From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Sarah Savage	**Date:** 04.11.2019 **Age:** 37
Key issues: Stonewall. Trans Rights. Trans Erasure. Gender Recognition Act. Genderqueer. Genderfluid. Non-binary. Trans Pride. My Transexual Summer. L With The T.	
Narrative summary Sarah begins by talking about how so often within LGBTQ+ histories trans people – and often trans women of colour – are not mentioned or are purposefully erased. She discusses the involvement of trans people in the Stonewall Riots, and how the modernity of the events gives trans people a more modern history with recordings, photographs and so on. She talks about how there hasn't been a major 'campaign group' for trans right comparable to GLF or similar. Sarah describes how the trans community is far more centralized around smaller community's cohesion and identities, as they haven't been able to rely on large well-funded campaigning groups. Sarah talks about the impact that the internet has had on herself and others in the community, and how being online allowed trans people to make their voices heard and challenge cis-heteronormative ideas of transness. She goes on to talk about trans and non-binary exclusion at pride events. For Sarah, the cisgender gay male centric prides are a result of commercialization and gay club culture, which fails to represent the whole LGBTQ+ community. This was one of the factors that led Sarah to become involved with starting the first Trans Pride in Brighton. Due to Brighton Pride being so big, and largely cis, trans women were left in vulnerable situations, often being abused. This led to the creation of a safe space for trans people where they wouldn't be mis-gendered, mis-represented or excluded. She talks of the struggles that Trans Pride have had with the police and transphobia. From the refusal of licenses in 2013, to the refusal to acknowledge the march as a protest in 2018, Trans Pride have been constantly battling with the police and their failure to understand the trans fight, to ensure their event can go forward. Sarah explains how over the years there has been an opening of arms from Brighton's LGB community, realizing past exclusion and ignorance towards trans people. She talks of how visible allies and visible shows of support is such an important form of activism. She ends by discussing the current climate for trans people. Sarah talks about how it is a scary time to be trans as there are daily attacks on trans rights by the cis media; and uneducated cis-people in general. She talks about how transphobia is still coded in everyday language and that there is a long way to go. She ends by saying how big change happens slowly, but also reflects on how far that trans community have come, and the positive things that they have achieved.	
	Length of interview: 1hr


DEAD GIRL

Evelyn: Right. So today we are in Brighton talking to the lovely Sarah Savage, and this is a recording for From a Whisper to a Roar, an oral history project undertaken by Opening Doors London, and sponsored by National Heritage Lottery Fund. Today I'm here, Evelyn Pitman, with Lori E. Allan, who makes the podcast possible.

So, Sarah, as you know, this podcast is looking at the impact of the Stonewall riots as this year marks it's 50th anniversary. It happened in August, 1969, and we're looking at how the impact has radiated through the years but really, in terms of trans history, the Compton riots are very seldom spoken about and happened in San Francisco three years before the Stonewall riots. And, again, if we fast forward to Stonewall in '69, the forceful characters in the forefront of that are people like Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson. How are those events thought of in the trans community today?

Sarah: Amongst my kind of small circle of friends, it's very much viewed as we were there at the beginning of the LGBT rights fight. We were there. We instigated it, and it's a major point in history that the trans people were there for. It also signifies quite how trans people are erased or not mentioned in history because there's this whole nonsense about who threw the first brick, who threw the first punch. I guarantee you it was a man police officer who instigated everything.

But it's like, can we just give trans, and can we just give women this one thing? But, yeah, even now every couple of weeks on my social media feeds, I'll see someone sharing an insight or a picture of one of the first instigators in the riots. It's very much like touchstone issue, you know?

Evelyn: Because they were amazing characters.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. Have you seen that video of Marsha P. Johnson. She's standing up in front of those people and giving this awesome speech about how she's been oppressed and how she deserves to be treated equally. These kind of videos are highly viewed, I reckon, by the trans people, and we still take inspiration from it.

Evelyn: Al these years.

Sarah: I know. Luckily, she was caught on camera for a few things, and we have this moving image, and we have her voice, and we have something to look up to, you know? We're aware of the weight of the people who've gone before us, whereas in LGB history it goes back a little bit further, and the pioneers were not necessarily caught on camera or on film. It's more just kind of a written history, but I think trans people's modern history is very much in front of the cameras.

