

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Alan Gray
Interviewer: Keith Stewart
Place of Interview: Stonewall Offices
Date: 8 June 2009
Files: AG1-15

Key

KS: = Interviewer, Keith Stewart
AG: = Interviewee, Alan Gray
[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time
[5:22 IA] = inaudible section at this time
[Word 5:22] = best guess at word

AG: Yes, I maintain a garden for a project in King Henry's Walk, so I come down this way as part of my travels.

KS: Is King Henry's Walk an estate or something, what is it?

AG: Well the road is called King Henry's Walk and apparently history somehow seems to recall that the road itself was where the King's horses used to be exercised when it was a dirt track or something I suppose before all this was probably built up. So they called it King Henry's Walk because they used to walk the horses up and down this ... I dunno why. But there we are.

KS: He owned everything so he could call it whatever he wants. He owned it at the time so I suppose he could...

AG: Well this is it, if you're king you can do whatever you like!

KS: Yeah. I'm going to put this on you, we'll natter as we set it all, and this you want to clip it on maybe just above your zip there or something.

AG: This won't be used to incriminate me, will it?

KS: I won't say it will, or won't, 'cause you never know what'll happen in the future so. On the news it might be found, all the evidence is there, that's why I'm picking up all these little bits of...

AG: I'll have to immigrate.

KS: <Laughs>

AG: I'll have to change my identity! I'll have to get a new life. I'll have to...

KS: Get a new identity and all those sorts of things! That's what happened. Then what'll have to happen, I'll have to chase you across the world! If you go somewhere nice that would then...

AG: I'll be a fugitive, shouldn't I? I'll be...

KS: If everybody's having **[IA 1:51]**...

AG: Yes, because oh I love the sunshine!

KS: Well if you honestly think you're going to be on the run, there's no point in going somewhere cold, would there?

AG: No, it would have to be ... well people go to South America, don't they, that's nice and warm.

KS: Brazil I think would be ... Chilli would be a good...

AG: The politics are a bit dodgy in Chilli. But Brazil, people flee to Brazil, don't they?

KS: They do, what's his name?

AG: That train robber?

KS: Yeah, he did all of that, didn't he?

AG: Yes. He built a whole life, didn't he, while he was ... had a child and things.

KS: And then what we'll do is we'll make a film about it afterwards.

AG: Yeah.

KS: We'll write a book, a film...

AG: And I'll just be laid on the beach there with a G and T by my side.

KS: And I'll send you a royalties cheque for a monthly...

AG: Yes, and that's it! We've got it all worked out!

KS: That's sorted then. I'm just adjusting this a little while we chat, it's getting the recording level right for it, it's alright now.

AG: I'm not sure, I mean Matt just said would I 'like to come in?' And I'm not really sure what you'd like me to say or ... I mean you can ask, I'm better at answering questions and I can talk a lot, so I tend to babble on and on. So if I lose my thread or whatever, just...

KS: I'm the same.

AG: I used to say to Peter when we were talking, and he'd say, 'Yes but Alan, let's come back to ...' And I'd say, 'Oh right, OK.' So I might wander around a little bit.

KS: I've got a few questions on topic areas to help us point and I'll ask you a few questions just to get started so we've got those on tapes. Now I've got these topic points to ask you and then we'll just record what comes out and see what we build up, how does that sound?

AG: Yes, yeah.

KS: Oh there's some water there for you...

AG: Oh thanks, thanks.

KS: ... if you need it. So the date today is the...

AG: Are we on now, are we?

KS: Monday, 8th of June. My name's Keith Stewart. So will you tell us your name and where and when you were born?

AG: My name's Alan Gray. I was born in Grimsby in Lincolnshire in the North East of England and I was born on the 24th of April 1950.

KS: Will you spell Gray for us, you spell it the same way...

AG: Yes. My surname is spelt GRAY.

KS: And the place of the interview's at the Stonewall offices and this is the Stonewall Galop Oral History Project. Well that's that little bit done. I'll ask you that other question again, so tell us a little bit about your background, your childhood and where you grew up and those things.

