

Interview with Russell Van Dyk - Rainbow Jews

Surat:

Hello, today is Wednesday 19th June 2013 and we are here for the Rainbow Jews Project at the Montagu Centre in London and I've got today Russell with me. Thanks Russell for coming in, my name is Surat Knan and I am the project manager of Rainbow Jews. Russell, could you just give us a little background, personal background information, your name, your age, where you were born, what your occupation is currently or was.

Russell:

1. Yeah sure, well I am Russell Van Dyk. I was born in North-West London in Colindale hospital. Sort of middle class Jewish family, brought up in Golders Green, a good Jewish area and my parents went to the north-western reformed synagogue at Alyth Gardens and, but I had a conventional. Well the childhood was very nice and then a conventional education at Prep school then a boarding school, all boys, and went home really at weekends once I was at the boarding school and only occasionally. So, I think they thought that was a way of dealing with any issues, sent him to boarding school and he'll learn about.

Question 1 take 2:

Surat:

Hello today is Wednesday 19th June 2013 and we are here for the Rainbow Jews project. My name is Surat Knan and I am the project manager and we are at the Montagu Centre in London and I've got today Russell with me, thanks Russell for coming. Russell could you just give us a brief overview, background, name, age, occupation.

Russell:

2. Sure. Thanks for inviting me. Yes I was born in North-West London in 1954 in Colindale hospital. I was brought up in a good Jewish area, Golders Green. Educated at Belmont and then Mill hill school, also North-West London and ended up in the National Health Service working as a manager, but I no longer do that now. I've retired and doing property.

Surat:

Russell could you tell us a bit more about your family, your upbringing, sort of early memories that just come to your mind.

Russell:

3. Well it was a nice, middle-class home in Golders Green. I have two elder brothers, once three years older, one five years older. My parents belong to north-western reformed synagogue, the one at Alyth Gardens, and from a very early age I was taken to synagogue on Saturdays and the Revered Cohen was in charge and Lionel Blue covered occasionally when he was away. And yes I had nice memories of synagogue services and leading up to my Bar Mitzvah, which I went to the religion school there and I think it was a fairly happy childhood. I was closer to my mother than my father, but reasonably balanced, but it wasn't...

Issues around sexuality didn't really arise because I was too young. When I went to boarding school

I sort of discovered those sorts of issues much more seriously because puberty comes on and you realize that you might be different to other people so, that's when you have to address the issues. But I would say it was pretty happy, my other brothers were quite different to me, in fact, no one would say that we were brothers really. We look so different, but my middle brother is gay and the oldest brother is married with kids and so I am the baby as my mother liked to introduce me to anyone she met, at the synagogue, Russell is the baby. Being the youngest, I suppose I was rather engulfed by that maternal love and reasonably distant father, so that made it intensified that he was busy with business and city, and actually he worked a lot for the synagogue in admin and was in charge of it for two years. But he, I think the day to day upbringing of me was not really a focus for him, he left it to my mother to do all that stuff.

4. So, I can move on to discovering my sexuality now which took place at school and realising that I preferred boys to girls and there were a few like me at the school but 98% were boys growing up and taking interest in, there was sort of a girls school down the hill, there was a lot of focus on that and you play along with that because you are not quite sure yourself. You think you know, you prefer boys to girls but you are not sure so you play along with it a lot and, but in the end the direction of travel is clear and I and a lot of people say they don't accept the idea that the mother is influential in that you know you are just born gay or nature nurture argument. But I, I'm pretty sure that that had an influence actually, in my case anyway, that my mother's love, directed me. I don't know I thought that I ended up liking the same gender she liked which was men. I think that has directed me there but by the time I left school at 18, there was no question in my mind at all that I was, I preferred men. The word gay was getting currency then, it was about 19, well early 70s, 71 and it was around, been around a while but I didn't apply it to myself too much I just thought that I liked men

5. I suppose the first big realisation was when I went on holiday with a friend from school and we were touring Italy and we were in Florence and I just remember we went to these digs and there was an American girl staying at the digs and she said to us "you know that bar down the street" and we said "oh yes we passed it on the way to these digs" she said "Don't go there that's where all the faggots go" and I thought ah, maybe that is where I need to go. But the friend I was with was completely straight so I had to wait until he was tired and had an early night and I slipped out to this bar and met someone from South London, in Florence. My first boyfriend turned out to be [English]

Surat:

Do you remember actually the whole situation? Was that your first? What were you wearing when you came in? What music was playing? How did you feel, you know, entering that bar back in Florence?

