

## Interview with Lynn Murphy

Jake *Feldman*: So this is an interview with Lynn Murphy on February 21st 2010 –

*Note from Lynn : I have added in more information in italics, and deleted one or two ill-considered comments.*

J: so, when did you start living in Halifax and how old were you?

Lynn: I came to Halifax in 1968, I was 21. Before that I had lived all my life in P.E.I. and I had taught school for one year and found out it was totally not for me and came to Halifax and got a Job in the *Saint Mary's University* Library here. And my career since then, *except for the two years I spent traveling*, has all been in libraries. And all in Halifax. But now I'm retired. Happily!

J: How did you feel about your orientation when you were in school?

L: ahh. Not a problem whatsoever because I had no thoughts at all of having any, any gay orientation when I was in school. I kind of first *became aware* of gay people around me after I moved to Halifax in the late '60s, and I would say, I'm trying to remember when my first experience was, kind of came out at *a time when* the women's' movement was very *aware of what we then called* "the woman identified woman," and that was not necessarily identified as a lesbian, and not necessarily not. (2:09) I feel that I'm bisexual and my first experiences with women were probably in the early to mid 70s here, in the relatively positive atmosphere of the women's movement at that time. I wouldn't say that I was out to everybody because that would not have been a great idea but it was a relatively positive atmosphere.

J: Because I read some things about in the sort of women's movement of there being conflict between

L: well yes there were, but there wasn't the level of hostility that I think men felt in coming out in a male society. Within the women's movement there might be conflicts but also there was an awareness that umm... lesbians were doing a lot of work and that as a feminist you 'ought' to be somewhat lesbian positive even though, o yeah there were struggles all right

J: and so you said you were, this question is: during which years were you starting to come out and what was that experience like in Halifax

L: Well...yeah...It was again I think it was easier than what a lot of people have experienced because of that surrounding of the women's movement, and getting to know a whole bunch of lesbians ummm at the same time so it's not to have that feeling "I'm the only one in the world, oh no!" which some people

have - have described to me. I have certainly never been out on Prince Edward Island, let me tell you, where I have a large and varied family although word has seeped back to me in more recent years that I do have a gay cousin. But I've never met him. *I used to go to the first women's centre, the one before A Woman's Place - Forrest House, and I became sort of subliminally aware that some of the women around me were lesbians.*

J: and so, do you feel like the women's movement kind of cushioned that

L: Tremendously. Tremendously.

(time: 5:05)

J: and do you think a lot of – like talking to other friends who have been lesbians or who have come out in Halifax- did a lot of people find support from the women's movement?

L: I think so. Yeah. I think there were, you know, women who moved here from smaller communities, as indeed I had done, but not for that reason, but who came from smaller communities who felt a wonderful sense of relief at finding some community here. At finding, you know, just some people to hang out with. And at that time, I'm talking about involvement with the women's movement because I wasn't yet aware of Gay Alliance for Equality, at that point. At that early point.

I should, I feel this is kind of awkward to throw in now but I will anyway: To be clear that aside from one year at the very beginning I've always identified myself as bisexual and this has at times puzzled some people in the community but.. ummm... I continued to be active within the community until GALA folded and to a slight extent I'm active in terms of the Atlantic History and Archives Network which is a very small group of people who are interested in the history and archives of the gay and lesbian community in primarily Halifax but also Nova Scotia. So now. And then. Its time to go back to where we were.

which was that my first, actually my very very first involvement with the Gay Alliance for Equality was: There used to be a bar called The Jury Room. On Argyle Street. And the building is still there and it's still a restaurant whose current name escapes me for the moment [*the Carleton*]. Have you been told the Jury Room story by other people already?

J: no

L: O well then, ok. So the Jury Room, you know how some places would kind of become a hangout. And so the Jury Room gradually had acquired a number of gay customers and the word finally came down from the management: "We don't want these gays in here anymore". And so they did a 'purge' of the customers one weekend and kicked out anybody that they thought was gay. Well. At that time I was dating a young Prof. at St. Mary's. and there came Saturday night and we were going out on a date unspecified and he said "where would you like to go?" and I said "well, I'd like to go down to the Jury Room and join the gay picket". And god love him he was all for it and we went down to the Jury Room and we joined the picket and after the picket everybody who had taken part was invited back to the Turret, which was the gay club at that time, and to go for a drink. And so that was the first time that I had

come in contact with the Gay Alliance for Equality. This is before this coming out in the lesbian community. *Well, obviously, as I was dating a man.*

J: And what made you decide to join the Gay picket at that time

L: Well, ummm, a little previously I had had a massive crush on a young man that I knew at St. Marys and...who turned out to be gay. And we became aware that... the group of his friends kind of, you know, in fear and trembling of what does this mean. And there were a few gay movies coming out at that time. The Boys and the Band was one and Fortune and Men's Eyes was another one [*a Canadian movie*] which was about a umm.. actually it was about a young straight man in prison, but about his experiences being raped and so on and his friendship that he developed with a gay man

