

Pussy Palace Oral History Project
Oral History Interview with JP Hornick
Conducted on May 19, 2021 via Zoom
Interviewed by Alisha Stranges on behalf of the
LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory (Elspeth Brown, Director)
Transcribed by Rev.com and Ellis Martiskainen

Summary: JP Hornick is a 50-year-old white, middle-class, queer person. At the time of the interview, Hornick was living in Toronto, Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic and working as a professor of Labour Studies at George Brown College. The interview mostly concerns Hornick's experience as a security volunteer for the September 14, 2000 Pussy Palace bathhouse event, the night it was raided by Toronto police. Hornick discusses their immigration from the U.S. to Canada; their experience with volunteer security at Pussy Palace events; their recollections of the raid and being questioned by police; their memories of patrons' reactions to the police presence at the bathhouse; the charges the police laid against her and the ensuing court case; the motivations behind the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee filing a subsequent human rights case against the Toronto Police Service; and the LGBTQ-sensitive police training that she helped to create and facilitate as a result of the settlement. Toronto, Ontario; New York City, New York; and Michigan, U.S.A. are mentioned. Hornick discusses the time period between 1995 and 2021, but focuses in on Toronto from 1998-2005.

Keywords: Queer; Genderfluid; Bathhouse; Immigrant; Community Organizing; Activism; Transgender; BIPOC; Accessibility; BDSM; Sex Work; Disability; Police Raid; Police Training; Legal Case; Human Rights; Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:01):

This is Alisha Stranges from the Pussy Palace Oral History Project, and I'm in Toronto, Ontario, interviewing JP Hornick on May 19, 2021. JP is also in Toronto and is going to tell us about the experience of being a patron of the Pussy Palace bathhouse event on the night of September 14, 2000. JP, do we have your permission to record this oral history interview?

JP Hornick (00:00:31):

Absolutely.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:33):

Thank you. Before we get into your experience with the Pussy Palace, I'm just 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 categories you occupy, different identities that you hold, and how at least some of these may have shifted or evolved over time. Just to start relatively simply, can you tell us your name, your age, and your preferred gender pronouns?

JP Hornick (00:01:04):

Sure, yeah. JP Hornick. I'm 50 years old now, and my preferred pronouns are... You can take your pick, but usually I'm she/her, they/them.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:19):

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

JP Hornick (00:01:25):

Primarily interested in women. I would identify probably as queer and genderfluid. Or gender-, I suppose, non-normative, I don't know. Somewhere along the trans spectrum, but I wouldn't claim the identity of trans because, yeah... It's complicated. But pretty comfortable with the fluidity of my gender and less concerned about how other people perceive it as much as making sure I support those for whom that is not a privilege that they can experience. And so, yeah, I try and inhabit those spaces and use my privileges for good.

Alisha Stranges (00:02:09):

And what about 20, 21 years ago in 2000? How might this sort of description have been different, if at all?

JP Hornick (00:02:16):

I'm not sure it would've been. I thought about that question a lot. And if anything, 21 years ago, it might have been different in that I might have made different choices around my body, and some of my decisions around gender self-expression, more physically, if those had been more readily available. But I think I'm actually pretty comfortable in terms of who I am and where I am. And so... It's an ongoing process and struggle and not always completely comfortable, but I don't think that that's shifted that much in that time.

Alisha Stranges (00:02:56):

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

JP Hornick (00:03:05):

Yeah, so, I'm white, and I was originally very much working-class. Very much now middle-class. And when I... 21 years ago I was new to Canada. I came up here from the [United] States and was not yet able to work legally, for the most part. I was working legally in contract work at the college. Every four months reapplying for my job and having to go get NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] permits and things like that. And then supplementing that with a lot of whatever jobs I could get under the table, and that included bar and event security, house painting, all these kinds of jobs that you just do to pay your rent.

Alisha Stranges (00:04:01):

Right.

JP Hornick (00:04:02):

And engaged in a lot of activism primarily, as I was in the midst of working on my exams for my doctorate, which is not completed. Came up here from NYU [New York University], and then just decided to do this instead.

Alisha Stranges (00:04:21):

Can you say a little bit more about the things that occupy your time professionally? Maybe start back then in 2000?

JP Hornick (00:04:34):

Yeah. In 2000 I think I probably left entirely the doctoral program by then. I came up to Canada in '97, '98, somewhere in that. I was really involved in a lot of stuff in the queer community, in a variety of different

kinds of ways. I had met the organizers of the Pussy Palace as the first one was being planned. And as I said, I was working informally as part of this event security outfit that we ran. We helped with door and ticketing and all that kind of stuff. Oh! My cat just popped in so I'm going to shut that door again if you want to...

Alisha Stranges (00:05:19):

Sure.

JP Hornick (00:05:29):

Now, I'm a professor in Labour Studies at George Brown College. Then, I was still doing activism and things like that, much more involved in union politics and labour organizing probably than in the queer community. But then it was a lot of... I'm trying to think. In 2000, we were engaged in a lot of different stuff around Pride. The policing and Pride hadn't really started at that point, but it would shortly thereafter. Police out of Pride has been an ongoing concern. And community engagement, with the focus of where the queer community's energy should be lying. Where, for me, my politics have always leaned towards the more radical and inclusive, rather than "let's try to be just like straight people," around queer organizing in particular. And so, while I recognize and validate the experiences of those who fought really hard for same-sex marriage and things like that, that was not my primary focus or goal.

Alisha Stranges (00:06:49):

Right. Just a clarifying question here, your doctoral work, what field was it? Is it related to the field you're now working in?

JP Hornick (00:07:00):

Yeah. Interesting. No. I was a PhD student in American Studies at NYU [New York University], and my doctoral work was going to be — and so this was back in like '95, '96 — a comparative analysis. My focus was on Cultural Studies of science and medicine. And I was looking at a comparative analysis of the narratives that trans men told about themselves and why they sought medical interventions into their gender presentation, versus medical professionals' narratives about what they thought they were doing. A kind of look at the two different ends of how gender, and specifically masculinity, was seen as being constructed and thought. What the end goals were, what people's sense of "why" was.

Alisha Stranges (00:07:52):

That's really interesting. I imagine it would have been quite a different time to be doing that work, late 90s. What was that experience like for you, if you care to share a little bit about it?

JP Hornick (00:08:06):

Yeah, I think that there wasn't very much out there at that point. It was a really nascent field, even looking at Trans Studies at that moment. Queer Studies, we were looking at a lot of stuff then... I was heavily involved in Queer Nation and ACT UP in the [United] States and Lesbian Avengers later on. And so, to me, these were... I was reading a lot of personal narratives and experience coming out in zines, and the few books that had been published at that point. I was working at A Different [Light] Bookstore in New York City, which is now gone, but then was the big queer bookstore there. And so, we had access to all these other... There was a lot of historical stuff that was off-shelf. And so, having access to these other narratives and noticing like... My mother had just had a mastectomy. She had breast cancer and reconstruction. And the doctor who did all that was one of the early doctors, at that point, who was actually learning and studying on how to do this for folks who were transitioning. Right?

Alisha Stranges (00:09:23):

Right.

JP Hornick (00:09:24):

And for men who wanted top surgery, basically. And so, it was this weird connection. What he [the doctor] thought he was doing, and what I was reading in these narratives and talking to friends about, what they were doing or what they wanted, there was some overlap, but it was also... There was a lot of stuff about surgeons' fascination — not my mom's surgeon — but in some of these stories that folks were telling about bottom surgery, in particular, and penis size. There was a real sort of interesting conflation of characteristics of sex with presentation of gender, and nobody was really exploring this stuff yet. And it was really kind of fascinating. At NYU [New York University], there was a really fabulous crew of queer academics and Jack Halberstam happened to be there for that year that I was getting started. And so, it was pretty cool. It was pretty cool. There was a really good moment. That moment didn't really last as much as I wish it had. And so, there was some support for the project, for sure. But there were a lot of politics in the department that I was just not able to navigate, to be quite frank.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:43):

And is that why you decided to put it to the side and choose something new?

JP Hornick (00:10:50):

Yeah, I came up here. I met my lover at the time at a conference. And we started sort of traveling back and forth between New York and Toronto. And I was like, I could write my exams up there as well as down here. And then when I got up here and started working, getting to know the community here, it felt like a better fit. And so, I was like... I abandoned a fellowship, all that kind of stuff. I was just like, "ah." I was younger. I was a lot younger. I was like, "All right, that's cool. Let's see where this road goes." And, the PhD, I never expected to be doing a doctorate. Honestly, I never really expected to go to grad school and had been encouraged by this dyke mentor when I was at Ohio State [University], who said, "You should apply just because they don't want you." She's like, "You're kind of a pain in the ass but you're really smart. So, you should apply and try and pursue this." And so, to me, it wasn't like abandoning my life's destiny. It was more of, this system doesn't seem like a system that is going to be one that preserves my mental health and sense of self. It didn't seem right. And honestly, it's worked out.

