

Pussy Palace Oral History Project
Oral History Interview with Josey Vogels
Conducted on April 15, 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: Vogels is a white, Canadian woman of Dutch descent. She describes herself as a “heterosexual queer,” possessing a fluid relationship with sexuality and a strong cultural and political allegiance with LGBTQ+ communities. Vogels grew up working-class, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Journalism, and worked for two decades as a sex-positive, feminist news columnist and activist. At the time of the interview, in 2021, Vogels was 56 years old. She was living in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic while working as a real estate agent in Niagara Falls, Ontario. The interview mostly concerns her experiences as a journalist, covering the Pussy Palace for her syndicated column, *My Messy Bedroom*, on the evening that the bathhouse event was raided by police in September 2000. She discusses her coverage of other public sex events; her experience as a first-hand news reporter at the Pussy Palace; her memory of the police raid and the subsequent legal case; and other topics. The interview covers the time period from about 1993-2003. She mentions Niagara Falls and Toronto, Ontario, as well as Montreal, Quebec.

Keywords: Journalist; LGBTQ; Sex-positive; Feminism; Police Raid; Legal Witness; My Messy Bedroom.

Alisha Stranges (00:02):

All right. Okay, so this is Alisha Stranges from the Pussy Palace Oral History Project, and I'm here in Toronto, Ontario interviewing Josey Vogels on, what is it? April 15, 2021. Josey is in Niagara Falls, Ontario, and Josey's going to tell us about the experience of being a patron of the Pussy Palace bathhouse event on the night of September 14, 2000. Josey, do I have your permission to record this oral history interview?

Josey Vogels (00:37):

Yes, you do.

Alisha Stranges (00:38):

Perfect.

Alisha Stranges (00:39):

So, before we get into your experience with the Pussy Palace, I'm going to just ask a few questions to get you to tell me a 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, some of these may have shifted or evolved over time. So, to start relatively simply, can you just tell us your full name, your age, and your preferred gender pronouns?

Josey Vogels (01:05):

My name is Josey Vogels. I am 56 years old, and I generally use she/her.

Alisha Stranges (01:15):

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

Josey Vogels (01:20):

I guess female and heterosexual.

Alisha Stranges (01:27):

And is there anything that has changed about that over time? How might you have described your gender and sexual identity around 2000 when the bathhouse raids were taking place?

Josey Vogels (01:39):

I mean, I've always, I guess, identified as heterosexual as much as that's worth to me. I'm pretty fluid about sexuality, so I mean, I've never been a banner-waving heterosexual I guess, but my history in relationships is heterosexual. Yeah. I don't know, it's a funny thing, that, because I have so long, and so much of my career and my life, identified with the LGBTQ community that if there was another gender that was like "heterosexual queer," I guess that would be mine.

Alisha Stranges (02:31):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). What would "queer"... How are you using that word?

Josey Vogels (02:37):

I guess "queer" in that I feel more allied and aligned with a lot of those communities, more so in some ways than, I don't know, heterosexual communities, whatever that means. Yeah, I have always been, not even so much a supporter, but I've always been very much involved and very much... I don't know. It aligns more with my identity and my politics and my life philosophy, so I just feel less comfortable identifying as heterosexual than I do as queer, which is a strange thing.

Alisha Stranges (03:31):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Thank you.

Alisha Stranges (03:34):

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

Josey Vogels (03:41):

I mean I'm white, Caucasian. I grew up immigrant family, European immigrant family. Dutch. So, I identify with my Dutch heritage, but racially I guess, yeah. White with a strong ethnic immigration influence.

Alisha Stranges (04:12):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative). What can you tell me about your educational and class background?

Josey Vogels (04:20):

So, class, grew up, I would say working-class. Farmers. Grew up in a farming community. What was it? Sorry. Class and...?

Alisha Stranges (04:35):

And educational background?

Josey Vogels (04:37):

Oh, education. So yeah, I did go to university. I was one of the first in my family to go to university, so that was an unusual experience for me, to actually enter into academia because it was very much outside of my comfort zone, but I am university educated with a Bachelor of Arts.

Alisha Stranges (04:58):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). In what particular field?

Josey Vogels (05:02):

Communication and journalism.

Alisha Stranges (05:06):

What kinds of activities occupy your time these days? What do you do?

Josey Vogels (05:10):

So, after many, many years of, I guess, activism and writing and 20 years as a journalist, I switched careers, and I got into real estate, more out of financial necessity. Journalism was kind of a dying money-making art form, and I just needed a change, and I got into real estate. I've been doing that since 2012.

Alisha Stranges (05:42):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). What role does religion or spirituality play in your life currently?

