

**Pussy Palace Oral History Project**  
Oral History Interview with Diane Hamilton  
Conducted on August 9, 2021 via Zoom  
Interviewed by Alisha Stranges on behalf of the  
LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory (Elspeth Brown, Director)  
Transcribed by Rev.com and Elio Colavito

Summary: Diane Hamilton is a 54-year-old, queer, white woman living in Toronto, Ontario. At the time of the interview, Hamilton was working as a teacher at ALPHA Alternative School in the Toronto District School Board. The interview concerns her experiences as a volunteer organizer and patron of the Pussy Palace on September 14, 2000. Hamilton discusses her involvement in the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee, the appeal of the Pussy Palace events as an avenue for sexual liberation and sex radicalism, her sense memories of being inside the bathhouse, her encounter with police from within the ticket booth at the threshold of the Palace on the night the bathhouse was raided, and other topics. The interview concerns the years 1998 to 2000. Hamilton mentions Yellow Springs, Ohio in the United States and Toronto and Elora, Ontario in Canada.

Keywords: Sex Radicalism; Organizing; Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee; Police Raid.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:01):

There we go. This is Alisha Stranges from the Pussy Palace Oral History Project, and I am here in Toronto, Ontario interviewing Diane Hamilton on August 9, 2021. Diane is in Elora, Ontario and is going to tell us about the experience of being a volunteer and patron of the Pussy Palace bathhouse event on the night of September 14th, 2000. So, Diane, do I have your permission to record this oral history interview?

Diane Hamilton (00:00:36):

Yes, you do.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:37):

Thank you. Before we get into your experiences with the Pussy Palace, I'm going to ask a few questions that 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 how, at least, some of these may or may not have shifted over the past 20 years. So, to start simply, can you tell me your name, your age, and your preferred gender pronouns.

Diane Hamilton (00:01:09):

So, I'm Diane Hamilton. I'm 54 years old, and I use she and her.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:16):

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

Diane Hamilton (00:01:25):

I would call myself a queer woman at this point. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:32):

What does the word queer mean for you? How do you use that word?

Diane Hamilton (00:01:39):

I use it as a blanket word to... I'm somehow more comfortable with the word queer because it can mean a lot of different things to different people, I guess. You know, for me... Queer. I should have thought about this ahead of time. Yeah. I'm a little speechless on this somehow.

Alisha Stranges (00:02:23):

I would be as well, to be honest.

Diane Hamilton (00:02:30):

What does it mean to be queer? To call myself queer? It's important to me to be out as queer in as many public spaces as I can be. I never much liked the word lesbian when I was younger, and I think this question is coming. I liked the word dyke, and I used the word dyke a lot to describe myself. It's funny. Dyke is, sort of, feels a little young to me now, or it was just part of a younger me, and I think it's important to me that queer implies alliance and solidarity with other sexual identities that I want to be politically aligned with. It kind of brings in trans and the stuff about gender identity, too. I know it's a word that has lost some of its... It's a more mainstream word than it used to be, so it's maybe not as radical as it once was, but it's a word I am comfortable with to describe myself.

Alisha Stranges (00:03:54):

How about back in 2000? Would it have been more, you would use the word dyke back then?

Diane Hamilton (00:04:01):

Yeah. Yeah. I called myself a dyke then. But I also used queer then too. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:04:11):

Yeah. You're talking about how dyke felt a little bit like it was attached to a younger you. Can you say a little bit more about that? Or what was the appeal of dyke for you back then?

Diane Hamilton (00:04:36):

Maybe it was a little more transgressive at the time, a little more in your face. Yeah. It's sort of the typical thing that happens as a person gets older, but not for everybody. Yeah. Maybe it feels a little too hard-edged now or something. I don't know. Yeah. It was an identity I took up very proudly. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:05:05):

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

Diane Hamilton (00:05:14):

White in terms of race. I prefer to say European-Canadian. I wish that more people would talk about being European-Canadian or, for me, I'm Scottish-, Irish-, English-Canadian. Yeah. I'm hoping that that gets... It's just really important to identify our actual cultural backgrounds and not sort of make the differences between

different white folks invisible because there are real cultural differences between white folks. I mean, white privilege comes along no matter what but... Yeah. My cultural identity I guess is Protestant, WASP, Anglo. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:06:20):

What can you tell me about your particular educational path and class background?

