

Voice 1: On today's episode: Shelly Bauman, her gay discotheque, and how one leg changed the LGBTQ community in Seattle *forever*.

Voice 2: Wait, what's a discotheque? Who's Shelly Bauman? And how did *one leg* change the gay scene in Seattle forever?

Voice 1: Well, Shelly Bauman was at a Bastille Day parade when -- wait, wait a minute, what am I saying? You'll have to listen to find out.

(theme music plays)

Voice A: Seattle is—

Voice B: Well, we don't use umbrellas.

Voice C: Coffee.

Voice A: Computers?

Voice C: It's a city with a needle.

Voice B: Home to sasquatch.

Voice D: Home to the Museum of History and Industry.

Voice B: Innovation.

Voice C: Rain.

Voice A: A story.

Voice D: A history.

(music fades out underneath)

Voice 2: My name's Atul.

Voice1: And I'm TK. We're Youth Advisors at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle—

ATUL: And this is Rainy Day History, recorded from MOHAI. In this first season, we're exploring inclusion, exclusion, objects, people, and how the Seattle we know now - the questions we grapple with now about what it means to be a Seattleite—

TK: Are all part of a bigger story of belonging. Enjoy the show...whether it's raining outside, or not.

ATUL: We've been saying "LGBTQ" throughout this episode. We want to acknowledge there are many other identities besides the ones in this acronym that are part of this community and that new ones are always being added.

(small sound of rain fades in and out)

ATUL: TK! You can't leave me hanging like that. What is a discotheque? And who is Shelly Bauman? And why was her leg so important?

TK: Slow down Atul! I can only answer one question at a time! A discotheque is literally a disco, a place where people listen and dance to disco music. Shelly Bauman is the protagonist of our story today, and we'll get to her leg in a moment.

TK: In 1968, Bauman moved to Seattle from Florida. In Seattle, she did not know many people, and ended up living with Joe McGonagle, the owner of the gay bar, The Golden Horseshoe. In the book [Gay Seattle](#), written by Gary Atkins, McGonagle recalls how she simply appeared at a party one night.

ATUL: "I don't know how she got there. Somebody brought her. Sunday morning she was still there, and she was still there Tuesday morning, and she just stayed."

TK: Bauman and McGonagle soon became friends. With their other housemates, they would fantasize how much better the gay bars in Seattle could be. They could be so much more than darkly lit rooms in back alleys.

ATUL: In 1970, at age 22, Bauman was at Bastille Day parade in Seattle when a canon misfired and hit the left side of her pelvis. Michael Buckley, a doctor who happened in the crowd, was able to staunch some of the bleeding, and she was rushed to the hospital. While Bauman survived, her left leg had to be amputated.

TK: Bauman sued the Kissel family for sponsoring the parade, Morris Hart for bringing the canon, and the city of Seattle for having police officers who ignored a loaded weapon in a public event. She won \$300,000 from the suit.

ATUL: For those of you who are curious, \$300,000 in 1970 is almost two million in 2019.

TK: With this money, Bauman and McGonagle's dreams about gay bars in Seattle could become a reality. Together, with friend, Pat Nesser, they opened their dream gay bar, Shelly's Leg, in 1973.

ATUL: Okay, wait, wait a minute, I've got a question. You mentioned earlier that there already were gay bars open in Seattle, like, way before the 1970's, so what made this Shelly's Leg so special? And what were the other gay bars like?

TK: Well, to answer that question, we have to fully understand the history of the LGBTQ community in Seattle.

(peppy piano music plays)

ATUL: Let's begin in 1851, when Arthur Denny and his colonizing party arrived on Alki Beach.

TK: Woah, that's way too far back! Let's go with Pioneer Square, the oldest neighborhood in Seattle. A part of Pioneer Square, called the "Tenderloin," was known for encouraging sexual openness, which went against the strong Christian values of the time. In 1893, the Washington State legislature passed a law making sodomy illegal.

ATUL: The Webster Merriam Dictionary defines sodomy as "anal or oral copulation with a member off the same or opposite sex," so technically the anti-sodomy law could be applied to both hetero- and homosexual relationships.

TK: The law passed by the Washington State legislature applied almost exclusively to sexual acts between two men, and the resulting punishment was a sentence twice as long as the punishment for heterosexual rape.

