

Project: 'Queer Lives: Barriers from cradle to elderly care - An Oral History'

Respondent: Lucia August

Year of Birth: 1952

Age:

Connection to project: Local Knowledge

Date of Interview: 19 November 2024

Interviewer: Rachel Kelly

Recording Agreement: Yes

Information & Consent: Yes

Photographic Images: Yes (Number of: 3)

Length of Interview: 53.12

Location of Interview: Respondent's home, Edinburgh

Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics)

Glasgow's Southside+ Stories







Time (from: mins/secs)	Description	Transcribed Extract (from- to: mins/secs)
00.35	<i>Where were you born and where did you grow up?</i>	
	"Los Angeles, California."	00.40
00.42	<i>Where do you live now?</i>	
	"Edinburgh, Scotland."	00.45
00.49-01.00	<i>We've used the term queer in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible but appreciate that not everybody uses this term to describe themselves or an aspect of themselves. Is there a term you would like me to use in the interview?</i>	
	"Queer is great, I like the word."	01.02
01.05	<i>Do you have any preferred pronouns?</i>	
	"I use she/her and new Scot."	01.11
01.21	<i>Can you tell me if you have come out as Queer?</i>	
	"Yes, I actually came out as lesbian in 1974 and then sometime in the last 10 to 15 years I started adopting the term queer, so I use both, lesbian and queer."	01.22-01.45
01.46	<i>Can I ask why you've embraced queer?</i>	
	"It's a big term and I think it incorporates different values I've had and different practices. At some point about 20 years ago I started practicing ethical non-monogamy, polyamory and that just seemed to come more under the queer umbrella than lesbian. Time went on and there was a movement in the U.S. to adopt queer and I just liked the feel of it, it's broader and includes all sorts of definitions of L.G.B.T."	01.52-92.09
02.48	<i>Can you tell me about your experience growing up as a queer person?</i>	
	"I grew up in the '50s-'60s and people were not talking about homosexuality at all, it was a bad term. I remember one time I was about 12 and I was looking at a magazine in the living room and the word homosexual was there and I knew it was controversial but being the kind of sassy one that I was and am, and I was like 'Mom what's that?' She got all kind of flustered and I don't think it was a very positive article, somehow I had that feeling. Then in high school I started having an attraction to girls but I didn't know what it was, I just felt wrong and weird and I somehow perceived I was dangerous to them, that I would injure	02.49-04.45

	them by approaching them, but I didn't even know that's what it was until the late '60s early '70s and I was like oh that's what that was. So it was a very repressive time and conscious time, feelings were not to be identified and I'm so glad now that at least people can identify and that's super important."	
04.48	<i>Who did you come out to?</i>	
	"First I came out to myself at about 19. I had my first sexual experience with a man and I was just about 19 and I was like that wasn't all it's cracked up to be then a bit later I thought maybe I'm bi-sexual. So that was when I was 19 and I pushed it aside for a couple of years and then when I was at uni' in California there was a gay liberation club and I started going along to it with two others, one who later came out as lesbian. The three of us were very close and then I realised I was in love with my best friend and we got together and that other friend who had invited us along to the club, she had moved away by then and I was on the phone to her and I wanted to tell her but it took me about five minutes to get it out my mouth. So maybe that was me officially coming out to her."	04.49-07.16
07.28	<i>Within the Gay Liberation Group, what sort of things did they do?</i>	
	"It was mostly a get-together and chat kind of group. "	07.33
08.21	<i>Did you come out to your family?</i>	
	"Probably soon after I got together with Christie. It was 1974, I had gone back home for spring break. I first came out to my mother and she said she wasn't surprised she always thought that might happen. Then a few days later and I was in the sewing room and my father came in and he was like, so what's going on? I said, well I'm in love with my best friend, a woman, and he was like oh is it Christie? I said yes and he said, oh I thought so. So that was the big reveal. They were both like, we still love you, but they both worried about me being ostracised."	08.22-09.57
10.40	<i>Do you feel your experiences are similar to those of other queer people?</i>	
	"There were times I did get judged and discriminated against, but not in job situations but then I had my own business so that resolved that but I do think I was lucky. My parents and aunt and uncle came up for my wedding to my ex-wife and they were completely accepting and they jumped on the band wagon. My parents lived a long time and my mother walked around her nursing home wearing a button saying I'm straight not narrow."	10.58-12.29
12.59	<i>You said you didn't face any barriers in education, what University did you attend?</i>	
	"I went to the University of California in Santa Barbara, where I got my bachelor's degree and then I went to a more private university in Northern California called John F Kennedy University. By then my whole experience was like I'm here, I'm queer, get used to it and that's been my attitude for almost 50 years. So if there was any discrimination, people wouldn't say it to my face and I didn't experience anything specific. I was fortunate in that regard. I heard tales of people being discriminated against at work and certainly having family difficulties. I had a job in my 20s in the Welfare Department of Social Services and my supervisor thought I was wonderful and then when she found out I was a lesbian, she backed away."	13.00-14.09
15.00	<i>Do you think any of these barriers to education or work has changed over time in America?</i>	
	"Yes in America it depends on which state you live in because even today in some states, it's like dangerous, like Florida and maybe parts of Texas and other places. California has always been ahead of the game fortunately. I think people	15.03-15.34

