

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Jackie Fernandez, Ex-Chief Executive of Stonewall Housing

Interviewer: Susan Hansen

Place of Interview: Cambridge

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Key

JF: = Interviewee, Jackie Fernandez

SH: = Interviewer, Susan Hansen

[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

<Part 1>

SH: I need your date of birth.

JF: My date of birth is the 24th of March 1968.

<End of Part 1>

<Part 2>

SH: So I guess the first area we need to cover, because it's an oral history project, is your background, like going right back to your childhood, so where you grew up.

JF: Blimey!

<Laughter>

OK, I grew up in Slough in Berkshire, my dad moved over here in the early ... late 50s, early 60s and my mum came over shortly afterwards, and they moved around Berkshire so I live around Slough, Maidenhead and Taplow. I'm the youngest of the family; I've got two older brothers. And I lived most of my life in Slough up until the age of 16, so I studied there and everything, and I moved ... where the hell did I go? <Chuckles> I'm trying to think, you forget when you have to talk about it, let me have a think. Yeah I left home at 16 and I lived and worked in Slough for a couple of years, and then I decided to, for some reason I wanted to become a journalist, and then I enrolled in the London College of Printing and I studied there, and I went on to Coventry University and I lived there for three years and then I moved to London and kind of just worked. It was weird when I finished in Coventry because, I think in my third year I realised I didn't want to be a journalist, so it's one of those things where you have this momentary lapse where you go, 'Oh my god! What am I doing in this, you know, thing.' The good thing about that course, it's very heavy in cultural studies, which I found quite interesting.

So I left Coventry and I moved into a flat with my brother, my middle brother, Jeff, and a friend of his. And I didn't have a job, and it was just a real fluke how I got into housing – my mum was on a management committee of this local hostel down our street in Slough, for 16 and 25-year-old people who

were homeless. And it was a real dodgy place to live because they were always causing a bit of trouble and stuff, but my mum was on a management committee 'cause she was a housing benefits officer for Slough Borough Council, so they knobbed her a bit to <chuckles> sort out the housing benefit a lot. And she sorted me out a locum job there, so I just was doing it on an ad hoc basis, and that's literally how I fell into housing, it wasn't a career path that I chose out of pure love, it was something that I needed something to pay the rent and I needed something to make me live and go out and have a good time really, so that's how I fell into it.

<End of Part 2>

<Part 3>

SH: So you moved to London from Coventry.

JF: Yeah I kind of...

SH: What kind of date?

JF: Let me think, I went to ... it would've been 19... oh bloody hell! Let me get my CV up <laughs>. I would say 1992 but I can't say hand on heart. It could be 1992 – let me have a quick look at my ... it's really rare, I never usually think that far back unless I've got a job interview so it's a bit odd. Let me have a look. Yeah 'cause I think I was at London College of Printing until 1989, that does sound about right 'cause I would've done three years at Coventry so ... there you go, job applications, that's always a good one to look at. Let's have a look at this one, obviously 'cause I've applied for lots of jobs <laughs>. There you go, application. So I've been around ... housing ... that's my work, yeah 1989-to-1992 I was in Coventry and then I moved to London, well, Clapham Junction in '92 so. But previously when I was at London College of Printing I lived in London, I lived in Tooting so, and then I left London to go to...

SH: Coventry.

JF: Yeah and then came back.

<End of Part 3>

<Part 4>

SH: Can you tell me about how you came to be involved with Stonewall Housing?

JF: Yeah. Once again it was a real fluke, I'd been working in housing obviously since 1992, '93 actually, that's when I got my first job and I worked for Stonham Housing in the hostel in Slough. And that job, Stonham Housing were quite a large housing association, they still are I think, I don't know how big they are. I think they're mainly around the southeast of London actually come to think of it, 'cause I've not heard of them up here. And so I was doing locum work there and then suddenly there was this gambling hostel in Beckenham that were looking for a temporary worker, and some how they got hold of my name – I think one of the regional managers knew about me, and they said, 'Would I be interested in going to work with compulsive gamblers?' And I was living in London so Clapham Junction to Beckenham wasn't too

bad, and I was fascinated by it so ... 'cause it's something that I never knew existed, so I went and worked with some compulsive gamblers for a couple of years and then I ended up getting a permanent contract there. And then I ended up working in Nacro as well, 'cause I ended up in supported housing at many different levels. And they were really good jobs.

And then I went into general needs housing, which was I worked for a BME Housing Association called ASRA. That was really interesting but highly political and it did my head in a bit, and there were many issues there in terms of what happened, but I had to re-apply for my job and I didn't get my job, for many reasons. And so I ended up ... a friend of mine who worked at Refuge, the charity Refuge, helped me out and offered me a really, really temporary contract like paying me week by week. And then suddenly I saw this job advertised at Stonewall Housing in *The Guardian*, and then my then partner said to me, 'I've found your dream job.' Because I always wanted ... I clearly had housing experience, I'd been in housing for a while, but by then I'd come out and, you know, my ideal thing for me was to work in a gay setting that ideally dealt with housing, and I'd never head of Stonewall Housing. And it was also a step up, it was a housing services manager post.

So I applied for the job and I went for an interview – I did terribly at the interview in <chuckles> terms of the finance report, which I thought I'd blew. And then I was interviewed by Julia, Julia Shirley, Dennis Carney, Stacey Dale, I think three of them, in then old meeting room at Leroy House. And I was crapping myself, and there were a couple of questions I couldn't answer, and by then I'd learnt not to blag it and I didn't think I did well at the interview. And I was driving off somewhere and I think a couple of hours later Julia called and said I'd got the job and I nearly drove off the road! 'Cause back then you could actually answer the mobile phone <laughs> and drive, not that it's a good thing to do, but <chuckles>. And that's how I got into Stonewall Housing, I'd never heard of it before but I was dead chuffed when I got the job, it's one of the best moments in my career really.

<End of Part 4>

<Part 5>

SH: So you were initially Housing Services Manager, that was the post was it?

