people can do what the hell they want. We couldn't get married in '83 so, lump it.

SP: Well, some people, straight people, say, well you didn't get married 'til 2003. Well what are we going to do with the other 18 years? Forget about them?

NP: So, we took a bunch of friends out for dinner and did a 20th Anniversary celebration there. And this is Ottawa. So, this is the paperwork catching up with the holy union. And we went up to Ottawa and we went out to dinner to the revolving restaurant.

SP: And they had just put up the Christmas lights [*JG: Oh how lovely*] it was just gorgeous.

NP: And we wore, my sister made us Rainbow vests so, we wore our Rainbow vests.

JG: Nice.

SP: And in the restaurant they found out that we had just gotten married and of course, they made a big to-do. Brought us dessert [*JG: Aw*] and they found a little card and they signed it. It was so sweet.

JG: Nice. That was very sweet.

NP: It was very sweet.

JG: These are great photos. Fantastic. Always smiling. Wonderful.

NP: Yep, so.

JG: That's a beautiful thing to keep. You should definitely make sure that you keep it In good, in good nick.

SP: Kind of funny now because we put everything on our phones, and we don't put anything in photo albums anymore, so we're lucky we have these, right.

JG: Yeah, I know. And so, as people downsize, the fear is, and part of the rationale for this Lesbian LGBT Seniors Archive and the Lesbian Oral History Project is because as people are downsizing, stuff is ending up in the tip [trash] and then we can't get it back, and unfortunately some people squirreled things away in cubby holes and shoe boxes never to be seen again, and then when they move, or they pass away, that stuff is chucked in the bin.

NP: So it's interesting when we got that letter and then I saw this article, this one, the hate mail in the Herald. I did call the police in, the RCMP because there was a name mentioned in here who was handling it. Let them know that we had the same thing, and I cross referenced the numbers, but I don't think it did anything.

JG: That was in Tantallon?

NP: Yeah.

SP: Just so that they're aware.

[Remainder of conversation redacted.]