

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Casey Galloway

Interviewer: Philip Cowell

Place of Interview: South Tottenham

Date: 21st July 2009

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Key

PC: = Interviewer, Philip Cowell

CG: = Interviewee, Casey Galloway

[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time

[5:22 1A] = inaudible section at this time

[Word 5:22] = best guess at word

PC: Today's date is the 21st of July 2009. The interviewer is Philip Cowell, for the oral history project being run by Stonewall Housing and Galop. We are based in South Tottenham today. Can you please confirm your name, where and when you were born?

CG: Casey Galloway. Where? I was born in London, in fact in Hackney, and as you know, I haven't moved very far really, but anyway, that's that. And born in 1964, so I'm 45.

PC: Fantastic, thank you.

<End of Part 1>

OK, can you tell me a bit about your background Casey, and you can go back as far as you like, to childhood if you want, and tell me a bit about where you grew up, about your family if you'd like to and growing up in London?

CG: OK, well I was born and brought up in Hackney, in Stoke Newington to be exact. And I suppose when we moved into ... I lived with my aunts, when we first ... sorry, when my parents were married they lived with my aunt and I was born in that household. So I was born ... I was brought up with my cousins, which is a bit of a strange situation because I used to call my mum and dad, uncle and aunt, because that's what my cousins did. So anyway, we lived together in this house which is fantastic. We then moved into our own house in Stoke Newington, I think that would've been 40 years ago, which my mum still lives there. Yeah, and I suppose I still regard that as home, in a funny kind of way, considering I've moved here, there and everywhere and my life has taken various different courses really, but I still regard that as home. I've got ... I had two brothers, one of my brothers died unfortunately about four years ago now and I've got a sister as well, and I'm the oldest of four children. Yeah, I mean I pretty much did every ... my life was Stoke Newington, my life was Hackney, that's what I did, I had a pretty ... well 'normal' in inverted commas, ish, upbringing. I suppose I was always slightly different 'cause I was sickly child, I had asthma from an early age. And I suppose I was the one who was more protected than the other children, just because I was always ill. And I suppose that kind of informed, to a large degree, how my parents ... yeah, that my health informed, to a large degree, how my parents treated me.

And I suppose also that I was always slightly different to the others as well. So I was always very aware of that and there was five years difference between me and my brother, who was the next one along, and that felt like quite a big gap. So I spent quite a lot of time just having my parent's attention, then somebody else came along and then two others came along later. So yeah, that's my family set up.

Yeah, I went to school, primary school in Stoke Newington, secondary school in Stoke Newington. I pretty much enjoyed it, pretty much managed all that fairly well. What do you want me to talk about? What do you want me to talk about?

PC: Well how about secondary school, for example, I mean so that was....

CG: Secondary school, I went to Clissold Park Secondary School, which was ... funnily enough I was talking to somebody about this last night, it was at one point, it was the third worst school in Europe, there was a <chuckles> it was a high proportion of Afro-Caribbean kids or similar to that, going on 90, 90 odd percent, and they didn't really ... there wasn't much expectation, there wasn't certainly much in the way of educational achievement. It was either you went into sport once at school and went out of school and you were really geared towards nothing types of job; there were no expectations you were going to achieve anything. And I suppose I always had expectations that I would achieve something and that's because I always thought I was slightly different, and I don't know if that manifested itself, in that I thought I was different, in that I thought I was better. But I just thought I was different and actually I deserve something else, I deserve something more. And so I suppose I ... yeah, I fought for that a little bit more, in my own little way I fought for that a little bit more and I said I aspired to be some ... <pauses for thought>

I suppose, if I think about it, being gay, I knew I was gay from very early on, and that, in some respects, wasn't an issue. It was something I think that I accepted fairly early on in my life and that was all part and parcel of being different. And so I knew I had to take a different course than everybody else that I knew., so everybody I went to school with, my family, I knew that my life was going to take a slightly different chain of events, which was fine, most of the time. School was OK for me, I didn't have a bad school life, I think primarily because for some reason I managed to get in with people who would look after me. And I remember there was one guy, Joseph, who was the biggest guy in the year, and for some reason he took a liking to me, and for some reason as a result of that, nobody touched me. So being quite small, a bit fay <laughs>, a young gay man at that time, I probably wouldn't necessarily have identified at that time as such, but as a result of that anyway, nobody troubled me, so. And I suppose it was quite a good time, it was around the age ... I left school as 16 which was 1980, so there was lots of stuff, lots of positive stuff going on at the time. I had some really good teachers as well, which re-enforced some really good ideas in my head as these are all on the issues ... I mean I suppose the issue, being a bit more politically aware, around issues of race and sexism, homophobic to a degree touching on those because primarily around ... Actually there's one teacher I had, and she done a lot of work with the young women around feminism and I don't know quite how, but I got caught up in that, and I really can't remember how I did, but I caught up in that and it released ... I don't know, made me a bit more interested to find out what was going on out there and I suppose

where I fitted in, in things as well. And being, and identifying being gay and being black, there was all kinds of mixed thoughts and feelings going on about that. So that gave me a route to explore things a little bit further. So it was a really good time for me, that late seventies, early eighties, it felt like there was some change going on, it was a positive move, and I think that helped, that helped in terms of providing me with a little bit of a building block to then feel comfortable about moving on. And I think I had lots of very supportive people around me, friends, and teachers, and I think they were probably more aware that I was gay than maybe I did. And actually, they were very good and I suppose without stating the obvious to me, they just guided me in what felt like all the right directions. So it allowed me to move on and develop without feeling I was being pushed in any way and just feel gently supported.

I did a lot of ... I suppose also at the time we did ... because I was quite interested in drama, we went to the theatre quite a lot and quite a lot of fringe theatre at the time as well, and there were lots of ... I remember doing something at the Royal Court and we went to meet one of the directors there, he was a gay director. I can't remember what his name was, he was quite famous, and I found him really quite interesting and the work that he was doing very interesting, exploring all these issues about sexuality in young people and all that kind of business. And again, I suppose even though I wasn't directly involved in that, all that kind of thing had a bit of an impact on me and in a sense strengthened me to some degree; gave me some positive belief that who I was, what I was, was actually OK.