Josey Vogels (05:49):

So, I was raised Catholic. So, we all like to joke "recovering Catholic," but I mean, yeah. It was definitely strong. I went to Catholic school, but I don't identify with any particular religion. I would say agnostic is probably the closest to what I would identify with right now.

Alisha Stranges (06:13):

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

Josey Vogels (06:27):

No, I don't think so.

Alisha Stranges (06:30):

Short and sweet. Good. Thank you. All right, so I'm going to invite you to travel back in time to the fall of 2000. Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee was preparing to host, what I think they called, the Night of 2000 Pussies, which was the fourth instalment of the Pussy Palace. How did you first learn about the Night of 2000 Pussies bathhouse event?

Josey Vogels (06:55):

So, at the time, I was a working journalist and my area of specialty was sexuality. I was the author of a syndicated column called *My Messy Bedroom*, which was a feminist take on sexuality. So, as part of my job as a journalist, I was very much always interested in seeking out things to report on and talk about from a sort of... I was always more interested in marginalized sexualities and also feminist sexuality. So, I was very much involved in the lesbian/gay communities in Montreal at the time when I first started my column and in university. I was very much involved in active feminism at the time and also the LGBTQ... At that time, it would've just been LBGT. Probably just "LB" actually. Sorry, "LG" at that point. "Lesbian Gay." I don't even think they included "bisexual" at that point, but anyway.

Josey Vogels (08:03):

So yeah, that was kind of my beat, I guess, so I was always looking for interesting things going on in the community. My approach to my column and my journalism was first-hand reporting, so it was always trying to experience it first-hand and then view it through my eyes or through people who were experiencing it as opposed to being an objective, outside reporter.

Alisha Stranges (08:34):

I see, okay. Had you ever been to a Pussy Palace bathhouse event or any other public sex event before the September 14 Pussy Palace?

Josey Vogels (08:46):

Not to Pussy Palace. I was living in Montreal, so... Yeah, I had just moved to Toronto at that point, so I was more going to events in Toronto. I had been to many types of public sex events in Montreal, both through the S&M community, through the gay and lesbian community. Yeah, so it was not my first event, but it was my first Pussy Palace for sure, and it was my first women-only sexual event, I think. Yes.

Alisha Stranges (09:28):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Do you know what it was about this particular event happening in Toronto that intrigued you, captivated your attention, made you want to report on it?

Josey Vogels (09:35):

Yeah, for sure. I would say that one thing that always interested me when I first started my column as *My Messy Bedroom* was I really felt that there was a lack of female agency when it came to writing about sexuality, and the framing of sexuality and female sexuality was often from a male gaze, as we say, but also male perspective. I've always been fascinated with female empowerment when it comes to sexuality and ownership of our own sexuality, so I was very much, I mean I lived in Toronto in the 80s. I had several close gay male friends who frequented the bathhouses, the gay male bathhouses there. I was very much aware of that world, and I was very intrigued and interested in the idea of women taking that approach to sexuality from a female perspective, and just how that would play out and what some of the politics that are involved in it being an all-female event, a lesbian event.

Josey Vogels (10:59):

Yeah, so that very much intrigued me, and also, as a journalist, it seemed like a great event to cover that would provide a lot of great material for me to write about. I mean, let's face it, I did have selfish interests as well in terms of what I was doing and what I was writing about. I was always looking for things to write

about, and it seemed like a juicy thing to write about in terms of just, from so many levels, on so many levels and layers, both politically and just culturally and historically, et cetera.

Alisha Stranges (11:43):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. I'm curious about the space and time during which you would've gone from being someone who's decided they're going to attend this event to someone who becomes an official patron of the event. So, I'm wondering if you can do your best to remember where you might have been before you made your way to Club Toronto.

Josey Vogels (12:05):

Uh-oh. What did I just do? Sorry. Am I there?

Alisha Stranges (12:13):

I can see you, yeah.

Josey Vogels (12:14):

Okay, sorry. Something just happened, popped up on my computer, and I clicked something and it changed. Okay. Sorry, can you just ask—

Alisha Stranges (12:21):

I can repeat for you, sure.

Alisha Stranges (12:22):

So, I'm curious about the space and time during which you would've gone from being someone who's decided they're going to attend the event to someone who becomes an official patron. So, if you can do what you can here to remember where you were before you made your way to Club Toronto.

Josey Vogels (12:41):

I don't remember a lot about it, to be honest with you. I mean, I can't even remember who the actual organizers were, but obviously I was in touch with them and in communication with them, and they were familiar with my work and what I was doing, so they were comfortable admitting me as an attendee, knowing that I would be writing about it. So, that's as far as I remember. So, I was given a pass and I went as media, like—

Alisha Stranges (13:23):

I see.

