

Outright Radio

**Series 2003**

www.OutrightRadio.org

Comments@OutrightRadio.org

1-866-688-7234

## Leaving the Gay Ghetto Show

From PRI, Public Radio International, it's Outright Radio, I'm David Gilmore. Today on ORR, stories of leaving the gay ghettos – folks who have become pioneers, setting out from big city gay life on a quest for an easier life or a chance to start over and what happens when they get there...

First up, my own story of leaving coastal California for the blazing sun of southern Arizona...

*“The unglamorous reality was settling in: I was a big city homo moving to strip mall hell with a climate akin to a blow dryer left on high. God, no, I thought. I come from the land of trolleys on hills, pastel architecture and puffy clouds. But now, I've made a terrible, terrible mistake.”*

Later on Barbara Bernstein tells how a recent wave of lesbian immigrants have continued the legacy of the **previous** generation of lesbians in Portland, Oregon...

*“Joa will show up in a tank top, no bra. She'll wear a crazy, crooked straw hat and handwrite bills with purple pen and the professionalism is in her work. It doesn't need to be in appearance. Whether she could do that anywhere else, I don't know.”*

And finally the story of Tim Albee who traded in his grand life in West Hollywood for a tiny cabin in rural Alaska...

*“Seeing the places where you wouldn't pass another human being, wouldn't pass another car, maybe the gas station was dry, or all it was a diner and gas station. It felt like home. There was no pretense, there was no fancy façade on the front of the building to make it look better than it was. It simply was what it was. And to me that's home.”*

All true stories and all on a theme of Leaving the Gay Ghettos... Today on Outright Radio. We hope you'll join us for the next hour as we present these extraordinary stories from the heart of gay America.

Music

In the 1970's, riding the wave of Stonewall and the new civil rights movement, gay folks began to leave their hometowns and flock to big cities to come out and exercise their power and freedom in the safety of numbers. Of course gay civil rights was in its infancy and now, 30 years later, as queer life has become more mainstream, people are beginning to stay put in their hometowns, or choosing a life in smaller cities. This of course is changing the social landscape and demography of small and medium size cities across America. It is also leaving holes in the ghettos.

Music

Now, If you've ever spent much time around gay men, you know that almost always, at some point, dinner conversations will eventually turn to discussions of sex. Who's done whom? Size comparisons...you get the idea. Well, for gay folks living in the Bay Area of California, one of the most prominent centers for gay life in the world, the topic of sex at the dinner table has become supplanted by the topic of the rising cost of housing. At one point, in the maelstrom of SF's real estate boom, I simply couldn't bear to hear of yet another artist, yet another dance company being evicted for the dot.com loft space. Then the crisis arrived on my own doorstep and I was faced with the decision of complaining about it or saying goodbye. I said goodbye.

Music

A year later, for better or for worse, I'm living far from the temperate climes, and easy sexuality of the Bay Area. Our show on leaving the gay ghettos begins with my own story...

David Gilmore's piece:

DG: I was born in California. 1964 – Orange County – back when there were still orange groves near our tract house in Placentia. At age 9 we left when my father was laid off from the dwindling space program. I was whisked away to South Florida where I spent my whole sweaty childhood, longing for the day when I could return to California. In 1988 I came back, this time to San Francisco as a young gay man seeking the companionship of other wild and free-spirited gay folks. 13 amazing years later, I left California once again. My awakening from the California Dream began with a phone message on May 29, 2001...

Answering machine message from Macken giving us notice.

“Hi David this is Tracy with Macken properties, just rec'd an email today the 29th from Loni West they are coming back to the US and want to make the house their permanent residence. So, umm they're giving you notice of that and would like the house vacated by August 1st – that's a couple months. (cut the rest).

We were living in Santa Cruz - just south of San Francisco - that spring. Santa Cruz is a place that if Norman Rockwell painted pictures of California surf towns with hippies, this would be the town. Santa Cruz was Shangri-la to the Bay Area. Virtually free from the traffic, crime and environmental degradation of the rest of the Bay Area. Santa Cruz is home to a very large lesbian population and has the highest per capita occurrence of men who refer to each other as “brother.”

We had this funky little community house about a mile from the beach in a very middle-class neighborhood. Nothing fancy about this house. And we were paying a very modest \$1,325 a month. There were 4 of us living there – John the gay performance artist/computer tech, Robert the gay opera singer who drank too much, Ian the straight comic book illustrator and me. All of us in our mid 30's to 40's – the time when most people in America are having their second child or refinancing their house. I lived in a little shack in the backyard, they each had a bedroom. I worked in the garage – which was like working in a giant refrigerator with a washing machine and spiders for company.

We were typical of a creative, queer household in California, living close to the ground, tightly packed into modest quarters trying to survive the escalating cost of living.

Music

When I moved to California in the 80s, it was in the middle of the AIDS crisis and a recession was looming. For rent signs hung all over San Francisco. Not so any more. Now there were bidding wars for houses. People would line up to apply for a rental place. In fact, I paid for the deposit on our house in Santa Cruz – sight unseen. I was the first of 70 applicants to call before the rental agents finally unplugged the phone.

Music

Anyhow, when our eviction notice arrived, I knew it was the end of my life in the Bay Area. I did a quick scan of the few rental listings in the paper in Santa Cruz. An identical house down the street to ours – another ordinary 3 bedroom house was renting for \$3300 a month. I called the landlady to confirm that they hadn't misstated the price. She confirmed it. That's \$1100 per bedroom before the inflated utilities of CA are added in.

The high technology boom in Silicon Valley ushered in California's second gold rush, and strong-armed many of us artists to the door. Tired of having my life disrupted at the mercy of landlords, I knew in my bones it was time to buy a house and live in a place far from the foggy coast of California, where I could build equity and have my summers back. I set forth my criteria and began the search for: Cheap, warm and liberal. We gay folks especially like liberal.