Russell:

6. Well I was probably wearing a t-shirt and jeans, sort of like, there might have been flares actually because flares were in and I remember I was smoking cos' it was the thing to do, you left school, just left school, and it was like breaking away from another rebellious thing and also it was something to do with your hands. So I just remember very buzzy atmosphere of course it was full of Italians, in various sort of, some of them very camp and tight t-shirts and tight trousers and stuff which I didn't, thought that's not me. I was just regular Russell and it was only when I heard this voice on my right saying "what are you smoking" and I realised it was somebody English and this person was just marvellous at asking me lots of lovely questions which I could say what I thought about myself and what I thought I preferred. At the time I thought it was like chains

[Pause because of the microphone... pick up again]

Russell:

7. So I went into this bar down the street and it was very crowded, mostly with Italians and often very outrageously dressed, bright yellow shirts, tight trousers, very camp and I thought that's definitely not me, maybe I'm not like these people but I wasn't sure. And I smoked then so I had this cigarette, more for nervousness and something to do with my hands, and I just heard this voice from my right, "What are you smoking", it was clearly an English voice and it turned out to be someone who became my first boyfriend for a few years. He came from South London and he was a writer, a journalist, and very sensitive to the situation so I was really...

8. I could say everything that I had been bottling up, my confusion; I was still pretty confused so much so that by the end of the evening I hadn't taken much note into about him. It was all about Russell and his needs, so he just said "can I go to bed with you", I was like shocked and then I said "If you like", which is a curious response. I just hadn't given it much thought to be honest about that bit but in fact I went back to his digs because I knew he couldn't come to mine because my friend was asleep there and that was a very interesting night, evening and night, and in the morning I knew I left my jacket in his room and I knew I had to go back to collect it, slightly embarrassing but as his friend was around but anyway that was a very important meeting and I realised that I had a bit of a gay identity and I was beginning to play to myself as a gay man really from that point on. That was August 1972 and I was only 18 so it was early days.

Surat:

So if we stay for a moment in that time, how much or if anything, did your Jewish faith, your families religion and your religious background, come in to this 'coming out'? You also mentioned your brothers, was there any notion of "I shouldn't be doing this" as a Jewish boy or...?

Russell:

9. Oh yeah, I think I was very aware and that's why I felt I was under such suffocating and pressure not to say anything and why it was such a release in that bar because I could then say things. Yes I knew that homosexuals were strange people and my father said things like "they're unsavoury", that was his words, "they hang about street corners" and I think he must have had a bad experience with someone who approached him, I'm only guessing, but he was pretty uncomfortable about it. And the person I met at that bar, he warned me not to tell my parents anything and I just thought that they love me, their my parents, I'm going to tell them. I'm going to tell them everything! And he, I was illegal then I was 18/19 and it was 21 was the age of consent. He had to shape me to say actually Russell if you tell them, they will go to the police, I could go to prison. I thought What?! I just found it so difficult.

10. After having been shook a bit, I realized that had to be right, there were a lot of tears but I knew I couldn't say anything to either parent, even my mum being closer to I didn't think I could say anything because there was a sort of Jewish morality, you know, it's an "abomination" and stuff and it was taken sufficiently seriously. I think people that were a bit prejudice or uncomfortable about the issue would then use that abomination thing to defend it, so I just bit my lip and I didn't, even thought my father came out with his unsavoury stuff, I thought you are talking to one now but I didn't say anything.

Surat:

Did you ever get the courage to actually come out with it to your family?

Russell:

11. Well um, what happened was a few years later I met Alan, my partner, and end of '74 and he was like my landlord as far as they were concerned but he was a bit older than me and there was acceptance that the friendship was not just landlord/ tenant, that we were actually quite close. And the only one time though, my father made any reference to him, Alan used to come for lunch occasionally and for a chat, was when I was talking to my father about marriage, I don't know why and he said that "well Alan's never going to get married is he!" I thought 'how did you work that one out'? Alan wore plat-formed shoes as you did in the 70s and flares and stuff but I think my father may have equated that with being effeminate in some way, it was definitely derogatory assumption about Alan. But with me he probably thought that it might be a passing phase or whenever marriage came up in respect of me it was always about "well there's plenty of time for marriage later so sort your career out Russell", get the good job, get your exams, go to university, and all those things. They were the important things.

