CONVERSATIONS ACROSS THE GENERATIONS: GLBTI PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THEIR LIVES.


This series of dialogues has been written from the stories of GLBTI men and women of all ages, from 14 – 70 years. We thank those people for their contributions.

Young people 14 - 20

JEMMA
Hi I'm Bree, I live in the country and I'm 17 years old. My 'story' is rather typical. I was always attracted to women, even as a child...but i thought it was a case of idolisation, the way i looked at the female superheros, how i liked supergirl more than superman and the way i always liked Ariel more than Eric.

MARTY
Hi I'm Liam and I'm 20 years old. I first discovered my feelings towards other guys when i was in grade 6 or 7 when i was going through puberty. i didn't just wake up one day and think "im gay" it was a gradual process where the attraction to other males become stronger as time went by.

JEMMA
I'm Jo. Kinda known I was trans since I was 10. From that point onward I had an almost pathological fear of all things feminine. I suppose I tried to bury any feelings I had, hoping they'd go away. They didn’t. I knew that I liked women, but I wasn't sure if that was because I wanted to be a woman, or if I wanted to have sex with them. I took 6-8 years to realise it was both.

MARTY
I'm Tom and I'm 16 years old and I live in the country. I always knew in the back of my mind that i was gay, but for almost 5 years i tried to force myself into heterosexuality. Eventually i became fed up, i was tired of trying to be someone i wasn't, so i came out.

PAUSE
MARTY
The first person i had to tell was my mum, and as i spoke the words "Im Gay", i was so filled with the fear of rejection, that I didn't even hear myself. My mum had the perfect response, she hugged me, she told me she loved me, and i could be myself without fear of what she would say or do. My next task was Gus, my mums boyfriend, i was scared to tell him, but i knew i had to. He told me he didnt care what i was, and i thought it was too good to be true. not even a week later, in a heated argument, he said "at least im not a freakin pansey", i havent spoken to him since.

JEMMA
I tried telling my mum but she didnt believe me and just brushed it off and it hasn't been brought up since then.

MARTY
I told my mum who was great but said i was too young to know, she told dad who said it didn’t change anything. My brother was fine. My other brother, being more religious, said it was ok but to never have sex, then he looked into having me converted. But it blew over and he’s a lot older and wiser now and accepts me.

JEMMA
One of my friends told her mother and her mother forbade us to be friends. This was my first direct encounter with homophobia. I came out to a teacher I was friends with whose first reaction was "How wonderful!".

PAUSE

MARTY
People say things like 'cover you asses here comes the gay' and I have been told that it is hoped that I contract AIDS like all other gays and die. I'm a fucken fag who is a disgrace to my culture and I will burn in hell forever.

JEMMA
I came out to everyone except my family and religious friends and then attempted to turn into a celibate, non-practising lesbian, got lonely and more and more depressed, suicidal and self harming. Suicidal because i couldn’t see how i could NOT be a lesbian and i couldn’t see how i could
NOT live without my family/religion so stuck between the proverbial rock and hard place. Death looked like a good and logical option.

*MARTY*
Fucken faggot - you should die before you spread more disease. Stay away from my little brother you dirty fuck.

*JEMMA*
My parents said that I’d never find someone, that I’d always be alone and unhappy and that by telling them I was gay I had made them depressed.

*MARTY*
I’ve been listening to these comments since I was 13 years old. I’m now 20 and they make no real difference to me, although they do at times bring my self esteem down. I suppose I am a stronger person because of it.

*JEMMA*
Depending on my mood I’ve been known to ignore what was said, glare back, hurl some abuse back (only rarely), make some smart remark. In one case I reported abuse that happened in a traffic situation to the police, who followed it up and were great about it.

*MARTY*
I don’t believe the [homophobic] comments has changed me much. Like I said, most people get bullied to some degree at school and if you can’t get over it well ??? you don’t have much choice. No I don’t do drugs, I still live at home, sometimes I think I’m crazy but that’s about it.

*JEMMA*
It makes me angry and it makes me stronger and even more sure that I have to be out for those who can’t be/are too scared to be/aren’t yet.

