

Bluiston DeYoung, February 8, 2024

00:00:00 **Andrew Darien**

My name is Andrew Darien, I'm a Professor of History at Salem State University, and I'm conducting this interview as part of the Mass Humanities funded project "Through A Rainbow Lens: A Reflection on Lynn's LGBTQ+ History". I am honored to be joined today by Bluiston DeYoung, a retired chef and painter who was born in Beverly, and a patron of Fran's in the late 1970s and 1980s. I just wanted to begin by confirming that I have your permission to record this conversation.

00:00:34 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yes, you do.

00:00:36 **Andrew Darien**

Thank you. You spent your childhood and teen years in Beverly. Can you maybe just say a little bit about the section of Beverly you grew up in and what your neighborhood was like?

00:00:50 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Sure. So, well, we grew up — we grew up poor in Beverly, because the reason why I kind of... hesitate on that is because Beverly, at least when I grew up there, did not— it does now —you didn't see poverty in Beverly. You saw middle class and wealth is what you would see in Beverly. So, you didn't really see poverty. So it doesn't— poverty doesn't look, didn't look, then as it looks today. Which [whenever] I go back to Beverly, my sister lives there, and you can actually see old neighborhoods that to me look the same, but are completely run down. You can see more poverty, if that makes sense. But interesting enough, the group of kids I grew up with— my friends were mostly boys, although I had female friends as well. Interesting also is that we were all raised by single moms. They— it wasn't originally like that. We all had, you know, we all had dads, but they— our folks — had either separated, divorced, or what have you. It was interesting group of kids that I grew up with. So... I grew up off of Railroad Ave in Moulton Courts, [a] duplex — so I grew up on a duplex. Inter — Also, I don't want to say interesting anymore..... my relatives, a lot of my aunts and uncles also lived in Moulton Court. It was kind-of like our own little compound, if you will. So from there I moved to oh...what was the next street over? It was, oh, Bow Street! I actually moved down, down to Bow Street. So that was one.... —and Waller? Wilson? Wilson Ave? I can't remember, to be honest with you, but they were either off of Cabot or Rantoul. And I spent most of my days riding my bicycle with my friends and hanging out at Dane Street Beach and just roaming Beverly, for the most part.

00:02:56 **Andrew Darien**

Did you have an awareness growing up that you were poor or working class?

00:03:03 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yes, absolutely. I did. Yeah. Yes. I mean, ask me something more specific to give you — [to see] if I can try to give you an example, because I, how do I describe that? Even some of my friends who were growing up with, say, just their mom, they seemed to all grow up in homes. [Whereas] I grew up in apartments for the most [part]. So that was already kind of, like for me— well, I mean, [that] was an example of my poverty, right? Like growing up, I didn't have the same things that other kids have. I didn't— we didn't get new clothes every year for school. We grew up on welfare when my dad left. My father split and remarried. And then my mother worked really hard. We were on welfare. She worked really hard. She also went to school and she ended up getting a Ph.D— no, sorry, a Master's in Education and became a parole officer for the state of Texas. Interesting. Yeah. She did all that after my dad left. And while she's working and trying to raise, you know, a couple of kids, one of them— well, there was three of us really being in the house —Well, so I didn't answer the question about my siblings' names because there's a lot of them, you know? I would have needed more space. I figured I would just tell you [later]. So both my parents were married at one point before they met and they both had children. My father had one, which is my brother, Dominic. And my mother had two: my sister, Debbie, and my brother, Rick. Then they met, and they had me while they were still married. There was always this bit

of controversy around that. So there's, you know, so that— and then they met, they had me and then my younger sister. [Then] my dad left my mother for a younger woman and had four more kids. So, yeah. But so he, so my childhood— my father, I mean, I'm not going to paint a horrible picture of my dad or my mom for that matter. Right. So they...they gave us what they had, right? My father, on the other hand, he was a bit on the shady side. If he could find ways to make money or not work, or whatever, [he would.] That's what it always looked like to me, as I never saw my father working all that much. But I did see him doing certain deals in and out of our space, so I don't know. So there's, you know, I'm just— I'm trying to explain what was poverty. It was a lot of motorcycles in front of my house or apartment duplex. We didn't have a lot of things. And sometimes it was a question, like, this is all after my dad leaves too. It wasn't, I mean, — we, you know, — I could see poverty then, but we ate.

00:06:26 **Bluiston DeYoung**

How old were you when he left?

00:06:28 **Andrew Darien**

Ten, about ten years old when my dad left.

00:06:34 **Andrew Darien**

Was your poverty a source of shame and embarrassment or a badge of honor?

00:06:43 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Shame, when I was growing up. Yeah. Now it's more of a— I mean, I don't know if I'd call it a badge of honor, but being from [a] working class [family], struggling, like knowing..... cause I've also had things, [that we didn't have as a] kid, but as I got older [I did] so I felt like I grew up with a little deprivation, let's say. But I didn't. And that's only because you're coming from this young age, all your friends got new bikes, they've got everything brand named. And meanwhile, which there's— see, it's also beautiful, right? Your mother is still hand-making your clothes. So there's that shame with it too, when you have to finally tell your mom, "Mom, we need a pair of like Levi's jeans, not— [you] can't make my jeans. If you don't get me some Levi's, you don't give me some corduroys, I'm going to get into a fight." It came down to that kind of thing, right? My mother finally got it, but if you look at it— if I look at it today, I could go, "Oh, wow! That was beautiful." 'cause all the food that I got was made from scratch, everything we know— like I said, we ate. So we weren't, but when I say I'm— we grew up poor. We did, we grew up poor. We grew up very poor actually, because there were moments when it was like, "Is it going to be lights or heat?" These are conversations my mother would have with my sister, which— and so of course we choose heat. Sometimes we were eating by candlelight. Sometimes..... Yeah. Yeah.

