

Interviewee: Susan Adams

Interviewer: Oscar Campbell

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

OC: So, just to begin, can you tell me a little about yourself including things like your date, your date and place of birth, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Any places of residences you had. Any brief employment history and how long you've lived in Nova Scotia specifically.

SA: Ok. I was born in Montreal in 1951.

OC: Oh, and your full name too.

SA: Oh, sorry. My full name is Susan Elliott – two “l”s and two “t”s – Adams. And I was born in Montreal in 1951. I lived. I'll tell you where I lived first. I lived north of Montreal until the age of 15. I then moved to Jamaica for two years where my parents were Cuso volunteers. I then went back to Montreal for one year and attended McGill University and I then came to Antigonish, Nova Scotia, which would have been 1969, and I was back and forth between here and Montreal until I graduated from university in '72 and I've lived in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, or the county surrounding Antigonish, since that time. So what were your other questions? Employment, was it? Or, was it employment you wanted?

OC: Yeah. Any sort of employment history that you had, that you can remember, and also how long you've lived in Nova Scotia, which you just answered.

SA: Right, ok. So, I've lived here since 1972. Employment history – you know when I was a young student, I had the regular types of summer jobs. Waitressing, office work. Following that I did a little bit of part time work as a research assistant at the university where I studied; then I became a library assistant at StFx University, and after ten years of being a library assistant, I got a Master of Library and Information Science degree and worked as a librarian from that point on, so that was for 25 years. And I retired when I was 60.

OC: That's great. Congratulations on retiring and living an exciting, full life [SA: Yeah, yeah] and of course, continuing to do so.

SA: I was very lucky to be one of those people who found a field of work that I really enjoyed, and I was fortunate enough to have continuous employment in that field for, you know, as much of my adult life as I wanted it for [OC: Yeah]. Yeah, not an option that a lot of people have now, I know. I quite recognize the privilege.

OC: Well, yeah, as I mentioned to you, I'm in the Library and Information Technology program at NSCC, so I am, I guess just starting a pretty similar journey for myself, I suppose.

SA: I wish you all the best, and I hope you enjoy it [OC: Thanks]. In fact, I really hope you enjoy it.

OC: Yeah, I am so far.

SA: Good

OC: So, in terms of your experiences here in Nova Scotia, what, what have they been like in your interactions with the LGBTQ2IA+ community here in the province and in Antigonish and its associated regions. Say within [SA: Yeah] any organized activism that you've done, community groups, personal relationships and so on.

SA: Ok. I would say that until sexual orientation was added as a banned grounds of discrimination in 1992, I would say I was extremely low key. I worked at a Catholic university and although I was in a relationship, it was not open. It's a small town. Everybody knew, but, you know, it was one of those things that nobody wanted to talk about and so I didn't, at that point, press the issue. I didn't. And my partner really would not have wanted me to press the issue. So, after that point, we [inaudible] a number of people started being more open and, I mean, for example I can remember at a, at an International Women's Day cabaret, several of us formed a singing group that we, rather tongue in cheek called the Nova Scotia Masked Choir as opposed to the Nova Scotia Mass Choir and we all wore paper bags over our heads with little holes cut out and sang a couple of songs parodying homophobic individuals like Rosanne Skoke, and the, just in general the situation of homophobia. In, you know, Nova Scotia in general and the world more broadly. So, I would say from about 19, I guess it would have been '93 or so on, I participated in a number of, you know, Pride events when they started happening in Antigonish. X-Pride. My partner was part of a group at, did positive, wrote a manual for positive space training at the university, or was it the Women's Centre? It was done, I think it done initially at the Women's centre and then was used at the university, but I could be wrong on that. Yeah, and you know, I participated in groups like, well I kind of helped organize a Raging Grannies group and we are often called upon or choose to do songs at anti homophobia events [inaudible]. I have not been an organizer for the most part of those events, but I've taken a fairly active part in them. And I forgot to say, you asked initially about sexual identity and sexual orientation. I would identify as a woman who is a lesbian.

OC: Great. And so, you mentioned that you have done a sort of that tongue and cheek acapella group and also your Raging Grannies group. Do you know if, if, do you have any recordings from any of those or any, you know, audio visual material from your engagement with that kind of work, or has it mostly been like the, you know, kind of one-off performances at particular events?