Evelyn: So after the Stonewall riots, there's a large number of groups and organizations that have flown from it. Obviously, originally, the gay

liberation front, both in America and over here in the UK, and that splintered up into loads of other groups. Which have been the most important either campaigning or support groups for the trans community?

Sarah: I think... I've forgotten the name. There is a legal company, Stephen Whittle was part of it, that brought about the Gender Recognition Act. Press for Change, I think they are. They did a lot of work that was... I'm rubbish with names this morning. Caroline Burns, Christine Burns, sorry, these are the people who transitioned in the '80s and then they've quietly fought for rights throughout the '90s, and then in 2003 they finally got the Gender Recognition Act. I think also there hasn't been a major campaign group that has been wildly successful like many other lesbian-gay groups.

I think the thing that's different for the trans community is that our support is based on community, and we haven't been able to rely upon a large well-funded campaigning group. The support and the instrumental pieces of the community have come from within. So night clubs, a lot of local trans support groups dotted around the country. This has been far more effective through supporting community cohesion and community identity much more than a large campaigning group.

Evelyn: Part of it is the numbers because it's a somewhat smaller group of people, really.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. It's said that 5% people are gender variant, and of that 5% a certain amount will actually identify as trans and will go onto transition, and for a long time it's been seen as you have to pass, and to pass as your true gender then that means you slip away into the cis world and nobody even notices that were once trans, you know?

I think, now, in the last 10 years a lot of that has melted away. But yeah, we are few but I think people are starting to realize that they can be gender variant, and they can [inaudible 00:07:41] into however much they want, and so there's been an explosion in people coming out. People coming to terms with who they are.

Evelyn: You feel it's allowed people to unlock a closeted existence, essentially.

Sarah: Yeah. Also because the whole social stigma in the '90s and the early 2000s was that you weren't trans enough if you didn't want surgery, or you weren't trans enough if you decided later in life to transition and you had no hope of passing. But now, it's very much that genderqueer people, people who just fuck with gender, they exist.

There are role models of these people who exist, and when a little egg is in the closet and is looking for inspiration, for that person seeing a genderqueer person like Sam Smith recently, who's just like massively famous and successful and also a part of him is genderqueer or genderfluid, or whatever. It's these role models that have just been completely missing in 10, 20 years past but are now existing. Sp people are realizing the possibilities. There's a lot of social stigma has just fallen away because of it.

Evelyn: So that push to pass was so restrictive.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. When I was growing up, the first I even knew about trans anything was adverts on the back of a Sunday newspaper. There was no public persona of trans, so role models are hugely important.

Evelyn: Also because, as you say, it's a small community, it's obviously difficult for people to find others to connect with locally and so on. So what do you feel about the impact of the internet on the growth of trans consciousness and connectivity?

Sarah: It's been huge. I mean, I grew up on the Island of Jersey. So it's nine miles by five, and there was 90,000 people living there. So by the statistics, even if there's 1% of the people that transitioned, there should have been about a thousand trans people on the island. But I was very aware that trans people were so hidden that they never came out. They fled the island or they were known as "that trans person." When the internet first came along... I'm old enough to remember this.

Evelyn: No. No, you're not.

Sarah: One of my first ever searches on the internet was trans related. But even in its infancy, there was still all these horrible cisgender tropes that dominated the trans searches. So it was all sex based, and it was all viewing trans women as an object, reducing them to their genitals, reducing them to a sex object. And of course, trans masculine people didn't exist on the internet unless you knew exactly what search terms to use.

So the internet was key to me deciding that I needed to transition, and this was 2009ish, 2010? So as the internet evolved, there was a lot more social support coming on. It was a sense of community that evolved from within from trans people. The first internet site, the one internet site, that gave me the confidence and the courage to come out was a hook-up site, but it had forums, and on the forums were just normal trans people who were just chatting about anything and everything. It was there that I first developed a sense that I could transition and have a successful life.

I think to start with the internet was very cis/het, and kind of as more and more people have got online and more people have talked about their identities in depth without being challenged by anyone apart from themselves, more people have read these and the level of consciousness of the trans community has been raised up to say that we are more than sex objects. We're more than being reduced to our physical bodies. I think the internet has developed into the largest trans propaganda tool ever.

Evelyn: It's interesting because the nature of this project overall, and looking at changes over such a long period of time, you will almost certainly be one of the youngest, and probably the youngest, woman that I will interview because a lot of people are looking back over more than 50 years.

