

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Lorraine Roberts

Interviewer: Olly Zanetti

Place of Interview: Tottenham.

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Key

LR: = Interviewee, Lorraine Roberts

OZ: = Interviewer, Olly Zanetti

[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

LR: I was born in 1961, October 25th, in Sunbury on Thames. I didn't live there very long, about eighteen months, and then we moved to Barnet in the furthest outskirts of north London, which is where I spent most of my childhood. A short spree in Birmingham, about four years, because my dad's work moved us up there, and then I came back again and I lived in Barnet until I left home when I was nineteen and went to live in Muswell Hill. And then I've lived in London all my life really since then, not been out.

OZ: And how old were you lived in Birmingham?

LR: From about the age of nine to about thirteen.

O: So a significant period in your life, or just before a significant period in your life started maybe?

LR: Probably just before a significant period in my life, although that age is quite ... important. But the upheaval I think is one of the things, 'cause I had friends at that age that would have carried on, which I lost really when we moved out of Birmingham. Although I do remember living in Birmingham was all around ... that's when I was really into people like David Bowie and Mark Bolan from T-Rex and all that sort of thing, and lots of cross-dressing stars and things like that. And apparently, although I have no recollection of this, it was also when was there that my mum tells me that she came upstairs, I was in my room with some friends and she came upstairs to bring the washing up or something and she heard me say to my friends, 'Now can anyone tell me what a lesbian is?' I don't even know where I got the word from at that age. So there's obviously something significant but I don't have much memory of it!

OZ: And so how did ... you mentioned this interest in David Bowie and cross-dressing; was that something that was significant amongst you and all your friends, or was it quite personal to you?

LR: Well I suppose there was an element, 'cause we, me and my friends, tended to fall into the two camps – in terms of us as girls there would either be the ones that went for the David Cassidy's and the sort of stereotypically good looking heterosexual males, and those of us who were into something a bit quirky and something that looked a bit more androgynous, the men who

looked a bit feminine or played around with gender. And I remember I had a newspaper clipping of David Bowie cross-dressed with a male friend in a bad, and there was this whole speculation, and I also had some clippings of Mark Bolan and things about his possible relationship with a male member of the band. So I was interested, clearly, in what all that meant.

OZ: And were they clippings that you had posted up on your wall?

LR: Yeah, stuck up on the wall. I was going to say blue-tak but probably blu-tak wasn't around then, so probably sellotaped up on the wall.

OZ: And how did your parents react to that?

LR: I don't know. They seemed to think that was ... they didn't say anything.

OZ: How about your friends?

LR: I suppose I hung out with the same friends who thought that that sort of thing was kind of cool. I do remember actually with my friend opposite, with Fiona, having a kind of a ... could we practice kissing with tongues session, so yeah ... it's interesting remembering that now. So that does put it exactly in that time period then as well that I was clearly getting a bit interested. I wasn't stuck in this idea that it had to be a boy and a girl. And ... I suppose when I then moved to London then I was in a ... I went straight into secondary school. There was a different schooling system in Birmingham to London at that time, so I had quite a jump. I'd been in what was junior school but they called middle school, and I was at the beginning of my final year but still in that set-up, and then all of a sudden we moved and I suddenly found myself thrown into the first year of a secondary school without doing that transition with everybody else around me. So I was suddenly the new girl in a class of people who'd all just got used to being the new girls in the school, and so that was ... quite hard really, and I think maybe I worked quite hard to fit in with a lot of stuff there. And this wasn't specifically to do with sexuality, but I wasn't badly bullied, I was harassed a bit, but only by people who bullied anybody that they thought they could, and I stood up to that and that was fine, and then I found my niche of friends, and we always considered ourselves a little bit different and hippie but fairly heterosexual. So actually from fairly early age, while I was still at school, I became fairly rampantly promiscuously heterosexual. I was on the pill by the time I was fifteen. And ... had loads and loads of boyfriends, although nothing meaningful or long-term, it was more sex really. I don't know, looking back, if I enjoyed it, or just thought that it gave me a certain ... it certainly gave me a certain status that I quite enjoyed. <Laughed> And I don't know whether that was a backlash to going into that school at that time, when I had to make a name for myself. But I had close girlfriends ... but that was always very different, that was a separate thing, although I do remember having this very vivid lesbian dream about one of my girlfriends, and it was so vivid that the next ... it was one of those dreams when the next day, when I went into school, I couldn't look at her 'cause I was convinced that she must know that I'd been thinking about this, about her. And part of me wanted to talk to her 'cause I thought she must have had the same dream as me, 'cause it was so vivid, but I knew I couldn't, so ... yeah.

OZ: Did you ever?

LR: Talk to her about it? No. No, we didn't. No ... I mean and my girlfriends at school would be ... we were quite affectionate with each other and that sort of thing, but we were always very clear ... we quite often slept with each other's boyfriends and ... we took drugs as well and hung out at late-night parties and did all of that, but we were very clearly heterosexual as far as we were concerned then. And in a way it's quite sad, 'cause especially as girls I think there was a lot of status to having a boyfriend ... if you didn't then ... And there was more status for some boy or man at a party to say, 'You look sexy' than you had interesting conversation or anything like that. So it was very clear that my status in the group existed on that sort of basis, and I certainly know later on I slept with a number of men that I didn't particularly want to, but it was a fairly cheap commodity.

Gosh, this is all getting quite intense, isn't it? <Laughs>

OZ: It's interesting. And so ... we're still at about fifteen or something now?

LR: Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen ... I left school, I did my A levels at school and then I left school ... just ... yeah.

OZ: And so where does your family figure within this? You mentioned a lot about your friends but what was your family life like?

LR: I think it was generally OK. I think my parents probably worried about me. I think they had some idea that there was soft drug-use going on. I don't know if they knew about hard drugs or worried about that. I think they did worry about it a bit. But they didn't say anything, they didn't intervene at all.

And I've got two sisters, both younger than me, and the sister who was a couple of years younger than me totally ... idolised me, and she started coming out with us and started going out with one of the boys in my group. And the youngest sister was quite a bit younger, so there was a bit more of a gap really.

So otherwise, yeah, I mean I was quite ... I didn't really want to be part of the family on one level, not because of anything personal. I started opting out of family holidays at a very early age.

OZ: How early?

LR: About 12 I started refusing to go on holiday with my family! <Chuckles> For a while I managed to get out of it by I'd go off and do an activity holiday, separate to them, which usually involved horse riding 'cause I was also into horses in a big way then. We didn't ... my background, I suppose I would call myself lower middle-class, my parents are working-class background, so we were OK. They had aspirations, especially my dad, to be more than that. So we never had a lot of money but we were comfortable. So if I wanted these holidays I used to have to pay for them for myself, and I'd have jobs – I had Saturday jobs and things like that. I was always quite self-sufficient. Neither of my sisters particularly were but I was.

So then I didn't ... I was doing A levels, everyone assumed I'd go to university; I decided I wanted to take a year out, so I got a job and then I went off travelling, and that probably gave me the space to think about a few things, which was helpful. And while I was away, that's when I read a couple

of books, I read *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French, and that was a turning point for me, and a couple of other things, and I came back and came out as a feminist first. So that was around feminism, so I came out and got a bit active around feminism and ... I did various odd jobs, I didn't really settle. I continued to have relationships on and off with men until I was ... twenty-two. And it was when I was twenty-two that ... I don't really know how the whole, how it really came to me. I went on holiday with one of the friends that in fact I'd been to school with, and we island-hopped around Greece and that's when I said to her, 'You know, I think I might be gay, but I don't know.' And she wasn't particularly interested. She was more interested in <chuckles> some Greek man that she was pursuing at the time, but that was how I was ... because I was so not interested in any of them, and so ... yeah, I came out ... just after my twenty-third birthday in 1984.

OZ: And how was that?

