

Jack's Story – script

Will Hansen interviewer

**Please note:** Sexuality as well as processes related to gender affirming surgery are discussed in this podcast. In addition, a swear word is used twice in the course of the discussion.

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Kia ora, I'm Will Hansen and you're listening to Inside the Bubble.

Stories from lockdown in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We're here in our bubble during quarantine lockdown. I think we are somewhere at over 40 days in lockdown, now at level 3 and potentially going into level 2 tomorrow.

Tess - Yeah, so, what was the question again sorry? [laughter]

Will – what is it like living in an all queer flat? So I guess we should say I'm trans, we've got Ailish who is a bisexual and Issy who identifies as queer.

Tess – yep, and then there's me who came out as trans during lockdown and I'm also bi. Right now during this interview I've still got a feminine sound voice, but hopefully by the end of this year I'll be on testosterone and in a few years I'll be in a different situation I think.

Will - So that's me, talking to my flatmate Tess. I'm Will Hansen, an Oral Historian, and what you are about to hear is from a series of interviews I did with friends, neighbours and flatmates, for 'Kei roto i te miru: Inside the Bubble'. In this episode, I'm talking to my flatmate. This, is Jack's Story...

Tess – So my name's Tess, I use they/their, or he/him pronouns, I'm 24 years old, and I work as a primary care practice assistant at a medical centre in Wellington, and I live here in Newtown with my interviewer Will and others.

[laughter]

Will – now I really want to talk to you about queerness.

Tess – Sounds great.

Will – So you've been in an all queer flat for lockdown, how do you think that's affected your experience of lockdown?

Tess – I think it's definitely [affected me], I know from comparisons with other friends during lockdown we've had a really good time [laughter]

Will – Just because we're queer [laughter]

Tess – No, it's been really good, I've thoroughly enjoyed being part of an all queer flat, and lockdown has, since Will and other flatmates have mostly been at home since their jobs or whatever are not available at this time it's meant we've been able to spend a lot more time together and do a lot more queer stuff together [laughter] which has been really cool. I can't even remember now if it was during lockdown, the pantry collage?

Will – the very start

Tess – the very start of lockdown we all picked out some pictures and whatnot of our favourite queer icons, and favourite queer stuff in general, and Will and Issy did most of the work piecing together this amazing collage on our pantry

[laughter]

Tess – Which is just two big old doors of queer stuff [laughter] and um we've had a masc night where we dressed up and painted our faces

Will – do you want to say what masc is?

Tess – oh masc, short for masculine, so we had a masculine night if you will where we painted our faces up with moustaches, and tried to do a masculine photo shoot in our garage

Will – [laughter] I'm so embarrassed, I loved it though

Tess – and we've been watching a lot of queer films, making our way through as many as we can

Will – favourite one so far?

Tess – favourite one so far, ooh...

Will – that's a hard one question

Tess – a hard question

Will – a very hard question, sorry

Tess – because we've watched a lot

Will – So many

Tess – I wish we'd kept a list really, some of them the really well known ones, 'Rocky Horror' [Picture Show], 'Brokeback Mountain', 'Carol', 'Call Me By Your Name', 'A Secret Love' a new documentary, 'Circus of Books', 'Handmaiden', 'Portrait of a Lady on Fire', that's a good one

Will – That awful one about the girl in boarding school

Tess – Ah, um, 'Disobedience'

Will – Or was that the Rachel Weisz one (sp?) We also watched 'The Favourite'

Tess – 'The Favourite', oh, 'Imagine Me And You'

Will – 'Pride'

Tess – 'Prid'e, that was really good

Tess – we've been smashing them out. That really terrible one, 'Mary Brave, B. for Brave', and the one with Rachel Weisz, sorry, was that 'Disobedience'?

Will – Yeah

Tess – so what was the question again?

[laughter]

Will – what is it like living in an all queer flat? So I guess we should say I'm trans, we've got Ailish (spelling) who is a bisexual and Issy who identifies as queer.

Tess – yep, and then there's me who came out as trans during lockdown and I'm also bi.

Will – Do you want to talk about how you came out in lockdown and stuff?

Tess – Yeah, so big changes for me during lockdown

Will – Huge!

[laughter]

Tess – huge changes for me during lockdown, so I guess right from the get go of moving in here, I think the first night I was here, before lockdown, ah, we had a big conversation about gender stuff, and it was always something that was there, having conversations about gender, me thinking, not cis, probably...

Will – Cis?