Josey Vogels (13:23):

I did go as media. I was upfront about the fact that I was going and potentially writing about it for my column.

Alisha Stranges (13:31):

I see, and do you remember anything about those exchanges? Were the organizers initially eager to have you come as media or...?

Josey Vogels (13:44):

Yeah, I don't remember there being really any resistance. Again, like I said, I think there was a preceding relationship with the organizers. They were familiar with me, I was familiar with them, so they didn't have any problem with me attending.

Alisha Stranges (13:59):

And did—

Josey Vogels (13:59):

As far as I remember.

Alisha Stranges (13:59):

Yeah, as far as you remember. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (14:04):

Do you remember anything about the journey? Where was the club in relation to where you were living? How did you get there?

Josey Vogels (14:10):

So, I lived in Parkdale. I probably rode my bike at the time, which was mostly what I did. Yeah, so I just remember, I mean I vaguely remember being at the door, getting let in, but I don't really remember much beyond that, like before that.

Alisha Stranges (14:34):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Do you know—

Josey Vogels (14:38):

I do know it was one of those things that I just, as a journalist, as a columnist doing my thing, it was an event that I was attending, so I went. I knew I was on the list to get in, so I just attended.

Alisha Stranges (14:47):

Do you remember what time you were planning to arrive or how long you were planning to stay?

Josey Vogels (14:55):

I really don't. I don't even remember what time it started. I mean, I got there at the beginning. Well no, I didn't. I guess it was a while in because it was a lot of people already there when I got there. Yeah, and I really didn't know how long I'd stay. I didn't know what it would be like, and I was just kind of going. Again, as I

liked to at the time, I'd just submerge myself into an environment and then observe, respectfully obviously, and then get what I could from it and leave when it felt right.

Alisha Stranges (15:28):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, you were saying earlier that in Montreal, you had gone to other similar types of events. I'm curious about... Do you remember how you were feeling about attending this particular event, which was a little different, maybe? Nervous, excited, or...?

Josey Vogels (15:47):

No, just more intrigued, and kind of excited because I thought it was such a cool thing, but at that point, been writing for, well '93, so like seven years I'd been doing my, well. Yeah, almost seven years I'd been doing my column at that point, so I was fairly comfortable with a lot of different communities, different events, sexually charged events or public sex events, that type of thing. I wasn't nervous in that sense, no.

Alisha Stranges (16:30):

I see. Do you remember anything about what you might have worn to the event?

Josey Vogels (16:37):

Do you believe I don't remember what I wore? I don't think that I... Because again, it's like I'm trying to respect... I'm not trying to hide the fact that I'm a journalist and try and go undercover or something like that. I honestly think I just wore my usual street clothes. I didn't get dressed up fancy. I had no plan to participate, per se because as I said, I do identify as a heterosexual... Not that I haven't been with women, but it wasn't my motivation in going there, to participate at all. It was very much as an observer, so I guess I probably didn't wear anything that would attract too much attention.

Alisha Stranges (17:25):

I see. Once you were inside, what do you recall about the space itself?

Josey Vogels (17:33):

I remember just thinking it was very relaxed. It was very friendly. Everyone seemed to be in a good mood. There was various states of dress and undress, which I fully expected. There was more intense activity happening in a couple of the rooms, I think. There was like a playroom where there was more intense sexual activity happening, a lot of lounging around the pool, just everyone kind of chilling out and relaxing. I remember there being a cupid board, which I thought was kind of fun, where people could post and try and find matches. I think I made a joke in my column, at the time, that it was all very polite as opposed to... As a commentary on, culturally, female sexuality versus male sexuality being a little more overt and less polite and empathetic, whereas I felt the environment there was very inclusive and feel-good.

Alisha Stranges (18:40):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Which parts of the space did you gravitate towards?

Josey Vogels (18:46):

I was hanging out by the pool a fair bit, only because it seemed like a more comfortable place for people to chat with me and stuff because people were just lounging. The playroom, I'm not going to interview someone

while they're involved in an intense sexual act or anything, so I was kind of in and out of there very briefly, but yeah. My strongest memory is the pool area.

Alisha Stranges (19:17):

Yeah. You were saying that that allowed you to talk to folks. Anything coming back? Anything that remains in those conversations? Impressions of folks or...?

Josey Vogels (19:30):

No. I mean the only thing, again, just the overall feeling of it being very comfortable, everyone being very polite. Everyone being very, just, a little giddy I think almost, like people were just excited to be there. It was fun.