Diane Hamilton (00:06:29):

Upper-middle-class in terms of my background. More middle-class on one side, more upper-class on the other. I went to a public school in an affluent neighbourhood in the elementary years and then a private, very academically-focused high school. Then was able to go to university in the States to a place called Antioch College, which was kind of a hippie school. Very progressive and, for me, in terms of my political identity, in high school, it was quite a conservative environment that I was in, and it wasn't until university that I found my people in terms of politics. I came out in university. It was a really great place to be. Environmental studies was my major and Antioch is in Yellow Springs, Ohio, so that's where I was for five years actually.

Alisha Stranges (00:07:47):

What kind of things occupy your time these days professionally?

Diane Hamilton (00:07:51):

Oh, well, I should add in terms of education that I did my teaching degree at OISE [Ontario Institute for Studies in Education], at the Eric Jackman, now, Institute of Child Studies back in 2012. Now I'm a teacher. It's my third career. I worked in a women's drop-in centre. I think that's where I was at the time of the bathhouse, or maybe I was... Anyway, there was some years as a professional potter and pottery teacher and then transitioning into teaching. I teach full-time now at ALPHA Alternative School, which is a wonderful, democratic, alternative school in the TDSB [Toronto District School Board]. Yeah. That's what I do professionally.

Alisha Stranges (00:08:52):

Can you say a little bit more about what you remember about what you were doing in 2000? You said you worked at a women's drop-in centre.

Diane Hamilton (00:09:02):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:02):

You think? Potentially?

Diane Hamilton (00:09:04):

I think I was still there, Sistering. Yeah. I was a frontline worker with women experiencing homelessness, mental illness, different sort of crises in their lives. Yeah. There was a College Street and a Parkdale location back then.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:38):

Right. Yeah. There's a Sistering near to where I am located in Bloor West.

Diane Hamilton (00:09:46):

Yeah. Yeah. That's the same organization now. That's where they moved. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:52):

What role, if any, does religion or spirituality play in your life?

Diane Hamilton (00:09:59):

No organized religion. I'm a pretty committed meditator, so there's sort of a Buddhist influence in my life. Yeah. Nothing organized. I would say I have spiritual beliefs around the connectedness of all things. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:25):

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

Diane Hamilton (00:10:39):

Identity?

Alisha Stranges (00:10:44):

Or transitions.

Diane Hamilton (00:10:53):

Well, I just wish that I had known then some of the things I know now. You know? That's how it is with getting older. I just feel like I have a better relationship with myself than I did then. There's less noise going on, and I am compassionate towards my younger self. That's where I was at then. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:11:29):

Yeah. Beautiful. Thank you. I want to transition here and invite you to travel back in time to the fall of 2000. This was when the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee was preparing to host the Night of 2000 Pussies, which was, at the time, the fourth instalment of the Pussy Palace. How do you recall first learning about that particular event?

Diane Hamilton (00:11:55):

I had joined the organizing committee [Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee] I think the previous spring. I had attended the very first Pussy Palace, which was I think '98 possibly. And that was so exciting. Just all the talk leading up to it, just the fact that it was even happening. It was just sort of a landmark event I'd say for me and my community of friends. I think I went to the bathhouse the next year too, probably. And then I wanted to get involved, and I had some time, and I thought I wanted to volunteer and do something, and what did I want to do? And I thought I wanted to contribute to this event and also meet more people. I was interested in who were the people behind the scenes of the bathhouse.

