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Interviewer: If you could start off by telling me a little bit about your childhood, when and where, siblings etc.?

Respondent: Right, I was born in the early 1950s, 1952, so I was a postwar baby. I have two younger sisters, so I was the oldest of three children. And we had a very simple sort of upbringing, but my parents were very caring and wanted us to have a good education and put a lot into making sure we had a good start in life. I've always had a good relationship with my parents, which was good. They didn't have a good relationship with each other, unfortunately, so they split up when I was about 14...no, 16, I think it was, and got divorced and subsequently married again. But I always had a good relationship with them. And with my sister, I've got the two dearest sisters any man could ever wish for, and we have a very good family relationship, which is wonderful.

Interviewer: Okay. Were your parents believers at all?

Respondent: My father was very much a Christian believer and a regular churchgoer, to an Anglican church, and yes, he was all his life. And I think actually when he finally died, about three or four years ago, after having a long struggle with cancer, he really modelled how to die in the most wonderful way, he was totally accepting of it and of God's sovereignty and I think I shall remember him almost best of all for that, although he was always a very kind man.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: He wasn't an evangelical Christian, and was somewhat flummoxed when I first became a Christian at the age of 21 through a local Baptist church, and my sister subsequently did as well. And of course, being an evangelical church, I particularly, and my sisters too, were very kind of triumphalistic, enthusiastic, new believers who were telling our parents they didn't believe anything and that they needed to repent, and you know, turn to Christ, all of which my father found a bit strange and hard to cope with. But he, bless him, was very gracious and learned a lot, or said he wanted to learn from us. He never became evangelical, but he did learn, in his words, that being a Christian was more about commitment than about just going to church and obeying the rules.

Interviewer: Okay. So did you go to church as a child?

Respondent: Yes, I went with my father fairly regularly and joined the local church choir, and that then led to me going to St Paul's Cathedral choir school in the 1960s and becoming a boarding member of the school and a chorister at St Paul's during the 1960s, which was actually the most amazing experience, and...

Interviewer: Good amazing?

Respondent: Yes, and I never liked any of my schools, even though they were all good, I felt very isolated and very different and I didn't mix well with the other children, but I think that's because I didn't realise about my sexuality before my teens, but I think that was probably it. I felt different, I didn't like sports, I wasn't any good at them, I was a mixed up, rather reserved, lonely child. But St Paul's was a particularly good experience because I loved the music. I wasn't the most brilliant of singers and I didn't go on to do more singing, but I did love the music and it was an amazing experience to go there, for lots of reasons really, a great privilege.

Interviewer: Yeah, wow, I didn't know that. So your awareness of your sexuality came early teenage or...?

Respondent: Yes, I put it down to about the age of 13, when I could identify myself as being attracted to the same sex. It all happened accidentally really, it was probably through watching TV programmes and seeing good looking guys on there. I always remember Richard Chamberlain in Dr Kildare, oh, goodness me...it made me swoon, and I felt terribly guilty about it and I don't remember when that series started actually, so it might not have been the beginning, but it was something like that. And I thought, "This is something I can talk to anybody about."

[00:04:28]

Interviewer: Yeah, I think I had the same with Kate Jackson in Charlie's Angels, and I couldn't talk about it.

Respondent: Really? No.

Interviewer: Higher education? So you went to St Paul's and then...?

Respondent: Yes, St Paul's really covered the sort of prep school stage and then when I left there, I did have an option to board at another school but I didn't like boarding very much, so I ended up going to a local grammar school in the Guildford area, so... And that was a huge school of 1000 boys, but having only 38 boys at St Paul's, it was a very big culture shock at the time.

Interviewer: Yeah, were you actually born in Guildford or...?

Respondent: No, I was born in London actually.

Interviewer: London, okay.

Respondent: Then we moved out to near Weybridge and then we moved to Guildford after my parents were divorced.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. And then you went on, did you go to university?

Respondent: I didn't actually. I think, although academically, I think I was probably reasonably good, I was so messed up in myself during my teenage school years that I couldn't concentrate on learning really well, so I got some basic O and A Levels, but I didn't really know what I wanted to do anyway, and I tried going to university to do English, which would have been my chosen subject, but I didn't have enough good satisfactory O and A Levels. So I went to work for the BBC for a couple of years, because in those days, I was very keen to get into film or television. And anyway, I knew quite a lot of people took a route whereby they could go into internal BBC training courses by doing a clerical job, and then applying internally for other jobs. Unfortunately, when I'd been there for a few months, I realised that people near retirement in that department had all joined the BBC for the same reason; 40 years later, they're still cutting up newspapers and doing, you know, filing clerk stuff. So I thought this wasn't a job with any prospects.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So I then went to college and studied photography, professional photography. I did get a diploma in that, but that was not the same as a university degree. There was three years of college training and that was very valuable. So that took me into a career in professional photography, in fact, which actually was good for me in many ways, and I ended up working for a publishing company that produced colour slides, travelled all over the country and specialised in photographing cathedrals and stately homes.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Respondent: Which was amazing. And did a lot of work for St Paul's, including being their official photographer at the Royal Wedding in 1981.

Interviewer: Oh!

[00:07:07]

Respondent: Charles and Diana. So my association with St Paul's carried on into my professional career later on, which was very interesting.

Interviewer: Wow, that's fantastic. How did you get into LGBT ministry?

Respondent: Right, well, that was interesting. All through my 20s... I should backtrack just a little bit to say that during my childhood years, I would now say that I was a Christian because of my influence from my father and because I was a churchgoer and I did believe something, that there was something deep inside stirring in me, but of course, I couldn't articulate it, because in the Anglican church I grew up in, nobody ever taught you anything, you know, you were a Christian because you were a white, middle class, conservative English.

Interviewer: Yeah, shopped at Waitrose.

