

An Oral History of Jenny Oxier

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Interviewer: Jeff Auer

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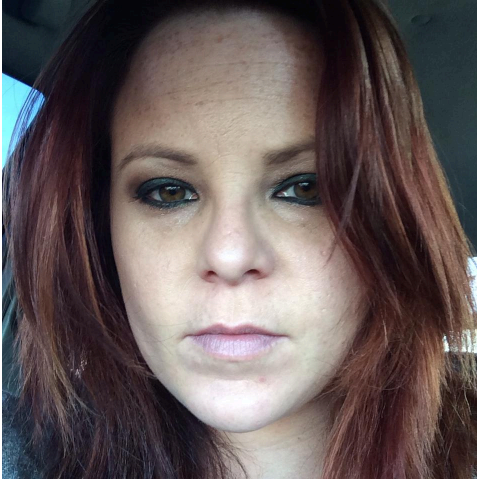


Photo provided by Jenny Oxier

JENNY OXIER

Interviewed on April 24, 2012
Jeff Auer, Interviewer

Stylist Jenny Oxier, or Jenny O, is the founder and co-owner of A Salon 7. The business started on Cheney Street and moved in 2009 into a renovated historic fire station known as 11 @ the Firehouse, at 495 Morrill Street.

Auer: This is Jeff Auer and Jenny O [Oxier]. We are at the Firehouse. What can you tell me about the Firehouse itself? Because I know there was some remodeling that went on, right?

Oxier: Correct. This firehouse is one of the first firehouses that Reno's ever had, so the historic value is just amazing. It sat vacant for quite a bit of time. They built several new firehouses around town, obviously. You see them all over now. After it was no longer a firehouse, it ended up being the mission for a long time, and that's why it's ventilated, to correspond with people living here.

It sat vacant again for another probably ten or twelve years, and then our developers, HabeRae Investments, ended up taking over the building because they wanted to take a historic building and make it unique and kind of create an anchor to build a community around this area. Obviously, since we've been here in the last three years, lots of stuff has popped up, so, her idea was correct in that sense. That's a little bit of history about our building. Also, this was the building that my business partner—her dad was a firefighter—worked in.

She's a native Nevadan, so you can imagine how special that was for us. This building was the "spider bug building" for so long, and the gentleman who actually did that sculpture was my friend in middle school's stepdad. I remember him talking about it when we were twelve, about how he built this spider, and we thought, "What? That is so ridiculous," and then years later you go to Hug High School and you see murals of the spider bug building, and it was a big landmark here. It's been neat to be in this space, and to feel the energy of all the history is super awesome.

Auer: How big is it? It seems huge on the inside.

Oxier: Well, my section alone is 5,180 square feet. And then there are nine artists' lofts above us—nine living and work spaces, that's what they call them—and one on the side, and then, obviously, the bagel shop, which is where we're sitting right now.

Auer: Are they full?

Oxier: I think so. I think with any apartment complex, especially during this economy, they're going to see a lot of turnover, but there's never nobody up there. It's usually fairly full. I think the newness of the idea has dwindled a little bit only because it is such a small space upstairs and you have to really think about how much you're paying in rent as opposed to a different space, because Reno's pretty easy to live in.

Auer: How old is the building itself?

Oxier: This building was built in the 1950s, and I don't know necessarily why it stayed vacant for all those years. The city owned it. I just think over time the buildings just—they dissolve, and then obviously this is Fourth Street. You have to remember again that this is where people used to hook. We still see a little bit of that, but now that the ballpark's over here, the Freight House District, this is all up and coming, with all the businesses that have opened up around here.

It's fairly old, but Eddie used to have pictures of it. I wish I had some to show you, but it was neat to see this building back then and all of the landscape behind it with nothing constructed.

Auer: Oh, really? There was nothing here?

Oxier: There was nothing. I mean, you could see plenty of stuff on the mountains behind it. I think the Wells overpass was still here, but the way the pictures were taken, you could just see on the side there were no apartment buildings. It's really neat to know that it's been here that long. I wonder how many people have walked through these doors.

Auer: So it's just these two businesses then?

Oxier: Yeah, these two businesses. The SPCA used to be next door till they got their new building, but now there's a groomer next door. SPCA had been here for *years*. It's neat to see that as soon as something is out, something is taking its place, which is what the idea is. You want to see those businesses keep popping up all over.

Auer: Tell me about Salon 7.

Oxier: Well, we've been open for a little over eight years, and originally, when I opened the salon, I had no business degree. I had no idea besides the Internet how to run a business. We started out on Cheney Street and, again, we were an anchor for that, for the Midtown area. A decade ago there was nothing around us besides Black Hole Body Piercing and a few other businesses that have since closed down and other ones have popped up. There are about twenty that have popped up around that area.

When I originally opened the salon, it was not to be a salon owner and that was not my lifelong dream. I just wanted to have a space where I could be myself and kind of create my own purple cow. I have a lot of business savvy for not having a degree and I felt like I just had something to say and I feel like gay people needed a soapbox to stand on and, obviously, having a business gives you a lot of leverage.

