

Pussy Palace Oral History Project
Oral History Interview with Stephanie Dutrizac
Conducted on June 2, 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: Stephanie Dutrizac is a 46-year-old, cisgender, poly, queer femme and white settler living in Toronto, Ontario. At the time of the interview, Dutrizac was working as a senior policy advisor for Ontario's Inclusive Diversity Office, collaborating with the government to implement more equitable policies and services for the province. The interview concerns her experiences as a patron of the Pussy Palace on September 14, 2000. Dutrizac discusses the evolution of her feminist and queer politics, her involvement in the BDSM community, the political ideas that informed her bathhouse attire, her role as the first point of contact for those interested in participating in the "fuck line" at the Pussy Palace, her sense memories of the physical space, and her recollection of the police raid, among other topics. The interview concerns the time period between 1993 and 2021, with a focus on the year 2000. Dutrizac mentions Montreal, Quebec; Ottawa, Ontario; and Toronto, Ontario.

Keywords: BDSM; Kink; Feminism; Trans; Play Parties; Lesbian; Femme; Top; Police.

Alisha Stranges (00:01):

So am I. So, this is Alisha Stranges and Elio Colavito from the Pussy Palace Oral History Project, and we're here in Toronto, Ontario interviewing Stephanie Dutrizac on June 2, 2021. Stephanie is also in Toronto and is going to tell us a little bit about the experience of being a patron of the Pussy Palace bathhouse event on the night of September 14, 2000. Stephanie, do we have your permission to record this oral history interview?

Stephanie Dutrizac (00:32):

Yup.

Alisha Stranges (00:34):

Thank you. And so, before we get into your experience with the Pussy Palace, we're just going to ask a couple of questions that sort of invite you to tell us a bit about yourself. In particular, we're trying to get a sense of the different aspects of identity you hold or categories you occupy and how at least maybe some of these have shifted or evolved over the past 20 years. So, to start simply, can you tell us your full name, your age, and your preferred gender pronouns?

Stephanie Dutrizac (01:03):

Stephanie Dutrizac, 46, and I use she/her.

Alisha Stranges (01:09):

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

Stephanie Dutrizac (01:14):

I'm a woman, cisgender, queer, sometimes I use dyke depending on the context, queer femme, queer femme top.

Alisha Stranges (01:25):

And can you unpack some of those terms for us in terms of how you use them, queer, dyke, queer femme top?

Stephanie Dutrizac (01:34):

So queer, I use because I date and love and have sex with lots of people, multiple genders. And so, it feels encompassing to me. I'm also poly, and I also have a sexuality that's oriented towards BDSM. So, I feel like queer just is a nice umbrella term to capture all of that and that I don't have to pick a letter of the alphabet.

Alisha Stranges (02:04):

I see. And what about around the time of 2000 when the bathhouse events would have been happening or in their heyday. Would you have used different language?

Stephanie Dutrizac (02:16):

I used queer back then, and back then, it was actually a more political and less common word than now. Now it's become quite mainstream, and sometimes it's often now just used to mean gay, but back then it was intentional and it wasn't as popular, if I can put it that way.

Alisha Stranges (02:40):

And that's how you were using it back then, more politically?

Stephanie Dutrizac (02:43):

Yeah. And I use it that way today, too.

Alisha Stranges (02:45):

Right. Right. What about racial, ethnic, cultural identity? How do you express yourself through these types of categories?

Stephanie Dutrizac (02:54):

I am a white settler. I would not have used settler 20 years ago, but I have awareness of that stuff now. Francophone is another one that I'll use occasionally. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (03:09):

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

Stephanie Dutrizac (03:13):

Working-class background who went to university, and I consider that I kind of stepped up after university with my government job. So, my professional life is surrounded by middle-class, upper-middle-class people, but my personal life is still mostly folks from working-class backgrounds.

Alisha Stranges (03:33):

Right. And can you say a little bit more about what occupies your time professionally these days?

Stephanie Dutrizac (03:40):

I am a senior policy advisor for the Inclusive Diversity Office for the provincial government. So, we do human rights stuff and just basically work with government to implement more inclusive, equitable policies and services for the province.

Alisha Stranges (03:58):

Wow. I've been curious about policy development myself. Very cool.

Stephanie Dutrizac (04:03):

I'm happy to talk to you about it. I've been a policy advisor... Actually, my first government job was around the time of the Pussy Palace.

Alisha Stranges (04:11):

Okay, okay.

Stephanie Dutrizac (04:13):

I'd just joined the Ontario government back then.

Alisha Stranges (04:16):

Yeah. This was going to be my next question. How would your professional life now, you sort of described but how might it have been different around 2000?

