

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Mary Boenke
Interviewer: Gemma Evans
Place of Interview: Clapham South
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Key

GE: = Interviewer, Gemma Evans
MB: = Interviewee, Mary Boenke
[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time
[5:22 1A] = inaudible section at this time
Word 5:22 = best guess at word

GE: Could you state for the tape where and when you were born?

MB: Right. I was born in the East End of London, I was born in a district called Westham in St Mary's Hospital 2nd of October 1962.

GE: And we are in South...

MB: We are in Clapham South, or Balham, Balham Hill as people like to call it, yeah.

GE: Could you just tell me a little bit about your background please?

MB: OK. I was born in a working class family, grew up mainly in the East End of London, did have some periods of time growing up in Ireland but mainly grew up in the East End of London. I had a catholic background so I went to, though it was a local East End community which is always mixed in the East End, I went to a catholic school. It was a quite good childhood, but it was a hard childhood, there was not a lot of money around and that was, I think that was more compounded as my father had, later on, in my later childhood, had a rare disease and that was quite hard going on the family, and he died when I was in my early teens.

GE: OK, so you grew up in London. So you say it was difficult in your teens, so I mean was that due to the politics at the time as well?

MB: Definitely, definitely, definitely, because I mean you've got to recognise that in those days, I mean I think it's quite difficult being a teenager anyway, for any teenager regardless of any generation or whatever because there's so many changes going on. For me it was quite difficult because I was dealing with a bereavement, and for our family, for a lot of people the concept of counselling and stuff like that, it just didn't exist so you were kind of left to get on with it, so it was quite hard, I think it's quite an intense thing to do. Also it was the Thatcher years and for our family, as a lot of working class families, it was really, really difficult – there was no money, there were no jobs. My mum had worked before just like a home help, when my father was ill she had to give that up to be like a carer for him, and also she's deaf as well, so a lot of employers, you know ... weren't that aware, so it was kind of quite difficult. So

there was like no money basically and my mother would've been in her 30s, early 30s, do you know what I mean so. When I look back now I think it was quite difficult and then she's trying to sort of support a family. So it was really difficult, it got really ... I mean we were always a poor family but there was like enough, but when that ... I think those circumstances of the economy changing and bereavement and not having money coming in, I think that really had a bigger impact on our particular family.

GE: You said you had a big family, didn't you?

MB: Yeah, yeah so. And other brothers and sisters that were also within a year of me, a good catholic family, do you know what I mean turning them out, but. So it was quite a lot, it was a quite a lot of intensity to be involved. So everyone was quite, as a lot of families were, quite aware of the times. And I think those days 'cause it was so big and there wasn't a lot of money, I mean people were, seemed to be more aware of politics because there wasn't nothing, and there seemed to be, you know like socialist workers were big in East London and anarchist groups were big, so you heard a lot of talk of different politics because there was, there was very little work going on so I think that tends to happen in different places, year definitely.

GE: So you said you did your A Levels. What did you do after A Levels?

MB: Not a lot actually, I mean there wasn't a lot of work available anyway so it was quite hard to get even a cleaning job or. Yeah so like a lot of people my generation there was a lot of ... I mean I did subjects like sociology and stuff like that, so there was a lot of interest in politics and different issues like that and the music scene at the time. And in London the music scene was quite big so there was literally like a pub scene, so in every area from Islington, all the way through to Hampstead you'd have, a band would go through. And so I think I spent a lot of time talking, but like I'm [5:49] anarchist basically me, do you know what I mean? Talking politics, doing this, going to see that group, going ... just holding on really because there wasn't a lot going. And for me it was a way of keeping what very little confidence I had, it kind of kept you going because you weren't in a position where it's like, I'll go travelling or I'll go... there simply wasn't any money. So I think you had to be particularly confident probably to step out from my background to me going off travelling, it was more common to be holding on or trying to find something, so yeah, for me it was quite difficult, when I look back it was quite difficult times it was like I was kind of holding on. And lots of things did sort of impact on probably my self esteem or identity at the time but some of it was to do with things like the bereavement and stuff, looking back. I mean at the time I probably wouldn't... it's too on top, but when you look back I can see it more.

GE: Do you move out of the family home or did you [6:58 1A].

MB: Yeah, because in those days you could sort of, when you were 16 if it was intense and ... you're rowing and overturning the system 'cause you're doing your sociology, do you know what I mean, anarchism and all that, you know I love it, I loved it all. And it was going towards the emerging of like identity politics probably, generally, so there was a lot more talk of it, there was a lot of radicalisation going on, on different levels. Though in those days the benefit system was different, I mean again with Thatcher it changed, but again, if you were a young person and you wanted to leave home you had more chance of leaving home, you could actually find a bedsit ... it was more likely going to be

a bedsit, it wasn't a flat, it was going to a bedsit, it was going to probably be a horrible bedsit or whatever, and you could get a deposit paid for by the benefit system and you could claim for housing benefit. I mean that's something that then changed, so I think young people today haven't got that option 'cause they can't get full housing benefit and stuff like that but in those days you could, so you could leave. And I left fairly early as well, and went to a shit place, do you know what I mean? It was fucking shit! It was in Stamford Hill, fricken ... but it was the thing of having your own place, do you know what I mean? And all the tensions at home and all the arguing, I mean now it's nothing but at the time it was big.

GE: How old were you sorry, when you moved out?

MB: Probably about 17.

GE: 17, so late 70s again.

MB: Yeah. So first place I see, oh yeah, yeah, 'cause it had an L shape, and I was thinking, I just read *The L-Shaped Room*, and I was thinking it's really good – it was an absolute shithole actually, it had like bricks on the floor, it had fricken mice running around, it was basically shit, do you know what I mean? But it was like, ooh I've moved out of home! That kind of stuff so. But you could do that, you could do that. But as I said, if you didn't have the money it wasn't like you were going to move into a flat or something fantastic, but I mean compared probably to the generation of people coming up today, I mean they just haven't got that choice 'cause they won't pay you full housing benefit. So yeah.

GE: Did you move in with other people then?

MB: No, no.

GE: Just on your own.

MB: On my own, on my own, which people did, 'cause remember I was London based so you got people, it was quite common for people to move into bedsits or move into squats, I mean that was quite big. And being in London you'd probably know other little people around, yeah, I think it's probably a different game if you're moving into London, that's probably quite brave 'cause you are literally coming in, and moving in and then you've gotta get used to the area, you've got to ... whereas I did have a sense of London. 'Cause in my day when you were a kid, in my day you could get things like a red bus rover, which was like a ticket that was something like 25p at the time, couldn't get it all the time, and you could literally just go across London. And when I was growing up a lot of kids used to just catch the buses and just like run round London. Again, you had a sense of London, you couldn't do anything else but it was the thing of getting on the buses and just going there and doing stuff, yeah. So at least you had a sense of where you were and the diversity in London and stuff like that, so yeah it's a lot easier that way, of course it is if you're born into an area rather than coming into somewhere, especially a capital really, it's a bit more difficult yeah.

<End of Part 1>

<Part 2>

GE: And moving onto your involvement with Stonewall Housing. Could you tell me how you got involved with that?

MB: Yeah, I was working in a young persons' project, Centrepont, which at the time it was sort of a leading young persons' project, I mean it's still here, it's still established but at the time it was quite a groundbreaking project that had looked at young people's needs, young people that were homeless and there support needs basically. And I think it was probably the first project that kind of did that and led the way for a lot of young people's organisations. And I was working with them and I worked in a high support hostel, it was a small hostel in Olympia. And I'd been doing that for a number of years and I'd worked with quite a few lesbian/gay young people during that time that had gone into the night shelters – they might've come from Northumberland, Cumbria, different places and had quite bad experiences because of their sexuality, do you know what I mean? Had their beds burnt, or stayed outside of hostel. So it had been recognised that they were young, they were vulnerable, they were homeless and that kind of thing was recognised at the time, it was like if you were homeless at the time it was one tick, it was a priority, now if you're homeless and you're young it's like there's no tick, it's not seen as need because it's ... I think it's quite bad out there now.

