

Pussy Palace Oral History Project
Oral History Interview with Lyla Miklos
Conducted on June 1, 2021 via Zoom
Interviewed by Alisha Stranges on behalf of the
LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory (Elspeth Brown, Director)
Transcribed by Rev.com and Elio Colavito

Summary: Lyla Miklos is a 46-year-old white, queer, cisgender woman of Hungarian and Irish-Canadian descent. At the time of the interview, Miklos was in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, working in multiple contexts. Specifically, she is an Administrative Assistant for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Owner of Lyla the Publicist, Lay Chaplain with The First Unitarian Church of Hamilton, and Host and Producer of Centre Stage on 101.5 FM The Hawk; she is also a community activist, writer, theatre performer and vocalist. The interview concerns Miklos' experiences as a patron of the Pussy Palace on September 14, 2000, the night the bathhouse event was raided by Toronto police. Miklos discusses her involvement with Bisexual Women of Toronto, the activities she participated in at the Pussy Palace, her recollection of the police raid, her experience communing with fellow patrons over breakfast the morning after the raid, and other topics. She also shares her observations of trans-inclusive politics in the early 2000s, both at the Palace and in her queer communities more broadly. In the interview, Toronto and Hamilton, Ontario are mentioned as well as Montreal, Quebec and Michigan, USA. The date range discussed spans from the late 1990s to 2021, with the focus on 2000.

Keywords: LGBTQ; Queer; Bisexual; Bisexual Women of Toronto; Police; Temple Priestess; Activism; Trans; Trans-inclusive Politics.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:00):

All right. So, this is Alisha Stranges from the Palace Oral History Project. And I'm here in Toronto, Ontario interviewing Lyla Miklos on June 1st, 2021. Lyla is in Hamilton, Ontario, and is going to tell us a bit about the experience of being a patron of the Pussy Palace bathhouse event on the night of September 14, 2000. So, Lyla, do we have your permission to record this oral history interview?

Lyla Miklos (00:00:28):

Yes, you do.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:29):

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

Lyla Miklos (00:01:00):

My full name is Lyla Miklos. You can call me Lyla, and how old am I now? My birthday is October 15, 1974. I think I'm turning 47 this year. It's all a blur. COVID. Time has no meaning. So, and then what was the other thing? Oh, she/her are my pronouns.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:21):

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

Lyla Miklos (00:01:28):

I would describe my gender as female. I would describe my sexuality as queer.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:37):

And what does queer mean for you? So many people use it in such different ways.

Lyla Miklos (00:01:42):

Well, back in my days of hanging out with Bisexual Women of Toronto and Toronto Bisexual Network, which is what sort of led me to being at the Pussy Palace, I would probably call myself bisexual, but over the years I've found that that term is a little incomplete because then people just imagine me having threesomes and where I feel that my sexual identity is very much connected to my political identity. And queer is more of an umbrella term that's sort of... It's less about what I'm doing in bed and a little bit more about my identity beyond just the sex part.

Alisha Stranges (00:02:16):

Yeah. And how might this description, how might it have been different 20 years ago around the time when the Pussy Palace event was taking place?

Lyla Miklos (00:02:26):

Well, 20 years ago, I wouldn't have used queer to identify myself because 20 years ago, it was still not as socially acceptable as it is now. Because even back then, when I was doing activism, I think we were still saying GLBT was our acronym at the time. So, it's evolved over the years, more in Canada I find than in the States, although in the States, it's picking up some steam that queer is a good umbrella term that sort of encompasses a lot of different identities and says more about community than sort of your specific identity.

Alisha Stranges (00:03:02):

And what about racial, ethnic, cultural identity? How do you express yourself through those types of categories?

Lyla Miklos (00:03:09):

White, Caucasian, Hungarian background. So, my father, refugee from Hungary with his parents and my mom is Irish-Newfoundlander-Hungarian, not Hungarian, Canadian, so, yep.

Alisha Stranges (00:03:25):

And what can you tell me about your educational and class background?

Lyla Miklos (00:03:33):

Just as high school finished, my parents' finances took a bit of a nose dive, so I wasn't able to go to university. So, I went to community college. So, I have a college diploma from Mohawk College in Radio Broadcasting and Broadcast Journalism, and worked in broadcasting, broadcast television, for well over a decade. But for the past decade I've been working in education.

Alisha Stranges (00:03:56):

And so, then what specifically kind of occupies your time these days? I know you do quite a lot of things outside your main profession. So, could you tell us a little bit about that?

Lyla Miklos (00:04:08):

The Monday to Friday, nine-to-five job, I work for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board currently as the administrative assistant to the managers, and, what is it, managers and principals of specialized services, specifically right now for the Autism Department and the Behaviour Department. So, I've been in that particular role about five years, but office clerical for the school board for the past while. That's the one that pays the bills. But I also am the chief negotiator for my union. I'm the owner of Lyla the Publicist, which is a PR business. I am a lay chaplain for the first Unitarian church of Hamilton, where I officiate weddings, funerals, child dedications and more. I have a radio show with Mohawk College called Centre Stage where I talk about theatre and interview theatre people and play Broadway musicals. I'm a writer, I'm a performer, I'm a vocalist. I'm sure there's something I'm forgetting. I don't dust my house much. So, I'm sure there's some other thing I do that I'm forgetting, but that's most of it.

Alisha Stranges (00:05:15):

I see. And has it always been that way for you that you like to have your sort of interests diversified and lots to do in the week?

Lyla Miklos (00:05:26):

Has it always been that way for me? Yes. Has it necessarily been the way I want things? Not necessarily, but that's been my life for the past while.

Alisha Stranges (00:05:37):

Can you say more about that? Like it is the way, but not necessarily the way you want it to be?

Lyla Miklos (00:05:45):

Well, I only laugh because I just did a similar-ish interview for a group doing something called the Queer Justice Project. And they've been, and every time I seem to get thrown into activism in the city of Hamilton, when it comes to queer community stuff, it's like, I wasn't planning on being the chair of that, but, I wasn't going to be on that committee, but, I wasn't going to be the one that spoke to the mayor, but. So, it just happens a lot.

Alisha Stranges (00:06:13):

Well, why is this kind of work important to you that you find a way to say yes?

Lyla Miklos (00:06:22):

Sometimes because if I don't do it, it won't get done. And I'm in a position where I can take some of those, sort of, risks to be out in the public about my identity without, I can't say any risks, but with less risk than some about losing your job, your home, your family, so on. So, since I'm in a position to be able to do that, I will do it. Although I often encourage people, "Please stop asking me. Please go ask somebody new." But I've had that conversation where the once too. "Yes. Please stop calling me; call somebody else."

