

**Pussy Palace Oral History Project**  
Oral History Interview with Chanelle Gallant  
Conducted on May 19, 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 Emily Mastragostino

Summary: Chanelle Gallant is a white, raised-poor, queer, cis femme; a former sex worker; and, at the time of the interview, a sex worker activist. The interview mostly concerns her experiences as a member of the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee and an organizer-patron of the Pussy Palace on September 14, 2000. She discusses her organizing efforts with the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee; the intentions of the Pussy Palace events; her identification with police abolitionist politics; the physical space that the Pussy Palace event occupied in Club Toronto; her participation in the legal case that followed the police raid; and other topics. Gallant discusses the time between 1998 and 2021, focusing on events taking place from 1998 to 2003. In the interview, she speaks about Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia in Canada, and mentions New York City, New York as well as San Francisco and Los Angeles, California in the United States.

Keywords: Bathhouse; Queer; Femme; Sex; Police Abolition; Sex Work; Organizing; Activism; Fundraising.

Chanelle Gallant (00:00:01):

I thought you were recording.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:02):

Okay so it should say for everyone, up there in the corner, that it's recording. Yes? Okay. So, we're going to do a little spiel off the top here. This is Alisha Stranges and Elio Colavito from the Pussy Palace Oral History Project. And we are here in Toronto, Ontario, interviewing Chanelle Gallant on March 10, 2021. Chanelle is also in Toronto. Is that right?

Chanelle Gallant (00:00:32):

Yes, I am.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:33):

Chanelle's also in Toronto and is going to tell us about the experiences of being an organizer and patron of the Pussy Palace bathhouse events. Chanelle, do we have permission to record this oral history interview?

Chanelle Gallant (00:00:49):

Yes, you do.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:50):

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

Chanelle Gallant (00:01:19):

Yeah, Chanelle Gallant, and I use she and her pronouns.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:22):

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

Chanelle Gallant (00:01:30):

The short version is I'm a queer, cis femme.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:32):

A queer, cis femme. And what about in, in 2000, how would you have described your gender and sexual identity around the time when the 2000 Pussies event took place?

Chanelle Gallant (00:01:45):

Well, the funny thing is that at the time I would've... I couldn't have used the word cis because the word cisgender had not been invented yet. So, what you'll find in the court documents, actually, is that the word trans is used, or probably transgender, but the word cisgender is not because it had not yet been invented by, I think it was Emi Koyama, and then popularized by the woman who wrote *Whip Smart* or, sorry, who wrote *Whipping Girl*. I'm forgetting her name right now. Anyways so, we didn't use those terms. And so, I would've identified probably as... Well, I couldn't have identified as cis, and I think I would have identified as bisexual back then because also the word queer was really only coming into its current meaning in the 90s. And so, around 2000, I'm not sure if I was using the word queer yet. I may have, but I probably was also still using the word bisexual.

Alisha Stranges (00:02:46):

I'm curious, different people use the word queer in different ways. How do you use it? What does it mean for you?

Chanelle Gallant (00:02:55):

Well, I feel that that could be a whole 'nother interview, but the short version is, I use it actually as a shorthand to describe, not really the gender of the partners who I'm involved with, but that I orient toward my own freedom. So, my sexual identity is feminist. My sexual identity is autonomous, and there isn't really a word for that. So, I call myself queer.

Alisha Stranges (00:03:28):

And can you expand a little bit more on the definition of femme for you?

Chanelle Gallant (00:03:36):

Femme? Well, again, the shorthand version is that, for me, femme comes out of a lineage of queer/lesbian/bi women's history, that it's sort of a reclaiming of femininity. And so, it's actually very important to my identity as well because, for me, it's very feminist. Feminist is a conscious, powerful claiming of femininity, not as a position that is in relation to or subjugated by men or masculinity. It's an autonomous... It's an experience of gender autonomy. And again, femme is sort of just shorthand and then, you know, the way that many people

hear it, and straight people will hear it, often, they just think we mean feminine, and that's not what we mean, but our language doesn't always make sense to people who are outside of the community.

Alisha Stranges (00:04:55):

Yeah. Thanks for that answer. What about racial, ethnic, and cultural identity? How do you express yourself through these types of categories?

Chanelle Gallant (00:05:05):

I would just identify as a white lady. You know, I come from a... I don't know if you're going to ask about class background, but I come from a raised-poor family, which is multi-racial. I have family members of colour, but I'm a white lady, and my background is Western and Eastern European.

Alisha Stranges (00:05:30):

Yeah. I was going to ask about class background. Is there anything else that you kind of want to expand on about your educational and class background?

Chanelle Gallant (00:05:39):

Well, I grew up in a poor, single-parent family, and I'm the eldest daughter of a teenage, single mom. And my class background is a very important part of why I was involved in the bathhouse and my relationship to sex generally because sexuality has always been a way that I expressed my... It's always been a way that I rebelled against middle-class norms and expectations. And so, I was a sexually rebellious young woman. And then, which was part of my not wanting to assimilate into a middle-class culture. And the bathhouse was part of that as well.

Chanelle Gallant (00:06:30):

Our sexuality is classed, right? And our class is sexualized. So, for me, I come from a family that is very outside of normative heterosexuality. I'm from four generations of like unwed, Catholic, teenage moms. We are not respectable. We do not fit into the norms and expectations of good, respectable, white womanhood. And I didn't want to. And so, I didn't want to be a teenage mom; that wasn't the way that I was going to do it. My sister did, my mom did, my grandmother, my great grandmother. And then, there's queer fruit on every family tree. And for me instead, that meant that I was queer. So.

Alisha Stranges (00:07:28):

You're sort of sharing how, or what I'm hearing is that, class and sexuality are intertwined for you from a young age, but what about nowadays? How does your current educational or social class compare to who you were in the 2000's when you were organizing and attending these events?

Chanelle Gallant (00:07:53):

I mean, I was a scrappy, broke bitch back then. I was a grad school dropout at the time of the raid. Now, I have a master's degree; I've class ascended. I have middle-class resources now, and so I consider myself mixed-class now. I have access to middle-class resources. I have a graduate degree. And at the same time, my family is still, my mom lives on disability. My sister is a waitress with a GED. And so, I don't come from... Like, that hasn't changed. The family that I come from hasn't changed. And my own class allegiance hasn't changed. Like, my allegiance is still to the poor and working-class people.

Alisha Stranges (00:08:44):

Yeah. And you sort of mentioned you have a master's; I'm curious, of what field?

Chanelle Gallant (00:08:50):

In sociology.

Alisha Stranges (00:08:53):

And what kind of activities occupy your time? These days?

Chanelle Gallant (00:08:58):

I am a coach, a writer, an activist, an organizer, a trainer.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:04):

And how might that have been different in 2000?

Chanelle Gallant (00:09:08):

Well, before or after the raid? Because my life was sort of influx right around then.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:15):

Let's go with just before the raid, then.

Chanelle Gallant (00:09:21):

I think I was unemployed. Yes, that's right. And so, at the time of the raid, I think I ended up like, the activism responding to the raid took over my life. And I lived on my credit card for two months after the raid. And then it was like, "Oh, can't keep doing that. Guess I got to get a job." So, I got a job at a temp agency and then that turned into a three-year gig with the government. But yeah, at the time I had just, I had been in grad school for the prior two years. And then, and then I was dropping out right around the time of the raid.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:11):

Right. I'm just going to switch gears a little bit here and ask about religion and spirituality. Curious, what role, if any, these two things play in your life currently?

Chanelle Gallant (00:10:24):

Currently?

Alisha Stranges (00:10:25):

Yeah, currently.

Chanelle Gallant (00:10:28):

I mean, historically, I come from a lapsed Catholic family or Acadians and historically Catholic, but the kinds of Catholics that still get pregnant when they're 18. So, the good kind, the best kind really, but I don't feel like I have much to say about my current spirituality.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:55):

Yeah. That's fair. Is there anything else that you think would be important for us to know about how you understand different aspects of your identity that you hold today as compared to 20 years ago?