The first year we were 600 square feet with only five employees, and then a year and a half later, a girl, my first employee that I hired—she was a girl who I had gone to beauty school with—came into some money. I thought she'd make a great business partner and I said, "Do you want to come into business with me?" We expanded after that and then went to fourteen chairs and ended up opening up another salon in the Sands. We closed that down a couple years later because with the economy it was hard for hotels to keep it busy. And then over time, we have created a culture for ourselves.

As I've gotten older, I've become smarter and you learn, you live and you learn. So we have more structure. We're just around the same as any other salon, just a different style. It's been interesting because I never thought that I'd create a culture, but it's true, you know, after a decade of being in business, you realize you have something good and it works. Oh, now we're 5,000 square feet. I guess that's what I should say.

Auer: How did you come up with the name?

Oxier: When we teach at beauty schools, that's one of the questions where we give out a prize, because I want people to wonder why. Eight years ago I was trying to think of names, and I really wanted to engage my clients in taking ownership and I wanted them to have a say in what was happening. So it was narrowed down to three names, and it was A Salon 7, A Studio 7, or Headbangers. Had I known Headbangers would have been perfect, I probably would have named it that legitly, but I'm really glad that I didn't—although back then the seven had no significance to me at all.

I was born and raised in Reno. I've been around gambling my whole life. Stupid people come from out of town and think that their lucky number is seven, so I was thinking, oh, seven. Actually, Studio 7 won, but it was taken by a photography studio in Las Vegas, so I had to go with Salon 7, which now has been amazing because on 07/07/07 we had a wedding every fifteen minutes in the salon.

Now as I've gotten older, I think thirty-three monumentally hit something for me and all of a sudden numbers have precedence, and so now every time I pick a number or I think about something, I think, it has to have seven or it has to have three or it has to have something that has to do with gambling.

I didn't know that I was going to be doing that, but, ultimately, people really do think of seven as their lucky number and will pick us first. The "A" was even another smart choice that I thought about ten years ago, not knowing about Facebook and Myspace and all these things. The "A" was added so it'd show up first in the phonebook, so I wouldn't have to put an ad. But now we show up first in people's pages. So it was really smart back then to do that, and since then I've seen other salons do that. They add an "A" or an "N" or an "An" or whatever to their name to do the same thing I did, and imitation is the biggest form of flattery, so I think, whatever. I copy other people, too.

Auer: How long were you in the original space over there?

Oxier: We were there for five years, starting in 2004. We moved here three years almost three years ago in August, 2009.

Auer: How would you say it's organized, the business? I got a brief glimpse of it. It's just chairs in the back.

Oxier: Well, we are departmentalized, and I'll give you a tour and then you'll be able to see it better, but we have hair, nails, and spa. That's in the very back. It's tucked away neatly back there so it's a little more private, but departmentally that's how we are.

Auer: And who would you say your customers are?

Oxier: It's so funny because by looking at me and looking at my staff, you would think our demographic is, like, seventeen to twenty-nine. To be quite honest, because of the level of professionalism and the education that we have, my personal demographic for my chair is thirty to sixty-five, and the demographic for the salon as a whole is anywhere from eighteen to sixty-five.

Usually the majority of our clients, because there's only a small section of people who can afford to get stuff done here and usually people in high school can't, we cater to professional women, liberal-minded professional women or conservative. They just know that our education is topnotch. Everything that we're doing is progressive, and that's why they come to us. People are getting past the look of somebody, and the way that they talk and their verbiage is what's keeping someone in your chair. It's the professionalism that you have. So we're artists. We're supposed to look a little unusual, but we're supposed to act nothing like that. You're supposed to be very professional.

Auer: Do you get men in the salon?

Oxier: Yes. We do cater to the gay community too. I think people just feel comfortable here, transgender, obviously, and know that we're a safe zone for all that, me and Tonya both being in the community. We're pretty out. But we get a lot of gay men. We have a lot of gay people who work here. Still, the majority of people who work here are straight, but it's advocates, people who love and care and don't really think twice about gay people. It's so part of their every day, it doesn't even matter, but, you know, it's very rare that we get a client in here that is offended. They know that if they come here there's going to be somebody who may be a man dressed in a dress who needs to learn how to do their makeup, and they just need to be open. It's not about tolerating, anyway; it's about being accepting. You cannot walk through these doors and feel like you're going to judge somebody by any means.

Auer: How many people work here?

Oxier: About twenty-seven employees. We have independent contractors because they're all independents.

Auer: What is your relationship with Fourth Street as a business?

Oxier: It's funny, because I've had relationships with the businesses that are on Fourth Street prior to even being here, so EN Soul, which is right around the corner, they're our

hair extension place. We've been doing business with them since I started my career. The strip clubs that are around here, the owner is one of my clients. I've known him for years. Cadillac Lounge, we know the people who are in there, the owner of Lincoln Lounge, and he owns Imperial, and Granite Street is also one of my clients and I've known him for years. He came from New York, found us online and became my client. You know Louis' Basque Corner down here? Tonya's family has been going there for years. I mean, they're old, old, old Reno, very Italian old Reno, and they've been going there for years. When we got here, it was a little slow truckin' at first. There wasn't a lot of traffic. Now we have people—and unfortunately during the construction, it's harder to get people down here, but I feel like the stigma that has been behind Fourth Street for so long is kind of melting away. Thank god for the ballpark, you know. All that good energy and the beautiful streets and stuff are moving towards this way.