Stephanie Dutrizac (04:25):

In 2000, I had just dropped out of grad school. I was in queer and gender studies at U of T and sociology, and I was going to be a professor and then for lots of reasons that didn't work out, and I didn't quite know what to do, but I had a lot of research skills and was interested. And so, long story short, ended up trying government policy and haven't looked back.

Alisha Stranges (04:50):

Okay, cool. Well, so, I guess I was curious what role religion or spirituality might play in your life or not, currently?

Stephanie Dutrizac (05:01):

Not at all.

Alisha Stranges (05:02):

And was there ever a time when that might've been different?

Stephanie Dutrizac (05:06):

Nope. I was raised Catholic, but at the age of 14 I told my parents I'm done and haven't really engaged in it since.

Alisha Stranges (05:14):

I see. Did you want to expand on that or leave it there?

Stephanie Dutrizac (05:21):

It was part of my whole feminist awakening of realizing that the church was not something I was comfortable with, so yeah.

Alisha Stranges (05:30):

Yeah. Sorry?

Stephanie Dutrizac (05:34):

Yeah, just listening to the priest's sermon, I think once, and shaming women publicly in my church and then just going home and realizing I just couldn't go back.

Alisha Stranges (05:48):

Yeah. I am compelled to sort of ask what was the response? Was it supported, that decision?

Stephanie Dutrizac (05:58):

Actually, my mom was relieved, and she never went back to church either, and she did it for us. She did it for the kids. I think she thought it was the right thing to do, to raise us this way. And so, she never said she was relieved, but she literally stopped going. So, I feel like, yeah.

Alisha Stranges (06:19):

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

Stephanie Dutrizac (06:33):

It's been shockingly constant. I still identify... My sexuality and gender is very similar to how it was. I sort of came out and did a lot of exploration really young, a lot younger than I think maybe a lot of other people. So, by the time I was in 2000, I was fully, really out. I'll put it that way. I had a lot of experience. I've lived on my own since I was 16. So, that's also a bit of a context. So, I had already been on my own for four years. I had just moved. I had moved to Toronto from Montreal a year and a half ago. So, when I arrived to Toronto, I was so eager to just fully explore the queer and BDSM communities here. And I jumped in with both feet, and the Pussy Palace nights just came right at the right time for me for that period.

Alisha Stranges (07:36):

Right. So, when you say you moved a year and a half, from what time period?

Stephanie Dutrizac (07:41):

I was in Montreal from '93 to '98, and then I moved to Toronto in '98.

Alisha Stranges (07:49):

I see. Okay. Well, let's get into it then a bit. I'm going to invite you now to sort of travel back in time to the fall of 2000, when the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee would have been preparing to host the Night of 2000 Pussies, which was the fourth instalment of the Pussy Palace. How do you remember first learning about that particular event on the night of September 14, 2000?

Stephanie Dutrizac (08:16):

I had been to a few of them before that one. So, it was probably my third, I think. Which was it? Was it fourth?

Alisha Stranges (08:27):

Yeah. We're told it was the fourth.

Stephanie Dutrizac (08:29):

Fourth. I would've missed the first and then gone to the second, the other ones, maybe. So just word of mouth through my community, it spread really fast. It was very popular. And we got on getting tickets like really fast when we heard that it was going to happen. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (08:50):

Where did you go to buy tickets?

Stephanie Dutrizac (08:53):

Probably through Good For Her and Carlyle [Jansen] who was friends with friends of mine. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (08:59):

What was it about these series of events that was intriguing for you? What compelled you to decide, every time, I'm just going to go check it out?

Stephanie Dutrizac (09:09):

I was really loving... So, I was going to play parties as well, BDSM leather parties. And I just loved the idea. I just love sexual spaces and public spaces where people are playing and having sex, it's just super exciting. And I wish there was more of it now. Maybe there is, but I just don't know where to find it. It feels like things have really changed. But at the time, there was a lot, there was a lot going on, especially in the women's and trans communities. We were, I guess, pretty underground, but there was a lot of private parties happening throughout the city. So, I would go to quite a few a year. And then I also, I used to go to more of the straight Northbound Leather gay men's events too, but it was exciting to have an all women and trans inclusive space was the main draw.

Alisha Stranges (10:21):

Yeah. One thing we've been curious about is the space and time during which a person goes from being someone who's decided they're going to attend the event to someone... The process of becoming an official patron, basically. So, I've got a couple of questions here that maybe seem a little inconsequential, but just bear with us. For example, where, do you remember, where were you before you would've made your way to Club Toronto that night?

Stephanie Dutrizac (10:52):

Probably would have met with my friend ahead of time, or friends, maybe a group of us at a bar around the corner and sort of arrived together.

Alisha Stranges (11:03):

And about what time do you think you were planning to arrive?

Stephanie Dutrizac (11:10):

Probably early, because by then I knew to make the most of the night, so probably on the early side, like eight o'clock or something.

