

Pussy Palace Oral History Project
Oral History Interview with Chloë Brushwood Rose
Conducted on May 25, 2021 via Zoom
Interviewed by Alisha Stranges and Elio Colavito on behalf of the
LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory (Elspeth Brown, Director)
Transcribed by Rev.com and Elio Colavito

Summary: Chloë Brushwood Rose is a 48-year-old, white, queer femme. At the time of the interview, Brushwood Rose was in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, working as a professor at York University and as a part-time child and adolescent psychotherapist while raising two children in Toronto, Ontario. The interview concerns her experiences as a volunteer photographer at the Pussy Palace on September 14, 2000. She discusses both the practical and the emotional nuances of her interactions with patrons during a typical shift, the significance of Polaroid photography as the medium of choice, her sense memories of the physical space that the “pornography photo room” occupied, her recollections of attending the post-raid protest at 52 Division, her involvement in the creation of promotional materials for the Pussy Palace, and other topics. In the interview, Toronto Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia are mentioned. The date range discussed spans from 1998-2003, with a focus on Toronto in the late 90s.

Keywords: LGBTQ; Photography; Polaroid; Pornography; Police; Marketing; Art; Queer; Femme.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:00:00):

...on waves, so.

Elio Colavito (00:00:01):

Well, then it is working.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:00:05):

Awesome. All right.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:06):

All right, Chloë. So, I just have a little spiel off the top here, and I'll say it now. Here we go. So, this is Alisha Stranges and Elio Colavito from the Pussy Palace Oral History Project. And we're here in Toronto, Ontario, interviewing Chloë Brushwood Rose. Chloë is also in Toronto, is that right?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:00:30):

Yes.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:31):

And is going to tell us about the experience of being a patron volunteer of the Pussy Palace Bathhouse event on the night of September 14, 2000. Chloë, do we have your permission to record this oral history interview?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:00:47):

Yes.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:48):

Perfect. So, before we're going to get into your experience with the Pussy Palace, I'm just going to ask a couple of questions to get you to tell us a little bit about yourself. In particular, we're trying to get a sense of the different aspects of identity you hold, categories you occupy, and how at least some of these may have shifted or evolved over time. So, to start simply, can you tell us your full name, your age, and your preferred gender pronouns?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:01:18):

Yes. So, my full name is Chloë Brushwood Rose. My preferred pronouns are she/her. And my age; I am 48. I turn 49 in a month.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:29):

And how would you describe your gender and sexual identity today, in 2021?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:01:35):

I would say I'm a... Queer femme, would be my shorthand, yeah. And that hasn't really changed. That was how I identified in 2000 as well. I mean, the words don't change, but that doesn't mean the experience doesn't change. But yes, I would probably use the same words I did back then.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:57):

Can you say a little bit more about that, about how the words don't change, but how the experience might?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:02:04):

Yeah. I think that... Well, in terms of gender, I would say more than sexuality, that there's a pretty profound... Like, aging has a really profound effect on one's experience of gender. I also, since 2000, I've had two children who I actually carried physically in my body, so that also changes your relationship to my gender in some really positive ways and also some not so positive ways because once you participate in those kinds of practices, you also get called into more hegemonic modes of a gender experience. So, there's a way that being a mother, for example, is both this really interesting experience as a queer person and as a femme, and also this very normative experience at times.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:03:00):

I think I'm more invisible as a femme, and as a queer femme, than I was as a younger person, and that's something that lots of my friends, we're the same age, we talk about this. I don't feel like I get read as queer and femme. I mean, my partner always argues with me about that, but I don't feel like I get seen or read... That I'm visible in the same way. So, that changes because, of course, gender and sexuality are completely relational in my opinion. They're about being in relation. They're not just these things that are essential that you carry around with you, they're about practices of connection. So, it's weird to not be seen or to be seen differently.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:03:45):

I think my sexuality and gender have actually stayed quite consistent in terms of how I eroticize myself or how I objectify myself, those kinds of things. Like display, gender display. My hair is weirdly long right now because of the pandemic. I usually have very short hair, so that's weird, that's like a whole new gender

experience. So, I was never a femme with long hair, so it's weird to be a femme with long hair now. So yeah, those things mutate, but I think that there is some constancy for me in those categories too. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:04:23):

I just had one final follow-up question here. I'm curious about what you said about not being read. Are you saying that that's connected to something like age, or motherhood, or something else?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:04:41):

Yeah, I think it's mostly about age to be honest, and I think a lot of female identified folks have talked about this for a long time, like the way that women become invisible, or feminine, female identified people become invisible as they reach middle age. There's this way that that's an effect of the patriarchy. Like it's just kind of a... And yeah. And I think it's interesting, I feel like there's a thing with queerness too where youth is really valorized in queer communities. It's idealized. It always has been, I mean, club culture and all that stuff. And so, in a way, it happens in both spheres, like in the world where I might be misread as straight, I'm invisible because I'm middle-aged. And in the queer world where I'm probably not read as straight, I'm becoming invisible because I'm also middle-aged. Because queerness is about young people. So, I do think it's about age.

Alisha Stranges (00:05:38):

Right.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:05:38):

Yeah. But that's also only one side because I also think there are lots of people are very attracted to older... So, I think it's a mixture. It's not all one way for sure.

Alisha Stranges (00:05:50):

Yeah. Thank you for expanding. I'm going to shift gears here and ask you about racial, ethnic, cultural identity, how you express yourself through those types of categories.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:06:01):

So, I identify as a white woman of European descent, very disconnected from any cultural or ethnic ancestry. But yeah, my relationship to my own race is very simple. I'm definitely white, white privileged, live with white privilege. That's my experience of my own racialization.

Alisha Stranges (00:06:26):

And what can you tell us about your class and educational background?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:06:32):

So, that's shifted. So, as a kid, I grew up in a very low-income household, but highly educated household. So, we often didn't have food, but we had a lot of cultural capital. So, my parents, they were creative people, cultural producers, so people who had a lot of intellectual in cultural capital could move through the world with that ease, but we didn't really have any economic resources, and we moved around a lot. We didn't have a lot of stability, so we were really precariously housed and so on. So, my relationship with social class is complicated. And in 2000, I was a grad student. I was making very little money, living a typical... But again, I

had a lot of cultural capital because I was a grad student, and I had a lot of privilege because of that. And now I'm definitely more middle-class. I mean, I'm highly educated in this sort of traditional sense, and I am a professional. And so, I would say I'm better off than my parents for sure. So, definitely have experienced some class upward mobility.

Alisha Stranges (00:07:47):

I see, I see.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:07:49):

Yeah, yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:07:50):

And can you expand a little bit more on the activities that occupy your time these days professionally?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:07:57):

Yeah. So, I'm a prof, so I teach and do research, although the research is up and down. I try to write; I have a consistent writing practice. And I also work, I trained about six years ago as a child and adolescent psychotherapist, so I also have a part-time psychotherapy practice with kids and adolescents, and that takes actually a lot of my time. And then I still have two kids at home, so I'm a parent. For fun, I quilt. I love baking and cooking. Like I am a Cancer, okay, I'm a cancer. So, just imagine all the Cancer things, that's just... The domestic arts are my preferred sphere of pleasure, so yeah. And I love going out in nature. I just got a canoe. I bought myself a canoe this year. Yeah. But I mean, this year has been weird, so I've been home a lot and doing those things. But yeah, I've been working full time this year because I'm lucky to have a job that I can do that; I can continue to work. And so, yeah. And so, I would say my job at York is 80% of my time and my clinical practice is about 20%. And yeah, I don't know if that's what you wanted to know, but yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:24):

Yeah, absolutely. I'll just drop this in here. I'm a Scorpio, so you and I are both water signs, so it's in the stars, and we'll be the best of friends.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:09:36):

I love all Scorpions. My partner is a double Scorpio, so I am a Scorpio lover. I'm the rare...