Diane Hamilton (00:13:12):

So, I started going to the organizing committee meetings. We planned that event. I was kind of apprenticing, you could say. Lorelee [Gillis] and Chanelle [Gallant] and Carlyle [Jansen] had put on the bathhouses, and they were just bringing in some new people to the [Toronto Women's Bathhouse] committee and so those of us who are new really just kind of followed their lead and did the joe jobs or did whatever needed to be done. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:13:50):

Do you remember how it was decided what role you would take up on the September 14 event?

Diane Hamilton (00:13:58):

It was all just sort of negotiated collaboratively on the [Toronto Women's Bathhouse] committee I would say. I worked with Lorelee [Gillis] on organizing the volunteers. And we had the different shifts and the different roles for all of the volunteers, the lap dancing volunteers, the photo room volunteers, so I had a hand in just sort of organizing the logistics of all that. And then on the night of, it was committee volunteers who staffed the booth where people arrived to. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:14:47):

Right. I want to get into some more details around that, but I just wanted to backtrack a bit because you had said you attended the first event. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about what was so great about this event, why it captivated your attention, why it was intriguing for you.

Diane Hamilton (00:15:12):

The term sexual liberation comes to mind. It felt very taboo to get a bunch of women in a space to get sexy together and connect. It was sort of scary and thrilling and exciting all at the same time. I guess I had in the 90s been involved with AIDS Action Now, with gay friends. And I was aware of men's bathhouses and how gay men just seemed to have sex with each other all the time, and just that we could do that too was... I feel like it opened up new possibilities for myself and just what it could mean to be a dyke or a queer woman. That we could be playful and adventurous, sexually, in sort of uncommitted or transitory ways, was... Like, I don't think I would have come up with it myself if the event hadn't been there to provoke me to think, "Oh, I could do that." You know?

Alisha Stranges (00:16:58):

I am curious... I'm imagining, okay, you go to this first event, and it's really exciting, and it's opening up new possibilities. What is it that prompted you to get into the organizing side as opposed to, "I'll just wait for the next one and have another great night" as a patron? You know?

Diane Hamilton (00:17:22):

I think it does come down to identity really. I wanted to be a sexual radical. I wanted to do something political. I had done other activism with Queer Nation and AIDS Action Now. And this just felt like a really important thing for the community of women that I was in. And, personally, I mean, it felt very risky. It didn't feel comfortable. It was pretty scary to step into that. I think I was really nervous at my first organizing committee meeting. It helped I knew Carlyle [Jansen] socially, and I knew Lorelee [Gillis] a little bit already. Yeah. I just wanted to be one of those sexy, sex activists. The outfits. It was for the outfits, right?

Alisha Stranges (00:18:48):

Thank you. Let's go back to the night, to where you were volunteering. I'm curious what did the job of working in the booth entail?

Diane Hamilton (00:19:10):

As people arrived, they would give us our tickets, and we would warmly welcome them and tell them the lay of the land. I think there were other volunteers who were greeters once they were buzzed in the door. There was a door where we buzzed people through, and there was a long hallway and then a window that we would see people through. I think we just sort of took the tickets, introduced them to a host-type volunteer, and then we were also the nerve central. If there was any issue, all the information flowed through there. We had walkie-talkies, I think. If they needed something in one place, they would let us know and we'd pass on the message. So, communications, I guess.

Alisha Stranges (00:20:15):

Would there be just a single person working in the booth at any one time or more than one?

Diane Hamilton (00:20:20):

We were always in pairs.

Alisha Stranges (00:20:23):

Oh, in pairs? Okay. Do you recall how long your shift might have been that night? When it might have started?

Diane Hamilton (00:20:36):

I think they were two-hour shifts, and I was on a late one. It might have been one hour. How long was the whole thing? Maybe they were only one hour. Midnight to 1:00 a.m., or 1:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m., or midnight to 2:00 a.m., something like that.

Alisha Stranges (00:20:56):

Yeah. I want to ask a few questions here about trying to slow down that space and time from which someone has decided to volunteer or to participate in the event in some way and when they actually become an official volunteer arriving at the club. Do you recall anything about where you would have been in the city before you made your way to Club Toronto?

