

Pussy Palace Oral History Project
Oral History Interview with Hanlon McGregor
Conducted on March 17, 2021 via Zoom
Interviewed by Alisha Stranges and Elio Colavito on behalf of the
LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory (Elspeth Brown, Director)
Transcribed by Rev.com and Elio Colavito

Summary: Originally from Nova Scotia, Hanlon is a white, pansexual, gender-fluid, transman and playwright. At the time of the interview, he was living in Toronto, Ontario, raising two children, writing, and securing funds for the workshop and production of his plays. The interview mostly concerns Hanlon's experiences as a patron of the Pussy Palace on September 14, 2000, leading up to the moment the police entered the bathhouse. They discuss their recollection of the space; the sense memories that remain; negotiations around what to wear, what to pack, and how to curate an enjoyable evening at the bathhouse; and other topics. Having attended Palace events both alone and with a date, he speaks about the challenges of penetrating established peer groups within an explicitly sexualized, queer space and the significance of the Palace for polyamorous folks, wanting to access erotic freedom with individual partners. He reflects on his experience of leaving the bathhouse as the police were entering and his participation in the community activism immediately following the raid. Hanlon speaks about Toronto, Ontario, in the late 1990s and early 2000s but dedicates most of their interview to Toronto in 2000.

Keywords: LGBTQ; Bisexual; Pansexual; Transgender; Non-binary; Closet; Police; Abolition; Sex.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:04):

To iCloud, and here we go. And are you recording already Hanlon?

Hanlon McGregor (00:00:05):

I am. It's just voice recording, right, on this?

Alisha Stranges (00:00:10):

Yes. Yes.

Hanlon McGregor (00:00:13):

Okay. Yep. That's what it's doing.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:14):

Okay. So, this is Alisha Stranges and Elio Colavito from the Pussy Palace Oral History Project, and we are here in Toronto, Ontario, interviewing Hanlon McGregor on March 17, 2021. Hanlon, are you also in Toronto?

Hanlon McGregor (00:00:32):

I am.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:33):

Okay. So, Hanlon's in Toronto, Ontario, and Hanlon's going to tell us about the experience of being a patron of the Pussy Palace bathhouse event on the night of September 14, 2000. So, Hanlon, do we have your permission to record this oral history interview?

Hanlon McGregor (00:00:50):

You do. Yep.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:51):

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

Hanlon McGregor (00:01:22):

Sure. My full name is Michael Finn Hanlon McGregor. My preferred pronouns are, he/him or they/them, and I don't have a strong preference of either one. I think, "they" has come in recently because I feel more fluid and sort of not as binary as, he/him would suggest. So, I'm making room for more of that. I wouldn't consider myself fully non-binary, but there is definitely a non-binary aspect and fluid aspect to my gender.

Alisha Stranges (00:02:03):

And, is there any more you want to say about how you would describe your gender and sexual identity today, in 2021?

Hanlon McGregor (00:02:13):

I mean, when I came to Toronto in '95, I came out not too long after that, I guess it was a couple of years after that, as bisexual. I kind of already knew I was bi, but it took me a while to come out to myself, and I was female-presenting, cis-het-presenting at the time, and I was in an open relationship with a cisman. But I got in touch with the BiWoT, it's the Bi Women of Toronto, I think that's what that stands for, and I got a lot of support at The 519. But then when I started to see women, I kind of had this crisis and went, "Oh my gosh. I think I am actually... am I a lesbian? I'm not sure what's going on here." It was quite an awakening for me, energetically, and I couldn't figure it out, and I kept being attracted to gay men, all the way along. And then, at some point, I came out as a bi and started sleeping with queer men and women, and that was a better fit for me.

Hanlon McGregor (00:03:36):

But there was still something up. And then, flash forward, so the Pussy Palace was in 2000 and then, so I was dating women at that time, and the Pussy Palace was one of the places that I could go to have privacy with a date, to have the chance to explore, to be in that wonderful energy with other people, and it was a safe space. It was a space that was created for women, I think that that was the terminology that was used at the time, but I imagine there were trans men there as well, I'm not sure. It's hard to remember now because I was more focused on, well, my date and the ability to be with other women in this safe space.

Hanlon McGregor (00:04:31):

And so then, about seven years after that, I had my first child, and that experience of becoming a parent, but to be so gendered, everything was gendered, mom, mom, mom, day in and day out. And I just, the dissonance that had always been there around gender for me just started to ring in my ears all the time, and I couldn't figure it out. I didn't know what the hell was wrong, but I knew something was wrong.

Hanlon McGregor (00:05:03):

And then, I just couldn't sleep for a long time, and I started writing at night; I was up, so I just started writing, and I started writing about gender and started sharing monologues at Buddies [in Bad Times Theatre]. And then, my director at the time, Michael McKidd, came to me after one of the cabarets and said, "Your work really resonates with the trans community." And I was like... Like, members of the trans community who are here, and I was like, "Really? Huh. Oh." It was so funny because I was just saying how I felt about gender and that I felt like both and I felt like... that things didn't fit and I didn't understand. And then, it was almost like something came in from the outside and said, "Actually, you're trans." And I was like, "Oh cool."

Hanlon McGregor (00:05:56):

So, then I... And I actually live in a co-op now that... So, it took a couple of years for me to sort of start to futz with that. And when I moved downtown, I was living at Caledonia and St. Clair, and I moved downtown and started going to Buddies [in Bad Times Theatre] and being around more queer folks. There were actually several families in my co-op that had... Trans dads were the heads of the household. So, there was, I'm trying to think, there were two different trans couples who were parenting in the co-op. And so, it was kind of cool, I made friendships with them and had sort of this safe bubble to start to explore who I was.

Hanlon McGregor (00:06:47):

But, I was also working at a nursing and maternity wear store, and that kind of dissonance was also really strong because I was going into this very femme-centric space, and then queer folks would come in and I would feel like a gender traitor or something like, "Oh, we don't have anything for you. We have some plain t-shirts and some jeans, but there's nothing special for you to wear as a trans man who is also nursing or also pregnant." So, it was weird. It was a weird time, and eventually I left that job, and it was right around then that I was full on starting to be like, "Yeah, I'm trans."

Hanlon McGregor (00:07:39):

So, my art kind of pushed me and pulled me and it was very relational, the way that I came out. And I had a small kid, so I was saying to them, "I don't really feel like a mom." This is a long, long answer to a short question. So, long story long, the whole... It was all very, like, trying to figure out what I needed. And I think that's what it boiled down to; how my identity needed to be phrased and framed and how my body needed to be. What did I need? Because I wasn't on a mission to rush out and quote, "be a man," but I was on a mission to figure out why the dissonance and how to make that ringing go down. And so, I arrived at, "I'm Papa." I've written plays about that. I've talked about that a lot, but...

Hanlon McGregor (00:08:45):

Yeah, so now I identify as pansexual, and trans, and I'd say a bit fluid, a bit non-binary, and I'm attracted mostly to queer folk. Yeah. That just seems to be what happens. I mean, I'm attracted to people, so... And yeah. So that's kind of where I fall.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:16):

Thank you. Thank you for that wonderful answer. I'm going to take a bit of a hard right here and move into a question about racial, ethnic, and cultural identity. How would you say you express yourself through these categories?