Alisha Stranges (19:46):

Yeah. I mean I don't know what it's like to be a journalist, but I can imagine that it's a little bit challenging to figure out how you're going to strike up a conversation with somebody and also let them know that you're there as a reporter. Were any of those kind of deliberations going on for you?

Josey Vogels (20:02):

Yeah, a little bit of that. I mean again, as a journalist in the area that I worked in, I was so... A lot of people were familiar with what I was doing within those communities, so usually I would be like, "Okay, well I am a journalist, but this is who I am and what I write about," and often there'd be, "Oh yeah. I know your work," so that would be okay because they knew where I was coming from, but no. I don't really remember anyone having any negative reaction to that or feeling like... I don't know. I mean, I guess it's just my approach. I'm good at reading the room. I don't try and push it if I'm not welcome. I try to be respectful, so yeah. Again, I don't really remember the details of any conversations. I just, again, remember a feeling of people being polite and nice, and if they didn't want to talk to me, I didn't talk to them, but it wasn't like a hostile thing at all.

Alisha Stranges (21:14):

I see. So, I really also want to get a sense of the impression that the space may have made on your senses. So, I'm going to invite you into a little exercise here, and I'll do it with you. Whatever comes is what comes. Don't have to judge it, or don't worry if nothing comes.

Alisha Stranges (21:34):

So, if I could invite you to soften your gaze a little bit. If you feel comfortable, even close your eyes. I'll close mine. Just breathe. And with each inhale and exhale, allow your body to re-inhabit a particular location in the Pussy Palace that night. Don't worry too much about what space is coming to mind. The first one that comes to mind is the best one. Just breathe into that space. From this contemplative space, if you can remain there as you answer these or try to answer these next set of questions, looking around in your mind's eye, tell me what you're seeing.

Josey Vogels (22:31):

I'm at the pool, and I'm just hanging around. There are various women lounging, some in the pool, some dressed, some undressed, and just a lot of laughter and fun. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (22:51):

And if you could magically distil this space into a single colour, if it could express itself as a single colour, what is the dominant colour you're seeing?

Josey Vogels (23:06):

Red, for some reason.

Alisha Stranges (23:07):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). If this space could somehow express itself in sound, what's the sound of this poolside space?

Josey Vogels (23:26):

I mean an actual sound or—

Alisha Stranges (23:28):

It can be abstract or actual.

Josey Vogels (23:34):

Yeah. I mean, I think joy is what comes to mind. I don't know if that's a sound, but yeah. Laughter. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (23:47):

And if a part of your body, some part of your body, could brush up against some part of the space, tell me what it is you're touching and describe its textures.

Josey Vogels (24:12):

I guess, I don't know. That's a tough one. I don't know. I mean, the thing that just keeps coming to me is kind of just a feeling of jubilation and joy of just the space that is just a little cocoon of everybody just feeling really positive and happy.

Alisha Stranges (24:40):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). If, this cocoon of joy, if you could taste it, what would its flavour be?

Josey Vogels (24:52):

Sweet?

Alisha Stranges (24:53):

Sweet. Yeah. You can let that go. Open your eyes if they're closed. Thank you. Thank you for—

[crosstalk]

Alisha Stranges (25:05):

Yeah. We're just trying to see what we can excavate from folks' memories; you know?

Josey Vogels (25:13):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (25:14):

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

Josey Vogels (25:26):

Oh, my goodness. I am the worst at guesstimating that. I mean, honestly, I don't know how many people were there total. I don't even know. I can't remember.

Alisha Stranges (25:38):

Well, I'm curious about what remains—

Josey Vogels (25:40):

My perception, like it wasn't packed; there was room to move around, but there were a lot of different spaces too, so I don't know. There had to have been a hundred people there when I was there.

Alisha Stranges (25:55):

Yeah. By the poolside, how many did it—

Josey Vogels (25:59):

Pool, I'd say there was probably about, again, not tons and tons, but there was like 25 people around the pool I'd say.

Alisha Stranges (26:07):

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

Josey Vogels (26:14):

Yeah. I would say it was predominantly white and female. Many... Variety of body types. Again, as I said, some dressed, some not dressed, some partially. Seemed to me, I mean I assumed mostly lesbian, definitely. I believe there were some trans. I think there was some controversy. I seem to remember there being some controversy about whether transwomen were allowed or not, but I do believe in the end that they were, so there may have been that, but honestly, I don't have a strong memory of that. I feel like I have a memory of that, but I'm not sure if it's mine or what I've read after the fact.

Alisha Stranges (27:02):

I hear you, yeah. And thinking about your own positionality, how did it feel for you to exist in your body in that crowd that night?