PC: And when was that? That was early eighties was that, with the Royal Court?

CG: That would've been the late ... that was when I was still in secondary school, so I left at 16 in 1980, so that would've been the late 70s, early 80s.

PC: It would be really interested to research what was going on at the Royal Court at that time.

CG: Yes.

PC: But did you find that out independently or was that through...

CG: That was through school.

PC: Yeah.

CG: Yeah, that was all the stuff through school just because I'd got involved in that, and got involved in that ... I don't know, it was ... it wasn't even any kind of formalised group, it was just this fringe opinions is all I can really describe it as, and I got caught up in the wave of that. And for me it went very positively and I really enjoyed that time, I got a lot out of that time. And I think it was part of my awakening, so to speak, it sounds a bit corny really to say that, but actually, I do think it was. And so the next ... the final years of going to college and stuff were a bit different, 'cause I think things slowed down, 'cause I think I was then moved into unfamiliar territory and it was new people and I think that was a bit scary to some degree. So I don't think I developed between 16 ... I think once I left school and 19, I think there was a bit of a lull really.

PC: That's interesting, do you know what was scary at that time?

CG: I just think it was new, I'd moved ... I suppose going to college, going to college in a different area, meeting new people, then slightly out of my comfort zone really, I suppose ... yeah, very much out of my comfort zone. And I suppose you're going through puberty and I was a bit of a late starter really, so I think all combination of all those things left me feeling a bit ooooh. But that never changed in terms of the whole gay issue, that never really changed anything, I always knew I was and never had any interest in pursuing heterosexuality; it never appealed to me in any way. But I think at that stage I just wasn't quite sure what I was gonna do about it. And then that all changed when I was ... I must have been about maybe 18, 19, I can't remember if I was working. I started going out when I was 18, 19 and ... Well now it's amazing actually 'cause there's things I did then that I would never dream of doing now. I remember going to Heaven on my own when I must have ... oh god, I wouldn't even do it now! I tell you, I wouldn't ... But anyway, I remember going to Heaven and I remember it felt like I was the only black person there, and it was this very strange, very, very strange group of people that had nothing to do with, I suppose, my reality. And that was really ... but that common connection that we're all gay. And that was very wired. I did it, and I can't remember ... and I went out quite a lot. And as I said, now I'm not the type of person, I don't do that anymore and I don't know whether it's age or whatever. But I did that quite a lot because I think I needed to make that connection; it was the only way I knew to make that connection. And I suppose there were other ways as well, I remember going to Gay's The Word bookshop and doing things like that. I never went to groups. I never fancied groups at all, I just never fancied that. But clubs I liked, I love music, I love dancing, so for me that was a way in.

PC: So you'd go by yourself...

CG: I'd go by myself.

PC: ... regularly?

CG: Yeah, I went regularly. I went regularly, I went clubbing regularly pretty much on my own for years, for certainly between 18,19 to 21.

PC: Did you meet people there, did you...

CG: I met people, yeah.

PC: The sort of people that you'd build up...

CG: People that I'd build up bits and pieces of friendships and relationships with, but not anything deep and meaningful. I think I knew ... I certainly knew a lot of people, by association rather than ... they weren't friends, real friends, but they were people you just met out on the scene and you had a laugh and ... But then you went back to your normal world and I use normal very reservedly. But you went back to going to work and doing all that and blah, blah, blah, blah. And I suppose in that, being gay was then part-time, it was evening and weekends, but during the day ... And I never ... I also made the point, I never ever said I was straight. So I would never, ever ... if anybody asked. I might have avoided answering the question, but I would've never said I was straight. But again, I suppose at that point it was still about building up a strength in myself really to move on, and it was very different back then, being in London and feeling like you were the only black person, or one of

very few black people on the scene. So that was quite a period for me. And there was some positives and also some negatives in that. Yeah, there were the positives and the negatives about that time, 'cause sometimes you did feel like you were a bit ... weren't people's motivations for coming to talk to you and chat you up or whatever, there was all of that. So I dealt with a lot of that shit right at the beginning. But I think that I learnt lots of lessons along the way and I think you learn, it makes you a bit stronger. But I did find then ... it was a place called ... I started going out to a place called The Lift and it was in Falconberg Crescent, which is just opposite where Centre Point is now and it's right by the Astoria, and there was a club there called The Lift, and it was a club that primarily was black gay men. And that's where I went for then, the next few years, and that's where ... it was the music I loved and I danced, and I danced, and I danced, and I danced, and that's all I really wanted to do. I had some of the best times of my life there; it was just great! I was young, I was carefree, and it was great. Your own environment, an environment with people that you could associate with, it felt a really positive place to be, a very affirming time. So it was good, it worked well for me so.

PC: It must have been so liberating though...

CG: Yeah.

PC: ... that experience of feeling like you were the only black gay man...

CG: Yeah, absolutely.

PC: ... by The Lift.

CG: Absolutely, and it was great, it was great! And I suppose then my plumbing career really started off big time because then there was a Jungle on a Monday night, Pyramid on a Wednesday night and The Lift on the Friday night and I was working at the time as well, and god knows, I can barely go out for a drink after work now <laughs>, and get up in the morning, let alone going clubbing. But I did it. But for me, that was my social life, how I made contacts with the gay community and that's how I developed all of that and developed a better feeling about myself. So the scene at that time was very important to me in terms of making me, to a degree, who I am today. So it was a very, very important time. And then at 21 ... I think 21 I did ... well how old was ... <pauses for thought> For some reason I can't remember why, but I joined Lesbian and Gay Switchboard as well. So I did that for a couple of years, two or three years.

PC: That's volunteering, isn't it?

CG: Yeah.

PC: Yeah, what sort of roles did you do?

CG: I was a telephone advisor.

PC: Oh of course, yeah.

CG: Yeah, so that's what I did so. And I was very early 20s, so I must have been 21, 22, 23, actually 27 ... no maybe about 23 actually, around about 23, and I did Lesbian and Gay Switchboard.

PC: Taking calls from...

CG: Yeah.

PC: ... from people with any...

CG: Any problem any...

PC: ... any issue or any...