Chanelle Gallant (00:11:13):

Gosh, 20 years ago? Well, I think now I... Only in the course of the last 20 years have I come to identify as a survivor, I don't think I did at the time. I just hadn't politicized my experiences of sexual violence. So, that's changed. I'm now a former sex worker. I became a sex worker in between the raid and now, and that's been an important part of my experience. And maybe sort of just to kind of broaden that a little bit, I also now understand myself to be part of a family of people who are criminalized. So, a number of my family members have had interactions like with police and prisons, and have been charged, incarcerated, et cetera, and are caught up in the criminal legal system. And that's a way that I understand my experience now too. Again, I just hadn't politicized. And I guess that made me realize that, the reason I wouldn't have thought about it that way is that, in the interim, I have also become an abolitionist. So, I'm a prison and police abolitionist. That's very important to who I am too.

Alisha Stranges (00:12:46):

Whenabouts did that kind of... In between 2000 and now, whenabouts did that take shape in your life?

Chanelle Gallant (00:12:53):

Well, I became a sex work activist about four years after the raid. And so, I was involved in activism around the raid. Then I was involved in sex work activism. And so, I just kept being drawn to this work that was around the criminalization of sexuality. And what I saw with sex work was that all the harms that sex workers experience were all being caused by criminalization. Even though everyone thinks they're caused by sex work, they're caused by the criminalization of sex work, right? Sex work is not dangerous. Criminalization makes anything dangerous, right? Just like it would have been... People would have told young people how dangerous it is to be queer before it was decriminalized in 1969. Queerness was never fucking dangerous. I mean, any more than anything else is, and similar to selling sex. And so, I started to become very politicized around the damaging impacts of criminalization.

Chanelle Gallant (00:13:54):

And then I did really deep political education. I did a four and a half month long anti-racism training program in 2009 through an organization called the Catalyst Project. And as part of that, I interned with a prison abolition organization called Critical Resistance, which is a national prison abolition organization. And then at that organization, honestly, the thing that turned me into an abolitionist was answering prisoner mail.

Chanelle Gallant (00:14:27):

And when I started to really understand the impact, I could not believe it. It absolutely blew my mind and broke my heart. And I cried in the bathroom every week answering that mail because it was astonishingly horrific, what I was being exposed to. The length of sentences, the severity, the brutality of it. It was, I

realized that it was genocidal and that, even if I couldn't in that moment understand how we could live without prisons and police, I knew that we had to live without a genocidal system.

Chanelle Gallant (00:15:01):

But there was no... There could be no justification, no need for safety or security; nothing could justify that the solution was this white-supremacist, genocidal institution. I came to understand it was a direct manifestation of slavery, the unfinished work of slavery. So, then I became an abolitionist, and that became very central to my politics. And I would say also my spirituality.

Alisha Stranges (00:15:32):

Thank you for sharing such a full picture of yourself over these past 20 years. I think, I'm going to pass it over to Elio now. Are you all set there, Elio?

Elio Colavito (00:15:45):

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for sharing, so in-depth, all of the different categories and identities that you occupy. I'm really excited to see how those categories inform your responses to all of our questions. We're just going to transition.

[crosstalk]

Elio Colavito (00:16:01):

And before we talk specifically about the September 2000 Pussy Palace event and the raid, tell me a little bit about the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee. First off, how did this idea come into being?

Chanelle Gallant (00:16:14):

So, I feel like this is probably in writing somewhere. Did you guys see, the archives actually did an event last September, too? Yeah. I don't know if we talked about it then, but the Pussy Palace was the idea of Janet Rowe, who is now the director of PASAN [community-based prisoner health and harm reduction organization] and Janet Rowe was, at the time, worked for the AIDS Committee of Toronto doing women's outreach and HIV prevention work among women. And she saw that, you know, I'm going to like paraphrase the story I heard from her. So, go to her to get the original story, but she saw that there was all... Tons and tons of HIV prevention work was happening in the men's bathhouses of which there were, I think, nine operating 24/7 in Toronto and zero for women, never even a single night.

Chanelle Gallant (00:17:13):

And so, she got the idea to do these bathhouses as a way to both create a safe sexual space for queer women and also, I think, the idea also was to provide sexual health information and education. And so, I was not on the committee at the beginning. It started in 19... I can't remember if it was '97 or '98 now? By 2000, it was only, I think, the fourth bathhouse. I think the September 14, 15 bathhouse was the fourth one. I had been to one prior, but... Had I only been to one? I had been to two events. They did like another kind of mini bathhouse at a men's leather bar. But I think the second one that was raided that I helped to organize was the first one that I helped organize. And it might've only been the second one that I ever went to.

Elio Colavito (00:18:19):

Interesting. Do you know if there were any other inspirations beyond what you've already mentioned around forming the committee?

Chanelle Gallant (00:18:26):

Well, 90s' queer women's sex culture. It was a very different time. You know, the culture was, there was like a very deep sex-positive, queer, feminist culture. And so, it fit in, you know, it was, I think it was like a natural outgrowth of that, but I will say that it was the first one that we're aware of in North America. And that there had been non-sexual women's bathhouses, but believe it or not, it never happened in L.A., New York, San Francisco — Toronto was the first one.

Elio Colavito (00:19:01):

So then, in that case, there weren't any other similar committees in other places that you guys knew of and were drawing from?

Chanelle Gallant (00:19:06):

It was completely innovative. Nope.

Elio Colavito (00:19:08):

Wow. Incredible. So, can you remind me again when the committee was founded? I believe you already said—

Chanelle Gallant (00:19:14):

It was either '97 or '98.

Elio Colavito (00:19:16):

Awesome. [crosstalk] Do you know who was involved when it was founded?

Chanelle Gallant (00:19:22):

I won't remember all the original members, but I know Janet Rowe and Carlyle Jansen, maybe Lorelee Gillis and maybe Carol Thames, but I'm not sure.

Elio Colavito (00:19:37):

Do you know anything about the kind of work that they were doing? What goals they had in mind, how often they met, things of that nature?

Chanelle Gallant (00:19:44):

No, no. I mean, I think one of the goals was to raise the visibility of queer women's sexuality, create a safe space for sexual exploration amongst queer women. That's all I know.

Elio Colavito (00:19:56):

Cool. And do you know anything about the demographics racially, sexually...

Chanelle Gallant (00:20:00):  
Of who was on the committee?

Elio Colavito (00:20:02):  
Yeah.

Chanelle Gallant (00:20:05):  
I mean, I think it was majority cis white women, not exclusively.

Elio Colavito (00:20:12):  
And was that still true when you joined as well?

Chanelle Gallant (00:20:16):  
Yes. Although I should've gone back and seen who was actually on the committee when I joined. Carol [Thames] was on the committee with me. Karen BK Chan came on right after. Susan Anderson. And Carlyle [Jansen] was still on. Janet [Rowe] was on. There were... Members changed; there was a small membership the night we were raided. It might've only been five of us. And then some members left, and new ones came on over the course of the next three years. 'Cause I was on the committee for a total of three years.

Elio Colavito (00:20:59):  
Do you recall some of the reasons that people were kind of in and out of the committee over the course of that time?

Chanelle Gallant (00:21:05):  
Hmm, no. I don't. I think you'd have to ask them. I mean, yeah, personal reasons, but I don't really know that I can say more than that.

Elio Colavito (00:21:15):  
Awesome. All right. So, when, and how did you actually become involved with the committee then?

Chanelle Gallant (00:21:21):  
I volunteered for... So, I attended an event... Oh, maybe I had been... When did I attend that event? Hold on a sec. I attended events in, I honestly can't remember if it was '98 or '99. I volunteered at what was called an Underwear Party, which was like a mini bathhouse at The Barn, I think it was at. And then I was invited to join the committee. Like I had been around, I had participated, I volunteered, I knew some of the organizers. I had probably been to events for volunteers. And then in the spring of 2000, I was invited to join the committee.