Sarah: Wow.

Evelyn: I'm interviewing an 84 year old tomorrow, so it's interesting for me that exponential growth over a relatively short period of time within this history for trans people, and I think the internet must be one of the tools that has facilitated that, really, through the mid-nineties and on from there.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, like, I could list off four or five websites with the forums because that's how I work with writing and with reading rather than visual stuff. These sites have existed and they've gone through a big boom in users, and then in the last 10 years the specialist internet sites for trans people have kind of dropped off. We've come over to the more traditional social media, and we've kind of made our own space there instead of having our own space away from the cis/hets. Now we've kind of moved into a more mainstream position, which I think is awesome.

Evelyn: That's really interesting, yeah. So since Stonewall, there have been decades of history around organization of Pride, and so I wondered do you feel trans people were included or excluded over that time, or has there been a pattern?

Sarah: Before we set up Trans Pride, I went through a period of about a year and a half, two years, where I used to visit Prides to do an appearance or to give a speech or to do a workshop or something. I think it was about 25 different Pride events around the country from Exeter to Cambria to Hasting as well, and there was a complete lack of representation of trans people. If there was someone onstage who was gender variant, then they were a drag queen, and the organizer felt that that tipped the box for their "T" of LGBT.

My experience of Pride has been one of exclusion for trans women, for trans men, for non-binary people. I'd like to think it's not been deliberate. I like to think it's more born of ignorance.

Evelyn: Yeah. That was my question. Where does it come from?

Sarah: I think this ignorance has come from straight, sorry, heterosexual, no, cisgender gay men organizing Prides. There was a period…. I noticed that Pride is very difficult to fund unless you want to sell out to some big corporation, and there was a period where the community-focused Prides ran out of money. They ran out of the sources that they used to get money from, and as these volunteer-led organizations struggled with getting people to donate time and energy towards them, it seemed to be taken over by nightclub owners.

People who, because they run a gay club, they saw themselves as the centre of the LGBT community. I think that Pride just became a reflection of gay club culture or nightclub culture which obviously doesn't reflect there whole LGBT community.

Evelyn: Part of the story but not all of it.

Sarah: Exactly. Exactly. I think that, because these people who ran various Pride events, they made a profit. They didn't go into massive debt. The event

happened, therefore it was a success. It's a self-repeating problem. Its a cycle. They go round and round, and because the overall disenfranchisement of trans women trying to engage in their communities, we kind of gave up. We tried to make a difference. We tried to speak with these people, and we were told we do the drag queen thing, we do butch, lesbian night, or whatever, therefore we are completely inclusive.

It's just people don't like to look at themselves critically. They don't like to look at projects that they put a lot of time, money and energy into, critically. So I just think that the erosion of trans women came from people meaning the best but missing the mark and then failing to take on criticism.

Evelyn: So would that be one of the things that prompted you to become involved in starting up the first Trans Pride in Brighton? In 2013?

Sarah: 2013, yeah. I mean, so the big problem with Brighton Pride is that it's so big. A quarter of a million people turn up in this city, of quarter of a million people, to see Pride. With that amount of people, the majority are cis and het. It creates an atmosphere where trans women, especially, who are visible and vulnerable, and they get abused, and these stories of being abused spread like wildfire on social media. It might happen, out of a crowd of a quarter million people, it might happen to half a dozen trans people, but those stories get amplified, and they make everybody else feel less safe.

And so, there was a lot of boycotting of Brighton Pride within the trans community, and so after 'My Transsexual Summer' and all the work that we all were doing, the idea that we should have our own Pride, Trans Pride, kind of came up from a number of people all at the same time.

We just wanted to create a safe space for trans people where it wouldn't be questionable whether we'd be gendered right. There was never a question that we wouldn't be represented and we wouldn't be properly represented. Not like some token gesture from some cis/het twat man. Something that's genuine. Something that's from the community, for the community. So yeah, there was half a dozen of us that got together to create the first Trans Pride, to make it happen. It was an incredibly nerve wracking time.

Evelyn: Tell us about some of the challenges, and some of the triumphs.

Sarah: One of the challenges, always money. Always figuring out how to pay for this. Also, the police have been massively challenging.

Evelyn: I think in the first year they didn't want you to march at all?