Again, we are an anchor in this area, kind of the pioneers behind all the other businesses opening. There's something opening up on the corner here. Steve Starr owns Studio on Fourth. We have a great relationship with the mission. You can't not envelop what is happening here on Fourth Street.

Auer: Since you're local, what are your memories of Fourth Street? You sort of are alluding to the stigma like everybody knows what the stigma is you're talking about.

Oxier: Well, if anyone's from Reno or knows about it, Fourth Street's always been the place where the hookers would be. Like, that's where the girls work. Now in a day and age where I feel like sexuality is becoming a little less taboo, the novelty has worn off. People aren't so shocked by things anymore. I feel like now girls are no longer working on the streets. I mean, there are. Don't get me wrong. We see them a lot, but not a lot of girls are working on the streets. They're working in brothels now. We work closely with Mustang Ranch, too, so not that it's okay, but that it's cleaning up, I guess you could say.

It's cleaning up. People aren't looking at the brothels as places that are skanky. The streets are cleaning up, especially on Fourth Street. I mean, there are still a lot of motels farther east, but all of this that's really close to the heart of downtown, not much at all. I mean, we have more trouble down on Cheney.

Auer: Really?

Oxier: Yeah, oddly enough, way more trouble down on Cheney. With people sleeping in the backyard, needles. It's just because everything's so tucked in, and this is more of an open space. Not that it won't be tucked in eventually. I'm sure stuff will be happening across the street, but there are churches in this area. There's, you know, the fence store across the street. It's changing and you can see it start at the Freight House and work its way down slowly but surely.

Auer: As a child, do you remember it being skanky, Fourth Street?

Oxier: Oh, yeah. Well, because the original Reno Arch is right off of Lake Street, and that's kind of where the traffic was happening for so long—well, not when I was alive, but, I mean, some movie set came in and redid that, made us a new arch, but I can't

remember when. I can't remember the history of that now. But when I was younger my mom would say, "Don't go to Fourth Street because that's where the hookers are." Because I would cruise, because that's what we did when we were sixteen. I would cruise up and down there, and my mom would be like, "Just don't go to Fourth Street."

Auer: Well, you must have at least tried it once, right, to see it?

Oxier: Of course. We'd go right through it. I don't listen to anything my mom says. Yes, we drove right through it and—

Auer: And you saw hookers, I'm assuming?

Oxier: Oh, yeah, we would see them. You know, this area isn't like that so much anymore because it's happening everywhere now, and if it's not happening on the streets, it's happening in safe places like brothels. And it's okay. Nevada is okay with prostitution. We legalized that here and I'm okay with it, too. I just don't want it around my business, obviously.

Auer: Well, as a business owner on Fourth Street, how do you feel about those motels?

Oxier: Well, fortunately, they're so far down the east side. It's really underneath that overpass over there, and we don't really see it. What we do see, though, is a lot of transients from the mission, people going to Tent City. All of that's right by the ballpark, though. There wouldn't be a city without a mission or homeless people. We would not be a thriving city if we didn't have that. It's part of our culture. It's part of any big city's culture.

You can be a business owner and totally get upset about it and try to fight it. To me, people will respect you and leave your business alone if they know that you're helping out or you're doing your part in making your face known, especially volunteering at the mission or anything like that. We haven't had any trouble.

Auer: As a business owner, what do you think can be done to make it better for you here on the Fourth Street corridor?

Oxier: Exactly what they did to downtown, redoing the sidewalks, creating parks, hub communities, like how they do in San Diego where every district has its own grocery store, hardware store. Micro-communities is what it is, and that's what we're creating down here. We're still part of downtown. We're just the east side of downtown. And getting along with other businesses is crucial. We go to EN Soul as often as we can. We got to the Ethiopian restaurant my friend Suda's [phonetic] parents own. He's been a client of ours for a long time—I went to middle school with him. You know what I'm saying? So that's the kind of family community. This truly is the biggest little city. It's a big city where everyone knows each other, and that makes it little. Everyone knows everyone.

So that's how we try to act—we try to sell to each other and stay local and build micro communities. The only thing we need down on this side now is a grocery store and a hardware store. We have Twin City Surplus, so that's sort of hardware store-ish.

Auer: Do you think the city's committed to the Fourth Street corridor?

Oxier: Yes and no. I can say it's very early, although the ballpark's been there for a minute now. We've been here for three years. That's still very short in the long-term goal. So I feel like no, not right now, but I think they will. Do you know what I'm saying? I think they will start taking it very seriously because of the business that we're bringing and the revenue that's coming. I think the city will eventually. I do. I truly believe it. They've done it with every other district that I've seen. They need to redo the sidewalks.

Auer: What's wrong with the sidewalks?