Alisha Stranges (11:22):

Right. We've heard that if you didn't get there early, you couldn't get a room. Was that sort of something on your radar? Try to get there early to get a room?

Stephanie Dutrizac (11:31):

Not for me. I was more into the public aspects. So, a private room with the door closed wasn't really what I was going there for.

Alisha Stranges (11:39):

I see. How long would you have been planning to stay, arriving at 8:00 p.m., knowing that it kind of goes all night?

Stephanie Dutrizac (11:48):

Probably all night, until I was completely exhausted. Probably as long as possible. I brought snacks. I had water. I was ready for a whole night. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (11:59):

What kind of snacks did you bring to them? I'm curious. I don't think we've heard of anyone bringing snacks yet.

Stephanie Dutrizac (12:06):

Oh, everybody brought snacks in their little bag with their lube and their gloves and their flogger or whatever. Yeah. So, trail mix and granola bars. You know? Stuff like that. Chocolate.

Elio Colavito (12:18):

Wow. Nancy [Irwin] left that out.

Alisha Stranges (12:21):

She did leave that out, yeah.

Stephanie Dutrizac (12:23):

Did she?

Elio Colavito (12:25):

She didn't tell us the snacks were in the bag. She did bring us through the rest of the bag, though.

Alisha Stranges (12:30):

How might you have been feeling before... You say you're waiting in line or you're getting ready to go in? How might you have been feeling?

Stephanie Dutrizac (12:40):

Excited, probably really excited. And I'm an extroverted person, too. So, just the energy's just very exciting for me. Yeah. And by then not nervous. Like, the first one, I probably was much more nervous, but this one, I kind of knew the deal. I knew lots of people who were going to be there. So, it wasn't like a room full of strangers. I had established quite a community by then.

Alisha Stranges (13:07):

I see. Well, I'm going to pass it over to Elio [Colavito] now. Curious about your fashion choices.

Elio Colavito (13:16):

Yes. Do you recall what you would have worn that evening or at any of the other Pussy Palace events, if you can't quite pinpoint a particular outfit?

Stephanie Dutrizac (13:27):

Yes. And in fact, I pulled out my old Polaroids that I have to remind myself, and they confirmed what I remembered. So, it would have been really slutty, lacy stuff. Like, black and red fish nets with some kind of lacy outfit, lingerie, but very little and very practical. So, folks I hung out with, we were very much about not standing around in our perfect outfits, but in getting dirty and messy. So, it would have been stuff where you could easily take on and off with multiple layers.

Elio Colavito (14:09):

Okay. And what were you trying to feel internally with this outfit, but also communicate to the people around you with this outfit?

Stephanie Dutrizac (14:18):

At the time... So, when I first came to Toronto, I presented in a very kind of androgynous way. And in the first few years that I came to Toronto, with the community I found and the people I dated, I came to sort of reclaim this femme-ness that I had rejected before and thought that... I'm in my early twenties, right? So, I'm exploring what it means to be a feminist, and can you wear heels, and all these stuff that seem ridiculous to me now, but at the time were important things that I was working through. So, I was reclaiming lingerie, reclaiming a bunch of femme stuff for an audience that was women and trans people and butches. By trans, I should mention I'm using that in a really umbrella, broad way. That includes non-binary, gender fluid, butches, bois, like, that whole spectrum. So, I would have been wearing clothes probably way more femme

and quote unquote sexy than I would have in my day-to-day life, because it was a space where I felt excited and safe to present in that way versus out in the real world, I did not feel that way at all.

Elio Colavito (15:43):

Right. I'm interested in these feminist politics, and I'm wondering how they kind of influence the entire community around you and the friend group around you and how that would have taken shape in the Pussy Palace itself.

Stephanie Dutrizac (16:01):

That's a big question. I think feminism for me was about honouring what everyone wants and not shaming people for who they are and what they want and what gets them off. And so, which is why the community I was part of had a lot of issues with the quote unquote lesbian feminists of the time that were very categorical. And there was a lot of judgment about being into certain things and meaning that you're just replicating patriarchal ideas, et cetera, et cetera. And the folks I was associating with were really saying, "We don't give a shit. Everyone deserves pleasure. Everyone deserves to express themselves however they want." And that was my kind of feminism. So, I was in the process of really embracing all of that. And so, the femme clothes was a way of doing that because I would get even judgment from people that I don't hang out with anymore around dressing like that. And saying that it's, like, I'm buying into sexist ideas of femininity, et cetera, et cetera. So, it was like a reclaiming, you know?

Elio Colavito (17:40):

And how did your sort of brand, if we want to call it a brand, of feminism versus maybe this alternative brand deal with the issue of trans folks in the community?