JF: Yeah, I was initially Housing Services Manager, I started in '99 and I did that, I can't remember ... it all happened because of Tor, you might need to talk to Tor 'cause she's got some kind of ... she has got a connection to Stonewall Housing. 'Cause she worked at Refuge and I knew her a Refuge and she had ... it's very incestuous, the LGBT sector <chuckles>. I knew a really good friend of mine called Rita Hirani, who now chief execs at Broken Rainbow jointly with me and was then at Refuge, and she heard about the Advice Services Manager vacancy at Stonewall Housing, thought Tor would be ideal for it, so Tor applied and got the job. And Tor didn't stay at Stonewall for long, I think she stayed there for maybe just under a year, but when she left Julia was either worried about me leaving or was just trying to think of how to hold onto me, and in hindsight I can see that I would worry, because there were some real challenges at Stonewall at the time in terms of the staff morale and just the way the staff used to be a collective, so it was a real challenge to try and move away from the collective thoughts. And so Julia offered me a position of assistant director, which I thought was amazing! 'Cause I think I'd

only just been there a year, and once again I can check on my application form <chuckles>. But within, certainly within a year to 18 months I was assistant director, and I wasn't doing that for long because then Julia went on long-term sick leave – it was all planned, and then I acted up as director. So it was an amazing career path I had at Stonewall, but yeah I started out as housing services manager, because my background was doing that and managing rent arrears and managing staff.

<End of Part 5>

<Part 6>

SH: Now, you may tell me that this is not a topic that I can touch on, in which case fine.

JF: Yeah

SH: But you mentioned there were some kind of challenges to staff morale going on around the time you were kind of shooting up the ladder.

<Laughter>

JF: Yeah

SH: Are you comfortable talking about that stuff or?

JF: I am, there's just ... [SECTION REMOVED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY REASONS] I don't know if you are going to speak to someone called Jo Fraser, she was the chair at Stonewall Housing, but she started the day after me. And I remember me and Jo were sat in on a staff team meeting and it just, we looked at each other 'cause all of a sudden a couple of staff members started shouting at Julia. And ... for me, when I say it sounds quite normal I think back there, but when I joined Stonewall Housing I thought, I have never worked in an environment where people shout at each other, and me and Jo just looked at each other going, what the hell is going on here?! It's like, you know, what's going on?

I think Julia dealt with some really tough things and I think when you talk to her she'll ... you know, she's amazing just holding on there, but they used to call her the cancer of the organisation, they used to accuse her of being racist and ... and it was a really difficult time that she had to deal with it, so I think when she got a couple of semi-competent people, like me and Tor, she wanted to hold onto us. But the challenges were just trying to deal with a lot of the unprofessional behaviour that was going on where it was, it was common practice and accepted by staff and also the managers that they could be shouted out, and for me, it wasn't. Certainly I think the previous housing manager to me, when I heard what happened, I think she was really stressed out, I think she had a really difficult staff team, I think, I know there was three of them but they were difficult and I think she found it really difficult to deal with it and challenge it. I think, in a really odd way, it's quite good that I was Asian because suddenly the race card couldn't be played with me, and if it was I just didn't entertain it, I just kind of thought, well that's just rubbish, and it never was played with me. An attempt was made when I was director, but I just pretty much dealt with that. But I think a lot of the managers there, certainly my feeling was is that to actually call someone a racist is actually

quite disarming, and to actually be called a racist must be quite difficult. I mean I don't use that term lightly so when I do use it I do have evidence, but I think to bandy that around within the workplace was very, very bad.

And it was a real atmosphere sometimes, staff t... I remember one of the questions I was asked in the interview when I went for housing services manager place was: what would you do if someone phoned in sick when they had to turn up for supervision? And I thought it was hypothetical, but it was real. So there was real issues of high sickness levels, general attitudes towards 'the management' as people would call it and really, really poor work ethics in terms of bringing in the rent. I mean at the end of the day Stonewall Housing is a charity but it needed the money to pay the staff to actually exist, so it had really hideous rent arrears and coming with my background from what I learnt at ASRA actually, working in general needs, made me quite on the ball of how to monitor rent arrears and stuff like that. But it was a real challenge to not only deal with the attitude, it was a challenge to deal with competency as well.

SH: Quite a challenge?

JF: Yeah, I mean <sighs> when I met one of the staff members in particular at my first or second day there, I came in, arms folded, it was really strange and like, you know, not much eye contact. And I was chatting to them, you know, 'How are you?' Blah, blah, blah. And then to be honest it wasn't, it was only probably, it was my probably first managerial post – I had a secondment up in ASRA, and that was difficult 'cause I was promoted and had to manage my then, my peers and that was difficult. This one was interesting 'cause it was a brand new one and I was a middle manager, and the individual came in and it really threw me 'cause she had quite an attitude on. And she basically said to me, 'I have no ambition, I want to do this job until I retire.' And in hindsight, as I got to know this individual, she's very nice, but I ... every time a new manager came in, housing services manager came in after me, I'd always take her to one side, 'Look, can you just be nice to this person and give them a chance.' And they'd just say, 'Blah, blah, blah.' And in the end it became a bit of a joke, but I was still trying to be really serious about, 'Right, you've got to be OK about this because they're going to manage you, da, da, da.'

So it was real challenges there, and I don't know how we stuck it out actually <laughs> I don't know, but I did. And I think people like Jo and Tor really helped, 'cause Tor was going through the same stuff with the advice services team, so it wasn't something that was isolated to my team, it was a bigger issue. And having some people just to talk to, like Jo and Tor, was really useful, and Julia as well might've appreciated a bit of support. And I think the board also didn't know what to do at the time, I think they found it really difficult to deal with. And at the end of the day, they're volunteers, they come in every six weeks for a meeting and then they go away, but we had to deal with the day-to-day stuff. But it was a challenge; I'm glad I stuck it out but I don't know how I did, 'cause now I just wouldn't have the patience for it, I think I would've just dealt with it a bit more effectively but you just never know do you.

SH: You were thrown in the deep end.

JF: I was yeah, completely <laughs>. I wish I was warned a little bit, but I don't know, sometimes it's good to be thrown in the deep and I think it was good for

me to do that, and also it was at a time in my life where I needed a job and it was closer to home as well so I just did it and got through it.

<End of Part 6>

<Part 7>

SH: So we've been talking about issues within the organisation when you arrived that you had to deal with. Kind of looking outwards a bit I guess, could you talk a little bit about the major issues that Stonewall was engaged in?