Alisha Stranges (00:07:00):

What were you up to sort of professionally back in to the 2000, late 90s? Do you remember?

Lyla Miklos (00:07:07):

So, when the Pussy Palace was happening, I was working for CHUM Television in television programming. I started off as the assistant to the, what was it called? I can't remember if she was the director or manager of Bravo! and SPACE programming. And then I eventually became, I can't remember if I was still her assistant or the time, or if I was the person programming SPACE. I became... They called me a programming coordinator, programming supervisor. It shifted a couple of times because they gave me one job title, and then the union complained I was doing some job that wasn't unionized, and then they had to change my name, but it's all good. So, I was working in programming, and I worked for Bravo!, SPACE and Drive-in Classics at the time.

Alisha Stranges (00:07:57):

And what role, if any, does religion or spirituality play in your life currently?

Lyla Miklos (00:08:04):

Well, I was raised... Baptized Catholic, raised as a Jehovah's Witness. Eventually went, "Gee, I think I'm a feminist and queer and politically active, so being a Jehovah's Witness is not going to work for me." So, left that. Just was like, "Ooh, ooh. Organized religion. I'm getting an itch. Gross." And then Star Trek humanist for a long time. And then I had queer, feminist Wiccan friends who introduced me to Wicca. And then about 20 years ago, friends of mine within the queer community said, "There's this really queer friendly church. You got to check it out." And I was like, "Okay, church, I guess." And then I went and I was like, "Oh, I really dig this place. This is, like, my kind of people." And so, I've been there for 20 years now.

Alisha Stranges (00:08:56):

Right. And you said you're a lay chaplain as well.

Lyla Miklos (00:08:59):

Yeah. I've been doing that. We're getting into, what am I in year six going into seven. We had to extend my term. It should have ended because COVID, and people's weddings being delayed and we need to get a new lay chaplain in place. So, I think I'm in year seven of being a lay chaplain.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:18):

And is there anything else that you think it would be important for me to know about how you understand the different identities that you hold today as compared to 20 years ago?

Lyla Miklos (00:09:32):

Well, 20 years ago, I wasn't hanging out with Unitarians like I am now. So, I was aware of them, had friends that were associated with them, but wasn't proactively involved. Again, since I just sort of had allergic reactions to being involved in any kind of organized religion. But because of my leadership roles in Hamilton, I have connections with other spiritual communities that are like-minded and being queer friendly. I just did an event with Beth Jacob Synagogue, where we talked about the trolley problem and watched a little clip from *The Good Place* and then had a philosophical, theoretical discussion with a doctor, a lawyer, a philosopher, the

rabbi, myself about the trolley problem and had people talk. So, make interconnections through my spiritual identity and my queer identity with other faith communities and doing sort of inter-faith or fun stuff.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:31):

Thank you. Well, I'm going to invite you now to travel back in time to the fall of 2000. The Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee, as you know, was preparing to host the night of 2000 Pussy, so the fourth instalment of the Pussy Palace. How did you first learn about that particular event?

Lyla Miklos (00:10:50):

Well, I kind of knew about it because previous ones had been mentioned in *Xtra*, and I would read *Xtra*. And also, what else was there? There was something called... Was it *Horizons*? There was a lesbian magazine and *Fab*. So, print media from queer community. So, I was aware of it. And then because of being involved in Bisexual Women of Toronto, there were quite a few members of the group that were polyamorous, went to sex parties, sometimes in the check-in and stuff would share stories about, "Oh, I went to this thing." So, I'd heard stories from them. And sometimes as a group they would organize, like, we're going to have a field trip to go do this, or go do that, or have a party or, whatever. Roller skating, or we're going to go swimming or to the nude beach, whatever it was. And so, one of the field trips that the group organized was we as Bisexual Women of Toronto are going to go together to go to the Pussy Palace. And I was like, "Okay, well this feels less, a little less scary or a little less intimidating if I've got pals going with me." So, that was what led to me being at the doors of Club Toronto.

Alisha Stranges (00:12:00):

And what would have been some of the reasons that you were hesitating or what was scary about it? About the event?

Lyla Miklos (00:12:08):

Well, at that point, I had never had sex with a woman, and I certainly had never been to a sex party or anything of that nature, nothing that adventurous. But since I had made pals with all these folks and some of them had done this and some of them hadn't, and we're like, "Okay, well we're all in this together. So, if we're feeling weird or awkward or whatever, we can check in with each other, and if nothing else, we can hang in the hot tub or hang in the pool and it's all good." So, it was kind of like we had a buddy system like, "Hey, this is a new experience for a bunch of us. And it's not a new experience for some of us, but we've got a group of us that we can look out for each other."

Alisha Stranges (00:12:49):

I see. Yeah. And so, I'm curious about the space and time during which you went from being someone who's decided to go to this event and someone who becomes an official patron of the event. So, I'm going to ask a couple of questions here and that may seem insignificant, but we're curious. So, where were you before you would have made your way to Club Toronto?

Lyla Miklos (00:13:13):

Like, physically or mentally, spiritually? What are we asking?

Alisha Stranges (00:13:17):

Let's start with physically.

Lyla Miklos (00:13:19):

Like, that day, that month, that week?

Alisha Stranges (00:13:23):

That day or earlier that day, like what were you doing?

Lyla Miklos (00:13:26):

Well, because I live in Hamilton, I made sure to pack myself an overnight bag, and I brought it with me to work, and I sort of hid it under my desk at CHUM. And I didn't tell... I wasn't announcing to everybody at work, "Hey guys, guess where I'm going." So, I just sort of kept my little overnight bag by my work station. And then I probably would have grabbed, I probably would've grabbed the subway from... Because I was at the CHUM building that used to be... Well, it's still there at Queen [Street] and... Well, close to the Queen subway station. So, I would have just gotten on the subway, did the turnaround at Union and got off at Wellesley and then just sort of walked.

Alisha Stranges (00:14:12):

Yeah. Do you know about what time you were planning to arrive at?

Lyla Miklos (00:14:18):

Whenever it opened. I can't remember what time that was. I remember waiting in line outside with a whole bunch of other people. Because I remember, as we were waiting in line, they handed us these flyers, letting us know, "Heads up. These things are illegal." And there was stuff about, I think alcohol and drugs and underage. And because I remember one of the friends of mine from BiWoT was kicking themselves because they forgot their ID and had left it at home. And I don't think they came back because they were like, "Shit, I didn't bring my ID." And I went, "Are they really going to ask all of us for our ID? Because I'm pretty sure no one's going to think I'm 19, but okay." And then, so the one that always stuck out in my head was there was a comment that if two people are in a room having sex, a third person in the room watching you is illegal, which I found fascinating. I'm like, "Really, this is a law on the books?" Doesn't that mean that threesomes are illegal if that's the law? It's like, "Wow, how antiquated are we?"

