

Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards*

Karen Long: Hello, I'm Karen Long, and you're listening to The Asterisk*, a production of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards. An asterisk is a reference mark indicating an omission. Today we are figuring out some of the holes in our knowledge with Lillian Faderman, a nationally revered scholar of lesbian and ethnic history and literature. Professor Faderman won an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in 2016 for her magisterial 10th book, "The Gay Revolution, The Story of the Struggle." It takes us from mid-20th century characterizations of gay people as perverts and criminals to the current moment. Welcome Professor Faderman.

I thought we could begin by asking Lillian Faderman to read from the beginning of her book, an anecdote that puts us in a place in time that we can launch from. Welcome.

Lillian Faderman: A few pages into the book, this is a section called "Lawbreakers and Loonies," and the section I'm going to read is essentially an interview that I did with a wonderful woman. I did the interview just a few months before she died. And this is the story that she told me. Sally Duplaix was a sophomore in 1956 at Smith, a rich girl's college. Classy, All-American girl looks, stylish and smart too, Sally had even been valedictorian at her posh high school. She seemed to fit perfectly into the Smith environment until another student reported to the Dean that she'd caught Sally in her room with her roommate in flagrante delicto. Though wealthy whites, especially females, didn't generally get arrested and committed to state hospitals for being homosexual, they weren't unscathed by the widespread assumptions that homosexuality was a sickness and needed curing.

Sally Duplaix was sent to the Smith College doctor who informed her parents that they put their daughter under psychiatric care. Duplaix's parents found a psychoanalyst for her in Manhattan, and five days a week she was to take the train in from the suburbs in order to be cured. Duplaix showed up dutifully but was uninterested and uncooperative, the doctor said. He told her parents she'd do better in a residential facility. He recommended Silver Hill Hospital in New Canaan, Connecticut, a place that looked like a five-star hotel on a country estate. As well off as Duplaix's parents were, they had to take out a second mortgage on their home to afford the treatment.

The facility specialized in super rich alcoholics who came to dry out. But the doctor thought Duplaix would benefit from the multi-hour seven day a week regimen of private and group therapy. She didn't. She refused to stop saying she was a homosexual and was not ashamed. The Silver Hill staff recommended that she be sent to a private mental hospital, the Elmcrest Psychiatric Institute in Portland, Connecticut.

There, Duplaix was heavily medicated. She received both insulin shock and electroshock treatment. She was told that if she didn't behave, she'd be

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transferred to Littleton, the state asylum in the next town, which was far worse. She had heard that lobotomies were sometimes performed to cure people of homosexuality and she feared she'd be lobotomized.

One evening Duplaix managed to escape, running through the autumn fields in search of a payphone. She found one in a café not far from the hospital. She wanted to call her parents and beg them to get her out of Elmcrest, but the café was the first place the Elmcrest attendants looked for her. Before she could tell the telephone operator she wished to make a collect call, the attendants had huddled her into the hospital van and brought her back.

From that point on, she was allowed to dress only in nightgown, bathrobe, and slippers to assure she wouldn't attempt another escape. In December 1956, after five months of shock treatments and heavy medication, Duplaix was released to her parents who again put her in psychoanalysis. She died in July, 2012 at the age of 76, still a lesbian.

Karen Long: Such a story. How did you find her, do you remember?

Lillian Faderman: Yes. She was recommended to me by another woman that I had interviewed, and I was very interested in people who had had run-ins with psychiatrists or had been committed to psychiatric hospitals simply because they were homosexual, which was very common in the 1950s and even into the 1960s.

Karen Long: And was she able to find a partner and go on with her life?

Lillian Faderman: Yes, she did. She had several relationships. She had a long-term relationship several years before Sally herself died, and the woman had predeceased her. But she did get on with her life, yes.

Karen Long: That's a testimony to her resilience, and also it's shocking that she would carry that for the rest of her life.

