

## From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
<b>Name:</b> Mairi	<b>Date:</b> 15/07/2019 <b>Age:</b> 59
<b>Key issues:</b> Brought up in a lesbian household. Tomboy. Lesbian. Sappho magazine. Loneliness. Sexism in the Medical profession. Feminism. Socialist Feminist Cooperative living. Collective Living. The Gateways. Socialist Feminists. Lesbian Feminists. Radical Separatists. HIV. Civil Partnerships. Marriage.	
<b>Narrative summary</b> Mairi's mother divorced her father after starting a relationship with another woman. They moved from Canada to the UK and her mother and her mother's partner – Jackie Forster - set up home together, at first in Surrey and then later in London. Mairi describes her younger self as a tomboy, always wearing trousers and having her hair cut short. She thought the world was an easier, more fun place for boys; and she also liked it when girls liked her. She always liked girls; she first properly fell in love with another woman at the age of 13.  Her mother and Jacky Forster started Sappho – a lesbian magazine – in 1970. Mairi drew the cartoons for Sappho from the ages of 10-12, creating a lesbian couple called Mabel and Mildred. Her family home was used as the Sappho headquarters, so she was constantly around other lesbian women who worked on the magazine. Sappho became a way for lesbian women – who may have been isolated all over the country – to get in touch with one another, allowing them to form friendships and relationships.  She studied medicine at Barts which she found to be the most heterosexist, misogynistic, awful experience; Mairi kept herself in the closet. She talks of how the socialist feminist cooperative household which she lived in at the time, saved her and helped to counteract the dreadfulness of Barts. She was constantly surrounded by talk of socialist and lesbian feminism. Mairi talks of how she frequented The Gateways – sometimes three times a week – so she could talk to, drink with and dance with other lesbians.  Mairi talks about the HIV and AIDS crisis, and the ignorance of the heterosexual doctors towards it. She was a junior doctor at the time, and they were all made to wear protective clothing and face masks so that they wouldn't 'catch' the 'gay disease'. She found the whole thing frustrating, especially when senior doctors and lecturers wouldn't listen to her; obviously being in the LGBTQ+ community she was far more aware of the actualities of HIV and AIDS. She talks about the current strains on the NHS, and the lesbian and age discrimination her mother and her mother's civil partner often face.  Mairi talks about how lucky she was to be brought up in such an open and feminist family. She talks of how she never had to come out, she only had to come to terms with herself loving women.	
	<b>Length of interview:</b> 1hr. 11 mins





Evelyn: So, this is an interview for From A Whisper To A Roar, an oral history project conducted by Opening Doors London, and supported by The Heritage Lottery Fund. Today is the 15th of July, 2019, and I am interviewing the lovely Mairi.

Evelyn: So, could you start by telling me a little bit about your early days, and how you came to an understanding of who you really are?

Mairi: Oh, my God. I was born in Canada, and I lived in Canada and Massachusetts, until I was just about eight when my parents separated, my mother and my father. And my mother moved over to the UK with my sister and myself. My mother had, prior to that, back in Canada, started a relationship with another woman. And my father and my sister and myself all sort of tagged along in that relationship.

Mairi: My father was very fond, adored his children, as did my mother, I think, and Jackie, but Jackie was a part of my life from when I was four. And so, when we came over to England, my mother and Jackie set up a home together, first of all in Surrey, for about a year, I think. And then, in 1969, we moved to London, with Jackie, where my mother and Jackie lived together until I was 15, and my mother fell in love with somebody else. And that was the end of their relationship.

Mairi: I personally was a tomboy, and I absolutely loved it when all the girls thought I was a boy, and chased me, and fell in love with me. When I was eight, nine, 10, I always had short hair. I always wore trousers, I always wore sneakers, as we used to call them in America. I got away with being a little boy, basically, until puberty, when all the puberty things start to happen, and you can't hide it any longer, the fact that you're a girl.

Evelyn: The lumps and bumps come out.

Mairi: The lumps and bumps, a whole set of... well, one bump didn't come out, and two bumps did! [laughing] And yeah, that was very disappointing, but I think that my own... yeah, I mean, I think I was a tomboy. I wanted, I thought the world was a easier, more fun place for boys than it was for girls. And I liked girls, liking me, and I never, as a small child, had a thing about a boy. I never had a boyfriend. I never wanted a boyfriend. I always wanted a girl, and so, when puberty came, we were living with Jackie Forster, in Connaught Square.

Mairi: In fact, when I was nine, when we, more or less when we moved to Connaught Square, I joined the local church choir as a boy. And I joined the Boys' Brigade as a boy. And I was really good at football in those days.

Mairi: Of course, it, being in the Boys' Brigade, I got a chance to play football, because girls can't play football otherwise, and I loved being in the Boys' Brigade. And I had a little gang. There were me and three other boys.

Evelyn: Did you change your name?

Mairi: Once or twice, I called myself Mark, just for the hell of it. But actually, my little boy, my gang, knew pretty early on that I was actually a girl. But they didn't care. And they were happy that I was one of the gang and one of them, and I was happy to be part of my gang.

Mairi: In the choir, I did really very well, and was sort of racing up the Royal School of Church Music. It was a fantastic choir at St. John's Hyde Park Crescent, in London, and then, my sister, my mother, sort of realised I was having a great time. My sister wanted to join the choir, but of course, she couldn't, because she was a girl. So my sister outed me as a girl.

Evelyn: She's jealous!

Mairi: Which was outrageous, and I've hated her... Well, I love her now, but I hated her at the time for doing it. And in fact, what happened was that rather than being expelled from the Boys' Brigade, and rather than the choir expel me, the choir became a mixed choir, and the Boys' Brigade became something called the Monday Club, both of which could have girls in them. So that was a sort of revolutionary thing to do in 1969.

Mairi: As I went on improving with the choir, because I carried on, I became the head chorister, and did the Royal School of Church Music Red Ribbon, which is quite a high up thing in the Royal School of Church Music, and sang solos at various cathedrals around the countries, and the country, and actually, really had a great time.

Mairi: But, yeah... then, of course, puberty came when I was 13. A, I fell in love with a, properly fell in love with a woman for the first time. Who I met, of course, through my mother, and her life, and was obsessed by this person.

Mairi: Her name was Ros. And, in fact, when I was 18, I was forbidden, we were forbidden to see each other, because she was 23, and I was 13, which was probably a sensible idea, in retrospect. But when I was 18, and I had the right, you know, what do they call it, the age of consent. And the age of 18 is the big pinnacle.

Mairi: I contacted her, and we lived together for two years after that, you know, when she was... She was still 10 years older than me, but I was by then 18. So I did sort of really fall for her in a big way, but stayed.

Mairi: I went to a great school, I went to a primary school in Paddington, near where we lived, and then, when I was 11, I went to Camden School For Girls, which was a great school. And carried on, all the way through my school years, still holding a flame for this woman I eventually contacted.