Lyla Miklos (00:15:22):

So, it was interesting because when I read articles and things about what a hedonistic sex-fest this place was, I think because of that, it did kind of tone things down because I'd heard in the past, people were like fucking on the stairs and everything. And you'd just see sex, sex, sex everywhere, where I think there was a little bit of a little bit of restraint because of this messaging we got. And I did find out after the fact that part of the reason they gave us all that is they got a heads up that we probably were going to get a raid. There was going to be a raid, which was why they handed that out to all of us. So, it was a good thing I was standing in line waiting forever because I did read the whole thing. So, when we did eventually get raided, because I read it, there were certain things that I was like, "Oh, I read my pamphlet in line. I don't have to open this door for this cop banging my door. I'm just going to ignore him."

Alisha Stranges (00:16:13):

Can you recall how long you were planning on staying?

Lyla Miklos (00:16:18):

Oh, because I live in Hamilton and I don't drive, I was just going to stay there until the next morning when they kick us out. And then I was going to meet a bunch of people. There's a breakfast place just across from Maple Leaf Gardens. Oh, what is it called? Something Pancake House or something. There was a bunch of us that were going to meet there after, when we all got kicked out. So, that was the plan. I think I got kicked out, I don't know, five in the morning or something like that. And then I went back, we had our pancakes, and then I went back to work and, not in my offices where SPACE is, but in the offices where Star! was, there was a couch, and I went to go lie down on it and go have some sleep. And I remember I scared the shit out of somebody who came into work early because they're like, "Whoa." And I'm like, "Sorry, man. I got in early. I'm just lying down."

Alisha Stranges (00:17:12):

So, you stayed up all night, basically?

Lyla Miklos (00:17:15):

Well, no, I got a "room" and slept in my room overnight. I can't say it was the best sleep in the world, but that was the plan.

Alisha Stranges (00:17:25):

Okay. Okay. So, when you were talking about meeting up with friends and sort of doing the whole experience with friends, about how many folks were you with?

Lyla Miklos (00:17:38):

Hmm. I think there was about a dozen of us from BiWoT who all went, if I remember roughly.

Alisha Stranges (00:17:45):

And I just want to clarify the acronym BiWoT. Is it B-i-W-a-T or W-o-T?

Lyla Miklos (00:17:52):

B-i-W-o-T, Bisexual Women of Toronto.

Alisha Stranges (00:17:56):

Right. And prior to being let in, you're reading your pamphlet, do you remember how you were feeling about what might happen once you got inside?

Lyla Miklos (00:18:11):

I was just, like, I brought a change of clothes. I brought some dildos. I brought condoms. I was just sort of going through my checklist. I wasn't really nervous, just sort of like, "Okay, how much longer do I have to wait in line?" Because I really... Oh, I know what I was a little nervous about was I needed to get there sooner rather than later because they warned you that it was first come first served to get a room. And I knew I wanted a room because I knew I wanted crash there for the night, since I wasn't going to be going back to Hamilton and all that. So, I was a little anxious to make sure that I got in in enough time to get a room because if he didn't get a room, then you just got a locker, and it all worked out. I got a room. I remember the anxiety.

Alisha Stranges (00:18:54):

Yeah, I know. I can totally imagine. Do you remember the look you were going for that evening? What do you recall about what you might have worn?

Lyla Miklos 00:19:03):

My first time I went, I just wore comfy. I remember I had this like cute little cotton dress thing I wore. At later iterations of going, I got a little more into it, but the first time it was just, it was hot. It was summertime. I wanted some breathable fabric and that's more where my thoughts were. Oh, and I remembered to pack a bathing suit to go swimming, stuff like that. But yeah, I got a little more into like sexy lingerie and stuff in later years. But the first time I went, it was just about being comfortable.

Alisha Stranges (00:19:32):

I see. So, you get let inside the club, finally. How would you describe the space itself?

Lyla Miklos (00:19:44):

Lots of stairs, lots of stairs everywhere. And it was kind of, it was funny because it was like this old, Victorian house with all these different areas. So, I remember coming in the front door and somebody gave you a towel. I think you got a key. And I think there was like wristbands. I think, I think, I think, I think. And then there was different areas. You could sign up to get a tour. I know I signed up for the tour thing because I remember one of the things on the tour was being shown the labyrinth with the glory holes and all us girls having a good little giggle over that. And the girls were not going too much in the labyrinth of glory hole room. And then there was a sauna, the steam room, the hot tub, the swimming pool. There was a room to get photos. There was a room to see the priestess or the goddess, I can't remember what her title was, where you could have a private one-on-one session. There was a dance area. So yeah, there was all sorts of... There was a sling room too. So yeah, lots of different things going on. And I do remember getting a tour because I was a newbie. They encouraged the newbies to go for the tour.

Alisha Stranges (00:21:02):

Right. And what was the atmosphere like inside the club?

Lyla Miklos (00:21:07):

It was fun. I think one of the things I really noticed was I was like, "Oh, there's like all different ages of women." There were Black, white, brown, all of it. I was seeing all sorts of different races. I was seeing trans women, cis women. So, that was just kind of a nice to be in a space where it was feminist, sexually friendly, diverse group. That was nice to see. So, I remember it was a good cornucopia of our community, so that was nice. Also, I wasn't the only Hamiltonian there, so I was running into a few people because whenever there's a women's event, because we don't have enough of them, you get women from everywhere coming. So, I was like, "Oh yay. I'm so thrilled to see you person who I live with in town at this sex event." But, it's all good.

Alisha Stranges (00:22:07):

Well, which parts of the... After you got your tour, and now you're kind of free to do what you're curious about, which parts of the space did you gravitate towards?

Lyla Miklos (00:22:22):

Well, because I was kind of game to just try everything. So, I know I went to go see the High Priestess and we had sex. Well this is funny. So, I was... I had an on again off again relationship with a guy at the time who I said, "Hey, I'm going to this thing. So, give me some tips on oral sex, since this is probably going to happen." And he did tell me. I said, "So what do you do when you're having oral sex?" He told me, "Well, I spell the alphabet with my tongue," which I later shared as a joke with lots of people in an event where I said, "Does this mean every time he went down on me, he was going A, B, C, D, E?"

Lyla Miklos (00:23:03):

So, I did that with the priestess lady. She seemed to really enthused. I'll go with, she really was and she wasn't just putting it on to make the new girl feel good. So anyhow, and then there was another room where I can't remember what they called it, but they would blindfold you and you could either... Okay, so you could either be blindfolded and have stuff done to you or you could sit and watch. And I said, "Okay, I'll try the blindfold." So, I was blindfolded, put on a chair, and then one person after another was having sex with their fingers with me. And I could hear like the slap of the plastic gloves or rubber gloves as they went.

