Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Peter Davey
Interviewer: Olly Zanetti
Place of Interview: North London
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Files:

Key

OZ: = Interviewer, Olly Zanetti
PD:= Interviewee, Peter Davey
[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time
[5:22 IA] = inaudible section at this time
Word 5:22 = best guess at word

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

PD: I was born in Harold Wood in Essex in November 1950, which makes me 58, I think.

OZ: OK. So if we could start off by just telling me a little bit about your childhood, a little bit about your background?

PD: Gosh, my background! Right, well as you just heard I was born and grew up in Essex. When I was seven I was sent away to boarding school and I spent between 7 and 17 at boarding school at a place called Brentwood, in Essex, which I have to say was not a particularly happy experience so I was glad to leave it behind. I have one brother who is 15 years older than me and so his three children are like closer to me but pretty much … he left home pretty much when I was still a toddler and so to all extents and purposes I grew up on my own with my parents.

OZ: OK. So tell me a little bit more about your boarding school then?

PD: What would you like to know about it?

OZ: Tell me what you liked about it first of all?

PD: I would be hard pressed to think about things that I liked about it. I think the one thing I would say it has left me with is the ability to be with lots of people and to essentially be in my own world. So, as I was saying before, I go a lot to Laurieston Hall, Edward Carpenter Communities Gay Men's Weeks and, for me, being in a dormitory with a lot of people is neither here nor there – I just co-exist in my own space really and just spend my time and get to know the people I really want to get to know. So that was a plus I think.

I think being away from home at a young age I didn't find very easy and so, as I said, it's something that I don't really have fond memories of at all. I suppose it would qualify as being a 'good education' - something like that.

OZ: So what were the things that you didn't like about it?

PD: The other kids. I'm not very good with my fists and so I always will tend to come off worse and I didn't find the people very friendly. The people I was most friendly with were masters and other staff in fact. And it's kind of curious now when I think about it with the way that life has changed, it simply wouldn't be possible now to go and spend … to have late night conversations with the Assistant House Master in his bedsit for ages on end, although I was extremely grateful at the time. I suppose this was an era before everybody got dead conscious about that sort of stuff.

OZ: Do you remember any specific situations with teachers that you liked to hang out with?

PD: Well I can conjure them up in my mind but essentially they were just times of having long conversations about life really.

OZ: What kind of things did you talk about?

PD: Oh my God! You are asking me to remember back 50 years ago! I can't … I would have difficulty remembering … no I couldn't remember with the Assistant House Master. With the … I can remember having lengthy conversations with the Chaplain. But I think what I most remember is just about school life and what it was like and his nickname was 'Sex' I think, something like that and … anyway he had a reputation for being fairly outspoken about one or two things so I can remember it was a fairly free conversation. What's his name? Griff Rhys Jones has written his autobiography which is about the same school and I have to say there are episodes in his book which I do remember <laughs> but it was more about bringing back memories than it was stuff that I would actively remember. My brother read it first and he used to ring me up and say, 'Do you remember blah, blah blah?' and I'd be kind of like, 'What?' kind of thing but then I would start to remember things.

OZ: So was it just the House Master and the Chaplain that you used to chat to or were there other staff as well that you got on with?

PD: There probably were but those are the two I most remember. The whole thing about being gay was a complete taboo, or sex was a complete taboo. There was a certain amount of exploration I suppose when younger but not after about the age of about 12 I suppose.

OZ: Was sex and that kind of growing up type conversations the sort of thing that you would chat too …?

PD: No. No, no, no. No more about life in the school – I'm talking about the mid-sixties and I don't know … no, I really can't remember.

OZ: And tell me about the other pupils at the school?

PD: You are asking me difficult questions <long pause>. In what way? <laughs>. They were a bunch of interesting people. When I was growing … I mean of course I was … folks like Griff Rhys Jones are a little younger, Douglas Adams, who is a year younger than me and Jack Straw who was two or three years older – so it's that sort of character, that sort of person. David Irving, the Historian with a rather chequered history. Although I have to say I only knew Douglas Adams when I was at school, I didn't really know the others. All the

time I was there, the one person who was well known as having come from the school was a guy called Hardy Amis, who was the Queen's dressmaker and when he died, which was actually just recently, one of the obituary writers talked about his penchant for firm, young, male flesh and I thought, 'ah yes, that must have been what the handshake meant.' <laughs> Anyway.

OZ: So are there any specific incidents that you can remember because you mentioned that you weren't terribly good with your fists so do you remember the school being … for example were there lots of fights?

PD: I don't remember it as being very sympathetic. I mean I certainly … much younger, people were really not very pleasant with each other, I don't think, so yes I think there was quite a lot. And … I mean for me there was a joy of reaching what would be the age of about 15, 14/15, and the routine becoming much less prescriptive so it was actually possible to start to be away from other people a little bit and I became very good friends with somebody, who in fact has the same surname as me, who started in the 5th form – but we were able just to be away from other people and that was much more pleasant.

OZ: So what was your routine like in the stage where you had quite a prescriptive routine?

PD: Oh pretty much every moment of the day would be prescribed in terms of getting up time, meeting … having your post, going to breakfast, starting school, finishing school, doing games after school, then supper and then homework and I think you probably had an hour at the very end of the day before you went to bed. But it was pretty much completely regimented so it wasn't really very possible to get away.

OZ: So what kind of things did you and your friend with the same surname get up to after?

PD: <Laughs> Mostly it was out walking and sitting, drinking tea. The thing for me … I used to cycle a lot when I was much younger so as I got older, cycling again was a great escape so I used to enjoy cycling a lot. Again, it seems odd now and it doesn't feel like people would allow it anymore – that you could take your bicycle to school and then just, you know, as a 14-year-old just go off for a cycle in the afternoon, but yes, I was glad to escape the routine of football and rugby and take up cycling instead. From which you can gather that I was not a great footballing person – I'm one of those folks where the connection with a ball doesn't work too well, not with feet anyway.

OZ: Likewise.

PD: I'll tell you a story – I was up at Laurieston last year, 60 gay men. One of the guys who lives there, his 11-year-old Grandson was staying and loves to play football. So I say to 60 gay guys, 'So-and-so's grandson is here and would love to play football, is there anyone who would be prepared/ willing/ interested?' Not a single volunteer. And every time I tell this story I am shouted down as being a stereotypical view of gay men and I don't think it is.

OZ: So tell me about … you mentioned not liking being away from home very much, tell me about what home was like or can't you remember that?

PD: I would reckon I had a pretty good childhood. Although my parents didn't get on with each other they stayed together for 50 years, something like that, and basically operated in their own worlds really. So … and I was just left to my own devices so I got on and did all kinds of things when I was at home. I suppose I appreciated their support that they gave me as I was growing up and when I got older.

OZ: How much time did you spend at home?

PD: School holidays, when I was a child, and then when I went to university I started living at home, I was then living at home for 18 months because I didn't have a student grant and so I needed to live at home. But eventually then I did get a student grant and then I scarpered and went to live in halls of residence, so that was pretty much the last time I lived at home I think.

OZ: Who do you think was more significant in your childhood – was it your mum or your dad that you remember?