PAUSE

*MARTY*
I think my SSAY group made a difference. Before that I was depressed but now I have the group I think they are ignorant.
**JEMMA**
I have depression and I self mutilate a lot, this has nothing to do with my sexual feelings, I don’t really know what the reason is for it. I’m trying to seek help.

**MARTY**
We are so dependant on our parents. So much depends on what your parents think. If it gets back to them you’re in trouble. We need family support to grow up healthy. We have so much to lose.

**PAUSE**

**MARTY**
The best things about being same sex attracted are that you get to meet new people who’re like you knowing you’re not the only one.

**JEMMA**
Once I’ve disclosed my heart and soul people feel safe to do that as well. I have closer relationships with my friends and a lot of people open up more to me. Especially girls because they share more.

**MARTY**
I love holding hands with my boyfriend – one day a guy came up and wanted to shake our hands and said congratulations.

**PAUSE**

**JEMMA**
Life would be better if my parents accepted me for who I am.

**MARTY**
Life would be better if other kids parents accepted me - I’ve been told to stay away from their children.

**JEMMA**
Life would be better if John Howard wasn’t in government - the laws that surround us are crap.

**MARTY**
Life would be better if everyone was gay too - we’re the next step on the evolutionary ladder.
JEMMA
Community is people who are supportive of each other.

MARTY
I don’t believe in a gay and straight community. If we separate ourselves out then that’s not we want. We are the same people with different preferences like political parties. By putting us into different groups we strengthen the barriers.

JEMMA
I’m from a rural area. It would help if gay and lesbian people became more public – break the stereotype that is presented. A lot of the older community hides. YP don’t know how they’re meant to be. It’s unknown territory. The adult community can start by presenting those relationships and young people can see how they work. If older gays and lesbians hide they are saying this is what you do. Young people see how they are meant to act.

MARTY
People in the community should guide the way, be a role model. There are some decent guys looking after the young but some older guys do take advantage. You do get a lot of attention when you are younger. When you try to go out to a club and get refused then you dress more like the stereotype and hold your friends hand and then you get let in. The scene is a very small part of the community but drugs get handed out there.

JEMMA
It would be have been very hard to be gay 50 years ago. There would be no support and no visibility You’d have to hide it more. It would be more difficult to find others like you.

MARTY
I think it would be hard to be over 60 now. You’d suffer more from connotations of dirty old men and pedophilia.
JEMMA
You’d never be accepted by your own generation - that’s a very big thing. Our generation is less homophobic than all generations before us.

MARTY
We have more support groups and things are steadily improving. We feel like we have a good future as people become more aware and support and there is more for us.

PAUSE

JEMMA
In 10 years, I’ll be a youth worker, or a psychologist. I might get a doctorate. I’m going to marry a girl and have kids.

MARTY
In 20 years I’ll be fighting the last remnants of homophobia. ............... I want to have kids but it’s difficult.

JEMMA
When I’m 50 my kid’s will look after me.

MARTY
There’ll be more people out and straight people might be the minority - we’ll have to watch there isn’t a payback.

JEMMA
I’ll be settling down and supporting young people and giving advice from when I was younger.

MARTY
There’ll be no more homophobia and I’ll be writing my memoirs.

Women and men 20 - 40.

FELICITY
I think the main health issue for women in their 20s and 30s is invisibility and discrimination. I might not come out the doctor or counselor due to
fear of homophobia. I dislike the way sexuality is often seen as "the problem", and you're not cured until you are heterosexual.

DANIEL
Mmm...when I think about the main physical and mental health issues for me and men in my age group I think of myself and other guys who are sexually active. HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections are a concern.

FELICITY
I had a funny experience this year. I had appendicitis, not that I knew it at the time. My partner took me to the local doctor, who I had never been to before, just booked in because I was in heaps of pain. He wanted to rule out girlie problems and do an internal examination, so first he sent my partner out of the room and then asked me about sex, so I boldly told him I was a lesbian.... It was kind of funny (if I wasn't in so much pain) how uncomfortable he became, asking is it okay and getting the female nurse in. I felt like saying "just stick your fingers up there and get it over with". Once I had told him I was a lesbian he realised that he had sent my partner out of the room, not just a friend. He did apologise for this.