Respondent: Yeah, shopped at Waitrose, or the equivalent in those days. And that's how people of that generation seemed to think. And when I told my father I'd become a Christian at the age of 21, they said, "Well, what were you before then?" because I'd been christened as a baby in the Anglican church, and there was no perception amongst the people I mixed with that you had a choice, whereas when I went to the Baptist church at the age of 21, they taught you very definitely have a choice, you made a confession of faith, you repented of your sins, you got baptised into Christ as a believer, and of course, that invalidated all my understanding but gave me a new understanding, and of course, a fundamentalist evangelical perspective. Now, of course, in those days, I'd lived through the 1960s, when the media was talking a great deal about homosexuality, leading up to the change in the law and following the publication of the Wolfenden Report. And in those days, people only talked about homosexuality in terms of it being a criminal offence, and I didn't what 'it' was, I didn't know what it was about homosexuality that made people such a criminal that they would be incarcerated in prison for a few years. I had no idea what homosexual sex was about, all I knew was that I felt drawn to and attracted to and desiring of a close relationship with a man. So I was very messed up by that because nobody could explain to me, but I also knew that society was treating gay people like the scum of the earth, you know, beneath contempt. So I was terrified of coming out, and so that messed up my teenage years. And I suppose really, in my own mind, the last thing I ever wanted to be was gay, because I just thought, "No, this is a terrible thing," you know, "It's abnormal, it's deviant, it's horrible, there's something about this, I don't understand what it is, but it's awful," so I just tried everything I could to shun the whole process and try to be straight.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But I think my spiritual hunger that led to me going to the Baptist church at 21, that was inspired by a schoolfriend who'd been converted and changed a lot as a result, and I went there hoping that God could change me, that this would resolve my sexuality. And of course, he didn't, but in the process, I met some wonderful people and I had a lot of counselling and I got introduced to the idea that God can heal people, so I thought, "Well, whatever it is that's wrong with me that's led me to be attracted to the same sex, maybe God can heal that and maybe I can go on, marry and be normal and forget the nightmare of this horrible scenario." So that was my focus really, and even though through the church I did meet a gay couple, a wonderful gay couple actually, who had been through the same journey and decided in the end it was okay to be gay and Christian and got together and are still together today, 35 years later, or about 40 years later, to their credit. I envied them really and I wished I could take the same route, but I didn't dare because I didn't think my parents would understand, when I got into the job in publishing doing photography, it was a conservative old-fashioned firm and I didn't think they would understand. The church, I knew, would probably kick me out, I thought, "I can't afford to go independently, because I don't have the self-confidence to believe in my own opinions." And your question, your last question was...?

[00:11:48]

Interviewer: How did you get into LGBT ministry, in a non-affirming...first of all?

Respondent: Yes well, during my 20s and then for the first half of my 30s, I was working for a publishing company doing photography, and during those years, because I felt desperate inside and very alone and isolated, I went for counselling, I went for psychiatric help. The psychotherapist I saw thought my biggest problem was my religion and not my sexuality - and he had a point, a good point. I then sought, you know, Christian counselling, deliverance ministry, I was offered it all and people spent hours and hours trying to delve into my past, to work out what it was that went wrong in my childhood that could have resulted in me ending up gay, looking for the love of a father was how people interpreted it. And although I had a good relationship with my parents, of course, from a classic pop psychology point of view, the fact that my parents were not happy, they split up, my mother was often upset, my father was absent because he buried himself in his work, it looked like the classic situation which would cause a young man to grow up gay. And so it wasn't true at all, of course, but it was how we saw things. And so, anyway, I exhausted all the possibilities of deliverance ministries, because none of them worked.

Interviewer: You didn't have any physical aversion therapy, it was all...?

Respondent: No, it was all psychobabble stuff.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And then I discovered the ex-gay movement in America, and in England, we had the True Freedom Trust, but the True Freedom Trust were very much a gentle, pastoral organisation that basically is preaching, "You might change, if God does that, but we can't lead the change, basically you've just got to be celibate, but we try and support each other," which actually was quite a mature approach. But it was not enough for me in my 20s and early 30s, I wanted something more. Being part of the charismatic movement, the church was promising more, it was promising revival, it was promising miracles, healing, and I wanted to find that, I wanted, you know, I wanted to be a Christian who changed the world, you know, in those days, I wanted to see a resolution to this. And in America, I discovered an ex-gay ministry called Love in Action, in California at that time. And they were preaching a very positive message, "Oh yes, God can change you." They still had the same pop psychology background to their thinking, but they thought if you went through a Christian discipleship programme and you

absolutely shunned any thought of gay relationships and pursued Christ, following Christ, then you would become heterosexual, which we all saw as our intrinsic creative capability or potential. And being America, I mean, they were also upbeat, they were positive, they were friendly, you know, nothing was too difficult for God, and I was very caught up with that kind of spirit – it sounded wonderful, much better than anything I'd seen in England, which was very kind of cynical and downcast. Over there, they were all up changing the world.

So I went, I left my job in photography when I was 35 and I went and I stayed with this ministry for four months. And unlike most people, I didn't go on their programme as such, I worked in their office and tried to learn on the job. I think I'd always had a pastoral acumen and ability, so I naturally found myself being drawn into the whole pastoral care aspect of the ministry. And people liked me, people found me helpful, and although none of us changed actually, we were all seeing this as being on a journey together, we were following Christ together, we were encouraging one another to live a holy life together, we got a lot out of the camaraderie, the community, the sense of being on this journey together. We were no longer isolated, and I think this is what was lifechanging for a lot of American gay Christians because up until the point where they joined Love in Action, they'd only known total isolation and fear and loneliness, now they knew a community of people who were all on this exciting journey together. So it felt really good, but I had to fund the trip over there and when I ran out of money and I had to come back. And then by this time, I'd lost all my fears of telling people, and my local church by this time was up in Harrow, I was going to a church in Harrow; I'd moved up to Watford because of my job and went to a church in Harrow, and they said, "Well, we think you should start a ministry like this here." So they gave me every encouragement and I basically gave up any idea of returning to secular work and I began the Ministry of Courage – and I chose that name specifically because I didn't want to suggest there were easy answers. I wanted to give the message right from the start, "This is going to be difficult, but with courage and perseverance, we'll win through, and we're on the journey to find that way through."