Alisha Stranges (00:12:17):

Wow. Thank you for sharing all of that, about your own history and for answering some of those unplanned questions. Before we move on, is there anything else you think would be important for us to know about how you understand the different identities that you hold today as compared to 20 years ago?

JP Hornick (00:12:43):

No. I think that, for me, I'm probably more secure, and therefore less wrapped up in my own need to have a specific identity than I would've been then. But the continuity of like... I've been pretty lucky in my life in terms of having people around me who support and accept me, for the most part, exactly as I am. And so, I think that that's contributed a lot to, again, how I would frame it is it does feel like a real privilege to not have a high level of anxiety about that. But I recognize it as a core feature of others' sense of self, friends' sense of self, and it isn't without its struggles for me too. And so, it's hard to say like, "Yeah, this is it." As much as it is to say, "I understand the political landscape against which I exist and get read and do my best to make that a comfortable one for all of us." I don't know if that makes any sense whatsoever.

Alisha Stranges (00:14:01):

Absolutely. Thank you.

JP Hornick (00:14:02):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:14:03):

I'm going to switch gears now and invite you to travel back in time to the fall of 2000. As you know, the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee would've been preparing to host the Night of 2000 Pussies, the fourth instalment of the Pussy Palace. How did you first learn about that particular event on [September] 14?

JP Hornick (00:14:27):

So, I was involved in the planning, in the sense that there was a crew of us who had worked together on the event security and support part of things, generally, for a lot of queer and indie events in Toronto. And we had connected into the specific Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee from the early states, before the first one happened. And we ran the door and helped with making sure... Recruited security volunteers and helped with that scheduling and things like that. And we all rotated who was in charge. So, on the fourth one, it was my turn. We literally called it the "OOD," the Officer of the Day. And this kind of fun and only slightly ironic, paramilitary structure. And so, I was involved in that sense in attending some planning meetings and whatnot, to make sure that our role was filled.

Alisha Stranges (00:15:40):

Right, so you had said that you kind of got involved right from the very first one in that similar capacity or same capacity, but how did you end up finding that work?

JP Hornick (00:15:52):

Through the friend of mine that ran this little event company.

Alisha Stranges (00:15:57):

Okay.

JP Hornick (00:15:57):

Who's very integrated into the queer scene, and we had become very close when I moved up here. It felt like being a six-year-old a little bit and knocking on somebody's door and being like, "Hey, I see you doing this event stuff. And this seems to be a good way to meet other queer people in Toronto, who I know no one. Can I volunteer or work with you?"

Alisha Stranges (00:16:24):

I see.

JP Hornick (00:16:27):

And they knew everybody. They'd been around for a long time, and so they'd hooked into this plan. They knew the planning was going on and so had volunteered all of us to a large degree and brought me to, if not the first meeting, pretty close to it.

Alisha Stranges (00:16:46):

And aside from this personal opportunity to maybe grow your network of peers, was there anything in particular about the events themselves that you found intriguing?

JP Hornick (00:17:02):

Yeah. When I was still living in New York City, there were these... The Clit Club was a big deal. Which was literally in the meat packing district, in the back of a warehouse kind of space, that was, I guess, similar in some ways. It was a very sexualized space, but it wasn't a sex party, per se. And there were a couple of underground women's leather events and there were women's... I say women more broadly because that's the way it was contextualized. It was very much contextualized in time. And then there were strip and burlesque shows and things like that that were happening there, and that were just... I loved the subversion of space, the way in which all these queers... That it was unabashedly dirty.

JP Hornick (00:17:59):

And in that sense, really unabashedly, people embracing their sexuality and really foregrounding that as, this is who we are. We're young. And it felt like this wild moment of folks really saying, "We're going to take up the space, and we're going to use the space the way that we want to use the space, to create different kinds of intentional, if not long-lasting communities, momentary communities of engagement that are primarily about, literally, sexuality." And so, simultaneously, I had this wild course with this prof who's unfortunately no longer with us, José Muñoz, who did this public sex course at NYU [New York University]. And this fabulous sort of... Some of the assignments were having to go out to these... The one assignment we had to go to this... He tried to send us all to this gay men's strip club. And I was like, "You know what, José, we're going to change that space. If I go in there, that changes the space, and it kind of changes." And I'm like, "So what if we do this instead?" And it was pretty fun to be able to... There was already this community in this program that I was in, that already had been engaged. Some of my colleagues in the program a couple years prior, during their master's, had written a book on public sex spaces being encroached upon in New York City. And so, it was a good confluence and some of the people I knew who were living in the city were dancers and artists and things like that. And so, when I came to Toronto and realized there was this scene starting here... You're talking about days leading right up to Will Monroe and Vazaleen and all that kind of stuff. It was like, "Oh yes, I definitely want to be involved in that." Right?

Alisha Stranges (00:20:03):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JP Hornick (00:20:03):

This is history. You feel it in the moment, it's a historical moment.

Alisha Stranges (00:20:10):

I can't believe that José Muñoz was a prof of yours. That's amazing.

JP Hornick (00:20:15):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:20:19):

That's amazing. All right. I know that one of the main reasons we're here is to talk and learn a bit more about the events of the raid and the fallout of that. But before we move there, I am curious about the space and time during which a person goes from being someone who has decided to attend or work at this event, and then they become the official patron or volunteer organizer. I want to focus on that period of time. If you can think back to how you would've made your way to Club Toronto, what kind of transportation you might have taken?

JP Hornick (00:20:59):

Cool. I walked. I lived literally three blocks away, at that point, in a co-op right around the corner. Yeah, for sure. I walked over. I lived on Bleecker Street, so I just came across Allan Gardens and to Mutual [Street]. And got there... I was there from... I would've been there early. On the first one in '97 or whenever it was, '98?

Alisha Stranges (00:21:28):

'98, yeah.

JP Hornick (00:21:31):

Yeah. We got there at 3:00 p.m. and other committee members had been there all day. It smelled like a hamster cage. Club Toronto wasn't the high end of the men's bathhouses. It was wild. It was intense. Yeah, I just walked there.

Alisha Stranges (00:21:54):

Okay. That night, do you think it would've been the same? You would've arrived sort of around 3:00 p.m.?

JP Hornick (00:22:00):

I think it was a little bit later, because they were still packed. Like, the first one, even at, I think by 4:30 p.m. in the afternoon, there was a line-up down the block at the first one.

Alisha Stranges (00:22:13):

Right.

JP Hornick (00:22:14):

And I think that it probably would've been... I don't know when doors opened. 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. probably, so I would've been there by 4:30 p.m. or five o'clock.

Alisha Stranges (00:22:26):

Right. What kind of things were you having to do to get the space ready?

JP Hornick (00:22:31):

We had headsets. We communicated by headsets with the volunteers, making sure that the folks who had shown up to do security volunteering and the door training and things like that. We knew too that there was a likelihood, there was a possibility that we could be raided, because the Barn and the Bijou had been raided. And the rumours flying. And so, the committee had gotten legal consultation about what we needed to do. And so, we really also wanted to hammer home with all of our volunteers, “Okay. These are the things we need to be careful of, but we have to really also make sure that we’re enforcing these policies tonight and making sure that everything’s tickety-boo.” Also, I had the liquor license, or a Special Occasions Permit. I was one of the signatories on that. And so, making sure that the bar that was being set up was being done correctly and keeping with the special occasion permit regulations. And Club Toronto, it was a wild space. You walk in and there were mirrors everywhere, once you got off that main entrance floor. Once you got into all the little cubicles, every hallway ended in a mirror. It felt like a maze. And so orienting people to the space, liaising with the committee to make sure everybody was on a page. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:23:52):

Hopefully the same one, yeah.

JP Hornick (00:23:54):

Yeah. Right.

Alisha Stranges (00:23:58):

Okay. I’m curious then, about how many volunteers would you have to oversee for the night, in the security and door?

JP Hornick (00:24:05):

That’s a good question. Over the course of the night? For just the security folks, I don’t know. Probably about... You’re talking about 6:00 p.m. at night until 3:00 a.m. in the morning, on more or less two-hour shifts. There were probably about 25 people throughout the course of the night. There’d be three or four on a shift, yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:24:32):

And what kind of things were you doing? What was involved in preparing volunteers to...? I don’t know, forget how you phrased it, sort of in preparation for informing folks about the potential of the raid. What was involved in that?

