

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

Respondent: Wendy Miller

Year of Birth: 1975

Age:

Connection to project: Respondent

Date of Interview: 23/05/2024

Interviewer: Rachel Kelly

Recording Agreement: Yes

Information & Consent: Yes

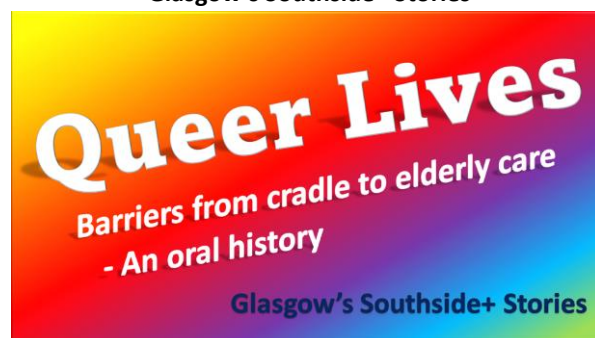
Photographic Images: No (Number of:)

Length of Interview: 27.34

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)
00.33	<i>Where were you born?</i>	
	"I was born in the then Irvine Central, now known as Ayrshire Central I think."	00.34-00.42
00.43	<i>Where were you brought up?</i>	
	"I grew up in Dalrymple which was a mining village in the then Cumnock and Doon Valley."	00.44-00.56
00.58	<i>Where do you live now?</i>	
	"I live in Govanhill in the South Side of Glasgow."	01.01
01.03-01.20	<i>We've used the term Queer in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible, but we appreciate that not everybody would use that term to describe themselves. What term would you use to describe yourself?</i>	
	"I would describe myself as a queer artist and poet."	01.22-01.25
01.28	<i>Do you have any preferred pronouns?</i>	
	"She/her"	01.30
01.31	<i>Would you mind telling me if you've come out as Queer?</i>	
	"Yes I have, yeah. It was quite a difficult time coming out to my family when I was about 27. My parents found it really hard to come to terms with, so it was a process that took maybe about 10 years for our sort of wounds to heal, for everyone to recover and evolve and move on. Yeah it was very difficult because I came from a former mining village and in the village everyone knows each other and my parents found it so difficult, it was just really the sense of how could this be. So it was very difficult, but things are much better now but I do reflect on it sometimes but it was very challenging. It was probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life actually, coming out to my parents, but I'm also very lucky in being queer at that time, I've always had a very supportive network of my chosen family, like very, very close friendships so I think that helps, these people would hold you up during difficult times and it was definitely the right thing to do because my family, we have a very close relationship now, including with my partner and our son, so things have evolved a lot."	01.35-03.35
03.36	<i>When you were younger, what was your experience growing up as a queer person?</i>	
	"I don't really think I fully realised until I was in my early 20s, so maybe that made it easier. Some of that was maybe because nobody was gay in Ayrshire at that time. I had relationships with boys and stuff and I wasn't not into that, it just took me a while to realise so I can't say that I had a difficult time of it, no. I suppose I realised that I felt attracted to women and that was something to be ashamed of and confused, so I told a few close friends and they were very supportive and then I moved to Glasgow and went out on the gay scene and started to sort of explore my sexuality a bit, but still at that time	03.45-06.47

