

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Julia Shelley

Interviewer: Olly Zanetti

Place of Interview: Age Concern Offices, Near Brixton, South London

Date: Thursday 21 May 2009

Files: JS 1-5

Key

OZ: = Interviewer, Olly Zanetti

JS: = Interviewee, Julia Shelley

[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

OZ: Could you tell me where and when you were you born please?

JS: Oh god, I was born in 1957 in Manchester, but grew up on the South Coast and then moved to London.

OZ: Excellent. Could you tell me a little bit, first of all, about your background?

JS: My background in terms of how I ended up working ...

OZ: Say we start off with a little bit about your childhood or something like that?

JS: I grew up in Kent on the South Coast, until I was 12 or 13. And ... lived up the road from the sea. If you walked down to the end of the road on a clear day you could see France, so that was a very nice place, and then it just started to get a bit dull and then moved to London, and ... then I was 15, 16, spent a year in the States when my father was working there, so did that, went to university in Brighton, and then ended up in London starting work.

OZ: And how old were you when you moved to London the first time?

JS: Twelve.

OZ: And what are your memories of moving or your perception of London?

JS: That it was ... a more exciting place to live than a small seaside town, that's for sure!

OZ: Were you excited to move, were you pleased to move?

JS: I think so. It feels a long time ago and it was just what was happening, but yes, pleased to move and live somewhere near and have more exciting things to do and opportunities.

OZ: And so what was life like in London?

JS: Very ... <pause> it was a comfortable, nice life. I always had a nice family life and we had lots of friends and relations in London, and it was good to be with them, and ... started ... just opportunities in terms of cinema and galleries,

and holidays and ... I had a very nice and comfortable childhood, so part of that.

And then it only took an unexpected turn when we ended up living in the States for a couple of years, and that was quite an eye opener.

OZ: So how did that come about?

JS: That just came about because my father's employers suddenly said they had this new business in Philadelphia and would he go and run it for a couple of years, so great upheaval and off we went, and ... that was a real eye-opener and living in a different culture, having grown up in a safe, white, English, middle-class suburban childhood, and even though it was moving to a suburban life in the States, life was very ... it was a very different culture, and you don't realise quite how much 'til you're transplanted.

OZ: Tell me about a specific memory that made you think, 'Whoa, this is really different!'

JS: There's one very specific memory. We lived in the suburbs of Philadelphia and this was in the early '70s, and it was just suddenly realising how segregated life was in the States, and so we lived in this very comfortable, middle-class suburb of Philadelphia, but if you drove into the city it was really clear that you went from the white suburbs to the black inner-city ghetto areas, and then in centre of Philadelphia was a very beautifully renovated area, the very old part of the city, and it just felt so completely different from London, and in a way that you just accept where you live and London has been very mixed, and to live somewhere that was so segregated, and I just remember one night we'd been somewhere in the centre of the city and driving home and the car broke down in the middle of the black area, and us all being very nervous about it, and then somebody stopped to help us and it was fine, but it was just a very strange experience, and that experience of living in the States just taught me an enormous amount very quickly about the differences and people living very separately and accepting difference, and the other issue in the States was about noticeable anti-Semitism, and again very separate Jewish community, and because my family background is mixed, my mother's Jewish and my father Christian ... it was never an issue when we were in England, but in the States it suddenly became an issue. And we were ... my parents were invited to be members of this local country club that my mother was really clear if we hadn't been from England, she'd never have been invited to join, because she was Jewish. It was again a real eye-opener.

OZ: Sounds amazing! And so you say your family was a very comfortable family? Tell me about your family, who makes up your family?

JS: Mother and father and a brother and a sister. I'm the oldest of three children, and ... they're both ... a bit younger, they're both married with children, but it was a very straight, very ... comfortable family, but ... but I think, and I didn't realise when I was a child and a teenager, I didn't think about it, but in later years just very clear that actually my family is of a very mixed background, and although we've had this very white, English upbringing, in fact none of my grandparents were born in this country, and my parents had had to argue quite hard to get married because it was a mixed marriage, and I think it

makes them much more open and tolerant than you might expect from the visible sign of my family.

