


<p>Project: 'Queer Lives: Barriers from Cradle to Elder Care - An oral history...' Respondent: Thom Gallacher Year of Birth: 1957 Age: Connection to project: Local knowledge Date of Interview: 05/12/2024 Interviewer: Billy Ferrie Recording Agreement: Yes Information & Consent: Yes Photographic Images: No Length of Interview: 01.08.46 Location of Interview: Respondent's home, Glasgow Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics)</p>			<p>Glasgow's Southside+ Stories</p> 	
Time (from: mins/secs)	Description	Transcribed Extract (from- to: mins/secs)		
00.44	<i>Where were you born and where did you grow up?</i>			
	"Born in Glasgow and grew up in East Kilbride, a town very close to Glasgow."	00.48-00.56		
01.00	<i>Where do you live now?</i>			
	"Battlefield, Glasgow."	01.03		
01.12-01.26	<i>In this project we use the term queer in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible but appreciate that not everyone is going to use that term to describe themselves. Is there a term you would prefer me to use during the course of this interview</i>			
	"Queer is fine."	01.28		
01.29	<i>Do you have any preferred pronouns?</i>			
	"No."	01.35		
01.35	<i>Would you mind telling me if you've come out as queer and if so, when?</i>			
	<p>"I remember phoning the gay and lesbian switchboard when I was in my teens and it was based in Glasgow. I'd come out to myself then and I remember walking along the street and actually seeing the word gay and it was really strange for me to say it but I remember meeting someone from the gay and lesbian switchboard in The Vintners pub in Glasgow and that's the first I've ever been in a gay bar in my life and it was really difficult because I came from East Kilbride, didn't drive so actually getting through to the pub in Glasgow was difficult but I knew I had to do it. East Kilbride although close to Glasgow was very provincial and the first I'd actually seen gay being discussed was in the local East Kilbride News when someone had written there should be something in East Kilbride for gay men and women, but it was jumped on, so I knew Glasgow would be the place that I would need to come to, so I phoned the switchboard and I remember the very first thing the guy on the phone asked was 'why do you think you're gay?' Anyway, we met in The Vintners and we had a drink and after the event I was so nervous I physically threw up and jumped on the train going to East Kilbride.</p> <p>So I never really came out to my parents, never did, they were very West of Scotland parents and in retrospect when I think about it now because they've been nothing but welcoming of my relationships over the years and</p>	01.44-06.01		




	<p>very happy about all of it but we never actually openly discussed me being gay, although they came along, I eventually got married and we had a wedding dinner and they were incredibly happy. So, I feel like I missed out, if I'd told them then I'd probably have got a lot more support.</p> <p>When I left East Kilbride and came to Glasgow in the early 1980s, I did come out and people at college were incredibly liberal who knew all about my sexual orientation and I discovered gay bars like so many in the '90s. So that was a defining time for me and if I had to give a time, I would say I came out when I went to college and I became much more aware of my sexual orientation."</p>	
08.10	<i>Did you experience any barriers to early education due to being queer?</i>	
	<p>"Horrible, horrible bullying. I never went to secondary school, I hated it. I was a very obvious gay boy there was no doubt about it and in the '60s/'70s that just wasn't on in school, or you had bully me written right over your forehead and the best way I had of dealing with that was to make myself invisible and I meant literally, so I just never went. It was appalling and later I ended up going to The Children's Hearing System for truanting because I just wouldn't go and my Father would try and take me back. Teaching was different back then, there was no sense of any guidance teachers, I never felt there was any that I felt particularly close to that I could talk to or that I would gain any support from and they didn't have any bullying policies but it's very different now. So, I left school with absolutely nothing in the way of qualifications.</p> <p>I then started college collecting O levels and Highers over a course of years, going through colleges and further education. It was great and I just ate all of that up, ending up with about 25 O levels and some 10 Highers covering a range of courses from Food and Nutrition to Mathematics, so I knew I had the abilities but I'd better start concentrating on something I really liked, so I did and that was on English and Modern Languages and then I went to university. The fascinating thing about that in the '80s was I went to Glasgow University which was a very elitist university in the '80s. The great thing about Glasgow University was we had the Q.M. Union which was fantastic. Our Union was the very first to be run by an out gay Manager, so we had gay societies every month and all sorts going on which I just absolutely loved and felt included and at the end of the night we'd all sing the Tom Robinson song 'We're glad to be gay'. They had nothing else in Glasgow for anyone younger at that time other than a gay sort of society where they met in Argyle Street up a close and up an alley and it was the saddest place, but you went to that, no drink, no alcohol. It wasn't till later on when you could hit the bars. I loved university and became so addicted that I ended up doing one degree after another, English, French, Modern Languages, then I taught for a while in a very Catholic Secondary School where my sexual orientation wasn't up for discussion at all. At that time the Catholic schools were run by Bishops and Cardinals, and the Food Nutrition Teacher taught sex education which appalled me so I hated the whole experience of teaching in a Catholic school being a gay man who was struggling with isolation. I hated teaching about Byron and Keats with children who had very little, so I then went and did a Social Work degree and from that I studied the Criminal Justice system and did a Criminology degree then I did a Forensics degree and my final doctorate in Psychology.</p> <p>So I loved education I was very much a part of it and didn't find any great barriers as I moved through it and I ended up working in Children & Families in Bridgeton but I specialised in Criminal Justice so I did a lot of the court working and I went through the whole criminal justice social work etc, and ended up in Barlinnie where I worked for about 10 years and that was most difficult being an openly gay man and was not something</p>	08.17-15.41

