

# Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

**Interviewee:** Susan Paterson

**Interviewer:** Fiza Hassan

**Place of Interview:** Empress State Building

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## Key

**FH:** = Interviewer, Fiza Hassan

**SP:=** Interviewee, Susan Patterson

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

[5:22 IA] = inaudible section at this time

Word 5:22 = best guess at word

**SP:** My place of birth is Edinburgh, and I was born on 15 March 1969.

**FH:** We are at the Empire State Building for a Galop Stonewall Housing Oral History Project.

Good to have you, Susan.

**SP:** Thank you very much.

**FH:** Would you like to start from the beginning, from your childhood, and tell us a bit about yourself?

**SP:** Sure, OK. I was born in Edinburgh, I was adopted and my adoptive parents moved to **Glen Robert**, which is a place in Fife, which is central Scotland, and it was quite an idyllic place at that time, although it's changed now into a new town. It was quite agricultural and I was running around in farming fields and having a very nice early childhood. I was always very sporty, I really enjoyed doing sports, so as I moved into my high school period I spent more time going to competitions and I was very lucky to compete for both Scotland and Great Britain, which allowed me to travel an awful lot, which gave me an insight not just into a small parochial local Scottish place but wide perspectives and understanding, and I think I very much enjoyed that. As I got older I had to accept I wasn't going to become world champion and therefore went off to University of Glasgow and studied, for my undergraduate degree, psychology and sociology, and then for my masters specialised in sociology looking at a variety of topics and including the two that I'm currently doing for my job, which is social research methods and crime and deviance. So it's now no longer a surprise to me that I'm a criminologist for the Metropolitan Police Service, but at the time I didn't know that's what I was going to turn into.

So I'm now up to the current date.

**FH:** So how did you get involved with the Met Police?

**SP:** Well I had, in 1995, moved from Glasgow University, once I'd graduated, down to Leeds University. I had been asked to do a social research project that was looking into the development of an auditory warning system that was going to be used on ambulances, fire engines and police cars, and the reason

why I was involved is that the physiology department that had developed it could do the lab development tests, but they weren't very good at doing the in situ tests, so therefore asked me to go along and actually set up an evaluation while the emergency vehicles were actually running, and what we did was a comparison between the newly developed auditory warning siren and the existing one. So that gave me this vast experience of working with the emergency services. Again, I didn't have a sense of what I was going to do with that. The project was very successful, the product won the Prince of Wales Award for innovation, but the reason why that was very crucial is two things: it took me to London, 'cause London was one of the sites where we did the tests, and it made me realise that London was a place that I could use my social research techniques, in terms of getting more employment; and secondly it was the place where I had my first gay experience I suppose, and I was twenty-seven at the time, and those two things converged and that was how my life has now continued.

**FH:** So would you like to tell me about your life when you started life in London?

**SP:** I moved here in late 1996 and I ... think the first place or first thing I went to was actually a bi-group, because my first gay experience was when I was twenty-seven, hadn't really had a consciousness before that, and before that I'd always had boyfriends, so at that point in time I felt a bit of a fraud to call myself a lesbian or a gay woman, because at the time I hadn't really worked it all out. So I joined this bi-group that I think is actually still going, but anyhow ... and it was a bit of a ... boy scout social group crossed between going out on the scene. The going out on the scene tended to be going to clubs and pubs after we had done our sort of ... I don't know, a sort of workshop thing. I found the workshop thing was really a bit hideous, I don't know why; maybe I wasn't very patient with other people's views of things. But going out on the scene was quite good. That was the time that The Candy Bar was just opening, actually, and one of the things I really remember then was The Candy Bar refusing to allow one of the members in our group, who was a trans woman, saying that she was clearly a trans and they didn't like that. Of course we went back to the owners and said, 'This is ridiculous' and they eventually apologised and realised the error of their ways. But I think now, ten years later, or fifteen years later, sorry, that wouldn't really happen so much. But in those days there was still a bit of a segregation between lesbian, gay, trans and bi, whereas I think more often people are becoming much more tolerant and relaxed in each other's space. You don't just have to have a lesbian space.