Josey Vogels (27:11):

Really comfortable. I mean, the one thing I've always had in all-female and especially lesbian spaces, I've always described it to like going even to a lesbian bar or anything. It's just a nice feeling of lack of male energy, which is a nice space to be in sometimes for women, right?

Alisha Stranges (27:35):

Then around 12:45 a.m., five men, as you know, all plainclothes police officers, entered the club. Stayed about 90 minutes. Were you still in the Pussy Palace when they arrived?

Josey Vogels (27:45):

Yes, I was.

Alisha Stranges (27:47):

Okay, and do you remember what you were doing when the police arrived?

Josey Vogels (27:52):

When they came in, I was actually at the pool. I spent a long time at the pool, obviously, but yeah. When they walked in, I was at the pool. I was just kind of standing around. I can't remember exactly what I was doing, but I just remember it being so surreal because I was like... I couldn't kind of make sense of it at first because at first, it's like anything when it's weird like that. You're like, "Is this really happening or is this performance? Is this something that somebody's staging?" I just didn't know what was really happening because it just seemed like... The last thing I thought of was "police raid." It just seemed so bizarre.

Alisha Stranges (28:28):

Right, and how did you become aware of the police presence?

Josey Vogels (28:33):

People just started, well talking, and then it dawned on me because, I think, at the time, I remembered four. There were four, but I think there were five. I can't remember the exact number of police officers, but then I was just like, "Oh. Something's happening here. Obviously, the police have arrived," and again it was so strange because it's these men in the middle of this female environment. It was just so jarring, right? So then, everyone was just kind of confused. "What's going on?" There was confusion. "What's happening here?" So, I didn't really know what was going on, but it just seemed super strange that they were wandering around the space freely.

Alisha Stranges (29:15):

Did you actually see or talk to them?

Josey Vogels (29:19):

Yes, I did, I recall. I think. But they were very tight-lipped. I was asking like, "What's happening here?" But they didn't respond to me, I don't think. I don't remember, actually, having a verbal exchange with any of them.

Alisha Stranges (29:38):

Yeah, I can imagine that must've been... I'm curious about what that moment was like for you as someone who was there as a journalist, right? Were you expecting or anticipating...? It sounds like you weren't anticipating something like this could happen. So now, all of a sudden, they're here. That must've changed what you were planning to maybe say about...

Josey Vogels (29:59):

Yeah, for sure, because suddenly, here I was just kind of hanging out, having fun, enjoying the environment, and it was whatever. Then suddenly it was an actual... Turning into a reporter and the story, but it was very difficult for me to get any information from anyone. I almost feel like I was so taken aback, I don't know. I don't really remember. Maybe I was just being a bad journalist at the time, or whether I just couldn't get anything from them. I don't really remember... I mostly just remember the visual. It was such an impactful visual moment, of seeing them walk in and just being so jarred and then confused by it. Then yeah, just seeing them walk around.

Josey Vogels (30:58):

I guess I went into more of an observation mode where I was just kind of watching what they were doing and how they were talking to people and how they were treating people because I was like, "Okay, this is now something, and I should probably pay attention to what the interactions are like and what their attitude is like." I was then aware. I do remember being aware that's like, "Oh shit. This is going to become something different now, and I need to pay attention to what's going on here." I do remember them... Like, the playroom, they were very aggressive about that and what was going on in there. The thing I remember mostly is they were just very gruff and very not conscientious about what they were walking into. That was the thing that struck me. I just remember thinking like, "Why would they send men?" It just seemed so strange to me.

Alisha Stranges (32:00):

Yeah. I'd love if you can parse some of this out for us. How did the atmosphere of the club change, do you find, when folks realize that there was a police presence and a male presence?

Josey Vogels (32:13):

Yeah, for sure. There was a lot of scrambling around, there was people putting clothes on. There were people just like, "What's going on? What's going on? What's going on?" I don't remember much more than that. Yeah, it was just a complete 180 of the atmosphere before that, right? Because, suddenly, it went from this great, positive, everyone feeling happy and joyful to like, "What the hell is this?"

Alisha Stranges (32:45):

Right, yeah. I remember that in one of your pieces, I think "Polite Gal Love," you sort of were talking about how they made a big deal out of the photo room?

Josey Vogels (32:58):

Yes.

Alisha Stranges (33:00):

Is there anything you can tell us about that?

Josey Vogels (33:07):

I don't really remember. Yeah, I don't remember, to be honest with you. I'd have to read my piece again, which I thought I did, but I don't remember now. I don't have a strong memory of it without reading what I wrote about it.