Elio Colavito (00:22:15):  
Do you recall how you found out about the opportunity to volunteer at the Underwear Party and anything about the Underwear Party in general?



Chanelle Gallant (00:22:23):

Well, I was dating someone who was volunteering. If I recall, that's right. Everybody knew about the bathhouse. The bathhouse was an extremely big deal. This was before social media, but everybody knew. I mean, the first event, I was not at, but all the events that I helped organize, they were at capacity. We would have 300 people there; we'd have a lineup around the corner. So, I certainly knew about them because they were covered in queer news, and everyone was talking about them. But I probably first got connected to the organizing committee through a girlfriend who was volunteering with them, and The Underwear Party, it was a smaller version of it. It was in The Barn. All I remember was that I had sex on the pool table, and I was specifically asked not to spill beer on it, but we did anyways. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:23:35):

As you should have. So, you mentioned kind of word-of-mouth — helping get the word out about these kinds of things — but also the queer news. Can you just mention some of the queer news outlets and publications that you were looking at and engaging with at the time?

Chanelle Gallant (00:23:50):

Yeah, certainly *Xtra* was the biggest one. And then also there was a queer women's magazine called *Siren*. That's all I remember. And then there were message boards, very early, young internet, online message boards.

Elio Colavito (00:24:13):

Interesting. I'm just going to kind of bring it back to the committee itself again for a moment. Why was this kind of work — volunteering, being a part of this committee — important to you at the time?

Chanelle Gallant (00:24:32):

I mean, I know that it was thrilling to me, but I'm trying to figure out how do I explain why. I don't know, I thought it was great. I was thrilled. I don't know, I was a sexual bad girl. I wanted to fuck shit up. This was the best thing on offer. You know what I mean? Yeah. I was like... I wanted to sexually experiment. I wanted to flex my sexual power. I wanted to meet sexual partners. I wanted to have fun. I wanted to break some rules, and I really did all that.

Elio Colavito (00:25:08):

At the time did you see those feelings as very political in nature or were they just flat-out feelings?

Chanelle Gallant (00:25:13):

Yeah. No, I definitely... Like, my politics have shifted in how I understand them. Certainly, it developed a lot more depth and nuance, but no, I knew it was political.

Elio Colavito (00:25:23):

Cool. How—

Alisha Stranges (00:25:24):

Can I just jump in for one second, Elio?

Elio Colavito (00:25:25):

Yeah, go ahead.

Alisha Stranges (00:25:26):

Sorry, just don't want you to get on a new line. I'm curious, in what way did the public nature of these events... I'm just wondering, you said there's great opportunity to fuck shit up. Was that partly because it was public? Could you not fuck shit up in private?

Chanelle Gallant (00:25:47):

Oh, I did both. I did a lot of both, as bad as I could get. It was great. Yeah, no, no. I was interested in both. I'm not an exhibitionist too, that wasn't actually part of what it was about for me. It wasn't about being seen. It was about the energy of the community, certainly, and I think it was the night of the raid I did like a public sex ritual. Yes. I think I did. I actually think I fucked like 13 people that night who were all blindfolded, and we had them all in a row, and we had some fun.

Elio Colavito (00:26:32):

You were fucking shit up, that's for sure.

Chanelle Gallant (00:26:34):

I fucked shit up. Oh my God, I'm so retired now. But at the time, I just wanted to explore the outer edges of sexual freedom. And so, there's a way you can do that in community that is different than I could do in private. But like I said, it wasn't, for me, necessarily about the visibility. It was about the experience of being community, but I didn't eroticize being watched or anything like that. It's just not my thing. And then I also lap danced. I think. I lap danced at one of the bathhouses. I can't remember which one, might've been my first one too, which was terrifying to me. And I took a whole class on it, and I was so scared. I was the only one in the class who wouldn't practice in front of others. I really wanted to push my own edges of fear, is a big part of what I think I'm realizing I'm trying to get across. I wanted to push my own courage. I wanted to push the outer edges of what I felt afraid of and constrained by. And I could do that in community, in this really amazing way that was so different than privately.

Elio Colavito (00:27:55):

Right. Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. Did you know some of the organizers separate from your work on the community, and if so, in what context?

Chanelle Gallant (00:28:04):

Yeah, I knew everyone. I mean, yeah, I didn't know anyone I think really well before I became a member of the committee. I was still pretty new to community because I had been in like a three-year monogamous partnership. And so, I really busted out of that, but it meant that I actually didn't have a lot of queer community. Neither one of us did. And so, I knew people, but not deeply. And then I got to know everyone quite well, not just because we worked together, but because we worked together under the enormous pressure of, suddenly, police charges. So, that really has an impact on relationships.

Elio Colavito (00:28:44):

Can you say a little bit more about how that time kind of deepened those relationships?

Chanelle Gallant (00:28:52):

There were much higher stakes. So, we really had to count on each other more. We had to make much, much bigger decisions like, where we might've been planning a party, suddenly we had to figure out where are we going to get hundreds of thousands of dollars for a legal defense. So, we had to strategize with each other a lot more. Our disagreements were a lot more loaded then because the disagreements were no longer over where should the volunteers hang their clothes when they arrive. It was like, should we file a human rights complaint against the police? So, the stakes were much higher. The pressure was much higher. The amount we had to be in contact with each other was enormous.

Chanelle Gallant (00:29:41):

We had constant meetings after the raid. I mean, I think we were raided on a Thursday night, maybe, something like that. And then we had a meeting on the Sunday after the raid, which lasted I think eight hours in my kitchen. And I did not have enough chairs for everyone. We sat on plastic chairs, and we strategized for eight hours about... I don't really remember the meeting now, and I could have that number wrong, but in my mind, I remember that it was like eight hours long in my kitchen, freaking out and planning. And I was a baby. I didn't understand what had happened. I didn't understand that we were going to fight back. I didn't understand we were going to have this whole political response to that. But the other people on the committee were all older than me and more experienced, some of them 15 years older than me. I think Janet [Rowe] is 15 years older than me. So, they had a much better sense of what was going on. And they had a much better sense of how what happened to us, the raid, fit into queer history of police persecution.

Elio Colavito (00:30:50):

You mentioned a little bit about tensions growing a bit more as the stakes got higher. Do you remember some of the things that you all had disagreements over before and after the raid?

Chanelle Gallant (00:31:00):

Race was always the central one. And so, how the committee should organize the party. How we should respond to the raid. Gosh, how we should fundraise. Everything was impacted by disagreements around race and racism in our work. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:31:29):

Can you talk a little bit more about maybe the different sides of the coin that was present at the table at that time around race?

Chanelle Gallant (00:31:37):

Well, I don't know if I can really remember like... Oh, let me think about this. I don't know that I can do justice to the arguments of the time. It was certainly what motivated me to want to do deeper learning around race and racism, and why a big part of how I ended up in that training program in San Francisco was because I had seen the way that race had really fractured our work. Those of us who were trying to work on the same side, against the police, were often in conflict with each other around race. And it really undermined our work. And, specifically, white racism was undermining the work.

Chanelle Gallant (00:32:26):

And so, yeah. Okay. Hold on. Some of it is coming back to me, okay, who should represent the bathhouse? Who should represent the impact of the charges? And making sure that it was clearer... Because the media

very much focused on and wanted to, with no awareness of the dynamics involved, the media really wanted to lift up and focus on the white organizers. And so, I remember that being one problem.

Elio Colavito (00:33:14):

Were there—

Chanelle Gallant (00:33:15):

How do we deal with the way that the community and the media was really lifting up and focusing on the leadership of white women on the committee?

Elio Colavito (00:33:24):

Were there POC committee members that you felt were being ignored and sidelined in that process?

Chanelle Gallant (00:33:31):

Yes. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:33:35):

Do you remember where you sort of fell on the side of the issue at the time, in terms of where your political affiliations were with how race should be treated in these matters?

