

Pussy Palace Oral History Project
Oral History Interview with Leanne Powers
Conducted on July 2, 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: Leanne Powers is a 49-year-old, white, Acadian and Mi'kmaq, queer femme and BDSM aficionado. At the time of the interview, Powers was living and working in Toronto, Ontario as a spiritual sex professional, healer, and artist. The interview mostly concerns their experiences holding intentional, sacred, sexual space as the resident Temple Priestess of the Pussy Palace bathhouse events. Within the temple, Powers provided an unprecedented form of radical sex care that is not typically associated with bathhouse culture. Informed by feminist and queer theology and trauma-informed practice, she incorporated ritual, elemental work, spiritual tradition, mindfulness practice, body work, and empathic connection to welcome patrons into the Pussy Palace, to ease anxieties and fraught energy, to explore curiosities in a safer space, to assist patrons in setting intentions for the night, and to encourage folks to ground themselves in space and time, among other things. Throughout the interview, Powers discusses their journey toward spiritually-informed sex work and healing, highlights from her interactions with patrons while serving as the Temple Priestess at the Pussy Palace, reflections from her brief encounter with the plainclothes officers while the September 14, 2000 police raid was underway, the support work that she provided for patrons during, immediately after, and in the five years following the raid, and other topics. Powers mentions Toronto, Ontario from the years 1998 to 2021, with a focus on the years 2000-2005.

Keywords: LGBTQ; Sex Work; Ritual; Spirituality; Paganism; Radical Sex; Care; Kink; BDSM; Bathhouse; Police Raid.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:00):

All right. Me as well.

Leanne Powers (00:00:02):

“This meeting is being recorded.” Continue.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:06):

All right. So, this is Alisha Stranges from the Pussy Palace Oral History Project. And I'm here in Toronto, Ontario interviewing Leanne Powers on July 2, 2021. Leanne is also in Toronto, is that right Leanne?

Leanne Powers (00:00:22):

That's right, yeah.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:24):

And is going to tell me about her work as the resident Temple Priestess of the Pussy Palace bathhouse events. In particular, her reflections on the September 14, 2000 event, which was ultimately raided by Toronto police. So, Leanne, do I have your permission to record this oral history interview?

Leanne Powers (00:00:46):

Yes, you do.

Alisha Stranges (00:00:47):

Thank you. And before we get into your experience with the Pussy Palace, I've got a couple questions here that invite you to tell me a little bit about yourself. We're hoping to get a sense of the different aspects of identity you hold or categories you occupy, and how, maybe some of these have shifted or evolved over the past 20 years. So, to start simply, can you tell me your preferred full name, age, and gender pronouns?

Leanne Powers (00:01:21):

My name is Leanne Powers. I'm 49 and she/they are fine for pronouns. Thanks.

Alisha Stranges (00:01:35):

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

Leanne Powers (00:01:44):

That's an interesting question. Today in 2021, I would say femme, for sure. I would say queer, and do you just mean gender and sexuality? I would also say that I'm a kinkster. I don't know, I don't like that word, hold on. BDSM aficionado.

Alisha Stranges (00:02:29):

Yeah. I mean, can you tell me a little bit more about the words femme and queer, and sort of unpack them a bit more, how you use those two words?

Leanne Powers (00:02:41):

Well, it's interesting because I was coming into my identity around femme not long before I was involved in the circle that would eventually become Pleasure Palace and Pussy Palace. So, I did lean heavily on that in a certain way with, well, I don't know leaned on it, but tried to use it as a stronghold for the temple. In part just because the space was not terribly warm and inviting, necessarily, but bringing different aspects to it. I always had this material in my temple because it's silk and metal. And so, sort of the weaving of that together and the strength of that was something evocative for me, for sure, in terms of the temple. So, what exactly...? Are you saying, when I started working there what was my understanding?

Alisha Stranges (00:04:06):

I mean we can talk about that as well. I guess my first sort of question is where are you sitting now in terms of the way you would describe gender and sexuality for yourself, today? But I'm also curious about how that might have been different back around the time of the 2000 Pussy Palace event. So, you had said, "Well, I use the word queer and femme" and a lot of folks do. However, it means something a little bit different to everyone. So, I'm just more trying to get you to unpack femme and queer, what they mean for you, today.

Leanne Powers (00:04:44):

I think it does mean something a little different than maybe I would've used dyke a little more back in the day. But queer is also big in terms of identity studies within theology and spirituality, for good or bad, appropriative or not. It was something that was definitely there for me at the time. And someone who is a trans ally and someone who is part of the two-spirit community are things that I would identify with. That is complicated. I think that you have some follow up questions about that, so... Is that enough? I don't know that I used the word "old school." I would've said old school at one point.

Alisha Stranges (00:05:40):

I'm also curious. You had said, "Oh, I don't like the word kinkster, but..."

Leanne Powers (00:05:47):

I would say "player," maybe. Playing with energy, playing with power. Kinkster feels a little "straight" to me. Yeah. It's interesting to have been at a place where the words that we use now and that are identifiers and in memes that are so present in everyday culture, like "witch," is something that I was using in my early twenties, but had a very different feeling about it. Because it wasn't something that... Talking about it meant something different. And the things that we emphasized meant something different at the time. I think privacy and taking care of people's secrets and taking care of them is something that is a little old school, but certainly helped me in my work, in my temple work.

Alisha Stranges (00:06:58):

And what about racial, ethnic, cultural identities? How do you express yourself through these categories?

Leanne Powers (00:07:10):

It's changed over the years. Now I would say that I identify as having white privilege or being white. That being said, my mother's side of the family is Acadian and Mi'kmaq. I didn't find that out until later in my life. I could see it happening, but we never talked about it and, through violence, it was kept out of the knowledge of my family until my late teens. And then trying to figure out then what that meant in terms of my life as a chaplain or in the church or as someone in theology and how that shifted over the years and what it's meant to me has changed and evolved for sure. So, I identify as someone who has Indigenous heritage, but not as someone who's Indigenous. However, I have been active in two-spirit community since my mid-twenties directly and doing anti-racist work prior to that.

Alisha Stranges (00:08:27):

And what can you tell me about your particular educational path?

Leanne Powers (00:08:40):

Well, I started university in 1990 and never really left. Just until the early 2000s, maybe 2004 or something like that. So, I lived with immune illness for several years, as well as had my child very early in my life, when I was in my late teens. So that affected my academic career, but not necessarily in a bad way. I also worked at the University of Toronto as a chaplain and doing student work in the interfaith community there. So, I was able to sort of take courses that were graduate courses, but not for credit. So, I did do a lot, but I don't even have a bachelor's degree.