So I done that and I'd obviously, I'd got used to that so I done that for about five years and I needed...

GE: [1:42 IA].

MB: I don't know, I mean 1994 was when I worked with Stonewall so it would've been, well we're talking about 1990 maybe or something like that yeah. So I was sort, like anyway, you know you go somewhere, you work there and it's enjoyable, you get used to it. If you work in, I think, supported housing or hostels I sometimes have the feeling of like, oh god I'm feeling a bit institutionalised myself 'cause you're going to a building every single day and I just needed a change I guess. I needed a change and I was quite ... big into lesbian and gay politics, at the time it was still the times of kind of identity politics, so in a lesbian and gay scene. It was still quite political, there was still lots of campaigning, so all that stuff was still going on or the ends of that was going on, so it did come into the scene generally, you sort of saw it. And even in my work the offshoots of that were there, do you know what I mean at Centrepont so. People in the voluntary sector, 'cause that would've been the voluntary sector, the paid voluntary sector, there was a lot, people seemed to be a lot more aware of things like different campaigning organisations and stuff like that around things like rape crisis and Southall Black Sisters, it all seemed to have quite a high ... it had kind of filtered into the mainstream. And someone I was talking about Stonewall Housing, 'cause we had quite a bit of contact with them referring particular young people there for housing or for advice and stuff. And we had a locum worker there who worked at Stonewall Housing, Joseph and he worked at Centrepont at the weekends or whatever, so I was getting aware of this organisation and its existence, what Stonewall was about, the history of Stonewall itself generally. And then I was kind of feeling a bit like, oh I've done this, oh I need a change, I'm getting bored with this, and I think a vacancy came up, it was in the *Guardian* or whatever and I thought, yeah I'd like to go for that. So that's how I became involved, I actually went for a job. And thought yeah if I'm gonna stay in housing and homelessness, actually I'd like to do that, I'd like to work in a lesbian/gay environment.

- GE:** So your route into homeless people started roughly in the 90s, the 1980s and into [4:43].
- MB:** Or just bef... yeah, yeah probably sort of late, probably ... yeah sort of late 1880 ... 1980, 1880s ...1980s or whatever, so yeah. I mean I always sort of had a kind of interest in homelessness and stuff like that, you know as you get ... not that I was reading piles of books on it, do you know what I mean? But it was an area that I definitely was drawn towards, it was like even going for the work at Centrepoin, doing some work before for other places, I was kind of drawn a lot of community work, but I was kind of quite, again with Centrepoin, when I first saw the job I was drawn towards it, do you see what I mean? So yeah.
- GE:** You mentioned your interest in LGBT politics as well, what you did and [5:35]?
- MB:** I just think, no, I mean I did quite a bit but I think it was because those times it was ... especially being a young lesbian at the time you came ... it was sort of in the air, it was in the air, do you know what I mean? So there was women that came before and men that came before that were older than me that led the way. So there was like the first women and men that did the first Pride in this country in the 70s, I think 1970 it was in Highbury field or up in Islington, I mean 'cause I would've been younger, they were older so they'd kind of led the way. But it was near enough that you still felt the impact, so people were ... it probably had gone into that identity politics where ... especially in London and of course as a generalisation your hair was chopped off – I chopped my hair off, do you know what I mean? And all that kind of stuff, it did go on and people spoke politics. And I guess at first it was very, very good but then you've got your diversions and it got into ... it did get into identity politics. And some of that was really good and some of that sort of became, had its own issues, own diversions, you know where people separated off because, for example, there was like a black, lesbian and gay scene, I mean I know there still is, but do you know what I mean? And that was because ... 'cause when you're dealing in politics I suppose and identities, then of course it's like well the white scene's oppressive or it's not recognising our needs. So there was a lot of that kind of stuff that was ... you saw more of it and it was in the air, so lots of women wearing the axe, the axe and lots of stuff like that. And I was kind of influenced by that.
- GE:** You mentioned that you worked with LGBT homeless people who had their mattresses burnt, so that's a point of [7:53] victimisation against LGBT people that wasn't being addressed at the time. So is there anything you would like to add to that, is there anything that you saw that is a historical point, you can think back and think that wouldn't happen now or?
- MB:** I think it probably could happen now, and it think it does happen now. I think at the time because of this strong influence around ... for a generalisation, identity politics I'll call it, I mean people now kind of knock it, but at the time actually it did have a bigger influence on things like, lots of things probably like Rape Crisis' Centres, they had a really quite high profile in quite a lot of areas, and it was women generally but a big percentage of lesbians involved in raising that profile and stuff, and making workers, generally workers, all workers regardless of sexuality aware of different issues. So I do think it had a big impact, and the same with lesbian and gay issues, I think because I worked in the paid voluntary sector so with a general generic work team and

workers were more aware of different issues, lesbian and gay issues and stuff like that, and I think it was that influence. So, and because they were a bit more open to it, then I guess that's why people came into Centrepoint, young people came into Centrepoint and they would feel able to mention their sexuality or to go, 'Oh I went into your night shelter...' So this was the Centrepoint night shelter, '... and actually someone burnt my bed.' Or whatever. And I think most people would go, 'Ooh that's out of order.' Probably what was good was, I mean that could've happened anyway, but the young person might not have said, oh actually I feel ... or would've mentioned their sexuality, do you know what I mean? Because that kind of thing can go on anyway, bullying or ... around all kinds of issues. So I think it was good, and because you got people I think being more prepared to be open about their sexuality it seemed to be happening a lot more in the workplace, but particularly in the voluntary sector, then I think it probably made things a bit open.

GE: In the '90s [10:39].

MB: We're talking 1980s at that point yeah, for some sectors. I don't know if it was for all sectors but my impression was the paid voluntary sector there seemed to be quite a few people that were open with the sex... and probably drove people mad, but would generally bring up their sexuality or be raising the point, and it was like that. And I think that probably was the influence of a generation of people that were before, that are sort of, were quite radical, and then probably people of my age come in after that who, not everybody obviously, but definitely people like myself that would be, 'As a lesbian here!' Do you know what I mean? I mean I look back now and I cringe, but it wasn't unusual, you'd be sitting in a meeting or going training and someone would go, 'As a Jewish lesbian da, da, da.' Do you know what I mean? I mean I look back ... but it didn't happen before I guess that so people just had that necessity to voice, voice, voice, to speak out.

So I think during that time there was a lot of speaking out that hadn't happened, and maybe in some places now it's like, well it's a given so you wouldn't do it, or maybe it still needs to happen, I don't know, do you know what I mean? But I don't think it's necessarily got easier, I think that's just what seemed to happen, that just seemed to be my experience and a lot of people's experience I think, yeah.

GE: And how long did you work for Stonewall House?

MB: I worked for I think it was about six years, six years I think for them, yeah.

GE: And what work did you get involved in?