Hanlon McGregor (00:09:37):

Well, I was born in Nova Scotia, which is a very white place, and my identity for a long time was around my Scottish heritage and my Irish heritage and, to a certain extent, my French-Canadian heritage. My grandmother was French-Canadian from Chéticamp, and I was a Highland dancer and all these things. So very, very, very white, and yet, I've recently been learning, and I haven't had a chance to do a DNA test, I had long wondered, and my dad and I had talked about the idea, that maybe we might have Métis roots as well through the Acadians in Chéticamp. So, I don't take up space or claim that as an identity, but I am very curious, and I feel a pull. I haven't dived into it yet, but I'm very close to getting the DNA testing and starting to explore because, yeah. I don't know how to explain it, except that energetically, whenever I hear make Mi'kmaq singing or anything like that, I just feel this rush of energy, and I don't know if that's just responding to the art, or if there's something... I feel like there's something more than that there.

Hanlon McGregor (00:10:56):

But anyway, I'm a white person, and I look like a white person, and I have a white background, but I am really interested in that aspect. And I'm very, very vocal about being anti-... Trying to change the system that has been white-serving and remains white-serving. That it's supremacist and it's toxic because so many people don't recognize it now. I think there's this awakening happening, slowly, but I still find that there's a ways to go because I feel like people... There are some folks who still cling to this idea that everything's now equal, everybody's fine.

Hanlon McGregor (00:11:51):

And so, in my art and in my life, I try to enter those discussions of how... And it's uncomfortable, but how are we being served? How are white folks being served in ways that people who identify as non-white that... How do we recreate the system so that everyone can have, and how uncomfortable will that be? Because it will mean, for some folks, that they will need to relinquish some of their superiority, or stuff, or access. Or, at least, that's the fear in some people, I think. And I think what it actually means is building a culture where we're all having better access to the things that we need and want. And yeah, that's more equitable.

Hanlon McGregor (00:12:53):

I was talking to somebody last week about being trans and money. I was interviewed about how transness affects me financially, and one of the things that I think is really important is the universal guaranteed income. I forget what it's called, there's a little acronym for it. But yeah, I think that's one step towards helping, but I think there's a huge societal shift required in order to... We just need to rebuild. We need to rebuild the prison... We need to abolish the prison system, abolish the police, and find a new way, find a better way, or an old way, but find something that's not so entrenched.

Hanlon McGregor (00:13:45):

And I think, that's what the abolish movement is about. I think it's about not settling for this thing that we've been told is absolutely necessary. But instead, finding ways to create a better way of relating to each other actually, a better way of intervening when people are in crisis, a better way of how to respond. Because, if we're always responding with force, then it just becomes a predictable dance, a predictable choreography that

ends the same way, and I think we need to change all of that. And the only way to change it is to stop doing what we're doing currently and change to something else.

Hanlon McGregor (00:14:37):

And I think that a lot of people, when they hear abolish, they're like, well, "Then what happens if someone breaks into my house?" They think there's not going to be any protection, but we need to look at, like, "Why are people breaking into your house? Why are some people not having enough?" And sure, there will be some people that potentially fall outside of what I'm talking about, and we'll have to have some kind of something, but it doesn't mean that we have to stay with what we have now. Yeah. Anyway, that's how I feel about race.

Alisha Stranges (00:15:15):

Thank you.

Hanlon McGregor (00:15:15):

I feel myself going on and on. And I'm like, "Oooh, okay."

Alisha Stranges (00:15:20):

This is your time. This is your time.

Hanlon McGregor (00:15:22):

I need to cough, just a second.

Alisha Stranges (00:15:24):

Sure.

Hanlon McGregor (00:15:27):

Thanks, I have bad allergies.

Alisha Stranges (00:15:30):

I hear you. I resonate with that. I actually resonate with a number of things you were saying. I'm also a Highland dancer, worked at Buddies in Bad Times [Theatre], so we've got a lot of points of similarities. So, you sort of mentioned being an artist, an activist, a parent; I'm curious, what kind of things occupy your time, these days, in 2021?

Hanlon McGregor (00:15:57):

Playwriting is my main vocation right now, especially since the pandemic, I was doing more temp work and other stuff to kind of make ends meet and the pandemic came along and took away all my sort of "Joe Job" stuff, catering and mailing out packages for... Anyway, and so now what I do is, I'm writing one play that is called *Inherited Beliefs*, that is being supported by Nightwood Theatre and received an Ontario Arts Council grant last year, a project grant. And so that's a piece about... It's a feminist work and a trans positive work about a senior woman who is sexually abused by someone she knows and, sort of, the relationship of being in a small community and being an older female. So that's one piece that I'm writing and the other piece, wildly different, but still pro trans, is a children's, like a young audiences play. It's an adaptation of *Unexpectedly Trans*,

which was the play I wrote about coming out to my kids and my community. And, so that is called, *Call Me Papa*. And it's been supported by Roseneath Theatre and, with two recommended grants now. And so, I'm trying to get funding to put together a workshop of that in the fall, so we'll see how that goes. It's probably going to be a Zoom workshop.

Hanlon McGregor (00:17:40):

But, yeah so, that's what I'm doing and I just finished working for Thatz Showbiz [Theatre Project] on their third iteration of *3 Plays in 30 Days*, where they take a youth, they take three youth playwrights, and you have 30 days with a mentor, and the youth creates a play in that amount of time. And in non-COVID times, they would take the next 30 days and produce the play, and they still are doing sort of a version of that, where they're producing something online. So, I've been a part of all three of their projects and yeah, I just mentored someone who wrote a play. And I'm not sure if I'm supposed to say, but I think I can say that Emily wrote a play, anyway... Yeah, so I mentored someone.

Hanlon McGregor (00:18:35):

Yeah, so a lot of writing and a lot of hustling my buns to try and find funding and looking after my kids, and one of my kids is special needs, and they have a lot of diagnoses, multiple diagnoses, and so they are home during the pandemic, and they're not actually able to access much school. So, there's a lot going on, and my partner just lost their ex-husband, and we're having to deal with their estate. So, that's what's occupying me and dog-walking, you can't see them but there are two really cute black dogs lying on the floor, being

[crosstalk]

Alisha Stranges (00:19:25):

What are their names?

Hanlon McGregor (00:19:27):

Saoirse, who's six years old, and Feargal. So, Saoirse means "freedom," and Feargal means "brave," and they're both Irish-Gaelic so...

Alisha Stranges (00:19:39):

Nice. Well, is there anything else that you would want... That you think it would be important for us to know about how you understand the different identities that you hold today, as compared to 20 years ago, 2000 when the Pussy Palace took place?

Hanlon McGregor (00:19:54):

Yeah. I think that... I guess, when I think about it comparatively, I just have a bigger sense of the struggle that queer folks have had through time because writing plays and talking to people in the community has meant learning about the bathhouse raids of the 80s, and I have a much better understanding of the AIDS crisis and the relationship between the police and queer folk during that. And I would say that, now, I more understand that there is an ongoing tension between the queer community and police. Whereas, when I was attending Pussy Palace, I think that I thought of that sort of as in the past. I thought of it as something that happened somewhere way back in our history. It felt like, "Well that's done, right?" Much like Nazi Germany is done, and so we have no more Nazis. No, that's not true. You know? And so, I think that I was young, and so I thought that we were in a brave new time, and nothing like that could happen.

