

From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Marguerite McLaughlin	Date: 29.09.2019 Age: 68
Key issues: Stonewall Riots, NY. Street people. Gay Liberation Front. GAA Firehouse. Lesbian Feminist Group. Pride 1974. Global Pride 50. Dyke march.	
Narrative summary <p>The interview opens with Marguerite's recollections of hearing about the Stonewall Riots aged 17 and as yet unaware of her own lesbian identity. She explores the civil rights climate against which the uprising occurred and the tensions between the mafia, police and the members of the queer community - largely an underclass of 'street people' who frequented the Inn. She discusses the explosion in visibility as people came out of the closet and the big social as well as political scene that flowed from this. She describes how the Gay Liberation Front burst forth with the first Pride march following on its heels. She talks about the focal location of the GAA Firehouse for meetings and social occasions. The first Pride Marguerite attended was 1974, she describes how she directed a lesbian feminist musical – possibly the first ever! Within weeks she had left the US to undertake a Masters degree at Essex University.</p> <p>At Essex she became involved in student politics, gay rights and feminism, noting the strong link between feminism and lesbian activism. She talks about the impassioned debate and annual decision within the feminist movement to reach a consensus on a 'demand' which would shape the following year's activism. She outlines the reasons for lesbians aligning themselves with the feminist movement rather than with gay men.</p> <p>She talks about the AIDs crisis breaking and public's reaction to it; she also discusses the impact of Section 28 and the way in which these two issues drew the community together in the face of adversity.</p> <p>Marguerite returned to New York in 2019 for Global Pride 50 – the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. She reflected on the original impulse in the wake of the riots to not only fight for gay rights, but to work towards an alternative to the status quo – different ways of living. She describes in some detail the celebrations in NY, particularly the dyke march and the strong sense of community and solidarity.</p>	
	Length of interview: 1 hr 12 mins





- Evelyn: Today as part of the oral history project From A Whisper to a Roar, we are remembering the 50th anniversary of Stonewall Riots, and considering the impact that this had particularly on the UK. The project is conducted by Opening Doors London and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Today is the 27th of August, 2019, and I'm here with Lori E. Allen interviewing Marguerite McLaughlin. So, you were actually in New York at the time of the original Stonewall Riots. Tell us what you heard about it all at the time.
- Marguerite: I had graduated from high school literally the day before. So, that Saturday, I was home relaxing. It was literally too hot to do anything but hang around at home. I had the radio on in the background when news came through that there was what they were describing as a riot in Greenwich Village and that it was centering on a gay bar and that the police were being attacked by a small crowd.
- Marguerite: At the time, I was 17 years old, and I was already involved with the anti-Vietnam war movement. So, I was very pleased to hear the news, because somehow in New York you know, particularly if you're curious, or knew back in those days, that the mafia were very much in control of minority bars. That the protection money that they charged gay bars was actually protection against the mafia itself not actually the police, because the police still would raid and create havoc. People lived in dread of having criminal records because they

wouldn't get jobs. It could literally ruin somebody's life. So, I was like basically saying, "Yes, go." I thought it was a great thing.

Marguerite: By the next day, there started being coverage in newspapers. There were comments on television news, and the riots got worse for several days. Ultimately, people began to form themselves into spokespeople about what was actually happening. It went on from there, and a month later, there was the first march for lesbian and gay rights, which was what the first movement was considering focusing on.

Evelyn: So, what was the reaction to that?

Marguerite: I think a lot of very ordinary people really didn't have much sense of who gay people were. If I think about it now, of course they weren't calling them gay then. They wouldn't have said, "Oh, gay people are rioting in Greenwich Village." They would have said, "The homosexual community," I suppose. It's interesting how you forget those things as sort of social movements progress. But I got the impression that a lot of people felt that harassment was just wrong. That kind of extortion was wrong. In New York, we lived with the reality of the mafia quite a lot more than I think people in this country realize, particularly back then. And anything that was going to loosen that hold as well as police harassment was seen as a good thing, people standing up for themselves.

Evelyn: So, you reckon there was a certain amount of sympathy for the community because everyone was facing the same-

Marguerite: Kinds of oppression.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Marguerite: Yes.

Evelyn: And you personally ... Did you already have an understanding of your sexuality at this point?

Marguerite: No. I was happily straight at the time, but very much in empathy with a number of minorities really, because I grew up within the unfolding of the Civil Rights movement. I was 16 when Martin Luther King was killed. People had a very much growing understanding. I had an analysis because of my involvement with the students against the Vietnam War. I suppose I was beginning to develop a bit of a left wing perspective, although I would never have seen it as such, because left wing was considered quite a bad thing in the States at that point.