Anything south of the 36th parallel would be considered. Using my database, the web and an atlas, I narrowed my selection to Albuquerque, NM, and Tucson, AZ. I knew some folks already in Tucson and since it was closer to the mothership California, I made my choice. Practically sight unseen, Tucson it was.

## Music

It's now June, 2001 and our community house of artists is scattering fast. Ian is moving down the street, God knows what happened to Robert and John's off to his new house-share by the sewage treatment plant. ...

Sound clip of John Brennan at his house...

JB: Ok this is my new place. (Opens door.)

DG: Oh, it's kinda ugly. Laughs. It's like 1955.

JB: Yes, it's got questionable carpeting.

DG: And what's that smell John?

JB: It's musty in here. Although this room in here doesn't smell too musty. I'm going to try and air it out.

DG: Which means you'll have to open this window onto this street. So you kinda got a noisy street...but the VIEW, you know, that's worth, HOW much are you paying?

JB: I'm paying \$670 including utilities...for a view of a sewage treatment plant that I can't hear right now because the car traffic is so bad.

DG: Once the traffic noise dies down then you can...

JB: hear the sewage treatment plant. So then I think I'm back to a place where I'll be sleeping with earplugs. But you know, even for \$670 it's a deal here in Santa Cruz.

DG: California, you know. (traffic noise. Fade out by before John Speaks next.)

Visiting John at his new house confirmed for me that I had made the right choice to get out of California.

## Music

Next week, my possessions, including some original artwork of my housemate went up on the block as we had our moving sale – hoards of people picked over my things while I sat guarding the piano.

DG: did you find anything here today that you wanted?

Shopper: Not yet. I want to know if you're going to come down on your picture frames over there.

DG: Gosh these are my roommate's.

Shopper: The one dollar guy?

DG: Laughter. (Cut noise) I would do \$5 for both.

Shopper: laughs. I was hoping it was the \$1 guy's frames and that he would go one each.

Kid: it says \$3 though.

Shopper: I know, but I was hoping that I could talk to the \$1 man in the back.

DG: But you get the artwork with it.

Shopper: Well, that's what it is, we really don't care about the artwork. Laughter. We just want the frame. We want to frame the girl's pix.

DG: I love that – we're selling the artwork and people are going to throw away the artwork and keep the frames.

Shopper: I hope I didn't insult anybody's artwork.

DG: It's OK. (fade out.)

## Music

The metaphor of someone buying our original artwork and throwing it away for the frame was biting symbolism for all the artists who left California, pushed out by the new high-techonomics. I put the remainder of my things into storage and spent the summer finishing up business and couch surfing around Northern California.

## Music

The summer of my homelessness wore on and my patience wore out. I found myself growing weary of negotiating for a bed each night, making myself invisible at people's houses and checking my email from under kitchen tables while dust bunnies gathered around my laptop.

After a couple of months of this nomadic life, I finally had enough. I was now staying with my friend Richard in San Francisco who had the requisite psycho roommate. But I didn't know she was psycho until one night I was reading quietly in the living room when she came home, flipped out told me to leave.

Music – something driving. A little tense.

I grabbed my car keys and took a cab to fetch my car – something only people in SF and NY can understand. I returned with the car to find myself separated from my lifeline – Oh MY GOD - my laptop and cell phone were locked inside the apartment. I met Richard coming up the stairs as I was dejectedly heading down to my car to leave...

Track 28: 2:55 RS: we ended up on the sidewalk outside the apt. talking about what we were going to do we were both thinking there's not much sense talking about what happened...and I already heard you talk about wanting to go to Tucson. And I put myself in your situation I think and thought if I were you, I just want to get in the car right now and just go down there and get it done. Just move. B/C that's the kind of person I am. DG: Well I am too. RS: Well we found that out. DG: We got in the car and I said I feel like going to Tucson. And we could go to Greg's house and be up all night talking about this and feeling miserable that I don't have a home and where do I stay tomorrow night. 4:00 RS: I was hoping that you would decide to go b/c it sounds like a great adventure to go. DG: And you closed your door and we stepped on it. RS: We went to AZ from SF that night. We decided to go sleep that night on the way to Tucson.

Music

I anxiously awaited my first real sight of Tucson. I had been there before – 10 years ago for 1 day. But I was too enamored with my all gay life in SF at the time that I didn't care much for Tucson then. But things were different this time around. This was an arranged marriage – a geographic choice made empirically over the web = Tucson met all those requirements: cheap, warm and liberal. OK. Cheap, HOT and basically liberal. But would I like it?

Car noises & Music

We pulled off Hwy 10 late that night. My mind was a blur of from endless hours of watching tumbleweeds and mountain ranges gliding past the car window. We drove down the main drag. I opened the window as the dry heat blasted into the car like I had just opened an oven door to find a fan inside. The unglamorous reality was settling in: I was a big city homo moving to strip mall hell with a climate akin to a blow dryer left on high. God, no, I thought. I come from the land of trolleys on hills, pastel architecture and puffy clouds. But now, I've made a terrible, terrible mistake. And then...we drove through an old neighborhood with vintage adobe houses, cactus and bouganvillea spreading up over mission walls. My heart softened and a smile came over me at the first sight of a saguaro cactus with its beheaded anthropomorphic charm. We checked in to my friend's old adobe house on a double lot with pool hot tub and guesthouse that he bought with his equity from a 1 bedroom Victorian on a busy street in Santa Cruz. We settled in for another sleepless night of house-hunting anticipation...

Music & Bird noises

Morning broke to the sounds of exotic birds and warm sunshine, a rare summertime treat for someone from the Bay Area. I marveled at all that Tucson was NOT: crowded, cold, expensive and competitive. We even got parking right in front of the house where we stayed. No street sweeping schedule. No freezing morning fog.