Alisha Stranges (00:09:43):

I see. I see.

Leanne Powers (00:09:46):

I also took time out to do psychodramatic body work training and different healing modalities to add into my repertoire over the years. So, I did take Gender Studies and Sociology at the University of Toronto, started out as Women's Studies.

Leanne Powers (00:10:12):

So that's changed a little bit, but I dragged it all out, all around town really.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:20):

Just for clarification, did you say psychodynamic body work?

Leanne Powers (00:10:24):

No, Psychodramatic.

Alisha Stranges (00:10:26):

Psychodramatic. What is that?

Leanne Powers (00:10:32):

It's sort of pre-somatic work. So now we use the word somatics all the time. And I work with a somatic therapist now to help supervise me and do my own work, but back then it was more called psychodramatic body work. So, body-based knowledge. We used theatre. We learned ways to support each other's bodies while we were going through releases of grief and anger and fear. And I used a lot of that work and brought it into the temple just to help me recognize what was going on with someone and how trauma manifests for them. Or joy or release and trying to find ways...

Leanne Powers (00:11:32):

But mostly asking permission and figuring out the best ways to support someone in their issue that they're bringing forth. And we would play different roles within the family. So, there was little parts about family pattern, attachment, and roles and that sort of thing. I can't quite remember the word right now. It's interesting how our vocabulary changes over the years. But back then we would do scenes and dramatize things that happen and then help support each other through that. So, I did that work and then I was doing a lot of training in BDSM as well. So, I was attending a lot of conferences, teaching, learning all around the world luckily. And I did the Urban Tantra workshop series through Barbara Carrellas. I took courses with Annie Sprinkle and those sort of things back in the late 90s, and studied work of feminist activists, like Shannon Bell here in Toronto. So, I was just gathering things over the years, and now the field of somatics has opened up and that's sort of what I would kind of understand it to be now.

Alisha Stranges (00:13:12):

Yeah. I see. Well, you've sort of been talking about it a bit, but I'll just ask more directly. What kinds of things occupy your time these days, professionally?

Leanne Powers (00:13:24):

Oh, such a good question. Well, I closed down my event space, Lap Space, three months before coronavirus hit. And Lap Space in part came out of the work that I did both as a professional dominatrix and as a healer that I was able to bring events to support people in that space. We had performance art, we had a gallery space, different events. People could work out of there as models, as sex professionals. So that was for 13 and a half years. So, I don't quite know the math before that. I worked in a few Dungeons and small spaces for a few years just before that. So, these days, I think it's been four or five years, at least, since the last Pleasure Palace, I believe I was at the last one or maybe the second last one. I'm not sure now.

Leanne Powers (00:14:45):

So, please remind me your question. It's all word-of-mouth. I've never talked about my priestess work in public. I've never even stood up to say a word about it. It is all word-of-mouth. I still have close people to me that I met at the temple, some of my closest friends, really. And so, I'm able to continue to carry that energy with me, but I am also trying to take care of myself and doing more my own artwork and finding some of the stuff that I've done over the years and really buried. I'm thinking hard about writing and letting myself remember more. It's a mind game in a way to remember what happened, but not attach it to the people and not have it attached to my sense of self or my ego. So, it takes a lot of teasing out these days, but I really do want to speak to it in more ways, at least in the imagery that I'm doing, in my painting and needle work right now is sort of my focus.

Alisha Stranges (00:16:22):

Lovely. I didn't quite ask this, but is there anything you want to reflect on in terms of how class has impacted your life, social class, over the years?

Leanne Powers (00:16:44):

Wow. I mean, I always talked about the temple being a place of radical hospitality and Lap Space as well. So even though it was sexuality-based, the space it also held refugee families sometimes, it also held people who were in trouble, people who were running and hiding, any kind of sanctuary I could offer. So, that was part of how I brought justice through the access to wealth, very little access to wealth I had as a professional dominant. I used to run lunches. There was a trans folk meetup there where there's a kitchen and they could cook food and talk and read together and share. So, there were small art circles and stuff like that, that I was able to help provide for. When I was in my teens, I was homeless for a period of time and in and out of the shelter system and very difficult terms with my family and in large part because of my queerness. So, building towards that space has always been there for me, initiating space, holding space, staying in the background, staying steady.

Leanne Powers (00:18:26):

And these days I am talking about people around cooperative, rural living. So, with a BDSM and kink and arts retreat aspect to it. In my dreams, maybe that will happen and then people will see them. Anyway, something that I'm working on, I have a meeting about it later. So, it's exciting to just think about how, with Toronto being so gentrified, right? It just was just out of control, the rent for me. I was able to negotiate using my wiles in many ways and my connections and was able to keep costs down as much as possible and whatnot, but I was on Queen Street West and Bathurst [Street]. So, it was primo area, good access, but also, you're always running after, or running away from your landlord who's like [mumbles]. And you're just like "Oh, hello. Really, that much?"

Leanne Powers (00:19:38):

I paid a lot in my heating bill, and I was always very upset about it. He didn't push me too hard. I was very... A lot of fortuitous things happened to keep that rent down. But everything I earned really went towards holding that together. It's an interesting thing sorting out money, sexuality, healing work, and professional work. To be able to balance that and not have too much of it bleed into the other and my stress about it and things like that. But it was also incredibly stressful and heart-breaking sometimes. Even though so many things happened that were so amazing, there was still hard things, but not too bad. Like, people stealing things when they're in a sexual frenzy, excited or at a party or things getting broken, that sort of stuff.

Leanne Powers (00:20:58):

Really, honestly, I was very lucky and count my blessings all the time that that space happened for me. So, I just don't exactly know my... A transition out of that kind of work is... Especially when you are completely underground. Completely under, almost completely. I've only written down what Lap Space was a couple of times in my life and I don't even think it's on a computer. So that's the only way because the workers there and their health always came first, their privacy.

Alisha Stranges (00:21:37):

Oh, wow.

Leanne Powers (00:21:37):

Yeah. Did I answer your question?

Alisha Stranges (00:21:44):

Oh yes, absolutely you have, yes beautifully. Before we kind of move on to speaking more about the Temple Priestess specifically, I'll just leave a little space here. If there's anything else you think would be important for the listener to know about how you understand the different aspects of your identity you hold today as compared to whomever you were 20 years ago?

Leanne Powers (00:22:18):

I am asked a lot around... Femme is now a non-binary identity or can be part of a non-binary entity as well. What that means to me in my life is something I'm still trying to sort out. Trying to bring the wisdom and power of words that in the past just made a difference in a way that they don't now, just even using the word woman, or using the word pussy. So, I think that's for now. It's great.