00:08:28 **Andrew Darien**

Did you have to fight a lot growing up?

00:08:31 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I got into fights. Yes. I got into fights growing up. I got into a lot of fights growing up. Mostly boys. I had one— the other thing was is that I was always masculine and even [when I was] very young, I was masculine. I mean, I don't have memories of it that young, but my mother would tell me that even as a toddler [that] other women would say to her that— they would address me as he, or they'd tell her that, you know, "He's very handsome." My mother would say "That's, that's my daughter"....., you know, so she, yeah, it's interesting enough. So, um.

00:09:16 **Andrew Darien**

Do you remember at a young age what it felt like when someone would call you he?

00:09:23 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yeah, it was, it— I would feel shame, interesting[ly]. Um, well, I don't know if it's shame. I don't know if it would be fear. I think fear, not shame. Fear is what I would have — that's what I would feel more. [That was] because I also felt male and more male, more masculine, than female. And so I would go out of my way to hide

as much as— and I didn't, you know, I didn't blossom, I guess, until I was in my thirties. It was easy for me to do that. But I had long hair too. So I'm a child of the 60s right? And I [had] come of age in the 70s. I had really long hair and one of my memories is— it's kind of cute—but one of my memories is having this young hippie girl who's probably nineteen or twenty come up to me and touch my hair as I'm playing with my friends. [Back then we] were roaming around the city of Beverly. That's all we did: was ride our bikes and cause trouble. We did cause trouble. I got into a lot of—I was a troubled kid. Um, but [she was] touching my hair and complimenting my hair, and asking me like, "Oh my God, I can't believe that your mother allows you to grow your hair that long. Like your mother's like — that's so beautiful!" I was like, "Yeah, why wouldn't she?" And it dawned on me later that I was like, "Oh, you thought I was a boy." I mean, so I got that a lot with long hair or not. And I did have boyfriends. I had a couple, who I guess didn't have a clue. I don't know. But, I eventually came out. I mean, I came out young. I came out at like eighteen. I came out in '78 actually.

00:11:08 **Andrew Darien**

When did you have a clue?

00:11:11 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Um, probably.....very young, very young. And, um — so my parents were also kind of 'hippie-ish' themselves. Both of them grew up very conservative — and they all both came from trauma. Both of them came from trauma, you know? So as far as like their— their upbringings weren't the best. They both [were traumatized], especially my father. My mother[']s childhood was] probably mixed [in comparison]. My mother had like a lot of good [experiences as a child], and then [some] not so good. She was also, she was sexually abused by her stepdad for.... for up until she was [around] fifteen. So, you know....and my dad, my grandmother —his mother —his father was from what I hear, I never met him, but his father was a bastard, a real son of a bitch, like just a horrible man. And, my grandmother who..... [my father] also had a lot of siblings. I'm sorry for bouncing around. But, my grandmother was an alcoholic....and she also dabbled in some....[the] Ouija board and did some strange stuff. So yeah, my dad kind of had it rough. Where was I going with that? What was the... I'm sorry.

00:12:40 **Andrew Darien**

Well, all of this is interconnected, but I think we were starting to talk about when you yourself had a clue [that you were not straight]

00:12:48 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Oh, when I came [out!]. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So I came out when I knew, I probably knew— well, okay, so I'm looking through National Geographics, and I can't remember how old I am, all I remember is my mother coming in and I'm looking and [at] naked women, tribe women from where[ever], you know? Like... and I'm just looking at the pictures. But my mother— so it's interesting enough because I think when I realized something was up with me is when my mother, my mother got upset first. I wasn't trying to hide anything, I was just looking at a National Geographic. So it's like my mother knew, yeah. It upset her very much, I remember that. [I also remember] my father saying to her, "I don't know what the big deal is. It's National Geographic. They're boobs, Jerry. They're just boobs"or something like that. He might've said, I don't know what he said, but that's what he's saying: "Nothing wrong with it. There's nothing, leave it."

00:13:55 **Andrew Darien**

How did her getting upset express itself in that moment?

00:14:00 **Bluiston DeYoung**

She got pretty angry, actually. Yeah. She got really angry. There was another time that she got angry when, um, I was about fifteen, and I was fooling around with girls, and I was with my girlfriend at the time. This is like '75, '74. Um, so we were experimenting— she was experimenting. I, you know, I already knew. But anyway, we weren't doing anything. We were, at that point, just two teenagers in my bedroom, changing our clothes —is what we were doing. We were changing our clothes. I think we were getting out of our bathing suits, or doing something like that. And my mother came into my room, and she completely flipped out because we were both standing half naked. Now, she never would have flipped out if it was my sister and one of her friends, she flipped out because it was me. And this was before I come out. This is like— I'm, you know, fourteen or fifteen,

