

**Pussy Palace Oral History Project**  
Oral History Interview with Paul Gallant  
Conducted on May 19, 2021 via Zoom  
Interviewed by Elio Colavito on behalf of the  
LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory (Elspeth Brown, Director)  
Transcribed by Rev.com and Elio Colavito

Summary: Gallant is a white, gay man from Prince Edward Island who works as a journalist for queer publications in Canada. At the time of the interview in 2021, Gallant was 51 years old. He was in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, working as freelance writer and as an interim contributing editor for *Xtra* Magazine in Toronto. The interview mostly concerns his experiences as a journalist at *Xtra* while covering the Pussy Palace bathhouse raid. He discusses his coverage of the event and the legal case; his experience as a journalist at *Xtra*; his understanding of the relationship between police and queer communities in Ontario, and other topics. The interview covers the time period from about 1999-2008. He mentions Toronto, Hamilton, and London, Ontario, as well as New York City, New York.

Keywords: Gay; Bathhouse; Organizing; Journalist; Xtra; Police; Raid.

Elio Colavito (00:01):

I just hit record. This is Elio Colavito from the Pussy Palace Oral History project, and I'm here in Toronto, Ontario, interviewing Paul Gallant on May 19th, 2021. Paul is also in Toronto and he's going to tell us about the experience of being a journalist surrounding the 2000 Pussy Palace Bathhouse raid, as well as the experience of dealing with the entire situation of it all. Paul, do we have your permission to record this oral history interview?

Paul Gallant (00:34):

Yep. You do.

Elio Colavito (00:36):

Awesome. And before we get into your Pussy Palace experience, I'm going to ask a few questions that invite you to tell me a little bit about yourself. In particular, get a sense of the different aspects of identity that you hold, or the categories that you occupy and how these may have shifted over time. Can you tell me your full name, your age and your preferred gender pronouns?

Paul Gallant (00:56):

I am Paul Nelson Gallant. I am 51, and he and him.

Elio Colavito (01:01):

Awesome. How would you describe your gender and sexual identity today?

Paul Gallant (01:06):

I identify as male, and as a gay male.

Elio Colavito (01:10):

Was that the same in the year 2000?

Paul Gallant (01:12):

It was, yeah.

Elio Colavito (01:13):

Amazing. And what about racial, ethnic and cultural identities?

Paul Gallant (01:18):

I am from Prince Edward Island. I am half Irish and half Acadian, very assimilated Acadian. If I was a little bit older, I would have been raised French, and if I was a little bit younger, I would have been raised French, but raised English speaking.

Elio Colavito (01:32):

Beautiful. Sorry if you could hear the buzzing in the background, somebody's trying to get in, apparently.

Paul Gallant (01:40):

No.

Elio Colavito (01:40):

Amazing. What can you tell me about your educational and class background?

Paul Gallant (01:45):

I grew up in rural Prince Edward Island. My mother was a bookkeeper. My dad was a mechanic who eventually became an automotive instructor at a college. I went to a rural high school, graduated with like 50 people. Went to university, studied journalism at Carleton [University], and have been a journalist most of my life since then, with a few intermissions. After Carleton [University], I ended up moving to Vancouver, where I edited an arts entertainment magazine for several years. Then I moved from Toronto, oh sorry, from Vancouver to Toronto, when I got a job at *Xtra* as features editor. That was 1999, so it was *Xtra* that brought me to Toronto.

Elio Colavito (02:36):

Wow. Very succinct. That's a skill, I guess one you'd need as a journalist for sure. What kinds of activities occupy your time these days, as compared to 2000?

Paul Gallant (02:54):

I moved to Toronto in 1999, so I was new to the city, and I was relatively new to the city when that Pussy Palace story broke. I would say, in 2000, I was working on Church Street and going out on Church Street more. It probably wasn't that unusual to be out four or five nights a week at that time, especially as somebody just discovering the city. The village probably had more options at that time, so it was kind of a busier place, even pre-pandemic. Now that I'm a bit older I, not counting the pandemic, I probably would go out a couple of times a week. Not counting the pandemic, I go to movies, I travel quite a bit. I'm a writer creatively, as well as a journalist, so I read. I read, I write a lot, I watch a lot of stuff.

Elio Colavito (03:51):

Nice. Sounds like a good time. Does spirituality or religion play a role in your life at all?

