From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Rosie Garland	**Date: 18.12.2019** **Age:** 59
Key issues: Adoption. Writing. The March Violets. Goth. Rape Crisis Collective. Lesbianism. Bisexuality. The Yorkshire Ripper. Spare Rib. Poetry. Rosie Lugosi.	
Narrative summary: By the age of 5 Rosie knew that she was adopted by her parents. She grew up with a sense of being different; not in terms of queerness but everything else. At age 18 she tried so hard to be heterosexual because she knew she wasn't like other people in so many other respects. She started writing very early on as well as reading lots of fiction and sci-fi and this is where she found her solace; she had a very rich imagination. She moved away from Devon and went to university in Leeds. Within 10 days a man had proposed to her – and she said yes. She realised her mistake fairly soon and broke off the engagement. After she left that relationship she started living as she wanted – she joined The March Violets (a goth band), started wearing and doing what felt right. She stopped trying to be heteronormative and settle down into a life that she didn't actually want. She started seeing women. Rosie says that more recently she's had lesbian and bisexual goths approach her to thank her for being a visible queer woman; she gave them something to aspire to. She was also radicalised by the attitudes towards women underpinning the Yorkshire ripper investigations. After uni she was sick of England so moved to Sudan to work for the Sudanese Ministry of Education. Whilst she was there she witnessed some of the worst behaviour of Western aid agencies during the famine; Rosie explains that this increased her political understanding dramatically. She went back to Manchester after reading about what was happening there in Spare Rib. She wanted to get involved in political activism – so she joined the Rape Crisis Collective. She also re-joined the goth community. She talks about her experiences with counselling. Counselling, along with being involved in the Rape Crisis Collective allowed her to realise her past experiences of sexual abuse. Rosie describes this as a major turning point in her life, as after this she was able to have successful relationships, form friendships; she was now more emotionally available in ways that she wasn't before. Rosie talks about actively sitting down to write poetry. She set up Launch, a weekly night for up and coming female poets. She also got into a band called 'Something Shady' – a lesbian show band who performed at LGBTQ+ events like the Section 28 Celebration. She talks of really finding her community here. She creates her stage character, Rosie Lugosi; who she describes as 'gothing the gay scene and queering the goth scene'. It was something which people really hadn't seen before. She has performed at events like Euro Pride and Manchester Pride.	
	Length of interview: 1hr 4 mins

Marguerite: This is Marguerite McLaughlin, and this is an interview with Rosie Garland for the project From a Whisper to a Roar, oral history project, conducted by Opening Doors London and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Rosie, could you start by telling us a little about your early life and how you came to an understanding of who you really are?

Rosie: Move it around there if you want to[moving recorder]. Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start. Or rather, yes, let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start, or as near the start as makes no difference. I learnt a couple of very important things at the age of five. By the

age of five, I already knew I was adopted, because there was never a time when I didn't. My mum and dad were very ordinary folks, and they'd adopted me. And very sensibly, and against the advice of a lot of people, had decided to tell me I was adopted.

Rosie: I knew from the beginning that I was different, and I knew that I didn't fit the normal family scheme, so I grew up with a sense of being a bit different. Not unloved. They said, "We adore you. In fact, we had to work really hard to get you." But I always knew I ... But anyway, that was even before the age of five. Age of five, a couple of really big events happened. One of which, I was in the infant school play playing the Elf Queen, and I had to call my elf minions onto the stage, i.e. into the classroom. And so I crooked my index finger and curled it to call, and the teacher said to me, "No no no, dear. Big arm gestures. Big arm ... If you want to call people onto stage, bigger." I had stretched out my five-year-old arm and swept it. She went, "That's right." I learnt something about big gestures, and also, I suppose, being camp on stage, that you're big and you're flamboyant, age five-

Marguerite: Larger than life.

Rosie: And larger than life, and thought, "Ooh, this is nice." Of course, I did that with my arm. All my elf minions came scuttling on to stage, and there I was, Elf Queen. That was age five. I was in infants. The other one was, I am a writer and I've always told stories, and like a lot of people, I started with fanfiction. I was writing fanfiction by the age of five or six, and because one of my favourite stories was Tintin, one of the things I did that all fanfictioneers do is write oneself into the story. Tintin never had female sidekicks. It was a silver fox and lad relationship with him and Captain Haddock, as we all know. But I wanted Captain Haddock out of the way so I could be Tintin's-

Marguerite: Mate.

Rosie: Mate and sidekick. And I can remember, I was drawing the cartoon strip on the kitchen floor, and of course, me and Tintin were off having adventures. Then, of course, at the end of our adventures, we're very tired, so we go to bed. And so there's a picture of me and Tintin in a bed. You know, I'd watched Morecambe and Wise, and there were two men in bed. Laurel and Hardy, two men. Where is the problem? And so, my mum looked at the story and said, "What a nice story, dear. Oh, now you see, a lady and a man can't get into bed with each other until they're married."

Rosie: And I was five or six, and I looked at her and I went, "But I'm not getting married." And I wasn't doing it to be difficult or rebellious, but a cog, something turned in my head, and I can remember looking at her and go, "Oh, but I'm not getting married." And she looked at me. I remember the look, and she went ... The look of "Ah, aren't they sweet when they talk nonsense?" And she said, "Oh, you will when you grow up, dear. You'll get married and have children." And again, I looked up at her and I went, "But I'm not going to have children." And I

think she did a little bit of a double take like, "Oh my God, what changeling demon have I brought into my bosom?"

Rosie: But I knew really early that I wasn't saying it as a fight, but that I wasn't going that way. And that happened really, really early for me. And it was like, I had me wobbles. I, at the age of ... Jumping on, because why not? At the age of 18, I tried so, so hard to be heterosexual, because I realised I was adopted, I realised I wasn't going to get married, and I knew that I wasn't the same as all the other kids in school. I didn't know it was queerness. It was a whole raft of other things. It was just difference in every way. I knew I didn't think the same way as other people. I didn't want the same things.

