

## From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
<b>Name:</b> Gill Butler	<b>Date:</b> 11.10.2019 <b>Age:</b> 67 years
<b>Key issues:</b> Working class background. Political influences: Vietnam War, Communism, International Socialists, Women's Liberation Movement (1971). Activism: National Abortion Campaign, Rights of Women & Lesbian Custody groups, Board of Stonewall (late 80's to 2002), Trustee of Peter Tatchell Foundation. Qualified as lawyer in 1979, advocated on behalf of lesbian mothers likely to lose their children in custody cases from 1984 to early 90's.	
<b>Narrative summary</b> Gill was adopted into a working class family and got to university against the expectations of her class and her sex. She had boyfriends, but discovered the delights of women through the Women's Liberation Movement. She became a committed feminist and fought for the rights of women in general and lesbians in particular. She talks about the initial antipathy to lesbians in WLM and about the tensions between the different strands of feminism (culminating in the 10 <sup>th</sup> conference in Birmingham, 1978) as well as the political lesbians, separatists and issues around class.  She speaks about how the law stood in respect of giving custody to lesbian mothers in divorce cases and tells some arresting anecdotes about the behaviour of judges in these cases. These illustrate the underlying attitude that a lesbian was, of necessity, an unfit mother. She speaks of the bravery of lesbian mothers to 'take on' the courts and also mentions how difficult it was for gay men.  She believes attitudes have changed over time and that legislation has sometimes been ahead of this. Whilst the feminist in her revolts at the thought, she thinks the legal recognition given by the Civil Partnership & same-sex legislation has been the most important. It was pivotal in recognizing our relationships. However, she returns to the subject of class as ultimately one of the key issues affecting her life. Finally she highlights the importance of remembering the struggles of lesbian and gay parents.	
<b>Length of interview:</b> 45 mins	



Evelyn: So this is an interview for From A Whisper to a Roar, an oral history project conducted by Opening Doors, London, and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Today is the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, 2019, and I'm interviewing the inestimable Gill Butler. So, Gill, could you start by telling me a little bit about your early days and how you came to an understanding of who you really are?

Gill Butler: Goodness. Well, I'm 67. I was born in Wandsworth, continue to live in Wandsworth, adopted when I was three into a working class family, managed against all odds to get to university. There was no support at home for that, which was in the early seventies. I became political, or politicized, rather, when I was, I think I was 16. It was a Vietnam war, and it had a huge effect on young people. That was my first political involvement.

Gill Butler: It would take all day if I bored you with my rather odd groups that I became involved with when I was in the Young Communist League. Then I became a Trotskyist, joined the

International Socialists. In the meantime, found women's liberation, went to my first women's liberation meeting in 1971 in Wandsworth.

Gill Butler: That all got sort of mixed up with being in the International Socialists, which was the Trotskyist organization, which never really got to grips with women's liberation. So a lot of pressure about not being too involved.

Gill Butler: I also was criticized for wanting to become a lawyer because it was at the time they had their 'Turn to Industry'. So the white middle class men thought that you should go and sell papers or get jobs in factories rather than enter into a profession. So, is this okay?

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gill Butler: So I left IS in 1975, and I became really involved with the National Abortion Campaign for about five years whilst we were resisting all the restrictive legislation, which took me up to about 1980. Personally, I was still at that time in a relationship with a man. I'd been involved with him from when I was 16 until when I was 26 and try as I may to think there must've been something going on, a bit about coming out as a lesbian, I can't think of anything.

Gill Butler: What I think led me to 'the path', if you like, was joining the women's movement and finding that women were interesting, et cetera, et cetera. And so I came out when I was about 26. By that time I was working as a trainee solicitor and you really didn't say anything about your personal life because it just wouldn't have been accepted.

Gill Butler: And then, in the eighties, I joined the Rights of Women group and particularly the Lesbian Custody group. This is all about my political history, I'm afraid, rather than mine. I'm getting to the end. I then joined the Board of Stonewall at the end of 1980s. I was involved with Stonewall until 2002. I was chair for three years, and then then rather strangely perhaps, got involved with Peter Tatchell and was the trustee of the Peter Tatchell Foundation for 17 years, which brings me up to date.

Gill Butler: I retired in January. Since then, I've been looking for my next cause. I'm not sure what it's going to be, but I can't exist without being involved in something. So that's rather a bit, perhaps, impersonal.

Gill Butler: My personal life, well, I'm now now living with my partner, Norma. We're not married or in a civil partnership because, although I would fight to the death to the right to marry, I always felt as a feminist, I didn't want to marry a man, so I don't want to marry a woman. We've got a number of great nephews and nieces, which is great, so we enjoy that. The other thing is I stopped working as a lawyer about three or four years ago and it really is fantastic. It's the best thing I've ever done. I don't like the word "retired" because it's it's another life that I-

Evelyn: Liberated.

