

UOH002731_Perrault
LBGTQ Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

Ann Perrault

Interviewed by

Kimberly Shay

December 12th 2017

Detroit, Michigan

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

Fall 2017

Brief Biography

Ann Perrault is long time Detroit resident, business woman and activist. A longtime champion of LGBTQ and environmental rights in the Detroit area, Perrault can trace her roots back to her upbringing in the Detroit area and her grandmothers and mother love of baking, a skill on which she co-founded Avalon Bakery in Detroit Cass corridor in 1997. Her activism is associated with the founding of Affirmations a LGBTQ resource center in Ferndale, Michigan and the

Detroit Women Cofteehouse in Detroit in conjunction with Lizette Chevalier.

Interviewer: Kimberly Shay

Abstract

The Detroit area has a rich history of activism in the LGBTQ community. The LGBTQ Oral History project was established as a part of the Oral History Class taught by Kimberly Schroeder a professor in the School of Information Science at Wayne State University. This interview covers the life experiences of Ann Perrault an active member of the LGBTQ movement in Detroit, beginning in the 1970's. Ann Perrault is also a forty-year resident of Detroit, an experienced business woman in Detroit, and co-founder of Avalon Bakery founded in Detroit.

Restrictions

None

Original.Format_

WAV format, Time: 51 Min 26 sec

Transcription

Kimberly Shay, 20 pgs. Microsoft Word format

Detroit LBGQTQ Oral History Project
UOH002731_Perrault
Walter P. Reuther Library
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

Transcript of interview conducted December 12th 2017 with: **Ann Perrault**

Interviewer: Kimberly Shay

Begin Perrault Transcript:

Shay: So we are here today with Ann Perrault. My name is Kimberly Shay the date is, ah, December 12th 2017 we're um, are at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan and we're are going to um talk to Ann Perreault a little bit about her life history. And for the oral history project, um for the oral history class at Wayne State University. So, if we just kind of start in, um, I could probably just read the questions through to you, and then we could maybe elaborate a bit on it. Could you tell us a little bit about where you were born?

Perrault: Sure. Um, I was born in Inkster, Michigan ah, so 1959 and I was one of twelve children and at that time I was the fourth, um, fourth oldest. Um so, I was born into a family, my father was um, at the point of ah, working on his um graduate degree at Lawrence Tech University and my mom she came from the um ah it was kind of like upper Minnesota farm and they moved

my mom, she came from the uh, ah it was kind of like upper Minnesota family... and they moved here when she was probably about 15,16. So, But they were both in the military. mom was a performer and a singer. So that's kind of...ah, we have a couple of people in our family that are singers. So on the first round of where were you born, what were your parents. My mom's name was Joanne Howger and my father was Robert Francis Perrault. Uh, his family grew up in Detroit. Um, he went to Cass Tech. He lived, ah, like Fenkell and Schoolcraft area.

Shay: The Brightmoor neighborhood or Old Redford they called it, right?

Perrault: Yep so um so yeah he was you know in Detroit a lot. So my grandmother uh, she worked for the City of Detroit for a lot of years. She retired from the city of Detroit actually, yeah.

Shay: Oh, did she? So, your grandparents have a long history in Detroit?

Perrault: Un huh, Yep, so how we uh ended up in Inkster, I don't know. It was probably after the riots my parent's kind of veered more towards that way, just like a lot of people did. Um but they weren't really in the city. They were kind of living with my—after they came out of the military, they were living with my, uh father's parents, um, for a while. Before they got married and stuff. And then when they got married, they purchased the house in Inkster. So yeah.

Shay: So you said, mentioned that you have twelve, twelve brothers and sisters, so there were twelve of you or thirteen?

Perrault: Yeah, no, there twelve of us total.

Shay: That's a full house right?

Perrault: Yeah, Yeah, there's eight uh eight boys and four girls, so. My father used to always tease me because I was the one girl in between six boys.

Shay: Were you? Yeah, that must have been a pretty rough and tumble existence.

Perrault: Oh, yeah, you just had to learn to kind of.....you know

Shay: So, that must of... I've seen the houses in Inkster and they're uh, they're not huge. So, um you guys must have been pretty close then, your family, growing up.

3:33

Perrault: Uh, yeah, yeah, we definitely were, we had a swimming pool in the back yard we were kind of like a corner. Um, so once my father, got through like the first seven kids or so going on the eighth, um he started, ah working, doing design stuff for the car industry and, um, then started his own company. And then you know, so we were able to go from having no money at all to having some money. And so he put in the pool in the backyard and we would have the neighbors at our house. But yeah, we pretty much, there were three bedrooms there for a while and at one point we had 10 kids and they built one-bedroom downstairs. But it was kind of a little bit funky, cause my dad was an alcoholic, um, so that was the little bit funky part, until my mom kind of smashed him upside the head with a frying pan and she was like, uh, O.K. that's enough, either get out or you know straighten, up kind of thing.