Hanlon McGregor (00:21:19):

And now, looking back I go, “Oh, that’s interesting.” Because when it happened, I was shocked, and I don’t even, I just felt like, “What?” You know? “Really? This is what you need to spend your time and money on is this? Busting up a party?” And I still, I look back and I go, “Oh yeah, I can see where that came from.” I mean, at the time, I thought it was a select few, but now I view it more as probably, more of a majority, I would think. You know what I mean? At the time I thought, “Oh, well this is like a little conspiracy. Somebody had a bugbear.” And now I look at it and go, “No, that was still this war on queer culture and queer people being able to express themselves and do what they need.” Yeah. Anyway, that’s sort of...

Alisha Stranges (00:22:35):

Yes. So, I’m going to invite you now to sort of travel all the way back in time to the fall of 2000. And this is when the Toronto Women’s Bathhouse Committee was preparing to host the Night of 2000 Pussies, which was the fourth installment of the Pussy Palace. How did you first learn about the Night of 2000 Pussies bathhouse event?

Hanlon McGregor (00:23:03):

I think I found out about it through an email list, I think. As I said, I was part of the Bisexual Women of Toronto group, and I think I found out about the first Pussy Palace through that. And, I forget if there was an email forum or something, like a Yahoo group or something like... That may sound ancient, but we had such things back then. So, it might have been through email, or it might have been word of mouth, I’m not sure, but I know that I had been to previous Pussy Palace events, and I was excited to go to another one. I had gone by myself in the past, and it was really awkward. I’ve since been to bathhouse events at Oasis [Aqualounge], both by myself and with partners, and I have to say that going with a partner is way better. So, I was seeing someone at the time, and she and I heard about it. And we decided that since we both lived with our partners, and there wasn’t really any... There wasn’t an easy way to have privacy. And both of us, although we were in consensual open relationships, it was hard to figure out where to connect.

Hanlon McGregor (00:24:25):

So, when we found out about Pussy Palace, we were like, “Oh yeah, we need to go to that together and get a private room.” I forget precisely how I found out about it. I just remember being like, “Oh yeah, I’m going to this one. This is going to be great.” Because I was so envious when I went to the others of like people who came with their partners where they seemed to know other people. And people were having sex everywhere. I mean, not everywhere, but you’d walk up the staircase and turn a corner, and there’d be a whole bunch of people having sex together, and it would be like, “Oh, okay.”

Hanlon McGregor (00:25:09):

And I had been to sex parties before, private sex parties, so it wasn’t like particularly shocking to me to see a group of people having sex. It was just that it was so unapologetically out there in the open. That was refreshing and took me aback a bit. And I was like, “How do I get in on that? I’m here by myself.” At one of them, they had this board where you could somehow flirt with other people by leaving messages. Oh, I forget how that worked. People had numbers or something, and they had different ways of signaling what you were looking for.

Hanlon McGregor (00:25:54):

My memory isn’t good enough to remember what those ways were, but there were different codes. I don’t think they were wristbands. I think it was something else. You had to pin something to yourself, or I don’t know, or write a number. But I just was so envious because I didn’t even know how to break the ice, and I

was shy and all that. So, I was super happy to be able to plan to go to this event with this person that I was seeing.

Hanlon McGregor (00:26:24):

And she was closeted, which actually bothered me a lot when we would go out on a date. We went to Sneaky D's one time, and she didn't want to hold my hand or kiss me or anything. And I was like, "What the fuck? Like why?" Because I was out and I... Out and proud. I was out at work even, I think, at the time. Was I? Yeah. Yeah, I think I was. And yeah, it was really, really upsetting to me that she wouldn't. So, the idea that we could go to this place where she felt safe and free was wonderful.

Hanlon McGregor (00:27:07):

And she came from a community... She was Asian and her background... I don't want to be too specific because I don't want anybody to be able to put it together. But anyway, it was a cultural thing, partly, was why she was closeted. It was also a class thing. She came from money. And yeah, at some point we ended up breaking up. But at that time, this was sort of a compromise. This was a way we could be together and have her feel safe. And it just felt like an escape or just getting to do what we wanted to do.

Alisha Stranges (00:28:00):

I'd like to try to think about slowing down a particular moment in time, the sort of moment when a person goes from being someone who has decided to attend the Pussy Palace to somebody who becomes an official patron. Just trying to slow down that moment in time. So, thinking about where you were before you made your way to Club Toronto, do you remember?

Hanlon McGregor (00:28:28):

Oh my. Where did we meet? I think we met outside. And, where was I? Was I at work? I think I had to work that day, and it started at 8:00 p.m. I think I got off at 6:00 p.m. And I went and got lost. No, no, I got lost the first time I went. Yeah, I think I met them outside. Did I eat before I went there? I can't remember. I just remember that I had to wait outside for them, and I was really excited and nervous. And yeah. I'm not sure what you're looking for, but it was like any date, a little bit of nerves.

Hanlon McGregor (00:29:35):

And I got there and it was all those questions of like, "How much clothing do I bring? Do I bring a bag? How are we going to work this? Are we going to be able to have our stuff in our room?" It was like a lot of these logistical questions. And also, safer sex supplies like, "What do I bring. Do I bring lube? Do I bring gloves? How safe do I need to be?" Because at that time I was in, as I said, a poly relationship, and we had a very strong emphasis on safe sex. And I contracted HPV. I had warts when I was in university. So, I was very careful about not subjecting anyone to that, like not passing it, although I hadn't had an outbreak in a long time.

Hanlon McGregor (00:30:31):

Sorry, this is very personal. I don't know if this if other people are going to talk about this kind of stuff. But thinking about safer sex stuff was top of mind. It was like, "Okay, how do I make..." And I believe that I had disclosed to this person, and we were very careful. So, there was a certain amount of just pragmatic like, "Do we have lube? Do I have gloves? If I strip down to little clothing, what is my little clothing going to be?"

Hanlon McGregor (00:31:01):

And I mean, even then, back then, I had a lot of dysphoria about my body. And so, I didn't really want to wear... It makes perfect sense now that I've come out as a trans man, but I didn't like female bathing suits at all. So, the idea of going into the pool in a female bathing suit was also something that I was like, "How am I going to navigate this?" I'd much rather be naked than wear a bathing suit, if that makes any sense. And so, I was spending a lot of energy trying to figure out what to wear, and how to put myself together, and how much stuff to bring.

Hanlon McGregor (00:31:48):

And I remember, I think they used to search the bags at the door because you weren't allowed to bring in... I mean, there was obvious things you weren't allowed to bring in, like alcohol. Was that it? Maybe you weren't allowed to bring in any beverages or food. Yeah, so, I mean, just making sure that I had the stuff that I needed and that I was ready for anything. Dental dams, all the things. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:32:26):

That's perfect. Thank you for painting a little picture there. Elio, I'm wondering if I can pass it over to you and can learn a little bit more about this outfit that you were planning to wear.

Elio Colavito (00:32:37):

Yeah, absolutely. Thankfully, you're very attuned to those considerations because my first question for you is what look were you going for that evening and what do you remember about what you wore that night?

Hanlon McGregor (00:32:51):

It's funny. For all the stress I had at the time, I cannot recall. I don't remember. I know that I preferred to be nude in public, like in sex parties that I preferred nudity. It's kind of like Isadora Duncan talked about, and I used to think about this a lot, that full nudity is much less... I think it was Isadora Duncan. But full nudity is much less provocative than only covering up a little. And I think I just felt more free and myself when... As myself as I could be when I was naked. And so, I think I spent a lot of time in a towel when it comes right down to it, with like a bag of stuff. And I can't even remember if I wore shoes around.

