

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Peter Tatchell
Interviewer: Rasheed Rahman
Place of Interview: Elephant & Castle, South London
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Files: PT1-4

Key

PT: = Interviewee, Peter Tatchell
RR: = Interviewer, Rasheed Raman
[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time
[5:22 IA] = inaudible section at this time
Word 5:22 = best guess at word

RR: Could you spell your name and give your place and date of birth please?

PT: Peter Tatchell. Date of birth: 25th January 1952, Melbourne, Australia.

<End of Part 1>

<Part 2>

PT: I was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1952. My family were quite small conservative, very traditional working class. My father worked as a laid operator in an engineering factory, so I didn't see much of him because he mostly worked night shifts. My mother, when she first went out with my father, worked in a bank, but when they got married she was sacked because in those days women were not allowed to work in banks if they were married. I grew up in a city, working class area in the West Melbourne area, very heavy industrial part of the city.

RR: Did you enjoy school?

PT: Well, my parents were divorced when I was four and for a while I went to live with my maternal grandparents, who lived sort of out on the edge of the suburbs, you know near an area that's sort of just down the end of the road with all paddocks, and forests, and creeks, and rivers and things. And then when mother re-married my stepfather was a gardener, and then later worked in a factory, then later did a spell of taxi driving. He was very, very, very harsh and authoritarian. He was of Russian descent and he'd been very badly brutalised as a child and then inflicted a similar sort of brutality on myself and my half brother and two half sisters.

At school I did very well academically, nearly always close to the top of the class. I also did quite well at sport, particularly tennis, long distance running ... not so good at football and cricket, although I occasionally made the team. When I was at secondary school I went to the Australian equivalent of a comprehensive, [2:17] High School, co-educational mixed school. It was a new school; I was part of the first intake of founding pupils. We initially had port cabins in another school, so I had to bicycle about three miles to school when I was young, which was quite a far way and not easy, transport was

limited. At school I was sort of like, I did well and was liked by the teachers and the pupils but I was quite a rebel all throughout my school years.

RR: In what way?

PT: Well in about the second year of school I hit on the idea that we should set up ... that students should have representation on the running of the school. And so I managed to persuade the headmaster to set up a students' representative council, which he thought would just be a little talking shop and you know it would just keep us all happy. But then we kept on coming up with ideas about how to change the school and reorganise everything <laughs> it was quite a mouthful. And then in my last year at school when I was 16 we insisted that all the school prefects should be elected by the pupils and not appointed by the staff or the parents or whatever, which happened in some schools. And I was elected as head boy. Which was really interesting because I was a rebel and an outsider, you know I'd organised protests in the school playground against the American and Australian war in Vietnam; on July the 4th we burnt the American flag; I helped organise a secondary school campaign to raise money to send aboriginal children to school, like to give them scholarships, like a substitute for going out and working and earning a wage we gave them money instead to stay on at school. And that was done by me and lots of others, we organised together to do fundraising events like long walks and things like that, which we raised huge amounts of money, huge, huge sums of money. But it led me to be denounced by the headmaster as a communist. And there was a period where there was a sort of semi-threat that I might ... well not expelled but, you know, that I was pushing things pretty close to the line allying myself with, what were then, unpopular causes like campaigning against racism and for aboriginal rights. But still I was elected as head boy.

It was also strange because, although I didn't realise I was gay at the time, lots of other people did or assumed I was, and I was well known as Poofter Peter, or Peter Pansy <chuckles>. But in a nice sort of ... well obviously it had an element of prejudice to it, but it wasn't said in a vicious way, it was in a jocular way, and I was still chums with everybody and I was still voted head boy. I can remember at one of the interschool sports meetings overhearing some of the other guys on the sports team, there were some boys from another school who were wolf whistling at a couple of girls from our school. And I remember overhearing <chuckles> two of my colleagues from my school saying, 'Ah no, no she's no good. You oughta see our head boy; he's got the best legs in the school.' So yeah, it was quite amazing.

RR: So politicised at quite a very young age really.

PT: Yeah

RR: Why do you think that, was that to do with the war in Vietnam or was that to do with what you were saying, and what were your stimuli if you like, for becoming politicised so early?

PT: I guess it was partly due to my upbringing from my parents, partly religious and just partly common sense. They always taught me, you know, don't follow fashion; do what you believe is right; you have to take personal responsibility for your actions; don't go along with the mob and just follow everyone else. And also because I had a quite strict and orthodox religious upbringing, I was

quite well versed in Christian teaching and ideas, but somehow I thought they're not just ideas, these are things you're supposed to put into practise. So to me the Sermon on the Mount was a manifesto for revolution and liberation, that's the way I read it. When I remember ... I must've been about 11 when white racists bombed a black church, I think it was in Birmingham Alabama and three young girls were burned to death. I was really shocked and horrified by that and, you know, felt how could other people do this to other human beings? And I suppose also because the black civil rights movement was led by a reverend, Dr. Martin Luther King, that also ... I made that connection. And it sort of led me to, initially, be motivated around human rights issues from a religious standpoint, you know that we're all God's children, we're all equal and that love thy neighbour as thyself, be a good Samaritan. Those basic fundamental teachers, which of course are not exclusively religious, but in those days that's how I learned of them and understood them.

Now the first campaign I really did was in 1967 at a time when there was still the death penalty in Melbourne, Australia. A prisoner was due to be hanged for allegedly shooting at a prison warder during an escape. And I worked out at the age of 15 that he almost certainly did not fire the fatal bullet, and this is based on just a little aside I read in one of the newspaper reports, which mentioned that the bullet entered the warder's upper shoulder and exited through the lower abdomen. Now if the prisoner was running away and turned and shot the warder who was chasing him, how could the bullet have that trajectory? Not impossible, it could've been deflected off the bone I guess but unlikely. I think probably he was accidentally shot by another warder firing from one of the watch towers, but again, I can't prove that. But anyway, you know, he was scheduled to be hanged and I felt that was really wrong given the dubious evidence. But nevertheless he was hanged anyway. And that really shattered my faith and confidence in the police, the courts and the government, who I'd always looked up to. I'd always seen the policemen as my friend <chuckles> in fact there was due to be a programme on the ABC Radio I used to listen to as a kid, called My Friend the Policemen, and that's the way I saw the police up until that point. And I suppose it provoked really what amounted to a lifetime's scepticism of authority. You know after that moment I thought to myself, how and why should we trust those in power and authority when I have seen in this instance it being so wantonly abused? And this is perhaps just one instance of many, you know if this injustice or this miscarriage of justice can take place, what other things are happening that perhaps we don't yet know about?

So I really got very much more sort of engaged with looking at other things I'd taken for granted. Initially I got quite involved with the campaign for aboriginal land and civil rights against Australia's involvement with the Americans in the war in Vietnam, and of course against the draught for that war. I, at the age of 15 and 16, swore that I would not register for national service, that I would not fight, in what I saw, as an unjust war in Vietnam. It wasn't until a bit later when I was 17 that I realised I was gay and then that became a big issue for me.

RR: You'd left school by this point?

PT: Yeah I left school at the age of 16, I didn't have the equivalent of A Levels, just a lower sort of qualification. I did well but, you know, my parents couldn't afford to keep me at school, they wanted me to go out and work and pay for myself and contribute to the family income. So even though I was doing quite

well academically, and even though my teachers pleaded that I stay on, I just had to leave school. So I first began working in a department store. My passion was art and design, I didn't have any qualifications, I couldn't afford to go to university, so I thought well I'll work in a department store and learn on the job. So I signed up as just a junior dogsbody in the design and display department and eventually graduated to designing and doing windows, interiors, logos and all the design paraphernalia associated with a big department store. And I signed up at one department store but then was quite ambitious and went to the best department store <chuckles> and basically sold myself to the head boss. It was very, very hard to get in to work for this store because it was world famous, it won gold medals in design, and windows, and interiors and everything. But at the age of 18 I persuaded him ... I'd just turned 18 I think, persuaded the boss of Myer, the major big department store in Melbourne, to take me on. And had quite a meteoric rise, started off as a junior and then within a year I was a senior and helped design windows which won gold medals and international awards.

RR: And I read in your biography that your coming out at 17 was linked to what you had seen of the civil rights, is that correct?

PT: Well I realised I was gay in the early part of 1969, yeah soon after I was 17. And fortunately met a very nice guy at work, who was a little bit older, 21, but we fell instantly in love and we're still best friends to this day. The relationship hasn't lasted but the friendship, which to me is very, very important, has. Yeah <pause> soon after starting this relationship I was very keen to move out of the family house 'cause I was just fed up with the abuse, and threats and generally aggressive and unpleasant behaviour of my stepfather. So to me, moving in with my partner was a real big relief. First and foremost because we were in love, but secondly just to get out of the abusive family situation. That was just like an immense weight off my shoulders.