AG: I grew up in Grimsby, a small fishing town in the North East of England and very small community based people, very ... just a small community, small town. I went to a regular school, left school at 15, went to work in local industry, and lived my life. I think I always knew that I was a gay man. But it was very difficult to express that in Grimsby. People are quite resentful of ... people are quite homophobic in small towns and Grimsby was no exception. And so I muddled around and focused on my work and had quite a nice flat to live in after a while. Really just survived in the local community. Had a few friends. But again, very little outlet for my sexuality. The usual thing was the hanging around dark places and fumbling in the bushes and all this business. And I've learnt over years that various attempts were made to open gay clubs, pubs, but they never survived because people there really don't want that sort of thing. So I was there 'til I was in my middle 30s. Looking back it seems an enormous length of time. But when you don't know anything else, when you're ... you think that's how life is. I met someone through a set of circumstances which is a long story, who lived in London in 1985 and we were friends and I came to stay with him one weekend in London and he came to visit me in Grimsby one weekend. And <laughs> he, when he came to see me, and I took him round the town, he sort of ... and he was so unimpressed and he said ... he literally said what was I doing there? My life was bigger than living in this small town and I'd always thought that I'd always wanted to be in a city, with no opportunity to do that. <Coughs> And so he persuaded me ... no, he didn't persuade me, I decided that this would be my course of action. It was an enormous leap looking back now, it was a tremendously risky thing to do. And I gave up my flat, sold my furniture, gave up my job which I'd had for many, many years and found ... well I came to live with him for a short while. He was so keen that I should broaden my life and things and we were quite close to start, but we grew apart. But it was decided that I could stay with him 'til I found a place of my own or somewhere independent.

<End of Part 1>

KS: Can you tell us a little bit about the job and your life in Grimsby, just a little bit more what you did and those sorts of things?

AG: Yes, there were lots of manufacturing, lots of food processing. It was a big, big fishing port at one time which it isn't now. So there was lots of fish processing; Birdseye, Ross Group, all the usual frozen food names. But I worked to start with, it was a biscuit factory. But I enjoyed it tremendously. The people I worked with, the comradery, it was just what you did when you left school; you went into anyone of these processing types of jobs and you built up a circle of friends and you lived the same as everyone else.

KS: A quite social way of being then?

AG: Yes, yes. I mean the friends that you had, the people you worked with, were the people you went out with at the weekend or that you socialised with. And you would literally see going round the town perhaps at the weekend, round the shops and whatever, you would see the same people that you worked with because it was such a small time. But I enjoyed it, I enjoyed it a lot looking back. It was all that I expected, I didn't know anything else. Although I always wanted to meet someone to be ... a partnership. But there isn't that opportunity. I suppose there is, but it's quite rare. So I still have a brother and sister that live there, so now and again I'll go back and visit and stay. And it's changed quite a lot. New industries have sprung up, new housing, the town's expanded, a lot of companies have closed down. But they were happy days. I mean you got homophobia but it wasn't spiteful, it wasn't ... you accepted that you were different from other people, like being a different colour, a different race. So you would get fairly good natured ribbing, but it was not violent, it was not really meant to destroy you. It was just you accepted it because that's how people were.

KS: And were you out in Grimsby?

AG: Sort of. I never really accepted my ... I never felt comfortable with my sexuality then and people, my contemporaries at this workplace, they would all go into their late teens and they'd find girlfriends, marry. And they'd say, 'Oh you haven't got a girlfriend Alan, have you?' And I'd just say 'no.' And there was this quiet smile that no one said, 'Oh it's because you're ...' Oh no, one or two people would make a remark. But it was just accepted that I didn't come out as such. So they didn't ... it was just the innuendo and ... I wish now I'd been more assertive and more myself. I was really quite a shy person I suppose, I wasn't very happy at school, I didn't like my teachers and they didn't like me. I was quite a rebel, although I was a shy person. I don't really like authority, even now. And I would often rebel against being told what to do, how to do it, when to do it. And this would get me into trouble sometimes and people resent the fact that I could just quietly, I don't know, retreat into myself and not communicate, not give anything out. People quite resented that.

KS: You are giving a really...

<End of Part 2>

... good picture of Grimsby life, you were saying that phase at that moment that you moved from Grimsby to London, that big change, selling your furniture, giving everything up. Remind us again of the date when you did that and what was it like, that move, what do you remember about it?

AG: It was the summer of 1986 and I mean a little story behind that was I'd heard of a ... like a country retreat where people went for just spiritual refreshment

and things. I spotted an advert in a magazine and I went off to this place out in the wilds of Lincolnshire, a small village. And it was like a retreat, there was no television, no video. But there was one person there, Japanese he was I remember. He was a Buddhist, and I was quite taken with the Buddhist outlook at that time. And we helped in this garden, and there were one or two other people there. And there was this one guy, who seemed to want to talk and chat and it was him that I came to meet in London, and ... quite a strange way of ... we chatted but we never said anything about our lifestyles or whatever. But we swapped phone numbers and he phoned me a couple of weeks after I came back home and he asked me if I was a gay man. And I thought yes, yes I am. So he said, 'Well ...' he thought he might be and 'could we meet?' And that's when I came to London to stay with him for a weekend.

KS: What were your first impressions of London in...

AG: Oh it was like ... we'd walk down Oxford Street and I'd be looking...