JP Hornick (00:24:48):

There was a list. I think that the committee had produced a list of the do’s and don’ts for that. They usually had one going and this one, I think it had a few extra lines in it. I’d have to take a look at it again. And reinforcing the boundaries around alcohol, because with an SOP, a Special Occasion Permit, one of the contentious moments is: what counts as our boundaries for this? And so, being safe, there’s a pool space at Club Toronto. And folks couldn’t drink around the pool. I think that that was it. They could only drink inside. And frankly, it’s a really tricky balance. Making sure that people are able to have a good time and not feel over-surveilled and over-policed. Things like engaging in fire play, or other kinds of activities, that things are done safely, that they’re done according to code and everything else. We had had visits in the past. There was this one time where the fire alarm got set off just by the sheer of volume of bodies in a single room. The body heat, and the action that was happening caused the alarms to go off. And then the fire department

shows up to the door and then we have to go and talk to them. “No, no, it’s okay. There’s no fire actually.” And letting people know you’re not, you’re not a cop. You’re just a volunteer who’s going to say, “Look.” So, if I’m asking somebody to not drink by the pool, I’d be like, “Okay, y’all. Look, I’m not a full Canadian at this point. I don’t want to have to get deported and go back and live in my mom’s basement. So, if you guys could take your drinks inside, that’d be great.”

Alisha Stranges (00:26:44):

Using your charm. Yeah.

JP Hornick (00:26:46):

Yeah, yeah. I’m not the biggest person in the world. And when you work bars, you’re like... Those are skills that are honed over time, about cajoling rather than trying to ruin... You don’t want to ruin anybody’s night. Everybody’s there to have a really good time.

Alisha Stranges (00:27:03):

Would you say that for the most part, the team was successful in doing that?

JP Hornick (00:27:07):

Oh, yeah. Yeah. For the most part. And honestly, the events are... Sex aside, these are pretty tame events. There’s not a giant bunch of fist fights breaking out. There’s like the classic, sort of the same thing you see at Pride, “Oh my God, my ex is here,” and that kind of drama. But for the most part it’s pretty benign. And there’s not knives being pulled, unless it’s in play. And so, it’s mostly... And the committee’s also circulating and folks are there and it was... Overall, I would say, it was one of the easiest events to staff for that reason. You’re really just making sure that people aren’t bringing stuff in that they shouldn’t. It’s a quick bag check. It’s a quick ID check for the committee, and for the most part, you’re tickety-boo, and then you’re just walking through to make sure it’s all happening and okay.

Alisha Stranges (00:28:05):

Can you describe a little bit more about the space itself? The first I’ve heard is that it was a very reflective space. A lot of mirrors. Can you describe this space a little bit more, once you’re inside of it?

JP Hornick (00:28:18):

Yeah. You come in off of a side door on Mutual Street, you’re buzzed in through a door. It’s like a sort of basement, almost, like a raised basement. And that’s where usually there was a dance floor, a bar along one side, whoever was staffing the door. And there’s also a coat and clothing check if you needed it, for folks who couldn’t get rooms or whatever. Off to the right is where one of the staircases goes up to the pool, or also up through the rest of the building. With the basement, it’s one, two, three, four floors, I think? The top’s an attic space. Also, on that floor, there’s a sauna, a hot tub, some showers and bathrooms. And then you go, you can either go up to the pool area, out to the deck where there’s an outdoor heated pool and also where you could get extra towels. Or, the internal staircase would take you up to where the bar area was. There was a whole slew of extra little rooms, a locker room. I think the locker room was there. And then on the third floor was more... And when I say rooms, these are like tiny cubicles. There’s a single bed, a rubber foam mattress, and that’s pretty much it. And I think mirrors. And then there were also showers on that floor, in one area. There had been a mirrored gym off on that second floor, or maybe the third, I don’t know. And then there was, by the time you get to the third or the fourth floor, there were these little... Is that the year they had the glory hole room?

JP Hornick (00:30:01):

There was one year, they had changed Club Toronto a bit and there was a room that was just pitch dark, and there were glory holes in cubicles. There was also a little jail cell door that closed on one of the regular rooms. So, people could either be visible if they wanted to, or not. But it was, I guess, role play. And then on the top floor, there was also the BDSM room, that had a lot of stuff in it. And then there was a space where there were... Couple of rooms were set aside, one for the photographer, one for the... "Dungeon Mistress," it was some sort of, it was basically, I can't remember her title, but you could ask for what you wanted. Oh, what the heck was she called? It was awesome.

JP Hornick (00:30:47):

And so, things for people to explore. Can't remember if they still had... The committee would always come up with interesting ideas to try and get people to connect too. I think the first one, certainly, people could have numbers on their arms, and they could put messages on a little poster board for each other to hook up or whatever, or try and meet. There were always different kinds of activities to get women to engage. Or, I shouldn't say women, because not everybody identified as women, right? There were a lot of trans guys there. And so, there's just different ways to get people who were attending to engage with each other and interact. These aren't spaces that women and trans folk were used to, invited into, had long-standing mores and cultural practices or norms around. And so, having to establish those from the ground up, I really commend the committee for a lot of what they were... Pretty forward thinking in what they were trying to do. People who were involved in the leather community already knew what to do in these spaces, or had a sense of what they wanted to do with this kind of space. But I really think that it was something different, that the committee didn't just take that for granted, that they really tried to anticipate and make it feel good, like a space that people could reclaim. And so that was pretty neat. And then there were dancers, was it that year? I don't know. At one point, there were dancers in one of those rooms upstairs too, people who volunteered their services basically.

Alisha Stranges (00:32:32):

Can you describe the atmosphere inside the club? When it's really getting going, what's the atmosphere like?

JP Hornick (00:32:43):

Oh, it's hot. It's like frothy hot, and I don't mean temperature. I mean, it's pretty steamy that way too. But it's something to watch. I feel very lucky to have seen these things evolve over that period of just a couple of years. And once you hit a critical mass in there and then it was an incredibly beautiful space. People hooking up wherever they wanted. It was like a sound scape of pleasure, frankly. It was intense. So, it felt like there was just a constant layer of sex.

Alisha Stranges (00:33:33):

Did you ever get to play the role of patron in your shift?

JP Hornick (00:33:38):

Yeah, yeah. That night, not so much. On other nights, I had had my two-hour shifts and would go and enjoy the place. So, I'd definitely gone on all the rides.

Alisha Stranges (00:33:49):

I see. But on [September] 14 then, you would've been functioning more, because you were the Officer of the Day. Is that why?

JP Hornick (00:33:57):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:33:58):

Okay.

JP Hornick (00:33:59):

I was the OOD [Officer of the Day] so it sucked, that part sucked. You're a voyeur for the night. But it was still fun. But I was more, I had to be on. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:34:16):

And so, what did that involve? Is that you circulating around, or what were you...?

JP Hornick (00:34:21):

Yeah, you're walking around and, honestly, trying to help people fill in for the committee if they need it. Again, make sure the bartenders are switching their shifts and everybody's got their Smart Serve card, and all that kind of crap, with them, and wearing a headset all night, like some sort of Madonna roadie or something. So, if any of the volunteers have questions, it's coming to me and that kind of thing. So, yeah. Or if there's a crisis, if something breaks out, you're just like... But I don't remember there being any major event. And honestly, the restriction on my behaviour would've been, I can't lose the headset or be completely out of contact. That's the long and short of it. That one is tricky to say. If I had a break... I must have had a break during that shift, that kind of thing, but I'm not sure who was taking over at the time. I probably made some volunteer do it.

Alisha Stranges (00:35:25):

Right. Well the dreaded question, what do you recall about what you would have worn for your shift that night?

JP Hornick (00:35:33):

Oh, I would've put on my best undies and some jean shorts and a t-shirt of some kind, or been topless at different points. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:35:45):

Oh, okay. So, there's nothing marking volunteer security folks?

JP Hornick (00:35:49):

Oh, no, during... Sorry. Sorry. That was the volunteer shift. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, we had t-shirts. What did they say on them? Maybe they said "Security" on the back? Because we had them. So yeah, I would've had a t-shirt and shorts.

Alisha Stranges (00:36:04):

I see. Did you ever spend any time in the photo room?

JP Hornick (00:36:10):

No.

Alisha Stranges (00:36:11):

No.

