

TED BROWN

Clare (C) interviewing Ted (T)

Extract 1: Track 1: 1.47 – 5.42

GROWING UP GAY AND BLACK. TELLING HIS MOTHER THAT HE WAS GAY.

T: I started going to a school called Eltham Green Comprehensive, was quite happy there although, again I was experiencing a fair amount of racism, and there was homophobia amongst the kids. It was quite common for children to be abused as – boys mostly, to be abused as being sissies and so on, and one of my early memories is being very unhappy at reading an article in The Beano magazine, The Beano comic, which featured Dennis the Menace, because one of Dennis's habits was to attack Walter. Now, Walter was a character in the comic who was gentle, he was kind, he liked flowers and he liked poetry. He wasn't a sneak, he wasn't a bully, he wasn't a snob, but apparently - according to the comic it was quite OK for Dennis to hit him, to erm, douse him with water, to play practical jokes on him because he was such a gentle character. And even at the age of I think about eleven, or twelve then, I realised, as many other children did, that Walter was supposed to be a gay character. He was actually called a sissy by Dennis in the comics, and I was very unhappy at that. I think I was beginning to recognise myself as the gay character, as a gay person! And had been looking in the comics for myself as a black er, child, but there were very few representations in early comics, The Beano and The Dandy and the kind of literature that children would look at in those days, except the occasional er, gollywog, or there would be representations of Africa, with people wearing grass skirts and spears and bones through their noses and so on.

Anyway, around the age of eleven, around 1961, as I said, I was becoming aware of my attractions to one or two other boys in the school, and I mentioned this to my mother, and as most parents would do, and as is actually common, she felt that this was just a stage. It's very common for kids to develop crushes on same sex people without there being any sexual overtones, erm, but I realised some time later, when I was about fifteen that these were not simply er ... it wasn't just simply a stage and that I was sexually attracted to these other boys, and I remember also that I told my mother at the time. I felt very lucky being able to tell my mum that I was – in my own words at the time – “I think I'm becoming homosexual” because I know that a lot of parents and a lot of other associates of the family would not be accepting – receptive, or understanding of their child telling them that they were homosexual in 1965. This was four years before the Stonewall riots in New York that started the modern lesbian and gay rights campaigning.

Extract 2: Track 3: 5.08 – 10.02

FIRST GLF MEETINGS IN LONDON. LIVING IN A GLF COMMUNE. CHALLENGING SEX ROLES

T: Apparently Noel saw me at the meeting and says that he, found me very attractive at the time. I think I may have seen him, but I don't remember him at that particular meeting and I, of course, didn't know that we were going to be still together 44, 45 years later. There were various meetings held at the Covent Garden, but for one reason or another, they were later moved to Notting Hill. Um ... Powis Square in Notting Hill became the centre of several ongoing lesbian and gay meetings, and it was at those meetings that the Gay Liberation Front was formed, and this was a group of people who felt that lesbians and gay men should actively fight for our right both legally and socially. One of the slogans was that The Personal is Political, because many people who didn't want to join argued that the law was one thing and um, that your personal life was something that you should keep away from everybody else. But we felt that your sexuality, your race, your age – all these things had implications both politically, socially and personally, and that we should um, look at them clearly and challenge the problems that arose from the discrimination and hostility that people often faced.

At one stage erm, by which time I had actually met Noel and we were beginning to get known as a couple, erm, it was suggested that there should be some communes set up by GLF. Gay Liberation Front. So that we could actually live the principals of The Personal is Political. Three communes were set up. One in Brixton – remnants of that still exist in Mayall Road in South London, not far from where I'm actually living now. Another in Notting Hill, and another in Bounds Green in North London. Noel and I moved into the one in North London. I can't give or remember exactly the exact address of the house, but there were fourteen of us there, and we had twelve mattresses in the living room, and we agreed that we would share our food, we would share housecleaning responsibilities, that we would be open to erm, the friends, relatives and guests of other people, that we would encourage both the women and the men – there were only two women out of the group, to dress as they wanted to. If er, somebody wanted ... a man wanted to dress in camp outfits or transgender items that was fine. If the women wanted to wear men's clothes, or women's clothes or whatever, we wouldn't challenge them in the way that people normally would be outside, erm, and we would try to disrupt the gender classifications that we were used to.

At one of the meetings that had set up um, GLF erm, the communes, a lot of the women walked out, because the habits were so ingrained in us of sexual division that at those meetings, when there was a break, many of the men expected the women to go and make the tea! (*Laughs*) And after a while the women said "Can you not see that you're still carrying on the, you know, the nuclear family male dominated structure and that one of the things that we have been challenging when we set up GLF was the fact that both women and men, gay ... lesbian and gay men, had habitually imitated heterosexual sex roles?"

Extract 3: Track 4: 1.22 – 5.42

CAMPAIGN AGAINST BUJI BANTON'S HOMOPHOBIC LYRICS

T: Moved on to the Buji Banton issue, which was challenging the homophobia presented by an artist called Buji Banton who, back in 1990 I think it was, issued a song called *Boom Bi Bi*, promoting the idea that lesbians and gays should be killed by having burning tyres wrapped around their necks or shot and killed, and we were very worried because he was very popular in Jamaica. The song actually became number one in Jamaica. He was becoming the most popular artist since Bob Marley in the country and was being promoted by his record company, and could have become extremely successful with that particular record. He was due to appear at an organisa ... at a festival called WOMAD, which is the World of Music and Drama. This was a major project which helped launch many well known artists today.

Now we decided that we would translate the pigeon English of the song *Boom Bi Bi*, to the promoters of WOMAD because they were planning to have this sung on the stage. They didn't understand what it was saying. So we translated the words, and when they realised that this was promoting violence against lesbians and gays, they asked Buji Banton whether he would er ... still perform but leave that, leave the song out. He refused and so they had to cancel him ... his performance altogether, and in fact there was quite a big protest in Jamaica to the extent to when my family and I went back in ... to Jamaica some years later, I was with my sister and it came up - the issue of *Boom Bi Bi*, because they were talking in Jamaica about how sad they were that Buju Banton had not become as popular as ... as Bob Marley, and I was about to say that I had been involved in the campaign that challenged his homophobia and my sister, I think, literally saved my life. She kicked me under the table, stopped me from saying anything! Because earlier in the conversation she had heard them, my cousins, saying if they found out who it was who had stopped Buji Banton from appearing at WOMAD and becoming as prominent, they would kill him, and at the time, and still now, gay ... gay men in particular are still being killed in Jamaica, erm ... lynch mobs and so on.

And one of the reasons I was apparently so prominent in the issue about WOMAD was that I appeared on a TV programme while I was working at Lewisham Action on Policing ... The Word, which was a popular programme came and interviewed me at my offices when I was working at Lewisham Action on Policing, I still have the film – with me saying ... explaining how vicious the lyrics were, and saying - I quote that “lesbian and gay people are not putting up with this kind of frack any longer” and they published the ... my interview on The Word programme, and also published Buji Banton's response in which he said that he apologised if what he had said had offended anybody, but he hadn't meant to erm ... he was ... he was an artist and had not ... and we artists should encourage peace and justice and so on, and he couldn't understand why anyone was upset by the lyrics.