Actually incidentally when I'd just moved to London I think the Lesbian Centre, or Community Centre, I don't know what it was called, that had just closed down, so interestingly when I was looking for venues and places to go it seemed to be advertised but it was actually closed, so I think I came at the end of an era, and I also remember going to a place called the Ace of Clubs, which was a very cheesy disco for lesbians, and it was the very last night. It was in Piccadilly Circus, and it was really funny because the first person I saw almost when I went down, it was this really dark, dingy sort of club, really ... very seventies I guess, was a soap opera actor in East Enders; she's called Pat Butcher, but I think her name's Patsie St Clements or something, Patricia St Clements. Anyway, that was really funny. But unfortunately everything was closed down so I didn't see the old-fashioned London lesbian scene, I saw the new thing that had been growing, and that's maybe what The Candy Bar

typified itself as, having new chic bars and lesbian cool kind of thing was moving in.

The first bar I ever went to was called **Burst Out** actually, and that still exists now. And I was taken to that by a woman I'd had my first lesbian kiss and all that sort of stuff with, and so it's still really ... yeah, I suppose it's got a real memory for me. And then the first nightclub I went to was the Astoria, which of course has now been shut down and turned into a shopping mall or something like that, which is very unfortunate. So I think those are my first memories of the London scene.

**FH:** So your first experience was in a club?

**SP:** Yes.

**FH:** And not in university, because I **thought it probably would be that.**

**SP:** No, no. What happened was this project I was telling you about where we were looking at emergency warning sirens, I was in London with the London Ambulance Service, and it was round about Christmas time and they were all going for some sort of Christmas party and invited me along, and I ... I said yes, that's fine 'cause I didn't have anything else to do. I was actually staying in the nurses' accommodation on Gower Street, and if you've ever been to the nurses' accommodation on Gower Street, it is just the most horrible place to be. It's small, small rooms and they look really dirty and horrible, so any excuse to get out I'd agree. I went to a pub where everyone met, they were all chatting away and it seemed that the woman who I eventually kissed, she automatically thought I was lesbian, which I think does happen a lot, but at that time I was quite surprised. But she was saying, 'But even all the rhetoric you're coming out with and all the stuff you're saying, you're so PC and politically out there' and she had been involved in the Lesbian Avengers, I think it was called, which was this thing even before I went which was people chaining themselves up to ... I don't know, Houses of Parliament, to try and get gay rights. So she was quite political out there. Anyway, because it was a night out everyone was getting drunk and they said, 'Oh, we're going to this nightclub' and I didn't realise it was a gay nightclub at that time, but cottoned on as I was in there, and yeah, that's where I had the first lesbian experience.

**FH:** So in university were there no gay unions, political activism, did you come across any of it during your time in university?

**SP:** Well I didn't, actually, and that doesn't mean that it didn't exist. It just meant that I didn't come across it. I remember the Freshers' period, going to, we had two separate unions, one was more a conservative and one was more people with social consciences, with alternative views, and at that time they were advocating not to drink Nestlé milk and there was all sorts of issues, but there didn't seem to be particular sexual orientation at the forefront. And again, as I say, that doesn't mean it didn't exist, I'm sure it did, but very small scale. And of course in Glasgow at that time we didn't even have a Gay Pride, there still isn't ... various things that we've got in London. There are gay bars. The time that I went to a gay bar was only because of the masters course I was doing, we were looking at sexual identity and it was one of the field trips that our tutor thought would be really good for us, but it was very ... gay male orientated and perhaps a generation before me as well, so I didn't really see or feel I identified with it. And again in those days I was so directed towards

doing sport stuff, so in the evenings even though I wasn't competing as much as I used to when I was younger, I was still coaching and coaching the clubs, and that was my life cycle, doing sports, going out with mates who were sporty, doing my studies, and I just never really came across a scene or even had my opened to a scene.

