

## Nanaimo Pride Society

Interviewer: E.T. Turner

Interviewee: Jay Gatley

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Transcriber: Joanne Fulton

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Time span full interview recording: 00:00 – 26:51

**ET:** Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and your name, or age if you're comfortable?

**JG:** I'm Jay Gatley. I'm forty-six and I've been out most of my life since I was young. I always knew I was gay and I've never hid it but I've gone through stuff throughout my life. But I keep going.

**ET:** Okay. Well, we're going to give you an opportunity to tell us about some of that stuff. How long have you been part of the Nanaimo area community?

**JG:** About twenty-five years.

**ET:** Okay. So, a lot of your adult life I guess you'd say.

**JG:** Yes.

**ET:** Okay. How do you self-identify?

**JG:** I am gay, male, he.

**ET:** Okay. Did you ever actually come out, I guess formally come out, and if so how old were you when that happened?

**JG:** When I told my parents—this is a good story—that I was gay or liked men, I must have been ten or eleven, they giggled. My mother already knew. So the story says, “Oh, I knew you were gay when we took you into the store and you went right for the high heels (E.T. laughs) instead of the men's shoes, you went right to the high heels.” So I think my family knew a long time ago that I was gay and they had no issue with it. They just wanted me to be safe and cared for and happy.

**ET:** Oh, that's positive, more positive than some people's experience.

**JG:** Very true.

**ET:** So you didn't really have, as far as your family went—that was pretty early on that you told them that. What about friends or other family?

**JG:** I had a lot of friends that were against it and didn't want to be associated with me or be around me. I was bullied a lot growing up through schools. I always had to transfer school to school because of the bullying and me running away from school. Back then I was a figure skater too so I had a lot of things against me going through elementary school and high school because I was always a figure skater. I always had to bring my figure skating outfits with me into school so I got teased a lot about that. It wasn't easy. It was difficult but I just went and dealt with it.

**ET:** That's great. How has your being out changed over time from maybe when you first realized that you were gay and were out to some people?

**JG:** Growing up until now I've seen a lot of changes and I like the way things have gone. There's more information out and there's more people out. You've got to be proud of who you are and if you can do that then things will come to you easier and people will help you more and if we help each other I think it just gets better.

**ET:** I agree. Have you been an activist for the LGBTQ community?

**JG:** Yes, I have been. I have many different aspects of trying to help out here and there. I always want to help. I always like helping. It's my community and I think I should do it. What else do I have to do but help other people and make a big difference in the community? I've always tried to be active in different sorts. It doesn't have to be just the LGBT—it could be Women's Rights, it could Men's Rights. Anything that is active, I'd like to be involved.

**ET:** Can you give a few specifics maybe of, as far as the gay community, what you've done, tried to do in that area?

**JG:** Okay. I first came onto Nanaimo Pride back in the beginning, and I'm not very good with my dates, but I remember going to City Hall with the Nanaimo Pride Board and trying to get our declaration signed, and going through that emotional roller coaster of trying to get the City to acknowledge that we were even in the city. Unfortunately we had ups and downs with the mayor walking out and not signing the declaration but that didn't stop us. We kept on coming back every year and sitting in front and making sure that they knew we were there and we weren't going to go anywhere. This went on for at least a year, but different things—more people came once they knew what we were doing and what we were trying to accomplish, we got more people involved. And things turned around. They did sign it but they still wouldn't acknowledge us. As long as we got that paper signed, that at least got the ball rolling. They acknowledged that we

were there so we were allowed to move forward and that was a big, big step for us here in Nanaimo.

**ET:** I'm trying to remember if the flag-raising started along with the proclamation or not— or if that came later.

**JG:** I believe that came later because we needed the papers first and then we had the flag-raising.

**ET:** Okay.

**JG:** From what I remember, yes, we had the proclamation done first and then we had the flag-raising.

**ET:** Okay. One thing I remember you doing is after the flag-raising we would march down to one of the coffee places.

**JG:** Correct.

**ET:** And you always led the parade with your big Pride flag so that's one thing that you did every year that I remember.

**JG:** That's when we weren't allowed to have a big parade but I did a small parade from the City Hall to a coffee shop and I always carried the big flag and tried to get everybody to follow. It was good. It was fun. Every year, I'm always there.

