

Interviewees: Anne Bishop and Jan Morrell

Interviewer: Elizabeth Fitting

Date: February 24th, 2022

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

EF: This is basically just a guided conversation to talk about your experiences and then of course they would keep them in the archives for, you know, future generations. I'm wondering if you have any questions before we get started? No? Okay. Well, I mean obviously this is whatever you want to share so if there's something, if there's something I ask that you're not comfortable answering, we'll just skip over it. You don't need to worry about that. And you know, if you feel like we run out of time and you really want a follow up conversation, we can do that too, so. Usually, I start with asking people if they can tell me their names and their date of birth and when, you know, where they grew up and when they arrived in Nova Scotia, and the reason for that is that that is part of how they, you know, document the interviews, the recorded conversations in the archives. So, maybe we could start there.

JM: My name is Jan Morrell and I grew up in southwestern Ontario. And I arrived in, well in the Maritimes – you want Nova Scotia specifically, so 1988, in the fall.

EF: Nice.

JM: I almost didn't want to [*laughing*]!

AB: There you go, you've lasted!

EF: Yeah, well, that's good. That's great for now. And then we'll just, we'll delve into stuff in more detail in a moment.

AB: Oh, I'm Anne Bishop and was birthdate in there? I was born in 1950. And I grew up in Ontario too and moved to Nova Scotia in 1979. Although I went back to Ontario from '84 to '87, and, I've already forgotten your list of questions.

JM: Do you want my birth date now? Because I don't think I gave you it.

EF: Yes, please.

JM: Yes, [*redacted*], 1945.

EF: 1945. Right. Okay, great. So basically, I just am gonna ask, you know, what the experience of coming out was for you, where you came out, and then you know, why you moved here and what your experience with community was here. So, do you want to, where do you want to start? Would you like to start with, you know, growing up in Ontario, you both grew up in Ontario. Should we start there and talk about maybe how you figured out, you know that you were gay or, I guess also I should ask how you identify. That would be good. You identify as lesbians or? Yes, you both identify as lesbians.

AB: Yeah, we're from that generation. Yes.

EF: Me too.

AB: From when queer was an insult [laughing].

EF: Right. Okay, so how, how did you know that, you know, you were a lesbian? Jan, you wanna start?

JM: I think it's an interesting story in the sense of growing up in a very small town in Ontario. That was not on the radar as a possibility at all in – [audio cuts out] – [audio resumes] twenty-eight hundred people [EF: 800 people?] they – twenty-eight hundred [EF: 2,800?] Yeah, and I, I, the only thing I can remember about anything to do with gay is significant, I think, in the sense that it was subliminal. I was a young person. I can remember walking down the street with my mother. I can remember seeing a young man, much older than me, but he had been, honestly, gone way to hairdressing school. He has his hair coloured and he was fairly stereotypic. Effeminate, walking down the street with his mother. And my mother and another woman had a conversation about pitying his mother. And, I had no identity, but that comes back to me and always has as how insidious it is, that it, you know, stayed there. So just as setting a scene and going off to, going off to university and still there was a little subliminal there. I recall there being a club for people who were, who were gay, but it was way out. Didn't, didn't affect me. I didn't, I wasn't always comfortable growing up in the teen years of the dating thing, but I did it because the rest of the, my cohorts were, were excited about that. And all through university, I was just getting through university and, and then the first little inkling was going to teachers' college. And doing further training to, to specialize in teaching Phys Ed. And doing some, some exercises, we actually had to hold hands with, and it was all females. And getting a few little zings [laughing].

EF: When, when was that more or less like what...

JM: That was 19-, that would have been 19-, let's say '65, '66 [correction: 1967 or 1968]. Yeah. And that, that eventually morphed into, I'll say, a relationship but the way I've come to understand it is – I was justifying it – that it was just this one person [EF: *Right*]. And that even to be sexual with one person, you had to go live with them, which was a big mistake in terms of having a relationship. A healthy relationship. But that, that was – it's, it's very interesting progress and that was one of them for me. And therefore, living as a teacher, closeted in a, in this relationship, with no other people because we were both very closeted, because we weren't comfortable in our own skin to start with, and then because of teaching, so it was, it was a strange, strange time and not a particularly healthy time.

EF: Did you, did you feel like you could lose your job if somebody found out that you were a lesbian?

JM: Oh, for sure. Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Yeah, yeah. So. In terms of moving from that and moving toward Halifax I, I left a relationship and I left teaching as a career, but that was much to do with just being frustrated in the system that was there. I had the opportunity to buy a piece of property which was on my family Loyalist land in New Brunswick which was where my dad grew up. And I did that, and I moved there, and sort of began an even more rural life living there. And, but, you know, I had kind of gone into another relationship. And again, kind of closeted but – [audio cuts out] [she had some friends] –

EF: She had some what? Sorry?