Mairi: But yeah, I had an affair with a girl in the sixth form, and we were very... yeah, we had a proper affair, and I would say she was probably my very first girlfriend.

Evelyn: So what was it like in the '60s, early '70s, being in a, essentially a lesbian family, with lesbian parents?

Mairi: It was, I was certain it was very difficult. You know, the time... I remember Jackie standing up at Hyde Park Corner every single Sunday, because we lived near Hyde Park. She would go down to Hyde Park Corner, to Speakers' Corner, and get on a soapbox, and stand and scream out, "You are looking at a raving lesbian!" And I remember wanting the ground to eat me. It was just too embarrassing. It was awful.

Mairi: But, at the same time, I really got, because of my own way... that I preferred being a boy, I preferred singing in the choir as a boy, I preferred being in the Boys' Brigade. I was a tomboy. I really got the injustice that women went through, from a very early age, and so, although I hated the sort of sexualisation of a same-sex relationship, and Jackie shouting out, "I'm a lesbian!", it sounded like a really dirty word.

Mairi: But, actually, I really totally understood, very early on, from a personal point of view, I think, that women being together was a good thing. That was a great thing. It was not at all like any of my friends, any of my... it was just, I didn't know any other children of lesbians. And in fact, when Sappho started, which, again, I think was about 1970, so I would have been about 10... and my mother and Jackie started Sappho in the house we were living in. So it was basically a printing press.

Evelyn: So, for the benefit of-

Mairi: Everything happened.

Evelyn: Future listeners, way off in the future who may not know, explain Sappho.

Mairi: Sappho was a magazine set up by Jackie Forster and my mother in about 1970. It wasn't the very first. The first magazine was Arena 3, and Arena 3 folded. I think Jackie probably had a row with the one, the woman who ran Arena 3, whatever. But anyway, that folded, and Sappho started.

Evelyn: And Arena 3 was a Kenric publication?

Mairi: I don't know.

Evelyn: Well, actually, but Jackie wrote for it, didn't she?

Mairi: Yeah, Jackie was involved with it, and Esme Langley was the editor. But I think Jackie and Esme fell out, I'm not quite sure over what. I was only 10 at the time, or nine, but Arena 3 stopped, and Sappho was born. And Sappho was a magazine, primarily a magazine, a monthly magazine, that was for lesbians, by lesbians, for lesbians, but one of its major functions was to try send out magazines to people, isolated women who lived in Yorkshire, who lived in, I don't know, Essex, wherever, all over the country.

Mairi: So the mailing list was really a lot of women who didn't, who weren't London-based, who didn't even have that base, and they also organised functions. So there'd be a Sappho meeting once a month, which was a... the original meetings happened in the house, so I would have, I was around, listening, and a lot of drinking and smoking, but ideas being exchanged, and people... And they'd also then have Sappho functions, which went on, really quite a long time. I think they went on into the, well into the '80s. There'd be a Sappho disco, or a Sappho meeting at a pub, or whatever.

Evelyn: Did you go to many of those?

Mairi: No.

Evelyn: The meetings in the house, give us a flavour of.

Mairi: Meetings in the house, I didn't actually go to.

Evelyn: Yes, [crosstalk 00:11:18].

Mairi: I was too young. But they were very... these women from all over the country would turn up on the doorstep, absolutely petrified, and they'd leave, feeling that they'd, they had a home, they had found other women. There were other women that they could relate to. Then there was a sort of core group of women who wrote for Sappho, who did the... I mean, back in the day, who were stamp lickers. They were people who'd just come in and lick stamps for hours and hours and hours, so the magazines could be sent out on time.

Mairi: I remember, there was a sort of deadline, Jackie would get completely frenzied, two or three days before publishing. Because it had to get to the publisher's, and the pages all had to be ready, and so on. My only real personal involvement with Sappho was that I did the cartoons for them. And I invented this couple, called Mabel and

Mildred, and Mabel was a butch. They were based on a couple of women that I'd seen coming and going into the house.

Mairi: One was sort of the very, butch, fat, curly hair, and the other one was very, very skinny. So they were sort of caricatures. And Mabel and Mildred carried double-headed axes with the Labrys thing, and were constantly fighting. Anyway, I had this sort of cartoon strip, which I did, probably from when I was about 10, till 12 or 14. I don't know, I'm not quite sure of the dates. So, I mean, if I could look at some Sappho magazines, I could say, "Yeah, there's Mabel and Mildred."

Evelyn: Indistinct?

Mairi: They were all made. They were all mine, and I'd do the cartoon, so that we had a cartoon in the magazine, and I did that. In terms of the magazine, otherwise? To be honest, it was about making them cups of tea and avoiding the smoke. The dining room was the office, and that's where the typewriter was clicking all day long, and the stamp lickens were there, and the cigarettes were smoked, and it was-

Evelyn: Everybody smoked in those days.

Mairi: Oh, my God, you could hardly see from one... if I'd opened the door, you could not see the end of the room. Everybody was sitting there, smoking and writing and talking, and stamp licking, and whatever. So it was a great thing.

Evelyn: And so, the content of Sappho. Was it political, or romantic stories, or what was it?

Mairi: Yeah, I think it... all of it. I think, they were, it was all there. I mean, I'd have to look back at the magazines, but I think it was, yes, there'd be short stories. There'd be upcoming events. I mean, my mother and Jackie were very active in the feminist movement, so anything to do with a sex discrimination march, or anything like that, would be... But it was woman-focused. It wasn't a gay magazine, it was a lesbian magazine, and I take my off to Jackie, for being brave enough, and worked ... she works so hard. She worked every single day, every single month.

Mairi: I don't remember my mother and Jackie actually ever going on holiday, apart from Christmas in the Lake District. I mean, they just worked really hard, and it was... There was the cartoon. It was a sort of mix of things. I think it was what came up at the time. I remember, they championed the first, they wrote an article about the first, and helped, I think, with the first woman to have a baby by artificial insemination, who was a lesbian. Except the baby would have been much younger than me.



Mairi: But they were sort of championing the whole idea that sexuality could, for women, could involve having children, even if they weren't heterosexually married, and all that sort of stuff. So they were great. I think when Spare Rib came out, which was much more on the feminist, much more biased towards the feminist and the political, the difference between Spare Rib and Sappho was that I don't think Spare Rib ran, sort of, life stories, and things like that, in the way that Sappho did. And also, Sappho had this outreach side of its nature, that Spare Rib... well, Spare Rib came out later, so that people had more access anyway, by then, I think, but... yeah.

Evelyn: So we're talking about days long before the Internet.

Mairi: Absolutely.

Evelyn: Mobile phone, that sort of thing, so women getting in touch with other women-

Mairi: It was, yeah, often via Sappho. I mean, a lot of them did via Sappho.

