

GayTucsonNews[®]

April 10, 1985

Gay Tucson News[®]©

Interviews

Emma Nelson

The Tucson LGBTQ+ Memories Interviews

Emma Nelson Part 4

TUCSON - In an interview with native Tucsonan octogenarian Emma Nelson on April 10, 1985, Emma recalls both fondly and sometimes not so fondly the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s world of Gays and Lesbians in Tucson, Arizona.

"We often met together privately in homes, out on ranches, and at the few 'Gay' or friendly bars back then in the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. By the 1970s we had some good Lesbian later called Womyn bars. Collette Bajaras had a good one in the 1970s. The bars always had lots of events for us on weekends and holidays like Turnaround where the guys and girls switched out their clothes then acted and became the opposite sex in fantastic uproarious shows and skits the bars held every year. The biggest every year were the Thanksgiving and Christmas shows with the free big potluck buffets every year. A bar's pool tables got covered with table cloths or sheets and there were lots of hot pots and dishes of food everyone had brought with the big main dishes often supplied by the bar's owners. It was all free, seemingly never ending big juicy turkeys, hams, beef roasts, and nobody went hungry on those holidays," reminisced a grey haired Nelson.

"Some national events took their time to finally influence Tucson. It was towards the end of the 1970s when that upcoming generation began protesting, marching, and forming political groups. We here in Tucson had celebrated our Pride of being a Gay or Lesbian every year at the annual Spring Gay Festivals and Gay Carnivals that the bars always held inside the bar and out in their dirt parking lots. Also were our more private and at times wilder Spring or Summer Gay Carnivals celebrating being Gay and Lesbian that we had up in the foothills, at homes on the big lots that had land around them, and the other areas just outside of Tucson on the small ranches," mused Emma with a little girl sparkle in her eyes.



1962 Tucson Gay Carnival local Pride celebration

"The food, beer, wine, and drinks at the annual celebrations was always free, it was big tables of food dishes, we all pitched in, the BBQ was often done over a pit dug down in the ground, pigs &

beef roasts being turned over the coals with BBQ sauces with beer and chili sauces slathered constantly on them. That juicy dripping BBQ meat was falling right off the bone fantastic, and there were booths and carnival games that we played. The carnival games we adapted to Gay themed ones like "throw the ring on the dildo", the Corn Hole Toss' horseshoes with a bra or a dildo tied onto the metal or wooden stake, "bobbing" with your face down in the big water trough mixed with beer or whiskey for floating single condom packages or things like corks and you won prizes depending on how many you could pick out of the water with your teeth in 30 seconds, gunny sack races in the nude, carrying an egg with a small spoon in the nude to a finish line with everyone cheering you on, then there was mud wrestling that you could place bets on. And, always there were the crazy fun skits & shows. Didn't take a stage to put them on back then, we did them right out there on the dirt and the desert sand or put down a couple sheets of plywood then pulled up a big bed sheet at times behind the performers and simply tied the sheet on a couple tree limbs or just people taking turns holding the big sheet up as a background. It was always simple and a real hoot back then," Emma reminisced fondly.

Gay Tucson News©©

Notice of Copyrights - Trade Names

All Rights Reserved:

This interview is copyrighted, trademarked, and trade named under Gay Tucson News©©

All images, videos, articles here are copyrighted by the Gay Tucson News©© or by third parties. All Rights Reserved. Any use or

publication of these contents is strictly prohibited without written permission, note-backs, link-backs, referenced back.



Publication of names, photos of any person or organization in the Gay Tucson News is not to be construed as indication of the sexual orientation of such person(s), organization(s), advertisers, or any employees thereof.

Copyrighted - All Rights Are Reserved

