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Respondent: ...at an early age that I was different. I didn't know how I was different. And the kids at school knew that I was different, and I got a bashing for that from (inaudible 00:00:13) years. But yes, gay bashing is not exactly a new phenomenon.

Interviewer: No.

Respondent: And as I say, I knew I was different, I didn't know how I was different, I couldn't work out how I was different, but I knew I was different. And by the time I was 16, I knew what the difference was, you know, I realised that I was...well, as we would say, homosexual. As my parents would have said at that time, I was, "One of them," not that they knew, until many years later that was the case. So yeah, so I found my teenage years quite difficult really, because when everybody else was running around talking about their girlfriends, I didn't have a girlfriend, in my experience of (inaudible 00:01:09) village. So it's an odd situation. And at that time, I mean, life was actually sort of quite difficult for gay people. Being homosexual was still, well, defying the forces of nature, as we used to say, it was not acceptable, it was something you didn't talk about, and in my case, it was something I preferred not to think about. And it was really quite nasty, because you know, you were regarded at that time as either being very sinful, if you came from a religious background, or seriously deranged, mentally deranged, if you didn't. I came from a religious background, so I was both deranged and ill, according to the likes at the time. And I used to find...I don't know whether I thought my doctor had got x-ray eyes, but I always used to be petrified about going to see the doctor, because I thought somehow or another he was going to realise that I was, "One of them," and then there'd be trouble. Fortunately that never actually happened. The church I went to at that time, which was Dorset Gardens Methodist Church, I think there is still a church there, was, well, it wasn't very keen on people who were gay, let's put it that way. And I remember one famous occasion when we had a visiting preacher, I don't know who he was but I certainly didn't like him. It was just about the time the Wolfenden Report, recommending the legalisation of homosexuality came out, and he obviously didn't agree with this at all. And he thundered away in good bible bashing form, telling us that homosexuals were damned in the eyes of God, which I found difficult at the age of 15.

So obviously this was something you didn't talk about at all to anyone, and yeah, I decided that if it was something you didn't talk about, it was something you could ignore and perhaps it might go away at some point. I spent quite a lot of time praying that it would go away. It didn't go away, it just didn't. So I went through several years of...I call them my wilderness years, because I couldn't be me, I felt very, well, not like a second class citizen, I felt not really a person at all. I was this disgusting, "One of them." And so I toddled off to college, I attempted to seek some advice from a psychology lecturer at college who told me it was just a natural phase of growing up, which of course, is the way Freud taught of it at that time, or it was thought of by Freudians. And so it was just a phase I was going through, I thought, "Well it's a blimmin' long phase," is all I could say about it. And I lived an immaculate, sexless life. My mother used to tell me all sorts of stories about what wicked men did with little boys and I used to think, "Bring them on." You were supposed to be horrified by it, but I wasn't particularly horrified, I was rather intrigued actually.

Interviewer: So was the psychologist, was that the first person you'd ever spoken to about it?

Respondent: I had tried to talk to one of our ministers at Dorset Gardens Methodist Church, and he told me that, because I told him I thought I had a problem, and he said, "Yes, this is," you know, he came out with the usual stuff about how sinful this was and how the bible prohibited it and all the rest of it, and I better get rid of this problem fairly quickly. So I

decided that wasn't a very... Well, in actually fact, I sort of didn't go to church for, oh, about 13 or 14 years after that because I just felt that I wasn't worthy to go into a church, which was sort of...very confusing to me really. So, as for my parents, you wouldn't dare tell them, and when I did tell my mother many years later, I mean, I was absolutely right not to have told her before.

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Interviewer: Really? What happened?

