

## From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
<b>Name: Rosalind Pearson</b>	<b>Date: 17/01/2020</b> <b>Age: 69</b>
<b>Key issues:</b> Working-class. Socialism. Butch/femme. Lesbian. Women Like Us. Squatting. Lesbian Line. Homophobia. Section 28. London.	
<b>Narrative summary</b> Rosalind grew up in a socialist working-class household; her father was a trade unionist. She talks of how throughout her school years' boys didn't really feature in her life; she went to all girls' schools. She always had crushes on girls at school. She talks of her first experience of a gay pub in Blackburn before she was out – she was horrified at the butch/femme roleplaying and thought the place was full of men. Once she'd moved away to university she realised that she was a lesbian.  After her MA Rosalind became a campaign research worker for a charity for older people, which led her to start working in television as a researcher. She made two documentaries called Women Like Us and Women Like That; they showed lesbians of all ages talking about their lives. Women Like Us is Rosalind's proudest achievement, mainly due to how much it helped other lesbians.  She joined Lesbian Line in 1980 – an offshoot of Gay Switchboard. She led the first ever Lesbian Strength March with Lesbian Line; she talks of how aggressive police and the public were towards them. She says people forget how much lesbians were hated back then. She was involved in a lot of marches and protests – advocating for lesbian visibility. Rosalind was also very involved in protesting section 28 – she talks of one big demonstration at the Daily Mail Exhibition.  Rosalind talks about the progress she's seen in attitudes and laws towards LGBTQ+ people and women; however, she warns of a backlash towards LGBTQ+ people, with an increase in hate crimes. She talks about the importance that the word lesbian holds to her and others; because it took such a long time and a big effort to reclaim and make visible, it's important that people keep using it.  She talks about how much joy she gets out of living in London, really making the most of every opportunity. She gives Suffragette tours of London, goes to the theatre, museums, galleries and she still acts. Rosalind talks about the squatting that used to take place in Islington, which she also took part in. She talks about how content and happy she is being alone and living alone; she says there is so much excitement to be had in the world.	
	<b>Length of interview: 1 hr 22 mins</b>



Susan: I have to do this little bit of intro. Interview for From a Whisper to a Roar, which is an oral history project conducted by Opening Doors London, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Today is the 17th of January, 2020, and this is Susan Rudy interviewing Rosalind Pearson at Susan's house at South Street London. I'm going to start with a really broad question, and then we can go wherever you want. Okay, this is the question we're asking everyone to start with. Could you just tell me a bit about your early life and how and when you came to an understanding of your sexual identity?

Rosalind: Well, I come from a very small mill town in the north of England. It's called Darwin, in between Blackburn and Bolton. I was brought up a Catholic, and therefore, I was taught by nuns at primary school. And then I went to a convent direct grant grammar school. I passed a scholarship to go to a posh school. So it was an all-girls school.

Rosalind: And so I suppose most of my life and all with my relationships were very much centred around other girls really. Boys didn't really feature in my life, and, in fact, if anything, I didn't really like boys. I can still remember when I went to school at the age of five, I cried profusely on my first day at school. And everybody thought it was because I'd left my mum, and it wasn't. It was because I was sitting next to Michael Burns, and I really didn't like boys. As I said, I didn't really like boys, and they never really featured in my life. I didn't know how to relate to boys. But when I was-

Susan: What year were you born?

Rosalind: 1950.

Susan: Okay, yeah.

Rosalind: July 1950.

Susan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rosalind: So I suppose by the time I got to be a teenager and everyone started going out with boys, I'd had millions of crushes on girls at school. And we used to snog in the toilets and things like that. You know, and danced with it some because, you know, we just didn't get an opportunity to see boys really. I was a mod, and I was quite outrageous. So I didn't have lots of friends outside the school. And so I suppose I started going out with boys because everybody did, but still, my emotional relationships were with girls. I just thought men and boys were just peripheral to my life.

Rosalind: I was very close to a young woman who was a couple of years older than me who didn't go to my school called Regine. And I thought she was just incredibly beautiful. She had long dark hair, and we used to paint eyelashes. Those were the days when everyone used eye makeup, and we used to paint eyelashes. And we were inseparable. We went everywhere together. She was a lesbian, but she didn't tell me.

Susan: Do you think she knew?

Rosalind: She did know because when I was 17 and just before I went to university, she took me ... And this is a tragedy. I made this into a monologue. I do acting and do monologues, and I made this a monologue. So just before I went to uni and I was 17, she took me to this awful pub in Blackburn. We used to go out drinking

in Blackburn. We went under age drinking really early on, and we got quite drunk I have to say a lot of the time.

Rosalind: And it was the seediest pub I'd ever been in. We went in seedy pubs, but it was seedy. And it was a gay pub. So basically, I think she took me in there to try and tell me. It would have been preferable if she'd just kissed me I think. That would have saved a whole lot of hassle. But she took me to this pub, and I was horrified. I was horrified because it was full of very butch lesbians who I thought were men. And within a matter of about 10 minutes ... I had long blonde hair, and as I said, she had long dark hair. We didn't like anything like, where she'd taken me. And within a matter of five or 10 minutes, I was practically with my back against the wall with a woman who I thought was a man at the time with her foot up on the chair basically, more or less, pushing me into the wall.

Rosalind: I was so horrified I ran out. Regine ran after me, and I said, "Why on Earth did you take me in there?" And I think that just probably made her feel even worse. And very shortly after that, I went off to uni. And then I realised, and I went back. So I went back to tell her that I was a lesbian as well. I sort of managed to work my way into that. But I didn't feel like I was related to any of these people that she'd shown me. And when I went back, she wasn't living in Blackburn anymore. And I found one of our friends, Rowena, and I said, "Where's Regine?" And she said, "Oh, I don't know. I don't talk to her anymore. I think she's left because she's a lesbian, you know?" And it was really, really awful. And I realized that without me, Regine had gone somewhere else. And I never saw her again.

Rosalind: I spent....It's a really sad story, so I made it into a monologue. I spent all of my life trying to find her to say sorry. And I looked on Facebook, I did all sorts of things throughout the years. And then about three years ago, I was going through ... I had to do some ancestry records for my family, and I looked for her. And I found that she had died in her 30s.

Susan: You're kidding? But you don't know how or what happened to her?

Rosalind: No, I think I might get the death certificate. It was just too sad for me to.

Susan: So sad, in her 30s, really sad.

Rosalind: I know. And I can't tell you how inseparable we were. We used to hitch all over the country. We had a little sleeping bag each. Underneath is was like a ground sheet. And we didn't take a tent with us. We would just roll these sleeping bags out and sleep wherever we felt like sleeping, which is horrifying when I think back on it now.

Susan: Good grief. At that moment, did you actually question what your identity was when that happened?

Rosalind: No, I just-

Susan: Tell me that story of how that unfolded.

Rosalind: That just made me feel worse going into that pub because I thought that's nothing to do with me. But then I went to uni, and I found exactly the same thing, that all my emotional relationships were with women. And I did carry on having relationships with men, but I was really horrible to them because I didn't care about them. They were just some bizarre creature who-

Susan: Did you feel like you had to, or why would you have relationships with men too?