ATUL: So pretty much it just made sex between two men illegal.

TK: Precisely.

ATUL: Over the next decades, there were periods of time when the LGBTQ community was threatened and periods when they were relatively ignored.

TK: For example, during the Klondike gold rush, same-sex relationships were virtually ignored, and the red-light district of the Tenderloin was creating profit for the city by catering to miners. When the gold rush slowed down in the early 20th century, the city began to crack down on illegal sexual activity including same sex relationships.

ATUL: The deputy chief prosecutor, and the chief prosecutor at the time was George Vanderveer. He strongly pushed this agenda.

TK: With the continued urbanization through the 1930's, Seattle population was booming. From 1880 to 1930, Seattle's population grew from 3,500 to 356,588. With this rise in population came a rise in the LGBTQ community, and in 1930 Joseph Bellotti opened The Casino Pool Hall. After Prohibition Era ended, Bellotti opened up the Double Header bar in 1934 above The Casino Pool Hall. It is believed to be the nation's oldest continuously operating gay bar until its closure in on December 31, 2015.

ATUL: The number of gay and lesbian bars in Seattle increased over the next couple of decades.

TK: In the 1960's, gay bars in cities such as New York City or San Francisco were often raided and harassed by the police.

ATUL: Basically, in these cities, the police would enforce anti-gay laws by raiding gay bars, arresting patrons and breaking up the community.

TK: Exactly. However, in Seattle, gay bars were not raided or harassed with the same frequency. The police would take bribes from the bars to ignore everything from same-sex dancing to drag performances. This system made room for growth of gay bars in Seattle, however the Seattle Police would use these bribes as opportunities to shake down the bars, extorting for free food, money, alcohol, and other favors. All to quote-unquote “protect” the bars. And this brings us up to 1970, which is where this history ends and Shelly’s story begins.

(peppy piano music fades back in and plays out)

TK: Shelly’s Leg stood out from the other gay bars of the time. It was glamorous, with art deco interior, a glittering chandelier, and palm trees arching over what was then the largest dance floor in the city’s LGBTQ spaces. As opposed to other gay bars of the time, the lights on the dance floor were not dimmed; patrons could clearly see with whom they were dancing with and their friends across the bar. At Shelly’ Leg, no one was under the impression that they were hiding in the shadows.

ATUL: In the book, Gay Seattle, Atkins wrote, “It may have been the first time heterosexuals in Seattle acknowledged that there was something they actually enjoyed about the culture being created by the city’s newly decloaked gays and lesbians.” This was a big deal. Before Shelly’s Leg, straight and LGBTQ people stuck to their respective bars. Because there were so many straight people going to Shelly’s Leg, Bauman, Nesser, and McGonagle were worried that LGBTQ people would be put off.

TK: Bauman was upfront and proud about Shelly’s Leg being a gay bar. At a time when many gay bars were quiet and nondescript, a sign inside the bar read, “Shelly’s Leg is a gay bar provided for Seattle’s gay community and their guests.” This sign told both the public, and the LGBTQ patrons that the bar was meant for them.

TK: Unfortunately, in 1975, a fire on the Alaskan Way Viaduct destroyed several of the buildings around the club and damaged part of the club itself. After the fire, patrons never returned with the same numbers and the club shut down in 1977.

ATUL: Around this time, developers in Pioneer Square were both tearing down buildings to build parking lots *and* renovating historic buildings, causing the closure of many gay bars. At the same time, Capitol Hill was becoming increasingly bohemian. When the new manager of Shelly’s Leg opened another bar, he opened it in Capitol Hill, not Pioneer Square. This marked the shift of the LGBTQ community in Seattle, and these neighborhood demographics can still be seen today.

TK: While Shelly’s Leg was only open for four years, it’s impact on Seattle was huge. The gay bar scene in Seattle was, so to speak, out of the closet (Atul chuckles).

ATUL: In 1973 and 1975, Seattle passed two ordinances banning employment and housing discrimination against sexual minorities. In 1976, sodomy was decriminalized, and 1977, and Seattle held its first pride parade.

TK: Now, Capitol Hill shows its gay pride with its rainbow crosswalks.

ATUL: In 2013, Seattle elected its first openly gay mayor, Ed Murray.

TK: And our current mayor, Jenny Durkan, is also openly gay!