MB: I was their, I don't know how many houses they've got now but they had so many supported housing projects, to they had I think it was ... two in Hackney, one in Islington ... no, two in Islington and they'd just opened one in East London, I think it was James Baldwin House. So yeah working with the young homeless people that were either lesbian or gay and had, I think, medium to high support needs or low to medium support needs, yeah. So I was basically, it changed from housing officer I think we started off as, to housing support officer, so I was in that particular team. So I used to do one-to-one, so one-to-one work basically with young people around their support needs and around any issues around their sexuality, and just managing the

place where they would be living and sharing with other young people. So the set up was it was a house and it would be divided into maybe three flats or four flats, so there was all the dynamics that come with people living with each other. So you'd be doing that kind of stuff and the maintenance and then the general just, I suppose like key work sessions, one-to-one work or any issues that were going on, if there was mental health issues or family breakdown, just that support basically. Or signing them into different support services, whether that be probation, whether that be a mental health service, or whether it be a youth work service, just trying to have some duty of care around their general support needs that they wanted support around, that they'd identified that they wanted a bit of support around, until they could be hopefully ... 'cause I think it was quite a long stay, I don't know if it was two ... I can't remember, you might have to check this, it might have been a two year stay and hopefully moved on to more permanent accommodation. And I know that Stonewall used to get like, we were very, very good at getting nomination rights from different councils, Hackney Council, Islington Council, different housing associations to hopefully move people onto something more permanent and stable. So I was sort of involved in that, so from them coming in, so from interview stage to them staying hopefully and then being moved on and then some probably move on work, yeah.

GE: You mentioned the councils were very supportive. Are there any examples you can think of where they was a distinct lack of support in the service sector and certain ways that you can think of?

MB: In terms of councils? I mean I'm saying that now because I'm comparing it to now, 'cause I think it's appalling now. But at the time, I'm looking at the time, at the time it always felt like a ... there as workers at the time and they were really good – there was a couple of workers actually, I'm trying to think of their names. Mandy Head was one woman and ... I can't, there's a woman, I can see her face, I can't remember her name, if it comes back... but really, really, really good nomination workers. And they used to do the housing advice, so they were the people that went out, did the advice surgeries. Margaret Spence was another one...

<Interruption>

God that woman's name is really bothering me, she was so good at it. Lou, was her name Lou? Anyway, they were a really good team. And they used to apply to the different councils that the supported houses were in, so Islington, Hackney, Newham and they got nominations but it was never enough. So you might have, in one year they might have 12 nominations, but you've got possibly ... you'll have to check this out, you know 40 young people with Stonewall at the time. So it was also about getting someone ready, and choosing, and prioritising who was right, who was ready for independent living. And at the time I thought god, you know they really do a good job and there should be more. And they'd put a case forward like ... like in every area there's blocks where you wouldn't want someone to live because they'd be estates that would be known for homophobia or known for violence, and the way the estates were set up it would mean like you could walk through and you could be targeted. So they would argue, and you would argue and put a case forward to say, 'No, we want an on-street property.' Particularly if someone has been harassed or come from a lot of homophobic violence anyway beforehand or had issues, other issues that were to do with it, and it used to get taken on board. And even in the case, I know that we had

someone that was like transitioning, so it was like, look a large estate is maybe not the best place for this person to go through that, and it would be taken as a serious argument and yes a serious point that would be taken on. But now, I mean I work in a different field but I know just the limited bit of housing stuff that I have done, 'cause it's not in the housing field that I am now, that is just like a no, no, they don't take any notice of that at all, do you know what I mean? It's almost....

So I think housing is probably a major issue out there now and it has changed, as in certain issues, like I said originally, when I worked at Centrepoint it was almost, someone's homeless, right that would be a need and that would count as a need, whereas now that's like, oh well that's not a need is it, do you see what I mean? If you had a tick box system that would come in then as first tick box where not it's not. So I think it's really, really hard. So I do think it's good that Stonewall still exists and I know that they must do things far, far, far differently, it must've changed in the way it worked. Because when I was there the workers definitely, they were really good and they definitely presented case to say like, 'No, this person has to have a certain kind of ... you need to take these factors into account.' Whereas now I think that I ... I think social housing is probably a massive, massive issue. I personally feel it's one of those un-talked about issues and I think it's quite massive. I mean I work in the drugs and alcohol field, and the amount of people generally, regardless of sexuality, that come in for housing, desperate, desperate for housing is huge!

So I think social housing is ... I get a feeling that it's like a really major problem that's not really taken on, so I think Stonewall is really needed. 'Cause I get the sense from working with people that in generic work and generic housing, lesbian or gay, or needs around that connected to sexuality or transgender issues, it's just like, it doesn't hit a benchmark at all. And I think before it did get to a stage where, definitely in some London boroughs it did hit something, it was kind of taken on board, do you know what I mean? Or you could get it recognised. I just get the sense that more and more it's sort of like, oh so what? Do you know what I mean? Because there's so many needs going out there, so I think it's slipping and I think it's easy ... and that's because I'm outside of working from a lesbian and gay organisation. When you work in a lesbian and gay organisation it feels full on, it feels you're getting there, and I was surrounded by lesbian and gay workers and it felt like the world was lesbian and gay, and it was like there was progress, and it was great, and it was like every other person seemed to be lesbian or gay or transgender. And then when you work outside of that over time, it's funny, because you can sort of think, no actually maybe it's ... some things have changed but some things maybe haven't changed as much as what we may think at times.

I work in Southall and we've had people come in and have been lesbian and gay and transgender and had massive issues, massive homophobia, won't disclose their sexuality. And sometimes when I'm dealing with those clients I feel like, and I've said it, I said, 'Oh it's like being in the 1970s.' Do you know what I mean? And people have laughed and I'm ... but I've had a real sense of it and thought, fucking hell! You know? Have we really moved forward at all? People are scared to talk about their sexuality, people getting stick from their family, comments from workers like, 'Well god, we don't get it in our community much.' That was referring to the Somalian community, 'Oh I've never met anyone like that.' Do you know what I mean? So things that you

sort of think, well I didn't think I'd be hearing comments like that again, and I have, it is like whoa, this is surreal. So that's when I think it is important that organisations like Stonewall stay, hold their ground and do the work that they do. Because when you work in other places you realise there's a need and also that people haven't heard about Stonewall.

One of the good things for me where I worked in Southall we had the Stonewall, you know the campaigning group where they did that advert where it's ... it's just a straightforward advert poster where it said, 'Some people are lesbian and gay – get over it.' It would be nice if they'd put transgender on there actually, trans. Yeah I wish they'd do that, I wish they would actually dictate that on board a bit more – I think Scotland Stonewall do, don't they, but the trans community, I wish they'd take that into account more actually, I think that would be good. But in Southall it had a really big impact because you heard people going, 'IS THIS [24:28]?' That's really, really outrage, but it really made me smile and I thought yeah, really if ever something simple should be in a place like that and have impact and it did, because people were so either outraged, but other people I think it really made a difference. And it was like I had people going, 'Who's Stonewall; what's that about; who's that?' 'Cause I think if you're lesbian/gay yourself and you have moved through that identity politics or whatever, or come out of it, I think what may be quite natural you can get really complacent and be like, 'Oh that's standard innit, everyone knows who Stonewall is.' But I mean I work with people that are lesbian and gay that are younger than me and they're going, 'I don't know what Stonewall is Mary.' Do you know what I mean?

So, you can see how things will just, could, do slip and you can see how things are complacent. And actually, for some people in the community, I mean I know that's a general thing, it looks like, 'Oh yeah, but we've got this and we've got that and then we've got that.' But then when you're out there and you're working then people come in and it's like, it hasn't touched them at all and they're frightened, and they're worried, and they're getting abuse and you just think, oh actually I don't know, do you know what I mean? Maybe it would be good to have a bit more impact in other places as well rather than ... you know the places like Hackney, which is really good, like core places, but you just ... for me, it made me realise that no, no all is not as good as maybe it could be. Yeah 'cause when I was growing up you heard a lot of homophobia and that, but because there was that radical kind of identity politics and rad ... you know I am alright, and no I am OK with who I am and blah, blah, blah, blah, it kind of helped carry me through, do you know what I mean, it carried me through. But you heard people sort of say, usually an older generation, and it might be like a straight old generation come out with something bigoted or redneck and people go, 'Oh what do you expect? She's 60, she's 70, she's 80, she's 90.' And almost when they had their last breathe they want you to hear less of it, you'd hear less of that kind of redneck language or homophobia and that kind of prejudiced. But now I'm still hearing it, and I think, oh, well that generation will be like my age group, do you know what I mean? And I still hear people going, 'Oh well it's because it's like that generation.' And I'm thinking it's the same argument, it's the same argument except, oh fuck it happens to be like they would be the parents that would be my age group, or even grandparents in some cases. And so you just think, oh, it's still there.

