

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Mark Hutin, Oral History Coordinator

Interviewer: Alex Jackson

Place of Interview: Lordship Park, London

Date: Thursday 7 May 2009, 2.00 pm

Files: Alex Jackson interviewed by Mark Hutin 1-5

Key

FH: = Interviewer, Fiza Hassan

SP: = Interviewee, Susan Patterson

[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

MH: Where and when were you born, Alex?

AJ: I was born on 19 November 1983 in South Wales.

MH: Great. Thanks very much. So just ...

<Part 2 starts>

MH: Just kicking off, could you tell me a bit about your background, where you grew up and when you came to London?

AJ: I grew up in Neath, South Wales. I spent a good few years there, then I moved to Ireland for a bit, moved back about ... I stayed there for about two years, then I moved back. <Pause> I came to London five years ago.

MH: So what brought you to London?

AJ: Oh! <Chuckles> Problems with the family. Major problems. An abusive brother, an alcoholic brother, alcoholic father, violent brother ... actually no, I had moved out of my mother's before I moved to London, into another housing association. Clewed. But I got kicked out. <Chuckles> it wasn't a gay-friendly place to be! The manager got fired for being homophobic. Actually no ... a couple of members of staff got fired for being homophobic, 'cause they stuck ... there was me and two lesbians, they stuck us all on the top floor and they named it the gay floor, so ...

MH: Gosh. So tell me about coming to London. Describe that to me.

AJ: I was excited. Anything to get out of Wales.

MH: Why did you decide to come to London?

AJ: See, London wasn't my first choice. I had moved to Cardiff, Triangle Wales. I got kicked out of there as well! <Laughs> And then, I can't remember where I read about Stonewall Housing ... <pause> Ah! I phoned up someone who used to work here, from South Wales, and she told me about the place and I came down here and ... <pause>

MH: So you came specifically to London to come to Stonewall Housing?

AJ: No

MH: I see, OK.

<Part 3 starts>

MH: So you came to London to meet somebody at Stonewall Housing?

AJ: Yep

MH: So how did that go?

AJ: Well I'd arranged an appointment first, ooh ... no, there was another place before Stonewall Housing that I applied to, Open Door, came all the way down from Wales only to tell me that they didn't have any spaces. I'd come down for ... <pph> it was a waste of time basically!

MH: So you mentioned earlier that you'd experienced homophobia in one of your previous places that you'd lived. So is that why you approached Stonewall Housing, because they were LGBT, focussed on LGBT young people.

AJ: Yeah. I'd much rather live in a gay environment, it's a lot friendly down here, surprisingly.

MH: So tell me a bit about your experience in Stonewall Housing?

AJ: It's been up and down, clashing with the other tenants.

MH: So tell me a bit about the up bits first. What were the positive sides?

AJ: There's been *some* positive feedback from Stonewall staff ... most of them ... I'd say most of them are alright, but some of them can be a bit ... I dunno. I do get on with a large portion of them.

MH: Good, so in what way has that helped you?

AJ: <Pause> Hmm ... trying not to say anything bad now, but ... <sighs> see, if I had kept my first key worker when I moved in I'd be gone by now. She got everything spot on, she ... she physically took me to places I needed to be, 'cause otherwise I won't go, but I've been juggled around maybe four or five key workers since and I've had to trust new people and then they leave and I have to trust another person, and ... it's ... hard at the moment.

MH: So how long have you been here for, roughly?

AJ: About five years now.

MH: OK. So in terms of living here, what do you think of the place?

AJ: I think it could do with a makeover! <Laughs> [3:13 IA] it's pretty close to pretty much everything. The support I'm getting at the moment ... I'm not getting support from my key worker, I'm getting it off the manager, and it's perfect ... at the moment.

MH: And what are your aspirations, what do you hope for ultimately?

AJ: My own place and a job. <Laughs> Been looking for a job for the past five years! It's hard to get a job when you've got no qualifications.

MH: And what would you like to do, what sort of work?

AJ: See there's only specific places I wanna work, I wanna work in a gay environment, so that's either a gay company or ... not so much a gay-friendly company but a ... more of a ... gay owned or ... gay run place, or a gay organisation. I'm not comfortable working for a straight ... place. Not after the experiences in Wales!