I had selected a realtor over the web before I left. Steven Luckett – the only out gay realtor in Tucson who wore a nifty little bow tie. Happily clad in sandals and shorts, we arrived at his office at 9 am sharp on our first day in Tucson. Meet Steven the realtor...

SL: ...I remember walking into the office and you were there and your friend was there. I thought he had fabulous glasses – they were very stylish. You both had a really good energy. I knew right then that it was going to be a good day.

DG: VO – Steven got on the computer pulled up listings in my price range – under \$125,000 – money that would buy me a trailer in Willits – 3 hours from San Francisco. I was delighted to find things in my price range. We set out looking....

Music

DG: I think my attitude was that “Oh my GOD, I can buy a house. I can afford all the houses that we walked into, basically.” And that was such an unusual thing, I’d never seen a house that I could afford before. Coming from CA. So I remember we walked into this house and it was “OK, I’ll take it.”

SL: It was a pretty fast decision. But you you know, you do know when you walk into a property...you pretty much know right away. You can kind of feel it. Oh this is the one. What a lot people aren’t able to do is say, OK let’s do it. They have to think about it. And they lose it. If they wait a day and someone else has written an offer.

DG: Well I felt like you were showing this house to Thelma & Louise. (Laughter) There was nothing holding us back. We bolted from SF and suddenly we’re at your office and the 6th house, 7th house we put an offer.

SL: You did. “It’s not very often that I just take someone out and 4 hours later I’m writing a contract.

DG: Being that you are a realtor, you certainly would be one to assess the situation. Do you find like what percentage of people moving to Tucson do you find are gay people leaving the gay cities...SF, Chicago, etc?

SL: I don’t know if I could speak to % but I do find a lot of people that are moving away from the bigger areas. For one thing b/c Tucson is affordable, you can make \$30k and buy a nice house. And that’s difficult to do in a lot of the places that might be considered gay meccas. The bigger cities with all the energy and the gay ghettos. The concentrations of people. That’s one thing that T doesn’t have – it’s spread out all over the place. There are certain neighborhoods that have more gay people in them. My neighborhood in particular b/c I keep selling houses to gay people and putting them in my neighborhood. I think a lot of people are looking for an easier way of life and they’re looking for a place that is comfortable to live is affordable to live and has a nice climate. And Tucson does for the most part. We’re kinda hot, but you can get around that...you can take clothes off.

DG: Yes you can. Go ahead. (Laughter)

Music

So, that’s where my story ends. I’m now fast approaching 40 here in the desert.

I can’t say it’s been happily ever after here and that my transition was seamless. I miss the people I left behind in the Bay Area. I have spent a lot of time scratching around the desert for the more interesting and intellectual gay people that I love to pepper my life with. They’re here. But they’re not everywhere I turn. They’re not the PhDs serving lattes at the cafés in San Francisco. They’re in line at Home Depot or they’re at Wingspan, the gay community center where I volunteered at the front desk when I first moved here.

Sound clip of me answering the phone at Wingspan.

DG: :03 Good afternoon Wingspan, this is David...

For me, life in Tucson is more integrated, and it’s more ordinary. Yeah. More ordinary. It’s something I love and something I struggle with. I no longer have those frequent peak experiences of being high on a hilltop overlooking the ocean with a boyfriend and watching the fog roll in over the golden gate bridge. Driving around the scorching streets of Tucson, I rarely see gay couples walking hand-in-hand like I did in San Francisco...though that could be because mostly NO one walks anywhere in Tucson...

But life here is good enough. I’m not sure I could be here, had I NOT lived in those gay ghettos of New York and California for 16 years. When I was younger, I needed to surround myself with gay folks constantly for the affirmations – to see on the outside that I was just fine on the inside. I needed to see a gay couple sharing a chocolate shake in the front window at the Hot n Hunky in the Castro. My own personal belief has been to push myself into realms where I’m not comfortable. So here I am in the desert without that daily external validation.

Begin music under.

Is there life after the gay ghettos? For those with a sense of adventure and a willingness to adapt to a new way of life, for those willing to be pioneers, like the Jews in Israel making the desert bloom, the answer is a resounding yes.

And you know the most wonderful thing I've discovered, is that California is great place to visit...

Music: *Motherland* by Natalie Merchant

DG: Well a recent development in my life since the recording of this piece. Leaving the comfort of the gay ghettos of California seems to have thrust me into the role of **activist** as I find myself reaching for the same freedoms that I took for granted in the mothership. Point in case: what **gay** bar in their right mind would throw drag queens out? Well, much to my shock, it happened here recently in Tucson. A group of 4 of us dressed up in drag for the holidays last year and went out bar hopping. At our first stop, we were refused service because we were in dresses. Remember, this is a gay bar and keep reminding yourself, this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century **and** that the gay civil rights movement began with drag queens in a bar.

But the ethos (pr. Ethas) of Tucson at times seems to cling archaically to the dusty memories of the wild west where folks running a saloon or even the local public radio station stubbornly refuse to upgrade their values to modern thinking. So in the spirit of Stonewall, we drag queens put our heads together, without mussing our hairdos, and made the decision to stay. So the bar called in the police and threw us out. There we were – 4 beautiful drag queens – freezing in the night air outside the bar!

Well, while the bar owner was busy passing beer around in the 70s, the City of Tucson was busy passing a law that extends the right of public accommodation to **anyone**, regardless of (among other things) their gender identification. And fortunately for us, one in the group that was chucked out, without ever being served a drink, was a lawyer with a fondness for public service. Our complaints to the Equal Opportunity Office were filed the next day.

Quote from the Wizard of Oz: “Toto, I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

Coming up: Lesbians continue to shape the culture of Portland and Tim Albee bolts from We-Ho to Faibanks. We'll be back with more stories of folks leaving the gay ghettos when Outright Radio continues... from PRI Public Radio International.