<End of Part 2>

<Part 3>

GE: Right, so we've talked about how you feel that things have kind of progressed slightly I'd describe it as, so ...

MB: Or maybe not as progressed as much as maybe at one time I thought, even though there's different legal things that have come in and there's ... on paper, I think some things look really good, and I'm not saying that that isn't a progress of sorts, but I think in reality maybe all is not what it seems.

GE: So, we've kind of covered it to a certain extent but more of Stonewall context, but what was it like living in London around the time you were working with Stonewall Housing, so in the period that, you said it was six years, with reference to politics?

MB: Well I suppose when I was working with Stonewall it was still, you know you could see this ... because there was people there when I was working there that were probably there, I mean they had been there a considerable time. So they had probably been there, I think one guy that was there, probably just after it had been set up itself, and there was one particular woman who actually, a really good worker again, who had been there quite a long time. And the structure of the place I think was still very much influence by the politics of identity politics. So what was really unusual about Stonewall Housing at the time, I'm not sure about now, I don't know how it is now, is they really took on board black, lesbian and gays. I mean they were very, very strong on it, black, lesbian, gay and other minority in terms of ethnicity and nationality was probably their real, real strong point. REAL strong point and they were known for that. And I think they really took that on board strongly, that was reflected in their workers, so they made sure that their workers did ... I mean it was big at the time for a lot of places, but it reflected the group that they were working with. So there was a black only house to take on, and they knew their staff, they knew their politics that way – I don't know if that's still the same but they really did take that on board. So that was quite interesting. And you saw that and that was reflected in the team at the time so it was a diverse team so it wasn't an all white team, it was a very mixed team with people of mixed parentage, people that were black or African.

So for me it was quite interesting and then the politics had come in at the time and I think it was also reflected on their ... I think they still have this, their meetings, you know like, I was going to saw tru, not trust, trusts not the right word but their management committee. So they had a guy at the time, Dennis Carney, who was ... a really interesting guy actually. And again, I mean I don't know, if you could interview him I'd say it's be a really interesting guy to interview. And he definitely kept black and ethnic minority agenda there, on the agenda, in kind of loads of ways. So things like that, I mean I don't know how much ... so that's again like a voluntary sector organisation is not, there's a fine art between keeping an agenda alive and saying you're not being too political because of voluntary sector money and how it works. So I mean definitely an interesting time to actually work there and definitely as a white worker quite interesting in terms of that ... diversity basically, and acknowledging that within generic lesbian and gay, transgender that it's so diverse and there's so many differences among people. And kind of pulling that together is quite interesting, you know the conflict that comes from that and then that idea of community as well. But definitely this particular guy, I

mean I don't know if he has come forward or you would manage to speak to him, Dennis Carney would be really interesting.

So you got that. And again ... so quite brave people, I mean again probably influenced by the politics of the time and again identity politics. But I suspect with some people they are people that would be quite individual even now, they're the people and I suspect he is one of them that would say what he's got to say and be his own individual regardless of whether it was a popular thing to say or just identity, oh everyone's saying it so it's quite easy in some ways to come out with the politics that everyone's spouting forth. So it was a, I mean I don't know how but they were very, very conscience of the time of black, ethnic minorities, very, very, very, very kind of conscience of reflecting that in the lesbians and gays that came into the project that were young people and within the workforce. And I think it's quite unusual, I don't know if that happens now, I don't know if those kind of considerations came in so there was like a women only house and ... black only house. And again, really strong considerations of why you ... how to justify that, do you know what I mean? And again, we'd have diversities within that and what that was about, which I don't know how ... I'd be quite intrigued to do that. And the house in East London, when I got there ... there was a house in East London that they managed to get from London and Quadrant, they owned the house, we managed it. And again the thought, I mean it was called James Baldwin House which is after a black writer, but just like... I mean there was a lot of consideration and stuff around, and thought put into things like that.

I'd be quite interested to know ... I mean I have had contact with a housing advice worker for some of my clients, but when I look back it would be interesting to see if those kind of things come into ... you know how much it shifted or is it we just bring people in? And particularly working in Southall which is a really, really high multicultural community with high Somalian, high Sikh population, you kind of realise ... 'cause I think people at the time thought, oh you know they're being a bit specialised, or what's the difference? But I have had people come in that have never heard of Stonewall, really beaten up by their family, ostracised from their family, using substances because of it, and you think fuck! I mean yeah Stonewall would be ideal and they probably would've been, at my time, you'd just think oh yeah there is a real need. But now it's like never heard of Stonewall, don't know what it is, frightened to use the words gay, and you just think oh my god! I don't know. I kind of can appreciate it more than probably when I was there to be honest.

GE: I'm just trying to think.

MB: 'Cause you get, I got complacent there, like I said, it felt like I'm working in a lesbian and gay environment, you know everyone's lesbian and gay, I'm going to the boroughs of Hackney, I'm going to Islington, it seems very high profile do you know what I mean? It seems very high profile, lots of the environment, pubs, bars, lesbian, gay, it just seemed like the whole world is lesbian and gay do you know what I mean?

GE: Yeah

MB: So I think I got complacent and I'd probably appreciate working there now actually and I think I probably didn't always.

GE: It sounds like you identified the most vulnerable, like you talk about the trans community as well and you've identified 9:14.

MB: Yeah. I mean when I was there the trans community, I mean we did get people that were trans but it always at the time as quite problematic, it was like, oh my god, how do they identify; do they identify as lesbian and gay and stuff like that? I mean now in retrospect I wish, with more hindsight, that we'd just had trans basically, that we'd ... that they were encompassed, do you know what I mean? 'Cause I think ... and that was quite, I remember one particular client and for him I think it was really difficult, really, really difficult. And there was talk of a house for ... I mean it didn't go on and on, on the agenda, but there was talk, it might've been loose talk about having a house for trans people, something had come up. There was one particular worker at the time, Kim, and again I'd say, now I look back and I think actually, you know one of those workers that you think, oh I think she was light-years ahead really of the team, who was I think more on the ball about trans issues and stuff. And now I wish I'd been her actually 'cause I'm thinking, oh yeah she's right, do you know what I mean? Whereas I got into that, oh is it, oh yeah but should I identify as lesbian or gay or whatever? And now I'm thinking well if it came to it, and we were all out there facing a bunch of rednecks, I mean I don't suppose they're gonna be going, '<Tut> She's trans, she's a lesbian.' Do you know what I mean? I think it would be like you're all the fucking same, basically, do you know what I mean? And so I've got it down to that kind of <chuckles> mentality, like bottom line is, and I think that's one group of individuals. And again, real variations like the lesbian and gay community, bisexual community, there's so many variations that have probably had quite a raw deal actually from everybody, including LGBT community I think – probably still not listened to, still not taken on board, still kind of dismissed, people still really vary on whether their acceptance of them, do you know what I mean? So yeah I do think they get a REAL raw deal.

GE: Do you feel that hasn't changed?

MB: I think as a very... I mean again, it's one of those things where it's like, well what the fuck does that mean, trans? 'Cause it's so, I mean and people are so varied within that, and I guess that will be 11:57 to that community. But I think it hasn't changed enough. I think they're becoming more visible themselves, that the trans community seem to be becoming more active, funnily enough out of all the communities, and I think in some ways they seem to be leading the way 'cause they seem to be more radical. You know there was something called Toilet-gate at the last Pride, I mean it's meant to be LGBT, it's meant to include them but the toilets was a big issue because it was like, ooh, you know? And I know it took a lot and they sort of raised it on the profile, which is again like the old politics but they're doing it, they raised it, they brought it to the attention and I don't think it's kind of been sorted out properly. And I heard that this year, you know the floats? There was all the stuff around the floats. But they'd asked the trans ... I mean I heard this recently so it may not be true, but if it's true I think it's appalling, that they'd had this trans float basically, you know like representing?