LR: Fantastic! I mean for me, personally, totally liberating. I was a student, I'd gone back to college, I was at Middlesex Polytechnic at that time. I was quite active in the women's movement, and I'd been to Greenham Common a few times and I'd met lesbians and I thought I might be, but I thought I couldn't be. I did have this strong ... I had this kind of ... I wanted to be. I felt attracted to women and I also politically felt that that's ... was more comfortable for me, but I thought because I had slept with men and had relationships with men then I couldn't be, 'cause I did have, somewhere in me, some idea that if I'd done that it meant I couldn't be. And initially it almost all went wrong, because I had a short, brief relationship with a woman and then she ... said oh, she didn't want to continue and I thought oh my god, that just proves that I'm not really one. <Laughs> 'She's sussed me out, I'm not really a lesbian, oh god!' But luckily there was another woman who was at college with me who was actually volunteering for Lesbian Line at the time, and started following me around and having conversations with me, and unbeknown to me sort of I suppose counselling me through the possible options, and so ... yes. Apart from that little blip, initially when I came out it was ... I was thrilled. It felt like a massive release. It felt like for the first time I was totally who I was.

Although I have to say that I was ... and I continued to be for some time, quite a radical lesbian separatist. My feminism was as important to me as my sexuality, and I did see being a lesbian as a political choice, but it just wasn't a very difficult one 'cause it felt like a fairly natural one ... so I suppose it was a combination of the two. But certainly where I was coming from at the time, it was a bit like some of the difficulties I was having with myself were sort of ... although I was involved in student politics and I did work with men on the different political groups, on the Socialist Action Group I think it was called, I did think, 'I can't see how I could possibly, with my feminist politics,' where they were at that time, 'how could I possibly have a relationship with a man?' Because it felt a little bit like I could never ... I wanted an equal relationship, and how could I have that with an institutional ... institution as it was? So on one level I would have probably slotted into the political lesbian slot, but as I said, it did feel like a very natural choice, so there was no conflict there.

OZ: So tell me a bit more about the feminist politics that you were involved in.

LR: Oh god, I don't know what to say really. <Sighs> I read loads, all the sorts of Andrea Dworkin and lots of other stuff. I didn't see myself, I saw feminism as an ideology in itself and not as a sub-branch of socialism, which I knew other

feminists who did. I didn't see the oppression of women as stemming from capitalism, but more stemming from patriarchy. So that's pretty much where I came from, and I set up a women's group at college and I was involved in Greenham Women's Support Group in Hackney and we used to go to Greenham and support that. Not that in fact that was fighting a feminist cause. I think Greenham is very interesting – I think an awful lot of women who were involved in Greenham, yes of course they were fighting against nuclear weapons and the establishment but actually it was all bound up in the creation of a women only space and community, that you could come in and out of, and in which when you went there you had political discussions around feminism and you were accepted within that. And I would say that was probably my main motivation, to be part of that. And our Greenham Women's Support Group was actually largely a consciousness raising group in the old sense. We did used to ... it was almost like well there wasn't anything to discuss about nuclear weapons, 'cause we'd all decided we were against them; it was more we'd turn up as the group and talk about the different issues that were going on in our lives in a feminist context really, and making the personal political, and all of that. So that's what happened.

And I saw that ... and I made the decision that where I wanted to put all my energy was into women and into women's liberation from patriarchal oppression, and so that's ... I got involved in different women's organisations and in fact it was around that time that I got involved in Lespop which was the Lesbian Policing Project, which was the women's branch of Galop. Galop existed at that time as just for men, and Lespop was just for women, and both got funding from the GLC. And I think Lespop got less funding because on one level there were less obvious policing issues for lesbians as lesbians. I mean to be honest most of the ... and I suppose that's where a lot of my feminist politics came from, a lot of the shit that we as lesbians were experiencing was actually because we were women, rather than because we were lesbians; or women that didn't fit a certain stereotype or were out and about without a man to protect us. So a lot of it was also experienced by single women or women who were out ... and so that felt like that was the real battle.

So I was also very involved in anti-pornography stuff, and that's one of the reasons why I got involved in Lespop, because I did get arrested a couple of times and ... we did various direct actions, spray painting, Super Gluing locks, some fairly minor stuff, but stuff that technically could be called criminal damage if they wanted to. I actually got arrested down in Tottenham by Seven Sisters tube, for spray painting a poster that was kind of around male violence.

OZ: When was that?

J Yeah, when was that? I'm not sure. I certainly wasn't ... hmm, maybe about twenty years ago. So a lot of the focus was around male violence, a lot of my feminist action was around male violence. I didn't ever, but I supported Rape Crisis, I organised fund-raisers, several of my partners at the time, or friends, volunteered for Rape Crisis, and we were involved in Women's Aid and that sort of thing. There was always the irony there that it was predominantly lesbians who were supporting organising, propping up organisations for whom the main client group was frequently heterosexual women. But where our feminist politics came from, we felt that if women were free from patriarchal oppression then they would also be free to make more choices generally, and

that included about their sexuality. So it wasn't about oh, we're going to recruit more women to become lesbians; it was about that basically women didn't have all the different options and choices, and a lot of women had gone in the direction of marriage and children and found themselves in positions that they couldn't get out of.

When I was arrested at the Tottenham site, myself and my girlfriend at that time, on both occasions we were let off with a caution, I was never prosecuted, but on that occasion at Tottenham Police Station we were ... we were harassed. And without a doubt I'm sure that they never used the words but they threatened to strip-search us and suggested that we might enjoy that, or maybe we wouldn't ... So there was a homophobic undercurrent to that experience of being arrested.

And then just generally being on various pickets. I was involved in Women Against Violence Against Women as well as doing sex-shops and pornography displays we also picketed various films, a few films that we felt depicted women in degrading and oppressive circumstances, especially if violence was involved. And that was a mixed group. We were doing that alongside heterosexual women, but we would nearly always get quite a lot of anti-lesbian abuse when we were involved in the pickets.

OZ: Tell me about one of those pickets – in detail – one that stands out.

LR: Oh, now there was loads. Basic Instinct, Seven and a Half Weeks, those were the sorts of films. It would be mainstream films. We didn't go necessarily for the hardcore pornography. What we were going for was ... we would stand outside, we would picket the film and we would try and talk to the people who were queuing up to buy tickets. We'd have placards and try and talk to people, saying, 'This is being sold to you as entertainment but actually it's an insidious indoctrination of this is women's roles and it's OK to treat women like this, and not OK for them to fight back or be something else themselves.' And we did used to, I do remember several, not one specifically but several pickets where people did turn back and not go to the cinema after, and we had to work quite hard – we didn't wanna align ourselves to the right-wing campaigners who were the Mary Whitehouse censorship, this was wrong because it portrayed sex; we were trying to be quite clear that it wasn't about that. So we'd have a leaflet and we produced a whole booklet I remember about different aspects of mainstream women's oppression and issues of wearing high heels and wearing makeup and this sort of thing, the sort of roles we were put **[in from that all the way 26:23]**

We had a slideshow that we took around different women's projects and youth projects and things like that, that showed different aspects. We were trying to say that pornography is a whole continuum, and it's a whole continuum that creates a climate in which it's kind of OK to treat women in a certain way and that's what's wrong with it, and our focus wasn't on the harder core or even the *Penthouse*.

Although we did join in the campaign against W H Smith's and their stocking of pornography. We did quite a bit around that, picketed quite a few shops and I found some lovely pictures of myself recently, standing in W H Smith's. We'd just go into the shop, I was in Southend and we went into the shop and we'd just stand in front of the magazine racks with big placards about it. That

was quite difficult for the store to do something initially with us, but obviously we were damaging their custom.

So yes, we did all of that sort of thing.

OZ: And were you still in college at this time?