(10:35)

anyway... and finding out these horrible things that were happening. [*In those days you might end up in jail for years for smoking dope, which naturally I will not say in so many words ever occurred at St Mary's, a good Catholic university, good heavens! And it seemed that in prison some terrible things might happen to a nice young man from the Drama Society.*] So my stance on the whole gay question was, "They can't do this to Stephen." And that was my political analysis. Ummm. And so having moved on from my wonderful crush on Stephen, but I still felt when the issue came up: "They can't do this to Stephen's friends." And so that's why I wanted to – to go in the picket and also becoming a feminist around that time I thought uhh. Although it was mostly men that were involved in this being kicked out. So, anyway, we went down on the march *which was* right across the street from the Chronicle Herald building which is now being torn down. And about a week later there was a guy called – total media silence on this whole event, right- and there was a writer called Basil something-or-other [*Deacon, I think*] who was perhaps the entertainment writer or something like that who *a week later* put in like 2 lines about it. And I was saying to one of my women friends: "Well, he didn't kill himself with covering the event," and she said "Look, he has probably spent this whole week arguing with management over being allowed to say one word about it so don't put him down." Which was probably true. She had more grasp of reality than I did.

So anyway that was my introduction to the Gay Alliance for Equality.

J: that's interesting

L: and as time went on, and I did form my first lesbian relationship – o my god I was so in love (12:52) – and ummm we were together not very long, maybe 3 or 4 months but I was desperately in love and sort of felt like I was throwing caution to the winds here. But we used to go out dancing and so we would go to the Turret, which was GALA - sorry I say GALA because that what it became later, but G.A.E's club. And then across the street was another dance club in the Green Lantern building umm... sometimes called Condon's because a guy called Condon ran it but I think it had another name as well...ummm.. and so we would go dancing at one or another of these clubs. *The first time we went, I remember having a discussion about how to sign in because on the one hand, what if the membership records were seized, Lord knows why, but we were a little paranoid. But on the other hand we ought to have the courage of*

*our convictions. But then again, men - not here, but in Ontario and elsewhere - had committed suicide after being arrested as "found-ins." Legally it was "found in" a bawdy house, but a bawdy house was whatever the police said it was, including at least once a man's own residence. So I forget whether we signed in with just our first initial and last name, or it might have been our middle name and last name.*

J: Cool. Ummm was there – and this was in the mid 70's because the Green Lantern closed in '77 so

L: sounds good

J: so was there a big enough 'gay and lesbian community' to support more than one establishment?

L: well, probably not in a way because I mean, Condons closed, so, probably there was only enough support to keep one place running. – but for a while there were two.

J: Ok.

L: umm... yeah...I'm trying to remember back if one was more women positive than the other and I think possibly the Turret was a little more women-positive than Condon's, but that's not to say that Condon's was negative, but just the people *in* G.A.E. already had a bit more political analysis- maybe not the everyday people who would just come to dance, but it was run by, you know, membership and executive and all these people were elected and so on.

J: were there any sort-of lesbian hang outs in the 70's or 80s outside of the Turret? That you know of?

L: not exactly. Now there were lesbian dances that were run once a month. And there was – at the time that I used to go to them – there was a man called *Sekai* who was a dancer and *Sekai had* a nice sort of apartment and studio which was quite large because I think he taught dance as well and so umm..he would clear out for the night and leave his space to us to have dances. But it wasn't a hang out because you couldn't go there only on dance nights because it was *Sekai's* living and working space.

J: cool. So where – this is sort of a follow up- but where would you spend time with other lesbians bisexuals and/or gay men?

L: well, with other lesbians a lot of it was you'd go to people's houses. (16:55) you know and there might be 6 or 8 women. And you'd go and have a meal or a potluck or sometimes somebody would just put a meal on and there was so many political activities going on you were at meetings all the time (laughter)

J: Were a lot of your friends political – Politically active?

L: yep. You see because the lesbians that I had met, I had met through the feminist community and so that's the ones I knew, were the political ones.

And ummm I guess getting to know gay men probably I got to know gay men mostly through G.A.E.

J: so gay men mostly through G.A.E. and then lesbians mostly through the women's movement

L: but to an extent through the dances, but more through the women's movement. Because you know you go dancing and the music would be so loud that you'd be introduced to the future love of your life and you'd say 'what's your name again?'

J: ok. Cool. Were your closest friends in the 70s, and 80s often gay, bisexual or lesbian?

L: yep. Still are.

J: still are.

L: ummm... yep. In fact. Umm.. my closest friends now are three couples: one gay male couple, and one lesbian couple and one straight couple. And the gay male couple I met the first man in a drama workshop way back in PEI in 1967 and umm we went out on a few dates before he discovered where he was going and.. the female couple I met one of them at ..through a party at my then lover's house – had we broken up before then? – but anyway I met this woman at *that* house at a party [*maybe around 1978*] and then met her now-partner through her, and the third couple, ummm remember that nice Prof. at St. Mary's? Well he and his wife (laughter), so they go waaaaay back

J: yea, that's great ok. So now im going to get into the historical stuff. So what was your involvement in gay or lesbian activism in the 70s, 80s and 90s?