JF: As director or?

SH: I guess at the time of your arrival, what was the focus?

JF: The focus for Stonewall back then, '99, when were they established? I can't remember <chuckles>. The issues for Stonewall back then was to just get funding in. The housing services side wasn't that effective at the time because, while Stonewall didn't own any of their properties, they were actually, and I assume still are, owned by a number of housing associations and housing trusts. They didn't have to worry too much about how that was financed, they got something called a Supported Housing Management Grant for each housing association prior to supporting people, which was a challenge. And that funded quite a lot of those, that part of the services and then the rent arrears would fund the rest of the organisation. Basically, the housing services team funded most of the organisation to be quite honest.

The advice services team had a real challenge, I think they had to fund, you know Julia was the main fundraiser and she fundraised for the BME post, which was quite new then. But certainly when I joined she seemed to put in a lot of funding bids. Back then The Big Lottery Fund, which was then ... I can't remember, what was it called before then? The National Lottery Fund maybe? There you go <laughs> ... rocket science! Had just opened, literally just established itself and that's how she told me she learnt how to do funding bids, it's one of the biggest funders. And they just came in and they funded the advice services manager's post, so it allowed her to get that in, but I think fundraising was a real issue and I think just like the survival of the organisation was really important. Not as bad as it was now, I think now the climate's changed, but clearly it was externally just trying to raise our profile and get known really, but <prff>.... When I used to go out and talk about Stonewall Housing back then, a housing services manager, not many people knew about us and there wasn't such an emphasis on lobbying too much. Julia might beg to differ but she was probably doing a lot of the work herself, whereas I was dealing with a lot of the operational stuff. It's quite difficult for me to see what was going on on the director level back then when I was housing services manager, but certainly I think just lobbying in terms of monitoring has always been something that Stonewall believed in, certainly when I joined the need to monitor sexuality was something that everyone was ignoring and still do. But it was probably medium level publicity we were doing in terms of getting out an annual report, and this is prior to websites as well, so it was like the dark ages really <laughs> where we were there huddled round just two computers in the office and just trying to get on with things. We were just trundling along back then; we were probably more inward looking than we were outward looking but I think maybe it was probably because of my position at the time in terms of what I was doing.

<End of Part 7>

<Part 8>

SH: We've been talking about the focus within Stonewall at the time you arrived, and this was pre-internet and website.

JF: Mm, yeah.

SH: So thinking about as you're kind of moving along in terms of your position within the organisation, was there like a shift in focus as you moved around or?

JF: Yeah there was a shift in focus, because external stuff happened that ... and also internal stuff happened that meant the organisation had to change. In terms of funding, I'll break it down into that, the new government rethink of how they would fund supported housing services was coming in. I think it was coming in in 2002/2003 called Supporting People. And that was quite a ... that happened the time I became director, as soon as I became director there was stuff going on, but prior to that when I was assistant director there was talk about Supporting People. So I was doing some work on it for Julia with the finance worker as well, where we had to basically work on the rent but also had to cost our support service, which we'd never ever done before – in hindsight it's a fantastic thing 'cause it stops you dossing really, it makes you actually say, 'Well this is how much it costs to support a person.' But we had to cost the service, so you had to break it down into befriending, counselling and you had to break that away from housing management which was stuff like rent areas, health and safety, maintenance issues, and so we costed up the service. And it was a really interesting time 'cause the local authorities that we were working with were Hackney, Islington, and Newham and Haringey, and a couple of them were encouraging us to hike up the costs 'cause they said, 'Don't worry about it.' Because prior to Supported People actually coming in, so maybe in the 2001/2002 year, 'cause it was going to come in in 2003, they were always saying, 'Don't worry, just put in as much support costs as you want, just really do it.' And me and Abbey and Julia at the time thought, well we don't really wanna do that because they might take it away. And what happened 18 months in to Supporting People was a lot of organisations actually folded because their support costs were too high and the local authorities turned around and said, 'Well actually we're not going to pay it anymore.' And they were stuffed! So it lulled you into a false sense of security.

So it was quite a challenging time, I never really worried about it, but it was kind of like I had to manage, it was externally and also internally, because internally the then management committee, a couple of them were freaking out because <chuckles> because of Supporting People, because at the same time Supporting People was coming in ... it's quite complex, and I'll try and explain it really simply <chuckles> but I'm not usually that good. Because Stonewall didn't own their properties and because back prior to pre-Supporting People the housing associations dealt with all of the maintenance and we just dealt with the collection of rent. And when Supporting People was coming in the housing associations had to write to decide whether they wanted to take back all of the support services and the housing management part of it as well. And [3:29 IA 33] were one of the first ones that I met with,

they said, 'Well we're taking back the housing management.' So they meant they were taking back all the rent collection, they were taking ... that was the biggest part of the income, which we then thought. And then suddenly London and Quadrant said that and [3:45] at Hackney, all of them said it at the end. And so the board of trust, we went, 'Oh my god! Well that's it, we may as well turn the lights off.' And I had to manage that internally and say, 'Well look, no, no, it's OK because Supporting People can cover that.' And I thought it's a good thing 'cause we don't have to collect rent anymore, 'cause we're not very good at collecting rent to be quite honest, and it will take away from that and we can actually focus on the real work which is supporting people. And the long and the short of it, it all came out in the wash, and somehow for the first year, I didn't use up a lot of money and a lot of that money has gone on to form reserves at Stonewall Housing, that we've got ... they, we ... you see, I can't let go of it – that they've got now, which has actually put them in quite a strong position financially. 'Cause after Stonewall I'd moved to some other smaller charities and none of them have reserves as big as, as strong as Stonewall Housing's ... were, probably have grown over the years.

So that was a real challenge in terms of funding for Stonewall Housing. And also because the housing management side has shifted back to the housing associations, the advice team, by default, were no longer supported by the financial finances that was coming in. So suddenly the advice team were absolutely un-funded, it's an unfunded service, but luckily we have some reserves because of the money that we kept to actually fund the advice team – and it was my priority to go out and fundraise for the advice services team, which I did by pure luck I think. But their real challenges was Supporting People coming in, and also with the use of the website we realised we needed a website but didn't have the money. And so we got one free through the then advice services manager who knew a contact at Camden who did this thing called CASweb which gave us a free website, which back then was fine, they were very static pages but hey, we were there. And bought the domain and just getting simple things like email set up internally was a complete farce, 'cause I hired a number of cowboys, IT cowboys who did the talk and they delivered nothing. So in the end, you know, <chuckles> you live and learn. Now I just hate most IT people, but I have got a really nice guy now who supports me so <laughs>.