Lyla Miklos (00:23:44):

And it's a good thing I finished that activity before the cops showed up because that would have been one of those illegal things. So... And I do remember one thing that was, that pissed me off was there was a trans woman waiting in line with us, and they were told that they couldn't participate. And I was like, what the fuck? And then when I did it, I got kind of why, but the way it was handled 20 years ago lacked some finesse and delicacy. And I think now would not have, the language would not have been used that way, because that that particular woman joined us for our breakfast the next day. And we were sharing stories and I said, "Hey, I'm really sorry that you didn't get to do that, and the way that person talked to you because that wasn't cool."

Lyla Miklos (00:24:28):

What else? Went in the hot tub, went in the pool, went in the sauna. Oh, and there was, you could put a number on your chest and then people would write like love note things. And there was an area, a board where, and you'd look throughout the night, did someone send me a note? And there was a photo room, and I got to get sexy photos of myself on a Polaroid. I think that's most... Dancing. That's most of what went down when I was there. Before the cops showed up, before the cops showed up.

Alisha Stranges (00:25:03):

Yeah, I'd love to stay on this moment, a couple of these moments before the cops showed up. So, just to go back to your interaction with, your session with the temple priestess. What intrigued you about that experience? Before it happened, why were you curious about it?

Lyla Miklos (00:25:26):

Well, me going up to random strangers saying, "Hey, I'm a newbie and haven't done this before. I want to go do..." It felt like, ah! But here was somebody who was allowing themselves to try out whatever. And I just said, "Oh, here's the reality. I'm a virgin to all this and dah-dah-dah." And I just was upfront about it. And she said, "Well, let's try it." And I was like, okay. So, that was very nice of her. And then, more embarrassing was when I saw her at one of the, it was one of the protest/rally thing-dings we went to where I was sitting with a bunch of friends, and she was like sitting right across from me and I said, "Hey." And it was like, "That wasn't awkward at all." But you know, it's all good.

Alisha Stranges (00:26:17):

Well, we haven't actually heard too much about experiences with the Temple Priestess so I'm curious, what is that interaction like? Did she sort of talk with you before? Or, how do you decide what will happen when you're sharing space together?

Lyla Miklos (00:26:36):

There was a little bit of talking at the beginning and then it just kind of went to sex. So, I didn't have tons of chatting with her, a little bit at the beginning, but you know—

Alisha Stranges (00:26:49):

And is the idea that, sorry?

Lyla Miklos (00:26:51):

Sorry.

Alisha Stranges (00:26:51):

I was just wondering, is the idea that she, I don't, I guess I'm curious more about what her function was. Like, what kind of service she was providing?

Lyla Miklos (00:27:02):

I don't know. I just got up and said, "Well, I signed up for your thing. So, what's the story here?" And I think one of my friends who was there knew her through the kink community and said, "Oh, you really should sign up for that. She's really good dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. Especially, since you're new." And I was like, "Okay." And so, I had no idea really what the hell to expect. Are we going to do a tarot reading together? I had no idea. Are we going to do it naked? I don't know. And I was just like... I do remember it went to the sex pretty quickly. So yeah, anyhow. It felt safe. I wasn't feeling like I had to worry, kind of thing.

Alisha Stranges (00:27:54):

Yeah. You said that you had some photos taken in the photo room. I am very curious about this interaction. We've had an opportunity to chat with the person who took the photos, and what was your experience like or what can you recall about that process of deciding what you would do in front of the camera?

Lyla Miklos (00:28:20):

I wish I could remember more about the process. I think there was props and things in the room because I do remember, because I still have the pictures, and I do have like some diaphanous cloth thing in front of me. So, I think there was stuff you could put in the picture with you and you could kind of choose your pose and stuff. And since it was a picture, essentially for me, I was like, "Well, this picture for me." Although I do remember, what was that? What was the word? Oh, when we were having our brunch, I did show the picture to that same trans woman who got dissed about not being in the room with us. And they said, "You look very Rubenesque." And I said, "Hey."

Lyla Miklos (00:29:09):

And they said, "No, that's nice." You're just saying fat nicely, but anyhow, but I never had anyone take a nude picture for me. Again, this was just about Lyla beyond sensory overload. I'm like, "I'm going to go do

this thing and I'm going to go do everything at the thing." I think the only thing I didn't do was the sling room stuff because I'm not into that. Never have been. I appreciate my friends who do it, but it's just not my bag. And so, I think that was the only thing I didn't do.

Alisha Stranges (00:29:45):

I see. Can you say a little bit more about your experience? I mean, I don't know how much you want to say about seeing this interaction go down in the room where you could be blindfolded or receive pleasure.

Lyla Miklos (00:30:00):

Well, see, I didn't see it because I was blindfolded. So, I was having it done to me, but one of my friends was one of the people watching, and they did tease me about it when we went all for like a group movie date thing later. I said, "Hey, shut up."

Alisha Stranges (00:30:17):

What did they tease you about?

Lyla Miklos (00:30:19):

Apparently, I guess I was exciting to watch. Anyhow, they're just like teasing me about my reactions to being touched and fondled in the dark by strangers. And they got off on it and were excited and I said, "Well, okay, shut up."

Alisha Stranges (00:30:38):

Well, I mean what I'm hearing here is, like you said that you were afraid to go and then, "Oh, I'll go with my friends and so a lot will be better." But then when you went there, you literally did almost everything that you could possibly do. So, I'm just curious how you got to that place of just being so adventurous when previously it was like, you might not have even gone if you didn't have others to go with.

Lyla Miklos (00:31:05):

I don't know. The spirit moved me. Yeah, I tend to be rather goal driven. So, the goal was: go to this place. I think my goal was have sex with a woman. I think that was my goal-oriented thing going into it, "All right. We're going to this thing where people have sex, go have sex." And so, I was like, "And I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do that." And so, I just decided to try everything that was there to try.

Alisha Stranges (00:31:32):

I see, I see. So, I really want to get a sense of the impression that the space made on your senses. So, I'm going to invite you into a little bit of an exercise. Now, I'm going to do it with you. It's just something to kind of get us to enter a bit more of a contemplative space and sort of think and re-inhabit the space to try to access those sense memories if they're still lingering. So just go with me to the best of your ability. So, if you can sort of get comfy as you can in your chair with your throbbing ankle and soften your gaze or even—

Lyla Miklos (00:32:12):

Now that I have slippers on.