Oxier: Well, you can see where they upgraded, downtown by the river, how they have the planters and carry on that same theme through downtown.

Auer: Do you think transportation issues play a big role in the health of Fourth Street?

Oxier: No. We're right by the bus station.

Auer: So there are no transportation issues on Fourth Street that you see as a problem?

Oxier: Not that I'm aware of. I mean, I have a Prius. [laughs] I think getting access to here, unfortunately, with the construction, now—that's the only problem is the construction that happens all year long. That's a pain in the ass for anyone who knows that you can get anywhere in Reno in fifteen minutes.

Well, see, I can't complain. This is the power of positive thinking, because I look at what they did to 395 northbound in the eighties on the ground and it looks all fancy. I just can't help but thank them; that looks beautiful. I can't wait to see how big our freeway is and how accessible it is, but I just wish it would be done. They work on it every year. When are they going to get one guy who can think into the future and make the freeway look how it's supposed to? Because I really like what they did with it.

I could complain and bitch about it all, but that's the only thing is the construction. Reno never seems to be stopping—I just wish we would do it right the first time. But it's Reno.

Auer: What kind of transportation issues, and not just public, are needed in this area to help you, for things like cars and parking?

Oxier: Well, as it grows, that's where that's going to come into play. Like I said, right now we're still very early. I can imagine this place will not be booming until seven years from now. Seven, see? Not until seven years from now. About a good decade is when it

will really truly boom—because think about how long it took them to redo downtown by the river and how long it's been now. It's been a while.

Auer: Oh, yeah, twenty years.

Oxier: It seems like it was only like yesterday, but it really has been a while, and it's going to take some time to get all that stuff done. Since we're in the early stages, I don't know. If I want to think long-term, I'm thinking parking structures, but again, we're not that far along. I think people in Reno don't like to walk, so the more free parking we have, the better. I know in San Diego in one of their micro communities, which is Ocean Beach, they leave it up to the districts to decide if they have to pay for parking or not. I know ours is a city thing, but for right now we don't pay for parking outside of our building and we have great parking.

We're in a location where we have access to a lot of parking, but some buildings are tucked away right on the street or in a strip, so they are dealing with Fourth Street itself and the parking. I feel like I've never been able not to find a parking spot. Now, when that changes, obviously, as this area grows, that may be something that they'll have to look into, but right now we have a bus stop right around the corner and the city center is right there. It's only four blocks from here. But people in Reno don't like to walk, so four blocks to somebody is far away. To me, I'm thinking I could walk from here to the Circus Circus and that's just not that far. But people will start walking because gas is only going to get worse, I'd say. And the people in the United States are getting smarter about being overweight, so when people get skinny, they want to be more active. They're going to walk.

Auer: Are you aware of any transportation safety issues in the corridor? Would you say the traffic is too fast on Fourth Street? Are sightlines bad as a driver?

Oxier: No, not right now.

Auer: That's all good?

Oxier: Eventually, if they build something in this lot over here, we will probably need a stoplight or something because you can't see when cars are parked that way, but again, that will be years from now. But I think on Fourth Street, all along that area, there's no parking. It's all red. You can't park along the street there, and that keeps things more visible on both sides.

Auer: Is that a good thing to not have parking on the street?

Oxier: Yeah, bad for the businesses, good for visibility as far as not getting in accidents, but I think that could be easily fixed. Put parking there. For the buildings that are right there, put a stoplight. That would easily fix that, but that's just me.

Auer: Do you feel like you're always behind a bus driving on Fourth Street?

Oxier: I'm very rarely driving. I'm on the freeway the whole time because I live in Sparks right behind In-N-Out. Hop the freeway right there and I get off the freeway to here. So I don't really see downtown. I go to Midtown a lot because I eat over there often and I don't feel like I'm ever stuck behind a bus.

Auer: Do you feel like you have clients who complain about Fourth Street transportation issues to you?

Oxier: No, they don't have problems. No, actually, not at all. As I say, they only have problems finding our location, but that's not hard now.

Auer: Do you think the buses should have their own lanes on Fourth Street?

Oxier: Not yet, but maybe as we get more crowded. I'd probably say in about five years maybe start planning something like that, but in Reno, everything's very slow. I feel like in five years that the planning of it should begin so then in another five years they do it. So in a decade from now, that would be feasible.

Right now, if we were to put something in, I'd be like, "Why the fuck are they wasting money? Finish this. Finish that out there." But like I said, maybe in the future that would be something that would definitely make sense—I see it in San Diego and San Francisco all the time. They have to have that. We're not in a need for that yet, but I also think why not do it while it's slow, while there's not as much traffic going along Fourth Street. Do it now while it's slow, so that way it doesn't impede on anybody's schedules or doesn't inconvenience anybody during the construction like this.

Auer: What would you like to see for pedestrians to make it more pedestrian-friendly?

Oxier: There's something that we don't have on this side of downtown is a park, and not that it's for pedestrians and maybe for pedestrians, but maybe something. We do need a park over in this area. That's what they did for Wingfield and it looks amazing. Not that we need an amphitheater by any means, but we just need somewhere that is more inviting for not homeless, you know? And maybe bridges or walkways.