Late in 1969 I read a small report in one of the Melbourne papers which said, just something very brief like, 'Thousands of homosexuals marched through New York last night to demand civil rights.' And I remember reading that and thinking wow! This is what we need here. Because at the time in the State of Victoria, of which Melbourne is the capital, male homosexuality was still totally illegal, you could be put in prison for several years, you could be forced to undergo compulsory psychiatric treatment, including things like electric shock therapy. There were no gay organisations at all in Melbourne, no campaign groups, not even any help lines or switchboards, absolutely nothing! Just a couple of seedy bars and I think one café which I was never able to find. Definitely no gay newspaper or gay listings in any magazine or anything, it was just everything was just word of mouth. And for most gay people you met on a cruising beat, or at the beach or occasionally there were sort of ... like groups or circles of gay people would organise concert nights at hotels, or at cinemas, or theatres; there was an annual arts ball, but that was about it.

There was a tolerance but it was a very repressive tolerance, and it was a very grey area between legality and illegality. And I can remember, in many instances, hearing of people being beaten up by queer bashers, or even murdered, and the police doing nothing. In fact people were too frightened to report the hate crimes and killings to the police because they felt that they themselves were likely to be investigated and could be prosecuted. So the atmosphere was pretty bad. So after reading that report in the paper, I tried to persuade some of my friends to do something, I said, 'We've got to set up

some organisation, maybe not like marching through the streets but we've gotta do something to challenge what's being done to us. We can't just sit back and allow it to happen.' And they all thought I was absolutely mad! They thought, 'You are crazy, you're going to get us all arrested, we'll all end up in prison, you know just shut up and go away!' And some of them were quite a bit older and they treated me like a, you know, 'He's 17 what does he know?' And idiot, you know?

So all I could do at the time was write letters, mostly to newspapers challenging homophobic stories or just telling them about things that had happened. Like a gay man was murdered on the South Melbourne beat three days ago – the police have not interviewed anyone, there have been no public appeals, there's no proper investigation. Initially I was too frightened to sign my name even, let alone my address, but then eventually after a few months I signed my name, but then not my address <chuckles>. And then a few months after that I began to sign my name and my address. But I sort of fully expected they'd be police knock on the door, 'cause I thought you know, what happens if some nasty homophobe in the newspaper office is reading this and decides to phone the police? And my boyfriend was quite nervous about it as well, I mean he thought it was good what I was doing, but he thought we're standing close to the wind here on this one. And there was a danger if those letters had been read by the wrong people that they may have doxed us in, you know?

So yeah, it was a very, very, very different world from today. And it wasn't until I came to London in 1971 that I was able to actually join up with other lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and start campaigning on queer issues. Well when I arrived, the day after I arrived I was wondering around tourist sites in the West End and saw a sticker on a lamp post advertising the meetings to The Gay Liberation Front. The very next Wednesday I was there <laughs> at my first meeting at Notting Hill at All Saints Hall. And within a month I was helping to organise some of The Gay Liberation Front's very spectacular extravagant protests. To me that was an incredible personal liberation, you know, I'd been fighting for aboriginal rights, against the war in Vietnam, against the death penalty, but now at last I was also fighting for my rights as a gay man.

RR: And that choosing the direct action route, it sounded like it was kind of no question for you in a way, kind of going direct action rather than what the workers say Campaign for Homosexual Equality which is I suppose a more lobbying approach.

PT: Yeah I was aware of the work of The Campaign for Homosexual Equality but they did seem very fuddy duddy, and fusty, and respectable. They didn't wanna rock the boat, and I felt the boat not only had to be rocked, it had to be sunk <chuckles>. And that was the ethos of The Gay Liberation Front – we weren't there to plead for tolerance or to grovel before straight people, you know we were there to demand for and total acceptance on our terms, on our terms. And it wasn't just about equality, in fact it wasn't really about equality at all, we were here to transform society, we allied with the black and Women's Liberation Movements with workers' struggles, with the struggles against colonialism and imperialism. We saw ourselves as part of a bigger broader movement for the transformation of society. In our case what we wanted was a new sector of democracy which would overturn patriarchy and homophobia, but that was in the context of the liberation of black people, of women, of

workers and all oppressed people in this country and worldwide. It was a revolutionary agenda. No mistake about it, the gay liberation was a revolutionary movement, a movement which was intent on fundamentally changing the law's institutions and values of straight society. And in the process we also intended to benefit straight people, because we had the foresight to recognise that straight people didn't have everything perfect either, that straight people were also oppressed, you know? [22:04] slaves in factories, they may be straight, but they were still [IA] slaves, they may have a greater privileged position than a gay person, but they were still slaves in the factory and we wanted to abolish that whole system.

RR: So tell me about those. You said you were, 1971 so you would've been 19 at this time 19/20?

PT: Mhmm

RR: And had you come over with your partner or had you come to London on your own?

PT: Yeah I came to London in 1971 with partner Robert. We'd wanted to travel anyway and I in particular was not prepared to even register for national service for the war in Vietnam, so I was faced the prospect to stay and possibly go to prison for two years or leave the country. To my shame I left the country <chuckles> as did thousands of others. For a while I was seriously contemplating staying and risking imprisonment, but the government was very cannae and instead of arresting all draught refuses they would just arrest one or two here and there and everybody else would be under sort of constant threat and have all kinds of harassment. So if it had been possible to get, say a thousand people to refuse to register, and they all would've been jailed, that would've provoked a huge political crisis. You know it would not have been accepted by the general population, you know the mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters would've not put up with it. But the government realised that so they just selectively hand picked a few so the strategy as we envisaged it didn't really quite work.

So anyway, for all my sins I came here, and I intended to stay just for a brief while, maybe for two or three years because I, even then I was aware that the probability was that the war would wind down and Australia would eventually withdraw. Even when I left there was the prospect that Labour might win the following general election and they were committed to ending the draught, pulling out of Vietnam and granting some form of amnesty. So the idea was to stay here for a while and travel round Europe and maybe go back through Asia and eventually turn up when all those issues were resolved.

RR: And where were you living when you first moved to London?

PT: I first moved in, well we first stayed with a friend of ours from Australia who had come over about a year previous. He was living in Chiswick in West London. So we stayed with him for a few days and then got a flat nearby. And I began working doing similar sort of art and design stuff for stores here, as did my partner. Eventually we sort of drifted apart. I was much more political than him, just our lifestyles just gradually sort of were parting, a pleasant convivial parting of the ways.

RR: What was London like for lesbians and gay men compared to Melbourne I guess around that time?

PT: Compared to Melbourne, London was pretty close to queer paradise <chuckles>. First of all male homosexuality had been de-criminalised in England and Wales in 1967, and that wasn't the same as legalisation, you know there were still police harassment and victimisation. But the threat of someone coming in and bashing down your bedroom door and dragging you off to prison no longer existed. The other thing was that there were gay bars and clubs, not very many, but there were some and they were much, much removed from the couple of seedy bars that Melbourne had. But the biggest difference of all of course was the existence of The Gay Liberation Front, the fact that not just hundreds but thousands of gay people were organising and fighting for their rights.

RR: Tell me about those early meetings that you would go along to in those early campaigns that you took part in.

PT: At the All Saints Hall in Notting Hill Gate where The Gay Liberation Front had its weekly meetings, you'd often get 500 or more people. It was what I'd describe as, a glorious, chaotic enthusiasm <chuckles>. So many people from so many backgrounds, so many competing ideas, you know it was amazing how the whole thing more or less came together. There were fractious moments and disputes, but on the whole, amazingly, in this huge melly of people, you know there was someone who facilitated and convened the meeting and ran it, and somehow people managed to have their say and business got done. Out of those meetings there were sub groups like the action group, which planned the particular protests that had been agreed by the general meeting. There were other groups like the youth group, which did campaigns and specifically around youth issues and so on.