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. So the first year we started organizing it in April, which is quite late in the year because it was a July event.

Evelyn: Wow.

Sarah: Yeah. We needed to get an event license or something, and the police would not.. made clear to us that they would not give us the event license if we

planned a march or a parade. I'd organized protests before, and this really annoyed me. They claim that it's on safety grounds, and it's absolute rubbish. It's just another way of trying to oppress people, you know? So there was a group of about 20 people, and we just arranged to make our own little march up the pavement. There was no banners. There was no chants. We walked together quietly along what would be the route of the march next year. That was really encouraging to me, to see that people were willing to take part in this and were willing to be visible.

The police thing has continued to be a royal pain in the butt. Last year, 2019, well, that's this year, isn't it? But the last event the police called us in. This is after seven years of running the entire event brilliantly, if I do say so myself.

Evelyn: I was there in..2018 was lovely. It was a lovely event.

Sarah: Cool. So we've never had a safety incident. We've organized it the same every year. We always get stewards to... We understand we have a duty of care to the participants, so we take lots of steps to make sure that we keep everyone safe. Last year, the police called us in for a meeting at the last minute. I couldn't make it. I was in hospital having surgery, but we sent a few people along. They sat down and were faced with eight officers, all in uniform. They sat down and they were like, "We don't view what you do as a protest any more. We view it as a parade, and because it's a parade then we're not obligated to fund the policing, so you have to pay to close the roads, pay professional stewards to stand at each road juncture."

We costed it out and it was going to be about the same as it costs to put on the entire event, just in having this one march for 1.4 miles. It absolutely floored us. I sent the police videos of the speeches at the march, and I made a point every year to say this is a protest.

Evelyn: Protest. It's a political march, not a parade.

Sarah: Yeah. The police still would not believe us. Eventually we had to have about three or four meetings with this transphobic police officer who laughed at us when we tried to get everyone around the table to introduce pronouns, and scoffed when we were like you don't understand the trans community's fights. You don't understand that we have a reason to protest. Eventually, I went on Wikipedia and I searched the Sussex police on Wikipedia, and I found the big boss of the County. We arranged a meeting with her, and we pleaded with her.

Eventually she agreed, and we were a protest again. So dealing with the police has been massively challenging, especially when our community, Trans Pride has to represent the entire community, so we represent both the super radical "police are just a means of the state reinforcing it's oppressive rules," kind of person, and we also represent trans police officers, because there are a few around the country.

So we have to take the position where some members of our community are saying the police are making me feel less safe because they're sex

workers, they're drug dealers, they're part of the trans community, that the entire rest of society has shat on from a great height. We make money from however we can.

We have to listen to those people, but we have to do it in a way that respects the trans officers and the trans partners of those officers. So we kind of, over the years, eked out our position where we don't invite the police into the park event. Every year the police are like, can we come and march in your event, and every year we're like you can come but you can't come in uniform. Show your support, but don't come in uniform because, honestly, it makes people feel less safe. It's going to cause so much problems. And so, of course, they never bother. They only support us if it means they can make a show of it. It's really disingenuous. So we don't invite the police into the park.

There are a couple of understanding members of the police that we've developed a relationship with, but every couple of years someone gets a promotion and then we have to go through this whole process again. It's incredibly frustrating. Trying to deal with the police as an authority figure is so difficult. The majority of the time it's like smashing your head against a brick wall.

Evelyn: Aside from the difficulties of costing it up if it's a parade rather than a protest, do you still feel, putting that aside, it is still a protest rather than a parade?

Sarah: Hell, yeah.

Evelyn: I mean, aside from the political side of things. From there.

Sarah: Yeah, I mean if you look at the media landscape today, there was someone in the Telegraph or The Times calling for trans people to have identification cards outing themselves as trans. There's every single week there are more transphobic articles in the press. The right wing is using trans gender variants as a lever to break open society. We've got so much to protest about. For the Gender Recognition Act, we still have to go and submit our application to a bunch of cisgender people, a panel of cisgender people, and hope that they accept that we are trans enough to be given a birth certificate in our true gender. It's an absolute travesty that trans people are still used as the punching bag for society's issues. We've got so much to protest about. It's really frustrating.

Evelyn: But in terms of your marches and your gatherings in the park afterwards, it's always such a lovely occasion when people chill out together. What's been the bit that's really made your heart sing?

