

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Paul Burston

Interviewer: Mark Hutin

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Key

MH: = Interviewer, Mark Hutin

PB: = Interviewee, Paul Burston

[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

MH: Paul, could you start by you stating where and when you were born?

PB: I was born in York in 1965, but I moved, after initially a couple of weeks, to South Wales, to a place called Bridgend where I grew up. I spent the first 19 years of my life in misery <laughs> no it wasn't all misery but it wasn't easy.

MH: So thinking about that then could you tell me a bit about your background and growing up and so on before you came up to London?

PB: Well I was always very academic, well before I was ... I was always an avid reader, since I was very little I was one of those classic torch under the bed clothes type people and my father wasn't very impressed by this. And I wasn't very sporty. I was getting called a poof at the age of about six at school; I was bullied a lot at school and as I got older, well actually it was probably a lot when I was younger and then there was a kind of gap where I didn't get bullied. And then once the puberty came and the dawning of one's sexuality, although I had girlfriends, I mean I had my beards but I knew I was gay and I was trying to sort of not be but it was sort of coming out anyway, so even though I was dating girls I was looking ever more flamboyant. So I was very into David Bowie, I had the Ziggy Stardust hair and I used to pluck my eyebrows and wear makeup to school. And so of course this didn't really help <laughs> in a town known for its rugby team in those days – now it's known for its teenage suicides of course, but in those days it was known for its rugby team.

So it was a very rugby culture, everything revolved around the rugby club, there was no bookshop in the town at all, not one, and if you weren't.... In order to be head boy you had to play rugby, so academic achievements were really secondary to sport in my school and it was quite a bizarre thing. It was a bit like a Smith's song, I mean there was this sadistic, vial, probably repressed homosexual sports teacher, he used to invent these ridiculous games where you had to sort of run around the gym shirtless and slap each other hard on the back – I mean what is the point of that, except just to punish people for nothing, and it was just horrible. So by the time I was 16 I thought, I've got to get out of here. So I was going to leave school at 16 and work for the local newspaper, and then I realised if I did that I'd probably be stuck there forever, so I thought, no, I need to study. So I'd always been good at

certain, well not so much maths and science, but the arts subjects. So I did O Levels then A Levels and then came to London at the age of 19, ostensibly to go to college but really to be gay <laughs>.

So I went to college to study religious studies believe it or not, English and religious studies combined Honours Degree. Namely because I did RI at sixth form for A Level simply because the teacher reminded me of Debbie Harry and I had a bit of a sort of weird gay crush on her. She was called Moira Jones and she used to wear plunging v-neck sweaters, and had big boobs, and big spike heels, and blonde hair with black roots, and she always looked like she'd just been shagged in a broom cupboard and I thought she was just fantastic, I loved her. So I did it for A Level, although I was never religious.

So then I came to college to Twickenham, St Mary's College in Strawberry Hill, which is part of the University of Surrey, and quickly discovered that being in a college called St Mary's and studying religion wasn't going to be the same as doing it in an academic way. And I was being taught by, you know with dog collars, they were telling me that, 'This was the word of God.' And I was just saying 'Well hang on a minute, my bible is...' I had my bible that was all marked in different highlighter pens to show you where different texts were inserted and everything, 'No, no, no it's all the word of God.' So I was like OK I need to get off this course. So the only available course that ran concurrently was drama, which I did. And that was the turning point really in my life really was doing that, because although I never wanted to be involved in dra... well I didn't think I wanted to be involved in the theatre in any way. But the way the drama was taught there really helped you to become a writer because it was all about taking the t ... whereas in English you would study a text then write about the text, in drama you'd actually take the text apart and act it out and learn about how it worked, and how the dialog worked, and actually improvise around the text and stuff like this, so it stimulated you creatively. And you also had to keep what they called an observation file, which was basically a big A4 folder where you'd have to write down thoughts and observations and little bits of dialog and things you saw. So it was kind of like a writer's notebook really.

<Chuckles> I left there in 1987 with no idea what I wanted to do. I poned around on the fringe theatre for a little while and realised that was just not gonna happen, that was not gonna work, I didn't really like it and So I sort of dedicated myself to being gay fulltime pretty much <laughs>. I went clubbing a lot and I had a lot of older gay friends, so when I came out I sort of found gay men my age a little bit trivial, and I wasn't really interested in the things they were interested in. So I sort of cultivated this group of older gay friends who, one was my first sort of flat mate, a flat share and then his friends and so one, and they sort of mentored me as it were, they were like older brothers really and they showed me the way. And sadly they all died because there was that generation that was hit by AIDS so that really politicised me. So by sort of late 80s I was a very angry young gay man <chuckles> and also a very grief stricken young gay man who had been to far too many funerals for somebody that age. And so I said I wanted to go into gay politics.

So I started by ... I got involved in ACT UP which was a great way of expressing your frustration and grief really, as well as ... I think they did good work in raising awareness. But it was ... a lot of people in ACT UP are really

there to sort of express their, to share their grief with other people and to show how that grief expresses itself which is through anger and action.

