Bek Credeur

June 24, 2023

Lafayette, LA

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Ethnographic Preface:

As part of the ongoing LGBTQ+ Archives Project, Special Collections of Edith Garland Dupré Library and the Guilbeau Center for Public History are collecting oral histories documenting the region’s LGBTQ+ community. Project Co-Director Dr. Zack Stein and Undergraduate Research Assistant Gabrielle Hoffpauir-Rosatto attended Pride Acadiana 2023 and interviewed various attendees for an oral history harvest.

 TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [GH]

Interviewee initials: [BC]

GH: Today is Saturday, June 24. My name is Gabrielle Hoffpauir-Rosatto. I am here with Bek Credeur. And obviously, you know Bek that we are uploading this to UL's website, and I just want to make sure you're okay with that and you know that if you want to skip a question, stop recording at any point …

BC: Yeah, absolutely. For that.

GH: Okay, alright. So, describe what it was like growing up LGBTQ+ in Louisiana.

BC: Complicated. I do have one gay parent. So, there was always, fortunately enough for me, access to at least a safe space. But on the other half of things, my father was extremely homophobic and introduced me to the conservative side of things (*laughs*) and was that influence in my life and was very heavy and was pushed by religion fully. And what I noticed with a lot of people is that it's fully centered around religion, it seems, or like pushed by--especially in places as Catholic as this. But overall, like with both sides of things, it took a long time to feel even safe. It took a long time to even feel stable. And because of those things, it took a long time to identify who I was. And it started with the complete opposite of what I am now. Like, it started with me being a lesbian woman and identifying that way, and it's slowly transitioned into like me, dealing with like gender spectrum stuff. And so I guess that it just attests to, like I've been through a lot of it, I've been through all of the hateful experiences and stuff like that. And I would say like, unfortunately, the number one adjective to describe my experience here is "fearful," and sanctioned off from like constantly being separated and identified with or perceived in some kind of way or whatever. There's always distance between me and the general public it feels, being in the South, in such a conservative place. So, just always under-educated; it took me so long to get where I was. Just a little disorienting, but in the same way, like so intrinsically beautiful because of the people that you get to meet that go through that kind of stuff, you know. Absolutely wonderful as well, in the same breath. But yeah, hard.

GH: What's the best part about being LGBTQ+, on the complete opposite side?

BC: Yeah. Now that I have had some time and some space and like the means to identify with myself, it's been beautiful, but it's still, like represents challenges in every way. Every time that there's a joyful moment, there's always me looking behind my back. So, like that question for me is complicated and a little sad. Because it's like, every good moment that I get is being ... I feel like I have to look around myself and check to make sure everything's good. But I would say the best thing is that the community is so so beautiful, and the people that you do get to meet and the experiences that you do get to have are just that much better. But I do have to say that's because of struggle; it's still hard. Every day is, like I said, it's just a matter of surveilling my own self and making sure I'm being perceived in a way that I won't get hurt. But beautiful, still, in that in that way.

GH: I asked this to someone earlier. How do you think that that struggle that so many LGBTQ+ people have to go through, how do you feel that that shapes them as people?

BC: Yeah. It's kind of that double-sided coin because it's similar. I personally feel like these people that go through these things ... The saddest part of it is that they're forced into it. But there is a certain awareness that you're brought to about, like acceptance, and just people being people, like if it deals with socio-political boundaries or not, like just people existing and accepting what it means to be a human and the range of emotions. And this is what I've heard from a lot of people, just being more open-minded in general, which is the most beautiful thing you can be, especially at my age. Like, just being able to look at the world for what it is, being able to, I don't know. I think it shapes people, and like I said, it's both things because it's like: I was forced to get this way, and there was a lot of painful experiences I had to go through to get this way. But I feel like I am one of … I feel so well rounded. And I feel like I've like seen so much and I feel like because... again, it's unfortunate, but I feel like because I've experienced this deficit of security and safety and love and abundance in terms of just being myself, that everywhere that I go from here and that every moment that I accept myself I am in full abundance and I'm like above 100%. You know what I mean? Every time that I get to go into these beautiful spaces and experience these things, I am in full overflow of like... It's amazing and it's beautiful. But I don't know. I think it's shaped me immensely. I think it's really complicated, and I feel like a lot of people don't get to explore that a lot.

GH: What does Pride mean to you, and why is it important in Louisiana?