OZ: So you were in the States for two years?

JS: Two years.

OZ: Are there any other really residing memories of being in the States?

JS: There's all sorts of memories, and some of it is just about your growing up, teenage years and the parties and the learning to socialise and the do the things that you shouldn't do and rebel a bit, but otherwise I think the only thing it did for me was to really appreciate London when I came back, and what a beautiful city it was and how old everything was. And being in the States people would take you out to see some fantastic eighteenth century horseshoe and you'd think, 'But those are two a penny ...' And then you come back to London and realise just what an amazing city it is.

OZ: And what age were you when you came back to London?

JS: Sixteen/seventeen.

OZ: And on your return, you've mentioned London being this old city, did your whole family move back together?

JS: Yeah, yeah.

OZ: And how was it when you moved back?

JS: My father and I would quite like to have stayed and my mother and my brother and sister were very clear that it was time to come home, and in retrospect they were right. But at the time ... I'd had a good time there at school and ...

OZ: And what was it like as a teenager, seventeen, eighteen, living in London?

JS: When I came back, it was quite strange 'cause I felt then quite out of touch and because I'd ended up doing my A levels quite young and so the people I'd been at school with before I went had left school, so I was back trying to rush through my A levels in a year, and so it was quite strange to be back and I wasn't very happy to be back. But you settle again and then for me it was a good move to go off to university when I was eighteen.

OZ: Did you go straight from school to university?

JS: Yeah, yes.

OZ: How was that? That was in Brighton you said?

JS: In Brighton, and it was exciting, it was ... I was quite happy to get away and to start being on my own and explore university and see what was going on. That was a good three years.

OZ: Can you remember your first day down in Brighton?

JS: I can remember my first day at university and meeting someone who became a very good friend and is still a friend, and it still feels like that was a good

chance that we met on our first day at university. And ... <pause> I can't think what else from the beginning, it feels a long time ago. <Laughs>

OZ: How did you guys meet?

JS: Oh, we met because he met someone else, I don't know, on the train or they were in the same hall of residence, and that other man was a friend or knew this woman who was a friend of one of my cousins, who ... and in that way that on your first day you get in contact with people who there's some tenuous connection with, and so this woman who was the connection ... I think she never became a friend and she left university quite quickly, but she was an important link in to someone who became a very longstanding friend.

OZ: And what were you studying down in Brighton?

JS: American Studies, which was definitely a hangover from having spent those years in the States and thinking that's where I might want to be. But ... and I also timed it very badly, 'cause when I did the degree it was the last year or so before it became a course with a four year course with an automatic year in the States. I did American studies for three years in Brighton.

OZ: But you enjoyed it?

JS: But on the whole I enjoyed it. But for me it was also, that was when I started thinking about my sexuality and coming out and ... not coming out while I was there, but putting it off for a long time while I was at university, so ..

OZ: Were you completely in the closet or were you out to close friends?

JS: I wasn't even out to myself, so ... but looking back you just think, 'Ooh, that's what was going on.' And it took 'til towards the very end of my time at university to start thinking about that and what was really going on.

OZ: And you moved straight back up to London after university?

JS: And then I moved back to London and briefly moved back in with my parents and looked for a job and that took about three or four months, and then found a job with a housing association. And while I'd been at university I'd been very involved with the Student Community Action group and doing that sort of work, and working with homeless people and organising children's festivals and all that sort of thing. And so I left without being really clear what I wanted to do, at the time I was very clear I didn't want to be a social worker but I wanted to work in some sort of social care related field, and I had a friend at university whose mother was on a housing association committee who said, 'Why don't you come and spend a couple of days in the office and find out what housing associations do?' And I did that and enjoyed it, and it seemed interesting and a nice sort of middle way sort of job, so I applied for various jobs as a housing assistant with a number of the main housing associations and got, I don't know, third job I applied for, something like that, as a trainee housing assistant.

