

Dick Longdin

[00:00:00]

PARTICIPANT: I'm Dick - that normally gets a laugh, people remember my name. My background... I grew up on a farm in Yorkshire, so a conservative farming family, which I guess made it difficult for me to come out. I finally came out in my final year of university - I was at university in Sheffield. I was doing landscape architecture so it was a five-year course, and I waited until my very last year before coming out. And the thing that made me come out was the fact that that was, I think that was the autumn after the iceberg AIDS leaflet had been dropped through everybody's door, and that the lesbians had invaded the Lords or Parliament, whichever one it was. And that section 28 was coming in. So there was this barrage of hatred and fear that was being directed at the gay community in terms of HIV, and AIDS as we called it then, and section 28. And I honestly thought, if I want to have sex with men, I'm going to have come out, and come out now, or else everyone is going to be dead from AIDS or locked up because of the Tory government hating us. And that was a real genuine fear, that wasn't exaggerated; that's what I thought.

So I broke one down one night in the flat I was in, and my housemate said, you've got to come out, you've got to come out, and he forced me out and said he'd out me if I didn't come out myself. So I ended up going to the lesbian and gay group at university and ended up getting in- there was a group of us then got invited back to Mark's house, Mark was chair of the lesbian and gay group. So he invited the newbie back along with some of his friends, and we had drinks and then his friends left and I stayed and stayed and stayed the night! And Mark became my first boyfriend. So from the moment of coming out, I had a boyfriend, and Mark was studying politics and he was really politicised, so he was the person that taught me to be political and encouraged me to be political during this really political time for gay people in the UK.

[00:02:30]

[Interviewer adjusts mic.]

[00:03:02]

INTERVIEWER: So... right, wow, there's a lot there. So just out of interest, because I also grew up on a farm, what kind of farm did you grow up on?

PARTICIPANT: Well I tell people I grew up on a farm in Yorkshire, and people have these ideas of the Yorkshire Dales and James Herriot and all of that, but it wasn't that part of Yorkshire. It was the Rotherham/Sheffield/Doncaster bit of Yorkshire which is coal mines and pit tips and that kind of flat, horrible, boring industrial farming landscape. So it was mainly arable with a flock of sheep as well.

[00:03:36]

INTERVIEWER: OK. Cool. Great. So you didn't do the shearing or anything?

PARTICIPANT: No... I did lambing, I've done the whole James Herriot lambing thing! [laughs]

[00:03:47]

INTERVIEWER: I guess that puts me in mind of your family. Maybe we can come back to that, but when you were going this period of coming out and it's all quite exciting, did you share that with family and friends, or how?

PARTICIPANT: No. I did find it difficult coming out. Most obviously because of context and upbringing, and it being a conservative family, a traditional farming family. I didn't know any other gay people. I didn't know any gay adults, I didn't know- you know, there was gay group at school back then. The idea of it was unthinkable. So I had no gay role models apart from, you know, the only gay people on TV were [missed] [00:04:36] and John Inman, that I just thought were horrific. But I knew I was sexually attracted to men from the moment I started wanking. [laughs] People always ask me, how do you know, oh I'm not sure if I'm gay – well what do you think about when you're having a wank? I mean it's different now, people have porn. In the olden days when you had to close your eyes [laughs] and conjure up an image, what do you think about then? Surely that tells you whether or not you're gay or not. So ever since I've been doing that, my fantasies were always about men, not women. So deep down I knew that that's what I was attracted to, but it took me till my early 20s to have the personal courage to come out to myself, never mind to come out to other people.

[00:05:19]

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, OK.

PARTICIPANT: And then it was a couple of years after that before I came out to my family.

[00:05:27]

INTERVIEWER: OK. And how did they respond?

PARTICIPANT: I waited until... I was going away doing a summer of doing terribly butch conservation work in the Yorkshire Dales, repairing drystone walls, repairing [missed] [00:05:41] and that kind of thing for the summer. So I knew I had accommodation [and] friends for a summer, if my family disowned me. My dad had died a few years before, so it was just telling my mum. And I waited until the evening before I had to go to North Yorkshire and do these butch things.