GE: Yeah

MB: And they wanted the ... female to male trans, for want of a better term, to dress in like footballers' things, and the male to female in tutus or something

like that. And apparently, I mean this was discussed at some ... and this is what I heard and it was discussed at some group linked with the trans community and they rejected it unanimously, they just sort of went, 'No way.' But I just thought that is appalling, that is fucking appalling actually. So again, I sort of think god that's really awful 'cause that, you know, again it's like it's back in the 1970s, to come out with something like that. So I think they get a really raw deal. I think the lesbian and gay film festival, they had lots of trans films there but it wasn't the lesbian and gay and trans film, but you know LGBT. In some places they'd put it, I think in some papers and that they said, 'Oh there's the LGBT film festival.' But actually when they advertised it I think they just put lesbian and gay, and yet it had a whole, which was good, it did have quite a lot of trans films, but some might be five minutes, some must be longer. So I just think that's quite interesting, because we're saying, 'Oh yeah, we're including.' And then you've just gone and done that, you've put out the catalogue and thing and you haven't ... really small things, but I think from that person's point of view, I think it must be like, 'Oh but you haven't included me there.' Do you know what I mean? 'But why haven't you put it on the magazine then, or the catalogue or whatever?' So I think, yeah I think we're really complacent actually, really complacent.

<End of Part 3>

<Part 4>

GE: So again we have covered this, but looking more now about the impact of Stonewall Housing. I mean what impact did it have on you as a person while you worked for them? That sounds like a really deep question.

MB: Oh, as a person?

GE: Yeah, did you develop or did it change your views in any way?

MB: I think to be quite honest <pause> see I think I got so ... I probably got complacent in the end, do you know what I mean? Like I said before, it was like, 'Oh it's all lesbian and gay!' I probably appreciate more now what the aim of it was about. I suppose the biggest thing is diversity within the community itself, you realise when you're working with a team that's all lesbian and gay how different, because we're all human, and how complex and how, although we're connected by that issue of sexuality and stuff, and that experience maybe, how diverse everyone is anyway, no matter who they are, where they are and identity politics. 'Cause there was still that sort of influence ... did play a part, but how much like diversity within diversity and how much variations within the black community. So it's quite interesting, for me, it was quite interesting as a person because in the end it was like yeah, I probably felt a bit suffocated by it all actually.

GE: You talked broadly about the impact of the LGBT community while you were working, but could you feel at the time, really in retrospect, did you feel the impact that Stonewall Housing was having on the LGBT community?

MB: It's really difficult to say because it did seem there was a lot more ... when I worked it did seem like lesbian and gay profile was a bit higher, so different organisations took it on board, like councils would listen when someone put a case forward. So you felt the impact more on that level and you saw it made a difference because you were working with people's lives, and you see how

they will change, and you would see how someone would get confidence or they would ... if they'd been really isolated they were socialising. Because at the time ... I don't know if it's still there, I don't think it is, there was a very big youth group in North London that was a lesbian and gay youth project. That was really, really successful actually and quite high profile in itself. So it seemed to be more linked, so you seemed to be linked in with more other projects and people ... like there was Galop, I know there's still Galop. I mean at the time they didn't always feel strong, but looking back I think they might be stronger than I thought they were.

So you had this whole sort of network of other lesbian and gay organisations sort of linking into each other, and someone would know someone, and someone would know someone and I think it really did help. I mean the sort of young people that we worked with we could ... it would really help people get to where they want to be, do you know what I mean? Or they'll be a strong link with someone in a mental health service, it could be over the other side of London but someone would know somebody. And there was that kind of networking going on, it was like, 'Oh right, they're good.' And that doesn't seem to be as strong, and people would ... it was almost like Visa card – lesbian and gay, oh right OK. Do you know what I mean? But it was nice and it kind of helped, it really helped a lot of people who hadn't had that help or support or who had been so isolated, it helped them catch up with who they wanted to be and it was quite nice, and I don't think that probably happens as much.

I get the impression that people have got a bit more individual, probably because of the times and because it was that kind of culture wasn't it. It's like ... from people being very collective, you know 'cause there was co-ops all over the place, Housing Co-op, this housing co, lesbian and gay housing co-op. I think a lot of them have gone. And so we used to have access to some of them, so it would be like there was one in East London, there was one in North London, so you'd have access to all these things that I think now have gone, and at the time probably didn't realise how useful they were. And then I think people got more into, including myself, everyone seemed to be sort of the individual, do you know what I mean? So less collective but more individual so people were getting on that money run, which there's nothing wrong with that, but it was like everyone's sort of out on there own. And now I'm wondering with everything going on, is that such a good thing? Because I think it's probably quite isolating in a sense and you just wonder for people coming up, especially young ... and we're thinking of Stonewall as in younger people, is it that easy, considering there's so many changes? When I worked, again, they could get the benefit, sorting out their benefits or stuff like that was pretty straightforward. Whereas now I'm thinking there seems to be a different set of rules, I mean generally for young people, which doesn't help if you've got other issues going on as well – it gives you another hurdle to have to jump over while trying to get your head round whatever you want to get.

GE: I've been thinking about this issue of complacency; do you think that it's because there are a lack of issues to focus on, such as back when you worked for them there was Section 28 or HIV?

MB: The thing is I think Section 28, I remember Section 28, I mean I wasn't working at Stonewall at the time, but when Section 28 came you saw people really sort of rad ... they came together really strong. There was a group in Newham, you know like little community groups, it was very, very common in

lots of areas of the country that you would have a lesbian and gay group, or a lesbian only group or something like that, so there might be three people sitting there, do you know what I mean? But it was like literally every area in London they'd be someone, there was like lists and lists that had three people.

When Section 28 happened it was really weird, it was like people just fucking got up and they were outside – I remember Newham Community Group, Lesbian and Gay Community Group, and all of sudden it was like, fuck, shit! Do you know what I mean? There are so many fucking lesbian and gay in Europe it's un-fucking true! Where did they come from? All outside this community hall that was like based on this estate, supported by their local councillors and stuff. And so it did, people got up and did, it was like if it was going to be taken away it was like, fuck this is outrageous, do you know what I mean? And the same with HIV I think, it did get people, the community did pull together strong. And maybe that's why I see that more in the trans community actually, not that they get the highest profile, but you read through and some of the things that they do or you hear you think, oh my god that really reminds me of that kind of trying to get recognition and campaigning and speaking out, and you're thinking that's doing exactly the same. And I'm just amazed that it doesn't resonate with people 'cause it's like can't see the parallels or the connections.

But I still think there's things that sort of ... I mean especially ... I do think there's a complacency and that there are people out there that are getting lots of ... you know don't know about organisations like Stonewall – Housing particularly, they might know about Stonewall the campaigning group but that might seem, it has got its place, but it might seem like too far away or isn't that the place where you've got to have lots of monies and they do a show? And maybe that's the nature of, you know they are successful in their own right, but I just think there's people out there that are just <pause>. The smaller groups like Stonewall Housing, like Galop I think keep more connected with what's going on, hopefully that still happens, and I think that's their role and it really, really helped. 'Cause you imagined sort of, I don't know, maybe a few more Stonewall projects but in different parts of the country, in different places or ... but always limited by resources, 'cause it is, it is shocking to go somewhere like Southall and then have people come in and it's like they can't say they're gay, they've been beaten up, or trans or whatever, and you just think, oh my god! Do you know what I mean?