SA: Yeah. Unfortunately, it's been one off performances. What I could do because I did write the songs for that initial performance, I could probably mentally reconstruct the lyrics for that, which I could send you guys if that was of interest? It was, it was specifically around, that particular performance was specifically around, I, you would probably not be old enough to remember this, but there was a politician from what was at that time the neighbouring Federal constituency. She was a Liberal politician called Rosanne Skoke. I don't know, have you ever heard of her being...

OC: No, I'm not familiar with her.

SA: No, ok, well she, she, in parliament made at least one, and no doubt more than one, very homophobic statements which kind of outraged a whole lot of people and her kind of most famous one had something to do with, see this was at the time when they were, you know, adding sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for, I think it was hate speech...

OC: So would this have been in the late 1960s, early 1970s.

SA: No, no, no. This was in the 1990s [*OC: Okay*] this would have been, yeah, yeah. Anyway, her kind of famous statement was something to the effect of she didn't think that parliament should be bowing to the "homosexualist agenda" [*OC: Right*] which, yeah, which was quite funny. A group of folks in Pictou County, you know, immediately formed themselves into a group that they called the "Homosexualist Agenda" [*laughing*] to protest her particular point of view. She was a one term politician because she got removed, or [*OC: Well that's good*] voted out at the next election. In fact, I think, if I'm not mistaken and I could be wrong about this, I don't think she was even the candidate in the next election. I think she was defeated as the candidate, you know, when they do the nominations [*OC: Yeah, yeah right*]. So, yeah. A lot of people from Antigonish actually went down and became instant Liberals and got to vote at the nomination convention, which, to vote her out.

OC: And did you, did you take part in convention yourself? Or...

SA: No, no I didn't. I personally would identify as an anarchist so I, so I didn't. I wasn't going to sign up as Liberal even, [*OC: Yeah*] even for a day.

OC: So, you mentioned that you had been a library assistant and more recently a librarian, I was wondering if you, if there, if you had any sort of experiences in your work life that sort of dealt with your being a lesbian or you know, any sort of LGBT+ issues that you'd encountered at work, either in terms of the work, you know, in terms of the work you were doing, or like, you know, co-workers or the work environment, or anything like that?

SA: Certainly, no issues with co-workers. And I don't recall any other issues. I do remember at one point, some group had donated a very, a very right wing collections of books to the university library, many of which I personally found offensive, and I brought

them to the attention of the university librarian at that time who was a, who was a priest, and he looked over this collection of books and said he did not think that those donations needed to be catalogued and added to the library collection. Which was interesting. This would have been before I took my masters in Library Science, so I wasn't as aware as I would have been in later times about, well, for one thing we didn't have a collection development policy at that time and I wouldn't have been aware as I was later of, you know, libraries' difficult position when, certainly a difficult position when it comes to removing books from the shelf, but, you know, also in terms in what to add to a collection. So that was, that was quite interesting. So, he chose not to add that collection. It was, it was a small collection, about 25 books had been donated, and he just said no. Don't have to deal with these things. Which I appreciated at the time.

OC: Yeah, yeah. That is surprising. And it's interesting to me also that you didn't have a collection development policy at that point either, because obviously that's a pretty important document for this line of work.

SA: Yeah. I mean, you know we're talking, this would have been in the 1970s, [OC: *Right*] so you know, even academic libraries, small academic libraries in those days weren't necessarily kind of up to the mark, and of course, you need to remember that as a Catholic university, up until not long before then, the library would have been subject to the index of banned books. Index Librorum Prohibitorum [OC: *Hmmm*], you know, so there were some books that the Catholic church would not, you know, permit or you know, would discourage practising Catholics from reading. So, you know, there were a whole bunch, so in a sense that was a [inaudible] anti-collection development policy in itself [*laughing*] But you know, there was no, there was no, and I would say at that time, formal and written library policies in that library were a bit thin on the ground.

OC: Interesting. How did you find – so you said, you mentioned that you went to graduate school to get a Master of Library Science; how did you find that in terms of either any LGBT+ experiences or any, you know, sort of interactions with other peers with regard to that or any differences you might have felt between being in that context versus being a library assistant?

