

Interview Summary

Interviewer: Eleni Tziourtzia

Interviewee: Edward Teeger

Transcriber: Eleni Tziourtzia

Track 1, [01:07:57.4] minutes

[00:00:00 – 00:03:34] Personal Profile

Edward Teeger was born in Johannesburg, South Africa on 14 September 1945 and he is a retired architect. He now spends his time studying Spanish, watercolour painting, life drawing and ceramics culture. He is also teaching Hebrew to people who convert to Judaism while he is teaching his grandson to sing for his *bar mitzvah* as well. He attends a lot of art exhibitions, he likes reading history and he is helping his boyfriend with his career as a teacher. Politically, he is interested in the Jewish and LGBT affairs of the country. He wants to share his story as he feels that *“it’s part of my commitment to both sides of my background, and my personality, and my character, they’re both (Jewish and LGBT identity) very important to me... um... and they have similarities in that to be Jewish and, in my case, to be gay or bisexual is something that happens inside you or happens without any choice ... eh... it can give you some problems, and it can give you a lot of satisfaction; and you can choose to certain times in life to hide it or to make the problems the most important part or make the celebration of these things the important part”*.

[00:03:34 – 00:08:16.] Childhood

Edward’s grandparents were born in Lithuania, Eastern Europe and they moved to South Africa in the late 1800’s. Both of his parents were born and died in South Africa while all of his siblings eventually left the country. While growing up, he remembers going to the synagogue weekly and that he wanted to be able to take part in the children’s services and he eventually learned how to do that. Edward got more involved with the Synagogue from the age of twelve onwards. He says that the Jewish part of his life was always important and that he enjoyed his Jewish upbringing. He started painting at the age of 9 having a teacher from Yugoslavia who taught him until he left South Africa at the age of twenty. He remembers her as a lovely lady with whom his parents were friendly. When she moved to England, Edward continued his classes with her and had a close relation with her and her family. He also remembers being shy at school, where he was teased for being gay. Generally he says that he had a cheerful childhood, where he was *“privileged of being white in South Africa and, to some extent, there was an element of guilt about that privilege”*. Talking about his siblings, he says that he was the second child of the family and that he would always try to please everyone, giving them the answers they wanted to hear while his older brother would always do what he wanted without worrying about what people would think.

[00:08:16 – 00:13:05] Family Relations

Edward has an older brother living in New York, U.S.A and a younger brother living in Toronto, Canada. He is on good terms with both of them, going on holidays together and talking on the phone every week or two. He mentions that although there is only one year difference between him and his older brother, he feels closer to his younger brother with whom he was protective while growing up. As he says *“Both of them are straight and both of them have no problem with me being gay”*. Both of his parents were well known and respected in the local community. His father was a doctor and a very warm and loved person by his friends and patients. Edward, however, remembers him having *“a little bit discomfort with the way I was [...] We got on well, but there was an element of reserve in our relationship”*. His mother was more artistic and Edward was closer to her out of the three brothers. He never came out to his father, who died in 2002 when Edward was already a grandfather. He only came out to his mother in 2003 when he left his wife. She accepted him although she was a little bit uncomfortable and she never discussed this with others although all her friends knew. Edward talks

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about her suffering from cancer and how he went back to South Africa to look after her. She eventually died in 2006.

[00:13:05 – 00:15:48] Marriage and moving to England

Edward met his wife at the University and they got married as soon as they qualified, when he was 23 and she was 21, in 1969. They left the country the day after their wedding, moving to Paris, France. They moved in England in 1971 and had their first child the same year. Edward was very involved with the household and the upbringing of their children. He remembers that his children would come to him for comfort if they had heart themselves. They all had a close and warm relationship. His son Gregory was very supportive with Edward being gay but his older son has more of a problem with it. They enjoy each other's company when they are together but they don't meet so often, and his son's wife doesn't want their children to know that Edward is gay. As a result, he sees his grandchildren once every two months.