[00:17:02]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: No, of course, the term 'ex-gay' was actually a bit like the term Methodists for, you know, the early Wesleyan followers; it was a derogatory term used by other people, but it was a label that stuck, and so we became an ex-gay ministry. It's not a label we liked, it was a name that stuck. And of course, people's expectations when they came were hugely beyond what we could promise, and I knew from the beginning none of us could promise that there were changes, we could promise that we believed God was in the business of changing us, but how that was going to work out we were still exploring. But we set up a discipleship programme along the Love in Action lines, it was called Steps Out Of Homosexuality, and I never, ever looked for people to come, they just came, they just found out about us – and this was before the internet, before email, before websites, before even mobile phones.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: People would ring us up and they would write and they would say, "We hear you're doing this ministry, I want to be with you, I want to experience this." And so very quickly, we were having enquiries from all over Europe, from all over England, and I was stunned that people even knew we existed, you know, we were new on the block, we weren't people who'd been there around for years like True Freedom Trust, we were the new kids on the block. But I just interpreted that God brought them, and also I was very fortunate that three or four other young men who I'd met through True Freedom Trust and lived in the area all wanted to be part of this with me. And so I won't mention their

names for exposing them, but I had at least four absolutely wonderful young men who were utterly committed to following Christ, all from strict evangelical backgrounds, none of us had been involved in any kind of gay life at all, and we all wanted to follow Christ. So not only did I have a great team of people but I had all these people coming wanting our help. So we all made the pilgrimage to Love in Action, we all went for at least two or three weeks to see what it was like, and see what the model was, and we went to conferences of a group called Exodus, which was an umbrella organisation connecting ex-gay ministries. And they were all enormous fun, you know, we were riding high and we thought this was this great adventure in following Christ, and to be honest, at the time, it was the only positive thing we saw. It is true that LGCM existed, but the trouble was LGCM in those days, we saw as being very liberal, very theologically woolly and just really like a political organisation that was campaigning for change, and that unnerved us. We wouldn't go anywhere near LGCM because its image was that of a provocative campaigning organisation and that's not where we were at, we were looking for the pastoral care which LGCM wasn't offering. So that's why there was these two roots going on, there was the LGCM who were the political side and there was us offering the pastoral care. It wasn't until years later that I met Richard Kirker first and the LGCM people, and discovered the closer connections.

Interviewer: Yeah. Were you supported through the church, with the Courage Ministry, or did you become independent and pay yourself through people joining?

Respondent: Yes, well, what happened was initially it was purely a step of faith. I didn't know how on earth I was going to be financed, and the church which recommended we start it up, were not in a position to finance me.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: We had one special gift day when the congregation all, you know, put money into a collection and they raised, actually, I think it was about £2500 which was very impressive, to help get me launched, but that was it. After that, they did give a small amount each month, but it was, like, a small contribution, it wasn't financing us. And two of us were working full time at the Courage very, very quickly and having to rent an office and so on, so we had outgoings, I think I remember about £5000 a month, which in those days seemed enormous. I think we got, as I say, about £500, about a tenth of what we needed.

[00:21:32]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So we all literally put in everything we had, you know, we sold our homes, we contributed everything we had to try and make it work and we were so full of faith in the first days, we thought, you know, that God would surely provide for us. But anyway, we ran out of our money very quickly and in the end, by setting up a community and people living in, that was really our income, people living in and paying a little rent and paying what we called a programme fee, which was quite modest, but it was a contribution towards us running it. But in fact, the whole thing virtually bankrupted us really within a few years, and we were living along... I think we honestly thought that first of all we couldn't go wrong, that God would finance it, and we also believed that the evangelical churches who said that they wanted to support gay people would support us, but actually, they weren't really interested at all, they were just glad to think that there was, "Somewhere we could send these poor people."

Interviewer: Yeah, like the lepers' cave.

Respondent: Exactly.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: SO we were, like, the token evangelical response to gay people. It was like churches could say, "Oh, we're not anti-gay, in fact, we have this lovely ministry called Courage we can send you to and they'll sort you out." But of course, they didn't support us much - a little bit, there were one or two people who did make generous contributions, but it was a small percentage of what we needed to make it function in a viable way. I think some people think ex-gay ministries are, you know, get huge funding, even in the states from big evangelical churches, but they don't. I don't know that any of them have got big funding at all, most of them were run on a hugely sacrificial level, by the people who founded them.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, so in terms of timeline, when was this? The late 80s?

Respondent: Yes, now, I went to Love in Action in 1987, September that year, and returned in 1988 and then began Courage then, and so, because of the number of people who straight away showed interest, we kind of quickly grew within the first year of two and were running a community house within a couple of years, which we did until the end of 1994.

Interviewer: How did you run a community house, did you rent somewhere or...?

Respondent: No, three of us sold our homes, and bought a big one, and we all lived in that one, but we then actually, a couple of other people joined in and bought homes in the area, so we ended up being able to, at one point, accommodate about 14 people, which was as much as you could fit into a living room to have our disciple group meetings and so on. And we had a little office nearby too, and well, I would say for the first three years, we were all riding high and it seemed to be immensely positive, and then after that, our first group of house leaders burnt out; I knew from seeing the Love in Action experience three years is as long as they could cope, and then they would need to move on. And then after that, I couldn't find anybody else who was really available and equipped to do this. And in a way, within, well, by the end of '94, the whole thing was really becoming unmanageable and we had to close the houses, not to mention the fact that it was financially ruinous for us.