Break

You're listening to Outright Radio, pause from PRI, Public Radio International, I'm David Gilmore. You can contact us at [Comments@OutrightRadio.org](mailto:Comments@OutrightRadio.org) or call us toll-free at 866-OUTRADIO. That's 866-688-7234.

Now back to our theme of Leaving the Gay Ghettos...

Intro to Barbara Bernstein's piece:

Since the 60's, Portland, Oregon has developed a reputation for being a major attractor of young counter-culture folks. Lesbians comprise a **significant** number of these newcomers seeking a life in the company of other alternative-thinkers. Portland producer Barbara Bernstein was part of the first wave of lesbian immigrants in 1971.

As you'll soon hear, Barbara compares her experiences adopting Portland as her new home over thirty years ago with what's happening with the current wave of young lesbians coming to Portland.

Barbara Bernstein's piece:

BB: A few years ago I began having deja vue whenever I went over to the Hawthorne District of Portland. This area has been the center of a large lesbian community since the early 1970s when I first moved here. Back then Hawthorne Blvd. was a funky business district. There was a used bookstore, a stoned out shoe maker and some neighborhood taverns. But tucked between these businesses that you would never find any reason to patronize, were a free women's clinic and a crafts cooperative. On Belmont Street—an even seedier strip six blocks to the north—was the office for an underground newspaper and the studios of KBOO community radio. Both streets were filled with longhaired hippie men and

shorthaired hippie lesbians who lived in rambling communal houses on the side streets than ran between Hawthorne and Belmont. The lack of a vibrant business district didn't matter to this youth community because their social and cultural world revolved around what was happening in people's houses and backyards. In the early 1980s many of Portland's counter-cultural endeavors turned into small businesses, than began to line both sides of Hawthorne Blvd. By the 90s, this cultural renaissance had reached all the way north to Belmont Street as well.

Until a few years ago the Hawthorne district was dominated by baby boomers like myself. Then I started noticing more and more young people hanging out on the Boulevard and the most surprising thing was that they looked just like we looked in the 1970s.

Recently I've gotten to know some of the younger lesbians who are part of this scene. Like Lori Edmunson, a landscaper and visual artist who moved to Portland a few years ago from Atlanta.

Lori: I visited Portland for a couple days and all I had to see was every other car having a bike on the back. The attraction for me was being around people that appreciate being outside.

I met Lori through Joa, a young lesbian who has been pruning our trees for the past couple years. As we work together in my yard, Joa and Lori tell me about their community of friends, many who have just recently moved to Portland. It reminds me of the community I hung out in thirty years ago when I first came here. It seems when you first come to Portland, you only meet other people who have also just recently arrived, but after you've been here maybe ten or fifteen years, you lose touch with the newcomer community. So it was fascinating to get a glimpse into a new community of young lesbians in Portland who are experiencing this place much in the same way that I experienced it when I first got here.

Corie: There's so many parks in this town, it's amazing.

Lori's friend Corie McMillan was born in Portland but spent most of her life in the Bay Area. Recently Corie returned to live in Portland again.

Corie: I think it's very important to the lesbian community in general to be close to nature and there's much more awareness in our community about being healthy and eating organic food. I think in general lesbians are much more in touch with the sort of natural part of our world and it's funny too. You don't even have to start out wanting to be interested in that. I think that once you get into the lesbian community there's no way of getting around it, you're going to have a bunch of friends that are going to draw you in there whether you like it or not.

Portland's biggest attraction is probably that it's not that much of a city. It lacks an impressive downtown or the expansive watery vistas of Seattle or San Francisco. Its lesbian scene doesn't even make it into the usual gay tour books. What seems to be drawing this whole new wave of lesbians to Portland are the same things that drew me and my friends thirty years ago. There are farms right outside the city where you can go buy produce. There are vast acres of wilderness-like parks within the city limits. Because of Oregon's statewide land use planning laws, urban sprawl is less of a plague around Portland than most cities. It's easy to drive an hour or less in any direction and find yourself in spectacular country. So if you like hiking, skiing, snow boarding, kayaking, wind surfing or meditating in the mountains, Portland is an ideal base camp.

When you live in a place for a long time it's easy to get hung up on what's changed, what's lost, and to yearn for that mythic past before this place was discovered and ruined by too many people. Talking with Lori and Corie, I begin to realize that maybe not that much has really changed here in Portland. Sure there's a few more high rises downtown than there were when I moved here. There are suburbs at the edge of town where there used to be farms and forests and the metropolitan area has nearly doubled in thirty years. Yet the do-it-yourself attitude, that was one of the things that was so attractive about the counter-cultural scene in Portland in the 70s seems to have survived and even evolved into a new entrepreneurial spirit.

Lori: Portland is more likely to support somebody that is self-employed. People want to support the smaller businesses and that's very clear with no McDonalds on Hawthorne. They don't want the chains to come in.

Corie: This town is much more welcoming to people just doing their own thing. The other day I was at a Thanksgiving dinner party and I just let the people there know that I was not working. Got a job for me and Lori that night. This town thrives on locally owned business, thrives on the fact that Sauvies Island is so close and everybody gets their produce from there. I love it, it's amazing.

When I came to Portland in 1971, I had a couple hundred bucks to my name. Although my total living expenses were \$50, I needed to get a job. While most of the rest of the country was still riding on the tail end of the prosperity of the 1960s, it seemed that Portland had never really recovered from the Great Depression. So I went to the food stamp office before I going to the unemployment office. I never really had to look for a job though because one of my new friends offered me half of her shift at the childcare center where she was working. There I made \$100 a month, and in six months was able to save enough money to go traveling for a couple months. The cost of living in Portland has probably increased tenfold since then, and currently with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, Oregon is not exactly the place you move to find a job, yet Corie and Lori's experiences don't seem that different from my own.

