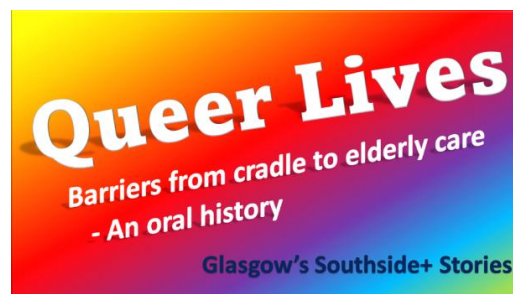


Project: 'Queer Lives: Barriers from cradle to elderly care - An Oral History'
 Respondent: Billy Ferrie
 Year of Birth: 1960
 Age:
 Connection to project: Local Knowledge
 Date of Interview: 23/05/2024
 Interviewer: Rachel Kelly
 Recording Agreement: Yes
 Information & Consent: Yes
 Photographic Images: Yes (Number of: ?)
 Length of Interview: 37.57
 Location of Interview: Marie Trust, Glasgow
 Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics)

Glasgow's Southside+ Stories







Time (from: mins/secs)	Description	Transcribed Extract (from- to: mins/secs)
00.28	<i>Where were you born?</i>	
	"I was born in the maternity ward at Duke Street Hospital in Dennistoun."	00.28-00.37
00.38	<i>Where were you brought up?</i>	
	"I grew up in a place called Camlachie, Comely Park Place, which is not far from the hospital, then the family moved to Easterhouse."	00.40-00.50
00.51	<i>Where do you live now?</i>	
	"I live in the Calton overlooking Glasgow Green."	00.57-1.03
01.04-01.19	<i>We've used the term Queer in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible but we appreciate that not everybody is going to use that term to describe themselves or an aspect of themselves. Is there a term you would prefer me to use?</i>	
	"The term I normally identify with is gay so that's fine."	01.20
1.28	<i>Do you have any preferred pronouns?</i>	
	He	01.34
01.35	<i>Would you mind telling me if you've come out as Gay?</i>	
	I have, yes.	01.37
01.38	<i>When was this?</i>	
	"This was 1981 when I came out as gay because that's when I thought it was then legal to do so. I think it was around 1980/1981 it became legal. So I had waited because I knew if I was to come out, potentially I might be criminalised."	01.40-02.13
02.18	<i>What was the reaction from your family?</i>	
	"I was a student at the time, 20/21. I was at college and living in a bedsit in the West End of Glasgow and every Sunday I would go to my parents' place in Easterhouse and have Sunday dinner. So I'd planned this coming out event and prior to getting my dinner I was helping my mother with the laundry, she was out in the backcourt sort of taking sheets off the line, so I was helping fold things up and taking them upstairs to the flat getting ready for the big announcement, so I was in the bedroom and it was almost a cliché. I said there's something I need to tell you and her	02.21-04.08

