

Project: 'Queer Lives: Barriers from Cradle to Elder Care - An oral history'

Respondent: Sarah MacDonald

Year of Birth: 1997

Age:

Connection to project: Local knowledge

Date of Interview: 01/02/2025

Interviewer: Dr Sue Morrison

Recording Agreement: Yes

Information & Consent: Yes

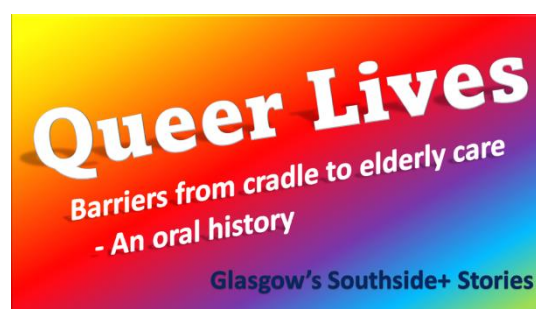
Photographic Images: No (Number of:)

Length of Interview: 47.37

Location of Interview: Tain

Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics)

Glasgow's Southside+ Stories



Time (from: mins/secs)	Description	Transcribed Extract (from- to: mins/secs)
00.36	<i>Where were you born?</i>	
	"Raigmore, Inverness."	00.37
00.38	<i>Have you always lived up here?</i>	
	"Yes, I very briefly, very briefly lived down in Hastings for a couple of months, went to Uni there, came back up and went to Dundee for four years for university and then came back up here, so between Invergordon, England, Dundee and Tain."	00.39-01.02
01.04	<i>Do you intend to stay up here?</i>	
	"Probably not, no, to be honest with you. I thought I wanted to stay here where I lived, sort of away from home, I wanted to come back to home, but now that I have lived away from the Highlands and I've come back here I realise how much I'm missing out on living here."	01.05-01.13
01.18	<i>We've used the term queer to be inclusive, is that okay or would you prefer me to use something else?</i>	
	"No, that's fine."	01.23
01.25	<i>Do you have any preferred pronouns?</i>	
	"No, just she/her."	01.29
01.34	<i>Would you mind telling me if you've come out as queer?</i>	
	"I think a lot of people now assume I'm not because I've obviously married my husband. I guess came out officially, publicly, when I had my first girlfriend about 18 and had girlfriends continuously until I got with my now husband when I was about 23, so a lot of people, family and friends, just assume when I was queer it was just a phase and because I've married a man I'm no longer part of that community, I'm just straight and normal now. I'm not. It's an absolute mystery to me that I've married a man and if anybody asked me to put any money on it, I would've put my whole life savings on it that I'd never have married a man, but I did."	01.40-02.45
02.49	<i>What age were you when you started having feelings for girls?</i>	
	"Honestly as long as I can remember. I think when I was young, before I even knew what feelings properly are, I was always drawn towards women, spending time with them. Even when I was in primary school and your friends are like oh,	02.50-03.42