Sarah: The reason why I do all of this is because of 'My Transsexual Summer'. Afterwards and still now, I have people come up to me and say that that TV show saved their life. Before I transitioned, I was a twat. I didn't have any goals. I didn't have any belief in the things that I can achieve, my skills, or anything. And then, to have people come up to me and say that I had a part

in giving them confidence to come out, I had a part in giving them hope in their life, has changed my entire outlook on life.

Every time someone says it to me, it's incredibly moving. Someone last week, and it always makes me very emotional when someone says that. So seeing eggs come to Trans Pride, eggs are people who are trans who haven't come out yet. They haven't hatched. Seeing these people come to Trans Pride and then coming up to me and saying, "This is my first time I've ever been out dressed as a man or as a woman," and seeing the courage, the inspiration that they take from Trans Prides is amazing.

The trans community has never had anything like this before. We don't have Stonewall, the campaigning group, we don't have anything that is ours and ours alone. So to have thousands of trans people turn up in one place and for it to be organized by trans people and to have only trans people on stage, and to have these forty or fifty community groups of community organizations that only support trans people, that gives us a sense of identify.

It gives us a sense of support that there are people out there. You're not alone. There are other people like you, and those other people have also had successful lives, and now that they're working for the betterment of their community. I think just the fact that Trans Pride exists for trans people and is run by trans people, it changes people's lives. That's an incredibly moving thing to be involved in.

Evelyn: Excellent. And you mentioned ‘My Transsexual Summer’. Visibility has been incredibly important for the whole range of the LGBT community, but ‘My Transsexual Summer’was something very special. For the benefit of our listeners who may not have seen the series, would you tell us a little about it?

Sarah: ‘My Transsexual Summer’ was a Channel 4 TV documentary series in 2011. It followed the lives of seven trans people, four trans women, three trans men, over the course of a summer. It was different in that it actually showed us as people. It showed us growing as people and getting support from each other. Before, TV shows centred around the medicalization of trans people or the sexualization of trans people, whereas this show showed us in a completely human light rather than this is a trans person. We're going to focus on one tiny part of their existence.

It showed one of us, Drew, she was going for a job. She'd never had one before, and she was growing in confidence, and so it showed that. For other people there was Donna, who was trying to find a boyfriend at the time, so they did a lot of filming around that. It showed us as people and it showed us as normal and it showed us in a very social light, you know?

So, for me, having all said that, for me, it showed me literally the first days of me living as a woman. Before that, I was back home in Jersey and I was massively depressed and everything was going wrong. I was homeless and I was living in my car at the beach. I got in contact with the show once I knew

that they were casting for people, and they were like, “sure, let's film you”. I was like I'm moving to England and I'm going to transition, and they wanted to show that. So it showed the first four or five months of me transitioning. It wasn't a medical transition or surgical or anything. It was literally just me saying, "Call me Sarah," plus I'm wearing female clothes now. It was a very tumultuous time in my life.

Evelyn: It must have been.

Sarah: Yeah, also massively affirming. I found the entire process of filming really affirming because it was interview-based, a lot of the things that we did. So people were questioning my reasons for transitioning. They were asking me for more detail about my identity and why I did things like this or like that. So I just found it a very affirming experience. It was really positive for me.

Evelyn: Did it build your confidence?

Sarah: Massively. Massively. I mean, one of the things that wasn't shown that happened during filming, I went and stopped at a motorway service station, and I went to use the loo. For some reason, I just had a massive confidence drop, and I was like I can't be in here. I need to leave. So I just got back in my car and drove away. But having other trans people who I'd never met before... I'd never met other trans women and trans men before and having that little social circle gave me massive amounts of confidence.

Evelyn: Well, it must have done. You're organizing Trans Pride.

Sarah: I know, right? Before transition, I was a twat. I had various black market jobs and I just kind of went from one crisis to another. I never knew my place. Never knew how I should act, and then all of a sudden I discovered this part of me that was confident and knew what to say in the right situations. I never knew it was possible within me. So weird. I remember a few weeks after filming had finished I was giving a lecture to the LGBT National Union of Teachers conference about children's books. It went really well. I don't know how I did that. I didn't know that I had a piece of me inside that could do that, before.

Evelyn: And then, organizing Pride, and there's been seven years of Trans Pride now?