Hanlon McGregor (00:33:48):

But I just remember being like not... I had a black, like a pleather bustier. I might've worn that that night. I don't know if I had that yet. But yeah, I might've worn that. Because I had a little bit of fetish gear. I had some black PVC pants and I had like... I guess it was PVC. Or, was it PVC or latex? Anyway, I had this very, very tight bustier. That might've been what I was wearing that night. But I just get lost in time, sorry.

Elio Colavito (00:34:32):

Absolutely. How did this outfit, or lack thereof, I guess, in some circumstances, align with or different from your style presentation more generally during that period of your life?

Hanlon McGregor (00:34:46):

I was much more free in these safer spaces than I was in general. Like, in general in my life at that time, it was 2000. I was having to do temp work. I was having to basically put on a costume to go to work and pretend to be like a corporate drone. And because I was an artist and an actor, I played the role. And I always thought of myself as almost like a double agent. And I guess that's the writer part of my brain or the actor. The artist

part was always looking at everyone around me and sizing them up. And my clothes never felt like me, to be honest. And now it makes perfect sense as a trans person. I could not find clothing that felt like, yeah, that's it.

Hanlon McGregor (00:35:43):

And the fetish... The PVC pants were actually more me than anything else, I think, because they were men's. They had belonged to my partner at the time, and that person grew out of them. Different partner, not the female partner. That person grew out of them and handed them to me. And I think that that was like a super... It made me feel more like myself.

Hanlon McGregor (00:36:14):

And I think the fetish stuff made me feel more like myself because it felt like stepping into a reality where my sexuality was also part of my power. My God, I've never realized this before, but anyway. Yeah, it was like I could be powerful. In that space, nobody's asking like, "What's your job? What kind of car do you drive?" It's about who you are. It's about who you express yourself to be. It's about your connection with other people, or at least that's how I viewed it. And yeah, I think there was just a big part of me that was able to be freer.

Hanlon McGregor (00:37:01):

And I remember a different party that I went to one time, and I had come from work and dropped by in my work clothes. And then I went home and changed into my more badass look and came back in these very high boots and whatever. And I remember this douche guy saying to me, "Oh, well, before you were so mousy, and now you come back and you're all badass. What's that about?" And I remember being, a) hurt to be called mousy, and b) also a bit mystified myself going, "Huh, that's interesting." Like, I couldn't quite get it all together. And at this point in my life, I feel like I'm badass no matter what I'm wearing. Now, I'm me, and I will be me whether it's mousy or badass, that's all me. Whatever is going on is me in that moment. But I think, at that time, I felt I had to play a role most of the time.

Hanlon McGregor (00:38:14):

And so, spaces like Pussy Palace or other sex parties. Or even my partner and I at the time created these gatherings called Wide Open, which were confidential weekend gatherings where all of the participants created an experience. So, you arrived, there had been a bunch of food purchased and a general menu planned, and that's it. The rest of it was up to the participants. People taught boomerang throwing. There were sex parties. There was like yoga classes. There was peer counseling classes. And this was all just created by the people who showed up and scheduled.

Hanlon McGregor (00:38:57):

So, I was very much into the fairy scene, the peer counseling scene, the sex party scene within the queer community within the people that I knew, and into like creating alternative spaces, I guess you would say. And so, Pussy Palace was one of those for me. And so, by extension, I could wear a cowboy hat or whatever. If I wanted to play with my dress, these were the places that I could play with that, and so that was cool. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:39:40):

Amazing. So, let's just put you back in the moment for a second. You get to the club. Describe the scene outside of the club from what you remember.

Hanlon McGregor (00:39:51):

From what I remember that night... It's hard because they all blend together. There were some nights that we had to wait outside to get inside, and there were some nights where there was nobody. And I think that night, I don't remember a lineup that night. I think it was just... I met my friend. If I happen to say their name, I am trying really hard not to, but I don't want that on record. But I met my partner, and we went in. We might've had to wait inside a bit. And generally, I think it was a lot of... We knew they were going to check our bags, so we're nervous. We're hoping we're going to get a room. We really, really wanted a private room because that was our whole purpose of going. So, I remember there being people checking us in and checking our bag and this anticipation and like... Yeah.

Hanlon McGregor (00:40:59):

In terms of other people, like I said, unfortunately, all the Pussy Palace parties almost blend together in my mind, so it's hard to pick this one out. But I think that we went in and there was a lot of... When we went in and paid, we did get our key to our room. And I think we had one key to share, which they don't do anymore. They don't do that at Oasis [Aqualounge]. I think everybody gets a key now, I think. Anyway.

Hanlon McGregor (00:41:34):

So, we went up. And as we walked through, it was like you came to the place where there's the music going on. And we're seeing people dancing, and we're seeing people in groups dancing, and some people by themselves. And then we're going up to find our private room and getting excited, obviously, as we're walking, like seeing people having sex, seeing people hanging out and making out. And we talked about going in the pool, but first we went up to our room, and we made out for a while. And I just remember feeling like it was... And I've had this feeling since when going to Oasis [Aqualounge] or [Spa] Excess of like, "It's so amazing that this exists." Being so grateful to the organizers for having made this space that felt safe, that felt set aside for us.

Elio Colavito (00:42:45):

Right. Absolutely.

Hanlon McGregor (00:42:46):

And I honestly don't remember anybody... I think we were drinking that night as well. And it's funny because later it became all about the liquor license. But I don't actually remember whether or not we were told not to take drinks out onto the patio. I think everybody did, I think people did, but it wasn't like... I don't remember it being raucous or anything, either. People were swimming, people were having fun, people were naked in the pool. We swam around in the pool a bit, and then we went back up to the room and had sex.

Hanlon McGregor (00:43:39):

Yeah. I mean, it was one of the best nights. It was one of the best nights I'd ever had with this particular partner, and it was definitely the best Pussy Palace for me. And the reason why I don't remember a lot about other people is because I was there with someone I really, really liked. And my focus was all about them and it was about having sex with them, getting to have sex with them in a space where I didn't have to worry about my partner's feelings or anyone else's feelings, and yeah.

Elio Colavito (00:44:14):

Completely understandable.

Hanlon McGregor (00:44:14):

Yeah. I'm not going to describe the sex, but it was great.

Elio Colavito (00:44:29):

We have heard from some other folks that there was a photo room where patrons could take Polaroids of themselves and document their night at the bathhouse. Did you spend any time in that room? Do you recall that room at all?

Hanlon McGregor (00:44:41):

I remember there being that. I don't think we did that. I think it was really popular, and there was a lineup a lot of the night, but we didn't go into that room, I don't think. Yeah, no, that wasn't our focus, really. But we did hang out and toy with the idea of, "Was there anybody else there?" And we did some dancing on the dance floor.