Chanelle Gallant (00:33:45):

I mean, I think I was often really confused. I think I was very politically inexperienced. It was my first organizing. And so, it was my first organizing and therefore my first time in a multi-racial, feminist collective. And I think, looking back, I already felt very explicitly anti-racist, and that was clear to me. And that was part of how I was raised too. It wasn't new to me, but, looking back, there were so many ways that I just absolutely was not seeing the way that white supremacy was showing up in our work. Yeah, definitely.

Elio Colavito (00:34:29):

So, would you say that racial diversity was a goal of the committee at time, in terms of how different racialized folks would have been represented at the events themselves?

Chanelle Gallant (00:34:39):

Yes. And I think that was part of the problem. Part of our problem was like a liberal racial diversity analysis that was like tokenistic and that focused on representation, not on meaningful leadership by people of colour, and I don't think we understood deeply enough how much the raid was tied to white supremacy, that even an event that is organized... Even if white people are targeted as part of a raid on a multi-racial space, but that's still the operation of white supremacy. Definitely, I didn't know that.

Elio Colavito (00:35:23):

Right. I'm curious about the very first event in 1998. Were you involved in organizing at this time?

Chanelle Gallant (00:35:31):

No. So, it was in 1998. Remember, I couldn't remember which year it was. It was '98 and no, I was not involved and did not attend the first one.

Elio Colavito (00:35:41):

Okay.

Chanelle Gallant (00:35:42):

I think I had just recently... My partner and I had just broken up, and I think we kind of divided up who got to go to which bathhouses. And I think she went to that first one. When was it? Do you have the date in 1998?

Elio Colavito (00:35:55):

On my notes right here just say '98. Alisha, do you remember off the top of your head?

Alisha Stranges (00:36:00):

I believe that it happened in summer of '98, but that's all that's coming to mind at the moment.

Chanelle Gallant (00:36:08):

Yeah, no, I don't... No, I don't think I was at that one.

Alisha Stranges (00:36:11):

There were a couple of summer events, sort of coinciding around the time when Toronto would typically celebrate queer pride. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:36:22):

Despite not being there, do you know anything about the event itself from the perspective of your partner?

Chanelle Gallant (00:36:28):

The first one? Yeah. I mean, what I've heard is that people didn't... I was going to say, I think you had to buy tickets. You did have to buy tickets back then; you could buy advanced tickets. That's right. And I remember, from what I heard, it was legendarily packed. It was a huge hit and organizers were run off their feet and did not have a second to sit down because it was queer, sex pandemonium, but I wasn't there.

Elio Colavito (00:37:04):

Do you know how that event differed from the 2000 one, besides the obvious raid?

Chanelle Gallant (00:37:11):

Well, no, because I wasn't at the first one. I don't know... I doubt if the first one had all the services we started to offer. We would offer tours of the space. There was an in-house photographer. There was like a G-spot room. I think there was a butt room. There was a temple priestess room. There were introductory games

that would help people meet each other. I don't know if all those things were going on in the first one, but by the 2000 one, there was a lot going on.

Elio Colavito (00:37:44):

Right. And the kind of advertising process, did you as a group use any strategies or did you just depend on word-of-mouth?

Chanelle Gallant (00:37:52):

No. No. We did like a ton of outreach, but I don't really remember how now. I mean, like I said, we couldn't really rely on the internet, so we probably put up posters. We probably put up posters, we probably put them up at queer businesses. We probably put them up all over the village. I don't remember beyond that. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:38:21):

I mean, fair enough.

Chanelle Gallant (00:38:22):

Oh, we flyered. For years and years and years, I organized events, and you would go out on a Friday or Saturday night and go to all the club lineups and flyer everyone, or you'd go into the queer bars. And usually they were friendly about this, unlike straight businesses. And they would let you just flyer everyone.

Elio Colavito (00:38:40):

Would you still flyer the predominantly straight bars?

Chanelle Gallant (00:38:44):

No, no, no, no, no. No, no, no.

Elio Colavito (00:38:45):

Never?

Chanelle Gallant (00:38:46):

Fuck No. We're don't want straight people even knowing it existed. No.

Elio Colavito (00:38:50):

In case you caught a closeted person—

Chanelle Gallant (00:38:52):

No, no, no, they would find their way to us. No.

Elio Colavito (00:38:55):

Fair enough. Yeah. And my final question before I hand it over to Alisha is, when did the group disband? When did the committee dissolve itself?

Chanelle Gallant (00:39:02):

I don't actually know. I think it was certainly after 2010 because I remember going to a bathhouse in either 2010 or 2011. So, it kept going for quite a long time, but I don't know when they disbanded, I was long gone by then.

Elio Colavito (00:39:19):

When did you leave?

Chanelle Gallant (00:39:20):

'03.

Elio Colavito (00:39:21):

'03. Do you remember why you left?

Chanelle Gallant (00:39:24):

I couldn't wait to get the fuck out of there. Yeah, it was extremely stressful. There was a lot of conflict. It was exhausting. It was very consuming. And I think I committed to staying until we had fundraised a certain amount. Maybe it was like \$50,000, which now I would know how to do in like three months. But back then it took me three years. And so, once we had achieved a certain fundraising goal, I left. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:39:58):

Do you remember what some of the conflicts were that really pushed you away from the committee?

Chanelle Gallant (00:40:06):

It was just kind of constant, low-grade conflict. Yeah. There were just power struggles over everything. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:40:21):

You sort of started talking about, just before you got involved in it, being this amazing opportunity to fuck shit up. And then by 2003, it's a feeling that, "I just can't wait to get out of here." What was it like to experience that transition?

Chanelle Gallant (00:40:37):

It was pretty sad. I was very burned out, but that's also true... Like, organizing burns people out under the best circumstances. Now add a police raid that is national in its significance and visibility, my own friends are charged, and we have no money. We're an unfunded, grassroots, no staff organization that have to deal with a political crisis and a massive legal bill. And so, that was just so much stress. There's no way you could come out of that without being burned out. So yeah, I actually at the end of it decided that I hated feminist collectives and I never wanted to do it again.

Elio Colavito (00:41:27):

Did you ever do it again?

Chanelle Gallant (00:41:30):

Yes, I have. A year later, I started organizing with sex workers after I found out about the massacre on the Downtown East Side of Vancouver. And then, I started organizing with sex workers in Toronto, but it was not a flat, egalitarian, feminist collective. It was an organization with a director and a hierarchy, and I was much happier.

Elio Colavito (00:42:06):

Thank you so much for sharing all of that. Alisha, I think you're good to go on the next part.

Alisha Stranges (00:42:12):

So Chanelle, I just want to focus a little more closely now on your experience as a patron of the September 2000 event. Can you tell me how you managed to balance your role on the night as an organizer with your experience as a patron?

Chanelle Gallant (00:42:38):

Hold on, I'm thinking about this. It was very high pressure because we had received a tip that we might be raided. And I don't think that is public information. I don't think that has ever been shared. So, we knew that there was a potential, wasn't guaranteed, but we knew there was a potential for a police raid. And so, there was a lot of pressure. We had to make a decision about whether to go ahead with it. We didn't want to cancel the event before we even knew that that was going to happen, with no evidence that that would happen, but we had to do a lot of preventative and preparation work. So, what I remember of that night as an organizer was handing out flyers that we had developed for all the patrons explaining their legal rights and what to do in the event of a police investigation.

Chanelle Gallant (00:43:41):

But we couldn't disclose that we knew that it might happen. So, we just had to do our due diligence and prepare for the worst, but not expect it. That's mostly what I remember from that night in terms of myself as an organizer, and as a patron I think I held that big sex ritual that night, which in retrospect might not have been, I don't know, the most sensible thing to do, but clearly that was not my priority in the way that I was involved as a patron. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:44:28):

What kind of area in the bathhouse did this take place in?