SA: Hmm. Well, let's see. That would have been 1985-86. I would say that, I, you know, I certainly didn't encounter anything either in terms of renting an apartment or, or in, you know, in the context of library school itself, we had, we had a couple of very strong feminist profs who, you know, were I would say very, I don't know that either of them was a lesbian, but, certainly very open, you know, to people of different ethnicities, you know, faith groups, sexual orientations, etc., so I didn't encounter anything that I, you know, was made uncomfortable by. On the other hand, I wouldn't say I was out at that point. You know, I was, you know the folks I hung around with knew I was sharing an apartment with another woman, but what they made of that, I don't know.

OC: Right.

SA: So, so no, I don't think I encountered anything at that was, that was problematic for me and I don't think there was anything, yeah, in 1985, you know we were just at, I would have said a very early stage of there being a lot of public statements. You know this would have been roughly – and my dates, I'm not so good with dates anymore – it was probably around this time that, let's say that the Anglican church was deciding whether gays and lesbians could be ordained. I can't remember the timing on that, but that was one of the first, sort of, you know, big, sort of public expositions on gays and lesbians in sort of mainstream society, so to say. So, it, it wasn't anything that figured in any of the courses that I took in Library school, and it, so you know, being a lesbian did not seem to be an issue.

OC: Right. Of course. I know, for instance, just in my own travels through library world so far, you know, I've developed my healthy hatred toward Melville Dewey as it seems like everybody does in this, in this field [laughing], and so, you know, for instance I was thinking of how the dewy decimal classification for example, it has a sordid, not great history with how to approach homosexuality and, you know, lesbianism as a category, you know, seeing it shift, you know, social disorders or kind of sexual deviants and this kind of stuff, so I was curious if you encountered any of that at your time, but it seems like was a more recent, you know, people have been re-appraising it more recently in ...

SA: I would imagine so, yes. Yes, for sure. Well, I mean, you know, I can't remember the exact date that homosexuality was removed as a category from the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association, but it was fairly recently, like well within my lifetime [OC: Yeah, yeah]. You know, so I often used to joke that, you know, when I was first, well when I was a teenager and first sort of recognizing that I was attracted to women, at that time, you know, the churches were you know, universal in their, you know, disapproval. This was a psychiatric disorder, and you know, there were legal implications and, because I didn't feel like I was a bad person or a sick person and I didn't see why I should be illegal, I decided I wasn't gay. You know, the internalized homophobia was, no I'm not any of those things so I guess this isn't being gay.

OC: Right. And so, if you feel comfortable in answering, I was sort of curious about how you came to that realization and if you would be willing to talk about it. 'Cause it sounds like you had a good network of support among your friends, and potentially family as well, but that you sort of acknowledged there was that, sort of, more formal disapproval of it, you know, in the church as you mentioned, and you know in wider society of course at the same time. So, how, you know, how did you end up navigating that?

SA: Well, like I say, denial [OC: Right] until I was probably, oh I don't know, maybe, maybe 20, 21, something like that and then just sort of like, no, no, that's who I am. And, you know, fortunately, as you said I had good friends. My parents would have probably reacted negatively had I decided to, you know, do an official coming out, but, I just decided, no, I'm not going to be scared. So, except of my parents, so I just proceeded to live my life as I felt comfortable doing. And it wasn't a huge negotiation on

any level until I decided to come out to my mother when I was, gosh how old, let me think, probably 34 or something; you know, formally.

OC: Yeah, right, yeah, yeah. So, could you maybe tell me a bit more about your coming out experience and what that was like, and you know, how it was received, and this kind of thing.

SA: Yeah, well, I guess with my mother, I mean, it was, a lot of my friends laugh about this. You know, we were kind of standing washing the dishes and it was, there was something on the news about a lesbian couple in Ontario who were adopting a child, and, you know, we were listening to the news, washing the dishes and my mother [*laughing*], my mother kind of, you know, broke the topic. So, she looked at me and she said, "so do you have many friends who are lesbians?" And I said, "Well mom, WELL mom [*laughing*] I said, yes, I do, and you know I'm a lesbian, right?" And she said, "Well, yes, I guess I knew but I'm not sure I wanted to hear it." I said, "Well, you did ask!" And then, and then, the, then she sort of very confidentially leaned over and said, "But I don't think you should tell your father because he's a little bit bigoted, you know." [*laughing*] Oh, really! And apparently a number of years later, she, my mother, you know, said something about this to my dad and he said, "Oh yeah, I know [*laughing*]. So what's the big deal?"