Diane Hamilton (00:21:30):

Yeah. I would have been at my place, Montrose [Avenue] and Dundas [Street West]. I think I would have ridden my bike. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:21:44):

How were you feeling headed to the club about what might transpire that night?

Diane Hamilton (00:22:02):

I think I was excited and a bit nervous about doing a good job as a volunteer or whatever. You know? There was some kind of tip-off, eh? We had an idea that the cops might be coming, and I can't remember when we heard that. There was some sort of last-minute communication from maybe Carlyle [Jansen] that the cops might be coming. I think I was kind of worried about that.

Alisha Stranges (00:22:47):

Were you headed to the club just before your shift started, or were you planning to spend time inside the Palace as a patron either before or after the shift?

Diane Hamilton (00:22:59):

Yeah. No. I got there early. I think I got there when it started, and I was there for the whole time. You know, hung out with people, and just had a nice time myself leading up to that shift. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:23:17):

What was the look you were going for that evening? What do you recall about what you might have worn?

Diane Hamilton (00:23:23):

You know, I don't remember what I wore. It's too bad. I know what shoes I would have worn. I had these great platform boots with silver, like the platforms were silver, and then probably knee socks and a mini skirt. Yeah. I had a Spandex or something mini skirt. Then I think maybe a bra and a little sort of lacy thing, something like that. I would have worn lipstick, which I don't usually.

Alisha Stranges (00:24:12):

What about the colour palette of the outfit?

Diane Hamilton (00:24:17):

Probably a lot of black and a little bit of colour thrown in.

Alisha Stranges (00:24:23):

What colour lipstick?

Diane Hamilton (00:24:28):

Like an orange-y red.

Alisha Stranges (00:24:31):

Do you recall what you might have been trying to feel in this outfit or to communicate to others?

Diane Hamilton (00:24:39):

Well, definitely just feeling sexy and sexually sort of powerful. Yeah. Just communicating confidence and interest in connecting, I guess.

Alisha Stranges (00:25:02):

You said you rode your bike. Would you have arrived and changed there?

Diane Hamilton (00:25:09):

I think I probably did. I think I brought my clothes with me. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:25:13):

Yeah. You arrive at the club, you get in, you get changed. Can you describe for me the atmosphere inside the club? Before your shift started.

Diane Hamilton (00:25:34):

It's a combination of things. I mean, there wasn't the sort of electricity of the first bathhouse in '98. Yeah., I don't think you could reproduce that. On the other hand, I think... I knew a number of people there, and we sort of knew how to do this now. Lots of people excited to connect and see what happens and sort of insecurity about, "Will I meet somebody? Will I have the night I'm hoping to have?" There's sort of the nerves and the excitement going on and just really good peoplewatching.

Alisha Stranges (00:26:46):

Yeah. As a patron, which parts of the space did you gravitate towards?

Diane Hamilton (00:26:55):

I remember hanging out by the pool, and I think I did some lap dancing. Then on the third floor, I think there was sort of a kink space up there, which I didn't go into but went up to see what was going on a little bit. I remember I met a friend, and we made out up there, which we never had before. Yeah. I had some little adventures before that, before the shift.

Alisha Stranges (00:27:56):

Yeah. Do you recall spending any time in the photo room?

Diane Hamilton (00:28:04):

I don't think I did. No.

Alisha Stranges (00:28:06):

I really want to get a sense of the impression that the space may have made on your senses. I'm going to lead you through a bit of an exercise here. I'll do it with you. Just go with me to the best of your ability.

Diane Hamilton (00:28:21):

Okay.

Alisha Stranges (00:28:22):

I'll invite you to soften your gaze or even close your eyes if you feel comfortable, and just take a couple of deep breaths in and out. Sort of allowing your body to sink into your chair. Allowing your jaw to relax. And



with each inhale, inviting yourself back into one or another space inside the Pussy Palace, just trying to re-inhabit one of the spaces. Don't worry too much about which space is coming to mind, whichever space, no matter how insignificant it might seem, is a perfect one to work with. From this sort of contemplative, embodied space, look around and tell me what it is you can see.