Sarah: Yeah, seven years, now.

Evelyn: How do you feel it's developed over that time?

Sarah: To start with, we were very much kind of small budget. It was always built with inclusion of everybody at the heart of it. I think, yeah, our budget has grown. The number of volunteers and attendees and everything has exploded. Last year, the Argus said that we had 8,000 people in the march. The first year, I think we had about 600 people in the park event that turned up.

Evelyn: And about 20 walking along the street.

Sarah: To see how many new people have come along, there are people who are on the committee now who hadn't even come out when Trans Pride first existed. To see the development of our community, and how that's reflected back in Trans Pride has been really cool. So now, we've got support events around the week of Trans Pride, we've got Sober Spaces. There's an academic conference that has sprung up as well. I think the trans conversation has really turned mainstream, and that is completely represented by Trans Pride and reflected by Trans Pride.

Evelyn: The tentacles have gone out into the much broader community.

Sarah: Absolutely. This year, we had an MP email us and ask "Can I come on your parade?" Before, we've asked that particular MP to come in the past and we never even got a response from her emails, and now they are recently begging us to be part of our march. To see that has been awesome. One of the great things that's been instrumental to Trans Pride has been support from allies. The first year we had the head of diversity and inclusion of the Brighton council, Nicky Cambridge, she was instrumental to helping Trans Pride happen. She walked us through the steps of how you get an event in the city and how to deal with all the red tape.

That support has carried on. Now, different people have taken the jobs within the council, but now there's even more support form the council and from local politicians as well. It's been really great to see.

Evelyn: How do you feel that the "T" sits within LGBT now?

Sarah: I think it's still included. It's still there. I think that, in Brighton at least, there has been a big push from LGB "T" organizations to include us. Brighton Pride, the last few years, they really recognized their failings in the past, and they've done a lot of steps to change that. But there's also local funding bodies that will get in touch with us before we even get in contact with them. They'll be like, okay, your event's coming up this year. How can we help? What can we do?

So I think within the city, there has been an opening of arms from the LGB community, because they recognize that the feelings of the past, they're not phobic, they're not prejudiced, they're just a little bit ignorant and a little bit uneducated. So I think that that base level of education and awareness has come up, and has raised a lot. That definitely gives me a lot of hope for the future, you know?

Evelyn: Do you feel that Brighton is replicated across the country, or is there a Brighton bubble?

Sarah: There is definitely a Brighton bubble but I think, from what I've heard, the major cities are more inclusive, like London, Bristol, Manchester. There are still some issues. I've got some friends who have tried to engage with other Prides around the country, like Newcastle, or Northeast Pride or whatever

it's called They've tried and I think the cis people just don't quite understand. They haven't got the same base level of awareness and knowledge that the more forward thinking organizations and activists do.

Evelyn: What about the other members of the LGB end of the community because there are some tensions there at the moment. How do you feel about those?

Sarah: The big thing, it was 2018, there had just been London Pride and some anti-trans activists had hijacked the front of the parade. This has been videoed and spread across the world. From that, there sprung an "L with a T" organization which was really, really supportive. They came to Trans Pride's for the March, and I asked them to march at the front because having visible allies is so important. I think visibility, or visible allies, visible shows of support, is one of the most underrated forms of activism there can be.

To see the support we had, the protection, that they were offering us, was really, really important, and also people who weren't necessarily associated with a campaign group got in contact with us and wanted to give their support, so they volunteered their time to become a steward for the march. Usually, up until that point, we used to struggle to get 50 to 80 stewards for the march, but that year we had to close the application form after we got over 200 applications. It was really, really, moving to know that despite the efforts of anti trans activists and protestors and all the phobic arseholes, the majority of people were there to support us.

Evelyn: Kind of backfired, in a way.

Sarah: Yeah, totally. It was glorious.

Evelyn: Looking at the group, the community overall and looking at where you've come to in your history, do you feel that trans people are in a better place or a worse place now?

Sarah: In the grand scheme of things, we're in a better place. ‘After My Transsexual Summer’ and the first few years of Trans Pride, there was talk of a gender revolution. There was talk of a tipping point of trans rights, but it feels like in the last year or two, with the rise of Trumpism and the right wing takeover of our politics and media in this country, it feel as if there's been a sustained attack on trans people's identities, and then on our rights. So it's hard to say that the situation has not improved for every day trans people because there's much more visibility of trans and gender variant people. But at the same time, we come under attack weekly in the media and on social media from cis people, and this creates an environment that is hugely oppressive for new people coming out. For people who don't pass. For people who have visible... for people who don't want to pass.