And then there's like Stonewall Housing, they've got their advice shops or whatever and people have got no idea that they exist and it's really difficult. And no idea of things like the *Pink Paper*, which has got smaller and smaller but you kind of, again, it makes you think, for myself, something that I in the end took for granted, you kind of think, oh I can see why it was a big thing and it is a big deal. I kind of wonder is, will something like that, people go, 'Oh no you don't need that, you don't need that, you don't need something like that.' If it disappears, then at some point I'm thinking what if 20 years down the line someone goes, 'What we need to do is a paper like that.' And it goes full circle. People go, 'Oh I don't know the *Pink Paper* I don't know. I won't go into a bar either because of my religion, I'm Muslim where can I find it, will you get it for me?' And you just think, oh god this is really weird.

It really makes me think actually, from getting really complacent, almost being like really like, 'YEAH, YEAH, YEAH, RAH, RAH, RAH, RAH RADICAL!' All

that, to really complacent like, 'Oh I'm sick of the whole lot of it.' Do you know what I mean? 'Fucking lesbian and gay.' To the other way around, to sort of like, 'Ooh shit! Actually there is a lot to be said for a lot of stuff that people did, a lot of stuff that people take for granted.' Or you know like comments that you sometimes hear, like I read something and it made me think, and it was after a particular thing had happened where someone had been beaten up and stuff and didn't know what to do and didn't know where to go, where there was a group of women and ... it was a, you know something like in *Diva* and again it was like, 'Do you need to go to lesbian and gay only venues or are you OK going to straight?' And people are entitled to their thing, but it was like, 'NO! We don't need, no I'm ... well why do you need a lesbian and gay venue, do you know what I mean?' And it was like, 'Don't need that, I'm fine going to straight places, it's really OK, it's never any problems.' And you think yeah that's true, but a part of me was like, oh please don't get rid of them, because there's loads of people out there that you just think ... if that slips, will it will be 30 year's time someone going ... some radical woman or guy going, 'Do you know what I'm going to set up my own venue!' Or a trans person going, 'I'm going to set up my own venue.' Almost going round in circles basically.

So yeah things like that make me think, not that people can't go where they want, course they can, but yeah I think maybe things aren't as ideal as maybe we think. I mean obviously it's based on different people's experiences, but for me it's sort of come a bit full circle and then I've been quite ... maybe by my own complacency, quite taken back by like, what? Oh I didn't expect that, or I didn't expect that person to say that, or I didn't expect that person to be so homophobic, or god, where on earth did that point of view come from? So I think it's made me think again really. And then you read all those things about ... I mean I know that in this country there's all kinds of new paperwork that's gone through and legal things come through, but then you read other things around other countries where Iran and people being persecuted and you think, ooh, ooh god I don't know if it has changed that much actually, do you know what I mean?

GE: It sounds like now we've become more multicultural than it was when you worked for Stonewall Housing, that it feels like that's where it's gone backwards; correct me if I'm wrong.

MB: I think it was, when I was working it was multicultural, it was multicultural but it wasn't ... the perspective wasn't on, because I think London is, I think the UK is, the UK has always been an island. You go back to the 18th century, you go back to the 19th century and it's always had people coming into the country, do you know what I mean? Somalian people coming in, black people coming in, all round the country, in Newcastle, Liverpool so it's always been there, I mean not always recorded, but always been there and I think that probably is part of being an island. You know the UK, I mean although you grow up in the UK and you think, oh what an enormous country! It actually is an island. So I think when I worked there it was definitely sort of, and working in London, it was a diverse community and London was then. But I think probably we didn't have like an international outlook, so it was very what was happening here. And then you get used to certain groups coming in, so second generation folk, like my mum's generation, Caribbean generation, I mean they've had their waves before they've come in, so you kind of get used to that. And then maybe a new generation comes in like Polish and then that's when you notice

differences, for the UK anyway, do you know what I mean? Sort of different values, different outlooks or whatever.

So you see it, I mean I see it, again 'cause I work in Southall it's quite close to the airport so you have different people coming in, so you see that change of different groups coming in. But now I suppose where things have got, in terms of communication, supposedly more national, you've got more insight into what's happening in other countries. So there's always been people that have come into Stonewall and it might be they come from South America or whatever and they've had staff in that country, but it seems to be ... I notice more profiles on the abuse that goes on, that kind of makes you think, and it's not that it didn't go on before, but.... It's kind of a constant reminder 'cause again you're taken back, it's like, ooh god! And that things do change, like in the States wasn't it, they've got California it was proposition whatever, and the campaign they thought, right we've cracked it, and then it was like, no, no, no we're gonna take that back. Do you know what I mean? So you kind of think how strong are these things? It's like having, you know people having laws on the statutory but people don't follow them through or people don't feel ... they haven't gone enough into society, they're not grounded or strong enough yet in society to give it its full power.

So things like, I don't know, again where it's like ... you know all the stuff around reporting hate crime and stuff like that, so on one level it's like, no it has to be taken on board. It's like everything should be in place to ... oh my god an apparition <laughs> everything should be in place 'cause you think, well why don't people report it? The police are meant to be more aware, sent on diversity training, but people don't report it and then people have bad experiences of reporting it. So it's kind of I guess making those things, and I don't know how one does that, I don't know if that's over time, but they become real, whereas at the moment they're kind of ... they're there in place but somehow they're not as concrete as maybe they should be, which is frustrating for people 'cause you can see it 'cause it's like, 'No we've got that in place, yes all our officers have been on diversity training.' 'Shall we send Officer DD on officer training then?' And it's like, oh yeah. So it feels a bit hollow and I think it is reflected in people's, it's a lot of people, not everybody's experience but a lot of people's experience of whether you report these things or not. Bearing in mind that generally people say generally whoever they are, 'Oh I've had a burglary and it took them six days later to come round to do it.' So it's kind of putting things in perspective. But you still, I don't know, I just think there's still a lot to do in a way. I think yeah the shift isn't completely there where it's, 'Oh it's no big deal.' The assault is not that someone's lesbian, gay or trans, it's just like the assaults happen basically, there's no ... but I still think there is a kind of, 'Oh god, well fucking hell, what do you expect?' Do you know what I mean? 'If you're trans, or what's that about?' I still think that's there getting in the way from basics like someone's been assaulted actually.

<End of Part 4>

<Part 5>

GE: We touched a little bit on your [0:03 childhood], I'm not sure ... I mean do you have anything to add to while you were working for Stonewall Housing whether you dealt with any ... was that a big issue at the time, do you feel it was a big issue?

MB: It was an issue at the time, we did have clients that were ... HIV or HIV symptomatic, and again, there was more ... so it would have been after the initial kind of hysteria around it, oh it's well after that, it's well after that where people were really having to fight, really, really, really having to fight to make people aware and people getting abuse and stuff like that, but it was still going on. So it was kept on the agenda, like sexual health was kept on the agenda, I think at the time things like distribution of condoms, that was kept on the agenda, definitely, definitely kept on the agenda basically, so it was still an issue. Yeah again, with clients that were, if they were symptomatic and dealing with health issues or bad health, it seemed to be easier to get support, again, from certain councils it was ta ... or support services, it was definitely in place and there was like a quick response to it, do you know what I mean? And the same with social services, if we were trying to get someone, someone had moved to a permanent accommodation, they needed their place adapted, there was definitely a sense of priority and we can ... yeah we've got to make the calls and we've got to do it. So yeah it was definitely there, there was an awareness, it was kind of reflected in the information, it was reflected in the leaflets, it was reflected in posters, it was reflected in, you know things that people would say, with prejudices of challenging that. So it definitely was on the agenda and it definitely seemed to be there, definitely, definitely, definitely was there.

GE: You mentioned there was a strong link between all the different types of charities to do with LGBT at the time.