Stephanie Dutrizac (17:53):

There were a lot of debates at the time, and I thought it was ridiculous. I've always embraced all of that. But this has to do with my academic background where gender is a construct, et cetera, et cetera. So, I was coming from that queer theory perspective. Am I making sense? I feel like I didn't...

Elio Colavito (18:21):

It makes perfect sense which is why I'm asking you these specific questions because your articulations are so incredible that I keep asking you more.

Stephanie Dutrizac (18:31):

Okay. Yeah. I mean, I was reading, I don't know if you know, but Judith Butler and all this stuff. And so, I was fully into that, was literally living that academically. And the people I dated and were with were all, we were all freaks and a minority within a minority in the community around all that stuff. So, for me, gender was always fluid and always... It shouldn't be policed.

Elio Colavito (19:09):

So, I hear that you're saying a lot of your opinions kind of came from your background in gender studies. How about the influence from the kink scene?

Stephanie Dutrizac (19:20):

Absolutely. Yes. A hundred percent. I was going to say it was... That's why I loved the kink scene so much. And also like the body positivity was incredible. I just couldn't believe. There was just so much acceptance of different ages and body types and presentations, and people would shift their presentations in the community over time, and it was all just celebrated. It felt really comfortable, felt really, really comfortable.

Elio Colavito (19:56):

Right. So, I want to bring you back to the Palace. Thank you so much for going there with me.

Stephanie Dutrizac (19:59):

Yeah. No problem.

Elio Colavito (20:01):

When you arrive at the club, can you describe the scene outside a little bit?

Stephanie Dutrizac (20:08):

I just remember a line-up and just standing there. It was quiet on the street and us just probably wearing clothes to cover what we were wearing underneath and probably just trying to keep a low profile because we were aware there's all these houses and community around, like people... We didn't want to draw attention to the building.

Elio Colavito (20:33):

Right. And can you kind of take us through the process of being admitted to the bathhouse?

Stephanie Dutrizac (20:43):

I barely remember. You walked in. You probably handed your ticket. They probably... They were always very good about getting your consent and explaining what it was you were going to see. I barely remember it.

Elio Colavito (21:01):

That's completely okay. I imagine I wouldn't remember either. So, how about once you get inside, then? How does your mindset shift? I mean, you're on the street. You're like covering up. You don't want to draw close attention to yourself. And then what happens when you become a patron and you're in the space?

Stephanie Dutrizac (21:23):

We probably ran right to the lockers to get ourselves organized, to take off her street clothes. I'm sure we put them in a little corner. Got ourselves all dressed up and then kind of got ready. And then probably right after that, I would have walked around and surveyed the space and did a bit of strutting and did a bit of walk about, I guess.

Elio Colavito (21:48):

And surveilling the space, what kind of things stick out to you in your memory about what the space actually looked like and felt like?

Stephanie Dutrizac (21:57):

So, it was dirty, smelly, and cramped and dark and humid. And I loved all of it. I loved... It felt like a gay men's space that we were taking over. And as a leather, kinky pervert, that is super exciting. So, it really felt like that. And when you were walking around the different floors, there were some... You had to walk through lots of spaces and corners and it felt, it felt, how did it feel? The opposite of bright and open and clean. That's what it was.

Elio Colavito (22:55):

And what kind of parts of the space did you gravitate towards? What activities did you get up to that night?

Stephanie Dutrizac (23:02):

So, I think I remember learning or being told that, by that time, folks like us, we had to be more on the upper floors so that people who weren't comfortable witnessing BDSM activity would know. Like, there were certain floors designated. I think that happened. Maybe it happened at another women's event that was there after, but I remember that happening and being aware that the kink was happening on the top floors.

Stephanie Dutrizac (23:39):

So, the activities? I would have spent a lot of time walking around and watching, which I love to do. I think that was the night... So, one of the things is, I remember lots of what I did and happened, but I can't remember which party it was. They all kind of blend together in my memory. I remember, I think that that was when they were, they had more organized activities at that one. So, they had you could get a free lap dance. Is that right? Did you hear that? I'm confirming with you if that happened.

Alisha Stranges (24:17):

I heard that from time to time. I heard that the other day that there were lap dances. Yeah.

Stephanie Dutrizac (24:22):

Yeah. So, I got a lap dance. I engaged in lots of flirting. I watched a lot of play happening. I think that's the night, yeah, I think that's the night... Have you heard about the fuck line?

Elio Colavito (24:46):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes.

Stephanie Dutrizac (24:49):

So yeah, I think that was that night. So, I was part of that. My top, at the time, organized it with her girlfriend. So, they were the instigators, and they had planned it weeks before the Pussy Palace night, so it was already organized before the night, and I got to participate, me and my friend. So I was, my role, it was very exciting, super exciting. Oh my God. So, what we did was we took over this one big space that was called the group sex room. And we decided that for a specific time in the night that our group would take it over, and we spread the word beforehand about what was going to happen so that there would be like rumours and people would hear about it.

