

Ian Dyer

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INTERVIEWER: I'm Ian Dyer. I'm 69, and I've lived in Wigan all my life. I lived with my parents, then my father unfortunately passed away many years ago, and then... so I lived with Mum, till she passed away at age 85, which was in 1999. I went to, education-wise, it was junior school, then Wigan Grammar School, then into the civil service, where I worked for 42 years. Quite a life sentence, I know! To retirement, at 60. But along the way, I did come out whilst I was in the civil service. Very few problems, as it was, and in fact, later on, in the last couple of years or so, I was diversity champion on the sexual orientation strand at the office. And also included in that I gave talks to various teams, including management, on sexual orientation. And even, in fact, one year our chief executive at the time, she came along and we had a celebration of World AIDS Day. And in fact, I got permission to sell the red ribbons on behalf of the LGF as it was at the time. Did very well there.

On the way, I came out when I was 51, it was really when Mum went into a home following a couple of strokes - that was in 1999. Then the following year, through a mutual acquaintance, I met my late partner Alan. He was living down at Uttoxeter at the time, and... well, he was Lancastrian ancestry, came from Oswaldtwistle between Burnley and Accrington. And, well, it was - sounds corny perhaps, but love at first sight when I first met him. And next thing was, I said, well, would you like to move up to your Lancashire roots, to Wigan? And he said more or less straight away, yes. And 3 July 2001, he moved in with me. And then in the November of that year, 10 November, we had a Christian blessing at the local hotel. It was a reverend who used to advertise at the time in Gay Times. And then the following year, Manchester set up their civil partnership register, and we went onto that. And then following civil partnership legislation, in 2006, 19 June in fact, we tied the knot with a civil partnership, again at Manchester here. We had basically twelve and a half good years together. There were a few bumps along the way, and I think in any relationship you do get that.

And, oh and also, 2006 was really a hat-trick, because I clocked up 40 years in the civil service, had a civil partnership, and then July that year, following a phone call earlier on from our honours [?] [00:04:15] people, went down to the Royal Garden Party. It was an absolutely fantastic experience. Saw the Queen at close hand, shook hands with Prince Philip and saw Charles and Camilla and one or two other royals as well. Absolutely fantastic day, that. And in fact, we stayed overnight, and Alan was a keen gardener at the time, and so we went over to Kew and then headed back north later on in the day, the following day. It was an absolutely fantastic year, it really was.

And again, we had many many good holidays together. The very first one was in Prague. I'd already booked, and I said, Alan, would you like to come along? He said yep straight away, and we had a really fantastic holiday. And then when I took retirement at 60 from the civil service, I went down to the south of France, I had a car at the time, had a few stops en route, overnight. And again, we had a wonderful time there. And, as I say, many other holidays. Following my retirement at 60 from the civil service, I did have a few jobs along the way, finishing up as an interviewer for

Ipsos Mori, the market research company, and then finally to retirement at 60, full retirement at 65.

Unfortunately by then, Alan had developed deep vein thrombosis. That year, we should have been going to Cyprus - he'd been twice before. So it would have been a lovely hat-trick for him, but that scuppered it. And then later on he finished up with, unfortunately, a pulmonary embolism. I mean it doesn't help that he was a smoker. I've always been a non-smoker, but he did open the windows, things like that, you know, in consideration. And then he died four years ago now, 18 December 2013.

But again, you know, we... at least he was happy. I mean, he came back up to this Lancashire roots, and we had, like I say, many good times today.

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INTERVIEWER: That's great. Aw. That sounds really interesting. What was your role in the civil service?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I finished various roles, but among them on telephony and also acting team leader as well.

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INTERVIEWER: Was that with Wigan council?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, it was with the pension service. DWP.

[00:07:10]

INTERVIEWER: Right, OK. So, could you say a little bit about how, when you first became aware of HIV, of-?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. It was really in the 80s when there was the advertising campaign on television and the leaflets through the door. Yeah.

[00:07:37]

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel when you first saw those?

PARTICIPANT: I think a bit... probably a bit shocked, in that sense, it was very powerful. I've subsequently, downloaded through the Internet, the adverts, and again, it's still as powerful as it was in the 80s really, the tombstone and the wreath on the tombstone, the flowers on the tombstone... it was very powerful that, really. At the time of course, it was targeted at gay men, which as we know, was rather a narrow remit, that. You know, straight men can get it as well, and women as well of course, too.