**FH:** So how did you actually think of joining the London Met?

**SP:** When I was probably a couple of years into living in London and learning about the gay scene and having a lifestyle that was gay, unfortunately the 1999 Soho bombings happened, and of course it wasn't just Soho but there was Brixton and Brick Lane too, but the reason why I remember Soho so vividly was I was coming back on the Metropolitan Line to my then girlfriend, who's Indonesian, and there's a reason why I mention her actually, and I remember coming back at 6.37 'cause I'd looked at my watch, and everybody was talking about it on the tube. They were saying, 'Gosh, there's been this bombing in soho' and I just automatically thought ... just awful, I'd never considered being targeted at that point. I don't think many people had, especially my generation where we weren't experiencing police brutality or anything, it was just a bit shocking.

So I remember at that point thinking that after David Copland was arrested and quite rightly so, that I needed to start up three major things, and one was a political thing, or some kind of advocacy, and that's why I joined Galop.

Also my girlfriend then knew somebody who was involved in Galop called Tracy Hind, who's an incredibly lovely person and very, very good. Tracy had contacted me a wee bit later saying that there was this job going and they had been, Galop had been sent an email saying, 'Do you have anybody who fits the criteria?' One was to have a technical social research background, knowing about things like crime and deviance, and the other was to ...

So they were looking for this technical background alongside understanding about one of the strands of hate crime, which I guess for me was understanding about the LGBT community. And I thought yep, that sounds really interesting, thanks for giving me the heads up. So it was really my involvement with Galop at that time got me the opportunity. I contacted the professor who was heading up this particular project and met with her at New Scotland Yard, and had an interview with her, not with the team. The project, which was at that time quite ground-breaking, used Metropolitan Police hate crime data and look at in depth rather than just look at top-line things i.e. volume frequency numbers rising and falling, but to look at much more of the circumstances and look at the police case-notes and start doing work on that, and because I had both the technical stats background and an understanding of evaluation assessment projects, I was asked if I would take up the position.

So I was employed as a consultant at that time, and was really happy to be involved with a project that was starting to try and use official information to understand more what's going on in, at that time it was hate crime, race crime, domestic violence and sexual assault, but that was the reason, that's what prompted me to get the job.

**FH:** In the job, how did you find that atmosphere as an outsider and a woman and then gay?

**SP:** Yes, it's kind of interesting, because of our project we gained quite a lot of honeymoon period status in the first couple of years, we were seen as this exciting team, so in some ways I probably didn't suffer some of the pressures that other people who've entered the Metropolitan Police, women members of staff, had. But over time we certainly realised some of the limitations, some of the barriers that being this, I guess, elite team had, so the elite team being a criminologist, we would get, 'Well you've got really clever stuff, but it won't go any further' so you got closed doors, to a certain extent. The being a woman was about your authority. One always had to align yourself alongside people to get things done. That was quite difficult. You couldn't authorise things on your own bat, you had to have this countersigned, whereas you could see other people who'd been 'in the job' as they call it, seemed to know automatically how to do the informal way of getting things done. So that could be quite a frustration. And just your gender was really ... I did really notice that. And then thirdly, I didn't come out immediately, but it seemed to be quite an obvious transition just to throw in things; you didn't have to say in front of people, 'I am gay' or anything, but the fact that you had been working alongside an LGBT organisation, people kind of guessed. Because again we were quite a protected position, we were given quite senior ranks, we were protected to a certain degree, but there were times that I remember my colleague was there, when people forgot we were around there were a couple of times where now very un-PC gay language had been used, and then when they remembered I was here that wall of silence, which was particularly horrible experience to go through. So yeah – I guess I've had some experience, but not, I don't think it's been as bad as other people's experience if they were say recruits and things. I think that might have been worth.

**FH:** Do you know of any recruits who had a ...

**SP:** I don't. We were unfortunately a little protected. I think also this department being the diversity department, you're probably in a nicer environment. Weirdly enough, when I was working for London Ambulance Service on the pilot way back, there was an awful lot of discrimination, it was very sexualised and it was very homophobic, and that was not necessarily just me, just everyone per se. I was working very much on the ground at satellite stations, which are the equivalent of boroughs here, and I could imagine that feeling on the borough, and we only hear of stuff that's going on centrally, but we hear that you can have quite a lot of isolation if you're in ... they call it a dinosaur borough, so old fashioned place. But I haven't actually heard myself.