at this time. At this point, my mother is flipping out. My mother knows [that I'm gay] before me. A couple of her friends, also, Joe Muse, [was a] homosexual man [that] my mother was very close with. [He was a] very good, good friend of my mom's. [He was] also a good ally for me, as well. And [there was] this therapist that she would have me see when I was young. Um, so she worked— my mother also worked for a little bit, while she was going to school: Project Rap, in Beverly. I think it was called project Rap. But, it was like free therapy and one of the, uh, anyway— but, she had a lesbian friend there. So my mother was having me see this woman, my mother, but she wasn't saying anything. So, it was the two of them that had told her like, "Cherry, you need to have a conversation. You need to have a conversation with her." I don't go by 'she' now, but that I was 'she' then, right? "You need to have a conversation with her." And she was like, "No, I don't. She's only twelve. I don't need to. She's not gay. She's not a lesbian. She's only twelve." And they were like, "Cherry, yes, you need to have to have a conversation!" But she never did. I came out. So when I came out, my mother was— so here's the thing, when I came out, my mother was not angry at me. I think, in so many ways, she was relieved, but she was also frightened. But I think she was relieved, because she wanted to have that conversation, and didn't know how. I came out at eighteen, so I think I realized it very young. I knew I had feelings for girls. I knew the only— my role models were all like, I mean they were Marlon Brando, and Paul Newman. I idol[ized] them because that's what I wanted to be like. But it was never.....yeah. I found myself having crushes. I had crushes on my third grade teacher, Mrs. Steele, for years, like for years, so I knew. I think I knew then.

00:17:09 **Andrew Darien**

What did it feel like to get these non-verbal messages of disapproval from your mother?

00:17:24 **Bluiston DeYoung**

It's been so long, I gotta.....—that would be where shame would come in. Shame would enter there because I'd be immediately like, "I'm doing something wrong, [which means] there's something wrong with me." So, um, yeah. Shame would.....

00:17:40 **Andrew Darien**

And what made you finally decide to come out to her?

00:17:48 **Bluiston DeYoung**

So, I'm in high school, and I'm not really going to school, to be honest with you. But I'm in high school, and I meet a couple of friends. I played some sports in school, and I played flag football, girls flag football, so I met a couple— so we would play, my junior high, would play Briscoe. I went to Briscoe, and then there was..... what was the other one? Ralside, or something? Rhey're middle schools now, but they were junior highs then. We would play them, and I met a couple of girls on there that were.....not as masculine as me. They're probably not now. I don't know. It's interesting enough, but they gave off the same vibe that I gave. And one of them knew about Fran's Place, surprisingly enough. So, yeah. We found ourselves there. I was also, like, eighteen The drinking age was jumping around. There was like some period of time when the drinking age was jumping around, and it had dropped down to eighteen, which, honestly, I don't think it ever should have, but— like sometimes I even question twenty one, if you want to know —but when I was twenty one, [I mean,] when I was eighteen, I was like, "Yeah, that's great." Yeah, so it bounced around. I just remember being able to get into the bar scene a little earlier, that's why I'm trying to think. It was either '78 or '79 that I discovered Fran's Place.

00:19:22 **Andrew Darien**

How would you describe Fran's to someone who had never been there before?

00:19:29 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I can still picture it, and I'm sure it evolved, you know, like it changed, had some changes. I'm trying to remember when... I can't remember when....., I mean, I was in my twenties— probably closer to my thirties — when I stopped going there. [It was] probably when I moved here, to Western Mass. So you'd walk in, and I just remember there was the bar, and it was bright with like..... [it] seemed like they just had Christmas decorations. I remember that like everywhere, Christmas lights. Um, and then this, um, what do they call it? Astro turf, on the floors, right? That's what I also remember. Some type of type of either horrible carpeting, or like some green Astro turf somewhere. I know they had some Astro turf on there, I swear to God they did. It had a pool table.

And depending on the time of day that you went in there, the energy [would be] different. If you were there in the afternoon, it was darker and rather depressing, because the same crowd that would be there in the afternoon — which wouldn't be that very many people, but there would be the same people that would be there, in the afternoon would be there in those same seats all night long. [From the] time it opened, till the time it closed. There was lots of sadness in there, too, but there was lots of fun. So how would I describe it? I would describe it: If you walked in there on a Friday night, it was going to be a good time. You were gonna have a lot of fun.

00:21:06 **Andrew Darien**

Were you nervous the first time you went?

00:21:09 **Bluiston DeYoung**

You know, I can't remember. I imagine I was, but I think I was excited and I had no— I was really like.....I'm surprised they let me back in. Like when you're that age, you're just all over the place, you don't know. And I'm seeing this for the first time. And I really thought, until I met these other, these other two women that I was, I was it. I was the only [gay person,] like there was something wrong with me. Interesting enough, we can go back into this, because there's still like— there is that issue that we have that transphobia here in our community, which kinda sucks. But, um, so was I nervous? Um, yeah, in an exciting way, like I'm about to take an amusement ride that I really like. I had no idea what to expect. I really didn't. It was a fast education.

00:22:11 **Andrew Darien**

How would you describe the background of people who were in Fran's at that time?

00:22:18 **Bluiston DeYoung**

The background? Do you mean..... give me a little more what you're asking. You mean like their personalities, their, their what?

00:22:28 **Andrew Darien**

Oh, more just in terms of either their class backgrounds. Was it mostly lesbian? Was it gay men? Were there straight people? Were people of different racial backgrounds there?

00:22:46 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Oh! Okay! Yeah. There were some people of color. I would put Fran's where the majority, at least the folks that I hung [out with] were working class. It was the working class bar, when I was going. There were probably college students on a Friday, Saturday night, you know? You had your girls coming from either Salem State, Endicott College. Endicott College [was a] different class, right. Um, nine times, I mean....— probably, chances are is a lot of those women that came in there were not working class, but I'm sure there were some scholarships in there, as well. [There were also] some people who were definitely working class in the college scene. But, gay men [came as well]. Yeah. Jimmy.....I can't remember Jimmy's last name, but he was the bartender, and I remember him being blonde, thin, barely wearing a shirt in the summertime, and really sweet. I think he was from Tennessee, if I remember [correctly]. [He was a] really lovely man, if I can remember. I wish I—.....you know, it's funny cause I don't know, if I'd recognize him, but I think he had a few years over me.