L: well, the first thing was the most exciting activity to me in G.A.E was the civil rights committee. And I started going to the civil rights committee and Robin [*Metcalfe*] will remember all of this because I think he was the chair of it when I started going and ummm... so we would go and have discussions and blah blah and then every so often we would put on an event for the community to come to and we'd you know, contact somebody to be a speaker on some interesting topic and advertise it through the GAE newsletter which changed its name fairly rapidly in those days. Ummm.. now a couple that I can remember. There was a lot of negativity within the lesbian community towards drag. And one of the events that we put together was a workshop on drag, and we had ummm a man, a fairly young man called Randy who did drag and who was a little more politically oriented than a lot of the drag guys *who* were just you know there for performance night, but Randy had a little more, kind of analysis of it. and then there was a [*straight*] woman called Lulu Keating who may still be around or may not. And Lulu had put together a theatrical piece in which.... Lulu has a very deep voice and so she's very often been taken for a man. *And she had long wild curly red hair, and she put together this hilarious theatrical piece about being taken for a man and she did it dressed in a nude man-suit with the penis and balls dangling down* (laughter) and so they came to the Turret and they gave a talk about their umm.. perceptions of drag and so that was one of them. *Lulu's final line was, she's at a party, right, and this drunk has been obviously fascinated by her but can't quite figure her out. So at the end he comes up to her and says, "I know who you are now. You're a man, pretending to be a woman, who's pretending to be a man!"*

J: cool

L: we had another one on prostitution and umm... we always had more than one speaker. But one of them was a lesbian prostitute who was – talked about the prejudice she felt towards her within the lesbian community. She said “you have parties, you never think to call me to come to your parties,” which was perfectly true.

J: because she was a prostitute?

L: yeah. *Well, that was her perception, and there was probably a lot of truth in it.* So those are two that come to mind. I might think of some others as time goes on but ... *The first one I ever went to I think was on censorship. It was at the time of one of the many attacks on the Body Politic, a gay newspaper in Toronto, which always won in court but in the end was driven out of existence by legal bills, and I suppose by the exhaustion of the publishing collective. I miss the Body Politic to this day.*

J: and so you said that you kind of started to get involved in GAE....

L: so to the civil rights committee and I was asked to come on some kind of committee for Bryony House which was just new at that time. I was very keen on the work of Bryony House and I said "Well, I have to wait because I'm running for a position with the Gay Alliance for Equality and if I get that I won't have time to do both" so... and you actually ran and you.. and the members elected the chairs of these committees. And I got elected.

J: Out of the civil rights one

L: out of the civil rights committee. *[There was also a Speakers' Bureau, and if an organization wanted to have someone come and speak about gay rights or just about being gay or lesbian, you would do that. We used to go to Dalhousie Health Sciences every fall. Probably four or five of us, so we would present like a panel and then each one would go as resource person to a smaller discussion group.]* So I was with them *[the Civil Rights Committee]* for a couple of years and then after quite a while there was the management board because there was kind of two sides to the Gay Alliance for Equality there was the political side which was really the central part of it was the civil rights committee or so it seemed to me and the other side was managing the club and you would go to meetings and we had meetings every two weeks of the Gay Alliance for Equality and umm...all the time would be taken up with detailed stuff about the management of the club and the managers of the club at that time were elected. And people would run to be the manager of the club rather than hiring a manager. They were paid, but they were elected. Uhhh.

(25: 50)

Phone call by accident (25:50- 27:10)

L: so where were we, so the other thing was managing the club, you're always talking about details of management and so eventually there was a management board was formed and I don't know when that started to be, we didn't have it when I first joined in. umm which was to take off some of that daily-ness of club management and those were the two sides. You were trying to do civil rights work and respond to issues and write letters and go on protests or whatever, and then there was the Gayline so that was maintained and counseling for people coming out among other things and then there was the early incarnations of Wayves and then there was the bar. And as time went on the bar the bar the bar took on more and more and more and more *[time and effort]* and it distracted from doing any political work because we also saw the bar as political because we were maintaining a safe space for people to come to and meet each other and that it would be social but they would also get to know the other things that were going on and could perhaps become.. ummm.. involved in some other activities if they wanted to like, like the Gayline or....

J: yea, and like cuz I was reading that there that the Turret was the only gay and lesbian hangout for like 15 years basically

L: well they left out Condon's haven't they?