Alisha Stranges (33:21):

What's coming to me is, like, there was a sign that said "this way to the porn room," "this way to the photo room." They wanted to know where the photo room was, like it was going to give them some evidence of something.

Josey Vogels (33:34):

Yeah. Oh, I remember now because I remember them just pointing, like again, I mean the way cops are, though, right? They're just very authoritative in a way that just didn't need to. I guess it was, to me, the contrast, right? Because it was like this feel-good, everyone whatever, just such a loving and cool atmosphere, and here are these guys who are getting all super serious about it. It just kind of seemed funny to me. I was just like, "What? What are you doing? There's nothing going on here, dude, that you need to worry about, so what is with the aggression?" That's the way I remember feeling.

Alisha Stranges (34:22):

Yeah. Do you remember how the atmosphere changed after the cops left?

Josey Vogels (34:29):

I don't feel like I stayed very long, for some reason. I mean, I feel like it just kind of killed it. So, I don't really know what happened after. The whole mood changed for me. It just seemed like everyone was just like, "Oh. Well that suddenly put a big pin in the balloon of our lovely little party here." Yeah, so the space was almost like it was contaminated or something weird like that.

Alisha Stranges (35:05):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Was it the raid itself that prompted you to leave or something else?

Josey Vogels (35:11):

I think things just sort of seemed like they weren't... I waited around, and I guess they eventually left. I don't really remember. I really don't remember. I obviously just felt like there was nothing more going to happen, so I kind of left. It was late. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (35:30):

It was later revealed that before the plainclothes police officers entered the club, there were two women police officers attending the event undercover. How did it feel to learn later that there were—

Josey Vogels (35:45):

Yeah. I mean that made a lot more sense to me, but even still, I don't know. I guess the whole thing kind of left a bad taste in my mouth because I just thought that it was such an unnecessary use of aggression and force, but that's my feeling with these types of things, whether it's an all-female event or any kind of private, I mean public, but private, adult, permission-based event where there was nothing, in my mind, harmful or

illegal going on. To me, because it's around sexuality and sex, then it evokes fear and such negative reaction. To me, it just fed into that whole thing where I'm just like, "Of course. How dare we let something like this go on?" It's so ridiculous because really, ultimately, one of the most harmless things you could do, and here we are raiding it. It just seemed ridiculous to me.

Alisha Stranges (37:05):

Yeah. In our email correspondence, you were saying that you were a little bit involved in the legal proceedings—

Josey Vogels (37:12):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (37:13):

It sounded like. Can you tell us a little bit about your involvement?

Josey Vogels (37:15):

Yeah. So, because I had written this article, and so then when it did finally go to court, I actually got subpoenaed, and I had to appear in court as a witness. It's the first time I've ever had to do that, and yeah. It was pretty intense because I had to go to court, and I had to sit in this little room. I didn't know... Like, I was cross-examined. It was... The strongest memory I have of that, because I think the first line of my piece was something like, "As your average pervert" or something, which was my sense of humour and making that joke obviously in a tongue-in-cheek way, and the cross-examiner went after me for that line and was like, "Are you a pervert?"

Josey Vogels (38:07):

I was just so taken aback. I just said, "Look, if you read any of my previous works, you know that I use a lot of humour. So, I'm using that word as a way of reclaiming it and putting it in my own context," which of course he wanted none of. He just kept saying, "Are you a pervert? Are you a pervert?" I was like, "I don't know how to answer than any other way than I'm answering it." I was like, "Wow. This is what being cross-examined feels like, when they're trying to put words in your mouth and trying to make you say something."

Josey Vogels (38:45):

That was pretty interesting. I also remember... Because Kyle Rae was also part of that hearing. I feel like we were in the same room together beforehand, and we were kind of exchanging notes, but I don't really remember the exchange, but I just remember that whole thing being very bizarre and me just kind of feeling like, afterwards like, "Oh, I hope I didn't say or do anything that is going to hurt what I felt" because despite me being a journalist, I was never objective. I mean I wrote a column that was from my personal perspective, and I was an activist, so I was very much aware that I didn't want to say or do anything that would incriminate anybody who shouldn't be incriminated. That's mostly what I remember is him cross-examining me about whether I was actually a pervert and... Oh. He asked me to define what a "pervert" was, and I was trying to explain again that I was using the word in my own context.

Alisha Stranges (39:54):

So, did you, I mean I don't know much about court proceedings, but it sounds like you're just called in, made to testify and be cross-examined, and then, was anybody supporting you from the defence side?

Josey Vogels (40:11):

I seem to remember Kyle Rae and I being in this room and someone talking to us before we went out there, so whether that was from the defence or not, I honestly don't really remember.