PD: When I was very young, my mother rather than my father, because he was out at work, so he was really only a presence when I was around in the late evening, or late for me. My mother taught me to read before I went to school and that kind of stuff so yeah, I would say she was more significant. I think as I got older then he was more significant. He was always … I mean a grumpy old sod, 'love' would not be a word that I ever heard cross his lips I don't think, well not that I remember, but he was always incredibly supportive both financially and of the rather dubious things I used to get up to.

OZ: And what kind of things when you were younger did you and your Mum do together?

PD: I don't think we did anything together <laughs>. No. We used to play cards with neighbours, gosh.

OZ: And how old were you then?

PD: I don't know, 11, 12, 13, 14 perhaps. She used to let me drive her car when I was … from about 14 onwards so yes, we used to go driving together. I used to be very interested in aeroplanes so we would sort of be motoring around aerodromes and that kind of thing.

OZ: Aged 14?

PD: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

OZ: So quite liberal parents?

PD: I don't think my Father would have approved if he'd known <laughs>. But you see that was a time when if there was one car parked in the street it was unusual. Whereas if you went to the street now it would just be completely full of cars, unless it's covered in yellow lines. And actually, the last time I went back to the school, the school is in the centre of Brentwood and it's like a quarter of the town and it's been there for 400 years or something, and the last time I went there I discovered that the inside is completely full of double yellow lines which I thought was very funny. But then a friend of mine who we were seeing whose brother went to the school said that this is because of

course, these days, all the parents have Chelsea tractors and they all bring the little darlings to school, which of course didn't use to occur in my day.

OZ: How about your father? Because he was more of an influence when you got older you say?

PD: Well <long pause> … was he an influence? Yes, I suppose he was. He had quite liberal views, quaint views about a number of things but as I said I got very involved in squatting when I was 22 and he was just really helpful and it was not … it was a time when it wasn't considered to be something that was appropriate for folks to do and all his friends were a bit sort of surprised I suppose. Yeah.

OZ: And as a kid did you chat to him about …?

PD: No never, about anything.

OZ: So you were very, very independent when you was at school as well as at home?

PD: Yes.

OZ: Then tell me about your university actually.

PD: I was at university at Queen Mary College which is in Mile End and I studied economics and I was there from 1968 until 1972 because I stayed on for an extra year and did a Masters and I loved it, I had a wonderful time. I made some wonderful friends, as I said before I had to live at home for the first 18 months and then I got a grant sorted out and then I lived in hall and yeah, I had a whale of a time.

OZ: So where was your parents' house again?

PD: In Essex. In Gidea Park if you know where that is? Romford? Hornchurch?

OZ: They are all names but I can't …

PD: OK. If you ever take the train to Chelmsford, then the slow trains are all stations to Gidea Park – so it's where the slow trains finish. It's only about … it's about 25 miles from London.

OZ: And so were you squatting when you were at university?

PD: No, no, no. I was at university and then my first job was at The University of Kent, in Canterbury, and just on I don't know, a late night conversation, someone said to me, 'You're an armchair socialist.' So I thought, 'Well perhaps I'd better do something,' so I went and squatted. I had a bunch of friends that I was very close to and … we must have been kind of homeless, I think we were and so we decided to squat. We toured the town looking for possible buildings, we got stopped by the police, we weren't very good at it <laughs>, but then we chose a particular house and in we moved.

OZ: Tell me about the day you moved in?

PD: Ah it was great fun. It was open, it was … this is an early 19th Century, Kent tiled, timber framed house, which hadn't been lived in for about 10 years I would say, maybe more, and it was at the entrance to the Court Yard which is adjacent to one of the stations and British Rail always wanted it to fall down, they couldn't knock it down because it was listed but they were quite keen that it should fall down. It had been kind of used by some of the art students so all the walls were all full of paintings that they had done, but the back door was open so we just pottered in through the back door and slowly cleaned it up. But for the first six weeks we had no electricity and the first three months we had no water because the lead had all been nicked and that kind of thing. It was great, there was anywhere between 6 and 10 of us, or 12 of us I think. And we used to have a fire going in about 5 or 6 of the rooms in order to stay warm.

What was good was it was a lovely group of people and the local neighbours did clock, as time went on, that we were actually looking after the place and we were actually slowly tidying up. The whole of the garden was completely full of rubble and everything and they just kind of noticed that we were slowly clearing it up. So when it came to the battle to sort us out they were very supportive indeed and we ended up negotiating the first licence with British Railways to stay in the house. I don't know if you know about these things but licence equals permission to stay and it was, as I say, about 1974 and it was kind of pioneering days. I was lucky because one of the joys of living in Gidea Park is it's a kind of upmarket bit of that part of the world so one of my near neighbours happened to be a Member of Parliament for North Paddington, which was one of the big squatting areas, and it must have been a Labour government and I knew them all because I was involved in the Labour party and his wife was Chair of the Education Committee of the Local Council, this kind of thing, it was before the reorganisation. And so I was able to get lots and lots of help with what to do about the whole thing and that's when, as I say, was when my father was incredibly helpful because he just kind of made suggestions about how to … what the approach to take was for the campaign to enable us to stay. But the licences were … you just simply sat down and wrote one on a piece of paper, like your piece of paper there, and we sent it to them and eventually they agreed it.

OZ: They just had to stamp it and send it back to you.

PD: Well they had to agree it, but yes. As I said it was the first one that British Railways eventually agreed. But as I said, we were just kind of lucky with whom we knew and also I suppose because they didn't want to use the house and in fact the tenants moved out of the house on the other side of the entrance whilst we were there and they moved in, as they would often do the following or same day, smashed the entire place up – you know smashed all of the toilets, the bathrooms and everything, all of the everything, boarded it all up and thus it remained for the next, nearly, 30 years. It has actually now been refurbished but that was kind of typical. Whereas the house we were in was eventually given back and sold so there's a guy who lives in it … well the last time I was there, there was a guy who was living in it who had kind of gone about trying to do his best to restore it. It was a bit delicate, it was a bit like this place – if you jumped the whole place shook and it was reputedly built around a ship's mast and the Beatles had been at the bottom of it, or something like that anyway.

OZ: Tell me about the people that you lived with.

PD: There were two of us who started it off, both of us were gay, still are gay I suppose, and then the other two, three, four were straight, all the others were straight, but it was a time when … when am I talking about, 1972, '3, '4, 1974 and the feminist movement had got going and there was a reaction to that called, 'Men Against Sexism,' so a lot of the guys were kind of sympathetic and I suppose would be considered quaint. So they would quite often be dressed up in a frock – everyone had extremely long hair and beards and all that stuff so their hair would be, if it was like yours, then they would quite often just bunch it so it would stick out this way and that way and all sorts of things. So they were a kind of laid back bunch who, probably fortunately, because it was a bit of a … one had to ask whenever you went anywhere, 'Could I use the loo please?' and then, 'Do you mind if I have a bath?' kind of thing and so we kind of got used to … it was all a bit vague, anyway. But everyone was incredibly friendly and as I said we got on extremely well.

OZ: Did you have big events or parties or galleries or anything in the house or was it just a house to live in?