Chanelle Gallant (00:44:33):

Just like one of the larger rooms. The bathhouse itself was like a gritty, sticky-floored, working-class, men's bathhouse. It was low lights and music playing and not the cleanest or classiest place. And I liked that about it.

Alisha Stranges (00:45:01):

How did you go about choosing what you would wear that night?

Chanelle Gallant (00:45:05):

I just picked something that I would feel sexy in.



Alisha Stranges (00:45:08):

Do you remember kind, sort of, what it was or what it comprised of?

Chanelle Gallant (00:45:14):

Probably a very short, leather skirt.

Alisha Stranges (00:45:20):

How did you feel in that outfit?

Chanelle Gallant (00:45:26):

I don't remember well enough to really give you like a nuanced picture, but I think I probably felt like a boss.

Alisha Stranges (00:45:36):

And how did—

Chanelle Gallant (00:45:37):

I would wear like black, leather boots and be in my little skirt that I had hemmed so that it was shorter. And yeah, I had a great time.

Alisha Stranges (00:45:53):

Was this the kind of outfit that was sort of reserved for the bathhouse?

Chanelle Gallant (00:45:56):

Oh yeah, definitely. Couldn't wear it out of the house, too much sexual harassment, plus not interested in that audience. I didn't want to be in that clothing around straight people.

Alisha Stranges (00:46:06):

So then, how did that particular kind of, I don't know if it would be all right to call it a costume, but costume for the evening, how did it align with or differ from your style presentation more generally during that time period in your life?

Chanelle Gallant (00:46:24):

It was just more revealing. It was just sluttier.

Alisha Stranges (00:46:28):

So, we know the event took place at Club Toronto, former men's bathhouse on Mutual Street in Toronto. You'd just started describing the space, but I'd love if you could go into a bit more detail. What about the exterior of the club? How would you describe it?

Chanelle Gallant (00:46:47):

The exterior actually just looks like an ordinary, large, Toronto, Victorian home. Brick. Nondescript. It would fit in with any... And it is. It was a converted, Victorian home.

Alisha Stranges (00:47:05):

Once we head inside, what do you remember about how the space was set up? We know that there were different spaces people could occupy and do different things. If you were the host taking us through it, can you describe the different rooms?

Chanelle Gallant (00:47:24):

Sure. First you would go down a few stairs. Unfortunately, it was very inaccessible. You go down a few stairs, come into the door, and there was a little vestibule and a, what's it called? Someone behind a glass window who would take your ticket or your money to buy a ticket, your ID. Then you'd be buzzed in. The door was locked. You could only get in once you were buzzed in, which was no doubt security that gay men needed to protect themselves.

Chanelle Gallant (00:47:55)

Then once you entered, on the main floor there was a small dance floor, a bar. You could go through a couple of rooms to go into a hot tub, some showers, or you could go up some stairs and go outdoors to the outdoor pool. You could take an indoor staircase to the second floor, which was all small rooms, very small little rooms. I think the third floor was small rooms as well. No, there were lockers on the second floor as well, so you'd go up and put your stuff in a locker. People would get changed, and then they would figure out where they were going to hang out.

Chanelle Gallant (00:48:43):

There were some rooms that were where, for example, the different sexual service providers would be. I worked a G-spot room once, and I would just get my own room. Then there was one that was slightly larger, and I use the word larger here... By larger I mean bigger than a pantry where people would do lap dancing, there was a porn room. Then you could only have a drink in the area that was licensed. You could not take your drink out to the pool. That was very strictly prohibited because of liquor licenses. Then you could go out, and people would be having public sex wherever. They would be having it beside the pool. People would be swimming. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:49:34):

So then imagine, or take yourself back to that event when it's the height of the night, what was the atmosphere like inside the club or outside the club or near the pool?

Chanelle Gallant (00:49:47):

You know, I think part of that depends on who you are and how good a time you were having. It's a loaded space. Just even think about being in a queer bar. Are you having a good time or are you spending the whole time anxious because you feel like you don't fit in? Your people aren't here. People here don't look like you, whatever. I think it really depends on how you related to the community that was there at the time. Some people probably were having a really, really great time, and some people were probably not. I think it was a stressful place for trans women to be, I think it was difficult even though the space was explicitly trans inclusive. Initially, actually, it was just inclusive of trans women. Then it opened out to all trans people, but initially it was inclusive of trans women, which was unfortunately very radical at the time. But I think that it

remained a very... I think it was a space that could be very racist and trans misogynist, and so I think how people experience that space really depended on their relationship to the community that was there.

Alisha Stranges (00:51:00):

Yeah. Some of our questions will get a little bit more into that a little bit later. I just want to stick for a moment on the space itself. I'm curious, what parts of the space did you gravitate towards in particular?

Chanelle Gallant (00:51:22):

I did not go in the pool, I know that. Probably though the outdoors around the pool, if it was warm enough. It really depended on what I was doing and who I was with. I mean, was I cruising? Was I with a date? It depended on what I was doing. Was I talking with friends on the dance floor? Yeah, I didn't want to be in any of the, basically, the actual spa or sauna spaces. Like, I wasn't interested in the hot tub. I don't think I ever went into the hot tub. Yeah, or the pool.

Alisha Stranges (00:52:03):

What was it about the hot tub/pool that turned you off?

Chanelle Gallant (00:52:08):

Not interested. Also, don't fuck up my hair and makeup; I spent all night on this.

Alisha Stranges (00:52:13):

I see.

Chanelle Gallant (00:52:13):

You know what I mean?

Alisha Stranges (00:52:14):

Yeah. We've heard there was a photo room where patrons could take Polaroids of themselves to document their night. Did you spend any time in the photo room?

Chanelle Gallant (00:52:24):

My friend ran it, so yeah, I would sometimes go in and say hi to her. I have a couple of Polaroids she took of me that night.

Alisha Stranges (00:52:30):

You do? Do you still have them?

Chanelle Gallant (00:52:32):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:52:33):

Yeah? Do you remember what they're capturing? What's happening in the photos?

Chanelle Gallant (00:52:39):

I probably know where it is. If you give me a sec, I think I could grab it.

Alisha Stranges (00:52:44):

Well, actually we can put that on pause, and maybe we can talk about maybe getting pictures of them, for later. I don't know. I'm nervous about time myself, so I would love to hear more about it, but I think we can capture it just by talking about it afterwards, but that's great to hear that you still have them.

Chanelle Gallant (00:53:09):

Yeah. I actually found this box. I went looking and I have this box of things, which I thought... So, like, I have... Hold on. I've had my, oops, self-view hidden. I'm going to show it so I can see the camera. So, I have this button from our legal defense parties. Then this was one of the flyers. Oh yeah, this showed you where we advertise too. This was 2003. This was when I was on one of the flyers, advertising one of the events.

Alisha Stranges (00:53:46):

Oh amazing.

Chanelle Gallant (00:53:52):

It was kind of our slogan, was "pussies bite back," which now we wouldn't use, which is why we also changed the name. Thankfully, we never got a cease and desist for using Catwoman all that time. But I also have all the court transcripts.

Alisha Stranges (00:54:15):

Oh, you do?

Chanelle Gallant (00:54:16):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alisha Stranges (00:54:17):

Yeah, maybe I'll touch base with you later on about all of this. It would be great to learn more about it, take a closer look at it all. So, last set of questions here about the space is about the impression it might have made on your senses. So, I'm going to take you through a little bit of an exercise, an experiment. I don't know how well it'll work, and I'll invite Elio to do it as well, and I'll do it as well. So, if I could just invite you to soften your gaze, and if you feel comfortable, you can even close your eyes, and just breathe for a moment. With each inhale, allow your body to re-inhabit one or another location within the Pussy Palace. Don't worry too much about which location, just whatever instinctually is coming to mind.

Chanelle Gallant (00:55:25):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alisha Stranges (00:55:26):

Just looking around that space and trying to really get back in touch with what it sounded like, smelled like, tasted like, its textures and all that. As you look around the space, tell me what it is that you're seeing.