12. So, my father was happy to shunt it onto the back-burner which was fine because that meant, it gave me the freedom to do stuff and when I met Alan, I had already gone to, heard about the Jewish gay and lesbian group in 19, because I knew it was around. Tiny, tiny group, I had to go to some tiny bedsit in Clapham to meet someone who was from it and it didn't give me a very positive view of it, but then I met some other people and I realised there was a tiny, tiny network of people that had coffee evenings and socials, very occasional and I sort of joined that and went to the coffee evening and. Yeah it was nice to make the connection with my Jewishness and my gayness because I didn't think that was possible. I just thought there was so much prejudice around but that was good. Then I suppose its selfish but that's when I met Alan in November '74 and thought well yeah I've met the love of my life now 'cos the previous person I met, I had broken up with the one if Florence, if you like, South London, and I thought I didn't need the Jewish gay group anymore as it was then because I've got Alan.

13. Unfortunately, I left it for a few years, a good three or four years, I just thought you know I am going to live this life with Alan and that will all be fine. You know when you are out of the sort of high point, the cloud nine period, the relationship then you sort of look around and say are there any networks, so I go back to Jewish gay group and see what's cooking and met quite a few people again and we both went to what was then the regular thing was coffee evening, always at people's homes and generally just to sit and chat and compare notes but it was nice to do that. And there wasn't really any religious stuff and there was talk about having *seders* and they started soon after. I think they were the first bigger event that also started having in people's homes and once that got going in the 80s. I think every year second night Seder was held in someone's home including Alan and my home.

14. We had once such event and it was very nice to do that because you could sort of have, regular *Haggadah* to go through it all and bond with all the people there. I have to say it was all men, I don't think there were any women in the Jewish gay group at all, and the name of course didn't help. But I think it just didn't really happen for them, it was a male dominated group, it was triggered by men and gay men network in a particular way, so, and there was none of this sort of outreaching to lesbians. It hadn't even been considered in those days. It happened a lot later of course, with more recent times but not then.

/edit in here

15. So, those were the big things in the 80s really, there was a really important weekend, we were sort of friends with Lionel Blue and we knew him and of course he remembered me from Alyth Gardens from when I was a child. And he said he remembers all the Van Dyks in a row, three

children and Russell the youngest, you could see him when he covered for the regular rabbi there so, it sort of, I knew him which was quite nice and I knew he was gay. And so he organised for us to go to a big weekend in **Spode** which is a retreat. I think it's used mostly by Christian faith, but it's like, it has dormitories, it has very good catering and meeting rooms.

[Pause]

16. So there was a very important weekend I'd like to mention which took place in Spode, near Rugeley, and that was a weekend through the links Lionel Blue had with these Christian retreats. We were able to use these premises, beautiful house, wonderful catering, and dormitories and lecture rooms and we could have discussions on any subjects we like, and we had services and given it was very early, about the beginning of the 80s. It was really special to be able to go there and just and completely relax and talk and network and I just have memories of lying by the swimming pool chatting or pond, I can't remember, but it was certainly we were very relaxed and just enjoyed the good food and company.

17. So, that was just like a special weekend, very nice. And it was probably sometime after that I was asked to become Chair of Jewish gay group and there was a gap someone left and I took it over and that really was a big jump from being a member and going to a coffee evening or two to doing this and there were a lot of things I was then able to do, pride marches were really getting established in the 80s, getting bigger and bigger and we thought why not have the Jewish gay group, bagel and cream cheese stall, and so with Alan and others from the group we would organise this and we would always sell out. We had hundreds of these bagels, I'm not sure how much people joined the group but some did, some people actually joined the group on the strength of that. We had a banner and we would march with that and famous folk like Peter Tatchell, were in the foreground, the forefront, it felt like a coming out. It was very special.

18. I think we got a lot more interest from that because there was no internet so everything had to be done by post or adverts and I was involved in trying to get the group promoted a bit more and we thought why don't we have a service, a regular service once a month, and we just thought lets pick a day and we picked the last Friday of the month. I think initially we did that in people's homes so we would just sit in a circle and read some prayers and again it was a chance to chat and schmooze and I didn't have the connection but somebody did have the connection with a rabbi at Alyth Gardens, my old synagogue where I was Bar Mitzvah and he said well why not have a room in the new youth centre they'd opened at Alyth youth and community centre which was new then the old now. And we are allowed to use this upstairs room.