Rosalind: I thought that well, everybody did. I didn't really question it. And I didn't particularly dislike men. I just thought they were a bit silly really.

Susan: But you didn't marry any of them?

Rosalind: Oh, no, no, no. I knew then I'd never get married. And I was always getting into bed with my friends. And so I think it was then I thought, "This is just really silly." And also, by that time, there was a sort of nascent feminist movement, and that's what saved my life really.

Susan: Tell me about that and how you came to London, how you became an activist, all of that.

Rosalind: Okay. Well, even from the age of eight, I knew I was out of that mill town. All my family still lived there, but I was going to London, even at the age of eight. Somehow I knew that I was bigger than that place, and I didn't want any of the conventions. I knew at the age of 10 that I wasn't going to get married. So it's very interesting that life .. just maybe this sort of torturous path that you go on. I came to uni in London first of all, but I only stayed a term because my mum and dad were very supportive and said, "Are you sure you want to go to London?" And I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

Rosalind: But I think I was completely unprepared at that time for ... I mean it's bad enough now, but then, people just laughed at my accent because I talked like this. I talked with a Lancashire accent. People laughed at my accent. It was just constantly irritating about how they perceived me because I came from Lancashire. But interestingly, I obviously still had something about me because even in that first term, I managed to be invited to the president's ball by the president of the union, and I met the queen mother. So there's sort of two different strands going on here. There's me thinking I'm horrified by this, but obviously, still being quite extrovert and making myself noticed.

Rosalind: Anyway, they'd changed the course in any case, so I left because it wasn't the course I ... they hadn't told me-

Susan: What were you going to study?

Rosalind: I was doing French and Spanish, and they changed it to only one language, duh, and wanted me to do Spanish as a major and French as a lesser thing where as in fact I wanted to do French ... Although, my Spanish at that time was indeed better than my French bizarrely. So I left, and I went to Leeds. And then I went to France for a year when I got my degree, and then I came to London to do an MA. And then I was more prepared for London. I'd lived a lot more, and I loved it.

Susan: And have you stayed since then?

Rosalind: I have.

Susan: Wow. Okay, so tell me, what did you do your MA in, and what did you end up doing for a profession?

Rosalind: I did my MA in modern social and cultural studies. It was a very radical MA at the time.

Susan: Which university?

Rosalind: London.

Susan: The University of London?

Rosalind: Yeah. It was at Chelsea College. It was set up by Stuart Hall. There were only two courses in the country. He'd already started one at Birmingham, and so he decided to do one in London. And I applied from my little place in France where I was teaching English. And it was amazing because we ... I mean now you wouldn't think twice, but then, it was interdisciplinary. I did a dissertation on Marx's theory of alienation. I did a dissertation on Jude the Obscure, Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure. We deconstructed film, Buñuel films and everything. And one of my friends used to say, "It's just instant culture." But it was just wonderful. It was the most wonderful MA I'd ever done really.

Rosalind: And then I became a campaign research worker for a charity for older people, a London wide one, which was really, really good. I got a Winston Churchill traveling fellowship to go to Norway, Sweden, and Denmark for three and half months to look at what life was like for pensioners in those countries, which was truly amazing in the late 70s. And when I came back, my research was used all over the place by Jack Jones who was the president of the Trade Union Congress. And so I became quite well known. I went into television when Channel Four started because people approached me to be a researcher on a magazine program for older people.



Susan: Wow!

Rosalind: And I stayed in television ever since. I went to work at ITN, and I made documentaries for Channel Four. And I made Women Like Us, and Women Like That, which is still shown now. And I think it's probably resonant now in many ways than they were at the time. But I've spent my life with people coming up and going like, "Your films changed my life!" Because it was about 16 older lesbians aged from 50 up to 87 talking about their lives.

Susan: Wow. Do you know Jane Traies too then?

Rosalind: I do know Jane Traies, yeah. She practically showed Women Like Us quite often in her research to young students because they can't imagine these women talking about what love was like then in the 1920s and coming out and everything. And we spent such a long time with those women because I was very interested in oral history, hence the reason I'm doing this. When I think back on it, it's really quite amazing that we managed to get the women we did because this was 1989, first of all, when we started doing the research. There's no internet. We would pour through Arena Three magazines. These are the magazines from the 1960s. And we wrote down people's numbers and traced them through that. And sometimes people were horrified.

Rosalind: We phoned one woman up in Belfast, and she was going, "No, I don't want to talk to you?" So lots of people didn't talk to us. We gave leaflets out on demonstrations saying desperately seeking older lesbians. And we managed to get together 16 amazingly diverse women from all over the country who came from different backgrounds. And we even had two black women, one from London and one from Sheffield in it who didn't want to be seen, but in the end, would agree to be in it because they really, really didn't want to be in it at all. What people gave us was sheer joy. They shared all their memories with us. But we did put an awful lot of time, and I was a bit relentless.

Rosalind: There was one woman who started the Arena Three Magazine, Diana Chapman, and I phoned her up. She was 60 at the time. I phoned her up, and she said, "I don't want to talk to you." And I said, "Oh, go on, please, please. You don't have to be in the film just generally, just talk to me." "No, sir, I don't want to talk to you. A young thing like you, what do you know?" Which I think is really quite funny. And I just kept phoning her and phoning her. So in the end, she said, "All right. Well, I'll talk to you then." And then she was in the film, and she was very good.

Susan: Wow!

Rosalind: But so I think I persuaded a lot of people that I was trustworthy and that I would look after and care for their stories.

Susan: And you did. If I wanted to watch it online, could I watch it? Or how would I access it?

Rosalind: I can give you the DVDs. I'm going to put it on Vimeo. I've been meaning to put it on Vimeo for a long time, but I can give you the DVDs.

Susan: That would be lovely. I'd love to see it. Tell me about what your personal life was like. Where did you live? What did you look like?

Rosalind: I lived where I live now. I got rehoused from there. You'll love this. So they tried to kill me, National Front, on that estate.

Susan: Tell that again because you told me that before this was on.

Rosalind: I lived on the council estate just here, Priory Green Estate, which had been built in the mid-1950s by Lubetkin. It was meant to be a model and wonderful estate for working class people where they would feel valued. But by the mid-1970s, it had become hard to let. It was a National Front enclave. And people who were key workers because I worked for a London wide charity. There was an Islington office. We were given property that basically the council couldn't let. And so I lived there for five years.

Rosalind: But also, I've never been in the closet although I didn't necessarily look like people's idea of a lesbian. I was quite noticeable. And so the young National Front people on the estate set fire to the roof above my flat. They threw milk bottles at me from a great height. And I was absolutely terrified in the end to go out because I didn't know what was going to happen to me.

Rosalind: So I went to the equality officer at Islington Council and said, "Please, will you put my name on to be transferred to a housing association because I think I'm going to be killed." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Because I'm a lesbian." And it was an Asian man. Oops, I think this the sign of the times then. He said, "Oh, I don't think that will look good if I put lesbian down." And he said, "I don't think that will be very good for you at all." And I said, "If I don't tell you that I'm being harassed because I'm a lesbian, then what am I being harassed for?"