LR: No. Yes, a bit in college and then ... and then I carried on and in fact when I first left college I didn't look for a job. I decided that for a year I was just going to be a full-time activist, so I didn't seek work and I worked almost full-time for **WAVER**, who had an office at that time at Embankment, at a building that was owned by the GLC and housed lots of different women's projects, so I used to volunteer down there. I helped run a violence against women helpline, when Rape Crisis wasn't operating, and I went to, through there I went to the International Lesbian Conference in Geneva, which was amazing.

It was hundreds, five, six, seven-hundred lesbians but it was also we were in this huge building and we had simultaneous translation, it was like being part of the UN, so people were giving speeches ... but it was a lot of quite hardcore politics then. So people would be challenged on the stage around things, around representation and diversity. Class was a much bigger issue than it is now. So there would be pickets and demonstrations. We were very good at arguing with each other, but having said that it was to kind of a good cause in the end, I think. We stayed in ... Geneva, Switzerland, I can't remember whether it was the town or the country, was supporting this International Lesbian Conference to the extent that they made quite a lot of facilities available, so we didn't have to pay to get in. Our transport, several of us got paid for by the GLC to go and some of us funded it ourselves, and to be honest some of us funded it with insurance scams, so I think my camera was stolen while I was out there and that was how I paid for my train journey to and from.

But we were put up in a nuclear bunker, this underground ... I've never been in anything like it before or since. We'd come back from the conference every day and you went into this ... you went down this walkway and through these huge two-foot thick concrete doors, a series of them, through a decontamination centre where, had there been a nuclear war, we'd have been scrubbed down – all these showers and hoses and scrubbing equipment – and then into the actual bunker itself, which I think housed something like 200-300 people in dormitories with beds which they allowed us to use, and then there was also kitchens and things like that. It did get a little bit out of hand towards the end, because some of the people who were there felt that ... anyway, they broke in to some of the rooms that were locked, and that was interesting 'cause we broke into a store cupboard where we discovered it was full of irons and tea towels and it was the strange concept of there's a nuclear and you'd want to be ironing. Why on earth they'd stock this place with irons – it was like you know, 100 steam irons, new steam irons in boxes in this nuclear bunker, and that was just baffling!

Another part of my feminism was also that we believed at that time that monogamy ... having a one-to-one exclusive relationship was part of the hetero-patriarchal plot. Now this, if you had ethics, wasn't an excuse just to sleep around generally, but it did mean that an awful lot of people had open or non-monogamous relationships, which were discussed and ... and I remember going up to a picket in Leeds where some students had smashed

up an exhibition which they considered to be pornographic, and had been caught and were being prosecuted by the university, and a lot of us went up there to support them, and I went and there was six or eight of us staying in a house of one of the women who was an activist in Leeds, and I went up with my girlfriend at the time ... although I had another girlfriend who was studying in America at the time, so I went up with this one girlfriend and then while we were up there the woman, she came to me and said, the woman who's house were staying in, she quite fancied her and they decided that they wanted to sleep together and was it alright if she did that at the same time? And so she spent one night with me and one night with her on an alternating basis for two weeks. I tell that now because I can't imagine it now <chuckles>, but at the time as long as you didn't deceive, the idea was you didn't sleep with anybody behind anybody's back, as long as you did that openly and honestly it was about, the theory was that it was about that one person wouldn't meet all your needs and that if you had ... And there was also a big issue about the idea that one-to-one exclusive sexual relationships were more important than friendships, and that's probably an ethic that I largely still carry on now; that long-term friendships are as important, need to be worked at and your one-to-one relationship with your primary partner shouldn't be automatically prioritised over your friends. So that was also an important part. So we really tried, at that time – I was squatting in Hackney at that point, like a lot of lesbian activists – and we really tried to live our politics and that was really important to us. So in terms of our personal relationships and the way that we lived with each other and the way that we spoke to each other and the way ... there was a constant ... it was quite hard work, no wonder I couldn't have had a job at the same time! A constant examination of your motives and why you were doing something, because you constantly had to go back and check that this wasn't just part of your programming; that you weren't feeling like you wanted to do this, where did that come from, had that been part of just your upbringing but it wasn't a free choice? So you were constantly going back and checking back against the choices that you made in life and what you were doing and that sort of thing, so it was a very ... it was traumatic at times, some of this open relationship stuff got very ... very interesting. But it was also very kind of exciting time, a very exciting and dynamic time I think.

OZ: So how did you move from, I don't know, radical feminist, to ... or semi-radical depending on how you want to put it – to Chair of Galop?

LR: Oh yes, because that's a very good question, because it was a significant move for me to give up some of my free time to what was a mixed organisation, and to what at that ...

<Part 2 starts>

... time was almost a hundred percent male organisation. So after I'd been an unpaid activist for a year, and then I got a job for Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Group, which was pretty amazing, because then I spent three-and-a-half years as a paid lesbian, professional lesbian being paid to do this sort of stuff. But that did also mean that I started liaising a bit more, and less of the activism, picketing, and more of the negotiation type stuff, so I started doing more of that.

OZ: So would you have been in your twenties at this stage?

LR: Yeah. I was in my mid-twenties when I started working for Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Group, and we were a collective and so there was lots of stuff there. We were also based in Summerstown, we also had bulletproof glass. We got shot at from across the estate a couple of times and we fairly consistently had threats, and we had to have a lot of safety policies. The police were not particularly helpful. We did get, from rightwing fascist groups, a lot of nasty mail, abusive telephone calls, but we managed to get that Lesbian Centre going. I wasn't part of getting it going – I got a paid job once it was up and running, and then we ran groups and did different stuff there, and I did that for three-and-a-half years.

And then I went to work for Islington Council as an equalities officer, mainly around women and around lesbian and gay stuff. And then I went from there to the London Voluntary Service Council, and I was at the London Voluntary Service Council (which is like an umbrella organisation, almost third-tier for all of London's voluntary sector), and I went there because I wanted to gain experience in management, and they were advertising a management post that didn't require prior experience. And I'd been working in Islington, I'd been working in the equalities office and dealing with cases of harassment and stuff like that, and it always seemed to me that a lot of this was also bad management, so I wanted to have a go at it myself so that's one of the reasons. And London Voluntary Service Council was funded by previous incarnation of London Councils, one of the other names. They've been through about five in the time I've known them. But the guy who was the Deputy Director of that came to me at that time and asked me if I would join an emergency management committee for Galop. And what had happened was that Galop and Lespop had been merged, the GLC, this is post '84 obviously, so the GLC had closed, the funding had gone over to London Borough Grants or whatever it was called then and they'd obviously rationalised various things and they'd closed Lespop and made it part of the condition of Galop that it delivered services to lesbians and gay men, but there was all sorts of problems basically, and there was I think two members of staff and one was leaving ... and I think the whole management committee had just resigned. And there was one member of staff who nobody could deal with and the whole management committee had resigned. And so six or eight lesbian and gay activists who were either working in other voluntary organisations or who were known on the circuit, had been brought in and had each agreed to give six months on an emergency management committee. Now I wasn't approached for that, but the six months was coming to an end, and in that six months what their task was to basically get rid of both members of staff in one way or another – either pay them off or whatever – and have a review. It's probably still sitting around in Galop, it was about six inches deep, of what the organisation could be. And then those people who had committed to the six months, part of what they needed to do was hand over to people who would commit for a bit longer. So I was approached then.

So why did I do it? Why did I decide I was going to be on the management committee of a mixed gay organisation? Well I suppose ... <sighs> I don't know, I did question it myself at the time, but ... I think on one level I was reluctant to be ... it was hard work being part of the women's movement at that time and being involved on the management committee of a women's organisation could sometimes get very personal, so I did think being on a mixed gay one would make it a bit less personal, and also I think I just liked the idea of a challenge and it seemed to fit the skills that I was developing at London Voluntary Service Council at the time. And I went in and after a

couple of meetings and after all these people who had been there for six months had recruited other people and were going to stand down, they were looking for another chair and basically unless there's a really good chair and a management committee is very well run I'm no good at being on it unless I'm in charge. <Chuckles> So ... I put myself forward as the chair.