Respondent: She just refused to speak about it. She absolutely refused to speak about it. One of my friends, well, I thought he was a friend at the time, I don't think he is now, took it upon himself to tell my mother that I was gay. He happened to be visiting us for Christmas, he went into my...what I called my workshop, my library, call it what you will, it was a little boxroom I used to keep all sorts of things in, and he eyed the books on my shelf and said, "Are you training to be gay?" and I said, "Well, I am." And we didn't have much time to discuss it, but he passed this fact on to my mother, which was not terribly helpful. And her response was simply to just clam up about the thing. I mean, by then, we're now talking in the mid-70s. I was sort of wanting to share this bit of information, I suppose, in a way, maybe it was a selfish wish on my part, but I've always been very close to my mother and I didn't want to have any secrets, so I didn't tell her, or, well, I tried to tell her, tried to discuss it. Her response was simply to say, "I don't want to hear about this. Don't talk to me about it, I don't want to hear about it." So that made life a bit difficult. And we had a famous Christmas when my parents came to stay with us and one of my gay friends around the corner and his partner decided to cook a nice Boxing Day meal for the lot of us. My parents couldn't have been more difficult. They sat there in stony silence, and two days later, I phoned my mother up and my mother said, "I don't approve of you, I don't approve of your lifestyle, I don't approve of the company you're keeping, so I find it quite difficult to come and see you," so I said, "Fine, I'm afraid that's your problem, not mine." And that was quite difficult, I must say, I found it difficult. But that's the way it was.

Interviewer: And how did...was that a turning point for you, realising that this wasn't your problem, this was her problem, was that something you'd got to earlier, or was that the point then?

Respondent: I got very sort of, well, I became rather suicidal about the whole thing in the mid-70s, and I won't go into the details of that, it's not a very nice thing, I did make an attempt on my own life at the time because I couldn't see any way out. By that time, I'd managed to get myself married, so I was married and I had two children, and a mortgage, and I was gay and I thought I was the only person in the world who could possibly be stupid enough or whatever to get in that situation. And during the, well, actually, the day I was trying to do away with myself, I literally ran into someone else as I was...my intention was to sort of put myself in front of a train at Harrow-on-the-Hill station. At the last moment, I thumped it and ran up the stairs, colliding with someone at the top, who said, "Are you alright?" and I said, "No, I'm not." And I spilled the beans to him and we had a cup of coffee. He turned out, fortunately, to be involved with the Samaritans, which was helpful, to say the least, and he was also gay. His name was Mark and he is still a very close friend of mine. And he said, "Well, I think you should... there are gay organisations where you could meet other people like yourself, and you'd find them very helpful." And he told me about one there was in the area I was living in, Harrow - it was called Harrow Gay Unity, and I went along to Harrow Gay Unity, full of trepidation. The organisation at that time met in an upstairs room in a pub called the Good Will for All, and I approached the stairs somewhat timorously and someone shouted after me, "I shouldn't go up there, they're all queer up there," and I said, "Well, I shall be in good company because I am as well." So that was Harrow Gay Unity. And I found this amazing, I mean, I walked into this room and there were 30 or so people who

were all gay, of all shapes and sizes, and they didn't bite and they hadn't got horns or anything like that, they seemed to be very nice people. And I actually eventually became chairman of that group. So that's...and I very quickly, it was amazing really, I very quickly came to the conclusion that I was gay, and that was just the way I was made, and if people didn't like it they could do and do the other thing. So I very quickly learned how to be out and proud as it were, and as I say, I became chairman of that group, and I was there for about five years. I had a sort of colleague-in-arms called Paul Oliver, I used to work for Shepperton Studios. He was nominally secretary of the group, I was chairman of the group and we used to run it as friends I suppose really. It was a strange group, it had started off as a bit of gay liberation front, turned into a campaign for homosexual equality local group, and it was one of the most active actually in the London region. We had meetings of 40 or 50 people, and we had all sorts of people came along to talk to us; we had Lord Soper came to talk to us, because I thought he would be a nice person to have talk to us, he was one of the few people at the time who were reasonably helpful. We had Lionel Blue came to talk to us. Ken Livingston, when he was in his first generation mayor of London phase. We were a very active group actually.

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Interviewer: And how could people find out about the group, how was it advertised?

Respondent: I think it was...we couldn't advertise. There was famous occasion when we had a new publicity officer who thought it would be a good idea to put the names and addresses of all the new committee in the local press.

Interviewer: Why?!

Respondent: God in heaven knows. I think a certain lack of imagination and brain power probably. No, obviously w couldn't advertise. It was largely word of mouth really, it was largely word of mouth. We use to do things in the local area. Every so often we would have a friends and family evening at one of our CHE evenings, where people were invited to bring along their friends and families, and very rarely did.

Interviewer: Were there gay bars, gay pubs at all at the time?