PD: We must have had parties, in fact I know we did, yes we did. Although I don't think we had very many, it was more about it being cosy, partly because it was the winter and it was cold, certainly when we moved in, and also because although there were like three rooms on the ground floor plus the kitchen out the back, when we first moved in we didn't use … you couldn't use the kitchen because it was just such … so it took three months before we could actually get the water on and then start to actually use the kitchen. So, initially one of the rooms was where we had the water supplies and did the washing up. I can't quite remember how we used to do that though. Eventually, basically, we had one room downstairs that was rather like a living room and then the other rooms downstairs were occupied by people as bedrooms. And we finished … we ended up with anything up to 12 people living there, so one of the rooms with a curtain drawn across the middle and people each side and everything.

Accommodation in those days were very, very difficult and Canterbury is a place where there are five, or there were then, five academic institutions and people were sort of far flung – Whitstable and Herne Bay and so on. So it was, there were lots of people who were generally … had difficulty finding somewhere to live so we were always populated. The loo was at the bottom of the garden.

OZ: Plumbed in?

PD: Eventually yes. Once we … once the lead was replaced then we could get the water supply on and we could … so yes we could then use it. But that was about three months after we moved in. It was across the road from the river so the river was very handy initially <laughs> but it meant that you sat in the garden on a Sunday morning, when the weather was nice, it was beautiful, the garden.

OZ: What was your wider friendship group like at that time? Who did you hang out with?

PD: I made very close friends, I've missed something out – basically when I went to university I did not know anybody at home really so I decided I would get involved with the local YMCA, which I did, and I made four/five really, really

close friends at home as well as the friends at university and it just so happens that one of those friends turned out to be gay as well as me, so we had an incredible love affair when I was 17 and he was 15, which lasted for a couple of years. So I suppose that for me was the major step, was just moving away from school. And then I made some very good friends at university as well. So when it came to being in Canterbury and by that time I was 22/23, I again had made some really close friends. Mainly through … I got involved with a youth counselling service that was all staffed by people from the university, mostly students and some staff members and I just met some really interesting people through that.

OZ: And so how does your sexuality entwine with this whole narrative?

PD: Well it certainly entwines with some of the close friendships that I've made and I would say I have the experience of being the outsider, but that's kind of all the way through when I was growing up so I don't … I'm familiar with that as a kind of archetype for being gay but I don't think I particularly associate that for me. It certainly weaves through inability to play football <laughs> and I would guess also through the kind of things that interest me and concern me and I have always been concerned, as my father would put it, for the underdog. So that's kind of pretty much always driven what I've got involved in. And I suppose … familiarity with keeping parts of my life separate – so I didn't come out until I was 24/25, to everybody I mean, obviously I was out earlier than that to a few people and indeed I used to, because I had a flat at the university, I had my name and phone number plastered all over the university in relation to gay matters because I volunteered, because I had a phone, so I suppose I was effectively out at that point, although I never really discussed it with anyone.

OZ: You had your phone number, why was it around the university?

PD: As a, 'if anyone had any gay issues they would like to talk about, do give me a ring.' I don't remember exactly how it was put, it was along those lines.

OZ: And did you get a lot of phone calls?

PD: No

OZ: Did you get any?

PD: I seem to remember one or two.

OZ: Were they …?

PD: But it was about the time you see … it coincided with the first people admitting to being gay and saying we should have some kind of gay society, where am I now? This would be about 1973.

OZ: And was there a gay society?

PD: Yes. Well you know, three, four, five, six people.

OZ: And you were involved in it?

PD: I was involved in it, I wasn't a mover or a shaker, I used to just go along at

OZ: So tell me about the kind of things that happened at the society.

PD: I can't … do you know it wasn't called a gay society, gay society is a later term so I can't remember what it was called and what I remember is sitting in small rooms, long conversationa – what on earth they were about I can't remember. I don't remember particularly doing things. I do remember one of the guys dressing up a little bit, but it's only like wearing a scarf or something, not very much. It was rather later when we were doing the squatting which I suppose was about a year later, '74 beginning of '75, where there were rather more people who were genuinely 'out' and so were noticeable around the university.

OZ: Was that a comfortable experience to be 'out' around the university for them or was it …?

PD: I think so. I mean obviously … <long pause> I would say it was more about, 'This is it, this is who I am, get used to it.' We had … I suppose there was a close knit group of friends so we were supporting each other and then you had other people around the edge who were less comfortable with it, who might be a bit more open after they'd had a few pints. But we certainly had a couple that I can think of who were very happy to walk around in a fairly obvious fashion. The university is built on a hill outside Canterbury – do you know it, are you familiar with it? No? They built it on farmland overlooking the Cathedral, overlooking the city, and two of the colleges, they have … they are sort of hexagonal built around various courtyards and in the middle part, which is the dining room, has a fabulous picture window, which frames the Cathedral, and then you get this double height staircase and so if you want to make an entrance it is very easy to do so <laughs> and that's what I remember about these guys – making an entrance and causing the entire place to have a collective intake of breath over breakfast or something <laughs>. So … but it wasn't, you know these are very early days really. There was a gay bar in Canterbury but it was fairly of an old-fashioned variety.

OZ: I'm just going to pause it.

<End of recording 1>

OZ: So I'm getting from the squatting obviously that housing is a narrative issue, there's a narrative there as well. So tell me about how you moved from being a squatter in Canterbury to being someone who was very influential in starting up Stonewall Housing?

PD: When I stopped working in Canterbury I was unemployed for a while and then I got a job selling petrochemicals for ICI, which in those days was Britain's biggest company, it has now vanished of course. So I came to work in London and worked for ICI between 1975 and 1980. I loved the experience of living with other people when I was in Canterbury and so I decided that that's what I wanted to do and when my parents retired I persuaded them to lend me some money and with that I bought a house just down the road from here which had, still has I suppose, six bedrooms, and then so I started living with five or six friends which I did for twenty-something years. So I kind of set it up for … in terms of my personal way of living. I had … originally I wanted to do that as a group purchase but in those days you could only get a mortgage based on the most pessimistic view which was that everybody would leave apart from

the lowest earner in the group, so it was completely a non-starter. So I used to be embarrassed about the fact that it was me and then of course I realised as time went on that this meant that if anybody wanted to leave, all they had to do was say, 'I'm off, bye.' Whereas if we'd done it as a group purchase it would have meant everybody had to leave – so I got less embarrassed about it.

Anyway, so I was living like that and I just decided I wanted to do something different. ICI, as a middle-manager, you had to keep moving. You would do a year doing a job or a year-and-a-half or two years and then you would move somewhere else and move somewhere else and so on and it was a whole career progression and I didn't want to leave from London so I decided I would have a rethink about what I wanted to do. Housing had always been an interest so I decided to switch to working in housing and, as it turned out, one of the homelessness organisations gave me a job. So I switched from selling chemicals, petrochemicals, to working with single homeless people in … and I was very fortunate to have that opportunity.

That was in 1980 and the organisation I went to work for was an organisation which is called St. Mungo. It had been through a very rough patch - two months after I started its founding director was at the Old Bailey charged with quite a few counts of fraud and most of the homelessness sector wanted it to shut down so I found myself parachuted into an environment that was extremely hostile and difficult, and also, interestingly, the guy who ran what was then called the 'Campaign For Single Homeless People' I knew as somebody who I used to drink with at the William The Fourth, which is a pub up in Hampstead. And I did not know what he did for a living or anything and all of a sudden, when I ran into him in the loo at the Westminster Cathedral Conference Centre, and I said, 'Oh hi, what are you doing here?' and he said, 'I'm a speaker.' So anyway, after that we had quite a few rows in the pub rather than conversations.