Paul Gallant (04:00):

No. I was raised Catholic. I was actually quite a serious Catholic into my early twenties, and then I stopped believing. I would say I had a very positive Catholic upbringing, but it's not a religion that I personally subscribe to anymore, and I have larger political problems with the church.

Elio Colavito (04:23):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Is there anything else that you think would be important for me to know about how you identified then, versus now, in any category?

Paul Gallant (04:31):

No. I mean then, I was an employee at *Xtra*. I mean, the funny thing is then, I worked there until 2008. I've been a freelance writer/editor since then, but oddly enough, now I am back working a contract with them, so it's like been 13 years since I worked at *Xtra*, but here I am, back doing similar things to what I was doing before.

Elio Colavito (04:57):

Are you enjoying being back?

Paul Gallant (04:59):

Yeah, it's kind of fun. Lots of things are new. Some things are exactly the same.

Elio Colavito (05:04):

Yeah, it must be a, kind of, interesting thing to jump back into after a while.

Paul Gallant (05:10):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Elio Colavito (05:12):

Go ahead, if you had something to say.

Paul Gallant (05:16):

No, no. That's it.

Elio Colavito (05:17):

Now, I'm just going to ask you to shift back to the fall of 2000. Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee is planning the Night of 2000 Pussies, the fourth installment of the Pussy Palace event. Prior to the media coverage of the bathhouse raid, how familiar were you with the Pussy Palace events?

Paul Gallant (05:35):

Only somewhat. I mean, because I worked at *Xtra*, I was going to work on Church Street every day. Our managing editor at the time, Eleanor Brown, was my boss. She was covering the story. There was advertising, and there was events notifications. I sort of knew of it as a thing. As a gay male it wasn't necessarily a thing for me, but I knew that it was happening. I think, when I had heard about it, I was surprised that there was so much programming to it because gay male bathhouses tend to be, you know, you pay your money, you wander around, you meet somebody, you enjoy yourself, and then you're gone. It's kind of more like a laundromat than an event. I mean, I do remember being surprised when people were talking about programming and some of the things that they were doing. I think they had performers and they had lots of things happening, which surprised me, but I didn't think too deeply about it.

Elio Colavito (06:39):

Yeah. Do you recall any other gay men that you knew having things to say about it?

Paul Gallant (06:45):

No. I mean, among my peers, not really. I don't think it was on the radar of gay men... I mean, at *Xtra*, because I do think *Xtra* was one of those places where gay men and lesbians and other LGBTQ people chatted in ways that probably wasn't happening in bars. If you went to Woody's, I don't think a lot of people will be talking about the Pussy Palace at that time, but at our office, it's something you would.

Elio Colavito (07:15):

Is there anything that you remember distinctly about the office chatter, pre-raid?

Paul Gallant (07:22):

Not really. I remember people talking about the programming. I think people were excited about it. It seemed like an interesting thing. I do think, I mean, you've probably talked to people about the history of Pink Triangle Press and *Xtra*, and how a lot of the founders of the press have been involved in The Bathhouse Raids in 1981. I think that the culture of the office was that bathhouses were important, that sexual spaces were very important. It was a topic often that, to this day, I mean, that highly sexualized space is something you... It's more associated with gay men than women, so I would say some of the ideas in the office were like... I think gay men that knew about it were excited about it because it almost gave a common thing.

Paul Gallant (08:15):

I think sometimes, gay male issues and issues of other people in the community, don't always overlap the way you'd like. People get excited about Pride, so that's universal. Bathhouses had been seen as a gay male domain. I think when the Pussy Palace started, I would say some of the older gay men in the community, who had followed these things in more of the political bent, were excited about it in that it was something they could get their head around. It was something that was, except for the programming, it was something that was very understandable to a sexually active gay male. They could get it, and why you would want to do it, and why would it be important.

Elio Colavito (08:59):

Right. For sure. Do you recall learning that the event was raided by the police?

Paul Gallant (09:07):

Yeah, I was trying to think of the day because it probably happened over the weekend, it was probably the Monday after. It was immediately after. I just remember Eleanor [Brown], our managing editor, saying that this had happened, and she had assigned a reporter to do it. Actually, it was pretty good, fast response to things like that, if there's police action. A few years later, there was a bathhouse raid in Hamilton [Ontario], that we were covering within a day or so of that, so the Pussy Palace, it was something we swung into gear. And again, because of the history of the press, going back to the gay male bathhouse raids in '81, like there's kind of a, "Yeah, we know what to do, we..."