JP Hornick (00:36:11):

Not my thing. Yeah. Yeah. But I saw some of the photos that came out of it and they were amazing. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:36:18):

Yeah. In what way, can you say more?

JP Hornick (00:36:20):

Ah, they just... I know that Chloë [Brushwood Rose], who had done the photos, had also done the photo shoots for some of the postcards that have been used for the promoting of the event, things like that. She's a beautiful photographer, honestly. And so, really captures what people wanted to get out of that experience. She did a heck of a job providing for them, and really nice take away photos. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:36:48):

Very cool. Well, I want to get a little bit of a sense here of the impression that the space made on your senses. So, I'm going to invite you into a little bit of an exercise here, and I'll do it with you. A contemplative exercise. So, if I can invite you to sit comfortably in your chair, maybe rest your hands on your lap. If you can, soften your gaze or even close your eyes, if you feel comfortable to do that. And just take a couple breaths in and out for a moment. Relaxing your jaw, letting your ribcage expand with each inhale. And as you're breathing in and out here, just trying to, in your mind's eye, re-inhabit the space of the Pussy Palace on the night of September 14. Maybe imagining yourself in one or another location within the club. And don't be too concerned about which one's coming to mind, whichever one is the perfect one. And looking around, from this contemplative space, what is it that you're seeing?

JP Hornick (00:38:32):

I would say a lot of the time that I spent was around going up and down stairs. Right? And so, it's often, what I remember, I don't know if it's true or not, it felt like a dark green utility carpet that was on the bottom floor, and the floor always felt either slightly damp or you just knew it was crusty. You can smell the chlorine from the pool a little bit and just the heat of all the bodies, and the DJ spinning, and folks dancing, and yeah. Definitely folks dancing everywhere downstairs. And then just bodies, just the number of bodies in that space.

Alisha Stranges (00:39:34):

Hmm.

JP Hornick (00:39:35):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:39:36):

And besides the chlorine eking in from outside, are there any other lingering odours?

JP Hornick (00:39:44):

It's a pretty musky smelling club at that point and then compounded by the fact that you have hundreds of people in there, basically sweating and dancing and having sex. And so, all of those smells.

Alisha Stranges (00:40:01):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And if this space could call out, what's the sound of this space?

JP Hornick (00:40:09):

There's the music on the first floor, it was the music. I don't even remember what songs were playing. And I don't remember who the DJ was. I think it shifted a couple of times that night. So, it just pounded, the same kind of music you would hear if you went out to a club, any of the queer clubs at that time. It sounded like a bar. It sounded like a dance club. People's conversations happening, and then you walk up the stairs, and you're starting to hear folks having sex in the cubicles in the hallway. And you could hear different implements being engaged with in some areas and yeah. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:41:01):

Hmm. Can you describe a little bit more this, when you're moving up the stairs and you're starting to hear different implements, as you say, being used? What are the materials making those sounds? Is it like metal or wood?

JP Hornick (00:41:18):

It's like the clanking of chains, the sound of leather or flesh on flesh, and the people moaning, clink of bottles, beers being poured out... Or cans, I think it was cans actually, being popped and poured. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:41:38):

And if some part of your body could reach out and brush up against some part of the space that you're re-inhabiting, what are you touching and what are its textures?

JP Hornick (00:41:55):

Skin, there's a lot of skin. You brush up against people everywhere. And to be perfectly blunt, I tried not to touch the floor or the wall.

Alisha Stranges (00:42:14):

I see.

JP Hornick (00:42:14):

Though when you do, it is, like I said, it's moist. The floor, not so much in a pleasant way, or you hit a patch of lube. So, there's a lot of body fluids, but there's just a lot. It's a lot of skin. There's a lot of skin throughout the place.

Alisha Stranges (00:42:43):

And last sense question here. Is there any lingering tastes in your mouth? If magically the space could be tasted, what would it taste like?

JP Hornick (00:43:07):

Yeah, I think the taste of the place would be pretty specific to the individual you had just been with.

Alisha Stranges (00:43:11):

Okay. You can let that go and open your eyes if they're closed. Thanks for going on that experiment journey with me. So, we're at two o'clock here and we're going to transition more into speaking about the crowd and the raid. I just wanted to check in to see if you wanted to take a break at all?

JP Hornick (00:43:34):

I'm good if you are.

Alisha Stranges (00:43:36):

Yeah, I'm good. So, I'm curious about who else was there. The next set of questions focuses on your perception of the crowd. How many people would you say, approximately, were there when it was at its height of the night?

JP Hornick (00:43:50):

I think capacity was somewhere around 335 or 350, maybe, for the entire space. And we stayed at that, I think up until the cops came, we were at capacity, I think. That's the way it was in those days. It was at capacity from the minute the doors opened until the place closed.

Alisha Stranges (00:44:15):

So, would that mean that some folks would be literally waiting on the street for other people to leave in order to come in?

JP Hornick (00:44:21):

Yeah. For a while. Right. And then it would just kind of hang there for a bit. So, for the first couple hours, yeah, you would have often a line-up a little bit. But it would stay... As people would leave, people would come. Right?

Alisha Stranges (00:44:37):

And how would you describe the composition of the crowd along lines of gender, sexuality, race, culture, things like this?

JP Hornick (00:44:48):

Yeah. I mean, I think it was still predominantly white, certainly able-bodied. There's so many stairs at Club Toronto. Oh, my goodness. Yeah. And that was a function of men's bathhouses that were more accessible being unwilling to share space. Right?

Alisha Stranges (00:45:11):

Can you say more about that?

JP Hornick (00:45:13):

Yeah. When the committee, every time the committee would try and find spaces that addressed issues around accessibility, that were maybe less, that were less sketchy. Although there was, I've got to say, some charm to Club Toronto too, on that level. I really quite enjoyed it. Not the lack of accessibility part, obviously. But there was a real reluctance for the men's... We ended up with a Thursday night at Club Toronto because it's the slowest night, and they weren't making money anyway. And so, this was a way for them to make money. But at the places that had a steadier income, or weren't as reliant on an influx of cash, were just not interested in sharing space for a night with women. And if I'm not mistaken, were quite concerned. Even at Club Toronto, there were a lot of concerns that women were going to bleed all over everything. It's like, "Okay, fair enough, gay men might not have the greatest understanding of female anatomy." But still, come on. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:46:28):

Right. Sorry, I might have interrupted you. Did you want to say any more about the composition of the crowd?

JP Hornick (00:46:37):

Oh, yeah. So, there was a reason that there was a branch off into spaces that were specific for women of colour. Right? There was a reason that those happened, and that was around that the Pussy Palaces might not have been the most accessible spaces for women of colour. Definitely there was a significant chunk of folks who were attending who were of colour. There were a lot of trans men and women who were there, for sure, as well. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:47:23):

When did this branch—? I'll just pause here for a tangent. When did this branch-off that you're talking about happen?

JP Hornick (00:47:30):

I feel like it was post-raid. They were called the Sugar Shacks.

Alisha Stranges (00:47:36):

Okay.

JP Hornick (00:47:36):

And they started, and there was also a move... It was around the same time we had the move to the place out on Dundas [Street] West, way out on Dundas [Street] West, in Little Portugal. There was this men's bathhouse that was right above this Portuguese sports bar. We had events there a couple of times. And that was a different vibe entirely. It was a really different space. Yeah so, I think it was around that time. So maybe 2001, 2002, somewhere in there, the Sugar Shacks started, and there were a series of those. There had been ongoing attempts to create a similar bathhouse space for folks with disabilities. And I know people had been working with Buddies in Bad Times [Theatre] for a while, to see if there was a way to use that space. But it

never came to anything. But I know that it was one of the major, major issues for the committee and also just the community. Right?

Alisha Stranges (00:48:45):

Right.

JP Hornick (00:48:45):

And then there was the issue of dancers being paid, at some point. There was a big controversy over that for a minute. And that was tricky because you have a lot of folks in the community who worked as sex workers, and this would've been a very good place for them to earn some money, to do some work there. And that definitely would've changed the outcome of the raid, had that been happening, for sure. Because at that point, we were able to justifiably say, "No one is getting paid for this. We all are losing money on this." I mean, the club made money, but the committee certainly didn't.

Alisha Stranges (00:49:30):

The committee would've had to pay a fee to be able to use the club?

JP Hornick (00:49:33):

Yeah. There was a cut of the door and then some, I think, flat fee on top of that. Carlyle [Jansen] would know about that. I know that Carlyle [Jansen] and Janet [Rowe] worked on those kinds of arrangements for the most part.

Alisha Stranges (00:49:42):

I see. Yeah.