OZ: So tell me about those two days in the office that you did?

JS: Oh, it was just ... we must have gone out visiting tenants and just learning more about what housing associations did and those were the days when

most housing associations were much smaller and more community-based organisations, and it felt to me like a good mix of having contact with people, I didn't want to work for a private-sector business, and I didn't know much about the charity world or anything, and it was a good way in, quite an interesting way of working, and opportunities to learn and develop a career.

OZ: So there wasn't a specific moment in doing the work when you thought 'this is what I really love!' It was a considered ...

JS: I think so. Yes. And it's never felt like I've had a planned career, things have fallen into place one after another.

OZ: And so not long after that you applied for these jobs and eventually ... well not eventually, quite quickly ...

JS: Quite quickly found a job with Family Housing Association, in their office in Brixton, about half a mile from where we are now.

<Part 2 starts>

And started working as a housing assistant.

OZ: And how was that?

JS: It was great. It was a really nice job, and a nice office and very sociable, and it was rather in the days when people really used to go to the pub at lunch time and after work, and all sit with your ashtray on your desk and lit a cigarette every time the phone rang. It's unbelievable to think of it now. And worked as part of the Southeast London Housing Management Team with a really nice group of people. And the team secretary who typed everybody's letters, and I remember going out to visit tenants and a bit of rent collection, which was never fun, but going to visit tenants to talk about their arrears and a few times turning up on people's doorstep going, 'Hi, I'm your new housing officer,' and then going, 'You can't be, you look way too young.'

OZ: So tell me about a day-to-day life at work?

JS: It was a mix of taking phone-calls and dealing with people's repairs, and it was very much as a housing officer you dealt with the whole process, so somebody would ring up with a repair and then if it was a simple job you'd just go straight to a builder or contractor to organise it, or if it was a more serious thing you'd pass it on to the team surveyor. Interviewing people for housing and the signing them up for new tenancies, and inspecting empty flats, helping people get settled and claim any benefits, the team had a social worker so you'd refer on anybody with particular difficulties, but did get quite involved in neighbour disputes and peoples' problems and helping people find additional help and signposting them to other things and getting to know the area that they lived in. It was a really satisfying job.

OZ: And how long did you work there?

JS: All in all I worked there I think four or five years, and gradually went from housing assistant to housing officer to senior housing officer, and the other thing while I was there is I got very involved as a ... in the union, and was a shop steward for the office, and after I'd only been there a year or so there

was a big crisis and lots of people were being made redundant, so that was a really interesting learning curve about employment issues and development and management.

OZ: Tell me about the movement into Stonewall Housing; was that the next thing you did?

JS: No, that was still quite a long way off, and I worked at Family Housing and it was then the choices were either to do Institute of Housing exams and go into mainstream housing associations or to look at something a bit different, and I then went and worked for a housing association called South East London Consortium Housing Association, which was a small collective of, when I started, six people, working in supported housing, and working both with some direct housing provision, but also working in partnership with lots of support agencies with people with a history of homelessness and a range of other issues. And again I started off doing housing management there and then moved into working as what was called a partnership agency worker, working with all these different small voluntary organisations, and working as a member of a collective, and that was a really good learning experience, and while during the time I was there the organisation grew from six people to eleven people, and it was really interesting looking at how you manage doubling in size when you're a small collective. It threw up a lot of challenges. <Laughs>

OZ: So there's a lot of leftwing stuff I guess going through here - the union, the collective ...

JS: Yes. And just in a seventies/eighties ... politics way, and then out of work being involved in feminist and lesbian politics.

OZ: So going against the grain pretty intensely.

JS: I suppose! <Laughs> Doesn't feel like it when you're doing it, but in retrospect, and also when ... you know ... I had a much more distant relationship with my family during all those years and coming out and being involved in all those things, it just felt like my life was very different from theirs.