Alisha Stranges (00:23:00):

So, I'd love to learn a bit more here about the evolution of your work as the Temple Priestess. Can you tell me very simply what is the Temple Priestess?

Leanne Powers (00:23:20):

Holding sacred sexual space, however that gets interpreted, someone would come to me and ask me what they can ask for. And I would say, "Anything that will enhance your sexual and spiritual life. And holding those two things in consideration, ask for anything at all that you need in this moment to help you get the most out of your experience at the bathhouse." That's how I would talk about it. I mean, I had some experience studying the work of ancient temple practitioners, that involved sex, that we know of it like through Greek, Roman, Latin tradition that we become aware of when you study theology and polytheistic religions and that sort of thing. So, I studied it academically for many years. And when I had my autoimmune disease, there was about five years where the only thing I could really do is read. And so, I spent a lot of time pursuing that and trying to figure out how to understand that. What was my role as a chaplain, as an advocate, as an ally, as a healer? It's a bit of a progression. Can you ask me that question again? What inspired me?

Alisha Stranges (00:25:20):

I'd say just what is it, right for anyone who... What is the Temple Priestess? I feel you've answered it. I guess that I can sort of move to asking what prompted the organizers to introduce the Temple Priestess into the Pussy Palace events?

Leanne Powers (00:25:38):

Well, I had been practicing... In my chaplaincy work, I would do groups of people who were healing from reparative therapy experiences, hardcore body trauma, and the kind of Christian counselling that was incredibly damaging to folks within church communities, and also Roman Catholicism, not just evangelical. So, some of that is where I was start to be able to apply a bit of self-healing techniques for folks and sexual healing work. My academic and speaking engagements with the church were focused on feminist and queer sexuality, its relationship to scripture, to human rights, to the mining industry in the Philippines and Indigenous allyship there.

Leanne Powers (00:26:57):

It all coming together helped me find out more about what it means to do responsible healing work, and speak to what you know and feel, and being careful about appropriation, for sure, but also owning where I've come from, which is a Roman Catholic and Protestant background. Someone who is a solo practitioner of elemental craft is how I would put it, since my late teens. So, bringing all that in, but without the necessary labels, is important to me.

Leanne Powers (00:27:51):

So, part of how I created sacred space was I would smudge with rosemary and herbs that were not sage. I would call the directions. I had a mat and several things that I had, what I would consider, that I would charge with energy during my preparation time, which was sometimes several weeks. Sometimes even months before the temple I would begin preparing for that, so that I could feel ready. And I had a yoga mat and things like that. Water and juice and things to help people if they needed it.

Leanne Powers (00:28:50):

And then, always had a shelf or something, sometimes I would call it an altar, and just have earth, air, fire, and water represented, as well as sensual things, things that you could use in a small sex ritual, like this thread. So, if someone has a feeling or an understanding and they want to break a thread at a period of time, or they want to tie it around their ankle to remind themselves of what they promised with me, or something to just carry them through, like tools, just physical tools. My softest flogger, little seed pods, and then I would hand-make paper that I made a sign out of, so people could write things down for themselves, or I would write an affirmation, that sort of thing, that would help support folks that night and beyond.

Alisha Stranges (00:29:54):

Anything else on the table there that you wanted to introduce us to?

Leanne Powers (00:30:02):

Just my smallest mirror, so people could look at themselves when they were saying things for themselves and feel more grounded. The surface of the water, or a mirror, was one of the oldest tools that practitioners have used. A mirror was sacred and not something used in day to day in many cultures. It was something that was held by a medicine person and would be used as a tool. So, try to help that and weave that in for femmes and for people to be able to help themselves when they're dissociative, for example.

Alisha Stranges (00:31:00):

So, I'm very curious how you taking up this role of the Temple Priestess at the Pussy Palace—

Leanne Powers (00:31:09):

Okay. That's another... I'm sorry. It was a long thing, where I was doing therapy circles and coming out in the SM community, teaching a little bit about healing in SM. First, more basics, like safety and things like that in the 90s, but then things becoming more... We were able to talk about them in different ways then, later on, I think, around energy work.

Leanne Powers (00:31:45):

So, focusing on healing and ethics within SM community drew people to me, and the kinds of activities that we were doing to fundraise for the Pussy Palace would help me communicate with people more about my interests. So, I would slowly have people that I would do small equinox and solstice rituals with, sex rituals, or just healing sensual things. There were a couple of sex parties that were run by Eswar Prasad. I'm not sure if I should be naming names.

Leanne Powers (00:32:34):

But kink spaces where I was invited to do a ritual, to start things off for folks. So, slowly, word-of-mouth spread and people came to me, and two of those people were involved in organizing Pussy Palace. So, those folks, I was doing more one-on-one healing work, but very slowly, because getting supervision around those sorts of things is super complicated and expensive. But also, it was deep and important stuff that I still hold dear and is still part of my life. Luckily, those people are part of my life to some degree. And they asked me to provide a more intentional sacred space, is how we talked about it. But still, sex first. Still sexuality and not disembodied spiritual work.

Alisha Stranges (00:34:03):

Right, right. And do you recall why participating as the Temple Priestess at the Pussy Palace, why that work would've been important to you at the time?

Leanne Powers (00:34:15):

I completely felt like it was exactly what I was working towards. It was incredible to be able to do that. There were small events, underwear parties. We called them underwear parties. And I did some sex ritual there too, upstairs, in the jerk off, back room area and on the pool table. And there's a little spot that had a jail, jail bars and stuff, you could crawl in there. So, we had a whole bunch of hoot and holler there, and I think that's part of maybe what made the volunteers talk to me more about it and us to explore that possibility, because... But I attended the first Pussy Palace just as a participant and had fun, and then things geared up more. At that point, they had massage, they had lap dances, and things like that.

Alisha Stranges (00:35:31):

So, I'm curious. When you were helping to fundraise for the Pussy Palace events and you were in this, what did you call it, a jerk off, back room, and you said, "Oh, there's something about this room that maybe was inspiring the need for something like the Temple Priestess." What's the connection there?

Leanne Powers (00:35:57):

Well, it's interesting because there's always feelings about who's going to be there, who's not going to be there, that person there, how do I express myself with my ex here? There's a lot of that sort of thing going on, as well as people curious and wanting to get to know. So, there's newbies and fraught energy at the same time. And so, I knew tangentially what was going on with four or five people who had a small circle of exes, and... Is it super bright? I can close the...

Alisha Stranges (00:36:36):

I like the way it's coming across yourself.