DANIEL
I'm also conscious about my body image. It's just so hard flicking through any gay newspaper or magazine and seeing all these buffed and muscled guys. It just seems to be this huge pressure - that the community expects you to be like this and I'm just not. It can be really depressing. It also affects my self esteem a lot.

FELICITY
A lot of us in our 20s and 30s want to have children. Getting pregnant can be very tricky. Do we trust a known donor or go anonymous and is that fair on the child? How will our parents take it? Will our children have loving grandparents? Will they feel too isolated because of the difference that we have imposed on them? What about the non-biological mother? She has no name or place in the law. Finding health practitioners who are accepting and open-minded. Invisibility of our families - no legal recognition and lack of training of workers at services our "Rainbow" families deal with on a day to day basis.

PAUSE
DANIEL
When I think of family today I truly believe that despite politics being conservative, the definition of family is being stretched, remoulded and challenged. For example, who do we include? Can I create my own? Do my closest friends count? I also think family can be a feeling, and that there people around us who are not “blood” who we still consider as such, perhaps even more so than our own traditional family.

FELICITY
Many of us still experience a general lack of support from our parents however most siblings are supportive. Being careful at family events, emotional blackmail such as - "don’t tell Grandma - she’ll have a heart attack". The challenge is gaining equal family acceptance of our relationships that our heterosexual siblings receive and having our family celebrate our relationships and rights of passage.

DANIEL
I’ve been pretty lucky in that I have a very accepting family.

FELICITY
Having children in heterosexual relationships, and then coming out can mean a fear of losing community approval and support, and possibly losing custody of the children. Fear of homophobia can have a real effect on self-esteem. Also depression around all these issues can lead to increased smoking and other drug and alcohol abuse.

PAUSE

DANIEL
When I think about other age-groups - younger guys particularly those under 20, know less about HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections and so are more at risk. Dealing with Sexuality is probably a bigger issue for them. "Gay" is often used as a putdown or in a derogatory manner in schools these days and teachers feel unable to interrupt or challenge this. That must be hard.

FELICITY
In comparison with what was available for us when we were young, there are now more supports and safe pockets available for the under 20 age group than ever before. These young people have support groups and are
generally more empowered. They have access to the internet for support and information if living in isolated/rural areas.

**DANIEL**
Coming out today hasn’t been that bad for me. 40 years ago it was illegal. Imagine having to constantly worry about being arrested. The lack of support 40 years ago would have made life extremely difficult.

**FELICITY**
My father’s best friend at school was gay and was sent to a psychiatric hospital. My father was told that he was not allowed to be his friend anymore. His friend committed suicide a couple of weeks later. If we think it’s hard now, it was impossible then.

**DANIEL**
I think with older guys the main growing issues would be more to do with aging and loneliness causing depression. I think this would be more common especially as it is perceived to be harder to find a relationship in this youth obsessed scene.

**FELICITY**
We definitely have an easier time than women who are 60+ and even women in their 40’s to 60’s would have had. We have more legal rights and experience less discrimination. Many of us can be more open about our sexuality and our relationships. But I hang out with a few 60+ women in my social group and life for them seems pretty good. They are confident and strong and don’t care about what other people think. They are making sure they do the things that they have always wanted to do and seizing the moment. Good on ’em! It must be amazing for older women to have seen so much change in attitudes. Fighting for rights can make you very strong and proud of who you are. Those who have fought before us are our heroines.

**PAUSE**

**DANIEL**
The best coming out story I ever heard was of a young guy who was a school captain, footy player and all-round bloke next door. He was struggling with it for many years. As a first year university student he designed a questionnaire for his parents to complete. Based on “stressful situations and responses”, his parents had to respond. Amongst the 20
life events was “your child comes out as gay”. His parents gave a good response to that one and so it helped psychologically to prepare to come out to them. It was nice and funny that they weren’t even suss about why they were doing the questionnaire!