Elio Colavito (00:09:45):

I'm a Libra, you guys need to get away from me.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:09:48):

Libra is my rising sign. See. Okay.

Elio Colavito (00:09:52):

It's my sun and my rising, and I have a Virgo moon.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:09:52):

Is it?

Elio Colavito (00:09:52):

Yeah.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:09:52):

Oh okay.

Elio Colavito (00:09:54):

I'm unfortunate to be around, I think.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:01):

Say that again, Elio [Colavito].

Elio Colavito (00:10:02):

I said I think I'm unfortunate to be around for a lot of people. They're like, "What is going on here?" I'm like, "Listen, I got two Libras in my main three. It's just chaos."

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:10:14):

Libras are great.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:16):

Aside from astrology, which we all appear to be interested in, is there any other spiritual or religious attachments in your life currently?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:10:32):

I'm not connected with a community of any kind, like a formal, spiritual community of any kind. However, I consider myself a deeply spiritual person. I was as a small child. It just came naturally to me. As a kid, I've always felt that way. So, I have my own ways of honouring that in my life, but no, I'm not currently connected to any formal network, or community, or even tradition per se. I would say I draw on, yeah, whatever... I mean, I definitely had lots of exposure to Christian traditions, quite progressive Christian traditions thankfully, not the really fundamentalist ones, but also, lots of Neo-Pagan traditions appeal to me. So, I make it up as I go along.

Alisha Stranges (00:11:30):

And is there anything else that you think would be important for us to know about how you understand the different identities you hold today as compared to 20 years ago?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:11:45):

I don't think so. I will say I like myself a lot more than I did 20 years ago. I'm happier, and I'm also a more whole person, which means sometimes I'm also sadder, but I would say I like myself more. And having said

that, the work I did at the Pussy Palace was a highlight for me of that few handful of years in which it occurred. So, the space of the Pussy Palace felt like a nice community space to me. It was a very positive community space. Not all queer spaces are, but it felt like quite a positive space. And I do miss some of that. I miss those having those spaces sometimes. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:12:36):

Right. And especially now, since there is virtually none of it.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:12:40):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:12:41):

Well, this is a great transition here. I'll invite you now to travel back in time to the fall of 2000 when the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee was preparing to host the "Night of 2000 Pussies," I believe they call it, which was the fourth instalment of the Pussy Palace. How did you first learn about that particular event on September 14, 2000?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:13:07):

I don't know. I had been doing the photo pornography booth since the Pussy Palace started, so I had been doing it at every one. And I had done promo photos. I don't think for that year. I think the year before I had done promo photos for their flyers and posters a couple of times as well where I just essentially photographed members of the planning committee and semi-pornographic, you know... They would invite lovers and we just would do these photo shoots and they'd just have images for the flyers. So, I had just been involved, but I was never on the planning committee. I was not a member of the organizing committee; this is my jam. I was like, "I love doing this booth. This is my thing." So, they just always included that as part of what was available there.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:14:02):

Leanne [Powers] and I always shared the space, we had, again, from the start. So, we had a tradition. We'd negotiate, like, "When do you have dates booked? What hours do you want to work the room? What hours do you..." We would work out how to share the room. And so, I don't think I, probably that year, didn't pay much attention. I just did what I always did, and just made sure I had enough film. I always tried to have colour and black and white so people could choose. I had a couple of Polaroid cameras. I probably had to borrow one. I would just have my kit that I would put together.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:14:40):

And I remember that year, I think I got a really crappy room. I didn't like the room I got that year. There was a room in a stairwell, and I was like, "This is not..." Before, we had always been on the top floor; we'd have a room on the top floor. But it actually went really well. I remember that night being quite a bit of fun. But it was just sort of a regular thing for me, yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:15:04):

I have a quick question. Did you take this one?

[Colavito displays a promotional image for the camera]

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:15:07):

Yes.

Elio Colavito (00:15:08):

Oh, amazing. Okay, cool. Yeah, I have it here in our box of materials.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:15:15):

I have a lot of photos from that shoot actually. I have all the negatives, I think, from that shoot. I mean the Polaroids, it's a different matter because the whole point was that... I remember strategizing with a friend about how to do it. And at that, I don't know if this probably predates you, but in 2000, Polaroids made a huge comeback because no one had phones. And I can't remember what company it was, but they reissued the Polaroid, but in these little tiny strips of little tiny Polaroids, and they became, like, the queer... Like, everyone had one. They were at every party, at every night club. And so, I was like, "Well, what if I shot big, real Polaroids?" They weren't the square ones; they were like these narrow ones. Because people seemed to be so into them. Everyone had them on their fridges. And so, it was like, "Oh, this is a perfect solution to the problem of..." Because of the photos weren't for me, and they just covered the cost of the film. So, it was like, if you couldn't afford it, you still got a photo. I mean, it was, like, a dollar, or fifty cents, or something like that, I can't even remember. I don't even remember, maybe there was no money involved, actually. That's interesting, I don't remember.

Elio Colavito (00:16:34):

Sorry. We can return to this at some point.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:16:34):

I know. I'm sorry, I'm going off the record.

Elio Colavito (00:16:37):

Thank you. I just wanted to know if we have a photo of you in my home. Go ahead, carry on.

Alisha Stranges (00:16:46):

Yeah. No, we can flow organically through it. I do have a question. I know you were saying you don't really remember how you learned about the 2000 event. So, how did you get in connection with the committee who ended up inviting you to volunteer both on the nights of the events, but also as the promo photographer? Did you know folks, or how did you get connected?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:17:12):

I mean, we all just knew each other. Toronto felt a lot smaller then. 20 years ago, the queer community felt a lot smaller then, and we just all knew each other. I just knew everyone. I mean, I wasn't good friends with everyone, but we just all knew each other. And I don't actually remember whose idea the photo booth was. I thought it was my idea, but I saw that Carlyle [Jansen] said it was their idea, so I don't actually know whose idea it was. Either way, I think they asked me because I was, at that time, doing a lot of photography in the community. So, I had been photographing Carey Gray's Aslan Leather catalogues. I'd been doing photos. I

mean, I had done photos that had been published in some random, feminist, queer locations. I had been doing photos of femmes. Two years later, I co-edited the *Brazen Femme* anthology, and so, the photos I'd been taking were in that book. And so... I was just around and people just saw me. And at the time, there weren't... Like, now, I feel like a lot of people are into photography. At the time, it just wasn't the same thing. And so, the fact that I was doing that was notable to people. And so, I think they were just like, "Oh, Chloë takes photographs." I kind of thought I pitched the idea to them, but I don't actually remember. So, either way, it would have been because I was already doing that kind of stuff in other contexts.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:18:49):

And so, yeah, I think there would be a Pussy Palace organized, and it was like, "Do you want to do this?" "Yeah, I'll do it." I mean, we were on email then, but not even very much on email. I mean, it was such a different thing. You'll see someone out, you'd see people out, and they'd say, "Do you want to do this thing?" And you'd kind of talk in-person. So, my best friend was dating someone on the planning, organizing committee. You know, it was just like that kind of a... But it didn't ever feel very formal or formalized. It wasn't like they would contact volunteers. It just kind of happened like, "Oh, I knew someone who was doing the security at the door and they mentioned my name to..." It was just very organic. And I remember the early ones. Like, the first one felt totally like we just pulled it out of our asses. There wasn't a big thing, it was just like, "Let's do this thing. Let's just rent this space." And I think the organizing committee did a lot more work that we just didn't see. But to many of us doing other parts of the work, whether it was security or things like what I did or Leanne [Powers] doing the temple priestess, we just thought it was fun. I mean, it was just a fun thing to do, so.