Evelyn: Yeah, yeah.

Mairi: And Sappho would encourage... supposing there were two or three people that they came across, who came from rural Hertfordshire. They'd encourage then to have a meeting, even if it was two of them, two or three or four women, have a meeting in Hertfordshire this month. And then, they put out on Sappho, "Anybody out there in Hertfordshire, there's going to be a meeting at the George and Dragon," and that sort of thing. It was all about connecting people, women, together.

Evelyn: Fantastic, in those days.

Mairi: Which I thought was a great move at the time. It was really, it was, as you say, it was before the Internet, it was before mobile phones, it was before text messaging. It was all about this sort of bush telegraph, and getting people connected, and-

Evelyn: Because people did feel terribly isolated.

Mairi: Yeah.

Evelyn: And a lot of married women, too.

Mairi: Yeah, and a friend of mine actually wrote them, somebody who's still a very, very great friend of mine, was a young lesbian at the time up in Huddersfield, and she remembers the brown envelope arriving, and snatching it from the doorstep, and running away, so the parents wouldn't know what was in it, and inside... and it was always in a brown envelope, Sappho, was in there.

Mairi: She read Sappho, and she saw my Mabel and Mildred cartoon, sort of, I don't know, 20 years before we met... that, you know, it was amazing. The little girl in Huddersfield, who was ... absolutely thought she was the only lesbian in the whole world, got this brown envelope once a month. And it made her feel she knew-

Evelyn: A part of humanity.

Mairi: Yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: So, Jackie was quite a big character.

Mairi: Very.

Evelyn: Tell me a little about her-

Mairi: Jackie was a-

Evelyn: Personality and [crosstalk 00:17:41].

Mairi: Jackie was a big character, a fearsome opponent. She had the capacity, she was a tiny woman physically. I think she was probably only about, I don't even know if she was five foot. She was tiny, very attractive physically.

Evelyn: She'd had, her early career was-

Mairi: She was married, twice.

Evelyn: Yeah, she was. I didn't realize it was twice, yeah.

Mairi: Peter Forster was her husband. And her early career was, quite a successful comedian with, on the radio, and on television.

Evelyn: Television presenter, wasn't she?

Mairi: Back in the '50s.

Evelyn: Quite.

Mairi: Before she went to Canada.

Evelyn: Groundbreaking in the way she presented-

Mairi: Yeah.

Evelyn: Because it was very open and funny and-

Mairi: Yup, yeah.

Evelyn: Whereas, it was very stilted in those days, most of the television output.

Mairi: Yes, yes. And she was on the... I remember going to see Jackie on a panel. I mean, she was still called up for various things, nothing to do with Sappho, or lesbianism, but I remember seeing her on a, the panel of, was it Any Questions, with Clement Freud? Things like that. She was still sort of known as a TV-

Evelyn: Personality.

Mairi: Personality, with a lot of integrity, and she was very bright. I mean, sharp as a knife. Clever, and funny, but had the ability to be absolutely vile, and drink masses of alcohol, and get violent, and be very badly behaved. I think she was banned from the local pub twice, I think, for... I think my mother was banned as well, but Jackie was certainly banned.

Mairi: I've got it written somewhere, you know, "Jackie banned from The Duke of Kendall again," because she was, because she wouldn't... she didn't mind swearing. She had a mouth like a sewer. I mean, her language... in fact, when I first went to school in London, people were horrified at my language. Because, of course, I picked it up at home. "Fuck this," "bugger that," you know, it was all, it was part of my upbringing.

Mairi: So, yeah, Jackie was formidable. And I think my sister and I related to her. I think she took on this woman, who had two children, which was a pretty extraordinary thing to do, and my sister, won't hear her name mentioned. Hated her, because of that side of her, that wasn't... she was, she could be vile. And my mother and Jackie's relationship was tempestuous and difficult a lot of the time.

Mairi: With children, it's so difficult. Anyone with parents who are fighting a lot finds it very difficult. So my sister, that, actually I, after my mother and Jackie split up, I reconnected with her, when I was about 18, 19, through the feminist, through my own feminist life. In fact, I saw her on the steps of, I can't remember, the steps of the Royal Academy or somewhere. And she, look, she didn't recognize me. And so, I hadn't seen her for about four years or something.

Mairi: And then, when she realised who I was, she just... after that, she always called me her "almost daughter," and burst into tears, and was terribly proud of our relationship, and... I actually was the person who notified, when she died, and looked after all the, you know, going to the Registry Office, and getting her papers together, and things, because she... when she died, she died with nothing and no one, really.

Mairi: In her last illness, I was very close to her. And in fact, so, I made my mother mother go and see her, which was good. And they sang.

They were in the, Jackie was in St. Mary's, in Paddington, dying of emphysema. And my mother went in, and they sang together. Which I think the ward probably hated, because they would be raucous, that's kind of what they were like.

Mairi: And yeah, so they did, they did see each other again, before she died, which I was very pleased about, so... yeah, a big part of my life, Jackie. And she went from Canada, through America, into London. So, a big part of my childhood, at 14, 15.

Evelyn: Okay. So you're 18, wildly in love?

Mairi: Yes. Picked up again.

Evelyn: Moving on in your political life, in your professional work?

Mairi: The most shocking thing that happened was, I was at Camden School For Girls, and it was a fantastic school. And I did, well, rather shockingly for the school, I chose to do a mix of A-levels, rather than be sausage machined into Oxford or Cambridge as something.

Evelyn: Arts or sciences, and never the twain shall meet.

Mairi: Yeah, I did, exactly. I did Ancient History, English literature, and Biology for A-level, not quite knowing where I wanted to go. And then, after my lower sixth, that, we were Camden, we had a lower sixth and upper sixth, and it was some time in the lower sixth. So I must have been about 16 or 17, I decided I wanted to do medicine with those A-levels, which was a shock to the school.

Mairi: And I was interviewed by a careers teacher at school about it, about why medicine? And I came up with something that probably didn't sound as clear as it should, but I said at the time, "I want to have a career which will be my career, which will be mine, wherever I go in the world, whatever I do. I'm not going to be in any, kind of, it's not going to be dependent on the society within which I'm living."

Mairi: And I went with a friend of mine, broke into the Careers Office a few weeks later, and found that she'd written in my file, "Wants to opt out of society."

Evelyn: Ooh!

Mairi: Bit of a turnaround, literally, she'd kind of got it wrong.

Evelyn: Whereas, you actually wanted to opt in, a better range of societies than other careers might afford.

Mairi: Absolutely, so, that was interesting. And then, got my A-levels, got good grades, and got into Barts on those A-levels, to study medicine. But I had to do something called a first MB first, which they don't do

now, but it's, it was basically a little loophole for those of us that didn't do science at A level..