Chanelle Gallant (00:55:49):

The space that I can most viscerally remember actually is managing the lineup because as an event organizer there's a lot of stuff that has to happen around the entrance. What I remember is having a clipboard, a headset where we would communicate with other members of the team, my little pen, and people in line, usually in couples. Usually, it would be either two or three or four, little clumps of people in line. I cannot believe I did that in heels, but I probably did. Wow. Yeah, no way now.

Chanelle Gallant (00:56:35):

I would run around with my little clipboard and my headset talking with security about whatever I needed to know to pass on to people in the lineup who were there. Everybody in a line also got a little, they actually got a little spiel, a little anti-oppression spiel on your way in, which I think included stuff around trans women. I think we were really trying, I don't know how successfully, to deal with the depth of trans misogyny in queer or cis women's community, which was very intense and just so horrible.

Chanelle Gallant (00:57:24):

That's what I remember most is the buzz around the line, because that was where there was a lot of pressure around time, where will people... Money, coats, things, keys. Coordinating with security, coordinating with other volunteers, where do people get their towels, et cetera. As an organizer, that's what I remember most about it.

Alisha Stranges (00:57:46):

This locale, if you could pull back a little bit and you could see it as a single colour, what would the colour of it be? The colour of this locale, this buzzing space.

Chanelle Gallant (00:58:00):

You know what? It's kind of the ugly, industrial, vestibule before you got into the sexy dance floor. What I'm remembering is it's brightly lit. There's a seriously heavy steel door that only opens by buzzer. Then there's like a plexiglass with some queer on the other side of it. Then immediately on the other side of it is an illuminated bar and DJ Nik Red on the turntables and people on the dance floor wearing a towel and nothing else.

Alisha Stranges (00:58:48):

This little space that's in between two worlds perhaps, if it could call out to you, what would it sound like?

Chanelle Gallant (00:58:58):

I'm not sure I understand the question.

Alisha Stranges (00:59:00):

Yeah, and you don't have to, in a way. I would say just answer it, whatever you think I'm trying to ask.

Chanelle Gallant (00:59:11):

If that space could call out to me?

Alisha Stranges (00:59:13):

Yeah. If somehow it had the capacity to call out to you, what would the sound of that little in between two worlds space sound like?

Chanelle Gallant (00:59:24):

It's the buzzer, the door opening. You're in or you're out.

Alisha Stranges (00:59:31):

Did it have a particular lingering scent or odour in the air?

Chanelle Gallant (00:59:40):

No, not that I can think of.

Alisha Stranges (00:59:42):

What about its structure? The texture of its structure?

Chanelle Gallant (00:59:49):

Well, there's the plexiglass, there's the heavy steel door, and then there's the shitty faded carpet that was everywhere.

Alisha Stranges (01:00:05):

It's interesting you say that because as you're taking me through it, I'm picturing a tile floor. So, tell me more about this carpet.

Chanelle Gallant (01:00:11):

Oh no.

Alisha Stranges (01:00:12):

Tell me more about this carpet.

Chanelle Gallant (01:00:14):

No, I think the main floor just had like, thread... Worn, faded carpet. Then once you went out to all the bath areas, it was tiled, but no, on the stairs up... I remember that too because it is hard to walk on carpet in high heels.

Alisha Stranges (01:00:36):

Absolutely. Okay, so my last question in this line of questioning is about your expectations for the night. As a patron of the event, what were you hoping to experience that night?

Chanelle Gallant (01:00:57):

I don't know that I can really accurately answer that. I don't know that I can remember my mindset 20 years ago. I imagine that I wanted to have a really good time. I wanted to have fun. Like all the things that I said at the beginning that drew me to it, I wanted to push myself. I wanted to challenge myself around my own sexual limits. I wanted to connect with others, and I hoped it wasn't scary or harmful because of the cops.

Alisha Stranges (01:01:46):

I know it's a challenge, but how would you say that your expectation for the night ended up comparing with your lived experience of it?

Chanelle Gallant (01:01:56):

Oh, I think I was too inexperienced to imagine what a police raid might be like or how I might respond or how other people might experience it. I don't think I had any idea what to expect.

Alisha Stranges (01:02:20):

I think that's it from me. Elio, I'm also just noticing the time, and I'm wondering if maybe Elio, you can just do your last bit and we can end after yours.

Elio Colavito (01:02:34):

Sure. Yeah, that works. You mentioned getting a tip about the raids. Do you remember how you all got that tip and how you felt receiving that tip?

Chanelle Gallant (01:02:45):

I don't remember, either Janet [Rowe] or Carlyle [Jansen] got the tip. I don't remember now who got it. I think it was one of them who got it. I think I felt shocked. I felt shocked that the police even knew about our party. Why would they be interested in... But at the same time, there had been a pattern of investigations and stings on other businesses in the queer community, but I still was really surprised that they were in any way aware of or interested in our event. I don't remember now if I was scared.

Elio Colavito (01:03:33):

Do you remember anticipating a raid or did you think that it was a shallow tip that wasn't going—

Chanelle Gallant (01:03:39):

No, I thought it might happen.

Elio Colavito (01:03:44):

Okay, so what we do know from the raid is that there were two female officers in plain clothes who were present that night at some point before the five male officers showed up. Was anybody aware of them? Were you aware of them or did you just think they were regular old patrons?

Chanelle Gallant (01:04:02):

No one had any idea that they were there until the police disclosed it during the trial.

Elio Colavito (01:04:07):

Right. So then, at 12:45 a.m., five men, all plainclothes police officers, entered the club and stayed about 90 minutes. Were you aware of their presence in the club while you were actually at the event?

Chanelle Gallant (01:04:21):

Yes. I knew that they were there.

Elio Colavito (01:04:24):

Did you see them or talk to them?

Chanelle Gallant (01:04:27):

No, because I was having sex.

Elio Colavito (01:04:31):

That was our next question of what were you doing when the police arrived?

Chanelle Gallant (01:04:36):

I was having sex, and I stayed having sex.

Elio Colavito (01:04:40):

Okay, so you finish having sex. You do whatever you do. Do you remember becoming aware of their presence?

Chanelle Gallant (01:04:50):

No. By the time I was done and left, they were gone.

Elio Colavito (01:04:53):

Convenient. Did you notice any kind of atmospheric change when the folks realized that there were police presence, a male presence?

Chanelle Gallant (01:05:06):

Well, at that point, yeah. To be honest, I'm surprised I don't remember this better. I don't really remember the rest of the night. I know we were there until morning, but I don't remember much about it. That might be also because my memory actually tends to, I tend to remember things less when I'm startled or shocked by something. But yeah, I'm surprised I don't really remember much about it. I know that it effectively was over and that there was a lot of shock and a lot of upset, but I don't remember much about the details. I remember us all still being there by the morning. We were there all night. We were there all night.

Elio Colavito (01:05:58):

You can't recall anything about how the atmosphere would have changed?



Chanelle Gallant (01:06:03):

I don't, really. Like... I don't. No.

Elio Colavito (01:06:15):

Do you remember becoming aware of the two women officers later and how you felt about these outsiders, surveilling your space?

Chanelle Gallant (01:06:25):

Yeah, I was really disgusted and horrified. I was really horrified because they actually were not the subject of the human rights complaint, only the male officers were. Yet they were actually, the women officers were the only ones who invaded our personal space and watched us having sex. They were the only ones who non-consensually, state actors who were putting what they saw onto the record, were these women officers.

Elio Colavito (01:07:03):

Right. Interesting. Would it be fair to say then that the subsequent human rights complaint and stuff were more centered around the maleness of those other officers than the kind of surveillance itself?

Chanelle Gallant (01:07:18):

Yes, exactly. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (01:07:22):

Do you remember how you felt about that at the time?

