

Interview with Ros Dalgarno

by Stephanie Dickinson

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S: Hello Ros. Thank you for being interviewed. I know that you came to Coventry from Ireland when you were 13 and that you went to school there and lived there but what brought you to London?

R: Well actually it was my, my Saturday job, because I got a job with Clarkes, on a Saturday job, and then I got the full-time job there when I left school. And then, um, I thought 'Well this is not for me. I want to do something a bit better'. I was just a sales lady. So anyway, I applied for the Clarkes management, um, course that they were doing, and I was accepted and I went to Street in Somerset, and then back home to Coventry. And then Clarkes found me a job and... going all over England as a... like a temporary manager, I finally got, landed a job in London, and that's what brought me to London and I stayed there.

S: Ah, but you came to London to work but you could have worked in Coventry, couldn't you? So why London?

R: I could have worked in Coventry but I had my eyes set on other things. Probably women! (*laughs*)

S: So tell us more about that.

R: Well, I knew I was different because I fell in love with my best friend, two of my best friends. Of course, they didn't know that I was madly in love with them. And I thought, well, you know, I don't know what's going on? And I thought, 'Oh well, why don't I just go to London and get a job up there' and see what, you know, see what things were like. Because I didn't even associate myself with 'lesbian' because you never heard it and, um, as I said to a friend, if I'd told my mother I was a lesbian she'd probably thought I'd got a new job. And, so there you are. So, I ended up in London anyway, and that was that.

S: So you came to London, presumably not knowing anybody?

R: Didn't know a soul, and I worked in Selby's in the Holloway Road and... Clarkes put me temporary in a bed and breakfast, which actually was next door to the Holloway Prison, and I was terrified. I thought I was going to be attacked and everything 'cos I used to see the wardens going up and down the road and, you know, me from a provincial town and to see all this was, you know. I did watch Cell Block H later on, I think, but never mind! Um, yes, so that was that and then I, um, when did I have my first? Oh, fell in love with my best friend again there, but she didn't know anything. and then I went to Pinner... got a job in Pinner then, and, um,

and I had an affair with one of my assistants, and it went from there. Never looked back, really.

S: So did you find anywhere to go to socially in London? Any sort of lesbian events?

R: No. That affair didn't last long and I was traumatised after it so I rang up, um, I think it was... I don't know whether it was the Citizens Advice or Samaritans. It was one of those. Can't remember which actually. But when she sat and listened to me and she went on and she said 'Well I don't know a lot about girls having affairs' she said, you know, probably about ninety she was! Anyway we got talking and she said 'Well let me, wait, and I'll have a look at my, my list of numbers you can ring'. So she gave me the Switchboard, the Gay Switchboard, and I rang them up, and they suggested I try Kenric. Which I did. That's the end of my life really.

S: The end of your life?

R: No, the beginning of my life I should say! No, but the end of my life as a straight person, and beginning as a, as a... a lesbian.

S: Can you remember the first lesbian venue that you went to?

R: Well, I went to... what's that place? I don't think it was Gay's ... is it Gay's the World, Word...

S: Bookshop?

R: The bookshop where they used to have meetings every Wednesday? Yes, that's the place, I went there. My memory isn't so good. And, because everything's changed - you're laughing at me! But everything's changed from when I was younger, including Kenric. Anyway, I went there on a Wednesday night and I went straight from work and I was wearing skirt and whatever, blah, blah, blah, business outfit, and lipstick and makeup, and I was sitting there and then the discussion was women, lesbians who wear makeup. And I felt, I thought, 'My God, I can't sit and listen to this. Here's me with makeup on' and blah, blah, blah, So when the meeting finished I kindly left them and said 'Bye, bye' and that was it. And then I went to Kenric. And I went to... I think it was the ... the Gateways, I went there. Yes, it was the first outing I went to was The Gates... Sorry, I'm rambling on.

S: So, have you made many lesbian friends in London?

R: Hundreds (*chuckles*).

S: So you've had a good social life.

R: I've had a very good social life. I've never looked back. I've had some good friends. I've had some... odd friends. But at the end of the day I'm 70 now, and I've

got a lot of friends, which I call friends anyway, that I can socialise with. I don't think, I don't think I could ever be allowed to be lonely into my old age because of my friendships with people. 'Cos we look out for one another. That's good. And the friends I've got now I met 35, 40 years ago... through Kenric.

S: Ah, so you said through Kenric. So what are your very very earliest memories of Kenric?

R: Gosh!

S: What would be the first event you ever went to?

R: The first Kenric event was at The Gates and, er, of course, I was terrified. I was sitting there, again in my skirt and stuff, but, yeah, it was terrifying. It was a good night, I had a good night, but I didn't start dancing until about ten minutes before they closed, because I was terrified. The second thing I went to at that point was the... the cruise, river cruise, and that was terrifying as well, because I was... there were two big queues to get on it, and I was in the left-hand one and in the right-hand one there seemed to be a lot of men there, and I thought 'That's really odd', you know? They must have one level for the women and one level for the men or something. I just couldn't get my head around it. But when I got on the boat, which I was greeted by Rita Mendoza – and she was lovely, she was. I really liked her and I sat down in what I thought was in the bottom of the boat, where the water was around my feet. I was terrified again in this thing, but then I realised that all these, what I thought were men, were actually butch, butch... they were dykes, and I quickly got a bit dykey in my way of dressing then. I thought it was cool.

S: So what happened to the skirts then?

R: Well, I still had to wear them for work, but that was all right.

S: Thank you very much. Thank you very much for sharing that.