Evelyn: I think it's probably the political climate at the time and the different political movements going on. The riots really placed themselves amongst some similar movements for rights, as you say, for black minorities fighting for their rights. It was a heavily political time in terms of, in America at the time, in terms of minority groups and political awareness, I suppose.

Marguerite: Very much so. But I also think it's interesting that that perspective is frequently lost now, because it's seen as gay people resisted and then revolted, and won their rights. It wasn't just a spontaneous birth of the movement, there was a context behind it. The scene had been set over quite a number of years, because there were already gay organizations that we would recognize as such back in the early '60s, even the late '50s. There were people who were working quietly towards various demands for rights. But specifically within the law, rather than as social recognition as well. I think it's

always very interesting to look at the interrelationship between when laws change, and that changes attitudes. Or when attitudes change, and that allows the law to change as well to reflect those changes.

- Evelyn: So those groups, the Mattachine Society, and the Daughters of-
- Marguerite: Daughters of Bilitis.
- Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative), and they were largely working on lobbying for legal change.
- Marguerite: Yes, and doing a lot of things around examination of previous writings, both fiction and non-fiction. Any kind of social research that there might have been, all those sorts of things in terms of creating a body of knowledge and evidence that would form a foundation for an ideology to take forward.
- Evelyn: So you had this more sort of academic approach, if you like, and then the Stonewall Riots came along, and that was all action.
- Marguerite: Yes, what is very interesting to me is that at the time I had no understanding at all of class. I was raised to believe that America is a classless society. So that very much hampered my ability to frame what was going on, because it was very obvious that the people who were at Stonewall, and who resisted on those first few nights, were what we often called we other, maybe more privileged New Yorkers called street people. They were people who were homeless, jobless, criminal records because they were queer. Radical transvestites, and again, that was how they framed themselves at that point in time, there wasn't a concept of transgender at that moment in time. But all of those people were together in what were basically dives.
- Marguerite: Real dive bars, nasty places that were dark and dirty, and in back streets. They had watered down drinks at very high prices, and of course the risk that if a raid happened, that you'd be arrested. The fear of that became so bad that there was an incident not very long before the Stonewall Riots, in fact, maybe only a few weeks before, where a young Hispanic man was in such terror of having been arrested that he jumped out the window of a police station and ended up impaled on the railings. That was something that was lighting the flames that actually blew up on that night at Stonewall.
- Evelyn: So there's many and varying stories of who threw the first punch. You will have heard at least one of them.
- Marguerite: I've heard several, and again, I think it's very important to acknowledge, for example, that a lot of women came, a lot of lesbian activists arrived via the Women's Liberation Movement. They were feminists. Particularly the middle class ones and the students. They would never have been anywhere near somewhere like the Stonewall Bar. They had a couple of dives of their own that were for women, but some place like Stonewall would have actively discouraged women to be there. So definitely there weren't dykes involved in those first few resistances. They joined later, and joined as part of organizations and social networks. But that's where the division between the middle class and the working class came together to forge that movement.
- Evelyn: So rising from the riots, what did you see emerge over the next months and years?
- Marguerite: It happened very fast. There were newsletters, there were posters, there were dancers. Apparently the dances were actually one of the

most galvanizing aspects of the movement because some people wouldn't have gone anywhere near the dive bars, no matter what. People with privilege who would have been able to have clubs and things that would protect them, both men and women. But suddenly everyone was wanting to come together to celebrate the fact that there was no going back in the closet, it had really blown the lid off it. There was so much going on in so many different ideological ways, shapes, forms, groups, what have you. That the thing that brought everyone together, because of course people wanted to meet each other, this as such a pre-digital age. That your luck in finding another lesbian who might have something in common with you, nevermind fancying each other, and being single and that being possible, people needed to gather.

Marguerite: These legendary dances, what we would call discos, I guess, became very much a conduit for those things, and just as politically radical as anything else, because they were very much in your face. Everyone went, everyone dressed up in a way that suited them. Venues were loaned by various sympathetic community groups, as well as a couple of local churches in Greenwich Village, offering a church hall to have the dances. The next thing that happened was that somebody had connections and the Gay Activists Alliance was given the GAA Firehouse. So it's a disused, literal fire station on edge of the village.

Evelyn: Did you go there?

Marguerite: No. Not for some years. I set foot in the GAA Firehouse for the first time at the age of 22. What happened to me over that period of time was the realization that I might be attracted to women as well as men. I had never suffered from feeling like I was making bad compromises in terms of going out with men. I had good experiences in my relationships with men, but suddenly women were more interesting.