Rosalind: So in the end, he did agree to that. It was agreed to have a transfer. But I was so frightened for my life by that time that I was squatting close by, and in fact, the housing association, which is the one I'm with now, were very kind to me. And once the transfer had been released, they found a permanent property for me, and I've been there ever since in lovely Newington Green.

Susan: Wow! Another woman I talked to said there was a squat maybe here on Killick Street. Wasn't there?

Rosalind: Some of my friends lived in Killick Street, I mean in fact on Northdown Road, there was a squat there. Angele Veltmeijer who is a saxophonist and was in the

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Gestalt in all those women's bands. She lived there, and one of my friends lived there. And one of my friends lived in the squat on Killick Street.

Rosalind: And when I left the one I'd squatted in, Albion Road in Stoke Newington, I gave the key to one of my friends who squatted it for another 10 years. It was just so easy because the thing is that in the 1980s, all of my friends were squatting because the property was really rundown. Islington was very badly bombed during the second world war, and so was having to build a lot of council houses as well. And although Islington had grown up only in the late 1800s really as a wealthy town, which is why you've got these beautiful Georgian houses.

Rosalind: Into war years, by the year 1920 to 1930s, it had become really quite run down. And so all the beautiful properties that had been built fell into huge disrepair. So in a way, the council didn't mind people squatting, partly because what they wanted to do, the council themselves bought a lot of empty property to stop Rachman type landlords who were making a lot of money, and to stop gentrification because Islington wanted to not be taken over like some of the boroughs had been by rich middle class people buying property for a song basically.

Rosalind: So yeah, it was very easy to squat in Islington, and Islington Council felt that it was really good because they maintained the property. So that Richmond Avenue. I went all over the place. I can't tell you where all my friends were squatting in Islington in beautiful, beautiful houses I have to say.

Susan: Everywhere you look there's beautiful houses around here.

Rosalind: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Susan: Tell me about your French network and where that was based or how that-

Rosalind: Well, I suppose in 1980, sorry ... I suppose because I was a feminist and active already right from the very beginning, I never thought twice about being out really. I mean once I'd come out, it was a delight, and that was it. So I joined Lesbian Line in 1980.

Susan: Evelyn always says to me, "You're a good interviewer because you know nothing about London in the 80s." Tell me what Lesbian Line was.

Rosalind: Lesbian Line was for women only. It was an offshoot of Gay Switchboard. People had been on Gay Switchboard together but decided they didn't want to be in a mixed environment and wanted to devote their time to women. It was very much that time of women only wanting to be with other women. So it was staffed by volunteers. It was an amazing collective. We met once a week for about three or four hours to go through all sorts of business. And two people did the phones every night from, I don't know, 5:00 till midnight in another old building just by Kings Cross, actually, which is .. some rickety stairs and

everything. It was really good, and I just thought we worked together really well. I mean I thought-

Susan: How many of you?

Rosalind: There were about 12, 15 of us. We did a lot of things together, so I think in 1981 was the first lesbian strength march, the first march just for women. We led that march as Lesbian Line. And in fact, there's lovely pictures of me and I think, "Oh, [inaudible 00:22:59]," at the front of that march, which I have to say was horrifying because there were probably as many policemen as there were lesbians demonstrating. And people spat at us. I mean it was really, really quite frightening. I mean people forget just how much we were hated then in the 80s really, I mean absolutely hated. And that was just why they tried to kill me.

Rosalind: And it's really funny because I don't ... Although I was aware that I was hated, and people did these awful things to me, I still went round with ... I had a lovely enamel back saying dyke. And I had a double women's symbol. I would always wear those things. I actually didn't feel frightened. I felt it was important to make myself visible.

Susan: Do you know where that kind of courage came from for you?

Rosalind: I think I've always been quite courageous really. My mum and dad, my dad, in particular, he was quite similar to me, and he was a trade unionist. And he thought it was important to fight your side and be on the side of justice and remain true to yourself.

Susan: Did they accept you too from early on?

Rosalind: My mum died sadly in February 1976. And my dad never remarried, but I was incredibly close to my dad. And he died in the 1990s. When....Oh, when, and I was living there still. My sister, who's five years older than me, and now sadly has also died. I'm left, I'm left alone. She came down to see me when I was living there, and it was really interesting because she was there for about four or five days, a long weekend. And my dad used to come down and see me. Oh, I don't know, for two weeks every three months. I saw my dad an awful lot. And I was very fond of my dad.

Rosalind: So my sister came down to see me, and when it got to the evening before she was leaving the following morning, she said to me, "I'm not stupid, you know?" And I said, "Oh, really?" And she said, "I know that Ellen and Ellen ... " Oh, no. Most of the people she'd seen, in fact, everybody she'd seen, every woman she'd seen was a lesbian. And she'd seen one man who was a gay man who was a friend of mine. She said, "I know that John, he's one of them, isn't he?" And I said, "If you mean he's gay, yes, he is." And she said, "Well, I don't know what makes people queer." And it was really sort of venomous.

Susan: Wow!

Rosalind: And she said, "Not just that, he kissed you." And I said, "Well, yes. He's my friend." And so then she made some equally homophobic remarks. And then she said, "And then Ellen and Ellen," the ones who lived on your road who were also on Lesbian Line, she said, "I know they're queer as well, aren't they?" And I said, "Do you mean they're lesbians? Yes, they are." And then she went through all the people she'd seen and realised that all she'd done was meet lesbians. So then she looked at me and she said, "Oh my God, are you one of them?" And I said, "If you're asking me if I'm a lesbian, yes, I am."

Rosalind: And we were in the pub, that one just there, and she screamed at the top of her voice. So much so I ran to the bar and got her a brandy. And she said, "Oh my God, what will dad say?" And I said, "Well, I hadn't planned on telling him. He comes down here all the time. He sees exactly the same people. And I would no more talk to my dad about being heterosexual as I would about being a lesbian." And she said something like, "I don't understand. What makes you like that?" And I said, "Well, some people think they're born like that. I personally feel it was a choice, I do."

Susan: Do you?

Rosalind: I do feel it was a choice. I mean I do think there's a spectrum. I think maybe there is some biological thing, but I don't think you're necessarily born like that. I do think that it's something about how you're brought up as well and where you find yourself. And I just think that being part of the women's movement made it really easy for me to come out and to look around and see all these wonderful women who were lesbians. It was a very easy step for me. I think I might've found it much harder if I hadn't been a part of that.

Rosalind: Anyway, she went immediately home and told my dad. My dad phoned me and he said, "I think I'll come down next weekend." And he came down, and we had a nice weekend as always. And the only thing he said was, he used to call me Fox, he said, "You know, Fox," he said, "you're my daughter, and I love you very much. And whatever you choose to do in your life is fine by me. I love you." My sister, on the other hand, remained homophobic for the rest of her life.

Susan: That is so interesting, brought up with the same parents in the same context.