00:24:01 **Andrew Darien**

Did this feel like a safe place for you?

00:24:05 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yeah, I mean, it did, because it was home. It was a place I could go and be myself, you know? Um, yeah. It was also a place where I got some hard lessons that I didn't really learn until later in life. Like they start there, but you don't pick them up until later.

00:24:23 **Andrew Darien**

Can you give me an example of one of those lessons?

00:24:26 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Um.....well, I don't know if I can. I mean, I don't— yeah. I don't know if I can right now.

00:24:42 **Andrew Darien**

Is it like life lessons, courting rituals?

00:24:46 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Well, more [towards] life lessons. I mean, there's more.....like a lot of things for me..... I mean, I came from a pretty, um..... I wasn't a happy kid, so I wasn't a really happy person when I walked in there. And I don't think a lot of people were, to be honest with you, at that time. I mean, from like the crew that I hung out with, or was drawn to, that we were all drawn together. In many ways, we were a pretty sad bunch. We all came from hard times, and we were having hard times then. So, we're going to Fran's to kinda forget about our bullshit, or try to find our girlfriend, or partner or whatever. It was like— Fran's was, you know, Fran's for me was an escape, and to be with, what I considered at the time, [to be] family.

00:25:53 **Andrew Darien**

How frequently would you go to Fran's?

00:25:56 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I probably went every.....I mean, I'm sure there was a time, because I was young enough, and I probably went as many times as I could. I probably went most nights. I'm sure I was there at least two or three nights a week.

00:26:12 **Andrew Darien**

And was there heavy drinking?

00:26:14 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Oh yeah. I didn't.... see, here's the thing. I wasn't a big drinker cause I didn't, um..... I mean, I did. I think I did definitely do some drinking there, but I did more drugs than anything there, and when I did drink, it was beer, but I wasn't a big drinker. I did a lot of drugs though. I made up for it with drugs.

00:26:35 **Andrew Darien**

Were you introduced to drugs there or you were already—

00:26:38 **Bluiston DeYoung**

No, I was introduced to drugs long before I found Fran's.

00:26:44 **Andrew Darien**

Did you ever feel unsafe going into, or coming out, of Fran's? Was there ever any harassment?

00:26:55 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Oh yeah. God, there was lots of harassment. So when you were in Fran's, we weren't going to take any shit from anyone. Honestly, we got more of our harassment from the cops, than anything else. I'll tell you a story. Two women that I hung out with back then, and I can see their faces today, they were having an argument outside of Fran's. They were a couple, and they were arguing. They weren't, you know.....—I mean, they might've been yelling, but there was no violence going on. There were a couple having a heated argument. And the cops drive by, and they had come by a couple of times— 'cause I remember Fran's being right next door to the bowling alley, right? Wasn't it connected to a bowling alley there? Yeah. That's what I thought. But anyway, the cops

come by and at one point, one of them yells out the window, calls us, "Dykes," he says, "Fucking Dykes, go inside and have your fight," Or something. And my friend said something to them. I don't know what she said, but she mouthed off, and that was all it took. They backed up really quickly, got out of the car, grabbed her, slammed her violently on the hood of the car, and was going to proceed to cuff her. I walk up, um.....—so I go over to the police officer and I'm like, "Hey, you, you can't do that. You can't just do that." And he hauls off, and hits me. So, I hit him back and his partner is there, and there's a big [fight] with me and those two cops. The next thing I know there's an army of cops. I don't even think they arrested my friend anymore. They all came at me at that point, so it was me and probably six police officers, I would guess. I got my ass kicked, but I end[ed] up going to court. My friends come with me, and there were witnesses to it as well. So, I end up having to go to court. I get arrested. I end up having court and I get.....there's.....—I wonder if they.....all I remember is there is somebody [that] gets ahold of a police— sorry, of a lawyer for me —and it happens to be a queer lawyer, which is great. It was actually a team. It was two [people], it was a man and a woman. It was a long time ago, Andrew, so I can't remember. But you could probably look it up in [at the] Salem [Courthouse] and, and I'll you my birth name, and you can probably find it there, unless it's been sealed— but I doubt it because I wasn't a juvenile. I doubt that it's sealed. But anyway, we ended up going to court, and they're charging me with assault and battery on a police officer. I ended up like..... it was basically tossed. It wasn't tossed out of court, but there were no.....it was over. It was like without a finding, I was like a suspended sentence, or something like that, without a finding. But I heard, I guess, [that] I fucked up his eye cause I kicked him in the face. I kicked a cop in the face. But he had it coming to be honest with you. He really did. So the Lynn police officers were, um.....—and I'm not very big, so, you know? And when he hit me, I reacted. The reason why is because when I was twelve, I got beat up by a cop in my hometown for nothing, and he too thought I was a boy, when I was twelve. So my first reaction, at that point, was reflex and that's why I hit him. It may have been a mistake, but I did hit him. But yeah, so there was harassment. We got harassed by the cops a lot. I don't think we got harassed after that so much though, after that, because, they got into a lot of hot water. It didn't just stay local. As far as I know, it.... I think even like, um, Boston news channels got ahold of it, like there were, um, or, or, or something. It made a little bit of airtime, from what I understand, for a brief moment back then— at least in Lynn. And these cops already had a bad reputation because there had been rumors of other things that they had done.