[00:08:32]

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel personally about it? Did you feel like, this is something that might affect me? Or not really.

PARTICIPANT: Not really, no, because at the time I wasn't sexually active. So it was many years after that. I think at the time I just thought, well, OK, the government are publicising it, and probably along the way... It perhaps hit a little bit when people like Freddie Mercury and that, died of AIDS. When I think personalities, probably well-known personalities, contracted HIV/AIDS.

[00:09:18]

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when it was announced that Freddie Mercury had died? Do you remember that?

PARTICIPANT: I don't remember at the time, but subsequently when I've seen the films and that, the documentaries. Alan was more into... at that time, was very much into Queen. [smiling] In fact, I know he'd been to the odd concert along the way.

[00:09:49]

INTERVIEWER: [long pause] In terms of your own awareness of what was being said... so you had the government campaign-

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, sure.

[00:10:12]

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember some of the attitudes, some of the [inaudible] around that?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. I mean, one story that always sticks in the mind was Jim Anderton, the chief constable of Greater Manchester, with his 'swirling the cesspool' and that. He was totally, totally, really homophobic on it. And I mean, there were various others, some of the Tory MPs and that, particularly, that were right- well, you've got... I think I remember one of them, I'm just trying to think of some of their names actually. I know there was Norman Tebbit - and apart from Margaret Thatcher - there was Norman Tebbit, and there was, err... she was a Midlands MP, her name might come back to me. It was the fact of really, all the negativity from the media as well. Rags like the Sun and that, and those, that really were very much blaming it purely on the gay community.

[00:11:40]

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember any positive representations of people, or conversations about HIV, in the early days?

PARTICIPANT: Not in the early days, no. Later on there have been, of course. But not in the early days, no.

[00:11:57]

INTERVIEWER: Could you say a bit more about- so at that time, you said you weren't sexually active. Was it something that you started to consider when you did become sexually active?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, yes. In fact, I know Alan and myself, we did go all the way, albeit bareback, but we did, after a few months, did have the test, and were both negative across the board, yeah. It was a relief at the time. So we knew that. I know he'd never been active himself in that context, so... and I hadn't as well. I mean, I'd been active in the sense of other aspects of sex, but not the anal.

[00:13:08]

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there was maybe a fear around certain kinds of sex because of HIV?

PARTICIPANT: I think there was, yeah, because I always remember, what always sticks in my mind was- it was when I was on the contact line, there was one guy from Blackpool where he was proposing to come over, but he did say, HIV positive. And to be honest, at that time I thought no, it's a no-no, to be honest. I didn't want to risk anything. I know looking back, I could have obviously used protection, but at that time with it being in the very early days of starting out and sex-wise... I just let him down, gently, as much as possible, said no, sorry. You know, which he accepted, you know.

Because prior Alan, as I say, he was the first one I had anal sex with.

[00:14:24]

INTERVIEWER: OK. You mentioned a contact line? Was that something that you used to chat to guys, or...?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yes, yeah. At that time, it was pre-Internet days, it was the phone lines, the adverts on ITV and Channel 4. And Channel 5 I think as well. In fact that's actually how I met John, who was a mutual friend of Alan. And there were some quite amusing encounters, yes! There weren't any unpleasant ones.

[00:15:12]

INTERVIEWER: So, from those experiences, did you get a sense that people were thinking about safer sex, or was that not a consideration so much?

PARTICIPANT: Not really a consideration, but again, I think it was the fact that I specified myself that, no anal sex. In fact, along the way, in saunas and that, you know, I used to go to saunas, again I made it clear to the guys there that there was no anal sex. We could do anything else, but not that. There was one instance where I did come pretty close to it, and shortly afterwards had a test, but it was fine.

[00:16:08]

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned saunas. Could you say a little bit more about that?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, sure. It was really a way of just [having] a bit of fun and games really, a bit of meeting guys, really. I've been to a few along the way, H2O, Basement, one or two at Blackpool, Dolphin over at Wirral. One or two of them, Alan and me went to as well, too. We just, we went separate ways there and had a few contacts ourselves. It was open at that time. But for a while we did have a fairly open relationship, for a while. And again, it was... yeah. It was an era, really, where it was... experimenting, I suppose, really.