There was always a great tension in The Gay Liberation Front between people who were coming to it from sort of a mainstream liberal civil liberties perspective. Quite mainstream people who perhaps belonged to the liberal party or in a few instances the Labour Party, but who were radical but very much within the parameters of mainstream orthodox politics. They were a very much minority. The two other bigger groups were people who'd come to The Gay Liberation Front out of some form of left wing, or anarchist, or socialist, communalist background and others who had come out of the county culture, you know the hippies, and drop-outs, and students and people into lifestyle politics. And within Gay Liberation Front there was always this tension between those who had a political revolutionary orientation about transforming society, and those who shared that perspective but really felt it had to begin by changing yourself. So quite a lot of people would say, if you pose as a straight man and act straight you are a counter revolutionary. You know the true revolutionary gay men dresses in drag, camps it up, ditches masculinity, embraces femininity, that's the true subversion. And we would all go and live in communes and share all our possessions in common, share our partners in common.

Although we had lots of points in common, there was always this tension between the political and the lifestyle revolutionaries. And even within the political revolutionaries there were those who were very much of an anarchist disposition who believed in abolishing the State and letting everybody do their own thing, not having rules. Whereas others were more out of the communist,

socialist tradition and believed in changing the State and the State institutions to liberate, not just lesbian and gay people and their bisexual and transgender friends and others, but also straight people as well.

RR: Where did you align yourself within that?

PT: I sort of straddled both camps. I'd come to The Gay Liberation Front mostly out of a left wing tradition, but I could also see the value and importance in changing the way one lived one's own life, that as much as seeking to change society we also had to change ourselves. You know if we still had the mindset of straight men and of patriarchy, plus racism and all these other oppressive ideologies, then we would never bring about a true liberation. And certainly with regard to lifestyle I thought that the commune idea, at least in some form, was basically quite an empowering one, that dropping out of the nuclear family orthodoxy and living in a big household with others where you shared experiences, money, possessions, that was quite a revolutionary anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist agenda. And I saw the commune side of things as being a way of demonstrating the here and now what the possibilities of a future society could be, that there wasn't just one particular model in terms of how you lived your life and that the straight model of the nuclear family was, by comparison, very restrictive and efficient.

RR: And if you could just give me some examples of the kind of achievements of The GLF and its **33:17** over, kind of through the '70s I guess. And The GLF kind of fragmented in was it '76 or something?

PT: No, '74. There was always a tension in The Gay Liberation Front between men and women. There were some gay men in GLF who really embraced pretty much the sexist patriarchal ethos of mainstream society – they just wanted their place in it. They were prepared to do very radical things, you know occupation, sit-ins; they were prepared to get arrested. But essentially what they were after was their place as men in a male dominated society. Most of us however, were highly critical of that patriarchal setup and allied ourselves to the Women's Liberation Movement because we saw straight men as the dual oppressor of both women and queers. So for us, straight men were the enemy. Not all straight men, but straight men in general were the enemy of us as gay people and of women. And so therefore it was in our interests to work with and support the Women's Liberation Movement to challenge male supremacism, because by so doing we'd be undermining the machismo which lay at the heart of much homophobia.

Within The Gay Liberation Front there were never any formal restrictions or oppression of women, but it was predominantly a male dominated movement in that there were mostly men involved. And because there were mostly men involved most of the speakers at the meetings were men and much of the agenda was male oriented. It was concerned with gay male issues, like the unequal age of consent, and police harassment in cruising grounds, bars and clubs. As we know historically the visibility of lesbians has tended to be less than the visibility of gay men and the overt nature of State oppression has tended, through the law, to impact more strongly on gay men. That doesn't mean to say that lesbians aren't oppressed, but it manifests in different ways and it's less overt, more subtle. And so that meant that there was a tension within The Gay Liberation Front between men and women, women felt in a minority, which they were, they felt their issues were in a minority, which they were. And I think that this came to a head when every now and then you'd get

some gay man, either intentionally or inadvertently, saying some stupid sexist remark which would quite rightly riel and anger the sisters. So they felt quite alienated after a while. They had their own women's group, they brought issues to the table, sometimes they were addressed, sometimes they weren't. In the end most of the women left and went off to work for lesbian liberation within the Women's Liberation Movement and only a minority stayed.

Now I'm not too sure which was the most effective strategy. I certainly think that after the women left, or a large segment of women left, many of the gay and bisexual men felt guilty, felt that it was a loss, perhaps they realised retrospectively that the women actually had more to contribute than they recognised and that they should've addressed women's issues in a higher profile way. But I'd say that the women who did remain had, in many cases, had quite a significant influence on the agenda. And there were some spectacular examples of where women's issues were given high priority, like the campaign against the Miss World contest at The Royal Albert Hall in late 1971, when The Gay Liberation Front teamed up with The Women's Liberation Movement to stage an alternative contest on the pavement outside. Our contestants were: Miss-Conceived; Miss-Construed; Miss-Treated, rather than Miss England, Miss United States and so on.

We also had Miss Bangladesh, 'cause this was the time of the war in Bangladesh, swathed in blood and bandages. We had Miss Olster, likewise, you know a bomb blast victim. This was a very [38:33] take on what the Miss World contest represented or misrepresented. And I remember we ringed the entire Royal Albert Hall with people, so that people going to the contest, you know the audience, and even some of the contestants had great difficulty getting in. And all throughout the contest there was this huge, huge cacophony of sound of people shouting, banging things – we made an absolute din and a racket all night outside while the contest was going on. I can still remember with great delight when finally it must've been midnight or close too, when it was all over and the audience started pouring out in their fur stoles and diamond necklaces, when all the Rolls Royces and Bentleys lined up, but couldn't get in because we were blockading the way. And then all the people came down the stairs looking for their cars and their chauffeurs and couldn't find them and couldn't get to them because we'd surrounded and blocked off the exit entrance. It was a moment of incredible theatre, which I think, you know ... we didn't stop the contest, but we did make our point. And we got quite a lot of publicity, particularly in the *Alternative Press*. And I think sort of helped cement an alliance between The Gay and Women's Liberation Movements that lasted for some considerable time.

I'll just give one other example. After the weekly meetings of The Gay Liberation Front in Notting Hill, we'd always make a point of going to a different straight pub – no point going to a gay bar, let's go to a straight pub and make ourselves visible and force straight people to accept us on our terms in their space. So we'd descend on various pubs. And we found time and time again that some pubs would accept us, albeit grudgingly, largely because we were spending our money and they were making profits out of us. But there were some pubs that would refuse service. They said, 'We don't want queers in here.' So it used to be: no blacks; no Irish; no dogs, now it was no queers as well. So we decided to do sort of the equivalent of the Freedom Rider in the southern United States, where the Black Civil Rights Movement went to lunch counters and demanded to be served, you know sat at the front of the bus and demanded a ride and so on. And so in this particular case what

we did was go into these pubs and demand to be served. And one night the Chepstow Pub in Notting Hill refused point blank to serve us. So we had sort of a little mini sit-in, but we decided we'll save the big occasion for next week.

So after next week's meeting we turned up on mass at the Chepstow Pub and when they refused to serve us sat in and occupied the place. With slogans, you know, 'queers are thirsty too,' <chuckles> 'gay, angry and proud' and so on. The response was the pub called the police and the police that arrived were not the ones we were expecting, they were from the Flying Squad, the hard men, the ones who deal with armed robberies and the serious criminal types. We were one by one taken out, dragged out of the pub and then subjected to very humiliating body searches; a lot of us were strip searched in the alleyway by the pub. I can remember being forced to drop my trousers and take off my top down to my underpants, and then a big burley sergeant's putting his hands in my underpants and squeezing my balls, you know till ... you know my eyes were popping with pain! But that's what they could get away with in those days. I don't think anyone was actually arrested, it was just this process of ritual humiliation and the threat that you know, come here again, you've had it.

What was really fantastic is that everybody despite all these threats and intimidation, you know stuck with the protest and I think in the end, I can't remember exactly, but it probably must've been 50/60 maybe 80 people were dragged out and mistreated in this way by the police. I think what was very noticeable is that the police were quite astonished at how un-coward we were, the fact that we weren't intimidated. They expected us all to be, you know ... camp, limp-wristed, fey queens who would melt away and fade away at the slightest intervention by the police. When we stood our ground I think they were quite surprised, and it sort of, I think, gave a lot of the officers a different take on who we queers were. You know they were used to be able to go into bars and clubs, read the riot act and all the queens would meekly obey – on this occasion we were not obeying. We were passively resisting.

In the case of the pub they very quickly realised that if they continued to ban us we'd be back, because we told them so, we said, 'If you don't give us the same equal service we'll be back every week disrupting your pub. We won't do it once a week, we'll do it every single night.' They very quickly got the message, you know within a week they had sent the message back, 'OK, you are welcome to drink in our pub.' And from that all the other pubs around the region, and even in the West End, heard the word and suddenly gay people could go and drink where they liked. It had an amazing ripple effect. I'm not saying every single pub in London changed overnight, but a lot did, a lot did. They got the message that we were uppity queers who would cause trouble, disrupt their business, cause a loss of revenue and that we were not worth messing with – better to give in than create a fuss. And as I say, we took our lesson straight out of the history books of The Black Civil Rights Movement, you know when they went to the lunch counters and demanded to be served, exactly a very, very similar sort of protest. And we got the same results ... without usually having to be arrested and going to prison.