Hanlon McGregor (00:45:14):

And I remember my partner being, for want of a better word, dressed radically different. I was going to say a different word, but I'll just save just radically different from how they would normally dress. I remember them being so excited to, I can't remember their terminology, but to basically dress really sexy. And I was shocked because they're somebody who I always thought was very classy, and they were dressed in something with fringes on it, and it was very revealing and whatever. And I was like, "Wow, this is a whole different side of you that I've never gotten to see." And that was pretty cool. I mean, I think there were a lot of more, I would say, butch or masculine looking folks there. And, at that time, I remember... It's ironic, now, to think about that, but, at that time, I felt very uncomfortable around some more masculine or butch looking people because I think... I wasn't sure what I felt about at all. And I don't know if I was afraid. Now, I can psychoanalyze and go, "Oh." I don't know if I was afraid that that was truly what I wanted to be or not. I can't pin it down. All I know is that once I transitioned, all of that went away. And now I think that... Now, I like everybody and find lots of butch lesbians attractive. But I think that must have been like a slice of inner transphobia or inner oppression for me.

Hanlon McGregor (00:47:15):

So, I remember that as well from that night being both curious and didn't want to look when I was seeing lots of butch people having sex. I was like, "I'm not ready for this." And, at the same time, now I'm really glad that I had that experience because I think that I can at least track how I grew. And it's interesting to note how much I've changed over time, and it helps me to understand when people are still struggling with stuff. And it helps me to understand... Like, what I see as complete truth now, about sexuality and gender, I feel like a lot of people just can't perceive, and that there's a lot of fear and, whatever, there. Anyway, so yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:48:24):

So, I want to try a little experiment. I don't know how well it's going to work, so just do your best to go along with it. I want to get a sense of the impression that the space made on your senses. And I know it's been a long time, 20 years. So, I'm going to invite you to sort of soften your gaze, or even close your eyes if you feel comfortable to. I'll do it as well. And just breathe for a couple breaths. With each inhale and exhale, allow your body to re-inhabit a certain locale within the Pussy Palace. Don't worry too much about which locale is popping up in your mind, just go with the first locale that comes to mind. And just breathing your body back into that space and time. And from this contemplative, embodied space, look around the space and tell me what it is you're seeing. Describe it.

Hanlon McGregor (00:49:46):

I mean, I see a DJ in the main space. There's a few couples on the dance floor, dancing. There's a bulletin board with messages on it.

Alisha Stranges (00:50:19):

If you could distill this space that you're in, if you could distill it into a single colour, what colour does it appear to be?

Hanlon McGregor (00:50:36):

I'd say, red.

Alisha Stranges (00:50:38):

Red. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:50:40):

And if the space could somehow magically call out to you, what would it sound like? What would the space sound like?

Hanlon McGregor (00:50:53):

I think it would say, "Be free."

Alisha Stranges (00:50:58):

Can you say any more about the tone or timbre of the voice?

Hanlon McGregor (00:51:04):

I think it would call me and say, "Let go and dive in." I think it would be encouraging and silky.

Alisha Stranges (00:51:20):

And see if you can get in touch with the air that's hanging in the room. If it has a particular odour that lingers. What would you say it smells like in this space?

Hanlon McGregor (00:51:36):

I mean, a little bit chlorine-y, a little bit like my partner's perfume, a little bit damp.

Alisha Stranges (00:51:57):

And if you could reach your hands out, or some part of your body out, and touch the space, what is its textures?

Hanlon McGregor (00:52:25):

I keep thinking that there was kind of a not nice carpet on the floor. And I think that there was encouraging, welcoming signs everywhere, so there's a lot of paper. There was also a hardness to the walls. I remember there being a contrast between the energy and the physical space.

Alisha Stranges (00:53:16):

Can you say more about that?

Hanlon McGregor (00:53:18):

Well, the physical space... Like, in our room, the walls were very hard, the bed was kind of small, and, if I remember rightly, it had a gym mat kind of feeling to it. I can't remember exactly if we had sheets or anything. It just felt very... Mercenary isn't the right word, but pared down. And I didn't care. But I think that there was this need to accept that this is what it is, this is what's possible. I don't know. But there was an excitement too. And that's not a texture, but there was an excitement to the whole thing. Because it had that feeling of: you're in a very intentional space, you're anticipating what's going to happen, what could happen. And it seems like anything could happen.

Alisha Stranges (00:54:52):

Right. Yeah. And the last sensory question is, the space, if you could taste it, what would its flavour be, the flavour of this room?

Hanlon McGregor (00:55:08):

Like a really weird peppermint dental dam. No, sorry. Maybe a little bit like alcohol. I feel like a lot of people were drinking. And there was a feeling in me that it might taste like rum and Coke, or vodka, or something.

Alisha Stranges (00:55:36):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Hanlon McGregor (00:55:41):

Yeah. And I mean, for me, I liked sober sex more. But I'm not sure if I knew that yet. So, there was a feeling that, for me, there's always a little bit of apprehension when lots of people are drunk. So, for me, I think that alcohol was definitely something I could both smell and sense, if that makes any sense?

Alisha Stranges (00:56:09):

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for going there with me. You can let that go, open your eyes. And when you made the decision to attend the event — you've spoken about its draw for you and your partner at the time but — what were you hoping to experience, you think?

Hanlon McGregor (00:56:32):

Yeah. I mean, I think that I wanted to have sex and intimacy and feel a deeper connection with my partner, and be able to just really relax and explore each other's bodies. And so, to a certain extent, it was about our relationship within the community as opposed to just connecting with the community. It was really about having that space that someone had created. And so, there was a privacy within the publicness, if that makes

sense. And so that was what I was anticipating, was just having lots of sex. And in fact, I would have been very happy, I think, to probably stay in the room the whole night. We didn't, but I think I could have.

Hanlon McGregor (00:57:34):

And I think there was some S&M stuff going on as well, if that was the right event. And I was sort of curious about that as well. Curious slash terrified of that curiosity. And that was something that I wasn't anticipating; I wasn't thinking about kink when I was headed. So, when I got there, I think there was some mixed feelings about seeing some of that.

Hanlon McGregor (00:58:02):

But yeah, anticipating... My partner was a very sexual person, and so am I. And so, we just really needed some time to have sex, to have a lot of sex. And I feel like I'm repeating myself, but basically that was what I was looking forward to. And I got to do that. And actually, I think that, if anything, I was surprised by how little time, relatively speaking, that occupied of the night; considering how much I was looking forward to it. But I did feel satisfied. I didn't feel, when I went home, "Oh, I only spent this amount of time." It was like, if I spent an hour or an hour and a half in that room, that was enough.

Hanlon McGregor (00:58:57):

And I also have the feeling that there was some kind of thing where other people were waiting for the room, or there was a limited number of rooms. And so, we were conscious of the longer we held that room, the less chance someone else would have. So, I think that, at some point, we turned in our key so someone else could use the room. But I can't remember if that was quickly before we left, or if it was a while before we left. It was very special, as I said before. It was a super special moment for me because it just felt like you couldn't get more perfect. Yes, the room could have been cushier. If every room had been like a hotel room or whatever. But you couldn't get more perfect, in terms of feeling like you were inside this womb space that was protected. And yeah, it was fantastic.

Elio Colavito (01:00:14):

I'm curious about who else was there? I know you said that you felt like your partner was the only person there with you and nobody else mattered. But regardless, how many people would you say were there, more or less, if you had to guess?

Hanlon McGregor (01:00:29):

Oh my. Oh, that's a hard thing to guess. Including the pool and all the levels... It's so hard because people were in rooms and stuff.

Elio Colavito (01:00:50):

Right.

