

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: So, Simeon, I wonder if you could begin by telling me about your childhood, what your parents did, siblings, that kind of thing.

Respondent: Yes, I was born in Henley-on-Thames as a war victory baby in the middle of 1946, so I'm a celebration baby. My father served for six years in the war and after the war he went into business with his brother as a minor building and decorating firm. And my mother, who was in service before the war, came from Wales, a mining family.

Interviewer: Whereabouts in Wales?

Respondent: South Wales, in the Llynfi Valley north of Maesteg in a little village called Caidai(?). And her father was a Barnardo's orphan who, after his service in the army at the end and the turn of the 19th/20th Century, went to South Wales, to the mines there. That's where he met a Welsh woman and settled there.

Interviewer: Okay. I grew up in Swansea.

Respondent: Oh, in Swansea.

Interviewer: Family from Edinburgh but then we...

Respondent: Aberdawe.

Interviewer: Yeah, but they moved to Swansea, so I'm a Celtic crossbreed, I suppose.

Respondent: Yes, yes, well I've got the Celtic blood in me as well, you see. We've got Irish, Welsh, British, English, no Scots as far as we know.

Interviewer: Ah, I only have Scottish and Welsh. My accent goes all over the place. (laughs) Brothers and sisters?

Respondent: Yeah, one sister three years younger than me, who lives in Henley-on-Thames. She's not married and at the present she... well, she's dying with terminal cancer.

Interviewer: Oh, sorry.

Respondent: But as we speak, but I mean she's maintaining life at the moment, but she is under hospice care.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Yeah. And growing up were you a church-attending family?

Respondent: Yes. My mother had always been church-attending. My father hadn't and we did go to church with mum, but when it was time to be confirmed, my father went to classes as well and we were confirmed together and he was baptised one week before me, before we were confirmed.

Interviewer: Is that Church of England or...?

Respondent: Church of England, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And that was... where was the church?

Respondent: Henley-on-Thames, Holy Trinity, Henley-on-Thames.

Interviewer: Okay. And was your faith important to you?

Respondent: I think it always was, yes. I seem to have been a rather precocious religious brat when I was little, and I was in the choir, I served and, yeah, so life went on like that, yeah. I maintained my faith.

[0:03:20]

Interviewer: Yeah. Was it a happy childhood?

Respondent: Very, yes, very warm, loving family life, we had. I look backward on it with great joy and happiness really.

Interviewer: That's good to hear. Boys, girls, who were you attracted to?

Respondent: Oh, from quite an early age I think boys, yeah, yeah, same sex really.

Interviewer: At what point...

Respondent: Didn't know quite what was going on because everybody else seemed to be attracted to something different from me, but from a very early age. I would say about nine, ten, I think I knew I was going to be different from my peers of the male sex.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you have a name for it in your head? Were you aware of...?

Respondent: No, I don't think I did, and I think I was rather worried about it really, perhaps a little bit older than that but, you know, because I didn't seem to be going down the normal route of relationships.

Interviewer: Was it ever mentioned at church when you were growing up, homosexuality?

Respondent: I don't recall it at all. I don't recall the subject being broached at all, even in confirmation class, which my father came to some. He went to the adult one as well but they came to us, I mean the norm was, you know, for married people, male, female, to have a nice family life and have children, etc. And that seemed... I don't recall any other options being mentioned at all.

Interviewer: Okay. So, when was your first experience with another boy, just romantic, per se, not necessarily full-on sexual encounter? (laughs)

Respondent: I think that must have been when I was, I would say, 17.

Interviewer: And did you come out, as such, to your family?

Respondent: No, no, no. There was a lot of guilt around having... one was growing up, and when I say 17, it was interesting because it was 1963 and the papers were full, and do you know, for the life of me I've lost his name, but there had been an exposure of a diplomat in America in Russia...

Interviewer: Yeah, I can't remember.

Respondent: And they'd taken photographs of and the Russians had... and he'd given details away, you know, secrets away, and I mean spent a long time in prison. I can't for the life of me get his name. So, that was all very negative at that time, you know.

Interviewer: Was it Guy...?

Simeon_Bishop.8e998f7b-8635-4b75-a09c-0e2d0be163cf.doc.doc

Respondent: No, it wasn't him.

Interviewer: No, no.