**FELICITY**
My best coming out story is a friend who came out to her parents after being in a relationship with the same woman for 15+ years, owning a house and having two children together. Her mother was so relieved that she could actually talk about it at last!

**PAUSE**

**DANIEL**
I find loving men to be an incredibly masculine experience. Despite stereotypes, I have achieved amazing masculine heights with other men that sport, gym and pastimes such as fishing could never provide.

**FELICITY**
The best thing for me about loving women is feeling strong about who I am.

**DANIEL**
Passion and intimacy with men? My mind, my body, everything racing when he is with, in and on me. Experiencing a body, so incredibly powerful yet capable of gentle and sensual heights.

**FELICITY**
Best thing about loving women for me is breasts, so soft and silky. I also love not having to fit into hetero-normative roles as women in today’s society.

**PAUSE**

**DANIEL**
Ironically the biggest challenge of loving men has been me loving myself enough to enter into the healthy loving of men. As I continue my journey of loving men I am challenged by loving someone who like me is stubborn, competitive, expressive in bursts and threatened by so much, not the least of which is the environment where this loving happens. There is also the challenge of sometimes dealing with baggage about being gay that can
get in the way of the relationship.

**FELICITY**
The challenges of loving women are the same as every relationship though I think girls are more complicated than boys. One challenge is who puts out the rubbish? - only joking!

**PAUSE**

**DANIEL**
I normally don’t think about guys who are over 60 but if I did I would be thinking that they don’t focus on their sexuality as much as they do on issues relating to aging. And being without children and/or a partner, old age for gay and lesbian people is likely to be pretty lonely and distressing.

**FELICITY**
Being over 60 now would be amazing if you could finally come out and find friends and community. However it would be difficult if you have concerns regarding housing or aged care and the possibility of being separated from partner, lover or community. There is no partner recognition in super, war veteran pensions etc. There should be a broader support from the general LGBTI community for these services/activities - WE WILL ALL BE OLD ONE DAY!!!!!

**PAUSE**

**DANIEL**
Mmm...when I think of what I would like to be doing in 20 years time I think of what I am doing today but bigger, bolder and even more troublesome - to be educating and challenging and people to move within and even beyond their current homophobia.

**FELICITY**
In 20 years I’ll have lots of kids and be a representative on the local school board. I’ll be queering the school system and I’ll still be an activist for LGBTI rights.

**PAUSE**
DANIEL
When I think of being into my 60’s or 70’s…well I haven’t. What I would hope I suppose is that I am still healthy enough in mind and body to contribute to the world around me, have plenty of time to reflect on my life and where I have been and to be surrounded by people I love and respect. Although I hope to be wiser.

FELICITY
I’ll have lots of grandchildren and be living in a community of LGBTI and LGBTI-friendly people. I’ll be poor but happy through having worked in the community sector all my life!

40 – 60 age group

NIKOS
One of the challenges for gay men my age is to be grounded about what it is to be older, what it is to be a gay male, and what it is to be an older gay male. It is also about managing the anxiety associated with body image, I no longer have the body beautiful - but then again, did I ever?

SUE
It’s the first real signs of aging that you really start to notice - having to wear glasses and finding it harder to get a photo that represents how you think you should look.

NIKOS
It’s also developing an understanding that whilst I am no longer young, I’m not sure what old is and recognising that age impacts on most areas of my life - work, home, sex, play, etc

PAUSE

SUE
Work is incredibly rewarding for me, I’m at my peak and I can’t imagine not continuing with it. I’m mentally healthier than I’ve ever been. I’m committed to keeping fit. I do more physically now than I ever did when I was heterosexual and I’m at least as fit and strong as I was when I was younger. But I know that it won’t always be that way.
NIKOS
At this stage in my life I need to continue to move beyond the grief for lost friends and lovers to a different place. I continue to search for a better understanding of my various selves - my ethnic self, my gay self, my parental/care-giving self, and how they make me who I am. I also need to remember to always laugh.

SUE
My dyke friends and I probably drink too much - but happy hour each day is a very important wind down and alcohol is an important part of socialising in my lesbian community. Many women I know have given up smoking but many continue with it.