At the moment, it's a very scary time to be trans. I think it just means that Trans Pride is even more important. The other day I went to one of the first meetings for the planning of 2020 Trans Pride. It was with the council events team and they asked me why do you choose Brunswick Park? Why can't we

have you somewhere else? I had to explain that it's fenced in. It's got a natural fence around it. We can put security on each point, and we can create a space that's not going to be invaded by random cis people who may or may not be transphobic.

We can guarantee that anyone in the space is going to be committed to our safe space and anyone who is not, we can eject. I think it's really important to be able to create an atmosphere where trans people feel secure, and know that they'll be respected regardless of their gender identity.

Evelyn: I'm interested. We picked up a couple of times on social media in terms of feeling secure and feeling respected and so on. Is it very much a double edged sword in terms of sometimes putting people in contact, but also attracting negative..?

Sarah: It's, what is it? The tall poppy problem? As soon as you put your head above they parapet, you open yourself up to being abused or to having your identity put down. Every trans activist, well, every trans person is an activist. Being open and trans is a political act in this environment that we exist in. Some people limit their social medias. They close them down to the public, and they just kind of withdraw into their safe space into their self-made area, but the ones that do, that are public and their heads are above the parapet, they're universally abused on social media.

The people who do the abusing know that they can't say bad words because the algorithms will automatically shut that down, so they're arguments have evolved into something that's a lot more subtle, a lot more dangerous because it questions people's identities, and it questions people's reasons for transitioning, reasons for needing surgery or not wanting surgery. Recently, there's been a lot of discussion or abuse for trans women who decided that lower surgery currently is not for them. Haters, anti trans activists, phobic people, use that as a reason to say, well, you're not woman enough. You're not man enough. You're not enough to be accepted because you don't want to go down the full transition.

It's called true trans. True scum is what we call it. People who are like, you must have surgery. You must have hormones. You must live a certain way. You must have your voice sound a certain way for you to be fully woman or fully man. It's subtle, and it's disingenuous, and it does have an effect.

I've got a friend who, they're a social worker and they're a reasonable person. I always respected them and now, because of this subtle argument that has been used, now they're saying maybe we need to do this to protect other people from trans people. It's very much couched in that kind of language that trans people are a danger to cis people. And it's horrible the way that people's views can be changed by these subtle arguments.

Evelyn: You mentioned earlier about the gender revolution. What would that look like?

Sarah: It would look like trans people in positions of power. It would look like self-identification laws where we could just say I am a woman, accept me, and not have to beg cisgender people for acceptance. It would look like no abuse in the media. Positive stories about us as people before we're trans. Trans actors who play cis roles in movies and on TV. It was beginning to happen very, very slowly and to see it slow down is really disappointing.

Evelyn: So that's the dream.

Sarah: I know, right? One day.

Evelyn: One day.

Sarah: Today, you can only really compare it to lesbian and gay life stories. Now, nobody would bat an eye that a lesbian actor would play a straight character, so why can't trans people have that? Why can't trans people just be in a movie written in as a normal character, and not have their identity used as a plot point, or as a storyline. It's just, we're normal people. Just fucking let us have normal lives.

Evelyn: Absolutely. So it's been fabulous to hear your story, Mrs. Normal Person. Having a lovely, normal life here in bubble Brighton. Hopefully, that will happen for many, many more trans people across the UK and across the world.

Sarah: It will, it will. It's just a matter of time. Big change happens slowly, especially when it's social consciousness. But there are these tipping points, and it does happen, and there is a lot of positives to get and to look for. The state of the trans community is very good. We're in a good place. We've got support structures already built in. There are loads of really cool organizations these days that do that kind of thing. I think we're just waiting for the rest of the planet to catch up, and I don't think it will take very long.

Evelyn: It's been great to speak to you today.

Sarah: It's been awesome having you.

Evelyn: To talk to you, because you've been one of the drivers of that positive change.

Sarah: I've just kind of been there, and it's happened around me.

Evelyn: Sarah, thank you so much.

Sarah: No worries. Thanks for coming.