<End of Part 3>

... around all these shops and people and this open space, this place to be where you could be anything, do anything, legally of course, but you know. You could just be ... no one cared, no one cared what you were doing, what you looked like. And he used to stay to me, 'What are you looking at?' And I'd say, 'I'm just looking, I'm just ...' When you come from a small town it's quite an overwhelming experience I suppose, in any big city really. But London, London's got this magical name.

KS: Did you go to any of the gay scenes?

<End of Part 4>

AG: Yes, yes we did, we did.

KS: What was that like?

AG: Again it was nothing I'd experienced. I mean again in again in Grimsby there were pubs that would have ... it was unspoken that they were slightly gay friendly. If you stood in a certain corner of a certain part of the bar, then that was your place where you could be and interact with other people. But I never liked that. It was like hiding in the dark. It was like ... I'd been a second class citizen. And so I regret a lot that all that time went by without my being who I was and who I wanted to be and things I wanted to say and do and ... Yes it was ... I suppose I just didn't fit. I always knew that I didn't fit, that I didn't belong there in some strange way, this wasn't my environment, this wasn't where I wanted to be. But seemingly there was no choice, this was how it was going to be.

KS: Tell us a little bit about ... so you've actually arrived in London, when you finally moved here, where lived and worked, as the first things.

AG: As I say, I stayed with this chap and he was very good to me because he said, 'I want you to stay here with me and we'll just be friends, but I don't want you to go back to Grimsby.' And he was quite a spiritual sort of person, and he introduced me to quite number of spiritual people, not religion but spiritual sort of ... So I'd obviously given up my job in Grimsby with no concept of what

I would do. So during those weeks my flat was taken away from me, or it was given away from me. My furniture was disposed of to friends, family, and I actually, at the time in London, I'd got a few clothes, a few personal effects and that was all I had. Quite scary now when I look back, it was such a risk and it's the sort of thing you only do when you're young, and it either works or it doesn't. But I went round ... as I was going round, it was in Walthamstow in North London, and so I would go round the shops because ... I've forgotten my thread. When I came to London of course I signed on, it was called signing on then. And it was much easier then to be between jobs, or to not have a job. You got suspended for six weeks without unemployment benefit, as it was called them. But you could get rent allowance and what's called supplementary benefit. And so I found this room in a house, in a shared house in Leyton, which is just next to Walthamstow. And this landlady, she said, 'I don't mind what you do as long as I get the rent, that's fine.' So I decided that I would not look for a job for a little while, 'cause I'd worked for so long since I left school. Literally I would go out for walks in the day time, get on a bus and just see where it went. I suppose, didn't really do the sightseeing places, the ... I just wanted to walk round and get the feel of people, places, get used to being near ... Sometimes at night time when I went back to my bed in this room, I'd sometimes be really quite scared. I remember before I dropped off to sleep or when I woke in the morning and I'd think what have you done? You've destroyed your whole stability of life! But it would pass and I'd think well let's wait and see. Again, not really knowing how I would earn a living or whatever. But the people in this shared house, they were all mixed cultures, races, and we all muddled along quite well. And then I heard of a housing co-op. I did some voluntary work as part of my benefit claim, you were told to find some voluntary work and you were put in touch with voluntary agencies, and care work was a big need of volunteers then; elderly, people with special needs, people with disabilities and things. And at one of my projects I met a young woman who said she lived in a housing co-op in Stratford in East London and if you filled in an application form you could be interviewed and go through this selection process, be selected to live in a shared house. It was a purpose built complex, 500 beds split up into houses and flats and things. So I was successful in finding a room in one of these houses and that was nice as well. There were, oh, such a mixture of people! And because it had quite non-discriminatory rules and regulations, I could be really quite out, I could be out as a gay man. In fact people liked it, you were encouraged to be independent and to have views on things and to have strength and be perhaps a little bit politic and things. So I enjoyed that really quite a lot.

KS: Thinking about...

<End of Part 5>

... coming forward, what was the atmosphere like, what was life like generally around being gay, I mean what was happening...

AG: Here?

KS: Yeah in London. What sort of things were happening?

AG: I could mention one or two stories of how I ... I have to say I was really quite naive about the social side of being a gay man in a big city, and wasn't really sure how to go on, which were the places that suited me, what sort of people I