CG: ... yeah, absolutely, so across the board. I mean I really loved doing that, that was great. And again in some ways that helped me, and I really don't know what my motivation for doing that was. And I think it's just, again, it's some way of actually getting something from the community by feeding something back into your community, so I think it was something like that why I actually did it. And the work interested me, I thought it was quite [18:24 IA], and I must admit, in terms of ... unlike now if I'm thinking about doing something, volunteering somewhere, I might think about what my motivation is and what I might get out of this and it could lead to this, that and the other, I don't think I thought about it in that respect. It was just something I felt like I wanted to do, any probably to some degree I needed to do, and I did it, and I stayed three years, I really enjoyed it. That's how I met Denise Marshall.

And Denise at that time worked at Stonewall Housing, OK so. I used to do the shift and for some reason I managed to get ... I used to do this Monday evening shift and it was <chuckles>, it was the lesbians and me <laughs>, and it was the only shift like that, and I loved that Monday evening shift; it was a great laugh and everything so. And it was a nice mixture of people, that's what I really liked, and it was people that I thought shared the some of the same thoughts and feelings and values that I did, so that was quite, for me again, quite good.

So as I said, Denise worked at Stonewall ... sorry, am I going too far forward too much?

PC: No, this is great.

CG: Yeah?

PC: This is great, yeah. Thank you.

CG: So Denise worked at ... yeah, Denise worked at Stonewall at the time. And then I was working for Camden Council in the Rates Department of all places, and I was looking for a change, and this job came up at Stonewall and so Denise ... I hadn't seen it, but Denise said, 'Oh this job's at Stonewall, why don't you go for it?' So I thought <exhales>, I'd never get anything like that. Under normal circumstances, if she hadn't suggested it, I would never have gone for it, because I didn't feel like I was one of those out there, dynamic, gay men really. So it was ... so yeah again, I don't know why, I just thought OK, what the hell, just do it. And I did it, and I remember going for this interview on ... what's that road near Leicester Square? It was some offices near Leicester Square. And yeah, it was this crumbly old building, I sat there, they interviewed me, I seemed to have said all the right things and at that point I don't think I really ... it's not like sometimes people can reel off stuff, reel off all the equal ops stuff. And so I think actually it came from ... it was

very raw and it came from ... not so much came from the heart really, it was what I thought was what I felt; it wasn't something I'd been through and I'd learnt, it was something that I'd really felt. So I went and I think I must have impressed them enough that they gave me the job. And I was shocked that they gave me the job. So I ended up working there for three years and of my working life, I'd always say it's probably one of the best jobs I've ever had. At that point it was a collective. So I was kind of on the second wave of workers there.

<Interruption>

<End of Part 2>

So at the time there was Sarah, Denise, and Alex working at Stonewall and then I joined them. And there was a woman who was before ... 'cause Sarah was the development worker along with Fiona, I think her name was Fiona, right at the very beginning. And by the time ... I think there'd been some kind of, I don't know what, but anyway, Fiona had left, I think it'd been some kind of restructuring whatever, whatever, whatever, I'm not entirely sure, but actually I think she was made redundant. But anyway so, there was us lot.

PC: So how many sorry? That's only three, isn't it, that's not many...

CG: No, Denise, Sarah, Alex and myself.

PC: OK.

CG: There was four of us initially.

PC: OK, and just to get hold of it, how many years had it been running up until this point?

CG: Up until this point it would have been maybe no more than one to two years I think.

PC: Right, yeah so you were really in there right from the very first...

CG: It was very, very early on, yeah.

PC: OK.

CG: And we were based in the Lesbian and Gay Centre on Cowcross Street. Which was again something, it was just all of a sudden I was in this gay world; <chuckles> I was living, breathing, I was a professional gay man! <Laughs>

PC: A full time gay man this time.

CG: A full time, exactly! <chuckles> A professional, I was being paid to be a gay! Which was at the time was all a bit wierd. But it was a great job! It was a really, really great job. I learnt a lot, I went in there completely green and I can quite honestly say it is probably one of the jobs I learnt the most in the shortest period of time. And I suppose I felt very lucky because actually I was doing something that I really, really wanted to do and I was doing something that actually I felt was really making a difference, and nothing I'd done prior to that ... had been like that. I'd merely been working to earn some money to do

whatever, to go out <chuckles>. And now I had a job where actually I was working with people like me, and also bearing in mind I was quite young at that stage, I was within the age group of the 16 to 25 that were Stonewall's catchment age. So that was possibly a little wierd at times, but actually I think worked quite well as well. So no, it was a great time. And all the ... I suppose, all my ... I suppose I enjoy the collective working; I thought it was a great way of working. I learnt quite a lot at that point, I took on quite a lot more responsibility than I ever had and it allowed me to grow and allowed me to develop as a professional really so. And because it was collective and you were all involved in all the different areas of work, I suppose you all learnt about everything; you all went out to meetings, you all went and met ... or going out meeting people and representing the organisation, things that I'd never done before, but I'd been forced into doing which was ... well not forced in a negative way, forced in a very positive way into doing, and actually that helped me grow really. I mean all the politics of it as well was a great learning experience, all the equal ops at the time because we were positive discriminating at that time before it was a dirty word, and actually achieving that when they were saying things, 'We'll never be able to get black lesbians,' and then we were getting them queuing up at the door trying to get into these hotels. So we were doing really positive things, we had a really mixed group of young men and women in these hostels and people were saying, 'Well they don't exist, they're not around, you'll never be able to find them,' and every time we did, there was never a problem. So it was great, and it was something new, and it was something nobody else had done anything like that, no one else had done. Yeah, there were other organisations, an organisation called Prince Arthur House, and they had a good equal opportunities policy, but they weren't exclusively lesbian and gay so. But they were really good and they were the only comparable organisation ... they're based in Camden. And in fact, one of the workers from there is still a very good friend of mine so, that's 20 odd years now still, even though how we met through work. So it was a great place to be, it was a really positive place to be.

PC: I'm interested in a couple of things there, you talked about first of all the collective which I mean it sounds great, 'I want to work in a collective.' I mean what does that actually ... does that mean everyone's one the same level?