But the world wanted St. Mungo's shut because they thought that the living conditions were absolutely appalling and during the first summer I was there, it was a warm summer, and most of the … in fact all of the other large hostels in London were less than half full and yet the St. Mungo hostel, which housed 530 people, throughout August had less than ten bed spaces available each night. And I just clocked, 'this has something' in the jargon, 'client acceptability,' which for folks who are not used to urine going down the stairs, what they notice is the smell and they are horrified by it, but for people who don't have the kind of choices that the rest of us have, it represented what they chose. So I kind of took it as the goal to improve, not to approach it from the point of view of taking away the option that people had, the one option they had got, but instead to broaden out the housing options that were available to them. And although I have to say it was a joyful day… this was a hostel what was in what was then the old Charing Cross Hospital, it is now Charing Cross Police Station, it still looks the same sort of thing, it's been completely rebuilt though, but in terms of physical conditions, they were pretty appalling. It had been re-opened by the then, the government in about 1976 or something as a big push to try and help getting people off the street but they … so that's what I did.

And I also had the joy of going back into the closet because I had decided that … I was in a BBC programme called, 'Coming Out', which as they put it on the back of the Sunday Times, 'Five, young, gay men come out,' and I was

very proud about this, to be described as young. But at the time it was unusual to be seeing people with full face and all that kind of stuff. And this was transmitted between my first interview and my second interview so I thought, 'Well, if they saw it, they saw it, and if they didn't, they didn't.' As it turned out, they didn't. But quite a few people in ICI did see it, because I was still working for ICI and again, they were incredibly supportive, although I then got the job in homelessness so I resigned nine days after the TV programme and quite a few people thought it was because of the TV programme, which of course it wasn't. So yes, I went back in the closet for a couple of years.

OZ: Why did you do that?

PD: Because my boss was a raving homophobe… and it didn't arise as an issue.

OZ: What kind of work were you doing?

PD: I was the Operations Manager so I was running all of the … everything except the finances. But it was a bit 'seat of the pants.' We were trying to essentially open other hostels and also development … a resettling programme to get people re-housed and so I was doing all of that.

OZ: And how long did you work for them for?

PD: I worked for them until 1984, so four years, and that's the period when I got involved with Stonewall and all that sort of stuff.

OZ: So tell me about your involvement with Stonewall, how that was started?

PD: Well, because I was very … having got involved in short life housing, which all the hostels were all short life accommodation, it wasn't permanent accommodation, not in those days, and there was a whole kind of … the organisations involved with short-life housing… and I became very close friends with one or two of the other people who were involved in that. Can we stop for a moment so I can just let her out?

<Interruption>

PD: There was an, one of the … an organisation that was connected with Shelter was called the Empty Homes Office, something like that, and I got to know a couple of the workers there, both of whom were gay, and again we became close friends and one of them had been working with a number of other people because there were a number of Central London agencies that realised that … there was no provision for homeless, young, lesbians and gay men in London, apart from Prince Arthur House. And Prince Arthur House essentially was not emergency accommodation. So they had decided that they needed to work out what to do and they had commissioned a barrister to give an opinion about how they might go about doing this and essentially the barrister's opinion wasn't very helpful and so all of the youth homelessness agencies vanished into the woodwork, too hot to handle, and that was the point at which I got involved.

OZ: So what was this … I don't understand what the barrister did? Was saying?

PD: He basically said that, 'you are at risk of being prosecuted for conspiracy to corrupt public morals,' and so …. which would apply to both women as well as

men. If you recall in those days the age of consent was 21 so … and you weren't allowed to have sex with more than one person in the house so …[11:55] panic slightly. So in other words, if you … privacy was defined more strictly for gay men than it was for everybody else. So having sex upstairs with your boyfriend while a third person was in the house was not private. Whereas if you were a straight couple it would be private. So that was the environment in those days and the barrister, I was just briefly scanning the notes before you came so I got the summary of what his opinion was, but essentially it was, 'This is not simply about the age of consent or the Sexual Offences Act, this is about a conspiracy to corrupt public morals and so you will be damned for everybody,' and although you would need to go obviously through the routine of liaising with the police and working with the police and all that kind of stuff, nevertheless there is a big risk. And this caused all of the supposedly right on agencies to evaporate. And I got involved just at that point, I was invited by one of the guys to join the group and so I did and we decided that we would do two things: That we would set up a secret hostel out of sight and we would set up an above board project that we would then wrestle through the system to get acceptance, and the above board project eventually became Stonewall Housing Association.

OZ: So tell me about, first of all, the above board project I guess that you set up in the early days when there were two projects. What was considered above board and what was it doing?

PD: Oh no, no, no. It was … essentially we created a housing association and then we had to apply to what was then the Greater London Council for funding to support the operation of the housing association and we had to get the approval of Islington Council as an approved manager of short life housing in order to get housing to provide, and then also get the acceptance of a housing association to provide the accommodation. There had been an initiative in 1980 called 'the Hostels Initiative' from the government and so there was money available to build housing … shared housing for hostels which is what the early hostels for Stonewall were. But the above board bit was about actually getting if you like through the bureaucracy in order to establish an accommodation for young homeless lesbians and gay men, that was clearly in the public domain. And then, as I said, alongside that we created a completely secret one which opened in about … at the beginning of 1983 and I would guess survived for about a year, maybe 6 months, maybe a year. It was called Full Out.

OZ: And what was the aim of Full Out?

PD: Emergency accommodation for young homeless lesbians and gay men. The same aim but just done out of sight.

OZ: And how did it kind of, how did it get known about as it was out of sight? How was its network?

PD: Oh gosh, I can't remember <Laughs>. But it did get referrals and there were people living there. Good Lord I can't remember.

OZ: And was it pretty full?

PD: It must have been. It was in a short life house up in Islington. Essentially we were able to get support from what was then Islington … the short life

organisation in Islington so obviously they knew what it was about but it wasn't, it wasn't done in liaison with the police and all that kind of stuff.

And then the first step with Stonewall Housing Association was becoming an approved organisation by Islington Council and the … I was always rather pleased with the name, I have to say, this was one thing I left the organisation with, and when it was approved by Islington, the reaction of course was those in the know knew what it was, because obviously if you are gay you know what a stonewall is and those that didn't know thought, 'What a marvellous name for a housing association,' so it actually, you know there were no barriers to it being approved because it was approved as 'Stonewall Housing Association.' It wasn't approved as, 'this lesbian and gay organisation.' That was the crucial difference, so it got approved status through Islington so the first building was in … I want to call it Islington Church Street but it isn't, but it's something like that. It's kind of quite close to where the Town Hall is in Islington. It was a block of flats. It was the first housing that the organisation managed, just short life.

And then the application went through to the GLC and I have to say even with Ken Livingstone's prior knowledge and support it still didn't get through at the first hurdle and they referred it to the ILEA'S psychologists, psychiatrists, something like that and as a result of this person's report, the GLC did not approve it at the first go. It resulted, oh I know what it was, it resulted in the largest report they ever considered. But anyway, at the second attempt it did go through and so it got support from the GLC.