MB: Yeah

GE: There would've been recommendations to certain charities then if somebody [2:32](#) for example.

MB: Oh yeah, yeah and it seemed to be taken on board, so it was like, 'Look, this is this person's situation in terms of housing, they've now become symptomatic.' But there was a quick response, and it was definitely probably when HIV was getting kind of, in terms of funding and ... space, for want of a better word, it was sort of up there, they were getting their space, they were getting their funding. It was seen as a priority, it was definitely, there was lots of different groups as well. So we had access to the bigger charities, the bigger HIV charities, but everyone had common knowledge of different support groups, you know this support group enhances this support group here and the [3:30](#). And those charities or voluntary organisations or statutory organisations that weren't specifically dealing with HIV were considered to be aware of it, so it was on their radar. So people would seem to be up and my guess is, you know so in terms of training and everything like that, HIV, HIV ... so if you worked in the homelessness field, if you worked in the national health and you were a fairly competent worker, it was on a lot of people's agenda, whereas it seems to have sort of gone off people's agenda a lot actually. And remember we work with young people, so again, with the youth groups, lesbian and gay youth groups, which there seems to be more of, there seemed to be loads, there was one in Newham, there was one in Islington that was very successful, there was one in Camden, and I think a lot of those don't exist now.

So it was really, really good in terms of keeping that agenda there for young people coming up so that they'd ... you know they make their choice, but it was like the information was there ... and people just knew it because it was

just there, it was just there in the atmosphere so you'd know it, it wasn't like a fear thing, it was just almost like, 'Oh my god, yeah, another thing on HIV.' And, 'Oh god, you know, I already know that why would I ... do you know what I mean? Oh god don't we know that already?' But I think it was good. And there were services so people could get the information really quickly, whereas now I'm not so sure how quickly you'd be able to get that information, and it seemed to be in quite a lot of places as well, so people came in from London from outside London and would've got information before from maybe a statutory service, not necessarily a L&GBT service, and they'd have some knowledge. So it was definitely something, whereas now I'm not so sure that that would happen, I think people would be like either, 'Well is there anything to know?' It might not even be on their agenda actually. Or it would be like, 'Oh I don't know, where would I go?' So I think there's less small groups about that were just probably taken for granted 'cause they just seemed to be everywhere, do you know what I mean? Like little satellite kind of groups, and I think they were probably really valuable at the time actually, and I think a lot of that seems to have ... I might be wrong, but there just doesn't seem to be as much as that and you sort of wonder does that make a difference, for anybody. But because I worked with young people, particularly for young people, do you know what I mean? Like how do you stumble across something, or is it common, or is it just like, well you go into a pub, you go into a bar and that's where it is but nowhere else. And doesn't take into account people like young Muslims, lesbian and gays who may not wish to go into a bar or stuff so.

GE: Did you ever come across any victimise ... I mean I'm sure you did, but any victimisation with regards to someone's HIV and possibly with the police or were they thrown out? I'm just trying to get a detail from...

MB: Yes yeah, no it did happen, I mean people ended up at Stonewall because they'd been victimised where they were living, so they might've come to ... I mean one person I remember came from outside London and came to London just because basically everywhere else they'd been they'd been victimised – from, I think it was like Derby and they'd got harassed and got really, really bad, got beaten up. And police were called because it's like, oh we'll call the police, and then the police, it was like just slow to respond and really not really taking on what it was about at all. 'Oh it'll die down, oh it's nothing.' No kind of real serious response to it basically. And for that person it got so bad and it go so out of hand that, I think they had connections in London and they, it got too much, literally having a breakdown and it was like they were trying to get support but support was quite limited in terms of it just wasn't enough of it, do you know what I mean? I think when you're going through something like that it can be 24/7, so with all the best will in the world it's quite hard for someone to ... have a limited support. It's not the fault of the people that are giving the support but things like that are so 24/7 on somebody's life, how it influences them. And I think the limited support that they were getting, in the end it wasn't enough to carry them through, it was affecting everything, it was affecting work, it was affecting their health even more and their immune system that they, I think, that was the basis for them to come down to London, do sofa surfing and then I think end up at Stonewall Housing.

So yeah, no you did see it and it did happen, and people, like we said, we'd interview them because there was limited spaces at Stonewall and you'd be interviewing people and you did hear that, it wasn't uncommon to hear ... I

mean it wasn't necessarily every day but it was frequent enough to remember that people were being harassed or ... either because they did have HIV or they were harassed because they were gay and it was like, 'You have HIV.' Do you know what I mean, automatically. So there was a lot of that about, a lot of that kind of fear about ... and it impacted on, say for example, maybe a young man that might be African, this might come up where it would be like, 'Oh they say I'm African and I've got HIV, or have I got HIV or has anyone ... I'm a gay.' Basically it would complicate issues so people would have an issue trying to get to grips with their sexuality and know that they were gay but then it was like they would be in a turmoil because it would be like, 'Right, is there anyone in the house that has HIV? Have we got a separate fridge? Have we got this?' So people's own fears around, like people's own fears around HIV were there as well, so you were kind of dealing with that, like people's own homophobia, do you know what I mean? 'Cause someone's lesbian or gay it doesn't mean they've got their ... you know you've got your own homophobias to get your head round and stuff that you don't even realise, and then you think, 'Ooh fuck, I'm gay and I'm homophobic!' So things like that you'd have ... those kind of dynamics are ... not I mean all the time.

So HIV definitely would come into the agenda, like the fear around it and the lack of education, lack of information and different issues and like different groups of people. That's why, I mean we're human so different people's ... you know because somebody's lesbian or gay but their own issues around someone else's difference and what they thought of that difference, their own prejudices within that. So it was quite interesting, people have got that connection of lesbian and gay, but also they've got the impact of all their differences. And I think what was quite interesting working with Stonewall Housing was because it did look at difference, and it did try and reflect difference in their houses. So every house you went into, you would see diversity, and within each community or within each house, so within the black and ethnic minority, you know black only house, there was like diversity, so people from different places. So it really broadened your mind to how diverse everything else is and how quite difficult it is to tick box everything. So it was good, but yeah definitely.

<End of Part 5>

<Part 6>

GE: We've mentioned a lot about how you feel and the LGBT community has changed, you talked about complacency a lot. Is there anything else you think is worth mentioning about how you feel the LGBT community has changed since your time at Stonewall and where you are now?

MB: I don't know really because it makes me sound like, OH I THINK THAT We're ALL REALLY COMPLACENT! Do you know what I mean? It's not meant to be ... 'cause I mean it should be varied, I'm not saying it all should be like RAH, RAH [0:37] whatever, 'cause maybe that was a bit too much because that was almost becoming the flavour, do you know what I mean? It was almost that was becoming the herb mentality. I guess what I'm saying is it's so diverse anyway, but I suppose it's just recognising that we are so diverse as a group and everyone is so vastly different within that, do you know what I mean? Sexuality links people but we're so diverse, but I suppose that some things we don't become too complacent or we don't forget our history, so it's not that I expect everyone to be political, I mean that would drive me mad,

you know? All too political and everything's like, you know that might be a bit too much. But I suppose that some things are sort of kept on the agenda, like the point of Stonewall, 'cause lots of people, people that I know probably in their 30s, it's like, 'Well what's Stonewall then? What was that about? Mary what's that about?' So I think things like that, to keep them on the agenda and the basics that maybe some people take for granted, it's like well don't assume that everyone knows, 'Oh yeah, this is what Stonewall's about and this is...' You know 'cause there's people that don't even know what the name's about. And I was quite surprised by that again, 'cause I thought god they're in their 30s and it was like, 'Oh I don't know, what's Stonewall about; what's that name about? I keep hearing it but what does that mean.'