Rosie: I went to school with people who just wanted to be married and pregnant, preferably by their 16th birthday. I can remember, again, one of those moments. I was 16, in the top year of my secondary school, and one of ... Again, just think about this. One of the girls in our class, on her 16th birthday, got married to the geography teacher.

Marguerite: Oh my God. That's unbelievable.

Rosie: And this is Devon. I'm sorry if anyone here is offended by the idea of me banging on at rural communities. Then you may as well switch off now. I did not, as the different, weird changeling odd kid, I did not fit. I know why I live in a city. For me, there is a safety in a city. Anyway, that's a different story. Okay, here's us, all the girls in that class, age 16, and guess what the reaction is? We're jealous. Because she's sorted her life out and has got a man, and a geography teacher, who's an older guy. Wow, clever girl. And this is the 1970s. Let's just leave that there. This is '76. I'm 16 in 1976.

Marguerite: Right, let me stop you there-

Rosie: Yeah, sorry. Because I'll talk, yeah.

Marguerite: ... and ask, did you suffer at the hands of various people or whomever about all of those being different?

Rosie: This is the funny thing. I think I was too weird to realise I was being bullied. It took me until I was probably about 40 to realise I'd been bullied. Here I am, in one of the many ... My parents moved around a lot. Here I am in one of the many primary schools I went to, in the playground, being followed around the playground by a gaggle, who were singing a little song about, "Rosie Garland went to Ireland where the flowers grow." And singing a little song about how I get stung by a bee, but it's all a little singy-song. And I remember turning, and I'm thinking, "They're singing! They've actually gone to the effort of making up a song about me. Isn't that sweet and lovely?"

Rosie: I was supposed to cry, because they were making fun of me through a song. They were going, "Nah nah nah nah nah nah." What I heard was people making up a song about me. "Isn't that sweet and lovely?" So I turned around to them, and they were expecting me to be bawling my eyes out and going, "You're mean ..." And I said, "Thank you. That's really nice of you." And, again, in their faces, they were just like, "Back away from the weird kid. She's too weird to be bullied, because it's gone over her head." I didn't cry. I didn't run into the corner and bawl me eyes out and beg for mercy. I went, "Oh, thank you. That's brilliant." I probably did get bullied, but I was too weird to notice. I got bullied when I was at work when I was an adult.

Marguerite: Okay, so yes, that strand of difference-

Rosie: I was away with the fairies. All I want ... I would hide in the classroom and write stories. And because I was quiet, the teachers would just go, "Just sit quietly at the back of the class and write stories." Because I didn't want to do sports. I didn't want to go and play in the playground. I knew that, because I didn't have any friends. I was too weird to have friends, but I didn't realise how bad it was, because I didn't know any different.

Marguerite: Yeah, yeah yeah. Were you not lonely from not having friends?

Rosie: Well, I had-

Marguerite: Did you want them?

Rosie: I didn't know what friends were, so I didn't miss them. I hadn't had any.

Marguerite: You had fantasy friends. It comes out in your poetry.

Rosie: And my stories I was writing. I had dolls, who weren't my babies. They were my friends. And I wrote stories, which were about ... I dived into fantasy stories. I loved Alice Through The Looking Glass, where she meets talking sheep and talking caterpillars. And I read science fiction when I was really young. I had a very rich, imaginative life right from the start, and that's where I got my solace. That's where I found my world. I had adventures with Tintin and Mr. Spock.

Rosie: God, when Star Trek first came on telly, I found my fam, as I believe all the young people are saying. I saw Mr. Spock. He was the alien. He was different. He had all these emotions caught up inside him that he couldn't speak, and it was like, "I know what I am. I'm a Vulcan." I was a space man.

Marguerite: Right, okay. Now, the thorny issue. You've known that there's difference from very early on.

Rosie: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Marguerite: But then, the gnarly issue of sexuality arrives. What then?

Rosie: Here's one that I've never really told anybody. Here I am in one of my many primary school playgrounds, and I can remember, one of my favourite fantasy games, which of course nobody joined in, because I was on my own, was imagining that my top half was female and my bottom half was male. Or my top half was male and my bottom half was female. And I actually used to prefer the idea of having a top half male and a bottom half female, because that was all smooth rather than bumpy. Because if you're a top half female, that's bumpy on the top, and if you're a bottom half male, it's bumpy on the bottom. It seemed to be lots of stuff was waggling around, which seemed a little-

Marguerite: Indeed, untidy.

Rosie: Untidy, so it seemed a little inconvenient. I thought, "Wouldn't it be interesting to be smooth?" I didn't pursue it, because I don't ... Although I see myself as-

Marguerite: How old were you at this point?

Rosie: About eight or nine?

Marguerite: Right, interesting. Very interesting.

Rosie: And I can remember my lovely mum, who was terribly embarrassed about sex, bless. She got me a book before I started my period, so I think I was 10 or 11. She got me a book about Peter and Pamela Grow Up, which is all about growing breasts and having periods. I was reading this, "Oh yes, growing hair in all kinds of unusual places and getting periods." And I was reading all this, and it got to the last page but one, which was about sexual intercourse.

Rosie: It had this line saying, "And the man puts his penis inside the woman's vagina." I thought, "You've got to be kidding me." I read it again, and it was just like, "Oh, come on." I actually remember going to my mum and going, "Look, I get all the stuff about the breasts and the hair, but this bit here about ..." I said, "Is that true?" And she went, "Yes, darling." And I went, "Oh."

Marguerite: Ew.

Rosie: It was just like, "That's weird."

Marguerite: Really weird, yeah.

Rosie: And it was just, I knew then that was really weird. It was not that I suddenly thought, "Hurrah, hallelujah. I'm a lesbian." But it was just all very odd. It's like, again, how complicated and odd.

Marguerite: Odd. Unlikely, somehow.

Rosie: Yes, that was it.

Marguerite: I felt that so much.

Rosie: And I think, again, before I even had my periods, there was something odd and unlikely.

Marguerite: Okay.