It was a real challenge to get us up. It was a real challenge internally in terms of just making sure the advice teams were funded and the fundraising level making us financially stable. But also getting us up to speed for IT so people could actually do the operations on their day-to-day work really well was a nice challenge; they needed to have access to the internet, they needed a computer on their desk. We didn't even have computers on desks back then; when I joined there was one computer in the main office, that was used for the advice team when they used to go into the ... that had internet access, that was the only one. And there was another one round the old partition that, probably where Bob's office is now which is where the director, I used to sit. And that one didn't have any internet access but that was mainly for the finance worker. And then me and Tor used to share a computer but that one didn't have a printer so it was not connected up to anything <laughs>. So it was a real challenge to get us up to speed, you know? It was a real major thing for someone to get a bloody computer on their desk, I think everyone's got a computer on their desk now, certainly by the time I left people had computers on their desks and there was a laptop flying around as well. But it was a challenge to balance the needs of the organisation to start delivering a

responsive service against the financial constraints we had and the demands that we had to deal with, the money and also fundraise.

So it was interesting. And also bringing up the team, 'cause Supporting People really challenged the staff team within the housing services part and they had to really skill up on the support side of it, and so it was a real challenge. But Patricia was a really brilliant housing services manager, Patricia McCann, she now lives in Ireland, and she really skilled them up and she ... she was really ... she was really funny actually how she applied for the job. Because we advertised the housing services manager post when ... yeah a couple of times and no one applied, all the people who applied were just like dismal. And it wasn't bad money and it was just unbelievable the people who applied. And then in the end I just thought, god we're just gonna employ someone 'cause they're lesbian or gay, it's getting really stupid, we need to just open this up a bit. And so we went to the board and I said, 'Look, you know, we need to maybe open this up to heterosexual people as well.' And they agreed. And Patricia <chuckles> she phoned up quite cheekily on the day going, 'Hello, I've been away for a while.' And she was going, 'I was wondering if you would accept an application from me because I've missed it by a day?' And I just thought, oh sod off! And then I was just thinking, oh actually, no, we haven't got anybody in, and so I was being a bit sarci with her <chuckles> I was going, 'Well you can send it in but I can't guarantee I'll look at it because we've had a lot of applications.' So she faxed it through and I saw it and thought, oh my god, she's fantastic! And I think Tor had left by then, she was at Galop but she was still on the management committee at Stonewall.

So me and Tor pretty much interviewed her within 48 hours, met Patricia. Patricia was fantastic the amount of experience she had – hired her within days and then she started within six weeks. But she's the one who pretty much set the systems up for Supporting People, and she's the one who managed them, and she dealt with some really challenging behaviour there, 'cause some of the staff team left when I joined but there was still some individuals there. And one of the best points that she did was in Newham where they were failing 80% of the supported housing services in the borough, actually gave us the highest score and we were in the top 10% in Newham with providing one of the best services in Newham. So she worked really well, so while she was doing that it was really good. But also Supporting People shifted us in terms of us having ... well me mainly, having to go out and lobby a lot, to actually hold onto the money and also to lobby a lot to tell people about the advice service as well. So whilst I was doing all that stuff internally, shifting internally as a result of Supporting People, it actually helped us become a bit more savvy in terms of marketing. And I felt really odd, you feel really odd in the charity sector going out and acting like a sales person, but I took it up quite quickly 'cause I had to meet a lot of the Supporting People senior managers and the first thing they say, 'What's the need for your project?' And I had to be armed with many a statistic to throw at them and many a brochure about Stonewall Housing, and feeling a bit of a twat at times thinking, well I could just go and sell double glazing or something, but it really shifted the organisation completely. The introduction to Supporting People affected the core services completely and for them to exist they had to hold onto the money and get more income generation, but to do that I had to go out and lobby big time and market the organisation to funders and also to anybody who would listen really, buy into it. So it was a

real challenge. <Pause> I don't know if that answered your question?
<Laughs>

<End of Part 8>

<Part 9>

SH: So we covered a lot of ground in terms of changes within Stonewall while you were there. Leaving that topic to one side for a little while, and the next part of the schedule is for you to talk more generally about what your life was like for you when you were living in London during the whole period of time that you were involved with Stonewall Housing.

JF: OK, I'll go back.

SH: So yes, including times when you weren't at work.

JF: Yeah, oh right, when I was on annual leave and stuff?

SH: Yeah <chuckles>

JF: OK, blimey! God.

<Laughter>

OK. I joined Stonewall in '99 and back then I was renting accommodation in Hackney with my then partner, living in a one bedroom flat in Hackney ... we were doing OK. Back then, I think on a personal level I was ... I've always worked, I've worked since I was 16 and I hadn't been out of work ever, and my partner back then wanted to go off and train up to become a social worker. And also she was having real difficulty finding a job and she had very, very part time work working for an LGBT youth group in Hackney, but it was sessional work so it was tiny. So I was pretty much funding the rent and everything, but I didn't really care 'cause I'd worked most of my life and so it didn't really bother me. So she went off to university, I think, in Islington, was it Middlesex University, down Holloway Road I think, isn't it? Yeah. She went there to study and I just carried on working at Stonewall.

It was weird when I had time off at Stonewall because it was so ... I was going to say stressful, I can't actually remember showing signs of stress, but I did have sleepless nights but never as bad as I do now, as a senior manager you really do have proper sleepless nights <chuckles>. But certainly the first year whenever I took time off work ... there's Tor ... I would get ill, I was ill every time I took a week off and Julia always said, 'You know, you need to stop getting ill whenever you take time off.' <Chuckles> But I think that's just maybe when I used to relax and I used to get quite ill. I didn't used to go anywhere, I think we used to just relax, or go up to Manchester 'cause my partner was from Manchester and stuff so we used to go up there or go out and see my mates, and I used to go out a bit more than I do now, now that I'm 41 and I'm too tired and I live in the country, but I used to go. And my friend Rita started up Club Kali and I used to go and work for her now and again; she used to exploit her friends and make them work for her for a pittance <laughs> you can put that on record <laughs>.