Stephanie Dutrizac (25:39):

And then what we ended up doing is the two tops that I was with, and I think two other tops, went into the space, and set things up. I was at the door and my role was to manage the flow in and out and to get people's consent before they went in. So, it was an amazing role. So, I stood there at the door, and there was a line-up. People were very excited. And I would say, "Hi, welcome to the fuck line. This is what's going to happen to you. You're going to be blindfolded, and you're going to get fucked and you're not going to know who's fucking you. And you can't ask who later, and you will never fucking know." Which was super-hot for lots of people.

Stephanie Dutrizac (26:27):

And at the same time, I remember talking about consent too, about what would happen, is there anything you want or don't want. And then, when that person was ready, I would put the blindfold on them and pass them into the room. And then there were four tops, I think it was four, lined up. And this person would literally get touched and fucked and passed along the line. And my friend at the time, her job, she was the lube and gloves girl. And her job was to continuously give new gloves to the tops and lube, and then escort them out. And then I did a little bit of checking in, aftercare afterwards. So, it was definitely a BDSM thing that wasn't for everybody. But for people who participated, it was super exciting to have that kind of complete anonymous sex and give yourself permission to do that. So, yeah, I was part of that. And that was super fun.

Elio Colavito (27:32):

Sorry.

Alisha Stranges (27:33):

Was it timed?

Elio Colavito (27:35):

I'm taking notes on my phone. I'm not trying to be rude. I'm just like, "Oh my God, this is great stuff, and I need to record it." Alisha [Stranges], go ahead.

Alisha Stranges (27:41):

I just wanted to clarify because I've heard of this room, but never heard it explained yet with such clarity. I was just curious, how does the movement happen, what prompts it? Is it a person's physiological response or is it time? How does movement happen?

Stephanie Dutrizac (28:04):

What do you mean by movement?

Alisha Stranges (28:05):

Well, you say there are a lot of people lined up and then they go in and they get passed along. So, I'm just wondering what decides that they're done now with this person and now they're passed along to the next person?

Stephanie Dutrizac (28:18):

Oh. So, once I would get their consent and, at the same time, turn them on by what's going to happen to them and blindfold them, I pass them onto the first top who would take them, and then that top would pass them onto the next top. And so, they had no say, but it happened. It wasn't very long. And I mean, these tops were very experienced, and I watched them, and you pretend that they have no say, but of course they're very skilled at getting feedback and not doing things that people don't want, all the while talking to them like they're an object and piece of meat and all the things. And then, at the end of the line, I think. Sorry, I keep avoiding people. My friend, I think escorted them back to me. And then, I think I had someone else, we had like aftercare, just someone just in case someone had a trigger or something happened who then brought them back out. So, the line-up was outside of the room. Does that make sense? So, I was at the door, throwing them in and taking them out basically.

Elio Colavito (29:39):

Interesting. You've told us that you have a Polaroid. Do you mind describing the image in the photo?

Stephanie Dutrizac (29:47):

It is of me with two other friends of mine, and we're posing on a bed, and I'm holding my leather flogger. I think I have it on her back. And it was like a posed picture.

Elio Colavito (30:12):

If you had to describe a feeling that the photo's capturing, what would you say about it?

Stephanie Dutrizac (30:29):

We did it campy. I would say campy. It was posed in a way that we weren't being serious, you know?

Elio Colavito (30:41):

For sure.

Alisha Stranges (30:44):

Before we kind of move on here, I wanted to just circle back because you were talking about the offering of aftercare, what did that involve? Was it ever something that you had to provide or there was any struggle in navigating that moment afterward with folks?

Stephanie Dutrizac (31:05):

I remember some people just being a little, like, glazed in their eyes because they were so... A lot of people came, and then they'd come out and they'd be... No one was upset because the people who went in were people who were into that. I don't think... It was people who were, I think, experienced in that kind of stuff. So it was... I don't remember anything... I might be wrong, but I hope there wasn't anybody who had a bad experience. I don't remember that.

Alisha Stranges (31:47):

Yes. I'm not fishing. I was just curious.

Stephanie Dutrizac (31:52):

Now you're making me worry that someone, somewhere...