BC: Another double-sided coin. Having to have events like this, or having that instinct to say like, we almost have to have events like this in order to have those spaces is frustrating. But in terms of here, Pride to the outsider, to the conservative person, to a lot of the people like the opposition that we have with this kind of stuff looks like excluding ourselves and lifting ourselves up from the population, when actually what it truly is is a sense of pride for what we've overcome, and the fact that we get to be out, you know what I mean? Widely, a lot of people like to- a lot of conservative like whatever like to spread this idea, this sense that "they're taking up space," and that there should be a straight Pride (*laughs a little*) or something like that, that this is not for everybody, like we're trying to exclude ourselves and make rights for ourselves that not everybody else has. But that's never been what it is. And it's always just been about recognizing the progress and getting to be able to even sort of approach being equal in status in terms of social standing and stuff like that, and to not be in fear and stuff like that. So for me, Pride is just the realization that we do get those spaces and that we both have come so far and have so far to go. The idea that the reason that there aren't events like that for other people is because those people haven't had to go through things. So, Pride to me is just a place … and this is what I've been hearing all day, but a safe space. And it's also a recognition of, "There's a problem, though," you know what I mean? We have to think and decide where we can be prideful of just existing and wanting to be equal. So yeah, I mean, Pride is a lot of different things, but mostly a safe space and a time to just celebrate the fact that we get to be here.

GH: Do you see a difference in the way that LGBTQ+ individuals in Louisiana live now versus when you came out?

BC: Yes and no. It seems, for me, having studied a lot of sociology and stuff like that, I'm ever-aware of the fact that it's a system and that some of the things that might seem better are actually just translations of how people have been filtered through their social environment and stuff like that. And the way that people perceive things is both not fully on them and not fully things that they often sometimes believe. So, in some ways, sure, there are some spaces that are less dangerous perhaps or a lot of people will say, "Well, people don't have a problem with that anymore. People don’t do anything, like people don't say these slurs anymore. They don't do that stuff." And that's never what it's been about. It's not just about that kind of stuff; I don’t know, there's a huge conception that we've gotten a lot better, and that is true in some spaces and there's stuff to be said about safety. But in full, I think that we're still dealing with huge systematic problems, and we're gonna get to this too, but in terms of legislation, the fact that in our legal system, it's still so intrinsic, and it's still so systematic and there's still so much that we have to deal with. It's hard to say that we've come super far, but it is safer for some people, and there are safer environments and more visibility in general. So, I feel like it's a little bit better.

GH: I feel like all the safety that has been gained for LGBTQ+ people is by LGBTQ+ people.

BC: Yeah, exactly. Right. It is.

GH: I mean, allies are important, but I feel like most of the work is done by the people in the community.

BC: Right. Right. Right. Absolutely.

GH: So next question--we just kind of touched on that. How do you feel about the recent political actions taken against LGBTQ+ people in Louisiana: book bans, legislation, sports bans?

BC: It attests to like I was talking about, just like the system of it all. (*Aside*) Oh no, do we have some paper towels? No, I don’t think we do. (*Back to GH*) With it being like, seeing it in our political institutions and seeing actual laws trying to be passed locally and in bigger systems, it's frustrating, but to me, it just attests to the fact that there is a huge problem still and the fact that we have to even do these things is insane. Because we are just people trying to exist and that's what I hear from all of these people, and it must sound so radical to the people that are opposing us, but it's just trying to exist. It’s insane. So, the fact that it's in our politics is to me alarming but also... it's not predictable--I guess it just makes sense to me because it's such a deep deep deep problem that people find it hard to even like view us as people. So, obviously there's going to be legal actions being taken to try to null those voices. I mean, these people genuinely will try to argue that gay people are threats and they are indoctrinating children and stuff like that--of course it's in the f\*cking legislation, and it's obviously disgusting. But to me, it really just attests to how it is down here. Even if it seems great, and it seems good, people are actively trying to disallow people from saying gay. At any given point, I don't think it attests to: "it's so bad, it's so bad, it's so bad." I think it attests to, this is a matter of how people scientifically even view us, like in every way and perceive gay people and perceive difference in general as well. I think it just attests to all of those things. It fully makes sense to me from coming from where we live.

GH: Another thing I asked someone earlier than I'm curious to know your answer to is: a lot of people I've heard the sentiment of like, "Well, why is it important that I respect your pronouns, this, this, and this? It's not my problem, whatever." Can you explain why that is so important to make that effort?