Diane Hamilton (00:29:50):

I see women and trans women dressed in all kinds of great sexy outfits and chatting with each other, moving about the space. Lots of flirting going on. I'm remembering the sort of main staircase and just people moving up and down the stairs and looking really fine.

Alisha Stranges (00:30:49):

And this scene you're describing at the staircase, if you could distil it into a single colour, what colour seems to be predominant for you?

Diane Hamilton (00:31:01):

Red.

Alisha Stranges (00:31:05):

Are there any lingering odours in the space? What does it smell like?

Diane Hamilton (00:31:12):

Yeah. I've been thinking about that since the whole going back is... The whole place had a very musty smell. Yeah. There was a sort of damp, musty smell.

Alisha Stranges (00:31:34):

If some part of your body could reach out right now and brush up against some part of the space you're describing, what might you be touching? What are its textures?

Diane Hamilton (00:31:56):

The handrail, just like nice wood. I remember the towels. They were kind of scratchy.

Alisha Stranges (00:32:22):

What can you hear in this space? What can you hear practically, literally, or just in the abstract what does it sound like here?

Diane Hamilton (00:32:37):

Dance music and voices and conversation, sort of some hooting and hollering, and click of heels on the floor and clinking glasses.

Alisha Stranges (00:33:06):

The last question here is a bit of a strange one but if somehow, magically, you could taste this space, what might its flavour be?

Diane Hamilton (00:33:16):

Blue cheese.

Alisha Stranges (00:33:16):

Can you say more about that?

Diane Hamilton (00:33:22):

Not a really strong, like a mild, blue cheese. It's something that, you know, in terms of the senses, the sort of dank mustiness of the physical space itself was just always there for me. But it was like really awesome at the same time. Blue cheese is mouldy but it's just so tasty.

Alisha Stranges (00:34:02):

I love that. That's beautiful. You can let that go, open your eyes, if they've been closed. Thank you for taking me there.

Diane Hamilton (00:34:12):

Sure.

Alisha Stranges (00:34:16):

So, I'm curious about who else was there. The next set of questions focuses on your perception of the crowd. In the height of the event, how many people would you say were there?

Diane Hamilton (00:34:35):

A hundred? I'm not so good with numbers. But, yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:34:44):

Yeah. Yeah. How would you describe the composition of the crowd along lines of things like gender, race, sexuality, culture?

Diane Hamilton (00:35:01):

It was a pretty diverse crowd. Trans folks, there was outreach to trans folks, and there were trans women there and trans guys there. And racially, it was diverse also, racially. I mean, it could always be more so but it wasn't a white women's event. There had also been a lot of outreach, and also on the committee there was a Black woman and an Asian woman. They had done work to outreach. Yeah. Black dykes were visible in the space and Asian dykes, too. It was diverse.

Alisha Stranges (00:36:05):

How did it feel for you to exist in your body in that space that night?

Diane Hamilton (00:36:16):

Exciting and scary.

Alisha Stranges (00:36:21):

You know, the Pussy Palace has been described as a space that was, at least, publicly inclusive of lesbian women, queer cis women, and trans folks. Do you have any recollection of what the relationship between these differently gendered groups might have been like inside the Pussy Palace, back in 2000?

Diane Hamilton (00:36:44):

Yeah. There was a trans woman on the organizing committee too, I'm just remembering. Two trans women on the organizing committee. Your question is what was the space like at the Pussy Palace?

Alisha Stranges (00:36:59):

Yeah. We're sort of understanding that there was an intention, at least, on the organizing committee's part to try to make the space inclusive of different nuances inside of feminine-of-centre gender? I'm curious, on the ground, what was that like? The relationship between those differently gendered groups?