PAUSE

SUE
I'm from a rural area. I don't know what community means outside of the stereotype. There was a tsunami benefit at the local pub. We had a table of 6 - the total dyke contingent in a 30 km radius. It was a great night and there was no discomfort. The girls played pool on a challenge table with the boys. We won the raffle and had a great time. My community is not specifically defined by sexuality. It's not a conscious decision - it's people you have the most in common with. It's not necessary, but when dykes are a part of it, it's icing on the cake.

NIKOS
For me community is a collection of people who take care of each other - valuing and taking care of the young and the old. In the glbti community we do not value our young and we do not treasure our old. Life is a conveyor belt, and if we are lucky we get to know those behind us and those ahead of us. You can decide to do it alone or do it with community. For me caring about others is a natural thing.

PAUSE

SUE
Same sex attracted young people today do have a hard time especially at school but things are improving for them. There is more visibility in the media and more awareness in the community. There are more supports if they want them.
NIKOS
Young people now have greater access to better information and hopefully better services compared to those available during my youth. Body image and acceptance as an ‘adequate’ gay male remain some of the tough issues faced by younger gay men. To be young and gay today is be securely middle class – thanks Queer Eye and Queer as Folk!

PAUSE

SUE
Lesbians who came out of marriages years ago could not be out because they might lose their children. I remember a court case 20 years ago over custody of children in which the judge allowed the woman to keep her kids if she didn’t let them know she was a lesbian. Her partner slept in another room and they had secretive rendezvous together. No open intimacy or tenderness. The kids grew up to despise the relationship which became a dirty secret to them.

NIKOS
I think the 60+s today tend to be polarised – they either have a good support network or are quite isolated. Many are doing it tough financially and many still feel uncomfortable around the idea of being ‘out there’ but enjoy seeing others publicly announcing the sexual or gender orientations.

PAUSE

SUE
I’m in a workplace that is SSAY friendly, I’m out to everyone, including health professionals. I’m not sure that all women are that lucky.

NIKOS
My sexuality has never been an issue at work and I never let it be one. Thankfully I have not had the need to be vigilant regarding discrimination. This is not the case for many of my peers where to be a ‘successful’, they have had to ‘heterosexualise’ themselves.

PAUSE
SUE
The death of parents has been a hard issue for me - both have died in the last 5 years and there has been a lot to deal with with siblings and old family issues. But we've done well I think.

NIKOS
I came out to my parents when I was 17. Given the times and the resources available it took almost 15 years for them to both understand and accept me. They live in Greece and I am acutely conscious that they are now getting frail. My local parental figures, older gay men and lesbians, are who I provide care for.

SUE
I've found that because I have no children a lot more is expected of me in the family. I can travel further and I have time to do the extra things for my mother. They are too busy because of the children. I think very often it is the lesbians who do the hard caring work with frail parents.

NIKOS
To desire and care for children is human. As a gay male to achieve such an outcome is both problematic and difficult. I can't get pregnant so for me to have children in my life requires having had heterosexual sex, being a sperm donor or as in my case being allowed to be a significant adult in my friend's children's lives. Not having children is one of my greatest losses.

SUE
Many of my friends do not have children and have not needed children to have fulfilled rewarding lives. However there is an extra loving element in my life because of my children and more recently the arrival of grandchildren. However, I would never want to depend on my children as I get older or to live with them. I would rather be with my dyke friends.

PAUSE

SUE
The best thing about loving women is softness and curves. Fantastic sex. Feeling as though my body is truly loved and cherished. The absence of role playing and the opportunity to challenge it if it emerges. The freedom to discover my masculine side. Getting off on power tools. Having someone who loves my successes and supports me through the challenges.
NIKOS
The best things for me about loving men are- that I know that it is real, it is honest, it is meaningful, and it makes me happy.

SUE
For me it's not having to worry about blokes any more. Not having to try and please and understand them. AND going clothes shopping with my girlfriend.