MH: Yeah. So you've been here for five years, so how would you describe your life, living in London, since you've been here?

AJ: I'd say the first ...

<Part 4 starts>

AJ: ... couple of years was tough. Adjusting to London and its unpleasant people. <Laughs> I got mugged my first week here! <Laughs> I'd say after that it's been ... it's been alright. I'm still adjusting but ... I'm more used to it now than I was.

MH: And to throw the question a bit wider, what's life like, how do you perceive life for LGBT people in London?

AJ: See I'm not really sure about that because I don't really know much about the community down here.

MH: Do you mix much in gay venues and stuff?

AJ: I try to. All my friends are straight though <laughs>. So I try to drag them along ... but with no success. Some of them are alright, but I know some proper hard heads, so ...scared of ... going.

MH: But thinking again about the housing side of things, would you say that your experience in a gay environment has been more positive than living in a mixed environment in the past?

AJ: Oh yeah! Well it depends on where you're coming from. I come from Wales and ... Wales is not a very nice place to live, so ... <laughs> It's the anti-gay capital of the world.

MH: OK. So thinking about impact ... the impression that Stonewall Housing has made on you and what you see it's doing for other people – do you think it's good, do you think it's bad, do you think it's somewhere in the middle?

AJ: I'd definitely say it's positive, giving gay and lesbians a place to live. <Pause> See, there was a policy at the interview that the staff were supposed to suggest the houses. I think the reason I wasn't told about it was 'cause ... I used to phone up every other day, they'd eventually pushed me to the top of the list and I was next in, but I wasn't given the choice of either a mixed house

or an all male house. I probably would have picked the all male house, but I'm more than happy here now. So ... I'm glad I wasn't given the choice.

But it's definitely positive, for gay people to feel safe and comfortable in their living environment.

MH: Could you maybe give me a story or something really good that's happened to you whilst you've lived in this house, something that made a big impression on you? Could be anything at all.

AJ: <Pause> The only positive thing that's happened to me in this house was my first key worker, Ann-Marie, she was perfect. She got everything right. She's done everything by the rules and she made my stay here a lot easier. I swear I'd be gone by now, I'd have only been at Stonewall Housing for about a year if she was still my key worker, but she was spot on with the support and ... when I first moved down here she showed me round, she took me to the West End, that was pretty much the most positive thing that's happened to me in the house. <Laughs>

MH: And in terms of friendships and stuff that you've got, have you made friends whilst you've been here?

AJ: Not in the house so much, but ... that's the thing, I don't know a lot of people in London 'cause a lot of my friends from Wales come down once a month or so, so ...

MH: Just thinking about ... the wider LGBT community, and I know that you said you can't comment too much about this, which I appreciate ...

AJ: I mean I've been to a lot of youth groups down here, in fact I've been to nearly every single youth group.

MH: And what do you think of them?

AJ: The first one I ... I'm banned from again. <Laughs> I haven't been back to a number of them, mainly because a lot of the people that I used to go there with have moved out of London so I just don't want the uncomfortableness of having to meet new people, 'cause I don't have a lot of confidence, so ... <pause>

MH: When you say banned, why in your opinion has that happened? You don't have to answer that, but ... feel free to comment.

AJ: I think some people may call it staff misconduct. Sexually. But he broke the rules, so ... staff are not allowed to go out with ... clients, after the youth group has finished, and he did, and we got drunk and ... <laughs>

MH: OK. I appreciate that you've only been in London for five years, but have you seen any changes in the way the LGBT community operates and the way people in London view LGBT people?

AJ: Well see the first year I was here I did a ... oh, what was it called? What's the ban homophobia from schools march?

MH: Oh right.

AJ: I'd say passers by in London were pretty nasty towards the whole group. Since then ... I think it's because most of my friends are straight, I don't get a lot of hassle off other straight people, but their attitudes towards ... see ... see that's the thing, I tend to only go to places where straight people hang out! <Laughs> I'll once in a blue moon go to a ... like Old Compton Street or ... not many straight people walk down there, so ... <laughs>

But ... <pause> see I've seen arguments ... I've seen arguments and stuff, out with people, but I can't tell the difference between gay and straight people, so ...

MH: But if you, for example, were to walk hand in hand with somebody down a street, would you feel ... how would you feel about it?