Lori: I've always had to move and like find a job and sometimes it's a lot harder but in Portland it was the first time I ever that it just seemed like it just fell into my lap. Got here with a \$150, decided that I needed to go look for a job. I was looking in the paper, saw some convention center banquet server position, started driving to look for it and I ended up on a bridge but I decided to follow this truck. For some reason, I was like, I'm just going to follow this truck and it pulled me right up to Bridgeport Brew Pub. I walked right in. The place was crowded, good music. There were two guys at the bar. One, this beautiful bald guy and then this flaming guy next to him. So I immediately asked if they were hiring and they said, wow, actually we are because so and so quit last week. Got an application and immediately got an interview right there within five minutes.

If you're looking to climb the corporate ladder, Portland has never been the place to be, but Lori had no trouble piecing together enough part-time work to support herself and still have time for the important things in life: like biking and snow boarding. One of the jobs she landed was with a landscaping company, where she met Joa. The company was owned by a couple conservative born-again Christians who had a hard time with Joa's total refusal to use chemical pesticides. They hoped when they hired Lori that she wasn't going to be another "organic fanatic." Joa's organic approach was all new to Lori, but she found it inspiring. Lori didn't last long at the landscaping company.

Lori: I quit. It was a little too routine for me. You did the same thing every week in the same people's yards so that to me just wasn't fun anymore and then that's when I started painting and I think for Joa to see how easy it was for me to get business painting, that's when she quit. She got a loan from her brother, bought a truck, bought all the equipment and she's been busy ever since and we've worked together quite a bit.

Joa's company is called Mama's Landscaping. We found out about her from some lesbian friends and she's been working for us for a couple years now. High up in our hundred year old rhododendron trees she looks like a forest sprite. She told us that the trees tell her how they want to be pruned and she just follows their advice.

Lori: Joa will show up in a tank top, no bra. She'll wear a crazy, crooked straw hat and handwrite bills with purple pen and the professionalism is in her work. It doesn't need to be in appearance. Whether she could do that anywhere else, I don't know.

Portland has always been a casual town and that's reflected in more ways than one's work attire. Rigid social codes, that tend to divide communities in other cities aren't so apparent in Portland and it's easier to hang out with a mix of different people at places like Corie's favorite lesbian bar, the Egyptian Room.

Corie: It's very diverse in there. The kinds of lesbians that go to that place are all across the board, which is really interesting and really nice for me because it is not like that in the Bay Area. If you go into a place people look you up and down, make sure that they're okay with what you're wearing before they can talk to you.

Lori: I visited Atlanta four or five months ago. I met a bunch of people out at a bar. You know, Atlanta is hot. Everybody's wearing like a pants suit, lipstick. I was like, it's 85 degrees outside. How come no one's wearing shorts?

Corie: I'm a very outgoing person and I didn't like it that I couldn't go into places in San Francisco without getting looked up and down and I could see people's wheels turning like, do I want to talk to that girl or not? I don't know. Does

she dress cool enough for me? I really love Portland because it's not like that at all. You can talk to anybody around here and nine out of ten times they'll just sit down and have a really long conversation with you.

If you want to get away from fashion trends and glamour, Portland is still the place to go—one more way in which Portland, despite its growth over the past couple decades, still doesn't feel like a big city.

Lori: The bigger city, you make more money because you have to. It's more expensive just to live there.

Corie: When I was living in Oakland I had this job in downtown San Francisco that I was making more money than I've ever made in my life and I was living underneath a freeway in Oakland. There was exhaust soot all over my windowsills, there was people getting mugged a block away from me. There was crack heads on my doorsteps sometimes. Even though there's something I really like about that, I sort of like the griminess of Oakland sometimes, there's something really romantic to me about it, but it's hard. Moving up here I was paying about \$300 less for a house that had two bedrooms and a gigantic backyard in a nice neighborhood with very nice neighbors and for instance, I haven't been working for three months and I'm still eating every day and still paying my rent. I don't think I could do that in Oakland. I'd be, I'd be struggling, I'd be crying every day if I was down there right now, but here in Portland I'm kind of getting by.

Lori: In Portland people aren't so concerned about money. It's more about having a career that you like, that makes you feel fulfilled and like you're making a difference. I think there's a lot more activism.

Corie: I am a person that if you hit me hard enough I would splinter off in a million pieces and I don't really like being put in one jar. It's very easy to experience all those parts of yourself here as opposed to other places. And the thing that I really like about Portland is, even though there's people that come from very different backgrounds than I do here, people are much more willing here in Portland to find that common thread with you. Last night I just had something happen to me that was really great. We went out to this bar last night. I was standing next to this man that looked like he was in the Marine Corps, he was really tough he had a crew cut and this big bomber jacket, someone who if I was going to generalize and stereotype him and myself, we would not get along at all. We'd be fighting, we would have very different political agendas. I ended up talking to him for a good hour last night and we were just cracking each other up and making jokes about how if people looked at us and were generalizing us they would not understand why we were talking but that was so funny because we kind of look alike. It was just nice. I don't think that happens as much in other towns. I think that people are much more true to their stereotypes in other towns because we all make each other that way and it just doesn't happen like that in Portland so much. People are much more free to be exactly what they want to be and to change their mind about it too. Wake up the next day and decide to be something else.

Corie and Lori have both found that the lesbian scene in Portland is not only looser and friendlier than the scenes in the bigger cities where they've lived, they've also discovered that the Portland lesbian community is huge.

Corie: I actually think that there's a larger, more diverse and more close-knit community here in Portland than there is in Oakland. You see gay people everywhere here, everywhere, like every other car has a freedom flag and there's just gay people everywhere and they're hanging out with straight people and they're hanging out with other gay people. We're in every single neighborhood. I fit in to a few kinds of different communities here which is real nice too. I fit in the lesbian community, I fit in a working class community that doesn't always include lesbians. I fit into sort of a politically active, hippie awareness community. In the Bay Area you had to choose one, that's all you really could belong to and if you wanted to sort of straddle a couple of different communities it was a little more difficult. You weren't as supported in doing that. There's a real small-town feel here. Even though I see it keeps getting bigger and bigger its still feels like a small town. It reminds me of the towns I grew up in, in Southern Oregon and Northern California that were only like 2 or 3,000 people. I think people really carry around that sense of community in here.

