

BARBARA JOHNSON-JUMA

COMING TO LONDON FROM THE NORTH. TRAINING AS A LAWYER. MARRYING A MAN BUT REGRETTING IT ON THE DAY

Extract 1: 3.42 – 6.24

B: So, you know, by the time I was 26 I was free, and I came down to London with somebody - it was a Londoner that I met up north, and I made the transition to go and make my own life and London gave me that life, it gave me that opportunity to explore a different thing. I mean, I was a ... I worked in retail when I first came to London. It was retail but because of the job that involved the computer, it took me to a magistrate's court and there was a scheme that ran, and if you're interested in becoming a solicitor or a barrister then you would be, can I say, brought up through the ranks. And I was financed. I didn't have to put in my own finance. I studied whilst I worked, and over a period of about six, seven years I became a lawyer, and then just went on from there.

But what was really interesting was the man that I came down to London with, I married in 1992 and I remember on my wedding day I didn't want to get married and I didn't know how to stop it, and I didn't stop it and I remember saying to one of the people that was attending the wedding "I don't think I can go through with this." Not fully knowing why. Whether it was just falling out of love, whether it really wasn't for me – because I was involved in playing football, lots of other things and getting on with men in a certain way which was all about sports and just having a good time rather than a relationship, and that kind of thing. But I did get married, even though regretting it on the day. But a friend had just said "Well, it's nerves. Its pre-marital nerves" and you just kind of believe it. But what I remember distinctly doing was – although we'd arranged for the after party at home, with a steel band in the garden, food and drinks and everything, and there was about 40, 50 people attending. I remember coming back from the church in my wedding dress. I did a few rounds saying hello to people in my wedding dress and then I was so uncomfortable in a wedding dress that I went upstairs and I changed out of the wedding dress into some casual clothes.

And then in the evening when everybody had gone we'd actually got a suite booked at a local manor, Grimsdyke Manor in Bushey, and that was the worst time, the worst time for me, and I kind of knew I shouldn't have gone through with the wedding ...

Extract 2: 25:26 – 32.00

CHALLENGES OF BEING BLACK AND GAY. BEING OUT AT WORK. THE IMPORTANCE OF JOINING KENRIC.

B: ... you know, I've gone through challenges because I'm Black. I'm not perceived as Black by some people because of my skin colour which is light 'cos I'm half Jamaican, half English, and maybe sometimes being of a light skin has helped throughout my career, but in terms of having struggles as a Black person, I envisaged having trouble coming out as a gay

person, and I thought to myself “Well, I can come out. I’ve got over the challenges of being Black. I might have to work harder at things. I might have to recognise when there are glass ceilings or prejudices, but I’ve work through that in my life so I can work through being gay in my lifetime.” So when I was ready to come out after I left my husband I told my mum, and I got a good reaction from my mum. Erm ...

C: What did she say?

B: She said “Well, whatever you’re happy with.” That’s what she said to me and I thought “Wow. Thanks, Mum. That’s supportive. That’s supportive.” And my relationship with my mum has only come in later life because she wasn’t around when I was youngish, and when she was around in my kind of pre-teens, early teens, you know, she wasn’t always there. My grandmother was the matriarch, the true parent. But yeah, I kind of felt “Well, if I can face those battles and get through and be OK, I can face this battle.”

So I told my mum and that was great, told her about Kenric and she was kind of happy for me, and a close colleague who was a male colleague at work, I still see him now even though we don’t work at the same place, we’re still friends, but um yeah, he was a very, very good friend. I was able to speak, speak out and just say who I was and he just gave me the courage just to tell my boss.

I went into my boss and she knew I’d got divorced and I just said “Look, this is where I am.” She said “You don’t have to tell me.” I said “Well, I want you to know.” And part of me wants people to know because in *our* environment which is erm, I don’t know, it’s a public service and such like, I have a lot of people around and I don’t want people to misinterpret *me*. Part of me doesn’t always want to explain about being gay, ‘cos it’s not often a heterosexual person will come up and say “Hey, I’m heterosexual”. But I kind of felt I didn’t want people to think that I liked them, especially women, because I was gay, you know? People are people. I like them for who they are. It doesn’t matter, boy, girl, whatever. So I just had to say at work who I was and to this day it’s the same, and I openly talk to my colleagues now. They knew when I had my civil partnership and got married, and blah, blah, blah, and yeah, I just talk about who I am. I don’t hold back and I don’t hide it.

And I find that London has given me a lot, and because it’s so diverse and there are places to go and different people to experience, it kind of supports you and it holds you and you know, you can be who you want to be, that’s what I find, and I’ve kind of enjoyed a lot of that freedom. I kind of feel I’ve been supported to be ... to go where I want to go, and be who I want to be. And I’m not too sure that I would have got that in Leeds, partly, maybe, ‘cos I’ve been up and down and been to gay clubs there and enjoyed, what can I say, the drag queens. I love to watch drag queens and people like that but I think London has done that for me. The Mineries, the Kenric group, and when I think about the Kenric group, you know, I think about the dances and the venues and usually I think they don’t use the place anymore, I think it’s gone, the pub at St ... St James’ Park, near Petit France, erm, where they used to hold their monthly discos, or bi monthly, it was at some point, and you know just being with women and enjoying women of a ... a similar mind, and it’s given me a lot of strength, a lot of strength to be who I am. So I have to say Kenric has played a big part.

C: What attracted you to Kenric as a ... It's quite a group, isn't it? And some people might not want that and other people might really like that. Did you want to *join* something that way?

B: Yeah. Yeah. The group aspect of it was good ... was good for me being with lots of different people, but it's the spin-offs from that group because what you had was other people that dipped into Kenric but had other groups that they'd go to, and do other things, and one of the other groups we kind of got involved in was the Beds and Herts group. I think it's called something else now. But at the time, you know, they had their big discos at the Watford Coliseum and places like that. That was a massive dance floor and lots and lots of women used to come from everywhere.

C: How many? Did they fill it?

B: Erm, I'd never say it was ever full full full but a ... generally a good turnout I would say and you'd meet lots of different people, and I just loved all that, and to me, I was enjoying my life, I really was. I still am, but, yeah it was a ... I don't know, it was just the grounding and the making of me, I thought, just being with collective people and different people, yeah. So I think it did me a lot of good and I'm grateful for it and, to this day I'm still a member of Kenric. I might not go to the odd dinner or dance but there's friends that I've met, like Sandy, Sandy Burnett, and she's a good friend and erm, yeah, so I'm just, you know, I'm grateful for it. I am. And I just kind of think "I've been accepted in a way."

BOB CANT