Elio Colavito (09:56):

Not your first rodeo at *Xtra*.

Paul Gallant (09:59):

Yeah.

Elio Colavito (10:00):

For sure. Do you remember what the office chatter was like? Other than whoever assigned the thing to a specific reporter, how did everyone react and take the news that Monday?

Paul Gallant (10:15):

I mean, I can't remember specifically, because the different departments are only interacting a little bit. I mean, I remember reception, there's several women in reception who I found were very political, so they were very engaged in it. I mean, one of the funny things about *Xtra* at that time was we probably had the most politically engaged reception desk in the city. The editorial department, we were engaged in covering it as a news story. But aside from that, I'm not sure it was something that everybody was standing around the water cooler at. It was certain departments and certain people who were interested.

Elio Colavito (10:52):

Did you know anyone who was present during the raid?

Paul Gallant (10:55):

I met people afterwards, who had been present during the raid, but I think, because I was relatively new to Toronto, I didn't really know anybody who had attended, or that I knew had attended.

Elio Colavito (11:08):

These people that you eventually got to know later on, were they people that you got to know in the immediate aftermath, and the Pussy Palace was still being buzzed about, or was this like many years later? "Oh, I happened to be there," type of thing?

Paul Gallant (11:21):

It was the aftermath because I wrote a bit about it, and so I was interviewing some of the organizers and then I remember a particular fundraiser I went to. They were raising money for the court case, so I remember that. So then, just kind of community level of friendships, and just people that were smart and engaged with it. As a feature's writer, I was always looking for people who could write about things, and I'm always looking for

things I could write about. I'd say, mostly, colleague level rather than... I didn't make best friends forever out of it.

Elio Colavito (11:58):

Yeah. Did you get a sense for the impact that it had on the people that you did get to interview, who were there?

Paul Gallant (12:05):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I mean, one of the things about the Pussy Palace was that they just had always seemed to be very organized, and they just seemed to really know what they were doing, and they really thought about it. Whereas, if you're used to gay men's sex culture, it's not as a thought through, at that time anyway. I think things have changed somewhat, but no one was thinking about accessibility issues or comfort issues. I think talking to the women, it was amazing to me, that they had thought these things through so much, and they had really thought through, almost anticipated, not that they anticipated a raid, but they anticipated being accountable for everything that they would do in a way that maybe a conventional business wouldn't.

Elio Colavito (12:53):

Oh, interesting. You did say that you attended a fundraiser. Do you recall if that was the public speaking event at The 519 Community Centre, or was that the Pussies Bite Back stage performance, type of thing?

Paul Gallant (13:11):

I think it was Pussies Bite Back. I don't think I attended The 519. I think partly because, the thing about *Xtra* is, often you're sending a reporter, so I think we sent a reporter to that.

Elio Colavito (13:24):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Can you tell me anything about the Pussies Bite Back event that you did attend?

Paul Gallant (13:32):

I've been trying to think about it. It's very vague. I remember Jack Layton and Olivia Chow being involved, but I would be hard pressed to describe it. I think I would probably get things wrong.

Elio Colavito (13:44):

We have read your article "Pussy House Triumph," which was published in *Xtra* in 2002, after the legal case. What do you know about the legal proceedings that unfolded following the raid?

Paul Gallant (13:55):

I think that most of that I know, just from interviewing JP Hornick, and who else was it? [Richard] Aitchison. And I think Chanelle Gallant and I talked a few times, but just... Most of my information was coming through them, so that's when... A lot of what I know was second-hand. I mean, it's funny. I probably have the notebooks somewhere, where I wrote all those interviews down in, but I don't know whether I could ever find them again, but it was mostly talking to them on the phone, and they came to the office a few times. Most of the stories that I wrote were mostly through interviews with them.

Elio Colavito (14:36):

Do you recall having any opinion on how things went down in the legal case?