NIKOS
On the other hand, the challenge is to ensure that you are neither his mother nor his wife (and that he is neither your mother nor wife). Worse still that your are not his child nor he yours.

SUE
Having been heterosexual, I do notice the privileges I have lost. I was never socially unacceptable when I was heterosexual. I was never thrown out of someone's house when I was heterosexual.

PAUSE

NIKOS
In 20 years I hope to be doing much the same.....laughing, making a nuisance of myself, caring for my loved ones. Attending Mardi Gras and Midsumma for the .....er I've forgotten how many times

SUE
In 20 years I hope to be doing something very creative as well as keeping fit and healthy. I intend to do more travel. I'll be reading and socialising and perhaps writing.

NIKOS
Still holding my partner's hand while we watch the telly. I'll have increased involvement in community-related activities - oral-histories maybe? Looking back and remembering that fear and discrimination are things of the past. No more HIV/AIDS.

SUE
I’ll be dishing out good advice to the grandchildren. We’re offering rewards to any who turn out to be bent.

AND

I hope to still be capable of getting the cork out of the bottle.

60+ age group

GORDON

I came to Melbourne from Perth in 1958 as a 22 year old. I told my parents I was gay when I was 14. I wanted to learn ballet dancing. My father said “People will call you a sis” and I replied “I am so what”. I did go on to learn dancing and I still love dancing today.

LILIAN

At school I was aware of my own difference and the way that I felt - I was attracted to other girls and I couldn’t understand why. My mother knew something though. When I was about 14 she gave me Radcliffe Hall and said I think you should read this. PAUSE I often wonder about her as well.

GORDON

When I arrived in Melbourne, my friend and I met a man who was known as the toast of the coast- he was a merchant seaman who used to get off with sailors. He introduced us to the gay scene. It was different because we used to entertain in our own homes. And we used to run between the Australia Hotel and the London hotel - and the word about parties spread between them.

LILIAN
I was a teenager in the 50s in Melbourne. There were plenty of places for a lesbian to go. There was Sully’s Coffee Lounge in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda - it was a fascinating place for a young lesbian. Val’s coffee shop in Swanston St Melbourne was also a good place to meet other women. There were women in flannel shirts and you never saw that in those days. If you knew where to go there were places. There have always been lesbians about but you had to know where to go. It had to be kept very quiet.

GORDON
The young ones today think they have all the fun but by God we didn’t miss out. Sunday morning we would go to the Sir Charles Hotham Hotel in Spencer St. It would be full of seaman and gay men and drag shows during the lunch hour…. PAUSE…. But being gay was illegal too. The police could legally pick you up at a beat somewhere and you were in strife because there were a whole lot of laws you could be charged with. You could also be charged with vagrancy and that was a catch all law so you could be locked up overnight. Also somebody could blackmail you and threaten to expose you if you didn’t accept their demands or someone could legally sack you.

PAUSE

LILIAN
Regardless of how you felt as a woman in those days, you didn’t see any choice in those days other than marriage. Now if a woman doesn’t get married what the heck - there isn’t the family pressure.
GORDON

It never occurred to me to get married. I knew what I was and what I wanted.

LILIAN

I left my marriage and had two kids to look after. I was a sole parent and missed out on so many community events because I had no childcare. I had to balance addressing the needs of my kids and my needs for a lesbian community. I also had to keep relationships going because of the kids that I would have left behind. And I was always worried that someone at school might make things hard for them because their mother was a lesbian. I look at young women having babies within their relationships now and I envy what they have.

GORDON

I had to leave my family in a little town in Italy because I couldn't come out. I couldn't risk being found out because it simply would not have been accepted. In Australia I am happier since I have a network of friends and support. While my Anglo friends provide much support I still feel an association with my heritage and have it fulfilled by being an active member of a local Italian club.

LILIAN

Family means a lot to me. While it started out as my biological family when I came out it now has expanded to lesbian friends and other friends. They have now also become my crucial supports.

GORDON
Family is pretty important to me and Vintage Men are my family as well as other friends and associates. Unfortunately my immediate biological family don’t know about me. I suppose I want respect and acceptance from family. Mutual understanding about needs is important. They need you and you need them. Just like when one of the members of Vintage Men was in hospital and he had gay guys coming in and out of the room during visiting hours. More in numbers than his biological family.