MH: So what was ACT UP?

PB: It was an abbreviation for AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power and it started in America. It was a very different situation in America of course, because in America AIDS hit there first and it was really about getting the ... when Larry Kramer started it, it was very much about getting the government to actually acknowledge there was a problem and to release the drugs, to release AZT. Which of course it turned out was not a very <huh> good drug, and there's still question marks in some people's minds that it actually killed a lot of people that wouldn't have died otherwise. But ACT UP here was much more about tackling media – there was a lot of homophobia in the 80s in the media, I mean AIDS was treated appallingly. I mean it was ... there was famous James Anderton, police from Manchester who said that you know, 'Homosexuals are swirling in a cesspit of their own making.' There wasn't a lot of sympathy for people with HIV and AIDS because they were seen as being gay and therefore deserving ... there was even talk about putting them all on the Isle of Wight at one point. Tabloids, they were rabid in those days, I mean there as no ... it's so different now, even the *Sun* now would not be like that I don't think. I mean the *Mail on Sunday* is still stuck in the 1950s but ... I mean the *Mail*, the *Mail* itself. But it was a very hostile environment. And you had Section 28 as well, which had sort of galvanised a lot of people who, I think prior to that a lot of people just felt that there was this inevitable move forwards, and people always assume that progress is natural and inevitable – it isn't, you know things can go back any moment, you have to keep pushing. I mean look at the problem in California recently. And I think Section 28 shocked a lot of people 'cause I think after the ... the 60s was the kind of birth of gay, Leo Pierre, the first gay liberation front marches and demos and stuff in the late 60s/early 70s, and by the early 80s you had AIDS on one front and then you had Section 28 and Margaret Thatcher and Victorian values. And there was a very clearly defined enemy which was the Tory party, who were viciously homophobic in those days. And so the community was very political, it was very easy to be political; nearly everyone you knew was political. It's very different now, to find someone now who is political is very rare.

We were terribly earnest and very angry in those days <laughs>.

<End of Part 1>

<Part 2>

MH: Well thinking about your involvement with Galop, could you tell me a bit about that, what your role was to start with?

PB: My role was fundraising because I was involved in ... my twin role was an actor, but I did media liaison and I did fundraising activities. So I organised benefits and things like that and people like Regina Fong and Neil Bartlett and Bette Bourne and all those sort of old stalwarts used to come and perform for free and we'd raise money to keep us going. And Jimmy Somerville was also involved and he did a lot of fundraising with us as well and for us. So the job that was advertised for Galop at the time was ... at the time I was earning money by working for a telephone interviewing company, market research, phoning up housewives and asking about washing powder, so it was very

rewarding. So I saw this job advertised in Capital Gay and I thought I could do that, so I applied and I got it.

MH: So what year was that?

PB: That would've been, I guess '89 or '90 maybe – it's a bit blurry now <chuckles>. It was '89/90, I mean '89/90 was the time I was already an actor, but I was still involved in actor when I started working at Galop so it would've been about the same time. But the job, it was a job share basically because one of the people ... there was two fulltime members of staff at the time and one of them had gone part time 'cause he had another career. So I was working on a 20-hour week and inevitably that involved, not just doing the fundraising stuff, but also being involved in answering the phones. And in those days it was ... I mean the police stakeouts were just, you know I mean it was ridiculous, it was just, there were people on the phone every day who had been arrested by [1.52 pretty/petty] policemen or lured into something. So you'd answer the phone to these often married men who'd been arrested and didn't know what to do. And we had a group of gay friendly and gay solicitors who would work on a sort of legal aid basis defending them, and there was one in particular called Angus Hamilton who was instrumental in getting the laws changed really, 'cause he took on this cases that really shamed the police.

I mean there was one famous <chuckles> episode where a guy ... I can't remember where happened, I think it was in Clapham maybe, but basically the police had actually sort of installed a police officer hidden in the ceiling of a public toilet with a hole in the ceiling and waiting for somebody to do anything. And then the crime was that they were outraging public decency. And what Angus argued very convincingly in court was, 'Well had the person not gone out of their way to look for it they wouldn't have seen it, so the fact is the person spent all this time and is this really a suitable deployment of police resources which is tax payers' money?' So the case got thrown out of court, so increasingly the police they would find that they weren't winning these cases because the lawyers were actually running circles round them. And the police in those days, I mean they were pretty thick <laughs>.

And the other thing that happened was that there was, a roundabout the same time, there was Colin Ireland, who was the gay serial killer who was picking up men at the Coleherne and so on and was killing people. And there was an awful lot of queer bashing happening, and there was an episode where a young guy called Mark, I can't remember his surname I'm afraid, but it must've been years ago. But a young guy called mark was beaten up on Clapham Common and died of his injuries, and at the same time that this was happening the police were on the other side of the Common chasing gay men around the bushes to arrest them. So these two things happening at the same time kind of really provoked this outrage among people, and the group Outrage was formed, Peter Tatchell and a group of other people started that.