Lori discovered the small town in Portland almost immediately after moving here. She had just biked over to a restaurant in downtown Portland to celebrate getting her first job, working at Portland's finest brew pub. As she was locking her bike to the bike rack outside the restaurant she knocked over someone else's bike.

Lori: I was like nervous, I was kind of like looking around and this somewhat odd looking kind of goofy guy came out with these yellow clogs. I was like, I'm really sorry and he was like that's okay, it's a sturdy bike, come on in and I'll buy

you a beer. I sit between him and this other guy Mike and this ends up being Bud Clark, the old mayor of Portland. I knocked over his bike, he bought me a beer. Why, of course I love Portland, I'm never leaving.

After 31 years in Portland, I still have never knocked over an ex-mayor's bike. But the longer I live here the more reasons I find to stay. Getting to know this place is a life-long labor of love and many of the things that hold me here now I didn't even know existed when I first came here. And then much of what makes Portland such an attractive place today for lesbian feminists like myself—as well as Lori and Corie's generation—are the changes wrought by the wave of newcomers that I was part of in 1971. I can only imagine what Lori and Corie and their friends have in store for us.

## Music

DG: Barbara Bernstein in Portland. Original music for this piece was composed and performed by Barbara Bernstein along with Robin Chilstrom and Izetta Smith and the Hester Street Klezmer Band.

Intro Tim Albee piece:

Finally on Outright Radio, the story of a gay man who had all the glittery trappings of an A-list life in West Hollywood – the gay ghetto of Los Angeles: a high-paying job in the entertainment industry and the requisite late model VW convertible. But for Tim Albee, the material treadmill was beginning to cloud his sense of himself. And so with some notions of self-discovery and a chance to pursue a fascination with dog mushing he got in his car and drove north for a week. He landed in Fairbanks Alaska and ever since, like someone from a Jack London novel, Tim has been responding to the call of the wild...

Disney characters, Saturday morning cartoons and animated movies inspired Tim Albee. In fact, he had one of his first crushes on Robin Hood.

EVER SINCE I WAS A KID I WANTED TO WORK FOR DISNEY BECAUSE DISNEY CREATED AND PAINTED THESE MYTHS AND THESE IMAGES OF PLACES OF PURE DISTILLED EMOTION: YOU KNOW, OF PURITY AND HONESTY AND INNOCENCE. AND THIS IS WHAT I REALLY SHAPED A LOT OF MY LIFE AROUND. I REALLY WANTED TO BE A PART OF THE CREATION OF THAT. UNFORTUNATELY, BY THE TIME I GOT TO DISNEY, THE NINE OLD MEN, THE ORIGINAL CREW THAT CREATED THESE FILMS THAT WERE SO PURE AND HONEST AND FILLED WITH JUST GOOD STUFF. THEY HAD ALL DIED, MOVED ON,. AND I FINALLY WOUND UP IN LOS ANGELES AND TRIED TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT, THINKING, OKAY, DISNEY'S NOT THE PLACE THAT I ENVISIONED IT TO BE, I'LL TRY TO CREATE THAT PLACE, AND TRY TO MAKE THAT PLACE HAPPEN.

(music)

Gradually, Tim's infatuation with the charms of his Los Angeles life dwindled ...Much of what originally drew him to the area began to push him away.

I WAS SO KIND OF LETTING MYSELF BE DEFINED THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE'S EYES AND IT WAS SPLITTING ME APART INSIDE. AND I HAD HAD A LOT OF FAILED RELATIONSHIPS AT THAT TIME BECAUSE HONESTLY I WASN'T IN THE SPACE WHERE I WOULD BE RECEPTIVE TO THE KIND OF PERSON THAT I REALLY NEEDED TO BE WITH. AND IT WAS REALLY A TEARING INSIDE OF ME, WHERE I KNEW WHO I WAS AND YET THAT WAS BEING PULLED AT BY ALL THESE THINGS I WAS BEGINNING TO BELIEVE IN, TO BUY INTO MORE AND MORE.

(music)

I HAD THE LITTLE BACK CONVERTIBLE VOLKSWAGON, THE CABRIOLET, WHICH IS A VERY NICE LOOKING CAR.. I HAD A BMW R 1200C WHICH WAS A MOTORCYCLE, A CRUISER. I HAD A LOT OF MONEY SUPPOSEDLY BUT IT WAS ALL GOING INTO BUYING THINGS – GETTING THE BETTER HOUSE, GETTING THE REALLY COOL CRUISER MOTORCYCLE THAT YOU DRIVE THROUGH WEST HOLLYWOOD AND PEOPLE WOULD GO “DAMN BOY! WHOOOO!.” AND IT'S LIKE THAT'S NEAT THE FIRST 5 TIMES YOU DO IT. BUT WHY DO YOU, WHY DID I GET THAT MOTORCYCLE?

(music)

IT WAS NICE TO BE ABLE TO GO TO WEST HOLLYWOOD EVERY SO OFTEN, WHEN I NEEDED THAT, I DON'T KNOW, I WENT TO WEST HOLLYWOOD FOR TWO REASONS. ONE, IT WAS TO KIND OF GET A LITTLE INJECTION OF YOU KNOW, HEY, LOOK AT THIS, IT'S OKAY, SEEING PEOPLE WALKING DOWN THE STREET HAND-IN-HAND IN TWOSOMES AND THREESOMES AND NOT HAVING THEM BEING AFRAID OF BEING BEATEN UP. BUT EVERY TIME I WENT TO WEST HOLLYWOOD I'D COME AWAY WITH THE FEELING THAT IF I THOUGHT I WAS WEIRD THERE WAS SOMEONE TWICE AS WEIRD AS ME SITTING RIGHT NEXT TO ME, SO IT'S OKAY.

