

Video Title: Ruth & Claudio Video 1

Interviewee: Ruth Sullivan

Interviewee: Claudia Brick

Interviewer: Unknown

Transcriber: Jordan C-T

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Formatter: Serena R.

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Interviewer: Alright, we're rolling.

Brick: Go ahead and go.

Sullivan: My first story, I guess, is about coming out in Baton Rouge. My name is Ruth Sullivan. I was working as a weekend director and master control for part-time during the week. Anyway, AIDS had just started. No one knew what caused it, no one knew where it was coming from, all they knew is that all the gay men in San Francisco were getting this cancer and then dying off quickly, and it seemed like the first time I heard about it was when half the gay population was already dead. So to me, it was something else, keeping abreast on, and noticing more every day how people had changed their opinions about gay and bisexual people. It was just very negative. Anyway, I was a happy closet case. One weekend—it was a Friday going into the weekend—the storyline read “queer disease.” I had a problem with that—they wouldn't have put the N-word up there or anything like that—course they had no problem putting the word ‘queer.’ I wasn't offended by that, but that was just the beginning, because later that evening, they were going over what they were doing, the news anchors were discussing what they'd show at 10, and the anchorman said, “Well, you know all those queers should be lined up and shot.” And I was at the other end of the control room, actually it was the newsroom, and I heard him say that, and my jaw just dropped, and I just blurted out, “Well, Jay, I'm queer, are you gonna shoot me?” And you could hear a pin drop. So I repeated myself, to make sure everybody heard: “Jay, I'm queer. Are you gonna line me up and shoot me?” And he goes, “Oh no, Ruth, I meant” something blah blah, backstepping the whole way. He was embarrassed to be caught by showing, I think, his bigotry, in general because I think news personalities are thought to be a little more liberal and open sort of people and they weren't. Anyway, that's how I came out in Baton Rouge. How'd you come out?

Claudia: It sort of was a long process. I just want to comment and tag in on what you were talking about, about the gay male population being decimated in San Francisco. I have a younger brother, who is about Ruth's age, and he was a bartender in San Francisco. And he saw literally, he said I think, 500 or so of his friends died; an entire generation of gay men died. He always assumed that he was gonna die too. So he didn't care if he racked up credit card

debts and took bankruptcy and stuff—they'd send him another one and he'd do it again. But he just always assumed he would die so he never planned for the future. Well, he's now still alive, and happy living on a few acres out north of Sacramento twenty years later. He's HIV, and all of his boyfriends died, but he never got full-blown AIDS. Some people even in the medical community call that San Francisco's dirty little secret, which is impossible to document because of the disbursement of the people, but it turns out that a lot of the men who were alcoholics and on meth are still alive. There's like some chemical combination just would not allow the virus to grab hold. It's an interesting notion that floats that will never be able to be proven or not.

My own coming out story was, well sort of, I came out a little bit, then went back and then came out. I was working at the telephone company and I ended up having an affair with my supervisor. We worked graveyard shift, and we'd go over to her mother's dry cleaners at our lunch hour. [laughs] We'd say "We have to go pick up my dry cleaners, Claudia you wanna come? "Yeah I'll come, I'm with you." So in the middle of three o'clock in the morning, we'd go to the dry cleaners and make out. Her husband, who worked swing shift, knew that something was going on, but he didn't know what. But he knew that if he wanted to save his family, he had to move them away somewhere, so he packed up his family and moved them out of state. And then I sort of went back into the closet and putzed around until I left the Bay Area and went to Oregon to go to school. At which time I hooked up with a bunch of radical lesbians at Reed College. And they were very radical. And then from there, I discovered women's softball. Things settled into a sort of a happy gay athletic experience. [laughter].

Sullivan: That it, yeah. Okay, story. Guess we can talk about the wedding story.

Interviewer: I'm going to try and move this just a little because I just noticed it's got a bubble here, that I'm supposed to, that means it—

Brick: Oh. You're supposed to be on the bubble.

Interviewer: It's supposed to be in the middle I assume.

Brick: I thought I told you it was crooked.

Interviewer: Yes you did you and you were so right

Brick: Pay any attention!

Interviewer: You were very right

Brick: Oh I hate that.

Interviewer: Ok we're good now. And the bubble's in the middle.

[laughs]

Sullivan: You wanna get that picture for me.

Brick: Yes.

Sullivan: You mind getting the wedding thing?

Brick: No I wouldn't mind.

Sullivan: Good. Because I can hold that up for you. [Holds photo.] You can get full-screen of it. You tell me.

Interviewer: Oh there that's good. We got it. This is Claudia and Ruth's wedding picture.

Sullivan: I had just come out of the hospital. So I had no hair whatsoever. I'd been battling ovarian cancer for a couple of years now.

Brick: We got married in West Hollywood [Holds wedding certificate] on the weekend that the city of West Hollywood set up a bunch of gazebos or cabanas.

[END OF VIDEO]