So there was just this sort of general sense that we weren't ... there were all these laws on the statute book which were specifically gay. So gross indecency did not apply to straight people, so if straight people were caught having sex in the car it was lovers' lane, and if gay people were doing it it was gross indecency. So there as a clear homophobic thing going on in the law. You know gross indecency was the crime for which Oscar Wilde was imprisoned 100 years previously so <chuckles> it was a bit ridiculous. And

the age of consent for gay men was 21, so there were people being arrested and charged and even imprisoned, where somebody was ... I mean I was breaking the law on a regular basis, I wasn't going till I was 21 to have sex for god's sake, I mean I was 19!

So there was a lot of issues and there were a lot of reasons for people to be calling us. So people could call us, most of them would be so-called sexual offences and a smaller degree would be people who had been the victims of crime, either they had been assaulted or threatened and they weren't sure what to do and they weren't sure if they would get a good hearing. There was even cases ... I remember one guy phoning up and a neighbour, a nosy neighbour had basically watched through the window to see him and his boyfriend and then made a complaint to the police. And those things were actually taken serious in those days, you know a nasty little, vicious little Mary Whitehouse look-alikes could actually get away with that crap in those day, it was disgraceful. So you had all this stuff going on and then you had all you know at the same time, until the mid-90s really you had people dying all around you as well, so it was just a really dark time, it was a really dark time, it was hard.

MH: So how long were you at Galop for?

PB: I think two-and-a-half/three years I think, 'cause it was a part time job so I started ... 'cause I was doing media liaison with ACT UP that sort of naturally, well not naturally but it kind of led in a sort of roundabout way to me ending up thinking about maybe writing for a living in some way or other. So I was there doing some of the odd interviews, I mean I think my first ever interview was with Regina Fong for Capital Gay <laughs> – start as you mean to go on. So I started doing an increasing amount of journalism and some of it was interviews with scene people like drag queens and whatever and entertainers, and some of it was more political. So, for example, I did this piece for, I think it was, yeah Capital Gay, and it was a front page news story which was about how police records on the police computer at the time ... I don't know how I got this information, somehow it landed in my lap, that they had these codes where they could basically ... they were actually keeping records of who they suspected of being HIV positive. So I broke that story, so I started doing more agitprop stuff as well, which obviously was natural to me 'cause I was an agitprop person by nature <chuckles>.

So I started writing more political and polemical pieces as well, so for the time I was at Galop, by the time I left I'd sort of become a journalist really so when I left it was to go on to do journalism. But it informed that working there, because having these ... I mean I even get these calls in my job here, I mean I get people ringing up and they've got no idea who to phone, and they ring up, oh they know Time Out's got a gay section so they ring up. I mean I had a woman last week who rang me up because she just walked out of her church 'cause she was so angry about homophobia, she was a straight old lady, you know? And she rung, she'd got so angry at the church so she'd walked out and she wanted to know how to get in touch with the Lesbian and Gay Christian movement, so one is still a sort of conduit for that really still.

<End of Part 2>

<Part 3>

MH: So over the two to three years that you were at Galop, did you see things change or were issues much the same during that time?

PB: Well the only change was that the police ... the shift in policing happened at that time, there was a ... I can't remember the guy's name, but it was a Chief Superintendent at Hampstead who was at the forefront of all this stuff, in terms of changing police practices. And he basically decided that if people were going off into this remote part of Hampstead Heath in the middle of the night, they weren't there to walk their dog, they'd gone there 'cause they know what was going on. So to all intensive purposes that was private, because the law at the time was gay sex was allowed between two consenting adults in private, that was the law, so anything outside of that you could be arrested for. And he decided to interpret private in a different way, so once that happened that sort of sent a message out to other police divisions.

So Galop, along with people like The Gay Business Association and representatives on Lesbian and Gay Switchboard and all these other different organisations at the time, set up this consultation meeting at The Lesbian and Gay Centre in Cowcross Street with the Mets liaison person, sort of community liaison person. And that would've been about '91 I think. And had this long list of grievances about what the gay community had against the police. Because the relationship between us and the police in the 80s was terrible, I mean there was you know police raiding the Vauxhall Tavern wearing rubber gloves, you know it was really awful. I mean ACT UP people were treated appallingly on those demos, and it was lots of cases of, what you would now call, police brutality. And there was this idea that the police was the enemy, I mean the thought that you'd ever see gay policemen on a gay pride march was just a ... I never dreamt that I'd ever see that in those days <laughs>.