**FH:** So tell me about your involvement with Galop, how long have you been involved with them?

**SP:** Well there's two things in one. Just after the bombings I'd known about Galop because my ex-partner had been very good friends with Tracy so I'd had involvement with them. Then in 2001, talking with Les [0:24 <file7> Moran], who was the Chair at the time, who was also professor of Birkbeck University, he'd said, 'Well you should join, become a trustee'. So I did. And immediately, the first couple of times I joined I think it was one of those observers roles, then almost the next time that I joined they were having their ... what do you call it? Yearly meeting, what's it? Not MC, that's a management committee. Annual General, that's it, sorry. Les was already Chair at that point and I think I became vice Chair, so quite quickly after joining them I ended up having a position, but that worked very well 'cause I learnt quite a lot off of Les, and understood how Galop worked. So then in 2003 Les stood down as Chair and

I took over that role, and really was very passionate actually about becoming Chair, passionate about bringing together my knowledge of working within the police, which was giving me I think a really good insight into the criminal justice and what has to be done in terms of improvement of service delivery, and then being part of an advocacy group that was really dealing with sometimes cases where people hadn't gone to the police but sometimes where people had, and also trying to get liaison between the organisations I think was really something I was very motivated to do, and so for my chair period, which is sort of two years, I really tried to push getting that agenda moving. And I also wanted to get us very visible in terms of how we were understood as being an effective organisation. I think that we had quite a good name internally within the LGBT community, wanting to get much more of a promotion amongst public sector organisations, criminal justice organisations, but also wider than that, public media. And in a weird way there was a murder that had taken place where ... that's the Jody Debrowski right at the end of the period that I was chair, there was visible understanding that Galop was actually an organisation that was really worth getting alongside the police, and I think that was the direction that we've gone and that we've continued, so you will always find in a critical incident Galop will be asked to come along and support the police in their investigations. We get contacts now from media, Channel 4, BBC London, ITV have now contacted us when we've got the Filling the Blanks project being motivated. So we have a better awareness. And we still need to increase our profile, but those were all things that I wanted to achieve. And finally I wanted us to be a viable organisation. I wanted us to have three months surplus in the bank, and at the time that I left we had that. Unfortunately that hasn't continued due to many things including the credit crunch, but I felt quite proud that I left with us in a very solid shape and with a very clear agenda of where we were going and how we would actually complement the criminal justice system. So I think we took Galop into a new generation.

**FH:** So that's your professional involvement with Galop. And your professional life. How has life been personally since you've been involved with Galop?

**SP:** OK. <Laughs> Do you mean do I socialise with Galop, or just generally my social life as a ... OK.

Yeah, I guess it's pretty good. I think I've probably got a name as somebody who can really enjoy themselves, I guess that's being Scottish. We do seem to know how to party and how to get involved in things and do stuff. We've had various nice Christmas dinners and events that we've done as part of Galop. I remember we did this incredible fundraising event at Heaven, and that was super, real fun and absolutely dynamic. I managed to get Sarah Waters, who's the author of Tipping the Velvet and many other books, to be our patron, and she came across to that and opened that up, and it was a really snazzy event. I think in my other personal life I'm also part of a choir called the Pink Singers, we sing a combination of classical pieces through to easy listening, and I really, really do love that. And then I'm really well known for also singing in Karaoke bars, anytime, anywhere, I'll just get up and sing. So that's probably my biggest things. Recently we were [1:34 file 8] jazz singer, which has been quite fun. The transition from choir to singing solos is quite interesting, and I just did a big event doing a couple of numbers, breaking my teeth into that. So I think socially I'm having quite a lot of fun, yeah.

**FH:** Would you like to tell me about the impact of Galop as you see it on the LGBT community, and also the impact of your role with Galop on others?