Alisha Stranges (31:57):

I'm just curious. I was just curious. I'm sorry. Okay. So, I really want to get a sense of the impression that the space made on your senses. So, I'm going to invite you into a little bit of an exercise here. I'm going to do it with you. Elio [Colavito]'s sort of witnessing us. So, if you can just go with me to the best of your abilities. So, just sort of get comfortable in your chair, allowing your arms to kind of rest gently on your lap. Maybe just really feeling the weight of your body in the seat. You can allow your gaze to soften or even close your eyes if you feel comfortable to do that, and just take a couple breaths in and out. And with each inhale, allowing your mind's eye to kind of travel back to the Pussy Palace. Maybe it's the night of September 14, 2000. Maybe you're not quite sure which night it is. Some night. And allowing your body to re-inhabit some or another space within the Palace. And just taking a moment to sort of look around, take in what's coming back. Don't worry too much about which space comes to mind. Whichever space comes first is the perfect one to go with. And then from this contemplative space, look around and tell us what it is that you can see.

Stephanie Dutrizac (33:50):

I am on one of the upper floors, and there is a line-up of people going up the stairs and around on the railing who are all just standing there, posing, and watching. And then there's people walking up and down the stairs, checking everybody out, up and down the stairs. It was like this parade of cruising. It was basically cruising and it was really hot.

Alisha Stranges (34:25):

And if you could distil that space, that staircase of cruising, if you could distil it into a single colour, what would its predominant colour be?

Stephanie Dutrizac (34:39):

Glossy red.

Alisha Stranges (34:42):

And sort of turning your attention to sound? What is sort of lingering? What can you hear?

Stephanie Dutrizac (34:56):

I can hear laughter and loud, loud laughter with the occasional [claps hands together] "uh, uh, uh," in some back room.

Alisha Stranges (35:19):

And what about smell? Any lingering odours?

Stephanie Dutrizac (35:26):

Just musty and sweaty.

Alisha Stranges (35:31):

And if some part of your body could reach out and touch some part of the space that you're taking us through, what are you touching? What are its textures?

Stephanie Dutrizac (35:42):

I'm touching the big wooden banister. It might've been painted glossy red. I don't know. And just holding onto it and watching everything happening around me.

Alisha Stranges (35:59):

And if you could magically somehow taste this space, what might his flavour be? What does it taste like?

Stephanie Dutrizac (36:12):

Meat.

Alisha Stranges (36:18):

And you can let that go. Open your eyes if they've been closed. Thank you.

Elio Colavito (36:25):

Awesome. So, I'm going to transition towards a line of question that asks you about the crowd, your perception of it. How would you describe the composition of the crowd along race, gender, sexuality?

Stephanie Dutrizac (36:48):

Probably, predominantly white, I think. And then prominently people that—

Elio Colavito (37:03):

Sorry, my cat is screaming at me.

Alisha Stranges (37:07):

So, so sorry. The number of pussies that we've also interviewed alongside, it's just remarkable. Sorry.

Stephanie Dutrizac (37:17):

Yeah. Predominantly white, probably. Predominantly people who would present in a feminine way or women. It's hard to say gender. Just dykes, like, a whole bunch of dykes with lots of butches and people expressing their genders in a bunch of different ways, I guess. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (37:54):

And we've heard that the space is supposedly publicly inclusive of lesbian women, queer cis-women and trans folks. What was your impression of the relationship between these differently gendered groups at the Pussy Palace?

Stephanie Dutrizac (38:10):

What was your first group that you mentioned?

Elio Colavito (38:14):

Lesbian women, queer cis-woman, and trans folks.

Stephanie Dutrizac (38:21):

Well, I can only speak for myself. So, I identified with the queer women and trans folks. And we tended to avoid anyone that we would perceive as lesbian, and the only reason for that is the judgment that I talked about earlier, but also there was a bit of a divide in the community at the time, but my definition of lesbian is likely not very broad, so maybe that's not fair. There were also, there were lots of people who were there and were very nervous and would just stand there and watch, which was okay. So, there was, you could see, like there was some people, especially on the main floor, I remember the main floor, there were a lot of people there who just were nervous, probably first time, and just watching and just talking all night. And then as you went up, there was more and more sex and play happening in the other spaces. So, it kind of naturally divided up in that way. People gravitated towards different spaces.

Elio Colavito (39:35):

I'm interested in your narrow definition of what a lesbian is.

Stephanie Dutrizac (39:38):

I don't want to say.

Elio Colavito (39:44):

The reason I'm asking is because you're not alone in this.

[crosstalk]

Stephanie Dutrizac (39:50):

Yeah, I know.

Elio Colavito (39:51):

And this is a space where you can express that openly if you feel comfortable. If not, we can move on. But I think it's an important aspect of what's going on in the sexual culture.

Stephanie Dutrizac (40:05):

Yeah. This idea of women loving women, this, lesbians who were very uncomfortable with and had very, very, more narrowed ideas about what it meant to be a lesbian, too. And were just less fluid both with their sexuality and gender. And, the thing is, I feel like they were in the minority there because I don't think they would have been comfortable. It didn't feel like they were the majority there. But then again, any space that I didn't feel comfortable, I would leave. So, my impression, my memory of it was that it was super inclusive, but maybe that's because that's how I felt, and what I saw.