Respondent: He was one of the four, wasn't he?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: But this... I wish I could remember his name. But at that time it was all in the news and over the papers how terrible these queer people were, you see.

[0:06:37]

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we're fine.

Respondent: Are we alright?

Interviewer: Yeah, I was just checking it was recording fine, but it is. Yeah, so you kept it all to yourself.

Respondent: Oh, yes, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you feel a sense of conflict between your sexuality and your faith?

Respondent: I think I did at that time. I wondered that we'd better do something about this, so the only way to do it was keep it under wraps and tuck it all away really, so I joined a religious order, which was the worst thing to do in one sense. (laughs)

Interviewer: And which order was that?

Respondent: They were Franciscans. The Society of St Francis Anglican Franciscans and I joined when I was... well, I explored it when I was 18, 19, and actually joined when I was 20, and for 20 years I was in as a friar, Franciscan friar.

Interviewer: 20 years?

Respondent: Yeah, I left when I was 40.

Interviewer: Okay. And did you suppress your sexuality?

Respondent: Yes, more or less, yes, yes. Occasional flutters and sort of emotional involvement, but nothing really to, you know, be on that. Feelings more than actual physical contact.

Interviewer: Did it make you ill, in a sense?

Respondent: It probably did, but I don't think I was aware of it, ill-ill. I mean it was a gradual realisation over those years that I'm not going to be able to continue this until the day I die, which is what I promised when I made my life vows. But I think that was a gradual process and... yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, what year was that then when you left?

Respondent: 1986, so I joined in 1966 and I left in 1986. I'd spent half my life in a religious order by then. I was 40.

Interviewer: Oh, gosh. The whole thought of that just fills me with (laughs) all sorts of negative emotions.

Respondent: (laughs) Does it? Yeah.

Interviewer: So, talk to me about the end of it, of that. Was there one final thing that pushed you?

Respondent: Yes, I mean I did, during that last year, I met somebody that I really felt very close to and wanted to pursue that. And it came to a crunch that, as I said to you, I didn't think I could continue really living a celibate or trying to live a celibate life for another 40 years. (laughs) So, I left.

Interviewer: And how do you have that conversation when you leave the order? Did you say, "I've met a nice chap and I...?"

[0:09:50]

Respondent: Yeah, I was quite honest. I said, "I don't think I'm going to be able to fulfil these vows I've taken 13 years ago. I think I've moved on in my life and my personhood," and more accepting, I think, things were beginning to open up a bit, not very much at that time, but things were changing and there was the possibility to talk more about how... one's inner self really, you know. And so with talking to people and coming to the conclusion that it was probably best now to go rather than risk being a liability to the order and doing something silly or becoming a nasty piece of work who's so bitter and twisted, which one did see in some elderly brethren, who were cold and had died many years before but continued to live an unfulfilled existence really.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So, what happened next?

Respondent: After that?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Well, I'd been ordained while I was a brother, I was ordained a priest in 1979, so this is 1986, and so I... that ministry was expressed within the community, within the society, so I was told where to go. But at that point, of course, the decision to come out of the order, which coincided really with coming out, as was possible, I felt possible at that time in '86, because there were other things that started happening then, but I... so I wrote to the Bishop of Birmingham and said, "Look, I really want to leave. I can't continue. Have you got any work for me in your diocese?" I was in Edinburgh at the time, in Pilton, North Edinburgh, and my parents were in Oxfordshire, so I thought Birmingham would be a good, reasonable distance from them and yet close enough to care for them should they need me. Edinburgh's a long way away, which I find with my sister at the moment. Anyway, he gave me a job. I was interested in deaf people because of an experience that I'd had when I was in Edinburgh, and I then worked with deaf people.

Interviewer: Deaf? Not deaf people?

Respondent: Not deaf, that's right, deaf people who use sign language. So, I learnt sign language and spent the rest of my working ministry with deaf people till I retired. So, that's what happened then.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And I did that in Birmingham. I had a brief interlude in Portsmouth in a hearing church. When you work with deaf you call it the hearing church, you see, and then went back to it because I missed using my skills in signing really, in Lincoln.

Interviewer: Okay. And you were out, out in your sexuality?

Respondent: Out, yeah, out in the sense that I met somebody and we lived together and... but it was not broadcast at all. It was the time... I don't know whether the name Tony Higton means anything to you?