Respondent: Yes, there were, and they were very strange places. It was a club near Leicester Square called the A&B Club, the Arts and Battledress Club, and this was very secret, you rang the bell, went up several flights of rickety stairs, and you had to either be introduced by a member and you had a password and it was all very hush-hush. It was sort of, I suppose, my first experience outside of Harrow of meeting gay people.

Interviewer: Would this have been in the 70s?

Respondent: Yeah. And that had been going since the Second World War, the A&B Club, apparently. And yeah, there were one or two others, but they weren't very thick on the ground. And I was rather horrified to discover that there were a large number of gay venues in Brighton, and I thought, "My god, I mean, I was actually brought up in Brighton, I wish someone had told me about them when I was in my teens."

Interviewer: Yeah. So you just didn't know that they were there?

Respondent: No. I found out that they were there in a way, I used to work for Schweppes Mineral Water as a lorry driver's mate during my holidays, and I found out by word of mouth because we used to go to places, there was a pub called the Greyhound, which was located near Poole Valley, near the bus station, and all of the drivers who used to go with us drivers mates said, "You shouldn't go up there. God knows what will happen if

you go up there, they're all queer up there." And so I knew of, but I had not experience firsthand quite a number of gay venues, and as I say, I was rather horrified, I thought, "Well, why couldn't someone have told me when I was feeling very lost and very alone?" It would have been good.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So, and then I actually managed to get married in the middle of all this, as I've indicated earlier, I think the most difficult thing I ever had to do in my life was to tell my wife that she'd got a gay husband. We'd been married then about three or four years. And her response was very...interesting, in a way, because she thought it...she assumed it was all her fault.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: It was her fault because we'd had two children in very quick succession so I hadn't access to normal sexuality, shall we say, and she was convinced that this was my main trouble. And I had to say to her, "No, Joan, I'm sorry, it's not about you or my relationship with you, it's about me." And we had to decide what to do about that, and we spent many hours talking into the night about what you do about it and we eventually decided to do nothing about it and see what happened. And the agreement between us was that we would stay married until such times as it became impossible for either of us, in which case we would honestly say that was the case and split up amicably, hopefully. Well, it never actually came to that, we were still married after... when my wife died, which was 39 years after our original wedding. So yeah, it was sort of difficult in a way, because I mean, obviously, for both of us, I couldn't...I was not as free to pursue my gay life as I might have been if I hadn't been married, and June didn't feel free to do so either, so in a sense, you could say that having to keep the whole thing under wraps was a problem for both of us, but we got on very well and... I always say that June was my best friend at the time and we...we managed to cope with this somehow or other. I mean, coping with the kids was sort of a different matter.

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There was one famous Christmas when the kids were going through their presents and they came to Smurfie, Smurfie was a character, a TV character at the time, a little fluffy doll thing. And, "Oh, this is Smurfie. Uncle Terry and Uncle Teddy gave me that." They're two men, they're very fond of each other and they live together...you can imagine the reaction of my rather straitlaced aunt who was watching these proceedings, you know, her face fell from I don't know where. Anyway, so we had a bit of a fun night. The kids by and large were pretty good about it, I mean, my elder son, Peter, who was a very...was and still is a very intelligent guy, had been raking around in my workshop and had come downstairs one day and said, "Dad, what's gay?" and I said, "Why are you asking me this?" and he said, "Well, you've got all sorts of things, you've got some gay newspapers upstairs, what's gay?" And I said, "Well, you know, normally men and women fall in love with each other, well, I'm afraid that in the case of gay people, we fall in love with people like ourselves, other men." And he thought about this for a few minutes, and then disappeared upstairs to his room to continue doing what he had been doing before, apparently none the worse for wear.

Interviewer: How old was he at the time?

Respondent: He was about seven, I suppose.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And my younger son, we must have told Merlin at some point, I can't remember, we never had a problem with Merlin. In fact, we had some rather funny incidents, I was walking down through Harrow shopping centre on one occasion when he was in his late teens, and I was well and truly out and so on and so forth, and we passed, well, someone who I thought was quite attractive, my eyes obviously diverted in the direction of this guy, and Merlin said, "Oh, dad, you don't fancy him, surely?" And I said, "Well, why not?" and he said, "Well, he's a bottle blonde," and I said, "Well, I actually rather like bottle blondes." And I thought at the time, "This is a very odd conversation for a father and a son to be having," but anyway, we had it just the same.