	<p>I was thinking that maybe I was Bi, I wasn't too sure, it was a confusing time and I suppose that meant there was a number of years where you're kind of living a little bit, feels a bit subterranean going to gay clubs but not telling straight friends and stuff. I can remember having a flatmate when I lived in the west end, I remember coming back and being out in The Polo Lounge or something and I remember her asking me where were you tonight, and I said I was in this bar called October Cafe which was a lie I hadn't been there at all and my flatmate who's straight said well that's weird because I was at a private birthday party there. So those kind of collisions could happen where you could get caught out, and if you were making new friends or being in the workplace you were always hiding a part of yourself and it wasn't a nice way to live, because I'm quite an outgoing person, I like to make friends in different aspects of my life, the only thing I can compare it to for heterosexual people maybe having an affair or if you were doing a job that was secret or whatever. It's psychologically corrosive I think to be in the closet. So it was a difficult time but it was definitely better to be in that situation living in a city than it would've been living in a village if I'd stayed at home, that would've been impossible, there wouldn't have been anywhere to go, there wouldn't be any gay clubs in Ayr."</p>	
06.48	<i>Did you have any friends in the village that were accepting or otherwise?</i>	
	<p>"Not really. I had one whose sadly passed away but I think I told him a bit later on, but I'm not really in touch with people in the village and I think that was quite conscious, I'd cut myself off from people in the village and from a lot of extended family because I just felt like they're not going to be accepting, I'll not go to family stuff and it'll be easier that way and I kind of regret that now because there were a few aunts and uncles that have died and I'm like, I wish I'd known you better actually, and I didn't."</p>	06.51-07.36
07.37	<i>Did you face any barriers in the workplace or career?</i>	
	<p>"I haven't. I worked on a few papers where I haven't come out and it was kind of like keeping a secret, or maybe the odd person would know but I hadn't really come out. But there was definitely a sense, when I worked for the Record Group, that you would hear stuff, like 'so so' said this about you, and stuff. So, I don't know if I'd describe that as a barrier. There was definitely a sense of disapproval then, but in later years I've worked in like, from call centres, I've worked in a couple of prisons, I've worked in education, and everyone's really accepting. I wouldn't even question coming out now in the workplace. I'd be like, that's just something people do, and, in fact, I think because I work as a lecturer, I realise it's really important to be visibly out so that I can be a positive role-model to young queer people that I might be teaching, because it's really important for them to see that, because I never had that in school. We didn't have any teachers that were out, so I didn't figure out I was gay until really late because no-one was openly gay; it just wasn't a thing, and I think that visibility is so important."</p>	07.45-09.22
09.23	<i>Do you think the experience of being queer has changed over time in terms of acceptance or otherwise?</i>	
	<p>Yes absolutely. I think we've evolved a lot in Scotland and I think the legal protections that are in place now really help that because the law's caught up. I think society was moving that way anyway and we've come a long way since section 28, so society was moving that way and then the law caught on and caught up. So we've got equal marriage, but first of all we had civil partnerships where you were allowed to, for me I wasn't in agreement with that politically because I felt well don't sell me a watered-down version of your own tired institution, so I'm happy that we have equal marriage now because I think that recognises, and I think actually for queer people who have chosen to get married and stuff they like that because it gives them an equal playing field, but in some ways there's hetero-normalisation as well, but it has to be an option, it has to be on the table, but the law that has helped me that I really respect is the Human Fertilisation and Embology Act it's called and it means we had my son and I'm on his birth certificate even though I'm not his birth mum, so I'm legally his guardian. So I think those kind of laws are really important and the two feed off each other if people are more accepting and the law confirms that, then the two work together to advance society. So yeah I think it's completely different than 20 years ago, acceptance is much greater and I tend to just assume that people are okay with it and I think that's just the way to live. It's a bit like philosophically assuming that most people are good and that's a good way to live your life, don't assume that people are bigoted or racist, why would they be and if they are then be shocked by it and call them out on it."</p>	09.29-11.55
11.56	<i>Is there anything you'd like to change in terms of workplaces going forward?</i>	

	<p>"I think we need more groups, like queer groups. I'm on one at Glasgow Clyde College and like maybe just recognising certain things, like recognising Pride and having an event and not just Pride. I think in schools there should be more like in my son's school, I went along to a discussion about equality and asked about the provision of books of families like ours in the library and they were like, oh no we don't need that, they were quite dismissive and I realised I was there to tick a box so I think definitely we could do more because we recognise that in schools now they're on-board with recognising different types of ethnicities, and it's not just queer families, they need to do more to recognise and support just different types of families. There are a lot of kids that are adopted, single parents, that needs to be in their literature, it needs to be in the teachings and of course there's always debate politically about sex education and how that's taught and even on Question Time last week they were talking about how they teach children and I suppose what's been the cultural wars about trans people at the moment. That's become kind of like the same arguments people used against gay people back in the day, now they're the demons, the trans people. People need to be supported, it's not ideology to try and turn our children into a different sex. It's so short sighted. We can always do more I think because in the past as queer people we used to say we just want acceptance we just want people to go -what you do in the bedroom is up to you, we just want you to be okay with that, more than that actually we want to be cherished for who we are, we want to be recognised as being a part of society as we are. It's not enough just to be tolerated, it has to be more than that, and young people need to hear that as they're growing up gay or trans, so we have a duty as elders, middle aged citizens of queer generations to be positive role models and to show future generations that they're part of society and that they are positive parts of society."</p>	12.03-15.22
15.23	<i>Have you faced any health care issues due to being queer?</i>	
	<p>"When we had my son that was pretty difficult because I felt really patronised by the NHS. They got it wrong from me going and speaking to the doctor about trying to conceive and I think at one point they sent out a request for a sperm sample and we were like, we're a same sex couple, so stuff like that, that's just one example, and then I remember on one of Gillian's maternity appointments I think I felt quite lost and I felt quite invisible during the whole pregnancy. I felt like I don't know what my role's going to be. Maybe it's not necessarily up to the health service to help you with that but I remember talking to a midwife and I think it was a conversation about breastfeeding and I said well I don't know if we're going to do that because I want to feed the child and I remember her saying oh maybe you could change the baby's nappy, and I was just like, oh. Maybe men feel like that as well but I felt quite invisible. So it's not that I've been denied healthcare or anything but I think that we just don't have any guide books, we didn't have anyone who'd experienced that same sex couple having a baby, there was no-one to go to. For heterosexual couples there are always friends and family that are like oh you'll be fine blah blah blah. We didn't have anyone to go to, it was sort of new thing although I did have friends that had had a baby but I think they'd split up by then. So I felt a bit invisible until Edwyn was born and I felt instantly different and he was mine. I just felt instant love the minute he was born. I wasn't sure how I was going to feel, I didn't really connect to the baby in Gillian's womb if you like, I just felt a bit numb through the whole pregnancy and stuff so I didn't know how I was going to feel about being a non-birth mum but it all worked out the minute he was real and born and actually he's turned out to be quite like me somehow so I think the whole nurture of a nature has been quite strong for us because we are very alike, and also his name is an anagram of mine which is the best thing for a writer."</p>	15.30-19.11
20.10	<i>How did you find the support services when Edwyn was little?</i>	
	<p>"I suppose we just joined the middle class mummy mafia in the south side and people were mostly heterosexual women and were very accepting. Actually it's quite interesting because a lot of the women would often say to Gillian your relationship is much more equal than ours, our husbands are not pulling their weight and they were kind of envious of us so that was interesting, yeah."</p>	20.13-20.51
20.52	<i>How about any medical services?</i>	
	<p>"I suppose Edwyn [her son] would have visits and jags and stuff. I suppose one of us would take him and just assume I was his birth parent. That happened a lot and still happens actually, old ladies would come up and say oh my god he's your double and I'd be like-umh yeah, because people see what they want to see I guess. So I don't think I</p>	20.57-22.08