Hanlon McGregor (01:00:51):

I don't know, like 150, 200, at least, I'd say. At least.

Elio Colavito (01:00:57):

And how would you describe the composition of the crowd along the lines of gender, sexuality, race; those kinds of factors?

Hanlon McGregor (01:01:06):

I mean, I knew some of the folks that were there from BiWoT. And so, a lot of those people were white. The person I was with was Asian, as I said already. There were a couple black folks that I knew. There were a few black folks, but I think there was predominantly white folks.

Hanlon McGregor (01:01:38):

I remember there being piles of butch lesbians here and there. Trans men weren't really on my radar, I think I would have lumped them in with butch lesbians, at the time. So, I don't remember there being a lot of trans men there that night. I don't remember any trans women either. I don't know that I would have known. But I didn't see any visibly trans women. And I'm not sure about non-binary, because that also kind of wasn't on my radar either. I don't know that I was sorting people into categories either.

Hanlon McGregor (01:02:27):

But yeah, I saw a number of femme people that I knew. I remember [unknown name], and I think my friend [unknown name] was there, and I think the woman who ran some of the BiWoT stuff was there. Oh no, she had passed away. Sorry, that was an earlier one I'm thinking of. Who else was there? La, la.

Elio Colavito (01:03:12):

It's okay if you can't recall, we're just trying to get a sense for the general demographic of the crowd.

Hanlon McGregor (01:03:18):

Yeah, it was pretty mixed. I think there was a lot of really femme people and lot of butch people, as I've mentioned numerous times. But a lot of people who were, if I had to describe them now, from this lens, I would say would probably identify as... You know, they had very funky, queer haircuts and weren't like, what, at the time, we would've said "lipstick lesbian." They were openly, proudly queer, I think, in every aspect of their life. So, I think that there were a number of those sorts of folks.

Hanlon McGregor (01:04:05):

Yeah. And lots of different body types. In terms of accessibility, I can't remember if there were folks in chairs. I don't remember that. I don't think so. Yeah, that's all I can think.

Elio Colavito (01:04:31):

You just described a lot of different identities and identifiers. And the Pussy Palace has been described as a very inclusive space for lesbian women, queer cis women, trans folks, et cetera. What was your impression of the relationship between these differently gendered sexual and gender groups in the early 2000s, but then at the event itself?

Hanlon McGregor (01:04:59):

In the early 2000s, I was predominantly hanging out with other femmes, mostly. I sort of identified that way at the time. And then I think that what I was seeing, was when I would go to somewhere like Pope Joan — I

don't know if that was still open then — or other queer spaces like Buddies [in Bad Times Theatre], I feel like there were groups that all knew each other. I don't necessarily mean like a clique, but just groups of friends. And I didn't know how to penetrate, as often I would either be there by myself or with friends. But I didn't always know how to penetrate those other groups.

Hanlon McGregor (01:05:59):

However, in inclusive spaces, like Tallulah's [Cabaret], like at Buddies [in Bad Times Theatre], I would find myself dancing with all kinds of different people in a night. I would find myself dancing with straight girls who were all over me, and winding with butch people at a certain point. It just depended on who was there that night.

Hanlon McGregor (01:06:27):

And at Pussy Palace, I found it less comfortable than Tallulah's [Cabaret] because I think there was more of a chance of somebody wanting to have sex with you. And I think that that made it more awkward, if that makes any sense? At Tallulah's [Cabaret], it was just dancing. Everybody's drinking and dancing, and whatever, you're just partying. But the way I felt at Pussy Palace about it was that people were in their separate groups, and it felt like you were crossing a chasm to talk to somebody, if that makes sense. I was much more confident at Tallulah's [Cabaret] than I was at Pussy Palace. Even though I felt super comfortable with my partner there, I didn't feel comfortable, as a single person, approaching someone there. And I think that's why they had all the icebreaker games and things, that they were trying to encourage and find ways for people to reach out to each other. With, in my case, mixed success, or maybe not much success. I just didn't feel comfortable.

Hanlon McGregor (01:07:36):

And also, I was newly out as bi, so I didn't have a lot of experience in being the person who did the asking. If that make sense? I was still learning how to put myself out there. I'm much more comfortable with it now. But even now, I'm really shy. I like to use nonverbal communication. But you have to use your words to get consent, so I've had to figure out how to say, "Hi, I like you. Want to do something?"

Hanlon McGregor (01:08:14):

So yeah, I don't know. That's a lot of words for it. But yeah, I think that there were people who were really confident and I think could just walk into the situation and be like, "You, let's go do something." And then there were groups of people who knew each other, and then there were couples that went together. And in terms of identities, I don't know that I felt like that there were identities that were creating exclusive groups, but I do feel like just because of who everybody knew that there were these separate groups.

Hanlon McGregor (01:08:58):

I would imagine the piles of people — I don't know; I have no evidence — but I imagine that some of those people, at least, came together and maybe added to their pile along through the night. But I know that I didn't feel like I could just dive in there, or I didn't know how to, even if I'd wanted to, because I was too shy and not sure how I felt about all that.

Elio Colavito (01:09:25):

I'm cognizant of time. Do we want to give Hanlon some options, Alisha?

Alisha Stranges (01:09:30):

Yeah, that's a good idea. What were you thinking, Elio?

Elio Colavito (01:09:30):

Well, I mean, we've got about a good page and a half left of questions, so we can power through now if everyone's got the time and capacity for it. Or we could, Hanlon, coordinate with you to have you do a second part to your interview another time; depending on what you want to do.

Hanlon McGregor (01:09:58):

I think it's better to power through and I'll just be briefer.

Elio Colavito (01:10:01):

Sure.

Hanlon McGregor (01:10:02):

Because I tend to talk, so I can just limit myself a bit.

Elio Colavito (01:10:06):

Absolutely, whatever you feel most comfortable—

Hanlon McGregor (01:10:07):

If folks are okay with that?

Elio Colavito (01:10:09):

Absolutely.

Alisha Stranges (01:10:09):

Yeah.

Elio Colavito (01:10:10):

I'm great. Alisha's great. Continue to answer the questions as you see fit, I don't want you to feel like you have to hold back at all. I wanted to give you the option to maybe break and then meet another time. So, we'll power through.

Elio Colavito (01:10:25):

At 12:45 a.m., five men, all plainclothes police officers, entered the club and stayed about 90 minutes. Were you still in the Pussy Palace or had you already left?

Hanlon McGregor (01:10:36):

So, I was walking out as they were walking in. We passed them, and my partner and I, we rubbernecked, and we were like, "What the fuck is happening?" basically. And it was super stressful too because, it was like,

“What do we do? Do we go back in and warn people?” I think we were aware of who it was. And I know it said plainclothes, but somehow, we knew they were cops. I don’t remember why. I don’t know if we saw the cruiser? I think we did. But we knew that they were cops walking in, as we were walking out. So, we left, they walked in. And then we were like, “Oh shit, we could have just been scooped up.” And it was just that feeling of worry about what was going to happen. And then, of course—

Elio Colavito (01:11:42):

Do you recall what you did after?

Hanlon McGregor (01:11:43):

What’s that?

Elio Colavito (01:11:44):

Do you recall what you did immediately after you had your rubberneck moment, “Oh my God, those are cops. What do we do?”