[00:24:53]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So we ended up closing the houses, and then 1995 came, and by this time, I realise, because of my pastoral concern for the long-term value of the work in people's lives, I realised that it wasn't changing anybody - myself included. By that time, I'd got married and my wife had been very courageous in, you know, joining the ministry and the church and everything else and supporting it, but it was a very, very tough time. And so we had to close the community houses and go back to leading weekly group meetings. And I was just thinking, "Well, actually, none of us have experienced any kind of change of sexual orientation." A tiny handful had married, but most of us were limping along thinking we were still waiting for the miracle.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: We never got into deliverance ministry because I'd known from personal experience that that was not only...got nowhere, but I was highly suspicious as to its value. We didn't do a lot of counselling because although we did get counselling training, again, the inner healing prayer-type ministry, I just didn't see the long-term fruit. And in the end, what we really came down to, because people often asked, "What did you do to

help people change?" we came down to the bottom line being that we were here to follow Christ, which meant you don't go the way of the world, which was to go down the gay route, you go the way of Christ, which means being obedient to him, you know, repenting of anything in your life which would contribute to unholy living, whether that's...it could be anything you like really but homosexuality was one of them. You were just being Christ-centred and living a life of worship and service, all of which was perfectly okay, it's what anybody in Christian ministry would devote themselves to, but it didn't change anyone's sexuality. So what was happening was people who left us to move on, which I encouraged, because I would say, "We're here to be an oasis and a place of support for you for a period," but more people were coming all the time, we can't become a longstanding community, you have to move on and use the things we've taught you to pursue your life." And I would keep in touch with all these people after they'd left and I would see that none of them were doing well, they were, for one thing, nothing had changed in their sexuality, they'd also go back home and be faced with questions like, "So when are we going to hear wedding bells then?" you know, from people who knew they'd made this investment in the ministry.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And they were thinking, "There's no way that I'm going to be ready for wedding bells," and so they began to think, "Well, what was all this about? I've committed these two years of my life to following Christ and nothing's changed, and I now feel even more of a failure than ever, nothing's changed, what is this about? Was I not good enough? Is this because I'm beyond the reach of God's grace? Is there something so awful about me that I just can't change?" And what this did was I could see it was leading to the destruction of people's faith. And so I began to think, "There's something awfully wrong here, and I don't want to be running a ministry that sets people up to lose their faith. It's bad enough that we didn't change your sexuality, but to lose your faith as well," it was like losing everything that was of value.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I think from about the mid-1990s onwards, I was beginning to question more and more the whole ex-gay ethos or message, I would ask around, I would ask other Exodus ministries, "Well, what are you finding here?" And in reality, they were all finding the same thing.

Interviewer: Were they honest with you?

Respondent: They would be honest insofar as saying, "It's difficult, yes, we have lots of setbacks, we're not seeing great successes, but we've got to press on." The evangelical Christian message was, "However difficult life becomes, you press on, because we're not supposed to be people who give up, we're supposed to be people who persevere and you'd look at the New Testament and the Acts of the Apostles and all the early Apostles went through terrible times, imprisonment and shipwreck and you know, martyrdom and they were saying, "Well, you're not going through that, are you, so it's not that bad, so think yourself lucky and press on."

[00:29:12]

Interviewer: "You're not inside a whale," or something.

Respondent: "You're not inside a whale," that's right, or something awful like that, and you're living in a civilised, wealthy, capitalist society, really life's not bad for you, just get on with it, kind of thing, was the message. But when it came to people's faith being destroyed, I thought, "There is something going on here, which is wrong," but I couldn't put my finger on what it was. So I started saying to people, "Come to us. If you come here

thinking or hoping we can change you, we can't, go away," I'd say, and I'd say it light-heartedly and they'd all laugh, and we all sort of knew, "Well, there's no great promise of change here," but we had nowhere else to go. We were just, you know, the church weren't talking about homosexuality in any positive way, they were rejecting us. They may have rejected the people who were pursuing what the church called, "A gay lifestyle," or even a relationship, but really they had no time for those of us who were struggling through. They saw us as hangers on, they saw us as people who were, you know, lacklustre in our Christian commitment, even though actually we were far more committed than the average church member. You know, if the whole church was as committed as we'd been, it would be a completely different church.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And I just thought, "There's something wrong here," but it wasn't until the late 1990s that what I was seeing was that people who had left us, say, in the early 1990s, what they were doing was that they were saying to themselves, "I can't choose whether or not I'm gay, but I can choose whether or not I'm a Christian, so if I can't be gay and Christian, I won't be a Christian."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And when they were kind of thinking this through, once they accepted being gay, they would then perhaps find a partner, and their lives would change for the better immeasurably, and I saw a number of people who...they were just so much better and so much happier having found a partner, I thought, "Actually, this is the sort of fruit we expected to see from coming to follow Christ, so why isn't it happening? Why are they giving up Christ and embracing a partner and now doing well?" So I thought, "We must be the ones who've got this wrong," but at this point, when I talked to other Exodus leaders, they were warning me that I was on the slippery slope to heresy, I was giving up the way of Christ, I was leading people astray, and they were suspicious of me. And when in 1999 I first began saying, "I think we should support or at least respect same sex partnerships," that finished me reputation in the evangelical world.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And in fact, an article was published in the year 2000 which then went viral, in those days, and that ended my association with the evangelical church, not because I wanted it to, but because they didn't want me. But from then onwards, I thought, "Right, we're going to support same sex partnerships and we're...we're not going to support 'anything goes, sleep with who you like,' nothing like that," it was a case of, "If you meet somebody you love and you want to be with, then we want to support you in that, and let's see it as a gift of God, rather than a choice between God or being gay."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And by the year 2000, I was again thinking, "Well..." because I'd had this crisis in 1995 when we had closed the live-in houses, I thought, "Well, is there anything for us to do?" But there were still people coming in their droves, so we did run the group meetings. And then by the year 2000, I thought we'd turned right around and were now supporting same sex partnerships, "Is there anything for us to do? Is this the time for us to close Courage?" And once again, still loads of people coming, and they were saying things to me like, "Oh, I'm so relieved you've gone public and said you think you've got it wrong, I've been on this journey too, but I've not been able to talk to anybody," so we were still having the discipleship meetings, we were still having worship meetings, we were still doing bible study, which was now all gay Christians who still wanted to follow Christ but be openly gay. So I then still found I was still busy, and my ministry still hadn't ended.