Auer: Those big metal walkways that go over the streets?

Oxier: Yeah, on the streets, for pedestrians, but right now I don't know if a lot of people are dying on Fourth Street. I'm not sure if that's the case. I mean, I definitely would probably revisit that if that were the case, if there were a lot of deaths on Fourth Street during a certain time, but right now I feel like there's plenty of space to walk, but it's just not pretty.

Auer: So it's not friendly because it's not pretty?

Oxier: Yeah, the closer you get to the east side of Fourth Street, you start to get scared, and if it were just some planters, people would be like, "Flowers! Let's walk there." It

needs curb appeal. It needs some brand-new concrete. Like, this whole building is brand new, down to the concrete. Everything is brand new. It was a shell.

Auer: That's amazing.

Oxier: I know. Isn't that crazy? If the city won't do it, the business owners will get together and we'll do it ourselves. It doesn't take much to put planters up. We can get them donated.

Auer: What about bicycling? Do the cyclists need their own lanes over here?

Oxier: A lot of people want to ride their bikes. I think that would be a very good idea now, a bike lane. That way it won't impede on the people who are walking on the sidewalks because the sidewalks aren't just, straight sidewalks. Sometimes there's gravel and businesses have rock and landscape and whatever. So I feel like that would be very good right now. I know a lot of clients who bike here from Old Southwest because they all live over there, so they'll bike over here, and I told you, people are getting smarter. They're getting healthier.

Auer: You did sort of allude to parking here. Do you see parking as a problem in this area and do you think it needs to be fixed by the city and change it to parallel or diagonal parking on Fourth Street?

Oxier: Yeah. So listen to this. When we first got here, we were parking diagonal. You can fit many more cars that way. So the city first blocks out rectangular spaces and can fit, maybe four cars. Well, we just ignored it and kept parking the other way. Well, the city got a hold of our landlord. It was, like, you know, blah, blah, blah. The city came in and fixed it and made them diagonal.

Now, who was the person who originally thought they'll get enough spaces if they're rectangle? Who does that? Who doesn't do it right the first time? Those are extra city dollars spent in places they shouldn't be. I don't even know this shit and I could have done that. It isn't rocket science. My issue is, they're doing it two and three times over when you could have done it right the first time, and I teach these guys not to do that. Do it right the first time. Take the time to do it right the first time, and I think that's an age-old secret. Do it right the first time.

I think, right now parking is okay, but on Saturdays and Sunday, you come in here and you can't find a parking spot either. We're busy.

Auer: Oh, so then how can that be fixed?

Oxier: Well, thank god, we are friends with most of the other businesses around this area and I think they appreciate our traffic. So they allow us to park over by the fence place, and, they let us do whatever we want, sort of.

Auer: Do you think they need to make something more official to alleviate that?

Oxier: Probably. Especially during the Aces games and stuff, I know that there's only that parking garage right in front of them. Even just a few blocks down, which is us, I mean, that could have been a parking lot. That would have been great. They would get out of their cars and have to walk somewhere, and that would be amazing. It will be an issue eventually. It was a huge issue when we were down on Cheney. The people who owned that parking lot would not allow our clients to park there, even though they had nobody.

Auer: Did you have some initial reservations about moving to Fourth Street when this property first came available? Did you know about the legacy of Fourth Street and just have reservations about moving over here?

Oxier: No. We knew the ballpark was coming in. My client had just opened Lincoln Lounge. These are all people I already know, and at that time, too, a lot of the businesses around this area, like the Reno Underground, which is the club down the street, had been around for years. So I wasn't too concerned about it, especially once we knew what building it was. This is a landmark.

And I could pick up and move to Sun Valley and our clients would still come. There's no doubt about it in my mind. They followed us right over here. I think for other businesses who don't have a clientele that they see every six to eight weeks, it might be a little different. They would have had some reservations. Another one is the Daily Bagel opening up here. I'm sure she's had to struggle a little bit, too, because her business is a shop with no shopping. She's doing great, though. If you build it, they will come.

Auer: Have you had issues with street people being here?

Oxier: Yeah, but we had it worse over at the old salon when it was, like I said, a little more tucked away, easier to hide. We're so used to it. Being downtown, that's part of the deal. You work or have a business downtown, that's part of the city appeal. We can't have a big city without homeless people, and so they'll come by and try to sell us some really weird shit during Christmas and I'll say, "Honey, you can't sell that in the salon. You have to go. You're scaring some of our clients."

They're like, "Oh, yeah," get all offended, but then they leave. They're fine. What I do miss is the dogs from the SPCA walking around here. I used to put out water and stuff for them.

Auer: Oh, that's cute.

Oxier: Yeah.

Auer: I meant to ask you about the developers of the building. What can you tell me about them?

Oxier: Kelly Rae and Pam Haberman, I think we've known for so long. They're actually outside doing yard work. They approached us back in November, maybe six years ago, and they said, "We want to find a space and we really love what you guys are doing here."

We love your culture. We love that you're gay business-owned. You know, we love that." And, you know, "If we build you a salon, will you come?"