JP Hornick (00:49:43):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:49:45):

Thinking about your own position—

JP Hornick (00:49:47):

Let me just say this. Any profit... Like, they were run as fundraisers. That night, it was... There was no profit ever, even if there was money come in. Any money that was raised, the club got... We got the bar too, because it was special occasion permit. But the club got a cut of the entrance fees, et cetera. So, any money that came in that night, the recipient was the Bill Seven Award, which is now, the Community One Award? It was a scholarship fund, at that point, for LGBTQ students, regardless of age. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:50:21):

Right. So, you're saying, surplus on top of the cost of holding the event went into a fund for a specific cause?

JP Hornick (00:50:30):

It was a fundraiser.

Alisha Stranges (00:50:32):

Right, right, right.

JP Hornick (00:50:33):

Yeah. We ran it as a fundraiser.

Alisha Stranges (00:50:36):

Thinking about your own positionality at the time, how did it feel for you to exist in your body, in that crowd, on that night?

JP Hornick (00:50:45):

Yeah. It felt really comfortable. I had no problem. That space to me always felt like a good space. And from what I could see, there were just so many different varieties of gender expression and queerness. Or not queerness, and just exploring. It was just... It felt like a pretty open and welcoming space from my position, recognizing that that wouldn't have been true for everyone who was in there.

Alisha Stranges (00:51:12):

Yeah. And I'm sort of curious about that. I know you can't say for sure, but at least your perception. We've learned from reading about the Pussy Palace, that it was publicly inclusive of lesbian women, queer cis-women, and trans folks. Do you have a recollection of what the relationship might have been between these differently gendered groups among the patrons of the Palace?

JP Hornick (00:51:39):

Off the top? No. In part, because I did avoid and wasn't technically on the committee, I wasn't involved in a lot of those post-event debriefs about... And I know that there were questions and lots of conversations that would arise around issues around race, around trans men, around ability and access, right? Disability and access. So, I wouldn't be able to say in terms of differently gendered folks. What I would have observed as a patron would've been through the lens of my own excitement and my position in relation to the space, which is one of greater privilege. I know that there were definitely discussions and issues and things that would get raised in the community, but I can't say... That's not what I was looking for when I was on shift, necessarily. And, in the SM [sadoomasochism] area, for example, there were dungeon masters to handle issues of consent and things like that. Were there people that probably felt like they weren't able to engage in that space based on their gender? Probably, I can't imagine there wouldn't be. But do I think that there were also attempts to mitigate that from the get-go and also address it as criticisms and feedback came up? Yeah, yeah. But, it's definitely not perfect.

Alisha Stranges (00:53:27):

I see. So, we've come to that point where [we] want to talk a bit more about the raid. We know that around 12:45 a.m. is when five plainclothes police officers entered the space and stayed about 90 minutes. What were you doing, do you recall, when the police arrived?

JP Hornick (00:53:53):

Yeah. What we found out later is the police had been there for quite a while. They had met at, I believe, the Brass Rail. They convened — no, it wasn't Zanzibar, it was the Brass Rail or something, it was the one on King [Street] — to plan their raid. And, they had sent in the two female-identified undercover officers a couple hours ahead of that, or at least an hour ahead of that. I was on duty, and we were in the midst of a volunteer shift change. So, I was putting a headset onto one of the volunteers and saying, "Okay, this is how it fits." And she looked at me and said, "JP, they need you at the front desk." We were not very far away from the front desk. "The cops are here."

JP Hornick (00:54:52):

And so, I took off to the front, and as I was reaching the front door... It's just through the dance floor, and you've got to understand, it was packed, it was just packed and loud. And so, when I see these five burly men, they seemed huge in comparison to everybody else there, coming through the door. I went straight up to them and said, "Hi. I'm JP, I'm the head of the volunteer security tonight. What can I help you with?" And the guy at the front, he and another one of the cops stopped, and then three of the others peeled off and started heading through the club. Before I left the security person, I said, "Go alert the other people that the cops are here. Start letting people know that the cops are here and to gather their stuff, do what they need to keep themselves safe or whatever."

JP Hornick (00:56:04):

The two cops at the front, who I think was Myron Demkiw, and what was the other guy's name? Can't remember. They said, "Well, we want to see the special occasion permit. Do you have a special occasion permit?" I said, "Sure. If you're here to see the special occasion permit, let me stop you here, and I'll take you to where it is, so that you don't have to go running through the club." And I said, "Where are those guys going?" And they said, "They're just going to check out the area. It shouldn't be a problem." And so, I said, "Okay." I took them up the one flight of stairs, and meanwhile, my security volunteers and the committee was fanning out to let people know that the police were there.

JP Hornick (00:56:45):

We walked up the one flight of stairs, I took the permit off the wall. I said, "Look, as you can see, it's all in order. We have a permit for the event. You can see the list of rules." I think they were posted, maybe. "Is there any problem?" And he said, "No, there doesn't appear to be a problem. It shouldn't take very long." And I said, "Well, why are they going through the entire building?" "Oh, they just need to check and make sure there's not a problem." And so, they said, "We're going to need to walk around the space." And I said, "I don't think that's a good idea. I can't stop you, but this is an all women event." And they said, "Well, go downstairs and talk to our officer." Or maybe one of the committee members called me back downstairs at that point and said, "You've got to come. The guy in charge is here." And the guy in charge, his name was Peter [Christie] or something. You'd think I wouldn't forget this stuff. I remember what he looked like, but I can't remember his name. And, I know it's in the transcripts.

Alisha Stranges (00:57:52):

What did he look like?

JP Hornick (00:57:52):

He had dark curly hair. He looked like a cop. He was a white guy, he had dark, semi-curly hair, wavy hair. Yeah, it was one of the committee members who was working the door, called me back down on the headset

and said, "The guy in charge wants to talk to you." And so, I went down to talk to him, and these other two cops took off with the other ones.

JP Hornick (00:58:17):

And I said, "Who are you?" And he told me his name, and he said he was with the "Morality Squad." And I was like, "What?" I said, "Well, I just showed your guys the SOP [special occasion permit]. What's the problem?" And he said, "We just have to make sure that... We've had complaints," or something. I don't know what he said, at that point. And then he starts asking me, "So, you have an SOP [special occasion permit]. What kind of beer are you guys serving?" And, I told him whatever. And he's like, "Well, that doesn't seem like good beer," or something. It's just like, "Well, you get what you get." And, then he wanted to talk to me a little bit about hockey. And I said, "I'm not really much into sports," or something along that line. And he said, "Well, who's in charge here?" And I said, "Well, it's a feminist collective. So, I'm currently the volunteer that's in charge of security. Who were you looking for?" And he said, "Well, get me your bartenders. I want to make sure they have their Smart Serve." So, I said, "Okay." And so, I asked the committee member to call the bartenders down, and then he checked their Smart Serves and they were all in order. And, I think he was probably getting frustrated because we had everything we were supposed to have.

JP Hornick (00:59:40):

And then, he asked again, "Who's in charge?" And I said, "Of what?" I said, "So-and-so's in charge of this aspect, so-and-so's in charge of this aspect, so-and-so's in charge of this aspect, but like I said, it's collectively organized and we're taking shifts. So, you just need to let me know who it is you're looking for, in charge of what, and I'll make sure they can be called down for you." Because when I'm stressed, particularly when I was that young, I would just go into hyper, "Sure, I can help you with that, but I'm just going to be very factual about what this looks like." And police, it turns out, have a difficulty understanding feminist collective organizing principles.

JP Hornick (01:00:24):

So, he went through, who's in charge of entertainment or something. And I was like, "Oh, okay, well that's so-and-so right now, let me get her down." "Who's in charge of the door and letting people in?" "Oh, okay here's so-and-so, you can't get in without being buzzed in, as you've just learned." And then, he said, "Well, who's making money off of this?" And I said, "No one's making money off of this. It's a fundraiser." I said, "We're raising money for the Bill Seven Award." "What's the Bill Seven Award?" So, I explained the Bill Seven Award. And he said, "Well, who takes the door?" And I said, "Well, Club Toronto gets a cut of the door and the rest goes into the Bill Seven Award. Then there's the bar proceeds, which once our basic expenses are covered, then that goes into the Bill Seven Award." And he said, "But, what about the dancers? Is anybody..." I'm like, "Nobody's making money. There is no money changing hands in here. Aside from coming in or buying your drink, and then those proceeds go to Bill Seven."