(MUSIC)

HERE IN FAIRBANKS, THERE IS NO COMPARISON. AND THAT'S ONE OF THE CHALLENGES, THAT'S ACTUALLY PART OF WHY I CAME HERE. I CAME HERE TO KIND OF FIND MYSELF AND I KNOW IT SOUNDS CORNY BECAUSE WHEREVER YOU GO THERE YOU ARE. BUT YOU DO HAVE TO FIND YOURSELF. AND I'D GOTTEN SO INVOLVED AND WRAPPED UP IN ALL THESE EXTERNAL DEFINITIONS OF MYSELF HAVING LIVED IN LOS ANGELES THAT I LOST TRACK OF ME.

Tim arrived in Alaska about two years ago, sight unseen. He'd thought Colorado would be the state to offer him refuge from the big city some day – he'd lived there before and loved it. But ultimately he decided Colorado was too crowded, too easy.

I'VE ALWAYS HAD THESE KIND OF SEMI-ROMANTIC THOUGHTS ABOUT BEING IN A PLACE WHERE WHETHER YOU LIVE OR DIE DEPENDS ON YOUR OWN ABILITY TO GET STUFF DONE. (MUSIC, LOW AND HOLD UNDER)... I CAME HERE FOR SPIRITUAL REASONS, TO GET BACK TO THE SENSE OF SELF THAT I HAD WHEN I WAS LIVING IN COLORADO ON MT. EVANS. AND WHAT BETTER PLACE TO COME TO FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE THAN A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN'T HOLD ON TO ANYTHING ANY MORE, YOU KNOW, I FIND THAT I HAVE TO STARE THESE PIECES OF MYSELF RIGHT IN THE FACE AND TAKE THEM INTO ACCOUNT AND IF THERE'S SOMETHING THAT MAKES ME UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT MYSELF, I HAVE TO DEAL WITH IT, I CAN'T IGNORE IT. (MUSIC OUT)

His priorities and his needs have changed. He's learned to use a gun to protect himself and his dogs from moose and bears. He makes the one-hour trip into Fairbanks in a quarter-ton pick-up truck.

(truck stops, engine cut, door slams.)

IT CARRIES ALL THE DOGS, IT CARRIES THE SLED, IT CARRIES THE WATER, IT CARRIES THE DOG FOOD.

(fiddling with dog boxes)

Dog mushing is a major focus of Tim's current life. He sees it as a way to be in nature, to bond with his dogs and to challenge himself. And challenge him it does. As the culmination of his first mushing season last spring, Tim and a friend each planned to take a team about 60 miles into a remote cabin in the Brooks Range, north of the Arctic Circle. (begin mushing sounds) After the gear had all been packed, the friend opted to pull HER sled with a snowmobile instead.

AND TO MAKE THINGS EASIER FOR ME SHE WAS GOING TO TAKE ALL THE HEAVY AND SUPERFLUOUS STUFF THAT I REALLY DIDN'T NEED FOR THE TRIP SO I COULD MAKE IT IN ONE DAY INSTEAD OF TWO. THE COOKER WAS IN ONE OF THE CONTAINERS THAT SHE HAD TAKEN AND I REMEMBER WATCHING THIS CONTAINER GO AND THINKING, IT DIDN'T OCCUR TO ME THE COOKER WAS IN THERE, I REMEMBER THINKING, YEAH, IT'S HEAVY. IT WAS HEAVY BECAUSE IT HAD THE COOKER AND THE HUMAN FOOD.

(MUSIC)

Deep fresh snow forced the dogs to run slowly, and Tim rested them often. After one stop, the dogs took off before Tim was ready. He had to lunge for the moving sled, hoping to grab a hold. He succeeded because his wrist got caught in a dangling rope loop.

SO IT'S GOT MY WRIST AND PULLING MY MITTEN OFF. SO I SLAM MY HAND DOWN INTO THE SNOW, SO THAT MY WRIST'S JUST TOTALLY IS BEING ALMOST CUT OFF BY THIS THIN LITTLE PIECE OF ROPE. AND I START DRAGGING MYSELF FORWARD LIKE IN THOSE STARSKY AND HUTCH MOVIES WHEN SOME GUY'S STUCK UNDER A SEMI TRUCK. GRAB HOLD OF THIS METAL BAR FOR THE ALUMIUNUM BREAK, PULL MYSELF UP AND FINALLY GET UP TO THE HANDLE BOW, GET MY KNEES IN THE DRAG, STOMP THE OTHER KNEE INTO THE ALUMUMUM BREAK. STOP THE DOGS. CLAW MY WAY UP. NONE OF THE DOGS ARE AWARE THAT ANYTHING BAD HAS HAPPENED EXCEPT FOR STRAWBERRY SHE'S LOOKING BACK AT ME LIKE, "YEAH, SHOULDA HELD ON, IDIOT."

(dog barking)

The trip wore on. Tim found his sleeping bag too light for the zero-degree night. Hungry and tired, but unable to camp out, he urged the dogs on. Tim feared for his life. The dogs led him to safety.