JM: – that were also lesbian.

EF: Oh, okay. She had some friends.

JM: – who were also lesbians [EF: *Right*]. And so, that the progress of being around some other people, and then getting to know – in terms of the importance of organizations, Fredericton as a centre, had an organization called FLAG, which was Fredericton Lesbians and Gays. And it was instrumental for me because by going there to their socials and to their workshops and meeting people I, I was able to drop that stereotype of that young man on the street of my hometown and say, wait a minute. These people are like me or not like me in many ways, but they are like the rest of society. And, and oh golly. They're not bad people. So, yeah, that was key. That organization. Also, because feminism helped in terms of me understanding, you know, women's situations, but also in terms of the lesbian situation, so that, that was a key

thing. Got to be around other women, got to flirt, I got to go dances, and, but also got to meet people that were really, I would have chosen as good friends. And I did choose as good friends/

EF: So, what year more or less did you join FLAG or move to New Brunswick?

JM: I'm not good, too much on the date, but it would've been, it would have been probably the late '70s, like '77, '78. Yeah. And one key event that went on there was, in '81, there was a conference. An all-Atlantic conference that [I think] they kind of, they hosted but, [I think] they kind of co-did with the Gay Alliance in Halifax. And it was a real undertaking, brought some of the major writers and scholars even, from around North America to Fredericton. So, it, it fed my, my need for that kind of information. And yeah. So, kind of, that's when I started to say, hey, guess what? This is who I am. It's not all of who I am and yet it is all of who I am. I'm all these other things too. Yeah. Yeah. From there, in my little rural setting I had, I met some other women, other lesbians that, you know, and we became a nice little social group. Having meals together and sharing aspects of our lives. Because, yeah, you couldn't travel off every weekend, off to Fredericton to do, to have a life so, that, that became really sustaining. And outside of that, I had a gay cousin in Toronto. Wonderful guy who every, every birthday, every time, opportunity he got, he went to the Toronto Women's Bookstore and got me books.

EF: Oh wow.

JM: Yes. That was my [lifeline], you know –

AB: Which she hid inside the tiles in her kitchen ceiling.

JM: Oh yeah [*laughing*].

EF: You did?

JM: Oh, in my house there, in New Brunswick, rural New Brunswick, [among extended] family who would drop in, yeah, I had little stash spots for my reading.

EF: Oh my goodness.

AB: Did I find those accidentally or did you – ?

JM: Well, I don't remember 'cause –

AB: I lifted the ceiling tile at one point and there were all her lesbian books up in the kitchen ceiling.

JM: Well, that's better that they were all there, but anyway [*laughing*] but, but, [*sad*].

EF: *Oh, my goodness. So –*

JM: That's where I was living. I was, yeah but, by then had enough, also had enough confidence that when I was on a, a steering committee through the work that I was doing, I was on a steering committee, an AIDS steering committee in Saint John, and when they were just being really, ah, homophobic, I, I was speaking up against it, I was speaking, pointing it out to them, and they weren't listening. So I resigned, and I resigned saying like, this is who you're talking about. So that whole thing developed to that point.

EF: *Wow. Well, I wanna ask you more. Maybe we'll turn to Anne, but I wanna ask you more about the AIDS committee and yeah. So Anne, can you talk a little bit about where you grew up and how you ended up in Nova Scotia?*

AB: Sure. I grew up in rural area outside of Oshawa, Ontario. Between Oshawa and Bowmanville [*laughing*]. And, now that I look back, I mean, all my crushes were on female friends and female teachers, but I had no language for it, or you know, like, and of course all the same negative messages like later, when you become aware of what that stuff is, you realize how insidious it was. But so, I did what I was supposed to do and got married [*laughing*]. I got married in 1973 and I had, I lived with him for two years and then I married him in 1973 and it wasn't until, and the marriage started to come apart over other things actually. I had one, my first affair with a woman was while I was married, but my husband thought that was very funny. He had had affairs with men, and they hadn't meant much to him emotionally, so he thought that was quite funny. It didn't, didn't faze him a bit. So, so it wasn't until – well, our marriage fell apart over our politics because I started to be, I started to move left, dramatically left, from about the 1972 or '73 on, and no way was he going there [*laughing*]. So we broke up more over politics than sexual orientation. But once I was out of my marriage, that's when I started to explore and I'm trying to remember when I first met the language to talk about it. Like we're talking about I got all the way through university, right, and into the working world and I still had no language to describe or talk about that stuff.