00:31:40 **Andrew Darien**

Did that feel like a victory for you?

00:31:44 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Um, yeah, there's some— yeah, I guess it did. Yeah. Yeah, it did. I was cocky at the time. I will say that. Back then it, I don't know, it probably just felt like, you know.....I don't know what I thought back then. I mean, I was easily pushed over the edge, let's just say.

00:32:18 **Andrew Darien**

Were you something of a hero to your fellow Fran's patrons?

00:32:23 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I have no idea. I don't know. I mean, I think, I think there were people in Fran's, like anywhere, you know, when, um—..... I don't, I don't know. There's probably people who were like, "Yay for you," and others who, it might have not been a good thing for them. It would....—because you have to think of the times, too. I mean, it's interesting because 've always been one of those people who probably be— I mean, not so much anymore, but uhm...—to resolve things, that's how you resolve things, right? That's where I came from. It was the only way I knew how to resolve things. And the other thing was, is with cops, I just didn't like them. I didn't like them before I got beat up because of.....like in relation with my father. I didn't like them [then,] and I don't like them today. But today. I don't have a chip on my shoulder. Today, I don't have anything to prove. And today I'm smarter, so I know how to talk to cops, and that's.....— and I'm fortunate, I guess, still, because I'm.....—it's like, even though I grew up in poverty, I'm well aware of my privilege. Well aware.

00:33:47 **Andrew Darien**

Do you think that police officers themselves have changed at all in their approach to the gay and lesbian community?

00:34:00 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I think depending on where you are from and live, yes. Depending on the sources, the available sources and education that's in the city or town, or wherever you are. Depending on the progressiveness of the area, yeah. They're forced to be. I'm sure they'd rather not be, to be honest with you, but they're forced to be. I mean, in Northampton, the chief of police is a woman, and she's a lesbian as well, and she's out. She's a cop, though. I mean, I'm not going to say, but she's, you know, she's a cop. Their mentality, they think.....—they, they really do. They have a whole different mindset. It's a whole different culture. But, she's a decent person. She's a good human being. I'd have to say that the majority of police officers on the Northampton police department, they're.....I mean, some are okay, but I think they feel stifled, to be honest. But there are cops in this town that don't want anyone to harm anyone, and will really go out of their way for you. Yeah, it's a safe [place]. Where I live, it's safe, even from the cops.

00:35:22 **Andrew Darien**

So, you were only probably like nine years old during the Stonewall riots. My best guess is that you don't remember them happening at the time or is that something—

00:35:36 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I wouldn't have seen— I would have had no reason to see, or hear, of anything. Yeah, no, I didn't. I didn't hear about that until later, probably until.....I mean, again, because I spent most of my youth high and having sex, so it was a drug infused, sex infused time for me. That was my goal. I wasn't really paying attention. I wasn't political until later. I probably didn't even pick up a book about it until later. So, no, I didn't know.

00:36:12 **Andrew Darien**

Do you remember reading about it and thinking, "Boy, that's kind of similar to my own experience?"

00:36:22 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Well, not to like.....yes, to some degrees, because I've had other.....so I hung out with ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] for a little bit, or in the crowd of ACT UP. I wasn't suit and tie, you know? I was more the leather jacket, and we were more like a romper stomper, really, when you think about it, because that's.....so, yeah, I protested. Yeah, it felt like that. Yeah, it kinda did. But I just....I mean, I don't think I identified it with my story really.

00:36:57 **Andrew Darien**

When do you first remember learning about the AIDS virus?

00:37:02 **Andrew Darien**

So, after some years, I got clean. I stopped drinking and using drugs. So, I'm trying to..... I mean, probably soon after it came out. Soon after we were becoming more aware of what was going on, because I remember the first AIDS march that I attended with my girlfriend, and I can't remember. I want to say it was '86 or '87, but I can't, I can't remember.

00:37:52 **Andrew Darien**

I imagine you had friends who were affected by that crisis?

00:37:55 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yeah, I lost a couple of friends, yeah. Yeah, I did.

00:38:00 **Andrew Darien**

And did that inform your activism?

00:38:05 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Well, yes, it did. I mean, it pushed me for another cause. Every day back then being, being gay was a struggle. Yeah. I do remember just, I was going, I was in the rooms at the time getting clean, and I just remember.....I just remember a lot of sad times for that. I thought of myself a little bit as a writer at one point, and decided I was going to write a play, which I did. My friend John— he was in the rooms, but he was sober —was part of that. He was part of the cast. I remember that. Anyway, after we..... I mean, I never really did anything with it, but we had fun for a while. But he got really sick, as I remember, and I just, I didn't see him anymore. Because they..... you know, even if you wanted to visit people didn't let you. Family members wouldn't let you visit. And John and I weren't that close, but I do remember losing him, which I thought was tragic, because he was such a just a beautiful man. I never saw him when he got really sick, but I know what it..... I know it just aches you, you know? You're like a shell of yourself.

00:40:07 **Andrew Darien**

[A] Hard time, indeed. I suspect you also have a pretty good memory of learning about the murder of Matthew Shepard?

00:40:18 **Andrew Darien**

Yes, I do. Yeah. I remember that too. I mean, even today, there's.....trans women are being murdered all the time. All the time. It's just horrible.