Evelyn: So what was it like when you first set foot in the GAA Firehouse building?

Marguerite: Those dances were absolutely fabulous. As I say, people from all walks of life, all ages, fantastic music, everyone was so excited. There was so much of a sense of possibility. It was just fabulous. The thing that was so impressive to me, because there I was coming out, was that the Gay Activists Alliance used to have what they called induction sessions. People were coming out in droves, literally, every month. So there was a once a month induction. Volunteers would tell you everything you needed to know about where things were, where to find them, what went on when. Who was whom. Absolutely fantastic times, such a sense of possibility. And the excitement of that, what we now call, intersectionality, because I was finding people who had been anti-Vietnam protestors, or civil rights workers, or communists. Who themselves used to experience a lot of harassment in a place like New York. And they were queer. So the multifaceted aspects of the connections were superb. It was like a global village of queer people.

Evelyn: So were there opportunities to meet and talk, as well as the noisy dance floor?

Marguerite: There were meetings. Not only was there the Gay Activists Alliance that has lots of women in it, but very much hot on the heels of the Gay Liberation Front, which was the very first of the gay

organizations that lasted about a couple of years at its most influential, and then fragmented into various different-

Evelyn: Groupings.

Marguerite: Yeah, and ideologies. There were ideological differences to that people actually fractured into various sort of sections of sections or segments. But there was the, god what was it called? Lesbian Feminist Liberation group. That happened because not very long down the road of gay liberation the women got very frustrated with the men never considering them, and walked. In walking off, they demanded not quite equal access, because there were nowhere near as many lesbians as there were gay men sort of flooding into the community. But the ability to use the GAA Firehouse as well. So yeah, there were meetings and actions. We used to call them zaps, and to this day I think we could do with far more zaps. A perfect example of a zap in this country would have been the abseiling in the Houses of Parliament.

Evelyn: In Section 28?

Marguerite: Yeah, in Section 28. As a protest.

Evelyn: So what sort of zaps went on then?

Marguerite: A lot of things to do with media representation and coverage, were the first ones. They were the most obvious, because there was obviously a media feeding frenzy about this whole new movement, because also let's face it, for some of them it was like real freak show stuff, that was what they wanted to show. Show the folks at home these terribly flamboyant, unusual people.

Evelyn: So I suppose one of the more tangible results of the Stonewall Riots was the Gay Pride marches. So tell us about your early experiences there.

Marguerite: I didn't have a lot of time to experience the Pride marches. I went on my first one in 1974. So that would have made it the fourth or fifth, yeah, probably the fifth official Gay Pride March. Things were already changing so fast, that I remember a whole huge group of lesbians cheering a police woman who looked very butch. Everyone beginning to call and say, "Join us. Join us. Join us." Because that was something that was happening at that point as well, is people, as I said, not only were they appearing at the Firehouse in droves, but people were literally coming and joining the march quite spontaneously. People could be encouraged from the sidelines. People who maybe felt a bit shy, or a bit scared, or a bit well I've never seen anyone who looks like me in a gay context, or in a media representation. Then suddenly you see a bunch of long-haired girls in bell-bottomed jeans, and you think, "God, they're just like me." With us chanting, "Join us. Join us." That's what very frequently happened as well.

Marguerite: It was very heady, very exciting. But also for me it was exciting because I had found myself in the middle of a lesbian feminist musical. We created a theatre out of the GAA Firehouse and had a weeks run of this production during Pride that year. So having come out in about March of that year, by June I was on the front page of the Advocate, which was the first magazine for LGBT issues with the cast and crew of the musical, because it had taken New York by storm. Suddenly everybody knew my name, everyone knew my face, and within six weeks, I was gone. I left New York, came to England to do a Master's degree at the University of Essex, and found myself

in a place where there were six lesbians. I thought to myself, "What have I done?"

Evelyn: Let's backtrack a little first. Tell us, what was the feel of the musical? Tell us some of the sense of putting it together. How all the women felt about doing it. What was your first audience reactions?

Marguerite: The people who created the show, because it was a musical, and it was like a review, and it very much was a piss take of South Pacific, so it was called North Atlantic. It was the story of every dyke who comes from a small town in Kansas, and finds herself in New York City facing all of the challenges of things like non-monogamy and hot and cold running lesbians everywhere you looked.

Lori: Every dyke [inaudible 00:23:16].