I was like, "Yeah, duh, of course." I would do it anyway. We wanted to be in a position where we could own our own space. That's the only reason why we moved is because we wanted an opportunity to have a lease option to buy. Everybody wants to own their own piece of the pie and that was kind of where we were coming from, and so we're in a position where we can do that, and we're so grateful because that's part of the appeal.

Auer: Did they do a lot of properties along Fourth Street?

Oxier: They did one right behind us on Cheney. They did 8 on Center. I'll let them talk about that because they have so many other ideas coming into the works. It's just been great. Like I said, they approached us about it and we were totally on board. I did my research about them first prior to that, just to make sure that their motives were genuine and they were.

Auer: I guess you're fascinating on a lot of levels because—well, how do you identify yourself? Are you lesbian?

Oxier: Well, you know what's weird is I've been a lesbian for twelve years and just recently I just started dating a guy, just recently. But I believe in Kinsey's scale. I feel like your sexuality changes throughout your life, and he's a great lesbian. You know what I'm saying? I still identify as a lesbian. I'm trying to embrace my sexuality. I just—I don't feel comfortable there. I feel comfortable being lesbian, for people's labels. That's what I feel more comfortable as, but like I said, it's too soon to change my whole—I'm not coming out. I never did come out even when I was gay. I was just gay. So to me, I'm just whatever.

Auer: Can you tell me a little bit about your background? You said it before we started recording, just where you're from. You grew up in Sparks.

Oxier: Yeah, well, the funny thing is I grew up in Sun Valley, in the back of Sun Valley, and I went to Sun Valley Elementary School all my whole elementary school life, and then I went to Billinghurst Middle School, and then my freshman year, I went to Reed High and I was there for three years, and then I graduated from Sparks High.

Auer: And you didn't identify at all as a lesbian back then?

Oxier: Well, no, because nobody did. Nobody did. As far back as I can remember, I've always done both. My first kiss was a girl when I was eight, but my first real kiss with a boyfriend was when I was sixteen. I was Mormon from the time that I was twelve growing up. I just have always been whatever, but I felt like the LGBT community needed more of a voice in that sense, and I have a strong one, so—and it's been interesting, now having a boyfriend, I feel like I've gotten more discrimination from the LGBT world than I ever did from the straight world being gay.

So, like I said, I still identify as gay, or bi, I guess I should say, but I feel like the bi is confusing for people, too, so I just want to—I may be needing to bring a voice to that. Now that lesbian and gay are cool, I need to go to the bis so I can be like, “No, bisexuality means you can be biemotional. That means you can kiss and love and kiss and love both sexes. It’s not just about sex.”

Auer: What was it like then? What was your impression of LGBT life when you were growing up here before you came out? Was it hard?

Oxier: No, you know, what’s funny is my mom and dad both lived in California and then came here and had me, and they didn’t marry, so they never divorced but they broke up around when I was five. And my mom always had gay roommates, so gay men have always been a part of my life. My first prom dress was bought by my mom’s gay best friend, you know. I just wasn’t aware. I didn’t know that I would have liked girls in my adult life had I not tried it, and that’s where I feel like a lot of people miss out on their sexualities because how do you know you’re not—how do you know you’re straight if you’ve never tried to be gay? I question a lot of breeders a lot about that. I give them shit about it because I say, “How do you—?”

They say, “Oh, that’s so gross, you know.”

I say, “Well, how do you know you’re straight if you’ve never been with a gay guy or you’ve never kissed a guy, never done anything? How do you even know? But you probably have but you just don’t admit it, you know.” I feel like I’ve just been kind of all over the realm.

My parents don’t know—never knew what to think about what I was doing. They had no choice, but I always was a good kid. I wasn’t, like, molested or anything. I was a cheerleader, for chrissake. I mean, I was hometown princess, but I just made choices and did whatever that was best for me.

And people are usually taken aback by that, but then realize that they love me and they think, “Oh, wait a second. I like her. But she’s gay. Well, I guess I like gay people.” And it’s changed over the level of me owning a business. At first I’d say, “I’m gay,” in your face, whoa, like that. “Are you scared? Woooo.” And then I met a really nice Mormon girl, because I did theater at TMCC, and I said, “Whoa, I’m gay, whoa.”

And she said to me, “So?”

And that was the first time I was all, “Wait. What do you mean “so”? Whoa. ‘I kiss girls, woooo.’”

And she said, “My best friend’s gay.” And that totally turned my life around. I have so much respect for religion and I have so much respect for people and disagreeing with what they do is best for them, and leave me alone and let me do what’s best for me.

But my life has changed now. Now I think, “You love me, you love me. I’m great,” bah-bam, short song and dance and I’m gay, and they say, “Oh, I like gay people.” It’s not as taboo anymore.

Auer: In the nineties, it was different then, wasn’t it?

Oxier: Yeah, I had gay friends in high school, but they weren’t out. And being in theater, I was always surrounded by gay people, and of course you knew they were gay, but they

didn't come out. Girls especially wouldn't. My parents never really taught me to not accept that. My dad has five kids and three out of five are gay. My dad said to me when my brother was bringing his boyfriend home—we were laughing, ha-ha, "He's gay," ha-ha-ha—and my dad says, "Stop it. You be nice to his boyfriend."

