

Summary of interview with Karen Newman and Susan Crane for Rainbow Jews.

Interviewer: Alison Turner

Date and place of interview: 30 October 2013 at the Montagu Centre

Karen and Susan have been together for 28 years, they met in 1985 when Susan was an intern at the International Planned Parenthood Foundation where Karen worked. They talk about how they got together, and their differing attitudes to feminism. After her year in England, Susan had to go back to the United States and finish university, so they commuted across the Atlantic for 2 years. They managed to sustain the relationship by letter, visit and rare phone calls, there was no fax or email. In 1987 Susan moved in permanently.

Susan describes her family finding out by accident that she was a lesbian, and it taking 6 years before it got normalised, in particular with her father. This caused problems when Susan's sister got married, Susan ended up going without Karen. Karen only told her family when Susan's family came to England to visit, they had been together for about 10 years by then.

Susan talks about when she first became aware of same-sex attraction, as a child playing with her friend, she saw women kissing and her friend's mother took her away and she knew it was a forbidden thing. Her mother was a Catholic and when Susan was 10 her mother said she did not want Susan's partner to be a woman. At University it was a whole new world and she came out to herself. She was relieved to find lesbians with children at a Women's Centre, that she could be with a woman partner and still have children. When she met Karen she thought of converting, having grown up in New York, most of her boyfriends had been Jewish, so it was no big thing, but Karen wasn't into anything Jewish then. Susan's family background included Catholics, Swedes and a Unitarian Minister. She talks about her mother's background and political views and activism in Planned Parenthood, that led Susan to her internship and to Karen.

They say their best moments were on trips, the civil partnership and things connected to their daughter Lily. Susan speaks about attitudes to same-sex parenting and how they have changed over the years. They talk about deciding to have a child and how they joined the Jewish Lesbian and Gay Group to find a man to be the father and financial and other arrangements they made.

They decided together to have a civil partnership, first in a civil ceremony on the TS Queen Mary, then a family dinner, party and after that a religious ceremony at LJS. They had many of the trappings of a wedding, and they describe problems because of this. They were the first couple to have a same-sex commitment ceremony at LJS and the Rabbis were very helpful, with very well-crafted words from Rabbi Mark.

They talk about their involvement with the Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group, Karen didn't feel the need to be Jewish and gay in the same nanosecond, so she was unprepared for how moved she was to find she could be Jewish and gay and celebrate both as well as each identity. They may convert their civil partnership to marriage in the future, after Lily's batmitzvah in 2014. They see themselves as very boring and ordinary and that this is the crowning achievement of Gay Liberation. Susan wants to be in a society where it just doesn't matter that they are gay and thinks we are getting there. They wanted to be involved in this project to have it on record, they offered documentation from their civil partnership to the Women's Library. They see Lily as a creation of JGLG's spirit, and enabled by the group and are pleased that she is now involved with LJY-Netzer. They want other people to see that it is possible to have synagogue involvement for gay couples and by speaking out to encourage more people to find that public recognition of their relationship in a Jewish context.