Interviewer: And what pointed you to speaking to your wife about it? Was it being involved in the group or...?

Respondent: It was living with someone, and I didn't feel that I was being entirely honest. I mean, I suppose it was a good cover, married and had two kids and all the rest of it, you could have gone on getting away with that forever, and I didn't actually want to do that, I wanted to...Well, I have a saying which is I'd rather be hated for what I am than loved for what I am not, and that was very much the case there. So I just felt I had to tell her because I couldn't go on in that sort of dishonesty really.

Interviewer: What role did sort of faith play in all of that? Were you...you said you moved away from the Methodist church after that guy, did you then come back to church later on?

Respondent: Yes, I did, when we got ourselves a bit together. We're now talking about the mid-70s. The minister we had at the time was a guy called Howard Booth, who was a wonderful man, and he came round one evening and he was delicately sipping a sherry, he almost sunk the rest of the bottle when I came out with the fact that I was gay, and he said, "You know, I'm very sympathetic to gay people but I can't bear to think of what they get up to in bed together." And I said, "Well, Howard, as your married couples walk down the aisle of your church on a Sunday morning, do you think, 'My god, what did you get up to in bed together last night?'," and he said, "Well, of course not. But you're absolutely right." And he was a great help. I actually decided I wanted to talk about being gay and the problems that gay people had at the Methodist Guild meeting we used to have once a month, and I told Howard this, and he said, "Yeah, okay, alright."

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He phoned me up about three or four days before the appointed evening and said, "I'm very worried about what might be going to happen when you come out with this during the week," and I said, "I'm not worried, I really am not," and he said, "Well, I shall chair that meeting myself in case it all gets out of hand." I don't know what he thought was going to happen, but it didn't get out of hand, I mean, people listened attentively, one dear old lady wandered up to me afterwards and said, "What is this? What is it about being gay? What does it mean?" and I said, "Well it just means that whereas you're assuming that you're heterosexual, and are attracted to or were attracted to members of the opposite sex, we're attracted to members of our own sex, and we love them in just the same way." And she just said, "Oh, is that all? I thought it was quite complicated." I said, "No, it's not complicated at all." So yeah, so that was my experience.

Interviewer: Were there any repercussions from that meeting or...?

Respondent: Well, not that ever hit me anyway.

Interviewer: Did that mean that there were then people...were you going to a church regularly?

Respondent: Yes, I was, North Harrow Methodists at the time.

Interviewer: So did people there then find out?

Respondent: Well, I stood up in front of 40 or so of them at this Guild meeting and came out very explicitly. I never had any negative feedback. If I had have done, I should have told them it was their problem, not my problem. And I think that is really, it was quite difficult to survive as a gay person being attacked in the 1970s, but I'm sure that was the recipe; if you stood up there and said, "Well, I am gay, now what are you going to do about it? Because that's me, I'm me, if you can't cope with me, please go away."

Interviewer: Did you have any...to what extent do you think faith was...because you talked about at the beginning there was an issue with kind of the way...there was an issue with the acceptance of gay people because of faith, and there was an issue because of culture as well, do you think kind of those two things were still true in the '70s, or do you think one of them was...?

Respondent: Oh, very much so, I mean, the '70s wasn't...we hadn't sort of reached enlightenment, we were...those of us who were involved in the gay rights movement were hoping that if we were very lucky, we might be able to get acceptance of gay people in the armed forces. The idea of things like gay marriage or anything like that was sort of over there, you just didn't think about it, it wasn't even...well, it wasn't on the agenda at all.

Interviewer: Why do you think that was? Was it that people didn't want it, or was it that people just never thought they'd get there?

Respondent: Oh, I think we would have wanted it, but we...I don't know, it was...it seemed so remote and so impossible that I used to think about it as a fantasy, which might, you know, might happen, but certainly wasn't going to happen in my lifetime. But it has, of course.

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Interviewer: And what...so what were the sort of main...what happened in those kind of groups at Harrow? Was it about organising campaigns, was it about support?

Respondent: It was about campaigning, it was about having a venue where gay people could meet in some sort of safety, with the people of their own inclination.

Interviewer: How safe was it? Were there ever issues with people protesting or...?