**ET:** Do you think looking back that the work you've done as an activist has been worthwhile and why?

**JG:** I say yes, because anything that you do a little bit can go a long way. I have done little things up and down the Island with—I have a men's group and I always keep all their knowledge of the guys around up and down the Island involved with different activities that the Island is doing from Victoria to Vancouver to Campbell River. I always keep everybody informed on what's happening up and down the Island so they know. I think it's good to know what's going on in your community so you can spread it around. You want everybody there.

**ET:** That's true. What are some of the significant changes or differences in the LGBTQ community from now to when you first became active?

**JG:** There are a lot more people out at events and more people trying to start events. There's always something going on behind the curtain that you don't know but you find out. There's always little groups that pop up that can make a difference. It might be small but if you look into

it more, it could turn into something bigger. Every little thing helps for anybody doing anything in the community. We've just got to support each other and try and help them out.

**ET:** So you've seen more people involved.

**JG:** Yes, yes.

**ET:** What would you like to see the younger generation of LGBT youth activists accomplish?

**JG:** I would like them to understand what it took to get to where we are now. A lot of the younger generation, I think personally myself, don't understand what we accomplished to get to where we are today. I think they take it for granted and I don't think they have enough information on what we have done to get to where we are now. I think more information on what we've done would help them understand what it took.

**ET:** Okay. Have you ever personally experienced discrimination or harassment because of your sexual orientation or your gender identification?

**JG:** Yes, I have. I've been—I have many different things against me. (laughs) I am native. I am blind—night blind. I am gay and all these different combinations—people just look at me, and just—oh well, there's so many things against me that they'll beat me up or say names. Growing up in school I was beat up almost every day in front of people just because I wouldn't fight back. I've seen it here and I've seen it there and I've seen it in stores once in a while but it doesn't faze me anymore. I think I'm stronger than that and I know who I am. It still hurts once in a while but I know what I've accomplished in my life so I'm very proud of it.

**ET:** Was there name-calling and the usual anti-gay sort of name-calling things that go on?

**JG:** Yes, I still get nowadays—I was in Bowen Park four days ago and two guys walked by me and called me a faggot, and they're native too, and I'm going, "You're calling another native brother?" What's going on, right? But you've got to look at that and just say, ignorance.

**ET:** Do you think that in the native community there's a difference? Is discrimination or that kind of harassment worse or better or more accepting or not?

**JG:** I think they don't know much in the native community. We call ourselves Two-Spirits because I have a feminine side and a masculine side, we're called Two-Spirits. In the native community there are a lot of them but people living on the reserve or out and about are just showing off and want to be bullies in front of their friends and stuff like that. So I just ignore it.

**ET:** Okay. Alright. How do you think your life has been impacted by these incidents of discrimination or bullying that you've experienced?

**JG:** Stronger. I always try and accomplish something in my life that makes me proud that I've helped out the community in one way or another so I'm better than that and I think that I have done a good job this year so it doesn't really faze me.

**ET:** Okay. How has your life been impacted by these experiences though? You're just feeling like you prove you're better than that. There's been some negative but on the whole it's made you stronger. Is that kind of what you would say?

**JG:** Yes, I would say that. I still get—sometimes it fazes me, sometimes it doesn't but I've never really shown it. I have days that I'm depressed about it and you just hide away. I've done it once in a while and you just feel lonely and you've got to think of what you've accomplished and say, "No, I'm better than that." Then you just pass it and then you move on.

**ET:** Could you share any memories of some times that you felt or feel proud in relation to the LGBTQ community? Or proud to be part of that community?

**JG:** Well, every time Pride comes around, the people you see that come to support you that aren't in the community and they come out to support you, that's what makes the difference. You've got other people coming in to the community to support you and that makes the difference on the community—when other people join you that aren't in the gay community but they're supporting you. And then every year it's always different faces too, right? Different events always help and it's just nice to see the community come together during Pride stuff. You run into old friends that you haven't seen for twenty years and that's just so cool. It's just a fun week.

**ET:** Do you have any people that you consider your heroes?

**JG:** Our president, John Lee was a really, really close friend of mine. I've known John Lee for the longest time and he was a really good mentor for me. He taught me a lot on different aspects of the community when I first came into the community and introduced me to a lot of people. He was a really, really close and dear mentor of mine.