And I remember all evening wanting to tell her and not being able to. And then mum going to bed, and me going to my bedroom, and going, I've got to go, I've got to go and tell her, because I couldn't bear lying to her anymore when she asked me if I'd got a girlfriend, [and] having to lie to her and make up excuses. This was in final year at university. And I remember thinking, right, I've just got to go and do it. And I can remember everything going into slow motion, and me walking out of my bedroom and knocking on my mum's bedroom door and going in and saying I've got

something to tell you, and mum going, what, and me going, [imitates repeatedly being about to speak but not being able to], and literally not being able to say it. And then mum getting upset because she didn't know what I was going to say. And she thought I was going to say that I had a drugs problem, or that I got somebody pregnant! The last thing that she thought of was that I was going to say I was gay. And then I said, I'm gay, and then Mum started crying, and I was crying and hugging her and it was... it was very very emotional. But she was great about it, and she said, I'm just disappointed, I wanted you to have kids. And I said, well, I might have kids yet, that's not out of the question. And then I felt really bad, because I was just fucking off the next day for three months.

But my mum wrote to me and she... She's a traditional farmer's wife, and very Church of England, and WI and all of that. So the first person she spoke to was the vicar [laughs] and he was really good and he gave her really good advice. He said, your son Richard is a really great kid and you should be proud of him, and there's nothing wrong with what he's told you, you should be proud that he's told you, and I'm not the best person to give you advice - you should ask Richard if there's any groups for parents of lesbians and gays, and they might be able to offer you some support and advice.

So my mum was very practical. And then she went to the doctor and asked him for advice [laughs]. It's a tiny little village, and she went to all the key people in the village and asked them for advice. And then she told me brothers and sisters - I'm the youngest of four. And they were all really good about it. My brother who now runs the farm, his wife apparently said "oh, maybe it's a phase," and my brother went, "don't be so stupid," to her. So he was very supportive in his farming way. I've never had any problems with it, they've all been really supportive.

[00:08:42]

INTERVIEWER: That's great. You mentioned the Don't Die of Ignorance campaign in a way being a bit of trigger. I was wondering if you could say a little bit more about that, if you remember when you first saw it, can you remember where you were or where you saw it and what kind of feelings it brought up for you?

PARTICIPANT: It was during my year out. I was studying landscape architecture, so it's three years at university, then you have a year in practice - and I was working down in West Sussex - and then you go back to your final year at university. So it was when I was working down in West Sussex, and it was big news. It was big news every week, or every day, there'd be new reports of how many people had HIV. It was a regular thing every week. And it was called gay plague, and all the tabloids were using it to hit gays where it hurts, and as an excuse to target gays as a minority. So it wasn't just AIDS, it was the way it was being used by the tabloids to attack gays, and by the government. The government were bringing in Section 28 at the same time, so it did feel like the world was against us. And without exaggeration, it was similar to Nazi Germany, where there's minorities being used as an excuse for all the ills in the world. And we were the minority. So I wasn't out, but I was aware that I was part of that minority who were being affected by HIV, and were being attacked by the tabloids and the government. And it made me really scared. And I had nowhere to go to, because I wasn't part of any group. So that's one of the

reasons why I thought, I need to come out, and find some allies and some people I can talk to and help me.

[00:10:38]

INTERVIEWER: Great. When you said that your first boyfriend was politicised, what do you mean by that? Could you say a little bit more about that?

PARTICIPANT: Well, he was studying politics at university, he was a member of Socialist Worker. I think Socialist Worker's still around. I suspect nowadays he'd be a member of Momentum. So he was out there on the picket line, with his placards handing out leaflets, all that kind of stuff. And he'd been involved - I must have come out just after the clause 28 march in Manchester. And he'd been involved in the organising the Sheffield side of that, and bussing people over from Sheffield to the big Manchester march. So he had contacts with all the gay groups in Manchester and London and Brighton, all those places. And he was involved in Gays Support the Miners and... any gay campaign, he was involved with.

[00:11:46]

INTERVIEWER: And how do you think that influenced you in our outlook?

PARTICIPANT: It made me realise the importance of politics and that you can effect change as an individual by getting the people surrounding you to go with you, and that one person can make a difference. It made me question my early politics, having grown up on a traditional conservative farm, conservative background. So I completely ditched all of that and became a young, left-wing, radical gay man. [laughs] A young good-looking radical gay man.