Alisha Stranges (00:32:13):

Okay. Soften your gaze or even close your eyes, if you want, and just take a couple of breaths in and out. Just allowing some of the muscles in your face to relax, really feeling your body sink into the weight of your seat and with each inhale, sort of allowing yourself to re-inhabit the space of the Palace, some or other space. Don't worry too much about which space is flooding to mind, whichever space comes first is the one to focus on. And from this contemplative space, looking around, tell me, describe for me what it is that you're seeing.

Lyla Miklos (00:33:20):

Well, in one section, lots of dark dank rooms and bad lighting and plywood called doors. But yeah, it's a little fancier in there nowadays, but then it was a little too Victorian-era, but yeah. Dark and danky.

Alisha Stranges (00:33:41):

And if you could distil this area into a single colour, what's its predominant colour?

Lyla Miklos (00:33:48):

Dark grey.

Alisha Stranges (00:33:52):

And are there any sort of lingering scents in the air. Smells? Odours?

Lyla Miklos (00:33:58):

Poppers? A lot of us said, "What's that smell." And then people told us what that was and we're like, "Oh."

Alisha Stranges (00:34:12):

And can you hear anything? What's sort of the sounds, the noise of the environment?

Lyla Miklos (00:34:19):

I can hear music; I can hear people having sex. I can hear people chatting.

Alisha Stranges (00:34:26):

And if some part of your body could magically, right now, reach out and touch some part of the space, what are you touching and what are its textures?

Lyla Miklos (00:34:38):

Well, lots of wood, and also feeling like I should have brought some slippers because all that carpeting didn't look that sanitary, but it's all good.

Alisha Stranges (00:34:50):

And this is a bit of a weird one, but if magically, you could taste the space, what might its flavour be?

Lyla Miklos (00:34:58):

Musty.

Alisha Stranges (00:35:03):

Musty like an old sock or musty like lots of bodies?

Lyla Miklos (00:35:10):

Musty, sweat, bodies, heat. Sometimes that sort of old-man smell when you go buy a bar that a whole bunch of like really old men are hanging out.

Alisha Stranges (00:35:23):

Yes, you're really bringing it up for me. Thank you. All right. And you can let that go and open your eyes if they've been closed. Thank you. So, I'm going to move in now to the moment around 12:45 a.m., when we know that five men, all plainclothes police officers, entered the club and apparently stayed about 90 minutes. Were you still in the palace when they arrived?

Lyla Miklos (00:35:53):

Yes. And I've got a funny story about that. So, somebody had said that there was lap dances happening downstairs, and I was like, "Lap Dances?!" And because I was on a kick to try everything, I was like, "Where's the lap dances happening?" So, I run all the way downstairs to the where the dance area is. And I can't find this lap dance that people are saying happening. So, I went to the front area where I'd gotten my key and my towel and the staff were there and asked one of the women at the counter. I said, "Hey, where are the lap dances happening?" And they're giving me this look like to shut the fuck up, but I'm not quite catching on. And then I see these dudes standing behind them. I said, "Who are those guys? Are they here to repair the pool?"

Lyla Miklos (00:36:31):

And they went, "They're not pool repairmen. They're cops." And I had run down in my cute little cotton dress, but I did not have underpants on. So, I was like, "Cops, eh?" And so, I just like backwards walked out of their space and went, "Oh, I read my pamphlet about what to do if the cops show up." And then people were kind of whispering and shouting to people, "Cops are here, cops are here!" And I went to my room and locked myself in. And I stayed there for about two hours. That was my "brave action" on Pussy Palace night when I heard cops were there. And I could hear women, some women were telling cops to fuck off and get the fuck out of there. So, some of them were being confrontational. Some women just left. They went, "I'm out of here." And some of them were my friends from BiWoT just went, "Fuck this shit. I'm gone."

Lyla Miklos (00:37:21):

And so, at one point, some cop was banging on my door, demanding to know who was in there and wanting to see ID, but I'd read my pamphlet and said, "If cop's knocking on your door, you do not have to answer the door. You don't have to." And I said, "Nope, I'm just going to stay here." But of course, it was just a horrifying, stress-filled-type body thing on that board with a mat on it, and I did bring a blankie with me and a pillow. That's how prepared I came with my little overnight. It was like, "Well, I guess I'm just going to lie here." But it was just, I knew the cops were there for hours because I could hear all the women telling them to fuck off and yell at them. And then there was like women crying and leaving. So, I can hear all these voices for about two hours straight. And then at some point I think somebody said the cops are gone. So, I finally

opened the door, but then half the party left and sort of the vibe from earlier had [trills lips] definitely depleted.

Alisha Stranges (00:38:17):

Yeah. So, did you have any direct interaction with the police?

Lyla Miklos (00:38:24):

Other than the guy who was probably looking at me pretty funny when I said, "Where's the lap dances," no.

Alisha Stranges (00:38:31):

And you said when you were waiting though, at some point somebody did try to knock on the door, bang on the door?

Lyla Miklos (00:38:37):

There was a cop knocking on my door, banging on my door, trying to... Demanding to know who was in there and wanted me to let them in. And I was like, "Fuck that shit. Nope, nope. I'm not opening the door," because I read the pamphlet.

Alisha Stranges (00:38:48):

Did you just remain silent?

Lyla Miklos (00:38:50):

I just stayed quietly sitting in the corner in my cube.

Alisha Stranges (00:38:54):

Right. And it was, well, I mean, what was that like for you to kind of be... I mean, you came here excited about what it might be, nervous about what it might be. You got in there, you're literally embracing every aspect of what it has to offer, and then this interruption. And it felt safest, I'm imagining, to be in that private room. What was that like for you to just be waiting, not sure for what?

Lyla Miklos (00:39:23):

It was pretty awful. It was kind of horrifying, and it was like all the joy of the evening that I had experienced thus far, all the camaraderie and the sex and the fun and the community and the music and all of it. It was like balloon air [breathes out] out. And then I remember, because when the cop kept banging on my door, I was just sort of like [grimaces]. Like, all tense, holding my blanket to my neck and just sort of stiff and not moving and not speaking. And I'm just like... Which is horrible, that's a horrible... It was like anybody hiding from somebody banging on a door. It just feels very, what's the word I'm looking for? Well, violent in a way. Like, not direct violence, but indirect violence. Like you violated my space, you came in here, and now you're policing me having sex. And nothing we were doing is illegal, and you're just being assholes, and now you've made what was a really beautiful thing become something gross and awful. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:40:23):

Yeah. Do you recall, after they left, how you found out it might be safer to emerge from the room?

Lyla Miklos (00:40:31):

Oh, because everyone was shouting, “The cops are gone!” And I think some of the Pussy Palace organizers were just sort of knocking on people’s doors saying, “You can come out now, the cops have left.” And because there’s no roof on, you can just hear everything. Like, there’s walls around me, but there’s no ceiling really. Right?