Rosalind: She still came down to see me. Her refrain all my life was what you say in Leighton when you think somebody is attractive is they're bonny. And she used to say, "I don't understand it because you're so bonny." Oh yeah, obviously, so I could get a man. And she used to say that to all her friends, or she'd say, "She wasn't always like this, you know. She did go out with boys. She could have got married." Which indeed, I could have done. Two people did ask me to marry them bizarrely. But she could never get over it, so much so when she used to come down and see me, I'd go to the loo, and she once said to my girlfriend,

"Are you my sister's special friend?" And this woman, Joyce, said, "Well, don't you think you should ask your sister?" But she didn't, so she would never talk to me about it.

Rosalind: And then strangely, when I made Women Like Us, she actually really liked it. My dad phoned me up when he saw it on the television, and he said, "Hey, Fox," he said, "I'm so proud of you." He said, "When the adverts came on ..." Because it was on Channel Four, he said, "When the adverts came on, I really, really did not see the adverts. I loved it." And he said, "I'm so proud of you."

Susan: What a sweet man.

Rosalind: Well, even my sister said she was proud of me in her strange way. Sadie, her daughter, who I'm very, very close to, became so vehemently non-homophobic because my sister was so homophobic. When my niece came down to see me on her own when she was 14, my niece told me later that she'd said to her, "If anybody does anything to you that you're not happy with, ring me up, and you can come home immediately because Auntie Ros is a bit strange."

Susan: Oh my goodness.

Rosalind: Yeah. So my niece never ever got over that. So in the end, we made it a joke about how homophobic she was. But bizarrely, suddenly, I don't know, in the late 1990s, she suddenly wanted to talk about it. And I thought, "Well, I don't know why you want ... I'm not going to talk to you about it now because it doesn't seem right because you still are quite homophobic, and it seems a bit like you want to find out about my life in a way I'm not so happy with."

Susan: Aw, that's tough. Wow. This is a big jump, but I want to make sure we talk about it. Evelyn mentioned that you were really active with protesting Section 28.

Rosalind: Yeah, yeah.

Susan: And how did that come up?

Rosalind: I'd done a lot of things, and I went on anti-racist marches. As part of Lesbian Line, we did all sorts of lesbian things and lesbian visibility. And when it came to what was initially Clause 28, me and a group of friends got together and decided that we'd do something, which was just something we wanted to do. I think it's amazing that it could never happen now because of security. But every year, there's the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition at Earls Court. It's a huge exhibition, huge. And people come from far and wide to go and look at all the exhibits and all things about how to have this wonderful house. So it's full of quite conservative - because it's Daily Mail - quite conservative rather affluent people. So we decided that that would be a perfect place for us to go and demonstrate about Clause 28.

Susan: Wow!

Rosalind: We planned it very carefully. There was a group of ... How many did we get in the end? We had to be really secretive, obviously. I think there were about maybe 10 of us in the end. And so we had somebody go in and recce what was in there. And it was this huge, huge house, I mean a really big house. So we created a banner. At that time, there was also ... One of the ways that Margaret Thatcher had implemented it was because there was a book. I can't remember, blahdy-blah lives with blahdy-blah. [Jenny Livers with Eric and Martin] And so we wrote on this banner, a huge banner, huge. The length of a house, that's how big it was. And we wrote, "Sue lives with Ros and Eve." And we wrapped it round. I think Eve wrapped it round her self, my friend Eve Featherstone wrapped it round herself.

Rosalind: And then we all gradually went into the exhibition, not together, and just walked around. We'd given ourselves a certain time to all head towards this place, this huge house. And so we looked, and we looked at a point where most people, where they would come out. So we all went and then locked the door so nobody else could get in. And we ran upstairs, and we unfurled this banner and yelled about stop Clause 28 and all sorts of things. It was full to bursting. I can't tell you how many people, there were thousands.

Rosalind: And everybody was so horrified, and the security couldn't get in because we'd locked the door. So we went on, and on, and on for at least 15 minutes yelling and shouting about Clause 28 to all these people just in amazement looking at us until they could finally get us out. And all they did was actually throw us out because they didn't know what to do with us. And so we were just sort of thrown out in the streets and had our photograph taken. And-

Susan: Did it get in the news, and did it get a lot of attention?

Rosalind: It didn't get a lot of attention, no, because people don't want to give it that sort of attention.

Susan: No.

Rosalind: But I think it got a fair amount of attention.

Susan: By all the people who were standing there looking at it. So around social change, what's your view in terms of how things are now compared to how they were then? What do you think of concepts like queer, any of that kind of space?

Rosalind: Yeah, I wouldn't call myself queer. I would always call myself a lesbian or a dyke really. I don't mind either of those. I think because it was so hard to reclaim those words, and queer, when I was growing up, really was about men. And so I understand young people who want to embrace that, and I have no problem with it. It's just that I wouldn't call myself queer. And I suppose thinking back,

trans, I mean, when I was in my 20s, I think I read *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy, which I really loved. And I would love to live in a genderless society. Then that was my ambition, and I would like it to be like that. I don't like being in a binary in a gendered society.

Rosalind: And I've got several trans friends, but I suppose I would just still always define myself as a lesbian because of my history. But I don't mind if other people want to call me something other.

Susan: No, absolutely.

Rosalind: But I also, I don't really want lesbian to be lost in it either.

Susan: It's a very specific identity and took too long to claim it.

Rosalind: Exactly. And I didn't want to be gay. I would never have said I was gay.

Susan: Did it seem like that was about men to you?

Rosalind: Yeah, exactly, yeah. So I would never have embraced that either.

Susan: Your friends from that time, the women you went you did the Section 28 protest with, are they still around. Are there any women you think we should talk to that you still are in touch with or that you could introduce us to?

Rosalind: Maybe Eve Featherstone who I did it with. I can probably get hold of her.

Susan: Could you?

Rosalind: Yeah, yeah.

Susan: Is she still in London?

Rosalind: Oh, yes, she is. Her current partner is the woman who Nicholas Witchell sat on when they went into the news ... took over the newsroom.

Susan: Mm-hmm (affirmative), sure. But she's the only one that's still around?

Rosalind: I think the others might be around, it's just that I don't know-

Susan: You don't know them anymore. That would be great. Maybe I'll get Evelyn to follow up with you about that. And do you have a sense, I mean part of the reason that Evelyn wanted to do this project was because she has a sense that the actions of women, like the activism of women at that time hasn't been recognised. Do have views on that.



Rosalind: Well, yeah. I don't think it's necessarily just that time. I think it's all times really. As I said, I'm now a guide, and I do a suffragette walk. And I am in awe of the suffragettes and what they did. And I feel really sad that growing up that was hidden from me as well. And the way that suffragettes were presented to me and us as feminists, as second wave feminists, were that they were just middle class women, which is not true. I did another documentary called A Peace of Her Mind. It was about women's work for peace going from before the first world war back up to Greenham Women.