Interviewer: Stephen mentioned it, yeah.

Respondent: 1987.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: He ram-roaded(?) the General Synod to issue an ultimatum to all these peculiar people that they weren't really very nice, and so we got a lot of negativity at that time. And so it was not an easy period. You couldn't be really honest with people who you were responsible to, like the Bishop of Birmingham and those that had the power, because I wasn't... I had no rights, as such, as an incumbent of the parish or anything; I was purely on a contract in the job I was doing, which happened for all my working life after the Franciscans. I've never had a living... because where you get the freehold where you get security of tenure and you've really got to have blotted your copybook to be thrown out. So, you know, it may have been difficult for me to get another job if people had not wanted to employ me. So, there were those difficulties. There were those things going around in the church at that time that a lot of negativity, a lot of nasty comments being made about certain people.

[0:15:31]

Interviewer: Okay. How did the AIDS crisis fit in with that, because that's a few years...

Respondent: That was coming up. Yeah, that had started while I was in Edinburgh and while I was there I did some buddying in Edinburgh with the knowledge of the Bishop of Edinburgh at that time who was very supportive of work with people with AIDS, which was very good. And I continued that in Birmingham as well. So, yeah, all these things because that compounded the Higton thing really that these wicked people, this is God having his own back on, you know, you've heard all this before, I expect, you know.

Interviewer: I grew up...

Respondent: The judgement of God on...

Interviewer: Yeah. I grew up with it. I was about 17 when all the horrible adverts were on TV, with tombstones and that.

Respondent: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: And I know that my mother said it was a divine judgement from God, and I said, "Well, you know, he spared the lesbians," and my mum didn't know what to say to that. Yeah, I'm very aware of it. I was probably too young to be fully aware of it, but I certainly remember being freaked out and frightened by the adverts.

Respondent: Isn't that interesting you say that because, you see, those... the leaflets came through every letterbox in the United Kingdom, I think '86, '87.

Interviewer: Yeah, we got them through the door because we used to get rabies ones through the door.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: It was very similar, these kind of scary this is what to do.

Respondent: And on the front of the AIDS one was don't die of ignorance, with all these great stones, tombstones. And at the Centre for Deaf People in Birmingham where I was chaplain in the diocese, and based at that centre along with the social workers, interpreters and everybody else, I used to do my turn of... I wasn't a trained social worker, but seeing deaf people who might need help filling in forms and that when I was in the centre. And I do remember very early on while I was doing that, and very bad at signing at that time, this young lad who came in absolutely petrified with this leaflet. And he had no speech particularly, you know, he was very deaf, he was profoundly deaf and there was hardly speech, but he was petrified because what it said on the front, don't die of ignorance, because of deaf school the teachers had called him an ignorant bastard.

Interviewer: Oh, so he thought he was next in line. How awful.

Respondent: And he knew the word ignorant, ignorance, and he thought he was going to die because he was ignorant because his teachers had told him. You know, lovely education, isn't it? The dominant language group again suppressing a minority. So, that really shook me that this poor... and, you know, I was determined more and more then to get sign language under my belt in order to be able to perhaps be of use to people, this minority group within a minority group, deaf gay people, you know. And so I did that and got involved with the Rainbow Group that deaf organise nationally, and for deaf gay people, you know, so became supportive of deaf gay people in that context.

[0:19:35]

Interviewer: Yeah. Have you been involved in sort of activist work at all for LGBT rights?

Respondent: I'm trying to think. No, I'm rather lazy when it comes to that. I like it to come to my door rather than, you know, that's the nature of the beast that I am really.

Interviewer: In Durham.

Respondent: Sorry?

Interviewer: In Durham.

Respondent: In Durham, yeah. No, all I do remember was going to the 20th anniversary bash service in St Martin-in-the-Fields in the '90s, but I can't remember when it was actually founded now. But our...

Interviewer: LGCM?

Respondent: Yeah. It was GCM when it was founded, of course.

Interviewer: Yeah, it was 1976.