Respondent: We didn't actually have any...we got chucked out of various venues, we used to...at one point, we always used to meet in pubs, and then our meeting place was taken over and turned into an office block, so that doesn't exist anymore. We moved to the...Harrow Leisure Centre, that's right, into this complex with swimming pools and meeting rooms and one thing and another, and we used to meet regularly there until some rather nasty Conservative councillor discovered that we were a gay group and made it more or less impossible for us to go on doing that, so we then had to look for another venue. I think we had about four or five venues in as many years, because people didn't want us.

Interviewer: And what would people use to justify that? What reasons would people give?

Respondent: Oh, my goodness, I think they thought that if there was a gay group, there must be all sorts of immorality going on. I mean, I remember at one of our North Harrow Methodist meetings, I was on a thing called the Family Committee, and the subject came up and one of the other committee members, announcing that he was a policeman, said, "Yeah, we've got a group of them and they meet here, god knows what goes on down there," and I said, "God knows what goes on down there? I'm chairman of this group and I can assure you that nothing goes on down there that I'm in any way ashamed of or should

give any reasonable person cause for complaint.” I think there was a great fear of the unknown. I’ve always assumed that must be the reason. People didn’t, “Understand” homosexuality and they feared the worst. I mean, the stereotypes were fairly awful, we were all supposed to have limp, floppy wrists and we were all supposed to be paedophiles, taking the trousers of little boys down. It was quite fantastic really, and the thing that’s happened over the last 30 years is, for various reasons, people have been forced into contact with reality of gay people and they didn’t turn out to be like that at all. And ironically, I mean, one of the things I think which helped sadly was the AIDS crisis, because all sorts of people were revealed as having been gay, as a result of dying of AIDS. And, well, people just had to change their ideas, because their favourite film stars and whatnot were obviously gay.

Interviewer: What impact did the AIDS crisis have on your group in Harrow?

Respondent: I had largely left the group by the time that this all...well, no, it started, it really was happening over here in the ‘80s. I had sort of bailed out a bit because June felt it wasn’t good with the kids.

Interviewer: Sure.

Respondent: ...For my name to be in the local paper announcing that I was chairman of a gay group. So I sort of bailed out of that. I was very aware of it because I happened to be in the States in 1981, in San Francisco, where of course it was all happening, and I was fully aware of what was then called the...they used to call it, “The gay cancer,” because people had this particular form of cancer which only affected gay people. I can’t remember its name offhand now. I think the effect...I don’t think it was quite so terrible over here as it was in the States, because dear old Margaret Thatcher was absolutely head opposed to homosexuality and we had all these government scare campaigns about the dreadful disease, ‘gay plague’ and all the rest of it. And I mean, the effect was more limited. I had, at that time, large contacts with Amsterdam and it was quite dreadful out there because people were dropping like flies. You would go into your favourite gay bar and you would see, well, you wouldn’t see the missing people, but that’s effectively it, you would notice gaps in the people, and you were, like, “What happened?” In Britain, we did have a sort of an AIDS prevention campaign on, led by Normal Fowler, who did a wonderful job actually. So I don’t think it hit us as hard as...I was watching last night a film about After Stonewall, it was an American film, and I was impressed by the sort of dire situation in the States, much worse than we ever encountered over here. We were isolated from this to a large extent. I think what really did affect us was Section 28, which is Section 29 of the Local Government Act, which stated that it was a criminal offence for people who were involved in local government in any way to promote homosexuality. I’m not quite sure how you promote homosexuality... But that actually had a wonderful catalysing effect because that was the thing which really got the gay rights movement back on its feet again, I mean, there was the organisation called Stonewall, which you probably know about, that was born out of Section 28.

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I mean, you had this ridiculous situation where people, teachers and so on and so forth were committing a criminal act if they spoke about homosexuality to a class. Well, I’m afraid some of them did and that was that, but it did more to actually promote the cause of gay rights than it ever did to suppress it. And it got everybody going, and then eventually of course, people like Ian McKellan came out the closet and announced they were gay, and of course, everyone was suitably shocked and they began to look at such people and think, “Well, he’s not obviously gay, he doesn’t fit the stereotype, he hasn’t got limp, floppy wrists, he doesn’t speak with a lisp,” and so on and so forth. And so people were forced to alter their ideas about what being gay was about. And I think it

was that sort of exposure of the reality of gay life compared with the myths which had been spun about it, which really got us out of trouble.