J: well from about 77 'til about 95 or

L: oooo no I don't think so. O boy. Ummm not at all. Ummm.... Let me pull my thoughts together there was a bar down in the umm... the place where the farmers market now is *[the Brewery Market]* and that was called 'Zhivagos' and they were open for a while and there was a bar in the space where Chives now is and they were called the Studio. And before it became the Studio which was very much identified as a gay bar but it had been one of the gay positive hangouts before it became an actual gay bar. And... now there was a restaurant with a German name..... just off Spring Garden Road and they were a hangout but after a while they didn't like to be a hangout anymore and they made people stop dancing together. So yea... there were a lot of other places but many of them kind of short lived, its true, because, again, you couldn't make a living with a second gay bar in Halifax. Not really.

J: which is interesting right, which is probably why the Turret was so important in a way

L: yep. Cuz the Turret would kind of struggle through while those places closed down. Yeah...

(31:30)

J: ummm... and ok yeah right. So here's where I bring up Radclyffe Hall

L: ok. Radclyffe Hall.. soooo besides the bar, over /o those many years there was also a meeting room that was rented. And there was a place down on Barrington Street. And then there was a place on ...was it the street where *Pete's* is now? – it might be, and they were just rented for the purpose of having meetings and of hosting the Gayline and I suppose the executive would go in and work on stuff from time to time. I certainly don't remember the civil rights committee going in but I suppose we could have

if we'd ever thought of it. so.

J: so how did it start?

L: o I don't know. We had it from already when I first joined. Ummm. And so for some reason we had to leave the one that we were in and we discovered how hard it was to rent another place because once they found out who we were, they said "well we don't want the likes of you". [*The last one we were at, they were willing to rent to us as long as we didn't put up any sign at the front of the building to show that here were the offices of the Gay Alliance for Equality.*] And so we started to think "wouldn't it be nice to have our own place? And a place where we could do the more political type stuff : that we could have the G.A.E. meetings; that we could have the Gayline; we could host little workshops; and have small socials that weren't involving liquor and dancing. And so eventually the idea was that we would love to have this combined with a bar that we would do all, everything together but we thought the first step was to get together some money. So umm... we ... you paid a membership to G.A.E. at that time. Which was the club membership but also the organizational membership. And so we said we would take all the membership money, we'd put it in a separate bank account and at some point down the road we would actually buy a place. *Of course this was all voted on and approved by the membership, by which I mean the people who came to meetings.* And we did that for a number of years. And eventually we bought Radclyffe Hall, *named for the British author of the much-censored lesbian classic The Well of Loneliness.* Which was up in the north end on..... Macara Street. And so. We rented out the upstairs to some gay-friendly people. Some of them were gay some of them weren't I guess. And the downstairs we had for our meeting place. And it was a good centre for the more political work and at one time we had a little summertime grant, and we had a young man and a young women hired to do youth outreach because it was identified as one of the big problems: you're coming out, you're terrified because you don't know what you're coming out to. You ummm...have no information to pass on to your more positive type straight friends. And umm.. older gay people are kind of leery of getting involved with you because of age of consent laws. And so. And the main umm... social activity of the community was going to the bars which you couldn't get into because you were too young and so we hired these people and they worked out of Radclyffe Hall, *which was an alcohol-free space*, for a few months and they developed some brochures and I don't know what else they did. I don't know that they went in schools : they were happy to go into schools, but they didn't get invited too much.

J: what uhh... what's happened to the house right now?

L: well, then when we had been renting bar spaces and then eventually when we bought the Gottingen Street Rumours and we owned that, well we sold Radclyffe Hall to put towards the down payment. Ummm. And you know that building was quite big and we had space to umm... have meetings and stuff as well. It's – it was a shame because if we could have kept *Radclyffe Hall* it might have still been around, but anyway we – it was the only way we could afford to buy the bar so.

J: and were people pretty much on consensus for doing that?

L: to sell the house towards buying a club? O yeah. People were keen on that. Not necessarily keen on



Gottingen Street. They grew to love it

J: and now its Palooka's which I box at

L: o do you? Ooo. After we're off you'll have to tell me more. I'd love to go in and see what it looks like. Now that it's been properly fixed up.

J: umm.. so what would you consider to be some important events in the History of Gay and Lesbian activism in Halifax?

L: well... I mean the formation of the Gay Alliance for Equality was definitely very important. There was a women's organization called APPLE and that was very important. Ummm... there was a national conference. National Lesbian and Gay Rights...

J: The one in '78.. or something?

L: yeah... that was very important. Ummm... and that was in a way the first Pride March. Almost. Although it wasn't called the Pride March and it wasn't continuous with the local pride marches.

J: what was that like what do you mean sort-of the first pride march?