Alisha Stranges (00:20:16):

So, we had our own ideas about why Polaroids might be a good option for the night, and Carlyle [Jansen] has talked a bit about that. But could you talk a bit about from your perspective, what they were trying to achieve by choosing the Polaroid as the medium?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:20:38):

Yeah, so again, I recall that the idea of a photo booth came up, whoever... And I remember talking to my... So, I had a lover at the time who was teaching me how to develop film because, again, we weren't working digitally yet. I'd been learning, essentially, photography from this person, and I'd been doing more and more photography on my own, and I didn't have a Polaroid camera, but they did. I remember just having conversations with people. I can remember having this conversation with Cameron, my lover, and saying, "How could I do this? Would I take people's names and then develop the film and get them photographs?" And that didn't make sense. And so, then this Polaroid idea came up. And to me, it was just perfect because yeah, it was instantaneous. It eliminated issues around consent, in terms of image taking, because they would walk out the door with it. I mean, sometimes I wouldn't even see the photo. Sometimes they'd walk away before it developed. I mean, often they'd stay because they'd be excited to look at it with me, and we'd look at it and then they'd leave. It was just perfect, and it was actually fairly affordable. I'm pretty sure now that the organizing committee must've covered the cost of the film. I don't think I could have. But it wasn't like there were thousands of people coming, it was hundreds of people, so it was reasonable.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:22:26):

And the aesthetic was awesome. For me as a photographer, I loved the aesthetic of the Polaroid; it was really sexy. Polaroids are just sexy. I mean, you can't take anything with a Polaroid and it doesn't look sexy, I just think. It's just so great. And there were all these books coming out, around that time, photography, this very postmodern aesthetic where it was raw, and Polaroid was part of that. And so, it felt like art to people. It felt

really aesthetic. It was about the image, but it was also the process, right? It felt like every time someone came in, we were doing relational art together. We were doing this performance art thing.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:23:13):

Okay, so groups would come, couples would come, and then people would come with one person then come back with a different person. There were people who came... You know, I had trans women come who had never been photographed as women, and who spoke about this experience and wanted to be photographed in very particular ways. So, some people would come and really want a very particular experience of seeing themselves represented, other people were just like, "I don't know what to do." They were very shy, and so I would say, "Well, why don't you just, I don't know, have fun." If they were with someone, I was like, "Just make out and I'll take a good photo and figure out how to..."

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:24:02):

I mean, weirdly I think it was kind of therapeutic. It was this kind of interesting experience, where people used it for a lot of different reasons. Most people wanted the door closed, but then some people loved the idea of the door open because it was even... It was like, they enjoyed the exhibitionism of it. If there was a line-up, people would watch each other. I mean, it was just fun. It was really like a...

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:24:30):

And then I once had someone who paid... She's like, "I want to pay you for me to take your photo." Yeah. I think I must've collected money because I wouldn't have taken payment for any random reason. But I think it was like you paid at a buck or something for your Polaroid, or two bucks. And she was like, "Well, I don't want my picture taken, but I want to take your picture." So that's actually one of the only ones I have, is I have a picture of me. Because she was like, "You should keep it." She didn't want to keep it.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:25:02):

So, I think the aesthetic was really cool and interesting. The immediacy of it was really wonderful. And it meant that the experience completed itself right in that moment and could be shared with, both with me, but with others. And it just meant that people... Like, people would not have been willing to do it, if they couldn't walk away with that image. They knew that I wouldn't be keeping anything of them. So, I think that was very important. Occasionally, people would be like, "No, I want you to keep a picture of me." People have... This is a thing. What turns people on? What makes them happy? There're all sorts of ways of having that experience. So, I was always fascinated by that aspect of it. It was like how people approached it.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:25:56):

I mean, now I'm like, "Oh my God, I wish we had all those pictures." Because it would be such a great collection of photos. But that's the nature of it. It's like ephemeral. It disappears. But for those four years, people would, at the bar, they'd be like, "Oh my God, I have your Polaroids on my fridge." People had them; they were out there in the community. And I mean, I didn't really feel like they were mine. I always felt like the people directed me. So, I just kind of felt like an instrument in a way.

Alisha Stranges (00:26:30):

About how many Polaroids would you have taken in a night do you think?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:26:34):

Maybe like... 50 to a 100, maybe.

Alisha Stranges (00:26:42):

Right. Because you worked in shifts, is that right? You wouldn't have worked the entire night?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:26:49):

So, Leanne [Powers] would... She would sometimes... Her thing took more time. So, she spent a lot more time with people. She was the temple priestess, and her last name is not [inaudible]. There were two Leannes around that time. And I always mix up their last names. Have you contacted her? Are you in touch with her?

Alisha Stranges (00:27:09):

Yes.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:27:10):

Okay, good. Okay. So, you don't need me to. Okay. Her temple priestess work took longer because she was working quite intensely with people. And so, she would often book time with people. I mean, I was happy to... I could do my thing whenever. We'd just put up the sign, and people would come and... So, sometimes she would want the early hours and then the end of the night, and I would work the middle. Sometimes she would do the whole first half, and I'd do the second half or *vice versa*. So, it just depended.

Alisha Stranges (00:27:43):

Right.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:27:44):

And yeah, I mean, there was no rhyme or reason to it. It was just whatever worked that year. Was one of us in a relationship? Was one of us single? Did one of us want more time? I mean, it was just like, whatever made sense in terms of our own participation in the bathhouse and stuff so, yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:28:07):

So, when you weren't taking photos, were you able to be a patron?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:28:11):

Yeah, a bit. I would often take photos for like four hours, like a long time. And so, there were times when that was one of the only things I did. I went and did that and then left. I'm also an introvert. So, this was like the perfect way for me to be there. I mean, it's partly why I was a photographer. I mean, most photographers I think are introverts. Because it's a way to participate in social life without actually participating. By maintaining a bit of privacy and distance. And so, I loved having that as my way of connecting with people, and it felt really intimate. It felt like an erotic experience for me, it felt intimate, it felt like I had all these dates. I had like 50 dates, or 100 dates, with these people who just would come in, and they'd want to get undressed. Some people had never been photographed nude, and they were like, "I've never had anyone take a picture of me naked. I want to have a..." Or they have a new lover or yeah it just...

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:29:21):

So, it just felt like I got to be part of the night anyway. It didn't feel like I was away from it. It felt like it was just my way of being there. But yeah, I would walk around and say hi to people. But people would come visit me. One of the other Polaroids I have is of a bunch of my friends sitting on... When we were upstairs in the attic, which is where we were for several years, maybe two years, there was this very skinny hallway and this bench. And a bunch of people I knew we're sitting on this bench, variously naked or clothed. It's very funny. And so, I just I have a Polaroid of that, of them in the hallway. Because people would just hang out They would just come and hang out at the room and chat between photos and yeah, it was fun.

Alisha Stranges (00:30:11):

That sounds amazing.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:30:11):

Yeah. It was awesome.

Alisha Stranges (00:30:16):

Yeah. Well, look, I've been asking a lot of questions here, so I want to pass it over to Elio [Colavito]. Elio [Colavito], do you want to just maybe start ask about... We're curious about outfit. Do you want to head there?

Elio Colavito (00:30:29):

Yeah. We can go ahead and head to the outfit. This is my favourite question of the interview. Do you recall what you would have worn that night?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:30:40):

Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:30:41):

Not that night specifically, but kind of at any iterations of the Pussy Palace?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:30:45):

Hundred percent, and I will bet you have heard this answer, number of times. I would just wear a slip. Because A, that's what you did in the late 90s, if you were a femme. You wore a slip and combat boots or Doc Martens. That was the uniform. But also, because it was hot, it was so hot in the inside. There was not proper ventilation in that building that is for sure. And we were in the attic Leanne [Powers] and I. So, you basically had to be as close to naked as possible. And so, I would have just worn a slip. Like, slip and I probably yeah, I'm sure I wore shoes because those carpets were not... Even if you were naked, you needed to be wearing shoes, definitely. Yeah so, that's probably it. And I'm pretty sure the photo I have of myself that someone took in the Polaroid, is I'm wearing a black slip. So, that was kind of standard. And it was September, right? So, it was still summer.