[00:33:22]

Interviewer: This is the early 2000s?

Respondent: 2000s, right. And so it went on, we'd run two retreats at a weekend a year, we'd run conferences, we would try to work with churches that were open to us, but there weren't many, and I continued to be supported just by voluntary donations from individuals, which is still true today.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But we became infamous as a ministry that changed its mind, changed its approach, because in 2000, I was desperate to give up the name, Courage, I thought we've got all these terrible associations with ex-gay ministries, who were beginning to be seen as abusive of people, but I discovered by accident that actually, we became infamous as the ministry that changed its mind, so it became important to keep the... There's a funny little story, I had a telephone call from Father Harvey in New York, who ran the Roman Catholic ministry called Courage, and actually they'd started before we did, but when I began Courage in 1998, there was no internet, no email, New York was 3000 miles away, who was going to know about New York. By 2000/2003, everybody knew because of the internet, and the news of this was everywhere. So Father Harvey rings me up one day from New York saying, "I want you to change your name." I said, "Oh really?" He said, "I'm sick and tired of people saying to me, running the New York Roman Catholic Courage, committed to celibacy, 'Oh, you're the ministry that's changed your mind'." "We are not," he said, he said, "We have not changed our mind and we are still committed to celibacy, so I need you to change your name." So I said to him, I think this was an inspiration from God, I said, "Well, it might interest you to know that there's a brewery by the name of Courage in England, which has been there for generations." And he threatened legal action against me if I didn't change the name, he said he'd done this with somebody else and they'd had to pay out thousands of dollars in costs, you see. So I said, "There's this brewery in England been there generations, I don't think it would be in your interests, never mind mine, to contest the use of the name in the courts." So he backed off. I did agree to publish a disclaimer on our website that said, "This is not the Roman Catholic Ministry in New York that is committed to celibacy." But anyway, we were infamous for being the ministry that changed our minds.

Interviewer: Gosh, how fabulous.

Respondent: The old message, the old Courage and the ex-gay ministers was, "Homosexuals can change," you see, in other words, the implication being you can change from being gay to straight, homosexual to heterosexual, and I used to say, "Oh yes, homosexuals can change, we need no longer be the neurotic, self-obsessed, you know, people seeking healing, we can change and embrace who we are as a gift of God, and be thankful."

Interviewer: That's great. You mentioned that you got married, I mean, that's your wife, ex-wife's story to tell, and I won't go into that, but just basically the kind of theory behind...were you the only evangelical gay Christian who got married in that era, and what was the thinking behind that?

Respondent: Right, well, yes, it's a very important question actually, because there was so many people now who did marry and hoped it would change them and now are getting divorced, many of whom will come to it today. I mean, in those days, we hadn't experienced change of orientation, but as far as finding a same sex partnership was concerned, there was a complete roadblock, we couldn't go there, we couldn't go there theologically, we couldn't go there within our churches or anything. And marriage to somebody of the opposite sex was seen as right, it was the road to walking out your heterosexual potential - very dodgy stuff, but it seemed to be plausible to us then. And

of course, it did give companionship, and we all wanted companionship, we didn't want to be on our own the rest of our lives. And I could see even then how many people were on their own and were very damaged people and became unable to make relationships. So it seemed like a positive step, and it did seem that God brought my wife and I together; we were from different traditions, well, different areas of struggle, and we did have companionship and love, but it was a platonic love, not a heterosexual love.

[00:37:48]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And we're still married technically, although we don't live under the same roof now, and my wife has been very supportive of the gradual change process, because she could see too that the ex-gays process wasn't working. And I think people were quite astonished that my wife would support the change towards supporting same sex partnership. And we are still the best of friends. And for many others, it has not been such a good story because many would get married, they would say to their potential wives, "Well, I had this period in my life when I was struggling with same sex attractions, but I'm moving on now and if God has seen to have brought us together, then let's go for it." And a few have managed to and I think possibly there may be more bisexual or more able to open with the dichotomy and they've got the kind of personalities that cope with it better. But I'm sorry to say that many have not.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And a lot of the people I see now whose marriages are on the rock, or are divorced, they didn't come through us, they didn't get married because we encouraged them to, in fact, we never encouraged them to get married unless they were absolutely sure in their own minds this is what they wanted to do, because we knew the potential for difficulty. There've been people who've married because they went to evangelical churches that basically gave them no alternative, and they're not even allowed to think about same sex partnerships, because to think about it was a heretical thing, and so they would bury it all and stuff it all down, and if they met somebody they got on well with and they were good friends with, they thought, "Well, hey, friendship and companionship, isn't that what marriage is all about? Let's go for it, let's take this step of faith," and they'd often bring children into the world and be raising families, and then after seven or 10 years, they would just...their lives would be full of work, full of trying to earn a living, full of trying to bring up a young family. Often their relationships were such that they would be coexisting under the same roof, and then, you know, the husband, the gay husband perhaps would meet somebody in the course of his work or accidentally, you know, something would click and they would realise, "I've been gay all the time, I just didn't realise it. Suppressing doesn't work. I now know that I really want to be with men, and I can't help it." And at this point, it would often, for many people, start another few years of torment really, until in the end they think, "I can't stand it any longer, I've just got to make or break." And often the wife had given her life to the husband, to the family, they feel totally betrayed and devastated as a result and it would have been a very hard process for her recovering her life. And I have to say, the churches, if they're as bad at handling (inaudible 00:40:43) for gay people, they are hopeless, completely hopeless at supporting the spouse who married the gay person, whether it's a man who married a female, lesbian woman, or whether it's a woman who married a gay man, the churches just think, "Well, surely you knew before you got married," or they say stupid, superficial things that do nothing to support them, and may even make them feel even worse.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So a lot of my work today, now that I've finished Courage officially in 2012, after basically 25 years of focusing on that ministry, I'm still finding myself overwhelmed with pastoral care work, just being there, being a listening place and a safe place for people who are still struggling to work out the implications of that hardline evangelical Christian message that you can't be gay and Christian.