wanted to mix with, what I was looking for, who I wanted to find. There used to be, at that time, near Farringdon Station, there was what was called the London Lesbian and Gay Centre and it was funded by the GLC, one of the GLC's projects, and it was like a warehouse that had been modified. It was eventually sold, but for the time, the GLC funded it for various projects. But part of it was this little Lesbian and Gay Centre and you could go there for an evening. You had to pay membership, about a pound membership, and you could get subsidised drinks, subsidised food, it was very nice. It was like an alternative to the commercial gay scene. And I used to go there feeling very unsure and not quite sure why I was going there or whatever. It's like having to learn my life all over again, like start a new chapter, find a new me, who I really was and who I was gonna be from now on. And perhaps a little anecdote of ... I was there one evening, one of the first few evenings that I went there and I stood at the bar getting a drink, and a young man came stood next to me. And he asked me if my name was Dave. And of course I said 'no.' And he said, 'Oh, well I'm waiting for someone called Dave, and I thought it might be you 'cause he said he would arrive at this time.' And I said 'no.' And he said, 'Well, tell you what, get your drink and come and sit and chat, we'll talk for a little while.' And I thought oh this is nice. So we sat and talked and he was a really nice guy. And at the end of the evening we got thrown out at eleven o'clock. And he said he was going home, lived in Highgate and did I want to go back with him. And I said 'yes,' which I did. And it was only in the morning when my tube journey back to Leyton, as I still lived then, and it dawned on me that there never had been a Dave, there never had been. But it was such a lovely experience to be approached in that way, to be looked after, to ... 'cause I could have been ... we hear stories of ... anything could've happened to me. But I felt confident and I felt quite happy. And I suppose from then on, perhaps not that particular instance, but things like that ... I'd learnt to be more confident, to let people know who I was. Whereas before I'd always wanted to be quite a secretive person and not really have an opinion on anything or ... even in Grimsby, I mean you didn't get into any deep conversations with anyone; it was just very football and the usual stuff.

KS: And what about politically, was there anything happening around when you were inventing your sexuality orientation?

AG: I suppose...

<End of Part 6>

... yes, I mean there was again, in the late 80s and the 90s, there was ... I suppose it was just easier. I straight away realised that it was easy to be, or easier than it had ever been, to be different or to have a different lifestyle. And of course, the politics at the time, the GLC as we said and the labour movement at the time, it was all ... there was legislation. I got to know about the Stonewall Equality Group and they ... I understand I belong to Stonewall, and they done an enormous amount of work to further equal rights and legislation, age of consent and so on. So I would often write letters to MPs to ... I belonged to Amnesty International. I used to write to world leaders on poverty and things that were happening around the world. I remember once, when I was still ... I'm fairly active now, but even when I moved into Brixton in 1992 I acquired this flat, my phone was being tapped <chuckles>. I could tell when I picked up the phone, when someone rang me, and you'd here this little click, this little rattle of things. And sometimes you could hear someone breathing while I was speaking to ... I used to write to embassies and people.

I think I was ... someone was keeping an eye on me for politic reasons. When I lived in Grimsby I belonged to a couple of Animal Rights groups. I've always been a fighter for justice, for equality, for things to be better than they are for people and for situations, anything that's wrong or that isn't as it should be. So I've always been a fighter for, as I say, for justice, for fairness, equality. I suppose again, back in Grimsby, although I had a bit of ribbon about my sexuality, I never received any violence. It was just good natured, you had to go along with it. But I remember there would be very few people in general from other cultures, races, but if they came to work at the place where I worked at, they would get the same discrimination, but it wasn't discrimination, it was a lack of understanding, a lack of bothering to look further than the colour of their skin or whatever. And so I would find myself trying to get to know the person. There would be perhaps a few Asian, African, Caribbean people, and I wanted to know who they were, where they'd come from, what they were doing. And people, my contemporaries, they thought that was quite strange that I couldn't join with them in ... I hadn't got the same attitude as them. And I've always been, I can remember since I was a child at school perhaps even, I would feel for someone that was being made fun of, someone that was being made to look small, I could feel that pain and anger and that's stayed with me, even now and probably will for as long as I'm around I suppose.

KS: Tell me about...

<End of Part 7>

... Galop and your involvement with Galop, how did you hear about Galop first of all?

AG: Right, well this is a story of ... where I live in Brixton, perhaps I'd better not mention too many trade names, but I live very close to what's called the Brixton Academy. It's a large music entertain venue and I live in a courtyard of 42 flats. The academy uses a waste processor to crush and break down all their waste from the nightly shows, bottles, cans, food, all this stuff. And it goes into a rubbish crusher which makes a lot of noise, a lot of smell, it leaks. And it's placed very close to my flat and two other flats which are below me. And some years ago I complained to the academy about ... could they do something about this, could they find another way of disposing of their rubbish, why did this rubbish crusher have to be exactly where it was? Because their premises are quite large, they've got a large car park where this could be placed quite away from residential property. I got a reply back from the manager who said that they would look at what they could do and see if they could make things better and nothing ever happened. And I tried to get a couple of people, the people below me on my side and they said, 'Well you can't do anything about it.' But again I was determined once I'd got this into my head and I complained to the council and Environment Health and they came and had a look. And of course the academy are a very successful group and they bring a lot of money into Brixton. But they're quite crafty and they found that if they knew the council was coming round to look at this processing stuff, they would tidy it all up, it would all be made to look clean and sanitised and clinical. And of course the council would say, 'Well there's nothing wrong.' <snorts> So I kept complaining and the manager kept writing back and saying, 'Yes, yes Mr Gray, we will ... stop complaining, it's just there, it's always been there, it'll always be there, this is what we do.' <snorts> So I took to taking photographs of all this rubbish that was thrown