L: well, I call it sort-of the first pride march because it was really a march of the conference participants and it wasn't a locally organized event and I don't know if it was even called the pride march. I feel it as though it was.. umm.. *maybe an inspiration for the Pride Committee. I don't remember a whole lot about that march, although I was on it, because my lesbian true love broke up with me the night before the march, and the rest of the weekend I recall mostly through a veil of tears. There may be elements of self-pity in there, not to mention rum.* A lot of things happened within the or...under the roof of GAE or GALA which were kind of the seeds of something else. So there were all these itty bitty newsletters and although GALA is dead, *Wayves* continues as a gay newspaper. There was umm..the Pride Week Committee began very small and looked on GALA as its.. its funding supporter, but it continues now without GALA and is much bigger and wider and so forth. There was an itty bitty committee called the Gay Health Association which was the germ of umm... AIDS Nova Scotia and the locally named MacAIDS – these people from Ontario come down they said “You guys are carrying this Celtic thing too far – MacAIDS for god's sake!” – but it was the Metro Area Committee on AIDS. *Actually, I'm not too sure about AIDS Nova Scotia : that maybe had a different origin.* And so there were a lot of things that grew out of GALA that continued even after GALA folded. *Other important early events would be* - Christians would say the founding of the Metropolitan Community Church local congregation in Halifax and I suppose if they are within a denomination that is friendly to the cause they would cite the foundation of their own committees like in the ummm... in the United Church and a lot of work was done on that. We're not supposed to mention anyone who is in Alcoholics Anonymous but in fact there was a period where there was leadership come out of.. there was a gay AA group and there was leadership in various ways come out of that group, there was a number of very, very good people who contributed to the community as a whole. And then. What have we got. We have got, of course, the famous, and infamous,

shirtlessness....

J: any protest in particular?

L: a picket on the CBC which refused to take public service announcements for gay and lesbian events. And that – now Robin will tell you more about that because he was really umm.. very much involved in . there was a boycott which went on for years of all the university presses in Canada, boycotted the CBC because of that policy. And at considerable cost to themselves because the CBC had been an advertiser in the university press and that was, that boycott began here with the *Dalhousie Gazette*. There was the Shelburne women. Every so often the military would have a little purge. And there was no 'don't ask don't tell' *in Canada*. They would decide to have a purge and ...so they kicked out the Shelburne women, I forget how many of them there were, but 5 or 6 and the *Military Police* would get you into a little room and they would interrogate you and who your friends were - *guilt by association* - and so on. Umm...

J: can I ask a question?

L: yeah

J: umm was there – cuz I know there was some protests organized about that- and was there a lot of male support?

L: o absolutely. O , no question. There was some military thing which was hosted here....

(45:00)

L: and there were women who *protested* that and who were arrested. And but I can't remember the details... it might come back to me *Anyway, by then we were out of the Turret and into the first Rumourrs, and we held a benefit to help them with their legal costs.*

J: and umm.. uhh... were there any other sort of major protests, or was it a lot of letter writing, because you, you were on the civil rights committee

L: yea... ummm there were a number of other things but I cannot... they might come back to me as we go along, because something else is in the back of my head that this umm.... That was major. And then there was ongoing trying to get umm.. human rights legislation in Nova Scotia and in Canada so there was always petitions about that and workshops about it and ummm... doing up a little brochure about it and making sure that it appeared on the desk of every MLA on the first... on the first day that the legislature sat, and we would umm... send them questionnaires before an election say "so where do you stand on this?" The NDP would answer and nobody else for a while but the odd time you'd get somebody else would answer.

J: yea...I got one question... I was going through the time line there. And it said in '82 there was this thing

called café sit-in... do you know what that is?

L: Café sit-in?

J: there was like a café sit-in, where people sat-in?

L: well I can remember a place.

J: ok.. that's fine I was just

L: yeah...I can remember going on a – there's a word missing –what café? Yea... cuz I do remember going on a sit-in at a café... but not a café I don't think; it was a pub so I don't think this can be the same thing

J: hmm... ok. Cool. Ummm... so I was reading that there was this women's issues committee in GALA.

L: Yes that was later. Ummm...and it's not something that I was active *in* so I can't really tell you much about it. There was a women's issues committee and a men's issues committee for a while.

J: and what was the transition of the Gay Alliance for Equality to like.. Gays and Lesbians.. like...GAE to GALA

L: well, just after a while somebody said – see I had always felt that gay was a kind of inclusive word umm... but not everybody felt that way and... it had come up two or three times... “maybe we should say gay and lesbian” and after a couple of years... It wasn't you know, really contentious but, it would come up: “maybe we should change the name” and eventually one meeting it came up again and we voted to change the name

J: o so it was pretty simple

L: yeah. I don't think there's a lot of negative feelings over it, it was kind of a feeling of, you know in other places this had been done and this is probably ... ok time to do it

J: and umm.. did people start saying GALA?

L: yep. Right away

J: right away. That's great

L: cuz it was ... it kind of worked better than saying 'G' 'A' 'E' – it kind of flowed

J: and you mentioned APPLE, earlier. Were you involved with it in any way?

L: no. I went to one meeting. They were the Atlantic Provinces Political Lesbians for Equality. And then after a while they decided that equality was too lowly a goal. And so they became the Atlantic Provinces Political Lesbians for Example. But then they folded.

J: and you went to one meeting

L: I went to one meeting

J: and what'd you think?