And at that point I think they were partway through an industrial tribunal with the remaining member of staff, which I think we just paid him off in the end, we didn't take it ... we just decided it was easier to draw a line. And then we rewrote the constitution, memorandum, articles of agreement and set about recruiting. And luckily London Borough Grants you see wanted to have an organisation and felt that it was better to get this one sorted out than just cut all the funding, so they were willing to stay with the whole process. So I think in a lot of ways it was ... I was interested 'cause I had been involved with Lespop, I had volunteered a bit for Lespop, so I'd worked on their helpline a bit. And if there were demos and things they would give out their number, and if anybody was arrested they would call and then we would put them in touch with a solicitor. And so I'd been involved in that part of it, and so it appealed to me a little bit. And then it probably just also appealed to a certain sense of vanity – that I felt that I had certain things and this was the sort of thing I could go in and help rescue. I like achieving things, so it felt like it was something that maybe could be achieved. So that's how ...

OZ: And was there a lot of competition for the chair post?

LR: No, absolutely none, no! <Laughs> So it wasn't difficult. Nobody wanted the chair, so that was no problem. And in the I think seven years, I think, I was looking back and I did it, it was 1995 that I got involved and became chair, and I think I left in 2002, and in all that time nobody challenged me to be chair, nobody wanted to be chair, and in fact I only really was able to leave in 2002 because somebody had come onto the management committee who was potentially interested, so I worked with him so that he would be able to take over from me. Because I felt very attached to the organisation by that point, and I wasn't going to leave unless I thought there was somebody who could do it, who could take over. But I did need to leave after seven years.

OZ: Can you remember your first day in this new role of being chair?

LR: Yeah, because they were based at what was then the London Councils organisation used to host ... well London Borough Grants had different offices but they were linked to the Association of London Government or something like that, Association of London Authorities, and Galop had a little office right at the top of this quite posh building with lots of important people coming and going through the front door, but we could also use their big boardroom for meetings, so yeah, that was going in and sitting round the board table, this huge big shiny board table, looking across St James' Park and chairing the meeting. So yes, I do remember that.

OZ: And what was your first meeting like?

LR: Businesslike, I suppose. And very focussed, but big decisions because, as I said, we were still in the middle of this industrial tribunal ...or maybe we weren't in the middle ... I mean the tribunal hadn't started, I don't think the tribunal ever started, I think we paid it ... but I think we'd just had the letter saying that we were being taken to tribunal for getting rid of this guy. And then

there was all these memos, so it felt like really jumping straight in. There was no getting used to it. A couple of people from the six-month one had stayed on for a transitional period of a couple of months.

So I do remember feeling a bit like am I going to make a complete pillock of myself? Am I going to say the wrong things. They've been doing this for six months; what makes me think I can make any better decisions or whatever?

But I think everybody made the decision, we were all fairly unanimous. There was no difficulties and everybody round there was actually quite skilled and committed in what they were doing, so that made it a lot easier.

And we just had to get adverts out and get new staff recruited and get the service up and running as quickly as possible. And I had been involved in recruitment before, so I knew how to get a job description together. I don't know if I ever read that consultant's report from the beginning to the end, it was so thick. I think I just kind of dipped in and out of it. People pointed out the key bits to read. And I'm sure I made loads and loads of mistakes, initially particularly, in terms of chairing a committee, but on another level we just had this one bit of funding coming in, it wasn't complicated. I've since been on management committees where it's much more complicated funding regimes, and I think it has got a lot more complicated than it was.

OZ: So was chair a fulltime role, or was it a ...

LR: No, well I was working for LVSC at the time but they were quite flexible with me in terms of letting me have time off to do it or fitting it around things or sometimes if we needed to I could have a meeting using their meeting room and things like that, so they were always quite supportive. And it was quite busy, because at that time the two staff we recruited, they were both on the same level, so there was no director, so it was very much ... it wasn't a collective, in that in a true collective the management committee is on the same level as the workers. It was never a collective in that sense, in that we were always quite clear that the management committee were responsible, and that's what the funders insisted. They needed to be able to hold somebody ... they wanted more of a clear ... And at the time with only two people it was relatively easy, but it did mean that different members of the committee had to do line management and supervision. But we were very lucky as well, because the two people that we recruited first off were brilliant; young, inexperienced but enthusiastic, committed, hardworking, willing to step outside job descriptions if necessary to do what they needed to do to get the organisation working. And interestingly we decided that we would get one woman and one man, and interestingly enough the young woman that we recruited was quite a committed feminist as well. So as far as possible I suppose I did aim to ensure that the feminist politics were reflected within the development of Galop. Just some of the personal stuff, the way we treated each other, the way the policies were developed, this sort of thing, and she was quite keen about that.

And a key part of the job that we had to do was to change the image and profile of Galop, which was still seen at that point ... I think one of the things that had pulled the organisation apart, as well as a bit of financial irregularity, which of course was never proved against this individual, was only even though it was meant to be mixed it only delivered services to men, and it really only delivered services to white men and one of the workers had made

some racist comments at a public meeting or something. So we had to change that image totally. We had to project an image that Galop was there for women and that there were policing issues around lesbianism. Because a lot of the gay men who were coming to the project at that time really didn't think that lesbians had any problems, in relation to the police. And certainly 90% of the stuff that the police were interested in was around gay men, and in particular men being beaten up at cottaging sites or being murdered by being lured ... and that was the more serious crimes that the police were keen on getting the gay communities support in convicting. So we negotiated, we got the police, 'cause they'd done it before and then they'd dropped doing it, to carry on funding the telephone line, as to do third party reporting of this, and that continued to be the main element I suppose of the work. But I do remember, in terms of trying to broaden people's awareness it wasn't just trying to get out there and tell other members of the community, and lesbians in particular, that we were there for them and that we did have services and there were policing issues, and for the lesbians a lot of the stuff was often home-based and it was either from neighbours and then it would be council or social housing providers not taking that seriously ... it was more that than stuff out on the street. But I do remember delivering a presentation and workshop to senior police officers on lesbianism, a lesbian awareness workshop, and I did think at that time, god, if somebody had told me ten, fifteen, twenty years ago, or even only a couple of years ago, that I would be at Scotland Yard in front of senior police officers, telling them what it was like to be a lesbian, and they're taking me seriously, I wouldn't have believed it. So that was ... because they were like, 'Well what policing issues are there that lesbians face?' So it was very much this is a presentation on lesbian lifestyles and what lesbians are and who they are and what they do and why there are policing issues around it. And it did feel very strange, giving that to all these white male senior police officers, white male heterosexual predominantly.

OZ: And how did they respond to that?

LR: Oh, very seriously! To be honest, at that level by the time we had Galop we always found police officers at that level to be very supportive, and generally kind of ... I mean they would always say the right things in meetings, and they would always promise support and they would do things. It was always, and I suspect it still is, and then it filters through to street level. And this was before all the LGBT Liaison Officer stuff, but even before that there was ... So at a senior level it was oh yes, yes, yes. And then I think ironically one of the turning points was the Soho bombing, and ... that threw Galop into the limelight in a number of different ways: speaking at different public meetings, but raising the whole profile of it, and hate crimes, and it was all around that time that the whole language changed to talk about hate crimes and to see hate crimes against the LGBT community alongside other hate crimes. And that's when they set up the hate crimes unit and I'm not sure if I'm getting all the actual names of it all right but we had the advisory group and I sat on that and we recruited people onto that and to advise the police on dealing with that. And there was one of them for LGBT issues and there was one for race, and it was, we started to feel like it was being accepted, so as awful and as tragic as the event was, it marked a turning point, I think, in the awareness and acceptability within the police for doing something about this. It pushed it up the agenda and then we would see a lot more published material where they would talk about hate crimes and this was all included.