Interviewer: So you took a bit of a break from being involved in gay politics and stuff in the '80s, did you then get back involved later on?

Respondent: Well, yes, I suppose I did. I mean, one of the things I got involved with, which was nothing to do with gay politics at all, but I was one of the founding members of the Bluebell Railway Preservation Society, which was set up in 1960. So I was involved in that. And yeah, I think I really...I'm just trying to think how I got reinvolved. Largely through North Harrow Methodist Church, I think because we had a minister there, Sue Mayall, who's now in Pinner, not very far from here. And she was sort of very sympathetic to the cause, and I happened to spend some time talking to her about my situation, and she felt that this needed to be more widely known, and there was a famous occasion when she decided that she wanted, in one of her services, to have various people talk about circumstances in which their faith had been challenged. I volunteered to talk about why my faith had been challenged, and it was a very interesting occasion, because then we had sort of 40 or 50 people in church listening to me talk about my experiences, and at the end of it, I waited for the heavens to open, and all that happened was applause broke out. So from that point onwards, I've sort of been involved in talking to church groups, other bits of the Methodist circuit here. I always say I feel that I was created gay for some purpose, and it needed to have some... I needed to use it in some way, and sort of trying to explain to people who hadn't really thought about the issue very much what being gay was about and how it was quite difficult being gay in society. I got involved in quite a bit there. I had been, actually, when I was with Harrow Gay Unity in the '80s, I was involved in quite a bit of public speaking on the subject. So it wasn't exactly a new experience for me, it was rather, I would say I was born again, but not quite in the way that some evangelical friends would like to think of.

Interviewer: Did a lot of that sort of speaking become in a church context then...?

Respondent: Yes. We set up a church...this was about three years ago now, three or four years ago, I wanted us to have a group, I wanted homosexuality to be discussable, before it was the hot topic it now is. I made the mistake, well, no, it wasn't a mistake, it turned out to be very good fortunate, I actually announced the first meeting of our Sexual Diversity Discussion group to a packed church in a prayer service. It did not exactly go down well with some people.

Interviewer: Why was that?

Respondent: Oh, well, they thought we shouldn't be talking about this sort of thing, particularly in front of the children.

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Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: And I said, "Well, if they know what sexual diversity is, they must be very well educated children, so I shouldn't be too worried about that." But it did cause an absolute storm. I went along that Sunday morning to the service because the notice hadn't got put in the notices, written notices, it had been edited out by some mysterious process, so I thought, "Well, it's not in the notices, what do we do about this, well, we'll have to give out the notice in person." So I informed the then new minister that I was going to be making an announcement and I gave him the text of it and he was too busy to be bothered with it, so I could get on with it. I did, and it caused a bit of a storm. Actually, it was a very good way of getting the group running because everybody knew about



SDDG and the issue of homosexuality. So I've been running that group now, that meeting now for three years. We meet once a month. We actually meet here, in this house, because initially we were told we couldn't use the church to promote such evil thoughts. So I said, "Okay, well I will hold meetings in my home and I presume no-one can stop me doing that."

Interviewer: How do you feel about the fact that this is decades after that minister asked you, was encouraging you still in a situation where the church is so negative about it?

Respondent: I feel very angry about it. And I still feel very angry about it, in fact, Sue Mayall said to me on one occasion, "How did you find the courage in the '70s to come out publicly and in your work and so on and so forth?" and I said, "Sue, I was angry, because I discovered all the lies and falsehoods that I'd been told about homosexuality, I was really angry, and that's what fired me." And in a sense, the Sexual Diversity Discussion Group at church, the reason I wanted to start that was because I wanted to make homosexuality as an issue at least discussable, I wanted to feel that it could be discussed. And...yeah.

Interviewer: What are your reflections on how discussable it is now then, you mentioned that it's become a hot topic.