So yeah it was kind of just quite a social, I was quite social, it's really nice to live in London and have lots of queer friends actually. And for me, the reason why I moved to London was, when I came out, is to actually go and see BME people and queer ones as well. Do you want to stop this while I...?

<Stops recorder>

SH: There we go, now it's recording again. OK, we took a brief break but we were talking about what life was like in London outside of work during the time you lived there.

JF: Yeah it was quite a formative time for me, personally, living in London and working at Stonewall Housing. Because like I said earlier, I moved to London quite deliberately, because I came out in Coventry when I was 25, which was probably quite old back then, and I moved to London 'cause I wanted to meet some BME people who were queer basically. And I remember when I first moved to London back in '92/93 that my brother Jeff, who I lived with, was very sweet and used to come to the gay bars with me, 'cause back then I literally knew nobody, I knew nobody in London. And then I found out of an Asian club night called Shakti, which used to happen up in Turn Pike Lane, no it's not, Tufnell Park. And I went there and that's where I met a really good friend of mine called Rita now, who I worked with at Broken Rainbow. But I've known her since then and she's a really good friend. And she was going out the then DJ, DJ Ritou, who was lovely. But then I got to meet loads of people and I met Michelle there and I heard about the Black, Lesbian and Gay Centre there, so I pretty much pursued them and asked to become a volunteer there, because it was really important for me to get into the BME queer scene. And I managed to do some volunteering work and they were fantastic.

I met a guy, Clarence, who was just fantastic, he was this great big BME bloke, black guy who had dreads and he was just, just really queer and camp and really proud of it and stuff, and he was a really nice bloke and we did a few TV interviews together and stuff. But he was fantastic and he really knew his stuff. And it was a really good time working at the BLGC but they had real funding issues back then and I became a trustee in the end there, and then I left because of work commitments and because the people who worked there were leaving because of the funding crisis going on, so it was really difficult.

So the backdrop to my life at Stonewall Housing was that I was quite political within the queer political sense and I used to go to a lot of events that focussed on specialist work, which was domestic violence and sexuality, nice happy evenings out like that. In Dalston, what's ... I don't know what the bookshop's called, but it was a great bookshop on the high street, is it still there? I can't remember, it's near Blockbusters, near the Rio. But it was great, it was like a bookshop come café, they did really good Caribbean food there actually so <laughs>. So I used to spend my time going out to Shakti and then it turned into Club Kali, Rita took over, set up Club Kali and I ended up working there helping her out. But it was really just kind of chilling out with my friends and going away now and again to Manchester or Amsterdam and stuff, but it was nice. And my mum and dad used to come and see me back then, and back then I wasn't out to my parents, so I was living with my partner in a one bedroom flat, clearly we weren't having separate bedrooms and stuff, but I wasn't out to my family. My dad died a few years ago and my mum's still alive but they're very religious, they're from Goa so they have a Catholic

religion, Roman Catholics which I grew up with. So me, I felt really odd because a few years ago when my dad found out I was smoking he was devastated back then and I thought well if I tell him I'm queer then he's going to <chuckles> what's he going to do with that? That was always my excuse, and back then I suppose I wasn't ready to deal with their disappointment, so I had to deal with that. And I told my brother Jeff back then, and when I came out in Coventry at 25 it was really important out of everyone that he accepted it, and he did which was no surprise, and he was pretty cool about it. Things have changed now 'cause we don't speak, but back then that was the backdrop where I was doing a clearly high profile role, 'cause you outed yourself just by saying, 'Oh and where do you work?' 'Stonewall Housing.' 'What's that?' Whereas with my mum I just worked in housing and I helped young people, but that was fine, that worked for her and that worked for me. But a few years later I found out mum and dad pretty much sussed and whilst they never ever wanted to ask me or confirm it, we pretty much just had this like unspoken understanding about my sexual preferences and that was it really.

So that was my backdrop initially in the late '90s in the one bedroom flat in Hackney. And then I ended up buying a house with my then partner in Stoke Newington. And back then I think the backdrop to Stonewall Housing was that I was assistant director then in that transition period between the two houses, and I got the directors post 'cause when I'm standing in my, then new kitchen when Stacey phoned my up saying I'd got the job and I was really shocked. And then I only lived with my then partner for about, I think about a year – Tor will correct you <chuckles> oh look, she's trying to listen now <laughs>. And ... when did we get together, 2001/200...

T It was the end of 2000.

JF: End of 2000, so yeah it literally was a year or just under a year that me and Tor got together. And then I had to leave my partner, and then I split up whilst still working at Stonewall Housing, I didn't take a day off work, I was with my partner for seven years by then and I just So literally I moved from rented, to buying a house, to getting together with Tor, who was a really good friend of mine back then and we got together, to splitting up, breaking up with a seven year relationship, moving out of the house in Stoke Newington, going to live with my mum and dad for a while in Slough, commuting from Slough to Islington <laughs> for a while and then eventually finding a flat to rent in Dalston. So that was a huge transitional period and the one thing that kept me sane was the constant, the constant was Stonewall Housing, believe it or not. And one of my, then lecturers said to me, 'What you put into your work will never let you down, what you put in is what you get, what will help you.' So if you're putting a lot into your work you'll do OK, but if you don't then it'll just be shit. And that's the only thing that kind of helped me 'cause I clung onto that and it was a bit of sanity, 'cause it was functional, I knew I could do it and it was alright and back then it wasn't too challenging.

So there was quite a lot happening back then. And then probably a year into getting together with Tor we were chatting about having children so we started fertility treatment. So that was another thing that we were talking about. So it started with me where we did some fertility treatment with me, and I think I had six or seven goes and I had a miscarriage, and then I did IVF. I think IVF was the final thing that happened to me, I was at Stonewall Housing and by ... I didn't tell anyone at Stonewall and it was when I had the

miscarriage and I had to take a couple of weeks off that I think Patricia told the staff team. And also, another thing that happened whilst I was at Stonewall, my dad died as well <laughs> in 2003, so it was some really, really major stuff that was going on whilst I was still at Stonewall.