OZ: And so as chair, what was your role?

LR: Well ... to be honest over the years to do a bit of everything I think, because I fairly quickly had to recruit and get a decent management committee together, because people had come but they actually tended to drift off, and although we did try and use open recruitment methods, advertising, I think the Guardian had free volunteer things and we went through different things like that, actually predominantly I got together a good management committee by approaching people I knew, either friends or people I'd worked with, and they talked to other people, and we managed to get a good skill set on there with a couple of good criminal lawyers, one of which specialised ... actually he was in training, but he was specialising in stuff that was around prosecuting the police and so forth. That was really helpful, and a couple of other people who were HR specialists, and so I suppose yeah, my role was to make sure meetings happened, getting the management committee together, keeping the staff happy, and there's a fair amount of goodwill, stroking stuff that needed to take place to keep staff happy. But it became apparent to me I suppose, I don't know, probably about half way through, that really we couldn't carry on with a flat structure. Before that one of the things that I'd done which was quite exciting, which I spearheaded, was submitting an application to the Lottery for the black services development project, and I think we were one of the first lesbian and gay projects, and I think we did get used as an example of the ridiculousness of the lottery, but it was a very positive project and it meant that we could target recruitment and diversify the workforce a bit more, and look at providing dedicated services. But we also did a big survey, which we did through volunteers and went out at Pride and on the streets and walked around Soho and just interviewed lots of people to get a report about black lesbian and gay men's experience of harassment on one side and policing on the other, and looking at how far that was separate from or not separate from racism and their experience of racism from the police, but then also homophobia from the black community. So it was a brilliant project, but having done that, there was a number member of staff then and then I think we also got more funding from another project, so by this point we had four, four-and-a-half, members of staff, and it just couldn't work on a flat structure.

So I looked into getting some funding from ... so as chair, the staff could do various bits, but as chair I suppose I had to be Chief Executive as well and do some of the jobs that a director would do, and I probably couldn't have done that had I not been at LVSC for the early part, and then letting me do a bit of that in their time, because it was quite time consuming. And then during that I think I was still ... Yes, I was in the last couple of years, because I went from LVSC to work at the GLA in 2000, so it was the last couple of years. So then I did have to start doing it in my own time. Oh, not initially 'cause technically I was still seconded from LVSC so therefore they dictated my terms and conditions, so I said part of that was that I was allowed to do some Galop stuff, so I still did go off and do bits of Galop stuff in what was work time. So that was good. But we got somebody in ... I knew it would be a delicate process bringing in a director level, 'cause on one hand the staff wanted it, because they kind of were missing having somebody that they could go to and decide, and they could see it didn't really work on a flat structure; and on the other hand of course they were a bit anxious about what did it mean for them and so forth. So we got a great consultant in, I think at that time there was a fund that paid generously for this sort of thing, so we could do it properly, and the consultant met with and spoke to everybody and then facilitated workshops with us so it was a jointly agreed ... it wasn't something we had to impose on the staff. And I suppose that was about the time of my

departure, 'cause I suppose at the same time as we got that agreed, set up the structure, started the recruitment process, was the same time as I handed over to this chair. So I don't think I ever actually directly worked with the director. So the whole time I was the chair, I was also the director.

Lots of things like that, and we got our AGMs going better and that was quite helpful; I worked at the GLA at that time, so there were some things that I could pull together and we had an AGM that I remember quite well, which I ... we managed to get some quite good speakers and I could get people along from ... so we had an AGM where we had two speakers: Linda Bellos, who at that time was chairing the advisory group in the Met, and Lee Jasper, who was the Mayor's, Ken's advisor on equalities. I didn't know that they had a bit of history between them, and not very positive history, so I had them up there on a panel with me sitting in between, both of them to speak and then to answer questions, and I almost had to physically intervene to hold them apart. Not the whole way through, but that's what it got to. But in a way that was one of the best AGMs we had. I think people quite enjoyed that. It all got quite heated but it also got quite interesting. People start speaking more freely.

So that was good.

And we had also at that time the consortium, the LGBT Consortium had been set up and John Fox was working there, and that was quite good 'cause we'd started at Galop to also look at we were a London organisation but we did get a lot of calls from outside London and the project wasn't replicated elsewhere, so we were able to work with the Consortium and their regional outreach workers as well. So that was quite good.

OZ: And that change from a collective to a hierarchy, how was that ...

LR: Well as I said, 'cause I wasn't there once the director actually started, but it seemed to me that that seemed to work quite well. It meant basically, 'cause before it was lots of little problems came about through not having that, so it would be like well, this needs to happen. We'd be at the board meetings and we'd be like OK this needs to happen, and whereas normally you would have somebody who was director and you'd say, 'Can you make sure this happens?' and then they'd go back to a staff meeting and allocate it, we were like, 'Well who's going to do it?' and then sometimes the lines of accountability and authority weren't very clear. And each of the management committee members had individual members of staff that they supervised, and we took the job very seriously, so there'd be supervision notes and everything, but that took a lot of time for people who were in effect volunteering to this committee. So certainly from what I understood, that made things a lot easier for the management committee once there was a director in place who could basically take over the supervision. And I think probably was better equipped, therefore, to look at some of the training and support needs and the overall organisational issues. It sometimes felt like ... there'd always be something that wasn't in somebody's job description, and therefore either they were all trying to do it or nobody did it, and just little things around sorting out the networking of the computers and things like that; there wasn't anybody to delegate the tasks to in that sort of way. I think, I hope, it was an improvement, but I wasn't really there to see that take place.

OZ: And you mention obviously you left eventually and there was somebody there who was ready to take your place. How did it feel leaving?

LR: Oh, it was still hard. It was hard. And I suppose that's one of the reasons why I had to leave completely. Like I couldn't have just stood down as chair and stayed on the board, and I couldn't stay very close to the organisation because 1) I think it might have felt like it was cramping his style and 2) I might have found it really difficult if I felt like he was making the wrong decisions or things weren't going so well. I might have found that really hard or tried to interfere or something. So that's one of the reasons why when I left, I left completely, although I continued to bump into some of the workers and keep an eye out and things, I deliberately steered away from contact with the organisation as a whole for a couple of years. I think he was ... I can't remember his name now, but he was a lecturer at Birkbeck, and so I hoped that that would be quite useful because we'd started doing a bit more, we'd started making links, which is how he'd come on to the management committee, in the research/academic side and trying to get more evidence based at that point. I'd got involved at the same time with this group of people who were ... 'cause this was coinciding when there was a number of lesbian and gay organisations who were either funded and trying to expand and trying to get more funding, trying to hold onto their existing funding or not yet funded and looking to get funded, and there was this whole issue of funders needing to see evidence of need, and that was really, really difficult for LGBT organisations because nobody monitored sexuality, so whereas you could, if you were a BME organisation, tap in to research done by other people or just national statistics, and say, 'Well there's this percentage of this particular ethnic group living here, this percentage of crime reported,' those statistics were kept, sexuality wasn't monitored at all anywhere, so there was this huge research deficit, this statistical deficit which was really negatively impacting on LGBT organisations' ability to get funding, because we couldn't prove that there was a need. We couldn't even prove that we existed on one level. We couldn't say that there's this many, this is the population of lesbians and gay men in Haringey. All we could do is those funny little **33:05** that say oh, one in ten, you know. And it didn't work. So there was a number of people including Julia, who was the director of Stonewall Housing at the time, who got this group together to try and develop and get money to conduct research, and it didn't really go very far and years later I ended up ... just a few years ago but after I'd left Galop, doing work for **Kiros**, and Jane Standing at Kiros taking up the banner of the lack of research and the need to develop evidence base, but ... that's kind of by the by. But I mean ... not only had we gone from a collective, but also I'd more than doubled the workforce. We'd have to leave the little office we were in because the Association of London Authorities or whatever they were called at that time needed the office space back, so we'd moved into Leroy House. We owed a huge amount of rent and I have John McDonnell who's now an MP, to thank for eventually agreeing, after much negotiation and pleading on my behalf, to just write that off, so that the organisation wasn't left in deficit for that. So I felt, I suppose I felt like I handed over a healthy, thriving organisation that actually had a huge amount of potential by that point, because with the whole recognition and hate crime stuff there was LGBT liaison officers; we'd managed to develop relationships with them. There was a lot more possibilities for doing the work, for getting funding, for taking the work further. But I knew that didn't mean that was going to be an easy task, but I felt like I'd done everything I could at that point. So ... yeah.