OZ: The second project?

PD: Yes, Stonewall this is, as distinct from Full Out.

OZ: And so how big was the first house, the one in Islington?

PD: What the first Stonewall building? I've got a recollection of it being maybe eight, maybe ten flats. I think it was in two houses, divided into flats and it was just occupied temporarily. Something of that sort of order.

OZ: And by short life you mean … is it a couple of days, couple of months?

PD: No, no, no. Short life housing, sorry, is like where with squatting, you don't occupy it permanently. You are using it temporarily because the Council owns it and hasn't got the money to do it up or a housing association owns it and hasn't got the money to do it up. There was a lot of housing that was bought up in the late '70s, early '70s, the 1970s. It was bought either compulsory, mostly compulsory I suppose, and then it had to wait until the money was available in order to refurbish it and so it was a question of using that property temporarily and indeed you still see it happening in different places. Lambeth – you know I don't know whether you have read the stories about people who have been occupying properties for so long then the council's completely forgotten that they own it and that sort of thing. Well it all stems from the same sort of era.

And there were … essentially the short life was the licensed version of squatting so it was putting it onto an appropriate footing and you would pay a small license fee. Other than that, you were responsible for all of the outgoings and sometimes buildings needed to be refurbished and sometimes

not. But there was a whole system that went with it so if you could … if you had a house for a year you were allowed to spend a certain amount of money on it, if you had a house for three years or five years then you could spend more money on it. There was a whole system that went along with the sort of temporary use of dwellings before they were permanently refurbished, and a lot of this was used for temporary accommodation for homeless people. So … and that's what … and it was owned by Islington Council and so it was licensed to Stonewall Housing Association but I really can't remember how long for and all that stuff, I just don't know.

OZ: And was there still the same … you and your two sort of friends/colleagues?

PD: Oh no, no, no. We had created … with Stonewall it was a creation of a group of people and a proper management committee and all that stuff.

OZ: So tell me about the organisational structure of the Stonewall Housing Institute?

PD: It was a group of interested people who mostly worked in housing who guided the organisation through until it got going. I dropped out around that point so I was only involved over the first year or two.

OZ: And how many of you were there?

PD: Can I look at my notes?

OZ: Yeah.

PD: There's the original writing paper.

OZ: Oh wow. I like the design a lot, it's great.

PD: Here we go <counting> there's a list of 13 people here and so this would have been about 1983 and most of them worked in housing.

OZ: So it had just a kind of management … a management group of 13 and then did you also have the kind of counselling element that there is now?

PD: No, no, no, there was nothing. When it first started it was one worker at the block of flats. But, as I said, I dropped out in about '84, so pretty early on, so certain … I don't think there were permanent staff before I dropped out – I don't think. I … can't quite remember to be honest.

OZ: And what led you to drop out?

PD: I had too many other commitments, or just literally too many commitments and I had to let something go and what was running along in parallel to this was the original London and Lesbian and Gay Centre and I was very involved with that and it was kind of a toss up over I had to give up one of them, I just simply didn't have the time. So I stayed with the Lesbian and Gay Centre and surrendered my involvement in Stonewall.

OZ: Were you sad to leave?

PD: … oh yes, yes but I just didn't have a choice really. I just didn't have the time, I couldn't … it wasn't fair because I didn't have the time I was able to give to it and also because you know, by that point, it had got going if you like.

OZ: And what was life like in London at that time, in the early '80s? As a place to live?

PD: Well I thought it was wonderful, I think. I had made some really good friends and I've never been a great scene person so actually the kind of friends that I made through … I describe myself as being a bureaucrat – I'm very happy sitting around with a group of people and discussing, 'what are we going to do about this,' and then working out and getting on and doing it. And so being involved with a homelessness organisation like Stonewall is right up my street and I suppose … so I knew a lot of people who worked in this field and so getting people to get involved in it was relatively easy and I suppose I had a great network of friends.

For the Lesbian and Gay Centre, we met once every eight days for three years – that was the extent of the commitment which perhaps illustrates why I just had to give up Stonewall. And it was once every eight days so that the day of the week rotated and we met at different people's houses in order to get everything sorted out. And that was just … it was a completely joyful experience, we never, ever disagreed on gender lines. Because I don't know whether you know …have you come across the Lesbian and Gay Centre? Ever heard about it?

OZ: I haven't. I was going to ask you to tell me about that.

PD: OK. Started by the same person, or certainly my involvement came about as the same person because he had discovered that the Greater London Council were keen to support a community centre and as it was something I really thought was really important he said to me, 'I've got something I want to talk about,' and I said, 'I'm too busy,' and he said, 'it's a possibility of a community centre,' and I said, 'tomorrow?' And so we met, and we discussed it and then a few days later we wrote the proposal in my bedroom and it went to what was the …. The GLC had a Gay Working Party in those days and so it went to the Gay Working Party and the GLC agreed to fund a development worker for a year and so the project moved forward. And then Mrs Thatcher, bless her, had a … there was something, some kind of under-spend which suddenly meant that capital was suddenly available to councils in about, what must have been, January, December 2000 … no, December 1982, January 1983, so suddenly the GLC had capital available to spend providing it was spent by 31st March. So we were able to find the building and buy it by 31st March, and this was a five story building in Calcott Street, which is just by Farringdon Station. And I was just looking through my diary to get my dates sorted out and I came across the entry for when we actually first went to visit it. Then it opened for business in … three years later in 1985.

OZ: What kind of things went on there?

PD: At the Lesbian and Gay Centre? All sorts of things. It had a café on the ground floor and a book shop. It had a disco space and a bar in the basement. It had a women's space on the first floor, it had a series of offices on the second floor … no series of meeting rooms on the second floor and a series of offices on the top floor. And there were a number of organisations

that were based there and there would be all kinds of meetings and discos, performances from people like Big Nancies, who were just a bunch of gay guys who used to put on a show once a month, always very under-rehearsed. And as far as I was concerned, it was a completely joyful place to be. Sadly .. those were the days when everything was … they were all collectives. So the first staffing group was a 'collective' and this was, if you like, the first mistake because subsequently people have realised collectives really don't work, you have to have some kind of management structure. And also, it was an incredibly representative management committee, which when we put it together we were very pleased about it because community organisations get very, very touchy about you know, feeling represented. But sadly, it was wonderfully representative but really not very good at managing anything so it started life with both hands tied behind its back and … yeah. But as far as I'm concerned it was wonderful.

OZ: And so it's quite interesting that Thatcher, who is normally regarded as the devil of social progressiveness or whatever, has actually been quite facilitative of something very positive in the gay community.

PD: By accident completely, and of course then shut the GLC because of its support for projects like the Lesbian and Gay Centre.

OZ: So politically it was a difficult time to live in?

PD: Yes. She didn't … had she known that money was going in that direction I don't think she would have said, 'please, here, let me sign the cheque,' in fact, quite the reverse. No, no, no, no, no, it was tricky of course, it wasn't a very … the GLC was, of course, an oasis and the Gay Working Party was chaired by a guy called Andy Harris, who was a GLC councillor. It was attached to their Grants Sub-Committee and it was … so it was … I don't know, there were conversations about all kinds of things, whether they were about discrimination or whatever. So there would be very lively discussions in one of the GLC committee rooms with 30 odd or 40 people there.