Respondent: So, it would have been 1996. There was a... in St Martin-in-the-Fields, and there were postcards published of that event and muggins here, my mugshot is right in the middle of a postcard that was produced. But no, I haven't been that... I've been on a couple of Pride marches in a dog collar when I was around, and I did the World AIDS Day, helped at the commemoration in Birmingham city centre and did part of the service and got the

Simeon_Bishop.8e998f7b-8635-4b75-a09c-0e2d0be163cf.doc.doc

cathedral to open its doors at night to allow this motley group of people carrying candles in to dirty the cathedral floor and, you know, and they were very good, very welcoming. It was a good dean, good chapter who were very open and welcoming there. But that's really the limit, not much more than that. Being available, doing what I can, but I'm not much of a placard carrier, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm not either. (laughs) And when did you meet Stephen?

Respondent: Oh, Stephen, well I was now, after Birmingham, I went briefly to Portsmouth and then...

Interviewer: And that was enough. (laughs) I'm from Southampton; we're very rude about Portsmouth.

Respondent: I loved Portsmouth, yeah, I really did love Portsmouth. I enjoyed living there, but I realised about a week in after I'd got... I didn't want much responsibility. I wanted a breather within just a different sphere of work, but very soon I realised I'd made a mistake. I wasn't happy. And the vicar then, nice as nine pence before I came, but as soon as I got there I saw his true colours, and especially his attitude to gay people and thought, "I'm not going to put up with this". So, after about a month or two I started looking for... I thought I'll go back to deaf ministry. I really loved it, and so I moved on to Lincoln after 18 months actually. And that's a huge area in the diocese of Lincoln. Lincolnshire is a big, big county, so I lived in Lincoln but I had congregations 45 miles away in different directions. I had eight worshiping groups of deaf people and all that that entails, with all that travel, you know. But Stephen and I went to a day organised by the... I've got to get it... yes, by the bishop because my arrival and the bishop's arrival was within a month or two and very open bishop we had at Lincoln when we were there. And he said, "Look, I've got all these queers in the diocese," and he said, "Nothing's being done for them. I'm a trustee of changing attitude and we haven't got a branch in the diocese".

[0:23:50]

Interviewer: Was he straight or...?

Respondent: Oh, he was straight as a die, but such an open, warm, John Saxby his name was, and he was bishop for ten years. He retired before I retired, but our period in Lincoln was co-terminus really, you see. And yes, so we got round the huge dining room table, all these gay people that he knew of in the diocese, he invited us all by name.

Interviewer: Like one long dating session. (laughs)

Respondent: Yeah, (laughs) but it was lovely to be... and to have a bishop that you could actually sit down and he said, "Everything's confidential here. You say what you like," you know.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: And that was so refreshing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And so that's too hasty, I've got to go back because that wasn't the first time. I met Stephen the first time, which he's probably said, I beg your pardon, Bishop Doe of Swindon, the suffragan of the diocese, I think, of Salisbury, came to talk to his book, I can't remember the name, it's terrible getting old, I can never remember it. We've got it on the bookshelf there. But it was about homosexuality and the church. And he spoke to this book and led this day for us, and Stephen was one of the people. It was one of the things put on by the diocese and this was about homosexuality, you see, with

Simeon_Bishop.8e998f7b-8635-4b75-a09c-0e2d0be163cf.doc.doc

somebody who'd written a book, a bishop who'd written a book about very positive, very affirming.

Interviewer: John Doe.

Respondent: Doe, Bishop Doe. What was his first name?

Interviewer: How do you spell Doe?

Respondent: D-O-E, as in doe a deer sort of thing.

Interviewer: I can look it up, it's fine.

Respondent: Yeah, Bishop of Swindon, he was. He became chair or head or whatever they call it of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, a missionary society after that. But he's now, I've noticed, one of the signatories on the letter to the Arch Bishop, Bishop Doe is one of the people.

Interviewer: Okay, yeah, I'll look him up.

Respondent: So, he's on there, as I've just signed it as well while I went in the...

Interviewer: Yeah, Tracy's email, yeah, I need to do it. I had to read it to approve Tracy signing it, but I haven't actually signed it yet. So, I will do.

Respondent: Oh, right. Yeah. There's nearly 4,000 now.

Interviewer: Oh, good.

Respondent: Which is quite good. And it's interesting to go through the list. I've just gone through the list very quickly, all 4,000 names, you know, scanning it as I go and seeing... it's always good to see who's signing these things, you know. So, that was the first time that I met Stephen, and I saw him across a crowded room of about 50 people and I thought, "Now, he looks rather nice". (laughs)

[0:26:54]

Interviewer: Did you go up to him?