00:40:45 **Andrew Darien**

I'd like to talk about that a bit more, but maybe we can step back to something you were briefly talking about before we were recording, and that was the butch-femme dynamic, which is obviously different now. Can you kind of describe what that was like when you were coming of age, to people who might not really understand it?

00:41:15 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting, because what I hear now is that the younger generation— I don't know if it's generation Z.....or is there the alpha generation? Is that an actual generation? And they're calling them the alpha generation? That's interesting. They use the term 'mask', right? Now, they use the term mask? Which is fine, but I'm always going to use the term 'butch'. I think it's important, because 'butch' was a dirty word, just like 'dyke' was a dirty word, just like 'fag' was a dirty word, just like 'queer' was a dirty word. The other thing is [that] the butch-femme dynamic— Well, the butch-femme community, now there's an umbrella, right? And other things fall under that. Where am I going with this? Can you ask this question again? Because I get a little brain fog every once in a while. It's like..... I don't know why, but—

00:42:18 **Andrew Darien**

Sure. Well, I guess if you have a model of butch-femme, then people are falling into one of two categories. Now, I guess there are a lot of people who feel like that's maybe a little bit restricting. But for you, growing up, and in your time, you felt sort of squarely in the butch realm.

00:42:44 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yeah, I mean, and it's.....well, yeah, okay. I mean, it's still very much alive. That's the thing. It really is. So, growing up butch, or trying to..... So, I didn't, I never hid, right? I wasn't one..... I wasn't at work, one thing, or at school, another thing, and then plau with my friends, [like,] "Here I am! Blue the butch!" I was queer when I came out. I came out, and I came out to everyone, and I always came out as butch. I never— and it might upset some people, I don't know —but I never..... you know, the term 'lesbian' just never felt right for me, for many reasons, because, again, class. I know that for some people, they don't understand that. But the butch-femme comes from working class environment. It's a culture of its own, is how I see it. In many ways, the butch-femme community is [a culture of its own.] Butches, back then, and maybe even in some places even now, and.....mainly, most of the harassment I got came from other queers in the community for being butch, even then, because for me to be butch, it meant that I was part of the patriarchy. I was part of the establishment. [It] was like I wanted to be a guy. I wanted to be, I wanted to have these certain privileges. That's not what it's

about. but that's how it was perceived is that we just want to be men.

00:44:41 **Andrew Darien**

It's almost like you're being marginalized within this larger group, that's already marginalized from the rest of society.

00:44:51 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And we're still, in some ways. I mean, we're not, you know, butches. Okay.....—so even for trans people, like trans butches or trans men, and there is a difference. It's like, I don't identify as a trans man. I find that most trans men.....—the reason I don't is because I don't feel like a man, for one. Secondly, my experience is that, at least with a lot of trans men that I know, they live heterosexual lifestyles, meaning they are out there, [and]they call themselves heterosexuals. I don't have any, I don't have a problem with that. But I think people see.....—so all of that is under our umbrella, and it should be because we all have to have a, you know.....—it shouldn't just be like..... it should be inclusive is how I've always felt. It should be inclusive, including our allies, like I just think it should be inclusive. I don't know where I'm going with this. But I struggled sometimes. Like I'll tell you....I had an example. I'll give you example. I asked a woman who was a friend of mine, just a friend that I had known— and this was back, this was in the '90s —if she wanted to dance. She literally looked at me with this shock. She's like, "No, I don't dance with butches." And I'm like, "What?" That just floored me. Basically, I mean, her point was really is that, yeah, because I was masculine, I'm butch, she doesn't.....you know, so.

00:46:50 **Andrew Darien**

And what was she?

00:46:52 **Bluiston DeYoung**

She didn't. I dunno, I was too masculine. I mean, it's not the first time. Like I've entered— Okay, so I joined this group on Facebook, because I had a friend tell me to, asked me to, told me it was a good group to join. So I decided to. It had the word 'lesbian in it', you know, "New England Lesbians," or something. And I was like, "You know? I don't know. I'm not going to fit in. I'm going to tell you that right now. I'm just not going to fit in. I'm going to get some TERF [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist] is going to come after me." And sure enough, there was a handful of them, as soon as I came in. And it wasn't so much because I'm butch, it was that I'm trans, and that I'm very masculine looking. So they came, and I got attacked, basically. I'm still in the group, and I argued with them for days. I had people come to my defense, and I refused to leave. But, yeah, so that shit goes on.

00:47:57 **Andrew Darien**

How exactly did they attack you? And on what ground?

00:47:59 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Verbally. They would say things like.....ah, Jesus, one said, "It's bad enough." You know? "It sucks enough that they're taking over women's sports, now they want to come into lesbian groups." She was talking about trans people. What I had to remind her was, —and here's the other thing, okay, and I swear to God, I'm not making this up, and I know what I saw. The one that attacked me the most, which was interesting for me, is a trans woman. Yeah, that was really....yeah. I don't get that from all trans women, but this woman was a trans woman. And as soon as I called her out on that, she shut up. But the admin had to come on, eventually, and was forced to [stop it.] It wasn't like the admin was taking a stand, because the admin didn't give a shit, if you think. But, the admin had to come on and save face for the group, and basically say that, yes, they allow trans people to come into the group. But I had to endure this for like,..... so I made a post, introduced myself, and I immediately got attacked. And then I left it for like, it was quiet for a couple of days. Then I noticed I had some notifications, and I went back on, and I'm like, "Oh, my god. They're fucking back at it again. They're still attacking me." —And there's other people that are arguing in my defense. I'm like, "This is ridiculous." So that shit still goes on, we still have to remind people that like....—

00:49:46 **Andrew Darien**

Let's go back to the late '70s, early '80s, when that butch femme-dynamic is more intact than it is now. You mentioned a time—

00:49:57 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Oh, it's still intact.