	<p>reaction was, oh what, what, she was very much a kind of concerned mother, concerned mammy so any problems or issues she would be on hyper-alert, so I said I'm gay. She looked at me and then she went I thought you were going to say you were emigrating or going away or something like that. So there was a bit of a pause and she said, look don't tell your father, let me do that and we'll see how things go when you come back next week. So that was the extent of it."</p>	
04.12	<i>What happened when your Mum told your Dad?</i>	
	<p>"He was not very happy. So I was kind of dreading going back the next Sunday. I went on the Sunday and my Dad was watching T.V. like he normally would do before we had dinner, so there was this long silence and he wouldn't even look at me, he was watching T.V. and I was on the sofa and he said, your Ma's told me the news. His tone and voice was very serious and he says 'have you told anybody? Have you told any of the neighbours anything?' I said no. He said 'do you think you should see a doctor?' I was just kind of dumbfounded at this kind of reaction, I knew he wouldn't be happy. First of all it seemed that he was more concerned about him, his reputation and his street cred and also it was an illness and I should seek help with. So I was a bit disappointed but also relieved in a way that it was out so that I could get on with my life which was always on hold until that moment really. It took probably a few years before my dad came round to accepting the news."</p>	04.14-06.15
06.19	<i>What do you think were the factors in your Dad accepting it?</i>	
	<p>"Probably because he became a grandfather, and that might have been one of his concerns. I think he wouldn't have been as complete without being a grandfather, but my sister, she provided the grandchildren."</p>	06.21-06.49
06.50	<i>How about coming out to friends?</i>	
	<p>At the time, just to backtrack a little bit, because of when I first was aware of gay feelings when I was younger, but I dismissed it still being a teen, and I was still going to the library in Easterhouse to get books out and things, because I was so confused I didn't know what was going on, so I didn't really tell anyone and knowing the way I was brought up in Easterhouse, typical working class housing estate scheme, you cannot be a poof and survive in Easterhouse without support, so I kept this within me trying to resolve it in some way, so I read about things and stuff like that and I even got depressed to a point where I was trying to look at books on depression and this is all because I think I couldn't talk to anyone about this or make sense of it. So I didn't really talk to anyone about it and it sort of led me to exploring the meaning of life so I tried things like meditation and there was a Buddhist centre in Glasgow that offered classes in that, again to try and find answers to things and there was a thing called the Theosophical Society in the West End, again for a philosophy or some kind of framework that made sense to me. I also became part of a small religious community, the Pi Faith, an off-shoot of Islam to simplify it. They took me in and I was not judged. I felt accepted.</p> <p>I was part of that community but realising I'm being incongruent with who my true self is in terms of my sexual orientation, so I came to the conclusion that I had to come out again to this community and they have conservative views on this kind of thing, so I had to leave that community. I think the philosophy was that you would be accepted as long as you didn't practice, as long as you didn't be physical with anyone you'd be part of the community. I thought no, to not be affectionate, touch someone, or be physical with someone, it's a lot to ask of someone. So I left."</p>	06.56-12.17

	<p>"I went on to Glasgow College of Technology and did a B.A. course in Social Sciences and there I studied Psychology, Social Psychology, Politics, and all the rest of it but that enabled me to develop the intellectual tools to make sense of what's going on with me and also had an opportunity to meet other gay people because there was a gay society. That was a great blessing that I managed to find, people like me and I wasn't the only one in the world, which I did believe living in Easterhouse, where there was no-one to talk to about stuff and even if you believed someone might be gay, you couldn't say anything. So from Glasgow Tech things took off, that dark cloud was lifted, I can breathe, I can be me at last."</p>	
12.18=12.23	<i>Have you faced any barriers in the workplace or your career due to being gay?</i>	
	<p>"One of the things I did prior to doing the Glasgow Tech course and because I'd experienced that wonderful release and freedom I wanted to help others so there was an opportunity to volunteer for Strathclyde Lesbian & Gay Switchboard . So I was a volunteer for them for about three or four years and when I was applying for jobs thereafter I was using that volunteer experience, writing that down on the job application or the C.V. but I'm not sure if sharing that information put me in a place where I potentially could've been prejudiced against or maybe not. I don't know, I can't really say. I certainly applied for jobs and got knocked back, but that could be anything. So I can't really say if I'm aware of any discrimination or issue."</p>	12.30-14.08
14.14	<i>Did you experience any prejudice in the workplace?</i>	
	<p>"Because I was really open about things, people who did take me on knew I was gay so it wasn't an issue for them."</p>	14.16-14.23
14.25	<i>Do you think the experience of being gay has changed over time?</i>	
	<p>From my time it's certainly changed, it's a lot easier, especially younger generations to come out, or even just not come out but just explore and have the freedom to explore and not necessarily identifies but just going through a process. I think that's a lot easier than in my time. You weren't encouraged or wouldn't even do that. Sometimes I get frustrated with younger people who don't realise the privilege place they're in because it was a lot harder for those before.</p> <p>I get frustrated about the lack of appreciation about how difficult it was before and also the lack of interest, they're not particularly interested in the older generation, it's not, understandably, part of their world. I think I certainly stand on the shoulders of others but I don't think the younger generation necessarily believe or appreciate that."</p>	14.34-16.02
16.03-16.10	<i>Do you think when you were younger you appreciated what the older generation had gone through?</i>	
	<p>"When I started doing the course obviously you're researching, you're studying, so you become aware of things and about how difficult it was in the '50s and so on. Some of the gay venues that have been around for years and years and I went to them talk to older people and you'd hear stories about what it was like in the '40s or '50s and you appreciate what people went through, people being arrested, people being set up, blackmailed, killed even and violence just because of who they were. So I think for me there was an appreciation of a whole generation before me that suffered far more than I had and because of them I can enjoy a better quality of existence than they did."</p>	16.11-17.31
17.37-17.44	<i>When you were in your '20s did you feel safe walking around Glasgow and going into what were known as gay pubs?</i>	
	<p>"It depends which part of the city and which venues you were going to."</p>	17.45-19.44