Lillian Faderman: Yes, and of course she always lived with it, but I go on in the rest of that chapter to talk about how she forgave her parents, and her point was that that was what loving parents did, particularly if they had some money, they got psychiatric treatment for their kids to cure them of homosexuality. And she said, parents who weren't so loving or parents who didn't have money often just threw their kids out into the street when they found out that the kids were homosexuals. So, she understood that what her parents did was they were simply victims of the time as well. They were convinced that homosexuality was an illness, not to mention a sin, that one could never lead a happy life if one was a homosexual, and they did the best thing they thought they could do by their dim lights. But it was a tragic story, and it happened over and over again.

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- Karen Long: And continues around the world. The news coming out of the Ukraine is particularly familiar, and yet, as I was rereading this, I was thinking about you, the exact same year in 1956 on the other side of the country, and that was the year you came out.
- Lillian Faderman: Yes, it was as a teenager with a phony ID. I had been introduced by a gay boy as we used to call ourselves, I was a girl and he was a boy. He was three years older than I was, still a minor, of course, under the law. At one point he said, "You know there are bars for people like me," like him, "And I can get you an ID and you can go on Saturday night." And so we went to a couple of gay men's bars, and then he said, "And you know, there are places for girls like this too." And I had had a couple of crushes but didn't think of myself as a lesbian, hardly knew what the word meant. And I said, "Oh really?" And he took me to a place in Los Angeles called The Open Door, and I walked in and I think almost immediately I realized that, yes, this was who I wanted to be. It was a very rough, working class bar and the women were often subject to police harassment. There had been police raids there and in many of the bars in the 1950s.
- And so I addressed that too in my book, "The Gay Revolution," how all homosexuals or gay people as we were all called then, all of us were presumptive criminals under the law because there wasn't a single state in the union that didn't have a law about sodomy, and sodomy meant in most states not only male sexual acts but also referred to any act that was not what they called the marriage act, and so lesbians were presumptive criminals as well.
- Karen Long: And when you walked into the bar as a teenager and felt yourself home, is that something you can conjure now molecularly? Do you remember that?
- Lillian Faderman: I do remember it, yes. And it sort of crystallized for me the intense crushes that I had had on women as a kid. And I just knew that yes, now it all made sense and this is who I was and wanted to be. And it was an epiphany and quite miraculous.
- Karen Long: And here we sit in a year you turned 80, happy birthday, from July. And your memoir is newly released this year.
- Lillian Faderman: Yes. Yes. By Bloomsbury Press, yes.
- Karen Long: Congratulations.
- Lillian Faderman: Thank you.
- Karen Long: What do you think your teenage self would have made of that, if she had been given the gift of time travel to know that is where you would land?

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Lillian Faderman: I think so much of my writing, particularly when I started writing, was addressed to that teenage self because I was a literary kid from the beginning, and as soon as I realized I was a lesbian and this was who I wanted and needed to be, what does a literary kid do? I went to the library and what I was able to find in the library were things like Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis and medical books that pathologized us. And the only other kinds of books I could find about lesbians were the pulps, which you could buy for 25 cents on drugstore book racks, which I bought avidly. And the pulps were wonderful in that they would present two women together and they would be romantic stories, but they always, always had to end in either the suicide of one of them or the conversion to heterosexuality of one of them, or one of them going off and drowning in the “well of loneliness,” to quote from Radclyffe Hall's famous 1928 novel.

So, there was just no decent literature, no history about people like me. And finally in the 1970s, the atmosphere was such that you could begin writing that stuff and publishers would publish those things and nobody had yet written a lesbian history, and I thought that's what I needed to do. And so when I wrote it, I was really writing to kids like who I used to be. I was providing them with the history that I think is so important for young people, to know that you're not just starting from scratch. You're not reinventing the proverbial wheel. People went before you and some of them had wonderful lives, and some of them, like the general run of humanity, did not. But I thought it was really important to show that, particularly to younger people. So, I think if I could talk to my younger self, I would hand her the books that I've written over the last 40 years.

Karen Long: That's such a great notion, a great thought experiment. I remember when you arrived, a friend of mine explained to me that a lot of groups have a history through proximity, but that doesn't exist when you are LGBT. You need to go seek it. And I was so struck by that gap. And here you sit with an auxiliary to Toni Morrison's idea of writing into the world what you need. So, congratulations on that.