Alisha Stranges (40:22):

Right. So, your central engagement was just to show up and be cross-examined.

Josey Vogels (40:27):

Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (40:27):

Wow, okay.

Josey Vogels (40:28):

Yeah. That's all I remember. I just remember having to go, sit in this little room, wait my turn, go sit in the little box, and yeah.

Alisha Stranges (40:40):

Did you develop any kind of deeper connection, as a result of this court case, with the organizers or the people who were being charged? Any of that happen?

Josey Vogels (40:57):

I mean I do remember being involved at that point following it because I realized it was becoming a more serious thing, but I don't really remember, honestly. I don't really remember what my exchanges or whether I was in communication with the organizers at that point. I honestly don't really remember.

Alisha Stranges (41:29):

How about the community activism that surrounded it? Were you involved in any of that? We know, that there was a meeting at The 519 Community Centre—

Josey Vogels (41:42):

Yeah—

Alisha Stranges (41:42):

And then—

Josey Vogels (41:44):

I feel like I went to, at least, one of those. I remember that. I feel like Kyle Rae was there, too. I do remember going to something at The 519. I can't remember exactly what it was, but I do remember something, but I don't really remember beyond that.

Alisha Stranges (42:05):

There was a march to 52 Division. Any of this ring a bell?

Josey Vogels (42:14):

No.

Alisha Stranges (42:15):

Okay. No worries.

Josey Vogels (42:18):

I'm old. I'm getting old.

Alisha Stranges (42:20):

It's a long time ago.

Josey Vogels (42:23):

I know.

Alisha Stranges (42:23):

It really is, it really is, so I appreciate everything that you're trying to do to recover the memory. So, here we go. When you made the decision to attend the event, what were you hoping to experience?

Josey Vogels (42:38):

I guess, again, it was a celebration of female sexuality on our own terms. I mean, not my terms, because it was the lesbian community, but to me, I still, as an ally, felt that it was just a cool thing that was about owning our own sexuality and creating our own space to express it in our own way. I'm a big supporter of that, so yeah. It was like, "Cool."

Alisha Stranges (43:11):

And how did your expectations of the night compare, in the end, with your lived experience of it?

Josey Vogels (43:17):

I mean I guess, in a way, even though it's my own personal perception, I also try to come at it with the perception of what "Joe Reader" would look at it with. So, my own expectation was not that different than what I thought it would be. I guess there was that thing too, like about the cops. It's almost like, "Oh, the disappointment of what you were expecting it to be and what it actually was," but it's like the perception I always had as a sex columnist too.

Josey Vogels (43:55):

People expect me to walk around in whips and chains and be just constantly, being so out there. So it wasn't that I expected that, but I was going in as a reader, kind of going, "Okay. If you were expecting that it was going to be this whatever, I don't know what, like Mardi Gras of people just like... One massive orgy of

bodies piled,” I don’t know what people expect, but it’s coming at it from that perspective and then going. “It’s really just a bunch of women who mutually are adults, mutually respecting each other and creating a space for them to have some fun, and socialize, and express themselves sexually to whatever degree they want to and are comfortable with.” So, it’s sort of trying to close the gap of what those juxtapositions and expectations are socially when it comes to people’s ideas and imaginations about what these things are — “these things” are.

Alisha Stranges (45:11):

Yeah, yeah. I hear you, yeah. So, we’re nearing the end here. My last set of questions focuses on what you imagine the impact of the Pussy Palace as a community initiative, what you imagine it to be. What was your impression of the intent behind the Pussy Palace, its reason for being?

Josey Vogels (45:33):

Well, and again, I think there’s such a history of gay male sexuality in public spaces and the history of gay male bathhouse raids, and what that did in terms of motivating the community. I guess I’ve always felt like we don’t take lesbian sexuality as seriously because it’s women, and it’s somehow not as threatening, or something. So, to me, it was, not that I ever would want it to be raided, but it was important in a way that it was like, women demanding the space and this opportunity in our society as well, and culturally to create their own space to express their own sexuality, and that it exists, right, in a more public way as opposed to just all being soft and not... I don’t know.

Josey Vogels (47:02):

Like I think it was just such an important event in that way because it kind of put female, lesbian sexuality on the map in that same way in terms of it being a tool for activism as opposed to activism that’s not directly tied to sex, per se. I don’t know if that makes sense, but yeah. Like gay male activism is always tied to sex. Lesbian activism isn’t always tied to sex, and I think it’s important that sometimes it is because sex is a huge part of how we express our gender and our sexuality, right?