CG: Everyone's on exactly the same level, no one has any more power than anybody else, everybody is part of the decision making process, so any decisions that are made, we all have to feed into that, OK.

PC: So that sounds like quite a new practice, or a relatively new...

CG: I think it's a relatively ... yes.

PC: ... model which has been used for this very new organisation.

CG: Yeah, absolutely. It was very new and I think there'd be other examples of collectives around at the time, and some worked and some didn't. And I think in respect, when it's kept small it was fine, I think when it starts getting above a certain number then it starts to get a bit unwieldy,, and then any decision takes forever and a day to actually sort out, so. But at that time, with that small number of people, it was great, because you did feel like you were part of an organisation, you did feel like whatever you were saying would feed into how the organisation would move forward from here. So it's not like ... I

suppose now, to some degree, I'm a bit of a tiny cup on this big wheel, but I can shout 'til the cows come home and nobody <chuckles> listens. At that time I didn't even have to shout, I could just say and you were listened to and within reason, of course not every suggestion is going to work or whatever. But actually there was an opportunity to talk through things, so you jointly agreed things. So there was nothing going on behind the scenes, nothing that surprised you, whatever, or whatever decisions were made were made collectively and we all agreed by them and stuck by them and worked towards common aims. So that was great, and as I said, at that time, when it was that size, it was fantastic! When it starts getting bigger, as I said, there are often problems. But it was, for me at that time, it was a great experience.

PC: So for your whole three years that you were working there it was a collective?

CG: For the whole of the time I was working there it was a collective.

PC: And what was your job title, do you remember your...

CG: I had this ... I was maintenance! <Laughs> I was maintenance. I was a maintenance worker, maintenance / hostel worker, that was my official title. And it really wasn't much to do with regards to maintenance just because ... they were new build properties, not new build, they'd been newly converted properties. So there wasn't a huge amount to do being a maintenance worker. But I suppose it was the hostel work bit which was the most ... And in saying that, when I say maintenance worker, there was lots of different things that I then got involved in. So it wasn't just there was a repair that needed doing, then I'd phone up the Housing Association and get the repair done and dah, na, dah, na, dah. You then got involved in lots of other areas of work, I did lots of benefits work, I did lots of ... just lots of it, whatever anyone came in about, you then responded to that in some way and so the job then got as big as you wanted it to get, or as varied as you wanted it to get. So it wasn't restricted to just sitting there and waiting for the repairs list to come in, so.

PC: But it sounds like the hostel work was quite interesting, that's where you were actually trying to get the message out there that you've got this service or...

CG: Well the hostel work, I suppose there was part of the work which is you're promoting the service, so you are going out there, you're going out to meetings, you're going out saying, 'This is the work that we do, this is how we do it, this is how we receive referrals.' So there's all that side, it was development type work, the going out there, promoting the service. There was the hostel work which was actually ... we were based ... we had, at that point, when I first started, there were two hostels, no there was only the one hostel when I started. And that had been running for a little bit of time and that was fine, that was self contained flats that had two people per flat. So that worked fairly well. You went in and supported the residents there pretty much **[on the far 9:29]** really. So generally speaking it was the interview, interview them initially, you made decisions about if they can move according to vacancies and according to the criteria we were looking for and if they were suitable and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So we did all that. And shortly after I started there we opened up a second hostel which then we were based in the hostel. So we were actually more like traditional hostel workers. So we had an office in the hostel and we had sleepovers at the hostel at that time as well. So you were there, there was a worker onsite 24/7, which was interesting <laughs> and challenging, but good in that it also enabled you to have really good,

strong relationships with the residents there because you were there; you were in there where they lived. And many of the young people that we had staying in the hostel had come from situations where their sexuality had been a major issue in terms of how they were treated, and then moved into an environment where, OK, they still had to deal with a lot of that shit from friends and family or whatever, but that was then outside the door, inside their sexuality wasn't an issue. So in some respects that then allows ... I kind of felt it allowed them to relax back and then more proactively deal with all those other things. But where that wasn't so much an issue, where you really weren't constantly looking over your shoulder, it allowed you then to deal with lots of the other stuff that was going on in your life. So I remember spending many, many, many, many hours just sitting there chatting to those people, just chatting, chatting about anything and everything really because that was an important part of what we were there to do. It was important part of that ... again, I keep saying 'normal,' but making people feel normal, 'It's all alright, it's fine,' their sexuality isn't an issue. You do as much as you can to boost people's confidence and make them feel good about things and their situation and help them, help them into education, sort out benefits, chatting about relationships; oh I mean you did everything, help them with their shopping if they needed it, it's everything, you did it all really, you responded to what they needed. And everyone had different needs. Some were absolutely fine, some were very independent, just needed somewhere to live, some needed a lot more support, so you dealt with that. So for me that was a really ... I got a huge amount out of that, I suppose it's the bit I love the most and it's the bit of work that I still do, is that I work with people, I love working with people and I love trying to get the best out of people and trying to get them to get the best out of themselves, so that's the bit I enjoy really.

PC: So this is the beginning of you discovering that love of working with people that you knew?

CG: Yes.

PC: Which perhaps you'd had a little bit at the Switchboard?

CG: I'd had that, but again, 'cause you're dealing over the phone there's distance there. But I enjoyed that. So yes, that was the beginning of the result of that now; I was sitting there and face to face, and you're dealing with a situation, dealing with a real situation with somebody who's got a variety of emotions, laughing one minute, crying the next and you're having to deal with that and you're having to respond with that, with sometimes what felt like my limited life experience as well, just thinking, shit! What do I say, what do I do? But there is always something you can say or do because there's always some part of your experience that you can then share, you can bring into that, that you can empathise with that person about. So for me that worked really well. I loved, I loved ... and to this ... I loved working with the residents. I found it difficult as well in that because I'd go out and I'd still see residents as well, which was good. But then they'd talk to you about things like rent arrears and all kinds of business and you're standing up in the **Black Cafe 13:57** having a drink and you're thinking, I'm not working <laughs>, go away! But they were great, they were great, they were good fun, they were fantastic fun! I mean there's a couple I still see every now and again from going back all those years. And yeah, I still think on all of the characters we had going through, and some of them were characters that we had going through that house, from a lot of the houses, with a lot of affection. And again, we were all growing up, we were all

part of something new and part of something different, whether a resident there or a worker, it was all, you know. And I'm not saying it was all roses, 'cause it wasn't, it was really hard at times as well. It was really challenging and we had some really challenging people live in the household at times. But overall, I'd still say it was a really, really good experience for me, a very good experience for me, and as I hope, I played a part in people growing, I certainly grew in that environment as well, so. And I think it was a really important ... what we provided there was really important I think, especially at that time, and now still, 'cause I don't think things have changed dramatically. But I think what we provided then certainly was actually really, really important in terms of actually giving someone somewhere to live which was safe and secure and free from a lot of the prejudices that they'd experience on the outside world.