<End of Part 2>

<Part 3>

PT: In early 1972 The Gay Liberation Front had a discussion about holding a Gay Pride Parade. It was a very new idea; it had never been done before. And eventually we got together a consensus that we should organise this first every Gay Pride Parade in Britain, which took place in July 1972. I was one of about 30 or 40 people who helped organise it. It began with a rally in Trafalgar Square, followed by a march to Hyde Park where we held an impromptu do-it-yourself gay day, which was sort of like a picnic – everybody brought food, and booze, and dope and musical instruments. We played party games, listened to music, did lots of kissing and generally had a good time, but it was not commercialised, there were no sponsors or <chuckles> you know big companies involved or nothing organised, but it was a good time. And it was very interesting the way in which the police acted on that occasion.

The first Gay Pride march was very, very heavily policed, it was basically one-for-one; there were only 700 of us and there was probably pretty close to 700 police. We were treated, more or less, as a threat to State security or as criminals, which of course in many respects we still we were, because many of the anti-gay laws had not been appealed. Anyway, the police presence was very, very, very heavy, very intimidating, very aggressive. There was a lot of homophobic remarks and comments from officers. And you know, you stepped out of line slightly and they'd push you aggressively back into the march. It was very symptomatic of the way in which gay people were, at that time, viewed by the State. At the best we were there in a public space on sufferance; we were tolerated at best.

When we got to Hyde Park for the Gay Day and Queer Picnic, the police just stood around and looked at us in sort of ... you know, with really steely gazes that quite clearly they didn't like the idea that we were there; they didn't like the idea that we were able to get away with it. If we'd been there as individuals kissing and cuddling we would've been arrested like that <clicks fingers> it was only because there were a few hundred of us that they felt they couldn't do much. So we were able to kiss and cuddle and pretty much do what we liked. But we knew that when we left we had to be careful, and the warning was, 'Leave in groups, don't leave by yourself.' Because we knew that the police would possibly try and pick us off. They'd invent some trumped-up charge. So that's what people did, people left in groups because that was the safe way to go.

Reflecting on how the police treated the LGBT community at the time, I'd say that it was quite repressive, but not universally so. Not every gay bar was raided <chuckles> not every person who held hands in the street was arrested, but there was always a risk that you could be and sometimes people were. We mustn't forget that although male homosexuality was ostensibly decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967, the arrests for the consensual offence of gross indecency actually dramatically increased by almost 400% in the two, three and four years afterwards. It was like the police were saying the message, 'We've given you a bit of freedom, don't abuse it! This is the line, don't cross it!' So I think paradoxically in the wake of the partial decriminalisation in 1967, the policing of the remaining aspects of illegal same sex behaviour, like cruising or soliciting in public or ... same sex kissing or cuddling in a public space. All these things, mostly, because more heavily repressed and more heavily policed than in the years prior to decriminalisation in '67.

At the time there were a few gay bars, not that many in London, and a couple of gay dance spaces, most notably the Catacombs in Earl's Court and Sombrero Yours and Mine in High Street Kensington, but that was about it. It was very rare the police would visit those places, but it was always a possibility, it was something you had in the back of your mind. The same with bars, you know like The Salisbury in St Martin's Lane, or The Boltons and the Coleherne in Earl's Court. I can't recall ... there were maybe one or two times where the police turned up but it was fairly rare, but nevertheless there was always that possibility. You could never think, I'll go out tonight to a gay bar or to a club and not find the police hanging around outside, or even sometimes coming in to check to the license, or to check on whether food was being served, or whether people were under age, or whether people were kissing or dancing. Let's not forget that The Father Red Cap in Camberwell was raided and I think 60 people arrested for kissing and dancing in the early to mid '70s. There were similar raids in Manchester and other cities. This was not a post-'67 nirvana for gay people. We were still regarded as outsiders, as criminals, as people not deserving of respect and acceptance and this was reflected in the way the police treated our community.

There was widespread use of police agent provocateurs in parks and public toilets. They'd find a young attractive looking officer, get him to dress up in tight white jeans, black boots, leather jacket and then go into a public toilet and stand at a urinal, and wait for someone to wave their willy or try and touch him or chat him up. Sometimes the police actually got out their willies and would actually wave them around to ... you know if they weren't getting a response from gay men, they'd be more provocative in their behaviour, they'd rub themselves in the genital area, they would perhaps even take out their penis, quite clearly inciting or encouraging the commission of criminal offences. They'd also often hide in loft spaces in public toilets so they could look down on cubicles, and then anybody who came in and did anything with another guy, they'd be a signal and officers waiting up the street would storm in and arrest them, that was pretty common.

At the same time the police were very, very lackadaisical when it came to dealing with homophobic hate crime with gay bashing attacks and murders. There were, never that I can recall, the public appeals that you would get in a normal murder case, where the police would appeal for witnesses to come forward, or the police would go around the area and ask people to give statements. The whole thing would be hushed up, brushed under the carpet and the case closes as soon as possible. So the paradox was the police were spending a huge amount of resources persecuting us, but almost zero resources in protecting us. And that of course led to immense anger and hostility towards the police, I mean the contempt towards the police was just stratospheric. You know they were regarded by most lesbian and gay people as the enemy. And they were. I can remember going to a private gay party in Peckham in the mid-to-late 1970s. The party had been put on with the OK of the neighbours all around, the music wasn't particularly loud, but somehow or other the police heard about it and stormed in. As soon as they realised that it was a gay party they stormed in with even greater aggression. And I can remember a friend of mine being bashed and beaten, and when he tried to push one of the officers away, just to protect himself, the officer fell down and hit his head which resulted in him getting an even greater beating, and he ended up with cuts all over his face and body. I mean really, really shocking police violence! But what could he do? Nothing. He could do nothing, because in those days the police were even more out of control, even more

unaccountable, than they are today. There were no police committees you could go to, no advisory groups, nothing. And he ended up going to court and being prosecuted for assaulting a police officer. And even though there were witnesses who testified that he was merely defending himself and he had not intended to push the officer over, just to get him off him, that was just dismissed, the judge didn't want to know. You're just a bunch of queers, I don't care. Guilty!

That's really the way it was in those days. In those bad old days there were gay saunas, but they were small, pokey places, they were tolerated on the sufferance of the police, and I expect as a result of bribes to police officers. I don't know that but that's what my suspicion, the suspicion of a lot of people was, that these places could only exist because police were being paid off. Because then after all, what was taking place in them was entirely illegal, you know under the so-called decriminalisation of male homosexuality in 1967, it did not extend to gay sexual behaviour in places like saunas, they were deemed public places and it was the equivalent of having sex in the street, as far as the police were concerned. There were also gay magazines, you know pin-up magazines, which again existed in a twilight world of legality and illegality and could be subject to periodic raids by the police. If some gay male depiction was seen as too raunchy ... I'm not talking about nude pictures or erections even, but just a bit too raunchy, you know with people with g-strings or swimsuits on, or shorts or something. The publication could be seized and it confiscated, and the publishers fined and even be at risk of imprisonment, whereas equivalent and much more explicit heterosexual magazines were rarely, if ever, touched.

There was also the frequent seizure of gay publications from abroad, you know customs would seize copies of American, or Dutch or German gay magazines on the grounds that they included a content that was sexually improper and indecent. Many of them were just like pictures of naked me, not even with hard-ons, and that was deemed indecent. So we existed in this twilight world of legality and illegality.

RR: Just in terms of you personally and your activism, and obviously you were involved in The GLF more or less as soon as you arrived in London. And did this begin to take up more and more of your own kind of personal time, and post-GLF late '70s and into the '80s? Tell me a little bit about that period for you.

PT: Even in the wide radical revolutionary days of Gay Liberation Front I always had a very strong pragmatic streak. So I was really up for challenging the police and invading pubs and restaurants that wouldn't serve gays and lesbians. But I also had an eye on things you need to do to get change. So together with some other people in The Gay Liberation Front, we hit on the idea of doing a survey to try and establish the experience of gay people of police harassment. Because no research had ever been done, it was all anecdotal, there had never been any research. So we thought let's compile some questionnaires that we can hand out in bars and clubs, cruising areas and so on, and get people to feed back about what had happened to them so we can get a picture of the scale of police harassment and the forms of police harassment.