EF: *How did you meet other lesbians, or gay people?*

AB: Well, it was when I moved to Nova Scotia. And I moved to Nova Scotia...

JM: You, you've talked to me about Centre for Christian Studies and [AB: Oh] the people you met there and that shaking up so that was pre-Nova Scotia. [AB: That's true, You're right] in terms of...

AB: Yes, language. Yes, of course. Yeah. Yes. I studied to be a deaconess in the United Church of Canada. And the Centre for Christian Studies where deaconesses were trained in Toronto, was extremely progressive, radical organization. It got in trouble not long afterward because so many of us resigned from the church [*laughing*] at the end of our program. Yes, some of that conversation was there. And some of the women there were exploring their sexual orientation, but not me yet. You're right, yes. That's where the language started to come. And when I got to Pictou County, there was a very strong lesbian underground. I moved to Pictou County in 1979 as part of our a research project, participatory research project called the People's Food Commission of Canada [*EF: Oh*]. We wrote a book called *The Land of Milk and Money* about the Canadian food system. And, but it involved about 300 people. It was, it was the first Peoples Commission. You know, non-government [investigative inquiry and I became part of the] committee. And that got me into a farming community and Pictou County. And, when after the report was written, I decided I liked it there. It was like the community I grew up in. The community I grew up in Ontario was already being paved over and turned into malls. And, in Pictou County there was still a small-scale mixed farming community. So, so I stayed there and quickly got onto a lesbian co-op, well, it aspired to be a lesbian cooperative farm, but it was falling apart [*laughing*] I'm currently writing a novel about that actually. About the way that, that, those kinds of lesbian separatist projects fell apart. I jumped a couple of steps there. I spent three years organizing for the Canadian Seafood and Allied workers, so I was working in seafood plants and organizing seafood workers. But then I started to get more involved with the lesbian cooperative farming community and, and the lesbian farming community generally, and that's when I started to really discover myself, find the language and...

EF: When you say lesbian farming community like, how many farms do you think were lesbian farms or, I mean, can you just give us a sense or was it just like a few, a couple farms or...

AB: I worked [on] two of them but there, there was a network. All over the province. In Cape Breton and I was in Pictou County, and I know there, there were some here in the valley. It was a time of experimenting with communal living and, and, and self-sufficiency on the land. There, there are books about that [*EF: Yes*]. It was happening all over the continent.

EF: "Back to the Landers."

AB: Yeah, that, that's what we were only, you know, lesbian, the lesbian cooperative version.

EF: It's, it's interesting because often, you know, in lesbian and gay history we think of the city as the place that people go to come out. And with both your stories you're talking about coming out and finding community in rural areas. And [AB: Yeah] I just wonder, could you say a little bit about that or would you – that's kind of interesting, do you think that's, do you think there was more community in rural areas here, or it's just that we're missing it in other places because we were so focused on this city as you know, where gay people go to come out.

JM: There's been some good research and, and some books written about [rural gays and lesbians], in Ontario for instance. So, it's, it, I would say gay and lesbian, but it [*EF: Yeah*] that kind of movement, I think it, it's everywhere. Yeah.

EF: Yeah, no, I just thought it was interesting that you're both talking about finding community in rural places, yeah.

AB: It's not nearly as well documented. I don't think. Because there was such a flow to the urban areas, but then there were these little clusters, right?

EF: And so, were you, how was, were you closeted among regular farmers or how was that, like, did other, you know, non-lesbian cooperative farms, and when you go to the local store, [all laughing] you know like, how did that go?

AB: We were, we were pretty heavily closeted, for sure.

EF: And was there an organization –

AB: Not until, until Roseanne Skoke [*EF: Okay*], do you know the Roseanne Skoke story?

EF: I've heard a little bit, but maybe you can – [AB: Alright] yeah.

AB: She was, she was so dramatically homophobic, militantly homophobic, that she forced the whole rural Pictou County network out into the open. To, to work, to work against her and demonstrate against her, demonstrate outside her office and that kind

of thing. But, you know, until – and she was really extreme. But until, until that it was a totally, a total underground.

EF: Uh, huh. When were the demonstrations at her office? Like, more or less, what year? In the early 80s or something, or?

JM: *[Audio cuts out]* – after the early '80s, because it happened after I had moved to Halifax and I moved in '88, so it would be after that.

AB: That's right. It would be right around then –

JM:– around the Human Rights [lobbying efforts].