Diane Hamilton (00:37:34):

There were trans women there, and there were trans men there. And, you know, I can't speak to their comfort level in that space or their sense of inclusion. The individuals I'm thinking of... Well, some were kind of central to, I don't know, what was going on in the space. I guess just had a lot of social connections, some less so. Some maybe looked like they didn't know a lot of people and might not be feeling in the current. You know, with these things, you could always do better. Yeah, I'm sure there were ways in which that space didn't feel so welcoming. But they were there.

Alisha Stranges (00:39:06):

Coming now to the point around the raid actually taking place, we know that at 12:45 a.m., thereabouts, five men, all plainclothes police officers, entered the club, stayed about 90 minutes. I know that you, indeed, were still in the Palace when they entered, but what were you doing specifically when the police arrived?

Diane Hamilton (00:39:32):

Carol Thames and I were the two committee volunteers on shift at that time. I think I'm remembering this. I don't think I'm making it up. I think I was at the window, and I saw them come in and walk down the hall towards the window. You know, I could hear my heart beating in my ears. Just like immediate pulse elevation, and not panic but fear. Yeah.

Diane Hamilton (00:40:21):

We also had Stephanie Nolen in that office room with us. In the event that police came, she wanted to be there to document it. She was a friend of Carlyle [Jansen]'s. The three of us were there. I remember Carol [Thames]'s reaction. She seemed to be immediately in crisis, like scared but also action. She just went out the door into the bathhouse and, right away, started telling people that the cops were here.

Diane Hamilton (00:41:22):

The head guy, I forget his name, came. I don't even remember what he said to me. I was like, "aaahhh." Yeah. I remember his manner was sort of slick and patronizing. You know? Like, I think he had an elbow on the counter and he didn't call me little lady but he just might as well have. You know? Just taking up the authority in the situation.

Alisha Stranges (00:42:20):

So, I'm imagining that because there is that element where you have to buzz people in, you become a little bit like an impromptu gatekeeper of the space, in this moment. Do you recall anything about how you had navigated their desire to enter?

Diane Hamilton (00:42:58):

I had no real clear idea of our legal right to even do this. You know? Even though, I was on the organizing committee, I wasn't really too clear about the legality of any of it. Afterwards, understanding about the liquor license and that being used as a wedge to basically harass us, that was all in retrospect. You know, based on some ignorance, even though, I was on the organizing committee, and I thought I was this sex activist, but I didn't really know the legal particulars of any of this, so as far as I understood, maybe they could come in and arrest us all for doing this. I really didn't know. It's just kind of weird that I was that uninformed but I was.

Diane Hamilton (00:43:48):

I mean, we hadn't really talked about the legality of it on the organizing committee. Maybe everybody else knew. I don't know. Anyways, I have to say that when they showed up, it was kind of like... My response was like the bad girl being sent to the principal's office or something, just like, "Ah. I've been caught. Yes, sir. No, sir. Yes, I'll open the door, sir." You know? I didn't have any kind of clarity that they shouldn't be here, that this was our space. I just didn't really have that. I was more in victim mode I would say.

Alisha Stranges (00:44:40):

Yeah. After you let them in, do you recall anything else that transpired while they were still in the building? Was that your last interaction?

Diane Hamilton (00:44:59):

Carol [Thames] had gone through ahead. She just walked through the whole bathhouse telling everybody the cops were here. Everyone I think had a minute or two or more warning before cops actually entered their space. I stayed in the office. I think Carol [Thames] came back, we were talking about what was going on. They spent a long time with JP [Hornick], I remember, the people who were holding the liquor license or who had applied for the liquor license. I don't think I saw them again until they left, and it was just sort of speculating about what they were doing and worrying that they might be harassing people or arresting people for all I knew. I really didn't know what their powers were in this situation. I was just hugely relieved after they left. Yeah. We didn't get back to a fun night after that. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:46:27):

Yeah. Can you say a little bit more about that? How the atmosphere changed, perhaps, after the cops... To be confronting a police presence, a male presence, in the space?