[00:41:33]

Interviewer: Are these people still within a church environment or...?

Respondent: Most of them are, yes, if their marital breakup was particularly messy and the issue of being gay has become public, then they'll often be, you know, cold shouldered out of their churches as well. Some of them do try to continue as independently and go to their churches and serving their churches, but it's a very difficult path, very difficult.

Interviewer: Yeah. What do you see personally as the future of the church in this country?

Respondent: Well, the good news is that although it's sort of probably 20 years too late, there are more and more evangelical churches that are facing the questions and beginning to change their minds. I mean, famously, Steve Chalk, as a Baptist minister, has actually published that he feels we've been wrong, and wants to lead a church that's affirming of gay people and their relationships. And he's not alone now, there are other Baptist churches like this, there are other churches, I mean, there are more Anglican churches like this now, and there are more and more churches beginning to change their minds or talk about it. Of course, it's much too slow for those of us who have given the best years of our lives to churches, but nevertheless, there is a groundswell of change, a new younger generation today who have grown up with gay people around them, with the fact that the law's changed, that civil partnerships and now gay marriage, and they just think, "What on earth is the problem here?" And I think there'll be a new generation of these that are growing up, who simply won't buy into the traditional theology and will say, "No, we're going to support any gay couple that are sincere about being in a relationship, we'll support them." So I think the church will gradually change, and for a lot of people it will be 50 years too late, but it will happen eventually, and it will have to, because otherwise the church will lose all credibility with the modern generation. As it is, young people today, they don't think of the church as being wonderful at reaching out to the poor or doing marvellous works, even though the church is, they just think of the church as anti-gay, in which case that means it has no credibility at all to speak into their lives on moral issues or spiritual issues, and that has got to change.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you think it will become polarised that you will have accepting churches, and then you'll have almost religious wars and have extreme fundamentalist churches?

Respondent: Yes, I mean, in America, that is definitely the case, that is happening now. There is a great polarisation. I think the church in this country has become so small that many of them are struggling to survive at all, and I think those ones that have any real vision for the future will say, "God includes gay people in the Kingdom of God as well as straight, there isn't an issue here," and so we will become a church that is inclusive of all. And there are some wonderful churches, particularly in the London area, who are like this. It just needs to go countrywide.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And if they don't, they'll become moribund. I have seen, because of the pastoral work I do, I've seen quite a lot of churches where at this moment, as I speak, there is a polarisation within the one church, that they'll have some members of their congregation, often the older ones, combined with some younger ones, who have said, "Well, we've changed our mind about this, we think it's okay to be gay and Christian,"

and then there are the hardliners who split the church over this and say, "We can never tolerate this." But what they're doing is they're splitting small churches into tiny churches and they're eroding what's left by their hardline attitudes. But I think they will be the ones now becoming isolated. I've heard one or two conservative pastors saying, "I can see that I shall be very alone in my conservative views within a few years, and it won't be a comfortable place to be in."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I suppose they'll have to retire or something.

[00:45:40]

Interviewer: Well, yeah. What contact have you had with LGCM historically or more recently?

Respondent: Well, with LGCM, my first real contact was in about the year 2000 when I contacted Richard Kirker, who was still writing about Courage in the most inflammatory way, saying we were running nazi concentration camps to convert gay people. So I wrote to him and said, "Look, Richard, this is really ridiculous, we never did that in the first place, but actually, we left our ex-gay message quite a long time ago, and now are supporting same sex partnerships." And I went and saw him and had a discussion and he looked astounded and said will I write an article for the LGCM magazine about this, which I did, which he then leaked to the press everywhere, and that kind of created the big furore, but that was Richard.

Interviewer: He seems to be a bit of a marmite person, from my other interviews.

Respondent: Yes, that's right. Well, he has done a huge amount for gay people, and he's a different kind of person with a different kind of approach, but I thought, "Oh well," in one sense, it made it easier for me.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: It kind of blew my cover. I was just trying to tread this tightrope thinking, "What on earth am I going to do? How can I handle this?" Anyway, he blew my cover and that was it. And it didn't end everything, in fact, it turned things around a bit more quickly and we were able to move forward in our gay affirming direction.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And so I would see Richard now and again at different events, but we didn't do anything together. He did suggest doing a conference together at some point but it didn't quite gel or come off. And then of course, when Sharon Ferguson took over, I think I invited her to come speak and she spoke at a conference that I was involved in organising, and we got on really well. But I haven't, because of my own sort of retirement from Courage, I've not been really involved in the latest incarnation of LGCM, with Tracey, I think I met her but I don't think we've ever sat down and had a conversation. But I suppose I'm moving...I'm trying to leave behind the whole Courage ministry and just sort of hoping to semi-retire and do the pastoral work, so I'm less involved in the events and things.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. I'm just trying to remember the questions I was going to ask you.