Gill Butler: Yeah, it's another life.

Evelyn: So maybe just briefly going back to your early days, when you came out at 26, how did you discover your folk? Was it all through women's lib? Was it political or the social side of things?

Gill Butler: It was, I think. I don't know why, but I was at quite a rough secondary modern school around here and I was friends with the boys because they seemed to want to do things which would much more interesting than what the girls wanted to do. So I really hung around a lot with the boys and I would have thought women were boring, you know. It's a terrible thing to think.

Gill Butler: In no way would I have thought about being involved in a relationship with one. It's very difficult to know. I think it was a gradual thing. I didn't know any lesbians and the women's operation groups that I've been to, there wasn't a lesbian. Oh, God, no. It was still like that, but I think the women's movement just just opened my eyes to how fantastic women were, and how creative, and how I felt much more at home.

Gill Butler: And maybe, I don't know, maybe I had suppressed feelings. I don't know. I can't find that I had, but maybe I did. But it was a revelation. And so, I think being in the women's liberation movement gave you similar things as I had got from being in an allegedly revolutionary organization, which it gave your friends, it gave you your lover or it gave you, where you lived, it became your life. And I suppose having a relationship with a woman went from being sort of not thought about to desirable and then possible. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

Evelyn: Well, why would you? And were there some tensions in the women's movement between lesbian and straight women? What were those kind of relationships like?

Gill Butler: Oh, God, yes. Certainly at the very beginning because in fact my first group, because a lot of it was around consciousness raising. Although the group I got involved with, we did some actions, but I thought the women were very much older than me. In fact only in their 20s, they were all married and they had children, and certainly the idea that you would want lesbians in your group.

Gill Butler: My memory, I think this is true, when Erin Pizzey, who ran Women's Aid, who was virulently anti-lesbian, I'm pretty certain something, God, what happened? I may be misremembering this, but I do remember an idea of, she was trying to make sure that these lesbians didn't take over the women's groups. So there was quite a lot of antipathy, I think. It sort of gradually went away.

Evelyn: Over time, did you find you worked well together for the cause as opposed to you walked away from those tensions, those early tensions?

Gill Butler: Well, certainly, I mean, my main involvement you know, in the latter part of the 70s was, as I said, with the National Abortion Campaign, which had lesbians in it, heterosexual women. I mean it was a very clear issue to be fighting around. So I don't think there were any issues there. I think the big splits came as you'll know, when, in the Birmingham's Women's Liberation Conference, when there was a showdown between the revolutionary feminists, was it?... and when the conference imploded?

Evelyn: Perhaps for the sake of future generations, you might elaborate on the Birmingham Conference.

Gill Butler: I can hardly remember. I think it was the last National Women's Liberation Conference. And I think all I can remember is on day two, which was the Sunday, there were some huge row between the revolutionary feminists who I think were advocating political lesbianism and separatism and the lot of it, and a lot of other women. And I remember the plenary session just getting completely... it just imploded because people were shouting at each other. I do have a poor memory now, but that was my memory of the women's liberation.

Evelyn: The emotion of it all.

Gill Butler: Were you there?

Evelyn: No, I was not there. The emotion of it passes through the generations, I think.

Gill Butler: Yes, I think so.

Evelyn: So perhaps you might explain for a future listener what a political lesbian was.

Gill Butler: Oh, a political lesbian was a woman who, even if she wasn't sexually attracted to a woman, should have a relationship with a woman rather than a man because you wouldn't let men into your life and you would live a separatist existence. And in fact, one of my earliest first lovers, Jane, who's now got two children who's very heterosexual. I mean, I think she was a revolutionary feminist, but she will admit that she wasn't a lesbian, you know, so it was mad days.

Evelyn: They were strange times, but it was a journey that women needed to make in many ways.

Gill Butler: I think that's right. I think, having taken your anger out on men, particularly the men you knew, had a function, but it was was shortsighted. It's like don't kick the person next to you. Get to the heart of the matter. Who's oppressing you? Well yeah, it might be the bloke next to you, but it's also got a whole structure in place. And yeah, I mean there were all

sorts of... I mean there was one conference when the working class women locked middle class women in the classroom, wouldn't let them out. And you know, that stuff. But it worked its way through.

Evelyn: So what do you think caused the class tensions?