So the fertility treatment was probably the last major thing that happened. And then after my IVF treatment me and Tor literally swapped while she was still at Galop and she got pregnant first time. So one of the reasons for me leaving Stonewall was the fact that Tor was pregnant with Bertie and it made us rethink our lives. I mean by then we'd moved here so, and we were commuting from Cambridge for about two-to-three years and then suddenly having a child in the equation just wasn't workable. And I think by then we were pretty much done with Stonewall, not in a really bad way but I think I wasn't giving it my best and I think Tor was really finding it challenging just dealing with the fundraising stuff at Galop. So we decided that I would take some time off to stay with Bertie – Tor got a new job in the village here, and whilst I was off I would look for some work elsewhere because ... and I kind of knowingly did that, and it was known to the management committee as well that whilst they were going to hold my job open for me they ... Jo, who's a fantastic, who was the chair at the time, and Rita, who was on the board, kind of knew that I wasn't going to come back. So I was setting up systems at Stonewall to ... when I was going off on adoption leave to take time of to stay with Bertie, it was literally my last day there, so my last time there, so I was setting up systems as I was leaving.

So it's been a real constant through some really life changing times, it's been really ... it's quite an important job to me and I really, you know, it's kind of sailed me through a lot of pretty traumatic times.

<End of Part 9>

<Part 10>

SH: OK, so we're going to talk about the impact of Stonewall Housing on you.

JF: The impact on me – it kind of grew. As soon as I became director you suddenly felt that you were running your own company and it was your company so. I mentioned that I would have the odd sleepless night when I was housing services manager but that was nothing compared to what I had when I became director – you would just wake up in the middle of the night saying, well how am I going to find some money to fund this; how am I going to deal with this staffing issue? People said it came with the territory that you will have sleepless nights, but it was tough at times, it was quite gruelling, but it was only like the last year that I was at Stonewall that things ... I could actually relax a bit, it was.... There were some really challenging times going on in the organisation ... <interruption> where I had to deal with some staffing issues, which meant that I didn't do things like hang out with people in the meeting room to have lunch together, and going out for socials wasn't something I felt comfortable with 'cause I wasn't used to it and also I didn't feel that connected to the rest of the staff team, I think being director was just one of those thing. And so I think the impact was just literally quite high level stress. And there was also stuff going on sort of below me, above me with the then management committee that resulted in me taking some time off sick with stress-related illness for about a month. There was stuff that the board were doing which quite disturbed me and I had to keep that from the staff

team, but they kind of picked up on it and said they wanted to start a revolution then I had to calm them down. But it really affected me quite badly and I think the outcome of me having to take time off was probably sensible, 'cause it was really knocking my confidence at a point I didn't feel that I was making any good decisions, and any decision I was making I wasn't sure about, so taking some time off was the best thing. And I came back and things did change, 'cause individuals who were on the board of trustees left and it made me realise, well let's recruit some decent people. But the impact was huge, and it was difficult living with Tor, who was chief exec at Galop because we both used to ... they're both very, very stressful jobs at the time, I'm sure they still are for Bob and Debbie. But we both had issues with fundraising, and we used to be really careful not to get into like the realms of say, well my problems are bigger than yours, which has always been a challenge for us 'cause we've done similar roles in different charities, so it's not like who's got the most stress than the other, so it's kind of trying to put it in proportion.

So the impact was huge in terms of just running things on a strategic and also a day-to-day level, but I was incredibly proud of it and no matter what kind of shit was thrown at me personally or how it affected me I was really proud of doing it and I truly believed in the work that I did. And when I went out and talked about it, still to this day, I was walking down and I've got ... after Stonewall I worked at Scope and I worked at Diverse and I'm now working at Broken Rainbow and another place. I can still rattle off some of the figures and some of the arguments with Stonewall Housing better than I can for the organisations I'm working on now. I could just about do it for Broken Rainbow but I was blagging it a bit the other day <laughs> 'cause he was asking me this thing and I was a bit like, just blag it, so I blagged it and he believed me. But I think maybe at Stonewall it was the job that I stayed at the longest ever, on my CV I was there from '99 till 2006 so it was a very long time and I've never been anywhere that long so it was ... hence the reason so many things happened. But I was really passionate about it and I think through, you know I'm a bit older, I now just go for jobs that I really feel passionate and connected to, I can't be bothered to do anything else so yeah.

- SH:** Alright, so we've just taken a brief break. We were just, I think, coming to the end of talking about the impact of working with Stonewall Housing overall, personally.
- JF:** Yeah. Yeah I think that's probably about it really. If you asked me to say it in a nutshell it's like sleepless nights but a lot of passion and pride in what the organisation was doing. I really believe the work they were doing was making a difference and I still think the work they do is making a difference. And I was chatting to Jo at the weekend, who was the chair, and she works in Kent County Council and she was having a go at somebody saying, 'Why on earth are you getting in touch with Stonewall lobby group!?' She started banging a drum for Galop saying, 'There's Galop who deals with hate crime, what on earth are you doing getting in touch with Stonewall!?' Blah, blah, blah and she had a right go at somebody at Kent County Council <laughs> and then she started talking about Stonewall Housing in the same breathe. So it's had a real effect on people who have either worked there on a voluntary basis or paid basis, so it's the same with me. It's a shame it's just London-wide I think, working outside of London, but it's one of those things.