out every night, huge amounts of rubbish that would be left from a Friday night to a Monday morning before it was processed and I sent these photos to the council. And then I thought why not get a video camera. So I got this video camera and I would actually video from my balcony. If you imagine, I'm three floors up and we've got outside balconies. My balcony actually looks out onto this area. So I could stand on my property and do this video filming and this annoyed the academy tremendously and they started threatening me with court action if I filmed their staff. So I had to be very careful not to film faces and I actually went to my library and spoke to one or two people to find out the legality of doing this. And they said, 'Look, we're not quite sure, but don't film anyone's face, do not deliberately point the camera.' So I found it quite easy and this was three years ago, and I sent these recordings ... it was video film then, sent these to the council and they wrote back and said, 'Oh yes, we didn't realise it was like this, we'll come and have a look.' And of course they came and had a look and the academy would change it all completely, it's a conspiracy, it's a conspiracy.

So I carried on filming and their retaliation was then some of the staff would come out into this car parking area ... although I said I'm three floors up, it's really quite close. I mean you can shout to someone within shouting distance. They found that ... because I wouldn't stop filming, they found that if they shouting things at me then that would be a retaliation for the filming. And I don't know, I mean I don't know how, but in sometimes it's obviously I suppose; I live alone, I'm always on my own on my balcony, there's only me comes in and out of my flat <snorts>. They decided that ... perhaps there's other things that give it away, but they decided that homophobic remarks would be a nice thing to do, one guy in particular. And I'd be filming him doing this stuff and they would call me various, not particular homophobic, but perhaps not say what they said, but it would just be swear words, it would be just names that they could think of. But then this Irish guy, he would say to someone standing beside him, he would say, 'hey, see him up there, he likes young boys you know.' Well this was serious and I never filmed his face, I would just get like the side of his shoulder, but his voice would carry onto the film ... DVD now. And I'd begun to be worried about this because he shouted it loud enough for other people in my courtyard to hear, for people going by in the street to hear and I thought what can I do about this? And this went on for some time so that I could get enough verbal recording. And so deciding what to do, I went to the town hall one day, Lambeth Town Hall, I was walking by and I just dropped in to pick up any leaflets that might help with whatever I was doing. And it said ... there was a leaflet, it said, 'Are you lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, are you receiving harassment, whatever, if so, phone this number.' And I phoned this number and it put me in touch with the Lambeth Community Safety Unit or something, part of the Metropolitan Police. And that put me in touch with...

<End of Part 8>

... somebody ... I don't know if you're switching that on or off.

KS: It moves it to another tape you see, as we move to a new subject.

AG: Oh right, oh I see. Yes, so I phoned this number and spoke to a nice woman who was most sympathetic and she said, 'Yes I'll follow this up and I'll get someone to phone you,' and she said this officer would phone me, which he didn't. And I phoned her again and so began this long saga from January

2008. And various officers spoke to me, phoned me and they said, 'Oh Mr Gray, yes we've got a report about you feel you're in danger or you're getting homophobic abuse or something?' And I said 'yes.' And this officer would say, 'I'll follow this up, I'll get back to you.' Nothing would happen for a week or two and then another call would come and another officer, either male or female, would say, 'Mr Gray, yes I've been passed a report about you having some problems.' This became so frustrating and in the end looking through the pink paper round about the summer of 2008, and I'd seen it before obviously, but my eye was drawn to this advert for Galop and I thought well let's try this. And phoned Galop, spoke to Peter Kelly for the first time, and explained a bit about what was happening. He said he would follow up one or two officer's names that I'd given him, the people that had phoned me. And gradually over the weeks it became clear, or Peter was able to realise, that this was a whole lack of interest by all of these people that was supposed to help me, who weren't the slightest bit interested. And so there was one officer that was particularly helpful and she came to see me two or three times, she watched this recording that I'd got and she said, 'You must try and get this person on camera, get this face on camera so that you can see his mouth moving.' And I said, 'But I'm not allowed to because ...' And she said, 'No, I'm telling you, get him on camera and then we'll ...' So I did and she took this away, gave her this copy of this recording and she took it away, passed it to her superiors and then heard nothing, I heard nothing for weeks and weeks.