PC: A safe time I suppose.

CG: Absolutely, absolutely, and it was, and it was great. And it was safe for them, it was safe for us for us as well; it was a good place to be and I really ... And I still, funnily enough, because I still live fairly close to one of the hostels, when I drive past there I still look in there and I still have a lot of affection, a lot of pride about what was done and that's still being carried on now, so. And I'm glad, I was glad I was part of it really, very glad I was part of it. So it's, yeah, it was good.

PC: I mean it sounds like you were almost a counsellor as well as...

CG: Yeah.

PC: ... as well as actually [16:36 shopping via] benefits and that kind of stuff.

CG: Yeah, absolutely.

PC: But I presume I didn't have any, for example, counselling training or...

CG: No, no. I suppose the only semi training I might have had was when I was on Switchboard. But yes, I suppose on one level it almost felt like counselling, but all you were really doing is you were talking to someone. You were talking, if it was a friend, it was as if you've come round here, you've sat down, you've got a problem, you sit down and talk. And so that's what it felt like; you were just dealing with a friend. And OK, on the other side of that relationships might have got difficult 'cause they knew I had to deal with rent arrears or problems like that. But most of the time you got over that worker / resident type relationship, it was ... it almost felt like, in a lot of instances, it was friends and I could quite honestly say, hand on heart, yeah, it really did feel like they were my friends. And as I said, they were my age as well. They weren't hugely different to me. Their experiences weren't hugely different to mine. It just so happened that I worked there and I lived there. But our experiences weren't different. And even if there was a bigger age gap, there still some experiences that we can relate to one another and we can learn from one another so, I think it worked really ... I don't think, I know it worked really, really well.

PC: And they were paying rent I presume?

CG: Yeah.

PC: Yeah, you talked about rent arrears, so I mean do you remember about the rent at that time?

CG: Do you know, I can't remember. We had an unusual charging system because they ... oh, I can't remember how we did it, I know they had licenses 'cause there was something about ... There was some particular way of charging that we had and I can't remember. But I mean most were in receipt of benefit anyway, so they were claiming housing benefit. So generally speaking that was sorted out. Some were working and therefore they paid a reduced level or rent, but I can't remember what the rent was. I remember doing the rent books and doing all those and I had no head for figures at all! But I remember having this leather folder we used to have, and every week we used to have to go and tot up the rent, oh it was just nightmare! I hated all of that.

PC: I mean this pre ... we're talking pre-Microsoft here, aren't we?

CG: Yes.

PC: Not being funny or anything...

<Laughter>

But...

CG: No but...

PC: ... so we're talking big ledger books and...

CG: Well yes, in effect, yes. No, no absolutely, no absolutely, it was at that point, we weren't doing anything on a computer. Within the three years that I worked there, towards the end we introduced an accounting system, Sage, I think we did. That was introduced by ... we had an old book keeper, well she was a finance manager, and she introduced that. But up until that point it was all done on these bits of paper and I said, 'I didn't know my arse from my elbow quite frankly, certainly in relation to finance!' But we did it.

PC: And what about your salary? Did you have enough money to live on?

CG: At that point, it was probably one of the best paid jobs I've ever had! <Laughs> By comparison, to what I'm earning now, it's actually not a huge ... and that was 20 odd years ago, it's not hugely dissimilar! It was good ... I was on, I remember ... 'cause initially I worked ... oh did I do it for the whole period? When I initially started working there I was on three days a week, and I was on £18,000 pro rata. So that was 20 odd years ago, so actually the salary was pretty good back then. So yeah, it was probably, by comparison, probably near the best paid job I've ever had, but...

PC: And do you know how it was funded?

CG: I think it was at that time we got funding from certainly the Housing Corporation, some of the local authorities as well, that's how we got the funding. Yeah, and also we worked with the various different housing associations, so they owned the property and yeah, they owned the property and we, in effect, leased the property from them, and we managed the

property on their behalf, basically that's how we did it. So we were merely ... not merely, but a managing agent in terms of the actual property, never owned the properties. So that's how we managed to do what we did. But yeah, it was primarily funded ... and also the residents had ... we managed to negotiate with various local authorities move-on rights in that they would give us an allocation of maybe one property or a couple of properties a year, and then they would then say, 'OK this property is available,' and we could allocate somebody for that property. So a lot of the people, certainly in that early stage who were in the hostel, they were guaranteed they were going to move into social housing. OK, so with the Housing Association, with the local authority. So that was also a great thing. I mean I would be very surprised if they could still do that now, but certainly back then we did negotiate those rights with the local authority and housing associations, so actually it was quite good. Somebody would stay there a year and a half to two years and move into to permanent accommodation, which was fantastic.

PC: That's great.

CG: Yeah, just absolutely ... and under no other circumstances would they have been able to actually do that.

PC: Yeah, so it's just showing that good work was being done...

CG: No absolutely.

PC: ... by Stonewall Housing, yeah.

CG: No, absolutely, it was great! It was a great opportunity!

PC: So people could stay in the hostel for up to two years almost?