PAUSE

LILIAN
Community is important to me and I have a close network of friends. I’m also actively involved in the politics of community. I get out and about in the community even though most people think as lesbians get older they disappear and don’t get out anymore.

GORDON
Community is a funny thing. I sometimes argue with people that I think there is no such thing as a gay community. Being gay isn’t enough to make you part of a sub community really because we are all part of the larger Australian community.

LILIAN
Some young people in the gay community look at older members and give you the impression they are thinking – when I get to that stage shoot me. Most young people however are a delight. PAUSE At the last street party in Commercial Rd Prahran, we came across a couple of baby dykes who came up to us all excited and said “Oh we’ve wondered what happened to older lesbians”. PAUSE My partner and I helped at Red Raw a few
years ago and we got free tickets. We went and were feeling really good - we were still on our feet dancing at 6am in the morning. A couple of young gay guys came up to us and said - you've got to be the oldest ones here. We were hopeful with the lighting and all dressed up that no one would notice.

GORDON
I agree not everyone in the GLBTI community respects older people or wants to think of themselves as old. Even at Midsumma we've seen old guys walk towards our stall and when they see us they start to go right round as far as possible so they're not seen anywhere near us. They don't want to come near us because it's admitting they are getting old. We just laugh.

PAUSE

LILIAN
There are health issues with being a lesbian. Because of the difficulty of talking about my sexuality due to a lack of confidence in the medical profession, I haven't made a habit of going for regular check ups such as pap smears and mammograms. I know it's getting more important as I get older but it's hard going to a GP with this big secret.

GORDON
I've got chronic fatigue. I just don't have much energy anymore. I've also got a heart condition and my kidneys are playing up. I'm on a bit of medication these days too that can be quite confusing.
LILIAN
One of the other things that makes it difficult for me compared to many straight women I know is the prospect of perhaps getting sick and not having the support that a straight woman can get from her immediate family and extended family. Unfortunately I have family members who still haven’t accepted my sexuality and I fear they won’t support me in such a crisis. I’m really worried about feeling alone and not getting enough support and understanding.

PAUSE

GORDON
The best coming out story I heard was from a friend of mine who plucked up enough courage to come out and his father said, “Christ, thank goodness”. He calls out to his wife to get a bottle of wine that they had kept for that moment and were worried for years that it was going to go off before he told them. They ended up sitting around having a drink and a laugh.

LILIAN
Wherever I go with my partner we hold hands, we are out there and open. We were in a shopping centre the other day holding hands and a woman looked at us, smiled and applauded. I belong to a walking club and a book club and I’m very active. And the sex is still great.

GORDON
I have a very accepting family. My brother in laws sister has been in a lesbian relationship for 42 years. I have 2 gay friends who 37 years.
LILIAN
I think life is a bit easier for young people these days. Being gay or lesbian is more public for one thing. It’s out in the open more. I think it’s more accepted today than it ever was. There’s more opportunities for families to learn and understand. In our day gay lifestyle was burlesque and cheap in underground clubs. Today you’ve got judges who are gay, you’ve got people in high and important public positions that say “I’m gay” and that’s it and they come out in the open. So it’s talked about more.

GORDON
When I think about young people coming out today I think it’s easier for some but not necessarily everyone. I know someone in his late teens and he still has family pressures and general difficulties. And you only have to look at that guy in Sydney who got bashed at school. It happens here in Melbourne too.

LILIAN
We worked hard when we were young to make a change and I think our contribution to today’s freedom is often forgotten by the subsequent generations. While I feel a tad envious of young kids today at the same time I’m happy for them. It is a good thing.
The best thing about my life at this stage is friendships. I work in the community and I love it and the people I meet. I have loads of friends and people I know.

LILIAN

I think the best thing about being a lesbian at this stage in life is I feel I have more established and genuine friendships. And the love of women is more fulfilling and has enormous warmth and passion. And as you get older it gets better.