Elio Colavito (00:31:52):

Yeah.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:31:52):

It had that vibe.

Elio Colavito (00:31:54):

Would you have worn this *en route*, or is this something that you would have changed into when you arrived?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:31:59):

No, I would've worn it *en route*. Yeah. With maybe just a coat over top or something. Yeah. No, I really miss that. I would say I'm not very modest, so I'm quite comfortable. I don't actually care if people see parts of me naked. So, I don't have a problem wearing fairly less clothing out in the world. But at that age, especially, I felt safe. I felt safer than I do now, actually. So, I felt kind of, I had a bit of that... In your 20s you feel a bit invincible, and I would've maybe ridden my bike. I mean, we all rode around in slips and boots on our bikes. I mean, that was just what we... Yeah. That was the look. I mean, it still is, who knows?

Elio Colavito (00:32:56):

Oh, it still is. The slips and combat boots, it still is.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:32:56):

I'm mean, it's classic. You can't really...

Elio Colavito (00:33:04):

Yeah. Now, you know, every queer my age, queer femme, will be like, "it's vintage. I'm very 90s."

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:33:07):

I love it.

Elio Colavito (00:33:09):

It's a part of the communication of it.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:33:11):

Yeah, yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:33:12):

I guess, kind of for you, at the time, what you may or may not have been trying to feel internally with this outfit, but then also communicate to folks around you with that.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:33:25):

Well, definitely gender. I mean, for me, yeah, I really love being femme. I mean, being femme, I mean, that's why I am femme. I love being femme. It's a really massive source of pleasure to me. It's self-pleasuring, right? To wear that clothing, and to sexualize or objectify myself in a particular way. I also felt really tough. To me, that was about toughness. And I know that there's been a lot of shift in femme discourses around strength versus vulnerability, and softness, and so on. I mean, I didn't ever felt my strength precluded softness, but we

felt powerful. Feeling powerful was very awesome. For many of us, we had not felt powerful previously in our lives. So, I felt powerful. Taking photographs for me, is super erotic. So, I really feel a physical pleasure in it. I wouldn't necessarily say sexual. Feeling beautiful and attractive and then taking other people's photographs, instead of being touched or attended to, is really erotic for me. I like that I'm the person attending to the person being photographed. And I enjoy that dynamic. So, I think the outfit for me going to the bathhouse was part of that whole erotic experience. And also, just, you're cruising. That's why people go to bathhouses, is to cruise. And so, you're signalling particular things so that you're hoping that the right people will notice you, and so on. Yeah, yeah. I think it's great. That's why fashion is so great.

Elio Colavito (00:35:27):

For sure.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:35:28):

All fashion. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:35:29):

Some fashion.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:35:32):

True. Okay.

Elio Colavito (00:35:32):

You arrive at 231 Mutual Street. Can you describe the scene outside of the club when you arrive?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:35:38):

Yeah. So, I think I got there really early that night. So, I don't think there was a line-up. There might've been a line-up because there were often people trying to get in last minute. They would always sell out, as I remember them. I don't know if that's true, but I remember they would always sell out. I loved that I never had to worry about getting a ticket because I was doing the photo booth. Because I probably would not have been organized enough. So yeah, I would often get there early, and I would set up, and I would get in before it opened, which was kind of fun to be inside when it's empty. And there're just a few people. And you get the lay of the land, you're figuring out the sort of layout because it's very maze-like, as you may know. It was very maze-like that location. And yeah. So, I don't remember much about happening outside that night. Yeah. There might've been a bit of a line. If it was that night or another time, I don't know. But I can picture it in my head. I can picture a bit of a line-up outside. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:36:39):

Can you clue us in to how the process of being admitted as a volunteer may have been different than being admitted as a regular, old patron?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:36:51):

I don't know because I never attended as a regular patron. I remember checking in at the desk, and I remember that there were always staff at the desk that weren't the ... They weren't the Pussy Palace organizing staff or volunteers. There would be a volunteer there. I think my friend Richard [Aitcheson]

always did security, worked the door. There were a couple people who worked the door. Did JP [Hornick] work the door too sometimes? I don't remember. But yeah, so JP [Hornick] and Richard [Aitcheson] were best friends, and they were good friends of mine. It was fine. You'd walk in, and you'd be kind of doing something at the desk. I don't even remember what they had you do, but I was busy, happy to see them and talking and excited. There was this feeling of excitement, but I think they made us go through whatever the same protocol. I mean, the difference was I didn't have to have a ticket. So, I probably just got looked up on a list of some kind.

Elio Colavito (00:37:46):

Okay.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:37:47):

Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:37:49):

And then you mentioned that the space itself was kind of maze-like.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:37:49):

Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:37:53):

Can you give us more of a description of the space itself once you're in there?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:37:59):

What I remember is carpet, narrow hallways, and staircases going up. It's a tall structure. No windows, right? Completely windowless. So, just eliminating any outside. There's no windows, narrow, carpeted, dark. Any lighting was kept very dim. Right? Because it is a bathhouse. Presumably that's part of what people are going there for, is the dim lighting. I mean, it kind of felt dungeon-y, except that it was not that cool. It was really, like, wood panelling and carpet. It didn't strike me as super clean, but we didn't care about that really. I mean, things needed repair. The room I would be in, would always be a little shoddy. Yeah, it felt maze-like because of the lack of sensory... There were none of the typical markers that help guide you through a space. So, every hallway kind of looked the same, and so you would kind of have to... Yeah. And there was vinyl. Like, lots of wipeable surfaces. And I didn't go outside. I think there was an outside part, but I don't think I ever... Or maybe that's the later location. Anyway, but I never really went outside. I sort of stayed in the timeless... It's like the timeless, dark... Who knows what time...? It could be 7:00 a.m. in the morning. You have no idea because, yeah. I mean, it was very night club-y that way.

Elio Colavito (00:39:44):

All right. Would you have gone straight to the photo room once you've been processed in? Did you gravitate towards any other spaces, check anything out?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:39:52):

No, I would have gone straight there. I would've said hi to people on the way, but I would've gone straight there. I always set up the room. I think I would make sure the bed had clean... I would bring a cover for the

bed. So, the room always had a double... Part of the reason they gave us that room, and actually then whatever the other room they gave us, both of them had double beds. And these are primo rooms. Most of the rooms don't have this kind of furniture situation, as far as I could tell. The other rooms I saw, never looked like that.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:40:22):

So, we kind of got a room with larger... And this was great for me because I wanted a large space for people to pose on. It kind of acted as a stage or a platform. And I always draped it so that it was neutral with something white or black or something to give a neutral background. So, I enjoyed setting up and putting out my sign. If I was there early, before Leanne [Powers], I'd be up there for a long time by myself before people started finding me. They always put us in a slightly out of the way spot. So, there was always a kind of time lag between when the doors opened and when people actually started making it to us.

Elio Colavito (00:41:13):

So, was this something that folks would have known they would maybe stumble upon at some point? Or, and that they would go looking to do? Or is this something that you kind of happened upon? And you're like, "Oh, lovely. A photo room."

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:41:27):

I think the first one or two times it was, people stumbled upon it. But then once there was sort of a regular group of people who attended, people knew it would be there. And it did get busier in the later years, in the last couple of years I did it because people knew it was there. And so, some people would go there first. Like, they knew it wouldn't be so busy early on, or they would actually plan to go. But the first year or two... Because I guess I did it four years maybe. I think 2000 was my last year. But yeah, it was just like, "Oh, what's this?" I mean, it was a very random thing, which is kind of awesome. It was like a surprise.