Mairi: And I was offered a place, and I got in, so in 1978, when I was 18, I finished at Camden, and three months later, went to Barts. By that time, I had, I was living with my, this woman that I loved, from when I was 13.

Mairi: I also forget to say, I left home when I was 17, 16 or 17, when I was in the middle... I was having a heterosexual relationship with this man, and my mother didn't approve. Not because he was a man, but because he was older, and so on, and my and mother and I were not getting on at all, and I left home.

Mairi: So I did my A-levels from a bedsit in Highgate, and then, did my A-levels, and then, went and lived with this woman, and I think that was one of my... yeah, she was one of the loves of my life. And went to Bart's in 1978, which was a horrendous shock. That was just the worst thing.

Evelyn: In what way?

Mairi: Well, Camden School For Girls, at the time in the '70s, was as near as it could possibly get to a feminist school, with feminist ideology. We were all girls. It was expected that all girls would do well. It was expected, I mean, we all wore jeans, we all wore desert boots, we all... we were a sort of hippie school, in many ways, but also, really seriously academic school. It was a great place for me. It suited me incredibly well.

Evelyn: And the expectations were very high?

Mairi: Expectations were very high. Most... I mean, oh, yeah. Anybody from the school could go to Oxford or Cambridge, if they'd worked hard enough. It was all about working hard, getting the grades, a lot of encouragement. A lot of the teaching method was what I would call positive reinforcement, so it was all about drawing out the goodness in every people, and all of that.

Mairi: And I went to Barts, oh, my God! What a shock. What a shock. I mean, when I went to my interview at Barts, the man asked me, the dean asked... "Well, Miss Todd, what sport do you play?" And I told him I played Scrabble. Which, I thought, "It means he's not going to want me, the fucker." Which is great, because I didn't like this place, but he did. He thought this was a, kind of a clever little answer, so anyway, I was offered a place at Barts.

Mairi: And when I went to Barts, I was absolutely horrified. I mean, it was like going back, two, three centuries.

Evelyn: So you were horrified in terms of just being a woman there.

Mairi: Being a woman, being an 18-year-old girl, really. Being, I was in a lesbian relationship, oh, my God, you have to keep that quiet. I mean, it was just, it was a heterosexual, awful, experience. It was heterosexist in the worst possible way I can tell you. And then, once... what you do in medical school, when I went, was you... I did my pre-clinical. I did my first MB, passed that at the end of '79.

Mairi: And then, in '79, for two years, you do something called pre-clinical. So you're sort of a student, learning anatomy and physiology, and biochemistry, and all this. And then, after your pre-clinical, you do clinical, which is when you're actually in a ward seeing patients, and trolling around off with, as a student in a gang, after an eminent consultant.

Mairi: I just found that the whole experience, from day one, really awful. I hated it. I absolutely hated it. Once you start doing clinical, you weren't... I wasn't allowed to wear trousers on the ward. You had to wear dresses. I mean, I hadn't been in a dress since I was a toddler. I never wore dresses, or a skirt, and I remember one of my tutors saying, "People like you need to be tarred and feathered." It was absolutely...

Evelyn: Did it, was that because you were a lesbian, or because you were a feminist?

Mairi: Because I was a feminist.

Evelyn: Feminist, so-

Mairi: I didn't come out as a lesbian, really. I mean, I was in the, I was closeted, which I'd never had to before. My only, the only saving grace was, at that time, I split up with the woman who I say was the love of the rest of my life. We did split up, and I fell on my feet, in that I went to live with this group of socialist feminists in Finsbury Park, who were a lot older than me.

Mairi: They were all 10 years older, and none of them were my lovers, none of them. One of the rules, it was a sort of amazing-

Evelyn: House rule.

Mairi: Yeah. One of the rules was that those of us that live here, we all have our own rooms, and we don't have lovers. We have lovers, if we want, in the room. But we don't live with them if we're in the house. Nobody was lovers, and it was run by, well, it was owned by two women, who were also quite a, I won't mention their names, but who were superb women, and amazing people in their own right, who... their idea was that they paid the, it was for their capital gain, the ownership of this house. So those of us that lived there only paid bills.

Mairi: So it worked fantastically well for me, in that not only was it a socialist feminist household, to counteract the dreadfulness of Bart's, but it was also, financially, I could manage it. And also, one of the women, was a doctor of psychology. And I think at that stage, I was really having a, pretty much having a breakdown. And she sort of nurtured me through, I would say, for about two years, when I was pretty much on my knees, and helped. She helped enormously, to get me, to help me through those first few years at Barts, which were just dreadful.

Evelyn: So, a proper sisterhood, too-

Mairi: It was.

Evelyn: To balance it out.

Mairi: Total. I mean, without them, without those women, particularly without her, I wouldn't be here today. No doubt about it. She was my... though she was the mother I'd never had, in the sense that my mother was a, did all the things she did, but her mothering was inconsistent, because she had a lot going on in her own life, and she was a very, a woman who pursued her own life, my mother. So for me to have this person, as a mentor, somebody I could come home from a day at medical school, and she'd there.

Mairi: She was steady, and we had meals on time, and we all shared... it was a very, very good cooperative house. And that would have been, I moved in there about 1980, I think it was 1980. Yeah, so, I had my twenty-first birthday there. So they changed my life completely. And they made me a steady person rather than a crazy person.

Evelyn: So they gave you a structure, where-

Mairi: Yeah.

Evelyn: It had been a little chaotic before.

Mairi: Yeah, very chaotic. I think, up until then, my life had been completely chaotic, although I had Camden, which was... but I mean, I did my A-levels from a bedsit. So I didn't have a home, from 16-17, until then. Well, I had the relationship with .... but that was a toxic relationship, in many ways. She was a big drinker and I wasn't.

Mairi: Yeah, so this, Finsbury... the Finsbury Park house was the absolute making of me. They respected the fact that I needed to study, and I needed... and you know, you sort of know it. And then, I was just their baby, ideally, but they looked after me. And they were fantastic. And it went on, I lived there until '83, when I fell in love again, with a fabulous person who's still my gracious friend. And

eventually I moved out of the Finsbury Park house, to go live with her in another communal house in Kilburn.

Mairi: But had I not had that Finsbury Park house, I would not be here today, no question.

Evelyn: So, at that time, were you engaging in political activities around feminism?

Mairi: I was... yes, to a certain extent, although I went on marches and things, and within the house, there was an awful lot of socialist feminist talk going on, and the whole kind of division between the lesbian feminists and the socialists feminists, and the power is, the "personal is political," and all of that nonsense with... All these discussions were actually going on around me. I was very lucky.

Mairi: I was right in the heart of, a bit like with Sappho, I was in right in the heart of a changing world, and changing ideas, and people writing books. Sara Maitland was writing her first book, and Jeanette Winterson, and there were all these people who were around me. They were in my immediate... I met a lot of people, who, again, I probably shouldn't mention too many names. But they were extraordinary people, and I was lapping it all up.