CG: That was generally speaking, yeah, how long. It was medium term and we would hope to get somebody re-housed within about two years. Especially some of the accommodation which was much more like a hostel in its set up, because it's more difficult for people to have actually lived there long term really so. And that was always our aim as well, so basically get people to the stage where they could live independently and we could support them to live in effect, that was the end goal for ... spend a bit of time with us, in a sense we'll look after <chuckles> you, it'll all be very lovely, lovely, lovely, then actually slowly but surely we'll let you go and move into your flat. And we still supported people once they moved into a new property, so we didn't just leave them. We supported them, we got them set up, we got them grants and stuff to furnish their flats and we were always there if they needed and quite a few of them I'd go round and visit whilst they were moving into a new flat, making sure they were OK and they were settled and all that kind of thing and they were accessing services if they needed and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

PC: So when people came to you, they perhaps had a crisis moment.

CG: Yeah.

PC: And so ultimately you would turn them round and effectively get them potentially another house, like you've just mentioned. So when they'd come to you in a crisis then, what would that've been? Could they have been thrown

out of that other house because they were gay because their parents had found out or...

CG: The issue would've been that they would be at threat of losing their current housing, or actually being made homeless as a direct result of their sexuality. Because a lot of the young lesbians and gays that we saw then were in effect coming straight from home, and the issue had been with their family then finding out and then throwing them out, so there was a lot of that. And a lot of them had ... one in particular, which had a huge effect on me, is he'd been on the street, homeless, for quite some time, and we had helped him. I can't remember how he accessed the service, I think it was through one of the Central London agencies at the time, I think it was the Piccadilly Advice Centre, which I'm not sure is still about, and I think he came in through there and got some advice. Anyway, he was referred to Stonewall and actually got a place. And I remember, it was this lovely, beautiful hostel, lovely and clean and gorgeous and whatever, lovely, I mean it couldn't have lovelier, I mean it was the *crème de la crème* of hostels; it was fantastic. But he moved in, and he was great, then he'd disappear! He'd basically disappear for days and weeks and whatever, and then he'd come back, and he'd come and he was an epileptic as well. And then he'd disappear again. And there was no issue about him living there, he seemed to be fine, his rent was being paid, but he'd disappear, and he would go back to the streets because actually ... and it took me a while to work it out, but I just thought, you know what, actually he'd spent so much time living on the streets, that's where he felt safest, and that was what was right for him. And you couldn't force certain values or whatever; that's the choice that he made. And actually that was a difficult one because I wanted him to have somewhere nice to live and you've got all this, it's warm and there's lovely hot water and this, that and the other and none of that. But actually, where he felt safest was out there on the streets. And I think he left the hostel in the end, I'm almost sure he did. But he was happy. But I saw him a few times at Pride and stuff like that and he always seemed to be fine and got himself sorted out and ... So I think sometimes you've just got to trust that actually people generally are going to be OK and whatever little that we did, we might have done, still quite possibly helped him in making his own decisions about how he wanted to live his life. So yeah, that was good.

PC: It's an interesting case, isn't it?

CG: Yeah. I've read some theories about the un-housed mind, this was the phrase that they used, that some people just have that ... that's just their mind. It's not a passing judgement, it's just saying some people have un-housed minds, and it sounds like he, at some level like you say, he felt safer there, that's...

CG: But also on one level, even though it's not something I can even remotely imagine, being street homeless, the impression I got from it is there's something quite liberating about it as well. It was like he was free from any kind of chains of any description. He was under no obligation to do anything or go meet anywhere or whatever; he was just a free spirit, and that's the way he liked to live. And there's a part of me which really understand and really relates to that. There's a part of me, of course, I like my comforts <laughs>, I like hot water, I like eating! But there's a part of me that could really understand that just wanting to do your own thing, and given the opportunity to do ... and I suppose also being gay's all part and parcel of that; it's about making those decisions, 'You know what, this is how I lead my life, this is

what I want to do.' And, 'You know what, fine, get on with it.' Who am I to say, 'this is right,' or, 'this is wrong,' so.

PC: It's interesting, you said 'it might have been liberating for him,' and then when you think of sexuality actually, embracing your sexuality can be quite a liberating thing.

CG: Yes.

PC: So in a way I wonder if ... it's just a paradox, but I wonder if trying to house gay people is trying to put them into a model of straight living where there he is, this hero of liberating energy and going onto the streets.

CG: I suppose...

PC: I dunno, it was just this silly...

CG: No, no, no, no, no, I think it's a good thought and I think it's interesting. I also think part of it was, 'cause a lot of what I felt at that time in terms of, I suppose, that straight world with, 'You know what, as gay people, we don't have to do things in this way. You don't have to meet someone and then get married and then have kids with them and then buy a house and do all the ... we don't have to do that!' Our lives are ... it's like open a book, and there's nothing in it; you create it! You put the words on the paper. And that's always one of the things that certainly back then, I feel slightly differently now, but certainly back then that's how I felt. My life was my own, to make of it how I wished. And again, I think that's what I tried to get across to people as well, 'OK you're here, you're living in this hotel, but this is actually an opportunity because maybe this can lead to ... you're going to have your own place, you're going to have your own freedom, you make your own family.' And actually, family is a good word to describe it 'cause I felt like we were all part of a family. We were living there together, and OK, sometimes I felt like <chuckles> someone's dad, saying, 'OK, you should do this,' or, 'it's a bit,' or, 'you're a bit drunk,' or whatever, whatever, whatever. But, it was, it was kind of like a family. And it actually allowed people to play out some of those familial relationships as well, but I think that was actually the important thing to do because actually maybe they didn't have the opportunity to do it before, and it was a safe environment to do that and everyone's still falling about, and the fact that you're lesbian and gay. So yeah, in that respect ... as I said, there was a lot of very positive things about it, it was great, it was really, really good, really good.

PC: Yeah, I mean you said ... it's really been interesting what you've been saying and in fact I think it's really good to spend a just a little bit more time on it as well if that's alright?

CG: No, no that's fine.

PC: 'Cause you talked about the challenging aspects of working there and I just wondered is there anything else that we can bring out of that 'cause I think you've done such a good job in terms of saying the good work that's been done. I know you've also wanted to stress that it was difficult work as well, and I just wondered if we can talk perhaps a bit more about the challenging aspects of your time during Stonewall Housing, and you might want to here

bring out a wider political context if you might, I mean that's where we're heading in terms of the discussion, but...