Respondent: That's alright.

Interviewer: I'm having a geriatric moment.

Respondent: Oh goodness, don't worry about that.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was wondering what you thought about...do you think that the church these days is accept in the sense if gay relationships model, heterosexual ones, I'm thinking if there's commitment and middle classness and almost shopping at Waitrose, then that's fine, but if you're non-binary, you're trans...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: They can't cope with that. Is that fair or am I...?

[00:48:36]

Respondent: I think again, among the evangelical churches, there's still two sides of this. There are a few who are now saying, "We will accept some sex partnerships and support them." There are others who basically, well, probably the best they could do is say, "We're not the church for you, if you want to do that. We can't support them theologically." I think the trans question is an interesting one, because I've had a few trans people come to me recently, and I mean, it's wonderful to hear their stories and I think the courage and the isolation they suffer is terrible. Again, I think there are some churches who are pastorally a bit more aware or who are a bit more open, or trying to understand, and there are others who can't. It is a very interesting thing, if I might just slip this in here, that there is, amongst fundamentalist churches, there is this very strange theological dichotomy, that some of them could accept a trans person more easily than a gay person, because their theology tells them we are made male and female. If you feel you are a woman trapped in a man's body and you go through sex reassignment surgery, they can accept that because they see it as corrective surgery. But the idea of two men or two women having a relationship together is perversion. So I knew this back in the 1970s, the church I went to then, the pastor told me, because I had a trans schoolfriend, he told me, "It is perfectly compatible for a Christian to go through sex reassignment surgery and live as a woman, but if you're gay and you want a relationship with a man, no way." And I've discovered from a BBC Horizon programme, I think it was, a few years ago, in Iran - which is a very fundamentalist, anti-gay society, where you can be stoned to death for having a gay relationship, they do more sex reassignment surgery operations than almost anywhere in the world except Thailand, because they will accept that if medically there is a case for you being the opposite sex and they can do it, that's okay. It's really weird, a weird dichotomy.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Now, for the trans people I know in our churches in England don't experience this level of compassion or care or understanding at all, and I think it's because there's still just a lot of mystique about the whole thing in people's minds, they don't understand it. Now, the number of people who are trans is quite a small percentage, and so they don't come across it often enough to have to engage in the pastoral questions.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But I hope and pray that for trans people in the future, they're going to gradually see a more understanding and compassionate and supportive approach, not just a case of, "Yes, we'll pray for you, it must be difficult," but a case of real, hands on support because we need to be part of the community of the Kingdom of God.

Interviewer: Absolutely. And one thing I didn't touch on, and I'm going backwards to the late 80s, obviously you were a fully-fledged adult during the 80s, as I was kind of late teenage, so I didn't kind of live through it as such, so I just remember terrifying adverts on TV.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: How did that impact your life?

Respondent: Well, of course, this was before I ever got into the ex-gay ministry thing, and I must admit, I found the whole thing terrifying because in those days, I still believe in the angry God who loves you if you repented and, you know, adopted the church's line. And it did seem like AIDS was like a judgement from God, it was like a spectacular indication of God at work in our society, judging people who led immoral lives. And of course, a lot of people said it was a gay problem, but I knew quite quickly from researchers in African countries, loads of heterosexual people were getting AIDS, but of course, they were promiscuous. So it was, like, God is extending his judgement on promiscuous people whether they're gay or straight, you know, there is only one rule, monogamous heterosexual marriage, and that's it, anything else is sin. So it fitted in very well to my theological understanding of it all, and it terrified me. And because I'd never got into the gay life, I'd never been promiscuous, I'd had one encounter with somebody just to try and prove to myself that I was gay or not, and that was it, which of course proves that I was. But I couldn't cope with it even then.

[00:53:14]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But of course, it just seemed to me, "Well, God is speaking to us," and then when I went to Love in Action in the States in 1987, I think two thirds of the people on our programme were HIV positive and some of them had full blown AIDS. And I have to say that Love in Action was very caring and compassionate and loving towards them, and in a few cases, nursed people right through to their dying day, and were full of love and care, and they were fully accepted and there was no rejection or anything. They would say, "Well, you lived a lifestyle at one time that was ungodly, there are consequences, like a woman who has a baby out of wedlock, you know, she may get pregnant and she's not married, but she still has the baby. We will support you, but there are consequences and this is just those consequences working out in your life, but we will support you." So in that sense, the ex-gay ministries were a huge step forward from hardline evangelical churches that would just reject you totally, and say, "Well, off to hell with you, there's nothing we can do for you."

Interviewer: How did they account for lesbians?

Respondent: Well, again, we didn't see as many lesbian people, women. But there were some and the message was the same, you just, "This has happened because of problems in your life, you probably were abused," - this is always the thing, you know, if you were a lesbian it was because you had been sexually abused in your youth, whether it had happened or not.

Interviewer: Despite all the people who are abused who are straight.

Respondent: Oh yes, of course, I didn't... I mean, like all the straight people who had absent fathers, I mean, if the absent fathers theory was true, 95% of the population would be gay.

Interviewer: It would be like the Oscars ceremony.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: But in terms of AIDS, obviously it would be gay men with HIV/AIDS.

Respondent: Yes, indeed.

Interviewer: And that was a sign from God?

Respondent: Yes, it was a sign from God that God was not tolerating this.

Interviewer: So was God tolerant of lesbians because they didn't get?

Respondent: No, God's message was the same, "You must repent and not be lesbian."

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So it was the same message, no, no partiality here. "Just don't be lesbian. Don't even call yourself a lesbian. No, you're not, you're a straight woman who just hasn't realised your potential yet."