BC: Right. I think whenever questions like that come about, it puts a sense of blame on the person asking for like whatever, a space to identify. It almost puts the sense of blame for like, they did something to make an extra step; like we're asking for more than what is given. But what's interesting about that is that everybody functions with pronouns, and everybody functions with the name that they prefer. People have nicknames, and they prefer to be identified certain ways. And instead of viewing that and accepting that as a normal thing or whatever, because it's associated with like gender spectrum and stuff like that, and just LGBTQ rights and stuff like that, it's perceived as we're asking for something almost like Pride. It's almost like we were asking for something more, but really, people don't realize that we're coming to... It's like, whenever you come from a point of having a certain amount of rights, if you're not queer and you don't experience these things, you have this perspective, and all we're asking for is the middle line. And they think that we're asking them for a ton of stuff. And it's super important to talk to people about how they identify, or just respect pronouns and stuff like that because, I don’t know, it just seems honestly a little bit crazy to even answer that. I'm like, "Why would you not?" Like it's just as simple as this guy has a name, this guy has a name--like everybody's name, that tree has a name, and you refer to it. It's literally as simple as language usage. I guess what's important about respecting those things is that if you're not, and you're asking, "Oh, well, why do I have to do it?" It's not actually that person saying, like, "Oh, why do I have to use that?" They're not actually upset that they have to ask you that. They're not actually upset that you use f\*cking pronouns. It's a constant system of opposition against the whole thing. You know what I mean? That's why it's important to respect people and use those pronouns because they're not asking you to do some crazy thing. It's just common. And so whenever you say something like "Why do I have to do that?" You are just saying, "I am anti-LGBTQ, and I'm anti-you-having-the-space-to-identify-with-what-you-need-and-who-you-are." And with those people, it always blows my mind. I'm like, "What if I just started referring to you as Banana or Tent or started calling you she/her if you identified- you would lose your mind! They would lose their mind, and conservative people would absolutely lose it. (*Laughs*) And they would be like “what …,” yeah. So, it is really interesting; why not just like absolutely just be like, "Yeah, well, that's your name." And it's just not like that. And also, just as a general consent thing too; you can always just refer to somebody as their name. If you have such a problem with pronouns, why aren't people just asking for people's names? And I say that just to attest to the fact that they're not actually asking those questions. They are simply expressing their discontent with LGBTQ community, and it's an intrinsic, systematic thing.

GH: What can you share about your experience of queer spaces in Lafayette?

BC: There's not many. There's not many, and I honestly live in fear in most of them and I'm constantly afraid. Because in non-queer spaces, a lot of the college bars or whatever that I'll go to around here, I've personally had to stop going to- I'll name drop them because this is for history. But The Office, JSP, f\*cking what is the name of the other one, oh that one Grant Street, or whatever. All three of those, I've witnessed things happen to my friends, and I've also had things occur to me, The Bulldog as well, to a degree that I have had to stop going to those places. So, first of all, the queer (*slightly laughs*) places are completely isolated, and not intrinsic to the... the entire space is not a queer space. So, there's a sense of danger. And so, those spaces are beautiful, though, because of that. Because there's a sense of "Everybody's here just to be safe and have fun and dance," because of that, they're beautiful, and it's lovely. But I am overall extremely grateful, but still scared at pretty much any given point with the queer spaces here. And like, physically scared, not just scared that something's gonna be uncomfortable. It is actually like a matter of my life and my friends' lives, and what they're gonna go through as well and experience--not from me, obviously, but like experiences with people just being f\*cking racist and sh\*t too, like all kinds of different bigotry, all kinds of different things that I just bear witness to, and it's mind-blowing. It’s mind-blowing. You tell these things, like I've heard some stories today... You tell these things to other people, and they wouldn't even believe you; it's crazy. It's absolutely insane. So not perfect. But again, just so beautiful and lovely sometimes.

GH: So, in your experience, if at all, what support have you seen from schools and other educational institutions?

BC: Very little, it's been very individual-to-individual basis. I went to a really big high school--two really big high schools--and in both of those experiences, it was just kind of like, if you didn't want to get messed with, you would probably be fine in terms of teachers and stuff. But if you didn't want to get messed with and stuff, you just kind of hush-hush about it. It wasn't necessarily like, I'm really disappointed with the university that I go to, and I'm really disappointed with higher education honestly because it's been super exclusive. It's been impossible to identify with how I identify; it's just been a mess. And everybody, every bit of help and love that I've gotten has been on an individual basis. These professors are not being trained, and definitely not the high school teachers, definitely not the elementary teachers. We're currently dealing with all this legislation, so it's little to none in terms of education, which is where it should be the most important, but whatever.

GH: Last question, what is your hope for the future of LGBTQ+ community in Lafayette?

BC: God, it feels impossible sometimes, but just constantly being able to mobilize and fight these kinds of legal things. And having more and more people be aware of the huge nature of the problem and being willing to put help with this kind of stuff. So, continuing to do things like this, continuing to build history; I hope that we can just be more aware of the problem, because I mean, it's in the favor of everybody else to let the problem be small and let the problem be unknown and let there be very few people, but these people around us, this whole Pride event, knowing what's going on and knowing the legal matters and things like that, I hope we find more ways to be educated and I hope we find more ways to be united just in general. Because it's a sparse sparse sparse environment and just for things to get better. I mean, as long as there's stuff in legislation and as long as it's a legal battle, it's gonna be a huge problem. But I don't know just like, general safety and love and acceptance, just everything. I hope for everything for the LGBTQ community. We have a long ways to go. That’s all.

GH: Okay, alright.