Alisha Stranges (47:52):

Right. In what ways did you think the Pussy Palace succeeded in delivering on this intention?

Josey Vogels (48:01):

Well, I mean, I think that like anything that makes its way into the media and gets some attention is that, it starts discussion and people are talking about it, be it negative, be it positive, be it supportive, be it not. At least there’s some dialogue around it, right? And I feel like it created some dialogue around that, and it was important in that sense, and also as a way to rally the community too. Communities. And to give people a focus and something to rally around. Again, just as gay bath raids in the past have been such a pivotal point in gay male activism, it was our own little way of doing that.

Alisha Stranges (49:02):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Is there any way that you would say it might have failed to deliver on its intention, in your view?

Josey Vogels (49:15):

Well, I mean I guess there's an argument to be made for preaching to the converted and, for those who are not supportive, it's just going to support their feeling that it's sexually perverted and that everything about gay LGBTQ activism is about sex, and, "Why do we care what you do in the bedroom?" It can reinforce that kind of side of things, much like the gay pride parade is like, "Why do they have to all be naked?" It's like, "Well, because. That's the point," but there's always going to be people who are like, "Ugh. Keep it to yourself and I don't want to hear about it," and "You're just making it worse for yourself," but at the same time, I mean any activism, you can't let that stop you, right? Because otherwise no one would do anything, ever.

Alisha Stranges (50:14):

Right. What are your thoughts on the name of the event, the Pussy Palace? Did it–

Josey Vogels (50:20):

Oh, that was a big thing around the time. I do remember a lot of discussion about that. I mean it drove me crazy, that kind of stuff. I wrote a whole column on the word "cunt" once because I was just so sick of people like, "Ugh, I hate that word," and women, "I hate that word." So, for me, I thought it was a great name, but I know there was a lot of controversy around that. Again, I started my column at a time when feminism was very anti-porn, was very, in a way, anti-sex in a way in that all porn was exploitative to women, and all of that kind of thing, so using words like "pussy" and "cunt" and all of that, to me... I liked seeing that kind of stuff because I felt like it was a little in your face. Again, there's always going to be people who object to that and say, "You're making it worse for yourself," but I'm always the one who will then say the thing that you shouldn't say because I think it makes people pay attention a little more. Yeah, I don't really remember the controversy, but I remember people having a problem with the name.

Alisha Stranges (51:31):

Yeah. We know that at some point, it changed from the Pussy Palace to the Pleasure Palace. It's hard to understand when this shift happened. It looks like–

Josey Vogels (51:41):

Oh, interesting.

Alisha Stranges (51:43):

I'm trying to find out about when it happened, why it happened, who suggested it, what prompted it, right? Were you aware that the name changed?

Josey Vogels (51:54):

No, not at all, but that's very interesting. Yeah.

Alisha Stranges (52:00):

I used the way-back machine on the internet to try to figure it out, like at what point did it start to be called something else. It looks like somewhere around 2010?

Josey Vogels (52:09):

Okay. No, yeah. I don't know. I don't know.

Alisha Stranges (52:13):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Josey Vogels (52:16):

I was no longer in Toronto at that time, so I wasn't paying as much attention. I was kind of getting out of what I was doing and shifting gears, but yeah.

Alisha Stranges (52:26):

Yeah. This is just a question about... Do you remember how the public received your writing on this particular event?

Josey Vogels (52:36):

I mean, you know, it's always hard to gauge because I heard more from supporters. I don't remember a lot of negative reaction to it. I got a lot of support, people who enjoyed it. Yeah, I don't remember a lot of negative reaction to it.

Alisha Stranges (52:55):

Is there anything else that you would want to share about your experience that night or surrounding that night that maybe my questions didn't allow you to speak to?

Josey Vogels (53:07):

Well, I mean, I guess the fact that it remains as kind of an important event that we're talking about 20 years later is, I think, kind of cool to me. I think that obviously it had some kind of impact for it... So, to me, that's significant in terms of history of the communities who organized it and who was behind it. No, I can't really think of anything else.

Alisha Stranges (53:57):

Okay. We're all done then. So, thank you so much for taking this time out of your day. I know you're super busy, but I really appreciate your effort to recall back and grab whatever you can grab for the record for us.

Josey Vogels (54:13):

Yeah. It's my pleasure, or "my pussy" as I should say. I don't know. No, what word should I use? No, bad joke. Okay, but yeah. No, good luck with the project. I would love to remain informed about where it goes!

Alisha Stranges (54:34):

Absolutely, absolutely. So, I'm going to press "stop" on the recording, but we can hang around for just a second afterward. You can stop your recording as well.

Josey Vogels (54:42):
Okay.