OC: That's funny. Well, I'm glad, I'm glad it was ah, easy for you to navigate that and not...

SA: Well, I think it was very easy for me to navigate. I'm not sure how easy it was for my mother.

OC: Right, yeah, yeah. Have you, have you sort of spoken with her since then about, you know, sort of how that, how that impacted her at all, or...

SA: Well, I mean she died a number of years ago now, but, at one point, I had, I had a couple of relatives; they weren't really cousins, but they were sort of like cousins, I don't know, a couple times removed or something; anyway, so my mom knew that this family, sort of almost distant relation, had a couple of gay sons and she told me that she had talked to that relation to find out more about this. And I thought, well, that'd be good, 'cause that would probably have been a good, a good way for her to get information she felt she needed from someone she felt comfortable talking to. And she told me that, you know, a couple of years after I had, we had had the initial conversation, that she'd had this conversation and, you know, found out about, you know, she might even have got a book or two out of the library where she lived, and I think she, my mother was a great library user. She, you know, would go through five or six books a week [*OC: Oh wow*]. Oh yeah, so, I think she did say she had gone and got a book out about gay people, to find out about it [*OC: Right*]. So, no, it was, you know, as I say, it was an uncomfortable conversation, but, you know, I'm sure it was more uncomfortable for her than it was for me.

OC: Right. And in terms of coming out you said most of your friends, basically already knew so, is there any sort of, do you have any sort of coming out experiences with them? Or was that, or was everyone kind of just like, yeah sure?

SA: I don't, I mean, I think it was so taken for granted [OC: Right] that, that, you know, I never went around with a checklist like, "You know right? You know?" [OC: Yeah, yeah] [laughing] You know, I think everybody just kind of knew. I did, you know, back in the days before 1992, one person who I was friends, well, an acquaintance with, and now this actually happened to be someone I worked with, now that I think of it, at the time, said to me one day, so are you and so-and-so, your partner, are you lesbians? And I said no, at that time, because this person was someone who would have not treated that piece of information with confidentiality in our work situation and, you know, not only could I have been fired for being gay, I could, you know, they could have said that that was why I was being fired [OC: Right], you know. After 1992 you could still be fired for being gay, but they couldn't say that's why it was [OC: Yeah, yeah]. So I did, I did on one occasion in my life actually tell an out and out lie about that.

OC: Right. And did, did that person ever, did you ever see that person again, like after you, you know, after, you know, maybe not in a work setting or, you know, in a situation where didn't feel like you had to sort of protect yourself that way?

SA: Oh, oh yeah, I did in- we didn't work together for very long, but, you know, I mean Antigonish is a small town [OC: Right]. So, you know, after quite some time, that person would have got to know some of my other friends and would have, I'm sure have been put in the picture, and you know, I still see them occasionally and, you know, we're actually quite, quite chums [OC: Nice] and that person is now in, what I guess you could call a non-traditional relationship.

OC: Nice. So, shifting gears a little bit here. You mentioned to me you had done some, you know, peace activism and anti-poverty work and some human rights work as well, so I was curious sort of if you want to talk a little bit about that and, any sort of, the way that your experiences as a lesbian woman has sort of impacted that, if it has at all?

SA: Well, I mean in terms of, I can really, in terms of human rights work, but, you know, probably, I don't know about now, but certainly in times gone by, I would have said, at least in Antigonish, that my friends who would identify as lesbians were certainly much more actively engaged in, you know, peace and social, peace social and economic justice issues than were the gay men that I knew in Antigonish. And that's not to cast aspersions, you know. The gay men are doing whatever they're doing. But, you know, a number of us who, I mean it's almost funny, you know you sort of look around the room in some meetings of some organizations and, you know, half the people there are dykes [OC: Right]. So, oh, ok. So, you know, and I mean, it's a small town, so I would say in Antigonish, a number of women who would identify as lesbians are involved in activism or advocacy work of some sort or another. And, yeah, so what to say.

OC: I have a, so I'm curious if you, I was curious that you said in your experience doing activism that most of the people you've encountered were also other lesbians and not so much gay men. I was sort of curious if you had any thoughts about why that might have been the case?