	<p>“For example the first every gay pub I went to with a college friend was called The Vintners on Clyde Street at the bottom of Jamaica Street. In terms of feeling safe, if you were in the locality of those venues you felt relatively safe but certainly when I came out, I was hyper-alert to any kind of dodgy characters or groups of guys or a gang of guys out in the street and being rowdy and stuff because you didn’t want to get their attention. There was ways of coping with stuff, as usual in terms of gay people that is quite a useful strategy but if I was with friends at say The Vintners or another bar and say one of us was a wee bit flamboyant then there’s a code word we used and it was called Buffs if it was potentially going to be an issue and Buffs meant Butch Up For Fuck Sake. So if there was a situation where potentially there could be an unpleasant interaction that would be the code word and of course we’d calm down, look down at the ground and walk past the potentially offending group.”</p>	
19.49	<i>How accepting would you say Glasgow was when you were in your ‘20s?</i>	
	<p>“Certainly within the student population there were more the kind of liberal progressive attitudes. Glasgow middle class were more old hippies anyway but in terms of a working class culture there was definitely a resistance to any of that stuff and that’s all tied up with ideas of masculinity. Certainly in Easterhouse it was difficult for me to be in that environment because it was very oppressive, never mind sexual orientation, but in your gender as a man and how to be a man. I mean if you were sitting and you crossed your legs you were a poof. It was all that kind of stuff that went on. Certainly it was like that from other working class areas, basically toxic.”</p>	19.57-21.26
21.32	<i>How did you socialise with other gay people in your youth?</i>	
	<p>“There was the initial pubs. The Vintners was one, there was The Duke of Wellington on a corner at Argyle Street and the Waterloo. These were more for older males and some females as well. There was one called Austin’s in Hope Street. There was Squires and I worked in there as a part time barman when I was a student. There were clubs like Bennetts in Glassford Street and Club X, and these places which started off, lasted about a year or two and then closed down. So there was always venues opening and closing. Essentially I socialised in pubs, pubs were kind of safe environment. You’d rarely be out on the streets being gay, you’d be indoors.”</p>	21.38-23.2-
23.22	<i>Has this changed as you got older?</i>	
	<p>“I’m now 64 so the need or desire to go to pubs and get drunk and all that stuff is less. Now and again I go to pubs but I’m more likely just to be in an ordinary pub in the city centre. I don’t feel that need to be in a gay place. Sometimes I think sitting at home with a glass of wine and watching the telly is ideal.”</p>	23.24-24.18
24.20	<i>Was there any change in the ‘90s or not?</i>	
	<p>“I’d say there were various venues coming and going particularly for the gay market. Bennetts was the major club, if you were in the city centre you’d go to a gay pub then Bennetts afterwards and also when I finished up as a bartender in Squires, you’d get free entry into Bennetts. In terms of the gay scene you went through various phases of fashion and looks and there was a time when the clothes were Levis and D.Ms, a check shirt, a moustache, a flat top hairstyle and I can remember being in Bennetts and these guys all sort of looked the same and at that time Jimmy Sommerville was based in Glasgow and he’d go to Bennetts all the time and Jimmy Sommerville had a kind of cute wee dance routine, so there was certainly wonderful experiences socialising in Glasgow at that</p>	24.22-26.08