AB: Yeah. I moved to Halifax in '87 and Jan in '88. And it was right around then. So, yeah, late '80s. But during the years that I was in Pictou County, you know there were worries about, like for example on one of the farms I lived on we had a couple of men come to help us build a fence. And you were really careful when you did things like that. Because of course, there were all these questions about why were all these women on the farm and they'd all hit on you and you know, and we had to, we had to actually strategize around that stuff. One of the farm sitters, this is after I left, but one of the farm sitters for a lesbian couple that, that were the centre of one of those co-ops, when she figured it out, trashed their house. So, you know you, you were very, very careful, right. About that kind of thing.

JM: I'll just say, from my experience and we've talked about this too, that they are also in the rural areas though, there's, there's a rural way of being, a set of ethics. And if you did the things that were good neighbour, you took a casserole after, you know, for a death. If you, if you helped out in some other way, if you, if you do those things and later you talked about the care of the animals, the respect. That can, so maybe you didn't say it out loud that trumped any suspicions they had.

EF: Mhm.

AB: This is skipping to a little later when we started farming here but we had a neighbour's little girl, she was four at the time, but was coming over regularly for a while because her – there was a day that her mother worked and her, and her dad couldn't take care of her, so she was with us quite regularly. And then they figured it out, or found out that we're a couple and they, they took her away from us. And, the mother was okay with it, but the father wasn't. But then he thought about it for a while, and she started coming back and he said, what was it? If she – [JM: He told his wife –] he told

his wife, who told us that they take care of their animals, they take care of their fences. There, there were several things, right, that were his farming value system, and we checked all those boxes.

JM: And we took care of his kid.

AB: She loved being with us [*EF: Right*]. That was, he could see that.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

EF: Yeah. Did either of you have children?

AB: No.

JM: No.

EF: So just thinking back to that AIDS organization. Could you tell me a little bit more about that and maybe we can talk about organizations in general or community in general like, it's, it's just so striking that you had to point out that an AIDS organization was homophobic?

JM: I don't think that's unique back then.

EF: Yeah.

JM: Yeah. [It was connected to my work so it was] what I wanted to do, you know. The, it's interesting 'cause I, I don't remember the organization all that well, except that I read – I also, some of the people on it ended up knowing my, like, knew where I was from and my relatives, so it was a coming out in [a place where people knew me], however, this one person would have, you know, whatever she would have done with that information [that I was a lesbian]. But, yeah, I just, and yeah. [*Redacted*]. It was a collection of, of people working – [audio cuts out]. So, yeah, it kind of, it blew my mind in a way that they could be that way. And then, I guess, not. Now there were a couple of gay guys on the organization from the community, from Saint John who, who I knew. They chose to stay even though it was driving them nuts. But they had, I guess, more patience than I did, and it was their immediate community, St. John, so they, they stayed with the organization and, and, and plowed away at it and those organizations eventually, I think, came, you know, came along. Yeah.

EF: I feel like the homophobia that happened during the AIDS crisis was really ramped up to the next level. And I'm just wondering, I mean, it was mostly directed at gay men, but did it affect your experience, or did you feel, you know, some of that hatred being directed your way at all?

JM: Within the organization I, I, it, I took it personally, but it was, it wasn't directed at me. In fact, when I would raise a homophobic thing that they'd said or suggested, they actually said, "Oh, but we don't mean you." And that kind of, that's when I really exploded and said, oh but you do mean me because, you know, yeah.

EF: Mhm.

AB: The guys, they were more open, [and] they'd already been that route with the group, but so, it, it would, [for me] it made functioning in the group and what I could have contributed, yeah, they lost that.

EF: Yeah, I'm sure if I think about it, I can remember times where I felt like the language around AIDS was sending me a message, you know like, yeah. But also, I kind of came of age during the whole like dental dam, you know, safe sex stuff. I don't know if you had experiences like that too where you'd go to women's dances and there'd be passing out dental dams and – [JM: Yeah] you did, okay. Yeah. How about you, Anne? Any memories about how the AIDS crisis kind of, maybe exacerbated or changed the language or the feeling of homophobia?

AB: I didn't really meet the AIDS stuff so much until I moved to the city [*EF: Mhm*]. In fact, not even so much in Ottawa. I, I lived for three years in Ottawa from '84 to '87. It was when I came back to Halifax and '87 that that started to be much more. I was never as involved in the AIDS stuff as Jan was. But you know, that's what made you know, silence equals death. Like, that's what drove that all home to people, right. It, it's what drove so many people out and what drove so much change, that of course, you know, I was part of all that, but I wasn't as specifically involved in the AIDS stuff as Jan was.

JM: It was such awful stuff but at the same time, it was the roll over into the positive stuff where they started to realize their next-door neighbour was really sick, dying or their son was, or, or that, I didn't need the education, but I lost several friends, several of the guys that I met in Fredericton. And, but that happened to people who identified as straight, too, so. I saw that as a rollover where people saw some really magnificent things happening [*EF: Mhm*]. Some horrific ones, but some, and those, those positive things have stayed.