Chanelle Gallant (01:07:25):

At the time, I really was troubled by it, but I thought that it was what we had to do, and it was what we had to do, but I didn't really understand why I wasn't comfortable with the focus on sexual harassment, and it was because I was a little baby abolitionist. I didn't understand that, inside, the reason I was upset about it was because I had more of a problem with the fact that it was state harassment than that it was sexual harassment. But nobody ever even said, well, we had a right not to have any police there and we have a right not to have police, period. Period. I had never been exposed that idea, so I discussed it with some of my friends and some of the folks on the committee, but I don't know that I would have raised it as a complaint or a concern about our strategy.

[crosstalk]

Chanelle Gallant (01:08:35):

No, not at all. Nobody had ever heard of police abolition, at least not us. Actually, people definitely had, we had not. So, yeah, no.

Elio Colavito (01:08:48):

So, you mentioned being tipped off and strategizing as a committee in a way in which you guys handed out pamphlets, know your rights pamphlets. Were there anything else that you did as a committee to try to preemptively prevent something completely heinous happening?

Chanelle Gallant (01:09:08):

Yeah, we did a lot of things. We found a lawyer. So, we contacted a lawyer. We also contacted a reporter who was someone who we knew and trusted, who spent the night in the bathhouse actually. She didn't participate. She wasn't a patron, I don't think. She was just basically hanging out to report on if something happened. Those are two things that I remember. Obviously, we met a lot. We had to consult the lawyer because we had to actually get legal advice and find out what was legal and illegal and what were people's rights, and we need to give accurate legal advice to patrons. So, we had to do that really quickly.

Elio Colavito (01:09:54):

Right. So, we know that there was a community discussion hosted shortly after the raid. You said that it happened in your kitchen actually. What was the purpose of that discussion from the onset?

Chanelle Gallant (01:10:06):

That was just a meeting. I think you mean the public meeting. We had a meeting at The 519, which was a week later, I think. And the purpose of the meeting was to generate community support for the resistance to the raid, which it was very successful at doing. Hundreds of people came to the meeting, and they were extremely outraged. A lot of the people at the meeting were also gay men who had been through the 1981 police bathhouse raids. So, a number of us spoke. I was on the panel as one of the speakers, but I was terrified. It was my first ever public speaking.

Chanelle Gallant (01:10:50)

And the people in attendance were actually so angry that they spontaneously organized a march to 52 Division to protest the raids. And so, participants at the meeting self-organized. They found some masking tape and put it around people's arms to serve as march marshals, they phoned the media to let the media know that it was happening, and then they decided we were going to have an angry march down Church Street, screaming "Out of the bars, into the streets." Might've been "Out of the bars, into the streets, queers bash back," or something like that. And so, then we marched down to 52 Division. By the time we got there, there was media there. And we also fundraised at the meeting. We fundraised almost \$10,000 for the legal defense fund and generated community-wide support and awareness about what had happened.

Elio Colavito (01:12:08):

Right. So, I wanted to bring you back to the community discussion kind of before this march happens down Church Street. Do you remember who organized this discussion, whose idea it was?

Chanelle Gallant (01:12:18):

Wed did. I mean, we probably did it in that meeting the Sunday after the raid.

Elio Colavito (01:12:24):

Where was the discussion held?

Chanelle Gallant (01:12:26):

The 519 Community Centre, in the ballroom.

Elio Colavito (01:12:29):

And you mentioned speaking at the event. Do you remember what exactly it was that you said or what you were trying to convey to the audience?

Chanelle Gallant (01:12:37):

We had prepared a statement about our position on it, and I delivered that.

Elio Colavito (01:12:42):

How would you describe the energy in the room throughout the discussion?

Chanelle Gallant (01:12:46):

It was very, very high energy. It was electric. It was very, very intense energy. People were absolutely enraged, and they wanted to take action so badly that they did it for themselves.

Elio Colavito (01:13:08):

Did you participate in that march?

Chanelle Gallant (01:13:10):

Yeah, yeah. Definitely. I think I was one of the people who led it, because the organizers led the march. And then we marched to 52, and then people wanted us to do... This was like queer activism of the day. It was like, we got there, there were probably some speeches, and then they wanted us to do a queer kiss-in. And so, me and another femme, who was my best friend, kissed for the sake of, that's what the people wanted. They wanted a performative statement of queer sexuality, and so they were like, "Do a queer kiss-in," so we obliged and kissed each other.

Elio Colavito (01:13:57):

Do you recall how many other people participated in the kissing part of this?

Chanelle Gallant (01:14:02):

No, I think it was kind of focused on us. I don't remember if anybody else did it too. You'll have to ask her. She might remember.

Elio Colavito (01:14:12):

Do you recall how long you stayed at 52 Division?

Chanelle Gallant (01:14:15):

I'm sure it was only like half an hour.

Elio Colavito (01:14:17):

What prompted you all to leave, or you specifically?

Chanelle Gallant (01:14:21):  
I think the action just ended.

Elio Colavito (01:14:24):  
Enough kissing, you know?

Chanelle Gallant (01:14:25):  
Yeah. I mean, there had been chanting and speakers, and we had done interviews with the media, and then it was over.

Elio Colavito (01:14:39):  
So, what was your role in the activism following the raid, following the community discussion as well?

Chanelle Gallant (01:14:45):  
I was the lead fundraising coordinator.

Elio Colavito (01:14:50):  
Do you remember kind of what strategies you employed to...?

Chanelle Gallant (01:14:54):  
Lots of them. Yeah. Well, I was a very inexperienced fundraiser at the time, so I would do it very differently now, but we organized events. This was actually the flyer for one that we organized. Hang on a sec. I got to see my camera again. So, this was called Cat Fight, and we had... This was like drinks and some appetizers and a silent auction, and tickets were 125 bucks a pop, which was basically just a way for people to give us money. And then we did things like this. And this was really more geared towards gay men who we knew had more money, and then this was more for queer women, and tickets were 10 bucks. And we would have queer performers. So, that was a lot of how we raised money.

Elio Colavito (01:16:03):  
Did you perceive any conflicts or disagreements among the activists in terms of how to proceed?

Chanelle Gallant (01:16:11):  
Like, how we should respond to the raid or how we should fundraise?

Elio Colavito (01:16:14):  
All, both.

Chanelle Gallant (01:16:17):  
And sorry, the question was conflict internally, or with other... Who?

Elio Colavito (01:16:23):

You can respond to both. Internally, but also kind of other community activists who are now taking up this cause because there's a situation to get involved with.

Chanelle Gallant (01:16:42):

I'm trying to remember. I feel like there probably were, but I don't really remember. I mean, I will say that every time we did a fundraiser that involved a lot of money, that was very expensive or involved people with a lot of money, there were some folks who felt that we shouldn't because...

Chanelle Gallant (01:17:11):

I mean, the community meeting where we fundraised on the spot was the first time, I had ever seen a public fundraising pitch, and I... Myself and Loralee [Gillis] thought, "Oh, well, you shouldn't really ask for too much money because people don't have it or you'll offend them." But in fact, it was Olivia Chow who did the pitch, and her executive assistant at the time, Bob Gallagher, said, "You know, just trust me. Just let us do it how we want to do it. We can ask for more than \$5. Don't worry."

Chanelle Gallant (01:17:51):

And in fact, Olivia [Chow] started the ask at \$500, and I watched people that I knew put up their hands, and I realized that there were people who had more money than I knew. And it was very important for me in realizing that the queer community had more wealth in it than I realized, that a lot of people were pretty quiet about, and people were hiding their class privilege in ways that I didn't know. Obviously, that changed my mind that we should ask people for \$500, not \$5. If they've got it, and they want to give it, we should let them give it to us. So, I always, after that, sided on letting people with wealth give us money, but making sure that people who don't have money also always have the opportunity to give.

Elio Colavito (01:18:48):

And looking back on that time, is there anything you would have done differently, or do you wish that the activist community in general would have done differently?

Chanelle Gallant (01:18:57):

About the raid?