Diane Hamilton (00:46:41):

A lot of women left. A lot of women. There was a lot of emotion. People were angry, people were upset and shaken. Yeah. I mean, the rest of the night I think was just sort of debriefing what had happened and processing it a bit with each other, I guess.

Alisha Stranges (00:47:32):

Is there anything that you remember vividly about engaging in that processing together?

Diane Hamilton (00:47:48):

Well, this is kind of personal but I think it's worth saying, and it's informed by the race and cultural and class identities that I've talked about. But, for me, I was seeing all these people react in anger, like self-righteous anger, in a very valid way, and I couldn't find that in myself, which is just this thing about my childhood and life story of not having anger very available. I remember just thinking, "Why don't I feel more angry? I should feel angry. I see all these people around me who are angry, this is something to be angry about but I don't feel it. I just feel scared."

Alisha Stranges (00:48:56):

Was there ever a point after the raid perhaps that that fear transitioned into something like anger?

Diane Hamilton (00:49:03):

Yeah. Actually, the aftermath, there was a demo in front of police headquarters. Sort of being in that demo space. It's less vulnerable too. You know? Being outdoors, being the political activist now instead of in my sexy outfit trying to meet somebody, yeah, that was great to band together and be like, "This was so fucked up. What the hell were you thinking?" And chant in a crowd and have our signs and all of that. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:49:48):

Did you end up following the court proceedings?

Diane Hamilton (00:49:53):

Not super closely. Yeah. Other people on the organizing committee who were the real stalwarts took that and ran with it. I think my life got busy, and I didn't stay as involved through that court case. Yeah. I wasn't too involved in the court case.

Alisha Stranges (00:50:24):

It was revealed during the court proceedings that there were two women, undercover officers who were attending the event prior to the entrance of those five, plainclothes male officers. How did it feel to learn that there were these outsiders in the space surveilling folks?

Diane Hamilton (00:50:55):

Yeah. Just another slap in the face. Yeah. That this space was... I want to use the word contaminated or just... Yeah. It felt creepy, actually, thinking that the people were all there on the same terms was actually not true, there were... Yeah. Kind of spies, really.

Alisha Stranges (00:51:40):

When you made the decision to volunteer for the event that night to attend yourself as a patron, what were you hoping to experience? This is sort of a double-barrelled question. Not only what were you hoping to experience but how did your expectations for the night compare, in the end, to your lived experience of it?

Diane Hamilton (00:52:11):

I was hoping for some connecting with people, some maybe sexual adventure, and also as a volunteer, just contributing to an event for the community and hoping that things would go well and there wouldn't be any major screw-ups. And then, it sort of shook me up, the lived experience. I wonder how connected that is to

my decision not to keep putting energy into that organization or that group. I think it demanded a lot of us politically, right? I saw other organizers and activists on that committee who were really so smart on the issues and, as you can see in the interview, I tend to be a slow talker and very thoughtful and not... I don't know. Maybe not right there with the political discourse and the right language of the time. I think I was a little intimidated or I just felt like I didn't quite measure up to be able to carry forward in this court case and in what had blown up to be a really political moment. It felt a little bit too much for me at that time. Yeah. I knew it was in good hands, and I felt like it was in hands better than mine, actually. Yeah. I don't know. If the cops hadn't come, I might have continued. There was a lot of press, and it just was a little bit too much exposure for me, I guess.

Alisha Stranges (00:55:00):

Yeah. Yeah. I'm curious if you have any more to say about that because you started off saying you joined the organizing committee because you wanted to be a sex radical, but then there was this feeling that maybe you're not the right kind of sex radical or you don't have what it takes. What was that like for you to grapple with that? The desire to do something, but it doesn't seem to be quite right.