So phoned her office, I'd spoke to her sergeant who was her superior and he said, 'Oh it's OK, we've spoken to the manager of the academy and they've agreed to stop shouting and they've agreed to stop calling you names.' And I said, 'But it's a criminal offence! They've been committing a criminal offence and I want something done about it!' And he said, 'It's OK, it's all been taken care of, they won't do it again, we've no need to go as far as that and in fact it's so trivial that the courts won't even be interested, we're not going to refer it to the Public Prosecutions Office.' So I kept reporting all this back to Peter and I made a note of every phone call, every conversation that I had with officers, what they'd said. And in the end I came here, to the Galop office one afternoon and Peter helped me to put a whole report together of every incident, every conversation, every visit, everything that I'd been told that would happen that didn't. Peter suggested that we'd got a good enough case to refer to the IPCC right, <sniff> which I said, 'Well, you know how to do this,' which he did. And so we sent off this report, or he sent off this report, gave me a copy of it, and we sent off this report to the IPCC. And within a week or two I got a phone call from an inspector at this unit, it's Clapham in South London, saying that he was most apologetic that all this seemingly inaction had taken place for months and months and months, the lack of action by officers, the way that ... Just going back, one officer told me when I'd given this recording of this guy's face, this officer I gave it to, she was moved to another department or something, and someone else phoned me and said, 'But Mr Gray what do you expect? If you're going to film people's faces, then they're going to shout things at you, aren't they?' And I said, 'But hang on, I've been told, this started long before them and I was told to film this particular person to gain the evidence.' And she said, 'Well that's why he's doing it.' And I couldn't get her to realise that this is what I'd been told to do, and that this was the escalation of the original filming. Anyway, this inspector, most apologetic, and he said, 'Could we meet to talk about how to go forward?' And Peter Kelly came with me, we arranged to meet him during the winter. Met with this inspector who said, 'Yes this has been a complete shambles, all these officers have acted so incorrectly, unsupported ...' A lot of it was

probably what he'd been told to say, but he was quite genuine, he was quite shocked because something had come back, I didn't ever see what came back from the IPCC. But apparently they weren't very happy at all about the way that this had been handled, the different conflicting directions that I'd been given. And so eventually I got a call from an officer who I hadn't met before, who said, 'We've been told to come and take a statement from you, an official formal statement,' which no one had ever done before, 'and then we will arrest this guy and he will be charged.' He didn't say what with. So of course I was feeding all this back to Peter Kelly and it really looked as if something would happen. I got a phone call after I'd given this statement and I'd said that I'd recorded more stuff because this guy carried on doing it because no one had taken any action. And he said, 'Well Mr Gray, yes, well we'll see what happens.' I got a phone call from him a day or two later, he was only a police constable but he said, 'We've arrested this guy, we've taken him back to the station, Brixton Police Station, he's been charged and given a caution.' And he didn't say what for. When I spoke to Peter, Peter said it would probably be some public order offense or whatever. And this seemed quite OK, but I never got a copy of my statement, I've never had anything written from the police, all over since January 2008, to say that officers have been to visit me; I've had to write everything down myself, luckily I did, which is what we sent off to the IPCC. So I said to this constable, 'Can I have something in written that says that you've done this.' And he said, 'No, no, no this is good enough, I've given you a verbal confirmation that you're complaint's been dealt with, that your assailant,' if that's the right word, 'has been given a caution, it's been dealt with, that's finished, end of story.' And I wasn't really quite happy with that. So I wrote back to this inspector who'd met with Peter and myself earlier and I said, 'Look, I'd really like to have a copy of something in writing.' And then I wrote a letter to Peter to say this has happened and this had happened and should I have a copy of something in writing to say what action had been taken, and if not, would Peter help me to refer this back to the IPCC. Well quick as a flash I got through the post, I got a letter from the constable who had taken the statement from me, saying this is to confirm that the staff at the academy has been arrested on a certain date, March I think it was, had been cautioned to stop shouting homophobic stuff at me, and that in fact he must not speak to me on any occasion at any time. And that was the combination of ... it's the only bit of paper that I've got from the police to say that anything has ever occurred. And that seemed to be the end of the story and indeed this guy at the academy has stopped. He looks at me now, but he doesn't say anything. So in effect this caution has had the desired effect. A little story onwards from that, some weeks ago, about a month ago now, I got a phone call from a sergeant, a police sergeant who said, 'Oh Mr Gray, I believe you made a complaint to the IPCC.' And I said 'yes.' And he said, 'Well you really shouldn't have done this, this is not correct procedure, this is not what the IPCC's for and I'm actually going to follow this up and I'm going to find out why this occurred.' He said, 'Mr Gray do you realise this is such a ...' he said it was a 'black mark,' and that was quite an incorrect statement to use and people don't say things like that, but he said, 'This is a black mark against my department and I won't have it, I won't have us criticised by the IPCC.' And I said, 'Look sergeant, I really don't want to have this conversation, in fact I'd like you to phone Mr Kelly at Galop.' And he did! And Peter phoned me back and said, 'It looks as if this sergeant's going to try and challenge all that we did, the complaint that we made to the IPCC, and he's going to try and overturn it and somehow say that it's invalid, that the outcome's invalid, that we could actually be put into some sort of trouble for doing this, that we'd acted incorrectly.' <snorts> When I spoke to Peter