Elio Colavito (01:18:59):

Anything that kind of speaks to you that you can recall, but especially the raid.

Chanelle Gallant (01:19:06):

I mean, I don't know because I don't know if we could have found a way to win the case without relying on a sexual harassment claim, which I think reinforced the legitimacy of policing; that there was a way we could have been policed that was nice and good, by women, which is bullshit. So, looking back, I wonder if there might've been a way to win the case that didn't reaffirm the legitimacy of policing.

Elio Colavito (01:19:44):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chanelle Gallant (01:19:46):

Also, I would have fundraised that money in three months had I known you don't need to organize events, you just ask people for the money, and they give it to you. Now, I do that. Now, I fundraise for movements, and I learned my lesson.

Elio Colavito (01:20:06):

Right. Fair enough. And you're familiar with the legal actions surrounding the raid, correct?

Chanelle Gallant (01:20:12):

Yeah, I was part of the team. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (01:20:16):

How would you summarize the actions taken by police, by the community, by both?

Chanelle Gallant (01:20:23):

How would I summarize the actions? The community was extremely supportive, and in fact, so were straight people. Straight people were very supportive, and I think there are complex political reasons for that. I think that they envisioned queer, cis women as safe in a way that they absolutely would not have when the raids happened on gay men's events or if we had been trans women, or if more of us had been Black or Indigenous. It would not have been seen as positively. It would have been seen as more threatening.

Chanelle Gallant (01:21:11):

But we were very supported by the community, and by straight people, actually. It was front page news on *The Globe and Mail* when the court decision came down, which was very strange for us. I felt like we were doing something that did not strike me as relevant to straight people, and then, certainly, I did not want straight people to be involved in. They were completely not relevant to what we were doing, to my mind. Can you say the question again? It was like, how would I summarize the...?

Elio Colavito (01:21:55):

The actions taken by the police, by the community, or by both?

Chanelle Gallant (01:21:57):

Oh. Well, the actions taken by the police were complete bullshit. I mean, they were harassment. It was an abuse of state power, no question. I've never felt like we have ever actually understood the real police motivations. Obviously, it was completely unrelated to public safety. It was an attempt to harass members of the community who they felt they could still get away with harassing. That's the only reason they did it. The police will kick around whoever they can get away with kicking around. And then, as a result of the raid, they found out that they couldn't. They lost the human rights complaint; the charges were stayed. The judge was very critical of the police actions and specifically said that he didn't believe the police testimony, which is very strong coming from a judge, and said that he thought that our testimony was more credible. They had no public support. The police had no public support for the raid. And so, they found out that, "Oh, well, this is a part of society that we can no longer step on their necks for fun." But it didn't mean that they stopped abusing people. They just moved on to different communities. So, they continued to harass and abuse and profile queer and trans people of colour. It just became less prevalent in our space.

Elio Colavito (01:23:37):

So, you articulated that you kind of felt that the whiteness and cis womanhood made this situation kind of more palatable to a broader social sphere. Is that something that you felt at the time or that you just kind of feel now in retrospect?

Chanelle Gallant (01:23:57):

I don't know. I don't know how much I realized that at the time. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I don't know how much I realized that at the time.

Elio Colavito (01:24:12):

Were you familiar with the defense strategy that ultimately resulted in a staying of the charges laid against the two volunteer organizers?

Chanelle Gallant (01:24:20):

Yes. Yeah, because the two people charged were not on the bathhouse committee. They were security volunteers.

Elio Colavito (01:24:27):

Right.

Chanelle Gallant (01:24:28):

But the bathhouse committee worked very closely with their legal team, and I was on the bathhouse committee for the entire time that that was happening.

Elio Colavito (01:24:40):

How would you summarize the defense's legal strategy?

Chanelle Gallant (01:24:44):

It was a sexual harassment claim. It was a claim that we had been violated by the presence of cisgender men.

Elio Colavito (01:24:53):

What was your perspective on it back in 2000?

Chanelle Gallant (01:24:58):

Well, I think I mentioned, I found it troubling. And I thought it was troubling for the fact that we were not questioning the right of the state to police us, but also because we had to make these distinctions between cisgender and transgender men because trans men were present in the space on the night of the raid, and trans women. And so, the strategy had to simplify, and I think in ways that were transphobic, why the presence of these men were a problem versus the presence of police.

Elio Colavito (01:25:58):

Has your perspective changed in any way in the last 20 years?

Chanelle Gallant (01:26:02):

Yep.

Elio Colavito (01:26:04):

How so?

Chanelle Gallant (01:26:07):

I mean, I think probably just what I've already said. I understand sort of the politics of it differently. I was very new and inexperienced and didn't understand the state and race and gender politics at the time. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (01:26:29):

Is there anything else that you want to touch on that seems relevant to the raid or the community action that you didn't get to speak about?

Chanelle Gallant (01:26:52):

I think it's important to talk about the fact that, even though I think that there were a lot of problems with our strategy, with the way that we organized and with the legal strategy, it was also an incredible win. We really crushed the cops. The cops lost on every front. I might not have thought it was the right strategy, but they lost the court case, they lost the human rights case, they were forced to publicly apologize and to sign an apology, the police were forced to undergo their first sensitivity training around LGBTQ issues, and we also forced the police to develop the first policy in North America on how trans people should be searched by police. And those are all really significant wins.

Elio Colavito (01:27:47):

Absolutely.

Chanelle Gallant (01:27:48):

Before that... The police didn't actually follow that policy, but it was the first one. Prior to that, there was absolutely no policy in place that protected trans people when they were undergoing a police search. Cops could do anything they wanted and any one of them could search trans people. And that was part of our negotiated human rights settlement.

Chanelle Gallant (01:28:12):

We basically, as we won the case, we tried to kind of fight for policy changes that were bigger than the bathhouse. So, for example, that change to police policy; a public apology that would then reduce kind of police power generally in the LGBTQ community. Them having to apologize to us, what it did was it humiliated them, and it signaled that they didn't have the same impunity in our community anymore. So that was an important win. That was beyond the bathhouse.

Chanelle Gallant (01:28:49):

The significance of the win wasn't that we got to keep running bathhouses. That wasn't important. That wasn't the important piece. It was the other things we won. So, it was that policy around trans people and searching, which then, New York City activists based their campaign on what we had won. So, again, it kind



of rippled out, which is very significant because then organizers in cities all over North America began to demand police policies on restricting the ways that police could search trans people.

Chanelle Gallant (01:29:24):

So, there was that, and then the apology again, which increased queer power in relation to the police. We also won, I think it was a \$350,000 settlement, and a hundred thousand of that went to a sex work organization, it went to Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project. So, we also helped fund political work and services being provided by and for other criminalized sexualities, which was great. And then it made a bunch of us into activists. It radicalized a bunch of people around their relationships to police. So, all of that I think is also important to capture.

Chanelle Gallant (01:30:08):

Obviously, I've said a lot in this about how I think it was complex, or there were ways that I think some of our approaches were counterproductive, but also I think it's just really important to see that all of those wins were only possible because of the power of the community. If the bathhouse committee had been the ones fighting the police, we wouldn't have won any of that. We wouldn't have won the court case; we wouldn't have won the human rights complaint. Even though the community isn't listed as an applicant on those things, that's actually why we won. That's why we won. We won because the community solidly and immediately backed us. Yep. Because you have to have that kind of power if you're going to fight something like the police.

Elio Colavito (01:31:03):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chanelle Gallant (01:31:05):

I think that's it.

Alisha Stranges (01:31:08):

Yes. I feel like in the interest of time here, just so that we can do a little wrap up about next steps, we can close it now, but thank you so, so much for sharing your wealth of experience, memory, visceral energy with us.

Chanelle Gallant (01:31:27):

Thank you both. I'm glad you're doing this and this is going to be shared with the world.

Alisha Stranges (01:31:31):

Yes. I'm going to stop the recording now.

Chanelle Gallant (01:31:35):

And I'll stop this recording too.