Lillian Faderman: Thank you.

Karen Long: You lived in the desert of this literary vacuum and you yourself have helped to plant. What would you recommend now? What is sticking to your ribs? What would you suggest that as someone who has led a literary life, taught English and been drawn to the world, what would you suggest people make sure they read this year?

Lillian Faderman: I would start with history I think because people do need to know that there was a past, and of course who we are keeps evolving. When I came out, all of us were gay. It was an umbrella term for lesbians, for gay men, for people who would now call themselves trans, for people who were bisexual, it was a term for all of us. And then we kept evolving into various groups. And I know that

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many young people now identify as queer, which was not a word that my generation would tolerate. That was a fighting word. And I understand that young people have reclaimed that word very proudly, which is terrific. But I think that young people would find in history books, and now there are many of them, I think that they would find things that are familiar. People who in the 17th or 18th or 19th century played with gender. Women who loved other women, men who loved other men, people who loved both women and men. The terms weren't the same, but I think they would find something to identify with.

And so I would recommend history books, first of all. And then just so many wonderful writers. I think, beginning, if you're interested in gay male history, James Baldwin's "Giovanni's Room" for instance.

Karen Long: Right.

Lillian Faderman: Such a moving and sad tale all the way up to in the '70s, the wonderful lesbian poetry by Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde and Pat Parker. Two terrific writers today that deal with what the younger generation would call LGBTQ+ issues, what my generation would have called gay or later on gay or lesbian issues and then trans issues. My favorite writer at the moment is Carmen Maria Machado, who is a really fabulous author I think.

Karen Long: And did she not salute your new memoirs edition?

Lillian Faderman: Yes. And I chose her because I admire her so much and she very graciously wrote a forward to the new memoir. But yeah, I think she is so talented. And then I also love not an American writer, a British writer, Sarah Waters, who's just an absolutely extraordinary novelist who very often deals with lesbian characters, historically as well. She has a couple of novels set in the 19th century and one novel set in the early 20th century. I think she's just absolutely terrific.

Karen Long: Well, I feel our book bags fattening, so thank you for that.

And now we'll pause for a short break. The Asterisk* is a project of the Cleveland Foundation to bring more readers and listeners into conversation with the best writers in English. In this case, recipients of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. We now return to the conversation.

I also was delighted to see the *New York Times* reached out to you on this, the anniversary of the 19th Amendment to talk about our forebearers, our foremothers who were gay.

Lillian Faderman: Yes. They wouldn't have called themselves gay, they wouldn't have called themselves lesbian. I think in the late 19th and early 20th century, lesbian meant French decadence, like Baudelaire's "Flowers of Evil." There was no term they would have been comfortable with. They wouldn't have called themselves

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homosexual because the emphasis was on the sexual. They wouldn't have called themselves invert as the medical profession did, because that was a pathology.

But nevertheless, what I discovered is that so many of these women who were so important to the suffrage movement in the 19th century and the early 20th century had long-term relationships with other women. And that included Anna Howard Shaw, who had a 30-year relationship until Shaw's death with Lucy Anthony, who was the niece of Susan B. Anthony. It included Carrie Chapman Catt, who had a long relationship with Mollie Hay, they were both suffragists. Carrie Catt was the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and she saw it through to the end. She was the president when women finally got the vote. She was predeceased by Mollie Hay by a number of years, but she demanded that they be buried together and they are. One marker covers their grave. And it says, "Here lied two who were united in the suffrage movement, but united as friends" is the euphemism, but of course they were lovers and they lived together for a number of years.

And it's even true as I discovered of Susan B. Anthony, who did not live with another woman, but I found letters in which she talked about how happy she was for her niece, Lucy Anthony, who had a relationship with Anna Howard Shaw, who was also at one point the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. And she said that she herself would have loved to find someone who would be to her what Lucy is to Anna Howard Shaw. And then I also found several letters in which she actually talks about one woman, Emily Gross, that she describes in at least two letters as her lover. It was a long-term relationship. They never lived together, they often traveled together. So there's a fascinating story of same-sex love in the suffrage movement. I think so many of those women were at the forefront of finally getting women the vote.