Leanne Powers (00:36:40):

Great. Just checking so that I... So, it was an interesting. Just taking a little bit of control of the space and being like, "Hey, we're all here." Let's try to figure out how to wish each other well and how to cope with someone coming to me and being in a little bit of an emotional crisis and being like, "What do I do? My person's here. My ex is here. Their new person's here. I love them, but I'm scared. How can we work through this?" So, I was like, "Well, why don't we figure out how to wish each other well, and then come up with an agreement about how we can share space tonight?" And it was like, "All right."

Leanne Powers (00:37:22):

So there, we had our little plan, and that plan turned into different levels of group and couple sex amongst the people who were involved, so there was like six or seven of us. I was a little bit of a person who proceeds over or officiates over that space, which was fun. I'd done a couple of weddings and conjoinings, and it was a little bit of that energy, and just being like, "Okay, let's all acknowledge what's happening here," and then figure out, "Okay, so we're going to stay upstairs. You guys go downstairs. And then we'll say 10 o'clock, Oh, I'm going to be leaving anyway." "Oh, okay. Da, da, da, da, da. Check in when you say goodbye," sort of thing.

Leanne Powers (00:38:11):

So, that's a little bit of about how that happened. And then, two people left, and then I ended up supporting two people as they had fun in that room. And one of them was a lover of mine. So, it was just an interesting dynamic. And then, people would wander in, peek into those things, and have fun with it, and then leave. And I think that's part of what fuelled things.

Alisha Stranges (00:38:45):

Yeah. I see what you're saying.

Leanne Powers (00:38:47):

I remember that time was pretty significant. I think it helped make the space happen.

Alisha Stranges (00:38:51):

Right. Let me just take a look at my notes here. Right. So, I mean, you've talked about this a little bit already, but again, I'll just ask more specifically, if you can speak about the different modes of thought or practical modalities that were informing your work as the Temple Priestess.

Leanne Powers (00:39:18):

Different modes?

Alisha Stranges (00:39:20):

Yeah. Different-

Leanne Powers (00:39:21):

Repeat that again.

Alisha Stranges (00:39:23):

Modes of thought, or practical modalities, or philosophies, or schools of thoughts. I don't know what the right language would be. Just, it sounds like you were drawing from all kinds of places that were informing your work. So just curious if you could speak a bit about those different places that you were drawing from.

Leanne Powers (00:39:53):

The word "healing prostitute" would be something that I studied and brought into the conversation. Feminist and queer theology, body work, and ritual. Self-healing that is derived from mindfulness practice and trauma-informed practice, so touching the arm, holding the back, and supporting the lungs when someone's talking about something and they want support around grief, for example. Teaching someone about how to shake energy off, that sort of stuff, that's now really big in somatics, is part of what I brought to it. A lot of teachings from two-spirit folks that I was able to learn from, I would say, brought to the space, but never spoke about directly. And craft, you can call it witchcraft, or you can call it elemental work. But I would say embodiment is that principle, and the practice of embodiment most especially is something that I would say informed my work.

Alisha Stranges (00:41:47):

Yeah. And I know that, and you alluded to this earlier, that in the weeks leading up to the bathhouse event, you would take a fair amount of time to prepare yourself. How did you prepare yourself to engage in this work, leading up to the event?

Leanne Powers (00:42:07):

I would do a countdown. I would freshen an altar and think about new things that I could bring every time. So, I always wanted to have basics there, but then also look at my notes that I had about what I was missing or needed the last time there was an event. That would help me to decide what to bring. I tried to keep it under a suitcase, a suitcase's worth, for sure. What else? How would I prepare? More meditation work, and sometimes, if I felt comfortable with it, mindful eating and a little bit of restriction, but not too much.

Leanne Powers (00:43:12):

So, trying to be careful about my own body issues, but also do something that made me feel healthy and strong. Strength training, physically, and journaling. So, sometimes I'd follow *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*, but then during those prep times, I would have larger goals for myself to make sure that I was feeling in touch with what was going on at the time. I would sometimes be in touch with people from previous Palaces, friends, people that I knew, to get grounded a little bit. I'd always take myself on a date the day before. Sometimes I'd go to the [Toronto] Island. There's a lot of queer ecology space in the eighties and nineties that happened on the islands.

Leanne Powers (00:44:28):

I also wanted to say another person that really informed my work was AA Bronson. He did an exhibit called "The Quick and the Dead," and he talked about doing this exact kind of healing work, but more focused on anal breathing, and on anal sex, and sometimes he would use and talk about shaman work. But for themselves, I think that they used just the word healer. And that was really, really important to me, to help get me there, and I connect, in some way, with him there.

Alisha Stranges (00:45:17):

On the [Toronto] Island?

Leanne Powers (00:45:21):

Yeah. I had learned a lot about memorials of radical fairies and gay men with AIDS. There's a specific place on the islands where there would be ceremony to honour those folks through the year. And so, that's part of how I was able to feel supported.

Alisha Stranges (00:45:50):

Yeah. What about on the night? Can you walk me through the process of preparing yourself and the space to receive patrons?

Leanne Powers (00:46:02):

Yeah. Within 10 minutes of it opening, I was there, for sure. I did do ritual in the daytime that day, packed my things the night before, got things together, had at least three outfit changes, absolutely, plus my outfit for my break. By the time I learned over the years what I needed, it came to three outfits.

Leanne Powers (00:46:40):

And so, I trolley in with my suitcase and connect with the people who were working there, told them I was upstairs when they had their break before everything opened up. And sometimes, then, those were usually the first people who would visit me would be folks who were volunteering. So that was really nice, to have a little bit of a welcoming circle sometimes, even, and then you could just keep including people, and have the door open for that period of time.

Leanne Powers (00:47:19):

But just prior to that, I'd go in, close the door, put my hands on all the walls, look at all the corners of the ceiling, where the walls meet the ceiling and the walls meet the floor. Take time. Make sure that I would have incense or sage, and acknowledge that, orient myself in terms of the directions and set everything up. And then I would open as soon as I could. Yeah. Luckily, there was a double bed, even. I was the one with the double bed. I was really... That was really nice. The only double bed in the whole place. So, I had extra special little sheets of material, and puppy pads to make sure that everything stayed nice and fresh.

Alisha Stranges (00:48:19):

Right. When you met with patrons, how would you decide what would transpire between the two of you during your encounter?

Leanne Powers (00:48:30):

I used music a little bit, chanting, just very low chanting. But I always tried to cover all of the senses. So, something that always helped, I think, was to create that ambiance and a little bit of a bubble. I would also have scarves over the lights, and over the TV, and things that I would bring over the years, so that I could help with that energy. Did I answer that question?

Alisha Stranges (00:49:12):

Yeah. No, that's definitely... I guess I would be curious if you were able to offer—

Leanne Powers (00:49:20):

How would I... Sorry. I was still thinking about the previous question before this one.