OZ: And was that relationship with your family distancing itself, was that a conscious thing or was it something that just slid into happening?

JS: It just slid into happening, and it just ... it's not that I fell out with them or didn't have contact, but I wasn't very out to them and ... and just led a different life. I still saw them regularly but it wasn't ... didn't feel such an inte... my life wasn't so integrated as it is now. That's it really.

OZ: And then ... what happened?

JS: I was at SELCHA for five years, and it was this fantastic organisation with an old-style contract that after you'd been there five years you could have a three-month sabbatical on full pay and you didn't even have to go back. So that's what I did. I took my three month sabbatical and then I spent, I don't know, again about four years self-employed working as a ...doing consultancy and training and lots of work around HIV and housing, and that again was quite a nice four years, and all the work I got was ... it was much less competitive and professional than it is now, and virtually all the work I got was

contacts through people I'd known when I was working at SELCHA, and I did that for about four years and then I got ... I both got bored and quite lonely working on my own, although I worked with other people but not being part of an organisation, and also I realised I needed some on paper management experience, because I'd been on lots of management committees and I'd been part of this collective, but you needed something on paper that showed you could do some management, so I went and worked for an organisation called Southside Partnership, which provided care and support, supported housing, for people with learning disabilities or mental health needs, and I was there again for about four or five years, and that was in Lambeth and Southwark, and a much bigger and more structured organisation, and that was good learning. And while I was there they funded me and gave me the time to do a Masters degree in Voluntary Sector Organisation and Social Policy at LSE, and that was really interesting. And then that came to an end; they restructured and my job was going anyway, and that's when I went and applied for the job at Stonewall Housing.

<Part 3 starts>

OZ: And what was Stonewall Housing like as an organisation before you got there?

JS: Before I got there ... well I'd known about it and I'd known different people who'd work ... not well, but I'd known people who'd worked there at different times in its early days when it was a small organisation and a collective and so I know a bit about it, and knew that it was moving from being a collective to a hierarchy and that they ... I was the second Director to be appointed. And the woman who'd been the first Director was a friend of a friend. So I'd talk to her a bit. And it was an organisation in a difficult place really at the point when I joined.

OZ: In what way?

JS: I think the transition from a collective to a hierarchy was difficult. It wasn't ... there were staff working there who'd been part of the collective who weren't happy with that change, and there was a lot of work needed to turn it into an organisation that was really working hard and professionally for the benefit of its tenants and its advice clients.

OZ: And what attracted you to it?

JS: For me it was like the perfect job, it was a chance to be a director of a small organisation, it brought together the stuff that I knew about in terms of being about housing and about ... and being a lesbian and gay organisation. So for me it just felt like, 'Oh, it's my perfect job.' So I was really pleased to get it. But it was definitely a real challenge and really difficult at times. It had a committee, a quite active committee. But again, I think they found some of the challenges difficult.

OZ: And how was it coming in, in that post-collective state that it was in, how was that for you as this new person who was ...

JS: For me, it was coming into an organisation which was full of people that were very resistant to any change and it was a ... in lots of ways it was a real battle to get it to change. I mean I'm really clear that the organisation did really

change and grow and become much more professional and delivered a better service at the end of the five years I was there and financially was in a stronger state and managed its finances better. But it felt like a real struggle at times and it took staff changing in order to be to change the culture. It was a real lesson in how long it takes to turnaround the culture of an organisation in that collective ethos. And while I'd worked in a collective for years, I understood some of the pleasures and the strengths of that as well as some of the difficulties. But it was also very clear that Stonewall needed someone that was going to take responsibility and lead the organisation.

OZ: Was it quite frightening being that person?

JS: Yes. <Laughs> At times it was a complete nightmare. But I learnt enormously doing that job, but it was a real challenge and it took its toll for me personally, and you look back at times and you think I don't know why I stuck at it. But at the end you think, that was good, that was worth doing and I think it's right to say that actually Stonewall Housing wouldn't exist now if I hadn't been there and made that ... I think that was a really key five years and I handed over an organisation that was in a much stronger state than the one I found.