[00:12:49]

INTERVIEWER: Great! So, where did that take you? [laughs]

PARTICIPANT: It was quite awkward, because... I recognise the importance of it, and I recognise the comradeship of it all and how value that was, but I was quite nervous about coming out. I was still in the process of coming out. My first time saying I'm gay was going to this lesbian and gay meeting, and then ending up in bed with the chairman! Which was great. But I was still very shy about saying, I'm gay, out loud to anybody. And I know that within a month or two of meeting Mark, that there was, I think there was the anniversary march in Manchester. One year on from the Section 28 march, they did another march, which Mark went on and organised a coachload to go over from Sheffield, but I was way too scared in case my face got on the news and my family saw it. It took me a while to get into a position where I was happy to start placarding on the streets and protesting outside town halls, and trying to get my face on TV news.

[00:14:16]

INTERVIEWER: So could you say a little bit about Section 28, and then the campaigns, even if you weren't visibly active within them. Can you remember at that

time, the kinds of... for someone who doesn't know what Section 28 was, what did it mean, and what are your memories of that time, in terms of people coming together?

PARTICIPANT: Well, Section 28 was a bill passed by the Conservative government at the time, to make - I might get this wrong - to make it illegal to "promote" homosexuality- for local authorities to promote homosexuality as a lifestyle. But that got confused by people about what it meant, and it made everybody very terrified of doing anything which might be considered to be promoting it, even if people weren't part of a local authority. But it also meant that education authorities and schools wouldn't do stuff for fear of being caught up by it. So sex education simply didn't discuss being gay. And books in libraries were pulled – *Jenny lives with [Eric] and Martin*, or whatever the name of book was, was pulled from the library.

So there were no resources for young gay people to find out what it's like, what being gay's about, what it means. But it gave the tabloid media an excuse to carry on attacking the gays, and you know, calling us the scum of society and everything. It's much like what's happening in America at the moment with Trump's racism, gives the far right an excuse to be horrifically racist. He doesn't have to be horrifically racist, he just can just be a little bit racist, but it gives them an excuse to be horrifically racist. And it was the same thing that the Tory government were doing, it was giving the media an excuse to be horrifically homophobic, so that they were blaming us for absolutely everything including dog attacks on children. I remember the headline in the Sun saying, Staffordshire Bull Terriers are the favourite pets of gays. But how can you blame gays for dogs attacking kids!? It was like, anything they could blame us for, we were being blamed for. So it just took this complete atmosphere of hate towards gays.

[00:16:49]

INTERVIEWER: OK. So-

PARTICIPANT: And what was worse, it was clear that the government of your country, whose job it is to support the people in their country, were putting forward this piece of legislation which actively discriminated against you. It wasn't a passive piece of legislation, it was actively discriminatory against a minority group, and that's what made it really terrifying, because it's, what's going to be the next thing that they do?

[00:17:21]

INTERVIEWER: Mm, yeah. I was going to ask you, when did you... was the Don't Die of Ignorance campaign the first time you'd heard of HIV? Or had you heard-

PARTICIPANT: No, HIV was all over the press, it was all over the news bulletins on the radio, on the TV, it was all over the press, it was everywhere. There was no way [I] could not be aware of it.

[00:17:45]

INTERVIEWER: OK.

PARTICIPANT: And as a closeted gay man, I was seeking out that information, because I knew it was relevant to me. And there was a whole series of late night TV programs, I'm guessing on Channel 4, to do with HIV and safer sex. I think there were adverts just came in about condoms, might have been that year or the year later... but each of those things on their own were news, but they then became news in the newspapers as well, so it self-generated its own news. So you couldn't not be aware of it.

[00:18:25]

INTERVIEWER: OK. Could you then take us... so you were in Sheffield but eventually you came over to Manchester, is that right, and you got more involved in campaigns as you became more confident, I assume.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

[00:18:37]

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell us a little bit about that?

PARTICIPANT: Well I left university in Sheffield and my first job was working in Halifax for the local authority there. I wasn't out at out. I was working for the local authority as a landscape architect, but I was in their outdoor section. So it was the same section that all their park rangers worked in. So I was a little gay designer working with all these big butch park rangers. But it was a really macho environment in our department. And it made me not want to come out. It was very traditional macho environment, it made me not want to come out, and it was... I don't understand how people can say, I'm not out at work, it's not an issue, if somebody asked me I'd answer. Because I found it a real issue when on Friday people go, what are you doing at the weekend? And I'd have to lie and not say, I'm going over to Sheffield to see Mark, my boyfriend. I'd have to talk around it a little bit. And on Monday morning when people said, "what did you do at the weekend?" I couldn't say, me and Mark danced Saturday night away at Chains in Sheffield.