Shay: And that worked? That worked for him?

Perrault: Yeah, that worked for him yeah yeah. She didn't literally hit him upside the head with a frying pan but you know but she, she definitely, she definitely, kind of put the screws to the edge and said hey straighten up. She was, she was a tough lady. She is a tough lady.

Shay: So, um, could you share a little bit about, you mentioned your dad owned a design firm and your mother was from upstate Minnesota. Could you share a little bit about your ethnic heritage and if that was important to you as a family?

Perrault: Sure, it's really important to me. I am French and German. My mother's uh maiden name is Howger and so she is you know full German, came over from Germany, um, kind of half of her family is never to be said "Jewish" uh, because you know how they all converted at that time, because of what was happening in Germany so um so ... but uh anyway where was I going with that?

Shay: So uh Did your mother immigrate or your grandparents?

Perrault: My grandparents did.

Shay: In the 20s and 30s?

Perrault: Yep. Yep, Yep, so my grandfather's family um were Germans and my grandmother's families were German Jews, um, but you know no one ever talked about that. You know that was kind of erased when they get to this country. And they were able to get to this country, so there was always that kind of back and forth. And so needless to say I dated a lot of Jewish women in my, in my early runs you know?

6:16

Shay: So you were kind of exploring the culture through that?

Perrault: [laugh] I don't know. [laugh]

Shay: By association.

Perrault: It just happens, you know it happens that way life happens that way when you go back and look at it. So my mom's family was um...so where we were going with that was you said for me to explain to you...

Shay: Yeah, I was just a little bit curious in your ethnic background and how that influenced you as far as food and culture...

Perrault: Yeah. Right, exactly so that is where I was going with it actually because the German heritage. My, uh, grandmother was a baker. Uh, She was um she did bread my grandma. And she had 9 kids. So uh.

Shay: So she had to do bread. [laughs}

Perrault: Exactly, she had to do bread; she you know she could do anything. But, um, on my father's side, they didn't do, you know they are more city people. They didn't have the...but my mother's side was definitely the um, kind of push towards food and she had the pie business when we were kids and I used to help her with the pie business.

Shay: Your mother?

Perrault: Um.

Shay: And so do you think that was between your grandmother and your mother you spent a lot of time with them it sounds like?

Perrault: Oh yeah yeah, yeah, yeah. And I actually spent a lot of time with my uh, dad's mom. I

was really close to my dad's mom. But she was more on the other end, she was more like the kind of psychic, the kind of, um, off spiritual kind of person that...you know there is the other side of me that people don't know a lot about but I which do now is a massage therapist and healer. That that was part of my life, um, before I really got way into the baking field and stuff

8:02

Shay: So, that is something you are coming back to kind of full circle thing?

Perrault: Yeah, kind of full circle for me.

Shay: You think both of these things the food culture and the spiritual culture you think you both from different...

Perrault: Different parts of my family, yeah.

Shay: family, different grandmothers influenced those.

Perrault: Umhmm. Yep.

Shay: Well, that's interesting. So you did in fact some way get influenced kind of by your upbringing...

Perrault: Well absolutely. My mother especially because, uh she not only, you know that whole music part of my life. I mean she sang to me, always. And you know we just loved music in our home so, and we weren't of the class to like take lessons and do that, but it's like, I play guitar because I could just hear it and play. My brother sang with the Michigan Opera Theatre. Um so we were just musically inclined uh through my mom's side.

8:56

Shay: You mentioned that she did that in the military.

Perrault: Yeah.

Shay: And you had a very musical family, you said several of you siblings, right?

Perrault: Right, several of our siblings. And we still get together for holidays and we still sing and all of that kind of stuff all that kind of good stuff. So kind of like the you know the food, the music, the cultural kind of existence in my life was, was, very strong. You know, we didn't, they watched a lot of TV, I guess, but in terms of us we were always listening to music, always singing, always looking for this, always looking for art, you know. So yeah, that influenced my life a lot.

Shay: That's interesting. So did you grow up your entire school career, primary school, high school in Inkster?

Perrault: No, I uh. We left Inkster when I was twelve and moved to Grosse Isle. Which is, if you know where that is. It's an island in the middle of the Detroit River.

Shay: That's a big switch.

Perrault: Yeah, It's a huge switch. It was like night and day for me. And, and uh you know culturally it was really, kind of tough for me, actually, because you know people were kind of sophisticated and they used to call me old fashioned and stuff like that. It was pretty funny actually. Um, but you know you get used to it after a while. And there's the culture on Grosse Isle, is kind of strange but, um, it's great in terms of boats and water and, um, farming. You know, you got enough land, we had a 2.5-acre garden. I had a horse, that I would deliver my

newspapers on. And uh, you know, we were out on the boat all of the time. I still have a boat now you know.

10:39

Shay: You have a sail boat isn't that correct?