OZ: So you mentioned the nail bombings in the context of the police. What was the political situation with regard to LGBT issues at that time?

- LR:** How do you mean, in terms of the political situation?
- OZ:** Well you started in '95, so that would have been the tail end of the last Tory government. How were ... organisations like Galop related to by that political situation, and did it change when Labour came in?
- LR:** Labour came in '96, didn't they? Or was it '97? '97. Well I suppose our main concern in the early years was around London Borough Grants, and in London it was managed by nominees from each of the London councils, and Labour and Tories at that point were fairly equal and the balance of power was held by the Liberals at London Borough Grants, and so that worked quite well. And then at the next local authority elections, and in a way that impacted more on Galop's day-to-day work, London based, a huge swing to Labour was really beneficial. And it meant that Labour had overall control and I think we managed to expand our funding a bit through there, yeah. And that was positive. I suppose on the national policy front, I'm not sure really. I certainly know by the coming up to year 2000 and so forth it did feel like it was ... the change in political context was much ... was apparent I suppose in ... I'm sure it would be behind the more favourable responses and openness we were getting from the police and advisors. We got invitations to speak much more widely and broadly at a higher level, and felt like we got treated more seriously I suppose. I'm not sure I can remember much more than that in terms of the political thing. I remember after the nail bombing, speaking at quite a number of political meetings with quite senior Labour people, and the sense of outrage and the sense of needing something to be done. And altogether, not so specifically with Galop but working at the ... I do remember in the Mayoral hustings, myself and one ... it must have been through Galop we got invited to attend a televised hustings of Mayoral candidates, and I think myself and Suzanne was the name of the other management committee member, and we'd submitted some question around LGBT issues and it didn't get picked and didn't get asked, but I remember coming out of the studio following Ken Livingstone, and not getting a very positive response from him because basically we were saying, 'So what are you going to do – where is it in your manifesto commitment, what are you going to be doing about LGBT communities and so forth?' And he appeared at that time to be far more interested in BME issues and racism and that sort of thing, but of course he hadn't been in very long when he introduced the partnership register, and because I was working there at that time, myself and my friend went down and we sat in on the first ever ... well they needed a bit of an audience really I think, but we sat in on the first ever partnership register of these two women, and ... that was great, that was really moving, even though it had no legal status at that point, that felt really exciting. Then after that it didn't feel like ... Ken was that keen to do that much on LGBT issues, as we set up a worker's group and tried to lobby for him to support things like Pride and stuff, which he didn't 'til quite a bit later on. Initially it wasn't first on his priorities, but the first partnership ceremony was good. So I suppose it did feel like, and I certainly feel like in retrospect I've got loads of criticisms of Labour and goodness knows what I'll vote in a couple of days' time, but I have to say I don't think we'd be anywhere near where we are now had it not been for this spell of Labour government, and I think they've quietly introduced bits of change which have had massive impact on people's day-to-day life. I don't know how much impact it's had on Galop though at all.
- OZ:** OK. So if we move on to the ...

<Part 3 starts>

OZ: Tell me a bit about what life was like, living in London while you were working with Galop.

LR: I'm don't know if there's much more that I can say really than what I have. In a personal context, or as a lesbian? I mean not ... you know ...

1995 – what was it like?

<Pause>

I suppose it felt like ... <pause> I don't know. When I'd worked at Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Group, before then it felt like there was so much going on, on the social scene. Not in the standard club way, but lots of different community-organised type events at the Drill Hall or other things like that; there'd be poetry readings, there was women's night, and in some respects that was fabulous and in other respects it made it quite hard, working at the Lesbian Centre 'cause I just felt like I was out all the time, but there was such a blurring between my personal space and my professional life. That was challenging. But it felt like there was loads and loads of stuff on, and I suppose by the time I ... I suppose that must have been about, just trying to work out how long when I was there. Maybe it would be about five years later, five or six years, seven years later ... No, it's probably a bit longer than that, but between five and ten years later that I was involved in Galop, it felt like the scene had ... radically altered, away from community organised events to stuff that was much bigger and more commercial. And in some ways that felt a bit alienating to be honest. I felt like I kind of moved from the ... I mean it's difficult, isn't it, 'cause it's great that there's huge Pride marches and there's a lot more people going, but I still kind of miss the really small events that used to fit into the park on South Bank and the little stalls, or Kennington Park or something, where it felt like a community event and not very commercial. And I suppose no one level it's great that now lots of businesses are prepared to go after the pink pound and recognise it and sponsor different things, and in another sense it feels we've lost something as a result of that. So yeah, I suppose before the time, living in London before the time I was involved in Galop it was much more community. We had our own Lesbian Strength March, we had a separate Lesbian Strength March. We used to go to both, and the Lesbian and Gay Centre. It felt much more political. And I suppose by the time I was involved in Galop it didn't feel like living in London and being a lesbian or being a gay man was such a political thing anymore. I mean there was the Lesbian Avengers around that time, so there was little bits that were more of an anarchist background. It felt to me personally like the feminist movement, the women's movement, had ... you know, died down again. I think it goes in waves these kind of politics. It felt like it had kind of ... run out of steam, or it had ... there was too many ... irreconcilable differences between different people, that it had ground to a halt. And overall I suppose it felt like the lesbian and gay scene was less political, more about having a good time, and that that sort of thing was done via ... you know, big commercial clubs where you spent a lot of money on beer and ... most of them weren't run by the gay community, so the money was going somewhere else, so I suppose it felt kind of more like that.

And ... I was then in a respectable mainstream job and turning up at the Management Committee meetings in suits now, and that sort of thing, rather

than what I might have been doing before. So it's kind of pluses and minuses, it also felt like you saw lesbian and gay lifestyles portrayed a little bit more on television. You had lesbian characters in Brookside and all of that. But yeah ...

OZ: And did you maintain any kind of contact with the feminist politics that you were involved in, while you were working with Galop?

LR: Yeah. I mean certainly ... but not so actively. I mean the actual groups, the campaigns, the groups of activists and stuff, had really ceased. It wasn't that I left. They had stopped happening. But maybe with friends and ... things. Yeah, where I could I did, but there was nowhere near the same opportunities. And I suppose I didn't really have the energy and spare time to create the opportunities, and it all felt a bit risky I suppose. We were involved in the whole Justice for Women and Emma Humphries and that sort of thing, and that was different 'cause that started moving into a much more professional campaigning activism, rather than the ... streets.

OZ: Tell me about that – what's the back-story of that?

LR: Well that was ... Justice for Women still runs, and things like that, but that was all about campaigning around women who had been imprisoned for murdering their husbands basically, usually after periods of domestic abuse, and it was all around the fact that that wasn't taken into account, and so ... and Southall Black Sisters really got the campaign going initially around an Asian woman who had suffered years of terrible abuse and then had turned round and retaliated and now was stuck in prison for the rest of her life. So it was a campaign to free her, that was eventually successful. And as part of that, an organisation called Justice for Women was set up, and more women were added to this list around the campaign, were discovered, who'd maybe never had a proper defence. The only way they could ... self defence was never even put forward, they might not have even spoken about it at the time. So I got involved in that, but that was organised in a different sort of way and had quite a good media profile and Southall Black Sisters ran it very professionally, and then Justice for Women, basically run it, by a woman called Julie Bendall, who now writes for the *Guardian* and speaks on Women's Hour regularly and is much more media-focussed in that way. So there was that through it.