L: well, it really- the meeting was called because they were kind of – I think – coming to an end and they were just kind of testing the waters,"If we brought in a whole bunch of new people. Umm... would that be a good idea and revitalize us? Or maybe we should just fold." And that's what happened. Was they folded.

J: ok. Ummm

L: umm there's a woman called Debbie [T] who was very involved in that. Do you, do you know Debbie?

J:I've read her name in the archives

L: ok. I have, someplace, possibly in my purse, her e-mail. So you could e-mail her.

J: that'd be great.

L: and she was an early chair of GALA

J: umm

L: I'm telling you, you could make, you could do so many interviews

J: I know. Maybe I want to do – I want to continue with this even when my thesis is done.

L: yea, you know that, that would be really good cuz that's what the community needs is somebody who will continue – because in a way the work that was done, you know, the political work, like there's- there's legal equality now, more or less, with a few issues remaining to to be [unknotted?], there's a lot more social acceptance. O by far! Even in smaller places, than there was in the beginning, and the time will come, not that far down the road, when young people will say "well I don't know what all that was about, things have always been pretty good" – yeah buddy, they've been pretty good *for you* because earlier people fought to make them pretty good. People will forget. You know and it's important umm... to have that history written while there are people who still remember.

J:Yea, for sure. Umm... so... can you think of some moment where you felt angry towards gay men within

a political context?

L: shirtlessness

J: the shirtless wars. Ok so why don't we talk about the shirtless wars

L: how it started... I don't remember... maybe it was just a hot night in the club... and a lot of men took off their tops. And there had always been a kind of rough agreement on a dress code which was everybody wore their tops, because we knew that women couldn't take their tops off because if they did then the government would get involved and call it public indecency – we didn't agree with that, but however, they very likely would and the bar could lose its licence and of course the saving of the bar was always a big deal.

and so, then some of the men start saying “well, just because the women can't take off their shirts, why does that mean that we can't take off our shirts?” umm... “we should be free!”. And the women said “well, if we can't, why should you use” ok it wasn't in this many words – “why should you use male privilege to do something that we can't do?” and then somebody wrote a letter to GALA about the men taking their shirts off and their “hot sweaty bodies”. Well my god then the sweat hit the fan and it was an unfortunate letter to have written. Understandable, that's how she felt, but keep it to yourself or to your friends...because the men just went up in smoke, well, a number of men went up in smoke and *[name deleted]* was one of them and I among a number of other women had HUGE respect for *[name deleted]* as being a feminist as well as a gay activist. And umm... *some of us* really felt.... betrayed that he was not with us on this issue. There were plenty of other men who were saying the same thing but of them we expected nothing else.. you know ....because... we knew that they weren't feminists. Uhh... or not very strong feminists anyways. So.. this was a big, big deal and there was a brochure written, *Our hot sweaty bodies*, and there was letters back and forth *in Wayves* and there uh... it was it was wicked... and so and I mean I.. and this probably if I take anything out of this I probably *should* take out *[the name of a specific person]* because why keep it going on in the generations future, but this was umm, this was a really tough situation and then get into the management of the club and the manager at the time was a female. There was just a lot of bad feeling and the chair of GALA at the time *[who was a woman, will remember more of the details]* and there was – and I can't remember then there was an election a GALA election. And the men put up a slate of candidates, which on election night they all withdrew! .... So it was very divisive ... ummm because ... by putting up this slate of candidates and .. it became a kind of almost the men against the women although I think there was a man on the other slate, *and not all the men were strong on shirtlessness*, but anyway.. the men against the women... and then push comes to *shove*, they weren't willing to actually be elected and do the work. So. Yeah... so that was like the end. The end of GALA.

J: now I know that

L: I over simplify there because its hard to remember the things that happened in... there was just the whole final year was... very harsh, very difficult

J: now I know in like... a lot of sort of major cities like Toronto, or Vancouver or Montreal there would be a lot of umm..gay men who would fight for things like the age of consent laws... the ability to have sex in public places... and sort of those sexual liberationist kind of things... like taking shirts off ..you know what I mean and...

I: (laughter) taking shirts off seems so minor. *[It was very difficult to decide which side to support, and maybe I chose the wrong side. From a liberation point of view, I think the shirtless activists would have been right if they supported the idea that both men and women should be able to take their shirts off, but I don't know how many did support that. We had this fear, which was probably well-founded, that the Liquor Licensing Board would yank the licence. So some of us wanted to protect the club at the expense of liberation. In the end, we lost the club anyway, so we might as well have stood up for shirtlessness as a liberation issue and gone out in a blaze of political glory. Would the men have supported the women through toplessness once the liquor inspectors moved in? I don't know. A few women did show up at the club and take their tops off, but most of the women didn't care about being topless, they just cared about being equal. This is unfair of me to insert my long simmered personal opinion here, isn't it? But here it is.]*

J: taking shirts – yea, but they would fight for these things and then... so there would be protests where men would like.. have these ‘no age of consent laws’ signs at protests that would maybe be and none of that happened here.