Rosie: But then-

Marguerite: Fancying anyone eventually?

Rosie: Apart from Captain Scarlet and Mr. Spock and Tintin, who obviously I fancied a lot, I can't ... I wanted to be their buddies more than anything. I got to about 16, and I thought, "You know what? I've really got to try hard." I think it started clicking that everyone was pairing off, and that I was just going to be lonely.

Marguerite: Well, everyone pairing off, you had your schoolmate marrying the bloody teacher.

Rosie: Yeah, and there was the school lesbian, who I didn't fancy. Because every school's got one, sort of thing. Although I knew I was weird, I knew I didn't fancy her, so there had to be ... And so I dated a few guys, and I thought, "I've just really got to try harder clearly, because nothing's happening." And I went to away to university, which is, again, slightly different story, but I ran from Devon. I lived at a time when I got full student grants, and I ran from one end of the country to the other. I went to Leeds. My mother wouldn't speak to me for a long time, God love her. And I thought, "Right, I'm at university. I've escaped." But I had this Last Chance Saloon, and this bloke ... This is where it gets embarrassing. I arrived at the university. Within 10 days, a bloke proposed to me, and I said yes.

Marguerite: Oh my goodness, 10 days?

Rosie: 10 days, because this is what you do. I've read the phrase. It's called whirlwind romance. All of my answers are going to be questions. All my questions are going to be answered. I just lost my mind. I realised that I had lost my mind fairly soon after, and I broke off the engagement. And my mum disliked me breaking off, because she thought he was adorable. She thought, "Thank God, my weird changeling demon child has got ..."

Marguerite: Straightened up.

Rosie: Straightened up. He wanted to be a teacher and go and teach in Devon, so it was-

Marguerite: In geography.

Rosie: He did, actually. He wanted to be a geography teacher.

Marguerite: No.

Rosie: No, no, no. You couldn't make this shit up. Dear God, and she hated, she was so angry with me for breaking off the engagement that she went to see the vicar. She went to talk to the vicar, because she told me this afterwards. She went to see the vicar and said, "My daughter's broken off her engagement, but he's such a nice man." He wasn't. We won't go into details, but he was not a nice man. He was a ... yeah. And the vicar told her, "A broken engagement is a time for rejoicing, Mrs. Garland."

Marguerite: What do you think that meant?

Rosie: It meant, "Far better to have a broken engagement than a broken marriage and three unwanted children."

Marguerite: Oh, of course.

Rosie: Wise man. Here I am in Leeds. Oh God, I talk a lot. Anyway, I left him, joined The March Violets, the goth band, because this guy would police me down to the clothes I wore. I started wearing what I wanted to wear and started thinking, "Do you know what? Aren't women attractive, now that I'm looking at them differently?"

Marguerite: But why were you looking at them differently? Or how were you?

Rosie: Because I'd stopped trying to be heteronormative. I'd stopped trying. I'd been beating my head against a wall for a comparatively short period of time, but I thought, "I am different." Wanting to be a big performer and wanting to express myself creatively is not ... Because I thought, "Oh, I'd better put all of that away now that I'm a grown up. I must settle down and be tedious, because that's what grown ups do." I thought, "This is my life, being creative." And I tried for a couple of years, very hard, to repress it. Just got miserable, suicidal, and was painting myself into a heteronormative corner, for lack of a better word. And luckily, I realised I was killing myself very early on.

Marguerite: And therefore, what the priest said about it being a cause for rejoicing-

Rosie: In many ways. It's also about me.

Marguerite: ... essentially very, very true. Yeah. Now, I want to unpick something, because I'm aware that there are two identity issues for you that look like they're pretty much happening at exactly the same time, and that's your goth persona. Well,

persona is the wrong ... It's a goth identity, and a lesbian identity. Or at least a not straight identity.

Rosie: I'd say I'd call it not straight at that point.

Marguerite: Exactly.

Rosie: Yeah.

Marguerite: Can you unpick that? I'm particularly interested in the meaningfulness of your goth identity and its birth.

Rosie: For me, it's multifaceted. It is. One of the definitions of goth and gothic that I resonate with is that the gothic is what does not fit, whether architecturally, historically, in a literary way. And it's that thing about things that aren't fitting in all senses of the English word. When you say, "That is not fitting behaviour," or, "These stockings don't fit," or you talk about-

Marguerite: "It's not fit for purpose."

Rosie: "It's not fit for purpose." And the gothic does not fit. I've always thought that the gothic and the queer are very, they're like two halves, same coin, two hands clapping or whatever.

Marguerite: How interesting.

Rosie: And one of the things I'd always been fascinated by as part of my reading of fantasy was dark fantasy, as it's often called. I was famously sent a copy of Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of Mystery and Imagination for my ninth Christmas present, ninth birthday/Christmas present, from an aunt who lived in America, for whom it's like, "Edgar Allan Poe stories are great literature for children. Of course!" And so I was reading weird, very odd horror edge stuff, very gothic fantasy stuff very young.

Marguerite: But suited your psyche somehow.

Rosie: But suited my psyche, and then, when goth as a tribal music thing grew out of the early '80s, and I'm in Leeds now, by the early '80s. Let's face it, Leeds and Yorkshire was where the gothic music scene started. It all was like I was in the right place at the right time. Gothic things were happening in Yorkshire. It wasn't just the riots of the early '80s or Margaret Thatcher in the early '80s. And the Yorkshire Ripper in the early '80s. All this was happening. It was this jumble of some very dark political stuff, some very odd and strange and disruptive political stuff. And out of that came a real sense of creativity.

Rosie:

And I am one of the ... There's all this goth, and realising I'm not straight, and then the third wave, which is, I'm one of the generation of women who was politically radicalised by the Yorkshire Ripper and the police investigation and the results. I'm one of that generation of women. When the Yorkshire Ripper stuff ... Yes?

Marguerite: I want to stop you, because I want us to finish the strange of the goth question before-

Rosie: We go off on that one.