We did do, probably just before Galop, we had a couple of international marches, International Day Against Violence Against Women I think, which was on 25th of November, and I was involved in organising two of those marches. So I suppose those sorts of things came along. We organised a big march, a big rally in Trafalgar Square, which was just brilliant. And ... so yeah, the opportunities, but they were more dwindling in that respect, and I suppose I was finding that my time was more taken up with other stuff.

<Part 4 starts>

OZ: And going back to Galop itself, in what way do you think it affected the lives of the people who used its services?

LR: I think the effect it had was much broader than the people that we knew who used the services, because I think a big area of work that Galop did was just around raising the profile, changing the approach of the police, so I think there

was an awful lot more beneficiaries than we could count or that we would ever know, because I think that Galop was key to changing the approach of the police to homophobic crimes, and I think it did change that whole culture and the way it was dealt with and addressed and I think Galop played a key part in that. So I think the benefits went far more widely than the people, the obvious direct service users.

And personally I've always, not always but certainly then and since, worked at that kind of more strategic level. That's personally what interests me, about changing cultures. Yes, obviously it's really important to provide services at the front line as well, but where I think I'm better suited and where I'm more attracted to is about working at a strategic level to change the system that creates those service users in the first place, and I think Galop did a huge amount of that, not just with the police but with local authorities, with various research establishments. I still don't think there's been any report since that's charted the experience of BME lesbians and gay men of violence and harassment and so forth, and I still see that cited in different reports, I see it mentioned. And it shouldn't be really, somebody should update it, but it's there and we got that into the ring.

On an individual level know that for a number of people we made a big difference to their lives personally, in terms of getting some of the casework we would take on, and some of that was ... much more broader than policing I suppose, because we ended up doing work with other authorities, where basically a police response would have been difficult and it was more appropriate to get ... if somebody was being harassed in their home, to either get them re-housed or to get the authority to do something about that if people didn't want to move. So I think all of that was quite important, but I think just being there and making it an issue and talking to people about it and talking to the police and changing ... I think that's the biggest impact, and I think it's really difficult to measure that, but ... I don't know. I think now ... I think personally, and for a lot of my friends, twenty years ago ... and twenty years is not ... not very long in the wider scheme of things, twenty years ago we wouldn't have dreamt of calling the police if we were harassed homophobically. We'd have just thought well that's just something you've got to live with and get on with, and there's no point in going to the police 'cause they'll just turn it against you. Now I feel like we would, we'd go to the police and we'd know what rights we could expect them to do, and if they didn't we would know what we could do about that, because even if on the front line things haven't changed massively, and I know for some people it's still really hard, knowing that you can then make a complaint and you can pursue certain things I think is important. And so I think overall that changed the landscape around that.

OZ: So Galop had two specific strands, or two different strands.

LR: Yeah. We ran the helpline, or the Shout Line, we did third-party reporting, but we also talked to individuals just who were experiencing ongoing harassment or who were having difficulties. We put people in touch with lawyers and people who could represent them, we told people what they should tell the police that they should expect. So we did all of that, we also went out and gave talks in schools. Oh that was it, because we did also get funding for the Schools Out ... not Schools Out, that's Sue Saunders isn't it? The kind of anti-bullying work that ... we started off, and nobody else was really doing that at

that point, taking stuff into schools and things like that. Now lots of people do that, so that's good.

So yes, there was that kind of direct, the helpline and the frontline working with service users, but on a much wider level there's all the other stuff that we did. I remember we had a big behind-the-scenes fight with The Voice, about its representation of BME lesbian and gay communities and we did get them ... we had to write it and we had to negotiate but our black services development worker got positive articles and things in The Voice, which was unheard of before. And you can't say what benefit that might have had to a young, black, gay man who thought he was the only one, to see that in The Voice. It was important that we got that into that, so you can't really measure that but ... yeah. So I think doing that, the profile, the strategy raising, being present, getting the advisory group to the hate crimes unit set up, and getting it on the agenda ... was really important.

There was the two strands of work and they were both equally important.

OZ: So tell me about this Shout Line thing?

LR: Well that's what the workers decided to call the helpline, rather than help it was about ... it was called the Shout Line. We never really ... we did look at seeing if we could get volunteers trained up and things like that, but that never really worked particularly well so we predominantly ran it at set times and we had an answer phone on at other set times. There was loads of logistical problems. The office we used was totally not suitable, we didn't have confidential space to run it, phones would ring all the time, and although we had the separate line over there it was just the other side of a partition wall and so logistically we weren't really very set up to run it. But we got a lot of referrals from switchboard and so forth, and then we did get our publicity together and got that out and we'd blitz marches and so forth, and we did get quite a lot of calls.

Our funders were always on at us to monitor this, that and the other, and of course it's really difficult to do that when you're doing a helpline. To suddenly start asking people about their background, where they live, how old they are, all this sort of thing. And we did predominantly ... the majority of calls always were by men, but we did increase the diversity of the male callers and we did increase the number of women who were using the line too. And we tried to use that not just in terms of assisting people, advising them. We set up a whole helpline manual, or a Shout Line manual with all the details of different solicitors and specialisms that we had worked with, that we'd approached, who were LGBT sensitive and appropriate to ... and some of the management committee members were really helpful in developing that, because they knew and they knew how to approach solicitors, so I think we'd done a survey and got that together. And other things were in the Shout Line manual. So ...

And it was important anyway, in itself, I think, always. You say about the two streams of work there. I think having those two streams was really important because it meant that both things fed off of each other. It meant that when we were doing the strategic work, we could say, 'And we know this because people tell us this on the phone. We don't just know this because we read it in a book, we know this because we have people phoning up who say this is what's happening to them.' And we could also sometimes, once people had

called a few times and were more comfortable, we could say, 'Would you be prepared to be a case study for us? Can we put you forward? Can we use you on one level to highlight the issues and promote the cause?' So the two things worked really well together.

OZ: And what kind of things were people phoning up about?

LR: Inappropriate responses from the police. So quite often just this has happened and I've been to the police and now they're just harassing me. Or people being attacked, beaten up on the way home from a club or so forth, and not really knowing what do and not knowing what they should do, basically, but wanting to do something. And so once they had the LGBT liaison officer, lots of people didn't know, probably still don't know that there are such things, so that was an important part of the job for us to be able to speak to give them, 'Speak to *this* person in the police station and you'll have somebody who'll deal with this sympathetically.' So that was quite often the case.

People wanting to know their rights and how to deal with issues. But we would also run specific lines sometimes for if there'd been a murder or a high-profile attack, for witnesses to come forward and come forward to us, so we did run a third-party reporting line on a number of occasions, for specific incidents that happened. Then all sorts of other things. You also just get the random stuff, some of which you can help with and some of which it's kind of referring people on. It was good being in Leroy House actually, because we had Stonewall which was good on housing, and down the other end of the corridor we had LAGER which was good on employment advice and so forth, and harassment in the workplace. So we had two on-hand referral agencies, and they to us as well. So they referred people onto us as well.

Mainly we did telephone work. As far as possible we would just try and deal with it on the telephone rather than seeing people face-to-face, partly because of the risk and safety element that that would involve sometimes that that would involve, either having people come into the office or having a worker go out there. And most of the time that was fine, most of the time we didn't need to see people face-to-face, but sometimes we did and occasionally we accompanied people to the police station if they really had nobody else and they ... needed to report something and they wanted that sort of support. So ... sometimes we did that.

<End of part 4>

OZ: Would you suggest there has been a positive change in the way that policing LGBT issues has taken place since say you started at Galop, through to the present?