Gill Butler: Oh, I think, you know, it's very difficult now. I can't really describe myself as working class now, but coming from a working class family, it was just a sense of privilege that a lot of women had, but I think also, I think what perhaps wasn't taken into account as much as it should be, and that is that you don't choose. You don't choose what family you're born into. You don't choose to take on the privileges, but it's just what you do with them. So, and there was just wealth. I think women could see other women with much more than they had. And, again, would think, well we'll attack you rather than maybe, you know-

Evelyn: The structures. The structures that had put it all there.

Evelyn: Yeah. That's right. The structures that have put it all there. Yeah, that's right because, yeah.

Evelyn: So a huge amount of your work was around lesbian custody issues. So if you'd explain what was the context at the time? We're talking about the eighties?

Gill Butler: The eighties, and the early nineties. I qualified as a lawyer in 1979 and I think I first encountered the first lesbian client that I was acting for, it was about 1984, something like that. Well, would it help if I just said a bit about what the legal position was?

Evelyn: Absolutely. Yeah. We like the context.

Gill Butler: Sure. They'd been a series of cases. 1977, I think, was the earliest case where the court had been asked to take a child away from his mother on the basis that she was a lesbian. And in fact, she did lose custody. Until the Children Act in 1989, we talked about custody and we talked about access to children, written largely by Brenda Hale, Saint Brenda, changed those concepts and introduced parental responsibility.

Gill Butler: Before 1989, on divorce, the court had to make an order for custody. It just had to because that's what the law said. And it meant that that could sometimes open up a whole can of worms because I do believe that I acted in some cases where the only reason that the father was objecting to the children staying with the mother is because he couldn't bear the idea of her having a piece of paper that said she had custody.

Gill Butler: The 1989 Children Act got rid of not only the concept of custody, but also the court having to make an order about the children on divorce so that sort of swept away quite a lot of things.

- Gill Butler: But the series of cases that came before the court, yeah, in the mid eighties really, going up, I was just looking to see when the last reported case was. It was really 1992. When I got involved as a solicitor, the vast majority of women where there were contested cases were losing custody of their children. And that's partly because I think the lawyers, well, I know that was because in a number of cases women got to me having been through the local solicitor or family lawyer who'd been told, you haven't got a chance. There's no point. You shouldn't... just give in.
- Gill Butler: And this is off a bit of a tangent, but one of the most incredibly valuable resources that we had then were the local switchboards, the lesbian and gay switchboards, because I had a lot of clients who would get information from the local lesbian and gay switchboard. I had one woman who made 13 calls and she finally found me. I should just say, and this isn't sort of wanting to be modest, just false modesty, but the situation is the reason I got involved because nobody else really wanted to. I mean there were no lawyers who wanted to be involved in this.
- Gill Butler: Certainly the concept of the pink pound wasn't there. I was willing to act and I, in 1985, set up a firm of solicitors with two others in Greenwich and the local population thought we were Bolsheviks because we had a policy where we wouldn't act for men in domestic violence cases. I mean you were just seen as so extreme and so people didn't want to get involved with lesbianism because it was not good for your career, et cetera, et cetera. But I did get a number of, I mean at one point, all I was doing was acting and advising lesbian mothers and going to court.
- Evelyn: So we're looking at a point in history where the underlying principle, really, unspoken maybe, guiding the judge was that the lesbian mothers were of necessity unfit mothers because they were perverted in some way?
- Gill Butler: Yeah. You brought me back to what you'd originally asked me and I did overlook. Lesbians were seen as deviants and a risk to children. The risk they posed could best be described as corruption and reputation. By that I mean there were two-pronged arguments. The corruption was that these children would grow up to be lesbian, or gay if they were boys. That was the first thing. And the reputation issue, argument rather, was that your child would be teased if it became known that they had a mother who was a lesbian.
- Gill Butler: Those were the two arguments which the courts had swallowed, and it was a theme throughout the cases. Just one thing which was quite interesting to me was that you would find yourself in situations where the court would sort of try and blame the lover, the other woman because, you know, she'd be the one who'd led astray the mother who couldn't be a lesbian because she'd been married and had children.
- Evelyn: Married and had children. Yeah.