Tess – Cis, identifying with the gender you're assigned at birth. So I kind of felt like I probably wasn't cis, but didn't really understand much more than that, and I don't really know how it happened, but during lockdown being able to spend so much more time around the flatmates, watching a lot of films, reading, I read Lou Sullivan's diaries, called 'We Both Laughed in Pleasure' which was really great, so Lou Sullivan was a gay trans man, reading his diaries was really incredible. We've actually got a photo between us of Lou Sullivan while we're doing this interview

[laughter]

Tess – we're both smiling at him, and I read a book about non-binary people, I think it's about thirty different non-binary people's stories, realising they were non-binary and coming out. And then there was our masc night, which was a big moment for me, this was something I was definitely identifying and vibing with, and I guess it's just been snowballing throughout lockdown, to the point where I finally felt comfortable identifying as trans. Will definitely had a big effect, he's been great to talk to, and he lent me the Lou Sullivan book, it's been amazing, he's been amazing, and since lockdown started, my flatmates started using they/them pronouns for me and then he/him which has been awesome to try those out and see what was working for me (turns out both of them are)

[laughter] since then I've come out to my parents, my siblings, my flatmates obviously, all of my workmates, and just about all of my friends, and some other close family members, and I've also spoken to my doctor and started the process of, towards, getting on testosterone which is really exciting. And it's all happened during lockdown. It's been quite a whirlwind thing, it's not been a whirlwind realisation as such, it's been for the past five years now probably, but somehow lockdown has certainly provided the, what's the word, it's gone...

Will – impetus?

Tess – yeah, impetus I suppose to really acknowledge that yes I am trans and start expressing myself differently and realising how happy it makes me. Which has been really really cool. It's been very exciting.

Will – it's been fricking awesome

[laughter]

Tess – it has. It has been fricking awesome. So right now during this interview I've still got a feminine sounding voice, but hopefully by the end of this year I'll be on testosterone, and in a few years time I'll be in quite a different situation.

Will – I'm excited for all the 'boyth days' to come

Tess – yeah.

Will – all the manniversaries. I suppose because it really is you know, a bubble in this flat, in terms of it being an all queer flat. I don't know where that was going with that, it sounded silly, but it feels like a pretty unique experience to be surrounded by queer people, I mean you have the exception because you've got to work

Tess – yes, but even but...

Will – so you're not constantly surrounded by queer people

Tess – yes, but even actually at my work we are a very, probably quite well known among the Wellington Rainbow community as a particularly LGBT+ friendly medical centre to come to for LGBT+ patients, even in my work environment there's still been that element of, not surrounded, but a lot of queerness still, and yeah it is a unique experience I guess to live entirely with queer people, and it's definitely had a huge effect on my confidence which I think has definitely contributed to me coming out as trans and wanting to start transitioning now properly and that kind of thing, because they, you know, you're all more knowledgeable about trans stuff for a start, especially Will obviously

[laughter]

Will – I don't know about that

Tess – it's I guess, we all get each other more. We have shared experiences which straight and/or cis friends don't necessarily have, identify with or understand as much and you know, I don't know, it's definitely a unique and very cool experience.

Will – I've been out for six years and it's been a revelation for me to be in an all queer flat for the first time. Thank you for sharing so openly.

Tess – [laughter] that's OK

Will - It's really lovely to hear all of that, obviously we've talked about a lot of it, but it feels different in this context

Tess – it feels different

Will – that's for sure, so thank you

Tess – that's OK.

Will – I'm wondering how you felt your coming out has gone for you. Do you think it's gone well?

Tess – I think it's gone incredibly well. I feel like it possibly couldn't have gone better which is awesome because it's obviously a nerve-wracking thing. And I have still been stressed about it, obviously flatmates knew already, I started with my siblings, it was kind of an immediate, what, are you planning to change your name? What pronouns do you prefer? That kind of thing. And one of them even said 'I'd wondered', that kind of thing, it really wasn't huge at all, and then came out to some other family members, came out to my parents, they were great about it, they were just straight up, this is amazing, what a journey you're going to go on, we support you, what can we do to help, what resources do you need, what can we read to learn more?' because they really haven't had much to do with I guess transgender issues or experiences at all, like they don't really know many transgender people, especially not people close to them, and then friends, different friend groups and stuff has all just gone really really well, everyone is just really supportive, really excited. Very committed immediately to learning more and seeing if they can do anything to help, working to get used to pronouns, some of them said 'at least lockdown's giving us the opportunity to practice different pronouns for you so when we see you in person hopefully we won't make mistakes' and that kind of thing, so it's all been awesome.