ATUL: Now, Seattle is seen as a very friendly city to the LGBTQ community.

TK: While Capitol Hill is still the neighborhood most known for having a prominent LGBTQ community, as the city experiences a rapid gentrification, gay bars are once again starting to dwindle.

ATUL: On the other hand, Seattle is home to two of the largest LGBTQ choruses in the world, the Seattle Men's Chorus and the Seattle Women's Chorus. In a 2015, Seattle ranked as one of the metropolitan areas with the highest rates of LGBTQ residents. This indicates both a significant population of LGBTQ people, but also that they are comfortable openly identifying as LGBTQ.

TK: And, if nothing else, there are some pretty amazing rainbow sidewalks.

ATUL: At the same time, we have to wonder why a group of nerdy teens are making a podcast about bar for LGBTQ adults in the 1970s. Why do we care?

(record scratch)

EMILY: Hey there, this is Emily T. During the recording session, TK sat down with fellow MYA Andrea and Julia to talk about what drew them to the story of Shelly's Leg.

(reflective, sentimental piano music)

JULIA: When you're not telling the history of a certain community or a certain people, that's part of oppression and that's part of disregarding the things that they've gone through.

TK: And I feel it so strongly for minority groups, when you go into history book and its only two pages on the Japanese incarceration, um, a couple more pages about the Vietnam War, but, but, it creates a narrative that just feels like they forget that Vietnamese people were people, and we suffered.

Andrea: Well, one of the interesting things I thought about the story was that I didn't realize that Shelly Bauman, who was the creator and co-owner of Shelly's Leg the bar, wasn't part of the LGBTQ community. I thought that was really interesting; she was just best friends with like, a bunch of gay dudes and she lived in their house and then she was like – We're going to make this bar! (laughter) —and I was like yeahh! But it was really interesting, in addition, as like an example of allyship that was so prominent and really like, wasn't about her, even though it was named after her, it was just like she saw this need and she had this money and this like, leg, I guess. And she was able to like, put that to good use, which was an interesting idea, because oftentimes being an ally in history can be the main narrative. But she was able to do it in a way that was both benefiting the community and not placing herself in the spotlight.

JULIA: But I-I like, that like, well I *don't* like that in history, or when we're talking about history a lot and just like issues in general, we always have to connect it back to ourselves. When I think that we should be able to like, look at another community, and another identity, and another issue, and be like this – um, connect it in a distant way. For example, I have friends who are in that community, but it's not about me and I don't need to connect it back to me, and I can still care and advocate for this issue, or learn about this history--as in the people who are in that community.

TK: Thanks to experiences like those, you can become so much more empathetic

Andrea: mhm, yeah

ATUL: Our staff quote of the day comes from Rachel. She said:

TK: As a queer women, having the sign from Shelly's Leg prominently displayed in a museum feel really important to me. It makes me feel both welcome and connected to the history of queer folks who came before. I love how unapologetically clear the sign is about claiming the bar as a gay space at a time when making those claims was still rare-- so many gay bars of the 50's and 60's were down dark stairwells and in backrooms with veiled windows. Seattle had a thriving pre-Stonewall bar scene, but it was not loudly proclaimed.

(wind ensemble end music plays)

TK: So if you want to see the sign that hung inside of Shelly's Leg...

ATUL: Not her actual leg

TK: You can find it in the Changes section of *True Northwest: The Seattle Journey*, on the second floor of MOHAI.

ATUL: Thanks for listening to the podcast



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TK: We hope you enjoyed what you learned. If you want to learn more, visit the MOHAI website at mohai.org/ that's m-o-h-a-i-dot-org.

ATUL: Come back next week for another episode of Rainy Day History to learn about Teamsters and Turtles.

(jaunty piano music plays and plays out underneath)

FINCH: This is Finch. I'm one of our editors, here with the credits.

This episode was researched by Leela and Andrea, written by Andrea, and recorded by Ziah and Julia. Our editors are Grace and myself. I wrote the theme music and performed it with Tyler and friend of the pod Sylvie Wang. Our logo was designed by Grace. Marketing help came from Julia, Tyler, and Grace. Special thanks to Pei Pei, Chris, Tori, and Emily: our fashion icon, celery queen, and bringer of all snacks and tea. We couldn't do it without her.

Stay dry out there!