**Paul C**

Extract 1

**P:** the change in the law, the royal assent to change the law was given in the week I was twenty-one. And I felt that was quite an important move in my life! Or moment in my life, and an important step clearly in the social life of the country.

**C:**  What was the general reaction to that amongst people you knew, and yourself?

**P:**  I think a great deal of relief that things that we could have in theory been sent to prison for were no longer illegal. But at the same time rather laughing at the ridiculous situation because as far as I recall, the law said two men can perform sexual acts, but nobody else can be on the premises. They have to be alone and they couldn’t do it if somebody else was in the house. And of course it wasn’t the same in Scotland and it wasn’t the same in Northern Ireland, so there were all sorts of ridiculous anomalies there to do with what you could do in one country, in one town and you’d go five miles across the border and you can’t do it. So there was relief, but a sense of ‘Well, we’ve got a long way to go yet.’

**C:**  Had you felt the danger before?

**P:**  Yes, I’d experienced the danger before, yeah. There were problems with police, agents provocateur, they weren’t very popular around the place, and I had one incident myself at Charing Cross railway station, which didn’t turn out as badly as it might have done, but I was walking with this chap in Victoria Embankment Gardens and he said ‘How long have you been homosexual?’ And I said ‘About seven or eight years, I suppose.’ And I said ‘What about you?’ And he said ‘I’m not, I’m a police officer’. And he said ‘Get on, bugger off.’ So I was very, very fortunate in that, but the atmosphere was…

**C:**  But if he was doing it to entrap you, how come he told you to bugger off?

**P:**  Oh I don’t know, perhaps he felt sorry for me or perhaps they were trying to stop people, they were trying to entrap people, maybe and then tell them to stop, rather than send them to the court. And that was, that was quite a …

**C:**  Did you know people who were actually arrested, or …?

**P:**  No, I don’t think I ever knew anybody, not who was arrested anyway at that time, or in the even much worse ‘50s, the early ‘50s, first half, perhaps all the ‘50s which were very very repressive. One thinks about people like John Gielgud, Lord Montagu and having terrible famous awful show trials. I think some of my friends, although they didn’t talk about it, may have had problems in the past, sort of people in the theatre work I did.

**C:**  You’re not old enough to remember the Montagu case, are you?

**P:**  Not really, but I’ve heard about it since. But some of the people I was … I knew would have been old enough. So, no, I don’t think I knew anybody who themselves had had a legal problem. And even by the mid, well 1967, things were easing up a lot anyway and that’s probably why I was sort of let off the hook by the police officer. But it was, it was still a danger and if that’s the sort of thing you did and if those are the sorts of places you went to, well, fine OK, people could say ‘It’s your own bloody fault for doing these things’ but there you are. Even in more recent days I’ve seen people be attacked in public places. Yes, well that was probably about twenty years ago, but long after the law changed, yeah. And so, when the law came, or when the law change came it was very welcome certainly. But of course it didn’t stop a lot of prejudice. It didn’t stop a lot of aggro, presumably it didn’t stop agents provocateur because what they were after was still illegal. What they were looking for, or trying to make happen, that was still illegal, but I think with a much more sympathetic view than had been the case in the 1950s. So things were tough and I think it built quite a wall of strength round one. I thought ‘Well, this is how life is going to be and I’ve just got to get on with it, and I’ll build a cocoon round myself and just get on with it. There was always the fear that something would happen and then of course one’s family would be involved, or one’s friends and that would be terrible. That would be unbelievably bad. But those things were certainly happening in the 1960s and by the 1970s things began to ease up and the law began to change and eventually Scotland and Northern Ireland changed their laws and great thanks to the 1997 Labour government that began to get ….eventually… Civil Partnerships going.

There’s another quite interesting link there. Among the many jobs that I’ve enjoyed doing one was based at City Hall starting in about 2000, 2001 when Ken Livingstone who was the first mayor of London, based at City Hall by Tower Bridge and he started a project called Partnerships Register, and same sex couples could go there and write their names in a book, I think, that they were partners and that they wanted to be recognised as partners, and as far as the law would allow, which in that case it wasn’t a legal thing at all, but as far as Ken Livingstone and London were concerned these two people were partners and wanted to be recognised. But that’s as far as that went. But then, of course, quite soon after that, that was quite a success, and quite soon after that the Blair government brought in the Civil Partnerships properly.

But I was… my particular involvement in the partnership register at City Hall was that with my bit of acting experience and things like that I contacted City Hall and said that I would like to be… my name to go forward as a registrant, I think that’s the name, that’s the right title…no it’s celebrant! I’m sorry, celebrant, for these ceremonies, and I soon began to get quite a lot of inquiries, quite a lot of couples came to me and we met and talked and when they had their partnerships register event at City Hall, they wanted sometimes a little ceremony, perhaps saying something to each other, perhaps somebody reading something. One might cynically call it a mock wedding, but OK, whatever, they wanted a ceremony to recognise this. They invited their friends and they wanted somebody to take the place of the registrar, or the vicar or whatever, and that’s what I did. Quite a lot of events there, about 25 I think or 30, for those people who wanted a ceremony to mark their entry onto the partnerships register. So I really enjoyed that and I met some very interesting, some very nice people and we went up to the top of City Hall, and I think they called it London’s Lounge, or London’s Living Room, some name like that. It was very nicely set out at there, and that’s where these ceremonies would take place and then after it had all happened and maybe there was a few tears and everybody was showering with champagne bottles or confetti, we’d go out onto the balcony at the top and look at London and sometimes they’d go off to a party. Sometimes I’d be invited, and I really enjoyed that. That was a very satisfying, very rewarding thing to do for people who wanted to register their lives together and their together-ness. That was one very positive thing I think for the cause before it was quite legal.