OZ: When you started, what were the kind of things that you felt really needed to be done, operationally?

JS: There needed to be real clarity about what the service was that we were offering and how it would be delivered and to what standard it would be delivered and as well as a whole lot of operational things in terms of our communications, our financial management and some of the quite basic systems of financial control and planning staff time, people being clear about what was expected of them in terms of delivering their jobs and doing that to a professional standard. And the fact that the organisation was there to be run for the benefit of its service users; it wasn't there at some of the staff's convenience.

OZ: And in doing this big change around, what would you say was the first thing that you just thought, 'That's a really successful project and I'm really pleased with how that's happened'?

JS: I'm trying to think back and think about some of those things. I think we made changes to the way some of the housing advice service was delivered and that got to be much clearer in terms of what people's expectations were and when it was open and how much time you'd spend with people and what advice you'd offer. Some other things that felt like really good achievements was we really improved the communications. So in terms of annual reports and a new logo and good annual report... we started doing calendars for annual reports and that worked really nicely and produced some good information for people and developed a house-style, and that felt like quite a noticeable achievement in terms of the outward image of the organisation. And the other thing for me that was really important was I was really surprised when I got there to find how little contact there was with other lesbian and gay organisations and at the time even Galop, who were only along the corridor, there was very little joint working or contact and with other groups as well. And I arrived thinking 'Oh, there'll be all these connections and contacts and that would be great!' And actually you had to really go out and make them and I got very involved in the development of the LGB, as it was then, Consortium for Voluntary Organisations and for me it made some of the challenges of

actually the internal stuff at Stonewall much easier, 'cause I had all these ... I was also doing external work.

And the other issues ... it's a real challenge working for an organisation where we were working across three or four boroughs in terms of the housing provided and every way ... and as well as working London-wide in terms of the housing advice. But you just have to ... and then probably even more than now, you had to really constantly battle for the needs of lesbians and gay men to be on the agenda and for me it's one of the things I noticed, now I work with older people and it's easy. Everybody wants to go, 'Oh, older people, come on in!' But that's a battle in terms of funding and recognition and the fact that every local authority would go, 'Oh yes, we can see it's an important issue, but it's such a small number of people it's not a priority for us.' And getting the organisation into a state where we could do that and then get more funding.

So some of the milestone achievements along the way were bringing in some additional funding; Stonewall had always had a few traditional funders, but we got some extra. We successfully fundraised from charitable trusts for a few three-year grants and that enabled us to both develop the service, but also bring more staff in and bring the idea of team managers and actually that led to the development of better services. 9:34

OZ: And how did you persuade people that this was something they should be funding?

JS: By using the evidence that we had from existing service users and the people who were ringing the advice line and by going out and networking and talking to other lesbian and gay organisations and generally raising the profile of the organisation.

One of the things I really clearly remember is that when I got there, there was this real thing about Stonewall Housing had been there first and then Stonewall Lobby Group had come along and pinched the name and then everybody ... and everybody assumed when you're from Stonewall Housing that you're something to do with Stonewall Lobby Group and ... And there was this continuing smouldering resentment that they'd pinched the name and they shouldn't have been allowed to do that and it just felt like that was such a negative attitude, instead of going, 'There are lots of Stonewall organisations here and in the States and you can't argue with that. But actually what you've got to go out and do is make sure that both the other Stonewall knows about Stonewall Housing's work,' and you go out and promote what you do and you use that as a strength rather than just going, 'Oh, we're really pissed off 'cause that was pinched from us!' So it was quite a turnaround. And we also, we recur ... during the time I was there, we recruited new committee members and strengthened the organisation in that way; improved a lot of the human resources practices and policies. I think it was important to be quite clear with the stuff what was going on, that there was a process of change happening and joining in wasn't optional. But also to be transparent about what was happening and to show it was worth it; the organisation was stronger, their jobs were more secure, but they also had to deliver the service.