afterwards, Peter seemed to say that he'd spoken to a solicitor or a legal advisor to Galop and that in fact what we'd done was completely correct, that we'd behaved properly, that we'd ... And so we never heard anything for a little while. And then a couple of weeks ago I got a letter from this sergeant who'd tried to start this all up again. And he said, 'Oh Mr Gray I'm pleased that the outcome was to your satisfaction, the police obviously try to do everything that they can at all times to help everyone and if we might have acted incorrectly at times then apologies,' and all this. 'We now consider the case closed.' And I haven't heard anything since.

KS: And roughly when was that?

AG: This letter?

KS: Yeah.

AG: From this sergeant, came about ... where are we now, June, it would be about the middle of May, the middle of May this year, 2009. And so this sergeant had obviously tried to follow something through, thought he got hold of something that he could twist around or whatever and then found that he couldn't. He did say on the bottom of this letter, he said, 'If you feel that I've acted incorrectly, then this is the address to write to,' and it was the address of the IPCC in Holborn.

KS: And tell in brief who the IPCC are?

AG: Independent Police Complaints Commission. It seems they deal with police misbehaviour, in particular individual officers who may have acted incorrectly, who may have not conducted a proper investigation, who have not followed procedure, who may have actually worked against a person who asked for help. So it seems the Independent Police Complaints Commission is there to police the police and I feel that without my help from Peter at Galop, it's been absolutely invaluable, I would not have known what to do, who to turn to if Galop hadn't, and particularly Peter ... I praised him so highly, that he knew exactly what to do and it was the referral, it was only the referral to the IPCC that actually brought things to a conclusion, that made the police sit up and take notice and take all this seriously. And I actually ... in this closing letter from the sergeant who tried to say that we'd acted incorrectly, he said, 'You can have a copy of your complaint in writing if you so wish.' So of course I wrote back straight away and said, 'Can I have a copy of this?' And he didn't reply, and I've copied all my letters to Peter Kelly at Galop. And so I wrote again and then I got a two page, quite an official looking document with police headed note paper and it was marked out in boxes of what is this about, who was the officer, what was the complaint; quite an official looking document. And it actually had been written in, 'The complainant has complained of homophobic behaviour from a person in his locality and this is as a direct result of a referral to the IPCC and we've referred this back to Lambeth Community Police ...' or whatever it was. So this was my proof in writing, if you like, that all this had taken place.

<End of Part 9>

KS: Another question, tell me about the impact of Galop on your life then?

AG: I think I'd heard of Galop, I'd heard of all the gay support groups. While I've been in London I've kept in touch with help places. I regularly pick up the gay press and take a note of adverts, organisations, support groups. And really thought oh well I'm sure they're doing good work, luckily I haven't needed ... But again it was only when I phoned the Galop number and I heard this voice, which was Peter, and it was such a relief, it was such a ... to find an organisation other than the police or an organisation that would help me to control what the police were doing or not doing, was such a relief, it was ... And of course I'd never ... again, I'd seen the adverts, I'd seen the logo, I'd read little reports about Galop does this, this is what Galop does, Galop has been successful in doing this or that or ... Really just took it as part of the news that an ... to me it was an organisation that helped people who needed help, but I wasn't one of those up until the point that I decided to phone the number. And it was only, as I said, my contact with Galop and Peter in particular who's been my case worker, he's my designated case worker so it was always him that I asked for or it was him that called me back. And he's been absolutely dedicated to reaching some sort of conclusion and even himself ... it seems that Peter himself could've felt that he was being attacked or criticised for helping me, for supporting me by the attitude of some of these officers that we eventually began to deal with together. They would phone me and I would say, 'Speak to my case worker.' And then Peter would phone me back some days later and say, 'Oh I've spoken to this officer and he said this and that, well we'll see what we can do about.' So Peter was such ... I can't praise him highly enough.

KS: What do you think the impact...

<End of Part 10>

... on the LGBT community has been of Galop?