	we're watching T.V. I fancy this person; I fancy that person. I was like yes, same, even pick a random person like yeah same. Obviously as I got older, I was clearly not straight."	
03.43	<i>When did you realise that?</i>	
	"I think the moment I had the realisation that I really wanted to come out I think I must've been about 11 or 12. So it was quite young compared to a lot of people who tend to be a bit older, but I wanted to come out, so yes, probably about 12 but I only came out to my parents and they told me that I wasn't and that all went back inside for about six years."	03.43-04.21
04.22	<i>Did you feel under pressure to date boys?</i>	
	"Yes, and I always remember thinking to myself that I would conform to society norm, have boyfriends, dress normally. It's only been in the past two years that I can actually just dress how I want now and when I was younger and had all these boyfriends and stuff I remember thinking, just wait till you're older and move away and nobody knows you, then you can live your life and you can get a girlfriend and stuff. So, I did end up coming out at 18 years old which was rocky."	04.24-05.26
05.28	<i>How did you feel inside at that time when you had to kind of hide your sexuality?</i>	
	"I remember just like night after night being on my knees beside my bed just praying that I would wake up straight and it would go away and I remember going online and googling trying to find websites to make myself straight and stuff like that and I was just so angry at the world. When I was in my teens, I was such an angry person thinking why couldn't I just be normal, why couldn't I be like my friends, going through break-ups with their boyfriends, being hurt and stuff like that. I wished I could experience a break-up and heartbreak because I didn't have anything like that, and I also felt very fake within myself as well, I felt like I was lying to everyone, which I was, I was putting on a facade and essentially telling a story that just wasn't true. So yeah, I was a pretty angry young person."	05.45-07.04
07.08	<i>Did that anger manifest in any way?</i>	
	"It's taken me a long time but I think I'm trying to better myself now. I think when you've been angry and hidden for so long for so many years of your life from such a young kid, it doesn't go away overnight but okay I'm not hiding myself any more but when that's almost ingrained into your body it just doesn't instantly go away, it's taken me a long time to work on myself and get rid of that anger and deal with it in a healthy way."	07.12-07.50
07.53	<i>Did that anger and your experience at that time affect your education?</i>	
	"I managed to keep myself together until I left school, I was living this perfect life for other people then, trying my very hardest at school, I had to go to university, I had to everything and then when I was by myself I would eventually start to crack, so outwardly I looked very well put together but internally when nobody was about that's when all the struggles would come out. I think when you pretend for so long you convince yourself it's actually real. I had a best friend at the time, when I first came out to my parents at about 12, I remember sitting crying on my bed and she was like you need to tell your parents and having her by my side gave me the sort of bravery to do it, but then eventually I didn't want to bother her with it so much anymore and because I was so angry I was quite quick to snap and things like that and I kind of wanted to stop bothering her it wasn't her problem anymore."	08.02-09.44
09.45	<i>How did you get on educationally at school?</i>	
	"Good. I was never number one student grade-wise and I'd never been sort of naturally gifted in education, I've had to work my arse off for it whereas I had a few friends their parents were doctors and everything and they didn't have to	09.49-10.23

	try, it was almost like they had photographic memories. I had to work very, very hard but if I wanted something, I can do it."	
10.28	<i>Did you know anyone else at school that was queer?</i>	
	"No. As I got a little bit older a few people started coming out, even in the year below but there was no-one that was openly queer."	10.29-10.47
10.48	<i>Were there any L.G.B.T. clubs or anything at that time?</i>	
	"No, nothing like that. It wasn't really even talked about. There was maybe a brief bit in sex education on where you could be straight or you could be gay. I don't remember any talk about being bi-sexual. So, it was very briefly talked about."	10.52-11.17
11.20	<i>What do you think the general public in the Highlands felt about queer people?</i>	
	"I do still think with people in the Highlands it is very much frowned upon and I think it very much depends on your own gender as to how it's viewed so I think if you are a gay woman it's seen by men as a challenge to see whether or not you can be gay. If you're a gay man, from the male perspective, it's very much frowned upon. In my experience, people just don't believe in bi-sexuals, either they think you're gay and you're lying or they think you're straight and you're just going through a phase."	11.28-12.22
12.23	<i>Do you think that attitude has changed over the period since you were a child?</i>	
	"No honestly not really. I think maybe wider outside the Highlands possibly yes but within the Highlands, no. Perhaps maybe newer generations are more accepting about it but my generation and older, I've not seen any change."	12.27-12.52
12.57	<i>Were you in the Highlands when you had your first girlfriend?</i>	
	"Yes, I was. I still lived in Invergordon, I lived at home with my mum and dad and it was hidden for a while. When we first sort of met it was on Christmas Eve and I think it was by about February or March we decided to go away down to Edinburgh for a few nights and I would text my mum and dad and tell them that way because I always knew it was never going to be a face-to-face conversation. I'd already come out a while ago and it didn't go down well so I always knew it wasn't going to be a face-to-face conversation."	12.59-13.52
13.53	<i>Have you got any other family?</i>	
	"No, just mum and dad, no brothers, sisters or anything. I had my Granny but it was all kept secret from her so she never met any girlfriends or anything but she did meet Scott before she died so as far as she was aware, I was always straight."	13.56-14.23
14.25	<i>Where did you meet your first girlfriend?</i>	
	"In a pub."	14.30
14.35	<i>At that time were there any gay pubs in Inverness?</i>	
	"No, not as far as I'm aware. I think now they do like a gay night in Johnny Fox's. I was only 18 then and I knew nothing about that and she was not to quote Little Britain but she was the only gay in the village that I was aware of, so I think that's why I went for her, I almost didn't think, I was like oh my God there's a lesbian, I'm going to get off with you because I'm also a lesbian."	14.35-15.20
15.21	<i>What did you think about being down in Edinburgh with a girlfriend?</i>	
	"It was like a whole different life. When we were in Edinburgh, we would hold hands and stuff. When we were in the Highlands we would hold pinkies, that's why we both had a love heart on our pinkies because we would hold pinkies instead of holding hands, because even although we were walking round Inverness we would get people making comments and saying stuff, whereas in Edinburgh there was nothing and it wasn't like we went to gay pubs, we were just going to normal pubs and walking about holding hands and it was just like	15.34-16.19