LR: Yeah. I mean I'm not sure that I can speak with any authority on that, because not being involved now in Galop I don't know how much of it feels anecdotal, but it feels like it's more positive. And I suppose at a strategic level, also the Metropolitan Police coming under the GLA and coming under some of the Equalities Framework stuff from there, and I have no idea what it's like under Boris now, but before meant that there was that safeguard, and there was the MPA, Metropolitan Police Authority, to keep them in check around some of those policies. I applied for that and was interviewed but I didn't get it, unfortunately, I didn't get a place on the MPA. And I don't know if they did

actually have anybody from the LGBT community on it. But I would say, but I don't know with how much authority that is, but I would say that there's more positive policing.

OZ: And how about Galop's work – do you think that changed over the period of time that you were working with them; the kind of things they did or the way they worked? (Obviously the way they went about doing it internally changed, but ... to the external viewer, did that change also?)

LR: Yeah. I think definitely, because of some of the new projects, and that was very apparent to everybody outside. So we were able to do targeted stuff for BME communities and diversify the services in that way, and I think that was very apparent and I think that ... as well that a lot of the strategic level stuff that we did didn't happen so much. We did other bits of research as well and made those academic links, and I don't really think that took place as much before. I think before, Galop, and certainly from what I know from Lespop when I was involved in that, was very much more the frontline services bit; the providing a helpline, having a list of sympathetic solicitors, putting people into contact, and not really so much flagging up issues to people at policy level. So I mean how much of that was just because those things opened up more within the time we were at Galop, it was possible to change policy more, and how much of it was a decision on that's where we were going to take the organisation. I think it was one of the things that came out of the consultants' report, even before I'd been involved, that in looking at what Galop did or didn't do well, that this was identified as a whole gap that basically doing these services but wasn't really using the information that it was getting through providing those services to change things so that the problems didn't keep occurring.

I mean the other thing that did, I suppose, change within that whole period, was the whole inclusion of the T. Certainly when I'd first got involved it was the Lesbian and Gay movement, and to be honest somewhat reluctantly the B would get put on, so it would be the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Group. Transgender was a whole issue that really only started to become apparent, and we did have lots of debate about that and how relevant that was to us, if it was a transgender issue rather than a sexuality through changing gender issue. And I don't know, to be honest, still, how far that's been resolved in various organisations and things. I think it's interesting the Commission for Equalities and Human Rights and the stance that they've taken on it, and putting transgender in with gender, rather than per se a sexuality issue, given the vast majority of people who do transgender remain heterosexual ... So that was a whole debate and we had to kind of ... and so the T was added during my time, and we targeted and developed publicity and services that targeted the transgender community.

OZ: So tell me a little bit more about that debate; how did it first come about?

LR: I suppose through transgender activists lobbying and pushing for it, but ... and I suppose for myself and some other people it was difficult because there was a whole history of first of all it felt like a bit of a new issue, it was separate from transvestite and drag and the whole issue of men thinking that they could be a woman better than women, and that was the political stance I had on it as a feminist was that largely it was all a big red herring. And so we did ... I'm not sure that we really felt that we resolved some of the debate. I think more we just took the easy option out and included the T but never really

addressed it properly. So I think we took the easy option out and were tokenistic in our response to it, because some of us would have rather not had it at all, and some of us would have wanted to have had it and addressed it meaningfully, so what we did was we did the middle line: added the T and didn't do very much. <Laughs> I think that's probably a fair summary.

If it's clearly a sexuality issue, if somebody is being harassed ... but it's very difficult to separate, so I do understand, if somebody is being harassed or is receiving inadequate police response because of their sexuality ... irrespective of what gender they started out at, then that's quite clear. The difficulty around transgender, particularly transgendered ... I suppose it particularly comes up under men who have transed to female and then identify as a lesbian often ... don't ... pass very easily in that context, and get a lot of harassment because they look odd really, and that's quite difficult to deal with in the ... But on another level it's totally not difficult to deal with when you go to the police, it's just well everybody has the right ... it doesn't matter on what grounds they're being harassed or whatever. If they're making a complaint to you, then you need to do something about it, so I suppose that was the line that we took around that.

OZ: So are there any other things which you thought of when you were thinking about this today or anything that you would have wanted to discuss or mention?

LR: No, I don't think so. I'm amazed actually to be honest that I've come up with so much. That must be your excellent interview techniques that you've drawn all this out of me. I think before ... Mark did email me with those sorts of areas, and I actually only rediscovered that email in my deleted box this morning and looked at it and thought, 'Oh my god – it's a lot more than just what I did ...' So that's actually a bit easier, because I was thinking, 'I'm not sure I can remember exactly what we did with Galop, and some of that's a bit dry' and so forth. I think Galop had a ... there is a question in here actually. I think Galop had an important impact on my life, in the other way as well. I think I got quite a lot of stuff from Galop as well, because I think it was ... a learning experience and I think I got a lot of useful experience out of it.

I'd sat on a couple of management committees before, like I sat on Camden Citizens' Advice Bureau Management Committee but they were big ... I think this was about trying to get community politics into a shape that funders funded without losing some of the ethos and the ethics behind what essentially was kind of community politics. And so we had to have this, so we had to set up a quality assurance scheme and we had to do the monitoring and we had to fill in the reports and we had to count numbers and we had to tick boxes, and we had to do all of that at the same time as remain true to what we saw as the activist basis of both Lespop and Galop. So I think there were times ... when things were quite hard in other areas of my life, that I felt that even though Galop was really hard work, that it was a positive experience. It felt like we were achieving something and moving on, so that was quite important to me then. And actually I'm still friends with quite a number of the board members, the Management Committee members, who were at the time only friends of friends that I'd never met before who we'd brought on, or acquaintances of acquaintances that I'd brought on. And it was funny because I thought when this interview was coming up, and I did email Mark but it's obviously the email that Mark didn't get, which was the one when he phoned me up this morning, 'cause I had emailed him saying, 'Yeah, I'm

all on for the first of June, but what's the name of the person coming and here's my address.' And he hadn't got that. I had put, 'Oh, funnily enough there were four ex-board members at my Civil Partnership, and if you want the details of these people, if you want to expand your oral history project anymore, I'll give you their details. They'd have something to contribute.' So I suppose it had that element of it. So I think I got stuff out of it, it was a positive board experience and I learnt stuff which I've since been able to go back to and build on, so it was good for me. I hope it was good for them!

<Laughter>

I'm really pleased when I see that Galop's still around, because there's not that many Lesbian and Gay organisations funded in London. And it still is, and I think that's a huge achievement for whoever's still involved in it now and for the staff who are running it and so forth, because these days I'd say it's an even harder funding environment than it was when we were there, and you can't just get by on good will. You've got to prove that you're doing stuff. I know that they must be doing stuff, to be still here. And I've done bits of work where we've consulted, and it's great. I did a piece of work recently as a consultant, looking at domestic abuse within LGBT community, and the police's response to that over in West London. It was specific to an area. But to be able to contact Galop and say, 'Do you have any people you can refer on to me that I can interview,' and so forth, and them still being there is great. So it's good.

OZ: OK. Shall we leave it there?

LR: Yeah, that's fine.

OZ: And just before we stop, can you just confirm the acronyms you've used? There's BME, which is ...

LR: Black and minority ethnic, so that includes African, Caribbean, Asian and other so-called minority ethnic communities.

OZ: And LAGER, the people down the corridor?

LR: Lesbian And Gay Employment Rights, also funded by the GLC initially, but no longer around I don't think.

OZ: And Lespop finally?

LR: Well Lespop was the lesbian version of Galop, and it was the Lesbian Policing Project, which doesn't actually create Lespop but neither did Galop ever actually spell out anything, so they're all kind of yeah ... but yes, Lespop was the lesbian version of Galop when Galop was men only.

OZ: OK. Cool.

<End of recording>