CG: Well there was, I suppose, it was an uphill struggle. I remember Denise actually saying that, 'We have to be twice as good ... twice as good to be half as bad.' No, I can't remember what it was that she used to say. But basically we had to do it bigger and better than anybody else, and we were still going to get knocked down for it, and that was true. And you were constantly going into these meetings, you were dealing with it, you were standing up, you were saying, 'I'm a gay man,' na, na, na, na, na, na, and actually every time it felt like you were putting yourself, not just the organisation, but you were putting yourself on the line, and you were opening yourself up for criticism. And there were times, certainly at the earlier time when I started there, when actually I wasn't that confident and that really did challenge me. So there was all of that. You were going out, you were saying, 'I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay ... I'm gay.,' and you were waiting for the lash back. You were just waiting for it. So that was hard, I'd say that was very hard. We had Section 28 then as well, which was, in terms of us as an organisation at one point, when we first heard about it, we were thinking we would lose the funding and that we would not be able to do what we'd set out to do. Because actually what we were doing, we were promoting homosexuality, we were ... that's what we were paid <laughs> to do. So there was a lot of that, and as a result of that we did a lot of campaigning stuff. And again, as a result of that, getting much more involved in the politics much more, was again interesting, but difficult, 'cause it's something I suppose I'd really, prior to that, really involved myself in. I was a bit of a bystander, yeah OK I knew the issues and blah, blah, blah, blah, but actually you were going out there and you were marching, you were marching for this right to be who you are, and marching for this right to be able to help people become who they are naturally, not indoctrinate anyone into turning gay or anything ridiculous like that. So I suppose then at that time, it all took on a different edge really, and I suppose it was ... being a little less coherent about this ... Yeah, it just became much more serious, the ... Yeah, it just became very, very serious because then at that point, as I said, we were thinking we were going to lose our funding and potentially all the good work that had been done would just go into nothing. And it was an attack on our rights, an attack on our liberty and it was scary quite frankly! It was scary what was being done. So we had to do something about it. And we did, in our own way, we held our ground. We were doing something that we believed in, so it was very easy for us to hold our ground. And eventually, you weather the storm. So yeah, I mean that was some of the challenges really. Lots of others everyday challenges were a nightmare <chuckles>; nightmare tenants who tried to burn the place down once.

PC: Really?

CG: Yes

<Laughter>

And I remember it was this big strapping fellow <chuckles> resident that we had and burnt the place down and we had to evict him immediately. I think I was there, I don't think I've ever been so scared in all my life, but actually he went, <chuckles> which we were very fortunate. But he went without too much fuss 'cause I thought oh god, we're going to have to call the police,

we're going to have to do this, it was not something we wanted to do blah, blah, blah, blah, I mean it was just horrible.

PC: Was there actually a fire?

CG: Was there actually...

PC: Was there actually fire?

CG: Oh no, yeah.

PC: So the fire brigade was called out?

CG: Yes! They set fire to his room.

<Laughter>

It was terrible! <Laughs> And it was almost ... and then you're thinking oh god they've set fire to his room, and then of course the neighbours the know that it's a lesbian and gay project, and then it's going to kick off, and then na, na, na, na, na, na. So you were constantly, constantly just ... pre-empting what might be said, or what might happen or whatever, whatever, whatever.

PC: Literally fire fighting.

CG: Yes.

PC: <Laughs>

CG: You were literally fire fighting. So that was difficult and there were lots of aspects of it that I did find very hard. But I mean overall I will go back to say, actually the day to day stuff, the interaction with the residents stuff, that's what made it all worthwhile. It really, really did, the work that you were doing, knowing that actually it was good, it was right, it made it all worthwhile. So yes, there were challenges, but there were enough positives to balance things out, so you didn't feel too negative about it really. So it was good. So I lasted there three years.

PC: And how did you leave?

CG: I left because I think I decided ... back track a little bit, I did a lot more ... we had a resident who was HIV positive. And at times as well in the early 80s ... no, no sorry, in the mid 80s it would've been for me, working at the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, doing a lot more stuff round safe sex, HIV, education and all that business, and dealing with someone with HIV in the hostel, that then got me moving more into HIV. So I actually left Stonewall and I went to work for a HIV organisation, it was called Frontliners at that time, and I worked there ... yeah, I worked at Frontliners. And I worked there for one year, but I continued to work in HIV for the next ... oh shit, the next ... 9 ... say about 13, 14 years. No, maybe even longer. No, I'm lying! It's ... no it's more like ... oh it's a long, long, long time! It's probably in excess of 15 years, it's a long time.

PC: As a caseworker?

CG: Yeah, that's what I did, I mean basically I was advice. At Frontliners I did housing and benefit advice and then I moved into being a generalist advisor, giving advice about everything when I worked for an organisation called London East Aids Network, which is now called Positive East. I worked for an organisation called Blackliners, which I'm not entirely sure if it still exists anymore, and that was specifically for basically black people with HIV. Then I worked for Camden Citizens Advice Bureau in their HIV project, and it's only in the last two and a half years that I left that work to go into a bureau, so I'm now managing a bureau, but yeah, generalist work, so we don't do specialist work. So I mean my HIV background is, as I said, 15, probably too many years that I care to remember quite frankly. But yes, my experience with Stonewall helped me move into ... it almost felt for me a natural progression, to move into HIV work as well, so. And again, I loved that area of work because I loved the interaction with people so. And a very different type of interaction and very different communities of people as well. But for me, very interesting and very rewarding all the same really. So yeah.

PC: Yeah, it's going to continue, isn't it, you can see it.

CG: Yeah.

PC: Yeah.

CG: And even now, even though I don't deal with clients or residents or whatever you want to call them, I now manage people, I still enjoy that interaction; it's the people bit that I love really and still love. And I still, backed by time back then, as to the formative of years in terms of certainly professionally and to a large degree personally, who I am now.

I met my partner, my ex-partner I might add <laughs>, 15 years when I was working at Stonewall, so yeah. And I had a child at Stonewall, when I was still working ... oh I'd just left Stonewall when Declan was born, and he's 18 now. So yeah. Actually that shows, so it's 18 year, Declan's 18, so no, I would've worked in HIV for 16 years then yeah, and Declan's 18, so yeah.