SA: You know, you can't speak for anybody else, so it's a little hard to, but I think, I, maybe I just didn't know which men were gay. That's also a possibility, but in early times, certainly the gay men that I knew were, I don't know, you know maybe not wanting to be that front and center, I don't know. That's speculation on my part. Certainly now, you know, the deputy mayor of Antigonish is a gay man who has been out for, you know, a long time. I actually taught him in high school now that I think about it [*laughing*]. I, I, yeah, I was a teacher's assistant and I remember him and a couple of the other young lads, and I remember thinking, you know those, those young guys, I wouldn't be surprised if they were gay. I never thought anything of it, but in later years, I was right on. Strangely [*laughing*]. I thought, oh, all three, there you go. Bingo. But, yes, certainly, I would say, and we have, you know, someone at the university whose, you know, very much a leader in terms of organizing Pride stuff and so on. A person who now I think identifies as trans, but initially identified as male, I believe. But, you know, it's just, of course, and like, frankly in most of the sort of social justice and economic organizations around Antigonish that I'm part of, it's mostly women. It's, you know, predominately women involved. And that may be a deterrent to, you know, to men participating. They may just prefer to be in other groups. Now, I'm not, I'm not involved at this time in any particular gay and lesbian and transgender organizations per say. You know, that have that particular focus, so there, of course there would be men, women and trans persons, but I'm talking, sort of like more generally speaking, like the Antigonish Poverty Reduction coalition for example, or, let's see what other organizations would, I think, I think I've made the point. You know, in Antigonish, at any rate, many of the social and economic justice organizations tend to be more women than men [*OC: Right*] of any orientation.

OC: Yeah, and I would imagine it's probably fairly similar, you know, where I am in Halifax as well and. . . So, I know also that you are involved in the community advisory committee. Could you maybe, sort of talk about your involvement there as well, if you don't mind?

SA: Yeah, I, I have not been an active member at all. I, there were some initial confusions when people initially volunteered, and I'm not sure how that happened, but, I think it was a question of who invited volunteers and I just, I said, oh yeah, I mean, I was a librarian, I have done a lot of digitization and so on, so you know, maybe this is something I could be helpful with. Then there was a kind of hiatus when it wasn't sure who was on the committee and who wasn't, and I wasn't sure if I was or wasn't. And, since that time, pretty shortly thereafter we got into the pandemic thing and I, because of where I live and because our internet bandwidth is so low, I couldn't really participate effectively in Zoom meetings [*OC: Right*]. So, I mentioned to Dan [*MacKay*] that I thought I would really be interested in keeping, receiving the minutes and if I saw anything where I could step up and help I'd be happy to do that, but, I didn't think, you

know, I didn't really think it was there was any point in my trying to participate on a regular basis in the meetings. So, I've been kind of a, you know, an outlier. I did send, when Dan MacKay was doing his part of the project, I did send him some material about Antigonish and a variety of things of things that had happened here in terms of you know, events, public events and so on that I happened to have newspaper copies of, stuff like that.

So, I haven't been a very active member, and haven't seen a way yet in which I could do much that would be particularly- except that, when I got messaged about the Lesbian Oral History project, I thought, oh, well, there's something I can do. So I sent a message around to folks saying, you know, this thing is happening and so anybody who's interested, here's who you contact, and, so, well let's see, that's one, two, three, four of us I guess. I really think it's important that, you know, that the rural experience be represented, cause, yeah, stuff that happens in cities is, is, whether it's to do with LGBTQ+ issues or environmental issues for that matter, you know, stuff that happens in Halifax tends to get, you know, media coverage, whereas stuff that happens in Antigonish doesn't tend to get media coverage, so there's a little bit of a notion that nothing's going on out here, [OC: *Right*] or that people don't know what it is that is going on [OC: *Right*], you know, in the more rural areas. I was just interviewed for a different research project that has to do with environmental activism and the, the researcher said well, yeah, I mean I've looked through all the media reports and I can't find, you know, anything that is happening. And it's like, well no, you're not going to [laughing] [OC: *Yeah, yeah*]. It's like it's 200 people go out for a climate march in Halifax, it gets in the news. If a hundred people in Antigonish go out for a climate march, despite the fact that that's like a quarter of the population, no, not a quarter, but proportionately a much higher percentage of the population, that's not going to make, you know, CBC [OC: *Right*]. You know, so, I think people don't know when things are happening in places other than urban centres. It's quite reasonable.