JP Hornick (01:01:24):

And, at that point, I think right around... No, no, one of the cops came back and handed him a piece of paper. He read the piece of paper, and then he got really excited and he was like, "So, then, what's this?" And it's about the photography room, or something. And it was like: "Photographs," and I don't even know if it was a dollar. It's like, "Photo Booth." And he said, "Well, what's the photo booth." And [the piece of paper] didn't have money on it. It just said "Photo Booth." And I said, "Well, um, it's a photo booth. It's a room where you get your photo taken." "Well, what happens there?" "People ask to have their photo taken and it's taken." Back and forth like that a little bit.

JP Hornick (01:02:08):

And then, whatever was on, I think Leanne [Powers]'s room, they brought that down, too. I'm just saying like, "Well I don't know. I've not been in that room, and I expect that whatever conversations happen in there is between the people that are involved, who would be consenting adults. And so, it's not really my business to say." So, it was a barrage, barrage, barrage. Questions like that. And then, he would get excited. And then Janet Rowe, who was one of the organizers, poked her head out. There was a patron who was there who happened to be a lawyer, and who had pulled Janet [Rowe] aside and said, "Tell JP to stop talking to the cop. You need a lawyer."

JP Hornick (01:02:56):

And so, Janet [Rowe] poked her head out and said, "So-and-so has just said, stop talking to the cop without a lawyer." And I said, "Huh. It looks like we'll be done this conversation until I have my lawyer." And he said, "Who's your lawyer?" And I said, "Frank Addario at Goldblatt [Partners LLP]." And he said, "I know Frank [Addario]." And I said, "Well, that's great. So, you know that you could contact Frank [Addario] if you want to continue talking to me. I'm going to go back inside." Because the patrons, at this point, are streaming out. And it was just constant. People you know, and you've seen throughout the night if you don't know personally, and they're just in such distress. And this is the kind of thing that in the raids in the '80s... This cost how many men their lives? Or their livelihoods.

JP Hornick (01:03:51):

And, these raids are nothing minor. It's an intimidation tactic and a fun night out for the cops. And it is devastating for the people that are in that space and don't know what the consequences are that they're going to suffer. And luckily, there had also been the reporter that was there that night to cover the series of events because it had gotten a fair bit of attention at that point. So, I stopped talking to the cop, went back into the space, tried to help with settling people down, also get my adrenaline back down. I'm just vibrating so high because I don't know if I'm about to be arrested. I don't know if I'm about to be charged with things. I'm watching everybody I know lose their minds. And, the room for the security team to meet up was right next to the clothing check. And so, it was just brutal, just brutal. I mean, people had barricaded themselves in the rooms upstairs wherever they could. It just took the whole event right down. So that was... It was ugly. They went through... I heard from my volunteers later and from different committee members, they were all through every inch of that place, those four guys. The main guy stayed pretty much outside the door. So then, everybody, whether you were inside or leaving, you had to do it under the eyes of these guys. And who knows if they've got somebody outside. And now we know there were the undercover cops in there who were claiming they'd seen all this kind of... They'd basically seen sex. And, so what?

Alisha Stranges (01:06:00):

Hmm. Yeah. Thank you for going into such detail about it from your perspective. Can you talk a little bit about the change in energy when the cops arrived? From what it had been at its height before they got there? What was that like?

JP Hornick (01:06:26):

From the second they got there... I get this call that they're coming in. I turn. Literally, it's like 10 feet. I turn around. This dance floor packed full of people dancing. And, I think in the transcripts, it describes people in "various states of undressed" or "scantily-clad" and this kind of stuff. You had people who were half naked, or just wearing a towel around their waist and a pair of flip flops. Or just totally naked. And, as they are realizing there are these men, these giant men. Not the guys that... There were the guys from the bar that would very quickly move towels from one space to another, that kind of thing. But they didn't really come

into the space at all. I don't know if you've ever been to Michigan [Womyn's Music Festival], before it went all transphobic and whatnot. Well, it was always, but before it all—

Alisha Stranges (01:07:19):

The Womyn's [Music] Festival?

JP Hornick (01:07:21):

Yeah. There would be these times that like the sanitation truck would come, and there'd be people going "Men on the land! Men on the land!" And, it had that vibe, but terrified. You could watch people's heads... I just remember seeing people's heads turn. And the dawning realization of cognitive dissonance followed by "Oh, fuck, this is bad." And, my security volunteers that night, I watched two of them run. Just run up the stairs, run through the space, "The cops are here, the cops are here, the cops are here." I think one of them turned around at one point while yelling, "The cops are here," and ran into a cop, kind of thing.

JP Hornick (01:08:13):

People were crying, people were just visibly, completely upset, shut down. Who knows what trauma people have experienced at the hands of cops, or just men? Whatever. You think you're in this really awesome, safe space, and to have that stripped away that quickly, the vibe, it turned on a dime. People were absolutely... It was brutal, it was brutal to watch people's faces and bodies just shrink in on themselves and go from feeling like they're in the midst of this celebratory experience of self. And it be diminished in that way.

Alisha Stranges (01:08:58):

Yeah. Was there a sense that the police were understanding that that's what they were doing?

JP Hornick (01:09:06):

No. Zero, no. I think the police... I would say that it's almost like they enjoyed wielding their power.

Alisha Stranges (01:09:24):

Well, I want to know a little bit more now about... Eventually we know that charges were filed, were laid against you. Can you talk a bit about, from the night the raid's over until you learned this? How did this all unfold for you?

JP Hornick (01:09:43):

Yeah, it was weeks. I think it may have been even six weeks. And so, we were on the phone with Frank [Addario] and Vanora Simpson and Yukimi Henry were all at Goldblatt [Partners LLP] at that point. Our law firm that we'd engaged as a just-in-case protocol.

Alisha Stranges (01:10:02):

Oh, I see.

JP Hornick (01:10:02):

I think that that might have been true, if not from the beginning, certainly by the second or third bathhouse. There was a kind of "Okay, here's your..." It's like going to a march and putting your lawyer's number on

your arm, kind of thing. And we didn't know, we just didn't know what we were going to be charged with. And, as one of the people who was a signatory on the SOP [special occasion permit], I knew that it was going to be me, and the other person that was on it. And, we both lived in spaces with a common mail area for our buildings. And so, I think it was six weeks, there was talk of filing bawdy house charges against us. The cops made it clear that they were going to try and nail us.

Alisha Stranges (01:11:02):

They made it clear to you on the night or...?

JP Hornick (01:11:04):

Yeah. It was clear by the questions from the guy at the front that he was trying to make a case that we were basically running a bawdy house. And, honestly, having a lot of sex workers in my life in various capacities over the years, "living off the avails" is no joke. These are trumped-up charges they use to get at people. And so, there's all kinds of things they could have tried. And, I think that they did, apparently, is my understanding later and that the prosecutors wouldn't push it. They just wouldn't file.

JP Hornick (01:11:42):

And so, we ended up with six charges under the provincial Liquor License Act. Those charges were posted on the fronts of our mailbox in these common mail areas, and they were bright. I feel like they were bright pink. They were neon-coloured, and they just put them on the front of our mailboxes. So, everybody walking by... Now, luckily where we lived was a pretty cool place. But it was still like, "Okay, so, I guess this is what we're doing." And, I lived in a co-op where the manager was one thousand percent super supportive. When we ended up winning the case, they put this big celebratory thing up in the lobby, used the space for fundraising events. It was a pretty progressive co-op. It was Bleecker Street Co-op. But, the waiting period of not knowing... And having to call my mom, who's pretty cool, but also saying, "So, this thing happened." And, I think I had PR [permanent resident] status at that point, but I wasn't a citizen. And so, I knew I could more easily be deported if I was convicted of a criminal offense. And so, I said, "Look, I don't know what's going to come of it." And I explained what happened. And she said, "Well, they were wrong." I said, "Yeah, I agree completely."

JP Hornick (01:13:15):

And, I will say that what was interesting is when the stories started breaking in the media. I think that this is where the fact that they targeted something that said it was effectively for women and that it was male officers was their undoing, really. Because people have a hard time conceptualizing women having sex with each other, aside from either a porn version or a sort of gentle "lie on your sides and touch each other gently" kind of thing. And so, there's no realistic perception of anything in between or anything aside from that. So, I think what actually played in our favour to a large extent was sexism. There was this widespread perception that the cops had over stepped. There wasn't the public outcry when they raided the Barn and the Bijou, for example, because it turns out saying "slurp ramp" versus "women's bathhouse" has two different frequencies in the social discourse. So, that was a fascinating moment of realizing that actually the public wasn't against us, for the most part.