Perrault: I have a sail boat and also I have had a boat with a friend for probably 20 years.

Shay: Oh ok, It's a lot of upkeep. Boats are expensive...and time consuming. So you really have to love it to do it.

Perrault: Yeah, yeah, no they are fun too

Shay: So you never mentioned, um you said that you were between 6 boys but you never mentioned kind how you fell in the hierarchy of you know like the 12 kids in your family?

Perrault: In terms of....?

Shay: You know, what number were you essentially...

Perrault: I was number four.

Shay: Oh, okay. There was 3 boys, So you were the third oldest.

Perrault: I was the oldest girl and the fourth oldest yeah.

Shay: So did you have a lot of responsibilities for taking care of....

Perrault: Yeah, oh yeah. Tons absolutely tons, it would be like uh...

Shay: Because I could just imagine as the oldest girl you know you'd get stuck with all the work a lot of the time.

Perrault: Umhum. And being that my father was an engineer, you know, he would design systems for me. So, he would put charts on the wall and he would say Okay, you see that, make that work.

Shay: Oh really?

Perrault: Yeah, so that the chart would be that everybody has a chore. And you know the list is just there and all I had to do to convince everybody to do it, or help them do everything. You know, so that everything got done. So it was, it was a good system.

Shay: So you learned management from a very early age [both laugh]

Perrault: It was a good system actually. You know, it was pretty good and then my mom actually worked it out so that I would get off school, from the time I was in sixth grade, on my last hour. I never spend last hour at school, I always spent it at home helping her to get dinner together. And then I would go back to school for sports and stuff like that. So I'm sure not a lot, not anybody I knew had to do that for their family.

12:22

Shay: No, I can't imagine you know that they would, but I am sure your mother needed and appreciated the help.

Perrault: Um. And she had to start working because my father's business, um, at that time was falling down, you know towards high school. And so she started working in the plant, um, in the car factory, you know on the line. Um, and so then, she was gone afternoons, and I was basically responsible for everybody.

Shay: That's a lot of responsibility in you know for a younger, junior high, high school, whatever.

Perrault: Yeah, totally.

Shay: That's really tough.

Perrault: Yeah.

Shay: So, well I know Inkster has changed over the years. From probably around the time you grew up.

Perrault: Yeah, it was a little rough.

Shay: Yeah, It's little rough now too, I believe.

Perrault: It's really rough. Well no, actually it switched over. About 10 years ago it was rougher, and now it's kind of evened out a bit, you know. I mean it still needs a lot of work over there, I mean in terms of the schools and the communities. But it's coming up, better.

Shay: What about Grosse Isle? How has that changed over time?

Perrault: Well you know when uh, well the biggest thing you know that I saw in Grosse Isle is the racial injustice when I was a kid. You know, um, I remember when the first black family moved on Grosse Isle and people exploded their mail box and put fire in their front yard. I couldn't believe it. I just, I absolutely couldn't believe it. Um and I think it was one of the big eye openers for, for me, but not—I mean I had a sensitivity to people anyway—but um I mean—there wasn't probably a black person who moved on to Grosse Isle for at least another six or seven years.

Shay: Really?

Perrault: Yeah, that's incredible.

Shay: That's incredible. Um and what year was that? Do you remember vaguely? Just generally.

Perrault: It was about 70, maybe 71.

Shay: So it was right about when the housing laws were changing then as well. Which kind of leads me into the next question. Because of being responsible for so many younger siblings, I am sure made you somewhat empathic for them, right, which I am sure only enhanced what you already naturally had. But you know I wanted to see I was going to ask you if you had had an experience when you were growing up that led you to believe, you know, that things were unequal or kind of eye opening. And that would probably would that be, would you say that be the defining thing...

Perrault: Well that, and I also, um, I was raped when I was five. And I think, the gender equality thing became real aware to me very early, at a very early age. You know, being the first girl in between six boys. And just kind of being in a world where, it was their world. You know, it's their world and then all of a sudden, you know, you are kind of this supposed to be like this princess girl, but you are not a fucking princess girl, you know. And, uh, so, you know, that

whole reality became real clear to me right away, that, you know, patriarchal society was at its at its height and so, you know, I was like—that whole around religion and all that I was, like, I don't want any part of this.

Shay: You didn't buy into it from an early age?

Perrault: No. I don't want any part of this. This is not me. This is not who I am. And you know, probably like, when I was probably like, in ninth grade or tenth grade, my mom kind of realized, Oh my God she is really different, you know. She's going to be [laughs] going to be a handful and she is not like my little princess that I thought she was, for sure. Probably earlier than that she realized.

Shay: Yeah, mothers usually know. Were you, so were you excluded from things, like when you were younger, were the boys able to do stuff and then you weren't allowed to, because you were a girl?

