

Interview Summary RJ201307A

Interviewer: Zack Shlachter

Interviewee: David Rubin

Transcriber: John Clarke

Track 1, [00:45:25]

[00:00:18 – 00:02:48]

Family life, growing up in Glasgow and relationship with Judaism

David's mother was from Glasgow and his father from London. His mother's family was large, close-knit and they lived in a very Jewish suburb of Glasgow. He experienced a warm safe childhood with Jewish family friends and Jewish and non-Jewish neighbours. David had a semi-religious childhood with his mother only attending shul on the High Holidays and his father attending shul on Shabbat and saying Kiddush on Fridays. As he grew older he and his sister were allowed to go out on Friday nights. The family was religious culturally and that was an important part of his early life. *"Prayer didn't come into it. God didn't come into it, but food did, Kosher household did."* He felt different from other people and at primary school he was the only Jewish pupil in the class. He didn't attend religious assembly along with one other Catholic pupil and he thought that the Church of Scotland was the biggest religion in the world at the time. He kept his Jewishness very private. *"One didn't advertise it."*

[00:03:18 – 00:04:00]

Moving to London after University

David's first job was in London and there he met an older lady who was a Jewish refugee from Germany who introduced him to people in the community. He knew his father's family well who were Londoners so there was no problem with his Jewishness. His second job was as a teacher and he felt to be part of a very tolerant environment where he was able to come out both as gay and as Jewish straight away. *"That was me. I was hiding nothing more."*

[00:04:25 – 00:05:15]

Tough in those days being Jewish, gay and vegetarian.

Scotland back then was a much narrower society, a narrow Jewish community in a narrow Christian suburb. Sex was not generally a topic for discussion and Jewish people did not mention to non-Jews that they were Jewish. Even at University David kept very quiet about such things. *"There was I, being different from people in three different ways and probably feeling quite shy and nervous about it all."*

[00:05:28 – 00:07:35]

When sexuality was first discussed with parents.

David never had any problems about being gay and it always felt very natural to him. He had early experiences cruising in parks on the way to Jewish youth club. *"I never struggled against it, never ever."* Whereas other people were troubled by their

sexuality, David felt very fortunate. He had a relationship just before leaving to spend a year in Paris. He wrote to his sister whilst in Paris telling her he was missing the guy he had been seeing. His parents opened this letter and they were horrified. His father flew over to Paris for the day and said David should see a psychiatrist. David agreed to go to a doctor when he returned to Glasgow. There he explained to the doctor that he was well-adjusted and fine with being gay and that if it would cause any problems for his father he would leave home. It simply all blew over. His parents were very loving but it was never really discussed again.

[00:08:04 – 00:09:00]

Seeing a Jewish and LGBT advert

When David saw this in a newspaper he felt the two most important aspects of his life had come together. He had always wanted to have a relationship with another Jewish man, although that never happened! He went along to a Jewish LGBT organisation, a social group and made friends there. There was a religious service each Friday, firstly attended only by men and then women started attending. It was very warm and friendly.

[00:09:47 – 00: 11:53]

London

London back then wasn't much more open than Glasgow. His sexuality was never discussed with family in London but they were aware of it and it wasn't a problem. It was easier in terms of sleeping arrangements since he had left home but there wasn't a huge difference. He had a Jewish and gay life both in Glasgow and in London. David felt he was lucky. He came across anti-Semitism only a few times at school, never at University or work. He didn't come across anti-gay feelings in the circles he was in, nor in the work he did.

