

“What happened was, I was bartending on Wall Street during *The Wolf of Wall Street* days—I used to hang out with those lunatics—and it was so extra that I was like, ‘I have to get the hell out of here.’ Back then when you wanted a job you picked up *The Village Voice* at midnight on Tuesday (that’s when it came out) and you looked at the classifieds and then you’d go and stand in front of whatever bar or restaurant it was and wait in line to meet the owner. That’s how you got hired. So, I look at this job that was like four blocks up from Henrietta’s. It was this beautiful restaurant and I was this killer bartender. I mean, to work on Wall Street when the bell rings you have to be good. When that four o’clock bell rings you’d have like seventy or eighty people in the bar at once. Anyway, the guy was like, ‘I’d love to hire you but you look too young.’ I was twenty-two and I looked maybe eighteen. And it was like a fancy restaurant. So, I was walking down Hudson Street and the sky opened up. It started pouring rain and I ran into this random bar—I thought it was random at least—to get out of the rain and that was the original Cubby Hole. I sat at the bar and there was nobody there, just the bartender, and she goes, ‘What are you doing out in the rain?’ And I told her I was looking for a job. She goes, ‘We just had a couple of shifts open!’ The manager happened to be there, her name was Phyllis, and she hired me on the spot! The moral of that story is that if it didn’t rain that day we wouldn’t be on the phone right now! And this place would never have been here.

By the way, that was 1985. So, I’ve been here continuously since 1985 except for about nine months when the Cubby Hole was closed and I went up the block and worked at Kelly’s and then I spoke to the landlord and reopened, opening Henrietta’s. So, I’ve essentially been here since 1985. I joke around that I’ve been working the same corner for over thirty years! (Laughing) I love it! I love how things have changed too! I love that the young kids reclaimed the word queer. I always did my best to have an inclusive venue. The young kids who are coming out today don’t necessarily identify as gay or lesbian. It’s just not how they identify! They identify as queer, as non-binary, whatever the case might be—this is a space for them now. We were a lesbian bar, then we were a lesbian-centric queer human bar, now we’re a queer human bar built by lesbians.

My favorite thing... I go to bed pretty early. I get up when the bar’s closing. I’m usually up at five, five-thirty in the morning and they’re just closing up and going home. I live on top of the bar and I walk my dogs every night and one of my favorite things in the world is as I’m walking past, I just see so many happy people. I get to have that experience. I get to have that experience any time I want it. I’ll walk by and have somebody hold the dogs and just open the door and take a peek inside and just see everybody smiling and jumping up and down and doing whatever they’re doing and I just say to myself, ‘You know, your work is done.’ That’s what drives me, the joy. The joy I see... And the freedom! The freedom I see in these young people. That I can have that any time I want, I can extract that joy—all I have to do is walk in the bar and look around.”

Lisa Cannistraci, 2022