EF: Mhm. So, what was it like being a lesbian in Halifax when either of you moved here? Or did you move together? Did you meet first and then move here? No.

AB: No, I, I got a job. Actually, I, I lost my job in Ottawa, partly over, well mostly over my sexual orientation. So, I had come out for the first time publicly in Ottawa. Actually, one of my male colleagues was very open and one day I heard my secretary and another secretary talking about how much they respected him and how it had changed their whole attitude towards LGBT people, well, that term didn't exist, gay and lesbian people [*laughing*]. Because they respected him so much, and that was the moment that I thought, oh, I gotta start being more open [*laughing*].

EF: And how did you lose your, so you lost your job in part because your superiors found out you were lesbian? Can you tell us a little bit?

AB: No, the two of us, the guy that they were talking about and, it was, it was CUSO, so it was Canadian University Services Overseas, and we discovered that there were some disasters happening. Well, he was involved in some of them because he was a field staff officer in Nigeria.

EF: Mhm.

AB: And the organization was not doing a proper job of warning people about the situations they were walking into. And one night he had to pull a lesbian [cooperant] out of her village on the back of his motorbike, while the villagers threw stones, you know and, like we, we were putting people's lives at risk by not preparing them properly.

EF: Mhm.

AB: So, when we raised that issue, we discovered that some of the seven Canadian regions were actually disqualifying people if they came out in their interviews. Like there, there was a totally uneven patchwork across the country. From, from places where they were welcoming people and finding appropriate postings for them, to those that most, the majority were just trying to ignore it. And so ,people were stumbling into situations, you know, and you're sending people to countries where there's a death penalty for their sexual orientation. It's [wild] to think about. But we discovered that they, that there were a number of the Canadian regions that were disqualifying people on that basis. And so, we tried to raise it organization wide and we formed a group. Of course, all the LGBT staff started being drawn to this campaign, but none of them wanted to be open. So, we had, oh, we had a group of about a dozen people nationally that were members of this working group, but only the two of us were open, the two chairs. And

so, and the organization got pretty angry about it because it's a very liberal organization. They didn't like to be told that they weren't liberal about something. And so, like we were putting out brochures since, you know, recruitment, at the recruitment centres saying if you're gay or lesbian and you want to join CUSO call us [*laughing*] at the national office, right, instead of going through your local office. Because we could warn people. We could tell them which office to go to. Like, oh, the organization hated it.

EF: Wow!

AB: They were really upset about it. So, what happened in the end was it wasn't direct like that, it was one of the people working under me went to the, well, she went to a whole lot of people and said that I was trying to force her into a sexual relationship. And she was a straight woman. Married. But very young, pretty. I don't know. She somehow managed to make it quite convincing. And she wouldn't tell people until they promised to keep it confidential. I discovered later about 14 people that she had led on for weeks saying no, I can't tell you. You, you respect this person, you know, you won't believe me, and then she would swear them to confidentiality and then she would tell them this. [*EF: Mhm*]. And she did it to the, to, to the personnel department as well. And so, I suddenly lost my job, and I had no idea why. And of course, there was no, you know, you weren't covered by any Human Rights legislation then for things like that. But it was a liberal enough organization [to] transfer me to a job like, I wasn't qualified for. What do call that? Positive firing, or there's a term for that, where you don't actually fire the person. You put them in a job they can't, they clearly can't do and are going to be hated in [*laughing*].

EF: Oh, geez.

AB: So that's what they did. So, I immediately started job hunting and, actually later, after I had the job in Halifax and was packing up my office in Ottawa, one, actually my assistant, came to me and said, you don't know why this is happening, do you? And I said, nope [*laughing*]. And she said, well I promised to keep it confidential. I'm sworn to secrecy. And so, I have to think about this. I said okay. And she came to me the next day and she told me why I was losing my job. And then she went around and found all these, another 14 people who had been keeping this secret, right. And they actually tried through the Union to get my job back, but first of all, that was really difficult. It had gone to the person who had, who had done all of that. And secondly, I already had the job in Halifax, so it really wasn't an issue for me anymore. But that's how I ended up in Halifax. And that was, by the way, something else and now I've forgotten what it was.

EF: I was just asking, I think, you know what the experience of being a lesbian in Halifax was when, when you first got here and, and then how you met each other.

AB: Oh, yes, I was going to say that's why I came out in my job interview, for my job in Halifax, because I wasn't going to risk that happening again. If they didn't want a lesbian working for them, I didn't want the job [*laughing*]. So yeah, I came out in my job interview. So that I became much more open after that.