So it surprises when people say, I'm not out at work, it's not an issue, because it is an issue when people talk about the weekends and the holidays and things. And I found it really stressful. And I didn't want to work there anyway, it was crap management, and I saw an advert for a job in Manchester, and I knew Manchester had a great gay scene and I was much more confident by then about being gay. So I applied for the job in Manchester and got it. And the office that I was based in was on the corner of Princess Street and Bloom Street, and it was the office that the LGF went in after our practice moved out. So I was based right in the centre of the gay village. And I was determined not to hide being gay. It was a tiny little design practice, it was just four of us: the two partners, myself, and a secretary. But I was determined that I would not lie about what I was doing at the weekend. I wouldn't make a big deal about it, but I would say, I'm going to Sheffield to see Mark. And next week, they'd say, where have you been? I'd say, I've seen Mark at the weekend. And eventually after four weeks they twigged that Mark was my boyfriend

and I was gay. So I didn't have to come out to them with a big "ta-da!" I just kind of came out naturally.

So that's how I came to Manchester. And within a few months of moving to Manchester, I met Johnathan, who was a friend of one of the guys I was sharing a house with. And Johnathan had been involved in the organising the clause 28 march in Manchester. So me and Johnathan kind of became midweek fuck buddies [laughs]. I still had Mark at the weekends over in Sheffield, and obviously that created a bit of a drama and it all kind of fell to pieces. So I finished seeing Mark and fell into having a relationship with Johnathan, who was another... he was a young teacher, a left-wing teacher, a radical head teacher, but part of the politico radical gay scene in Manchester at the time. So I became part of that. And his friends were the people that had organised the clause 28 march.

[00:22:20]

INTERVIEWER: Cool. So could you say a bit about how back then, you got involved with ACT UP from there?

PARTICIPANT: So at that time, that would have been 1989 I came to Manchester, so... I think at that time ACT UP London had been established, ACT UP had been established in the States- oh, I should have done my research before this interview shouldn't I, have found out when it started in San Francisco and New York. It'd been going quite a few years since then, at least five years in the States. So ACT UP London started probably 1988/89, and the people that had organised clause 28 were wanting another cause, another campaign! So they were going, it would be great if we had ACT UP Manchester, because we've got this huge gay community in Manchester that they now knew about because of the clause 28 march. So they invited some of ACT UP London up to Manchester to talk about what they did and how they organised and so on, and we set up ACT UP Manchester, and its purpose was to campaign and protest, to campaign using non-violent direct action around issues affecting people with HIV and AIDS.

So that's what we did. What we- The stuff they were doing in the States were very big campaigns and protests, we were doing it a bit smaller over here. And the aims were mainly to try and raise awareness around HIV, and to try and get media coverage about different issues. So there were various campaigns that we instigated with ACT UP Manchester.

There was [a national campaign] against Texaco at the time insisted that all employees had an HIV test, even if you just worked in the checkout at the petrol station; you had to have an HIV test. I mean it's now illegal to require that, but at the time it was quite common for some of these big multinationals to insist on it. So we did quite a lot of protesting against that, just to raise awareness of how wrong it was. Not that we'd actually think that Texaco would actually take any notice of this group in Manchester, but it was to try and get it in the papers and to make people aware of the injustice of it.

So we had a roll-out zebra crossing. We had two of them that we would roll out on the entrance and exit of the Texaco forecourts, and then we'd just walk up and down

the zebra crossings, and stop cars getting into the forecourt. And it was just a good newsworthy stunt that got us TV coverage and got us media coverage. And what was really great about ACT UP back then was the way that it used the different skills of the people in the group. It was a complete mix of people of different age groups and different backgrounds, straight and gay. And we had a professor from Manchester University who was one of the UK's specialists in epidemiology, if that's the study of epidemics, so he was shit hot on the epidemiology of HIV. And he could argue anybody about why it was wrong to call it an epidemic – it wasn't an epidemic – he knew all of that.