**SP:** I think it's interesting. I think you've got a direct impact and an indirect impact. The direct impact I think is when somebody's experienced a homophobic or transphobic crime, either they didn't know about us and they're doing what most victims do, which is first of all speak to friends about their experience and then we get referred, usually we get recommended by a friend or someone, and I think that the impact that we have is providing a very solid amount of care and support to that person, and also professional knowledge. I think that seems to be the feedback that we get. People don't always, if they haven't had a homophobic experience, know about us. But when they've had to use us I think the impact has been one of I guess being grateful that we can provide that level of service and that level of support.

I think the indirect impact is through the work that we've done, the developing work with the Metropolitan Police, with the **MPA**, the Home Office, the other parts of the criminal justice system including the Crown Prosecution Service, where we've slowly but surely built ourselves a place on every steering group, on any strategic group or even practitioner group, where we have a voice and we're giving advice and expertise, and that hopefully shapes better policy which then shapes the practice that practitioners should be following. And it's that indirect impact that is probably less measurable if we did some kind of user satisfaction. But I believe that's what we've got, and I certainly now what when I've been at meetings where people didn't know I was a member of Galop, actually the Home Office ones are probably the ones that spring to mind, them tending to use their alliance with Galop as an indication that they have LGBT covered. So I think that we have an impact on the public sector organisations in that way as well.

**FH:** You meet like for changes in policy and so on?

**SP:** Yeah, so if they change the policy, they say, 'We've informed LGBT organisations' and it's always 'Stonewall and Galop' so we have that place, which I think is very important. It's not like London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard or THT ... well maybe strike that off the record, THT are fantastic, but in terms of criminal justice we're seen as if you've got that voluntary agency recommending the policy too, then that's showing that they've done their consultation work and it will be a solid recommendation.

**FH:** So Galop is not limited to just policy an the police anymore?

**SP:** No, I think it's expanding. Yeah, definitely. I mean we have a place now on the Hate Crime Panel for the Criminal Justice System and that's incredibly important, because what it's doing is reviewing the cases and so where Galop may have got actual experience about that particular case outside the way the police dealt with it, they can make commentary, or in terms of looking at how the prosecutors perhaps have interpreted the incident, they can also make a statement, and so we're having that constant influence. And it might be wrong but back to the Filling the Blanks project, the CPS were not our funders but the CPS agreed to fund the conference, and I think that's a sign of how much we're regarded. That was a pretty big piece of money that they gave to us to do that, and so I think for me that's a very important place that Galop has moved into.

- FH:** Just out of interest I'm just going to ask you this – how do you monitor or collaborate with the Home Office? Do you look into the detention cells they put the refugees in or are you trying to ...
- SP:** It's more of a partnership piece of work where the caseload is brought around the table. The idea is that you'll have a panel and you have it represented by a number of the different partners in the Criminal Justice System, and we're largely brought the incidents that are looked at in the panel, or the other way around would be that a client has come to us and sometimes the client can be doing that on behalf of someone, and they could be explaining about issues that are happening. We use the police in this circumstance 'cause it's easier, where perhaps a borough hasn't provided a very good service and we're getting a client in, we'll be able to understand whether actually the police have not managed to meet what their service commitments are, and then what we would do would be to initially write to the borough commander or the agreed single point of contact, and if that didn't work then we'd have to raise it up. So it would be ... trying to make an assessment and a change at that level.
- FH:** So would you like to tell me the changes that you have witnessed for the LGBT community both generally and in terms of policing and Galop's work?
- SP:** Well I moved to London, as I say, just before 2000, the millennium, and I guess over the last ten years there's been really a solid move to have a tolerant and open policing. Whether that actually translates into equality and us being free from discrimination is different, but the knock-on effect that that's had on the LGBT community has certainly been one that doesn't any longer ...and again that's a generation thing, but doesn't any longer particularly fear the police, in terms of them being criminalised or them being too unfairly treated, it might be that when they go to report there's still a cynicism around whether they'll get anything done, but it's not at the level that they'll be brutalised or criminalised. So that's quite a big change in terms of LGBT community.
- Sorry, say the question again?
- FH:** I just asked you the changes for the community in general and for the police – how the scene has changed and ...
- SP:** I think the scene has changed in terms of being much more visible. I think more and more it's gone to visible, chic, alternative, which really has allowed the gay world to expand. So as I was describing earlier, thinking of that very almost stereotype gay nightclub which was enclosed, dark and a bit dingy and seedy, it has moved to much more a place where not only gay people want to go but straight people think it's cool too. So there has been I certainly think that move.
- FH:** How do you feel about that? Do you think it's a positive change?
- SP:** Well yeah, 'cause I remember a couple of years ago having the big discussions about ... I think we called it Pride and Prejudice because they were talking about, basically it was this idea that the pink pound has become so acceptable that you've become something that's creating revenue for hetero-normative commercial organisations that are not necessarily putting back into the community. So there's that whole discussion. And yeah, I actually think there's some right to be cynical about that. I think there should