Alisha Stranges (00:40:50):

Okay. And did you sort of meet back up with friends to talk about?

Lyla Miklos (00:40:55):

I connected with folks because the people were in the pool and the hot tub and stuff, but the dance had kind of died out and yeah, the party vibe that was there before the cops showed up really fizzled, so yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:41:10):

And then did you still end up staying all night like you had planned?

Lyla Miklos (00:41:16):

Well, I had nowhere else to go. So yeah, I “slept.” Then they kicked you out around, it was around somewhere around five or something. Golden Griddle, that’s the name of the place. That’s the one. And then there was a bunch of us from BiWoT that were meeting with other folks to go have... Because it was like a 24-hour breakfast restaurant place. So, we were meeting there afterwards to go do breakfast.

Alisha Stranges (00:41:42):

What was that breakfast like after such a—?

Lyla Miklos (00:41:47):

I mean, we were kind of all sharing our war wounds, and then fun stuff too. And it was kind of good that we did sort of come together as a community to go because then when we left, we kind of were able to do a check in with each other. And then I guess people were also feeling a little unsafe because well, five o’clock in the morning, it’s still pitch-dark, and it’s downtown Toronto, and we’re all women. So, there was that piece of it. And then are we going to get harassed because the cops already harassed us once? Are we going to be harassed again? So, people just making sure you’re okay, you got on the subway, and all that kind of thing. Yeah. I think I had to keep eating until six because I don’t think the subway starts until 6:00 a.m. or something. Take my time packing, take my time going to the restaurant, and have a good long chat. Okay, well now I’m going to go to work and try to find a corner to have a nap in. I do remember leaving work early that day and my boss just giving me all these kinds of funny looks going, “What the fuck were you doing last night?” Because I was like, “Oh, I’m really tired. And I got here really early. Can I leave early today?” “Sure, Lyla. Bye.” “Thanks.”

Alisha Stranges (00:42:56):

You know, it was later revealed that prior to the five male police officers entering the space, there were two women undercover cops. At what point did you become aware of that?

Lyla Miklos (00:43:12):

I did not find out about the undercover female cops 'til after everything had happened, and when we were going... There was like a community meeting at The 519 that I went to. And then there was stuff in *Xtra* and various other queer medias that revealed what had happened. And then there was a rumour going around. I don't know if this was valid or not, but it seems very typical because I used to deal with this shit when I organized Hamilton Pride, that one of the bars run by gay men took issue with the Pussy Palace because we were taking away business from them because you know all those lesbians were going to go over to your, go to The Barn. But nevertheless, we were selling alcohol with our Special Occasions Permit, so the rumour was one of the gay bars in town took issue with our Special Occasions Permit and all this alcohol sales. They weren't making because we were having our once-a-year event at a bathhouse, but I don't know if that was true or not, but that was a rumour that was going around at one point, which definitely has some validity because I've dealt with that sort of petty bullshit in other capacities.

Alisha Stranges (00:44:20):

Right. So, it's just like a rumour in the community?

Lyla Miklos (00:44:24):

Yeah, it was kind of going around like there that the ones who started the up with us were actually gay men in our community.

Alisha Stranges (00:44:33):

Right, I see. How did it feel to learn later that there had been outsiders so to speak surveilling you?

Lyla Miklos (00:44:44):

Well, it just felt kind of gross. It's sort of like, "Wow, so you used women cops to come into our space." Because their ultimate point was we had violated the liquor license because they said the liquor license only said the alcohol could go to certain spaces and not others, which was really fucked up because I remember there were signs all over the place saying no alcohol here, no alcohol there. Fair enough. And I don't even think I even bought any alcohol. I kind of wasn't interested in drinking any alcohol. It kind of felt like I wanted my senses aware of where I was when I was there, but I know some people need some alcohol if they're going to go have sex with strangers. But so, it just seemed like, it just seemed like a real setup. So, you sent a bunch of straight women into our space.

Lyla Miklos (00:45:32):

I guess the only thing that threw me off is, "How did I not spot the cops?" But shouldn't they have stood out like a sore thumb? You totally... You were cops. But I missed the cops in our space. I did not realize they were there. So yeah, all of it was very uncool, and then it became pretty clear, like really, you need to spend two hours investigating liquor license violations? You sure you're not just gawking at all the women that are having sex and half naked? Assholes. So yeah, it just was making me angry, very angry.

Alisha Stranges (00:46:06):

Did you end up, it sounds like you did attend some of the sort of community activist events. Can you tell me a little bit about what you would have been involved in?

Lyla Miklos (00:46:18):

That part's a little fuzzier. I always seem to remember the socializing after the event more than the event itself. But I remember going to something at The 519. I remember there was lots of calls for financial support, that sort of thing. And I do remember shortly thereafter I took part in the Toronto's Women's Day march, Take Back the Night march. Some asshole said he was going to murder all the women in the march, like the Montreal massacre. And so, I volunteered to be, what do you call it? I can't remember the word, person who helps monitor the parade to make sure like, you know—

Alisha Stranges (00:47:10):

Marshal?

Lyla Miklos (00:47:11):

Thank you. I offered to be a marshal. And I do remember going to the Sexual Assault Centre in Toronto for like a training session and stuff because that was kind of all in the same year that all of that kind of happened. And I think... Oh yeah, and [Pierre] Trudeau Sr. had just died too, all in that same year. That was sort of all things, that day. I think that day he had died, the news he had died, had come out and then we did the Take Back the Night march. So anyhow and I was kind of thinking, "Well, hey, [Pierre] Trudeau was all down with us having sex." He was about lifting up the laws about not making all this stuff illegal and all that sort of mushing together kind of thing. So, that was all...

Lyla Miklos (00:47:51):

I can't remember specifically what went down in those meetings. I do remember we get sort of updates on where things were at legally. The two people whose names were on the special occasions permit were the two people getting targeted with all the legalities. So, it was like a legal defence fund to help pay for their legal defence. So, I remember that. I had friends in Bisexual Women of Toronto that were on the Pussy Palace organizing committee that were sort of keeping me in the loop with stuff. I used to go to workshops at Good For Her and the woman who ran Good For Her [Carlyle Jansen] was part of that organizing committee too. In fact, she's the one who sent me the email to tell me about you guys.

Alisha Stranges (00:48:36):

Yeah. So, did you attend any of the court proceedings or just sort of watched through the media?

Lyla Miklos (00:48:43):

No, never went to court, would read about them or hear about them through queer media.

Alisha Stranges (00:48:48):

Right. And at some point, some maybe later point, you decided to write a bit about your experience. When was that?