Mairi: At the same time, I was going into Barts, and having to deal with the male-ocracy of an institution that, hopefully now, is a lot better. But in those days, it was a dreadful, dreadful, misogynist place. I hated it. Yeah, absolutely, 100 times.

Mairi: But anyway, yeah... so, I would say, in terms of politics, I didn't have time, because I was a medical student, to do a lot of the things that a young woman like me possibly should have done. But when you're a medical student, you have to put the hours in-

Evelyn: Absolutely.

Mairi: Both in, within the hospital, and at home. You're studying for exams. You know, you've got big exams every three months. So my main thing when I was living in Finsbury Park was work, but actually-

Evelyn: Getting from one exam to the next?

Mairi: Yeah, yeah, and working hard. But also enjoying this incredible company that was around me. And my playtime, I did, I have to admit, I didn't drive in those days. And I used to cycle to The Gateways-

Evelyn: Ooh, The Gateways!

Mairi: Three times a week, sometimes, just to go and hang out in the bar, and-



Evelyn: And The Gateways was the iconic lesbian club?

Mairi: Yeah. Absolutely, and the first time I ever went there, I was underage. I was 17.

Evelyn: That's shocking.

Mairi: So, yeah, 17, and... but all, into my, when I was living in Finsbury Park, I used to cycle from Finsbury Park, via Hyde Park Corner, down into Soho, and back again, just to go down there and have a few beers with lesbian, or other lesbians.

Evelyn: So paint a picture of The Gateways for me.

Mairi: Smoke. Again, you couldn't see anyone in the smoke.

Evelyn: Down into the basement.

Mairi: Yep. I don't know-

Evelyn: For the smoke.

Mairi: It had a great, fantastic bouncer on the door, who's a great friend of mine, as I think you know.

Evelyn: Yes. I think we have an interview in the can-

Mairi: Yeah.

Evelyn: For her.

Mairi: Yeah, she's wonderful. Wonderful crazy American bouncer, who was lovely to me, because when I first went there, I was very young, and she kept an eye on me, and just made sure that I didn't go home with the wrong person, or any of that stuff. Very very proper.

Mairi: You know, she never laid a hand, never... we've never had a relation, any kind of relationship, apart from friendship. She watched. She was a minder. She watched me. And I remember Gina and Smithy fighting, and I remember fights, and I remember, just thinking it was great. The dancing was wonderful. You had this tiny little room, and going down the little stairs, down... and when you got down into this den, you just felt like, "Ooh, it was wonderful."

Mairi: I loved it, I absolutely loved it. It was great, and I think I took, actually, a few other doctors from Barts there at one stage, who turned out to be lesbians, as well. But they weren't aware of it at the time. So I introduced a few women to it. I loved The Gateways, and then, of course, then there were places springing up in London at that time, that there were near.

Mairi: There was the Carved Red Lion, at Essex Road. I was a bit of a clubber, actually, yeah. I was. I was a clubber, and was a bouncer, and a night girl. Can't imagine doing that now. No, I just want to go to my bed at nine o'clock, but yeah, it was. I was a clubber. I loved it all.

Evelyn: And was, the atmosphere was good in The Gateways, even though it was-

Mairi: It was. It was great, I loved it.

Evelyn: And was it very, warm and welcoming, or-

Mairi: Very warm, very welcoming, very... yeah, and small, because it was quite small. I don't know how many people would be there at any one time, but it was small and intimate, and it was fun. The music was wonderful. I mean, they played Dusty Springfield, you know, proper music. Not this kind of rubbish that we hear nowadays, to be honest.

Mairi: It was really great music: Stevie Wonder, Joan Armatrading, it was all being played. It was all that time, when there was really good music around. And it was all being played in The Gateways, and we were all having a great time. There was a lot of dancing. The Gateway Shuffle was a particular dance that-

Evelyn: How did the Gateway Shuffle go?

Mairi: I think it was two to the left, two to the right, two to the left, two to the right, two to the left, two to the right, very easy. So that people who can't dance can dance. So, yeah.

Evelyn: It probably helped, when there were so many people packed in down there.

Mairi: Yeah. That was it. That whole room was just going like this. But no, it was great, I loved The Gateways. And then, I went to some other clubs that were in London at the time. The Ace of Clubs, I think, was another one. But they didn't have the same feel. The Gateways had something special about it.

Evelyn: And probably for all the fights, and whatever, Smithy, and-

Mairi: It was Smithy and Gina. They were just hilarious.

Evelyn: They would, they set the tone, because, yeah.

Mairi: Yeah, and then, people were banned, you know? It was, again, "So-and-so has been banned from The Gateways." And in a way, if you were banned, you were somebody. It was, everybody knew who was who, and these-

Evelyn: What did you have to do, to get banned?

Mairi: I think you had to fight with Gina or Smithy or something. Or have too much to drink. It was usually, again, it was a lot of drinking, a lot of smoking. I think getting banned probably just meant that you'd pissed off one of those two.

Mairi: I mean, Gina sort of propped up the bar with her cigarette hanging out of her mouth and whatever she was drinking, and Smithy was very ostentatiously, sort of, busily snapping around the floor, sort of watching the girls, and making sure that the girls were behaving themselves, and... I think you just got banned if you pissed one of them off.

Mairi: But, anyway, you know, we didn't get banned for kissing or anything.

Evelyn: I should hope not!

Mairi: So it was great.

Evelyn: So, amongst the... so you were with socialist feminists, but there were a lot of different streams, of threads of feminism at the time?

Mairi: Yup.

Evelyn: So there were social, socialist feminists, there was-

Mairi: Lesbian feminists.

Evelyn: Lesbian feminists, there were radical separatists-

Mairi: There were separatist feminists from the, there were radical feminists, there were separatist feminists.

Evelyn: Revolutionary feminists!

Mairi: Oh, my God! I mean, really. I mean, as I say I was lucky, in that I lived with a group of lesbians who were socialist feminists, who were grownups, who were professional women. They were all, one was a... the one I'm speaking of, who was my real mentor, was a doctor of psychology. Another one worked at Spare Rib, and another one was, got quite high up in the BFI. They were all really interested in people with their own careers, who chose to live collectively, and it was, I was just incredibly lucky.

Evelyn: And were they lesbians?

Mairi: Yes.

Evelyn: They were all lesbians?

Mairi: Always. They had to be a lesbian.

Evelyn: And I think, also, for future generations, probably, the whole collective-

Mairi: Living there, it was amazing.

Evelyn: Living, and just, there's very little of-

Mairi: That now.

Evelyn: Of that now.

Mairi: Yeah, basically, as I said earlier, the way that this house, the Finsbury Park House worked, was that two of the women had the money to buy a house. So they bought the house. I think it was inherited from their dad, who'd died from one side, and I don't know how the other one got the money. But anyway, they had money, they bought a house.

