

Hello Roger, it's good to be here and talk to you today. I am just wondering, when did you first come to Brighton?

I think it would be better to start where I first heard of Brighton. My Nan used to talk about it quite a lot, coming from London as she did. Granddad and Nan used to come down to Brighton quite a lot, I guess it was in the late 1930's and 1940's. Obviously Granddad spent three or four years overseas in Malta during the war but they would talk about walking from The Pier to Rottingdean and they talked about the blind school and many of the sights inside the town. So my Nan used to tell me about Brighton. I first came here was when I was around about 20, in 1990 to visit a friend that I met at University called Toby Rakes, and we came into Brighton. My first experience of Brighton was the Marina, not the Pier or the Pavilion, but the Marina and its Asda, which was an interesting lateral introduction to Brighton. I moved down here because I got a place at the University of Sussex to do my teacher training post-graduate course in 1996, so that's when I moved down here to live with friends and to study at the university and I have been here ever since.

(2.00) I am just wondering because that is covering a large chunk of history there, going right back to your grandparents, what kind of a reputation do you think Brighton had for your Grandparents?

It was an exciting day out, they liked dancing, so I presume, although I don't know, they attended tea dances and other things like that at the Hippodrome or the numerous other dancehalls that were in Brighton at the time, I didn't really talk to them about that. Because when I had a conversation with them, it was the first time I heard about Brighton, so it was quite young, I was quite young then, maybe 7 perhaps.

My Grandad, was a little bit of a, people in London might describe him as a little bit of a 'Wide Boy' so I presume he quite like the seedy atmosphere. As for it being the den of inequity, my grandparents didn't mention that at all, that side of it in any way whatsoever other than it was a fun seaside town, place to be. I am sure they were well aware of all the things that potentially go in Brighton, but I don't really think they had any prejudice about that in any way whatsoever.

The title of this project is Queer in Brighton, I am just wondering what that means to you.

I like living in Brighton as it does attract people that perhaps don't fit in in other communities around the country. So it is a place that has radical, liberal and left wing viewpoints and alternative lifestyles and people I feel are more free to choose to live their lives as they see fit rather than feeling like they have to conform to a certain stereotype.

What are those stereotypes that you are thinking of?

Well I think places are different; quite a lot of places are places where people bring up families and have children so they are more conventional perhaps in that sense. For gay people family isn't necessarily something that happens, in fact it is a lot more infrequent than it is common, so I guess living somewhere where things aren't conventional in that sense you do not stand out as much. It is easier to choose your own path without people making judgements about the way you should live your life. However saying that I have

been to very many places and lived in many many places and I don't think 'conventional' is a pressure is as strong as what I suggested when I first started talking about that.

I am just wondering, how you identify yourself?

Well I am human, and through that I am male, although I would describe quite a lot of my characteristics are both female and male, I don't feel pressured to be one thing or the other. In terms of nationality, I would see myself as citizen of the world first, then perhaps European then perhaps local and then I would see myself as British whatever that means. But culturally I suppose am obviously local,. I do see myself as a Londoner in Brighton who has been to other places. I lived in Bristol for a while and then in Southampton and you pick up a little of each place that you live in I guess

I am just wondering do you identify yourself as being Queer/ Gay/ any other terms?

I don't like those labels.

Do you want to say a little bit about that

Yeah, I don't like them because I am not sure what they mean and I am not sure how they apply to me or anyone else. I still haven't really come to an answer in terms of whether that of a person is fixed, or whether it is the same for everyone. To what degree people are gay or straight or bisexual or whether it is all just behaviours, environment and to a certain extent choice. Politically I have in the past defined myself as gay or as queer to stand up against the sort of oppression that the group of people have historically felt but in the terms of the word would I use it to apply to myself, well I wouldn't use the word gay but I wouldn't use the word white to describe myself, I don't like those classifications.

Do you think you could tell me a little bit about your day life your night life, possibly something about your work? Are you a different person at work? Are you always the same person in different different circumstances?

I think people put on different faces in different environments don't they and obviously I am a teacher and I have been a teacher for 15 years as an occupation and when you are in a place of work you have a professional attribute that you are supposed to adopt and obviously when you are teaching young people you have got to take a mature responsible adult position so I guess not every particular aspect of one's personality is expressed in a place of work. Is that radically different from who I am? No I don't think so, you can express different facets of yourself in situations. I guess that also means people behave differently when they're with their family and when they're with their friends.

People aren't fixed.

Are your colleagues or your students aware of your sexuality?

My colleagues are aware, it is not something I choose to hide but it is not something I go banging a huge tambourine or drum about. I think one's sexuality and who one chooses to sleep with or have relationships with is a very small aspect of one's total humanity. In regards the students it's not really appropriate for adults to discuss personal life. So it would be unacceptable, I think, to discuss any of their relationships with students. There's a professional boundary there that would be crossed. But do the students know? I suspect they do. I'm not someone that attempts to hide things in a closet of any kind.

Have you experienced any homophobia?

In a school context, quite a lot, yes. Directed personally at me? No. On a day to day basis you do encounter quite a lot of the use of the word 'gay' in a negative fashion. I always challenge it. Mainly motivated in a fear about themselves, and uncertainty about themselves as young people, more than anything else. It's not about hatred as such, but it can produce quite an unpleasant climate and obviously if you transpose it, the racist terms starting with 'n' and 'p' which I shudder to even think about saying, it does create quite a negative environment, especially for students coming to terms with their sexuality.

Why do you think the word 'gay' is used in this way in school environments when there are increasingly positive images of LGBTI people in the media and popular culture?