Alisha Stranges (00:49:24):

Oh, okay.

Leanne Powers (00:49:25):

Because that informs how I would interact with someone. So often, that interaction included metaphors, or allusions to a sense. So, I could use that to initiate conversation or to see where someone was at. So, I would ask someone how they were feeling. I would explain a little bit about who I am, where I'm coming from, answer questions. Usually, people just had... They'd just fire questions at me. Everyone's a little bit on fire when they're there, in a good way.

Leanne Powers (00:50:09):

So, things could move very quickly, in that. Sometimes, if someone felt like it... It all depended on body language. So, someone could come in, and you could see that they needed a little bit of uplifting energy. So, I'd ask them, check in with them, let them know where I'm at. They could tell me what they feel they need that would help their sexual or spiritual self in that moment or in their life. And then, their answer would lead the way. Sometimes they would be curious and ask about the space, so then I could introduce, "Well, these are some things that I have. How are you feeling?"

Leanne Powers (00:50:58):

Sometimes I would offer a bowl of water, and someone, if they're feeling really hot, they'd put their hand in it, just to cool down and collect themselves. Or looking at the candle, things like that. Sometimes I would ask permission to take off their shoes, and do that slowly and carefully while listening, and then lightly hold their feet, touch pressure points in their feet, hold their ankles and talk about grounding. Things like that always helped. And sometimes I would offer things. I would say, "Would you like to... Do you know what you want to do right now, right away?" If someone was shy, I could offer a back hug, so stand back-to-back. If they were shy and didn't want to talk to my face about it, then they often could release that way and be able to speak to what they wanted. Sometimes, someone would just come in and fall right on the floor, and be on that yoga mat right away, or they would just start taking their clothes off. You just never know.

Alisha Stranges (00:52:27):

Right. Right.

Leanne Powers (00:52:28):

And some would just get right on the bed, put their... "I really need to try this." I'd be like, "All right. Here we go." It totally depends. I'd offer to, sometimes, give a Five-Fold Kiss. So, Five-Fold Kiss was something where you could... It's a pagan term, that you kiss the feet, you kiss the crotch area, you kiss the chest, the mouth and the forehead. So that sort of thing, it was a way to just help someone feel good and protected, or comfortable enough to ask for more. So even though there was sometimes pretty big line-ups, I try not to worry about them. When I did worry about them, I realized I was off my game. The point was to feel like we had as much time as we needed.

Alisha Stranges (00:53:36):

Right.

Leanne Powers (00:53:37):

That being said, once I did try to be a bit cognizant of the time, usually it would rush by. But I would say I could spend seven to 12 minutes with someone, beyond 15 minutes in certain cases. Sometimes I could open it up. So, I would start with one person, or two people, or a couple, and then they would open the door and their friends were standing right there, like "Oh, come on in." So, then we'd do a group ritual together, something that would try to get that line coming in and be like, "We're going to do a self-blessing. And so, everyone who has dildos, bring them in," or whatever it would be...

Leanne Powers (00:54:18):

And we'd do something where we had things that we wanted to get charged up with and feel good about. And little bit of just solo, group masturbation. Sometimes, use my flogger, and not necessarily flog anybody, but use the flogger as a metaphor, and help people, or help people use it on themselves and do little circle things. So, I try to figure out ways to shake it up a little bit so that if it felt sometimes a little bit heavy with folks, that I could still give people hope that they could actually get through the line.

Alisha Stranges (00:55:10):

Right.

[crosstalk]

Leanne Powers (00:55:13):

Lights right in my eye, so I'm just going to move.

Alisha Stranges (00:55:15):

Oh, yeah. No. No problem.

Leanne Powers (00:55:16):

Let's see how that is. I think that's better.

Alisha Stranges (00:55:22):

Better?

Leanne Powers (00:55:30):

All Right.

Alisha Stranges (00:55:31):

So, I'm curious then. You're seeing maybe a couple people every 15 minutes, or seven to 15 minutes. How many folks would you be meeting with in a single shift?

Leanne Powers (00:55:50):

I think it really did depend sometimes. I've been thinking about it, and I thought... Later, the temples were slower, and the more extensive the amount of participants, it was more drawn out, in a way. So, I would have more sporadic. So then only one or two people in line, and then I could stay longer with some folks, but I would say... Okay, I remember one night, there were 46 people that went through the door, more or less.

Alisha Stranges (00:56:33):

Right.

Leanne Powers (00:56:34):

Other times, it felt like more than that. But sometimes I would do group sex and kink stuff outside of the temple, but just be like, "Okay. On my break, we're going to do something downstairs," and I'd have me and two of my top friends, and we would beat and fuck people for three- to five-minute increments and come on down the line. So, there's that sort of pace sometimes. I could touch over 99 people.

Alisha Stranges (00:57:10):

Yeah.

Leanne Powers (00:57:12):

Other times, on a slower night, there might be 25 or something like that.

Alisha Stranges (00:57:18):

Right. Did you ever have repeat patrons coming back to the Temple Priestess over several Palace events?

Leanne Powers (00:57:28):

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. People would come and check in, check-up, whether it be about their relationship status, or their health and wellbeing. There's a volunteer who went through many health crises through their time at the Palace and would visit me every time. By the end of it, she had a walker and could not barely make it up the stairs. So, we did a ritual with her new walker, and she had been sort of trying to accommodate long-term illness for a period of time. That would always be something we would check in with, and sort of help her ground and continue to stay feeling erotically charged, and to deal with the ageism in the Palace, things like that, and transphobia, that sort of thing. I definitely saw people through breakups and new lovers, and things like that, and then often continued friendships outside of the Palace too. And those people would come and go sometimes, so. Yeah, absolutely.

Leanne Powers (00:59:12):

That was repeat business. That meant good things. I mean, those forms that people sometimes filled out near the beginning when people were saying, "This is what I like, and this is what worked for me." That was some of the only feedback that you have is someone giving you such beautiful energy many years later. So, two people married that I helped with, things like that. I'm not a big marriage person, but you know what I mean? It's amazing to be part of... You had your first date, and we all touched each other, and now you're together and you're still solid after 14 years. That's incredible. Yeah, for sure.

Alisha Stranges (01:00:06):

When you think back over, what sounds like, numerous encounters with many patrons, and people, and friends, is there anything that you remember vividly about touching so many folks over the years?

Leanne Powers (01:00:28):

I feel like it's difficult to explain because the first thing is, what does it not mean? So, what it doesn't mean is that it really has anything to do with me. So, in that way, that's part of what's made it so difficult to figure out how to express myself around my experiences, or the experiences that I was part of.