So on that level, it was a very exciting time – at least I thought so. But it was also … as time went on, of course, it was the feeling of, 'this can't last,' and, of course, it didn't. Because Ken Livingstone was leader, he became leader, and John McDonnell was the chair of finance. Have you come across John McDonnell? He is the MP for somewhere like Hayes or Hounslow or somewhere in West London and he is very left-wing. Let's put it this way - he's not a Blair/Brown supporter. And so yeah, it was a very exciting time and everyone was incredibly supportive, so we did actually get … it felt like we were getting lots done.

Then obviously as time went on, Mrs Thatcher then demolished the GLC and then along came Section 28, so … But I have to say, for me personally, at that point the real … downer for me was that the Labour party voted in favour of it and so that, for me, was really a kind of signal of, 'we've got to get on with it and do this ourselves, the political route is not going to get us anywhere for the time being.' So, personally, I got much more involved in what became Edward Carpenter Community. So I've shied away from other kind of Lesbian and Gay stuff, until I've just recently come back to get involved in Stonewall.

OZ: And how did Section 28 impact on the kind of things you were doing? I guess at the time it would have been the community centre because that …? I

mean my understanding of Section 28, because I was in school when it was kind of going on so I know it as being the book in Haringey and like teachers not allowed to say that gay is OK and anything like that, but I guess it had a far wider reach?

PD: I think … it's funny, see I look at it the other way round – as far as I'm concerned its main effect was in schools and then you saw it in other local authorities who became kind of touchy about anything, about supporting lesbian and gay organisations. But, as I understand correctly, actually for a reason that I don't think I can tell you exactly why, it didn't actually apply to school but everybody thought it did and they all kind of self-censored and everything. And I think it was quite cleverly worded, the whole thing about, 'promoting a pretend family relationship,' or something – the words it used, it was quite clever. So …

OZ: So did things like the community centre or Stonewall Housing suffer as a result of Section 28?

PD: I don't really know about Stonewall, I kind of watched it from afar after I left, I mean obviously I knew people who were involved in it from time to time. I'm not sure that it suffered particularly. It perhaps didn't grow as much as perhaps people might have liked but I just don't know whether there were … just how … in a kind of real … their real experience of feeling under threat as a result of it.

The Lesbian and Gay Centre came to grief in about 1987-'88. Sadly, they managed to recruit somebody who had their hand in the till rather more, to such a degree that it just didn't survive. As it happens, my last partner used to be the General Manager and so I had dropped out because he was the General Manager. So we had gone all the way through the routine of raising the finance in order to buy the building, because it was owned … the freehold was owned by the GLC, and then went to the London Residuary Body, and then we successfully bid for and raised the money. So, I have a life experience which was, as I said, every eight days for three years to get the place open, then we managed to get the money, managed to buy it and then, as far as I'm concerned, people who should have known better then succeeded in recruiting somebody, and they did it more than once.

So it's an area where I'm very sore, I'm not a good person to talk to because they fired my partner and the only time the place made money was when he ran it. I mean he's not an easy character but at the same time, they … basically it became a huge burden for the people who were running it. They were a very small group and they were incredibly overburdened and they simply couldn't take the step back necessary in order to work out what to do about it, sadly. So we lost it as a facility. And we were so … you know we used to be up until midnight drafting the numbers for the business plan in order to get the finance, in order to get … it took so much energy and effort and having succeeded then people threw it away. So, yes, I'm not a hugely good subject on that one.

OZ: That was a massive blow I guess for the gay community as well.

PD: Well I think so – you know about £1 million quid was invested in it back in the early '80s, it was a very substantial building. I think at the same time, there was … I mean we were let down in the end by the GLC because they … or

what became the London Boroughs Grant Scheme because we were then dependent on … for revenue finance from the London Boroughs Grant Scheme and whereas a community centre would normally be located in a community and so would normally get support in respect of the local community, we weren't in that category and we weren't Asian or … and so they chopped off the funding too fast in my opinion – it was very difficult to survive. But, at the same time, the people who became the directors became unassailable in their position, they were unmoveable because the Constitution had all been changed so it was impossible to get rid of them and then they made some unwise decisions and then they didn't tell anybody until it was far too late. So it was just like a complete catalogue. So even when it became public knowledge there was a problem, by that time it was too late. So it was a real … a sad loss. Especially for folks like me who thought, 'this is just what London needs,' because I'm not a fan of the commercial scene. You know, its whole raison d'être was about alternatives for the commercial scene. So it was a sadness.

Anyway, back to Stonewall - that's been a joy, the fact that Stonewall has survived. Do you want to … shall we stop for a moment and I'll turn some lights on?

OZ: Yeah that will be good.

<end of recording 2>

PD: And I've got something else to say which was, of course, I've talked about the Lesbian and Gay Centre, what came pretty shortly after that was HIV and Aids and so that then became my next concern. So, I suppose like a lot of lesbians and gay men, that then consumed my energies because I was involved in the creation of a housing association to house people with HIV, called Strutton, and that's the other place where I then put my energies, if you like, in this broad arena and that was from about 1987 onwards.

OZ: If we come back to that.

PD: Sure

OZ: The next sort of topic I'd like to talk about is your impression of the impact of Stonewall Housing on the LGBT community kind of from when it opened and then I guess carrying forward but probably more the time that you were working there rather than …

PD: I have the impression that for the work that Stonewall Housing does it's very important but it's relatively few people and so it's provided a really important service but it's … but it's a shame that it's not been available to more people. And, also, that in order to continue, Stonewall has been driven towards people who are … have multiple needs. So just being gay or just being a lesbian is not enough in order to be housed by Stonewall and that's a kind of inevitable push that would have … you know has happened across the board. But I don't have a sense of the outcomes, I don't know the outcome stories for people to know the significance.

OZ: When it first started, was it … could you just be gay and they would house you?

PD: When it first started homeless and lesbian or gay would have been sufficient criteria, although it was always envisaged that it would be for people, if you like, who were moving within that orbit: So were in touch with picking the advice centre, were in touch with homeless advice switchboard, housing advice switchboard, were connected with Centrepoint – so in other words they were within the homeless … they were already homeless and would therefore provide a supportive environment for them to live temporarily. But I think as time has gone on, those criteria have got stricter, I think. That's my impression anyway.

OZ: And so how long did people spend?

PD: I don't know.

OZ: No idea. And did you ever keep in touch or follow up cases when people moved on?

PD: Not of people who moved on. I've had ... over the years had contact from time to time with people, people who worked there not people who were residents. So … yeah.

OZ: And what would be a kind of, a driver to moving on? What sort of things would cause people to progress?

PD: I would have thought, probably, just getting older. I don't know what the criteria had become so … but my guess is that people were staying for somewhere between six months and two years, something like that. And my … I would also guess that the main difficulty with moving on is the difficulty of finding somewhere else to live and so it would be more driven by availability of somewhere else than it would the person is ready to live somewhere else or live on their own, so that would be my guess as to how it went.