OZ: And was there some resistance?

JS: Yes, there was a lot of resistance and some of it was around some very detail things around; who had to be at work at what times; the fact that for the housing we provided an on-call number, out of office hours and what were people's responsibilities when they were on-call; i.e. they had to always be in a state to go to one of the houses if they needed to be; they paid extra for carrying, I can't remember, the mobile phone or the pager or whatever it was, evenings and weekends. So those were the sort of battles that had to be resolved. And again it was that thing of; the service was there for the service users.

OZ: And how did you resolve them?

JS: By being more stubborn I think and ... oh I can't remember, but being clear that, that was the standards that were expected and also being ... the other things we developed were proper supervision for staff and a better structure and more support and regular team meetings so that people ... it wasn't just like 'you must do this, this way.' It was actually about engaging with people and getting them to feel part of something that was bigger and improving and it did change and inevitably it needed some ... some people left and ... But some people stayed the whole way through and saw the change and actually, I think, came to enjoy ... it was a better place to work by the end of it, I hope!
<Laughs>

OZ: And what do you think, obviously you're biased, but that's a good thing I guess ...

JS: Yeah.

OZ: What do you think people's attitudes towards you and what you were doing was?

JS: I wasn't popular. <Laughs> I wasn't ... I wasn't popular with everybody. Some people it was fine and then new people would come in and in some way it's much easier, when they're people that you've recruited to your way of working and your way of thinking, it's ... you start to shift the balance. And people moved on and saw that the changes made things better. So ... but clearly there were people who didn't like me, but you don't do that sort of job to be popular.

OZ: And so by whom were you recruited then?

JS: I was recruited by the Management Committee.

OZ: So there was a serious awareness of a need for change?

JS: Yeah, yes, and the Manage ... there'd been a previous Director who'd been there for a couple of years I think and then the Management Committee were clear they were looking for someone who could lead the organisation through a period of change and strengthen the funding and move ahead. So hopefully I fulfilled that.

OZ: And as an organisation, how did it relate to politics beyond the LGB community? 'Cause what period are we talking now, this is ...

JS: I was there from '96, '97 to 2001.

- OZ:** I mean we're starting, are we not, that's the dog end of the Tory era, isn't it?
- JS:** Yes, 'cause I remember being in work the day after the '97 election when everybody was on that high. <Laughs> And so ... I suppose those few years, it did feel quite a positive time to be working for a lesbian and gay organisation and there were opportunities. But at the same time, money was very tight and so, as I was saying, local authorities were sympathetic but there wasn't a lot of money. But ... and that's why it felt important that Stonewall was part of the Consortium setting up because that was the beginnings of ... with the Consortium then getting some central Government money and then a Big Lottery grant for the Consortium that actually helped raise the profile of the LGBT Voluntary Sector.
- OZ:** And the Consortium is ...
- JS:** And it's the Consortium of Voluntary and Community Sector Lesbian ... well at the time it was Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Organisations, and now it's LGBT. So it was a national organisation trying to bring all those smaller groups together and support them around funding and raising their profile and good practice and providing some solidarity.
- OZ:** All part of the networking?
- JS:** Yeah, and all part of the networking. But organisations like Stonewall are too small to make all that difference on their own. It's really important to work with other organisations.
- OZ:** And for you, as your career progressed, it seems that you've moved from doing the visits and the talking about the rent payments or the [IA 17:35] ...
- JS:** Yeah.
- OZ:** And things through to a management position, and how is that, in terms of the job that you do, is it more satisfying?
- JS:** For me, yes, yes and I enjoy that and then I suppose throughout my working career I've veered from jobs that are much more about direct services to things that are a bit more training and policy and then the job I went to after Stonewall was a funding and policy organisation and like here, although I'm the Chief Executive here, we're a small organisation and it's very hands-on and I have lots of contact with services users and very involved and know about the service delivery, as well as doing policy and campaigning work and that's the balance that I like.
- OZ:** And that was true of your work at Stonewall?
- JS:** And that was true at Stonewall. I had lots of contact with our tenants and just part of that thing of you work for a small organisation and you maybe the Director, but you still need to pick the phone at times or answer the post or ... answer the phone or open the post or whatever. You can't be too picky about going, 'That's not my job!' And I think that's probably, I hope, that's one of the things that I was showed at Stonewall; that I was committed to the organisation. I wasn't just going to sit at a distance and go, 'This needs to happen.' I was hands-on and got stuck in and clearly worked very hard and was there when everybody came in, in the mornings, and was there when