Marguerite: Absolutely. What was happening in all fields of endeavour were the gay people within those fields beginning to create things for us as a community. It was a number of women who got together who wrote it, and they were all women who worked in the theatre. All the techies were people who also worked in the theatre. I had just finished a Theatre Arts degree from New York University. I had been trained as a director, and that was how they got hold of me, because they'd heard rumours that there was somebody on the scene who could direct. That was the one thing they were having real trouble with, because it was the need to coordinate a band, and the crew, and about 30 actors. Doing the rehearsing in various places, in a very ad hoc way, until we convince the powers that be to give us the Firehouse, because we went to their meeting and argued incredibly passionately and won the day.

Marguerite: That was actually a very cinematic moment, it was absolutely great, because we slowly but surely convinced all manner of people who were fairly hostile to the idea, into not only supporting us, but they actually elected to give us some money as well. So it felt like a real triumph for us. But of course the irony was that although I had a very solid, by then, five year background in working in theatre, and working my way up within the theatre, because before directing I was specializing in lighting. I made quite good money working my way through university doing spotlight operating. But I was very confident as a director, but I wasn't particularly confident as a lesbian, because I'd only been out for about 10 minutes. Here I was directing love scenes, sex scenes with women 10 years older than me, who I was full of admiration for in terms of their political activism, but also blown away by their lesbian lives. Here I was telling them what was a good enough love scene.

Marguerite: So I decided the one thing that I could do to save myself a lot of heartache and sorrow was to close the rehearsals for those scenes, and just have a very, very small number of people. Only the people who were absolutely required to rehearse those scenes. But it was fabulous when we opened because you always have a sense that people won't come. Suddenly there were crowds everywhere, and everyone was trying to fight to get in.

Evelyn: Where did it open, was it at the Firehouse?

Marguerite: Yes. Yeah, which is now what they call Soho in Manhattan, south of Houston Street. The building is still there, it now has a plaque on it, an historic plaque. But yeah, we sold out the whole run immediately, and hearing everyone laugh with recognition and cheer, it was fabulous.

Lori: Do you remember the price of the ticket?

Marguerite: I don't, but it probably would have been something like \$2.

Evelyn: Worth every cent.

Marguerite: Absolutely.

Evelyn: So there you are, toast of New York.

Marguerite: The toast of New York. And then left, and found myself in Essex.

Lori: That's two breaths of fire, one right after the other.

Marguerite: What a shock that was.

Evelyn: So coming to the UK did you find any sense of that Stonewall spirit?

Marguerite: Yes, but in a very different politicized context, because the University of Essex at the time was a hotbed of political activity, and was very much full of the lesbian socialist feminist crew, for lack of a better word, possee, what have you. That was very different, particularly because there was a class analysis that then made me smack my head and think, "Of course, of course." So many of the dynamics that I didn't understand or struggled with in New York were things about class that we were told didn't exist.

Evelyn: Explainable within your new context here.

Marguerite: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Of course, the other thing about it was that within universities the link for women between feminism and lesbian activism was very, very powerfully interlinked, and quite often the bias was far more towards feminism, than it was towards gay rights. There was the work that lesbians did with their brothers, but a lot of the focus was around women's rights, and the fact that a lot of lesbian feminists felt they had far more in common with any other woman, than they did with men, including gay men.

Evelyn: So you got involved in the feminist cause?

Marguerite: I got elected to be one of the NUS Gay Rights representatives for East Anglia. So it was student politics, as well as gay rights. We decided to be focused on visibility, because in those days, in the mid-70s, it was still very powerful to be willing to be shown on a poster, a photograph of you on a poster. The point we wanted to make was that we didn't look any different than anyone else our ages. But we all came from very different walks of life, and life experiences, and were working to make things better for everyone.

Evelyn: The social scene over here?

Marguerite: It was less. There were far fewer people who came out at a very young age, at that point, and of course that was what I was interested in, because I was still relatively young. A lot of the activists were women who were a good 10, 15 years older than me. Again, who in this country, got involved with things like the Gay Liberation Front, and the Congress for Homosexual Equality, CHE [Campaign for Homosexual Equality]. Which again, was a very important historic organization.

Evelyn: Did you have any involvement with the GLF?

Marguerite: I didn't really, between the students politics and the feminism, one of the things that was so interesting about the early year of the women's movement, where what were called the demands. Each year the major annual Women's Liberation Movement Conference would democratically arrive at a new demand for the year. That would then define the types of activism that would take place that

year. So for example, reproductive rights, or equal pay, and I think we got to as many as seven or eight demands before that way of identifying, in terms of being women activists kind of dissipated, and again, went into other things.

Evelyn: But lesbian rights became one of the demands?

Marguerite: It was, but only because a demand that it seemed that everyone thought would go through. Interestingly, I can't remember what that demand was now, but lesbian activists hijacked it. It was really a very dynamic process. There were particular activists from the University of Kent at Canterbury who were very consciously preparing to hijack it and succeed. It'd be interesting to actually look it up, but it was support for lesbian and bisexual women.