Even being Mormon, they didn't outright say gay people are bad. They just kind of beat around the bush in a nice young child kind of way, that it wasn't for us, but—and then once I started to have sex, I thought, "What do you mean? I didn't die. God didn't come down and strike me dead. I'm fine." Then I just made my own mind after that.

Auer: You came into the community around the millennium.

Oxier: Yeah, I started beauty school in—shit, how long ago was that? I had my first girlfriend when I was twenty-two and I'm thirty-four.

Auer: So around 2000?

Oxier: Yeah. I met my first girlfriend. We were together for eight years and we're still really good friends. We broke up about five years ago. Like I said, though, we were together for almost eight years and that a long time. From twenty-two to twenty-nine, that's a long time.

Auer: Have things changed between, let's say, ten years ago and now, 2012?

Oxier: Oh, yes. The biggest jump of acceptance I've ever seen. We just marched—I was just downtown for the Day of Silence. We were protesting, and not one single "Faggot" or "Dyke" or whatever. It was honks and woo-hoos—yeah, huge. And it's because of advocate-owned businesses. It's because of out gay people, because the worst thing you can do as a gay is be in.

I got a book when I first got gay and it's *The Lesbians' Handbook*. And the advice that she gave in that book was she said no matter how hard it is, don't hide who you are. No matter how hard and how weird you feel, or whatever, don't hide it, because the next time somebody sees it, the shock value goes down. It's so true.

That was twelve years ago, so totally, there's been the biggest jump in acceptance I've ever seen, but also then the biggest jump of bullying, because kids are coming out younger because they feel okay.

Auer: Do you feel the media played any role, like Ellen and Rosie and all them coming out?

Oxier: Oh, helping 110 percent, yes. I was told at a salon not to tell anybody I was gay, and that's why I opened my own salon. I said, "You know, I'm going to go open my own salon."

Auer: Good for you.

Oxier: Well, I'm a redhead and I'm very stubborn, and when I was younger I was super stubborn. And, you know, it ultimately leads to where you need to go. I'm grateful that I met her because I got gay, sat on the soapbox, needed leverage, opened a business, expanded, became successful, and, you know, everything happens for a reason.

Auer: Do you feel there's total acceptance in Reno now?

Oxier: No. There's just tolerance, and that's okay. The younger generation is accepting us because they know no different.

Auer: What about the outsider tourists? Are they still problems, like the cowboys coming in and screaming?

Oxier: You know what? I went smack dab into Clarksville, Tennessee, and my cab driver managed to find me a gay bar to go to. I'm so oblivious to it, because in my world and even if I take my world to other worlds, in my world everyone is just who they are. And now the minority are the people who are opening their mouths and saying "faggot," "dyke," and shit. They're a small minority. And they don't want to be looked at, they don't want to be judged, so they're going to keep their mouths shut, you know. Like I said, the only discrimination I've felt in the last twelve years is when I got a boyfriend.

So I really haven't—me personally, now I don't look gay, so that's probably a reason. When I say "look," I mean, not butch, but I think people find it intriguing, and I don't know because it's not my world.

Auer: Would you feel comfortable walking downtown holding a girlfriend's hand?

Oxier: Yes.

Auer: Kissing?

Oxier: Oh, yeah. And I would comfortable with my guy friends coming down Fourth Street and kissing. Women are more accepted usually because men find that fascinating. But gay men are—gay is cool. To anyone in my age and younger, gay is cool. And you know what the stereotypes of gay men are? You have great style and you're hot. Really? That's a bad stereotype? Come on.

Auer: [laughs] There are worse things in the world.

Oxier: Right. There are worse things to be stereotyped about, and it's just—again, times have changed. They have changed significantly in the last eight years since I've owned a business. Everyone used to call us "the gay salon." Now we're not the gay salon anymore. We're the cool salon. So we went from gay, a negative, to cool.

Auer: What would you say about the interrelationships between gay business owners or the whole gay politics scene in Reno? That's gone through a lot of phases over the years.

You've been a part of some of it, right?

Oxier: Yeah. I pick and choose where I stand because I represent the young, I felt like, and the old gays were not so much on board for all of the progressive stuff that was coming.

Auer: You felt they were, what, stuck in the past?

Oxier: Yeah, and so bitter. I grew up with parents who are totally accepting and loving of all people, and I just felt like most of the gay people who were above or older than me were coming from a place of so much torture. And gay people, transgender people, anyone who's in my age bracket or around my demographic are growing up with parents who are loving and accepting, and so I feel like the olders were very bitter, like they were just kind of mad about everything.

And still there would be man-hating lesbians and religious-hating gay people, and now there are gay religious people and there are churches here that embrace gays. It's been eight years in the making, so I'm so used to being surrounded by love and people embracing it, and if they don't, they keep their mouth shut because I'm louder than them. You know what I'm saying?

Auer: Yeah.