00:50:01 **Andrew Darien**

You mentioned a class correlation. Is it accurate to say that all the butches were working class, and the lesbians were middle and upper class?

00:50:14 **Bluiston DeYoung**

No, I would not. No. It's not that black and white, but I would say that the butch-femme community, the butch-femme [community] derived from your working class. Most of the jobs that women who were masculine could get [were labor intensive.]. That's why I referred [to, and talked] about the docks, right? Working on the docs, working in factories. Those were the jobs that most butches got— unless they came from a well-off family, and were educated, right? I mean, you had those butches too, but they were in different circles. I'm not saying every single butch is from a working class environment back then. Today, it's like everywhere, right? It doesn't matter your environment, your classes. But originally, the butch-femme dynamic was built from that: built from from, you know.....— and a lot of the women were in the sex business, a lot of the femmes. I mean, this is my experience, as well. This is a lot of what I've read about our history, as well. But, I don't want to imply that every lesbian [followed that trend], I mean, there's lesbians that come from working class families, too. I think it's also politics. I think politics play a part in it, as well. Maybe not so much today, but it did then.

00:51:56 **Andrew Darien**

There are a lot of factors that go into that. Were you—

00:51:58 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Yeah, Yeah, a lot of lesbians wanted to hide being lesbian. Butches couldn't hide. Butchers could never hide. Ever.

00:52:10 **Andrew Darien**

And do you feel like that's a source of bitterness or pride, for you?

00:52:17 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Pride. I'm proud. Yes. I'm very— I have a lot of pride. It's like I came up, I came from.... I mean, many people had it worse than me. so I can say it came from poverty. Should I say poverty? Or should I just say poor? So, I lived in.....—because I think about it, poverty, like..... I mean, I'm still poor today. I have more today, than I did when I was when I was a kid. So let me rephrase that. Yeah. I don't think. Poverty, no, poor. I was poor because poverty is.... is....is.... yeah. I didn't have poverty. I had moments when we weren't sure if we were going to have lights or heat. I don't know. Maybe to that's some people that would be poverty, but I can't say I had poverty. I always ate, but I was shit ass poor. Didn't have any money, and we still don't.

00:53:21 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Were you ever involved in the movement for marriage equality?

00:53:27 **Andrew Darien**

Yes, I was. A little bit here in Massachusetts, but when I got to Colorado...— I didn't actually do much here in Massachusetts with that. I mean, I wasn't out there. I mean, I probably went to some marches and I signed whatever anybody wanted me to do. But when I got to Colorado— I was in Colorado for about seven years —so I was there when Colorado finally legalized same-sex marriage. That, I did a lot of work with. I was with

'Oubolder,' and one of the coordinators and I were very close friends, and she did a lot of work in that, so we were there. We were there at the Capitol. Yeah. Yeah, I was involved. I was involved for that. That was a beautiful day too.

00:54:33 **Andrew Darien**

So there's a difference between believing in marriage equality, and believing in marriage in general. Do you have any feelings about that?

00:54:49 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I mean, I have not been legally married, but I was married. I was involved with somebody long enough to.....— that it it cost when I left. But, on a personal level, how do I feel about it now, marriage? Is that what you're asking? I'm sixty four. I don't know.

00:55:16 **Andrew Darien**

Well, either personal or more broadly, speaking on the whole, do you think that marriage has been a positive good for the LGBTQ+ community?

00:55:36 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I don't really know. I mean, in the sense of where they have more rights, more protection to each other, what happens to us when we die: hospitals and all of that? Yes, I think it's great in that way. But otherwise, I don't think it's any different. I don't think it's made the community any better of a community, but I think it's probably given the community more sense of inclus[ion,] being included in [the country], right? Because that's really what it's about, yu know? So, do I think marriage equality is necessary? Yes, absolutely. I think everybody should have the right to marry whoever the hell they want. As long as.... yeah, [as long as] they're not a minor. But do I think it's like, you know, I don't know, marriage itself? No, whatever. Honestly, I see a lot of divorces. I see a lot of....yeah.

00:56:49 **Andrew Darien**

So, I guess from one perspective, we can kind of look back at the last fifty years, or so, as one of great progress. Yet at the same time, in the last several years, it feels like there's been a bit of backlash against LGBTQ+ people.

00:57:11 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Oh yeah.

00:57:11 **Andrew Darien**

Is that something that you've observed, and what do you make of it?

00:57:20 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Well, it's frightening. Again, it's interesting, because I don't try. I've always just been me, but I mean.....okay, granted, I am taking T[estosterone], so I have changed a little bit, but not.... I mean, I can show you photos, I haven't changed all that much. But my point is that I pass all the time. Wherever I am, I'm passing [as my intended gender]. When you're passing everywhere, and I still haven't had top surgery, so I'm telling you that even when I go through [airport security,] and I have to get patted down, they're not, nothing's registering to them. It's just registered [as] male. My point is, is that I think I miss [the backlas], because I'm constantly in a privileged way of going, that I don't necessarily see [that backlash], but I do know that it's going on. I haven't experienced it myself, is what I'm saying. Like, I haven't experienced that. I do have fear, though, that when I'm traveling, that if— and I have to remind family, especially, "Do not call me by my birth name. Do not address me as she, because you could get me killed." That I know. Like when I say something like that to my sister, or whatever it sticks. When we're out in public, it's like, you know.....—I mean, out here, it doesn't matter. I'm in a very progressive area. I don't feel threatened here. But yeah. It angers me, really, that we're going [backwards.] I'm actually, I'm afraid. I'm actually afraid that..... I was just thinking about it the other day, because I just