So I had a meeting with Tony **Smithe**, who was then the General Secretary of The National Council for Civil Liberties, now called Liberty. Where we set out

a plan about what this questionnaire would consist of and how it could be done. And so The Gay Liberation Front, this radical, revolutionary group teamed up with the quite mainstream civil rights organisation, The National Council for Civil Liberties, to produce this research. And we did, we produced the questionnaires and we sent them all over the place, and hundreds were brought back and they were compiled and a summary of a report was made, which showed that so many people ... it was hard to put an exact figure on how representative this was. But it seemed pretty widespread that people had an experience of at least one or more instances of police harassment and victimisation, ranging from being abused by police officers as a queer, or a faggot, or a dike, or a lezzy, to physical shoving and pushing, maybe arrest, possibly even being beaten up by the police. And we were able, through this joint project with The National Council of Civil Liberties, to produce a snapshot of the kinds of ways in which the police operated to harass and victimise our community.

That research was of course very imperfect and inadequate, but it was the first time it had ever been done and it did give us a benchmark. We could say that we had ... I can't even remember now, several hundred replies. And almost every single person was saying that they had these multiple experiences of police victimisation, that that surely must be representative of a significant section of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population. And it does show that the police are operating in a homophobic and transphobic way and that needs to change. So that survey gave us the evidence to make a case to change policing policy. The problem is, at that stage we didn't have the in or the access to the commissioner or other senior officers, or to parliamentarians or government ministers, because they too were part of the problem. They were not interested; they wouldn't even give us an audience. So there was a bit of publicity about it in some of the newspapers, I think *The Guardian* and a handful of backbench MPs, I think all Labour MPs did raise questions in Parliament, or did write to Ministers, but I'm afraid we got no real progress.

The establishment of Galop was a very, very important milestone, because it gave the LGBT community an organisation that was set up to monitor what the police were doing, to start what the GLF had begun all those years ago, which was collating individual experiences and case histories and being able to set out the range of contemporary police victimisation, what it involved and how it was operating. And I think for the police, to have this organisation looking at them, monitoring what they were doing, calling them to account, publicising what they were doing, that was a bit scary. The police did not like it, they did not like it one iota. It's also very important to remember that Galop, or at least some of the people in Galop, took their original inspiration from organisations like the Newham Monitoring Group, which had been set up as a watchdog for the black and Asian communities to monitor racism and racist harassment by the police. That model had shown very clearly, and very successfully, that putting the police under surveillance can sometimes act as a moderating influence on their excessive behaviour. And also it can give campaign groups and politicians the ammunition, the evidence they need to challenge the way the police were operating.

So the anti-racist work of the Newham Monitoring Group was, for some people in Galop and some people like myself on the outside, a very important, significant template on how to do it.

I wasn't involved in the formation of Galop, but not long after it was formed I began periodically working with and supporting its work and trying to, wherever I had contact with MPs, to suggest that they should be working with Galop and supporting its work. In the early 1980s I was selected as a Labour candidate for the Bermondsey by-election, which I fought and lost in 1983. But that experience gave me a very good and close personal contact with lots of Labour MPs and Trade Union Officials, all of whom I was able to influence in terms of increasing their understanding about the general issue of police harassment and the role that Galop was playing in trying to monitor that and to put it under proper public scrutiny. I think through my connection with the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, lots of people became aware of Galop's work. I wrote articles about Galop's work for Labour Publications like *Labour Weekly* and *Tribune* and spoke about its work and the wider, broader campaign against police harassment at Trade Union conferences. So it was a process of me not being centrally involved but supporting the very important valuable and pioneering work that Galop had begun.

I can remember when I was lobbying the Labour Party and the Trade Unions in the early-to-mid 1980s. It was incredibly useful to have raw data that Galop was able to collate about case histories and examples of police harassment, you know this is the way the police are interpreting the law in a maliciously homophobic way, this is the kind of law that still exists on the statute book and that is open to police abuse. That's why you need to change the law, that's why we need to put the police under closer scrutiny, not just about LGBT issues, but also about race issues, women's issues and issues affecting the whole wide cross section of the population, who, for whatever reason, were at risk of falling foul of police abuses and mistreatment.

RR: My understanding of Galop is that it started off as this watchdog, a quite confrontational organisation that the police were ... well obviously didn't like being in existence. To I suppose what the organisation is today, which is one where there is some trust between Galop and the police, there is. And that kind of building of credibility and that building of trust from the beginning, how do you see that transformation having taken place?

PT: I don't think that Galop ever got it wrong, even in the early days when it was very challenging towards the police. I think that was a necessary phase to go through to win the respect that they ultimately acquired. The police would have never ever taken Galop seriously if they'd gone in, you know pleading or apologising in a differential mode. My experience with the police is that that in those days never got you anywhere; the police were very quick and easy and ready to take you for a ride if they could. It was only the fact that Galop was very, very clear about exposing police malpractice and challenging the police that ultimately the police felt obliged to start taking them seriously and to respect the work they were doing. And that was partly, I suppose out of recognition that they were telling the truth, these were not made up cases, they're actually true cases about what real police officers had done to real gay victims. But it was also about the fact that Galop had solutions, that Galop was talking about a different way of policing the community, it wasn't just attacking the police, it was about saying, 'This is how you could change.' And I think this combination of confrontation, dialogue and practical solutions is what won Galop the grudging ... and I emphasize it was grudging in the first few years, the grudging respect and cooperation of the police.

One thing that has constantly frustrated me is that there are dozens of queer academics in all spheres, fields and disciplines, but hardly any of them ever lifted a finger to bring their area of expertise to bare on the struggle for queer freedom. Think of the gay and lesbian criminologists who could've used their expert training and knowledge to help expose the police harassment and victimisation of our community. They didn't do it. They didn't do it. They studied other things, racism and racist harassment, which of course many other academics were studying. But in the void where there was no study of LGBT persecution they just walked away on the other side of the street. I feel very, very betrayed by that. But you know, there became a point where I felt well, if they won't do it, someone has to do it. So I decided, despite my lack of professional expert training and analysis, to use my limited capacities to do a survey of how the law was being enforced, to look at criminal statistics, to analyse them, to show and demonstrate how queer people were being victimised.

So I chose the year 1989, because that was the year when convictions for the consenting victimless offence of gross indecency between men, hit an almost record all-time high. In that year the number of convictions for that offence was almost as great as in 1954/55, when male homosexuality was totally illegal in all circumstances, when the country was gripped by a McCarthyite-style anti-gay witch hunt, which resulted in public figures like Sir John Gielgud and others being arrested and put on trial. How could it be that all these years, 22 years after the supposed decriminalisation of male homosexuality, that the arrest figures for this consenting victimless offence were so astronomically high? Well, there was a sequence of events leading up to it. The Conservative Government had embarked on a series of campaigns. Margaret Thatcher had talked about restoring Victorian values, then that became family values. Then Norman Tebbit, who I think was then chair of the conservative party, did a big speech where he bemoaned the liberalisations of the 1960s and said it was time to rollback the legislation of that era.

On top of that came the AIDS crisis and the way in which many newspapers, politicians and pundits described it as 'the gay plague' and effectively blamed the gay community for this terrible new deadly disease. There were literally headlines saying, 'The gay plague!' 'A million will die!' Real shock horror sensational stuff, which provoked great fear and anxiety, and resulted in people like the Chief Constable of Manchester, James Anderton, in talking about gay people, quote, 'Swirling around in a cesspit of their own making.' You know this was a period of incredible inflammatory, publicly and government sanctioned homophobia. So that is the context in which the police began this wave of arrests, this renewed crackdown on the gay community, leading to this near record level of convictions for the consenting offence of gross indecency.

So I decided to use that year, 1989, as the benchmark. And I got the huge weighty volumes from the Home Office, the criminal statistics for that year and began to wade through them and began to look at the numbers. Because up until this point no one had done the research to actually show how many men were being arrested for all these various anti-gay offences, like soliciting for immoral purposes, which was interpreted and criminalised gay men meeting in the street, park or toilet for an assignation. Procuring homosexual acts, even lawful homosexual acts were illegal when it came to procuring them, aiding and abetting, facilitating a homosexual act were still illegal even though the act itself had, in many cases, been decriminalised in 1967. You also had

of course the general laws about sex in public places, and the way in which the police would set up observations posts in public toilets and parks, send in undercover officers dressed sort of very gay, to lure gay men into committing offences which they'd be then arrested.

