

PAUL ALLCHIN

Clare (C) interviewing Paul (P)

Extract 1: 00:00 – 02:31

THOUGHTS ON BISEXUALITY AND THE BI GROUP AT HEAVEN

P: ... now I went to Heaven first when I was trying to come out and I thought I might be bi, and I went to the bi group there and that was very, very interesting and that was sort of ... that might have been 1982/83.

C: I didn't know they had groups ...

P: Yeah ...

C: As well as the club.

P: Well, they had groups and they had groups upstairs above the main erm ... well they had ... they had a space above the main erm, dancefloor area and we met up there, and I got to know a whole variety of people there who were um, either bi, gay, trans, transvestite, transsexual, and some of them were just very, very interesting, and I thought to myself "How lucky am I? I not only have the privilege of meeting all these interesting people but um, thankfully I don't want to transition!" *(Laughs)*

C: What happened in the groups?

P: Well it, you see, it was also this time ... in the groups ... the groups were more about talking about kind of what sexual politics is all about and where, where ... where you think we belong, and it was about this notion of what a bisexual identity is all about. Erm, so not only was I trying to form or connect to my gay sexuality and identity, which I felt I probably fitted in quite well with, but then I was trying to get my head around all these other kind of ... what that was all about. And I just came to the conclusion with the bisexual side of it, was that it was about falling in love with a person, regardless of whether they were male or female, and that there was something about the personality and the qualities of the person that was some kind of erotic trigger that led to a relationship of some sort of sex, and that it wasn't so important how they were physically, really ...

Extract 2 02:31 – 05:14

THE COLEHERNE

P: The Coleherne was a notorious leather bar ...

C: Right.

P: And obviously at that time it was full of smoke and er, leather queens and er ... and it had a bit of a reputation, to say the least, erm ... rough and ready and er ... bearded and scruffy and all kinds of, you know, it had a reputation, and when I went there the reputation seemed to boil down to ... hanging around, cruising and staring at each other, which ... which I wasn't very impressed with! And also, you know, I am a talker. I like to talk, and I like

to get to know people and I like to get to know their names, and all this kind of silent sultry boring crap, I didn't have any patience with! And I can't say I ever picked anyone up there, and then I had friends and, you know, they spoke about, you know, there's a local graveyard isn't there?

C: Yes, right behind.

P: What's it called? There's a church there ... a cemetery ... Yeah. Anyway, I mean I heard all these rumours and stories about all the things that went on in the graveyards and where they met and how they met, and I recently heard another story from someone and you know, there was sort of little side cul de sacs where there were sort of cottages and I mean sort of proper cottages, not loos, but proper cottages, and the men, you know, at night, the men would literally line themselves up and that would be part of the cruising area, so ... so ... so The Coleherne almost had like an en suite extension! As you go towards the graveyard! And I found all this very odd, you know, I was ... I mean I was completely and utterly, I wouldn't say naïve, but I just felt I was unplugged! You had all the gay men, knowing the score ...

C: Were there any bears there?

P: And there were bears, yes, but ... I mean I never felt I fitted in to all that kind of sort of machismo ... stereotype really, and I mean I can do the butch number with the leathers, as soon as I open my mouth and want to have a chat, and start giggling, you know? *(Laughs)* It just doesn't ... it doesn't resonate, does it? *(Laughs)*

Extract 3: 05:14 – 09:50

LONDON FRIEND and SUPPORT FROM QUAKERS

P: So I wrote to erm, London Friend, and they sent an incredibly helpful letter which I was ... was very encouraging and ... very grateful for, and that was in the early '80s, about 1982, '83.

C: What did it say? What sort of thing?

P: It said erm ... it was encouraging, it said, you know, well basically "Be who you ... be who you are, you know, there's nothing wrong with being gay." You know. "We're here for you."

C: They actually wrote letters?

P: They actually wrote letters and I think I've still got the letter, and it was, you know, it was just very encouraging, accepting. I mean there's the whole idea that the gay community ... that gay people and the gay community *exist!* This notion that there are other people that exist and that you're not strange and that this is perfectly normally actually, and then the fact that you had this connection to somebody out there beyond yourself and beyond your circle of people was very important and the other ones that were very important at the time, and I don't know how well they've survived over the years, was the ... was it the F ...

the Friends ... Friends ... oh, FHF, the Friends Homosexual Fellowship, which essentially were the ... were the gay wing of the Quakers.

C: I've never heard of that.

P: Yes, and they still existed until a few years ago, and it was run by a woman and it was up in the North I think, but they were very, very important and the role of the Quakers should never be ... er ... underestimated. They were always very pragmatic about what the reality of life is about and they were always very politically ... well I wouldn't say Socialistic, they were politically erm, for equality and fairness and community and peace, basically. They were known for peace. And so there was this FHF, and I've got a ...

C: Did you write to them?

P: And I wrote to them and they sent me back a letter, and they were very helpful and I ... I also, you know, had later friends from the Quakers who were gay. But anyway, so I promised myself while I was with Gordon, I wanted to volunteer for them, and Gordon was always possessive.

C: Did they have a London branch? Where would you have volunteered?

P: Well, it was London, yeah. It was London. And so when the relationship broke up with Gordon at the end of the ... of the 1990s, then, sort of 1999, 2000, I then volunteered for er, London Friend and of course, at London Friend, this is where I met George, and George is sort of....

C: Just tell me a bit about London Friend.

P: Well ...

C: Where it's based, what they did.

P: Well London Friend were ... I've always thought they were incredible in their mission and it was ... London Friend was about helping people, young people come out. In fact, helping anybody come out. They're not going to force you to come out, but they want you to come out to yourself, and they want you to come out and be comfortable in society, generally, and so they ran erm, they ran a telephone counselling line, and they rang ... ran social groups for men and women, and also for gay fathers who had children.

C: Where were they based?

P: And they were based at Caledonian Road, behind Kings Cross, and they still exist today and you probably know some people from there, um and these ... this ... this London Friend were terribly, terribly important and they help an awful lot of people and so I volunteered and I wanted to do telephone counselling and they offered telephone counselling training, and so I was part of a cohort that included George ...