I suppose one of the reasons is 'cause I think it's ... when you hear the story and stuff like that and even see the awful old film, I think it's quite empowering, 'cause people have seen it, again that were younger, and said, 'Oh no it was quite good actually, I didn't realise.' And I think things like that get lost, but I think they can actually ... like anything, like media, film, writing and stuff like that, it can be quite empowering actually and quite uplifting to who you are, do you know what I mean? It's something that kind of reinforces who you are and to be positive about it. I think it can help in a really kind of subtle way, like that film Harvey, *Harvey Milk*, yeah like again I was surprised that people were going, 'What's that Milk thing about? What's he about then? What's that? Is it all political? Mm it's all political.' But the amount of people that saw it that said, 'Oh actually it was really uplifting actually.' It did something, so they didn't necessarily wanna come out – I mean I did, I wanted to come out and sort of, 'GIVE ME A CAUSE, GIVE ME A CAUSE!' But some people said they came out and they said, 'I just felt really good. I just felt good and I felt really uplifted.' Or I thought, actually again, god that was only this amount of time away, god I didn't realise that was so ... like I would've been growing up then or that was just after I was ... it was just before I was born or something like that. Or they didn't realise how close actually it was, so it made them think again 'cause it was like, what?

So I think it gives a sense of perspective, maybe like why people do sort of go on about these things, again that sort of, 'Oh I didn't realise how.' Just didn't realise, and that could've been that person 30 years back or 40 years back. So I think it's a thinker, it makes people think, do you know what I mean? I think it's quite uplifting film on loads of levels, even if you're not into politics or anything like that. I think it just can make you think as a person basically. So I found that quite refreshing – it was a well made film as well, wasn't it?

GE: It was a very good film.

MB: I was there like, 'Oh it's really good, ain't it good!' I really liked it. But again, things like that I thought, yeah they are important, it is important to see something of who you are in terms of some aspect of your identity. So you might not encompass completely who you are, some people it does, some people it doesn't, but I think it's quite good for making it a positive part of who you are and helping with that and seeing those characters and their dilemmas, and thinking maybe things aren't always like, right you're lesbian and gay, so that's it, that's straightforward, that's sorted out, and maybe sometimes that's a bit more involved in that, do you know what I mean? But you don't have to worry, it's like anything, it's like give yourself time, get your head round it, if it changes it changes, if it doesn't it doesn't change, 'cause I think often people feel like they have to make a decision and then it means,

'Well I've said it now so now I'm completely sorted.' And then it's like, well no actually what does that mean? And sometimes it's hard to pick up on what that means 'cause it could be like really subtle things. So things like I think film, or people around you, or organisations like Galop, like Stonewall Housing, like the big organisations as well like Stonewall, all played their part maybe sort of helping us be who we wanna be and not feel like, oh god, I don't feel quite 100% or whatever – they help us get round it because who else is doing that really? 'Cause it's still not really ... I mean and you think there's all that bullying going on in schools, so you're not going to come out are you going, 'Well I've got me GCSEs and my NVQs and I know who I am now.' I mean some people might. So it's nice to have all these other things there, and it would be nicer probably if it was just so common place that it was there anyway. So I think it would probably make it a lot easier for young people from all backgrounds as well I think, it could probably make things easier, do you know what I mean? If it was so common place it will just like filter through, like ooh it's nothing, do you know what I mean?

GE: So maybe if LGBT should [7:19 go tour] in schools more, now that [IA] is no longer there [IA].

MB: Yeah, yeah, or it was part of like the general agenda so, I mean *Harvey Milk's* probably not going to be the most appropriate film along the Disney things, 'cause of the age group, but if you had something that was ... I don't know, if there was a film group anyway it would just be there on the agenda and it's like, 'Oh yeah, now it's *Harvey Milk* everyone.' Regardless of whatever, and people would go, 'Oh yeah it's a really good film!' Or, 'Oh my god!' For loads of other reasons, and it would be good.

GE: I saw the film as being pigeonholed as a gay film, would you agree with that?

MB: Probably yeah, I think it's probably one ... well yeah it was, it was, but I think its one saving grace is Sean Penn because because of who he was in terms of his status as an actor and director, I think it put it ... I think they were really fortunate to get him actually because you just think it kind of made the film more open, more ... it drew people in from all backgrounds basically. And then of course I think he then got the award didn't he, he got some award or...

GE: He got two Oscars, or the film got two Oscars.

MB: Yeah. Well as soon as he got that then of course it opens up because people would, you know you get like the film people so it's like, 'Fucking Milk, what's that about?' And then it was like ... 'cause I noticed a lot of people wanted to see it af ... even within the lesbian and gay community a lot of people saw it after that, it was, Oh it's Oscar, oh it's got an Oscar.' And they went to see it then, so I think that's probably helped it. I suspect if it was maybe somebody else, or maybe someone low profile, or it was the same kind of film and it was at the LGBT film festival with someone else in, do you know what I mean, one of my mates, I don't know if it would do as well. It might do within the community 'cause it was, the way it was put together was really good, but I think it probably helped that Sean Penn did it, and he did do it well but it kind of opened it up. 'Cause I was talking about him a couple of years ago going, 'Oh he's really, I'm surprised someone hasn't done him.' And I only saw it 'cause there was a poster on the tube, and I was like, 'Milk, milk, milk?' And then I went in and I said to someone, 'I think there's a film about that Harvey

Milk guy.' And my colleague went, 'Who?' Do you know what I mean? Lesbian went, 'What, who are they then?' So yeah.

GE: Do you think the fact that he did that, got it to a mainstream film, that that kind of reflects society or do you think that's a bit too profound and a bit too general to say, as in it's more accepted, it's more of a main... you mentioned that you wanted it to be more mainstream in schools and that.

MB: Yeah, yeah. What do you mean the film did become more mainstream?

GE: Well it was done by an actor such as Sean Penn, it got a lot of funding, therefore it might reflect that society has possibly changed since the 19 ... mean it's just a general opinion?

MB: I think it could indicate that, or it could indicate that some people ... I mean Sean Penn's quite an individual anyway and he's an established actor and he does his own directing, do you know what I mean? And there was links there anyway, so he was confident enough to go yeah, maybe with Sean Penn or someone starting ... I mean I think the real proof of the pudding would be if it was someone who was starting off that was quite ... who didn't know the links and they didn't know there was a possibility of Sean Penn and all his credentials, that was starting off new, it's like would they do it? Would they do it, do you know what I mean?

GE: Would it be pigeonholed again?

MB: Yeah, yeah. So it's like would they think, ooh is this a good thing to do, in terms of their career, would they get pigeon, yeah. But because it was Sean Penn it's kind of, I don't know, I mean I don't know. And the fact that he got the Oscars for it as well and I think there was talk before of him getting Oscars for something el ... all the politics that are going on in film, so I think it's really hard to tell.

<End of Part 6>

<Part 7>

GE: One last question, it kind of covers the last, but I mean do you have a general comment about how things have changed, just in terms of where you work now for your current organisation and Stonewall Housing. You've already mentioned transgendered and black problems and how that's changed; is there anything else that you want to just summarise just to sum the interview up?

MB: I just think, I mean I worked for Stonewall, I enjoyed it – in reflection looking back, you know I learnt more than I realised and I did take some things for granted because I was kind of cotton-wooled in lesbian and gay environment and it was lovely, but I did get complacent with that. And after that it's like I'm more aware of seeing things, homophobia, harassment, housing issues and I'm more aware of probably how important their role is ... and I wouldn't like them to lose that or feel like, 'Oh yeah it's changed so much it's just a different ball game.' 'Cause actually my experience has been like, oh no, people still need organisations like them to exist and not to get complacent, and to be aware of areas without London and outside of London that sometimes people's experiences are very, very much different. And the

basics like approaching someone like Stonewall, approaching someone that's lesbian or gay, knowing about them are still much on the agenda, yeah definitely.

[End of interview]