Elio Colavito (00:41:27):

Yeah.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:42:11):

Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:42:12):

Can you take us through kind of what this process would look like, from someone stumbling upon your room and you saying hello and then to them leaving?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:42:24):

Yeah. I would... Often, they'd say, "What are you doing?" And I'd explain. I called it the "photo pornography booth." That was my name for it. And I would say, "I'll take your picture. I can take your picture alone, or with other people, in whatever position you want. You can have your clothes on or not. And then you keep the photo." So, I don't keep the photo. And I always made that very clear to people. And then I was like, "You can, yeah, have the door closed or open. It's up to you what happens here." And I was like, "You can just sit and I can just take a portrait." I mean, it could be anything, it doesn't have to be sexual. And for the most part, it wasn't that. Most people didn't want to do really elaborate poses or sexual... It was pretty tame most of the time. And so, someone would come in and they almost always felt very nervous and

awkward. You could just tell. And they'd be like, "Well, what should I do?" I mean, there was this kind of experience of navigating that for them.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:43:34):

And I think the coolest part for me, I mean, besides the sort of process of getting to know people and having this kind of intimate moment with strangers, was that it would really... People loved seeing themselves photographed. I mean now I feel like we take photos of every fucking thing all the time. But then we didn't. We did not have cell phones. So, having a photo of yourself, was actually kind of a big deal. And for a lot of queers who aren't necessarily connected to their families of origin, or don't necessarily have those kinds of archives, or they might have archives of themselves that feel totally inauthentic, or not representative of who they are, I think having a photo, was really awesome. To have a photo of themselves in a place that felt authentic. Like you said, what they were wearing, what they chose to wear out to an event like that. I think it was pretty great.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:44:36):

But people were mostly very shy and awkward, and that was kind of the sweetest thing about it, is that they would let me have that experience with them. They would show that to me. And, you know, I felt awkward too. It's a weird thing to do with a stranger. But yeah, it was really cool. It always felt like we became friends in the process.

Elio Colavito (00:45:03):

And you had been taking photos for a bit, outside of the Palace, what have you. How did you find your photo-taking experience in the Palace different than anything that you had experienced outside of Club Toronto?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:45:21):

It was really freeing because there was no... It wasn't pretentious at all. Like, let's be honest, when you're in your 20s and you're trying to make art, it feels a bit... You just always feel this kind of pressure to be cool or doing something amazing or whatever. It has this pretention attached to it that's a bit stressful. And you're like, "Should I even be doing this?" I mean, I felt always like an imposter. I mean all that stuff. But this just felt so freeing. It was just fun, and it was a gift. Every time I gave someone a photo, they were so grateful. And I was like, "It's just a Polaroid." But they were really appreciative of it. There's something about giving your art away. Not keeping it to boost your ego or show people how awesome you are or... It was just like, "I'm just doing this to give to people." And there was something very liberating about that. It sort of liberated me from all of the stress of being cool, or being good, or taking an interesting enough photo or it was just for... I just wanted to take a photo that they would like.

Elio Colavito (00:46:37):

Yeah.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:46:37):

And that was awesome. Yeah. And all the other photography I'd done, I guess my biggest photo project besides the stuff for Carey [Gray] and some other, doing that kind of community stuff, is I had done this series of photos for *Boys Like Her*, which was the book by Taste This. Do you know that book? I don't know. Anyway, so it was Anna Camilleri, Ivan Coyote, Zoe Eakle, and Lyndell Montgomery were a performance spoken art group/troupe in the early 90s called Taste This. And we knew each other in Vancouver. And then

many of us migrated to Toronto. And I did a series of photos for their book. And so, say a project like that, I'm photographing people I'm close to and friends with, but it was like, we were trying to make art. There's this kind of different pressure. And I was also trying to represent their writing and speak to the nature of the book. And it felt like a very weighty responsibility in a way that the bathhouse photos just felt like a real pleasure. And a different kind of responsibility maybe, just like an interpersonal one. Like a relational thing, rather than a, yeah, a production. It wasn't about production.

Elio Colavito (00:47:59):

Okay. My final question before we move on to Alisha [Stranges]. Did you have any qualms about compensation, not being compensated, just being a volunteer?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:48:10):

No, none. That would never have even occurred to me, I don't think. I mean, no one was being compensated. My sense was that any money that came in just went to being able to rent it the next time. And I do think my costs for the film were covered, I think I'm now, and I've been through all these stories with you, I did charge. And I wonder... It's so hard to remember how much because our money has changed. Our money was different 20 years ago. I don't think there were... Were there Toonies and Loonies? I don't even remember.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:48:47):

So, it's like so hard for me to remember the actual interaction, but I'm remembering that time that she was, this one woman was like, "I'll pay you, but I want to take your photo." And I was like, "Well, it's just for the film." And she's like, "I know, but I want to..." And maybe she... So, I remember that exchange and it was like, "Oh yeah, I must've been taking money to cover the film," but yeah, no, I never thought about that. I mean, it felt like fun, and I got in free. That seemed like compensation in a way. I do remember occasionally feeling like, "Wow, I've done this for four hours, and I'm exhausted, and I can't really now have fun because I'm too tired," and feeling a little bit resentful of that. But I never thought that that was anyone's fault. Just the nature of the beast, I guess.

Alisha Stranges (00:49:46):

Well, I really want to get a sense of the time and space, the impression that the time and space of that photo room left on your senses. I'm going to invite you into a little bit of an exercise here and just go with me to the best of your ability, and I'll do it with you. If you can sort of sit comfortably on your chair. Maybe rest your feet on the ground if they aren't already. Let your arms kind of rest gently in your lap. It's a bit of a contemplative exercise. Just soften your gaze or even close your eyes if you feel comfortable and just take a couple of breaths in and out. And with each inhale, allowing your rib cage to expand a little further than the time before, and in your mind's eye, sort of traveling back to the space of that photo room, wherever it happened to be located, wherever you think it was located on the night of September 14, 2000, and allowing your body to re-inhabit that space. Kind of looking around, listening, smelling. And when you look around from this contemplative space, tell me what it is that you're seeing?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:51:35):

I feel like the carpet was brown, some brown pattern. And the room that night, I was in a new room, and it had much higher ceilings, and it was square. The old room had been an attic, and it had these sloping ceilings. So, it felt like a much bigger room. There is a double bed at the back of the room, and there was a mirror. So, you walked in the door, and there was kind of a mirror to the right on the wall, like a little desk maybe, like a little sitting area. And then the bed was straight ahead. And it was in the stairway. It was like on a landing,

there was a staircase. And so, the entrance to it was off a landing. And I remember being annoyed that they moved me there, but then it ended up being quite a good spot because so many people walked by.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:52:24):

Whereas the attic... Not everyone found us. And we were kind of out of the way, and you had to kind of hear from someone where it was. And so, this ended up being quite a good spot, and it was very busy that night. Waiting for people, the door would be open, and I would just be standing in the doorway, watching people walk by, saying hi to people I knew. Just kind of being in the space. It always was very damp and kind of musty, but it didn't smell. I don't remember it smelling bad. It just sort of smelled like a bathhouse, I guess. But the air was always very moist, like humid, and people were kind of dressed in somewhere between summer outdoor wear and bathing wear. This kind of spectrum and, of course, gender informed that. So, some people were fully clothed, some people were not clothed at all. I mean, you sort of have these range of experiences around people's bodies. And people were sweaty. There's kind of this humidity that made people... I was just sort of watching people, saying hi to people.