So doing this research and actually discovering the number of arrests, the number of cautions, the number of prosecutions, the number of convictions, and the number of sentences and the length of sentences and the type of sentences, this was entirely new, it had not been done before. And when I look back at that research, you know some of it is a bit flawed, I mean the gist of it is right, but there are some flaws in what I did. But at least that research, which got front page stories on *Capital Gay* and other newspaper, *Pink Paper*. At least it brought home to people that it isn't just a perception that the police were harassing us, it isn't just anecdotal, it's thousands of people being arrested every year. Thousands! Not a few hundred, thousands! And for a whole range of offences, some gay specific like gross indecency and the laws against procuring or soliciting homosexual acts, and others general like public indecency and outraging public decency and so on.

So that was a real eye opener. In addition, I was able to make a comparison to compare like with like, the way in which gay offences were treated by comparison to the way equivalent heterosexual offences were treated. For example, what happens to people of the same sex who get arrested for the offence of outraging public decency, compared to opposite sex couples who get arrested for the same offence? And I found instances where, mostly gay men but occasionally a lesbian couple, would be arrested for kissing and cuddling or holding hands in the street, arrested under the laws against outraging public decency, or more commonly under the public order act. And until I did this research most people were not aware the way in which the public order act was being used to harass and victimise gay people. You know the public order act was meant to deal with football hooligans, and that was the original intention.

RR: It was breach of the peace and [34:01 IA]?

PT: Well there was a clause about behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress. But when the legislation was originally introduced, the pretext was to deal with football hooliganism, that football hooliganism was out of control, the police needed stronger powers to deal with behaviour that caused harassment, alarm or distress by football fans. When the debates were in Parliament there was hardly any mention of it being used for any other purpose, it was all about hooliganism by football fans. But very quickly that law, we discovered, was being used against gay and bisexual men, you know for kissing, cuddling, holding hands, for maybe caressing or maybe ... no full sex but you know ... kissing and cuddling and things like that.

The research was able to show that at every single stage in the criminal justice process ... same-sex behaviour was treated more harshly than equivalent heterosexual behaviour. So for an equivalent behaviour, gay and bisexual men and sometimes lesbians, were more likely to be arrested than cautioned, they were more likely to be prosecuted, more likely to be convicted, more likely to get a prison sentence than a fine or a non-custodial sentence. At every single stage this research was able to demonstrate a clear homophobic bias in the criminal justice system – it was evidence. It was evidence that could be used by politicians in Parliament to show that

something had to change. It was evidence that we could throw at the police and say, 'You're not enforcing the law impartially, you're enforcing the law in a way that is bias and prejudice against our community. Here are the facts! Here are the statistics. You cannot deny it.' And of course the police had no answer. They sometimes flailed and fluffed that the research was not entirely exactly 100% accurate, but the essence of it they couldn't dispute, they could just quibble with bits around the edges. And so the end result is that that was a very, very, very powerful ammunition to press the police to change their policy. And of course it was allied with the fact that we were also able to show that there had been this wave of gay bashing attacks and murders which the police were not properly investigating.

David Smith, the then editor of *Gay Times*, did some amazing research which began the process of lifting the lid on the scale of homophobic violence and murder. He just started collating stories from newspapers about gay bashing attacks, and the murders of gay and bisexual men. I did some more research with my outraged colleagues, and we were able to add to the numbers that he had uncovered and show it was much, much more widespread. We found that in the period between 1986 and 1991, 50 or more men had been murdered in circumstances which pointed to a likely homophobic motive. You know they were either frenzied multiple stabbings, which you don't get in a normal murder, you know the body was found in a park or public toilet, well know to be frequented by gay and bisexual men. Maybe the body was tied up and mutilated in bed. These were all circumstances which didn't offer absolutely any conclusive proof, but very strongly pointed to a homophobic motive.

Now we found that in 90% of the cases the police were very quick to close down the investigation, you know it was very rare that they did public appeals for witnesses or for people to come forward if they knew the victim. They tended to be in a great, great hurry to ... first of all deny the possibility of a homophobic motive, or to rule it out, or to never investigate it, and then very quickly wrap up the case and say, 'It was beyond the possibility of solving.' Again, this evidence was incredibly powerful and useful – we could show that that police were putting disproportionate resources into harassing and victimising gay and bisexual men for offences that were consenting and victimless, where no one had complained, and for behaviour, which if it had taken place between heterosexuals, would not, in 90% of cases, even be a criminal offence. And conversely we could show that there had been a spate of homophobic bashings, and in particular this horrendous scale of likely homophobic murders, about which the police were sparsely concerned, barely concerned at all, and which were not being subject to rigorous investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice. It was just incredibly embarrassing for the police, because we made sure that all this information got published in local newspapers where the victims had been killed, in the national press, on TV programmes, on current affairs programmes, on chat programmes, on radio phone-ins. We just bombarded them with this information, and because we did our research, because we had the evidence, journalists lapped it up. MPs lapped it up! They had the evidence they could ask the questions. People like Audrey Wise, Gavin **Strain**, Alan Roberts and many others, asked questions in Parliament about this, backed up by the evidence and research that I had done and that David Smith at *Gay Times* had done, and of course, the case histories and research that Galop had done.

All this stuff came together, all these different efforts all came together into one big thing, which put the police under enormous pressure, which exposed

and embarrassed them, which made them look really shameful and really sordid in the way they were treating our community. They were backed into a corner. They were backed right into a corner. And so they got us to come to New Scotland Yard to discuss our concerns. And we went along. Galop, Stonewall, OutRage!, The Campaign for Homosexual Equality and many others. We had our meetings. We put our cards on the table, we said what needed to change; Galop made some very good proposals, so did OutRage!, so did Stonewall. But after a number of months we found that these were being totally and utterly ignored, the police were not acting on them at all. They would smile, they'd shake our hands, they'd give us tea and coffee, even biscuits and cake sometimes, but they would not change their policy.

So after a while OutRage! decided this has got to end. We cannot be taking for pansies, we're not gonna go there and just have tea and sandwiches, we're not going to participate in a talking shop, we're not gonna be part of a police PR exercise, we're only going to go there if there's serious negotiations to change the way the police operate. And although they had got the message, they still hadn't changed the way they operated. So we basically got together with a bigger group, OutRage! convened the meeting to establish what we called The Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative, which brought together, primarily Galop and OutRage!, but other gay rights organisations as well. And we set out a list of demands, what we wanted to change. And it was maybe ten demands for a non-homophobic policing policy. And we went back to the police again and we said, 'Look, no more talking, no more cups of tea, we want action. These are the things that need to change.' Still the police flannelled and waffled, so OutRage! took a decision, 'We are not going to be part of this facade, this charade, this PR exercise.' So we walked out. And we initiated a very high profile campaign against the police, a direct action campaign, because we knew that it was only if we further shamed and embarrassed them that we would get progress.

So we did things like invading Battersea Police Station, which was then organising raids and entrapment on Clapham Common. We invaded the police station, took it over, hung banners from the outside, got the local press along, explained to the local journalists and the local councillors, the tenants associations, the residents groups, 'This is what the police are doing with your money. They say they can't deal with racist attacks, they say they can't deal with domestic violence, they say they can't deal with street robberies and burglaries, but they've got plenty of time and resources to harass, and victimise and arrest gay men in the middle of night, on Clapham Common who are harming no one.' We won the argument straight away. Even the people in the community who didn't approve of homosexuality felt this was a stupid, absurd waste of police resources. And the local journalists as well, they thought the police were barking mad, 'How can you complain about not being able to afford a new patrol car or more officers on the beat when all your officers are down there at midnight on double time, over time, harassing gay men who no one had made a complaint about?'

We also discovered that the police had a night time observation post in a flat overlooking the common. And they'd set up a post there with army night time infrared binoculars to spy on gay men on the Common, and then to radio for snatch squads to go in to arrest them. So we had a guy in OutRage! who worked for a company which had big high sided trucks. So we got him to go and park his big high sided truck right in front of this flat so it obstructed the police view of the Common, so they couldn't spy and send in the snatch

squad. We also invaded some of the press conferences and meetings of the then Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Paul **Quandon**, which gave him a message very loud and clear, you are not going to get away with this, we're going to make your life hell until you stop harassing us. And do you know? I can remember the look on his face so many times when we turned up yet again – his eyes would roll and <chuckles> he was quite clearly very pissed off, very fed up and quite angry, because he knew we were winning the battle for hearts and minds and the police were being exposed for the homophobes they were.