L: It's a very conservative place Halifax really. I don't think anybody was too ready to fight for "no age of consent" laws... and sex in public places ummm..

J: But maybe that helped to unify men and women

L: yes. In a way some of those more contentious things were never umm... were never brought up... like we would never have umm... GALA would never have fought in favour of ‘sex in public places’ on the other hand we might have gone out uh-h-h, and protested if there had been a major roust of guys from the Hill *[Citadel Hill, Halifax's foremost cruising site]* and the jail full of young guys arrested on a summer night, but that didn't happen. So but you know it might have brought us all out seen as an individual event rather than as a sex in public places *issue*.

J: cuz I was just thinking that maybe that

L: yep. Yep. Absolutely

J: and the shirtless wars was this thing that like..broke it..but that's so in line with that sort of sexual liberation

L: yep. Because there - there were a lot of women who were not exactly...umm... the feminist movement was not always strong for sexual liberation. That's an odd thing to say, but there were a lot of women

who saw the sexual liberation fight as yet another way that men would ... take advantage of women and so they were kind of lukewarm. Try and get umm... a fight against censorship going and you would see a lot of feminists kind of sliding out of the room figuratively speaking because if censorship was going to *happen*, it would be mostly censorship of things that a lot of feminists found pretty unpleasant. You know, hardcore porn and the like so. Yea...but umm... but in the days of the civil rights committee we mostly fought the good fight against censorship.

J: and so, the shirtless wars kind of happened and there was a lot of kind of in-fighting in GALA and... GALA folded and then the Turret folded...?

L: ok, now the Turret was

J: I mean sorry, Rumours. Yea.

L: Rumours folded. When GALA folded. GALA was the owner of Rumours. There was.... And Rumours wasn't making very much money anyway. There was never great management at Rumours... I can't say.. not really... so the organization was pretty poor anyway. *If there were any former managers in this room, they would probably say that politics interfered with their ability to make the bar profitable.* And umm.. the prospect of if we took up the fight for women to go shirtless too, we would end up paying for lawyers up the ying-yang and we'd go broke. And we were going broke anyway. And *once* GALA ceased to be, then Rumours ceased to be because, when all was said and done it was a sort of project even a committee of GALA so it.... ceased to be. And so things were held in... *the last chair of GALA* could tell you more than I could but.. even things were held together long enough so that the staff could *get* separation pay and stuff like that. But the creditors kind of swooped in.. as they were completely entitled to do of course...

J: and.. after that happened. Did you feel like there was still.. like.. as a Gay and Lesbian community, where was it at at that point?

L: well, umm.. at that point, who I was, was the chair of the Pride Week Committee and I was terrified because if there was no GALA how could there be a Pride week, but I said " We have to have a Pride Week anyway even if it's absolutely tiny". So. We went out and we we...developed a Pride Week schedule [*a brochure*] and we sold ads for it. We went around to businesses..blah blah blah.. and got umm...and got money. And the – now *am I right?*- the Studio bar was still open at that point so we asked them if they would host, you know, the post march reception and uhh. You know we went in very humbly as if they would be doing us a favour and they *maybe said deep in their thoughts, you know,* "Two hundred people are going to come in here on a quiet afternoon and going to want to drink?! Gee, we'll try to be friendly to them." So .. and.. in the process we discovered that we were not dependant on GALA *for Pride Week* but really, in a way GALA had been dependant on us cuz we used to take those 200 people and march them into Rumours. And uhh and of course we'd have food and stuff but really Rumours had made money off of it and there'd always be events, events, events, events and some of them would be workshops which only had 8 or 10 people, but some of them would be like..there'd usually be a drag show and that would be packed to the rafters and umm... so really, the Pride

Committee had been supporting Rumours *during Pride Week* rather than the other way around. So anyway...so we put together some workshops and we put together some events and we had a little Pride Week and it made a little bit of money, we had like 3 or 4 hundred dollars to start the next Pride Week, we sold buttons- we always sold buttons.

(106:00)

and umm... gee and so the next year some other people organized the Pride Week but I can tell you there was some – there was some bad stuff. Ummm there was a man whom I shall not name but who had been very active and who had been considered a pretty good fellow politically so anyway well, I had asked him to come and meet me at the Studio umm.. and we would talk about some stuff about Pride Week and just by chance [*the final chair of GALA*] came by and sat down with me and we start talking. This man came in, saw us sitting down, walked right past us, and out in a circle. Didn't even speak to me. The woman who he had the appointment with - me. I'm telling you that was, that was dirty. And there were people who felt like that – there was a lot of negativity

J: because [*the final chair of GALA*] was sitting with you

L: yes. There's a lot of negativity towards *her*, cuz she had been the last chair of GALA and among – I think primarily among some men but maybe among the women too. Umm... but to give credit where credit is due, I can tell you who conducted themselves very positively were the leathermen. And the leathermen one and all, had been in favour of shirtlessness, they did not support *the chair of GALA*, and umm.. they were 'the other side' or part of 'the other side' but when it came to that Pride Week, they [*almost*] all came in, they did their regular thing, they usually provided some of the marshals for the pride parade, and they, you know, took part in Pride Week and they absolutely continued that support. I was, I was very moved by that in a way, because they, I had not expected it.