Marguerite: What you said is really interesting, but otherwise, we'll never quite-

Rosie: No, I know. I'm sorry.

Marguerite: ... so many key things. Would you say that, with a goth identity as such, that you found your community or a first community?

Rosie: I did, but again, I've never been good at fitting. Because I was goth, and I loved it. There I was with my big curly perm and my tight leather trousers and my big boofy taffeta flamboyant, and you can see how that would go down in the Leeds lesbian scene in the early 1980s. "You can't be a lesbian. You've got your tits on a tray. You can't be a lesbian. You've got long hair. You can't be a lesbian. You're wearing pointy-toed stiletto-heeled boots."

Marguerite: And basques or whatever.

Rosie: And basques and all of that nonsense. And you certainly can't be a feminist wearing leather trousers.

Marguerite: Oh yes, of course. Of course, of course, of course.

Rosie: I was falling between all stools available. And this actually, again, to skip forward about 20 years, I've had bisexual and lesbian goths come up to me right now saying, "Thank God you existed in the '80s, because you gave me somebody that I could aspire to." Because there was nobody. I always make it a joke, there were no lesbian goths in the 1980s, but if they were, I didn't speak to them. Anyhow, yes. There's that, and there's also, tying into all of that, my interest in vampires. Because for me, here again was a different kind of sexuality. Here were people who had their sexual, as in arousing, moments of arousal and connection that is completely unconnected to genitals.

Marguerite: Yes, yes. And was that a good thing?

Rosie: I found it very liberating. Again, I didn't have to get involved with that weird moment of, "What do you mean, penises in vaginas?" Not that I'm against it. If people want to do it, knock yourself out, but the idea, it didn't resonate with

me. It didn't feel like home, so the idea that you could have arousal all around mouths and biting and connection, and creating families without heterosexual sex. Vampires have got huge families. You bite someone, you've got a family member. There's all of this.

Marguerite: All right, we'll check that for now.

Rosie: We'll go back. Yeah, park that.

Marguerite: We might revisit that, but now, talk to me more, because I've never heard you say about the radicalisation to do with-

Rosie: Yeah, my life turned on a dime.

Marguerite: Tell me.

Rosie: It was a very, very strange time. The number of documentaries that have been made about the Yorkshire Ripper, so I'll just do the headlines. The police started making an effort to catch him when he started killing "nice" women, and I've just done the apostrophe thing with my fingers. And I'm not going to sit here for hours talking about the utter and complete bollocks of the police investigation, run by ... It was just a complete farce.

Marguerite: Okay, but this is intellectualising an impact, and it was emotional.

Rosie: Right, okay. And I'm now going to talk about the emotional impact. The last woman to be killed by the Yorkshire Ripper was a woman called Jackie Hill, who was my mate from Leeds University.

Marguerite: I know your poem.

Rosie: And we weren't close friends. She was in the same English class as me, and then suddenly, she wasn't there anymore. And it blew out of the water, once and for all, any sense that one can negotiate safety by playing by some kind of rules, because she'd played by all the rules. She was a Sunday School teacher. She volunteered for this wonderful charity. She volunteered for that one. She was quiet. She stayed under the radar.

Marguerite: She was a nice girl.

Rosie: She was a nice girl who dressed modestly, had a lovely little Princess Di haircut, and she wouldn't say boo to a goose. She should've been safe. All the rules of the fairy story says, "If you play by these rules, you will remain safe." Oh no, you don't. And it once and for all blew all of that crap out of the water.

Marguerite: So did you not feel any fear before he started killing so-called nice girls? Did you feel you were safe, because you weren't on the game?

Rosie: No. It hadn't really affected me. There was a level where it didn't affect me, because it was over there somewhere. But there was also, there was so much fear in Leeds at the time. Women wouldn't, including myself ... This was winter, and it gets dark at a quarter past three, and curfewing oneself at half past three, unless you go out with somebody and you have somebody with you. I can remember all the posters up in the student's union. We had buses. We had mini buses that would pick women up outside the student union and take them home, for 50p or something.

Marguerite: It went on for years.

Rosie: It went on for years, absolute years, and it was 1981 before they caught him by just Bobby doing his job. And there was an element where it was happening over there, but there was also an element where I was very frightened, and I can remember running home. There was one smarmy, smarmy lecturer wanted to change our timetable right in the middle of November or December, so that we had a lecture with him, and we were a small tutorial group, we were only eight people, so that our lecture, our final tutorial would be between five and six in the evening. And I can remember saying to him, "I do not want to be walking home through a dodgy bit of Leeds at six o'clock in the evening." And I can remember him looking at me and sneering, "You women, always making a fuss." And then, a fortnight later, Jackie was killed. Funnily enough, our tutorial was moved to two in the afternoon.

Marguerite: God, absolutely horrendous.

Rosie: And yes, the emotional impact of that was that I just changed. I just stopped. I wasn't safe, so if doing that won't make me safe, why bother? Why not just live how you want to live?

Marguerite: Right. You burnt your bridges in terms of conforming and belonging.

Rosie: Yeah. Live loud, live large, and a piano might drop on your head tomorrow. If your name's on the bullet, it's on the bullet, so why live with your head under, keeping behind, under the ... What do you call it? Under the radar. Why live under the radar, quiet and hoping it's all going to be okay when it might not be?

Marguerite: Were you aware at the time of that link between women behaving the way they should or risking literally being killed?

Rosie: Yeah.

Marguerite: The thing of, "If you're not a nice girl, you'll get yours."

Rosie: Well, this is what we were being told. It was the not nice girls who were getting theirs with the Yorkshire Ripper, because they were on the game. That all turned on its head, so you mean any woman, and it was, any woman is at risk.

Whether or not you're the nice girl, and then people were starting to talk to me about domestic violence. You can dot every I and cross every T, but when that guy comes through the door, he's going to kick the shit out of you, whether or not his dinner's on the table looking perfect. There is no safe, and if there is no safe, then you can just start with a clean slate. If there's no such thing. It's a lie, it's not real.