Mairi: It was a big house with big rooms, and so, they each had a room. And then, we had a communal kitchen diner, and a communal living room, and there were three other rooms. One was mine. One was another woman, who, another professional, a social worker. And one was the one who worked for Spare Rib. So there were five of us living together, but three of us didn't own the house.

Mairi: But the thinking of it, the thinking was, because this house would be the capital gain, eventually, of the who had bought it together, it was wrong politically to charge us rent. Because that would be giving them profit. So we only paid bills.

Mairi: So, basically, all the bills were split five ways, and the two who ran the house paid the mortgage in whichever way they could. And then, when the house ended, it was split up. They sold the house, and they got the capital gain, and we didn't get any gain. So that worked really well.

Mairi: And then, I moved into another house, similarly, it was a housing association, and we made our own co-op when I fell in love, when I moved in with [inaudible 00:43:46] in 1983. And again, it was all lesbian. A similar thing, really, we were all lesbians, all living in the house, all had our own rooms.

Mairi: But we... in fact, I think we kind of cheated the system, yeah. It was a housing association. But the Housing Association forgot about us, so again, all we did was pay bills. We didn't pay rent.

Evelyn: Lucky you.

Mairi: Although, I think, initially, they were supposed to be paying rent. But they got forgotten about, the house got forgotten about, and so, we just were able to continue to pay rent, oh, rate-

Evelyn: Your bills.

Mairi: Bills. That was it. Yeah.

Evelyn: So, how did things progress at Barts?

Mairi: I went through the pre-clinical work, which was the two year. So I did my clinical, which was when I did my first MB, which was the first year. Which is basically, physics, chemistry, biology, and maths to quite a high standard in a year. And I hadn't done any of that, apart from biology.

Mairi: So, got through that. I got through the pre-clinical couple of years with... it's really hard to remember it, or to talk about it, because it was such a terrible... I felt like I was-

Evelyn: That's interesting in itself, that it's quite hard to recall it, because it was-

Mairi: I blanked it out. It was probably in my diary somewhere.

Evelyn: That was, emotionally, quite scarring.

Mairi: Yeah, it was. It was, having to live in the closet, and having to pretend. I didn't ever pretend to be heterosexual, to be fair, but I remember once playing pool. I wouldn't, I didn't want to socialise with my other students, because I knew it would all come down to, "Why aren't you kissing this boy?", or, "Why aren't you going out with Andy, or whatever?"

Mairi: And I remember playing pool once, one of the rare occasions when I did actually think, "Okay, I'll go and have a game of pool with them," playing pool. And the big joke was to put a cue up... [inaudible 00:45:57] lean over a pool table, somebody shoved a cue up my, from behind, and I was supposed to find that funny?

Mairi: It's things like that, that I was not prepared to tolerate, and when I was not prepared to tolerate, they'd all come down on me like a pile of bricks. Like, "You haven't got a sense of humour, you feminist, blah, blah, blah." Sorry, it was assault. That's how I saw it. I think that's how I see things.

Evelyn: And so, most of the other students presumably were male.

Mairi: They were, it was actually in my year. It was more, it was probably 40-60, so quite a few girls, but the girls pandered to the boys. I did not do that, and I couldn't. I hadn't been brought up like that. I

didn't understand. It was like an alien environment, and I felt that they were backward than the environment I'd grown through with Camden, and so on.

Mairi: I mean, things like that pool cue thing... I mean, there are lots of, there are some stories I can remember. One is going into my first anatomy, this is in the pre-clinical years, first anatomy dissection, and you go into this room, and there are something like 30 or 40 cadavers. And the stink of formaldehyde, they were all pickled, pickled bodies, all in rows. And you were allocated to a table, with other students.

Mairi: So I was allocated to a table, where I was the only girl, and the other six, seven were boys, and we'd get round the table, and of course, the body that we're supposed to be, we're going to be working on for the next term, the sheet is pulled back. And it's an old elderly lady.

Mairi: And the first thing we had to do was cut her breasts off. I remember, that's gross, and you can imagine the comments from the boys, and me being the only the girl? And me being a femini... it was just incongruous with my personality, but I had to swallow it, and not say anything, just get on, try to work through it. It was awful. I hated it.

Mairi: Then I thought, going into clinical, which was three years prior to qualifying, when you go on the wards and everything, it would improve. And it was just bad in a different way, in my opinion. It was these bullying consultants, the way that they taught wasn't positive reinforcement, as it happened in Camden. It was all about humiliation, and showing what you don't know in front of other people.

Mairi: It was like being at a boys' public school, apparently, Eton or something. I don't know if that's how they teach them now, but it was just... it wasn't my cup of tea. And it was a real struggle for me to put my head down, and get a medical qualification out of it, which I did, at first shot. I didn't have to retake, but I could have failed, and it was only because of the Finsbury Park house, and then, the house I lived with, with my partner, from about 1983, and I qualified in '84.

Mairi: So it was only in that, most of my medical school, I was actually at Finsbury Park. It was only because of that I got through. I would have walked out. It was horrendous. I mean, I don't want this to kind of... I've been trying to think of any kind of good things I can say about Barts in 1978 to 1984, from my point of view, and I would have to say none. I didn't enjoy it at all.

Evelyn: Just got a medical degree out of it.

Mairi: Got a medical degree out of it, and even, right... I remember a week before my finals, we were all mugging up, and it was 1984, and the HIV thing had come in. In those days we called it HTLV-3, I think, or HTLV-2, which was, the gay man virus had hit the newspapers. And going to a lecture about it, because it was all very new, and Professor... I probably shouldn't mention her name either, because she's quite an eminent professor nowadays. In fact, I think she may be an OBE.

Mairi: But anyway, this professor, who was a female at Barts, stood up in front of this lecture hall of over 100, 200 students, and said, talked about the gay, the HIV thing, and it being a gay disease. It was a disease that affected homosexuals, blah, blah, blah. And I was quite shocked. You can imagine, after this background at, with Barts, that I was very shy and frightened of making a stir in any kind of a way.

Mairi: But I did ask the question. I did put my hand up, and I did say, "You are not referring to lesbians. You need to make it clear that this, because of the way that it's transmitted, it's a disease that's affecting homosexual men, not homosexual women." And she said I was lying, in front of all these people.

Evelyn: Wow!

Mairi: And I thought, I mean, I was very brave to do that. But it was, because I felt it needed to be said. And then what happened was, I qualified, and started my work in life as a junior doctor. Which in some ways, was better, having qualified was, in some ways, better, but it had its issues of... it's a terrifying job when you're a student. You're not expected to know anything.

Mairi: As soon as you're a doctor, you're expected to know everything, and you know nothing. You are absolutely ignorant, really. You're very ignorant and very inexperienced. You've not seen it before. You've got no idea what you're doing. It's a very frightening job. And in my early, one of my first house jobs, was at Newham General Hospital, in Tower Hamlets. And the HIV thing was terrifying. It was.