	discussed in the prison. I had to be very careful about how I managed myself in there, it was always a very grey line and not something I discussed with any prison officer and I knew there were a number of them who were openly gay themselves.”	
16.25	<i>Do you think things have changed now for queer people in education?</i>	
	“I hope so and in my heart I hope faith schools are not as rigid now in their approach although I suspect that they are and not much has changed which saddens me but I think kids nowadays out with the school realise there’s more scope that will look at sexual orientation and get more support in the community than we ever had which is fantastic.”	17.57-18.49
19.40	<i>When you did come out to your parents, what was their reaction?</i>	
	“You know I think I lost out on a lot because I didn’t tell them about it. My parents were born in the ‘30s, it was a different time. I’ve reconciled myself to all of that with them over the years, I never got a negative response. I was one of the lucky ones I’d had a few relationships and they knew about them and they invited them all into their home there were never any negative or homophobic comments, I never got any sense that they were ever discriminatory towards anyone I was having a relationship with over the years and they were very welcoming of any individual that I had a serious relationship with. My current partner was welcomed with open arms and it made me feel ultimately after all these years that perhaps if I had opened up to them earlier then I wouldn’t have been as isolated as I was, I wouldn’t have felt alone in terms of what I was dealing with if I’d said to them but I’ve wrestled with the notion that I don’t know what they would have to say to me, maybe they’d have said I understand, I know how you’re feeling but maybe that would’ve been enough just for them to acknowledge it. So yes, I do regret not telling them when I was younger.”	19.41-21.47
25.57	<i>Do you believe that there is such a thing as an L.G.B.T.+ community?</i>	
	“I’m very optimistic because I look at what it is now from what I had and it’s very typical from someone my age than when you reflect on what you had and what there is today and the bars in the town are very metro-sexual when years ago you would clearly know if it was gay or not. I remember when the Polo Lounge first opened but now you wouldn’t know, which is fantastic. I think that’s very important, I think we’re very visible and there has been an increase in homophobic attacks and the more we become visible the more people will attack visibility now particularly outside bars that are known to be gay. So, I think there is a coherence among gay groups in Glasgow, it’s better than it was but I think there could be more too. There were a lot of gay and lesbian centres but I get a sense that they’ve kind of fragmented, I don’t get a sense of closeness. Pride now has lost the sense of closeness and what’s all about and I don’t take part in it when I used to in the early days when it was about making yourself be out there, being visible, making a statement. I get a sense when I look at it that it’s party time which isn’t all bad in a way. Anything that supports L.G.B.T. is a great thing but I get a sense that it’s missed what it’s all about.”	26.12-28.50
29.00-29.18	<i>Do you feel the current debates on gender identity that has been an issue for the L.G.B.T. community?</i>	
	“It’s so topical we talk about it every night. I’ve got a nephew who’s a trans man and that’s been enlightening for me to understand that approach. If you’d asked me that 20 years ago, I’d have thought this is all nonsense, but now I don’t think it’s a bad thing. What I like about it is it’s out there and it’s getting talked about. If people are confused, they can ask a lot of questions, you can get round a table and talk about what you feel. I’ve	29.29-31.16