Marguerite: But the lack of safety was coming from men.

Rosie: Yeah, and this is it. The lack of safety is not about our behaviour, women's behaviour.

Marguerite: It's at the hands of men.

Rosie: And it's completely out of our control, so it was this idea of, "Well, if behaving by those rules doesn't keep me safe, then why behave by those rules? Might as well just go and do the opposite." So I join a band, start-

Marguerite: A goth band.

Rosie: A goth band, and say, "Fuck this shit," and start wearing leather trousers, and start saying all the things I'm not supposed to say, and wearing the things I'm not supposed to wear. When certain, not all, but certain lesbian feminists told me, "You shouldn't wear this," I've said, "I've just come from a relationship where a man said those exact words, so I'm sorry. If a heterosexual man says, 'You shouldn't wear that,' and you're saying, 'You shouldn't wear that,' I'm sorry. What I'm hearing are the same words. You might be coming from a different ... but you're basically policing what I'm wearing."

Marguerite: Exactly. What's the difference in the oppressive behaviour?

Rosie: Yeah. It's like, "I'm not wearing a uniform for you. I'm not wearing a uniform for him."

Marguerite: When did you start seeing women?

Rosie: Very shortly afterwards. Again, none of the lesbian feminists in Leeds would go out with me, because I was too weird and too goth. I didn't know any goth ... I didn't even know any goth bisexual women, so the only was I was going to get laid was to go out on the Leeds townie gay scene. The first woman I copped off with was a nurse called Louise.

Marguerite: Good old Louise.

Rosie: Yeah, good old Louise. Because it was only townie women who would go out with me, just the regular dykes, the regular lezzers. Because they didn't give a shit what I looked like. It was just like, "Ay, do you fancy a dance," sort of thing.

Going and get pissed in the alternative ... Because all the straights, sorry, the goths and the gays all went out on the same nights. There were no goth clubs specifically. They were the alternative nights. There was the alternative Tuesday night down at Le Phonographique, which is where all the lesbians and gays went, and all the goths went there as well. If I smiled at Louise long enough, she'd go, "Oh, right. She fancies me." And so, yeah.

Marguerite: Where did you go from there?

Rosie: Where did I go from there? Right.

Marguerite: You're in a goth band.

Rosie: I'm in a goth band. We-

Marguerite: You're at university.

Rosie: I'm at university. I do an MA.

Marguerite: You're now seeing women.

Rosie: Yep.

Marguerite: And what's happening in your life? What's really happening in your life? Do you feel that you belong enough?

Rosie: No. It's 1983, 1984, and I've, for a variety of reasons, like the band is starting to implode, Thatcher gets elected back in by a landslide for her second term ... Ring any bells?

Marguerite: Yeah, very topical.

Rosie: And I'd had enough of England. There was an advert in the Guardian Wednesday saying, "Have you got a degree from a British university?" "Um, yes." "Do you fancy coming to work for the Sudanese Ministry of Education, live on a local wage in a local community?" And I thought, "Yeah, okay."

Marguerite: Wow.

Rosie: Because there's other stuff going on as well. I know that, although there's loads and loads of positive stuff happening, there is stuff that I have not admitted to myself yet, and I think I'm still on the run from that. I'm messing up every relationship I'm in. I'm just buggering up. I wasn't overdoing drugs, but I'm aware, looking back at it in hindsight, that the kind of drugs I was doing was taking me out of the here and now. I was blurring the edges of myself so that I didn't have to stay that present. I was doing quite a bit of acid.

Rosie: I don't regret a minute of the drugs I took. I had a fabulous time, but smoking a lot of dope, taking quite a lot of acid, blurring off the sharp edges, because I still haven't admitted to myself and won't do until the late '80s, the fact that I'd been sexually abused. I didn't even know that that's what had happened to me. It was all over there so much, so I don't even know that that's a thing. All I know is that I'm still running, and so I run to Sudan.

Marguerite: Wow, because you've thought, "Here I am. I've achieved a certain amount of freedom from things that-"

Rosie: And I'm still screwing up. I can't hold a relationship together, and it starts to come back to me, the fact that I never had friends in primary school. Maybe I can't do friends. Maybe I can't do relationships. What's wrong? And I just go.

Marguerite: Right. In a way, you've escaped into Sudan.

Rosie: I've escaped so much and I'm still running.

Marguerite: Right, right. You escaped so much, and you escaped to Sudan as well.

Rosie: Yeah.

Marguerite: For two years?

Rosie: Yeah.

Marguerite: And was that just an escape, and that you were just in Sudanese reality?

Rosie: Well obviously, I thought I was like, "Oh gosh, this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I'm going to be an NGO or I'm going to work overseas, for voluntary service overseas. This is the beginning of a new trajectory. I've had it with England." Blah blah, kick the dust off my heels and all the rest of it. And so I don't think I'm running. A lot of this is hindsight and reflecting on it. And I work really hard for two years in Sudan, and it's an unbelievable experience. I grow up in a lot of ways.

Rosie: I learn ... Again, my political understanding is increased dramatically by going and living in Darfur which, as I get there, is in the grip of the 1984 famine that Live Aid was all about. I see some of the worst behaviour of Western aid agencies, the whole radicalisation of myself in terms of how the Western world creates famine and rich people never die in one, and again think. Yeah, so I grow up a lot with that as well. I do two years there, and I think I'm out ... When I went out there, I thought I was never going to come back. I thought, "I've had it with the West. I'm going. I'm going to go and do different things in different countries."

Rosie: And then, after two years, it was a bit like when a comet goes as far as possible away from the sun, and then starts to bend into a return. For a number of reasons, I knew that I was not going to stay there, because again, there was no outlet for creativity. There was no outlet for poetry or writing or storytelling, so my creative soul wasn't being fed. Also, a woman turned up in Sudan, a woman called Tina from Germany, and we kind of fell in love. When she left Sudan, she said, "I think I would like to stay in touch with you, but it's going to be hard if you're in Sudan."