be much more an emphasis of the LGBT community trying to force monies that have been commercially gained into supporting the LGBT infrastructure. And it seems that we're a bit shy of doing that, we don't know how to do it, we haven't practiced how to do it. We practice how to be advocates and lobbyists, but I don't think we're so good in terms of money and making money and generating money for ourselves. There's just a small few who can do that. So I think that's something where we have missed a bit of a trick.

**FH:** So what are your hopes for the community, and how do you see Galop driving it?

**SP:** My ultimate hope for the community, which would have an impact on Galop, is that the community ... there's a large decrease in homophobic crime, which would mean that we wouldn't need Galop. But I think that's an aspiration that's really out there. I think my hope for the community is a real confidence in making services commit and actually in reality come out with what they're supposed to be doing, so provision of service and the community being confident to say, 'No, I'm not getting the service I want, the full service that white heterosexual people get, why can't I get that.'

**FH:** So you still think people are there who would just say, 'Because we're gay we're not entitled to it' or wouldn't push for it.

**SP:** I don't think it's as conscious as that people would say that gay people are not entitled, although there are still some groups, but I think there's some unconscious poorer service 'cause they don't quite understand, as opposed to that they're consciously discriminative. So I want gay people to be able to pull people up on that and feel confident to say, 'Sorry – not being rude or anything, but that's not good enough. I want a better service,' and actually getting it. So that would be something I'd want to see, the confidence of the community to ask for the Goods and Services Act to be really upheld. The second thing would be for Galop, I'd like to see Galop become an organisation where we really are setting the standard and helping other groups develop, so we would have a strategic position and we'd also have an almost being that place where we can assess standards of other organisations to provide that level of advocacy. And I've always thought it would be really nice if we could become larger, in terms of national, but then I do understand at the moment even coping just with London and the boroughs has been hard. But that would be very nice.

**FH:** How about international?

**SP:** Yeah, international would be super! In actual fact sorry, yes, it completely included ... you know I've been lucky enough to go around places and meet some other LGBT organisations similar to us, and in fact we were at the EuroPride Stockholm in July, and it was quite clear amongst LGBT organisations that the level of service that we were giving was unheard of with other groups, and we would gladly love to train that up. I'm saying we! <Laughs> I believe for Galop that it would be wonderful to take that package across to other places and help other countries set up those type of services.

**FH:** When you say other countries, do you mean other countries where there are some gay rights, or ...

**SP:** Any country really! I mean I think we'd have to be careful where you've got countries who actually haven't got gay rights established. I think that is where Amnesty has got much more expertise. I'm not sure if we would be so used to dealing with that kind of environment. We'd probably be at a weakness. But if it was alongside a group that were trying to do that and there would be no reason why we couldn't come over and show a structure that was being set up very early on. I could see that as being really positive because you'd have a... I think we have got a strong formula and if you've got a new, emerging LBT community within a country, what better thing to get that new emerging place with a strong support culture. So there's two things you can do. You're providing for individuals who've had bad experience, but also we could help collecting evidence. I don't think in any culture that evidence is something that people can easily talk themselves out of, and I think it's that collection of evidence, having a body of evidence, showing where there's been inequalities has really helped.

**FH:** Thank you very much Susan.

**SP:** Thank you very much.

**FH:** It has been a pleasure.

**SP:** The pleasure's all mine. <Laughs>

<End of recording>