Paul Gallant (14:44):

I don't have strong opinions. I mean, I thought they just seemed very organized. I had interviewed Frank Addario for other stories, and he seemed to be knowledgeable. To be honest, they seemed to have a pretty clear case. I mean, even in the immediate aftermath, the police didn't seem to have a lot of confidence in the raid. I don't think we thought it was going to be a guaranteed positive ruling in their favour, but it seemed like they had a pretty good chance and a pretty good case.

Elio Colavito (15:18):

You mentioned that you had to cover Frank Addario things in the past. Can you for the record, just say why that was?

Paul Gallant (15:26):

I'm trying to think what else did... He had come out... Oh, sorry, he had been a lawyer in... Actually, I can't... There's probably two or three cases that he had represented that I interviewed him for at the time and, without looking it up, I can't remember exactly what they were. He'd been involved a lot of civil liberty cases at the time. He was often the go-to civil liberty lawyer, if you...

Elio Colavito (15:53):

Yeah.

Paul Gallant (15:57):

I probably had interviewed him for a couple of features about it, but I can't remember the exact subject matter. Sometimes we would actually call him, even if he wasn't involved with the case, to just say, "What's your opinion on this?" That's why it's hard to say exactly what it was because, over that period of time, I probably talked to him, I don't know, maybe a dozen times with different things, and some of them he would have been involved in, or some of them he would have been not involved in.

Elio Colavito (16:23):

You mentioned not really knowing which way that the case was going to sway, prior to hearing the ruling. Do you remember what you expected?

Paul Gallant (16:33):

I thought they would win. I didn't think they would win as clearly and as definitely. I thought it would be a mushier ruling, I guess. It's funny because I didn't really have a lot of experience with covering the police before I came to *Xtra*. It was a new field of coverage for me. One of the things maybe... I just want to back up maybe a little bit, if you don't mind because I think, when I started working at *Xtra*, it was 1999, and then it was like early 2000, Julian Fantino became the police chief in Toronto. I remember I went to the press conference where they announced his appointment, and it was just like a new king had been anointed.

Paul Gallant (17:20):

But then, because I had worked at *Xtra*, I was aware that there had been controversy about him in London, Ontario. So, we were very much on the watch for him. I felt like we were waiting for something to happen, in a way because he seemed to have, I guess, prejudices against the LGBT community based on what he was doing in London [Ontario], so we were watching him very closely. I mean, normally, I don't know if I would have ever attended a press conference where a police chief was appointed, but I ran down to the police station and asked him some questions in the scrum. So, that was, I think, in the spring. The summer, he held a reception on Church Street for Pride, which again was a big surprise. It just seemed like a bit of a public relations thing to make good with the community. Some people actually protested that reception because... I remember the guest list of that reception was very strange.

Paul Gallant (18:24):

*Xtra* wasn't invited. People that you would've thought would have been invited, weren't invited. It seemed to have been a very curated list. So, that was that summer, and then the Pussy Palace happened in the fall. So, not that we expected the Pussy Palace raid. I think that itself came as a surprise, but I think we were waiting for some shoe to drop, that the police were going to do something because there's just a suspicion that [Julian] Fantino had aggressive thoughts towards LGBT people. Then, with the court case, though I think the case seemed to be very good for the Pussy Palace organizers, you do start to wonder, "Well, I mean, are the police going to get off the hook for it? Even if it's a positive ruling for them, is it going to be a mushy ruling? How seriously are the police going to take it? Is it something that they can dismiss easily?"

Paul Gallant (19:18):

Because, by the time of the court case, it really seemed the police just wanted to sweep it under the carpet. I think, when the ruling came down, I guess it was just surprising that it was so clear, and then it was surprising that it ended up being taken so seriously, being used as a jumping off point for greater examination of the police behaviour. Because, I think up until that time, you think, "Okay, whatever the ruling is, they're just going to ignore it and roll on." But it did seem to have more teeth than I think anybody expected.

Elio Colavito (20:01):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Aside from your journalistic support, were you involved in any community activism following the raid?

Paul Gallant (20:07):

No. I wouldn't call myself an activist, but my participation in the community is as a journalist, is as a witness. I guess, I'm a advocacy-oriented journalist, but I wouldn't call myself an activist.

Elio Colavito (20:24):

Witnessing all of this stuff going on after the fact, did you perceive any conflicts or disagreements between any of the major folks involved?

Elio Colavito (20:39):

Oh no.