Will – Wow

Tess – work has been great, I think in particular there are a couple of workmates who I'm particularly close with and they've been really supportive and really excited for me. The whole experience has just gone really smoothly, which is a big relief, because obviously we're going through a global pandemic right now -

Will – [laughter]

Tess - and for some reason during that I decided to come out to everybody, so it was nice that during this very stressful time all of that went really well.

Will – I'm so thrilled for you

Tess – thank you

Will – that's really awesome. Do you think that – I have kind of covered what I was going to ask you, but going back to what we were talking about earlier. A lot of people have talked online about being in all queer flats and have been talking about queer lockdown culture and 'Queerintine'

Tess – 'Queerintine'

Will – that's the name we've given it. Just before we ended our last file we were talking about queer lockdown culture. I wondered if you would want to give your definition, explanation, of queer lockdown culture?

Tess – queer lockdown culture, I feel like it's anything we've been doing

[laughter]

Tess – during the flat in lockdown, obviously deciding to have our masc night and that kind of thing, but um, just yeah, so much we've been doing our flatmate Issy has been documenting what we've been doing, Will to, lots of video, lots of photographs, and as we do that, we're thinking of the collaged pantry we spoke about earlier, a lot of it's covered in queer people from history you know, from the '60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, you know? We can't help but thinking of that as we're documenting all this, this is us, they were queer people hanging out with other people, documenting what they were doing, just as we are now, and wondering what the world's going to look like when we look back one day, when we look at these photos and videos we've made during this time, so I guess that has felt like a very big part of our 'Queerintine', our lockdown queer culture is documenting what we've been doing and why we're doing it, and the ways in which we're doing it in a queer way

[laughter]

Will - yeah, yeah, absolutely

Tess – and there's all the films we've been watching, there's been a lot of dressing up, trying, you know, I just feel everything we've been doing has been a 'oh this is a masculine activity', or I don't even know how to explain it

Will – real euphoric, gender affirming

Tess – yeah, spending the day outside chopping wood while Issy and Will were building a bench out of wood

Will – [laughter] never felt so butch

Tess – exactly, this is so masc, let's all photograph each other doing this, let's pose with the axes and saws and stuff

Will – which is so camp [laughter]

Tess – exactly, and having our disco and karaoke nights in our garage with lights and disco ball, I think 'Queerintine' has been making the most of the fact that we are four queer people, stuck on one property together, why not take this time to bond over queer experiences, queer things, learn about past queer people, watch films about queer people, read queer stuff, just do kind of, bask in the fact that we can be ourselves completely, there's no, you know, we all get each other, it's felt very freeing to be honest, to try out all this stuff, to see how euphoric it feels to be doing, to be

feeling masc, to be dressing differently, to try out these things, and be able to be so jokey with each other about kind of queer stuff, knowing that we know what each other is talking about, we get the jokes, we're enjoying it, and yeah, it's just [laughter] it's been a really good time.

Will – and we're so lucky to be in the situation we're in and having such an awesome and very queer time but then lockdown has also affected queer communities negatively in some ways, you've experienced in terms of your medical transition being put on pause, right?

Tess – yes, for me it's very minor, it's just that I had to be referred to the Endocrine Department which is the only way to get on testosterone, and the only way I've been affected is that usually you would be seen within four months for something like that, but due to Covid, due to what's going on, they're expecting the wait to be much, much longer, which means it's going to be quite a while before I can actually get on testosterone, as in more than four months, possibly significantly more than four months, it all depends on moving through the levels, we go to level two next week, maybe it will happen, maybe it won't, it's all dependent on things like that, the other thing is top surgery, I'm really keen to be looking into that more, but elective surgery, non-urgent surgery, isn't really happening much at the moment from what I understand, and certainly not the appointment to discuss elective or non-urgent surgery. Because obviously they're wanting to keep people away as much as possible, they're not wanting to see people unnecessarily, so I'm hoping I'll be able to get an appointment to start working on the top-surgery side of things as soon as possible as well, but again because of Covid it's something that has to be postponed for a bit, until the situation is better for that kind of thing. So for me it's been a bit, more like, a bit of a hindrance towards things progressing a bit faster towards transitioning, but for other queer people the effects of lockdown will be a lot harsher and more significant. Which is unfortunate. Some of it will be difficulties accessing healthcare, there will probably be young queer people stuck in lockdown possibly with family members or something who aren't accepting of them, or there's just a lot of vulnerable people within the queer community. I'm lucky in that I've got my secure job, and great flatmates, flat, supportive family, but I know a lot of queer people aren't so lucky to be in this situation. So it's probably, yeah, I have a slight hindrance to transitioning, but other queer people will be facing much more difficult and severe situations which is sad.