19. I just remembered all the paintings on the wall. It was a very long room and we were quite small in those days, but we actually had our own place that was not somewhere that was a private address you had to keep secret, and that was a big jump because to actually be able to advertise and address, we could never do that. Where to advertise? Well, the obvious place was the Jewish chronicle and this was a scary period because the Jewish chronicle were very uncomfortable about the "g" word, and we had a ad that we ran, usually the week before to give people 10 days notice and we had to phone it in. You could post it but phoning was more reliable so every time it came to phoning in this ad to the Jewish chronicle, sometimes you would, they would just take the information and you'd pay for it. They didn't have an issue and you would be fine. Sometimes they would say just a moment and you would get this long pause while this secretary was writing this down and obvious hit the word gay and had gone to ask someone in authority if they could accept it. And I know on one occasion where they refused it and they said we can't always put these in for you and there was stuff on the letters page which was quite homophobic in those days. You know about one man one woman and this is an abomination and all that stuff, and there were counter letters for the greater of the good. We tended not to write letters because people didn't want to come out; there was a lot of

uncomfortableness about it.

20. Gradually they accepted these ads and we put them in and the group got bigger, more people came, more people saw the ads. We also put ads in gay times which was around then, gay news, it was still going then so we tried to advertise. But the Jewish thing was the Chronicle and that was the important one and so we were pleased to begin to grow the group and had those regular services. And they were taken by various folk, more profusely inclined, some very nice events they were right through the 80s and they were all at Alyth Gardens that ran through, that would be Seders, which kept going and the pride marches.

21. The group began to take on some substance, that it hadn't had before, you know with these discreet coffee evenings and that was very important to me and special that we were at last getting on the map. The other big thing, I suppose, for the group was the awareness that we weren't the only group in the world and that we were oldest but we realized that in the US they had many, many groups, the big synagogue in New York was going and we realized there was a network in the world congress and that we could actually attend these conferences that they held every couple of years. And so, various of us, we used to send ones or twos, if they wanted to go, and often we couldn't pay their fares or anything but they would go. It was good to network and realize that we could do this, and there was one in New York that was very memorable and just a much bigger family than we realized so that was very nice.

22 And yeah, just going back to my family, I didn't mention that whether I came out or not and in fact I never came out to my father. He died in 1978 and I was only 24 then and we hadn't gotten beyond the point of me living with Alan as some sort of tenant. But my mother sort of approached the subject, some years later after he died, and for some reason I was walking with her in Brighton seafront where she lived and she said "I want to talk to you about something", she said, "Alan's all very well but he's nothing special, when are you going to get married and give me some grand children?" And she was pretty frustrated because my oldest brother, the straight one, had produced grandchildren, but they weren't well-behaved and whoever certain children she liked, but she was pleased he had them. My little brother being gay of course wasn't going to produce any and I was her last hope. And I said "well", this was a clever question as I said, "Do you want me to be happy?" I said and she said, "Yees" and I said, "Well I am happy the way I am with Alan living the life we lead". And she "oh, oh", she went quiet and I thought that's it, she had accepted it but clearly she had to do something. So, she sent me a letter, strictly private and inside was, "what you have admitted to me is an abomination" blah, blah, but I know she was set up to write this letter and I think she thought, 'well I've written it now I don't have to mention it again. It's like off my chest.' She was then, once she had gotten over that, she then almost pretended that she had never sent it. She sent another letter about some book she had found for me so that was the end of that so I think after that she got used to the idea, but I think she just had to tick the box, that she had objected to this relationship, abomination. /

23. So that was the difficult period with her, but it was soon over thank goodness, and I was so active with the group. I probably I didn't see her as much as I would have done, but there was always things on at weekends, and generally tried to have an event every week which was nice. Our biggest event times, I remember, would be in 1990 right at the end of the 80s, when there was a big conference in Paris and loads of group, particularly European groups went. So there was a big Dutch delegation, obviously French delegation, a few from the states. It was probably the most memorable, warm, and friendly weekend event, and there were some serious discussions about the legal aspects because we had a lawyer amongst us who knew all about different countries legal systems; being gay and the issues, and the repression some people suffered. So that was very pivotal, and then I suppose that triggered the thought, "well could we do one London", and it was just a thought in those days. But we thought maybe, maybe we could, if we could present ourselves,

we knew we had a time lag and we knew probably 1993 would be the target date but with congress, it is a big undertaking. You know, three or four hundred delegates, all the food, all the speakers, everything to organise. But after a lot of presentations, a lot of mulling between different bids, we won it so that was fantastic.