they all went home in the evenings, which may not be a good thing. But there was a lot to do to actually get things changed and make sure that the organisation survived.

OZ: And how big an organisation, or how small an organisation was it?

JS: I think when I started there was probably ... oh I don't know, eight staff, something like that. And it grew to eleven or twelve. I mean it didn't grow enormously, but it did grow and had a stronger and more solid structure and was clearer ... the distinction between the housing advice side and the housing management and support side and that those were different projects and less muddled together.

OZ: And what led to you eventually leaving?

JS: Exhaustion. <Laughs> And time to move on; it had changed and I was tired and wanted to try new things and felt like it had got to a certain stage and a certain stage with the funding and that it was time to handover and move on and do something else. And I'd also, towards the end of the time I was there, I was ill and had an operation, was off sick for about three months ... no, two months, two and a half months, and that just felt like quite a hiatus and time to make a break, so.

OZ: And you were pleased with the organisation that you left?

JS: Yes, yeah. No, I definitely felt that I'd made a mark and made a difference and was pleased to have achieved that and I'm really glad that it's an organisation that's gone from strength to strength and is still there and still delivering that service and has survived through quite challenging and changing times. And I think I'm part of what gave it the stronger base to be able to do that, along with every ... lots of other people input and the Committee and staff. But I'm not going to pretend I didn't have an input into it. <Laughs>

OZ: And what do you think the impact of Stonewall Housing was on the wider ... on the lesbian and gay community?

<Part 4 starts>

JS: I think for some people it was a lifeline and provided ... and I think for the young people who were housed, for some of them it was a real absolutely unique and really important thing to help them have a safe period and move and to be confident in who they were and to move on from there. I think in terms of housing advice it was a good service but it was very frustrating because there was the wider world meant it was limited in what it could offer. But it's really important for people to have a place where they can feel safe to go with their problems. I think it's important that it is part of a network of organisations providing advice and support.

OZ: And you mentioned you had contact with service users, can you remember specific ... obviously privacy and all that, but specific cases that you thought, 'This is really good, this is such an important thing to be doing for this person'?

JS: Yeah and some of the young people, their stories of being thrown out of home and where they'd ended up and what had happened to them to be able to

actually provide not only a roof over their heads but some support and some help around getting their lives together again and to live in a house where you were the norm rather than the exception, I just think is really important in helping give people a base to grow from.