RR: Can you put a date to this?

PT: This is all in the period 1990/1991. So we also targeted specific areas, like down at **[46:32 Stew]** Ponds, a local beauty spot in Surrey. It's a little area off the highway where there's a car park and a picnic area and a woods beyond. We got reports that gay and bisexual men were being arrested there and given £1,000 fines, in some cases just for cruising, not even for having sex. So we decided to investigate. And we found that the police had long tolerated this area as a heterosexual lovers' lane, where mostly married heterosexual men and women rendezvoused for sexual trysts, often in the car park in broad daylight in their cars. As far as we could ascertain the police had never arrested any of them, ever. But when gay men learned about this some years previously and decided that they wanted a piece of the action, only they were more polite and considerate, they went off and cruised in the forest part, you know went up into the dense forest, not in the car park in the dense forest. When the police realised this they came down on them like a tonne of bricks, hence the arrests and the big fines.

So we decided to go there and we went there one particular day with warning notices which we stapled to the trees. And we'd heard that ... from one of the victims, that the police had sort of sprung out of nowhere to arrest them, and seemed to come out from under the ground. So in the course of walking around we discovered that the police had, modelling on the tactics of the army, hollowed out an underground observation post, where they'd covered it with timber and tin and foliage on top, but left a little slit at ground level so they could look out with their night time infrared binoculars to see where gay men were and then to jump out and arrest them. So we discovered this place and we just tore it to shreds and left a big, big sign saying, I think it was something like, 'Police provocateurs fuck off!' We then went to Surrey Police Station and demanded to see senior officers, in the end some officers did come out and talk to us. We brought along the local press, plus our own reporters and photographers, and very soon <chuckles> in full glare of the media the police were being exposed. We were saying, 'How come you allow heterosexual couples to have full sexual intercourse in the car park, in broad daylight, yet gay men who go off in the forest in the day, but mostly at night when no one's around, get arrested? Why the double standards?' They didn't have an answer.

Then we exposed the amount of time and resources the police were wasting, and the cost, we did a rough estimate of the costs – didn't have an answer. They were just embarrassed. We embarrassed the hell out of them. And of course, again as in Battersea, we very quickly won over the local community, who again, even if they themselves did not approve of homosexuality, certainly felt that this was a waste of police resources at a time when officers complained they didn't have the time, the money, the cars, the vehicles,

whatever, to do their job. People could see very clearly the police were spending their money, their time on the wrong things, on harassing people for victimless crimes.

So, we really won that one and very quickly the arrests at Stew Ponds went way down, they didn't stop, but they went way down as did the punishments, much less severe punishments. So after, I think it was only about three months of doing this campaign, which did create mayhem, did really create mayhem for the police, they were getting very, very anxious – for them it was an absolute PR disaster. <Pause> We went to Hyde Park corner where the police had been doing undercover entrapment operation, sending in a young pretty officer, dressed in tight white jeans, leather jacket, to lure and entice gay men into committing offences. We lay in wait and photographed him, photographed him, and then reproduced his photograph on posters which we then taped to lamp posts and stapled on trees warning people. I can't remember the exact words but we were quite ... some of the slogans were quite disparaging, 'Beware of this officer with a very tiny willy.' <Chuckles> So we were sort of mocking them as well. And it got big coverage, you know *The London Programme* did a big report about it, all the major TV current affairs programmes covered the story really, really big about what the police were doing. And the public support was very swiftly on our side.

So it was only about, really three months after beginning this campaign the police were literally pleading with us to come back into New Scotland Yard for serious negotiations. We made it very clear, 'Yes we'll come back in but on your condition that this is a meeting to discuss action, not just a talking shop.' And so we went back in with the ten or so demands for a non-homophobic policing policy, with the support of Galop and other LGBT organisations and just basically read the riot act to the police. 'Do this or this whole series of meetings is over for good.' And amazingly the police very quickly began to back down. They did appoint a lesbian and gay liaison officer, they did appoint one, but he turned out to be an evangelical Christian, John Brown, he was Inspector John Brown. And we thought, oh no, no, no, no the police are fooling us yet again. But very quickly we found that when we talked to John Brown the penny dropped, he realised, despite his own religious beliefs, what the police were doing was wrong, and he actually became a very strong ally. He wasn't perfect, no, no, but he did become basically on our side. He realised he had this conversion, so to speak, you know he came over to the side of the angels and began supporting, within the police service, the kinds of issues that we were raising.

So we argued for things like instead of going for arrests as a first option, the police should issue warnings through the lesbian and gay press, and then the next phase should be to give cautions rather than arrest and charge people and so on. We also argued that the police should cease interpreting laws in the most homophobic way possible, so for example, Section 32 of the 1956 Sexual Offences Act, which prohibits importuning in a public place for an immoral purpose. It does not specify the importuning for gay sex is an immoral purpose, that's just the way it had been interpreted. So we said, 'Stop interpreting that way. Stop interpreting the law in that way.' So these were all changes, some incremental and some quite big which the police began to implement. I think within about a year they had taken on board more than half of our demands for a non-homophobic policing policy. Within three years the number of gay and bisexual men convicted of the consenting offence of gross indecency, the same law that was used against Oscar Wilde in 1895, the

number of men convicted of that offence fell by two thirds. The biggest, fastest fall ever recorded.

Now, I'm not saying it was just down to the OutRage! campaign, it was down to Galop's work, to our campaign, to a whole conservation of factors that came together. The working inside the system, the direct action from outside the system, the inside/outside approach, the negotiation, direct action – it all came together and produced this really, really dramatic change. But the one thing I do know that without the direct action Galop, Stonewall and others would not have had a place at the table where they could secure serious changes, or it might've taken them, or would've taken them much, much longer. So I think the direct action campaign by OutRage! was the catalyst, the rocket up the arse of the police that prompted them to finally begin to take our cause and issues seriously. And when I look back I think that campaign and the subsequent negotiations, it has made a huge, huge difference. It has literally saved thousands of gay and bisexual men from arrest, prosecution, conviction and criminalisation. And the consequent legal penalties, usually only fines, but nevertheless public disgrace 'cause they'd get reported in the local press or sometimes the national press. In some cases the breakup of marriages, in other cases the loss of jobs, in other cases people losing custody of children. This campaign had an absolutely huge impact in saving so many thousands, literally thousands of gay and bisexual men from those kinds of consequences.

It really did work where the preceding negotiations and lobbying had failed – well intended, but unsuccessful. Direct action is what really got the results.

<End of Part 3>

<Part 4>

PT: It's very interesting to observe the way in which the police policed OutRage! protests. We were a direct action group of the likes that Britain had not seen for a very, very long time on any issue, and certainly not since the days of The Gay Liberation Front when it came to LGBT issues. The preceding groups had been very orthodox lobbying and negotiating groups, you'd have a calm peaceful picket or lobby, everything was very much nice and polite and well behaved. Like The Gay Liberation Front, OutRage! were the naughty boys and girls who were the ones that didn't play by the rules. So when we began our direct action campaign against homophobia, whether it be against the police harassment of the gay community, against the homophobia of the church or tabloid press, we tended to do things in a slightly more spiky way. Not for us a calm peaceful march from A to B, or an hour long vigil outside the General **1:20**, we were into more feisty radical stuff. And that created really big headaches for the police. They had been used to gay organisations cooperating with them and doing what they were told, you know the police would tell a gay organisation, 'You can have a march here but these are the conditions. No you can't march there, you can march here. No you can't stand there, you can stand over here.' And to be honest, gay organisations in those days pretty much did what the police told. There wasn't much answering back, not much dispute, and of course partly it's because they felt powerless, you know they felt in a position of powerlessness. But OutRage! made it very clear right from the beginning that we were not going to be dictated to by the police, that there were laws about the right to peaceful protest and we were going to demand that the police facilitated them and not obstructed them.

Moreover if there were issues of human rights we were prepared to break the law, our inspirations are people like Mahatma Ghandi, Sylvia Pankhurst and Martin Luther King. They all used civil [2:35] and non-violent direct action to challenge injustice, whether it be the Indian struggle for independence, votes for women or any [intervations] irrigation in the deep south of the United States. Those were our kinds of inspirations, so we applied and adapted their methods to our struggle. We're not averse to invading, occupying and taking over, in fact we rather liked confronting homophobes face-to-face and spoiling their day, because they had been spoiling our lives for decades even centuries, so it was pay-back time in our view. Some of the early OutRage! protests were very calculated to defy the law and to therefore expose the police and put them on the spot. A good example was the kissing in 1990, where in a direct challenge to the way the police sometimes arrested lesbian and gay couples for kissing, cuddling or holding hands in the street. We were going to hold a mass queer kiss-in, in Piccadilly Circus, on an appointed day and we challenged the police very directly. 'If you believe this law is worth defending you come and arrest us, otherwise we want your announcement that the law will not be enforced, that you will treat lesbian and gay kisses and cuddles the same way as you treat heterosexual ones, that they're lawful, they're legal, they're fine.'