AJ: I haven't got a problem with doing that in London. Anywhere else in the world I'm ... <chuckles>

MH: Just ... I appreciate as well you may not have much to say about the police, but I was just thinking what are your perceptions of the police and how they deal with and interact with LGBT people?

AJ: There was actually an incident with couple of ... I'd say about eighteen months ago, the police were supposed to come to a house meeting and they rushed ... well they got here, and they rushed off, said they had a job to do in the park or something, there was a fight that broke out in the park, I'd left the same time, I went to the park and there was no fight, so they lied. They obviously felt uncomfortable being in a house full of gay people. And the attitudes from some of them ... one of them came round to the house, the officer came round to the house and ... I was talking about, he was talking about asking me why I'd fallen out with a guy downstairs, and I said, 'No, I haven't fallen out with him, I've fallen out with his partner.' This copper turned around and said, 'oh, you mean his boyfriend.' Partner, boyfriend, what's the difference? That to me was slightly homophobic. But other than that ... I can't really comment on the police. Just the police in this area.

MH: Tell me what you think the main issues are for young LGBT people in London? What do you think the main issues are?

AJ: Live a positive life, free from ... hate crimes and stuff. Actually pretty much like anyone else, just to ... not be bothered by anyone.

MH: Fair enough.

AJ: You tend to have to keep an eye on gay people more than straight people, 'cause ... <laughs> not a lot of people like them. There's that Christian movement group down here, they're pretty nasty.

MH: OK.

<Part 5 starts>

MH: Is there anything else you'd like to say, or add?

AJ: Well ... just that I'm, at the moment we are trying to get, Stonewall Housing is trying to get their clients more involved in Stonewall Housing, and I'm the only person who's shown up so far!

MH: Why do you think that is then?

AJ: I'd say it's lack of enthusiasm, just ... <pause> The first meeting we had, I'm guessing the only reason they showed up was because ... there was an i-Pod and a couple of tickets on this raffle, three people won and we haven't seen them since, so they haven't come back, but ... <phh> I'm trying my hardest to get them more involved. I mean [1:00] with Stonewall Housing, if you don't care about the community or you just want to move in for a place to live ... you can do that in any hostel, but Stonewall's a specific organisation aimed at gay people and to get gay people more involved in ... <phh> the community. That's what we're trying at the moment. And it's ... I'd say ... I'm guessing a lot of the clients here have just moved in 'cause I've seen a lot of their family here and a lot of their friends. Me and I think one other actually moved in 'cause we had to move in, we had to get away from our situations. But ... yeah. I really think Stonewall Housing should look into their applicants more. Actually there was an incident a couple of years ago where they moved a straight person in and there was a confrontation at one of the houses, a couple of people got the shit kicked out of them. It was a big mistake on Stonewall's part, they should have looked into that more.

MH: And why do you think a straight person would apply to Stonewall Housing?

AJ: They must have lied in their interview. I don't know why they would have done it, but ... <pause> it did cause a really big stir. I think every single house heard about it, and they shouldn't have, 'cause it was private, but that was staff members ... left since, so ...

MH: So how do you think Stonewall Housing could improve what they do? Listening to you, I think by and large it's a positive experience, you're still here after five years so I presume overall it's positive, but obviously things could change. How would you like to see it change?

AJ: Well see at the moment ... that's why the client forum was set up, to get the clients to ... change Stonewall themselves, 'cause that's the only way Stonewall might be able to change, if they get input from their clients, and at the moment I'm the only person that's ... well, [3:53 IA]. Just that there are quite a few bad points. There's some really good points, but ... I'd say overall there are more bad points than good at the moment. The first couple of years was fine, but ... Stonewall's been up and down since. And they need to make some major changes. So that's ... hopefully at the next client forum meeting we'll have more than one there. <Laughs> And we can get some decent feedback, even if it's just one person from each house, then it's ... <pause>

MH: Why do you feel it's important to take part in that, when nobody else seems to be interested? What's motivating you?

AJ: I just ... I guess I'm more enthusiastic about to win something for the gay scene or the gay ... community. I mean I do go to a lot ... I do get a lot of ... activism groups and ... I just like that. <Laughs> I like causing a riot.

<Laughter>

Yeah ...

MH: Well thank you very much for that. That's been great.

<End of recording>