

Interview Summary – Trans Activism Oral History

Interviewee name:	Diana LaMonte
Interviewer:	Evan Taylor
Date of Interview:	February 14, 2020

Summary:

Diana LaMonte is a nurse who was 69 years old at the time of the interview. She transitioned in the 1970s, with surgeries in 1971 and 1977. She describes the impact of learning about Christine Jorgensen through a magazine article when she was young. She identified as a girl when as young as 4 and describes growing up as an effeminate person, and being the victim of older men, pedophiles. When 14, her mother placed her in a mental institution, where she was diagnosed as homosexual—a diagnosis she refused. She moved to Toronto and became involved in the drag scene, including as a performer. She began living as 'Diana' at age 17; while in Toronto, she was accepted into the Clark Institute's gender identity clinic. However, the program shut down before she could access the care she needed; devastated, she became addicted to crystal meth for about 3 years, supporting herself through sex work. She was arrested and jailed, and the sound of the cell door closing motivated her to get clean. Around this time (early 1970s) she became involved with CHAT (Community Homophile Association of Toronto) through her boyfriend at the time, George (probably George Hislop). She founded, with Rupert Raj, the Association for Canadian Transsexuals under the CHAT umbrella, with office space in CHAT's location. She describes the homophobic and transphobic violence that trans people and gay people experienced at the time, as well as the police's negative attitudes. In 1972 she left Toronto and moved to Vancouver, leaving Rupert to carry on with ACT in Toronto. She describes a Kitsilano BC women's organization that was supportive of her and other transwomen, even though this led to some tension in the organization. She supported herself doing sex work in the 1980s on Davie Street. She describes the changing terms through which people in the trans community have identified, including the term 'tranny.' (She also discusses the n-word and its role within the Black community).

In her late 20s she became a deck hand on a salmon trawler for 10 seasons. Discusses moving into straight society, not wanting to be known as a "trans" woman, just a woman. She understands herself as a heterosexual woman, and while having many close relationships with gay men. Discusses the devastating impact of AIDS on her community in BC, as well as the local activism. In 1991, she was in Victoria, and as the salmon industry collapses, she moved into health care as a home support worker and later as an LPN. Discusses the politics of passing, and her privileges as someone who has been able to pass more easily than many transwomen. She uses the term "horribleness" to describe her genitalia before surgery. She describes her surgery: extreme pain, as well as not as successful as she would have hoped—the poor surgical results had an impact on her self-esteem, as partners would make negative comments and even sometimes leave. As a result, she's been celibate for 30 years. Her pain after surgery led to a dependency on morphine, which she's now been able to free from for about 1 year. She discusses the risks of disclosing trans identity to sexual partners, as she's been beaten up in the past after disclosure; prefers not to disclose at all, as a result. Discusses not quite understanding the current emphasis on non-binary gender identities. Shares her initial concerns about doing the interview, and her decision to do the interview because of her interest in making sure this history is captured. Extensive discussion around the meanings of terms such as "going stealth" or "going back in the closet," as well as words such as "tranny." She describes her feelings of trepidation, of fear, about doing the interview. Discloses that when she was younger, in the wake of a bad breakup, she had tried to commit suicide, and has a scar of over 40 stitches on her wrist. More recently, in the wake of a head injury she sustained at work when she was attached by a patient, she has had low times. Evan, the interviewer, and Diana engage in an extensive conversation about sex work in Vancouver on Davie Street, and the role of Jamie Lee Hamilton in activism on the topic in Vancouver.