Diane Hamilton (00:55:52):

Yeah. I think we go through sort of expansive times in our lives and then times when we need to pull back. I think I was in a really confident space when I stepped up to be on the [Toronto Women's] Bathhouse Committee, and for whatever reasons I lost a bit of my confidence there. I don't think it was all to do with that night. Yeah. I just stepped back. I think just doing too much, feeling overwhelmed, and needing to just reel it in a bit at that point.

Alisha Stranges (00:56:39):

Yeah. We're nearing the end here. I just have a last few questions, and they focus on the impact of the Palace as a community initiative, your impressions anyway. What is your impression of the intent behind the Pussy Palace? Its sort of reason for being?

Diane Hamilton (00:57:07):

To create a space for women and trans folks to explore sexually together, flirt, just have a good time. Just not necessarily... To create a sort of charged space where there was lots of possibility of connecting in sexual ways and other ways. Then beyond just creating the sort of physical space and the event, it was about pushing one more step of the sexual revolution or whatever, that affirms sexuality, gives the individuals, gives all of us more room to expand and understand ourselves and express ourselves as sexual beings.

Alisha Stranges (00:58:26):

In your view, is there any way in which you think the Pussy Palace may have failed to deliver on their intentions or is it categorized more as a success for you?

Diane Hamilton (00:58:46):

I don't know if I really think of it in those terms. You know, I honestly haven't been following... I haven't been going, I don't know what's happening now with women's bathhouses in Toronto. I think they're still going on. I think it was a really important movement. I don't think it was only happening in Toronto. I think it was happening all over. At least, in North America and probably Europe, that queer women were starting to organize these kinds of events. I think that was, and is still, a really important expansion of our identities. You know, the whole socialization of women being either virgins or whores and feeling so boxed in around

who we are sexually in this society, it really challenged that. I guess that's a success. I feel like the fact... It is continuing, right? Am I right about that?

Alisha Stranges (01:00:22):

I don't think it is, no.

Diane Hamilton (01:00:23):

No? Oh, okay. Okay.

Alisha Stranges (01:00:26):

At least, not under the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee.

Diane Hamilton (01:00:36):

I know you probably heard from Chanelle [Gallant] more about this because she's done a lot of work with sex workers, but I know my consciousness was raised around sex work through that involvement and through that event of just it becoming really clear to me, well, of course, why would that be criminalized? Yeah. I think it really shaped people in important ways. I don't know what the failures were. I'm sure there were lots of failures, too.

Alisha Stranges (01:01:20):

And there don't have to be. Really, it's just more to get a sense of your impression. Thank you for sharing that. Is there anything else that you would want to share about your experiences that perhaps my questions haven't given you the opportunity to speak to?

Diane Hamilton (01:01:37):

Well, there's one kind of funny thing that's just a little personal anecdote, which is I went on to be a teacher and I was a grade one French immersion teacher in 2014 I think, was my first year at Lord Lansdowne. Frank [Addario], the lawyer for the bathhouse... So, I had these two kids, these twin brothers in my first ever classroom as a brand-new teacher, grade one. I saw the name of the parents and it was Frank [Addario], the lawyer from the bathhouse case. I'm forgetting his last name for some reason. I was trying to look pretty acceptable to the public. He recognized me, and I thought it was pretty funny to encounter him as one of my students' parents in my first year of teaching.

Alisha Stranges (01:02:49):

That's pretty wild.

Diane Hamilton (01:02:52):

Yeah. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (01:02:54):

Is that where you would like to leave it, Diane?

Diane Hamilton (01:02:58):

Sure. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (01:02:59):

Well, thank you so much for taking the time here out of your morning to journey back. I know it's a really long time ago, and I appreciate and feel honoured to bear witness to your effort to remember and recall what transpired so many years ago. Thank you.

Diane Hamilton (01:03:18):

Thank you. It's been a real pleasure. I enjoyed the tenor of your interview. It's lovely.

Alisha Stranges (01:03:28):

Thank you, Diane. All right. Well, I'm going to pause the recording but we can hang on the call. Okay?

Diane Hamilton (01:03:33):

Sounds good.