Leanne Powers (01:01:10):

So, how do I talk about that? There's so many deep and important things that people had help with. I did have some really amazing work with a few sex workers who came to me at once. And we were all talking about how we let go of negative experiences and things that we hold in our bodies. And so, trying to talk and acknowledge that as a work issue, putting some of that aside, so that we could then focus on our play and fun that night. Doing something around that was a really a big and sweet time where we were making a... I was there and people were making themselves squirt. So, they were able to sometimes say and talk about really hard and angry feelings, and watching it leave them like, "Get out of me."

Leanne Powers (01:02:33):

Sometimes workers hold onto a lot that they don't need and that is damaging. Not just damaging experiences, but just energy that drains you. Cutting cord or doing something to kind of maintain a sense of safety and to help if they needed it, to draw a line between what time is theirs, that they can claim as sexual experts, but then the new things that they wanted and needed in their life that didn't need to align with that. Just giving that permission for folks to be like, "Yeah, we're here." That was a really important thing that happened.

Leanne Powers (01:03:23):

Having rituals with people who were couples that were experiencing the temple together. So often people would come to the temple and one person was really, really excited, and the other person was excited-scared, more scared on the excited or more anxiety, and trying to figure out safe ways to open to possibilities there but with enough rules and safety established. So, trying to figure out how to negotiate that. So, a couple would come to me and be like, "This one's excited. This one's a little scared. Here's what's going on with our bodies. What can we do?" So, then I would do something where I might have them touch each other like this, put a cloth over and around their hands so they could look each other in the eye and breathe, and say the most sweet and wonderful compliments to each other about who they are in each other's lives. And then being able to say, "This is what I wish for you on your time alone tonight," and a little bit of privacy.

Leanne Powers (01:04:41):

Then an arrangement around what time they were going to get back together, or that maybe arranging a scene for them to have for the last part of the night, negotiating something like that. And then being able to hold them and initiate sexual contact for each of them, with me and through me, so that their times at the temple, it didn't just feel like it was like the first time with someone else. And then maybe someone would sneak back as part of the couple. Usually, the one who was the most gung-ho of the couple, and be like, "I haven't actually had any fun, and my partner's having a lot of fun, and they didn't even need it." And they're just able to say "Ugh." And I was just like, "Well, if you could, what do you want? Would you like to feel energy somewhere or to try something?" And then we go to it ourselves. And then that was between us, something that would help them then to be able to re-join, or have a little more confidence, and then take off again, come back and be like, "Yeah." Do a little dance.

Alisha Stranges (01:06:04):

Goodness.

Leanne Powers (01:06:09):

Yeah. Things like that are really fun.

Alisha Stranges (01:06:14):

That's amazing. One thing I haven't asked about is what you wore to the Palace. You have three outfits. Can you talk me through these outfits?

Leanne Powers (01:06:29):

Well, I would wear definitely a low-cut bra and full panties. And then over that, something semi-transparent because sometimes people needed to not be in a too heavily sex-in-your-face dynamic with me right away, but just enough to sort of lure you in with my areola. Not too much so that I couldn't just be like, "Ah." Sit cross-legged in lingerie that is semi-transparent and stretchy enough that it was easy to take off and move around, but gave enough of an illusion that it wasn't too confrontational for folks or triggering.

Alisha Stranges (01:07:31):

Yeah. Right.

Leanne Powers (01:07:31):

People didn't know quite what they were getting into yet. I want to make sure that that feels okay. By the end of the night, when I'd had six, 20-second to 40-second showers, I would have something that was a little easier to get into. I was wet, basically. So, a soft teddy or something like that. So, those of the sort of things that I wore. I also have some photos and a few things that I can either, I don't know, scan and send or something. I found some little invites. And I used to do a zine called *The Devoted Hor*, using the ancient language, H-O-R, which was a more sacred whore derivative. That was my zine at the time. So, I did find a bunch of things, and there are some that would show you a little bit about what I wore, I think. There was a Polaroid person who would come around and ask if they could take a photo or two sometimes. So that's been the only evidence that I really have.

[crosstalk]

Alisha Stranges (01:08:47):

Yeah, we can definitely talk about finding the best way to get those materials from you. I would love to include them as part of the interview, for sure.

Leanne Powers (01:08:59):

That was on my off time, barefoot in the temple.

Alisha Stranges (01:09:04):

I see. Okay, I see. If you can take yourself back to the night of the 2000 Pussy Palace, what do you recall about the atmosphere inside the club that night? This would've been the fourth instalment of the Pussy Palace.

Leanne Powers (01:09:26):

Yeah. It was one of those ones where Club Toronto changed into Club Oasis [Aqualounge]. They cut off a huge chunk of the upper area. So, I had a room. You would go up the stairs to the top floor, and then there was a long hallway, and that hallway had a bench that went all the way down the hallway. Sometimes it was a bit of a sex gauntlet, you'd have to weave your way. But then sometimes there'd be a line-up that could go all the way down one side, and then right around the corner, and that's where I was.

Leanne Powers (01:10:05):

So sometimes that line-up was a bit of a party itself, and people meeting and greeting, and dancing, and talking about me, or whatever it was that they wanted. So, there was always just so much sweet chatter, and screams, and fun things like that. So, I could hear that as sort of a steady thing, and it was very busy at the time that this all went down. So, a few minutes, maybe two to three minutes, someone knocked, and was a bit rushed and really apologized. It was a volunteer, and they said, "The police are here." I didn't know exactly what that meant. Was there an accident? Or was there a liquor license issue? Or was there just a scuffle going on? I didn't know for sure. And I said, "Okay, no problem."

Leanne Powers (01:11:17):

The person that was with me at the moment, we didn't think a lot of it. But suddenly I heard nothing outside, and that was when the police were walking through that area. I heard, "Excuse me." And I put myself in front of the person who was in the temple with me and stood up to just... Being as much in control of the situation as I could. And the person opened the thing, and "What's going on here?" And I said, "This is the temple." "Huh? That's it?" "That's it." "Huh," and then left.

Leanne Powers (01:12:28):

But also, earlier in the night, I had an encounter with someone who asked me about money. So, I don't know if that was connected or not, but it was the only... One time I was casually asked if I took donations, or if money was involved, if it was free, and I was like, "Oh, it's completely free. There's no money involved in the situation." But this person was shy, kept a fair amount of clothing on, but not too... Had a bra, pair of pants and a watch, things that you wouldn't maybe normally have at the temple. I wasn't sure.