OC: Yeah, and that, that kind of to me, that speaks to the sort of the importance, again speaking sort of as a library student, of how important it is to have things like community archives and community libraries and stuff that are able to effectively, sort of, capture that kind of stuff, both in terms of, you know, reportage, but also, you know, sort of the documentary heritage so it doesn't get lost, and you can sort of sustain those cultural memories.

SA: Exactly. You're absolutely right, yeah.

OC: So, I was, you mentioned I think one or two times that, it sounds like you have donated materials to the NS LGBT Seniors Archive. Is that correct?

SA: Just, I sent in one little batch of stuff, yes.

OC: Ok. Could you maybe describe how and why you collected those material, well, so, could you describe the materials, and then could you talk a little bit about the how and why of your collecting them in the first place, please?

SA: Well, I suppose, you know, in the pre-Internet days, I did, you know, and working in a library and becoming a bit more aware than I might have been previously of new, the importance of the documentary heritage, you know, whenever something appeared in the local newspaper, cause we did used to have a locally produced newspaper, a weekly, so, you know, if someone wrote a letter to the editor or an event was, you know, given a little bit of front page coverage, or even back page coverage, I'd just clip it out and stick it in a file. You know, so I had files on a variety of things, you know. Peace marches, women's marches, you know, groups advocating for LGBT+ rights, you know, so what I did send to Dan, if I remember correctly, was photocopies of a few newspaper clippings. I can't remember if I sent him my songs about Roseanne Skoke or not, but, if I didn't, I could. So that was basically it. You know, in those days, in those early days, you know you didn't have personal computers, so you had like little file folders in your filing cabinet, and I just had a bunch of stuff stuffed in there.

OC: Awesome. So you, circling back to when you were talking about the rural vs, you know, urban dichotomy, I was sort of wondering if there are any, you know, experiences or, like rallies or anything like that that you sort of felt didn't get enough attention that maybe you think are worth sort of mentioning now for posterity compared to you know, things that have been happening in Halifax and where you are that should, should sort of be better known. That you feel are quite significant.

SA: Well, I guess one example, you know, would be the Priscilla, Queen of the Highlands drag queen shows that have been, I don't know, there must have been about ten of them by now, I should think. There is, you know, I know, I can't name persons' names, otherwise you'll have to check with the if they can be included, but there is an individual who has been, I would say, at the forefront of an awful lot, you know, has really pushed things really forward in Antigonish that might not have been pushed forward had this person not been here. So, you know, the annual drag queen performances have been, you know, well attended. People really enjoy them. I think they've done a lot to, you know, to help people's attitudes shift and so on. So, you know, that would be one thing I can think of. You know, there have been Pride marches since, well in fact, in, Antigonish has something called the Highland Games and every year the Highland Games has a parade and for many years there has been sort of a Pride march within the Highland Games parade. And that goes back, oh, probably to the, let me think; I can't think how far back that goes. I'm sorry that's too bad, I can't. Probably twelve, thirteen, fourteen years, something like that. And, you know, I think because of the very strong Catholic heritage people sometimes think Antigonish is, you know, a very repressive and church-bound community and I would say that there is, Antigonish is a lot more progressive than some people sometimes seem to think it is.

OC: Why do you think that is?

SA: Why do I think that is? Why is it more progressive than it's given credit for? I have never thought about that question. Well, I would have difficulty answering that as to why it's more, I mean, I think people's impressions of Antigonish seem to be a little bit stuck

in the past. I think I could say that. And, you know, often if things do get reported about Antigonish, like, oh dear the bishop has been arrested for being, for having child pornography on his computer, that makes the news, you know. The fact that, you know, we've been having Fridays for the Future marches in front of Town Hall, that's not going to make the news

OC: Right.

SA: You know, so, I think if it's something a bit salacious happens, you know, that happens, to do with, you know, the Catholic church, you know, if things go wrong in Antigonish, they'll make the news. I think that's part of it and so I think that the impression is created that the town is not quite as, and people around here are not quite as progressive as they might be.

OC: So, in terms of – just to circle back to your experiences as a lesbian – are there any other experiences that you've had as a result of your gender or sexual orientation that we, sort of, haven't discussed yet, and you would like to sort of mention?