Perrault: Well, of course. You know my dad was a Boy Scout leader, you know so. He was part of the Boy Scouts you know. From the time I went to a Catholic School in Inkster and, uh, they had separate playgrounds, so I used to get beat at school every day, because I knew nothing but boys. So, I didn't know how to relate to a girl, you know. Especially when it came to playing you know. They are out there playing baseball and football and stuff and they are just jumping rope. Well, I don't want to jump rope. I don't have any...

Shay: Right, you have no experience with their activities, right?

Perrault: Exactly, So, uh, so it was more like that kind of a, that kind of a um ...for sure...and but my mom used to do the same thing to me, because of the fact, when I was like, we moved to Grosse Isle, I got really into single engines and so I used to take them apart and put them back together. And I used to build, like, go carts and mini bikes.

Shay: You are talking like single-piston engines?

Perrault: Yeah, yeah.

Shay: Do you still do any of that?

Perrault: No. No, I don't do it at all.

Shay: Oh, I was just going to ask you because I build flat-head motors.

Perrault: Oh, you do?

Shay: You know for flat-head Ford motors from um pre-1953.

Perrault: Awesome.

Shay: So I think that's interesting.

Perrault: Yeah, no it is. It's totally uh, I got away from it, only because you know my mom was kind of this person who was like, mighty to me, you know, and one day she said to me "You know, you might think about wanting to buy a horse." [laughs]

Shay: Because it was a girl thing. [laughs]

Perrault: Exactly. [laughs] You know, I bit that hook, line, and sinker, you know...so anyway. [laugh]

Shay: That's funny, because my dad often jokes that I'm the best mechanic ... I've got two brothers, but I am the best mechanic he has ever had. Well education hasn't ruined me apparently. So when did you first realize, you said that your mother kind of realized in high school, but when did you first realize that you were LGBTQ?

18:31

Perrault: Uh, Well you know um, probably when I was still living in Inkster I had these two friends that lived next door. Uh, they moved in when I was about five. In fact, I am still really good friends with their older brother. He is living in the neighborhood now. Um, and you know I thought to myself – huh, I like one of these? You know that kind of a thing, and uh. and so I started wondering about myself then, you know. Do I really like boys? Do I like girls? For myself. And then I didn't really start to act on that until about eighth grade, and I met this girl that I was really attracted to.

Shay: So you know, that must have been difficult because that was probably, you know I don't want to age you but I'm going to say only in the late 70s early 80s maybe....

Perrault: Yeah because I graduated in 77 so. Uh, yeah, probably around there.

Shay: And things weren't nearly as open then. So how would you identify yourself now? Although I am not really a great one for labels personally, but.

Perrault: Um, yeah, I'm not really one for labels either and I have had kind of uh, an interesting of life in terms of labels uh, especially since I'm seemingly attracted to bisexual women and so, um, that's always been, u, uh, you know has left me...well I am single now. And I have still identified myself as lesbian for sure, uh so.

20:12

Shay: But a lot of the women you have dated then kind of on the bi-spectrum?

Perrault: Uh huh, Yeah, absolutely, they definitely were on the bi-spectrum. You know my longest relationship was 16 years. And then, uh, probably some of my shortest have been maybe five you know, so. And I haven't had that many.

Shay: So it's a series of long term relationships then pretty much?

Perrault: Yeah, and I haven't really dated a lot, in my life, really.

Shay: Which is even more awkward now, than it ever was, I'm sure.

Perrault: It is. Totally. [both laugh] Those apps are just incredible, to me.

Shay: And the things that people say on them, it's like unbelievable.

Perrault: And the young ones that want the older women. That's a, that's a crack up to me.

Shay: Yeah, it's like you don't even know me, how can you say that to me. [both laugh]

Perrault: But yeah, I still identify myself as lesbian. And you know it's funny because I was in, um, the Temple Bar, um, the same night that uh Jay-Z was at Little Caesar's arena. Just a little while ago, just maybe a month ago, and, um, a friend of mine Stacey "Hot Waxx" Hale —do you know her?

Shay: I don't.

Perrault: You've got to check her out, she's in her 60s and um she you know, does remix and house music. And she plays at different places downtown. She plays at the Royce a lot downtown.

Shay: Oh really.

Perrault: She kind of attracts an older crowd that still loves music and like to dance. And, um, and the young crowd too, because, um, she mixes it up with some younger DJs and stuff. But anyway, I was in there and, um, kind of being out, you know, in this neighborhood, I'm kind of like of "Oh my God Ann Perrault is on the dance floor". It's ridiculous. But anyway. So people come up and they dance with me, and stuff, you know. Other people that knew me from the bakery or... So went up to the bar to, uh, because Stacey was up there, just to say Hi! and this woman comes up to me and she says "Oh my God, I have had a crush on you since I was 19." And this woman was probably 50. And I was like, Oh my God! Uh, and I met here years ago because I started a gay and lesbian coming out group at Affirmations.

Shay: Oh, did you? OK, because that is a pretty vibrant organization now.