We had someone who was a pharmacist who researched what all the pharmaceuticals were doing in terms of research about HIV drugs and how much money they were making around HIV drugs. She knew everything about what people should taking, what they shouldn't be taking.

We had a guy who was a civil- in fact, Johnathan, my partner, he changed from being a teacher to being a civil servant, but he'd been trained by the government in how to give media interviews. [laughs] So he was the media interview guy, so whenever we had the TV or media turn up, Johnathan would give the interview to them.

We had a solicitor there who would act as a legal observer, and she would bring her friends from work to act as legal observers. And we had a graphic designer who did all our placards. So we were using all these skills of these people really to make us much more powerful than just one of us on our own. And we had some unemployed people, people who were out of work, who were long term out of work [laughs], who didn't mind being arrested. And they were like, well you lot have got jobs, it's a real problem if you lot get arrested. So if the police suddenly jump in, we'll jump in between you and the police so that they arrest us and not you, because we don't mind it! So it was great how we used the different skills and experiences and guts of different people to create quite effective campaigns.

So there was a lot about Texaco. There was an issue with the prison service not recognising that men had sex with men in prison. And just being completely blinkered about the fact, and not giving condoms out in prisons. And not even recognising that it happened. So we did a stunt outside Strangeways where we filled tennis balls with condoms and then got tennis racquets and whacked these condom-filled tennis balls over the wall. And again it was a really good visual thing for the TV and newspapers to take photos off. So that got national coverage about the problem in prisons.

There were some really bigoted MPs at the time, one of which said that people with AIDS should be quarantined on an island and locked up in an internment camp on an island. So we made this massive paperchain. And when he had his surgery in this constituency in the village hall, we wrapped this paperchain around the village hall, which caused him to go apeshit and panicked, thinking that he was being attacked by these AIDS-infested people [laughs]. So that got the police out, which got the media out. Because he was just being a complete twat.

So there were things like that. None of them were- and we did things every World AIDS Day, we'd do things. So we let off helium filled balloons in the Arndale Centre, the big open bit in the Arndale Centre. We had these helium-filled balloons with rolled up banners that had safe sex messages on them, and we positioned ourselves around the atrium, and let go of these balloons so they all floated up and these banners unfurled and then they couldn't get the banners down, so they were there for weeks, with these safe sex messages on them for everyone.

We produced fake five pound notes with safe sex messages on the back, that we threw over one year, so everyone was running around trying to get what they thought were £5 notes, but they were actually safe sex messages. And looking back, you wouldn't be able of that now, you'd be arrested for incitement to hate and terrorist activity. But back then, there wasn't the CCTV footage, it was much easier to organise stunts like that. You wouldn't be able to do it now without being arrested.

[00:30:31]

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I mean any protest needs a permit, doesn't it? So, yeah. Wow, that's all incredible, the kinds of things you were up to. What was it like being in this group that was quite active doing these things? Did you also become friends, like amongst the group?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, it was a way of making friends. It was sociable. We had meetings every Monday evening over in the town hall, where we planned stunts and events, and found out what help other organisations wanted. So we were working closely with George House Trust, and... what were the other organisations? Body Positive, there was Black... what was the Black one?

[00:31:27]

INTERVIEWER: Black Health Agency?

PARTICIPANT: Possibly.

[00:31:30]

INTERVIEWER: Black Health Forum?

PARTICIPANT: [still unsure] Black Health Forum... but they all had problems, that they had to be seen as being upright, clean, law-abiding organisations, and if they had a problem with a government agency or the town hall, they couldn't shout about it. So they'd contact us and we'd be their stormtroopers.

[00:31:51]

INTERVIEWER: Rent-a-mob.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, we'd be a rent-a-mob for them. So it was good the way it got the different agencies talking to each other.

And we were also, at the time, if not the first, then one of the first groups to give out free condoms, because that wasn't happening. So we were giving out free condoms at Flesh at the Hacienda every month. Flesh was the biggest gay night in the country. The first Wednesday and last Wednesday of every month. So ACT UP Manchester had a stall there where we were giving out same-sex information and free condoms to people, because there wasn't any other organisation back then giving out that safe sex message.