So there was this shift which mainly came about through these handful of good coppers basically who were in a senior position who decided that this wasn't an appropriate use of their resources at a time when burglary ... you know if you asked the average person in the street what they were more concerned about, it wasn't what gays are doing, I mean the media may have portrayed it like that but the average person in the street was more worried about burglaries and being victims of crime than they were about whether people were on Hampstead Heath or not. So slowly as a result of this consultation also, these cases being so ridiculed and thrown out of court ... and there was several cases of arrest where the judge literally said, 'Stop wasting our time.' And chucked the case out of court. So the police stopped getting convictions. 'Cause the reason they used to do it was 'cause it was a really easy way of keeping up their conviction rates 'cause they were easy crimes, 'cause you arrest some closeted guy on Hampstead Heath, he's not going to test the case, he's going to plead guilty and try and keep it quiet rather than have his family find out 'cause often they're married men, you know? And even if they're not there was a lot of stigma attached to that. So it was an easy way for them to boost up their clean-up rate. But slowly because of these attitudes of these senior officers at the Met and because of people like Angus, slowly these things changed. So by the time I left the change had started, it wasn't resolved but there was a shift definitely.

MH: And just thinking from that time to present day, I mean how would you sum up the changed that have taken place since then within the police and their attitudes?

PB: I think there's been a revolution; I think there's been a complete revolution. I mean I'm not just saying ... that isn't to say that there aren't still officers, I'm sure there are, who view us with the same distain that they always did, but I think there has been a definite shift. I mean we used to do ... gay awareness training at Hendon, Galop would send somebody up to Hendon and they would talk to young recruits in the police force and the attitudes they used to come out with are unbelievable. I mean [4:28 IA] from that time really, which was you know, 'queers, urgh dirty queers' and all that kind of stuff. And now I think homophobia is still present in the force in the same way that racism is and in the same way that homophobia is present in society at large, but it's kind of, you don't speak or if, it's a bit ... then it was actually quite OK to be overtly homophobic, whereas now you'd have to at least pretend not to be, so I think the culture has changed so that it's not tolerated. And certainly, you know I was talking to this guy from *The Observer* earlier on, I mean I think that even before, somewhere like Merseyside, I mean when Michael Causer, poor teenage boy was beaten to death in Liverpool, I mean the police response to that was immaculate, they were fantastic. And it was actually the Crown Prosecution Service and the media that was at fault in that, I mean the police straightaway said this was homophobic hate crime and made a big fuss about it, the BBC had said it wasn't even news worthy except on the local news which is just a disgrace, you know? And then of course the one guy who was clearly, well <chuckles> sorry, it's the legal issue here isn't it, but I mean I personally suspect he may have been more guilty than the jury found him, put it that way.

So I think that the way that the police react now is very different to how they would've reacted then. I mean in those days to get the police even to acknowledge that a crime might be motivated by homophobia was impossible, I mean people would be beaten up outside a gay bar or on Clapham Common and they would argue everything other than that is the reason – it wasn't acknowledged that that could be possible. So the fact that we actually have homophobia, homophobic hate crime actually recognised by the force and by the law now is extraordinary to me. I mean that was such a sticking point, they were so stubborn about refusing to see that.

MH: So what do you think has contributed to such a revolution?

PB: Well I think partly it's generation, because I think ... by and large younger people coming through in large institutions tend to be a little bit more progressive than the generation before, by and large, not always but by and large they do. I think there was a lot of hard work on the part of people like Peter Tatchell, Stonewall Group, a lot of organisations that put a lot of time and effort and campaigning into winning people round. Also the government, which initially at least I was overjoyed to see and had a lot of faith in <chuckles>. And a lot of the changes that have come about in the law were also to do with Europe, so a lot of the things that Blair's government like to take the credit for, they didn't really instigate, they were sort of forced on them. I mean in many cases they dragged their heels as long as possibly could them, I mean Section 28 was one, they said in their manifesto for the '94 election that they would appeal Section 28 and then they didn't <chuckles> you know? It took them a long time and they had several opportunities to do so, 'cause I did a documentary for Channel Four all about it and found out exactly how many times a bill had gone through parliament where they could've easily tagged on an amendment that would appeal to the 28 but they chose not to. I think they were certainly more a friend of our

community than the previous government was, so there was a shift politically. I think rather than being homophobic they were just very cautious and very over cautious about things. I think that often public attitudes are actually way ahead of where the politicians think they are – politicians tend to be very, very conservative with a small ‘c’ because they’re worried about getting voted in all the time, so they tend to pussyfoot around things rather than take a strong line on things. But despite that, and because of all the other factors I mentioned as well, I think that there’s been a ... there has been a revolution, there’s no question.

I mean there’s been a civil revolution in the sense that there was, you know the 60s and 70s were defined by revolutions, i.e. protests and demos and zaps, I mean the activists called them zaps. But I mean they weren’t new, people in the GLF were doing that back in the 60s and 70s, letting mice loose in churches were Mary Whitehouse was preaching and all that kind of stuff, drag queens dressed as nuns, all that stuff. But I think alongside all that there was this sort of quiet civil Stonewall approach which was to kind of woo politicians and to get people to change their opinions and to get them onside. And it tended to be the gay friendly straights that did it because the gays, the labour gays, I found, were quite reluctant to even speak to me – actually none of them would. When I did this documentary for channel four it was in 1999 and it was to ask, well why haven’t they appealed this law? They said they were going to appeal it. And the obvious thing to do was to approach one of these very, very vocal gay MPs, and Stephen Twigg was on the cover of *Gay Times*, he was a *Gay Times* cover boy. And they all refused to talk to me, not one of them would speak to me.