Mairi: But again, I, being a lesbian, being gay, knew probably more than some of my... I don't know, the assistants seemed to know about infectivity, and how you get this is blood to blood contact, or semen to blood contact. I knew that. Having said that, in order to go and visit one of these poor young men who were dying... I was 24, and a young woman. They donned you up in a gown like a space gown.

Mairi: You know, you had to wear a mask over your head, and a special suit, and special gloves, and it wasn't... You could understand that if it was to protect the person whose immune system was compromised, but it wasn't. It was because they thought that we would be infected by these people. It was just crazy, and I saw a lot of young... I mean, I was a young doctor in Newham, Tower

Hamlets, and then, in UCH, I did my training in various different places to become a GP.

Mairi: I was out of London for six months in Sussex, and then I was at Newham, and St. Andrews, and Bow. And then I was at UCH, and then back at Newham for a year. What was my other one? UCH... there's another one, I can't remember what it was, but anyway, there were all these house jobs. The HIV thing was awful. These young men were dying of these dreadful, dreadful diseases, and a lot of them were my patients. I was very young.

Mairi: So, the early years of being a junior doctor... the other thing of being a junior doctor, which you're not, well, I wasn't ready for, is the hours.

Evelyn: Particularly in those days, they were-

Mairi: Horrendous.

Evelyn: Ridiculous, yeah.

Mairi: I remember, well, I mean, it was normal to go to work, to be on the ward at a quarter to eight in the morning, and not get home till half past at eight. It was also normal to go to work a quarter to eight in the morning, and not go to bed or go to sleep at all, until 10 o'clock the night after. To have no sleep, and then work a whole day.

Mairi: I counted once that the longest time that I ever had to go with no sleep whatsoever, because it was before the European Working Time Directive came in, was... I went to work Friday morning, and I was on call over the weekend. So I was in work by a quarter to eight, Friday morning, this was at Newham, and I didn't come... I didn't get any sleep at all, until Monday night. So that's Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday night, and all day. Three days and three nights without sleep.

Mairi: And what I used to say at the time was, it was torture. It was-

Evelyn: But it was torture!

Mairi: It was torture. It was physical torture.

Evelyn: Yes, yeah.

Mairi: It was absolutely-

Evelyn: And you were supposed to perform, and make-

Mairi: Life [inaudible 00:55:24].

Evelyn: Life-



- Mairi: Put drips in, calculate drug doses, dosages, and be the one that the families were screaming at you, to save their loved one, and you haven't had any sleep for two and a half nights, it's just... and you're young and inexperienced, and frightened anyway that you're going to make a terrible mistake. But when you're that young, and that tired, it was so wrong. And it is. Jeremy Hunt, with the junior doctors recently, I was incandescent with rage about that, because any return to those days that we had, when I was a junior doctor, I think are criminally negligent.
- Mairi: I think it's absolute negligence. I mean, the only reason I didn't kill anybody was... or maybe I did, I didn't know about it, but it was luck. And I thought, "You know, it was luck." It could so easily have happened, just through sheer tiredness. Yeah, it was awful. I don't know. I love my career. Becoming a GP was better, but even then, when I had my first partnership in 1989, I was a trainee junior doctor again, over in Tower Hamlets. A trainee GP, sorry.
- Mairi: But in those days, of course, we didn't have mobile phones, we didn't have techs, we didn't have any kind of thing. So we'd carry a bleep. So when we were on call, which was, again, you'd gone to work in the morning, Monday morning, and you were on call Monday night, and you're back at work Tuesday morning. You're on call Monday night, you've got the bleep. And when the bleep goes off, you have to find a phone box, to put 10ps in, to phone the Centre, which tells you where the patient is that you have to go and see.
- Mairi: Now, sometimes, that's three o'clock in the morning, up in the high rises in Tower Hamlets, just me and my little bag. Dangerous. Nowadays, doctors go out on call with a driver. I mean, not during the day, they don't. Usually, during the day, you'll go out and you'll make visits. But if you call an out of hours GP, they will probably have a driver, if they have to come and visit you at home.
- Mairi: But we drove, I drove... we drove ourselves everywhere. We had the bleep going off, we had no mobile phone. You had to find a phone box, you had to find 10p, you had to make the phone call, you had to write it down on a scrap of paper, and you had get in your car and find the address. And then, meanwhile, the bleep's gone off again. So you've got to go via the phone box to do the visit. Very stressful.
- Evelyn: Amazing.
- Mairi: And we didn't actually stop during our own on call. GPs weren't allowed to change that system, until I think it was, 2002. So I was 42 by then. So I think, if I have retired a little early, I've done my time.
- Evelyn: Absolutely. And then some.
- Mairi: I've done my time. And then some.

Evelyn: And then some.

Mairi: Absolutely, yeah.

Evelyn: So, speaking of retirement, did you-

Mairi: Oh, love it.

Evelyn: Did your mom retire from Sappho, when the relationship with Jackie-

Mairi: Yes. Yup, yeah, that all petered out. I know my mom actually had a couple of other little sort of career moves of her own. She worked for the British Council for a while, which she really enjoyed, and she travelled. She did some traveling. And my mother's new partner, I don't know quite where to... was a politician, and so, she, they had a lot of challenges, because of that, going on, from 1975 onwards.

Mairi: And then, they went to live out of London, when that was all sort of, coming to an end. So I, yes, I must have become... well, just about when I was becoming a GP, they moved out of London. And I have huge... my mother's partner after Jackie was one of the, in my opinion, one of the most important and underestimated and brave women of our time, actually. She's now frail and old, and she deserves more celebration than she's had.

Mairi: But she didn't want celebration, because she needed her privacy, after what they went through in 75. So, which is one of the reasons that she hasn't been celebrated, to be fair, is because their privacy was absolutely everything they wanted, after that time. But I've been very privileged to know her, and I feel that she was also the mother I'd never had.

Mairi: I inherited a mother when I was 15, who was second to none. She was absolutely wonderful. There we are. That's another story.

Evelyn: Lucky to have lots of moms.

Mairi: Yeah. And unfortunately, my current partner, when we got married, she said, "Oh, my God! I must be the only person who's inherited two mothers in law!" Which of course she did.

Evelyn: Yes.

Mairi: Yeah, so-

Evelyn: Yeah. But two very lovely mothers in law.

Mairi: Yeah, yeah, so... Yeah, so basically, that's it. I mean, I've been a GP in London, in Suffolk, in Surrey... no, in Suffolk, in Sussex, in London, back into London again, out to Sussex, back into London again. And

now, I've stopped seeing patients. I've stopped being a GP, which is great. I love it.

Evelyn: So over the last few decades, it's been an amazing shift, in legislation, particularly.