Karen Long:

How do you think about this, their ability to love women and be politically pressing?

Lillian Faderman:

You know, I think that so many of them understood that if they were going to have no man in their life to support them, they had to have a good job. And so they were also in the forefront of bringing women into higher education and opening the professions to women. They understood too if no man was going to represent them at the ballot box, they had to represent themselves, which meant they had to get the votes. So, it's not surprising I think that so many women who were in long-term partnerships with other women were at the forefront of that struggle. They were fighting not only for women in general, but they were fighting for themselves and they were fighting for their partners. It wasn't astonishing to me when I discovered this.

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Karen Long: You know that I was incredibly taken with your Harvey Milk biography and I was not alone in that delight. What do you think Harvey would be making of 2020? He'd have some quips, of course.

Lillian Faderman: Yes, he would. But there are so many hard things that have happened this year, but I think he would also be delighted that he pioneered in politics as an out gay male. He wasn't the first gay person to be elected to public office, that was Kathy Kozachenko in Ann Arbor who was elected to the city council, and then Elaine Noble, both in 1974. She was elected to the Massachusetts House. So there were those two examples, but he was the first gay man to be elected to public office. And the tragedy of his death also I think brought to public attention much more than Elaine Noble's wonderful election or Kathy Kozachenko's election, the fact that a gay person could run for office and be elected and do a terrific job in office as Harvey did and those two did.

I think he would be so pleased now that there is literally not a state in the country that doesn't have openly LGBTQ representation, a person in some political office elected to that office in the state. He would be so pleased that in Congress there are now 10 out LGBT people, and he would be so pleased that in the Senate there's an out lesbian, Tammy Baldwin, and there's an out bisexual woman in the Senate. And there are two out governors, in the state of Colorado, there's Jared Polis, who's the governor, and in the state of Oregon, there's a bisexual out governor.

So I don't think Harvey would have taken all the credit for it-

Karen Long: Or maybe he would have.

Lillian Faderman: Maybe he would have as much as I knew about Harvey, which is one of his charms, but I think he would be very pleased that in a sense, he got the ball rolling. And of course the tragedy of his assassination really brought to worldwide public attention that here was an elected gay man who was much beloved, who did a wonderful job on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and who was martyred essentially because he was gay. So I think he would be pleased that his martyrdom was not for nothing. He really did something important I think for the LGBTQ population.

Karen Long: I loved in your book the literal moving of the soapbox from the edge of the political discussion. It took him a few tries to get forward and to get it right and find his way. And here we have Pete Buttigieg who is still putting his hands on people to say, "I'm here," and lifting up people in the margins. I really found his candidacy moving in that regard.

Lillian Faderman: Very moving, yes. And he is so charismatic and so bright and so articulate, and I thought it was historically so important that that's what so many people in the electorate saw, and that he even won the democratic caucus in Iowa and tied in

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the primary in New Hampshire. That's so promising that not only the LGBT population understands that yes, we have a lot of talent in the community, political talent, but that the rest of the world understands and the rest of the country, much of it, understands that, yes, we're going to look at the talents that a politician has, what the politician stands for, and not inconsequential factors like the politician's sexual orientation.

Karen Long: Right. It feels so hopeful that each time there's an iteration and civilization doesn't end. The people have the proof.

Lillian Faderman: Yes, yes, yeah. I think that that was just a wonderful example of what a person with charisma and intelligence and good policy can do, and his sexual orientation doesn't mean very much for so many.

Karen Long: So that kind of leads us to thinking about the surprise that the Supreme Court delivered in the summer.

Lillian Faderman: Yes. Fantastic. I have to say beyond my wildest dreams, and you're referring to the fact of the three cases that recently came before the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court found, not only the four liberals on the court but Neil Gorsuch and John Roberts found that the 1964 Civil Rights Act did indeed protect LGBT people, and that was wonderful.

Karen Long: Such a day. And the "T" landing in there.