22:48

Perrault: Um, Yeah, it definitely is. I lived in Ferndale for a while, uh, right when it opened, so I lived like right around the corner with Jan Stevenson, who put a lot of work in to starting it and so we had lots of conversations, and lots of stuff, because I was working women's radio program at that point in time doing Roman's gay and lesbian kind of network TV cable stuff in Ferndale. And also doing women's coffee house stuff.

Shay: So you were really busy. So kind of what was your trajectory after you high school, after you finished high school?

Perrault: After I finished high school I kind of, uh, I ended up in this program, and, um, I played sports, so I got a scholarship for softball to play at Saginaw Valley. But I kind of ended up there in really, kind of, a weird way. Because my aunt lives in that neighborhood and I was actually driving my car and my brother borrowed my car and then I got arrested because he had drugs in my car.

Shay: Great. Thanks Bro.

Perrault: Nice, nice, Yeah, I was looking at about 20 years in DeHoCo, and it was like I didn't quite know what to do. And of course, my parents were just, not doing anything. So, you know, I had someone plea bargain for me, anyway, I ended up being able to keep my scholarship and go to school up there. My aunt pitched in for me and she, uh, helped me out—she's a psychologist. They had me do all this all this, uh, community service work and say that I would take therapy and that I would do drug testing and all this, for a really long time. You know, I was pretty clean at that time, uh, so I went through all of that, you know, to be able to do that. So anyway, so after high school, so I ended up there in Saginaw and going to school in Saginaw Valley, trying to afford with what little money they gave you back then. It was very little, extremely little, and um. So I was working for my aunt and I was working another job and trying to keep... At some point I just couldn't make all the ends meet. So I played, um, one season there and then I came down to U of D and went to school at U of D and then I threw out my knee, so I was... Then I got a job in, um, in a school for handicapped kids and so, um, that was right when I was about 19 almost 20 because I graduated when I was 17. Um, so then I started working at that school and going to Wayne State. Then I started back at Wayne County for a while, went to Wayne State for a little while and I was going to become a recreational therapist or some kind, of work with sports and therapy, kind of was my edge to go forward. Um, so and then being in this area ... I uh, you know I was in Detroit. So I had moved up from Saginaw, I had moved, came back from Saginaw, I was at my parents' house for a hot second, and then came back here to Detroit. It's

Saginaw I was at my parents' house for a hot second, and then came back here to Detroit. It's when I hit Detroit, like, I used to deliver the Detroit News when I was like 13 on my horse. So when I went to look for a place, I remember writing all this stuff in my journals and stuff about moving to the city, I used to deliver the paper to and all this because I was in the newspaper, when I was 13, because I was like an anomaly, because there was this girl, I never used to comb my hair and it was really thick and um, kind of gnarly and stuff and I rode bare-back at that time. Anyway, so when I moved into my first place – didn't that guy that I moved into his house have the picture of me when I was 13 on his refrigerator.

27:23

Shay: Oh really!

Perrault: Yeah!

Shay: Was it because you were delivering the news on horseback?

Perrault: Right, exactly, yeah. But it was kind like [twilight zone theme] it was kind of very strange, like I was supposed to be here kind of thing, you know.

Shay: That definitely sounds like a sign of some sort. Right?

Perrault: Yeah! So I started working with... I was starting to reach out and was starting to date a woman actually from Saginaw who ended up moving down, um, down here. She was working in restaurants and, um, I started to grow sprouts for a restaurant and um. These, this group of women created this restaurant at that time called The Casablanca. And they were mostly, basically women from the rape crisis network and they started that whole calling system and survival lines and stuff for women. Way back you know in the early 80s.

Shay: Yeah, like the phone trees. Because they didn't have the Internet or really any other way to reach out to people. Almost anonymously, because it was such an undercover type thing in those days, you know? There was a lot of shame.

Perrault: Right, absolutely, yep. So we were, we were doing that kind of stuff and I was growing sprouts and becoming friends with uh these folks that were really tied in - older than me. You know, they are now in their 75 or 80 years old. But um and that's what a lot of what my friends were, you know, so. I kind of, when I moved into Detroit I got into that network of people and there wasn't a community center. There wasn't a way, you know, for people to kind of meet people or be around people. So that's, so you know I went to church things sometimes. But I met this group of people through the restaurant, that I ended up uh creating a... um, I started off with a production company, we um brought in like different women's music things into Detroit... like Margie Adams and Trep Feery [?] All these different music acts into the city. And so that's how I started, and I went from there to doing Detroit Women's Coffee House. Um, and I was out working in the schools, and still try to go to school, and all that. And the school work was good for me, because it's a limited day—you know, you're only working 8:30 to maybe 2:30 and mostly worked with the severally handicapped. And uh, so then you have a lot of time to be able to work on other stuff.

Shay: You have your whole afternoon and then all of the musicians are notoriously night time people.

Perrault: Right, exactly.