(dog sounds)

I LOOK AT WHAT THE DOGS ARE AND DO ON A MOMENT BY MOMENT BASIS AND THEY'RE KIND OF LIKE I GUESS YOU COULD SAY MY SPIRITUAL TEACHERS. THEY PUT INTO PRACTICE THE KIND OF HONESTY, MOMENT TO MOMENT, UP FRONT, BEING COMPLETELY HONEST WITH EVERYTHING, THAT IT IS THE GREAT HUMAN TEACHERS HAVE TOLD US WE SHOLD BE LIKE. I MEAN, YEA, THEY DO WEIRD THINGS. BUT THAT'S OKAY. THEY'RE HONEST ABOUT IT. I MEAN, IT'S LIKE ME BEING GAY... YEAH, THAT'S NONSTANDARD. BUT THE THING IS, THIS LIFE IS PRETTY DAMN ROUGH. IT'S PRETTY DAMN HARD. AND IF BEING WITH ANOTHER MALE IS WHAT I NEED TO MAKE IT LIVABLE, WHAT BUSINESS IS IT OF ANYBODY ELSE?

(music; cross fade with computer sounds)

YOU'RE LOOKING DOWN AT AN ISOMETRIC VIEW, AND THERE IS A PARTIALLY GHOSTED WOLF THAT I JUST LOADED, THIS STATUE SCULPTURE. AND I CAN ROTATE THE CAMERA'S FIELD OF VIEW AROUND IT...

Tim still spends hours in front of a computer each day. He uses a software package called Lightwave to create digital paintings. It's work similar to the animation he did at Disney when he lived in Los Angeles, except now, he says, he has complete artistic control.

MOST PEOPLE THINK OF 3-D ART AS HARSH, SHARP-EDGED COMPUTER STUFF REFLECTING SPHERES, CHESS BOARD OR WHATEVER. THE WORK THAT I DO I TRY TO MAKE IT LOOK JUST LIKE GOOD ART, IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT HAS BEEN USED TO CREATE IT.

Tim's writing his second Lightwave manual. He's had gallery shows around Fairbanks. At an opening downtown, he set up a laptop to show visitors the software.

(ambient sound from gallery) I NEVER REALLY THOUGHT I'D BE ABLE TO GET 3-D STUFF THAT STANDS ON ITS OWN AS ART, AT LEAST NOT YET, I MEAN, GIVE IT A COUPLE MORE YEARS. BUT A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO I JUST DECIDED TO GIVE IT A TRY. NEAT. VERY, VERY NEAT. I'M CAPTIVATED. NOW I HAVE TO GO LOOK AT IT AGAIN. IT'S CAPTIVATING. IT JUST DRAWS ME IN TO IT. (FADE OUT)

Tim's finding his place in Alaska and in this new life. (begin ambient walking sound) He's settling in, finding interesting work. He likes his new digs.

(sound of walking up steps and into house)

WE HAVE WALKED IN THE FRONT DOOR, THE CABIN IS APPROXIMATELY 18 X 24... CLOCKWISE, FIRST IS THE ART CORNER, AND LET'S SEE GOING ANOTHER HALF A FOOT WE HAVE THE VIDEO TAPE CORNER. SILVERWARE. MUSIC CORNER...

The slightly-cramped quarters don't bother Tim, but they're a long way from his 2000 square foot beige stucco house in West Los Angeles and his corporate job at Disney.

THE CABIN IS JUST ABOUT MAYBE FOUR TIMES THE SIZE OF THE CUBICLE I HAD AT DISNEY.

But Fairbanks is home now. He hasn't left the 49th state since he drove a U-haul up the Alaska Highway.

SEEING THE PLACES WHERE YOU WOULDN'T PASS ANOTHER HUMAN BEING, WOULDN'T PASS ANOTHER CAR, MAYBE THE GAS STATION WAS DRY, OR ALL IT WAS A DINER AND GAS STATION. IT FELT LIKE HOME. THERE WAS NO PRETENSE, THERE WAS NO FANCY FAÇADE ON THE FRONT OF THE BUILDING TO MAKE IT LOOK BETTER THAN IT WAS. IT SIMPLY WAS WHAT IT WAS. AND TO ME THAT'S HOME.

(MUSIC – ALASKAN FIDDLE MUSIC)

As for being a single gay man in a town not known for its night clubs or Pride festivities...

I'VE BEEN ON SOME DATES HERE, WHICH HAVE BEEN VARYING DEGREES OF LESS THAN EXCELLENT. THE GAY COMMUNITY UP HERE IS PRETTY MUCH ALMOST EXACTLY WHAT YOU WOULD EXPECT TO FIND IN LOS ANGELES. THERE ARE THE GAY COUPLES WHO ARE OUT IN THE BOONDOCKS, IN THE WOODS. BUT THEY'RE OUT IN THE BOONDOCKS, IN THE WOODS. YOU DON'T REALLY SEE THEM AT A LOT OF THESE FUNCTIONS. THEY DON'T FIT WITH THE GAY COMMUNITY AND I REALLY DON'T EITHER. BUT THE PEOPLE WHOM I'VE KIND OF TOUCHED ON WITH THE GAY COMMUNITY, THEY'RE, YOU KNOW, YOU GO TO THE GAY BAR, OR THE BAR HERE THAT HAS A GAY NIGHT AND IT'S LIKE YEA, THIS COULD BE LA, EXCEPT FOR THE DECORATIONS IN THE BAR. YOU KNOW, THE SAME ATTITUDES, THE SAME DIG ME STUFF. IT'S THE SAME, SAME STUFF.

DG: Tim Albee mushes, paints, writes, and animates in Salcha, (saul-chuh) Alaska, 30 miles down the road from Fairbanks and about 24-hundred miles north of Los Angeles. You can see his work at [timothy.artistnation.com](http://timothy.artistnation.com). Amy Mayer produced our story.

That's it, that's all.

ORR is produced in collaboration with KXCI in Tucson, Arizona. Senior editor for our show is Jesse Rose DeRooy. Our business manager is John Brennan, our marketing director is Sheila Gerzoff, and our production assistant is Sandy Mauck.

Our theme music is by Clark Suprynowicz and performed by the band "Oz." They're on the web at [www.gnumusic.net](http://www.gnumusic.net)

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This is David Gilmore - thanks for joining us.

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