Lyla Miklos (00:48:57):

Well, I think two things happened. So, when the cops were going to apologize for their raids and that news came down and a whole bunch of us who were there when the Pussy Palace got raided, we were all sort of chatting on Facebook about our experiences. And I wrote a post that was fairly long and a friend of mine said, "Hey, can you turn that into an editorial?" I remember. I wrote a pretty long Facebook post about this because I said, "It didn't really hit me what a collective trauma this was until I started reading everybody

sharing their stories about the horror of that night and what went down,” because when it was happening, it was sort of... It’s all happening, and then it’s like, “Oh wow, that really was a trauma that we went through.” And I’m listening to all the different things that people are sharing and how it’s still sitting with them now.

Lyla Miklos (00:49:57):

And it was quite something that the organizers on the Pussy Palace told the cops to go fuck themselves and what they can do with their apology. And they’re like, “Yeah, we don’t want your stupid PR move. F-you. This is nothing. This is meaningless.” And they were right. They were totally right. Because even in the end, their “apology” for the raiding of the men’s bathhouses was bullshit. It wasn’t an apology. So, the Pussy Palace folks called it out. Because I think what had happened was we heard that there was going to be an apology for the Pussy Palace and then there wasn’t, and then there was a lot of confusion about why that was, and then we found out it was because the organizers told the cops F-you, and then I didn’t understand why the F-you. And then I found out the F-you. And then I heard the apology from the cops and read it. And it was like [trills lips].

Lyla Miklos (00:50:41):

And I know that Brent Hawks, the minister, he used to be with the MCC Church, was really integral in trying to make that all happen. And then there was people sort of bitching like, you know, Brent just wanted some sort of like ego stroke. And “look at me, I got the cops to say sorry.” Anyhow, so in the midst of all that, I wrote this very long post about sort of what happened that night and the things I experienced, and one of my friends who works for rabble.ca said, “Hey, this is really good. Could you turn this into like a thousand-word thing for *Rabble*?” And I said, sure. And so, I wrote an editorial for *Rabble* about the police, the apology, being at the Pussy Palace, cops and Pride, all that sort of evolution of all those sort of things coalescing together.

Lyla Miklos (00:51:27):

And the last time was at Toronto Pride, and how I felt when I was trying to find a friend and find a float. And I kept going down to the end of all the floats. And then I got near the end. It was like cops, cops, cops, cops, with their floats. And I was like, and I was feeling more like, ew. And I said, “Oh, I know what that’s about. That’s about this and this and this.” So yeah, cops, not really my friend. F-you, so get out of my parade, and just that whole conver-. So, all of that stuff. So, I wrote something a little more serious about it. And then I have a friend, Anne Bokma. She does this event fairly regularly called the 6-Minute Memoir. I had done 6-Minute Memoirs in the past for her. She wanted to do one for Valentine’s Day and she wanted the theme to be about love. And I said, “Well, if there was ever a time to tell my Pussy Palace story, this would be the time.” So, I told a more humorous version of events. Well, because as you heard, as much as there was horrible things, there was lots of fun things that happened. So, I shared my story of going to the Pussy Palace and then with the ending part. So, I’ve done an oral version and then more of a written version and have shared those.

Alisha Stranges (00:52:43):

Yeah. The question about... Oh, you were saying that when you were kind of involved in the Facebook group and you were starting to realize that this may have been a collective trauma, how did you come to that realization?

Lyla Miklos (00:53:04):

Well, because a lot of my friends from Bisexual Women of Toronto, we’ve all kind of stayed in touch with each other and some of us have been like super close. Like, one of my Bisexual Women of Toronto friends is my roommate here. So, we’ve all really stayed in touch and a lot of us were there that night, or if we weren’t

there that night, interconnected with people or came and showed solidarity because I know I went to the next one and even signed up to be a volunteer and part of the clean-up crew for the following one. Less about the sex, more about the political solidarity. So anyhow, so a lot of us knew each other and a lot of us were there. And I think when we heard this all apology, not apology, it sort of dug up old wounds that we had sort of put aside and then sort of brought it all up.

Lyla Miklos (00:53:47):

And I was like, “Oh, okay, well I know what I was feeling. And now I’m hearing what my friends are feeling.” And then I remember doing some Google searches and I did find this really cool document. It was like an oral history of the Pussy Palace from a whole bunch of different organizers, which was fascinating because I wasn’t part of organizing it, but I went to it and to sort of hear it from their perspective. And I remember I went to, you could get your tickets at, I think Good For Her and Come as You Are. And there was a day you could get tickets at The 519, and me and one of my Bisexual Women of Toronto friends, we waited in line at The 519 to get our tickets because you had to buy them in advance. Or, it’s not that you had to. They just strongly encouraged you to because, if you didn’t, you might not get it. And so, there was a line-up to get tickets too.

Alisha Stranges (00:54:42):

Right. So, you attended an event that was like a live oral history. Is that what you’re saying?

Lyla Miklos (00:54:49):

No, it was, I found it online. I found this whole document. And so, it was great to read just because it got me. Sometimes if I start reading things in the news and stuff, it gets down a little, I start on a Google search, go look for stuff. And I was like, “Oh, look at this.” It looked like it was like some academic paper that somebody had written that had a lot of, I knew a lot of the names in the stories, but it also sort of filled in the blanks about pieces of the story I didn’t know too.

Alisha Stranges (00:55:19):

Right, right. Care to share one titbit about something you learned?

Lyla Miklos (00:55:27):

I can’t tell you off the top of my head. I’d have to go look for it again. I might even have it saved somewhere from, I think part of the reason I went looking for it was because *Rabble* asked me to write that piece and I think I wanted to make sure I had the names and the dates and things right. And I think that’s partly what started that off was, “Oh, I just want to verify what was the actual, proper name of the event and of the group and what was the date?” And I just wanted to make sure I had all those pieces before I write some journalistic editorial, and then somebody says, “That’s crap.”

Alisha Stranges (00:56:04):

Well, we’re nearing the end here. The last couple of questions that sort of focus more on the impact of the Pussy Palace, from your perspective, as a community initiative. So, what’s your impression of the intent behind the Pussy Palace, its sort of reason for being?

Lyla Miklos (00:56:26):

Well, I think it's... One of the stories I shared in the 6-Minute Memoir thing was when I shared with my gay boyfriends my stories of going to the Pussy Palace, it was a total culture shock for them because this is not how the men interact with each other when they go to the bathhouse. So, they went, "You talked to each other? What? What? Like we just sit in the—" [alert sounds] Hold on one sec. "We just sit in the steam room and we grunt at each other, go have sex, and then go back to the steam room and grunt at each other. We don't talk and chitty-chat and take pictures. What is this thing you went to?"