AG: I should imagine ... my experience has been so positive, so helpful, just so supportive, if this is typical of their style of work, the support that they can offer, then it can only be a good thing that they exist. They should receive every kind of support or help to exist, to do what they do. Because even in these present times, LGBT people have such little representation, apart from the commercial side and the support of friends and family, contemporary people on the gay scene I suppose, but professional help for LGBT people is still relatively thin on the ground, it's ... So I'm just so pleased that I was able to contact Galop personally for myself. I don't actually know of anyone else that's had support from Galop or has reason to contact them, but my own experience, just speaking for myself has been absolutely invaluable. I wouldn't have known where to turn without them.

KS: What about...

<End of Part 11>

... your perception or your views on how the police interact with the LGBT community, what's your view on that?

AG: I only know from what I read in the press, in the alternative press, and it does seem that there are different attitudes in different police forces, in different officers. Again, in my experience, I would speak to officers who would phone me and you could pick up in their voice that they just weren't ... that they

would have some homophobic issue. You could tell by the choice of their words, their tone of voice, the way that they would want to ... or the lack of interest, the lack of interest; 'Well how can I help you?' It was, 'Well what do you want us to do?' So <coughs> I think ... I mean the gay press seem to say that relations between LGBT people and the police are much, much better than they were, in some areas and in some police forces and even in some parts of the country. And so I believe that that's probably true, that there are different levels of support; good support, bad support, no support sometimes. And I still think that the police have got a problem in general, the police in general, is not still as help as it should be. There is still this ingrained ... I suppose it can be said of the armed forces and so on, establishment ... organisations still seem to have a long way to go to fully accept ... perhaps not even to accept, but to just not actively discriminate, to just treat people as ordinary people. 'Yes a crime's been committed and you're a gay man, woman, transgender, bisexual, but that's OK 'cause we're still interested in what's happened to you.' That's what we want to reach. Rather than, 'oh yeah, well of course yeah, well that's probably why it's happening,' or, 'What were you doing to encourage someone to beat you up or attack you,' or ... There's still this, I'm sure and my experience has shown, that there is still this very negative outlook to people who are not heterosexual.

<End of Part 12>

KS: Another question, a couple more then we'll finish before...

AG: H'mmm.

KS: Have you noticed any changes in how the police are working within LGBT communities?

AG: <Sigh> It's difficult for me to say 'cause again I'm still only relating to my own experience. And I'm still ... I can only believe what I read or what I read could be what's happening. I think the police are trying to make a commitment. I think their desire is to improve their standards quite a lot. But again, I think it's down to individual officers, it's the way that ... maybe it's even the type of people that come into the police force, maybe they should have more training, a better selection or maybe the police should look for types of people who are not the best people to be liaison officers or part of a community police group. Again, my own experience is really what I've ... 'cause it's been over a year, more than a year, to reach the point that I wanted to reach which this final conclusion, it's taken 14 months, 15 months to actually get the police interested or to take it seriously, to actually dedicated themselves to my particular case. And again, my experience showed that police officers would not know what to do about this and they would pass it on to someone else, who would pass it on to someone else, who would say, 'Well I haven't got time to deal with this, I'm so busy, I've got ...' And so this business of passing this round, passing this buck around, not really wanting to deal with it, not really knowing what to do with it, knowing how to deal with it. And not even getting back to me, not even keeping me informed. I mean all this went in the complaint to the IPCC; lack of information, lack of direction, lack of communication, lack of liaison, all of this in my experience has borne out that the police have still got quite a lot to learn.

KS: Tell me...

<End of Part 13>

... two things you think the police could do to keep developing their relationship with the community?

AG: I suppose ... I mean we're led to believe from the press and the media, that the police are always trying to improve their image, that they're trying to have better relations with all sorts of groups of people; ethnic minorities, people who are victims of domestic violence, all of this. And I just think they need to improve whatever it is that they're doing, or what they think they're doing to try and deal with this type of crime or disturbance. They need to really improve in some way, not quite sure how, but somehow improve whatever it is that they're supposed to be doing. I mean they say, 'Oh yes we've got better training, we liaise more with the LGBT people, groups, we give talks to people, we visit places, we ...' And we assume that they are doing, we assume that they are doing this. But it seems so slow and so unfocused so ... So I think a lot of it is words, a lot of it is, 'Yes, this is what we'd like ... this is how we'd like it to be, this is our goal,' if you like. But they seem to be taking an awful long time to reach the point that they'd like to be at or that they say they'd like to be at.

KS: So faster and with more focus?

AG: Yes, yes.

<End of Part 14>

KS: And finally then to finish off our interview, and anything you want to say to finish off?

AG: About ... I suppose really I've been happy to relate my experience here at the Stonewall office and quite pleased that I was asked to use my experience as part of the research and history and so on. Again, my sincere thanks must go to Galop and in particular Peter Kelly for dedication and the knowledge and experience that I needed to support me in my particular case.

KS: OK.

AG: So there we are.

KS: Well, thank you very much Alan.

AG: OK Keith.

<End of recording>