Mairi: Yeah.

Evelyn: Have you felt the impact of that, in attitudes over time?

Mairi: Yes. I mean, particularly the civil partnership thing, and the, people being able to get married thing. I think that's empowered same-sex couples to feel that they have an equal footing, and to have inheritance rights and financial protections that they didn't have before.

Mairi: In fact, I got my mother and her current partner to get married after they'd been together for 42 years. Because, as I said to them, "You're living in sin," and not because they're living in sin, but because you're more protected, when one of you kicks the bucket. And one's going to go, at some point, and it protects the other one.

Evelyn: Yes. Also, particularly, coming from your professional background, there's a lot of cases where same-sex couples-

Mairi: Lost their homes.

Evelyn: Were put out of the end of life care for their partner-

Mairi: Oh, yeah.

Evelyn: Of maybe, 20, 30, 40 years.

Mairi: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: Suddenly, the family sweeps in, and they have no longer any say-

Mairi: Absolutely.

Evelyn: In their care.

Mairi: Yup.

Evelyn: And, as you say, then start to lose their homes, and so on.

Mairi: Yep. But, I mean, I think the whole thing about... I mean, I think, unfortunately, because politically, things have shifted, and the NHS is under terrible strain, and hospital admissions policies, and it's very, very chaotic. And I know this, unfortunately, on a personal level, because of my mother now becoming elderly and frail, and

her partner... I've had to do a lot of phone calling to hospitals in the last few years, on their behalf.

Mairi: Because I'm a doctor myself, I, in theory, I know my way through the system, but it's blocked. And I've said to nurse upon nurse upon nurse, "They are married. You must let her partner know. This is the phone number. They are married." And I don't know whether it's an age discrimination thing, or a lesbian discrimination thing.

Mairi: I mean, if I said, "Please, can you let my father know, her husband? This is, it's about my mother," would their attitude would be as, "Oh, yeah," and then, not pass it on to the next person? I mean, I've had to repeat myself, many, many, many, many times, for both of them.

Mairi: Somehow, some people say, "Oh, that's sweet." Yeah, the nurses will say, "Oh, that's so sweet." But actually, what I'm saying is, "Look. These are older women in a legalised relationship. They've been in it for 44 years. Let the partner know when she's coming home. Let them know when she's getting worse. Let them know when she's getting better."

Mairi: But because the NHS is failing so badly, these things aren't happening, when you're trying to tell Lancaster Hospital what to do. Or, not what to do, but what would be nice, if they could possibly do. So it's very frustrating, because I... but I think that the attitudes are better. I think that, for my mother and my mother's generation, they still can't quite get used to the fact that it's okay to go on and say, "This is my partner."

Mairi: Although I think my mother's probably a slightly different kettle of fish, because of her own background. I mean, she and partner do say, "This is my partner," but I don't know how disempow... I think that, probably, people who were in their eighties, who aren't them, still feel very disenfranchised, because of their own backgrounds.

Evelyn: Definitely.

Mairi: Because of their own fear. Although the nurses on the ward would probably say, "Oh yeah, I married my partner last week," and-

Evelyn: Yeah.

Mairi: He or she, they'll be gay themselves. I mean, the youngsters are so much more relaxed about it. But they really don't understand just how terrified elderly people are, still, a lot of them, I think.

Evelyn: Absolutely.

Mairi: Yeah, so...

Evelyn: So, attitudes are changing, but-

Mairi: That's why, it's the culture.

Evelyn: We still, of a certain generation, they carry the scars of the attitudes that they've grown up with.

Mairi: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think I'm probably a little different, because I was brought up a feminist. I was brought up in a feminist household. And I would say my father was a feminist also. I left him out of the story, but what a wonderful man. I mean, a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful man, who didn't like men. He thought women were the best thing since sliced bread, and he was a wonderful feminist. And I think I've been brought up a feminist by both my biological parents and my mother and her partners, and... so I don't think I carried the same burden as a lot of women of my age.

Evelyn: Yeah. I suspect that's the case, yeah.

Mairi: Although I do carry the burden of Barts.

Evelyn: Yes.

Mairi: I think, had I not done that, I wouldn't have, I would not have had that experience, I probably wouldn't understand at all what all the fuss is about. But having been in a primitive world, which it was, I do. But yeah, I think... you know, a lot of my friends, with their coming out stories and stuff, I didn't really have to. I didn't have to come out.

Mairi: I had to come out to myself. I had to realise that I was more drawn, I was falling in love with women, rather than falling in love with men. Although I had had relationships with men as well. Really being in love only happened with women, and so, I had to come to terms with that, and I had to come to terms with, when I was younger, I worried that people thought that I might be gay, because my mother was gay.

Mairi: But actually, I think I'm gay, despite the fact that my mother was gay. My sister isn't at all, she's very, very heterosexual. I think it's me. I think I've always been like it. I think if my mom had not been gay, I still would have been gay. That's just..

Evelyn: So it's not a case of just following the role models?

Mairi: No.

Evelyn: Your inner self.

Mairi: If anything, it's despite, because the role model wasn't always perfect. So, it's despite it, not because of it, anyway.

Evelyn: So, when you were possibly contemplating me coming along today with my little recorder, were there any issues or things you thought you might like to talk about, that we haven't touched on?

Mairi: No, I don't think so. I think only that I do believe that, I wrote in my diary in 1978, when I was 18, a sort of thank you note to this woman, who, my mother started a relationship with when I was 15... a thank you note to her, for her bravery, and for her sticking a neck out for my generation. And my generation have done a hell of a lot better, because of her generation. And I would hope that people coming after us, we make the world for them a better place.

Mairi: I'm worried that we're, globally, politics is in a bad place at the moment, and I'm hoping that there won't be a backlash against more liberal, little L, liberal-minded thinking. But there could be, and if there is, I want people coming after us to be aware of the fact that people have fought their way out of worse situations, the people who came before us have, and be brave.

Mairi: Be true to yourselves. And yeah, be true to yourselves, and be proud to be good. You're there to do good. I think that's to do the best that you can, and not to have Boris Johnson and Donald Trump colouring our world. It's just horrible, isn't it?

Evelyn: And I think you've probably just pretty much answered my final little question, which was, thinking as that young Mari of 15, 18, what would you say to her?

Mairi: I would say that the best thing I ever did was fall in love properly, for the last time, when I was 53. I think, leave the best till last.

Evelyn: Great! And on that note, with the tribute to your very lovely partner-

Mairi: Absolutely.

Evelyn: I just want to say thank you for sharing your life.

Mairi: Thank you.

Evelyn: Absolute privilege, been delighted to hear it.

Mairi: Oh, thank you. Thank you.

Evelyn: Thank you so much.

Mairi: Sorry if I've rabbitied on a bit much.

Evelyn: Never, never, thank you.

Mairi: Thank you.