And one of the other things we did as ACT UP Manchester is, we'd have, every few months we'd get together with ACT UP London and ACT UP Brighton and ACT UP Liverpool and ACT UP Norwich and ACT UP Leeds, and have a meeting to discuss what was happening nationally. And then once a year there'd be an inter-ACT meeting where all the different ACT UP groups from the different European countries would get together and discuss what was happening on a Europe-wide basis, and we'd help each other.

So if one group wanted to make an issue and raise an issue with, I don't know, with somebody like Texaco, say, then we'd have a day of action against Texaco, and we'd publicise what the fax number was for the different people at Texaco that we wanted to raise the issue with. And we'd have all the different ACT UP groups from the UK and from Europe, all on that day sending faxes to this one phone number. Because back then it cost you to receive a fax, and it took up time and paper in your office. We could clog up offices really easily by having dozens of people sending a couple of faxes from dozens of ACT UP groups in dozens of cities in dozens of countries, suddenly one person would receive 13,000 faxes on one day about an issue. So as a community organisation it was kind of worldwide, and it was exciting to feel you were part of a worldwide organisation. And in some countries, like in Spain, ACT UP's main role was giving out safe sex information. In the UK that became less of a role for ACT UP because other organisations took on that role. But in Spain it remained one of their main focuses, was giving out safe sex information.

[00:34:47]

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask a bit about that because obviously you've mentioned section 28, and there was also... what's the legal...? I mean, the end result was a censorship around, especially gay sex. So how then... I guess my question is like, why was getting that information out there [important], and was that something new, for gay men to have? In terms of safer sex. And why did it have to be you doing that? This is for someone who's not really... if you imagine someone who's not really aware of the kind of context that we're talking about.

PARTICIPANT: I think there was a lack of education about gay sex. There was a lack of honest education using street language about gay sex. There was the Don't Die of Ignorance campaign, which was about condoms and penetrative sex and penises and anal sex, but nothing talking about fucking and cock and ass, and using that kind of language. So it was that kind of stuff that we were promoting, we were talking to people in a way they could understand, that they could relate to. And some people didn't know how to put on a condom safely, and some people didn't know what else they could do in terms of safe sex, other than fucking. So it was giving out that information and being there as an ear for people to talk to, just being

there to listen to people. It was that, because there was no other organisation doing it.

[00:36:56]

INTERVIEWER: OK.

PARTICIPANT: And it was an excuse to get into Flesh for free! [laughs] It's a great excuse to go up to a really good-looking guy and say, here, have some condoms.

[00:37:08]

INTERVIEWER: Cool. What was Flesh like?

PARTICIPANT: Flesh was amazing! Flesh was at the Hacienda, which was the world's best nightclub back then, in Manchester. And the coaches would come up from Brighton and Liverpool; it was the best, at the time, most outrageous gay club night in the country.

[00:37:35]

INTERVIEWER: How did people respond to you being in there? Like, if people are going there to party, to have a good time, and then you're coming along and like, in a way, reminding people about safer sex? I do sexual health outreach work as well, it's another job of mine, and I was just wondering how people responded.

PARTICIPANT: I think people responded well, because we were talking about sex. And we weren't doing it in a clinical professional way, we were dressed up to go clubbing and talking to them about sex. It added to the frisson of the whole night, that there were people there promoting- talking about sex! [laughs] I think people saw it as a positive thing. I hope they did.

[00:38:27]

INTERVIEWER: [Break] Could you... what did it mean for you personally to be involved with this campaign. Do you think, looking back... what kinds of... did it change you as a person, did it... what was it like to be involved with this, and looking back, what did it give you and what did you get out of it?

PARTICIPANT: It gave me a group of friends. It gave me... it gave me a nice warm feeling that I'd done something good. It gave me a sense of... it made me recognise how important it is to be politically aware, if not politically active. I don't know that as a group, ACT UP Manchester achieved a great deal - you know, we didn't change the world. Hopefully we raised awareness about HIV and AIDS, and raised awareness in the press and in the media locally if not nationally. I don't think we got any major businesses to change anything; maybe we got them to think a little bit, and just that chipping away at things can make a difference. So I think we contributed to that... I made me- I think that's it-

[00:39:54]

INTERVIEWER: That's fine.

PARTICIPANT: ... it made me recognise it's important to be political and politically aware. And that a small number of people can make a big difference.