[00:15:48 – 00:19:43] Homosexuality and being in a heterosexual marriage

Edward was hiding his sexual identity all his life until 2002-2003. He says that part of that was falling in love with his wife and getting married, although he still had thoughts about being gay. There was an element of guilt about liking men and he was always very careful that no one will notice. For that reason he was careful about what he spoke about, the opinions he gave and the way he looked. His gay life was just some snaps during his marriage. When he came to England he started reading Forum magazine, which was open-minded about homosexuality and included stories, letters and articles. As he says *"It opened my mind to the idea that sex should be pleasure, should be nothing to be ashamed of [...] so that was quite a support to how I was feeling"*. However, he decided to keep it secret, as *"the straight side (of my life) was more important to me than my gay side"*.

[00:19:43 – 00:23:21] Coming out to his family

Edward says that he used to see the adverts at the Time Out magazine under the gay page, back in the 80's and 90's, that the Jewish gay and lesbian group were having events and he would think *"now that's the group I should belong to, but it's the one group I can't go near"*. He explains that the Jewish community know one another and, since he was hiding his sexual identity, there was the risk to be revealed. He joined gay film festivals and clubs though as *"London is a big place and it was unlikely to see somebody I knew"*. He then goes on to explain how his sex life with his wife was deteriorated over the years and his attraction to her reduced, although they still liked one another and got on well. Because of that, Edward says that he allowed himself to get more active with men and in 2002 he got sick and he found out that he was HIV positive, having to inform his wife. But they decided to stay together as they were both in shock; their children learned about it six months later. Edward remembers that his family wasn't judgemental due to the fact that he was sick, but he says that *"I had to hide everything. So with the diagnosis I was ready to come out of the closet and they (the family) were pushing me back into the closet and keeping it secret and trying to almost climb into the closet with me so nobody should know"*.

[00:23:21 – 00:25:29] Suicide attempt and living the family house

Edward and his wife stayed together after his diagnosis. This was a difficult period for both of them as his wife had to now hide things, something Edward was used to do throughout his whole life. They decided to do not tell his father, as he was an old man. Edward started being depressed and he thought of suicide during certain holidays. They had separate rooms with his wife by now and they had

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big arguments about Edward having gay books in his room. All these added up to his depression feeling and in December 2002 he took an overdose of 42 aspirins in an attempt to commit suicide. His wife realised that something was wrong; she forced her way into his room and his youngest son came with him to hospital where he was treated. The next day Edward left his wife. He went on to live with a friend for 7 months and afterwards he bought his own flat.

[00:25:29 – 00:35:53] Life out of the closet

Edward went on to join the Jewish gay group, living an open life without being ashamed of his sexual identity. He became a member of the comity and gave lectures on being gay and Jewish, while he also wrote a paper on this as well. He was able to stay with his Synagogue and he talks about the liberation of being able to judge the right and the wrong parts in the Torah. He went on to be in a support group of people diagnosed with HIV. He also joined the London Pride and he has been marching with the Jewish group ever since. He generally became a very active member of such organisations; he is also involved with Keshet UK and JGLG. Edward says *“I would say that when you’re in the closet [...] the danger that you feel is that if people find out, the people that you love and the people that you need will reject you. That’s the reason for staying in the closet; or one of the main reasons”*. He also says that he regrets hurting his wife and older son and not being able to have a closer relationship with his grandchildren but, although some of his friends chose to maintain a closer relationship with his wife rather than him it’s not a big deal. Talking about whether it would be harder or not to come out in South Africa, he says that the main issue would probably be the pressure of all the family, the uncles, aunts and cousins and comparing England to other parts of the world he concludes that it is a fantastic place to come out nowadays.

[00:35:53 – 00:40:54] Jewish identity

Edward was brought up under the Orthodox Jewish denomination of South Africa, which is more open-minded in comparison with the Orthodox movement of England. His grandfather was involved with setting up the community and then the rest of the members of the family, including himself, were involved with the community as well. He always enjoyed himself in the Synagogue and he goes on to talk about two of his personal objects, his tallit bag and his tallit clip, which are part of his weekly life. He talks about his current involvement with the Synagogue where he has a lot of friends and where he is the chairman of the rituals committee. Religion is a big part of who he is and he teaches Hebrew and religious ideas to people converting to Judaism.