[00:12:11 – 00:25:20]

Political Involvement, BKY, first LGBT shul

Political movements started in the late 1960s with CHE, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. David only began to get involved with things when he went along to BKY (Beit Klal Yisrael) originally a feminist Jewish lesbian organisation. He went with a friend and had always been interested in feminist issues. David was the first man to join in the early 1980s and he then became politically aware. In those days there was only three LGBT Rabbis but this number grew through the work of BKY. The atmosphere in the shul was warm, friendly, inspiring and open. *"It was terribly important to be oneself quite frankly."* The work of Liberal Judaism and the Reform movement also made it easier for people to be openly LGBT. David is still actively involved in BKY. He still finds that the work they do is vital for people. He supports other LGBT Jewish people and it is important to him to make other people feel welcome. He learnt a great deal about feminism in the early days and had always felt very strongly about feminist rights. The Jewish gay group before the women joined was very sexist and some lesbians in BKY resented a male joining. But soon these feelings dispersed. *"BKY gave me community more than just support...it feels like home."*

[00:21:02 – 00: 23:52]

Relationships

David met Jewish people in London through his family, the Jewish gay group and through BKY. In his social life now most people are Jewish. The first gay people he met in London were through cruising, gay saunas and gay pubs, which he finds are the most unfriendly of places. David had longer-term relationships in London.

[00:24:29 – 00:25:37]

Marriage Equality, Domestic and Civil Partnerships

David believes this is a very important issue for LGBT people generally. Most of the LGBT couples he knows have been civil partnered. His experience of the lesbian community was that the couples remained monogamous after civil partnership while gay men seemed to be more promiscuous after civil partnership. He does not know of any male gay relationship that is monogamous but that civil partnership is an important factor in giving stability. He believes it is important legally, socially and financially.

[00:26:15 – 00:29:25]

AIDS

David experienced some horrific times seeing friends die of AIDS. He lost a close friend who he had introduced to BKY. *“In BKY or in the Jewish gay group, you mention in the prayers the names of those who have died. Whereas you go along to a Liberal or a Reform shul, such a thing is not mentioned in the prayers.”* David describes living through those times as quite frightening. He remembers seeing someone with whom he had had a brief fling and then didn't recognise him. He sadly died a few weeks later. *“You just accepted it but it was heart-breaking.” “That's being Jewish...accepting...suffering.”*

[00:29:56 – 00:36:20]

Formative experience

Being gay was just part of David's development. *“There was no questioning. It was as if it was a natural thing in my life.”* David describes his experiences as really really fortunate and different to other friends. He wasn't hiding from anything and came out to his sister and cousins in Glasgow, relatives he was very close to and who he knew would be tolerant. *“We had talks about it and they were fascinated by it.”* He had one or two friends who were gay at University after returning from Paris which was quite unusual but there was no gay club. In those days one kept one's private life away from one's studies. His Jewishness and gayness did not come out at University with the people he was friendly with. *“My Jewish life, my gay life and my University life were compartmentalised.”* This never caused him any difficulty. On one occasion he saw a University lecturer at a sauna. He also compartmentalised his life. *“I didn't ever feel abnormal, I didn't ever feel I was doing something wrong. I knew I was different but I accepted that. But I was different being Jewish, I was different being vegetarian so I was always different.”* It did feel nice to know other gay people and to know that there were University lecturers who were gay. David always felt very self-sufficient and never felt the need to discuss his gayness.

[00:36:58 – 00:38:32]

First job in London and key early friendship

David worked at the MoD as a linguist officer. He learnt a lot from a person he met there whose parents had been killed in Auschwitz. She introduced David to opera, music and reading. Although his family was warm, they were not a cultured family. With this friend there was still no talk of being gay although she did have a couple of male gay friends. It was a very important friendship to him.

[00:38:33 – 00:40:36]

Teaching

David described his teaching career which he loved. It was a very tolerant environment in which to work.

[00:40:37 – 00:42:08]

West London

David lives in West London but would rather live in North London near a bagel shop! David would rather live in a more Jewish area. He likes being among Jewish people and feels at home among Jewish people.

[00:42:09 – 00:45:25]

Jewishness

“It’s not religious, it’s just being with Jewish people. Just feel really at home, there’s always a closeness.” “There’s a connection, there’s usually a warmth, a mutual interest and conversation starts. David describes his pride in being Jewish and pride in the Jewish legacy, particularly in the legacy that Jewish people have given Britain.