Respondent: Yes, and I said, "Look, this is me," I gave him an able label with my name and address on, I said, "When you're up in Lincoln," because he came from the border of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, way down south, 50 miles from Lincoln, "But when you're up," I said, "We'll go out for a coffee or a drink or something, or meet with you even," you know, but he never did. He never did. And the next time was when the bishop had called this meeting, and that's when I... I said, "You never contacted me". This was about a year later, you see. Because the funny thing is that when we (inaudible 0:27:46), did he tell you this? About three years ago we said we must have known, we must have. When did we first meet, we got, you know, and he said he'd got it in his diary, it was 2002, there, but couldn't remember the date when this meeting with Bishop Doe, you see. So, we emailed Bishop Doe and said, "When were you in Lincoln, talking to your book because Stephen and myself met at your talk, you see? And we think it's about ten years ago," whenever it was, and he emailed back immediately and said, "I've got my diary for that year open and it was... and it's terrible, it's April sometime. My memory, you know. And he said, "So, you've missed your tenth anniversary, but congratulations anyway". (laughs) Sorry, I diverted there.

Interviewer: Oh, no, no, it's funny. (laughs)

Simeon_Bishop.8e998f7b-8635-4b75-a09c-0e2d0be163cf.doc.doc

Respondent: So, that's where we met. And as they say, the rest is history.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, you had your civil partnership?

Respondent: Yes, with the support of the Bishop of Lincoln, who apologised for not being able to be present because there was a meeting of the House of Bishops of the Church of England, and he said, "Can you imagine what the Bishop of Winchester would say if I said to him, I can't come," whenever it was...

Interviewer: Was that Michael Scott-Joynt at the time?

Respondent: Yes, yes, very, very... I was with my aunt and my mother in Winchester, walking near the cathedra and he was coming down the road, and I thought, "I'm going to have to say something. I don't want to sort of spit in his face but I'm going to have to say something because he's been so negative," and as he came up, he smiled very nicely and I said, "Homophobe". (laughs)

Interviewer: Did you?

Respondent: Yes. (laughs) I couldn't stop it.

Interviewer: I wish I'd been an ant on the ground.

Respondent: I wasn't in a dog collar or anything, so he didn't know...

Interviewer: He didn't know who you were.

Respondent: No, he didn't know who I was, and I must admit he did have a lovely smile and these two old ladies I had either side on my arms, and my mother and her sister, you know, and...

Interviewer: Was he walking around with a purple dress on?

Respondent: Well, not the dress. He had his purple stock and a suit, with a nice bit of gold.

[0:30:28]

Interviewer: Yeah, the bling.

Respondent: Yes, sorry. This is all being recorded, you see, for posterity.

Interviewer: Yeah, we're not submitting... I don't have to... I can pick soundbites out for the point of quotes, but we have to put the full transcription in the archive.

Respondent: Yeah, that's fair enough. I don't mind. The poor man's dead now anyway; he's gone. But I was surprised myself when I saw him and had heard his attitudes, I just couldn't stop saying it. I though I'm just going to...

Interviewer: (laughs) Yeah. I mean I live in the diocese of Winchester. It's not significantly better.

Respondent: At the moment Dakin is not being very nice to people, like Jeremy...

Interviewer: Yes, Davis.

Respondent: Jeremy Davis, the canon at Salisbury, of course, and his opera singer partner, or husband, I think. They're married actually, aren't they?

Simeon_Bishop.8e998f7b-8635-4b75-a09c-0e2d0be163cf.doc.doc

Interviewer: Yeah, they are. They got married. What's your take on the Church of England? Do you see it lasting?

Respondent: (laughs) I think Christianity will last. Whether in incarnation within the Church of England will last, I'm not quite sure. But it probably will because whatever one says about it, the fact that we can have this conversation, whereas in the Roman church they are frightened silly of people knowing where they stand on things. I mean, you know, it may be messy, and it certainly is messy, but at least we have a voice and can... which we found. I mean 30 years ago it was a bit different, but there is, among people, there is a confidence to be able to, if you like, come out publicly and say... like this letter, that wouldn't have been possible 30 years ago. And it's not possible in many communions of the Christian church. Churches, you know, there's just not that... so the dear old CofE is not stupid really by cricket bats and iron balls, but I mean goodness me, it's quite an amazing thing if you want to believe in God the Holy Spirit, just look at the Church of England, because it would never have, except for the Holy Spirit, I mean it wouldn't be there because it just doesn't work on paper. Doesn't work at the best of times. (laughs)

Interviewer: Yeah. Have you personally experienced prejudice, homophobic prejudice, and if so in what form did it take?