Evelyn: So what was the tenor at those meetings?

Marguerite: Absolutely blood curdling. When women fight in that kind of political way, it really is quite something to see. People were very passionate, women were very, very passionate about the demands. So it was really hammered out. But once it was agreed, it was something that everyone took very seriously and began to work towards. That's where the whole issue of what was once referred to as a lavender herring was debunked, because lots of lesbian feminists felt that straight feminists would back away from radical action or radical identities if they were accused of being dykes. That was the weapon that would be used. Lesbians felt that it worked, and there was a lot of lesbophobia within the women's movement, and a lot of making sure that people were known to be, "I'm straight. I'm straight. I'm straight. I'm not a lesbian just because I'm a feminist."

Evelyn: Because that was the taunt from outside that feminist community.

Marguerite: Very much so, including our left-wing brothers in the cause, in other causes, because it was threatening.

Evelyn: At this point, there wasn't much solidarity between the men and the women in the gay community, if you like. It was a very fractured time.

Marguerite: What kept happening is that you'd go to a women's conference, and there'd be creches, and all manner of things to support women's lives. Then you'd got to a so-called lesbian and gay thing, at the first plenary the question from the floor would be asked, "Why are there no creche here?" It would be obvious that no one in the organizing group had even thought of it. So as soon as those sorts of conferences or meetings would begin, and it almost became like a cliché, we'd all get together, the first question would come up from the women, voicing something that wasn't good enough or inclusive. The men would show themselves to be clueless, and the women would get up and leave. That went on for what felt like years until it just solidified as being quite separate. Then some conscious separatism began as well.

Evelyn: So thinking along the lines of the impact of Stonewall, we've got a lot of activism taking off in all sorts of directions. What was your earliest Pride march here?

Marguerite: That's interesting. I probably went to the [inaudible 00:38:02], but they're not particularly memorable to me, compared to the Women's Movement things that were going on. That was where my heart and my allegiances lay. But obviously because of things like the homophobia within the Women's Movement it was a situation where lesbian feminists were trying very hard to reconcile those aspects of

their lives, to get something that reflected the whole of themselves. Of course, there were a lot of very real issues around things like lesbian mothers, and fights to be able to retain your children if you were exposed as a lesbian. Particularly by your ex-husband, in a situation where a marriage had broken down.

Evelyn: In terms of custody the courts would almost 100% award custody to the father, on account of the mother being a pervert, if the father contested custody.

Marguerite: Yes. It was seen as that you were not of good character, and trustworthy to look after your own children. Of course that did mean that some women chose not to be out, or have relationships with other women until their children would be of an age that they would be safe. Or, of course, then women started having children outside of marriage, and starting to create very imaginative ways, because no donor clinic was going to sell you sperm. But there were a lot of lefty men who were very willing to donate. All sorts of really fantastic systems were set up, and I'm thinking particularly Manchester had a very, very creative community going on. So that the men could donate, but the women could protect themselves from knowing which of the men had donated to them, because you'd have intermediaries for the protection of the women. As well as for the anonymity of the man.

Evelyn: Interesting. So many threads moving along, in terms of rapid change.

Marguerite: Very.

Evelyn: So moving into the '80s you have lots of things going on.

Marguerite: Well of course one of the most terrible things was that the '80s was the whole decade of HIV and AIDS, and it was a nightmare. I don't think people who are not old enough to remember themselves have very much of a sense of just how terrible it was, because I think things like that people want to put away, because it was so traumatic. In a way, it was a unifying thing that happened, a crisis, and that women came back into the movement in order to support men. Because certainly in places like ... It never got as bad ... It was bad in London, but it never got as bad as in some of the major American cities. In New York men died in droves. The whole generation that is or would be my age now, were literally just sliced out of the community. It was indescribable. Not just fast deaths, but terrible, terrible deaths.

Marguerite: Real suffering and the whole politics of trying to find out what was causing it. Lots of blaming around sexual promiscuity, and people saying that it was God's vengeance, God's message. Yet of course the other, the very strange thing for lesbians at the time, particularly those with political analysis, was that in terms of risk, and in terms of risk behaviour, lesbians were safer than anyone else, if all they were doing was having vanilla sex with other women. So the irony was, that there was one part of the community supporting another part of the community, one where it was the highest risk, and one that was the lowest risk.

Evelyn: Also within the '80s there was more adversity in terms of the political climate in the UK.

Marguerite: Yes.

Evelyn: You had Thatcher's administration, and the Section 28, or Clause 28, which stopped local authorities allowing schools to promote homosexuality in any way as a pretended-

Marguerite: Pretend.