Respondent: Well, yes, it has become more discussable, I mean, we had a recent church council meeting in which we had to...the minister put the item on the agenda to say, "What would happen if somebody came along to us in a gay relationship and wanted the church to bless it, what would we do? What would we say?" What could he do? What could he say? And it provoked quite an interesting discussion, we have a church council of about 18-20 people, I suppose, and I rather forced the issue by saying, "Well, let's take a vote on it," because everyone was flanneling around, and the vote was about sort of 75% in favour of the church blessing a relationship. Which is not the same thing obviously as marriage, but it got the item on the agenda and people in the church have had to get used to the fact that there is a thing called sexual diversity and there is a group representing it which meets once a month and has its meeting details in the church weekly newsletter, and so on and so forth. I thought, "Well, sorry, people are going to have to get used to the fact that gay people exist, and if we as a church want to serve everyone, we should be inclusive." And we had lots of people wandering around talking about inclusivity and how the church was inclusive, and I said, "Well, yeah, that's fine when you say the words, but what does it actually mean in practice?" And what it seems to mean in practice is that we'd rather not think about it, and I think the Methodist church is in that situation. We've got a period of reflection and prayer going on at the moment about the whole issue of same sex relationships. I think there are a lot of people in the Methodist Church who just really don't want to discuss, anyone to know, they look at what's happened in the Anglican church and the fuss that's been created there, and somehow or other they think that if they shut up and we don't discuss it, it'll all go away. But it hasn't, of course, we've landed ourselves with gay marriage at least for civil purposes, and that's it.

Interviewer: And how optimistic are you about the future? Do you know how fast things will change or not?

[00:48:37]

Respondent: Well, I think there are two things I want to say about that. Things have changed, I mean, on the legal front, we probably lead the world as a country in permissiveness in the fact that we've got rid of all of our anti-gay laws and so on and so forth. But of course, there's a world of difference between the law and how people actually behave and how they think and how they feel, and I think there's, not very far underneath the surface,

there's still a great deal of...I'd like to say anxiety about homosexuality. And I think this anxiety stems from ignorance, and by sort of shutting up about it, we simply contribute to that. And I get quite frustrated with the church, I must say that I've sort of, on occasions, I've been on the verge of leaving the church because I'm reading of the New Testament is correct, I can't imagine our Lord would have turned anyone away. And certainly not in the sort of vitriolic terms that one sometimes hears applied to the gay situation. So yeah, I find it quite frustrating being gay and being Christian, because a lot of the church's attitudes are so...they're not Christian. I find myself thinking, "Well, where is the love? Where are the New Testament garments of love? What do we think about all that? Does that not actually mean anything?" And as you know, we've got certain organisations in Britain, quite powerful organisations, which are ministry organisation and very anti-gay. So you've got things like the Institute of Contemporary Christianity and so on and so forth. Well, I don't think we should have those organisations, but there we are, we've got them.

Interviewer: What makes you stay in the church for all these years, given...?

Respondent: God, I ask myself that sometimes, I really ask myself that, is it just the sort of a habit I can't get away from? I suppose I live in hopes, but we've had two centuries of those, many centuries of those hopes being frustrated. I live in hope that we will actually start taking a loving and inclusive view of gay people and bisexual people and transsexual people and so on and so forth, and it seems to me quite natural that the church, with its beliefs about love and so on and so forth should actually be leading that, not trailing along behind. I mean, at the moment, we trail very reluctantly along behind and try and pretend it's not happening. We should be leading. So I feel quite strongly about that, as no doubt some members of the congregation in Northwood would tell you.

Interviewer: What's your involvement been in LGCM over the years?

Respondent: Not a great deal actually. Not a great deal. I don't know why that is, but I've always been aware of it, but I haven't actually been that involved in it.

Interviewer: And what's your reflection, as sort of somebody who was...took a stand a long time ago when other people weren't taking a stand, what's your reflection on kind of...how do you feel about kind of what contribution you've made over the last few decades. I know it's a funny question to ask, but I'd love to know the answer to it.

Respondent: All I can say is I've done my best. I've very quickly, once I've accepted...I mean, I thought that to accept being gay was completely evil and wrong and all the rest of it, and when I got involved in gay rights business in the mid-70s, I very quickly discovered that far from thinking of it as something wrong, I actually came to the conclusion that - this sounds a bit pretentious, but I actually came to the conclusion that God must have had some reason for creating me gay and I've got to get on with the job. I found it quite frustrating that the church does take such a long time, it seems to me. I mean, everyone says, "Well, the change has happened quickly," and of course, it has, I mean, in the last 20 or 30 years, we've made more progress than we had in the previous goodness knows how long. But I still get frustrated about the thing.