[00:17:15]

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of... how did people respond to you and Alan being in an open relationship? Were you, did you tell family members about that or did you-

PARTICIPANT: No. There was only one, who was a close friend at Bootle, Mark. He, well... I don't think he was particularly positive on it, but accepted, you know, if that was the way that we wanted it. But, and in fact, I mean, I had one or two guys that, well, actually, for a while, for a short while, we were in a gay nudist group, and one or two of the contacts there, they came to our place and stayed over. But at the end of the day, to be honest, felt like it was causing problems, so we put the shutters down on that, and got back to just ourselves.

[00:18:27]

INTERVIEWER: OK. So could you say a little bit more about how you got involved- so you mentioned that you became a Diversity Champion-

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

[00:18:41]

INTERVIEWER: What other- obviously now you're volunteering here as well. Could you say a little bit more about how you've become involved in the LGBT community, and...?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, sure. It really started way back in, well Alan was around at the time, and we went to one or two courses on the way, organised by LGF as it was at the time, subsequently the Foundation. Then I volunteered in 2013, just started off really with the LGF on a small scale, initially Manchester Pride, then steadily built up through the World AIDS Day. And then, after Alan passed away, got somewhat more involved with more volunteering, including distribution of safe sex packs. And then, later in 2014, Heather, who was the lead at the time at the Foundation for here, she issued a bulletin asking for volunteers asking for the archive project here. I had an interview, and then in December that year, met up with Dave, who'd already been working on it for a while, for some years, really. And then there's Robert as well, the three of us at the time, and since then it's been a regular feature here, volunteering. In addition, [I] still volunteer for World AIDS Day, although I gave it a miss this year. And for Manchester Pride. And also, in the last couple of years, Wigan Pride. I'm the representative for the Foundation on the committee of Wigan Pride. It was the

year one last year, and then year two this year, which included Sir Ian McKellen as a guest, and onwards to year three next year! In fact, Wigan Pride was talked about, believe it or not, about 13 years ago roughly. Because there was [an organisation] that Alan was on, there was an organisation called Whisk [?] [00:21:52] can't remember what it stood for, but it never came about. It was subsequently the BYOU, who are the youth group in Wigan, they actually instigated it a couple of years ago.

[00:22:08]

INTERVIEWER: Great. You mentioned that in one of your roles at the Foundation, you helped pack and distribute safer sex packs. Could you say a little bit more about that, for someone who's maybe not aware of why they might be needed.

PARTICIPANT: I didn't actually pack them, but I was just involved in distributing them. There were a couple of those... the lead staff member at the time, and James, and there was... I can't remember who the other one was, it'll come back to me, Shaun. And we distributed them to the bars in the Village. I just did it about once a week. And it's really that people can just pick them up, ad lib, anonymously, from the bars, and from the saunas as well of course, too, and that way it saves on any potential embarrassment of going into a chemist and that, because they've got the safe sex packs packs.

I mean, before that, I did get the odd pack along the way from the chemist. Never need it, but nevertheless. Really it's the fact that they can just, in a comfortable environment, and including the Foundation of course, collect the safe sex packs and hopefully get the message of using them.

[00:24:06]

INTERVIEWER: OK, great. You mentioned going to the chemist. How did you feel walking into a chemist to get-?

PARTICIPANT: Well there's a funny story there actually. So the very first time I went into a chemist... I was a bit naïve I think at the time. I said, have you got extra thick condoms? [laughs] And this person was a very firm no. I suppose I was a bit embarrassed at the time, but perhaps, I don't know, I must have had the balls to do that really. [laughing] Always sticks in my mind, that.

[00:24:57]

INTERVIEWER: When was that, do you remember?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, it was way back in the early days in 1999. Yeah. [chuckling to self] I think nowadays they wouldn't bother. [laughs]

[00:25:11]

INTERVIEWER: Did he assume, then, that it was for gay sex, because you wanted-

PARTICIPANT: I suspect that he probably did, particularly with asking for extra thick, yeah. Yeah.

[00:25:29]

INTERVIEWER: OK.

PARTICIPANT: I mean things like, KY lube and that, you can get that from the supermarket really. Then again I think I would have been a bit reticent perhaps, even then I perhaps would have been a bit reticent about getting the condoms from there and through the checkout. I mean nowadays they wouldn't bother, they'd just scan them and that's it.

[00:26:00]

INTERVIEWER: OK. Do you think attitudes have changed over the years in terms of attitudes to sex, and to safer sex?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, absolutely. Yes. Although there has been, according to reports, slippage in the use of safe sex packs. I'm aware of that. But yeah, I think it probably would not be a bad idea every so often for a campaign, perhaps even a government campaign, to remind people, but very very carefully... carefully put across, put it that way.