SA: I can't think of anything in particular. I think, I think I have been a pretty lucky person in that, you know, I have not had as many very negative experiences as has some folks that I know. And for that I'm grateful. And I think, I think really, the only challenge I had would have been overcoming that internalized homophobia that, you know, I lived with until I sort of went, "No, wait a second, I'm not sick, I'm not evil and I don't think this should be considered illegal, having feelings of this sort, so, screw it! I guess I am a lesbian – oh, ok."

OC: Was there any, speaking of overcoming internalized homophobia, was there any particular event or series of events that sort of led you to make that realization, or was it more just an accumulation of, you know, a bunch of different, maybe desperate, err sorry, disparate experiences across a wider range of time?

SA: Yeah. You mean there wasn't some kind of, you know, magical awakening or anything. It was just sort of, you know, overcoming this kind of dichotomy between being told that gay people are mentally ill and, you know, disgustingly immoral. And just sort of going, "I don't think so," you know. But I can't, I can't sort of link it to a particular event or a set of circumstances. No, no it was a gradual realization that that was nonsense. And, I mean, I think developing sort of anarchist politics through my late teens and early twenties was probably part of that. I, I, you develop a certain distrust of authority and, as such, you sort of start questioning whether the dictates of people in authority really have any validity behind them.

OC: So, teasing out the, what you just said about your anarchist politics, how, what sort of, I'm sort of curious, should have, if, you know, what things you might have been reading that were sort of anarchist literature, or sort of how that kind of worked with or against, you know, your sexual and gender identity at the time, and currently. If you'd feel like talking about that at all?

SA: I can talk about it more historically.

OC: *Sure.*

SA: Probably, I was reading, I was reading things by and about, let's say Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, you know, reading of some Russian authors like Tolstoy and so on who were anarchists. Kropotkin. Oh, I'm trying to think who else. Anyway, you know, just writers who were perfectly comfortable flouting what were accepted as social conventions and I think that that's how the two things tied together in mind. Like, you know, why should I believe that; those, you know, sort of societal norms around this.

OC: *And was there at that time, or throughout your life, was there much of an anarchist, you did you find a sort of a similar anarchist community in Antigonish at that time, or at any point later on, after you had those sort of formative experiences with Anarchist literature?*

SA: You know, no, I would not say there's an, you know, an anarchist enclave in Antigonish [*laughing*], but I think a lot of people have, you know, over time maybe given more attention to writers like George Woodcock and Noam Chomsky. And so, you know, not everyone thinks that all anarchists are crazy, bearded bomb-throwers.

OC: Yeah, yeah.

SA: You know, that people have, I would, I can't speak for the populace of Antigonish Town and County, but you know, those sorts of, and you know any of the sort of the more local movements, you know, the local food movement, all of those things are more in keeping with the notion of anarchist organization of society into smaller, you know, groups, rather than you know, large corporate states. So, I think in that sense there's a sort of a gentle edge toward more local, more locally organized and locally political thinking, you know. I mean, from my perspective, some of the most progressive work in, most progressive political work that's being done right now is being done by municipalities. Particularly with regard to, you know, climate issues and other issues of that sort. You know, poverty reduction and so on and it's not coming down from the top, it's coming up from the bottom. Yeah, which, I know, I realize we're veering quite a bit off the topic that you may be trying to focus on, but, that sort of, a really big part of my life is [*OC: Yeah*] that's the thing.

OC: *Yeah, and I suspect you might agree that they're, that really, that really they're all related, so it's hard to sort of analytically separate them, although sometimes it's beneficial to do so.*

SA: Yeah, yeah. It is a little hard to separate all those things.

OC: *So, we're coming up on our hour. I was sort of wondering if there's anything that we haven't talked about that maybe you would like to include as well?*

SA: Well, something that we haven't talked about that may or may not be of interest in terms of the interview, you know, in terms of where I would have thought myself to be in a kind of spiritual, in the spiritual part of my life, and I would say that that has shifted significantly from the time I was young to now. And a good part of that might have had something to do with, you know, churches, churches' approach to LGBT+ people [OC: *Uh huh*]. Yeah, so I was raised, when I was a small kid I was raised sort of vaguely in the Anglican church. I mean we went to church sort of on and offish. When I was, I think, really, and I think this as I'm thinking about it, I think this is quite significant; when I was sort of dealing with the whole issue of gay people being immoral, I took a turn toward fundamentalist Christianity [OC: *Uh huh*] because that seemed, that had clear answers. That was, you know [OC: *Could you –*] "We're very clear about this. This is wrong." And so I think, I think I was looking for a straightforward answers and so for a couple of years that was where I landed.