We caught Chris Smith off guard at the unveiling of the Maggi Hambling Oscar Wilde statue in Charing Cross, and he was the nearest thing to honourable among them, I mean he actually talked to us. But he hadn’t agreed to it, it was just ‘cause we caught him when there was cameras there and we’re going to talk about it. But all of the others refused, they had no comment to make, Ben Bradshaw, Stephen Twigg, Angela Eagle, to their eternal shame, I mean I think that’s just disgraceful. I mean you look at the Harvey Milk film which obviously people would be aware of, and Harvey Milk’s message was we can’t sit back and wait for our straight friends to do everything for us, we should do it for ourselves, why are we so embarrassed about it. I mean would a black cause be championed by white liberals and the black MPs not say anything? Of course not, nonsense, it’s just there’s still this thing of, ‘Oh you know we mustn’t...’ There’s this internalised thing going on, you mustn’t be seen as a gay politician. And Harvey Milk wasn’t only a gay politician but he didn’t refuse to be that either – his message was that you should unite all these different groups of people and you should get the unions onside and get the other minorities on side, but you did that whilst still being unapologetically a gay politician too. And I firmly believe then that’s the honourable way to behave and I don’t think that our honourable members of parliament behave very honourable in certain cases. That’ll really annoy Stephen Twigg <chuckles>.

<End of Part 3>

<Part 4>

MH: Moving on and thinking a bit about the impact of Galop. Could you tell me a bit about the impact of Galop’s work on you? I know you already mentioned a

bit about how it sort of contributed to your desire to go into journalism and writing, it informed that. Could you tell me a bit about the impact of Galop's work on you?

PB: Personally? Well I mean, as I say, at the time it was a lot of ... there were a lot of reasons not to be cheerful <laughs> you know? There were lots of reasons to be disgruntled, and cross, and unhappy, and irritated, and outraged and it was.... ACT UP is a great way of expressing one's anger and frustration by demonstrating, getting arrested and making a noisy, loud protest. And Galop was a very good way of feeling that you're actually helping, so it wasn't so much campaigning, although there was some work involved, I mean as I said behind the scenes, meeting with police and trying to change their tactics on things. But mainly we were there for the people on the end of the phones, that was what I regarded, you know for me that was the thing that I took out of it the most, was being able to actually have someone ring up and you may have been the first gay person they'd ever spoken to in some cases – often they were, as I say, closeted married men in most, I'd say about 80% of the calls I had were from married men, if not more, and often you were the first port of call for them. So to be able to put them in touch with somebody who could actually help them and ... reduce the risk of them being convicted of a ... 'cause again, you've got to remember, people were being convicted of what were basically sexual offences, so that you were basically treated as if you were a paedophile or something. I mean it was really disgraceful, consenting adult behaviour was criminalised by the state at that time. So people were terribly distraught, I mean it wasn't like George Michael turning round and making a pop video out of it and having a good old ... fuck you <laughs> back at the people ... which I thought that was genius by the way, I loved it when he did that. But it was very different ten years before then, that was 98, you know '88, '89, '90 was very different.

So for me there was a lot of job satisfaction in the fact that you could actually be there to actually help people. And often I'd come in of a morning and they'd be the old answer machine would be flashing and there'd be about ten people who'd left messages since the night before, I'm not exaggerating, it was ridiculous. And you'd spend the morning ringing them back and obviously often they couldn't talk because, you know, this was before mobiles so they were ringing at their work or at their home and they wife might answer the phone or whatever. So it was a difficult ... it was a challenging job that side of it but it was, for me, very rewarding personally. And it made me surer than I was already that these were great injustices that had to be fought and changed. I used to get really annoyed with the apathy, well I still get annoyed with the apathy <chuckles>. But I used to get really annoyed with the apathy of some people, I mean you'd literally go out onto the scene to try and raise money for Galop or for ACT UP or whatever, and the sort of apathy of people at that time was just so ... I mean I can understand now why people might be apathetic, I can understand that because there's a generation ... I mean if I was 20 now I'd probably be quite apathetic too I think, 'cause I mean you look around and to all intensive purposes there's not really an issue, I mean there are still issues to be addressed but it's not like it was then so. Then everything was so loaded against you and there was so many reminders on a daily basis of just how unjust everything was and how virulent homophobia was in society, and in the media, and in your face <chuckles> that to be able to contribute in a positive way and actually help people who were the victims of that, for me, was very rewarding, very rewarding.

<End of Part 4>

<Part 5>

MH: And in terms of Galop's impact on others and on the LGBT community generally, could you tell me a bit about that?