Respondent: I personally haven't. I personally haven't. I mean I know it exists, of course, and, if you like, I've been on the receiving end but not in a direct way. I've had some really good experiences within the church, but I do know it's there and there are two or three people I know who have removed themselves when I have been around because I know that they probably can't cope with having a great big poof doing things. So... but it's not been a direct thing. I'm, in one sense, fortunate that I haven't had to cope with direct homophobia.

Interviewer: (inaudible 0:34:39).

Respondent: No. (laughs) Bless you.

Interviewer: Yeah. What do you do at the moment? I mean talk about your life these days.

Respondent: Well, there we are, I'm in my dotage really, sort of here with Stephen. We came up here because neither of us has got much roots, home roots at all. I mean I've just got a sister who's not married or had any children. He has a non-relationship with his sister really. He was never part of her family and she just doesn't want to know. And although he's still got cousins, there isn't that relationship that draws you to be down near a family, as such. So, we thought, "Let's go somewhere completely different ourselves". So, that's why we're up here, we both like the northeast and came up, well, it will be five years this summer full time. Sorry, what was the actual question?

[0:35:58]

Interviewer: No, I'm just curious. Are you involved in church? I know that Stephen is still practising his reader ministry.

Respondent: Oh, yes, he is. Well, I help out in parishes where they need cover, otherwise I'm attached to the local parish where I go to church even if I'm not doing anything. But at the moment, because of my sister's health and the need to go down there once a month for ten days or so, and not knowing what, how she's going to be...

Interviewer: Yeah, things are kind of on hold.

Respondent: Yeah, they are. I don't commit myself at the moment to anything up here because I don't want to say, "I'll do that in three weeks' time," and find out I've got to go down and try and find somebody to cover me when I've been asked to cover, you see, so that's how I'm doing it at the moment. So, it's a helping-out capacity really, being available for holidays cover, vacancies, ill health.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what are the major changes you've experienced in your lifetime so far? What things in society have changed?

Respondent: Well, what one has noticed over the years, I think, in changes in society is how different it is from when one was growing up in the sense of, for want of a better word, I think respect. I suppose that may come from also coming from that period of knowing your place within society and all that has gone, in one sense. It's a far more open society for people. Yeah, things that happen now would never have happened then, so the whole openness of society is something I sometimes think about, you know. Gosh, that wasn't like that when I was young, you know. The opportunities that people have now. I mean I was, in one sense, factory fodder when I was little. I mean there was no chance of me going to university really. You know, I came from a working class background and it going to university... I mean it wasn't even heard of within the family, you know. Education was still 11-plus, creaming off the... which I failed in spite of always being first or second in the class, and somebody ten down from me who was always middling in the class failed but her parents... how they did it, I don't know, but she went to grammar school.

Interviewer: Oh, money under the table, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah, see, and I always... and I thought, "Why didn't my mum and dad go and stick up for me?" but it wasn't part of what they would have done. This is how things are and that's society. That's, you know, know your place in one sense. So, I did go... two years later I managed to do an exam to get... because once you were in the secondary modern system, that was it. I mean you were churned out for shop assistants, hairdressing, factories, that was... but two years later, at the age of 13, I managed to pass an exam which got me to a school in Reading which actually did CSEs, and so I managed to get there and I did get GCEs, which was... but even then, university seemed to be... it wasn't a thing you really thought of for my background. And that's the wonderful thing to see now that the educational possibilities for young people, and I think that's wonderful.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: So, those sort of things I think in society, and also with also the acceptance of difference as well. I think back in the '50s and '60s if you were different, yeah, you didn't want to be different. You wanted to conform, and that's all part of that knowing your place as well and being a part of society, and yeah.

[0:41:05]

Interviewer: Yeah. I mean I have two teenagers and they just don't get at all why there's an issue with LGBT things in church.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Totally nonplussed. They almost don't believe that I'm doing this project and why there's a point to it. So, that's... I mean obviously I'm a bit younger than you, but I grew up in the '80s really was my being a teenager was all in the '80s, and you didn't talk about it.