J: that's really great

L: yep.

J: umm... so I guess maybe I have one more question and then its just if there's anything you want to add. Or do you want to talk more about what you just said

L: no let, let go on to another question

J: ok. I guess the other question is..umm.. did you experience any gay or lesbian communities outside of Nova Scotia.. and how did they compare to your experience here?

L: ummm.. the only, only experience I had was at some point along the road here I went to Boston. Ummm early early on in my involvement with GALA. And I thought well, I'll go, I'll go to a lesbian bar. Quiet sunny afternoon and I had the address and I went into this bar and sat down and ordered a beer,



yeah. I look around. Well, these were biker chick *lesbians* lemme tell you. Holy Hannah. I had never seen that style of lesbian in Halifax. *There were not many old-fashioned butches on bikes on Barrington Street.* I hunkered down, drank my beer quickly and left. And you know, every so often you would get somebody who would, who'd come to Rumours and after they'd left they'd write a, a letter for *Wayves* or its various predecessors and write how unfriendly everybody was in Halifax, and how nobody came to talk to them. And we would mutter to each other "Well, what happened? Don't they have a tongue? Could have come to talk to us. We didn't know they were strangers". But that's how I was. Boy, I was too scared to talk to anybody, in case I'd be kidnapped into the Hell's Angelettes. No no they wouldn't have been called the Hell's Angelettes, good god forbid, but ....

J: ok, so you mostly lived here.

L: so this is it my experience is very very narrow, it's 'Halifax'.

J: that's great. Ok so is there anything else you wanna add or anything that I missed.

L: yep, I should say a few words about Arthur... umm.. Arthur and I lived together for close...well.. close to 20 years anyway, caused a degree of speculation in the community – we eventually married. And Arthur was also very active uhh, he was on the Civil Rights Committee, he chaired the umm... the Management Board, and he chaired GALA for a while. And umm.. and he was a strong worker for, for the cause. And should not be forgotten.

J: ok. And did he identify as straight? Like a straight ally?

L: yeah, I think so. *Well, he left it up in the air for people to make their own judgements, I suppose.*  
(1:12:37)

J: and how did people, like, receive that in the community, like

L: they were puzzled. But I mean these were umm... elective offices, you know. And puzzled or not they elected him

J: were there a lot of other straight allies in the movement?

L: ummm.... There were some. There were some people for instance who had gay and lesbian members of their family umm...there was a woman who had – had a gay roommate at one point and he started bringing her to the club and she umm... was certainly a member of GALA. I don't - she used to attend events, I don't think she was ever on any committees or anything. So there were a few. There was and perhaps still is a PFLAG group.

J: there is

L: at the later end and so they were umm... they were the kind of people that were not really active in

GALA, in the sense of coming to GALA meetings and so on, but they would come to events. So.

J: ok. Great. So, wrapping up?

L: guess we are. We could talk about... yea. Lets wrap up and then I might think of some other things and say "ooo we should have talked about blah blah blah" and we can do a little supplementary

J: sounds perfect, ok thank you.

L: thank you.

*This has all brought up so many memories. It is really a personal memoir, if even that : I could go on and on about the Pride Weeks and the workshops we had : Gay/Lesbian Marriage (but in the end it was really a workshop on gay/lesbian weddings - before they became legal); Abuse in Lesbian Relationships (that was never spoken of before!); Alcohol abuse in the gay/lesbian community; Options in becoming a Lesbian Mother; Religion and Gays/Lesbians (a panel, of course: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Buddhist); Why you need a Will. What we should have done, and I don't remember that we ever did, was a workshop on racism. Early Pride Weeks were more information and demonstration, not like now when the theme is mostly Celebration.*

*We also brought in writers : playwright Kent Stetson, who wrote Warm Wind in China; mystery writer Edward Philips, fantasy author Tanya Huff; Iroquois author Beth Brant.*

*Lots was happening outside GAE/GALA, too :*

*\* Pandora, a feminist newspaper with lots of lesbian participation : they were taken before the Human Rights Commission for refusing to accept writings by men.*

*\* AIDS organizations, which had their own struggles over gay visibility.*

*\* small gay/lesbian organizations in Sydney, Moncton, Wolfville, etc*

*\* lesbian brunches monthly, sometimes in a coffee shop and sometimes in a home*

*\* a gay caucus within the NDP*

*\* an ad hoc group of women that brought Holly Near to Halifax (most of whom were - you guessed it!)*

*\* a gay/lesbian film festival*

*\* the Wilde Bunch (Oscar, of course)*

*\* Over Thirties Group*

*Well, there was more and more and more....*