24. I had been chair of the group for about seven years or eight years by then and it was time for me to pass on. So I passed on to a woman, which was fantastic, women were just becoming to come in. Early 90s and we changed the name quite quickly to Jewish gay and lesbian group. There was a big campaign, I remember at the time from the new women, saying, "Oh it should be Jewish lesbian and gay group" and that stormed on, but I think the woman who ran the group then just said 'look we've got this, it's got the word in, there are bigger battles to fight'. And I think she very sensibly just put paid to that because it just was, you know, the idea being precedence to women is very important, but I suppose the roots of the group being male I guess the gay thing came first.

25. By that time I was out of the committee but I was very active with the group and I did a lot of the admin side of the conference, registrations and organising the hotel and stuff with other people, but it was an enormous amount of work, and it was just three or four days where you basically just didn't sleep because there was so much happening during it. So many issues to address.

26. And that's when another group came around called *Hineni* 'here we are' and they are a young person's group, well they were, they don't exist now, but basically they didn't want to be a part of Jewish gay and lesbian group, it was sort of the wrong generation I suppose for them but they were happy to be a part of the conference, so then we had all the debates around their issues and what they thought was important and how it different with Jewish gay group and so it made it very difficult that conference in the sense that we had to accommodate all these demands, but they were fun and energetic, and we worked it all out. That collapsed or disappeared. I think one person said you have to be twenty seven or under, until he got to be twenty seven, oh and make it twenty eight and then I think it just fizzled out.

27. The Jewish gay and lesbian group continues today of course and very successfully but in a sense what's happened is a new internet type group which has taken over from *Hineni* and called 'Gay Jews in London'. Very big group with hundreds and hundreds of Facebook type members on it, and they are attracting a lot of the young coming-out type gay Jews. And I think that has been a challenge for Jewish gay and lesbian group which considered 'fuddy-duddies', very private and need to, you know, because people are very sensitive about gayness and there's a lot about confidentiality, and only last week, or two weeks ago, that a Facebook group for the Jewish gay group, which is private and secure, was established. So in a sense you do have this problem of other groups now. You've got the synagogue now [58:59 minutes into audio file] Beit Klal Yisrael, which is not officially gay and lesbian but the majority of people are, probably with lesbian roots. So it's a far cry from those early days, but now we've got issues around how do all these groups work together. And I think the Jewish thing should be the bond, bringing them all together, but I don't know how well that is going to work. I haven't been too impressed with the joint working, try part working between these various groups up to now still seems to be paddling their own canoes and for pride you all come together. Pride is coming up, so there will be a big service for all the groups but you know, that's one week of the year, there's another 51 weeks where they tend to do separate stuff and don't attempt to interact. So that from an issue point of view for the future that ought to be addressed. It needs to be closer working.

Surat:

You did get involved in a very interesting film project, would you be able to tell us about that?

Russell:

28. Oh yes, 'Trembling Before God'. Yes I was. Well the lead on that Mark Silas, I'm sure is very publicly known, organised for a film crew to come to his house. And there was a Seder, in the back of his house, he sort of built an extension, very nicely done, and we were invited, in Islington and there were various folk there, from the group and this camera crew. And I thought wow, very exciting and it was just so very special to be invited to the party. And I wasn't at all worried about, I knew it was going to be a reasonably big film, I realised that and me and my partner were there, singing all the '*Chad Gadya*' type songs [1:01:06 minutes into audio file] at the end and the cameras were rolling, and it was really just a lovely warm atmosphere. Now, I knew the film was about the orthodox issues about being gay and not being orthodox, I don't have, I haven't had those sorts of problems and I was able to cope with my mother's sort of moral stance which was very short lived. To be part of something where the issues are really brought out and in that film the pain of some of these interviewees, when they met their rabbi and were told I cannot accommodate your sexuality. You have to either give it up or leave the orthodox world; I think that is a very painful experience for people. So I was just very proud to be a part of that film and its quite fun as people said "I saw you on the screen" and I thought yeah, yeah I was in that film and it was very special.

Surat:

So, Russell, could you tell us a little bit more about the relationship with Alan? How did it evolve?