	learned a lot from my nephew about it and I'm still learning. This is something that we'll be discussing for some time and I don't think anyone's agreeing on anything."	
31.37	<i>On socialising as a queer person, you mentioned some of the pubs, do you remember any of the clubs?</i>	
	Yes. I was basically a drunk like many of them in those days. I went from one pub to the next and staggered back home with my sausage supper or if you were lucky enough to pick someone up, you ended up back at their house so pissed. That's how I lived, like so many others, it was about superficial relationships with the hope that you'd meet someone and I did meet a few fantastic guys and had relationships over the years. I remember the pubs, The Vintners pub, which was fantastic, it was a big posh pub then over two floors and I was devastated when it closed. It's turned into a Euro Hostel now at the corner on Clyde Street. The Waterloo Bar and stand at the old bar, it's so changed now. The Duke of Wellington was an enormous old bar and downstairs it had little booths. On the Clydeside there was some gay discos and one up the West End, Tennent's, it was so gay. There was another one down at the very bottom it became The Volcano but it was actually Cinders. It used to have a gay night on a Wednesday and Sunday. Gay nights used to make a lot of money as they sneered at all the gay men and women who turned up on those nights. What you'd do is go to something like The Waterloo and then stagger along to Bennetts till about 3 o'clock in the morning and go for the late-night bus home. So, I loved the bars then, I loved the times, a lot of very happy times in those pubs but I walked a very thin line between alcohol and sobriety."	31.41-36.25
36.56	<i>You spoke about alcohol in those times, have you any idea why?</i>	
	"Absolutely, it was dis-inhibiting in a very real sense, it's amazing how gorgeous everybody looks after half a dozen pints. Apart from being dis-inhibiting and the hangovers, I was also a very shy introvert individual as I was growing up, certainly through adolescence and through my adulthood until I ended up in college and university, so getting to the bars first I needed quite a few drinks, I wouldn't make the first move. I really struggled with all of that but after a couple of drinks it was a bit easier and that was similar to most people I met, that it made it easier for them to talk to one another. Going on I realised this was very difficult to maintain, not just being costly but my health started deteriorating, there's no doubt about it at all. I was missing work when I was a teacher and I remember my mother phoning the school because I hadn't appeared for a whole weekend and phoning the school was just ludicrous itself, to find out if I'd turned up for work. So, it was starting to affect my health and work and I had to look at that seriously."	36.57-39.07
39.08	<i>Was there any kind of fear of physical violence when you had been drinking?</i>	
	"Yes. I was assaulted and it was a very serious one, it was in the papers at the time. We were coming out a bar and there was a guy with a crossbow and he fired and missed my head and I ran in one direction and fell and his friend who was there kicked me in the head. It was a homophobic attack they knew exactly where I'd come from. I went to the hospital and I remember going to the desk at the hospital and I was in quite a state in total shock and the woman on reception said, you were here last week drunk, instead of the response I expected which was 'let me help you' because I was covered in blood, but I got this absolutely appalling response and no other sympathy from the doctors at that point either. The C.I.D. were called because someone was running about the town, but I got the	39.18-41.28

	<p>sense that they really weren't taking it as particularly serious. I was questioned not so much as a victim of what had happened but that I had somehow instigated what had gone on, although it was incredibly serious. My parents didn't know what to think about it because I'd gone home to East Kilbride and the C.I.D. came to interview me there and nothing ever happened, I don't know if they ever caught whoever did it. You would think they'd be rushing about and it would be front page news, but no, I got a sense much later on it was because of where it was and what was happening and I got a real sense that they didn't take it seriously. That was many years ago, but I still remember it well, I could've been killed."</p>	
41.43	<p><i>Did you experience any other negative experience within the healthcare system?</i></p>	
	<p>"No, I'm lucky in that my health has been good but I am concerned for the future as we get older. We know one of us will go and how do you deal with the loneliness, what's there for L.G.B.T. community when your partner goes, is there some separate groups that could understand my particular needs or my partner's needs and I don't know that there is. The Southside in Glasgow is much more open, queer friendly yoga, men's groups for talking. So, I think they understand more about some of the issues but it does concern me as we get older that one of us will be alone and will that be isolating and what's there to support someone when they're in a position like that? I'm not convinced there's much out there but I'd like to think that there would be."</p>	41.56-43.22
43.23	<p><i>Any idea as to what that might be?</i></p>	
	<p>"I know in the States there are care homes which are L.G.B.T. and we visited one when we were on holiday once in Palm Springs and it was fantastic. All these silver surfers as they called them and they all stayed in this large community all made up of L.G.B.T. groups. There was a lot of understanding of what issues could crop up for men and women as they get older which may be different for any other community, because generally gay men and women don't have any children so they don't have the support of children as they grow older. So, you're going to be more isolated as you grow older and that does concern me. I'd like to think there would be supports out there that can offer assistance. I don't get a sense that there is anything like this available at present."</p>	43.32-45.38
48.59	<p><i>Do you think there are barriers to healthcare support for queer people?</i></p>	
	<p>I'm hoping there will be more help available. I'm hoping services will be more inclusive and understanding. I'm at the stage now and worried that I'll become ill because I don't know that I'll get access to any services as quickly as I would hope, never mind some that would've been difficult to access in the first place. I got my Covid and flu vaccinations because of my age. My husband was hospitalised last year and was very ill, doesn't qualify for the Covid vaccination. We're in a privileged position where we can afford to pay for these things and unfortunately for most things that would appear that's going to be the norm where we're going to be paying for a lot of things. So, I think one of the barriers and that's true for anyone not just the L.G.B.T. community will be about cost and whether you can afford it. Sadly, it's really disheartening if something should happen will I get access to it?</p> <p>My partner and I talk about this all the time as we get older, we talk openly and honestly about our concerns. I became much more aware of that when he was hospitalised and he was very ill, bordering on sepsis. So yes, we talk about getting older, what's going to happen and getting on with our life. That's why I retired before retirement age because I knew I wanted to do a lot of things before I physically couldn't do them. So, we travel a lot</p>	49.29-54.04