Will – your stuff's still bloody hard though. It's hard waiting

Tess - I'm feeling very impatient.

Will – fair enough.

Tess – [I] want to get cracking on it

Will – I bet. Speaking of patience, I can smell dinner [laughter]. So I just want to ask you a couple more questions. What are you most excited to do after lockdown?

Tess – I am most excited to go tramping

Will – I knew you'd say that [laughing]

Tess – I've missed tramping a lot, I want to be in the outdoors, I want to go stay at huts again, I want to sleep in my sleeping bag out in the middle of nowhere, yeah, I'm very excited to go tramping again, like I said I haven't been particularly good at maintaining social interactions with friends and stuff so I'm very excited to see my friends again in person and to catch up with them all properly. And most of my family is in the South Island, so I'm looking forward, probably later in the year to visiting my parents and grandparents, siblings and that kind of thing. But the most immediate thing is tramping.

Will – thank you so much for letting me interview today. Is there anything else you'd like to add to the record, while I've got you here, before we have dinner?

[laughter]

Tess – no, I think I'm good actually, I think we've covered a lot, I've talked more than we expected to

[laughter]

Will – I owe you some beers

Tess – it's all good, I'm looking forward to dinner too. Thank you too Will!

Will – Thank you Tess!

Will - That's Jack's Story, recorded during Covid lockdown for 'Kei roto i te miru: Inside the Bubble'. Since we recorded that conversation, a lot has changed in Jack's life. He picked a new name, he started using he/him pronouns, he came out to everyone in his life as trans, he started testosterone and had top-surgery. It is important to note that Jack's transition was a lot smoother than most others - his family, friends and co-workers have been wonderfully accepting, and his medical transition incredibly speedy. The recent *Counting Ourselves* report, a community-led health survey of trans and non binary people, and the NZ Human Rights Commission's PRISM report, both expose the significant barriers to gender affirming healthcare in New Zealand. Although this is not to diminish Jack's own struggles, Jack himself recognises that he is in this way very privileged. And I think his story shows just so clearly why accessible and competent gender affirming healthcare is important. As both a fellow trans person and as one of Jack's best friends, it has been an honour to watch him absolutely blossom - from my perspective, the biggest change in Jack has been his confidence and happiness. Without wanting to sound too sappy, he has always been a ray of sunshine, but now he just shines so brightly, it is incredibly beautiful to witness. It seems to me that this is what happens, when you are finally able to live your truth, and be loved by others for it. I love you Jack, and I am so proud of you!

I'm Will Hansen and you've been listening to 'Kei Roto i Te Miru: Inside the Bubble', a series of interviews recorded between March and July 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Like and follow us on your favourite podcast platform and you'll be notified when the full series is launched at the anniversary of lockdown in March 2021

'Inside the Bubble' is a partnership between Manatū Taonga and Auckland Libraries, the full interviews are available from Auckland Libraries Heritage Collection, OH\_1431. and if you are interested in resources related to this podcast, please check out our page.MCH .GOVT.NZ, inside the bubble

Thanks again to Jack for sharing his story, and to the Production team at Manatu Taonga, Emma Jean Kelly, Anaru Dalziel and Jamie MacKay, and thanks to Sue Berman from Auckland Libraries.

And, the music you have been listening to is titled 'Haerenga' composed by Steffan Paton.

Noho ora-mai-ra

*This interview was recorded on an iPhone 7 using the factory setting recording app.*

**Resources referred to in this podcast:**

*We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan 1961-1991* Nightboat Books, 2019

*Non-Binary: Memoirs of Gender and Identity* and its edited by Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane Columbia University Press, 2019

*Counting Ourselves: First comprehensive national NZ survey on transgender health and wellbeing* October 2019  
<https://nzfvc.org.nz/news/counting-ourselves-first-comprehensive-national-nz-survey-transgender-health-and-wellbeing>

*Prism Human Rights Commission Report June 2020*

[https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/9215/9253/7296/HRC\\_PRISM\\_SOGIESC\\_Report\\_June\\_2020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/9215/9253/7296/HRC_PRISM_SOGIESC_Report_June_2020_FINAL.pdf)

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