Leanne Powers (01:13:21):

But anyway, this person asked me twice if I accepted money. And they were someone who I had never seen, they were middle-aged. They were not able to make eye contact very well, but that's not abnormal. I tried to get them to engage, and they didn't want to engage. They were just asking, and I asked them if they needed anything, or if they wanted a blessing or anything. I can't remember what happened after that. They may have said that they wanted a kiss, but I'm not sure. And I don't know if that actually means anything, in terms of how police officers might engage undercover. But this person, I could tell, was dealing with a lot of internal conflict about being there.

Alisha Stranges (01:14:34):

Right.

Leanne Powers (01:14:35):

So, I didn't push it, but also, I've never told anybody that I had that encounter. I do think it's valid in that it could have been part of evidence, and I was lucky that I didn't answer any more than... I'm under that school of thought, "Only answer what you're asked and never give more information at all," is what I've always been taught. But it felt conflicted to me, and I just wish them well in terms of that. So, where was I? So, there was that brief encounter. I heard them move through the rest of the upstairs and then stomp their way out. The person that I was with really didn't care. They were like, "Okay, can we keep going?" Outside, people were talking, concerned.

Alisha Stranges (01:15:49):

Yeah.

Leanne Powers (01:15:49):

But also, there was still another person waiting, that I could still tell was waiting. So, I was like, "Okay." And then things petered out, in terms of the energy there. So, I took care of that person, and then the next person who came by needed to process that. So, they came in and were like "The police..." I was like, "Yeah." And they were like, "What do we do? And what does it mean?" And so, I told them about the alternate exit, in case they were feeling trapped. I said, "Okay. Here's your strategy. Here's where you can go if you need to. You can stay here in the temple, but I feel like I should go downstairs. Do you want to go with me?" But this person really had been waiting. They were at the front of the line at that point, so they were like, "I don't want to give up my place." I was like, "Yeah, just chill out here. I need to look downstairs just to make sure."

Alisha Stranges (01:17:05):

Yeah.

Leanne Powers (01:17:05):

I said, "It's my break time anyway. So, if you leave, this is what you do to lock the door behind you," sort of thing, and I went downstairs. Oh, it was like the aftermath of a tornado energy. Some people were wide-eyed, and quiet, and wandering alone. Other people were holding onto their friends and talking closely. Other people were laughing really hard and trying to continue their night, and brushing it off in an almost an assertive way because, in certain parts, the police just were walking through, making their presence known. In other places they were lingering. So, they were most closely at the bar. And that wasn't sort of... I went all over everywhere to check in, in every corner that I could at that point to make sure that a couple of people that I knew who might be triggered would be able to connect with them. And just people telling me, like, "He stepped on someone's foot and ruined their shoe." Someone else got knocked into, someone else had to walk backwards all the way down the stairs while the police were refusing to not come down the stairs beside each other, that sort of ongoing aggression and disrespect. Some said they were laughed at; two people were crying when we talked. I gave a lot of hugs.

Leanne Powers (01:19:35):

But I decided not to go down to the basement and involve myself further. I felt like that wasn't my place, and there's nothing I could do about it. And if they decided to turn their attention to me, then someone could just point to me and be like, "There's the prostitute." Sometimes people would call me different things. I just didn't want to get in a situation where I would have to give too much information. But the whole rest of that night was more heavy. Shock. And some reclaiming, too. I would say, reclaiming of space and body, and stamping it. Stomping out that anger, brushing it off and being defiant, and being like, "This is what it means to be in this space. This is what it means to be part of a legacy of marginalization and criminalization."

Leanne Powers (01:20:45):

“Here we are.” And also counting our blessings that the space even happened and that it wasn’t worse. So, there’s that kind of trying to be gratitude and anger and sadness. And a lot of people trying to make sure that their other person was okay, their friends that were outside or at the pool or smoking or wherever they were. So, people also just disappeared, and it was harder to know. People weren’t able to follow through on their promises to each other, so people felt a little lost. But then people who did come to me later that night often had things that were broader in scope than the immediacy of the Palace and the concerns of that night.

Leanne Powers (01:21:57):

So, I remember talking to someone about their mother. I remember talking to someone about their dog. I remember talking to someone about being in prison. So, there were some things definitely that came up that night, but it wasn’t heavy. I think people were more shocked and angry than... The people who would come to see me were not shaking or in terror. You’re trying hard to stay calm and grounded and to have an exit plan that felt good for them that night.

Leanne Powers (01:23:03):

And then, of course, there’s people who are like, “Whatever happens I still got this. I have been waiting to see you. This is happening.” So, it was a little bit back to business, and it wasn’t until later on when I was decompressing with some of the volunteers at the end that people really came together. So, it trickled at the end. The last hour, as I understand it, in my experience, there was a lot less people there except the volunteers. The volunteers were staying whether they were on shift or not, and a lot of them had to get together. And we all gathered at the temple and had a circle together for people to talk about their experiences and what they thought might... Try not to think too much about be in their head about what might happen, but also just needing support while they checked in with the folks.

Leanne Powers (01:24:17):

And then, could we be in trouble? What is that? What could happen there? How is so and so? People were particularly worried about the folks who were on the paperwork and the people who had to spend the most amount of time engaging with the police, the front door, the bar folks, the DJ, things like that. So, we did have some decompression time, and I continued those circles and at Lap Space also, after the G20, things like that. We would do things when there was community emergency of coming together, having a healing circle and then a play space or something like that. So, there was a wrap up, I recognize, sorry, I’m jumping back and forth in time a little bit.

Alisha Stranges (01:25:23):

It’s okay.

Leanne Powers (01:25:23):

But that was that night. And at the end, it was sombre, it was super sombre and sad. And just impending feeling because we really didn’t know what was going to go on. That being said, the energy of the invasion was felt for years. People came to me and needed to talk about that for years. I think people had more trouble transitioning into the space without reassurance or without a plan of protection in case they came again. There were Palaces where things were more apparent in terms of the consequences. And then later on it was more settled. But that didn’t matter if you were in the space and you were dealing with police or imprisonment, aggression, abuse, all sorts of these things came up for folks, safety, stalking, ridicule, ridicule, ridicule was often something that people needed to figure out how to counter, how to do something about that.

Leanne Powers (01:26:56):

The dismissiveness of the police. Being interrupted, not being able to answer the questions, being peppered and worried that they made mistakes. Not knowing if something that they said had an effect for that night, worried that they could be called as a witness or something like that. Upset about having been having a drink or two that night and embarrassed about how they handled it. Came back. Sometimes people would, because it was such a unique space and a different kind of claiming that could be done there at that time hadn't been done that most people knew of in that kind of public way.

Alisha Stranges (01:28:15):

When you say unique space, do you mean specifically the temple or the Pussy Palace?