Oxier: I don't know. The older population, I feel, just really was very bitter and kind of melancholy.

Auer: Would you say that sort of characterizes the LGBT community as a whole, the leadership community of that community?

Oxier: Well, the leaders are now my people or my peers.

Auer: They're your age group now.

Oxier: Yes, we are taking over. I mean, look at the BOC. Our president is twenty-four years old.

Auer: BOC?

Oxier: Build Our Center. I'm on the board.

Auer: Build Our Center is what?

Oxier: We are the committee to build a center here in Reno, a nice center, like a center center like the kind they have in L.A. and San Diego.

Auer: A community service center?

Oxier: Yes, a community service center that caters to LGBTQ, but it will be an “A”. Don’t forget the advocate, but there are going to be all kinds of wonderful events and advocates, friendly stuff. Our president is twenty-four.

Auer: It’s Jeremy, right?

Oxier: Uh-huh, and Jeremy’s boyfriend is one of my employees. It’s a tight-knit group here.

Auer: How is Build Our Center coming?

Oxier: Amazing. We just got finished with all of our bylaws for our 501(c)(3), so we’re just waiting. We’ve been fundraising for the last two years nonstop to try and raise money. And really what we’re trying to do is we create events first. We’re building events to build awareness and we’ve been doing webinars with Las Vegas’ center, and all of their presidents and chairs. We’ve been in contact with a lot of people, and there’s so much support for smaller cities and their centers, so much support.

We just finished a webinar on donors and we’re getting ready to start soliciting for donations and finding people with money, gays and even advocates who want to put money into this. Everything was slow at first because we were getting the board together and getting the bylaws. Everything’s so technical at that point. It’s annoying and boring.

And now we’re just getting ready to start the momentum—people are getting to know us now. We have business cards. We’re fancy. It’s slow, but it’s getting there. Everything’s slow.

Auer: This community needs it really bad.

Oxier: Yeah, I know. We are very well aware of that, and the more people we talk to, the more we have to solicit, the more information we get. So it’ll happen, trust me.

Auer: Any idea when you guys will be up and running with the space, or is it too soon?

Oxier: I can’t divulge that—I don’t want to put something out there and have it be wrong. It’s the preliminary stages of getting it. Once we have our 501(c)(3), the sky’s the limit. It’s like waiting for your license and then you can drive. So we’re just waiting for that, and then once that goes through and we have all of our paperwork, we’re a tax write-off. And then after that, it’s smooth sailing, and a lot of people will want to donate because they can write it off.

So that’s our plan, but we, again, we’ve been fundraising for the last two years. It’s been incredible. The board who is in place right now has an elder, has a younger, has an in-between. We’re trying to look at all aspects of it.

Auer: And of course I have to ask you, since you’ve been around the community for so long, you’ve probably been to many of the bars and the clubs. Care to talk about your experiences? What was your favorite one to go out to?

Oxier: You know, there's a special place in my heart always for the Patio. And the reason why I say that is because it was the first gay bar that I went to with my girlfriend. [laughs] Nina and Katy have been around for so long and have been great friends of mine. I mean, we share donations back and forth and they've just been there and they're solid, and they've had the same kind of bartenders who watched me come out, watched me go through girlfriends. I like the 5 Star, but it's kind of overtaken now with a lot of straight people. It's still gay-dominated, but I'm just not into the club scene anymore.

Auer: I was wondering if you could talk about the ones that are gone, too.

Oxier: Oh, like Visions? When I first met my girlfriend, it was, like, every day of the week we had a place to go and Visions was on Wednesday nights. Visions, man. Okay, let me tell you. Bad Dolly's and the 5 Star and Carl's were where I used to pick up my mom's roommate from in high school.

Auer: Are you serious?

Oxier: Yeah, I'd pick them up from the bars and bring him home because he'd be wasted out of his mind, and then, like I said, the Patio—I just have so much respect for Katy and Nina and how they run their business. They own their building and as a business owner, I have a lot of respect for them. I think over time, I've been to every single gay bar here.

Auer: What was Bad Dolly's like?

Oxier: Bad Dolly's was a lesbian bar. [laughs]

Auer: I know. Everybody says that and they talk about it, like, wistfully, you know, misty-eyed. They love it. Was it all that?

Oxier: Well, it was probably not, you know, but back then you just had a place to go, and I know my girlfriend, prior to me meeting her, would frequent there a lot. And then it closed, obviously, but people do talk about it with so much nostalgia, like, "Oh, remember Bad Dolly's?" They had karaoke. I remember them talking about that.

Auer: What was Carl's like back in the day?

Oxier: Well, when I first went to Carl's, I was not gay then, and I had gone with some friends. I just remember walking in and the boys just staring, like, "Why is a girl here?" It's interesting because it's very segregated. We are becoming slightly like bigger cities. The bigger we get, the more segregated we become, which is fine.

Auer: And you said 5 Star back in the day too? What was that like?

Oxier: I didn't go inside. That's the one place I used to pick up my ex-roommate from, my mom's roommate, and I remember it because it had five stars above the door. [laughs] I never went inside, though.