I think, for me, what's been really important is that people have stuck with the idea that it's valuable to provide housing situations for people who are lesbian or gay. And, so if you like Stonewall has continued … or Stonewall Housing has continued to be the beacon for that and as … I tend to agree with the view that, finally, people are beginning to realise this is an issue and I suppose that there are those of us who knew it was an issue but we were not very good at convincing people of it 25 years ago. And …. yeah. What else should I say? I suppose I am glad that as time has gone on, Stonewall has broadened out to provide an advice service to everybody – I'm not sure that's widely understood or widely known about and, of course, is now thinking about housing for other age groups.

OZ: So do you think that the housing association had any wider impact beyond its personal … the people involved in it? Was it supported for example? People knew it existed. Would you have that impression say?

PD: Sorry ask me that question again?

OZ: You mentioned that kind of beyond the immediate people who lived there, it had, probably, not too much impact but I'm just wondering whether there were wider impacts – like people, kind of although they didn't live there, they knew that they had this sort of option and they knew that this kind of service was

being provided and it kind of represented the forming of kind of a wider structure?

PD: I've not felt widely aware of Stonewall Housing Association so … obviously I've known it's there but I don't feel, until relatively recently, I've heard that much about it from other connections and I would say … so I would say for long time, I didn't get the impression that the organisation was clearly articulating its reason why it was so important. But that could just be that I wasn't in the right place, wasn't part of the target audience – I just don't know. Obviously because I was involved I knew there was this thing called Stonewall Housing, obviously Stonewall Lobby Group makes much more noise so people tend to be aware of Stonewall but not aware of Stonewall Housing I would say.

OZ: Do you think they better articulate their reason for being there?

PD: Yes I think so. Well that's the impression I have. I also think there's more evidence now. I did a module … part of … the reason I came back to be involved with Stonewall is that last year I wrote a module for the Department of Community and Local Government National Youth Homelessness Scheme and this is a scheme to provide … to make sure there are opportunities for homeless teenagers everywhere in the country so that they don't have to live in bed and breakfast. And there was a big push last year, no year before last, and I was involved because I wrote the module on short term hostel accommodation originally and then they realised that LGBT issues are not special needs, you know they are like being black and ethnic minority, it stretches across everything that might also be a special need but it's not just a special need. So I was asked if I would write this, write a module and that's how I came to be talking to Bob Green and a few other projects around the country. And as a result of researching that, I came across the research that's available here in this country and more so available in the United States. I just think that slowly that message is getting out.

I don't know the extent to which some of the material that, for example Stonewall, has published – how wide an audience that has got, I just don't know. It's obviously helped with … people are increasingly realising that it is an issue. I think people are still …. if you say to them in bald terms, because the numbers aren't here, the numbers from New York – a survey of 4,000 homeless youth, anywhere between 25 and 40% say they are lesbian or gay – clearly overrepresented. But those statistics are not available for this country although there are beginnings of evidence of it. And now, when you quote those statistics people go, 'ah.' Whereas a few years ago they would be … well I can think of somebody questioning, 'why does there need to be provision?' They can well accept there should be a house for women only, they can well accept that there will be a house for people who have got mental health difficulties, they can well accept that there should be a house for people who are black, but when it comes to lesbian or gay – 'what?' They are just not getting what it is all about and I think life has changed on that score – people are now beginning to realise it's an issue. And I suppose the material that Stonewall has produced must have helped with that.

OZ: So what would your assessment be of the situation for young lesbian and gay people who are in need of housing at the moment?

PD: It's quite difficult. There are only … there are very few dedicated services around the country. So St. Basils in Birmingham for instance, Outpost in Newcastle and obviously Stonewall in London and I think probably there's concern … there's increasing awareness that there is a problem. There is always sensitivity about, 'what's the right way to provide for people?' So that's actually, that's not only the professionals, that's not Joe Public, that's actually lesbians and gay men. You know, 'I don't want to be ghettoised, why would I want to live with them for, I'm fine thank you.' And then other people who would recognise immediately, 'actually, I would really like to live with other gay men.' So, and of course, where there's what's called floating support which is where there's support, like a support worker who will go and visit you in your own home, is probably a much more acceptable approach than actually everybody having to live together because it's much more flexible so that's for example the approach that St. Basils take. And I think … if there's going to be further development it's more likely to be like that.

Another thing that is actually tricky at the moment is the whole thing about the desire not to compartmentalise and I can't remember what's the correct way of phrasing this but essentially, if we have a Somali group, if we have an Egyptian Group, if we have a Palestinian … we can't keep on having separate facilities for … and so the idea that if you've got a lesbian and gay one it's separating, but you've really got to take a more comprehensive approach. And that's kind of drifting around amongst, in public policy questions.

OZ: And going back to the … was it Stutton?

PD: Strutton.

OZ: Strutton?

PD: Yes.

OZ: Tell me about the story behind that?

PD: Back in about 1980 … well let's say '85/'86, HIV or Aids as it was then, was considered to be a medical question and if there was any question of what sort of provision should be made available for people, well it's a hospital bed or it's a hospice, now that's it. And so, if you like, the first point in the discussion was to be saying, 'actually, this is a housing issue. People need to be housed, they are not quite dead yet.' Although in those days, of course, the average life expectancy was about 11 months. And so it was a battle to get accepted that it's appropriate to make a housing provision and that's what Strutton Housing Association set out to do and started life providing accommodations very similar to Stonewall, except it was self contained, everything was self contained flats grouped together – sorry, sometimes grouped and sometimes scattered flats, and obviously, initially, was mostly for gay men. As time went on, it became much more mixed particularly as most of the money available for developing new accommodation was for family units, so obviously that would mean that families would be not gay men. So it eventually grew to having about, something … about 450 units of accommodation.

OZ: And whereabouts were they?

PD: All over London, in about 25 London Boroughs. And eventually they merged with another organisation, about three years ago now – 2006, yeah that was three years ago. I suppose like a lot of people, you know you are a bunch of gay men and lesbians who were … tackling, what we thought was, a most important issue for us to tackle. Now I have no idea the extent to which this impinged on Stonewall Housing or not, but I suppose now I think about it, it must have done.

OZ: And you were involved in setting Strutton up?

PD: Yes. But that's just like Stonewall. You know creating a housing association and convincing people to give us properties.

OZ: And how many were there doing that?

PD: The same sort of number of people.

OZ: Was it similar people to who you started up?

PD: Yep. In fact, only, on this list only one other but yeah, very similar, very similar people. Gay men and lesbians working in a supported housing movement and taking it on as an issue. In fact, what … not entirely gay men and lesbians actually, there were some straight folks as well, let's be fair. Essentially, the issue of Aids and housing, as I was describing earlier, was about people not realising this is a housing issue and essentially the people who were concerned about it divided into two, so there were a bunch of us who wanted to do something about it in terms of making provisions, so we became Strutton Housing Association and then there were another bunch of folks who wanted to campaign about the issues and they became the Aids and Housing Project and I suppose you get a lot of that sort of distinction in a lot of areas.

OZ: But you worked quite closely I guess, the two groups?

PD: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. And …. Yes.

OZ: And how did the campaigning run?

PD: Well that was about convincing all housing organisations to make provision and it was partly about, which of course is still even a problem even today, it's about stigma and discrimination. So educating people that you can't catch it from a glass and all of that and trying to tackle some of the worst excesses of anti-social behaviour. So it was a strand that was about education and it was a strand about getting people to recognise that housing was an option and then I suppose also convincing the kind of health part of the world that it's much cheaper to keep someone in house than it is to keep them in hospital and all that stuff.