	have different experiences in the U.S. depending on where they are.”	
15.35-15.49	<i>Do you believe there is such a thing as an L.G.B.T.Q+ community which implies a coherent group identity based solely on sexual orientation or gender identity?</i>	
	“Yes I do and have for all these years, yes. The first Pride I ever went to in 1975 and it was in San Francisco and there were about 3,000 of us and there was music and speeches and dancing and after a while the men were running around naked and the women were naked and it was a great old day and there was a thing about here we are together, an identity, a community and we had to stick together, we had to work together, we had to dance together. So I’ve always felt that was important and I love seeing how that has expanded across the globe, it’s everywhere now.”	15.52-17.00
17.35	<i>Have you been involved in any activism?</i>	
	<p>“Quite a lot. I’m currently a retired psychotherapist. As a psychotherapist, I believe around the middle ‘90s. I gave a talk at a local psychiatric hospital on ego-syntonic gay and lesbian psychotherapy. Ego-syntonic means that your ego agrees with it essentially, where distonic means you don’t agree with it and don’t like it so get rid of it. So a lot of conversion therapies are aimed at people who are ego-distonic and they want to get rid of it for whatever reason.</p> <p>So I gave a talk in the middle of the ‘90s in a conservative area of California, about how to work with clients/patients, in a psychiatric hospital, who they felt were queer and there were psychiatrists, psychologists, medical staff all in the room, the whole nine yards, and I came out at it, I said I’m a lesbian therapist. It was a little nerve-racking but it ended up being very useful because afterwards people would call me and say can I consult with you on this or that. So that kind of activism is a very practical type of thing.</p> <p>I also went to every parade there ever was, all the Pride parades that got larger and larger till there were half a million people going from the 3,000 and any politician who wants to get elected is in that parade in their fancy car, so things have shifted over the years.”</p>	17.36-20.11
20.45	<i>Can you tell me about the creating the lesbian identity events?</i>	
	“I remember women places I would be in, one was a women’s solstice camp and it was women of all orientations and we made sure there was a very strong lesbian identity at it. This was before the word queer was used and way before trans issues although I do remember a trans woman in the group who was running into some difficulties in acceptance from the other women, which still happens, but I remember being particularly supportive and talking to her and inclusive and all that. I was the kind who always wore buttons, some of which I still have.”	20.50-22.11
22.22-22.30	<i>Within the context of California can you think of any legislation that has brought more rights for queer people?</i>	
	<p>“Well there was the right to marry, that was a big one. In 2004 the Mayor of San Francisco decided that he would allow same-sex couples to get married even although it was illegal, but he put through a decree and people came from all over the country and maybe the world, to get married at city hall and at the time, my partner and I we decided we’d get married, so we went and we got married in the city hall San Francisco which was beautiful. It was a glorious day. Unfortunately we got divorced a few years later. See, we’re like straight folk, we get married, we get divorced.</p> <p>Unfortunately they invalidated the right to marry decree somewhere along the line but then eventually it was passed, so you can get married now in most States of the United States.”</p>	22.35-24.12
24.20	<i>In what way have things got better?</i>	