Rosalind: And I talked to 90-year-old suffragette for that. I interviewed this woman, Phoebe Pole. And so I was in awe of what they did and the things that she told me. And that really transformed my life. And I think that what happens to women's history is, again and again, it gets obfuscated and lost and dished back to you in some terrible form. And I just wish I'd known how wonderful the suffragettes were when I was being an activist as well because I think I could have learned a lot from them.

Rosalind: And I fear that the same thing has happened again, that we've been written out of history for what we did. We've been painted as man-hating and rigid, and all sorts of things. And maybe it's sort of one of those cycles and maybe people ... I think maybe now people are beginning to think that yes, maybe we did do quite a lot. But I mean there's still that awful thing now, the terf label that's given to people and everything. It's just so awful because it's so ill-thought-out.

Susan: Absolutely.

Rosalind: Absolutely ill-thought-out. Nobody is saying that they're anti-trans, it's just a debate to be heard.

Susan: Absolutely. And the lack of solidarity that are ... People who should be in solidarity are just hating each other.

Rosalind: I know.

Susan: In the sense that young women have that you're starting from scratch every time there's a new generation. It's just really depressing.

Rosalind: It is. I mean it is very depressing. And I suppose what I feel now, well, I'm 69 now, which is quite strange. I sometimes think, "Oh, how did I get to 69?"

Susan: And we get that.

Rosalind: Oh, that's nice. I have lived. I said to my niece not long ago, partly because my mum died when she was 52, so it was quite difficult. I said, "I know you don't want to hear this now, but believe me, when I die you will remember this." I said, "I have lived the best life ever, and there's nothing I regret. I have achieved beyond any possibility that the working class house that I came from....Nobody

had those expectations that I could do what I've done. And there's nothing that I haven't done there that's ... I mean I've got a list of lots of things I still want to do, but if I were to die tomorrow, I have lived the happiest life."

Susan: That is a story that young women have to hear too because they have a sense that they're the first generation that had any choices, which is a lot of bullshit too.

Rosalind: Was it last year or the year before? I did a conversation. It must have been last year, maybe LGBTQ history week I think. With a young woman who was 22 about coming out. And it really, really angered me because I think they chose... what they wanted, I could see in my head, was an old woman like me who had real, real difficulties, and I'd lived this sort of awful life and wasn't happy and whatever. And this young woman who had all these choices, and she couldn't even say the word lesbian.

Susan: You're kidding.

Rosalind: She said she'd only just come out. Her parents were really awful to her. And I was going, "My dad was fine with me." And you could see people filming it hated it because it wasn't what they wanted. They wanted this young woman to be really ahead of the game and me to be some sort of downcast person who-

Susan: What do you make of that?

Rosalind: I thought it really upset me because I could see every time I opened my mouth, I was going like, "Oh, that was surprising that your parents are so awful." And I said, "What would you call yourself?" And she said, "Well, you know, and ... She said, "Well, what do you call yourself?" I said, "Well, I'm quite happy with the word lesbian and dyke." And she was going like oh, she said, "No, I really feel uncomfortable." She said, "I don't identify with that." And it was far, far worse than when I'd come out. I just embraced it. I had no problems, no problems.

Susan: What do you make of that? Because in practical terms you'd think that they have a lot more civil rights and public representations. What do you make of that?

Rosalind: I think it's more complex really. I think because loving through the 70s and all the activism of the 70s, I'm glad I lived through that. We actually believed that we could change the world. And I think if you believe you can change the world, then you see the world in a different way. I think, looking back now, I thought everybody was like us. I realise now we were actually only a minority. But at the time, because all my friends were like that, I had a slightly skewed version of the world. Although, I should have realised with my sister who had a different view. But I was surrounded by people who actually thought that it was a possibility.

Rosalind: And I can still remember I was a part of a group called Women Sync who made ... It was a women's film project. They got quite a bit of funding, so I made films for them as well. I remember it must have been 1982 I think when somebody said to me, "Do you think that things are changing now and it will never be the same?" So we all recognised that 1982 might have been the changing point where maybe you couldn't change the world anymore, but we still carried on being active. So I think by the early 80s-

Susan: Because of Thatcher and Reagan?

Rosalind: Yeah.

Susan: Yeah.

Rosalind: Yeah.

Susan: And for you, do you think gay politics came really overtly out of the left and feminist politics? Was that really something you were aware of?

Rosalind: Yeah. I mean my dad was a socialist, and so I grew up in sort of ... As I said, he was a trade unionist, so I was always a socialist. Before-

Susan: Was it easy to translate into this new-

Rosalind: I became a socialist. I started out as a socialist feminist. And very quickly I became a radical feminist.

Susan: And just for the record, can you talk about what that means to you, being a radical feminist?

Rosalind: Well, I suppose for me at the time it meant putting women's politics first, and so, therefore, trying to work out where we were going as women, and particularly as lesbians without having socialist men of which it's just the same now. Sometimes I think, I mean I am a member of the Labour Party, I have to say, but I sometimes think that it's the same in the Labour Party now as it was with Socialist Worker Party men then who were brutish and anti-women, and still thought of as a socialist, but had no conception. And I think that hasn't changed really. And in a way, that's what made me pretty want to become a radical or revolutionary feminist.

Susan: And what do you think of the liberal feminist agenda, which, if feminism succeeded, that's the only way it has, what do you think of that?

Rosalind: I think it's sad because it is about reinventing the wheel over, and over, and over, and over again. And I think we made huge strides, huge strides in the 70s, then 80s and it did change the world. I do believe we changed a lot of things. It

wouldn't be like it is now. But I think it's very easy to be complacent, and I think sometimes young people because they can't envisage what it was like before, that they think they've made huge strides themselves and not because of what we did.

Rosalind: But also, I think they think that they won't lose that, and I think it's only a blink of an eye. Already I can see a sort of anti-LGBTQ back thing going because in the 1980s, I mean there was a poll that effectively like 75% of people hated lesbians and gay men and thought it was absolutely really awful. It was really unbelievable to watch how that changed and then everybody being very supportive. And already you can see there's a backlash now, and there's going to be a lot more hate crime I think.

Rosalind: Even those gains, I mean personally I don't believe in marriage. I don't believe in heterosexual marriage, so why would I believe in two same-sex couples getting married? And interestingly, some of my heterosexual friends, one of them has just had the first civil partnership, heterosexual civil partnership because she didn't believe in marriage either. And I think some of my heterosexual women friends were thinking, "Why are you campaigning for this?" And I would support anybody who wanted to get married, but what a waste.

Susan: I was going to ask you about that too. I was born in '61, so I was a conscious person in the 70s, and I remember that feeling that society was about to change in these really radical ways, and there'd be new social configurations of all kinds. And if rights were granted, that would mean we'd live in all these new ways.

Rosalind: Exactly.

Susan: And instead, I have two daughters who are queer, and they're the most conventional people.

Rosalind: Exactly. I think that's what worries me now. When I was being really radical, all the lesbians I knew were really, really radical. And now, I know lots of young lesbians, and they are horrifyingly conventional.

Susan: Conventional, exactly, yeah. Do you think that's just a recuperation of that politics instead of actually having to change the world, just sort of is you want to be just like us, be just like us, but we're not going to accommodate any kind of changes?