There may be positive images of people who have alternative sexualities and lifestyles in the media and maybe there are in magazines and maybe there are in soaps and TV programmes and films and cinema but that's only one aspect of culture. I don't think it's changed very much in sport, in football, rugby. How many out athletes are there? If you go along statistical lives and you think 10% of the population are gay or bisexual, the fact that there aren't any gay athletes out there speaks volumes. And then there's the arena of music. Quite a lot of music that's listened to by young males tends to be quite unreconstructed as well. So there have been quite a lot of changes but it hasn't yet pervaded everything. There's still a long way to go and you can see that not only in the acceptance of gay people but in the promotion of women's rights and the treatment of people from different ethnicities.

Can you tell me about the places you might meet other gay people, friends. Where you socialise. Do you relate to the gay "community" of Brighton.

I don't particularly like what is perceived as the main gay culture in Brighton or for that matter any other place which revolves around specifically gay pubs and gay nightclubs. I think gayness in those senses has been commodified and turned into something you purchase by going somewhere and drinking. It is quite a narrow avenue to express oneself and whilst it was quite enticing in one's 20s and early 30s at the moment I shudder to think about going to gay nightclubs or gay pubs specifically. I go to the Bar Renee (????) which is supposedly a mixed place. I think most places in Kemptown are mixed. Yes, it is a pub but you do get a very broad spectrum of people there, both male and female from lots of different backgrounds and quite a lot of gay people go there, so you can meet all sorts in an environment that's much more relaxed than places that are a bit more famous I suppose. Places that you would go, like Revenge and the Bulldog and pubs like that.

That's not to criticise them. I did enjoy going when I did and they are very much like the venues you find in Bristol or Southampton or London. They're not the kind of places I would choose to meet people in any more and I don't think I was particularly committed to it even when I did.

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Were there any gay people who inspired you when you were younger?

I very clearly remember Bronski Beat. It was at the height of the AIDS epidemic and the homophobia associated with that and Jimi Somerville and Bronski Beat were very out, queer pop stars, very in your face. There was lots and lots of horrible homophobia at school at the time about them so it was slightly frightening. I knew by that point that I wasn't the same as everyone else, whatever that means, yet they were quite alienating to me because I wasn't flamboyantly like them. In many senses they underlined the prejudices of the stereotypes that people have about gay people. I find that quite alienating.

I've used the term alienating quite a few times now but I do genuinely find John Inman, Larry Grayson, Graham Norton - that's not me, that's not me. Sometimes I find it quite difficult to accept the term gay because I don't like the fact that it's associated with that. Those people are perfectly fine in themselves, good luck to them. I don't have any issue with the way they choose to conduct themselves but that's not me.

TRACK 3

So can you tell me a little bit about any political life that you have had in relation to the term gay politics or queer politics either currently or in the past?

It started politically I suppose when I was at sixth form and I joined the communist party and the Communist Party of Great Britain youth wing had quite a lot of gay people involved with it and we used to meet in Farringdon, I think there was Lighthouse or something like that.

The London Lesbian and Gay centre was it? That is in Farringdon, or was.

It was quite a long time ago now, I don't know if it is still there but The garden overlooked the tube line so every now and again you were drinking coffee and the tubes would noisily go through. So you know where I mean then?

Yes the LLGC as was and no longer is.

So when did it disappear?

Not entirely sure but I walked down that street a couple of months ago and saw the building and it is all offices now.

I think the area has been heavily redeveloped. The headquarters of the Communist Party of Great Britain is on that street on the corner. I wasn't a member of the communist party for very long but that was my first activism. When I was at university, lots of different forms of political activity. I was a member of the Lesbian, Gay and Transgender society. I had a lot of dealings with the Feminist Society as well and I always see the two things as quite linked. At that point there was a big campaign against obviously clause 28. The age of consent was another issue because it was still at 21 I think when I was in my late teens, early twenties and it was reduced to 18 during the John Major Government and then under New Labour the age of consent was harmonised to 16, obviously that still continues at the moment in terms of the campaign for civil partnerships and now we have had the campaign for equal marriage although I did notice the other day whilst reading through the policy even though there is the intention to introduce the right for gay people to get married, it still doesn't mean there will be equal pensions between those couples, so the battle goes on.

Do you have a particular view about gay marriage? Is it something that you have a view on?

Personally I don't support the idea of marriage, I don't agree with that as a construct. Once again politically I think it's important that if there is an institution called marriage it needs to be opened up for everyone equally. So if there is straight marriage there has to be queer marriage. However maybe in the future we can have a look at what that institution means and perhaps it will fall by the wayside.

So you see this about being very clearly about equality?

Well Marriage is a union that is sanctioned by the state isn't it. So if we live in a state that discriminates against one form of union over another that is unjust and the state must be made to recognise all unions.

However, I don't believe the state should have any role with the sanctioning of unions and marriage as an institution needs to wither away.

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One of the things I've been thinking a lot about recently is that, if I was straight and I was in a relationship with a woman, it's more than likely at the moment that I would be a father. If I had had children at the same age as my parents had myself and my sister, they would be 14, 15, 16 now. We're all brought up in a culture where we're trained to be parents, aren't we. Girls, I guess with the sort of toys that they historically are given - we all go through those motions. Even as a man you get pets when you are younger which you can look after and show that you're responsible enough to have a pet. It's sort of a training to have children so there's this great big child-shaped hole in the lives of quite a lot of gay people....but not just that; my friends who are single and straight or weren't able to have children for one reason or another.... What is your life about if a big part of it isn't raising children? I don't think we have an answer to that question. I think there within is where quite a lot of people's troubles come from - alcoholism being one of them.

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