Stephanie Dutrizac (41:03):

Definitely trans women weren't around as much as they are now. That's the one thing that I know has shifted a lot. So, there were a lot of trans-masculine people, butches and dykes who presented in all kinds of masculine ways. And that was definitely, hugely represented there, but trans women, less so. And since then, I have seen more and more trans women show up at these events and seem to be more included. I think that there was a lot of transphobia against trans women at the time that I heard about or was aware of. Yeah. That would be the one thing.

Elio Colavito (41:51):

What was your impression on why trans-masc folks had an easier time in the space than maybe trans-fem?

Stephanie Dutrizac (42:08):

So, this is my analysis today. It's transphobic. So, the transmasculine guys are still viewed as women. We're safe with them. They're part of our community. They are us. Trans women are outsiders. They're men, they're coming into our space. I think that was the transphobic mindset at the time.

Elio Colavito (42:30):

Awesome. Not awesome but awesome articulation of what was going on. So, at 12:45 a.m., five men, all plainclothes police officers entered the club and stay about 90 minutes. Were you still in the Pussy Palace?

Stephanie Dutrizac (42:44):

Yes.

Elio Colavito (42:46):

Okay. Do you remember what you were doing when the police arrived?

Stephanie Dutrizac (42:49):

I do. I remember it really vividly. I had been having lots of sex and play before they got there and I went to the bar to take a break and I was just having a drink and chatting with some people. So, I was on the first floor when they came in, in the back, and I remember just everybody just quiet. The energy changed. Things went shushed very quickly. I didn't see them. I saw, like, there were crowds in front of me, but I knew they were walking through because of, I think maybe I saw their heads or something. I don't know.

Stephanie Dutrizac (43:35):

And everyone's like, "What's going on? What's going on?" And then I heard people say, "The cops are here and what do we do? Do we just stand there?" And we just sort of, at the bar level, we just stood there and waited to see what would happen. And then we would get updates. People were updating each other through the rooms. So, someone would hear something and pass it on and pass it on. So, we were all communicating with each other and people would say, "They're still here. They're still here. Okay." And we were standing around for a really long time waiting. And I just remember, people were putting their clothes on and just stopped what they were doing. And we were all just standing there waiting, is what I remember. And I was in the bar area.

Elio Colavito (44:32):

Do you remember how you felt during all of this, kind of what was going on internally?

Stephanie Dutrizac (44:40):

I was confused. I didn't understand why police were there. I haven't personally had bad encounters with police, I've been very privileged, but I knew lots of people who had, but I think that naïve privilege... Like, I was standing there going, "Did someone get hurt? Maybe they called an ambulance." I was coming up with excuses in my head of why the police were there because I didn't understand. It didn't click until the next day for me. I kept thinking, "We're not doing anything illegal." Like, why would they be here? I just couldn't figure it out. And people, some people are like, "fucking cops" and all this stuff. And we're talking and, in my mind, I was making excuses for them. There must be a reason. Something must have happened. We don't know. I'm really embarrassed. I would never think those things now. I have a much more critical view of police and the history of policing in the community. But at the time, I didn't have as much perspective. So, yeah.

Elio Colavito (46:10):

And how did you feel about the maleness of the cops present?

Stephanie Dutrizac (46:17):

It made me really angry. Though, actually, I take that back. I just was mad that there were cops there. I just was like, "What are they doing?" It wasn't... The maleness wasn't so much as it just they were cops.

Elio Colavito (46:38):

And so, refresh my memory. You stayed until after the cops left?

Stephanie Dutrizac (46:45):

Yeah, I did. I did, but I didn't play or do anything else after. I think we left shortly after they were gone. A lot of people did. Kind of ruined the mood. It was also really late. So, I think I was done already, but I don't know because I've heard they were there a really long time. And I don't remember standing there for that long, but I must have because my friends were on another floor, and I wouldn't have left without waiting for them. And I think I left with my friend. But I don't remember.

Elio Colavito (47:35):

It was later revealed that before the plainclothes officers entered the club, there were actually two women officers, undercover. How did it feel to learn about that after the fact?

Stephanie Dutrizac (47:46):

Yeah, that made me really angry. And I mean, by then I had processed with a bunch of people the next day and realized this was a raid and had my feminist anger come up and had put that together. And it made me angry because if they went in before, they would have known that there was nothing going on that was illegal. Why did they go in and then cops came in after them? And the undercover part is just ridiculous. But yeah, it made me feel like there was nothing there. There was nothing there. There was no reason for them to be there and then leave and then come back.

Elio Colavito (48:36):

We know that there was a meeting at The 519 the following day, an outrage of all of what had taken place. Did you attend that?

Stephanie Dutrizac (48:48):

I didn't, but I went to the protest at the police headquarters.