	time in the '90s. There was the music scene as well happening as well, '90s music. It was a wonderful time."	
26.10	<i>Were there any lesbian bars around to your knowledge?</i>	
	"None that I'm aware of, there might have been a section of a bar that they allocated for women as a safe space for women to sit and generally I think there was a kind of relaxing interaction because women felt safe with gay men, so there was that kind of interaction. I think there might have been one lesbian bar, I can't remember, or there might have been lesbian nights, so it would be a gay bar but with a lesbian night."	26.15-26.59
27.01	<i>You mentioned The Waterloo bar and the characters in there, can you tell me a little about that?</i>	
	"The Waterloo Bar has been there for a long long time. Some of the sailors from the boats in the dock on the Clyde would go to The Waterloo to drink and obviously pick up and also at the time there was a famous red light district there, so The Waterloo would have, not sex workers, but prostitutes at the time, there'd be married men going there, there'd be homosexual men going there, so there'd be all sorts of weird and wonderful people there. That was where the married men would go to potentially have a quickie with someone. At the time I was going there, a guy, she was called Betty Hutton and Betty Hutton was a compère and she would go round chatting to the patrons of The Waterloo and as far as I'm aware she was very intelligent, spoke several languages and so on. He was such a character, he was the main star of The Waterloo, especially at the weekends and it was very busy. I remember him doing his stuff. Today he would be called a drag artist and very wicked and very cruel with a sense of humour but it was all done in good taste. So there would be people going to The Waterloo for all sorts of reasons."	27.03-29.38
29.40	<i>Were there any other drag queens that you knew of in Glasgow at the time?</i>	
	"Not really. There were certainly men who were effeminate but I think if they would dress up in drag in those days would be like a big sign saying come and beat me up. So there wasn't many people who were out in drag. They would maybe go into a toilet in the pub and change but there wasn't drag queens as such."	29.42-30.20
30.22	<i>Did you ever go to places other than Glasgow for the night life like?</i>	
	"London, Manchester, Newcastle and they have their gay scenes usually in the city centre, sometimes further out. More or less a replication of what we had in Glasgow, except London would be bigger. The thing about London was because there are so many venues there was a kind of delightful anonymity and a lot of people did because the scenes were kind of small in Glasgow and you get fairly well known and your face kent and that could be advantage where no-one really knew you and you could do what you wanted to do there. London was probably the more diverse in terms of clubs and pubs."	30.23-31.36
31.37	<i>Do you think about the future as you age?</i>	
	"As you get older you do start thinking in terms of your health and things are not quite working as they should. So that does prompt thoughts about the future and healthcare. Years ago I used to live in London and I can remember a friend was talking about potentially it would be great if there was an LGBT+ residential care home where people would come together and they would feel safe and part of me sort of understood where he was coming from and part of me was horrified as well. I don't know that I would feel comfortable, because there would be all sorts of assumptions about you as a gay person, what you value and what's	32.02-34.56

	<p>important to you and the gay community even is not a homogeneous group. The so called gay community is merely a reflection of the wider community, so you've got people with all sorts of value and attitudes, some quite extreme, some quite conservative and some liberal a whole spectrum of people.</p> <p>For me getting older I don't think I would necessarily want to be part of that or want to be in a residential home for gay people. I would be quite happy to have a personal care assistant to my home to look after me, then I'd be in control, I can choose who I want as an assistant and who comes into my home.</p> <p>In London I used to work for a charity I was a Call Centre Manager for an organisation called Jewish Care and it was essentially care homes for the Jewish community in London and some of the horror stories I used to hear about people's attitudes towards other minorities, for example there's a lot of racism in Jewish care homes, so if a care assistant was black there would be all sorts of uninhibited comments from the residents. So the idea of being in an elderly person in a care home, I'd be running away from it."</p>	
35.01	<i>What are your hopes for the future in terms of gay rights legislation in Scotland?</i>	
	<p>"I think there's been major advances in terms of equality and rights for people and I hope that things change with this whole transgender thing and I think the rights, the Government policy and so on will evolve as communities evolve and people evolve. For me, at my time in life, I have come out, I have done the gay style, I've achieved lots of things, experienced loving relationships and now I'm in my Autumn years and I think I'm quite settled. I don't lead a gay lifestyle as such, for me I'm kind of integrated so in a way I've achieved a lot of things people are fighting for, very early onward aspired to and hoped for, so I hope I'd achieved and maintained for my generation and next generations. For me the future is more about an integrated society where it doesn't really matter about your sexual orientation or whatever, you just see people for who they are, another human being. The universe has brought people into the world and that's to become their unique selves, sexual orientation is just part of it, just part of who you are, it's not all of you. Hopefully in society that will become more and more prevalent, we're all human beings with fallibilities and hopes and aspirations and lots of good qualities, we're all trying to make sense of what it's all about but it helps when we recognise that in each other, to support each other."</p>	35.04-37.32
37.33	<i>That's all my questions, is there anything that you would like to add?</i>	
	"I think this has been a good overview of some of my experiences as a gay person."	37.34
37.49	<i>Thank you for sharing your memories Billy.</i>	
	"You're welcome."	37.57
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