- OZ:** Do you think there's reflections with the stable and family life that you have and what your organisation is able to provide for ...
- JS:** Yeah, possibly and I think no, I've been really lucky and it's always been important to me to work in an area that actually you can see how the work that you do makes a difference to people's lives.
- OZ:** And I mean how many people are served by Stonewall Housing itself? Is quite a ... is it a limited number or is it ...
- JS:** Yes, and I can't ... there was about 30 rooms in shared houses then. I don't know if it's grown or shrunk or what's happened in that time since and I can't remember the numbers of people who use the housing advice service. But I know there was a steady stream of phone calls and that grew and a steady stream of people coming to see the housing advisors. So it was clearly a needed service and there were issues about actually managing the demand and being able to respond and I think as for other housing organisations it doesn't get any easier to provide that service and to help people find suitable housing.
- OZ:** And do you think, as an organisation of course it helps the people that it helps, but do you think its presence has a significant impact on the wider LGBT community?
- JS:** I would hope so in terms that I think it's important that <cough> ... sorry, that there are specialist areas. I think one of the important issues and I think one of the things that Stonewall Housing had to learn during the period that I was there was being lesbian or gay of itself doesn't automatically mean you have a special need for housing or a special need deserving or a ... it's not a charitable issue in itself in anyway. But there are things that then make you more vulnerable, particularly ... I used to talk lots about young ... attitudes had changed very much from when Stonewall Housing was first setup. But still, young people are still thrown out of home when they come out and are bullied and abused and need that particular special safe bit of support. And so I think it does have a very particular role and a specialism to play and I think ... I mean I do work now both through Age Concern and elsewhere around the needs of older lesbians and gay men both in terms of housing and social care and I think it's the same issue that our needs need to be recognised and it's not that you need lots of specialist provision, but in some ways it's about making sure that all providers recognise those needs. And I think it's the same for the work that Stonewall Housing does, but to recognise ... no, in terms of providing specialist supported housing that you need to provide a safe place for those young people for a certain time and actually then help them go out and be able to compete and survive in the world.
- OZ:** And do you think your work with Stonewall Housing changed you as well as the person?
- JS:** I'm sure it did. I learnt masses about working with people and running organisations and being clear and consistent and now looking back, it feels

like a good experience. There was times in the middle of it when I wasn't so sure. But yes and in terms of making me more open and learning more about different people's life experiences; you always need to take that onboard and take that into whatever you do next.

OZ: And so ...

<Part 5 starts>

OZ: In terms of the LGBT community, how would you say that itself has evolved? I mean I guess from over ... well, whatever period of time I guess it has changed, but like within the context of Stonewall Housing ...

JS: It's clearly very ... the world is very different than when Stonewall was setup and there's less prejudice. There's still, I think, a lot of discrimination and I think people ... I think there's a bit gap between people's perceptions and the straight world out there thinks, 'Oh, it's not a problem anymore and it's not an issue!' But I heard the other day of a friend's nephew and his boyfriend were beaten up when they were walking along their suburban street somewhere because they were walking along hand in hand and that still happens and you know it happens and people still need that extra bit of safe support. So while the world has moved on in lots of ways and I think it's probably much easier for people of my age and we've been out for a long time and it feels much easier and much safer. But there's still a lot of vulnerability and a lot of prejudice.

OZ: And do you think that's improving or do you think it's improving ...

JS: Yes, no, and it is improving. But let's not kid ourselves that it's all absolutely fine or that it will always stay that way and that it will keep improving.

OZ: And do you think in the housing world that there's a similar level of improvement ...

JS: I'm so far removed from the housing world really that it's hard to say. I mean I suppose for years I've been on the Management Committee of an organisation called Polari that works with older LGBT people and clearly in that area, in terms of ... I mean housing and health and social care, there's a much ... in the fifteen years we've been working in the organisation just close. But there's been a real sea change in ... started off fifteen years ago, people didn't even think there were older lesbians and gay men and that's changed enormously and so that you get Government departments and regulatory bodies and everything who are looking at the needs of older lesbians and gay men, and so that's really changed. But you still ... you'll get people who run care homes and not to generalise, but there are lots of examples of people doing research who ask a care home manager about their lesbian and gay residents and they're absolutely horrified at the thought that there might be an older person who's lesbian or gay. And so I think ... and part of what keeps changing is that there's people who've been out all their lives who aren't suddenly going to go scuttling back into the closet when they get older and that's good. And the work that Stonewall Housing does and organisations like it with young people all builds to that and I think one of the things that's noticeable and is really important for younger people; there's very few positive images and role models of older gay people and it's changing and it will keep on changing and that's exciting.

OZ: Yes. OK, can you think of any major things that you think maybe I should've covered or that you remember that you think are really important that I haven't?

JS: I don't think so. It feels like a good run through.

OZ: Yes. Brilliant, OK, well should we leave it there?

JS: Yeah, if that's OK?

OZ: Yes, excellent.

<End of Recording>