	nobody cared type of thing.”	
16.20	<i>Did that influence your feelings about living in the Highlands?</i>	
	“At that time, I would say possibly yes and then when I came out a little bit more, people around me my friends and stuff accepting and I was like oh maybe I could just stay here because I really had this idea that everybody would turn their backs on me and of course not everybody did. So, I was like maybe I don’t really need to run away, I don’t need to hide and then as I got older I just kind of realised the Highlands is very much 40 years behind everywhere else. It really is just so out dated in terms of getting older. I really don’t think I’ve got a life here it’s just everybody’s mind set is just 40 years behind the times, I think personally.”	16.28-17.27
17.29	<i>When you came out to your friends, how did they react?</i>	
	“It was like oh I’ve got a gay friend or my friend has a girlfriend, so I was like this thing for them to boast about almost.”	17.58-18.15
18.32	<i>Can you tell me a little about your relationships?</i>	
	“My first relationship was my longest relationship, and I went out with them for nearly three years but that was domestically abusive so that broke down and I kind of settled into uni, and when there I would see girls but also see guys because I didn’t want anybody thinking I was gay. It felt easier for people to think I was bi-sexual even though at the time all the men I was seeing I had absolutely no interest in them at all. I had a few kind of girlfriends here and there when I came back before, shock horror, I met my husband and we’ve been together for six years now.”	18.40-20.23
20.24	<i>Can you tell me about meeting your husband?</i>	
	“He’d been my friend for ages. He tried to get with my friend first and I said why are you trying to get with her and he said, sorry I was respecting your sexuality, I thought you were a lesbian, so forgive me for not trying to be with a lesbian. I was genuinely taken aback by that because everybody else always saw it as a challenge. Then obviously he realised I wasn’t completely gay and for about a year he was like we need to be together. I was like no we wouldn’t, no we wouldn’t. I remember one day my boss when I was working at the time was like I think you’re in love with him and I was like no I’m not he’s just my best friend. Then I genuinely woke up one day and thought oh my God, I am in love with him. It was like everybody knew before I knew, he knew, my friends, my boss, everybody knew. It genuinely took me a year to realise I was in love with him and here we are, married.”	20.25-22.06
23.10	<i>Tell me about his best qualities?</i>	
	“He is such a hard worker. I’ve never known him to take a day off work. He’s like I’ll get this done; I’ll do this for you. He’s a really talented martial artist and he’s just so humble about it as well. He’s so funny as well but there’s a catch to that because he just takes the mickey all the time but he makes me laugh as much as he does.”	23.10-24.50
24.56	<i>When did you decide to go into teaching?</i>	
	“I always wanted to be a teacher. I don’t even remember it ever being a decision, it was just forever.”	24.58-25.18
25.19	<i>When you were thinking about becoming a teacher did you ever think there might be barriers to that?</i>	
	“I remember when I was younger thinking about being a teacher in the future and would I still be living the facade and living the straight life or if I had found a partner that was a woman that I would keep that a secret from everyone in my career. I’d never grown up with any teacher that wasn’t straight middle-aged, just a very normal person, so I just had it in my head that in order to be successful	25.30-26.25