Rosalind: I think, yeah. I mean maybe they just think that there's no battle to fight really. If that's how they feel, then that's how they feel. But I find it very strange to know these people are in these little monogamous marriages with children.

Susan: Exactly.

Rosalind: And not a thought in the world about it being anything other. And I do find that really sad, I'd say, I think. Because you're right, I thought we would have a completely other world where we could shake off all those shackles.

Susan: For men and women too, that there would be all these different kinds of ways?

Rosalind: Oh, yeah, for everybody. Yeah.

Susan: Well, let's put on the record all the joy you've had in your life too. Tell me more about that. Tell me about, I don't know, three instances of what's been so joyful about your life maybe, however you want to define that, in terms of work or relationships, or whatever that is to you.

Rosalind: What would I say? I think I have been amazingly loved all of my life. And in a way, you can sort of see how important it is, I think, to be loved as a child. I've got lots of friends who I can see it's quite traumatising if you've had a not very good childhood. And I was amazingly loved. I wasn't spoiled by any stretch of the imagination. If anything, what happened is my parents taught me to take responsibility for my own life really, really early on, which has been both a wonderful thing and a burden I think. Because if one is aware of ... I became existentialist when I was at school in my lovely convent school. They let us read Satre, which was under lock and key, and I became an existentialist which is the same sort of thing. You are responsible for all your own actions.

Rosalind: And I feel that a lot of people throughout their lives blame others for what happens and what has happened to them. And I think if you actually realise that you are responsible for your every action really and embrace it, then the world would be a better place. So, I've had .. I've never lived with anybody, which is also posed me problems.

Susan: That's really interesting. Never?

Rosalind: Never, ever. And I have lived on my own since 1982. I think because I grew up in a very small house, I shared a bed with my sister. My sister was five years older than me, and until I was 10, we shared a double bed. The effect it had on her, I think, is that she couldn't bear to be on her own. The effect it had on me was I was desperate for my own space. And so whenever I've had relationships and people have wanted to live with me, I've always maintained that it wouldn't last. And I know it wouldn't because, after two weeks, I would be crawling up the wall.

Susan: Interesting.

Rosalind: And that has been problematic, not for me, but for other people, I think. I've had the most loving relationships all of my life, but I haven't always been what we used to call monogamous. We called it non-monogamous then, didn't we? But anyway, so I have been non-monogamous most of my life, but I've always

been honest. I think you have to be honest. And I think I have never thought that there was one person out there who I would spend the rest of my life with. I know a lot of people do think that. I don't think that. But I have only ever had really loving relationships. And always the people I have the relationships with mostly, I'd say 90%, are still my very good friends.

Susan: Isn't that lovely?

Rosalind: So that's the joyful thing. And I have a lot of friends. And I still feel very loved even by the people with who I no longer have a relationship with, and it's wonderful.

Susan: That's stunning.

Rosalind: And the other joyful thing I would say would be about Women Like Us. I mean that's the thing I am the proudest of in my whole life because so many people, as I said, have said to me it changed my life. It was shown at the Shrewsbury Rainbow Film Festival last year, and a young woman there stood up and she said, "I watched this on my black and white television when I was 16 years old in my bedroom and locked myself in." And she said, "You transformed my life because one of the things I got out of that was I much go to London because that's where the lesbians are." And now she's a publisher. She's a-

Susan: That is fantastic.

Rosalind: ... lesbian publisher. And I've heard so many stories like that of people saying how much it changed their life because they were joyful women and joyful stories, although they were difficult stories for some of them. Some of them couldn't come out, and some of them had lost their partners. And some of them had a difficult time trying to reconcile it. But they had all come to a nice understanding of their lives in older age. And everybody was very happy with their lives, which is really nice as well.

Susan: I think talking to you, this is reminding me that when I first was ... I worked on Lesbian Writers way before came out. And what I remember thinking was that these were women who were happy in the world and that so many women were unhappy. And I think we've kind of lost that in the present too. Do you think the same?

Rosalind: Yeah, I do. And I think also people keep, it's like the interview I said, people keep trying to make me as if I've had an unhappy life as a lesbian because I'm 69. And I just keep on saying I have the happiest life. Don't do that to me.

Susan: Absolutely. If you have one more example ...

Rosalind: Joy in my life ... I get a great joy, I think, out of living in London and still being part of all the vibrant things that go on here. Lots of my friends say, "Oh God,



you make the most of London," which is true. I love London. I love being here. I love meeting people and seeing what they make of life really.

Susan: Tell me a bit about your personal life now. What do you do?

Rosalind: My personal life now? Oh, I live alone with my cat. I'm not actually having a relationship at the moment. I had a relationship which lasted six years, which ended probably just two years ago now. It was with somebody who was much younger than me. She was born in 1981. We met because I'm part of the Not So Lovelies Drama Group, the lesbian drama group. We started out as ... I mean we've been together now for 12, 15 years. We started out at the Drill Hall Darlings when there was a Drill Hall. And so we met there. And she was quite amazing because she emailed me and said that she was very attracted to me.

Rosalind: She really made a beeline for me, and I sort of pondered on this because somebody else who was also the same age as her about a year earlier had wanted to go out with me, and I knew that I would break her heart. You can just tell with some people. And I thought that would be really sad, so I wouldn't go out with her because of the age difference because there's no point entering in something where you know that you'll just break somebody's heart.

Rosalind: But Sam and I, she pursued me relentlessly. She's quite different from me. She's on the spectrum as well. She hadn't been diagnosed, and she's got Asperger's, one of those high functioning ones. And I'm very outgoing, so with her being on the spectrum, she's quite introspective. But everybody said it was amazing that it worked. And it was one of the nicest relationships I've ever had in my life because we were so different but had a huge respect for each other, and we really, really got on.

Rosalind: And the age difference made absolutely no difference to either of us. I think that sometimes I'm five years old, sometimes I'm 95 years old depending on the moment or the day. And we used to laugh because I used to say that she had a much older head on her than I did really. And so we fairly amicably split up I think. I think what happens is you come to a point in your life where I mean I wanted to do lots of things, and she had to work. And I didn't want to live her life, and she couldn't live my life really. So that's how it happened, but we're still very good friends.

Susan: That's lovely.

Rosalind: And I was thinking the other day because all these people said, "Oh, she won't be on her own for very long." And indeed, I could have a relationship. I've had several offers. But I sort of think that maybe I just like my life the way it is at this moment in time. I suppose I wouldn't say not ever, but maybe I'm all done with falling in love. To me, I think have I got time to go through all that again? I mean I've got every intention of living to be 95, but, yeah, who knows?

Susan: So the things you like to do in your day are what? What do you do in your-

Rosalind: I do a lot of tours. I will take modern guides as well. I'm a Guildhall Art Gallery guide. I do take tours in Islington. I read a lot. I go to the theatre a lot. I go to museums and art galleries a lot. And I still do acting.

Susan: Oh, yeah, you were saying. When did you start doing the acting? You were talking about the documentaries really early on. Was it at the same time you think?