Alisha Stranges (01:14:33):

Right. So, you're saying that in some part, though, that was because of ignorance around...?

JP Hornick (01:14:41):

Oh yeah, absolutely. I think a hundred percent. Most of it's around ignorance, really.

Alisha Stranges (01:14:43):

I see. Right. So, these charges get posted on your mailbox. I know we can find this information; this information is available ourselves, but can you talk about what the charges actually were? Especially since you said, when you were talking to the police on the night of the raid, you made it very clear that you were not violating the liquor license.

JP Hornick (01:15:09):

Oh, we were so careful. Anyway, I think it was three counts. They did ask us that night about when we stopped serving, and I said, "Well, we're supposed to be stopped serving now," because we had to stop serving at 1:00 a.m., I think it was, and I said, "Well, as I'm having this conversation with you, I need to send a volunteer up to make sure that they have shut down, but they know they're to stop serving by one o'clock." But I know there was a charge of serving outside of hours, a charge of serving outside the boundaries of the SOP [special occasion permit], I think three or four charges on that. What were the other ones? There was three serving outside the boundaries, at least one serving outside the hours, and I can't remember what the other two were, but they were BS [bullshit].

Alisha Stranges (01:16:08):

Yeah. Yeah. How did it feel then, looking at these charges...? You were curious, how is this going to end up, what's going to happen? And then you get this and you know it's BS [bullshit]. What was that—?

JP Hornick (01:16:20):

There was, for sure, an element of relief, in that there's no criminal charges in this, that was awesome. And then, really kind of pissed off because, frankly, the volunteers that were on security... I was like, "Oh, no. The one thing we do well is we follow these rules like nobody's business." And I can't imagine a bar in Toronto that would've done better with that. So, 300-odd people in a space, are you going to end up possibly with somebody sneaking a drink outside? Probably, but if we saw it... We were on top of that stuff all night long. And then, you don't win friends and influence people telling them to bring their drink back inside.

JP Hornick (01:17:08):

So, there was a lot of anger. It was followed by a sense of righteous anger around like, "Fuck you guys. You are doing this to get us to stop running this thing, and you've just screwed with our entire community in a way that you can't even begin to anticipate. And, wow, did you just mess with the wrong community." It quickly galvanized; I have to say. Because, in the midst of this, there were all these community events happening where everybody went from feeling demoralized and dismayed and traumatized to a whole bunch of us going, "You know what? No." And, a lot of the guys who had been part of the raids... There's a big event at like The 519 where Olivia Chow came and raised like \$10,000 in five minutes. And Tim McCaskell and all these people show up who had been through this before. Other bathhouse owners, Peter Bochove, Kyle Rae who came out and was like... Kyle Rae and Olivia Chow were awesome. From the next day on, they had us in their offices, helping us navigate these systems, and Kyle [Rae] got sued for calling the cops "cowboys on a panty raid." It's bullshit that they even got anything out of that. And Olivia [Chow]'s office, her and her staff were just incredible, incredible. That level of support from official channels meant everything to all of us. We weren't on our own, and we weren't isolated, and we weren't having to face this without institutional support, in this weird way. That was unanticipated, let me just say that.

Alisha Stranges (01:18:59):

Right, yeah. Can you talk a little bit about the experience of going to court? I guess, maybe I'll give you a specific question. I'm curious about the defence strategy, [Frank] Addario's defence strategy that ultimately won the case. What were your thoughts, or what's your understanding of the legal argument he proposed, and what are your thoughts on it?

JP Hornick (01:19:27):

I think that the legal argument around it being akin to a level-four strip search was a solid one. I didn't have any problem with the legal arguments he was putting forth, and that therefore it was fruit of the poisonous tree, and everything needed to be thrown out based on that. And there were backup plans, and whatnot, in case, but recruiting people who were there that night, encountering the police narratives of what they were seeing... I remember being in Frank [Addario]'s office, and him looking at me at one point and saying, "You're going to make a great witness, you look so milk-fed." It's like, "All right, that's cool." Slightly insulted, but also like, "Well, if we can work this to our advantage, then let's do it," you know?

JP Hornick (01:20:19):

And I remember... I can't remember who was on the stand in the courthouse. It was one of our witnesses, and you know how they bring classrooms full of kids in? And it must have been one of the cops, I think they were testifying about digital penetration or something, witnessing. And this class of littles, probably grade threes, they were tiny, and this teacher brings them in, and everybody turns, and we're like, "Oh. No." And I can't remember if it was the judge, said, "I think this is probably the wrong courtroom." Because all of us were like, "I don't think that's a good idea."

JP Hornick (01:21:08):

But the experience of going to court... At that point, I didn't have secure, full-time work. I didn't have secure, full-time status in Canada, but I felt this really intense moral and ethical rage. And so, to me, I knew it could cost me my job, the renewal of my contract. I knew, since there weren't criminal charges, I was probably safe on that, but the like fact that they... I was just pissed. I got pissed. All of us who were involved in the court case, it was this sense of... The person who was charged with me lost so much more than I did.

JP Hornick (01:22:05):

And that, it was all so enraging. The differential impacts, the knowledge that that was happening across the board for a whole bunch of people who committed no crime, but for a night out had their lives upended in this way. All of us. And of no consequence to the police, community safety, the broader society, even a deeper moral fabric. There is no consequence in this event to anyone else, but that folks were going to have their lives upended. In many cases, completely redirected from paths they would've otherwise pursued. And so being in the courtroom, it felt like a responsibility, not just to fight the charges, but to take it further and to file the human rights complaint, and all that. And realizing how difficult it was to find people who would stand up and testify, because of the implications of that and being on public record. And even now, as people's lives have changed and evolved, if there's anybody who wants to run for office, or things like that. These were all things that are impacted by a single event that happened 21 years ago, and is, again, zero consequence.

JP Hornick (01:23:48):

And I'm pretty proud of the organizing and the outcome. I mean, for goodness' sake, we then took it and we changed the police. It's not that it stuck, but they were forced to change their policies around the search and detention of trans people. Which, even if that made a slim difference for a second, it was worth every second

of this bullshit. If it fixed something for one person and made their life a little bit easier in contact with the police, that would've been worth every single thing that we had to go through. We forced the cops through a year of LGBTQ training from the chief on down. [Julian] Fantino had to issue a bullshit apology. It was [Bill] Blair who ended up having to take the training, as well as, who was our last guy? Mark Saunders. He had to take it too, because he was a vice chief, whatever the heck they are. But I have to say, the cost of that training, the development and delivery, were incredibly high for all the community-based trainers. All of us, all of us had, there were sessions we couldn't do, because they're vicious to each other, the police. There are a lot of people in there that really like having a gun and a badge and probably shouldn't have one. And the kinds of things that you have to listen to on repeat, course after course after course, or workshop after workshop. You know, it wears.

Alisha Stranges (01:25:31):

I didn't know that you were among the community facilitators.

JP Hornick (01:25:36):

Yeah, I helped design the training.

Alisha Stranges (01:25:38):

Okay, I didn't know that.

JP Hornick (01:25:40):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alisha Stranges (01:25:41):

How did you get involved in that? Was it something you proposed, or was requested?

JP Hornick (01:25:47):

A little bit of both, I think. After the human rights case was settled, I had experience as an LGBTQ trainer and facilitator, and we brought in a number of people from different parts of the community. Kyle Scanlon, who was the director and coordinator of the trans programs at The 519, he was awesome. Chris Veldhoven who had been working previously as a trainer with TPS [Toronto Police Service], a community trainer.

JP Hornick (01:26:23):

The innovation in this, though, was that we did the training, a community trainer was paired with a cop from their training unit. Those pairings, the fact that the cops had to be involved in developing the training and figuring out how they were going to deliver it to their colleagues, it definitely changed hearts for those folks. I think that they developed a respect for the community trainers who were involved. We weren't a number or a stereotype, we were people with a passionate commitment to making change, and I think that that... And with trying to work through issues... Training police is like moving a beach with a teaspoon. And so, I recognize it for what it is, it's one intervention, it's not like, "And then it was fixed!" Clearly.

JP Hornick (01:27:24):

They asked us, some years later, to be part of that apology letter that they issued to the community, and so the committee, I don't why the committee sent me... They were like, "JP, can you go to this meeting?" And

I'm like, "All right, fine, I'll take a bunch of notes, but I'm not making decisions. I'll bring it back, and we can all talk about it." And we refused to participate when it became clear that they weren't willing to actually take action, they were just willing to say more words. They weren't going to change anything structurally in terms of policy, there was not even really a gesture towards that. They issued the apology, and then there's the Marie Curtis [Park] raids. It's just like, "Dude, this is why we said no." We said, "You've got to apologize specifically." We were putting in all kinds of folks. The money that we got out of the human rights complaint, none of us saw the money. The money went to Maggie's [Toronto Sex Workers Action Project] and Bill 7. We tried to make it an even split in the settlement, and the police wouldn't do it. We could not force them to give half to Maggie's [Toronto Sex Workers Action Project]. We tried our best.