	I would have to take on that normal role.	
26.26	<i>What did you do when you left school?</i>	
	<p>“When I left school originally, I went to Brighton University in the Hastings Campus and I studied English Literature and Secondary Education with a view to becoming an English Teacher. I left that, came back and worked in a factory until I kind of figured out what I was going to do and then I started my Criminology Course at Dundee University, did that for two years, took a year break, ended up moving in with my now husband and then went back for my final two years and wasn’t really sure that I would get into being that there was so many breaks in my education and stuff so I applied for the teaching course and I applied for the Police, and I got accepted into both in the same week and the decided to do teaching.</p> <p>I feel like I’m doing good, I know you don’t have to love your job every single day but I want a job where morally I can come home and be like I’ve done this in people’s lives.”</p>	26.30-28.26
28.40	<i>Did you experience any barriers in university or career?</i>	
	<p>“In university, no. I found my criminology course at university to be one of the free and nobody actually cared. When I went into the education system that’s when I actually found there was still prejudice and that’s where it really annoyed me because that’s where you’re literally working with young minds so easily mouldable and this is the time where you should hold no prejudices and that’s where I did find a few like underhand comments and stuff, stuff that made me feel guilty for just being me. I feel like my whole year in university was fine, I’d almost convinced myself that we were out of this stage and stuff and getting better and back into the education system and no we’re not, no, not at all.”</p>	28.45-29.50
29.51	<i>Who made these negative comments?</i>	
	<p>“It was comments made round the staff room table or conversations and stuff. In one of the schools I worked in one of the kids knew one of my friends who obviously knew about my past and stuff and the conversation must have came up about me having girlfriends and as kids do, they asked a question in class ‘Is it true about you having girlfriends before?’ I was like yeah. I could see they were itching to ask more questions so I said I’m bi-sexual and they were like, okay, and then we just kind of moved on, there were no other questions. There were no other comments. Kids genuinely were just curious which is fine. There were some comments the next day asking if I was talking about my sexuality with the kids. I said no, there was a question brought up in the classroom and I answered it and that was it. If a kid did want to talk to me on a deeper level, I would have no issue with that. They were like well I maybe wouldn’t talk about stuff like that in class and I was like, stuff like what? These are people that will come in and talk about stuff their husband did at the weekend, what their kids are doing and stuff, they have no problem talking about their lives to the kids but I knew it was the issue of sexuality that was being addressed that they didn’t like, that's where the issue stood.”</p>	29.52-32.50
32.52	<i>How did that make you feel?</i>	
	<p>“Embarrassed, really embarrassed and I felt as if I’d done something wrong, made me question whether or not I had done something wrong and for a couple of weeks made me wary. I felt like I was watching myself and questioning everything I’ve said and then I thought, no, I am a good teacher and there was nothing wrong with what I... it was just the way people reacted to it.”</p>	32.54-33.30
33.32	<i>When was that?</i>	
	2022 I think.	33.48
33.55	<i>What did you do, did you make a complaint?</i>	