Alisha Stranges (00:53:45):

And returning to the breath, if magically, you could distil the space into a single colour, what colour is coming forward?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:54:05):

Brown, I think, or black, but not in a... Those colours... There was a kind of warmth, but that's why I didn't say black. Black came forward first, but there was a kind of warmth to this space that kind of gives it this warm tone, this kind of sepia tone, almost. But it was dark, and it was kind of cave-like, and it felt very... But cozy; not weird. I mean, probably felt weird to some people, but to me, it felt cozy. But I liked having my room. I liked having a space I got to be.

Alisha Stranges (00:55:06):

And what's the sound of this room? Or what kind of things can you hear either inside that are coming and outside of it?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:55:13):

Oh, just people talking and laughing that kind of like... You can't really hear conversations, but you just hear all of the conversations, and people would walk by and so you'd catch snippets of a conversation. I think there was music too, but it was not the dominant sound to me, that I recall. You could hear people having sex kind of in the distance sometimes. I mean, there's sort of this range of human sound, but it was a good sound. It was like the sound of a space of celebration and fun. And people were excited and nervous. It has a charge to it. I mean, in the same way that a nightclub can feel that way. It's a very similar feeling, but unlike a big room where everyone... There was something about the fact that you could hear a lot of people you couldn't see because of the way that it's laid out.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:56:15):

You could hear people in rooms, and you didn't know who it was. You'd hear them. You could hear people having sex, or you could hear people talking and laughing and you didn't know who... You wouldn't necessarily see them. There's this sense of being part of something, but there was privacy too. You were able to have some privacy, and yet also not because if you came out of your room, you'd be like, "Who's going to see us come out of this room? And who's going to be walking by in the hallway when we come out?" So,

there's this kind of mixture of space for secrets and privacy and this sort of public nature of the space. The sound for is really about that tension, I think.

Alisha Stranges (00:56:59):

If some part of your body could reach out right now and touch some part of the space that's just by you, what are you touching and what are its textures?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:57:13):

Well, the first thing I thought I was touching my camera, but I just think of the walls because I spent a lot of time leaning on the door frame, and the walls were either a lot of bumpy plaster or this kind of wood panelling. I feel like this last room I was in that year kind of had some wood panelling, but there was a solidity to the space too. It sort of felt solid, and even though it was old, it didn't feel... It felt solid. And I never worried... It's funny because I'm a pretty anxious person, but I never was like, "Oh my God, we're all inside this building. What happens if there's an emergency?" I always felt quite safe there actually. It was a feeling of kind of being held by this very dark solid space that kind of took you in. For me, it felt familiar and comfortable.

Alisha Stranges (00:58:18):

And lastly, can you tell us a little bit about touching your camera? What it's like to remember holding it in that space?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:58:26):

Well, I think I always had it around my neck, and so I would often hold it because it was hanging on my neck. When I think about holding it to shoot, part of what I love about taking photos, especially with a camera and less with an iPhone, is that it's a very physical experience. As soon as you hold the camera to your face, your body gets... You crouch, you move. You move differently because your body becomes an instrument of... You're recording something, and your whole body is part of that process. And so, I love that feeling of, it's as if when you hold the camera up, you kind of disappear or you transform into something else. It's a very embodied feeling for me, that feeling of holding the camera.

Alisha Stranges (00:59:32):

Thank you. You can let that go, and opening your eyes if they've been closed. Thank you.

Elio Colavito (00:59:43):

Thank you so much. So, we're going to get right into it at 12:45 a.m., five men, all plainclothes police officers, enter the club and stay about 90 minutes. Were you still in the Pussy Palace?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (00:59:57):

I don't think so. I think I left right before, if not, as they were arriving. I remember leaving. I remember being very tired and leaving, and Leanne [Powers] was going to take the room for the rest of the night. And I remember there being a kerfuffle, like something was going on at the front door, in the front. I remember Richard [Aitcheson] maybe saying something like, "Someone's here. We're not sure who they are." We were friends, we always hugged goodbye. We hugged hello and goodbye. That was our... And I was like, okay, well, but it never in a million years occurred to me that that would be what it was. What I thought is like, "Oh, someone's trying to get in," because cis men would often try to attend. And so, that was common. I

mean, it was common that someone would be at the door trying to get in with their girlfriend, and there was always a lot of, I think, work kind of maintaining the boundary. And so, I just assumed it was something like that. And I didn't see anyone I assumed or thought were police officers. I didn't see any.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:01:05):

I remember hearing about it and just thinking, "Oh my God." It just blew my mind. It really was a surprise to me. Like I said, I think we felt very powerful, and there was this kind of feeling that we had a force field around us in a way. It was a very awesome time to be queer in Toronto in like the late 90s, early 2000s. It was a really vibrant time. There was so much happening, so much cultural production, so many spaces. We had so many spaces, regular spaces were open every fucking night. So many events. And so, it just felt like, "Really?" It just didn't even occur to me that someone could... But I don't think I was there. I think I was gone. I think I would remember if I was there.

Elio Colavito (01:02:09):

From what you had just said, what prompted your decision to leave was that you were very tired?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:02:14):

Yeah, I was done. I was with done my shift, and as I said, that night was really busy, and I think I was in a new relationship, and I think my lover had left, had been there and then gone home. And so, I was going home to see my... We didn't live together, but I was going to her house. It was like, I was going to have a date, but I wasn't having the date there. I think I just was, like, my night was done. I had a great time, but I wasn't into hanging out and cruising or visiting or dating.

Elio Colavito (01:02:52):

Do you remember how you ultimately came to learn about what exactly had happened beyond the kind of whisperings of somebody's here that's not supposed to be here, you're leaving, all of that stuff?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:03:11):

I don't even know how we communicated before email. I think we talked on the phone. I mean, I saw... At that time in my life, I was still seeing... I saw my social group almost every day. We hung out. We connected. Maybe even more so because we didn't have social media or any of that. We really, physically, got together a lot, and I remembered the demonstration at 52 Division. How many days later was that? It was really soon after I think. I remember going to that, photographing that. I have lots of photos of that demonstration actually.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:03:54):

JP [Hornick] and Richard [Aitcheson] in particular were in my very close social network, my closest circle of friends at the time. And so, I got a lot of the story, because they were sort of central to the story, I got a lot of information about what had happened from them. But it was probably just like, we saw each other that night at the bar or we saw each other, that's how we communicated. We went to the same places, so we could see and talk to each other because otherwise... We had to be together in person to talk. That was the only way to really do it. I mean, it's all everyone was talking about for a while.

Elio Colavito (01:04:38):

You mentioned being really close to JP [Hornick] and Richard [Aitcheson] and maybe some of the other folks who were there during the raid. What were the impacts of that experience on your friends?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:04:49):

That's a good question. It's an interesting thing. I think in some ways, at first, you're like, "Oh, this is exciting." Some part of you is like, you're in your 20s, and you're like... It's also a sign of power, when people come down on you. It's also about the truth that we were taking up spaces that we weren't supposed to, and we were being ourselves and honouring our sexuality in ways that we weren't supposed to, according to certain normative, mainstream discourses. In many ways it was like, it's fodder. You're like, "Yes, fuck you." It's sort of a sign of this resistance. It confirms the resistance that you feel you were a part of in a way.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:05:46):

But I wasn't there, and I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh, is anyone hurt?" I didn't know what had actually happened. And I was really concerned about people's physical safety. I was concerned about people's mental and emotional safety. There are all sorts of ways that people might allow themselves to be seen in those spaces that they don't want to be seen by others. They don't want to be seen outside of those spaces. As someone who had lovers who maybe weren't always as comfortable with exhibitionism as I was, to take the risk of that in a space that was containing in some way, but then to have yourself, like, that interrupted in this aggressive, violent way, it's really traumatizing. And so, for me, those were my concerns.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:06:45):

I would not want to speak for them, but I definitely remember them being quite rattled by it. It even was hard to just have people try to get in. And so, to have this other level of sort of invasive... I mean, it was like feeling like something was invaded and made really unsafe. Like, a space, as I just described it, that felt quite safe to me suddenly became very unsafe. And for so many, I don't want to generalize, but there's a very high percentage of queer folks who've experienced other kinds of trauma, which would map onto that. I think there's also this thing about an already vulnerable community being further attacked.