<End of Part 10>

<Part 11>

- SH:** OK, so the next section of this question is I guess about the impact of your work at Stonewall Housing on the LGBT community, I guess this is in **10:13 terms of content**...
- JF:** Being part of Stonewall Housing...
- SH:** ... over that period of seven whole years <laughs>.
- JF:** Yeah, I think the biggest impact Stonewall Housing had was probably this piece of research that Stonewall Housing did when it got funding from The Big Lottery Fund with the then National Lottery. Stonewall commissioned the National Centre of Social Research to go out and do a three year project on youth homelessness and it was called Hidden in Plain Sight. And basically what I used to say when I used to go out and talk about Stonewall was like, we had a hunch at Stonewall Housing that there was a need for specialist services but we couldn't really argue it and evidence it, and what that document did was open doors to allow us to evidence the need for specialist housing. And the impact of that research suddenly made people sit down and take notice of the needs of LGBT, no, LGB housing and homelessness issues for young people. And it was a qualitative piece of work where people interviewed around the country in Manchester and in Birmingham, and London and other places, but there were some really strong case studies in there actually. But it's a fantastic piece of work and we went and we got Comic Relief funding – that was the last thing Julia did as director before she left was apply to Comic Relief and we got funding to go and launch the piece of research around the country. And it was my job to go to Cardiff, to go to Glasgow, to do a launch in London as well to promote the research. And we got some major people coming in doing the talks there, we got Andrew Mason back then, there was someone from Shelter as well, the then chief exec of ... director or at Shelter. Julia came along and we had William and Donna from ... the two researchers come and talk as well.

The amount of people who turned up in London was massive, we had probably more people wanting to come to that one than we could fit in. And we weren't savvy at doing events so it was like, what do you do with them? <Chuckles> It was like, you know, just give 'em a Danish? Oh and Glenda Jackson came, she was a then GLA housing and homelessness person, and I was really scared she was going to burn my jacket which I bought for the event, 'cause she had the picture taken and she had a fag behind me! Like smoking away and I thought, oh dear god, I'm just gonna <laughs> catch fire. But yeah, it was quite a major thing to get and I thought it was quite a novelty getting her anyway 'cause <chuckles> that was quite good. But it was well received in Cardiff and Glasgow which really surprised me, they were saying that ... and that's when I realised the rural issues were so different from city issues and that's when you realise, you can get a bit London centric working around here ... in London, not round here, this is completely different. But it made me aware of the need for that research and how organisations were going to go out there, very small LBG T organisations were going to go out there, use that piece of research and pretty much take quite a risk going into very small rural communities in Scotland for example, and talk about lesbian and gay issues.

So that had a huge impact in terms of raising the profile of the organisation and getting us known. And what dovetailed out of that was Shelter approached me, Joanne Marks from Shelter approached me and said she read the research, read the summary report ...

<Interruption>

Yeah, so Joanna Marks from Shelter approached me and said she'd like to work together with Stonewall Housing in light of the piece of research. 'Cause by then we managed to use some of the Comic Relief money to publish some summary findings – it's a really short report where clear recommendations were being made. And me and Joanne talked about what was important in terms of this project, and we followed the recommendations that came out of the research which was to make sure that local authorities and agencies monitored sexuality. There was a need for more training and awareness, and also the training of frontline staff in terms of dealing with LGB young people who are homeless and have been outed or have come out. 'Cause there's some pretty horrific stories that went ... disturbing stories that came out where some people were either outed in some of the hostels they were staying in and were assaulted and then asked to leave by the professional because they didn't want to deal with it. So the research allowed us to say, 'Well look, this is what the piece of research is saying, so training, awareness raising and monitoring sexuality.' And also it recommended a need for specialist housing which was, not something we wanted as an outcome, but it just pretty much substantiated the need for Stonewall Housing. And also, I forgot to say, this piece of research had a huge steering group that met throughout the three years.

So we had a lot of LGBT organisations on there, so someone from Stonewall, someone from Albert Kennedy Trust, someone from Galop, literally everybody was on there that could be at the time to make sure that the piece of research represented everybody in terms of LGBT organisations. And what happened out of a few cup of coffees with me and Joanne and some chatting, was that Joanne pretty much singlehandedly got to people in Shelter <chuckles> and she got them to fund a one year project on the basis that I would go off and try and fundraise for the project to be funded long term. And we advertised ... and Debbie, who's now Chief Exec at Galop got the job as the worker, but it was really to go out and approach local authorities in London and to look at their policies, consult them on their policies, tell them how they could be more LGBT friendly, to deliver training to agencies and also local authorities, and also just to promote the needs for monitoring of sexuality. And that had a huge impact, I think, in terms of the LGBT communities 'cause Debbie made a contact, through that project, with someone, the chief exec at the Housing Corporation who came and spoke at the conference about then and they now monitor sexuality.

All housing associations now have to monitor sexual orientation as part of their core forms, it's just a stupid jargon thing, but it's basically whenever you sign up a tenant, no matter whether they're in supported housing or general needs housing, you basically have to do this whole raft of monitoring that goes through to the Housing Corp every quarter. You do a quarter, every housing association does a quarterly return. It's there that sexual orientation has to be monitored, and I know from my experience of core forms you can't blank 'em, you can't leave out one blank. So you know, I don't know what's happened, I hope people are being positive about asking that question but it's

a training need. But that made a huge difference in terms of what was happening in terms of monitoring. And when we finished the project after one year, 'cause I couldn't get funding 'cause the funder that we applied to said no, we did a huge conference where about over 200 people came from all over the country. And we produced a document of findings, which you can get from Stonewall, where ... it's a fantastic piece of work that was done but, I use it now. But that pretty much dovetailed out of the research which happened because of The Big Lottery Fund funding it. And that has had a huge impact on LGBT people I think in London, outside of London they've not heard about it, and certainly when I worked in a charity last year and I was talking to an LGBT project they didn't know anything about it, and so I got hold of Bob and got the information to them, 'cause I think there's a real need for specialist housing outside of the. And I think Stonewall has made a difference, whether the LGBT community knows it or not, I think they have in terms of the amount of calls they were taking on the advice line and the amount of people they were housing. 'Cause there was this piece of work done by The Women's Information Service back then, where ... well I think out of the 22-and-a-half thousand that (this is approximate figures) of bed spaces available in London, there was only like 50 bed spaces available specifically LGB young people, and of those 50 spaces available 41 belonged to Stonewall Housing. So it's quite a strong figure. Bob may have pretty much better stats than that, I mean I might have it on some of the old stuff I've got on my computer, but that was quite a stunning figure.