Lillian Faderman: Yes, the "T" landing in there with April Stevens and very sad that April Stevens didn't get to see the wonderful victory because she died just a few months before the final decision. But I think she knew from the questioning that there was sympathy on the part of Neil Gorsuch and John Roberts, and of course on the part of the four liberals on the court. But what meant so much to me I think, I expected Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonya Sotomayor and the other two to vote as they did, but it was so terrific that the Supreme Court was really doing its job, really looking at the case, really examining the issues at hand and not simply casting their votes along political lines. That was so heartening that Gorsuch wrote, and he wrote the majority opinion.

Karen Long: He did.

Lillian Faderman: Such a terrific opinion. And John Roberts too was such a pleasant surprise that he played the role that Anthony Kennedy had played before he retired. I think so many of us were so worried when Anthony Kennedy retired.

Karen Long: Yes.

Lillian Faderman: But John Roberts has shown that he can be fair.

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- Karen Long: And if I could call a ghost forward, it might be Frank Kameny who so bravely confronted the government and identified the government as you put in the epilogue, the government was our enemy and was out to get us, and they did.
- Lillian Faderman: Yes.
- Karen Long: Here we stand with the conservative chief justice finding his way to the right thing.
- Lillian Faderman: Yes, yes. And I was so happy for Kameny and for all of us that he lived long enough to be invited several times to the Obama White House for signings of very important bills. I think it must've been so wonderful for him as it is for us too to see that there is support from the government, depending of course on who's in charge. But there was astonishing support under the Obama administration ultimately.
- Karen Long: And I know that you are very careful to speak to what you know and what you've studied these decades, but it feels remiss not to ask you if there is something in the struggle against government, the antipathy of government and the medical establishment from the history of the gay struggle and might be applicable to those movements that are struggling now. Do you think there is?
- Lillian Faderman: What I've concluded about the gay struggle is that it has taken the entire community, all of us, regardless of our race, regardless of our religion, regardless of our class, regardless of our political affiliation, to fight together to win our rights. And we've done it in different ways. And I see that happening now and that's really fantastic that it's happening for broader questions as well.
- So to bring this back to the struggle for what we used to call gay rights, there were mainstream types who took over the Mattachine Society for instance and tried to work through government to get us our rights. And there were the wonderful young kids at Stonewall who decided that they would fight their own way and did it very dramatically. And I think that both were important. I think dramatic protests and people who know how to then take those dramatic protests and say, "See how unhappy my people are? You have to do something in terms of government. You have to make mainstream type reforms to help all of us." And I think that's what's happening today, and it seems to me that it's a very important statement, that from all directions we're fighting for rights.
- Karen Long: One of the most intoxicating parts of the book you wrote, Lillian, for me was the coalescence in California, to stand up and fight the referendum that would have denied teaching for LGBT people.
- Lillian Faderman: I think that was actually the first time that the huge in those days, gay or gay and lesbian community, which also included as I said other people who identify differently, it was the first time that they realized that all of us count and all of us

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have to fight in our own way, whether we're radical, whether we're more conservative, whether we're working class, whether we're middle-class or upper-class, we all have to do our thing and address a constituency that will listen to us. That was wonderful the way that's what came to pass with the Briggs Initiative, and of course it was defeated. It was the first major victory the LGBTQ community, or in those days the gay community, had anywhere in the United States. And I think it taught us an important lesson.

And once in a while we forget that lesson, like it was something called Proposition Eight, which took marriage away from us in 2008 in California. We had that for six months and we forgot that we needed to fight together in a unified front, no matter what our race was, no matter what our class was, no matter what our political affiliation was. And so we lost that one in 2008. But I think we're remembering again the lessons that we learned from the Briggs Initiative.

Karen Long: It is so good to learn from you, and may we continue learning from you long, long years. Thank you so much, Lillian.

Lillian Faderman: Thank you so much, Karen.

Karen Long: The Asterisk is brought to you by the Cleveland Foundation. The executive producer is Alan Ashby with help from producers Tara Pringle Jefferson and Jay Williams of WOJU radio. I'm Karen Long, manager of the prizes. Thank you for listening.