Elio Colavito (48:53):

Do you want to describe what you saw or what you took part in at the headquarters?

Stephanie Dutrizac (48:59):

I just remember us being there and chanting. What were we chanting? I don't remember the chants. I remember there were lots of people I knew there, everybody that I knew at that night, we all went together. Yeah. And we were just really angry.

Elio Colavito (49:33):

And did you follow the legal proceedings that unfolded following the raid?

Stephanie Dutrizac (49:37):

Not closely. I would just get updates once in a while from people, but I didn't follow it really, really closely.

Elio Colavito (49:47):

The last question before I turn it over to Alisha [Stranges], just kind of in that vein of the legal stuff, from what you kind of did hear, didn't hear, however you kept up with it, do you remember what you thought about what was going on with the legal stuff or what the folks around you thought about it?

Stephanie Dutrizac (50:17):

I remember realizing we have to keep fighting. I had this idea that these police raids like this were in the past, and it just reminded me that that's naive and that it's still happening now. And it made me feel more aware that we need to keep fighting. We need to keep fighting. We can't just sit back and say, "Oh, things are better now. And progress is inevitable, and things will get better over time." They don't get better over time unless people make it better.

Alisha Stranges (51:00):

Did you ever attend another Pussy Palace event afterward?

Stephanie Dutrizac (51:12):

No, I didn't.

Alisha Stranges (51:14):

Was it, do you think in any way, related to having had the raid, like, your decision not to attend further?

Stephanie Dutrizac (51:25):

I don't remember why. It might've been. I was going to private parties that felt way more safe, after that. I didn't go to public stuff for a while. So yeah, maybe it really did impact me. I don't think I realized it at the time.

Alisha Stranges (51:52):

Yeah. I'm curious about, last couple of questions here are more about the impact of the Pussy Palace, your impression anyhow, as a community initiative. So, I'm curious about how you perceived the intent behind the Pussy Palace. What was its reason for being?

Stephanie Dutrizac (52:16):

I think to have just sexual space that is ours. I have always been jealous of gay men's community and how much space they have, sexual space in bathhouses and bars and parties. And it's always frustrated me that we don't have that as easily accessible and available to us. So, for me, it was just powerful to be able to do that and to take over that space and to be shameless in being able to have that kind of thing for ourselves.

Alisha Stranges (53:06):

And in what ways do you feel like the Pussy Palace sort of succeeded in delivering on that intention and in what ways might they have not been so successful?

Stephanie Dutrizac (53:18):

I think they were from... I think they were super successful. For the last 20 years, people will still tell stories about their Pussy Palace experiences. Its gaunt continued. And so many people I know have had formative experiences on those nights, that shaped them. So, I think that it's been really positive. I'm sure there's been negative experience. I'm not trying to make it all perfect. But this is, I guess you're asking me my experience. So, my experience was very positive. And I think too, I think likely the raid also politicized some people and made them sort of consider, like remember, what it is we have to keep fighting for, at least it did for me. And I'm guessing it might have for other people too.

Alisha Stranges (54:25):

Yeah. Is there anything else that you wanted to share about your experience that night or at the Pussy Palaces more broadly that maybe our questions really haven't given you the opportunity to speak to?

Stephanie Dutrizac (55:00):

Not right now. So, I've been going to play parties by the same type of community since, up until the pandemic. I don't know if you've heard of Harvest in Ottawa and these other annual events that take place. And they take a lot of work, and it's all volunteer. And it's because of money. Gay men have so much space to be able to do this stuff because they have more money and they can... There's just bigger numbers of men that will pay a hundred dollars, two hundred dollars a ticket to go to things. Right? So, for me, it's like that's why it was special too is because it was, I think they had sliding scale and it was like, I didn't have a lot of money at the time, and I would not have been able to afford a ticket that was expensive. And the fact that it was not expensive, it made lots of people go that normally wouldn't go to those things. And, I mean, we have no bars now. We barely had some back then, but now we have none.

Alisha Stranges (56:33):

That's a sad note to leave it on. I just want to give a little bit of space. Not that we have to tie things neatly with a bow if they cannot be, but just to leave a little space.

Stephanie Dutrizac (56:47):

Michael [Erickson] has done amazing stuff with Glad Day the last few years. I think he has created an inclusive space where all kinds of queers of different genders feel comfortable. So, that is a positive thing. I'm friends with him through my circle, and he has created a place to go, but it's not, you know... It's still different.

Alisha Stranges (57:15):

Well, let's not fight. Let's not fight how this is concluding. Okay? So, thank you so much, Stephanie, for taking time out of your, I'm sure, very busy schedule to sit with us, reflect on something that happened so long ago, and it's just wonderful to bear witness to your story.

Stephanie Dutrizac (57:40):

Thank you.