Shay: So, right, so they are not even getting moving by the time you're done with a full day of work, right?

30:26

Shay: Um, so it sounds like, um you know, we refer to that kind of like because I have a lot of the same things with some of the populations I work with at the museum. Where they kind of create this, we refer to it as informal social support group. Where you have people you can lean on or can call for advice or do things where maybe you wouldn't have a formal place to do that but you have a group of people, that kind of hang together, you know. And um, there is nothing written and there is no agreement or nothing but you just kind of look out for each other.

Perrault: Right. Yep.

Shay: So that's the kind of group that you fell into? You said they were older than you at the time?

Perrault: Yeah at the time. There was only one woman that was right around and she was about a year older than me and that was Lizette Chevalier, she was a musician. And she was the one that I started Detroit Women's Coffee House with.

Shay: So, you two started that, so do you keep in touch with that group anymore. Is that group, you know, are those people still in the area?

Perrault: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We are all connected Facebook-wise. I mean, I uh, you know, Lizette has two adopted children uh. She is a professor at Carbondale University and she's an um engineer. But and she's adopted two kids—3 kids. Two from China and one from Haiti. But, so, yeah, we are barely in contact, but not, you know but not real close. Some people have passed, um; but uh you know we kind of keep an eye on each other as a group of people. I think the person that probably keep the closest to is the political Shea Howell. Who, there is a whole side of my life that — um, because one of, my first lover was a part of the National Organization of the American Revolution which was connected through Jimmy and Grace Boggs in the City of Detroit which are well known kind of political analytical thinkers. The other person that was connected to that was Shea Howell. Who, uh, she's a professor at Oakland University. She is probably one of the, one of the keener political minds in the city. If you don't her, you should reach out to her. She is an interesting gal. Um, so, um Shea and I...Shea helped a lot, just a ton with Detroit Women's Coffee House too, and so um I you know Shea and I have a boat together and we've had one for 20 years. And so we keep very connected through that. She continues to work with Detroit Summer, and Freedom School and a number of different projects. The Grace Boggs School. And which I don't, I don't do any of that anymore.

33:11

Shay: You're not active in any of those groups anymore?

Perrault: I am not. No.

Shay: Is there a reason for that or?

Perrault: Well, with the bakery I think that uh...

Shay: Your life just got kind of overtaken.

Perrault: Yeah, my life got really overtaken, yeah, between kids and the bakery and, uh. Especially with the bakery and then the fall out of the bakery. You know, just, so the biggest thing I work on now is incinerator stuff and water stuff, um, I stay connected to but that's about, that's about all.

Shay: So, I was specifically asked to ask you a little bit about the LGBT civil right movement in Detroit. Because like you know in the very early days. Uh because I understand that you were kind of involved with some of that. Can you tell us a little bit about your involvement that?

Perrault: Sure, sure. You know, because of the fact that, you know one of the bigger ways that I was involved in it was in the forming of Affirmations, which was a huge thing for to happen for um Lesbian Gay, Bisexual, Queer people you know anywhere. Um, but, I mean, we were, because of the Coffee House was a hub for women that, and it was primarily supported by the lesbian community. So there was a whole group of people, not always the people that helped do the show, and be there to make it happen. But kind of that surrounded it, that we did stuff like calendars for Nipple Works. I mean, um, we, we would uh, we did this whole defense for Karen Norman, um, which was this woman that was accused of first degree murder after, you know, self-defense. And because she kind of went crazy, I guess, stabbed, stabbed the guy a lot of times. They, um, but she still was attacked, you know. She, someone broke into her house and attacked her and she ended up defending herself and then getting charged with murder. So we went on a big huge thing at that time. And we did a lot of Take Back the Night marches. We were. um, uh, so primarily focused on women, in the movement, which was uh which always gave me that name of being a man hater I think early in the movement. And especially as we first started doing the boards for Affirmations and stuff, people weren't so sure they wanted me on the board, because I might not be so inclusive. But, and to me, that's totally not the way it was at all. And it ended up working out fine. You know, the beginning people like Henry Messer and those kind of folks, who had that hard line of, um, and just it was, it was tough, you know. It was tough in those days. Because people were raw in some ways in terms of not being really slick about how or having any couth about how to talk...

36:28

Shay: Um...Or how to engage in politics, you know, effectively.

Perrault: Right, right.

Shay: I want to ask you my own personal question because this is something I've seen; I feel like I've seen. I feel like there is a lot of, and you were speaking earlier about like you noticed right away as a young kid that there was, you know, this gender bias, right, between of your brothers, and you, and in the world. Did you notice that in the LGBT community, too?

Perrault: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, and it was always this...well women really can't. If you were a strong woman and you didn't kind of placate, then you were always like they didn't quite know how to deal with you, you know. And especially at first, I think now it is much more fluid, but, because of the fact that the men really ran the movement and remember AIDs was full blown at that time. So they were really dealing with a ton of stuff at that time too. And uh, but you know, the women's movement was at a different point and then it fell off into nothing. You know, really. If you look at the history of the women's movement; it kind of came to a certain point and then it and then when lesbian women kind of became really involved it kind of petered.