PB: I think a lot of people weren't aware of ... there were a lot of people that weren't aware of us. I mean often times people would be referred to us by a switchboard and back in those days certainly a switchboard, I mean I used to try and ring the switchboard just to try ... I used to ring them when I was trying to get a new flat share for example, and you'd literally be on the phone and it'd just be engaged for seven hours <chuckles>. So how someone managed to get through to them and then get through to us is like, they took real determination. But I think there was a bit of a split as well at one time, which was when the consultation stuff started with the police, there was certain ... how do I put this? Certain activist types who thought that was a sell out, and there was a pamphlet that went round called Queer Power Now or something, anonymous – I know who wrote it but it was anonymous, but I know very well who wrote it. But it was distributed in clubs and that and it was basically calling Galop and Stonewall and all these people, anyone who did any ... anyone who talked to the enemy was a collaborator basically, which was just ludicrous obviously. I mean at the end of the day you have to talk to people if you want to change things, you can't just be angry and you'll just rage away into oblivion on your own, that's just pointless, you have to consult and communicate.

So I think the perception of us was quite mixed, I think the people that we helped we were beloved and for those that felt that we were collaborators we were the enemy, well not the enemy but you know we were selling out. I never understood that, I still don't understand that. I mean it's like what, so you've actually got a meeting with somebody who can actually change police policy, and you've seen it happen in Hampstead already, and this can actually happen across the met and you think that to go to this meeting and to say to these people, 'These are our issues.' Is somehow collaborating? I mean I can assure you those meetings were not pussyfooting, people were really in the face of the police saying, 'Look this is not good enough, you have to do this, you have to do that.' And there was a lot of issues that were put before them and obviously they didn't change everything all at once, it took time, but we got those things on the agenda and they weren't on the agenda before. So for the people that recognised the value of that work, and for the people that we helped I think the perception of us was very good, and we were basically a helpline largely.

The fundraising side of it I wasn't so good at as it turned out <laughs>. I did try but it was very hard. I mean you have to remember as well this was the worst of the AIDS years and, you know, everyone's efforts were going towards the immediate emergency, which was people literally needing drugs and care and so on. So a lot of the gay community's efforts were concentrated on that, and by and large ... the gay male efforts I mean, I know there were lesbians involved as well, and by and large lesbians weren't so affected by the law, well they still aren't and they weren't then, but I mean very few of our calls ever came from women. And I think, well, I'm sure some people would argue differently, but I think that's because the fact is they weren't facing the same amount of stuff that we were, they weren't getting

into contact with the police in the same way that gay men were. Although there were ... there were certainly calls from women who'd been harassed or abused or even assaulted, so those things happened as well of course and still happen. But the policing of gay male sexuality was the bigger issue at the time, and the policing of lesbian sexuality didn't really take place, I mean the police weren't really interested in lesbian sexuality, you know it didn't exist <chuckles> so, it was [4:32] Queen Victoria.

So I think there was a perception that we were maybe more of an organisation for gay men than for anyone 'cause most of our work tended to be directed towards helping gay men, and I never apologised for that and I still don't apologise for the. You know you'd have these circular arguments at The Lesbian and Gay Centre where I spent far too many hours in a basement discussing the finer points of things with people who were just ticking boxes. I used to find that all very, very frustrating, it was like, let us do our work.

MH: I've been speaking to others, other people have said that in that period of time issues for gay men, lesbian women were very separate, there seemed to be a kind of separatism.

PB: Well there was separatism, I mean it was bizarre because Section 28 kind of brought people together in a way that they hadn't been for years I think. If you trace the history of gay rights movement in this country, it started off as gay pride and it was, you know, gay meant male and female. Then you had a split with the separatism in the 80s and you had gay pride and lesbian strength which were two separate marches. And there were a lot of lesbian separatists involved in, for example, The Lesbian and Gay Centre, and their obsessions were the kind of sex that was correct for women to have and the kind of sex that wasn't correct, so they were very anti S&M and very anti this and anti the other. I mean I remember going from an active demonstration where myself and a gay man who had full blown AIDS spent four hours in a police cell – we'd handcuffed ourselves across Westminster Bridge and stopped the traffic 'cause we discovered that was the only way to make the news, 'cause if you make the traffic news they have to report you.

So we chained ourselves across the Westminster Bridge with handcuffs, and the police came and just cut the chain and pulled us in like fish on a line <chuckles>. Then of course they just ... we'd thrown the key, so they just cut one, they just cut the handcuff off so you had one handcuff left hanging on your wrist and no key. So we went back to The Lesbian and Gay Centre afterwards, myself and this other activist, and this femi-nazi on the door wouldn't let us in because we were celebrating S&M by having a handcuff on our wrist. So I told her where to get off in no er <chuckles> very clear terms and.... There was a lot of that in those days, a lot of it, and it sort of hung over a bit into the early 90s as well.