EF: And how did you find each other here?

JM: [*Laughing*] The richer experience of Halifax. That's where, where I was moving. I mean, I wanted, I wanted more. Having, having finally figured out myself and that and my closest friend from, from FLAG, a gay guy named [*redacted*] and I would take the odd weekend and come to Halifax, and we would come for social things, so we would go to Rumours and, and but Lynn Murphy, who we had met through [*workshops*], because we would come for workshops too. Like I can remember one where they put on for managing phone lines. And so, we met different people there. And Lynn, had a group that met, maybe monthly, called the Over Thirties group. And so, we would come for those. We would get ourselves together, they told us, would come to Halifax. He would have his fun doing this and that, but we would have these time, usually a Sunday, which was like a potluck brunch at Lynn's. And meet people and talk and, and eat together and that was just a nice rich kind of thing. So, I was cultivating that from New Brunswick. And including the women's community that were having, putting on conferences and, and concerts and things. So, I was making that drive from New Brunswick occasionally to feed more of my, my need.

EF: What, you said that you were organizing telephone lines?

JM: The, the, yeah. FLAG in Fredericton was wanting to set up a phone line, like so that people who wanted to know about gay, where it was safe to be gay in Fredericton. People who were exploring coming out, young people. They wanted to run that phone line, [*like the one that*] had been going in successfully in Halifax. So, they, the folks in Halifax, I think it was the Gay Alliance, they, they put on like a conference that you could come, come and tell [*inaudible*] explain how to do that. [*Peer*] counseling, but also how to do, run the phone line in, so we went back. It was run out of my friend [*redacted*]'s house, but yeah. So, it was like sharing, sharing information like that as well.

EF: Mhm.

JM: But the coming together was at a conference that I gave too in December of 1987. Yeah. And I did workshop there. But by then, it was for people over 40 which, coming out in 77 doesn't seem [so old] right now [laughing], for old people now. Well anyway, it was for older lesbians then and yeah. So, looking at it, so we got kinda match-made by [redacted], a young woman I had known in New Brunswick that I had rented from her parents.

AB: And it worked!

JM: Yeah, we were deliberately matched [laughing] [EF: Neaf]. She really knew what she was doing.

EF: So, and what other, you know, like where else did you, was there anywhere else in Halifax where you got a sense of the lesbian and gay community? Any other places that you frequented or events or?

AB: We're not, at that point Jan was still in New Brunswick and I'm not a bar person or a, you know, that kind of thing. And that's where most of the community was happening. But having just lost the job for my sexual orientation and discovered that there was absolutely no legal recourse, as soon as I got settled in Halifax, I looked for who was lobbying about that. And Lesbian and Gay Rights Nova Scotia had started up the year, or I guess the year I moved, '87. And they, their goal was to get sexual orientation into the Human Rights Act as a [prohibitive] grounds of discrimination. And having just experienced, you know what it can do to you if it isn't, like what an employer can do, I immediately joined that and all my community in Halifax from the time I moved there in '87 to, to when we won that battle in 92? '92, '93 anyway, around there. And then the group kind of did some documenting of its own past. I gave all of, all of those files to the to the archives there. And we kind of tidied up the loose ends in disbanded in about '93, but no, that was when I came, I had a very deliberate goal. Well, I had two goals, actually. One was to work at it in my own workplace, which was Dalhousie University, because we weren't, there weren't spousal benefits or anything. But secondly, I joined Lesbian and Gay Rights Nova Scotia and put a lot of time and energy into that from, from '87 to '93.

EF: Can you tell me a little bit about the work, either to help Dalhousie realized that they should be giving benefits to same sex partner 'cause I am, I am a beneficiary of that. Or, [JM: Yay. I am too] [laughing] So thank you for your work on that. Can you tell me a little bit about that or the other organization and the work you did there?

AB: Even when I, I got laid off from my job at Dal in 80 – no, sorry, '98 and even then, I took out my pension money and, and put it into a locked RRSP because I didn't think Jan would be able to inherit it in my lifetime. That was just 1998. That's not that long ago. Anyway, well, those were my goals when I, when I came was to, was to lobby at Dal for, for spousal benefits. There was already an active lobby at Acadia. And so we formed an organization at Dal to lobby. And also, to get the Human Rights Act changed. I'm sure I don't know if you know about Lesbian and Gay Rights Nova Scotia? It was, it was really a good, well-organized organization. Did intensive lobbying at, at Province House and Intensive media work and, it was a really capable group in terms of having the right skill set to do all of that. We had a closeted member in the legislative press gallery, and they must have wondered how we knew, like he would get the daily, you know, the paper that says what legislation's coming up every day. And there were other things that related to it. Like we actually got, we got some other things you know in terms of pension legislation and stuff before we even got into the Human Rights Act. And whenever one of those votes came up, we would pack the gallery of Province House. And they must have wondered how we knew, because the order paper only came out every morning [*laughing*].