[00:40:08]

INTERVIEWER: In terms of your personal life, how did you navigate sex? You were saying that, for a time, you were in an open relationship, and then in a monogamous relationship-

PARTICIPANT: Oh, I've never been in a monogamous relationship! [laughs]

[00:40:26]

INTERVIEWER: Oh, OK! Sorry!

PARTICIPANT: Well I suppose for a few months with my first boyfriend.

[00:40:33]

INTERVIEWER: OK. How do you... how have you navigated that, and how has that changed? Or how... not necessarily monogamy/non-monogamy or... just more in terms of, safer sex, with whoever you were having sex with, or how you negotiate the kinds of sex that you want. Has that ever been an issue for you, or not?

PARTICIPANT: It's never been an issue for me, and it might be because of the period that I came out [in], and that I came out partly because of HIV and AIDS, that I was very aware of safe sex. And it was that that made me come out. So for my whole sexually active life, I've been aware of the importance of safe sex and using a condom, or having non-penetrative sex. And that's never really been an issue for me. And always assuming that your partner is HIV positive, and never assuming otherwise. Assuming that even if they say they're not, that they may not know their HIV status. So that's kind of how I've always approached sex - have safe sex, be responsible for my own safety, and always assume that they're HIV positive, but that's not a bad thing, you can still have fantastic sex.

[00:42:00]

INTERVIEWER: Where did that... because I've been aware of that as a strategy, in a way... where did that come from, that? Because I've heard people say that before, in terms of, that was a strategy, in a way, for coping with... Do you remember hearing about that, or educating yourselves around that, or...?

PARTICIPANT: I don't remember specifically hearing about it. But I'm guessing because I was so involved in safe sex education because of ACT UP back then, that to me it was the norm, and it was the strategy that you promoted to people.

[00:42:55]

INTERVIEWER: OK. Alright. Could you say a little bit about what you did after ACT UP, where you want from after that?

PARTICIPANT: So I guess ACT UP carried on for four or five years. When did the Labour government get in? 1997. So I think ACT UP had started to wane a little bit by '97. I guess because people move on, and people leave, and for whatever reason, that's what naturally happens to groups I guess. But then in '97 with Labour getting in and it being a new dawn, new day, as a gay community, we felt it was fantastic news and it was going to bring change, and it did bring amazing change, in terms of legislation equality. So the need for ACT UP was less. And a lot of the things we'd been campaigning for were happening in terms of HIV and AIDS; other groups were taking on safer sex promotion and handing out condoms and all that kind of thing. And governments and MPs and people were becoming more aware of how to talk about HIV and AIDS, so there wasn't the need for a lot of the campaigning that we'd been doing.

So ACT UP kind of fizzled out. And legislation came in, equal rights legislation, age of consent slowly came in, and we kind of got all the rights that we wanted. And it felt then, come the 2000s, that everything's fine and dandy. We've still got HIV, we're still having to wear condoms and have safe sex, but in terms of equality we're getting everything that we wanted.

And it felt as someone who was then becoming a slightly older gay man that the young gays coming forward had never really known the struggle that the older ones had been through, in terms of fighting for those rights and fighting for acceptance about HIV and AIDS, and... I mean there's still a long way to go with that but it's not nearly as bad as it was back in the late eighties. So there was a feeling that Canal Street was party central, and gays weren't politicised anymore. Which was a bit... in one way it's very good that they're not politicised because there's no reason for them to be politicised, because there's no campaigns for them to get behind, but it did make us feel like... you know, it's not like the old days, and what would happen if the Tories did get back into power?

And then that changed when it was the Sochi Winter Olympics. And my husband, Adam, was involved in organising a political theatre against the Sochi Olympics because of Russia's state-sponsored homophobia, and the fact that the Winter Olympics were being held in Russia, so there was a big arts campaign in Manchester against that. And Adam was organising the theatre side of it. And one of the things that he organised was a big protect in the Gay Village.