I think from the other side of the argument there were a lot of women involved in ACT UP, there was a lot of lesbians involved in ACT UP, a lot of women who put huge efforts into the early beginnings of Terrence Higgins Trust and the AIDS organisations and that should never be forgotten, I mean they were definitely there for us in a very big way, but there was also this tension between these two communities that didn't seem to have a shared agenda because their issues were very different to ours. I mean Section 28 brought us together 'cause it affected everyone, but I mean the main issues for women I guess at that time would've been sort of lesbian parenting issues

and things like that, whereas for gay men there was an immediate health crisis. There was a long, long, long debate about lesbian HIV, you know? And there was a woman who actually was part of ACT UP for many years, well for a year called Sheila [8:24 Montai] – this is all on police record so it's not like libellous or anything, who had her hand in the till and basically ran off with all the money that Jimmy Somerville raised by touring that year. And she claimed to be an Asian lesbian with HIV and she was a complete fantasist. And as far as I am aware there was never been to this day, a single recorded, substantiated case of lesbian on lesbian transmission of HIV so, I'm almost tempted to say that it was virus envy, you know? <Chuckles>

<End of Part 5>

<Part 6>

MH: We talked about lesbian and gay, and of course these days it's referred to LGBT. What are your thoughts on that?

PB: LGBT. I think it's great for ticking boxes if you're putting in grant applications, and I think that it's ... I think that a lot of people use it ... I think some people use it cynically, i.e. for ticking boxes, and I think some people use it because they think that it's inclusive. Personally I think it's a cul-de-sac and I think once you get LGBT then you take on LGBTQ, which I've now been ... I get sent books from America and they already say LGBTQ, and then it's LGBTQI, which apparently is intersex and Q is questioning. So I mean I just find it a bit of a non-starter really, 'cause I think if you follow it to its logical conclusion you're going to end up with like LGBTQI, not gay but happy to help out when they're busy. I mean how far do you extend this thing we were just fractures, and I think it ultimately becomes divisive rather than inclusive. I personally don't think that ... I don't believe although the ... when I was in the 80s, there were a lot of things in the 70s and 80s that one just took as read because they were the gospel, so one of the things was that bisexuals were doubly oppressed, which of course isn't true at all. They're oppressed for their gay lives and they're not oppressed remotely for the straight lives so that's bullshit for a start.

The other thing was that the transsexuals were ... I mean it was true that transsexuals were treated very badly, I mean male to female transsexuals were treated very badly often by lesbian separatists who accused them of infiltrating the women's movement and all this kind of nonsense. But the reality is that most transsexuals that I knew weren't politically active and wanted to be pretty ladies and live in the suburbs. So really, they didn't really have much of a shared agenda with gay men, or lesbians. And I think most people were, and probably still are, quite suspicious of bisexuals <chuckles>. I know several lovely people, I know a bisexual man, well actually I know several bisexual men and I know a couple of bisexual women who are genuinely bisexual and very comfortable in it and very upfront about it and good on them. But I think most gay men would not think like that about them, most gay men would be suspicious of somebody who said they were bisexual, it was like that old joke, bi today gay tomorrow, you know?

I had a lot of friends that went through a sort of bisexual/Goth phase <chuckles> before coming out. So everyone assumes that if you say you're bisexual that's what you really mean, of course it isn't but there's lots of suspicions and prejudices on different sides. And I think at the moment, I

mean I went to ... Cleve Jones came over, who was Harvey Milk's successor, came over for The Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and was interviewed on stage by Brian Robinson and spoke beautifully about Harvey Milk's legacy and about setting up the AIDS quilt project. You know there were tears; it was a very moving discussion. And then the first question from the floor was, 'What do you think about the appalling transphobia in the gay movement?' It was like, where did that come from in this evening ... what are you saying to this man, I mean what is he guilty of exactly? I mean this man, you should fucking bow down before him, he's done everything for our community for fucking 30/40 years and that's the first thing you say to him! I don't know.

I think LGBT is a great idea in principle, but in practise I think it's just.... I mean there was discussion about whether we should change the name of the section in *Time Out* to LGBT and I was absolutely against it and I am absolutely against it, for the simple reason, every other section tells you exactly what it is, so music says music, and books says books, and gay and lesbian says gay and lesbian – LGBT sounds like a sandwich and most people reading that would not know what that meant ... and I don't like acronyms <laughs> acronyms are not words. And as I say, once you go down that path it's like where do you stop? I genuinely have sincere reservations about what that means, 'cause where do you actually stop at the end of the day? It's like LGBTQI, we've already got there so that's six letters already, what's going to happen next, once that's accepted and embraced then what's it going to be. I just think it's, you know, political correctness gone mad.

<End of Part 6>

<Part 7>

MH: Just finally, in terms of summing up really, how would you describe the journey that's taken place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered people over the last 25 years and where do you think it's going?