Russell:

29. Yeah, I mean we met before any sort of relationship that were allowed or considered to be appropriate, and we were living together from February '75 and on, more or less as is now regarded as a partnership. And when the law finally changed, we had been together so long, 30 years, we just thought this is much too late, we should have really if we were going to be civilly partnered we would have done it in 1976 or something. So when the law came in December 2005, we thought well we are going to do it but we don't want a big to-do really because in a sense it's so late. So in January 2006, we went ahead with a very small event really with two lesbian friends and my first boyfriend, the one from Italy and his boyfriend and my oldest brother and wife came, so that was nice.

We had the civil partnership ceremony in Haringey town hall, signed all the documents, and it felt very nice to just, we had a little service of sorts, more like just made some sort of, it was none religious so it was just commitments. And some music and we went out for lunch and that was the day. Because in a sense it was so late, we just liked to get the bit of paper. It was nice that we could do that and it was nice that all my worldly goods don't end up with the tax man because that's very significant when one of us passes on. We have that same married status, but obviously a civil partnership is not traditional marriage and if you wanted a traditional marriage then, this legislation that's going through now of gay marriage, is very important. Probably not so important to us there's a practical reason and it Alan was Jewish and we felt strongly about needing to do it in a synagogue, then we would probably convert it to a marriage but Alan's certainly not remotely interested in that and I'm easy going./ I mean if he wanted to I would do it, so that marriage point of view we would. I think for others I respect, yes it is very important for them.

Surat:

So you brought us some very interesting say memorabilia, but its purim spiel way back, could you tell us a little bit about this?

Russell:

Yes well that was a fabulous event, it was in 1983 and we just had so many talented people around, people who could, a scriptwriter and someone who was very involved in theatre and we took show tunes, we crossed dressed, we wrote a whole sort of script, and it was a stunning event. We did it on a stage at the Unitarian church hall in Hoop Lane. And everything, the whole story of Esther was sort of changed to a gay pick-up on Hampstead Heath ending up with the traditional wedding and the Willsdone rooms catering event. So it was a very amusing twist, a very gay twist on the story of Esther. We used; I think I remember, Bali Hai being one song which was about Hampstead Heath renamed Hampstead Heath. I think we did more than one of these British spiels because the opportunity for being witty about being gay, I just think having fun. I dragged up as Esther and it was just magical really. We had a pianist who was a very nice guy and he played all the music and it was a great show. It got written up and we did articles about it and put it out with our newsletter, and yeah, it was unique.

Surat:

Well thank you, towards the end of the interview I would like to ask you if there is anything you would like to add? Some personal message? Something that sort of sums up your LGBT Jewish experience?

Russell:

Yeah, I mean I just realised today that there so much apparent security with a lot of people, I think the gay Jews in London who have not known the difficulties that gay people go through when they grow up. That this history project is really important because people need to know that things were much more difficult in the past and could go that way again. And that there are still people today who haven't come out. Who would not feel comfortable doing so. So I think some of the people I know, because I belong to a gay running club who are, you know, just in their early twenties, just think being gay is so easy, effortlessly easy. You can meet people. Well actually when you go back to the 60s and 70s, certainly the 50s, and people were being arrested. And in the Jewish world, of course, it was an abomination. So you have to learn that this is a difficult wheel and it turns and it could just as easily turn the other way. So my message is really to do your history and be on your guard and be aware. I mean the number of stars of David you see people wearing as jewellery, you know in the gay clubs, probably don't even realize how symbolic that is. Very symbolic and very important; it's not a bit of jewellery. You know, it's their roots. So that's what I, that's my message for the study history.

Surat:

Thank you Russell, thank you for your time and thank you for this interview

Russell:

Great pleasure, thank you for inviting me.

Surat:

So Russell, is there anything you would like to say, a message you want to add, in terms of summing up your LGBT Jewish experience?

Russell:

Yes, I've thought about this a bit and I think what I see today is a lot of young gay people, very confident and very out, and very relaxed about being gay. Which is great but they have to be aware,

a project like this, a history project, shows that things weren't always so easy and that in the 50s and 60s, there were regular arrests? The age of consent was much higher and it was very, very difficult to live a gay life in those days. The danger is that people get so relaxed and comfortable and certainly the young people I see on Compton Street look like that, wear their stars of David like a bit of jewellery and think it's fun. Actually it's a serious matter and one needs to be on ones guard because at any time the wheel could turn. Gay people could find themselves being arrested of life being made very difficult in all these areas of life, like employment. So just to be on their guard, study their history and to be ready in case things go the other way.