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Respondent: "As you see things God's way, you will realise that you are heterosexual."

Interviewer: Yeah...

[00:55:38]

Respondent: And one day you will happily marry a man who will be your head and you will submit to him as your husband and you will be happy and everything will be hunky dory.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: That's how we thought.

Interviewer: Yeah, it all seems so quaint now.

Respondent: It does, doesn't it?

Interviewer: Can you think of anything I haven't covered that you might deem significant?

Respondent: I think, you know, one of the... a lot of people ask me, "What changed your mind to move away from the ex-gay thing and adopt supporting same sex partnerships?" You know, a lot of people would love me to tell a Damascus Road experience when suddenly the scales fell off my eyes, and you know, I realised that it was okay to be gay; it never happened like that. And from my point of view, the background was probably about a seven year stretch of seeing the damage that the ex-gay ministries were doing, and realising how much better people were off if they accepted who they are as being a gift of God, and that God loves us as we are, gay or straight, no partiality. However, underlying all of that, I believe there's an unspoken, much more important theological issue here. Now, I was brought up with what is known as an understanding of the atonement, that this was satisfying God's anger against sin - so God is an angry God who hates and will not tolerate sin of any kind and has made his son die on the cross in agony to pay the price for our sins and therefore, if we accept that, we have a ticket to heaven. Now, if I put it that way, you realise instantly how ludicrous that is, because nobody could pay the price of our sins in that way, it doesn't make us right, the idea that you just think, "Oh well, Jesus, thank you so much, I'll try and be a good boy from now on, but I won't make it most of my life, but I'll try and be a good boy, thank you for what you did." It doesn't really redeem anybody, in fact, it makes us pharisaical religious people, who can live with our sins and do awful things in the name of Christ, nothing really changes, and their inner heart change, and frankly, the whole theology makes God look an idiot, not to mention an absolute monster.

Interviewer: And barbaric.

Respondent: A barbaric monster who's going to probably cast 95% of the population into the lake of fire to burn forever. And the theology behind it is so monstrous, it's so dreadful that how we can imagine this could be biblical or right or anything, I don't know, but I do see how people think about it like that. And of course, it's the same kind of thinking that's behind Islamic fundamentalism, but just that they have guns and use them. But I came to realise, probably began to realise in the late 1990s that this is where our problem lay; as long as we were appeasing an angry God, there could be no negotiation. But if we saw the atonement very differently as I would now, that God is a fully loving God, that yes, sin is a terrible thing, and it does need repenting of, but you're never going to get people to repent of it by holding them over the pit, as in, "Repent or I'll drop you in it." You actually...you win people over to a Christ-like set of values by loving them, by empathising with them in their difficulties, by walking with them as Jesus walked with all the drop outs in society, he walked with them and healed them and associated with them, whatever, whether it was physical or mental illness, whether it was lifestyles that were not religiously correct. And if you look at the kind of life Jesus modelled, it was one full of compassion and mercy and loving kindness, and people couldn't resist following him, they knew he loved them, they just wanted to sit with him. If it was like this with churches, if we behaved towards people like this, including all the minorities, helping the poor, focusing on being Christ-like to people, our churches would look completely different, they would no longer be riven by doctrinal disputes, it wouldn't really matter what you believed about the virgin birth or infant or believe there's baptism or anything of those things, what would matter is are you living a life that's Christ-like in mercy and compassion and goodness and so on, rather than the capitalist, materialistic society we live in. And I think if we live more by Christ's values, and realise that what he was doing on the cross was actually suffering the consequences of our rage against God, and saying, "I will not do the same thing, I will not retaliate with violence and retribution, you can do your worst to me and you can't stop me loving you." If that was the message we got from the cross, the church would be transformed and so would the world be transformed. And that is why I can still say I'm an evangelical Christian and I believe in following Christ, I think he's got the best message for the world we've ever had, it is the best news for everybody, but it's not like the message the churches are putting out, which are often politically motivated and motivated by a very skewed idea of the character of God.

[01:00:59]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And I think that's where the real issue lies to do with homosexuality and many others. We've got our essential core values wrong, and because of that, we abuse people instead of saving them.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you go to church?

Respondent: I wish I could. I can't find a place to go to where people understand. I do know of one or two churches, like St Luke's Holloway with Dave Thompson. If I lived nearer, I'd definitely be going there, I love everything he stands for and I'm on the same page.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: There are a few others, but they're not many, and I don't know of any in this area. The more liberal understanding ones, bless them, are not interested in what I'm doing because they can't see the point of it. They think, "Well, of course we accept people, gay or straight, of course we do, why wouldn't we?" And they are society-type churches

which people go to and don't have that sense of community that I'm used to. And the evangelical churches that do don't want me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So, you know, I'm a heretic in their midst and likely to infect their thinking in their congregations with devilish schemes, so I can't go there either, even though there are some lovely people there.

Interviewer: Yeah, yes, I'm on that page.

Respondent: It is difficult, isn't it?

Interviewer: There is a community on that page.

Respondent: Yes, so I mean, I have loads of Christian fellowship, I meet people all the time, and I still run, even though I'm not running Courage, I still have two meetings I'm involved with on a monthly basis, small meetings that are a great opportunity to introduce people. And the 2:23 Network, which succeeded Courage, are doing a wonderful job, I really take my hat off to them, they're a ministry for the 21st century and I'm a 20th century dinosaur, and I acknowledge it and I'm happy to use the experience that dinosaurs can have, but I shouldn't be in the frontrunning of these things anymore. I'm too old and I'm happy to leave that to the younger people now.

Interviewer: Okay, well, that's great. I think we'll end here, thank you very much.

Respondent: Pleasure, thank you.

[End of Transcript]