Evelyn: ... family relationship.

Marguerite: Yeah, that created a whole generation of activists of a very lithe, and flexible sort. Lots of the lessons that had been learned over a period of activism were then put into a modern context, and it was a long, hard fight. It's amazing how long it was. But it galvanized a whole generation of people to be fighting. But very early on a group of legal experts really, these were people who were the crème de la crème of legal minds got together and examined how Section 28 could be challenged. They never found any local authority willing to do it. To try to set the precedent. That was quite shocking, because over the years you believe, because various legal rights happen, and various key struggles are won, in terms of legislation. The fact of the matter is legislation is never enough. In the same way, no matter how much social progress there is, legislation can actually be very crippling to hard-won rights.

Marguerite: But she was brilliant. She was a brilliant strategist. She knew exactly what she was doing in terms of it being so damaging. A whole generation not able to speak to youth workers, teachers, social workers. In terms of being able to see role models. All of those terribly important things about being out, being publicly out so that people could have role models, as well as the general public being able to see that there weren't that many differences, people are people.

Evelyn: And young people coming to an understanding of their own identities.

Marguerite: Exactly. Exactly.

Lori: Total obliteration of representation.

Marguerite: Yeah. It seemed to have come out of nowhere, and was so hugely effective.

Evelyn: On the other hand, you have those two points of adversity for the community, the AIDS epidemic and Maggie Thatcher ranging across the whole decade. That pulled the community together.

Marguerite: It certainly did.

Evelyn: Created the community, essentially, that we think of today.

Marguerite: Yes. Yes.

Lori: It's interesting too, when you look back to your of observation before then that the community was split by essentially women's issues from the male gay community. Then this sense of family, or loss of family representation is what brought it back together.

Marguerite: Yes.

Lori: In addition to the AIDS crisis happening at the same time.

Marguerite: We knew again that we were up against very critical and very impactful, and very intentional attacks.

Evelyn: So at the end of that decade, in '89, we have the establishment of Stonewall UK as a lobbying organization, I suppose, say originally. Over the period in the interim there'd been huge changes in legislation, and in attitude. Or do you feel, how far do you feel they've gone to a sense of the kind of liberations that you wanted to see when you were a youngster back in New York?

Marguerite: The thing I struggle with, and I'm sure it was because of my experiences in my youth, and it's something I reflected on quite a lot when I was in New York for the Global Pride 50th Anniversary. Was that I was very involved in a movement that was looking to offer alternatives to the status quo. Yet slowly but surely, the status quo has become part of us. When I look at the corporate sponsors for Opening Doors London, for example, and I see the gay staff groups, the LGBT++ et cetera, staff groups, and the referencing of one's spouse as your wife or your husband, and the achievement of a corporate identity profession, lifestyle with 2.5 kids and a dog and a house in the suburbs. I know I'm doing this as an extreme to make the point... things like fighting for the right to marry of course were very important. But I don't ever want us to lose the recognition or the critique, or the analysis of the fact that often marriage doesn't work for straight people, nevermind for queer ones. Particularly the position of women within the context of marriage.

Marguerite: I find it very interesting that of all the people that I know, and all the lesbians I know who've had children within lesbian relationships, the model is still to have children with your sexual partner. Yet, sexual partners are the most volatile relationship. So to put your children's security on the line in relation to a sexual relationship, rather than for example, an extended family created to raise children, but not necessarily in that monogamous nuclear family way, just hasn't happened. There are a few alternatives, but actually very, very few.

Lori: What do you think is holding us back from really critiquing institutions like that, rather than trying to assimilate?

Marguerite: I'm not sure. But it is definitely, I felt like I fought for the right for alternatives, as well as to be just like everybody else. Actually I do know exactly what it is, it's global capitalism. That's what's doing it. It's the whole co-opting of everything about the way we live our lives in terms of work and where we live. I've become very aware of the importance of the politics of space. When I was first in London, London was shrinking and we had huge amounts of space that we could take over. Lots of us were squatters, either legal or illegal. You were able to create cafés, places to live, creative spaces, performance spaces. Now those things are impossible because of the price of everything, the cost of everything. So you know, we're grabbed around the throat by the need to generate very serious amounts of money for everything.

Lori: Or the need to own.

Marguerite: Yes, yeah.

Lori: Including people.