Shay: And you think its partially due to that? That factor, right? That strong women are just generally kind discriminated against, out of that culture of like being on boards and stuff like that.

Perrault: Yeah, absolutely. And at that time especially. You know, I mean I can still say to this day and I even felt that with Hillary in a lot of ways. You know, I felt that um...oh come on, what's his name, the...uh the real left...

Shay: Sanders, Bernie Sanders?

Perrault: Yes, Bernie Sanders. I really felt that in some ways Bernie Sanders undermined the gender of her.. in the running of, um, the political race. For me um, it was just an extension of the distraction. You know, even though Hillary had her issues, yeah, definitely, you know she had not only issues, she had a lot of strengths, you know. And, so but are we ever going to ever be at that point of actually having a woman in that seat? It's going to be an Interesting. you know.

anthropologically.

39:07

Shay: Well, we are coming up on the 100-year anniversary in 2020, you know of the women's right to vote. So, uh, we'll see it probably won't be done by then, unfortunately.

Perrault: I don't know.

Shay: Which seems kind of crazy, you know?

Perrault: It does. It definitely does.

Shay: Um, so do you think, because of your experiences like growing up and coming up in Detroit what do you think that the kids today, like the people that are coming up in the gay community, the lesbian community, what do you think their experiences are?

Perrault: Well, I think that, it's a whole different world. Because even, you know, I think a lot of people have gay experiences now. Um, which before, you know, you would almost kill yourself before you would have a gay experience. And, uh, now it is much more fluid, you know. It's just a whole lot more fluid. Um, and, I, I, in a lot of ways, I think that's good and in a lot of ways, you know. I think we are looking at... you know, I have a 17-year-old and you're looking at so much stress for kids, you know. What is their... where is their, where is their focus. You know, where can they put their hearts? Where can they drive their passions, you know, in a way that makes sense to them. The only way that I see is in helping other people, kind of. Uh, but at the same time, that's, that's, that's not strong enough, you know. It's not a, it's not a strong enough gate to actually draw them in, in some ways. Um, I mean, I guess, that's the way it was when we were trying to help other people that way, as we were growing up too, but, um. There, I guess there was a bigger sense of maybe unity in that, um, or maybe a movement in that. And where maybe younger people don't have that now. Uh, because I see a lot of kids being really lost. And drugs are a lot strong now. And, you know, so, it's the, in terms of the gay and lesbian community I think, um, continue to be a place to talk about expansion and concreteness, you know, um because there is so much, there is such a spectrum and we have to be able to talk about that spectrum in a way that's a—in an open forum I think. And, and also in a way that is grounded in, in, in so that it doesn't become like on the other side of the sexual revolution even though, you know. It's not there. But, yeah, I don't know. I don't know. It's, I think to provide the formats to allow the conversation and maybe it will develop out of that, um. I think there is still a lot of underlying work. You know, just basic human rights work that is not being followed through with. It's just basic stuff around marriage stuff, around family issues, around being able to bury your partner.

Shay: Hospitalization.

Perrault: Hospitalization.

Shay: Is a big thing, or, next of kin issues. Yeah, you know, um...

Perrault: I have those issues with my kids. That has always been a fear of mine too. Adoption.

Shay: Yeah, that has always been a problem in that community. And, do you feel like those gains have been made are being like, or are currently under threat in some way.

Perrault: It is totally under threat. You know, It's almost like there; and, you know, even in my family; it's almost like they're even if you are married and have kids or you are not married or divorced and have kids you really don't have kids, you know?

Shay: It's not the same as if you were a man and a woman together with kids. Yeah, it's not treated the same.

Perrault: Exactly, yeah they'd have kids, you know.

Shay: Even though you have all of the parental or financial responsibility for this littler person...

Perrault: Uh, huh, right, but um I think that now, with Trump [laughs], all that's attacked. You know, you take not only women's right issues in terms of the right to carry or not carry, but, all of the way through to...yeah who is to know what's going to happen. Hopefully nothing, Through the court system he is not going to be able to change that, but you know...

Shay: Apparently, they don't have to bake you a cake, if they don't want to.

Perrault: Well, hey. [laughs] You can also put a Christmas tree in the US Embassy in Israel, you know, yeah, so...

Shay: That's what we found out this week. The court decision about the baker.

Perrault: Oh, oh I didn't hear about that.

Shay: The baker, um, there was a gay couple, and their mother... two men and one of their mothers came in to order a cake for their wedding and he said he doesn't make cakes for gay people. And because it is an artistic expression, as a baker, he is not obligated to do it. That was kind of the court decision. Uh, because that is the question, you know, as a trained baker, how do you feel about current legislation efforts? "Which would allow bakers, among with other service providers to deny service to people who disagree with their religious beliefs."