Elio Colavito (01:07:50):

And what were your thoughts on having missed that part of the evening when the raid happened?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:07:56):

It's interesting. I think it was mostly glad. I think I felt guilty a bit. I think you have all the... These are probably pretty typical feelings. I think I felt like, "Oh, I should have been there. I wasn't there to help or to protect anyone." And, on the other hand, I was like, "Oh my gosh, I am so glad I wasn't there. I'm so glad I left when I left." I mean, I probably left half an hour before, like really close. If I didn't actually cross paths, it was right before.

Elio Colavito (01:08:34):

And what do you know about the legal proceedings that unfolded following the raid?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:08:50):

I think, at the time, I knew quite a lot about them, but I don't really remember too much. The interesting thing is that, for me, my life changed quite dramatically in the coming year. For me, my whole relationship to

that community and queer community shifted because of a bunch of different life changes I went through. It was interesting because, in a way, it was a moment in which my life kind of shifted maybe away from that community for a little bit. And so, I, in a way, was less involved than I probably would have been if it had happened earlier. I kept in touch with the friends of mine that were involved and made sure that they were... But I was always more interested in like, "How are you? Are you doing okay? How is this affecting your life?" And I knew that for JP [Hornick], for example, it affected their life for a long time. It had a long-term impact. It was an ongoing process and for others as well, but who I wasn't as directly connected to. I think that I wasn't super caught up in the details of it.

Elio Colavito (01:10:17):

Go ahead, Alisha [Stranges].

Alisha Stranges (01:10:18):

Just to jump in here. Have you ever read the court transcripts?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:10:23):

I have not.

Alisha Stranges (01:10:24):

I just was curious about... Sometimes what went on in the photo room is sort of brought up from time to time in court, and I just was curious, because I know that you shared the space. Did the person you shared the space with, did her work also involve taking pictures of people?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:10:46):

No.

Alisha Stranges (01:10:46):

Okay. Just because in the court transcripts—

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:10:50):

Not that I know of.

Alisha Stranges (01:10:50):

Yeah. Just the way you describe the nature of the interactions, that it was sort of mostly tame, and they speak about what they allegedly saw going on in the photo room, in a very different way. Not tame at all. I was just curious if there was actually a range of things that you were taking photos of or what?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:11:15):

How could they have seen it? Were they in the bathhouse longer before?

Alisha Stranges (01:11:21):

Well, that's a question, I guess that we'll... Maybe I'll just jump in and ask it. There were two undercover women police officers who came in, in advance of the five men.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:11:34):

That's right. I remember that. Yes, yes, yes. I do remember that. I remember that, and I remember us all trying to figure out who they must've been. That's right. Yes. Okay so, the interesting thing is that it was very tame. The other thing is I had... It was like this. [snaps fingers rapidly] I mean, there was no time for people to have sex or do anything. It wasn't like I gave people time. It was like, "I'm going to take your photo, and then you're going to leave." It's funny, and I think that... Like, people would pose. Maybe they'd pose with their legs spread. Maybe they would pose reclined, or maybe they'd remove a piece of... But to be honest, when people did that, they mostly wanted the door closed, so it's very difficult for me to imagine a scenario where they would have seen anything. I mean, when I had groups come in, they were just mostly rolling on top of each other with their clothes on. It was like... I'm not giving you time to have an orgy in my room. I have other people I need to take photos of. So, it just wasn't the nature of what I was doing. I mean, I had photographed people having sex, but not at the Pussy Palace. And, I mean, it just... That wasn't the nature of the experience.

Alisha Stranges (01:13:05):

Are we talking like a two-minute exchange maximum?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:13:08):

Yeah, like maybe five minutes? I mean, depending on how many photos they wanted. But even couples. I can't remember a couple ever... I mean, they would know there were other people waiting and... Yeah, it really was like a photo booth. I mean, it wasn't a "Let's make porn," booth. It was like a photo booth. It was like, come in and I'll take your picture in a fun way. It was more like an erotic photography experience than porn, than something really explicit. So, yeah, that is surprising to me, but it's also not surprising to me. I'm sure they made tons of shit up. I think history has shown us that when the cops raid any kind of bathhouse, they make lots of shit up about what's happening in those spaces that doesn't actually happen in those spaces.

Alisha Stranges (01:14:10):

Right.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:14:11):

I mean, the hilarious thing is that the bathhouse was mostly, like, there's actually very little sex happening. It wasn't a place for sex. I mean, some people would make dates, and they'd hook up there and go into a room. Mostly it was like a nightclub. It was just people walking around, flirting, you know... Like, it wasn't a particularly... Yeah. I don't know. That was my experience, anyway.

Elio Colavito (01:14:45):

You mentioned being at the 52 Division protests. Can you speak a little bit about what went on there? What you saw, what you did, that whole thing?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:14:56):

I remember it being a really great day. It was a great turnout and, it was funny, I remember people had their kids there. It was really a really diverse group, intergenerational group of people. I think I have a picture of Richard [Aitcheson] and JP [Hornick] holding hands in the air. There was this sense of solidarity and support for the people who were actually experiencing direct charges against them. We strung up that clothesline of underwear, of panties. What did they call it? Someone had a name for it. So, I remember it because it was really great visually. It was great. It was colourful. People made signs. You know, it was really great... It was good, but it was also this... I don't know, there's something that happens with demonstrations right, where it was sort of okay, so now what? We've done this, you know, we said this thing, but the truth is we knew that there was going to be this court case. And that felt like something that we didn't have a lot of... How do you intervene in that? Right? How do you actively engage with that process? And for me, it felt like the best thing I could do was support the people who were being... As a friend, be available as a friend to people who were going through the experience. But I remember it being a very uplifting day. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (01:16:44):

Did you attend any other fundraising events or participate in any kind of community activism after the raid?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:16:53):

I'm sure I did. I don't remember anything specifically. My friend, Jan, who is actually the friend this morning that I was saying should contact you, she organized the fundraiser with Olivia Chow right after the charges were laid and she... And so, I'm sure I heard, I don't even remember. I mean, we were talking about how little we actually remember of the stuff, and she at the time was dating Lorelee Gillis, a member of the committee. So, there were these interconnections in our various lives. So, I'm sure I participated in that. We are still very good friends, which is interesting. Jan and I. And so again, over the years have continued our close friendship. But at the time, I'm sure I... That's the only one I remember. But I'm sure there were others too.

Elio Colavito (01:17:45):

And before we kind of move on to the last chapter of the interview, I do want to ask a little bit about your photography in terms of how it played out for the promotional kind of materials and stuff. Can you just give me the five W's? Maybe we can peel back "why", but like, where, when, who are you photographing for these things?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:18:11):

For the promo for the Pussy Palace?