Hanlon McGregor (01:11:52):

Yeah. We talked about it, and I think we said, “What do we do?” And there was just this feeling of what do you do? We had gone through the whole process of going in and we just went through the whole process of leaving, and I guess we just kind of hoped for the best, hoped that the people at the door would handle it and that it would be okay. Because, in my mind, first of all, why were they there? Nobody had done anything wrong. So, I guess, I didn’t understand why they were there, and so I didn’t really have cause to worry that it wouldn’t be handled well. But I have to say that on a gut level, I was worried. On a gut level, I was worried, and selfishly I was relieved that I was no longer in there, and I felt like we’d just had a near miss. And I don’t remember if we took booze outside or not, and, of course, we didn’t find out about that stuff until later. But yeah, it was just this feeling of, “Phew” and “Oh, no.” Right? Like, what’s going to happen?

Hanlon McGregor (01:13:18):

So, we discussed it and we were both kind of like, there’s nothing to do. We’re not going to chase the cops back in there. But at the same time, it was nerve wracking because you end up feeling guilty. I felt guilty that I walked out. It wasn’t simple like, “Phew, okay, I’m going to go home to bed now.” It was like, “What’s going to happen?” And, at that time, I don’t know what the law was, but I think we were aware that sex parties were... I don’t know if they were still considered illegal. I can’t remember the exact law around it all, but I think we were aware that there might be some way that they could shut it down and consider it illegal activity.

Hanlon McGregor (01:14:21):

I remember because I had hosted some sex parties, and I had been to some sex parties, and there was sort of this awareness that certain swingers’ clubs and certain this and that were getting around it somehow, but that may be somewhere still on the books was a law. And sorry, I just can’t remember that exact snapshot of time, but there was definitely a feeling of, yeah, “What’s going to happen?” And guilt that we’re sort of free and clear because we’ve just walked out, but what’s going to happen to our friends, and how horrible would it be to be in the middle of this amazing moment and have cops walk in?

Elio Colavito (01:15:09):

Do you remember how you came to find out exactly what happened in the club after you had left?

Hanlon McGregor (01:15:18):

I think I got an email, and it was a call to action to come down to The 519 for a fundraiser for the legal defense of the organizers. But I also think that maybe... Did I find out from someone else? Oh, fuck. Yeah, I can't remember if my friend and I talked about it afterwards or if they let me know, but I definitely remember the email and the: "Come down to The 519." And I remember that I went to The 519 thinking that I was going to see the participants of Pussy Palace, and what I saw was the entire fucking queer community, is what it felt like, crammed into the big space at 519. And it was literally like standing-room only, squished in and, yeah.

Hanlon McGregor (01:16:27):

And it wasn't convenient for me to go. I can't remember what was happening, but I was like, "I can't not go. I have to go." And I had no money. I was really broke, all the time. And I'm giggling because not a lot has changed. A little. It's a bit better but still kind of just trying to scrape by. But I didn't have a lot of money, and I remember going... Sorry, am I skipping ahead? Is there another question about this?

Elio Colavito (01:17:01):

You can continue on your thought and we can bounce back. It doesn't matter. Just follow your train of thought.

Hanlon McGregor (01:17:06):

Yeah. Well, I remember going and this was when I became a lifelong fan of Olivia Chow because a few people spoke about what happened and talked about the charges and everything, and then Olivia Chow got up and she said, "Okay, I want you to close your eyes. And I want you to imagine that your name is the name. That you organized everything, and that you took out the liquor license. That you did all this work to make this event happen, and you took out the liquor license, and it's your name that's signed on the form. And now I want you to take out your wallets. And I want you to give as much as you can for the defense fund." I'm paraphrasing, but the way she spoke was so inspiring. And she raised thousands of dollars in a matter of 10 minutes. She was like, "I'm going to start at \$2,000. Who will give me \$2,000?"

Hanlon McGregor (01:18:19):

And hands went up around the room. There were men, there were women, there was all kinds of people. And I was aghast because, to me, \$2,000 was a awful lot of money back then. And people were just handing it over. Okay. And she went down and down and down, and I think she was down at like \$200, and she was going, "Come on, guys. Just skip dinner. Just skip dinners out this month." And I could hear people muttering, "How much money do you spend on dinner?"

Hanlon McGregor (01:18:52):

But I used that. I thought, okay, well, I spend about 20 bucks when I eat out. I can probably do \$40. And when they came around to me, I gave \$50. And I couldn't really afford it, but what are you going to do? You have to do something. And I was inspired by the people who were giving more, and so I thought it was genius. Just genius. I think everybody wanted to give, and she sort of opened up anyone who was feeling like, "Oh," any wavering, I think, at least speaking for myself. It was like, "All right, give till it hurts." Because there are people who are scared right now and they need us.

Hanlon McGregor (01:19:41):

And it was interesting, because I think that that was the biggest moment of queer community for me to date, at that time. I've had other big moments since, but that was a big one. And it was like instantly the whole community galvanized against this thing. And I also remember reading reports that... This is another thing. I can't remember if I was reading this online. Where did I read this? I remember reading an article that talked about, or I was reading reports. One set of reports said that the police acted on their own, and then there was a conflicting report that they were ordered in. And so, it was like the police that went in said they were ordered in, and the people who were their bosses said that they acted on their own. And people were criticizing, like, "Why did you send male officers into what was obviously a female event?" And there was no good answer for that either. And I just remember being like... All of us were outraged that this had happened. Yeah.

Elio Colavito (01:21:14):

Right. We could stick with the kind of aftermath of the event and we can kind of bounce around. So, what we've been told from another interview, is that some of these galvanized queers at this 519 meeting decided to march down to the cop shop and have a little protest. Were you a part of that or did you leave at some point before that happened?

Hanlon McGregor (01:21:37):

I think I left. I don't remember what time it was, but I think I had to leave. I think I gave my money and left. Yeah. I don't remember marching.

Elio Colavito (01:21:48):

Okay. And do you know anyone who was present when the police raided the club that you'd spoken to after?

Hanlon McGregor (01:21:55):

I think I did, but I can't remember now. That's just gone.

Elio Colavito (01:22:00):

Right. Understandably. And what do you know about the legal proceedings that unfolded, following the raid?

Hanlon McGregor (01:22:06):

I don't really know anything. I'm just realizing that right now. Maybe I am just forgetting, but I think that I was waiting to hear what happened. Yeah, I must've known at the time because I remember being stressed about it. But I can't remember if they got off with a fine? I think there was a fine to do with the liquor license. That's all. Is that right?

Alisha Stranges (01:22:35):

Well, there's a lot of different kinds of legal actions that were taken, right? There was the legal action that the police took against some of the volunteer organizers, and then there was a human rights complaint filed by the defense... What do they call it? The defense fund? No. The organizers who were in defense of themselves. And there was a settlement, but it was on the side of the folks who had filed the human rights complaint, not the police. In the end, the charges were dismissed against the volunteer organizers.

Hanlon McGregor (01:23:16):

Good. I think that I had relaxed about it because I heard either they were dismissed or there was some nominal fine, but I'm glad that there was nothing, that they were not fined, and that there was a settlement.

Alisha Stranges (01:23:31):

Yes. A rather tidy sum as well.

Hanlon McGregor (01:23:35):

Oh, good.

Elio Colavito (01:23:37):

Is it safe to assume that besides that isolated incident at The 519, that you weren't really a part of any of the community activism around the issue, or did you remain present in some of those actions and spaces?

