

Interviewee: Alison Rees
Interviewer: Anna Barker
Transcribed by: Anna Barker
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[00:00:00-00:08:46] Alison talks about her decision to have a civil partnership with Peggy. She describes how important it was to her to have a ceremony that had legal validity that put her ceremony on a par with that of heterosexual couples. She describes how they had two events: in August 2007 they had a service in St Alban's Registry Office with six people on a Thursday, followed by a Covenant of Love ceremony the following Sunday. She talks about going to register the banns at Barnet registry office. Alison describes getting the giggles during the service for the Civil Partnership. They exchanged rings, took them off, and gave them to their friends to give to them at the main event on the Sunday. Their Covenant of Love ceremony took place at Pinewood Film Studios. She describes a Covenant of Love as *'basically a Jewish wedding service but designed for same-sex couples'* [0:05:40]. She describes elements of the ceremony such as the sheva brachot; she and Peggy each broke a glass; four friends were chuppah bearers. The service was led by Rabbi Eli Sarah; Rabbi Mark Solomon also participated. They had an afternoon service followed by afternoon tea and a tea dance. She talks about the guests, and says that one of the nicest parts was that her mum made a speech on behalf of both their mums.

[00:08:47-00:10:10] Alison talks about the impact of the Equal Marriage Act. *'I very much believe in what Peter Tatchell says, that there should be equal opportunities for everybody, so straight people should be able to have civil partnerships, gay people should be able to have marriage, I'm really, really cross that the law allows religious institutions to opt out, I kind of understand that the church has such a hold on this country, but I really resent that aspect, that they've got the power...however I'm delighted that I'm a progressive Jew and I will be able to do it in a synagogue'* [00:09:06] She says that she and Peggy will do something different from what they did for their Civil Partnership, but they will definitely have a marriage.

[00:10:31-00:14:07] Alison talks about the impact her schooling had on her ideas about sexuality. Nobody mentioned homosexuality at school. She says that she had one sex education lesson, and that was in biology. *'There was never any opportunity to examine lifestyles or sexual identities and I was on the same kind of treadmill of sexuality as everybody else was'* [00:11:35]. She describes how the message she got from school assemblies and RE lessons was that everyone would get married. *'The world was a straight Jewish world, let alone non-Jewish, let alone gay or lesbian or bi or anything else. But I didn't realise it.'* [00:12:32].

[00:14:22-00:17:28] Alison recalls the earliest times in her life when she first encountered references to LGBT sexuality. She says she doesn't recall any discussions about LGBT sexuality when she was of school age. She recalls watching the episode of Brookside in which there was the first pre-watershed lesbian kiss. She talks about writing letters to Channel 4 complaining that the kiss got edited out of the omnibus edition of the programme. She didn't know any openly same-sex couples at university. She describes how it felt very unusual going to her first Pride and seeing people of the same sex holding hands. She recalls negative comments about women at Greenham Common.

[00:17:36-00:00:28:08] Alison talks about how she came to accept her sexuality more through counselling. Joining JGLG and meeting Peggy also helped her accept herself. *'Also talking to other people and hearing their stories I think has made a big difference in terms of how I've reflected on things'* [00:19:35]. She says that she was quite closeted at work for a long time, because of the nature of her work with vulnerable children. *'I was always nervous, and still am to a certain extent, about being open with families, not so much colleagues but families, because you just need one bigot and your career could be in shreds, just one false accusation'* [00:20:27]. She talks about how a colleague outed her to another colleague when she first started her current job, and her reaction to this. *'I really wanted people to get to know me – and then that's an aspect of me, it's not: 'Oh she's a lesbian, that's who's coming to teach here, she's gay.'* [00:23:17]. She describes how her civil partnership gave her the vehicle to come out to colleagues. She talks about how she and Peggy decided they wouldn't have people from work at their civil partnership, but they would have a joint work party. She talks about inviting her colleagues to the party: *'It gives people something to hang it on, because people understand weddings, and people understand civil partnerships in that context, and it gives them a point of reference to their own lives and that's why it felt like a really good opportunity.'* [00:27:02]. She says that Peggy often comes to events at her work: everybody knows her, and everybody asks how she is. *'And what's interesting now is that with new people who come, I just talk openly, because I know that they've probably been told, because it's still, however normal it is to us, it's still a novelty to other people I think.'* [0:27:40].