EF: Mhm.

AB: Our, our mole in the legislative press gallery was, would call us all up. We had a phone tree. Would call us up and say, "This legislation is coming up, estimated 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Who can come?" And we'd all like do what we could to get there and pack the gallery right, and stare down, and we'd pack it on the opposition side and stare down at the government side and, and dear Alexa McDonough was always ready to introduce us, like we would always pass a note in before we went upstairs to the gallery that we were there. And she would introduce us, and we'd all stand up, right. This great big presence in the gallery, and they really must have wondered [*laughing*]. It was a, it was a very accomplished lobbying group. And it was a real developed group of allies [*inaudible*].

JM: Yes. Individuals and organizations. That really played a role.) By the time we won that one, we had a mailing list of 300 individual and organizational allies all over the province. Many of them straight organizations. That, that was, that was a really effective lobby.

EF: Great. Well, I don't wanna keep you for too much longer. I guess I would just ask, is there anything else you feel like you wanna share about your experiences in Nova Scotia? Any other memories or –

JM: Well, I, I think of things that offered an opportunity to, to the bar scene. Even though I went by times because of coming with my [male friend from FLAG]. It's not really my choice of thing to do either, so, I think of some of the other things that certainly had a lot of lesbian presence, if not totally built that way, because I can't remember. But camping weekends [*EF: Oh*] where you'd go camping and everybody you know, you got to know all these people, well many or most of them were lesbian and that kind of thing was, was really a gift.

EF: Mhm.

AB: A farm I worked on, was the, site for, for many of those Maritime wide lesbian camping weekends and eventually became a commercial campground with the focus on the gay and lesbian communities and, was it called [*redacted*] [*EF: Nice*]. I don't know if the project has interviewed [*redacted*]. That's her farm. But she, she her back deteriorated and she couldn't be a dairy farmer anymore, so she turned her farm into a campground with the focus on the LGBT community.

EF: Was the, did the farm have the same name?

AB: No. It was...

EF: Do you know [the farmer owners]'s last name?

AB: [*Redacted*].

EF: [Redacted]?

AB: Yeah. And it was [name of farm].

EF: [Redacted] farm, okay.

AB: Yeah, she had, she had a herd of purebred jersey cattle. And produced cream for Scotsburn Dairies, but eventually her back deteriorated [*EF: Mhm*]. It became [the] campground.

EF: Well, this has been so Interesting.

AB: [*Inaudible*] like the history urban scene, I feel as though there's quite a lot of recording of it, but the rural scene I think is still [*EF: Mhm*] is still pretty unknown. Both

like when I was in Pictou County and then you were in New Brunswick and now that we've been on this farm here for twenty years now.

JM: Twenty-two years!

AB: 22 years. You know the rural scene isn't very well documented. (*mm hmmm*)

JM: I think in our situation too, I, I guess I should speak for myself, but you're not, you, you have the rest of your life so as I said earlier, it's kind of all of who you are, but not all of who you are. And so, you have the rest of your life, whatever work that you're doing with, with both going through a loss of both sets of parents. Life takes a hold so that you're not – you don't have the time, energy to kind of do very much socializing even. So we, we out here had several friends that also were on farms and that, that we saw regularly, but now even their health issues are, have gotten in the way. Well, add Covid to that, so it's, it's interesting. Yeah, how you like those.

AB: One thing that I was going to say before is that moving back and forth between urban and rural community, the rural community includes everybody because there's so few of you. And it's a very broad type of community in terms of personalities, politics, like I, I have rural friends that I can't stay overnight with because we'll be arguing by morning [*laughing*]. You know, 'cause, our politics are so different, etcetera, etcetera. In the urban community there's, there's enough people that you split off into interest groups and according to belief and political leanings and, and all of that so. So, rural community is a very different kind of thing, like you band together – or at least in, in those days more – you banded together for safety and companionship. With people that you wouldn't normally hang out with if you were in an urban setting [*EF: Mhm*]. Yeah, talking I feel like there's a lot more to say about the urban, er the, the rural setting.