PC: Sorry, just to confirm, you had Declan during the time you were working at Stonewall?

CG: I left Stonewall, because it was when I worked at Frontliners that he was actually born in 1990, December 1990 he was born.

PC: And you met your ex-partner during your time at Stonewall or...

CG: My ex-partner was ... and that's a funny story actually because he worked ... I should haven't a care to mention that. No, no, I don't mind ... anyway. His <laughs> ... We employed his boyfriend at the time as a hostel worker on this short term contract and I happened to be working alongside him, I was showing him the ropes or whatever. And so we got on really, really well, we liked him and he was a good laugh and stuff like that, he was younger than I was at the time so. And that was good. And anyway, they split up at Christmas. So I got to know my ex because he used to come and pick up him and blah, blah, so I got to know him, blah, blah, blah. Anyway, they split up and I went round to see ... as I got quite friendly with both of them I went round to see my ex-boyfriend, this other blokes ex-boyfriend that Boxing Day, and we chatted, and we chatted, and we chatted, and we chatted for about 24

hours, which was lovely, it was really lovely. And then the natural ... or just anyway, we just got it together and we were together 15 years. And then the ex-boyfriend who I was still working with accused me of <laughs> ... accused me of stealing him away, and I thought you'd broken up! I didn't know any of that anyway, it was just stupid. But anyway, I met my ex through Stonewall.

PC: Yeah, it sounds like a completely intense time then? You've got this amazing new project work, this pioneering work really.

CG: Yes.

PC: And your social life, your love life.

CG: Yes. Well no, I mean also it was all through the work; it was all through the work, it was all through the politics of the time because he worked for a lesbian and gay unit for one of the local authorities. So he was doing the same kind of work that I was doing. So it was all very challenging. We all believed in what we did and it was ... it wasn't even work, it had become a way of life really.

PC: I mean you said 'family.'

CG: Yeah.

PC: You said your work was 'in a way, a new way of having a family.'

CG: Yeah absolutely, absolutely. I mean there's lots of the people that, way back then, I still have contact with, I still see and you know. So it was, and for me it was always much, much more ... they were always much, much more than jobs for me. Yeah, always, always. Every job I've ever had, I still see people, people I worked with, or people who actually I worked with or were employed with me, people who I've worked with in terms of being residents or clients, I still see them around. I haven't moved out of London; the scene is still, even though a lot larger now than it was back then, it's still small enough that you bump into people or you hear about people and stuff. So you still know people's lives are going on and they're doing their own thing, they're happy and that's important, I suppose ultimately the most important thing really.

PC: Yeah.

CG: I mean that's...

<End of Part 3>

... amazing. Thank you. I think we'll end, if that's alright, with a very general question, and again, answer it how you feel comfortable, about the changes that have affected the LGBT community since that time with you working at Stonewall Housing. I mean obviously we're not going to be able to cover this in any comprehensive way, but perhaps just a sense from you really of the changes for perhaps you or for the LGBT community, the changes from then to now. So this is a social question I suppose, or a political...

CG: Do I think ... I suppose the question is, do I think things are much better now than they were then?

PC: That's a way of interpreting it, yeah.

CG: I think things are different. I don't necessarily think things are necessarily better. I think yes, there may be other laws out there now that may protect you or give you certain rights. But I still think certain things, it feels from where I'm sitting, certain things never change. And there's still that discrimination out there, there's still that ... I am 45, I am an out gay man, I've been out a lot longer than I've been in kind of thing, and I realise that I'm still maybe sometimes a bit selective about what I say in what company, because I don't know. I still certainly wouldn't walk around where I live hand in hand with my partner. Things like that don't change. I have a son who's 18 and when he was going through school I'd hear all the homophobic crap that school kids ... yeah OK, maybe in jest or whatever. But actually it has some meaning to someone out there; it resonates something for whatever reason, it's still there. So yes, I think in some respects there are certain protections in law, but I think that it's the same issues that are still out there. We're not completely prejudice free, we don't live a completely prejudice free society quite frankly, and we've still got a long way to go. Yes, things have moved forward a bit. But we've yet to attain true equality really and I suppose back in the Stonewall days when I was working there, that's what we wanted, was we wanted equality. We didn't want some second rate allowance kind of thing, we actually wanted parity with our heterosexual counterparts; that's what we wanted, we wanted equality. And I still think we're yet to actually fully attain that. So I suppose, to a very broadish question, that's as simplistic as I can put it really.

PC: Yeah, I mean that's definitely...

CG: So yeah.

PC: No, that's very interesting. Thank you.

CG: No problem. No problem at all.

PC: Is there anything else? I mean you covered about three of my questions in one whole section, so that's why I didn't really break it up, and there are three sections to our conversation. But is there anything that you think I've missed, or that you've desperately wanted me to ask you, or...

CG: No. I suppose it was ... No, I don't think there's anything ... I mean I think there's probably a load more ... Funnily enough, talking about, thinking actually I didn't have any much to say, I'm not saying it's of any use anyway, but talking about, it made me think actually there was so much that we did, and there was so many things that went on and so many things that I was involved in, and it's just reminded me of a lot of that. So I suppose of course there's a limited amount of time we've got, so there's a limited amount what you can actually talk about. But actually there is a lot more there, 'cause I'm 45, that was almost 25, going on ... yeah 20 years ago, over 20 years we're talking about really and I've said lots in that 20 years, a lot's happened. And I do think that was, as I said earlier on, in terms of me being who I am professionally, that was a key moment in time for me, and it's still a lot of the beliefs that I have. A lot of the equal ops stuff I still refer back to, not just equal ops, policies and practices that I'm trying to get passed in my current organisation were standard back then, and that was about 20 years ago. So

it's ... yeah, it's a funny one. So no, I don't think there's anything more you could've asked for 'cause I think we could've gone on for ages.

PC: But I think an oral ... as you say in speech marks, an oral history interview would probably go over three or four days and you'd have three or four hours each time. So you can imagine that that would bring up so much more. But in almost an hour and a half, we've covered so much. So thank you so much.

CG: No, that's OK, no problem.

<End of recording>