**ET:** Anybody else you can think of that maybe would be your gay heroes—

**JG:** Harvey Milk. I know the story, been to San Francisco, done that. I lived in San Francisco for six years so I've been there and done that, but yeah. And I want to say RuPaul. (both laugh)

**ET:** Okay, yeah. So Harvey Milk and RuPaul and John Lee. Why are they heroes for you? What did they do or what did they mean to you as heroes?

**JG:** That I'm not the only gay person that gets out and does things and represents different aspects of life and is not fazed by other people. They are able to stand up for themselves and the community and say, "Hey, we're here. We're queer. We're not going anywhere."

**ET:** Do you think any other groups or movements have influenced the advancement of the LGBT rights movement or community? Or, helped with acceptance by the broader community?

**JG:** I think every community is different but I think if each community helps each other community, it builds. Every time one community comes and supports another community, it's like Legos—you add onto them and they will build and they will make it more successful. I think things change when more people are involved in different communities because somebody might have knowledge of one thing that they can bring to the group and enhance the community. Yeah, I think everything comes together.

**ET:** What was Pride like when you first got to the community, became part of it and are there any differences you see between then and now as far as Pride?

**JG:** It's been a small group in the beginning. There was only five of us on the Board, four or five. It was small in the beginning and it went up and down throughout the years. We were afraid one year that we weren't even going to have Pride—that we shut down everything—but I was eager to keep going, keep going. Let's keep going, right? But I think nowadays with more people involved, I think even with our sidewalks painted that made a difference. That made us on the map. I think that right in the middle of town, I think that says, we're gay-friendly and that's good.

**ET:** Do you remember some of the old places that LGBT folks would meet in Nanaimo back in the day?

**JG:** Yes. We had Blackbeard's and I don't remember exactly, I think Blackbeard's was—but we had Blackbeard's and we had June's. June's was this lady that we went—it was under one of the restaurants. It was a little hole in the wall, dark but everybody used to sneak in there and sit around and chat. The story was when I first went to June's—there was probably beer or something but the stuff on the table that nobody was touching. I'm looking and going, "Oh, toast! It looks good. I think I want butter." (laughs) "Don't eat the toast! Yeah, don't eat the toast—it's for decorations only!" (both laugh)

**ET:** Interesting decorations.

**JG:** Yeah, right. It's like—you might as well bring your own toast. Wrap it around your neck. (E.T. laughs) It was the big joke of the bar because they didn't have a liquor license. You had to have food too so everybody just put the toast down on the table, and that was it, you were allowed to drink. (both laugh) It was the neat gathering place back then. Everybody helped out and met new people.

**ET:** Do you think coming out now is different than it was when you came out and how do you think it's different?

**JG:** It is now. I believe it's easier to come out now because we have more resources and we have more outlets to get where the kids want to go to, or find information where they need to get to. I've had many different phone calls from mothers with their sons that are sixteen–seventeen years old that are coming out and they're asking, “Who do I contact? Who do I talk to about my son? He doesn't know anybody.” I get e-mails and stuff like that still so I forward them on to different other locations. It's always good to have that connection.

**ET:** Do you notice any differences in how open or accepting young community members were when you first became active and now? Acceptance amongst the youth, I guess you would say.

**JG:** I think they're more open and out and I think they're willing to—I think they have no quarrel about coming out. I think that they will, and I hope they do, because there are resources and things out there for them. Even in schools now. The schools have changed and that's the biggest thing that has changed, is the schools. Because now you don't get bullying in schools. Having counsellors and a friendly gay centre in the schools is a good start. We didn't have that back in my day. I couldn't go running to a triangle room or go to a teacher.

**ET:** No, that's kind of the last thing you would do. (both laugh) What advice do you have for the younger community members as far as activism or just life in general?

**JG:** The younger generation should volunteer more or read up on different aspects of life and the community and see exactly what is out there and get involved a bit. Little things help big things so it always helps. Always volunteer or just be around it.

**ET:** Is there anything else you want to tell us about the whole topic or your life or just anything about the LGBT question?

**JG:** No, I think I've had a good trial. I think I had a good life so far. I think everything is going nicely and it's always good to get out and be involved and keep on trucking. That's what I say.

**ET:** I like that saying too. (Jay laughs)