

“Elaine Romagnoli ran the Cubbyhole that’s now Henrietta’s and then I believe she lent the name to Tanya [Saunders]. Lisa [Cannistraci] was part owner of Cubby Hole and changed the name to Henrietta’s. So, the name was still available when Tanya changed Fat Cat to Cubbyhole and she bought the name from Elaine. If that makes sense. I know it’s a little convoluted. (Laughing) I was working in family court and it’s really, really taxing. Young as I was, I was starting to burn out and I was thinking, ‘You know what, I need to step back from this and really think if this is the path that I want to take.’ I decided I would go bartend because I had always bartended on and off through college and I knew one of the bartenders at Cubbyhole. She was leaving and she introduced me to the owner, Tanya, and we just hit it off. I started working at Cubby and I just fell in love with the place – with the people, with the vibe, with the owner – and I never left. I became manager after several years and then when Tanya passed away, I took it over.

Tanya [Saunders] and I... We were very different personalities but we just clicked! We just really liked each other! We just really got each other. She was really smart and she had traits that I admired. She was really outspoken and I liked that. I mean, we would clash a lot but she was just really accepting. No matter what you did. No matter what anyone did to her she got over it! She never, ever held a grudge. Never. And no matter what you told her she’d get it. If you told her, ‘You know Tanya, I got angry and I stabbed somebody!’ (Laughing) She’d go, ‘Ok. Alright. Don’t panic! We’ll figure this out!’ It would be like nothing. She never judged you. The only thing – she was an avid animal lover – so, if you were ever unkind to an animal, that she could not forgive. That was her bridge too far. But anything else!

So, I loved that! I just never met anyone like that. And at the Cubbyhole, she created a space, which I try to continue. She was a lesbian, but she always found exclusivity kind of boring. Like, she always wanted a place that could be for lesbians – a safe place of course – but where their friends and their family, whether straight, gay or whatever, would feel welcomed as well! You know? There were some lesbian bars that had an issue with men. Why do we deliberately choose to segregate when we socialize? As long as we’re all respectful. So, she wanted that kind of space and she got criticized for it too. Lesbians criticized her for it whenever they’d come and they’d see there were some men in there and straight people... She’d be like, ‘Go fuck yourself!’ (Laughing) She didn’t care, ‘This is the kind of environment that I enjoy in my personal life and this is what I want in my business since I spend a lot of time here.’ And I understood where she was coming from! She was right. Because it made Cubbyhole a welcome, warm place for everyone.”

Lisa Menichino, 2022