So on the appointed day at 6pm, 300 same-sex couples turned up to do this mass kiss-in, in Piccadilly Circus in defiance of the law and openly challenging the police to arrest us. Just as we were assembling, you know the organisers were assembling at 5pm; I received a message to say that the Metropolitan Police had announced that from that moment they would no longer arrest same-sex couples for kissing and cuddling. In other words we won before we even began, but we went ahead anyway, we thought we'll test the police, we'll make sure that we hold them to their word. We got heaps and heaps of new coverage and masses of discussion on radio phone-ins, on current affairs programmes and on chat shows, it was the talk of the town. And the police were just incredibly embarrassed. And the fact that they had actually capitulated before the protest had even begun was the icing on the cake and a vindication of what we'd said all along. So we had overwhelming public, political and media sympathy on our side, you know there were a handful of red rags like *The Sun* that still held out their homophobic nonsense, but for the most part the media was on our side. We'd won.

In fact we were so successful I remember getting a telephone call about a week later from a Japanese tour company. They said, 'Oh we really loved your kiss-in, in Piccadilly Circus last week, it was so entertaining. We were taking a tour part along and we stopped and watched it; it was such great fun. We've got another tour party coming next week, when's your next event?' Now look, when you win hearts and minds in that way you know you're winning the battle, you know you're winning the battle. When you can do something political, and quite provocative, and challenging, but is seen as being fun, educational and enjoyable, then you're on a winner. And that's always been the OutRage! tactic, to try and make what we do interesting, exciting, challenging, educative and preferably entertaining.

We followed up that event with the wink-in, some weeks later, which was to challenge the law against so-called soliciting for immoral purposes under Section 32 of the 1956 Sexual Offences Act. Under that law the police had interpreted any attempt by gay men to meet in a public place with a view to having a sexual assignation, their interpretation was that that was a crime.

And people in those days were fined and sometimes even jailed for merely chatting each other up in the street or exchanging phone numbers, you know consenting adults. Heterosexuals who did that, that was normal, that was natural, of course boy sees girl, they like each other, they exchange names and phone numbers. That was never a criminal offence, that was never interpreted as an immoral purpose, but the equivalent gay behaviour was. And so the wink-in was devised because they'd been a number of cases where gay and bisexual men had actually been convicted for merely winking or smiling at other men on the street – that was taken as evidence of importuning for an immoral purpose, and they were convicted! They were convicted for winking or smiling at other men! So hence we had the wink-in. And we had these gigantic huge eyes with little props which made them wink all the time.

Again, we did it in Piccadilly Circus. And we exchanged gigantic cards with our names and phone numbers on, only, the phone numbers we gave were for No. 10 Downing Street, Tory Central Office, New Scotland Yard. But again, huge, huge media publicity and an almost universal view that these laws were absolutely barking mad as well as being oppressive. I mean people couldn't believe that men could be convicted for winking and smiling at each other, or even talking to each other and exchanging names and phone numbers. And when they realised this was happening they were angry, they shared our anger, for the most part. That was the process by which these laws began to be challenged and we began to build up support in Parliament, and even amongst some more liberal police officers that things had to change.

The police always found OutRage! very difficult to handle because we didn't always play by the book. We broke the rules. We didn't do polite, traditional marches and vigils, we did naughty things like invading and occupying places, you know challenging homophobes in the street. And there was this great occasion when Lady Olga Maitland was surrounded and harangued outside Parliament as she was walking to The House of Commons. The poor dear had no minders, no police to protect her, and she was just confronted about her homophobic record and she just emotionally and mentally crumbled. And I sort of felt sorry for her, but on the other hand she'd been doing far, far worse to gay people for generations and getting away with it.

When it came to protests the police were always very nervous about OutRage! because they knew we were not a conventional protest or lobby group, we didn't just comply with their wishes. So for example, on the 25th anniversary of the passage of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, we organised a commemoration on the theme of, 'Fuck the 1967 act! We don't want partial equality, we want full equality.' And we got various celebrities like Derek Jarman, Jimmy Somerville, Tom Robinson and Andy Bell to join us for a march, which assembled in Piccadilly and was essentially going to march to Parliament Square. Unbeknown to the police we were all along planning to do a little detour, in fact several detours. The first of which is when we were marching down Whitehall, keeping within the police lines, very well behaved, LOUD, but keeping to the rules. Then all of a sudden when the whistles blew people just stormed across the road and took over the gates of Downing Street, blockading, no one could get in or get out. So people trying to visit the Prime Minister or Downing Street staff trying to come out they couldn't get out, we just took over the whole road. And we were blowing whistles, fog horns; it was like the end of the world sort of – it was mayhem! And eventually after about an hour we moved on and went to Parliament Square where we

had a sit down and blockaded the road again. Then after that we went on to Buckingham Palace and the police tried to block our way but we always found routes down back alleys. And despite there being a ban on protests outside Buckingham Palace, quite a few of us managed to get there and to hold an impromptu protest before retiring for a picnic in the park. Again, it was a classic example of us being able to outfox the police and their security.

Another good occasion was the vote on the age of consent in 1994 when Parliament refused to vote for equality, but voted instead to reinforce and perpetuate discrimination by voting to bring the age of consent down, not to 16, which would've been equal rights, but only to 18, so maintaining a two year gap between the heterosexual and homosexual age of consent. That was a rally ... so we had a rally outside Parliament to coincide with that vote. There were about 5,000 people there, and when the vote was announced a mini riot broke out, you know people literally tried to, and almost did succeed, in storming Parliament. You know they had to force and hold back the doors to stop us breaking in. People clambered over the entrance to Parliament, and then a series of mobs when sort of ... raging through the City street, up Whitehall and through the West End doing sit-downs, blockading buses. It was a manifestation of the rage we felt at being denied equality. The police were just powerless to control us. They wanted to, but they couldn't.

Three weeks later we did a follow-up protest, a march on Parliament for equality, against the vote that had denied us an equal age of consent. We made it very clear that we were going to march on Parliament in defiance of the then existing sessional orders which the police interpreted to prevent protests in the vicinity of Parliament while MPs were sitting. We assembled at Piccadilly Circus and began our march with probably two or three thousand people. We got as far as the bottom of Haymarket before our way was blockaded by police horses and vans. We found it quite extraordinary that nearly 800 police were deployed to stop us. That's the sort of threat that we were seen to be. I mean if we'd got to parliament would it have been such a disaster? We may have created a bit of mayhem yes, but you know, but actually stopping the protest from proceeding down Haymarket with all those police vans and horses, that was ... that gave us a sense that we were powerful, that we were seen as a threat, that we were regarded as menace that had to be stopped, otherwise they wouldn't have bothered. And that for us was a vindication of our tactics and methods, you know sometimes you have to be provocative and confrontational, as the Chartists and the Suffragettes showed. If you don't get justice via the polite way, sometimes you have to up the anti and challenge those in power and authority. And if that means occasionally, or even frequently breaking the law, then sobeit, bad laws are there to be broken, not to be obeyed.

Looking back over the years I'd say that the work of Galop has been tremendously important in helping to move us to the place where we are today, where the police march in Pride Parades, where they liaise and negotiate with the LGBT community. Where they don't just march in and do things their way, they are, for the most part, with of course some exceptions, but for the most part they are willing and agreeable to listening. We have established a much more cooperative relationship with the police; we can work with them now to resolve issues like homophobic hate crimes, harassment of neighbours on estates. All those kinds of issues that still impact upon LGBT people despite to manifest games that we have made in the last two decades.

The fact that there's an organisation like Galop with expertise, knowledge and professionalism to address these issues, to highlight them, to offer solutions and that they have a place at the table, at the senior table at New Scotland Yard and amongst other police forces, that is an incredibly valuable asset. It makes the work of producing a fairer policing of our community much, much easier and more effective. So hats off to everyone, and there have been a lot of them, who have been involved in Galop over the years, all those successive Galop workers who have helped bring us to where we are today, we owe them a great, great debt of gratitude, because they have helped bring us to this place where increasingly the police and the LBT community cooperate rather than conflict.

RR: Right, thank you Peter for doing that.

<End of recording>