Hanlon McGregor (01:23:52):

I don't remember. I remember that if there were petitions and stuff like that, I probably signed, but I wasn't an organizer, for sure. And yeah, I have a horrible memory, so I'm actually not a great person to talk to about this. I'm telling you that at the end. But yeah, I remember that aside from donating and sort of keeping abreast of it as best I could, I don't know if there were any other things that I took part in. I'm a letter-writer and a petition-signer, so I might've done some of that, but I don't remember. I don't know. Yeah, I don't think so.

Elio Colavito (01:24:40):

It was later revealed that before the plainclothes officers actually entered the club, that there were two women police officers attending the event undercover. Did you ever become aware of that?

Hanlon McGregor (01:24:52):

Of them being there?

Elio Colavito (01:24:54):

Yeah.

Hanlon McGregor (01:24:57):

On the night or afterwards?

Elio Colavito (01:24:59):

On the night.

Hanlon McGregor (01:25:00):

No.

Alisha Stranges (01:25:01):

Before 12:45 a.m., when the five plainclothes officers entered, there had been two undercover women police officers.

Hanlon McGregor (01:25:09):

No, I had no idea.

Elio Colavito (01:25:11):

All right. And what can you recall about the relationship between Toronto's queer community and law enforcement back in 2000?

Hanlon McGregor (01:25:23):

I mean, as I've already said, I kind of thought everything was okay until this happened, and then it was eye-opening for me. But even then, I kind of looked at it as an isolated incident because, even at the time, I didn't really know much about the bathhouse raids previously, in the 80s. And I kind of just thought of it as a bunch of dick cops being assholes because the Toronto cops are horrible. Sorry. When I moved here, and I started witnessing Toronto police doing things, I was like, "What the hell?" They are on such a power trip. I could not get over it. And so, I guess when it happened, I sort of thought, well, the Toronto police just absolutely suck, and this is just another aspect of that.

Hanlon McGregor (01:26:24):

So, yeah, not really. I don't think that I really understood the animosity at the time. And I certainly didn't know about some of the stuff that I now know was going on, things like people being taken down to Cherry Beach and beaten, or they'd say, "We'll take you for a drive." That kind of stuff I'm learning about now, but I didn't know it at the time.

Hanlon McGregor (01:26:53):

And I think that's part of my privilege as being a cis-het-passing person, at the time. I was in the community when I was in it, and I was off in my life in little Italy and at my workplace when I wasn't. And I had a fairly supportive workplace. So, I had some buffer between me and that. So, no, I don't think I really realized. Other than that incident, I don't think I really realized what that animosity was. So, I couldn't say that I have a sense of the general tone. I know that everyone was swift to appear. So, I think that I got the message that everyone was standing behind people, but I didn't know if that was just this incident, if that makes sense. Yeah. That was a lot of words.

Alisha Stranges (01:28:00):

No, we appreciate it. I mean, it's 20 years ago, and we're looking for people to take us back to that time to the best of their ability. So, thank you. I just have one final question. It's about the name of the event, the series, the Pussy Palace. Did it feel fitting at the time?

Hanlon McGregor (01:28:21):

Yeah, I think so. It felt a bit provocative, but I also thought it was pretty fitting. I think that now I would question it because, if there were trans women present, then they may not have felt welcomed by that moniker. And of course, it's 20 years later, and I have a different viewpoint and, yeah. But at the time, it felt good. It felt like, yeah, this is our space for the night. And I remember feeling like there should be something

like that all the time. And to be honest, Oasis [Aqualounge] comes close, but I still don't think that there's something like that all the time in Toronto. And I don't know why because we have all the sort of more male bathhouses, but we don't really have a more femme-specific sex... What would you call it? An erotic exploration and celebration place?

Alisha Stranges (01:29:42):

Sounds good, yeah. Look, before we sort of close up, is there anything else that you wanted to share about your experiences that our questions maybe just didn't provide the space for you to speak to?

Hanlon McGregor (01:30:02):

Yeah. I mean, I think that the thing that was so profound about the Pussy Palace being raided, at that time, for me, was on the one hand, I had my brother... It took me a long time to come out as bi, and I was raised in a very Catholic household and told homosexuality was wrong. It's right in the Bible. And so, it took me a really, really long time to come out to myself. And I came out to my mom and my brother and sister, and my brother actually ran beside me for the whole Pride parade one year when BiWoT marched. I think we were the... Were we the...? I can't remember if we were the featured group or whatever. Maybe. Anyway, so I was marching and my brother ran the whole route beside me, and I remember my brother saying to me afterwards, "I don't understand why this is such a big deal."

Hanlon McGregor (01:31:14):

And I don't know if he still feels like that, but he was like, "I don't understand why this is such a big deal. I don't understand why you feel the need to be so hyped up about this." Like a lot of people, he supported it, but he didn't get it. And so, when Pussy Palace was raided, I think it felt like... That we were still very vulnerable, and we were still very much being told that what we wanted — our desires, our identities, our sexual liberation — was not okay. And in some ways, I think that that... Not that it was successful, or that it knocked me back, but it definitely affected me. And I would guess that it affected other people in the sense of feeling like... It's just another form of bullying and a profound one because you're just being told, "Oh, yeah? You think you can create this beautiful, wonderful thing? Nah."

Hanlon McGregor (01:32:35):

Because I had been, up to that point, creating spaces, and I was very inspired by Pussy Palace, I wonder if I would have done more organizing if that hadn't happened. But it really made me nervous, and I remember, I think a group of people that I knew at the time tried to organize sort of smaller parties, and I never ended up going. And I don't know if it was because I was nervous or what, but there was just definitely an aspect of the police picking on something that they feel that they can pick on. And I think we're still trying to take up that space. And I say we as a trans man, and I don't even have to be a part of that per se, but I just think that... The fact that it still doesn't exist bothers me.

Hanlon McGregor (01:33:40):

And Oasis [Aqualounge] is more of a het space, I think, through most of the time. I've gone on the queer nights and that's amazing, for the Bathhouse & Bodyworks, and I think that that is great, and it's a very empowering space. So, I think that that's a step in the right direction, but it's taken a long time to have Oasis [Aqualounge] be around.

Hanlon McGregor (01:34:06):

And I sometimes honestly worry that Oasis [Aqualounge] is going to get raided or something. I'm sure they're following all the guidelines, but one night I was there, and I saw people with drinks out on the patio, and I thought, "Uh-oh. I hope they have a liquor license for the pool area now. Don't want a repeat of Pussy Palace." So, it's still in there, that like, "Uh-oh. That's a way they could get us." And yeah, all of that. I just hope that we continue to be on the side of expanding women's sexual liberation, people's sexual liberation, and being able to create safe spaces that are truly safe because I think that, what they did was, they came into the Pussy Palace like a conquering army, and I think that's really sad. So, yeah.

Alisha Stranges (01:35:12):

Thank you, Hanlon. Thank you for being so generous with your time and your ability to fall back and reflect and take us through the visceral experience and the factual details and the nuances of politics. We're so appreciative. Thank you.

Hanlon McGregor (01:35:30):

I hope it made some sense because I felt like I rambled a lot.

Alisha Stranges (01:35:37):

No. It was perfect, yeah. I'm going to stop our recording right now. You can stop yours as well.

Hanlon McGregor (01:35:44):

Just have to turn my phone back. Okay.