Alisha Stranges (01:28:32):

Because of the nature of the organization?

JP Hornick (01:28:34):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (01:28:34):

Right.

JP Hornick (01:28:34):

I think so.

Alisha Stranges (01:28:35):

Maybe, for those who don't know, can you briefly describe Maggie's [Toronto Sex Workers Action Project]?

JP Hornick (01:28:40):

Oh, Maggie's [Toronto Sex Workers Action Project] is a support and resource centre for sex workers in Toronto, and they do a lot of street-level advocacy. And the reason for that was because we wanted something that openly acknowledged that sexuality is okay. Sex work is sex work, not some moral policing issue. And they do a lot of work with trans sex workers too, who were particularly... I would say trans women who were at the bathhouse were particularly named by the police as saying that there were men in the space, and that kind of bullshit. And so, we needed a strong statement in response to that.

JP Hornick (01:29:32):

Which is also what spawned the "search and detention of trans people" policy change. One of the things that was ongoing at that point was, Peel Region Police had just gotten... They had a human rights complaint filed against them by a woman who identified as trans who was forced repeatedly to show her breasts, reveal her breasts to the police as ostensibly part of a strip search, and had otherwise been harassed. And so, the appeal, in response, had created this bizarre set of questions that police had to ask people based on their perception of whether or not they might be trans. And they were really invasive. They were like, "Do you have a therapist? At what stage of the transition process are you?"

JP Hornick (01:30:17):

And a bunch of us looked at them and went, “If you...” And they’re like, “We’re going to use this!” Toronto Police Service. And we’re like, “Yeah, that’s not a good idea, hey y’all. You’re setting yourself up for another human rights complaint because none of your people are trained to do any of that.” So, we said, “It should just be based on self-identification. If somebody comes in and says, ‘I’m trans,’ that’s enough. There’s no more questions asked, whether their ID matches or not, it doesn’t matter. And that you need to respect that. And you need to start using the pronouns that they prefer. You need to ask which gender of officer they want to do the search, if a search is required at all, and whether it should be a split search with different genders.” And so, it was this back and forth for a while.

JP Hornick (01:31:08):

I would say, in fairness, they were receptive to that, but I think it was the notion of “you’re going to get sued otherwise.” They subsequently were sued, if I’m not mistaken, because the implementation is very different than the development of a policy. And in the training, that was one of the reasons that we were paired with a police officer. Because all of us said, “We are not expert in your policies and procedures, and there is not a cop in that room who’s going to listen to us talk about a strip search policy and say that it has any weight or meaning.”

JP Hornick (01:31:44):

So, the cops would have to introduce the strip search policy part and go through why it wasn’t a problem. And there were some really interesting reactions. Invariably, some male cop would say, “What if there’s this six-foot biker that says they’re trans, and says they’re a woman, and then they want to be searched by a female officer, and she’s just this little female officer, and da, da, da, da, da.” And this came up, I kid you not, probably no less than three quarters of the time I did this, that I was a facilitator for this training. And during one of them, one of the cops who identified as female said, “I’m trained the same way you are. So, if you think that... It is so patronizing for you to suggest that I can’t handle myself during a strip search,” and I was like, “Good on you, one.”

JP Hornick (01:32:45):

Another time, the cop I was training with, it was hilarious. They were questioning whether or not this six-foot biker... That a woman would know how to search a suspect who still had a penis and testicles, and the guy was like, “Look, it’s easy, there’s the frank and the beans, and that’s it. We all know how to do it, let’s get over this.” I was like, “Oh my God, I don’t know what we’re into now.” And another time when this biker came up again, I finally broke out of my, I wasn’t supposed to be facilitating. I’m just like finally, “Who the hell is this biker and why hasn’t his gang killed him yet?” Because for God’s sake, you cannot tell me that this is a common thing that’s going to happen every time you arrest someone. Let’s be realistic about it.

JP Hornick (01:33:39):

And so that was at the point where we were all pretty burnt out. That was some of the more benign stuff that you would hear. The worst was what you would hear from LGBT cops when the workshop was over, and they would come and talk to you. That was where the horror stories happened, and that was just, listening to people’s pain and trauma on their job. I’m not a big fan of police service in the way that it’s run, and the lack of community integration and responsible accountability. But I felt for some of these folks, for sure. Because what they thought they were getting into, and what they got into, were very different systems.

Alisha Stranges (01:34:25):

Yeah. Well I'm noticing that we are getting to the end of our time here, and I don't want to... I feel I could ask you question after question. There's so many things I remain curious about, but I'll just say, maybe take a moment here to speak to anything that the questions haven't allowed you yet to speak to that you were hoping to.

JP Hornick (01:34:51):

Yeah, for the record I'm open to talking to you whenever you want. So, if there's something else that comes up that you want to follow up on, that's not a problem, from my perspective. This isn't a retraumatizing event for me, or anything like that. I think it actually raises a lot of interesting questions for our community, communities. I think that the thing that I find most... I think that the excitement that was generated in the space around the Pussy Palace, as it was originally named, and then the way in which that had to be an evolutionary process to respond to, not just the raid, but as anything becomes more seen as an institution, has to respond in different ways to the folks who are attending, the communities it's trying to, I guess, serve in a particular kind of way. Of course, the energy will eventually die out of an event, but the raid certainly, it was night and day. The before and after of that was really abrupt.

JP Hornick (01:36:17):

But those spaces are not just worth creating, but protecting and trying to capture as a slice of what's possible. There should be interrogations of events and organizers, and we should constantly be in that process of questioning ourselves, and what we're doing. And what we think we're doing, versus its actual impact. And how do you better open up these spaces and create equity, and how do you evaluate your failure at that? So that it's not something that just is, "And you're a witch!" It's more a true accountability and reckoning process. And I think that there was a start in there that's worth exploring and taking up. It's a sort of ongoing challenge of, how do we create good spaces?

JP Hornick (01:37:14):

And I do think it's also important to not forget that the crux of anti-queerness is about who people desire, and how that intersects with social norms at a particular moment in time. And so, that desire is another possible organizing principle that needs to be celebrated, and again, protected. We need to remind ourselves of that from time to time, that that is one of the, definitely, in some form or another, whether it's through a deep engagement with it in all its physical forms, or a kind of abdication, or looking at it through different lenses, that it's something that does unite us. And I think then, putting that into intersectional politics... All these things are about how do we create community, right? And again, and again, and again. And how do we make it better, wherever we get a chance?

JP Hornick (01:38:27):

And the other piece is, I can tell you, and this is largely due, in part, to my race and my privilege around race, my privilege around class. But I've got to say, the cops don't scare me anymore in the same way they did then. If anything, it's the moment of that last... And sorry, you had a critical lens on systems and trustworthiness of systems, but for sure, the intimate interaction with that particular system and those circumstances, really changed my sense of... I don't even know how to phrase it. Definitely it was a complicated set of experiences. We worked with some really good individual cops, and we worked within a system and structure that is absolutely dead set against anything but ensuring the continuity of the protection of capital, not people, really. And we quickly learned that all of us are expendable within that system.

Alisha Stranges (01:39:55):

Right. Well, is that the note that you would like to leave it on?

JP Hornick (01:40:04):

I don't know, I guess so.

Alisha Stranges (01:40:09):

I don't know, I want to make space if there's anything else that you wanted to add.

JP Hornick (01:40:15):

I don't know, I wouldn't trade it for the world. Any of that experience. I mean, hell, I met my partner, which is... And my daughter wouldn't be here without that, [inaudible] on some level. But yeah, and I met some of the best activists I've ever known in the midst of that.

Alisha Stranges (01:40:51):

Well thank you, JP, so much for taking these two very full hours to journey back and grab at fragments and full detail in all its glory, I really appreciate it. It's just, it's an honour to bear witness to your story. Thank you for participating.

JP Hornick (01:41:17):

Oh, thanks for asking, it was a good time. I appreciate it, and I appreciate the work that you do there in the ArQuives too, and on this project specifically, making sure that our histories are not lost in the greater scheme of things. I think it's hellishly important work, so thank you.

Alisha Stranges (01:41:39):

You're welcome.