Rosie: And then, a bunch of English teachers, because there were quite a few English teachers. There was the English teachers scheme in Sudan in the early to mid '80s. And somebody brought out a couple of copies of Spare Rib. It was manna from heaven after living on the edge of the Libyan desert for two years, and loads of, "Oh God, you mean all this political activity is happening in England? I hadn't realised this." And all of it seemed to be happening in Manchester. I thought, "Maybe I won't renew my contract after these two years." And so I went back to Manchester. No, I didn't go back. I've never been there, and I thought, "I think I might just go to Manchester." The first women only bar in the UK was opening in Manchester.

Marguerite: I never knew that.

Rosie: I think it just beat the first women only bar in London.

Marguerite: What was it called?

Rosie: Sappho's.

Marguerite: Oh, of course. Sappho's, and it lasted a very long time, didn't it?

Rosie: Yep.

Marguerite: How amazing. I didn't know at all.

Rosie: They served cocktails, but left the K out. I thought, "You know ..."

Marguerite: How amazing. That's really interesting.

Rosie: And Tina and I, that was my first successful relationship, Tina and I.

Marguerite: Was it-

Rosie: We were, at one point, either she was going to move to England or I was going to move to Dusseldorf, and it never quite worked out. But she and I had a long and successful and happy relationship.

Marguerite: Wonderful.

Rosie: And I come back to England, move to Manchester, and the rest is history. And I've not left Manchester as a place to live. It has become my home. I never thought I'd have a home, and Manchester has become my home since then. I came back, and I had a happy and successful relationship with Tina. She was lovely, but things still weren't perfect. And I did, when I moved to Manchester, think, "Well, I want to get involved in some of this political activism." I joined the Rape Crisis Collective.

Marguerite: How old are you at this point?

Rosie: This is 1990, late '80s.

Marguerite: Right, so you are ...

Rosie: I'm 30. I'm hitting 30, and again, it's one of these things. It was around my 30th birthday, and I can remember going out with all me lovely mates. We were going out to the women's disco and having fun, and I came home, and I thought, "How long am I ... How much more of my life, I'm 30, how much more of my life am I going to be unhappy?" And I suddenly thought, "Ooh, I wonder where that thought came from." And that's when I started seeing a counsellor. I realised I couldn't do this on my own, that I needed help.

Rosie: And that I had so many wonderful things in my life. I was feeling secure in my sexuality. I was calling myself a lesbian. I was out as a lesbian. I was starting to connect with creative stuff in Manchester. I was getting back into singing, and there was the missing piece. I think being at Rape Crisis was the thing that made me identify what happened to me as sexual abuse.

Marguerite: So on the one hand, you were drawn to something.

Rosie: Because I wanted to support other women, and-

Marguerite: But that will bring out things, yeah.

Rosie: And it brought out, and I suddenly thought, "Oh, there's the missing piece."

Marguerite: Exactly. You've put yourself into a place where you would find it, you'd find that missing piece.

Rosie: And there was the missing piece. It was like, "Okay."

Marguerite: Yikes.

Rosie: I got a lot of counselling, and it was very good, and it was very supportive. It really helped me go, "Ding ding ding ding ding," and put stuff into place. And it's this idea of, "No, I'm not going out with women, because I was sexually abused by males. That's got sod all to do with it. But this is a piece in the puzzle, and I'm

working it out." And that really was another major turning point in my ability to have successful relationships, be able to form friendships. It meant that I was able to be emotionally available in ways that I was not able to be emotionally available before.

Marguerite: It's quite a journey, isn't it?

Rosie: All bells and whistles.

Marguerite: At the point that you're describing now, and you're 30, were you still involved ... Have you always continued to be involved in the goth community?

Rosie: Yeah. After I got back from Sudan, because after I left England, the March Violets did fall apart, and when I came back, I just thought, "Well, nobody's ever going to remember this." It's the late '80s, 1990-

Marguerite: But it did have some considerable success.

Rosie: It did, and when I came back from Sudan and people went, "Oh, you were in the March Violets? Seriously?" And I was like, "What, you remember us?" And that has always been a surprise to me, just how many ... And it's never gone away, how people really rated the band. Much later, 2007 later, we actually reformed and found that there was this groundswell of people who wanted us to reform. Considering that, after we reformed in 2007, we were actively together for 10 years, and yet, in the original 1980s incarnation, we were only together for five years.

Rosie: It's like we got ... I was surprised we'd had that much impact, but there you go. And I continue to write, because I have accepted that creativity and writing and singing and writing lyrics and performing is part of me. It is not a bolt on. It is not an add on. It's deep. We're in the early '90s now, '93, something like that, and I go out to a queer women's poetry evening called the Outlanders, and it's a lesbian and bisexual women poetry collective in Manchester. They do these readings, and I listen to the readings, and I think not, "I could do ..." Well, yeah. Part of it's like, "I can do this. This is me. This is what I want to be writing about. Why aren't I? But I've got my own stories to write about. This is poetry? Why aren't I doing this? I can do this."

Rosie: I felt a great sense of permission, so then I really started to think, "Right." Rather than just occasionally writing a poem because I felt like it, I thought, "Right, let's just turn the spotlight onto it and actually put some time and effort into this." I actively sat down and started writing poetry, and it all just spilled out, like it had been waiting for the dam to break. And so I start, and because I'm not really seeing many poetry events around that reflect me, I set one up called the Launch, which takes place in Follies, which of course is the amazing and very long standing Manchester women's club.

Rosie: And we, on a Wednesday evening, we have this thing called the Launch, which is a platform for new women performers. Nobody had ever done anything like it before, and so we had people coming from all over to perform at the Launch. And that was great. Then, I get into a band called Something Shady, which is a lesbian show band. We do covers like My Girl, get it? And Pretty Woman, get it? Everyone really enjoys that, and we actually play as part of the Section 28 celebration and Never Going Underground celebrations in Manchester, so this is all happening in the early '90s. This is all very exciting.