Rosalind: No, no, no, no. It really was maybe the early 2000s. Barcy Cogdale who ... The Drill Hall, do you know the Drill Hall?

Susan: No.

Rosalind: Alright. The Drill Hall was, in fact, a drill hall.

Susan: Where is it?

Rosalind: And it's in Chenies Street, so it's off Totten Court Road. And it used to be this amazing radical art theatre.

Susan: Oh, really?

Rosalind: And it was huge because there was a bar. They used to have a women's bar since forever every Monday night, so lots of people. In fact, Katie Walsh will tell you about that because she was one of the barflies there. And it had drama space, and it had this wonderful theatre, which seated 200 people, a wonderful stage with a bar outside, and then a little studio downstairs and things. And so all throughout ... I think Julie Parker who is also a lesbian might be worth talking to because of that.

Susan: She's still around too?

Rosalind: Yes, she is.

Susan: Yeah.

Rosalind: They managed to get a lease on it and build it up into this radical arts centre. And because she was a lesbian, there were quite a lot of lesbian things going on there like the women's bar every Monday. Her partner, Barcy Cogdale, was a theatre director as well. And so sometime in the early 2000s, Barcy decided to get together a lesbian theatre group, and so we performed all sorts of pantomimes. I think the first thing we did was a Jill Posenor play that had been written in the 1970s saying any woman can, which was sort of outdated, and yet not. Some of the things there were still relevant. So it was really quite nice doing

something that had been written for a gay sweatshop, I think Jill Posenor wrote that for.

Rosalind: And then we did Lesbian Pantos. We did Alice in Wonderland where the black hole was a lesbian bar. I mean it was just wonderful. And I was the queen of hearts. It was just amazing.

Susan: It sounds like, but let's just say this overtly, it sounds like documentaries and theatre, those are forms of activism for you too, obviously.

Rosalind: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Susan: I mean, you were always aware of that? It's a way to reach people, change people's minds. Yeah.

Rosalind: Yeah. And because I don't necessarily look like some people's idea of a lesbian-

Susan: I was going to say, did you ever feel like you needed to look different?

Rosalind: Oh, it was awful. In the late 70s and early 80s, it was much more prescriptive, wasn't it? And I wore dungarees, and I had really short hair. And I yearned to look androgynous. And even then I couldn't look androgynous. And people sometimes were quite cruel to me. They used to say things like, "Well, you're just so femme." And it was just really awful because I didn't want to be labelled like that. And yeah, and I think everybody's idea at that time of an attractive lesbian was to look androgynous. And there's no way in a million years I could look androgynous.

Susan: Yeah.

Rosalind: So then as I got older, I just thought oh, just embrace it. In a way, I think it's even funnier because when I say to people I'm a lesbian, they're more shocked.

Susan: [crosstalk 01:05:37] suddenly.

Rosalind: Yeah.

Susan: And I was thinking you're an obviously very experienced interviewer, what's it like for you to be interviewed?

Rosalind: I think it's really interesting because I used to say I'd never be interviewed.

Susan: Why?

Rosalind: Because I spent so much of my life interviewing other people, and I know what it's like. I think, I'm not that interesting, and I wouldn't want to give so much of myself away, but then I've given up now.

Susan: Sorry. Excuse me. (Interruption at the door)

Rosalind: Okay.

Susan: I didn't expect any more. Oh, thanks very much. Do you need to sign it?

Speaker 3: Yes, please. Your name is?

Susan: Susan Rudy.

Speaker 3: Thank you. Have a nice day.

Susan: Bye. Yeah, I don't want to let that one go because I actually think I've talked to a lot of women now, and I feel like you're actually telling me a lot of stuff.

Rosalind: I don't know. Maybe. But no, I mean I think it's really, really important now. I mean I always thought oral history was important, I just wasn't sure that I ... But now I think it's really important that I'm a part of it, so I do feel that it's important. I think I've just had a very varied life.

Susan: What have I not thought to ask you then that you'd like to tell me about?

Rosalind: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. It's what you would want to know. I mean there's lots of things I could tell you, but it's really what you'd want to know, really.

Susan: What would you like to tell me because we probably have time for maybe one more conversation about something? Do you want to just choose one thing we haven't talked about that we should have in this story?

Rosalind: Oh, maybe relationships. I think it's really interesting now. The only thing my dad did say to me was he was worried that I would be lonely when I got old.

Susan: Oh, did he say that even out loud to you?

Rosalind: Yeah, he did. And I said, "Well, this is really interesting, dad." I said, "Because you were married, and then my mum died really early on." And they had a life planned out for themselves. And it was devastating for my dad. When my mum died, she got cancer of the cervix and she died really quickly. She died within 18 months. She got secondary cancer. I mean it was early days. They didn't know what to do with her, so it was horrible. They packed her with radium. I mean really, really, really ... But they didn't know any better I suppose is all I can say.

Rosalind: And so if anything, I think my dad was the one ... I mean he had lots of friends, but he was the one who was more likely to be lost and lonely, and I'm not-

Susan: And you're not at all.

Rosalind: Not at all lonely. No, and I've never felt lonely ever in my life. But I suppose because I liked my own company. I've very happy in my own company. I'm very gregarious, but I'm also very, very happy. I can spend a whole day not talking to anybody quite happily. I don't feel any need. And I'm also very self-sufficient. And I also know what I want. And I think all of those things didn't lead me to being able to feel happy in a long-term relationship because I think people change. I think every relationship has its own natural end. That's what I think. And you can have a relationship that maybe only lasted three months which is as wonderful and meaningful as maybe one that lasted 10 years.

Rosalind: So I think that more people ought to appreciate that you don't have to settle down with one person, that the world is a fascinating place, and there are fascinating people to meet. And the more people you meet, the more aspects of your personality come to the fore. I've got a house in Honfleur in Normandy, which I've had for 25 years, and I've now taken to the last couple of years since I split up with Sam, I wanted to spend more time there. So I spend my summers there, three months there. And I have this endless stream of people. It's only a tiny house, so it's only two bedrooms. I have this endless stream of people who come and see me for a week, a long weekend, 10 days, and then go away. And I absolutely adore it because it means that I get to spend quality time with my friends.

Rosalind: And I don't get bored because every person brings something different to the equation and induces a different aspect of my personality. And if I was there for three months with the same person, in my opinion, it would be boring.

Susan: That is so interesting. It makes me realise how rarely we hear that story.

Rosalind: And I think the older I get now, the more anomalous I feel because I am ... Interestingly, most of my close friends are also single, which is-

Susan: Is that right?

Rosalind: Or if they're not, then I make a point of saying I want to see you and not you and your partner, which irritates me when you think you're just seeing the one person, and then you get the appendage who comes along without them even telling you. So I don't like it when you're joined at the hip. And I like people who have a wider life than just the person they happen to be seeing at the time.