Paul Gallant (20:40):

... individually. I would say from a PR perspective, they were pretty good. Whatever might've been happening behind the scenes, they seem to be very coordinated and I didn't really hear much infighting.

Elio Colavito (20:55):

Interesting. Looking back on that time, was there anything that you think any of them could have done differently?

Paul Gallant (21:04):

Hard to say. I mean, to prevent the raid or after the raid? I don't know. I found most of what I saw was very admirable. I mean, I think the excuse for the raid was liquor licensing permit, or something. You could say, "Well, if they had done that absolutely perfectly, would that have avoided the raid?" But then I think the police were looking for any excuse, I think. It could have been the most perfectly run event in all the whole world, and I think the police still would've showed up for it. I think it was going to happen. No, I can't say anything that I would criticize them for.

Elio Colavito (21:51):

Right. Is there anything else that you remember vividly about your involvement in this historical moment in Toronto's queer community, before we move on to the last section?

Paul Gallant (22:03):

No. Nope.

Elio Colavito (22:05):

All right, so we're nearing the end. The last set of questions focuses on the impact of the Pussy Palace as a community initiative. What was your impression of the intent behind the Pussy Palace, it's reason for being?

Paul Gallant (22:21):

Again, as a person who's not the target subject, I thought it was to help women explore their sexuality, to be more sexually free, to have a space that they felt safe and the freedom to be as sexual as they wanted to be; I guess, to have a space that has some relationship to sex positive spaces that gay men traditionally inhabit.

Elio Colavito (22:51):

Yeah. Folks who organized, and whatnot, have expressed that the one of the goals of the event was to address the invisibility of queer women's sexuality. The question that I have here is, what do you think contributed to this lack of visibility?

Paul Gallant (23:08):

I think that goes back a lot. I mean, and as someone who's kind of covered LGBT issues for too long now, most places in the world will complain about the invisibility of lesbians and bisexual women in communities. I mean, you have to look hard to find cities that have an active lesbian, gay bar scene. I think there seem to be some kind of social issues. I mean, I've heard it could be economic, could be that men and women express their sexuality in different ways and have different condition... I'm not sure. I think you'd have to be a sociologist or an economist or a human behaviour expert. I mean, it's a pattern you see. I think women's

sexual spaces tend to be rare around the world. They were then, and I think they somewhat are still now. I don't know why.

Elio Colavito (24:18):

What are your thoughts on the name of the event, the Pussy Palace? Did it feel fitting?

Paul Gallant (24:23):

I mean, as a gay man, a lot of gay male events and venues will have provocative names or something that's attention-grabbing. I would say the name, at the time, never struck me as unusual. If you're a gay man, you go to The Cock in New York [City, New York]. I guess, in retrospect, as a journalist over the last 20 years, you become much more aware of inclusiveness and how different people take things. I mean, at the time, *Xtra* was the gay and lesbian biweekly, so it was defined in a much more narrow way than it has become over time. I would say, in retrospect, I can see the name was maybe more limited than it should have been. At the time, especially as a gay man used to provocatively titled things, highly sexualized names for things, I didn't bat an eye at the time.

Elio Colavito (25:28):

Yeah, like you said, for inclusivity sake, at some point the series of the events was changed from the Pussy Palace to the Pleasure Palace. Do you have a sense for when that happened and why that would have happened?

Paul Gallant (25:41):

It was while I was still at *Xtra*, so it was definitely in that early 2000s, but I can't remember exactly when it happened.

Elio Colavito (25:49):

Do you know what prompted the shift?

Paul Gallant (25:53):

I do not know exactly. My memory is that it was to be more inclusive to transwomen, but I would say I learned that by reading *Xtra*, not by any first-hand knowledge.

Elio Colavito (26:09):

Finally, is there anything else that you'd like to share about your experience, that my questions haven't allowed you to speak to?

Paul Gallant (26:16):

No, I think that covers everything. I mean, most of my knowledge of it comes by talking to people on the phone or having meetings. I wish I could talk more about being in big rooms, full of excited people, but often that's not how I did my work.

Elio Colavito (26:34):

Yeah, no, fair enough. Thank you so much. You still provided some incredible insight into a different side of the story that we haven't had anyone speak to yet, so thank you so much. You can stop your recording and—

Paul Gallant (26:49):

Okay.

Elio Colavito (26:49):

I can stop mine.