started transitioning three years ago, and I was thinking like, "Wow." So when I was younger, and I was hitting the streets, and throwing cans or rocks back and forth, or doing whatever the hell we were doing, as we're protesting for our rights to be here, and for others —because I also, would stand up for anyone at that point, if they weren't a MAGA [Make American Great Again— a follower of former-President Trump]. We didn't have MAGA then, I guess, but that's what scares me, I think— is that we're heading down a dark path. Like, 2024 is not going to be this year to..... it's going to be a hard year for everyone, and I think it's going to be really hard for us. I don't know, I mean, have you heard of Project 2025 [for the Republic Party]? Okay. I've been reading— I mean, I know it's like nine hundred and twenty pages, this document or whatever, and I've only seen little snippets of it. I haven't read it myself, actually, but like, it's LGBTQ+ everywhere. They are [aiming for us.] I sit here sometimes, and I think, like, "Okay, so what does this mean for me?" And, "At my age, like, what can I still do?" Right? I'm not a keyboard warrior kind, because I'm not, I'm just not that. But I still think that I still have some life in me, and I'll probably hit the streets. I had the question of, like, "What do I do to keep my passport close? [Should I] call my Canadian friends, or stay here and say, 'Fuck you?'" I'll probably stay and say, "Fuck you."

01:01:09 **Andrew Darien**

Do you have any idea of what this backlash is all about? I mean, for a while, it felt like things were getting better. What do you think's changed, or why do you think it's changed?

01:01:28 **Bluiston DeYoung**

So, Donald Trump shows up on the scene. I don't think Donald Trump is the is the brains behind it, by any means, but I think they've been in the woodwork, and the [Right] waited for a moment for somebody to come. [Now,] here you are, you have Trump, a narcissist, who could have been a Democrat. He could be, you know.... —I'm so glad he's not, because just imagine if he was running the country as a Democrat, I don't know. I don't, I think we'd be in the same [situation.] He's a narcissist. He's a malignant narcissist, he's one of the most dangerous narcissists. They've been waiting for him, and I don't know..... they've always been there, right, the haters. I think there's just a majority of people who would like to see us all go back to women, queers— just go back to a time when we either didn't exist, and women were just obedient. I mean, it's hate. Hate's behind it. That's a hard [question.] I can't answer that because I don't know why people can't just [live.] I don't know why these people feel like they've been disenfranchised. It makes me laugh when I hear people, white people especially, say they've been disenfranchised. I'm like, "Well, how does my being trans disenfranchise you? How am I taking rights away?" It's hate, it's hate. It's just, it's hate. They've been waiting and waiting for their messiah, and they got him. I've got a guy who lives across the street, interesting enough, as progressive as this [town] is, and he's a Trumper, or he was, and he would put his Trump flag so high up. And on top of that, it was this small Trump flag, mind you, because he didn't want it to be noticed when you're driving by, because he's not in the majority [here.] But, here he is [anyways.] I don't even understand you, like, why? That's a hard [question.] I can't answer that one, I guess, very well. Unless I answered it the best I could, but hate is all I got. These people hate, they just hate.

01:04:01 **Andrew Darien**

Maybe the reason I asked the question is because it's hard for me to identify an answer as well, so—

01:04:13 **Andrew Darien**

I mean, bullies, right, they go after the ones they can pick on. The LGBT community is a blend of, of minorities, in a way. People of color— it's a blend of minorities, so here's their way to get all minorities, I don't know, a bunch of us at the same time. It's no longer.....—it's like, I guess, I don't know. It's not a good thing to call it about color, but it is also about color, so we'll just blame it on the queers. We'll take it out on the gays, is what we'll do, and the trans.

01:05:04 **Andrew Darien**

Well, if your interaction with those cops outside of Fran's is any indication about how to deal with bullies, there's something to be said for fighting back, whether that's physically, through legislation, activism, or otherwise,[or not].

01:05:18 **Bluiston DeYoung**

I'm afraid it might be otherwise.

01:05:23 **Andrew Darien**

Let me give you one last question: What do you most want people to know, or remember, about your generation, when they're— fifty years from now, when somebody's listening to this interview, what do you think is most important for them to know about your experience?

01:05:51 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Hmm. About my experience? Well, I don't know. That's hard to answer. Growing up queer? Like, that.....to be.....I mean, to just keep going. I don't know. I'm not sure how to answer the question. What do I want people to get out of my experience? Whatever they can take from it. I only shared a small piece of my experience as being queer, or being in this world, but I think that we still have a lot of work to do. My generation, we kicked a lot of ass, I mean, for a lot. I mean, I don't consider myself the Boomer generation [, the one following WWII], even though I was born in 1960, I lean more towards Generation X. I hear there's Generation Jones, I think that's where we might be— which was the 'punk' generation, so anyway. I don't know. I don't know how to explain that, I guess. I'm lost at what somebody should get from my experience. Whatever they can get. Stand up, keep going.

01:07:36 **Andrew Darien**

We've already covered a tremendous amount of terrain, and there's no doubt that there's lots in your story, in your perspective, that I think people will learn from. So, thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me, and I'm very grateful.

01:07:56 **Bluiston DeYoung**

Alright! Well, I hope I added to it.