	<p>“No, I literally wanted nobody to ever talk about it again, I was very, very embarrassed by it. Even now I do sometimes still question myself and actually it gives me a fear thinking about it. I really do overplay it and I feel like I did something wrong.”</p>	33.55-34.45
34.49	<p><i>Did that influence your decision to leave teaching?</i></p>	
	<p>“There’s a lot of factors in teaching that sort of made me want to leave but the main thing is I morally don’t agree with the way the education system is at the moment and that’s very multi-faceted, in terms of exams and issues like that, the fact that it’s not just about exams, it’s about teaching kids how to go out and how to contribute to society and stuff like that and it’s not, it’s really not. The education system still to this day is about getting kids to get the highest grades and pass their exams and I feel like there needs to be a lot more focus on stuff that isn’t just curriculum based. I always thought to myself I wanted to teach in the Highlands, the fact it was smaller schools, it was more community-based, so that’s why I made the decision to teach in the Highlands and then I regretted it because even though it’s not just a problem in Highland schools, the problem is country-wide, it’s just exacerbated in the Highlands.”</p>	34.54-36.58
36.59	<p><i>When did you actually decide to leave teaching?</i></p>	
	<p>2024. “ I went back to do supply which just really put a magnifying glass on the whole situation. When you’re doing supply you’re going from classroom to classroom, you’re just a baby-sitter really. I was in the music class, I can’t even play a triangle, I was in the English department which was fine I originally wanted to be an English teacher, I was in maths I can barely count to ten. That kind of made it a lot worse, you’re kind of getting paid to sit and watch kids. I’d had my offer, obviously I’d had my doubts and the fact that I was kind of debating it kind of put the answer into my head. The fact that I’d always wanted to be a teacher and the fact I was debating it in my head kind of going into a job.”</p>	37.07-38.49
38.56	<p><i>Do you think queer children today are more supported in schools?</i></p>	
	<p>“No. I think everything that’s there to support queer children’s support is like box ticking, schools have to be showing support queers and minorities and I don’t think there’s any substance behind it, I think it is just a box ticking activity and I think the people that are doing this, not that there’s anything wrong with this but you have people educating queer kids who aren’t queer themselves so it’s like a white person educating somebody about racial issues and it’s like you might know the facts and statistics on it but you don’t know any substance behind it, you can’t actually give it any meaning and I’m not saying you specifically have to get a gay teacher to do PSE or you need to get a transgender person to do PSE because that’s just not going to happen but I think you need to get somebody that’s lived it because the kids are so perceptive and it’ll mean a lot more to them if it’s not just read out of a text book type version and actually somebody who understands what they’re going through.”</p>	38.57-40.50
41.06	<p><i>Do you think across the Highlands there are any effective support systems for L.G.B.T.?</i></p>	
	<p>I wouldn't want to comment on it because perhaps I'm ignorant to it. I can't say I myself have ever known about it or anything but that doesn't mean there isn't but that also makes me think that there probably is a lack of it like even in Dundee they've got gay pride and in the schools they have an L.G.B.T.Q.+ group and stuff that meets, whereas here you literally hear nothing about it, like nothing at all. Someone put on the community chat that they wanted to start an L.G.B.T. Q+ group, basically it was a club, and you go through the comments and it's just people ripping into it. Statistically in the Highlands there must be so many queer people that haven't come out it's ridiculous, because I'm genuinely surprised that I did because I did think I would live the lie while I was up here and it's no wonder that you do have all these people hiding up here and you maybe</p>	41.10-43.19

	have all these people saying oh there's somewhere for me to go to and they maybe go to have a look through the comments and it's just abuse after abuse, dirty beast, dirty beast and stuff like that and I'm not saying it's only in the Highlands you get stuff like that you get the backlash for it, but the backlash does seem to be predominant up here."	
43.24	<i>Where was this club wanting to be set up?</i>	
	"It was either in the Duthac Centre or possibly Piper's Cafe. It was Tain based."	43.25
43.56	<i>Outwith education and your career, what have you been doing?</i>	
	"Me and my husband run a kick-boxing club so we've been doing that. I take a women's only class on a Friday. I'm part of the Musical Theatre; we've got a Shrek Musical coming up in March which is really exciting. Apart from that I'm in the gym six days a week and I've been studying my course so I don't have any free time at the moment but I do prefer it that way. I like being kept busy."	44.06-44.42
44.50	<i>What are your future plans?</i>	
	"My future plans are to start up xxxxxxxx, with eventually getting my own place to open up, and having a gym that's not just focused on body building strong men and not what everybody thinks of doing in a gym such as yoga and Pilates and stuff like that because I'm an absolute gym enthusiast, genuinely something for everyone. Up here they can be quite cliquey. I suffered from mental health quite a lot and the one thing that got me through it was the gym and the treadmill. I do think there's some form of exercise out there for everyone. My goal is to open up my own place not in terms of having big muscles but getting people healthier, making them feel better, making friends, have a community, have a safe space to come to if they're stressed, sad or something like that. Big plans but hopefully we'll get there."	44.51-46.18
46.54	<i>Have you ever thought about needing some help as you get older?</i>	
	"No. I've thought about it jokingly with my husband about being in a care home and getting helped to our seats and stuff like that and I've thought about it for my parents and stuff like that and my Granny before she actually passed away but I've never actually thought about it for me. I probably will now."	47.01-47.33
47.34	<i>That's all my questions, is there anything you'd like to add or raise?</i>	
	"No"	47.37
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