Marguerite: Going from being a child who didn't have friends and who was self contained, and not unhappily so it sounds like from the way you describe it, you, very many years later, as an adult, become very much a known figure in Manchester.

Rosie: I start to build it, I guess.

Marguerite: Exactly.

Rosie: Yeah. And I feel I have-

Marguerite: The publicly celebrated.

Rosie: I have compadres.

Marguerite: Yes.

Rosie: I have comrades. I have community, this really lively, vibrant community of gay women, of lesbians, of bisexual women. And it feels like this wonderful time, all these people coming out on Section 28 marches. And when Something Shady play a gig, the place is rammed with women. And some nice men too.

Marguerite: So you become a public figure from having been someone off on their own playground really.

Rosie: I guess it does start, yes. Yeah, and this feels wonderful. And then I start to think, "Well, come on." It's the goth part of me like, "Why not start ..." And so I start to bring the goth part of me into the performance. I start very, very quietly, when I'm hosting the Launch, to create this character of Rosie Lugosi. This is in the mid '90s. It starts very quiet. I just get out the clothes I used to wear onstage as a goth in the '80s, and I start to wear them. It's like, "Ooh, God. We've never seen anything like this before."

Marguerite: You were queering the gay scene.

Rosie: And I was gothing the gay scene and queering the goth scene. And, because I was working, in boring day life, I was working as a teacher, and remember, this is the time of Section 28. Funnily enough, no I wasn't out when I was a teacher. People go, "Oh, why didn't you come out?" And it was just like, "Go read your

history books, girls and boys." And so I called myself Rosie Lugosi, partly because a girlfriend once sidled up to me and said, "You do realize we call you Rosie Lugosi behind your back as a joke?" And I was like, again, that playground moment, "Thank you."

Rosie: She thought I would be really offended, and I was like, "You've given me the best name ever."

Marguerite: It is.

Rosie: "Do you mind if I use it?"

Marguerite: It is fabulous.

Rosie: And she went, "No." And she said, "We use it as a joke." I said, "I'm taking that as a name of power." And Rosie Lugosi becomes more and more flamboyant as I get braver and braver. I start wearing a lot more makeup. I start really going for extreme clothing, so she gets bigger and bigger and louder and louder. And then I meet somebody who says, "I'll do you some backing tracks." In about the year 2000, I get backing tracks and I start singing. Then, I start running my own night at a local theatre, called Creatures of the Night. And so Rosie Lugosi really starts to take off. I perform at things like Euro Pride and Manchester Pride, and I go around the world with her, with signing and queer poetry. I'm Being Queer For Britain, poems like that.

Marguerite: Now, I didn't want us to completely sideline the very important things that you've said about being able to acknowledge to yourself that you'd been sexually abused.

Rosie: Right, yeah.

Marguerite: Is there anything more that you want to say? I don't want to ask you direct questions. I wonder what else there is that you would want to say.

Rosie: It's something I've dealt with, and it is something that I can remember, at the time I was eight or nine, feeling a sense of shame, but the shame mostly came from my mother finding out and telling me it was my fault. That was where the shame happened.

Marguerite: How terrible.

Rosie: Because I was naughty for letting this happen, so there, for me, is one of the reasons why I've always wanted to work with young people, why I worked for Childline for many, many years, why I wanted to work with Rape Crisis. Because it's like, "This is not your fault." I guess that's the most important thing to say about it, yeah. Whether it's happening to a small male child or a small female child, it's like ... or large, anybody but, "It is not your fault."

Marguerite: And, "We believe you."

Rosie: Oh yeah, hello. "We believe you."

Marguerite: Well, just the sheer statistical demand that Childline has experienced all of these years.

Rosie: And I'm very glad I worked for Childline.

Marguerite: It's a testament to the amount-

Rosie: I think, apart from the fact of, I went from being a teacher to working for Childline. I went to work in Childline, and here was a job I could be out in.

Marguerite: Yes, yeah. Out in every way-

Rosie: Yeah, actually.

Marguerite: ... that you wanted to be.

Rosie: It's like they used to come out ... My team would come out and see me perform as Rosie Lugosi, yeah. Because that was a very, very closeted part of myself when I was working as a teacher. The reason I called myself Rosie Lugosi is so people wouldn't go, "Oh, hang on. Rosie Garland, you're our teacher."

Marguerite: "Let's all go see Miss."

Rosie: "Let's all go see Miss," yeah.

Marguerite: "Reading poetry where she exposes her heart."

Rosie: And a lot more.

Marguerite: Of course.

Rosie: Oh God, wonderful moment-

Marguerite: Yes, those outfits.

Rosie: I would go out wearing a corset that would hoist my boobs up around my chin, and I can remember coming off stage one time. I can't even remember where it was, and so there I am in this corset and six inch heels, and a big wig and a riding crop. This woman comes up to me, God love her. She's about the height of my cleavage, because I am very ... I'm six foot if I wear very tall stilettos. She's staring at my cleavage, and in all honesty, and she isn't saying it as a joke. She goes, "Are you a man or a woman?" I think that's the moment where I fully take on the understanding that I'm actually a drag queen.

Rosie: This is years and years before, and it's just the idea of, "Yeah, I am performing what a female looks like." It's the whole Victor/Victoria thing. I'm a woman playing a woman, but if it was a man playing a woman. It's the whole ... But she was looking at my breasts and saying, "Are you a man or a woman?" I just thought, "This is amazing. This is fantastic. I am playing against gender expectation so much that you're looking at breasts, and you're asking me-"

Marguerite: You transcended it all.

Rosie: Yeah, that's it. And I think, again, I'll never forget it. Seriously, her nose was practically in my cleavage, and she was asking me about ... Yeah. Anyway, yes.

Marguerite: How do you identify now?