Lyla Miklos (00:57:08):

So, it was just interesting to sort of hear their perspectives. There was another gay boyfriend of mine who quite regularly said, "Oh, when I'm stuck in Toronto, and I didn't catch the last Go-bus back to Hamilton, I would regularly go to the bathhouse and go sleep there for the night and just put some earplugs on so I didn't have to hear people having sex." So, I got lost in all my storytelling and then forgot what the original question was. Could you repeat the question?

Alisha Stranges (00:57:35):

What's your impression of the intent behind the Pussy Palace?

Lyla Miklos (00:57:39):

Oh, okay. Well, so generally speaking, queer women do not have enough spaces and places and events that are really for us. The gay boys have places and things to go to all the time. I got into a whole big argument with this one year at Hamilton Pride and a bunch of gay men got all pissy about the women's dance that we organized that happens once a year. "Why are you having a women's dance? Wah-wah-wah." And I said, "Okay, you know what? Shut up. Sometimes I just... Like my gay boyfriends, but I don't need your penises around all the time. And maybe next time you don't want me to come to your leather event because you all want to be boys together, you can shut up and think about that, right? Sometimes we just want a space that's our space and we don't have to deal with you because it's not about you."

Lyla Miklos (00:58:25):

And I think that's the point. So, it's a space for us and a space for us to explore our sexuality because, whereas men have had, gay men have had these spaces since sort of time immemorial, but definitely this was the formation of gay culture for men was around these sort of spaces. Whereas it's not really the way we're socialized as women because that's a whole other piece onto itself about sort of watching the way women interact with each other in these spaces. I remember, I think it might've been the second or third time I went and I was trying to go to sleep. And there's two women in the cubicle next to me who are like talking about their childhood trauma and their ex. And I'm like, "Oh my God, would you two just shut up? Have sex already, like enough."

Lyla Miklos (00:59:15):

Right. So... Did I come here for this? No. So, it's just funny because where men are just socialized, whether they're gay or straight, to be very assertive and when they want stuff, they go for it. It's a whole other weird little dance with women because we're not really socialized to be that way as women. And we're not socialized to be that way sexually. So, this is a way for us to move past those kinds of socialization that we get. Because we're socialized as women in a male-dominated society that doesn't value women and their sexuality and dismisses it and all that sort of stuff. So, it's just about good things that people keep telling you are bad things and realizing they're not bad things. I remember too, there were, what do you call it, women's condoms and

gloves everywhere and lube for free. It was just like, “Go party. Go have fun.” Sex is supposed to be good and a good thing and not something to be demonized.

Alisha Stranges (01:00:23):

Yeah. So, you were talking about when you first came in, there was, you were overwhelmed by the diversity across lines of race and gender, maybe even sexuality, body type, age. Was your sense of the interaction between all of these different groups... Well, what was it like in the early 2000s interacting across lines of gender, race, class, et cetera? What was your impression of that happening at the club?

Lyla Miklos (01:00:59):

It felt good. In later years I've gone now, it's not a women's bathhouse or a men's bathhouse, but it's a swingers' club, but they have had like women's nights, usually around Pride. They'll have something sort of Pussy Palace inspired-esque thing. And I've gone a couple of times with some friends over the years. And I did find the crowd has shifted a lot. Tends to be a lot younger, whereas when I went, you saw everything from the crone to the little baby dyke in the space. And it was a lot more baby dykes than crones. Is it because I'm just feeling old? No, it was a lot more younger folks, and I'm seeing a lot more differences in gender expression. And this is just because things have evolved, especially with the younger folks in our community, gender queer, non-binary. I'm seeing a lot more variations on that front too. And I was seeing more women-of-colour even more than when I saw 20 years ago.

Alisha Stranges (01:02:04):

Right. And the space has been described publicly, at least, as one that was trans inclusive or inclusive of something that expands beyond just cis-gender woman. But then you sort of described at least one moment where this might not have been the case in practice. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Lyla Miklos (01:02:27):

Well, and that threw me off because some of the people I went to, for the event and for breakfast, were trans friends of mine within our BiWoT group. So, when I was standing in line, and there's a trans woman in front of me who got all dressed up in sexy lingerie and everything. Like, really got into the event and looked really cool and gets barred from the room and gets told they can't participate, and I was just really thrown that the person organizing... And because I was standing in line, I'm like, “Well, this is first time I've ever been to this, but I'm going to go with that was not the way to answer that.” And then after doing it, I'm like, “Well, why didn't you say to the trans woman, pull her aside to tell her, okay, this is what's going to happen. What's the way for us to do this safely?” Like, whatever. But you just said, “No, this isn't going to work.”

Lyla Miklos (01:03:19):

I was like, “But, it coulda.” Or you could have said, “May I suggest you watch rather than...?” Something. So, and I think that just comes with, because 20 years ago, our language, our acceptance of these things, our sort of understanding, that was still pretty new. Like, saying that a woman's space included trans people was pretty new-ish because there was friends of mine who had gone to the Michigan Womyn's Festival, where it was like, unless you're a cis woman, you are not a woman and you don't get to come to the event. So, we were still dealing with female spaces that we're putting up those sort of restrictions, even though we're supposed to be queer and feminist and all this.

Lyla Miklos (01:04:03):

So that was still pretty new to say, if you're trans... Because they said you could have been born a woman and transitioned to male, or you could be a male transitioned to woman, like whatever. It was just women and trans folks, which I know did trigger some people who... Some of the cis women kind of went, "Eh-nuh-nee-nuh-nee." And so, I was just like, whatever. I'm like, we're all here to have fun kind of thing. But I would just say back then, language, understanding, the nuances... Like, the trans piece of our queer community has evolved so much in the past 20 years of our understanding of language. And it keeps evolving because now, now I get like... The old folks, straight folks who are in positions of power in Hamilton who wrap their heads around trans and asking the right questions and not mis-gendering people are like, "Okay, now I'm really thrown. Non-binary. What? What's going on? Like gender queer. I don't understand." I'm like, "I know it's hard. It keeps changing, but here, this is the dah-dah-dah," but back then just saying that trans people can be in a women's space was kind of a radical act in and of itself because that was not always happening.

Alisha Stranges (01:05:29):

Well, is there anything else about your experience that night or following that night that you wanted to share that my questions haven't allowed you to speak to?

Lyla Miklos (01:05:45):

[Trills lips] Nothing immediately comes to mind.

Alisha Stranges (01:05:48):

Okay. Then we can wrap up. Thank you so much for agreeing to sort of sit with these 20-year-old memories and dig up what you can for us to share it with the record.