Well, we had no idea how many people would turn up for this, and the idea was that there'd be a human chain around the Gay Village to protect the Gay Village from homophobia. And we thought, well there might be a handful of us old gays turn up, and it'd been promoted on social media. And we were really really shocked at how many young gays turned up. And it made us well up that young gays can be politicised when there's something for them to be politicised about. It gave us confidence in us as a community that we can stand together strong in the future. There's a future for us! It was great

And it was great as gay men that had been involved in campaigning and been on marches in the past, who knew all the old chants, to go on this, you know, to hold hands with young gay people, and march around the Gay Village and do some of the old chants of "we're here, we're queer, we're not going shopping" and them having never heard those kinds of gay chants. And then changing it for- "we're not going skiing," because of the Winter Olympics, and then howling with laughter and coming up with our own chants, and it was great to see that comradery again.

[00:48:12]

INTERVIEWER: That's great, not going shopping. OK. In terms of sexual health, and obviously over the past decade or so we've had quite a few changes in terms of better testing, PEP has come in, and now PrEP is coming in. How do you see that changing the landscape of safer sex? Or not.

PARTICIPANT: I think it's quite amazing, as a gay man who came out with the AIDS leaflet, because of the AIDS leaflet, whose whole sex life for the past 30 years has been with condoms, except with long term partners, and never thinking there would be a period in my life when I wouldn't have to use condoms. Over the past year, 18 months, that PrEP has come in, and I'm on PrEP now, that has revolutionised my sex life. For the better. And I'm out- I'm not out on the streets, I'm out there in the sheets, telling people that I'm with the importance of what a valuable weapon PrEP can be now in our safe sex toolkit, if you want to put it like that. And how it means that we can be much more in control of our own safe sex, we're not reliant on somebody else putting on a condom, or somebody else making sure that the condom's not split. Or somebody else behind you secretly pulling out, whipping off the condom and sticking it back in again without a condom, which I know has happened with friends. We can be in control of our own safe sex now, completely in control, and I think that's revolutionary, and it's changed sex for the better.

[00:50:24]

INTERVIEWER: How do people respond to you, in terms of being on PrEP. Do they ask you questions, or do they... is that attractive to some people, or is it not attractive to some people? What's the kind of response been?

PARTICIPANT: The response [from] people that don't know about PrEP is always really interested. And it's... it's generally interesting because I've found that a lot of people [who] want to have bareback sex aren't aware of PrEP. And I find that quite shocking that there's a lot of younger gay men out there who don't know about the importance of safe sex, whether it's using condoms or using PrEP. And they want to bareback but they're not aware of PrEP, which I find shocking, that they're not educating themselves about how they can keep themselves safe and have the sex that they want. So when I do bring the subject up, then they're interested in it. And I've found that most of them that I've spoken to and got to know, have gone on to take PrEP.

[00:51:48]

INTERVIEWER: How easy do you find it to access? Because obviously it's not available through the NHS at the minute except on a trial. Is it fairly straightforward for you to access?

PARTICIPANT: It has been, yeah. The LGF [LGBT Foundation] did a seminar 18 months ago with the... I can't remember the trial name, the early trial name, and they had the doctors up from Dean Street, and Chris the doctor from Manchester [missed] [00:52:15], and the guy from Prepster and I Want PrEP now. So me and my husband went to that and got all the facts, and went, this is a no-brainer, we should be on PrEP. So we went on the I Want PrEP Now Internet site, and it's dead easy to get PrEP. There's only been once when it's been difficult, there must have been a run on it, and it was difficult. But I've found it... it's not cheap, but I've found it easy to get hold of through that. And we've been using the sexual health clinic at Ashton, and they've been great. Before we went on PrEP, we went there and said, this is what we're thinking of, so we had HIV tests and got the all clear before we started taking PrEP. And even though the NHS weren't prescribing PrEP or giving PrEP, they were giving services for gay men on PrEP, so they gave us a background about what needed to do in terms of having regular 3 monthly checks to check our kidney function. So we go there every three months, get a health check. And through them we're now on the PrEP trial.

[00:53:35]

INTERVIEWER: Oh, great, OK. What's your experience of that so far?

PARTICIPANT: Well so far I've still got to- I'm not on- I'm about to be on the PrEP trial. My experience of that is, fucking Tory government, it was announced that they were going to start the trial in April, and then it was knocked back to summer, then it was October, and it's now December and we're still not- we know we're on the trial, but we've still not had the actual face to face meeting with a doctor and been given our first NHS PrEP. So it's on a slight frustration that it's taken so long, when it's so obviously that it's something that saves lives and saves the NHS money.

[00:54:16] End of transcript.