Rosie: I would probably claim the word bisexual, because it's interesting at the moment. I'm happy to be called queer, but I'm really aware that there is, quite recently, a bit of an erasure going on, where the word queer is being used as an umbrella term. If people want to call themselves queer, knock yourselves out, but it's when it's being used and saying, "Well, you have to call yourself queer, and you can't call yourself lesbian or gay or bisexual anymore." It's like, "Hang on a minute. This is back to the 1980s, where people said you can't be a lesbian and have a perm, or you can't be a lesbian and have stilettos. I can be a lesbian and do what I want. And please don't tell me how to identify myself."

Rosie: It's like, if somebody said, "Don't tell me that everybody's queer, because there are gradations." Anyway, that's a different ballgame. I would probably call myself bisexual, just to stake a claim and say, "This is what I am." And also, to visible the invisible, because the classic thing is, if you're bisexual, you're going through a phase, or whatever.

Marguerite: Or you're only bisexual if you're actually having a relationship with the ...

Rosie: Opposite or something, yeah.

Marguerite: It gets identified through who you're seeing rather than who you are.

Rosie: And people are so ... All this idea of, being bisexual is automatically anti-trans. No, it's not, and therefore, I'm going to claim the word bisexual to prove that it's not anti-trans.

Marguerite: Now, that's interesting. I haven't heard that.

Rosie: Oh, I have. Because it's bi- meaning two. It's talking about duality and that there are only two genders, and it's the binary. It's like, "Bullshit."

Marguerite: Okay, okay. Looking back on your life, what other reflections might you want to share with us? Because I know you have, given the prospect of us doing this

interview, some thought. Is there anything that you feel that hasn't come out that you would want to say and have on record in that way?

Rosie: I think some of the.. strangest thing is, because ... One of the weirdest things is when people want to interview me for things like this, because I don't see myself as specifically looking back at a life. I feel that I'm still living it.

Marguerite: Of course you are.

Rosie: That's not as an insult or anything, but I do get these moments where I go, "Oh." The oh moments like, a lovely ... Lovely, lovely lesbian writer, who's just a gorgeous woman, came up to me at a reading, and she gave me the copy of her first published novel and said, "I want you to have this." And I went, "Oh, thank you. That's really lovely." And she went, "No, no, no, no, no." She said, "When I was about 16, I saw you perform as Rosie Lugosi in Oxford. I was in the audience, and I was this quiet ..."

Rosie: She said, "I thought I was quite quiet, and I didn't really know what I was going to do." And she said, "Watching you being big up on stage and doing all this stuff about being a lesbian and being out and being queer and how fabulous it could be and how blah, blah, blah ..." She said, "I realised that I could do this too, that I was allowed. I had permission to tell my stories, and here's a copy of my first published novel. And thank you." And I get this occasionally where people will say, "Thank you for what you've done." And I don't ... I didn't set out to do it. I've just been living it.

Rosie: I just did it. I couldn't do anything else. I had to do this. I had to be true to myself and true to what I needed to do, because I felt I had so many barriers that ... I could've got married when this bloke proposed to me after 10 days. I could've gone down that road, but something in me pulled me back going, "Nooo!" And I heard that voice. I've tried to respect that voice going, "Nooo! Be true to yourself." I've hung on to that when things have been quite hard, really hard. And when people come up to me and say, "Thank you for just getting out there and doing this, because it helped me go, 'I can do this,'" seriously, I can't think of anything better.

Marguerite: Absolutely.

Rosie: Even if it's one person, and I forget. That's the weirdest thing now, at the age of 59, is when people say to me, "But you do realise that you have been an inspiration." And I go, "No, me? That's odd." But it also feels like, "Well actually, that means 59 years have been worth it."

Marguerite: To yourself and to others as well.

Rosie: Yeah.

Marguerite: Do you want to reflect at all on the changes that have happened in society that have either made it easier or harder?

Rosie: It's a mix, isn't it?

Marguerite: For those sort of people who you've inspired?

Rosie: It's a mix, isn't it? Because some things have become much easier, and it would be fatuous to say that they haven't. It's like hanging out with people who are much younger than me on the literature scene and the writing scene in Manchester. It's so obvious that, for a lot of people I know who are in their 20s, the whole idea of gender and sexuality is a bit of a, "Meh." It's like, "No, I don't identify as lesbian. I'll just sleep with, I'll just have relationships with who I love." The idea of it being a big thing to come out, it's almost like a, "Well, that's what my mum did." As long as there's a realisation that there is a history that's gone before you, then that's fine.

Rosie: But it's this idea of, I know people who are really mindful of the fact that they can do things in their lives that people of my generation couldn't, and there's that understanding of, "That's what was fought for. My foremothers fought for this, so I don't have to think about it." There are wonderful moves being made in that direction, but I'm also aware that there is talk about the '80s coming around again. I'm really aware that there is stuff happening for younger folk now that I will never have to face. I came from a lower middle class, working class background, and yet, I was given a full grant to go to university, to do a bachelor's and a master's. I got funded to do a master's. I have no debt. I got free university education, and people of my class background don't get that now.

Marguerite: And, of course-

Rosie: Of any class background.

Marguerite: There's no knowing now, because we're undertaking this interview at a point where Boris Johnson has just experienced a landslide victory.

Rosie: A landslide, like Thatcher.

Marguerite: And those of us who've suffered under Thatcher and have understood-

Rosie: Yeah, remember this.

Marguerite: ... what we have inherited ever since, know in a quite visceral way, what might happen.

Rosie: Yeah.

Marguerite: Not the detail, but enough to dread what might come next.

Rosie: Yeah, and I suppose how I feel now is that I'm aware that I'm privileged for a lot of reasons, and if privilege is a superpower, I'm going to use it for good. I'm there to support anybody I can do, and I feel that I've got the strength to support. I do practice a lot of self care, but I want to support people around me in whatever way I can.

Marguerite: I think that's a nice place for us to end.

Rosie: Okay, let's do that.

Marguerite: Particularly because it makes me think of the quote from Audre Lorde saying that, "Self care," for women, for people from ethnic minorities, "Self care is a radical, political act."

Rosie: Yes.

Marguerite: Thank you, Rosie.

Rosie: Thank you.