JM: I will talk about one organization that I'm really proud to have been involved with it and that's the PFLAG group. In Halifax, there, there was a guy out of, a couple of gay men, [*redacted*] and [*redacted*] who were initiating, starting a PFLAG group, and I ended up joining with them in it, and it's one of the richest experiences I, I had in terms of getting to know other gays, but while getting right inside the heads and hearts of those parents. [*Redacted*], our intent was to get them going and then, and then leave. But we were going to, we were getting set to do that because there were very capable people who could, could facilitate a group amongst the parents. And they asked us not to because they've gotten to know us, they trusted us, they could ask us all the dumb questions that they, you know, didn't feel comfortable asking their kids. They cried with us, [*save*] raged with us and everything like that. So, with that group, really, until I moved out here, and even then we had them out here for a couple of meetings, but that,

that was a really instrumental group. For that time and place, and it didn't last a lot longer after that. Because there was a – [audio cuts out] – what can change the group and allow it to be [redacted], for gays and lesbians as well, and even though we were there, but that was by request, they, it really has, for a group it needs to be the people who are experiencing that thing. [Redacted]. Yes. It was great, absolutely great and really proud to have been part of that group and, just still love to death the people that I met there. All the parents and that. Yeah.

EF: Neat.

AB: It's important to be doing this because it's changed so much [*EF: Yeah*]. You know like we're the generation that didn't even have language for what we were until we were in our 20s [*EF: Mhm*]. And when I think, when you know, talking about all of this puts me back into the fear, you know of living in closeted, in Pictou County. Or in a workplace in Ottawa or you know, like, the fear isn't there now. And the language is there, and the conversation is there [*EF: Mhm*]. Things have changed so much.

JM: We've got on my side, we've got a great niece and great nephew, [redacted]. This is in Southwestern Ontario and the kids are little. Well last year, in part because his wife more facilitates this, he wouldn't be quite as, as much, but you know, they sent us on, for Gay Pride. They sent us a picture of the kids who had [little] Pride colouring things and they sent us a package. [Redacted]. Like, holy jumping! [*Inaudible crosstalk*].

AB: And when he [Jan's nephew] was that age, we really tip toed 'cause we would have been cut off from them.

JM: Oh yeah, my sister-in-law –

AB: They're very, very, very Catholic, very [*blows air*] and we, we, we tiptoed and tiptoed because she definitely would have cut us off from those kids.

EF: Mhm.

JM: And made really hurtful comments when one of my friends was dying and I [happened] to be home, visiting my family, but he was dying in Fredericton and they didn't know that, and certainly I wasn't gonna share that with them. [Redacted]. I was calling back just to get reports, you know. At that time, she was making comments about who deserved to die, and who didn't, you know [*laughing*]. So. Oh, no way, but here's this, you know, now we're into this second generation where these little kids are sending, [it's] a little [Pride] package. [Redacted]. And at their wedding [my nephew and

his fiancé] we, they had us sitting at a table with two gay male couples, you know, so. Yeah.

AB: It's been so much change in our lifetimes.

EF: Well, I won't keep you any longer, but I could listen to your stories all day. Honestly, this has been so interesting.

JM: I've been myself from asking [about] yours too.

AB: I said, it's an interview

EF: Well, I know. I'll just, here I'll stop.

JM: Yeah. So, I had a friend in New Brunswick and, and she was closeted all of her life. All of her work career, and all of the pain and damage that that does. But she had, she was dying and actually a couple of the guys on that, that were on the same AIDS committee with me and myself were determined she would not die without that part of her [present]. But she was being cared for by her 91-year-old mother. And still closeted. So, we started going individually to visit her. In one of my visits toward the end, it was wonderful because we talked about old times. Even flirted a little, just fun and when, and she talked over her relationship with me, which was really important. And I knew people in Hospice that were going to her and were finding they didn't understand, they couldn't connect the way they could with most people. I said, well I can tell you why, you know. This is decades of that barrier so anyway the, the, one of the last visits I had with her she gave me two things. She gave me an old crock which we've got our utensils in. But she gave me a copy, this book that she said had helped her understand there was someone like her and she'd gotten it off a drugstore shelf. So, it was one of these pulp ones [*laughing*] but it was so used that the front cover is, you can't see the cover [*laughing*] really. It's all, so it's a treasure like, when I thought they would like that story and the [book], because it is one of those pulp ones and it's not kind of one of the later ones. Just, you know, [negative as anything] but, but that, that was so important to her she'd obviously had it hidden for I don't know how long and then, then one of those last one of those last gestures she could do before she died. She also died and we never heard or knew – [audio cuts out] – funeral or anything. So, the two guys and I, we didn't, we knew she died but there wasn't anything. So, we weren't really included as, as important to her, [in family] in a way. That was, that was kind of, that was sad. Yeah, but that book, I just I, I smile at it every time I see it. I think, what a lifeline. Yeah.

EF: Wonderful. It was so nice to meet you.

AB: You too!