And I think we've helped people along the way and I think now with some joined up service with Galop, 'cause I think it helps that we were in the same building back then and me and Tor were going out and we kind of used to chat about what we could do and work better together. But now, I think having Galop in the same building as Stonewall really helps. And I can see it happening at Broken Rainbow now 'cause the Consortium are in the same building as Broken Rainbow and suddenly it's really easy to just chat and say, 'Shall we do this together?' And stuff, so. I think Stonewall's impact has been huge in London, and especially just seeing some of the young people who are being quite empowered and resettled and got on with their lives. That's the real thing that you see and, you know, they've had quite a lot of crap to deal with. And Stonewall stuck their neck out, not only within the specialist housing part have they got LGBT now transgender spaces as well, they also had a BME house, you know, which people said, 'Well what do you need that for?' So they recognised that a long time ago that there was need for specialist services for BME people, hence the BME worker as well.

So it has been really good. And just before I left it was agreed that we'd add the transgender part onto it, but I was really keen that I didn't want it just to be transgender in name only. So we had a huge consultation going on with the board and staff team and quite ... surprisingly some of the staff team were quite dramatic about it and they said, 'Well if ... you know, there's enough work to be done for lesbian and gay people, how on earth can we deal with transgender people? You know, and if you do that we're gonna leave.' And stuff, and that was quite surprising, but you know, they were once again a minority, where the majority said, 'Yeah let's do it.' And so we did some trans training 'cause you had to deal with quite a lot of bi phobia and trans phobia that was going on, which happens, and it happened in the organisation and we did some training and stuff. But turning it into transgender was one of my final things and I think that was a good thing.

But I truly believe Stonewall made a difference to a lot of people, whether it was housing advice or signposting from the advice team to someone who was providing specialist support for a hate crime in conjunction with Galop, you know? I think they made a huge impact – the fact that they've been around for 25 years, maybe it's coming up to, is quite a, you know, a figure that you have to respect so.

<End of Part 11>

<Part 12>

SH: OK, this is the final section of the interview. We were just talking about the impact of, I guess, your work on Stonewall Housing on the LGBT community. This question is I guess, a bit broader and is about any changes that you witnessed for the LGBT community during the period of your work, both kind of generally and in terms of housing.

JF: Yeah I think, probably some of the main things that happened on probably a social level within the LGBT community was that you saw all these other Prides come up – it always used to be London Pride back then and London Pride was great and it used to be free, and then they started charging. And I think as something that started out of them was that you had these, you had prides everywhere. 'Cause when I was in Broken Rainbow the other week we were trying to ... someone gave us a list of all the prides going, 'Go and do that.' And we thought, my god, there's like 40 of them! And suddenly they were sprouting up and it was really nice. I remember coming to Cambridge when me and Tor decided that we were going to come and live here, and the Pink Picnic they called it then, was set up and stuff, so. It was quite nice that you could pick and choose to go everywhere – I know London Pride is now one of the biggest and I think Brighton Pride isn't far behind it actually, and Manchester Pride is pretty good, but that was quite a major thing. And also the real kind of focus on Soho kind of affected a lot of the outer London, so-called outer London venues that were specifically for LGBT people.

There used to be The Angel Pub in Islington, which was really nice and I think the influx of, what we called 'baby lesbians' coming along and going off into Soho. 'Cause if we ... oh what was it? The Candy Bar, that was it, I've never been there, I think it's gone now, but certainly the development of Soho and people just accessing more choice and more venues back there affected a lot of the pubs, and bars, and clubs outside of London, 'cause The Angel Bar closed and I think there was also a pub in Stoke Newington called Due South what was just mainly for lesbians as well. I think The Oak's still there, which is a bit of fright sometimes in the night, but it's always quite good for a laugh – I'm not sure if it's still there and specifically LGBT. But I think what I noticed on the social was that whilst there was a lot of prides coming, there was a lot of emphasis living in London that where you had to go out into town, into Soho to go out and stuff, and a lot of the clubs and pubs just couldn't deal with it and they shut, which was a real shame, because I missed them.

I would like to just go out locally and have a pint and see my mates who live in Stoke Newington or in Hackney and stuff, rather than go into town and deal with having to get home and, I think I was just getting a bit older then and didn't want loud music <laughs> but it was a real community feel back then. And what is it I'm trying to say? Within the LGBT community it felt more community based and you see your mates at the same club nights, in the pub

and you know, have a right laugh. Whereas I think that changed 'cause everyone used to go into Soho and it was a bit different, and I never used to bother to be quite honest, I couldn't be bothered, I think maybe it was just too much like hard work.

So that really changed. But I think in terms of legislation it was a really kind of pioneering moment, because whilst I was at Stonewall the equality legislation came in where it was ... LAGER was still about, and then it was the Sexual Orientation Equality Act came in where it was illegal for organisations to discriminate in terms of employment law. And that was really, really, really major. And that was a real moment I think because shortly after that the rights to goods and services happened as well and the sexual orientation bill came in as well – goods and services followed shortly after. And now we're seeing the equality legislation is now going to come up in 2010 and they also recognise the transgender strand there, so there's now seven diversity strands. So I think on the legislation basis it was a real major thing that changed, and hopefully made a difference, but I think people feel a bit more confident going to find work and knowing that they couldn't be discriminated against or take employers to court. But also the big thing was the civil partnerships, that was ... it didn't come from Labour, I mean I'd like, you know, I've been a Labour person all my life 'cause my dad's a member of the Labour Party, and I find it hard <chuckles> to support Labour at this moment in time, but it didn't come from there it came from Europe. A lot of the trans and LGBT stuff has come from Europe let's face it, but that's a major, major thing.

The only sad thing is the that the government wouldn't call it gay marriage, 'cause it's marriage effectively in every sense but they just don't want to call it that 'cause they don't want to annoy and ostracise the faith groups. But it's been really major and I think it's great that LGBT people can get civilly partnered, and get married and have the same rights as some of the heterosexual communities. And also to have work and take employers to court on discrimination cases as well, you know that's a really, really major thing. And I've seen cases now where organisations are being taken to tribunal and winning, and that's really major, 'cause once you've got a case for then you've got, you know, a precedent that's set. And also in terms of adoption, that's coming through now, but certainly in terms of fertility treatment it was difficult when we were doing it because Homerton in Hackney was one of the few that would take same-sex couples, and that's not the case now. So it has changed quite majorly and the adoption laws are coming in and stuff like parental responsibility are coming in now and stuff. But certainly at Stonewall those were the major ones, I think they broke the ground for a lot of the stuff that's coming in now, so yeah.

<End of interview>