[00:27:02]

INTERVIEWER: So, could you say a little bit more about your involvement in Wigan Pride?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, sure. I became aware of it in late 2015, whereby... it was through Andrew at the Foundation that he made me aware of it, and with being a Wiganer. It was a good way of representing the Foundation. There were two of us actually, for a while, Aaron and myself. But then Aaron just left me to it. And I met up with... well I initially met up at the Foundation with Dave, Andrew, Scott, and Elaine. Scott and Elaine were the senior leaders on it. And, well, then I just put myself forward for committee, and started attending the committees. And, well, took the lead on it on behalf of the Foundation. But at the same time, Dave has been involved in it, coming along to one or two of the committee meetings, and also [taking] a very active part on the day itself. I regarded Dave really- because I've been involved, really, on the stewarding side, particularly, so the Foundation have had a stall for the last couple of years, and have regarded Dave as the lead on that, on the stall side of it. And I'm glad that we did, and [it's] been a good way of... raising the profile of the Foundation as well, and the fact that the Foundation is more and more involved in the community-type events, community Prides, like Wigan. They've also been involved in Bolton, Wythenshawe, Oldham.

[00:29:37]

INTERVIEWER: Great. Obviously I've met you through your work as an archive volunteer. I was wondering if you could just say a little bit more about that, and the kinds of things that you do and what you're working with.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. We each have different subject areas. Mine at the moment is HIV/AIDS. It's going through the material, cataloguing it, putting it on to a system called Calm. And that will eventually be, through another system, accessible to the public. Also, last year for World AIDS Day, I had an interactive exhibition on HIV/AIDS. Then I'll be going from there onto trans material. Jenny-Anne, you've probably heard of Jenny-Anne-

[Interview is briefly interrupted by someone entering the room.]

I had a couple of visits to Jenny-Anne to collect some trans material. And again, that will be catalogued as well. Then after that, the other subject is back to sexual health and that. Because again, the aim is, next year, to have an interactive [exhibition] for trans memorial day in November.

[00:31:22]

INTERVIEWER: Brilliant. Are there any particular items, any things that you've come across that have really struck a chord with you; anything that you really remember?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, in fact, there was one again with the... it was in a fairly recent box actually, which again, you had a full quote actually from James Anderton on his attitude to HIV/AIDS. I can't remember the whole quote, I know it included the infamous swirling in the cesspool and that. Again, I think the attitudes, particularly in the early days, of the rampant homophobia, the rampant lack of compassion.

Oh, [missed] [00:32:18] I also had handling sessions as well, downstairs as well, where a selection of various materials, in time for Manchester Pride last year, again, so that the... the public have come along to have a look. Even a family day one time.

[00:32:44]

INTERVIEWER: And do you enjoy doing those?

PARTICIPANT: I do, yes. Yes, I do, yeah. Because it's a good team, and we work well together. It's a good fixture in the week really, each Wednesday I look forward to it.

[00:33:01]

INTERVIEWER: Great. OK. Well before we finish, is there anything else that you'd like to talk about that we maybe haven't covered yet? Anything...

PARTICIPANT: Well I think basically, I mean, coming back to the sex side of it, is... the only person again, that I do any... I mean it is bareback, but I know that both are statuses are absolutely negative. He's a guy, name's Ian, he comes across at times,

and again, you know, we have... at the moment obviously it's on hold, until I'm fit. But no, I think... certainly as I say, I would strongly advocate the importance of regular testing, absolutely. Fortunately in Wigan, there's... it's called the SHINE Centre there, and again it's... they're very thorough, empathy, you name it.

[00:34:18]

INTERVIEWER: So you have a good experience when you go there?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, surely, yeah.

[00:34:25]

INTERVIEWER: OK. Great. What do you think - obviously there's some new technologies that are coming in now? We've got PEP and we've also got PrEP. Thinking about the future, what do you see as the future of sexual health?

PARTICIPANT: I think PrEP is probably the way forward. Even though I know some of the media think it's going to encourage unsafe sex. At the same time, if it's potentially... at the end of the day, what they have to realise is that it's potentially going to save the NHS millions or even billions. There'll still be a role for PEP as well, if there's any slippage. Because that time that I mentioned in the sauna, I did, but it... should I go for a PEP, but she said, no, I don't need to. But there was that scope there again, for peace of mind.

[00:35:28] End of transcript.