Interviewer: Do you have any reflections on the differences between the sort of the younger generation of LGBT people that are coming along now?

Respondent: I think there is an age thing in this, very much so. I'd like to think the younger generation get much less worked up over this and I think they do on the whole. Whether the evangelical sort of branches of the church take that same line, I'm not sure. But in the population at large, I think it is an age thing. I mean, people under 30 probably don't understand what all the fuss is about. And people over 70, typically, still have the horrors and still go back to Leviticus Chapter 18 and whatnot.

[00:56:13]

Interviewer: Do you think...how have all those sort of decades of being out there and kind of presumably taking a lot of...bearing a lot of the brunt of a lot of people's prejudice, how do you think that's affected you?

Respondent: Oh, it's made me very militant. No, it really has. I mean, no, I think I really regard it as my duty actually to keep banging away at it, even on occasions when it doesn't seem to be getting very far, but... I'll come back to this fact that if God hadn't wanted me as a gay person, he wouldn't have created me as a gay person, and created this gay person I certainly was. I mean, no-one, "Perverted" me, it was just something that was natural to me and all of the reading I've been doing about the causes of homosexuality just convinced me more and more that it is something you are born with, just like the colour of your eyes, the colour of your hair and all the rest of it. And you have to get on with it.

Interviewer: Do you think there's been a cost though, that people have paid over the years for being out when other people weren't?

Respondent: Well, I'd like to sort of act the victim and say, "Yes, there's been a terrible cost," and all the rest of it, but I think in many ways I've been protected by it because I was very open about my homosexuality, I think... I used to teach about the gay subculture in...we had a module called City Studies at Westminster University and I used to teach on that, and I was teaching about the gay subculture in the 70s, and I got hauled up before the dean, who was very concerned about this, in the Section 28 days, to explain what the hell I was doing and what justification there was, and in fact, he said to me, "Well, I hope there's good literature in this," and I said, "Well, I've got about 200 or so references if you'd like to read them?" And it was very odd actually, because people used to come up to me, other members of staff would come up to me and say, "I've got this student, he has some problems, I think they're problems that you might be able to help with," and I used to think, "Oh god, here we go again." No, I don't think there's been a great cost to me personally, I mean, it's just made me more determined and more thick skinned and so on and so forth. In fact, in many ways, it's done me a good turn, I remember on one occasion in the early '80s, a lady member of our administrative staff tried to claim that I had been making advances to her, and one of my other colleagues said, "Well, that's rubbish, everyone knows he's as queer as a three pound note, he's the last person who's likely to make advances on you." And I thought, "Well, coming out does have its advantages actually." No, I've always found, providing you're sort of thick skinned enough to sort of say, "Well, this is where I am and this is what I believe, and you can all get on with it."

Interviewer: Cool. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think I should have done, or anything else you think you want to say or...?

Respondent: Well, I just wish that my own church, the Methodist Church would get itself together on this subject. We've been...if you go back through sort of conference discussions and one thing and another, since the mid-50s, we have been thinking about it, prayerfully usually, and I just wonder how far we've actually moved in that time. We're still thinking about it. That I find very frustrating. We shouldn't be thinking about it, we should be doing about it.

Interviewer: And hopefully we will at some point.

Respondent: At some point, yes, I find it very sad that the people who are most likely to be standing in your path are, "Good Christians," it shouldn't be. I mean, we had an SDDG meeting last, oh, a fortnight ago, and I had this bright idea of getting two people who had been refugees from Uganda and had fled Uganda because of the anti-gay legislation and

attitudes there, and been received here as asylum, you know, genuine asylum seekers and have now got permission to stay. They came along and they talked to us about their experience, I mean, what situation is it that we actually have people who are refugees from Christianity, which is what it adds up to, refugees from Ugandan Christianity? I don't know how you can justify that.

Interviewer: Thank you so much, I really, really appreciate your time and your honesty, thank you.

Respondent: You're welcome.

Interviewer: Cool. Have you told your story much before? I think Sarah said she came and interviewed you about your story before as well?

Respondent: Yes, I did talk to the group over at Berry Lane Methodists, yeah...I'm not sure about it. I mean, I don't broadcast it from the rooftops, but I'm certainly not shy about it.

Interviewer: Cool, well thank you.

[End of Transcript]