Leanne Powers (01:28:20):

No. The Pussy Palace in and of itself. That the police would target the Palace. For them, often, if they did come to me then, they were often invested in the space too in a larger ongoing way. And so, needing to figure out how to claim it years later, how to conduct themselves so that if another raid happened, they would be okay. How reasonable were their fears; needing to bounce some of that off. Protecting their bodies, creating a shield. How to talk about things so that they wouldn't get themselves in trouble with someone who was undercover. Rational or not, people had fears for, I could definitely say five years for sure. And then more casually in conversation outside of the actual Palace itself. But it was content that people brought to me that they needed to do some work around or even just decompress.

Leanne Powers (01:29:40):

“He saw me in this position. He laughed at me. I never could wear that again. I went home and broke something that I can never repair.” Sometimes people talked about it sort of in metaphors, like someone talking about breaking something in their home and it felt poignant. And people would tell me stories about how they'd decompress or let go of some of the negativity around it. And then my work, I felt, was to try to bring it around to being present, to the fact that this Palace could continue. And what can it mean now within that context?

Leanne Powers (01:31:42):

So, when someone comes and they're up high in their chest breathing, so then trying to figure out how to touch their feet or imagine the feeling of their feet touching the floor, and then the feeling of the floor touching their feet, acknowledging that their feet were on a floor of a house that was decades old, that, that had walls that supported the floor that supported their feet. And that the place had a foundation. And to picture that foundation, to understand that that foundation came after years of beauty and conflict underneath it. The centuries. Thinking back to when it was York. Thinking back prior to colonization. Just to say, there's a myriad of things. There is a safer space, but there's no safe space. And the Palace sometimes, I don't know if it's part of how we talk, how politics happen, but there's that sort of essentialist thinking that, “Well, if there's women or women and trans people in this space, it's different. It's safe.” It means that pride mingling with delusion, to some degree, of safety. And being able to be, like, hard things are going to happen, they have happened here, men were raped here.

Leanne Powers (01:32:33):

Men also had the most amazing experiences of their life here over the last year and here we are. So, trying to figure out either through visualization, through mindfulness and then through finding the spot of joy that they could carry into this new space, acknowledging it is a space. But that they planted a seed there first, before that happened. And here they are again. That the police didn't take that away. To let go of that

because it wasn't spoiled. Take apart those metaphors so that you can recover a sense of agency and plan so that you're not wallowing or carrying anxiety unnecessarily, especially when the point is pleasure. We're trying to bring that back.

Leanne Powers (01:33:54):

So, that's some of it, but definitely a few years later, the next one and the one following... It's so interesting because it's not always the next day, it's the day after. It's not always the next Pussy Palace, it's the Palace after. That people are more able to deeply acknowledge the pain that is still there. And especially the worry of how people could be holding the burden of impending criminalized activity against them. And that they were enjoying the space at the same time and that person was still not sure what was going to happen to them. Those organizers who were like, (clicking sound). So, trying to be like, "What ways can we bring honour to that while, fuckin', bring more pleasure?" See if you can uplift anybody, even with just your eyes. The smallest things that we can do to reassure each other.

Leanne Powers (01:35:17):

Taking that energy that I'm bringing. And I'm like, "Yeah, this place feels special for a reason, this temple especially. You are here, you say you're my accolade. All right. Take it. Go with it." And we don't need to be in denial to still move ahead with our own healing and actualization. So that is some of the little tricks that I tried to use to bring people around. Because again, I'm like, "Okay. Seven to 12 minutes, [inaudible]." Who knows really? The first Palaces were 10, 12 hours. It was wild and amazing. So anyway, I don't even know what I'm just saying, so next question.

Alisha Stranges (01:36:23):

Well, I'm actually conscious that we're kind of getting close to our two-hour mark here. I mean, I've loved every moment of it, but I just wanted to leave a little space here at the end for you to touch on anything that maybe the questions that I asked didn't invite you to speak to, anything more that you wanted to share about your experience of being the Temple Priestess at the Pussy Palace.

Leanne Powers (01:36:52):

Well, I think obviously what happened with the police was wrong and was wounding. That being said, it coalesced people into more fierceness, made people more defiant, made them more loyal to sexual space politics. The Palace wouldn't be... We wouldn't be doing this without that raid. Isn't that interesting? How much of what incredible things happened there that we aren't talking about because of this, but also is able to now come to light because of it. So, it's very interesting being like, "Yeah, that happened and now we have new gifts." Now we have new opportunities to care for each other and to speak to the most subtle things that agents of the state do to control us. So, there's thankfulness for that. There's people who came to know each other, become friends and lovers because of the raid, and nothing more, nothing less. That is what happened, it made people love each other. It made love happen between people, and so it was defining. So, there's this river, a legacy that makes it so that the Palace is what it is. And I think that the fact that the politics around the Palace changed so much during that period of time was a reaction to the police being there. And it wasn't a reaction, but it was development. It was deeper conversation, it was more cognizant, especially of trans people in the space. All of those things led to changes that helped actualize more for the community as a whole. The connection to other bathhouse raids, also.

Leanne Powers (01:40:01):

The incredible conversation that came outside of the temple with gay men. Really valuable, really important. Really caused interpersonal solidarity and conflict. Because the comparison... There is no comparison. The

things that have been done to gay men over the decades by the Metro Toronto Police Force [Toronto Police Services] are severe. Death and people's lives falling apart. We can't necessarily make those comparisons. That being said, it brought to light dynamics that were already there: transphobia and sexism, sometimes classism and institutionalized hurt and pain, all were conversations that deepened because of the conflict with the police. So, those are some of the things.

Alisha Stranges (01:41:25):

Is that what you would like to leave it?

Leanne Powers (01:41:28):

I think so. I think that feels right. I'm so grateful for you asking these questions and being so thoughtful, and such an amazing listener, your expressions just carrying me through this. It's been very helpful and honourable. So, now I'm going to cry, if you don't mind.

Alisha Stranges (01:41:56):

I don't mind, I'm crying as well so it's okay.

Leanne Powers (01:42:00):

They're not sad tears.

Alisha Stranges (01:42:03):

No, I appreciate it so much, Leanne. It was just wonderful to hear about this very unique feature of this particular bathhouse, queer bathhouse series. I'm so honoured to bear witness to you recounting it and getting a little closer to what might have taken place up on the top floor there is just brilliant. So, thank you.

Leanne Powers (01:42:37):

Well, wait and see what grows out of this legacy and continues to happen as gatherings become more safe and communicated about, it's going to be really interesting.

Alisha Stranges (01:42:58):

All right. Well, I'm going to pause the recording now, but if you can hang on the call, you can pause yours as well.

Leanne Powers (01:43:04):

All right, I will.