Rosalind: And I'll say, in fact, Barcy, the director of the Drill Hall Darlings, she came on my Tate tour on Saturday. And I said that thing about I think I might not have another relationship. I've been thinking about it. And she laughed and said, "But

all your life is relationships." And I said, "I know." And, in fact, in many ways, I've got with my friends all the intimacy of very, very close relationships, just not the sex really. And I said, "Well, I wouldn't mind having a fling. I just don't want a long relationship." There you go. You can't have everything.

Susan: Since you came out so early on, did you ever think about having or wanting children? Was that ever something in your head or not?

Rosalind: No, I never wanted children.

Susan: So that was absolutely-

Rosalind: No.

Susan: ... to you too.

Rosalind: I never ever, ever wanted children. It would just-

Susan: It was just completely clear to you early on. Yeah.

Rosalind: Yeah, and I never wavered from that. I think I'm a wonderful auntie. And in fact, my niece, because my sister died, and I was always very close to my niece. And bizarrely, my sister and I look quite alike in many ways, but our personalities were so different and so disparate. And my niece always want ... My niece looks more like me than my sister, and everybody used to think she was my daughter, which you can imagine, made my sister really, really cross.

Susan: Yes.

Rosalind: And my niece, I think, would have preferred me to be her mother in the way that people do. And I saw her only two or three weeks ago. I went to see some of my friends in Leeds, and she came over to Leeds to see me with her daughter who is also a wonderful young woman. And she kept saying to me, "You're the mother I never had. I love you so much." And all my friends were laughing because I said, "Yes, and I love you too, Nancy, but I don't want to be your mother."

Susan: Oh, absolutely. I think that's another thing. Young women don't have any permission to say they don't want children. I think feminism in the 70s gave us that kind of narrative-

Rosalind: Absolutely.

Susan: ... in a way that young women don't have now too.

Rosalind: I think the pressures to have children now are even greater.



Susan: I agree.

Rosalind: And as I said now, I saw some of my friends who sort of maybe their hormones kicked in at some point, but I didn't. I would have been a terrible mother. I mean I knew I'd be a terrible mother. And everybody says, "Oh, no, you would have been very nice." And, "No, I wouldn't."

Susan: Well, you clearly lived the right life for you. I'm going to have a quick look at this and make sure I've talked about everything that she wanted me to ask you. Let's see here. I think we've talked about all of this. Yep. Well, that's a good one. Did you feel heard in the past?

Rosalind: Heard?

Susan: Yeah, in terms of the argument that you wanted to make about how society should be, by friends, by ...

Rosalind: Well, yes, I did because all of my friends were the same and because we did have this deep-seated belief that we could change the world and that we had the right to change the world. And so yes, I do think I felt very much I was heard even in the Clause 28. I might have been disappointed by how long those things took, but I felt that my voice was always heard. And I think it's also sort of linked with the lack of fear as well so that therefore I was really outspoken. I mean there's a lovely story just come to mind. And lots of my friends laugh about this because they were there at the same time, but me and my friend Nicola Humberstone-

Susan: Oh, I met her too. I interviewed her too.

Rosalind: Oh, did you?

Susan: Yeah.

Rosalind: Well, I went out with her in 1980.

Susan: Oh, really?

Rosalind: And she's still my best friend.

Susan: Oh, I didn't know that.

Rosalind: And we went out for about, oh I don't know, three, four years, I think. And we did lots of things together. I just love her basically. And she was as outrageous as I am really. And we went to Portugal once, and they had these tee-shirts, which were a bit like string vests really. And we really liked them so we bought them. And nobody wore bras then. So we came back and we were wearing

these. And you could see our breasts and our nipples. And Jean Clitherow who lives in Norwich said, "I'm not walking down the road with you because that is just so awful." And we were like, "I don't know what you mean! We've got a right to wear this." And we walked down the road together with our tee-shirts on. And when men would look at us, we'd go, "Fuck off and die." And we thought that was really funny because it all stemmed that we thought had a right to be and a right to wear what we wanted to do and nobody was ... And we were fearless.

Susan: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So much of it has to do with this opening that London gives people to find the communities that they need in Britain, isn't it? That you sort of know that that's where you have to go to find your people.

Rosalind: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So yes, I mean it wasn't always easy. I think maybe in television it was a challenge. I worked at ITN, ITN news.

Susan: What is ITN?

Rosalind: It's what's now London Television News.

Susan: Oh, I see.

Rosalind: It's Independent Television News. It's still ITN, but it's on the ITV channel. And I worked there for about five years actually. I and my girlfriend also worked at ITN. We met at ITN as you do. We were the only two out lesbians at ITN, and we were vilified really.

Susan: Really?

Rosalind: I mean it was awful.

Susan: When would this have been?

Rosalind: This was in ... I started work there in 1988.

Susan: So, late 80s.

Rosalind: Yeah. And in fact. When I left, I left temporarily, and I came back because I freelanced. I left to make Women Like Us. It must have been, yeah, I started slightly earlier maybe 86. And it was really, really funny because those people who didn't know I was a lesbian, it was like every day for about two weeks I had to come out because everybody said, "Why are you leaving?" And I said, "Because I'm going to make a documentary." And they'd say, "What about?" And I'd say, "About older lesbians." I thought it was very good for me because oh my God, I don't mind being out, but this is really like outing myself every hour for two weeks because so many people came up. And it differed in

people's response. Some people said, "Oh, good on you." And a good number of people said to me, "Oh my God, that won't look good on your CV."

Susan: Oh my goodness.

Rosalind: And they actually felt they could say that to me.

Susan: Yeah.

Rosalind: And also then, what happened is those people who didn't know I was a lesbian, and particularly men who had been attracted to me were really horrible to me because it was as though I had lied to them. I just sort of led them on to think that they were attracted to me. And then I had the audacity to say, "Oh, but I'm a lesbian." It was really, really weird.

Susan: Do you think that happens still?

Rosalind: Yeah.

Susan: Really?

Rosalind: When I trained to be a City of London guide, there was one chap there who I could see really, really, really liked me. And we spent a lot of time together. And again, I have no probably about saying I'm a lesbian, but you know, you choose your moment sometimes. I'm not going to go like, "Oh, by the way, I'm a lesbian." Anyway, after maybe two or three months, I started talking about being a lesbian. And then he didn't know how to ... he couldn't talk to me. And my friend, Dillon, he was there I saw him on ... She met him on Sunday. We went on some city of London guide thing. And I said, "It's only now that he can be really all right with me, but he's still sort of slightly uncertain."

Susan: Word.

Rosalind: Yeah. Uncertain, but it was like he just had no idea how to behave around me. And it's that same sort of thing. It's a bit like, but I was attracted to you, so it's my fault.

Susan: That's so interesting. Yeah.

Rosalind: And that has happened to me all my life really, which is really irritating.

Susan: I bet. At least you don't have to come out every five seconds.

Susan: It's not your problem

Rosalind: I know. Because I just think, "Oh, just leave me alone." You know, just leave me?

Susan: No, absolutely. That's really in. Well, it feels like we found a natural place to close.

Rosalind: Yeah.

Susan: And I would just like to say thank you so much for speaking with us and telling me about these other people too. I'll follow up with you.

Rosalind: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Susan: And I'll just turn this off so we have a formal close to it.