	<p>"Recognition, a general sense of acceptance even though it's not verbal. I notice being here I make a point of coming out almost all the time in very subtle ways different ways. For instance I have jewellery my ex-wife made and I joke that well I don't have the marriage but I do have the jewellery. It used to be people would say I like your ear-rings and I would say very matter of factly, oh my wife made them. Now today I say oh my ex-wife made them. Mostly people just go, oh okay. It's way more matter of fact which is how it should be."</p>	24.32-25.53
27.04	<i>Can you think of any legislation that's diminished or rolled back the rights of queer people?</i>	
	"I can't."	27.14
27.15	<i>In your opinion what are the barriers facing queer people in Scotland/U.K?</i>	
	"Well there's still a push for conversion therapies which should not happen and the anti-gay marriage movement which in some quarters is not healthy. As I'm recently here unfortunately I do not know a lot about the current legislation."	27.26-28.01
28.03	<i>What are the barriers facing queer people in California?</i>	
	"I think we're all good to go in terms of legislation and in most of the U.S. and the Supreme Court made gay marriages technically legal in the U.S. There are a few states trying to counter-act that but nation-wide, it's legal. So nation-wide we're doing alright in the U.S."	28.04-28.30
28.50	<i>Have you faced any healthcare issues due to being queer?</i>	
	<p>"Not recently, maybe 50 years ago. So there was a gynaecologist when I was about 19 or 20, I just had this negative feeling from him, so either he's retired or got with the programme. Now I tend to kind of go to people who are more progressive minded.</p> <p>I think mainstream healthcare has changed over time, absolutely I do and there are more medical professionals who are out, yes."</p>	28.53-30.19
30.36	<i>How did you socialise as a queer person in your youth?</i>	
	<p>"I would hang out with friends, we would go to bars, go to people's houses. The usual stuff people do, that young folk do, drink too much, smoke too much dope, you know the usual stuff. There were specific lesbian bars but I don't think there are any more. There were some wonderful old bars that had been there for a really long time, classic type places, so I would go hang out and that was fun, sometimes meet people, do things I probably shouldn't, you know, the usual that's what we do.</p> <p>I did go to places that were not specifically lesbian. It would depend on who I was with and there would be sometimes some kind of judgement, like oh a couple of dykes. The word dyke at least in the U.S. is a very acceptable term."</p>	30.37-33.24
33.27	<i>Elder care, do you think about your future as you age?</i>	
	"That one is the thing and one that I talk about particularly with Age Scotland, the queer network part of it in Scotland. Yes I think it is an issue, I think we need to have a conscious un-bias awareness training because I think the staff, some are from different countries and are not accepting at all and that's a big issue. In fact there was a parliamentary reception in parliament here back in May and it was sponsored by The Diversity and Inclusion of Age Scotland and a couple of MSPs. It wasn't in the main body of parliament, it was in one of their reception rooms and our network was invited and the elder of people of colour was invited and I spoke at it and I talked about that very issue of unconscious bias and how we need conscious bias training. So that's my kind of go-to phrase now. We really need to have that in place to protect queer seniors. Definitely."	33.29-35.13
35.36	<i>How would you feel about a queer only care home?</i>	