Respondent: No, no.

Interviewer: I mean I certainly... I identified bi. I certainly did not talk about it and it was frightening and it was scary then, so to me things really... for it's only, I think, the last ten years that things have... feels a lot different.

Respondent: Yes, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, mmm. Do you think the future is bright for LGBT people of faith on the whole?

Respondent: (laughs) This meeting in Canterbury at the moment, there's polarity between these two warring factions. It's interesting because I went to Zambia to work, because I trained as a nurse as well when I was a brother, and went round a leprosarium and health centre in the bush in Zambia, and although that church, that province isn't as vocal as some others, like Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan and others, I mean the place of homosexuality, we knew a white farmer on the farm block where we were, who had had an affair with a black person and was actually caught and imprisoned for 12 years when I was there, a relationship with a black man. So, yes, there would be, but I don't... in a church which is trying to stay together, the western part of the church, for want of a better term, the white American-dominated, English-dominated, European-dominated, I think there's going to have to be some sort of break because I don't think we're going to have... the Church of England tries to live with two different integrities for all its life, like women priests and those who oppose them, and that they're both equally valid. I think this meeting in Canterbury is going to show that probably these two integrities of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in the southern black area are not going to be able to be reconciled and that there will be some sort of shift to loosening the links between the provinces, those who want to include people, gay people, and those who want to, what they say, go back to biblical standards, stoning people and divorcing women by just saying, "I divorce you. Get out". You know, I mean if...

Interviewer: Women in tents for a week during their period all together, yeah.

Respondent: It's that tribal sort of understanding of faith which you see in the Old Testament, which is prevalent in non-western cultures. Tribalism is very strong. And, you know, I don't think there can be much relationship between the two while...

Interviewer: You see a divorce of... irreconcilable divorce.

Respondent: There's going to be, as I think Welby said, wasn't it, you can remain family, but some families don't talk to each other. Some members of the family don't talk to each other, but you're never not a member of the family.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I mean Stephen and his sister is a case in point. They are family, but they're not family, you know. There's no relationship between them, but they're blood relatives. And looking at it in that way, I can't see... I think after this meeting where the true colours and then laid out, I think there's going to become... have to be some understanding that there's going to be a... whether you call it a split or a movement away from, and that will free the western church, I think, those... I don't like using terms like progressive and everything, but those who are trying to be more inclusive of people than people who want to use a book to knock them over the head, you know, to condemn people. It does stand a chance if that happens, but that will be at the detriment of gay people within the tribal churches because they will have no voice and that will be a bad thing. So, trying to stay together is the best option for the sake of those who live under oppressive regimes, supported by an oppressive church, you know, like Uganda that are agreeing with 15 years' imprisonment for, you know, I mean the Arch Bishop, I have nothing in

common with that. But for the sake of the people who are living under that system, I can perhaps and we can in this freer society be a voice for them on the world stage because isn't that in the Commonwealth? What have we got, 50-odd countries in the Commonwealth and 40 of them still have oppressive legislation, which we exported with the Empire.

[0:48:28]

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely.

Respondent: And we've moved on. But they're still stuck and it's reinforced by this tribal literal understanding of a book, which doesn't wash with us in the west any more really.

Interviewer: It's the aspects of the Commonwealth that the Queen never mentions on Christmas Day.

Respondent: Absolutely. God bless her, and she tries her best, but absolutely right, yeah, absolutely right.

Interviewer: Just to close, if you need... if someone had to describe you in three words, what would those three words be? You can say anything you like. (laughs)

Respondent: Flabby, wish-washy and...

Interviewer: Wishy-washy with a hyphen. Yeah, that's one word. I'll let you off.

Respondent: Is it? A third word. Okay.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I think I'm okay. (laughs)

Interviewer: Yeah, I think you're okay.

Respondent: But the flabby and the wishy-washy and somebody who doesn't really want or like confrontation particularly, even though I did shout homophobe to a bishop. (laughs)

Interviewer: That was pretty heroic actually. (laughs)

Respondent: I didn't wait for the answer. (laughs) Aunt and mum on either arm.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your time.

Respondent: Thank you.

[End of Transcript]