PB: Well I think if someone had told me 25 years ago when I was what, 18, that I would be married, civilly partnered, split hairs, call it what you will, then I would've never believed them. If somebody had told me that ... I mean I had a transsexual friend in the 80s who, every time she travelled abroad, would get stopped at the passport control because her passport said male because they refused to change your birth certificate because, as I said, it was a statement of fact. Now, that's a bit of an issue and I think there are many transsexuals now ... I'm actually co-producing an event tonight all about transsexuality at the South Bank with the House of Homosexual Culture. And we have a transsexual woman on the stage who is very vocal about the fact that it's actually not healthy for people to pretend that they were always a girl if they weren't, it's not healthy for you, for you mentally. And the advice given by psychiatrists at that time was to tell people that they had to destroy photographs of themselves as they ... I mean it was just The reality is you weren't ... that's one of the issues that a lot of feminists had with the transsexual movement was, but you're not a woman, you're a transsexual woman, you do not know what it ... you did not grow up a woman, you did not grow up, you've never had a period, you've never had any of the experiences that they had. So there was still misunderstandings on both sides there I think. But this transsexual woman that I knew used to suffer terribly travelling with, as I say, would have been stopped at passport control and now that's all changed.

I think it's very easy when you're in the middle of all these changes to sort of just get used to them, but when you actually sit back and look back you think, bloody hell, we've come a hell of a long way! I mean I think AIDS derailed everything for a while, I think AIDS came in and took all of our energies, and I think that had AIDS not happened we would probably have got to where we are now ten years ago. But I think so much of our energies quite rightly were diverted into dealing with an immediate health crisis that was literally wiping out our community. I mean there's a generation that was pretty much wiped out, you know? I mean there are some survivors but not many. So I think had that not happened we'd probably have been where we are now ten years ago. But as it is I think it's pretty amazing that despite facing one of the biggest threats to humanity in living memory, and despite all the ... disadvantages that we started off with back in '81/82, to have got to where we are now, is remarkable! I mean to be where we are now where you can ... I mean homophobia hasn't gone away and we should never think that it has, you know there are still gay people being beaten up in the street in broad daylight, in Old Compton Street even, and there are still gay children and lesbian children and transsexual children suffering in school terribly. So these are just so real and the cost of freedom is constant vigilance, you must never ever forget that these rights that have been won can also be lost. But having said that I think there are lots of grounds for optimism and I think that we've got to a place now where if you live in certain parts of the country you can lead a pretty ... you can lead a life which is pretty comfortable as a gay, lesbian or transsexual person without raising too much prejudice on a daily basis. Not to say that there isn't some, of course there is, and I'm sure there's more for some people than others, I'm sure that the transsexual you doesn't pass very easily probably gets a lot more trouble than a pretty lesbian who looks like a straight woman.

I look like a gay man so I still get harassment, I look very gay and I make no apology for it and I still get people harassing me; my partner, who doesn't particularly look gay, never gets any grief unless he's with me. So it's different for some people than for others. I mean I know two lesbians who are very, very ... you know they have sort of rockabilly hair dos and where suits and ties, and they've been harassed and threatened with physical violence in recent months. So those pockets of homophobia haven't gone away and we mustn't kid ourselves that they have, but the overall picture is a hell of a lot brighter than it was 25 years ago <laughs> bloody hell! A hell of a lot brighter. And I think that there are still things to be sorted out, there are still issues to be tackled, there are still battles to be fought, not just here but also abroad. 'Cause I think we have to remember as well that the gay movement is an international movement and the International Day Against Homophobia, which I think is a really good thing, it's a good reminder that not everyone in the world is enjoying the freedoms that we take for granted now, there are still people being thrown off cliffs, and burnt alive, and hung-and-quartered in public squares in the Middle East and Jamaica and places like that, and we must never forget that and we must support the people as best we can.

I mean we did an event at Southbank last month called Foreign Trade which was all about people from other countries living in London and why they come here. And one of the guys was a guy from, I think Nigeria, an African ... I'm pretty sure it was Nigeria. And he spoke very movingly about he basically had to come to London because if he stayed in his own country he'd be dead, you know you could not be an average gay person. And I'm sure the same was true for those, well obviously the same is true for those poor people in Iran

who try and seek asylum, and they should be given asylum. If you're going to be killed just for being what you are of course you should be given asylum, I mean it's outrageous and there's a big question mark hanging over that. So there are still these issues and they do affect us because often these people come to this country for protection. But the overall picture is very, very different to what it used to be.

My husband has lived in this country for ten years, he's from Brazil originally and then he lived in Germany. And when I show him old documentaries, 'cause I'm an avid collector of things, I keep lots of stuff, and I show him documentaries about gay life in the 80s or something and he's just shocked, he cannot believe that it's the same country, it's like a different country. It really is like a different country. I mean you see those images, the cover of *Capital Gay* newspaper from '80 whenever, '87 with police carting Lily Savage and co into the back of paddy wagons wearing rubber gloves, I mean you just can't believe this ... and now where's Lily Savage? On daytime television, sitting there, an openly gay man hosting an afternoon chat show, I <prff> and that just sums it up, doesn't it? <Laughs>

MH: Absolutely yes.

[End of interview]