Elio Colavito (01:18:13):

Yeah.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:18:13):

So, they asked. I did not arrange any of the W's. So, they asked me to do it, and they got the people, they got the place, they just were like, "Can you go to this place? We're going to find people to pose, to model." And I was like, "Sure, absolutely." I said, "I'm happy to do the photos and develop them." And I kind of remember who was there, but I don't even really. Chanelle [Gallant], I know was there because I have a picture from that shoot on my wall and it's her. So, I always remember that she was there and there were other people there obviously, but I don't even remember barely who was there. But I did not arrange that. So, I just came

and did the job. It was volunteer. There was no money exchanged. I think it was near U of T [University of Toronto], downtown. I think it was someone's studio space. Someone's apartment. I can't remember.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:19:11):

And yeah, so I shot black and white, which is what they wanted. I shot a bunch of different... You know, people would get into different configurations. It's black and white, and you, of course, want it to be suggestive, sexually suggestive, but it wasn't explicit, of course, because it was made for promo. And they wanted a variety of genders and different gender combinations. You know, you're trying to think about representing a range of experiences. But for the most part, it was also just what people were comfortable with, whether they were clothed or unclothed and so on. So, more or less clothed. Yeah. So, the "why" was, I don't think it was for 2000, I think it was maybe the year before, but you would probably know more than I do?

Elio Colavito (01:20:08):

This back here says 2003 on this one.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:20:12):

Right. But they may have reused the image. I wonder if I... Yeah, I can find out. 2003... Huh. I think they might've reused the image. I think it was shot earlier than that, but maybe not. Oh God. Oh my God. Tell everyone, you know who is between the ages of 15 and 30 to record everything because you think you're going to remember and you don't remember. You really don't remember. It's terrible. I remember when had my kids and I was like, "Oh, I'm going to remember everything." No, you do not. You do not. Oh, it's so heart-breaking to me as someone who likes to record things.

Elio Colavito (01:21:02):

Anyway, I am curious though about some of these concerns that the organizing committee had, that they wanted a diverse representation, what have you. Where these things that they said to you explicitly when you showed up? Like these are the goals per se?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:21:21):

That's interesting. I don't think so. I don't remember having a lot of communication with them to be perfectly honest. I really don't. I remember having very minimal communication with them. At that shoot Chanelle [Gallant] was there. I think she was still a member of the organizing committee. Maybe Lorelee [Gillis] was there, but I feel like there were a couple members of the organizing committee there who then were kind of in charge, and I was hired to take photographs. I mean, it really was a job. They'd asked me to do this job. And so, I really was like, you just tell me. I'm happy to do what you need me to do. It wasn't like I was shooting them for my own personal practice or anything. But I don't remember having really a lot of conversations about anything. I did get a sense that they wanted to assemble a diverse group of people for sure. But it wasn't explicitly stated to me as far as I remember. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (01:22:28):

So, we're getting near the end here. Just a couple more questions. We are wanting to get a sense of your impressions of the impact of the Pussy Palace as a community initiative. What's your impression of the intent behind the Pussy Palace? Its reason for being?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:22:45):

I mean, my impression was that bathhouses had been and have been such a huge part of men's, queer men's, masculine-of-centre culture. And I think it was like, "Well, why can't we have that?" You know, these spaces for... Because at the time, you know, I think we were really thinking about bisexual and queer women, lesbians, you know, the discourses were quite different. The discourses were less inclusive, for sure. But I mean, it was anyone who identified as female or a woman. There was obviously no policing of that. But I think that there was a sense of well, gay men do this. Why don't lesbians do this? Why don't queer women cruise? Why don't we have anonymous sex? Why don't we have spaces to do that, to kind of have those experiences of our own sexuality? So, I think in part, it felt like that was it. It was like giving ourselves permission to have that experience if we wanted it. To have the experience of meeting someone and just having casual, anonymous sex. Or even having a space to just have public sex with a lover or have sex that felt... Creating, opening up the possibilities for that.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:24:31):

In my experience at the time, the only communities that did that, that included queer women, were the kink and leather communities. And there's a lot of spaces for that, at the time in Toronto. There was a very diverse, inclusive, leather community; in some ways more public even. There were workshops being run out of Ryerson [University] that you could go to. I mean, there was actually a lot of resources around that kind of sexuality. And there were a lot of public play parties and dungeons. They were mixed gender and mixed sex, you know, many different sexualities, many different genders, but there hadn't been anything that had it explicitly... That kind of a space for queer women, queer, female-identified folks.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:25:27):

It felt like a space to be empowered differently, for lots of different people. And also, to celebrate the maybe ways we already felt empowered, but to celebrate how good we can be to each other and how much pleasure we could make available to ourselves and each other. Even though, in my experience, it didn't feel necessarily any more risqué than a nightclub sometimes, it had a different... It did have a kind of purpose that felt much more driven by sexuality. And that was kind of cool. That was a new experience. But I don't know if this still happens. I'm assuming it does. I haven't been to a bar in a long time. You know, we were also having sex in bars too. We were having sex in the bathroom all the time. I mean, it was not like we weren't having public sex. It also was an extension of what was already happening, right?

Alisha Stranges (01:27:01):

What kinds of things do you think were contributing to there not having been enough or really any spaces like this before for queer women, lesbians, trans folk? Around 2000, right?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:27:24):

I don't know. I mean, I think a lot of it has to do with capitalism and economic power. It costs money. As we know from how many queer spaces have closed down, it's a very expensive enterprise to have space, to own space. Even for a temporary time, to have space to yourself. I think historically women and trans people have had more, maybe other kinds of pressures and responsibilities than men have. Like again, just in terms of the economies of life, emotional labour, familial labour, domestic labour, and these kinds of things. So, I think there's just a difference. I think that historically gay men's culture in particular reflects a very particular kind of freedom and economic privilege.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:28:30):

I think that, in a way, it's a reflection of larger cultural dynamics. But in Toronto at that time, it felt to me like the scene for trans and women-identified or female-identified queers was very, very busy and vibrant. A lot of event nights were being sustained. People were coming out, hundreds of people. I mean, there was a club night on Yonge [Street] that Denise Benson ran for maybe a year. I mean, literally 700 people would come, and it was big. Like, there was just this scale. And maybe that's still happens now, but it felt at the time... Like, a lot of those places I think have disappeared or those big places, I think they are smaller. So, I don't know. It felt like there was a real lust for this kind of experience, and there were enough people to make it viable because they had to sell enough tickets to make it viable, right? Again, it costs money, and I have no idea about that part of it, but I can only imagine how much that weighed on the organizing committee, those kinds of pieces, practical pieces.

Alisha Stranges (01:29:59):

Yeah. Well, is there anything else about your experience as a volunteer photographer or, you know, sometimes patron, that you wanted to share that maybe our questions didn't invite you to speak to?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:30:14):

I don't think so. I think I want to just follow up a bit on the diversity question. I just want to be clear that while at that photo shoot, for example, the promo, I wasn't really privy to specific conversations about who would be there or who would be photographed. So, while I didn't have explicit conversations around inclusion or diversity, it was my sense that the organizing committee was having those conversations. I remember that there were also conversations around diversifying the organizing committee. Like, that the organizing committee itself, you know, was interested in how it should be diversified in terms of a leadership group. So, I did sense that those conversations were happening. I just wasn't that involved. I was happy to participate in the ways I did, but I just wasn't that involved with those larger conversations in that context at the time. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (01:31:27):

Well, is that the space you want to leave it on?

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:31:30):

Yep. Yeah. That's great. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (01:31:32):

Okay. Well, so thank you so much for, excuse me, choking on my gratitude. Thank you so much for participating. It's just amazing to get a peek into your particular experience as a photographer that night, as we've heard so much about the room, but not from the person who was, you know, holding space for it. So, thank you.

Chloë Brushwood Rose (01:32:00):

Yeah, no, it's been a pleasure. Thanks for listening. I appreciate it. And yeah, I look forward to seeing what happens beyond archiving the stories. It'll be interesting to see if anything is... Are the researchers planning to write about the data, to use this data to...? Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (01:32:20):

You're looking at the researchers. So, yeah, there are some plans for that. And we can talk a little bit more about where the project's going. Maybe we'll just pause the recordings now, or you stop yours and Elio [Colavito] can walk you through what to do next, and I'll stop mine.