	<p>"Well that's something we were thinking about back in California. It was right around my divorce I was nearly 65 so I wasn't quite an elder and I started thinking yes it would be nice to have that and recently I've been thinking about that, I wonder if there are such places. So yes, that's a thought to have queer identified folks in a home."</p>	35.16-35.50
36.06	<i>You were talking about unconscious bias how have you used that training in your career?</i>	
	<p>"I currently am retired as a psychotherapist and I've taken on the mantle of a performer/choreographer with Age Scotland and that's my main focus now although I do bring up these issues as part of my work on stage. So as part of my work with Age Scotland this is one of my personal focuses."</p>	36.10-36.58
37.21	<i>Would you say that the general public are supportive of equal rights for queer people?</i>	
	<p>"Yes I would."</p>	37.30
37.45	<i>Can you tell me how you got into your dancing and choreography?</i>	
	<p>"I've been dancing since I was young, creative dance for children, I went to a ballet class and a modern dance class, then folk dancing in college and the thing was my body was never the right size for traditional dance, so I got more discrimination for my body size than anything else in my life. I joined a class and there was a man who had gone there some twenty years before me, anyway he started an inclusive dance company for people of all abilities, people in wheelchairs etc, so I danced with him from 2003-2008 and he's still one of my dearest friends. We performed all over California, Hawaii, New York, and then he had taken the company here to the fringe festival before I joined and he was like I want to go back that was really exciting and that was 2013. Anyway he changed his mind and I had already gone out on my own in October 2010 and so I talked to a couple of people who had brought shows over here and I came here and performed a solo show in 2014, received four star reviews, then I went home gathered all my resources, came back here in 2017 did another solo show, went back and did a solo show in San Francisco in 2019.</p> <p>I came back here in 2022 and then I didn't leave and now you can't make me leave, I'm not leaving, you can't make me!</p> <p>There's strong support for L.G.B.T. here and strong support for elder dancers and the art world is very supportive of older folks, more so than in the U.S. I was quite surprised, so that's why I'm here. Everything is for the youthful in the U.S., there's not much funding for the arts. It's having it's issues here but it's much worse in the U.S. That's why I'm here, my heart is happy."</p>	37.45-43.29
44.11	<i>Can you tell me about the support for elder queer people you've found here in Edinburgh?</i>	
	<p>"Yes, the L.G.B.T. Wellbeing Centre, which also has a Glasgow base. I've also been attending the Coffee Posse for the last two years or so and there's the film club, that's how I met Ruth actually who was at the Coffee Posse, tomorrow we've got the International Smash It, so it's us and the baby queers. Oh it's so sweet, they're like age 13 up to 25 and they look at us like their grandparents and it's so sweet because a lot have lost family members because of being queer, so we're their queer elders. So I've been involved with that which is very gratifying."</p>	44.12-45.05
45.38	<i>Why do you think inter-generational is so important?</i>	
	<p>"Because we need to be a larger community and it would've been lovely when I came out to have some older queer folk around. It's just building a stronger based community with deeper roots."</p>	45.48-46.07
47.34	<i>Can you give any examples of the positive portrayal of queer people in the arts and media?</i>	

	"I think any art is open to people identifying in whatever way. I think it's completely wide open and acceptable at this point, in whatever media or art form you're using."	48.04-48.45
50.44	<i>Can you give any examples of negative portrayals of queer people in the arts and media?</i>	
	"To be honest I don't think about those things on purpose because I don't want to feel bad. My personal practice is to focus on what's working and what's positive."	50.53-51.06
51.27	<i>What do you feel about the current situation regarding gender identity?</i>	
	Do you know what, it's just this step of the game, that's all, it's just this step of the process and in a way it's positive that it's out instead of in. Yes, better out than in. So when it's out, it's out there, it can be seen, evaluated and cool minds prevail and that's how we've made progress all these years. That's how we've made progress, we bring it out, you see the ugly stuff and then you deal with it. It's just the next step in our evolution as queer people."	51.29-52.38
52.40	<i>That's all my questions is there anything you'd like to add?</i>	
	"No, I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this."	
53.09	<i>Thank you. I've really enjoyed you sharing your memories.</i>	
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