OZ: And what's Strutton doing today if it's still …?

PD: No Strutton has now merged with another homelessness organisation called Hestia and of which people with HIV are getting on to half of the people that they house. But they also house other people with other support needs, like drug users and ex-prisoners and so on and the reason that Strutton merged with Hestia was because they had had experience of working with people with HIV. Essentially, of course, what's happened is, with the advent of

combination therapy, it's … most people are able to live perfectly ordinary lives now so the kind of reason for Strutton disappeared, thank goodness.

OZ: And what would be your assessment of the whole LGBT housing situation today? Is it much better than it was in the '70s?

PD: It's much better <laughs>. I was reading on a … I think it's Care Services Improvement Programme, something or other on a website about a description of, 'how is it for young lesbians and gay men now?' talking about teenagers. And the person … essentially their assessment was it's much worse than it used to be and I thought, 'I don't think so.' And their argument was, 'in my day, people came out when they were 21, 22, 18,19, 20, 21 … essentially we were economically independent of our parents. These days people come out at 13,14, 15 and they are still economically dependent on their parents and they are still at school so they have a completely different set of issues. And yes, I understand that difference but it doesn't feel like it's worse than it used to be, they're different, and I actually think there are far more support opportunities available to people now.

And it's much less likely that you will think you are the only one in the world. It doesn't of course means that it can't be horribly homophobic in places that are not close to cities, but I do think, in particular I suppose with the internet.

And also we are seeing more and more ordinary people so … and that for me is actually the major change. I have always been a subscriber, once the penny has dropped, that, 'what is the most important thing you can do?' Well actually, just be yourself and then over time, things will change, and they have. Does that answer your question? Am I answering your question?

OZ: Yes.

I was with … I was at Gays the Word last week, I love going to their book launches and they had Elizabeth Wilson, it's over there - a thriller set in Hampstead, but her partner is Angela Mason who used to be the Chief Executive of Stonewall, as in the lobby group. And someone was asking her the question about, 'why did things change when they did?' and I said, 'that's easy, basically people like us got into positions of power,' and she said, 'ah,' and then she gave, of course, the rather more considered response of, 'we had just gone through 18 years of Tory rule and life had moved on for people and the Tories didn't keep up with it. So actually when we changed governments it meant that everything can change relatively quickly because actually the rest of the world has changed already.' And I'm sure that's right. But that sense of, a life now is completely unrecognisable as to how it was 20 or 30 years ago. And I was hearing recently that there is something like a cycle of about 20 years which seemed to make some sort of sense to me, that really we don't remember how it was.

And I subscribe to the view, I should say I was at a Round Table discussion for a project on intergenerational activity in Brussels just before Christmas and there were people there from 28 countries, this is an ILGA [IGLEUO 25.43] project, ILGA do you know? International and Lesbian and Gay Association, they are a lobby group across the world, well the European part and there's also a young person's part, earnest, young people with glasses like me, or like I used to be. And they were doing a year long project on intergenerational work and so here we had, 28 people from, it wasn't quite 28

countries but quite a few and … there were a lot of people from the UK who were trying to be terribly helpful to the people from the Baltic States who said, 'we don't have any older lesbians or gay men, we can't find them. They are all completely in the closet.' And of course I was struck by the world here has just changed out of all proportion. And interestingly the co-ordinator of the project, she made the observation that the UK is streaks ahead of anywhere else in Europe and we don't often get that perspective. We always think life is so much worse here than it is elsewhere but you know I think it's true, life is much better.

OZ: Is there any major points that you can think of that I should have asked you about?

<laughter>

Or that you would like to talk about?

PD: Well my current dilemmas are understanding how young people experience growing up being lesbian or gay and also understanding this thing called 'queer theory' although I think I am letting the second one of those two go. But … and I am a great fan of intergenerational activity or … but in the sense of everybody learning which I suppose is what this is about. But I found it something of a struggle to actually begin to understand how it is now.

My favourite, one of my favourite books is a book called Uncharted Lives which is by a guy called Stanley Segal, an American Psychotherapist, who discovered that at something like age 38 that he's gay. So he leaves his wife and child in New York and travels to San Francisco via a disastrous affair in Florida or somewhere, but he writes about it, he's a family therapist and so it's his sort of thing, but he just writes about this gay world that he just discovers as a kind of innocent, wide eyed, not so young boy and the story that he tells for me was utterly recognisable of the world that I know. And towards the end of the book he says, 'young people say it's not like that anymore,' and I am puzzled by that because it reflects my experience so closely. So that's what I'm interested in, is understanding if it's not like that, how is it? And funnily enough I met him at a summit meeting just outside New York, two or three years ago, and so it was this immense joy of meeting one of my favourite … in fact a number of my favourite authors – it was a Gay Spirit Culture Summit so gay spiritual kind of stuff and once again, that's just what he was talking about – people say it's not like that now.

And I think that's what I get out of a lot of the queer theory is, 'I'm not this, I'm not that, I don't want to be categorised,' and especially some of the stuff I read not from the UK and I am kind of screaming about, 'tell me how it is for you? Don't tell me what you are not. Tell me how you think about yourself, tell me about how you describe yourself to others?' And that for me is a gap that's missing. Will that do, I better stop otherwise this poor old sod who is transcribing will be at it forever.

OZ: Excellent.

<end of recording 3>

OZ: OK yeah we're going.

PD: Thank you. Sorry I've just remembered that something I probably should have spoken a little bit more about is Prince Arthur House. I think I mentioned it in passing.

At the same time that I started to work at St. Mungo, via the Quakers, because I'm a Quaker, I was asked if I would join the Management Committee of Prince Arthur House and Prince Arthur House is a homeless project for people between 17 and 25 and it happens to be just down the road from where I live. And it was created by the Quakers and … but everybody … pretty much everybody who was involved in it lived within about ¼ of a mile from it, just down in Maldon Road. So I got involved in that at the same time.

Now back in those days, Prince Arthur was the only hostel in London that would house lesbian or gay couples and, in fact, it was one of the barriers for the funding for Stonewall because one of the senior officers at the Greater London Council took the view, 'because a lesbian or a gay couple can be housed at Prince Arthur House, what is the need for separate accommodation?' Anyway, sorry that's as an aside.

The Prince Arthur was, once again, a kind of wonderful go ahead project which had a number of other people who were involved in it and I suppose at the same time as … what happened was Prince Arthur became independent of the Quakers in about 1983, something like that, so we are in the same sort of period, yes, and has continued always to be very open to lesbians and gay men. But it was another resource that wasn't actually specifically lesbian or gay and certainly very important to me personally. As much as anything else because it was always very important to have residents involved and very carefully involved, and one lesson that I learned as a result of that was that everybody has lives and they don't always like to be involved in the management of things. So it's a mistake to presume that residents want to be involved in the management. But the management group was a fantastic group of people and, in fact, for a while it was what were known as, '50% inside managers and 50% outside managers.' That is no longer the case now though and it's grown into an organisation and its name has just gone completely out of my head, but it's still based … or one of the hostels is still in the same hostel on the Wendling Estate. OK, thanks.

<end of recordings>