Marguerite: Very much so. I felt that so strongly seeing the ... And of course it played itself out in New York for the 50th Anniversary because there was a Dyke March. There was the original, what they were calling Global Pride 50, which was ended up being called the Corporate March. Then there was an alternative to the Corporate March, which was referred to as the People's March. There were huge numbers of people for all of them. So it all happened, and it all happened side-by-side, and with an amazing lack of aggression, or confrontation, or separatism. All of the marches were really inclusive. That wasn't necessarily a given. It's not something that you could take for granted, by any means. But the Dyke March was supported by just

such an array of people along the march. People singing to us. People bringing water to us because it was so hot.

Evelyn: What did they sing?

Marguerite: "There is nothing like a dyke. Nothing in the world." All sorts of things like that. Or when we got down to the bottom, to Washington Square Park, there's a huge arch in the park, and a huge number of gay men in wild costumes surrounded the arch and sang When the Dykes go Marching In. There were three bands playing along the route. Loving signs, loving messages, things like, everything from "we're with you" to one beautiful young man wearing almost nothing but rollerskates with a big sign saying, "Remember to hydrate, it's hot outside." He was standing next to these people who were from a local church, who came along with little trays with water, like you see at the marathon, but for the Dyke March. It was superb.

Evelyn: So give us a sense of your feelings getting up on the morning, getting ready for the Dyke March, and joining all those women.

Marguerite: I had so wanted there to be a Dyke March in London. I had been aware of the New York one for quite a long time, because this year's march was the 27th. So it's been on the eve of the major Pride March, and all the dykes, or lots of the dykes that go on Dyke March then go on the Gay Pride March as well, it isn't a separatist march in that kind of way. To see...I reckon there were about 7,000 women. And to see 12 blocks of every shape, size, age, outfit, ability, identity, but identifying as dykes and marching with drummers, and dykes on bikes. And some very moving acknowledgments like ... The march knew that on a certain street, on a certain corner, as we marched by, the women who were too old to march had all been taken to a place in the shade where they could be comfortable, and watch the march go by. And the rest of the march knew where to be able to look to these women, and acknowledge them, and honour them. Then in turn to be honoured back.

Marguerite: Things like that, those sorts of conscious acts of acknowledgement, recognition, unity, I think are tremendously important. Because you can fight for things like legal rights, but we have to be very careful that those things can also be taken away very, very quickly. What we really need is a sense of having each other there. That intersectionality is something that started off the pride movement, and is still very much alive in the States. I'm hoping that it's exhibiting itself in increasingly imaginative and constructive ways here as well.

Evelyn: I'm imagining that there must have been a rollercoaster of emotions. I'm tearing up hearing about the old folk. So how was it for you?

Marguerite: I just had the most fantastic time. It was just such great fun. That thing of, yes, I'm an old, lesbian, socialist, feminist, feminist socialist, or what have you. My loyalties are to that community. So it was, it was very much like going home all those years later to something that has truly become, in New York, an inclusive event. I know there's been struggles, there's been conflicts, confrontations, even places like San Francisco, but New York seems to have got it sussed.

Evelyn: So what was the reaction of people outside the community as you were moving around?

Marguerite: Eventually it felt like the whole of Manhattan got pedestrianised on the official 50th Anniversary day, on the Sunday. The police just

couldn't cope with the crowds, so they just one-by-one, shut down all of the avenues in New York, and the whole of Manhattan was pedestrianised. Everyone went around saying to each other, "Happy Pride. Happy Pride." All day. Again, gay folk recognising each other, tourists, families who came for the day to see all of the amazing spectacle that was going on. It just felt like a huge party.

Evelyn: Were you on the People's Walk, as well as the ... What were the differences between the People's March and the Dyke March?

Marguerite: Well the People's March was mixed, the Dyke March was-

Evelyn: Obviously, yeah.

Marguerite: ... yeah, the women's march. Although some men marched as well, but it was really hugely women of every type you could possibly imagine in terms of identifying. A lot of the dykes were then on the People's March. It was the Corporate March that people were reacting against, because it was an event where if you didn't have a way in, in terms of contacts, it was the whole wrist band issue, and if you didn't have a wrist band, you weren't allowed to join in. The corporate sponsors were getting huge amounts more wristbands than the community groups. Sage got 150, and various corporations were getting between five and 600 and were marching in, I found, quite an alienating way in terms of being in outfits where everyone was all dressed in the corporate ... You know, the shirt with the corporate name on it, and the corporate colours. Some of them were even doing little routines. Like little semi-

Evelyn: Dance things.

Marguerite: ... sort of dance ... They reckoned..they were thinking it might take as long as 12 hours for the march to move off, and it didn't in the end, it was something like nine. But nine hours of just this sort of constant thing of every type of company you could possibly imagine. McDonald's and Gap, and Disney, and whatever. Of course to me, that goes straight back to the question about assimilation versus alternative. There was an era in the States where people actually did talk about it quite a lot, and used to describe them as assimilationists. Saying, "That's what I want. I do want to be just like anyone else."