And it was, you know, as I say, after that, that I started, I took a course in Comparative Religions and realized that, you know, there's a whole world out there and not all of it is Christian. I mean, I knew that, but, you know, and that different world religions approached all sorts of different issues differently and, so I think in that regard I became much less interested in one clear dogmatic answer to all questions. And so, for many years I didn't, you know, I don't know if I wouldn't said I was an atheist because I don't think I would have, I mean I'm sort of more of an Animist I think in lots of ways, you know, seeing magic in, you know, it was all from the time of early feminists, you know. Wiccan thinking and you know Goddess religions and so on. So, I was interested in those sorts of things but not in any, not in any particular formal religious tradition I would say.

OC: *Uh huh.*

SA: And just through doing an awful lot of peace work, p-e-a-c-e, not p-i-e-c-e work, I became familiar with the Quakers because of course that's one of the peace churches and, you know, liked a lot of the Quaker principles; simplicity, integrity, community, peace and so on and I thought, "Oh, this seems to be a group that tries to live out some of the things that I think are important as values," but, you know, it was also predominately a Christian, well it was a faith of Christian origin, and it was only when I learned that you could be a nontheistic Quaker, that, that, you know, your spiritual leadings come from within, not necessarily from without, you don't have to think about a, you know, an external personal, individual, father-figure god, although many Quakers do. I thought, "Oh yeah, you know, this suits me, and suits me well" and so I, I am what's called a Quaker attender. I'm not, I'm not actually a member, so I go to a Quaker meeting. And that to me has been important because Quakers were one of the first groups to you know, welcome LGBTQ+ people.

OC: *Interesting. I was going to sort of ask you about that. How, in your experience, how the Quakers have been, you know, with LGBTQ+ issues like that compared to, you know, the mainline, dominant churches.*

SA: Yeah. It does depend. Quakers, Quakers are on a spectrum I would say. There are, you know, full on evangelical Quakers, right through the entire spectrum to nontheistic Quakers, so it kind of, and different Quaker meetings have different takes on things. And, you know, it hasn't always been the case that Quakers have, I think it would be fair to say and I'm not an authority on this topic, but it might be fair to say that Quakers would always have welcomed LGBTQ+ people but might not have been all comfortable with same-sex marriage, for example [OC: *Right*]. That might have come later, I think, but again, I'm not, I'm not actually a Quaker, so, like an official Quaker, I'm an Attender, so I can't speak with authority on that topic. But, you know, I think, I think it is significant that, you know, a number of LGBTQ+ people I know have sort of, I don't want to say drifted in that direction, but, have moved in that direction with their spiritual lives, towards Quakerism. So, in any group of Quakers, you may find quite a few LGBTQ+ people who feel quite welcome.

OC: *And have you, and so you are still a Quaker Attender?*

SA: I am, I am a Quaker Attender.

OC: *Attender, sorry [SA: That's ok]. And so, but you are not, no longer so much an anarchist? Is that correct? Or have you found that those have been complementary sort of developments in your experience.*

SA: Oh, I wouldn't say I'm, I'm, I'm not an anarchist. No, I think, frankly I think those two things go together quite nicely. There's no contradiction between those two, those two parts of my thinking, for sure. It's just, you know, most of the anarchist stuff that I read now is more Chomsky and, and thinkers like that you know. But, and I haven't devoted as much reading anarchist literature or theory in recent years as I did when I was younger.

OC: *Uh huh.*

SA: But, fundamentally I still, you know, I would still ascribe to most of those, most of the tenets that someone like Chomsky would put forward.

OC: *Right.*

SA: Which is basically that people should act decently NOT because the government tells them to do, but because they're good people. And, so it is, in a sense somewhat individualistic, but so is Quakerism [OC: *Uh huh*]. Boy, I'm really getting beyond the bounds of where I can speak with any, with any credibility here.

OC: *Well, I mean, we're credibly talking about your life and your points of view, so...*

SA: Ok. That I can speak about.

OC: *Yeah.*

SA: So, I think, that about covers it for me.