	had any problems with health services. Sometimes if we've gone to an appointment on our own. Occasionally someone, like a medical person, would make a mistake and say-Who's mum? And I have to say my partner is usually quite quick to say-we're both his mum. And then they'd be like- okay I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But we've not had that a lot. So I've not had any negative experiences."	
22.10	<i>Do you ever think about your future as you age?</i>	
	"I try not to. I'm kind of like I'm Wendy from Peter Pan, eternally youthful in outlook so I don't really think about being old but I would hope that maybe Edwyn would look after us if we get too old."	22.18-22.36
22..38	<i>Do you have any thoughts about the provision of care for elderly queer people?</i>	
	"Of course it must be a concern if we have evidence that there's discrimination and prejudice now for queer people receiving elderly care and I guess it has to be a question. It's not something that I've thought about. I would think about it more society than personally because I try not to think about being old. I would hope that my peers would not be bigoted but you can't guarantee that, so it has to be a concern, it has to be something that we think about I guess. I also worry about what elderly care will there be by the time that we're old because the way the state is being torn up I don't know if there'll be any services left."	22.43-22.50
22.52	<i>Do you have any concerns or hopes for the future in terms of Queer Rights?</i>	
	"I have concerns even about European countries. In Poland in recent years I think this government, they were called The Justice In Law Party that were elected maybe two or three years ago, I think they've maybe been ousted now, but they were banning abortion and they were really right wing and they were establishing queer free zones, areas where they were saying queers shouldn't be here. Queer people in Poland were really living in fear and leaving, it was appalling actually. So the growth in these kind of far right groups in Europe. I think in Britain we're a bit smug oh yeah we've got an equal society but it's not that long ago since we've evolved and become better so we need to not forget that and things can be rolled back really quickly, look at what's happened with the trans people, look at what's happened in Scotland we tried to get self-certification, look at the way people reacted to that. I think that's probably one of the reasons the SNP imploded and if you look around the world here are still loads of countries where queer people can go to jail or be punished or the death penalty can exist. So I think we still need to be fighting for queer rights globally, we need to keep discussing these issues and never get complacent, we can always do better but at the same time we have come a long way. I'm grateful that I'm able to live the life that I can and have the family that I can and to live openly because I think that makes a huge difference to people's quality of life, being able to come out and live openly and your general well-being and quality of life is so much better and so I really fear for people who can't feel that. I studied with a person from Singapore and that's a very conservative society and I spoke to him at length about it, he feels really conflicted about it because he has really close family relations but I just said to him, don't beat yourself up and don't think that you have to come out to your family, because it's not the right time for you but you can still love your family, don't cut yourself off and he was just like thank you so much and I hope that one day he'll be able to do that, but it's just not possible at the moment."	23.58-27.26
27.27	<i>That's all of my questions, have I missed anything or is there anything you would like to add?</i>	
	"No I don't think so."	27.29
27.30	<i>Thank you very much for coming in, giving us your time and sharing your memories with us.</i>	