	and often because I know there will come a time when I know we can't. We live one floor up and it's not too bad but I know there will come a time when I'll need to think about moving to a lower level. As each day passes, we become more aware of my mortality and not only have we lost our parents now, our friends now are very ill. It used to be our parents peer group now it's our peer group."	
54.12	<i>Can you think of any legislation that has brought more rights for queer people?</i>	
	"The Sexual Discrimination Act is really important. People shouldn't be discriminated against in terms of their sexual orientation. I think that's vitally important in the workplace. I've seen it in practice, so I know it works."	54.27-56.15
56.16	<i>It there any legislation that has rolled back or diminished the rights for queer people?</i>	
	"Every society should be aware of that, I think. In the U.S. particularly when Trump is in, the rights for gay, lesbian and trans individuals are going to be eroded. I think we're all on that borderline and I'm watching it across Europe and the rise of the Far-Right spreads quite concerningly. I'm seeing it everywhere and there's always that potential for that happening here. So, we always have to be on our guard."	56.24-58.19
58.28	<i>Would you say in Scotland/U.K. people in general are supportive of the rights for queer people?</i>	
	"I think Scotland is much more enlightened than it used to be. The SNP wouldn't stomach anything at all about L.G.B.T. It was very Church of Scotland, based on a very strong moral compass shall we say but that was Scotland at the time. I think it's better than it was but I still think there's room to do more."	58.55 - 01.00.05
01.01.35	<i>Can you think of any positive portrayals of gay people in the arts and media?</i>	
	"When I was growing up there was nothing but stereotypes like John Inman and that's what we shaped our understanding of sexual identity by looking at these people which is very unfair because they were part of a time, we were part of a time. I still laugh at it. The first thing I saw on television which tried to understand a gay identity was The Naked Civil Servant and I couldn't wait for it to come on again and I started to understand a bit more about what was going on. Then Angels in America was another turning point when I saw the play in London and I thought this was just astounding the different way of looking at what our experiences were and H.I.V. and Aids. So, I think how we're presented is a lot more enlightened. People understand the issues a lot more than they did and stereotypes are less in existence."	01.01.52 - 01.04.49
01.05.05	<i>How would you like to see portrayals of queer people in the media and arts in the future?</i>	
	"I don't know what I would want. Certainly not a gay channel. I'd like more inclusivity, whether it's the norm for gay men and women to be part of soaps. I think it would never happen. I remember the first gay kiss in Eastenders with Michael Cashman and he's still an LGBT activist. I remember the shock/horror. It was on the front page of the news, a gay kiss and not only a gay kiss but the other person was going to get Aids, I remember that. I was horrified by that whole notion of it all. I'd like for not anyone to be seen as victims or stereotypes."	01.05.14 - 01.06.45
01.06.50	<i>Is there anything you'd like to add?</i>	
	"I really do hope the next generation has much more inclusivity everywhere, I don't think it should just be major cities in the U.K, it should be more welcoming and I think everyone should understand just how	01.07.31 - 01.08.50

	important it is for us to be included. I know that cultures can change at the drop of a hat so I'm always aware that everything can turn on a sixpence, all the fighting all the marching down the streets with placards and before you know it we're back to restrictions, so for future generations you've got to be really mindful of where it goes and what you're doing."	
01.08.52	<i>Thank you, Thom,</i>	
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