[00:40:54 – 00:45:34] Edward’s partner

Edward says that his partner is very different from him as he is Hispanic and an ex Catholic – now atheist. He was 32 years old when Edward met him at the age of 58 at a gay venue. Edward says *“we were attracted to one another from the beginning... [...] I had left my wife about 3-4 months before, I wasn’t looking for a partner... but we got on well, I wanted to see him again. [...] We met on the 11th of March, I remember the day well [...] by June we were spending almost all the time staying in my flat and it seemed stupid to pay rent for the room I was sharing with a friend while I was spending most of the time here... [...] he moved-in in July 2005 and we’ve been together ever since”*. Edward goes on saying that he has met his partner’s family and they have accepted him completely. He mentions that he would like his partner to be more involved with his Jewish side but he is not interested.

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[00:45:34 – 00:48:49] Marriage and adoption

Edward talks about adoption by non-heterosexual couples in the UK and how the laws changed on this matter. He mentions that his partner wanted to them to adopt a child but Edward was reluctant “*mainly because I was much older than him, he was still building his career and he is still building his career, and I had two children, I was already a grandfather when I met him, and I felt that I would become the main carrier with a young baby at home while he would be going out at work... and it’s not exactly what I saw of my life in my 50s and 60s*”. He also says that he just got divorced after 10 years of separation and that there are still things he wants to do for his children and his partner and for these reasons he did not get married.

[00:48:49 – 00:50:58] Maintaining an open relationship

Edward says that since he came out he has been able to be more outspoken about being rebellious and he talks about the open relationship that he has with his partner, where both can have sex with other people, together or apart.

[00:50:58 – 00:54:36] Influences to his sexual identity

Edward says that while he was in the closet he was very careful and he didn’t have any gay friends except one, who is by now his best friend. His friend has been with his partner for 35 years and they all get along together, going on holidays and clubbing. He mentions that he was the only person to give his number to, back in the 80s and he was his witness at his Mitzvah ceremony. Edward sees him as an influence to his sexual identity, apart from the aforementioned Forum magazine. He also identifies his Rabbi as an influence as well, who helped him loosen up his thinking about the laws of God.

[00:54:36 – 00:58:17] Going to gay bars

Edward remembers going to gay bars and clubs secretly while he was in the closet. He says that it was exciting and dangerous and that he remembers wondering “*why I am doing this, the gay things... there are so many reasons not to do it... you could get sick, you could be recognised or you could be arrested. And despite knowing all that I remember thinking of these three things that could happen to you and yet the libido and the urge was stronger than those three things*”.

[00:58:17 – 00:59:21] LGBT people and the modern society

Edwards talks about how that society in UK has changed to the better towards LGBT people, as well as the Jewish community changed its views on the matter. He notes that “*London is a good place to be gay*”.

[00:59:21 – 1:00:42] Rainbow Jews, Keshet UK

Edward talks about his involvement with Rainbow Jews and Keshet UK as well as that he likes working with young people in this organisations and in the Synagogue.

[00:00:42 - 01:07:57.4] Epilogue

Edward notes that he feels good that he has been able to come out of the closet and as an extent that it is a dream-come-true that he is able to be out as a Jewish gay person, living with a man. He would like to see more his older son and his grandchildren, and it is his gay side that prevents that. He also

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notes that ever since he took the overdose he felt that *“I don’t have to hang around in this world forever. I think, common with people being diagnosed with HIV or maybe other illnesses that are incurable, you tend to prioritise what’s important in your life and doing what I want to do now, and I can, is important, as long as I’m not hurting anybody”*. He thinks that of everyone in the Rainbow Jews team he is the one who spent the longest in the closet. To his words *“I suppose if I had come out earlier I would have a very-very different life. I probably wouldn’t have had children, I wouldn’t have heart my wife the way I’ve heard her... there are certainly some regrets, some benefits and some regrets there...”*. On a final note, Edward admits he has been on a small daily dose of anti-depressants since 2002 , which stabilises him.

END OF INTERVIEW