Lori: I suppose in a way sometimes it kind of is a mixed message, because if some of the earlier campaigns were about, "Look, we're not that different from anybody else." It's quite easy to get confused with whether you are after assimilating or not.

Marguerite: Yeah.

Lori: Do you get what I mean?

Marguerite: Oh yeah, no it's a very interesting and important point, for sure. But it was that thing of because of the objectification of gay people as living in this twilight world, and the women wanted to be men, and the men really wanted to be women, and all of that type of very damaging stereotyping early on. Of these twilight people, you know, never came out except at night, and were sexual predators, and paedophiles, and all those sorts of things. The popular imagination had been fed a lot of that rubbish. So the impulse was to be able to say, "Look, we are you."

Lori: We're just as banal as you are.

Marguerite: Exactly, and we come from ... We are your children. Because a lot of the student politics very early on that was what we were saying.

Some of it was about the Vietnam War, and who was being sent off to die in an illegal war. Or who was being demonized for being queers. Our response to that was we are your children. We come from you. But that very powerful message to conform, there's nothing wrong with being like everyone else, it's just the alternatives seem to be the things that are at risk.

Lori: Because of corporate sponsorship, something like this it's just a vehicle that has a lot more power in terms of reach and-

Marguerite: It's seductive.

Lori: ... access, and ...

Marguerite: It's that thing of ... Yeah, it is, it's very, very seductive. I find it very interesting that now you see little bits of it in ads on television here. There's one for a car, and it's two lesbians, and one's having a baby. Again, that's fabulous, you know, a blessed event. But going off to have the baby in that particular car. Yes, I think alternatives are becoming harder and harder to genuinely live.

Evelyn: Do you think over time that women's voices have become more powerful as a result of all the changes?

Marguerite: No, I think it lost its way. I think the Women's Movement has lost its way. I sometimes despair at how little has genuinely changed, particularly in things like equality for not only very important things like pay, but the very important social things. Like who does the majority of domestic labour. But again, I think a lot of things have been individualised. It's not seen as a bigger picture. It can be identity politics that take up a lot of our time and focus, when really maybe we ...

Evelyn: Need a greater sense of the collective.

Marguerite: Yes, and we need to make sure that our eyes are open for what might come next.

Evelyn: So with that in mind, what do you consider to be the biggest issues facing the community today in the year of the 50th anniversary?

Marguerite: In this country I feel like we're fragmented. When we've talked about bi pride, and this pride and that pride, and black pride, and trans pride. I understand the importance of those events and celebrations, and those abilities for people who are like-minded, and of a struggle that still needs a lot of work. But we're so much stronger together.

Evelyn: It's a balance between people, as you say, with a common struggle, or a common purpose. Gathering together as a sense of support for each other. But needing the solidarity of the bigger community.

Marguerite: Mm-hmm (affirmative), all of us queers.

Evelyn: All of us queers.

Lori: It's a difficult one, I suppose, because if you feel like you're not represented by the community, then you don't feel your voice is relevant to it.

Marguerite: Absolutely, if you can't see yourself within in it, definitely. But I saw enough of it when I was back in the States to be hungry for it here again. To try to change those things.

Evelyn: So what do you think are the greatest triumphs arising from Stonewall?

Marguerite: Obviously all of the legal stuff. You can't talk about doing anything else if you're at risk in the eyes of the law. I do think, particularly to

do with the right to marry, that has hugely changed society. Simply because so many ordinary families, so called, ordinary families found themselves at same sex weddings. People just adjusted.

Evelyn: They recognised the emotions.

Marguerite: Exactly.

Evelyn: So huge attitudinal change, as well as legal.

Marguerite: But still, you can have someone like a Thatcher come in and just throw absolute destruction into the middle of what you thought you were achieving, or maybe just interrupt it for a while. But it depends on where, in your own life, you were at the point where that spanner was thrown into the works.

Evelyn: So we need vigilance, and we need our community.

Marguerite: I think vigilance is a very important thing, and I think people increasingly are realising, considering all the things that are going on both here in the UK, and in the States. That we can't afford to be complacent in any way at all. We can celebrate, of course, be joyful for all the things that we've achieved, but yes, freedom comes at the price of vigilance really. We do have to stay vigilant.

Evelyn: So all that remains is for me to say thank you so much for sharing-

Marguerite: Thank you.

Evelyn: ... all your experiences and thoughts. It's been amazing. Thank you Marguerite.

Lori: Yes, thank you.

Marguerite: Thank you to the two of you.