Perrault: I think people have been doing that for a long time, you know, and they have just not been so openly talking about it. Shoot, there is a guy right here in the neighborhood who hasn't rented to gay people and everybody knows it. You know, and it's been for 30 / 40 years that it's been that way. I mean, people have, people have been jerks about their beliefs forever.

45:04

Shay: And using them to discriminate against others, right...

Perrault: Absolutely

Shay: So it's not a new thing. It's a new thing that people are getting called out about now.

Perrault: Exactly. I think, so we always put everything...I mean, Cheney...we put that right out in the paper, right? And, and, whether something gets done about it or not that will be a different, you know, what are they going to do, about somebody refusing a service?

Shay: I mean, in my opinion, I think you should have a legal right but on the other hand if somebody wasn't happy to provide a service for me I don't think I would want them doing it anyway. You know? Right? So?

Perrault: Absolutely. In some ways I feel the same way you do. I mean, I should have the right to say something to you; or put a suit against you or whatever for refusing me.

Shay: At the same time, I don't want to use my economic resources to support someone who is going to discriminate against me in the next cycle or whatever; the next voting cycle or whatever. So, why would I support their business? And that's kind of my thinking on that. You know?

Perrault: Right, I mean, in the world, I mean, we have to support our families that don't support us, you know, and my family didn't come to my wedding. You know, my family is totally right-wing and voted for Trump. I came home one day and uh, Headlee, when Headlee was running and came out verbally against gays and lesbians, I came home and Headlee's banner was across the front of my parent's house. Yeah, so, we have so many places in which we have to, you know, deal with it why in the hell would I have to deal with it at home? [Laughs]. Exactly!

Shay: So, how, could you just briefly, I know you have to go shortly, I'm keeping an eye on the time, but I was just wondering, um could you tell me a little bit about the neighborhood. Because I know the neighborhood has changed tremendously since you've been in it. Uh, do you think that all of those changes are good? Or some good, some bad? I mean, is there, there must be good points and bad points to all of it.

Perrault: Sure, I mean, I think thank goodness it changed, you know. Absolutely. Um, this was a really tough place, uh 20 years ago. You know, the, all of the mental health institutions, everything, you know, had closed, people were on the street living in terrible situations and we're not talking about five or six. We're talking, you know, you would probably run into 25 / 30 people that you would, I would see and "Hey bread lady!", you know, on a regular basis that was uh, you know, living in a homeless kind of whatever shelter area that would kick them out at 7:00 in the morning. So, yeah, this area has changed a lot. I used to, I remember my daughter when she was three coming out of the back door right here on Warren and Second and saying to me "Momma what are they doing in the back seat of that car?" But you know there's the prostitution was right there on the corner of Second and Warren you know in that house, in that apartment building. So, I mean, the amount of uh growth and development I think, in a, I think in a lot of ways has been great. The high-end of it is kind of hard to take sometimes. You know, because of they want really high-end. Um, so, uh, in that, you know, split between where it was and way up here, you know, some of us got lost in the midst, you know.

Shay: Yeah, a lot of people have commented to me that it's kind of inflated, the market is kind of inflated in midtown right now.

Perrault: Yeah. But it is not only the market. It's also, you know, the way that the retail came in, the way that... Well even look at my business, the way that it grew [add emphasis] and developed. I am not a part of that anymore. So there's, there's a whole section of the city that I think is ramping because as you can see, that, um, you know, the city, when I've been here has been 99% black. And it's not like that anymore.

Shay: Yeah, not this part.

Perrault: It's just that the services, you know; it's not that the neighborhoods are developing at the same point. You know, there is that ebb and flow of what's happening.

Shay: And the argument that a lot of people make is it's not like those things aren't still happening, with, like the homeless population or the prostitution or drugs.

Perrault: Right. It's still happening.

Shay: It's they are happening, they've just been pushed out of here with this gentrification process, right? You know, so they've just went somewhere else. Um, they haven't eliminated them entirely.

Perrault: Absolutely.

Shay: So do you want to add anything else because I think we should probably wrap up. I don't want to make you late.

Perrault: No. I appreciate that actually. No, I don't think I want to add so much else other than the fact that, you know, I do have children, and I think children are an, an, just an incredible part of a lesbian life and, uh, and/or a gay life, and, or both. And, it's um, you know, what I have thought of my life was in terms of being like, in a relationship, having children, having a family, having, you know, it's a way different. And I think that we are looking at, looking at redefining what family is. And, um, and that redefinition of what family is, I think, lesbian, and gay, and bisexual people have a lot to say about all that. And people really need to write about it, you know, in terms of just how that structure needs to change. And I think that is what I'd leave with.

Shay: Well, I appreciate it. Thanks for coming out today.

Perrault: Yeah.

Shay: Thanks a lot.

END Transcript 51m 26 sec