- Gill Butler: There was no law that said lesbians couldn't have custody of their children. There was a section in the children's legislation which talks about the capability of each parent to offer care. But the court's attitude was, "If I have to choose, then I am going to choose the situation which most approximates the norm." They were words which one of the judges said, so one of the problems for lesbian mothers is that they were sort of having to disprove these things. And I always, I'm certainly of a view that if there was any evidence to show what those arguments were about any evidence in support, they would have been called in cases.
- Gill Butler: I had just one case I remember where we had a psychologist, and I'll say a bit about the evidence because that was crucial. We had a psychologist. The best the husband could come up with was some completely uninformed psychiatrist, didn't know what they were talking about. And the truth is that people couldn't call that into evidence because there wasn't any because there was no basis for-
- Evelyn: Assuming the children would be corrupted.
- Gill Butler: Absolutely, that they would be, you know, that worse off. But it was that sort of battle. Some of these women, I mean they were incredibly brave because the easiest option for some would be to just keep it all secret and live another life but I think they just felt they couldn't, and they weren't going to just say goodbye to their kids because some lawyer had told them it wasn't worth fighting.
- Evelyn: And, of course, the presumption for heterosexual couples divorcing at that time would have been predominantly the child is better off with their mother.
- Gill Butler: Oh, absolutely. No question. Absolutely.
- Evelyn: So are there any cases that really sort of stand out?
- Gill Butler: Well, one of the problems about looking at this issue just is that there weren't, there were very few reported cases because most cases were in the county court and they don't get reported. I can talk from my personal experience of cases I was involved with.
- Gill Butler: I remember the most horrendous questions that some judges asked the clients. I remember I had one judge in the South of England saying to my clients, "Well, it can't be natural because animals don't do it." That was one thing. He wanted to know if they made a noise when they had sex. It was a truly awful experience and we sort of won-ish, I think. I can't remember what happened. But oh yes, and he asked the girlfriend who'd come in a skirt, "Did you always wear a skirt?" I mean, you know, who are you trying to kid?
- Gill Butler: I had another case which was I was acting for the mother. I think it was a seven year old girl. Husband worked in an oil rig. The mother's mother had really turned against her and the husband was wheeling her in as the person who would



look after the girl when he was off on the oil rig three weeks out of every four. He was a chap who made a lot of play about the child getting teased, having himself written in chalk outside the mother's home that she was a lesbian. Then turns around and says, "Everyone's going to know," and I mean the court, the judge said it's a finely balanced case. How could it possibly be a finely balanced case when you've got the mother willing, able, and no subject...no criticism of her abilities there, and him off on an oil rig? You know? I mean that's quite extraordinary. That was in the mid eighties. I could go on, but I don't know if this is-

Evelyn: No, I think that sort of detail really draws out the kind of deep seated discrimination and prejudice that was happening at the time. What sorts of support was available for lesbian mothers? How did they manage financially

Gill Butler: Well, one thing I should make very clear is that if this happened now women wouldn't be legally represented because all my clients had legal aid. I think I had one who didn't, but all of them had legal aid so they could be represented. As far as support's concerned, it's tricky because a lot of them just weren't sort of part of any scene, if you like. I mean I had one client, I think there were about 10 houses in a row in a village in somewhere or the other and she got into a full relationship with the woman who lived next door. They met each other at the school playground. I mean, I think they weren't necessarily sort of plugged into some of the support networks. As time went on, I think you did get support groups growing up. I don't know where they got support from really.

Evelyn: Because it must've been emotionally, incredibly traumatic.

Gill Butler: Terrible. And particularly for, I mean I think, I talk about the mother, but there's the other woman, if you like. I mean often relationships broke down because the blame that was being sort of directed at the other woman who swooped in.

Evelyn: And did that sort of play into, back in those days, it was far more of a butch and femme kind of scene?

Gill Butler: Yes, but not necessarily. I can't think of anything that stood out to sort of explain why it was that the other woman got it in the neck. By the by, there's one case, one of the later cases, where the judge talks about militant and non militant lesbians. The militant lesbians were those who wanted to recruit, this is the words, wanted to recruit other women, but he was satisfied in that case that these were private women so they wouldn't be advertising or flaunting their relationship. So she was successful. It's pretty extraordinary.

Evelyn: And how much do you think was because it was the legal profession and definitely judges were so vastly male dominated?

Gill Butler: I think that was a factor, continued to be a factor, until relatively recently. I think one of the breakthrough points in

sort of the courts were concerned is when we got independent evidence. I don't know if you've ever heard of Susan Golombok. She's now professor of psychology I think at Oxford, and what Susan did, and it was a really important piece of evidence. Susan was at the Royal, I think. No, she was with Michael Rutter at Kings and she did a study of, I think it was only 23, but she did a study of 23 children with single parents, heterosexual mothers, and 23 children with lesbian mothers.

Gill Butler: She followed it and tracked it and her conclusions, and she wanted to see what the differences were, and quite obviously the conclusions were there was no difference. There really wasn't any difference in the development of the children. They weren't subject to any more great teasing la-de-da-de-da. She published that research I think in about 1985, '86, and that was really influential because the courts, by then, I think particularly in the high court, I think the courts were beginning to think maybe this is, you know, are we doing this right? And they love evidence that they can latch on to.

Gill Butler: Susan's study, given it was very small, really, was really important in changing attitudes. We would get her to come along to court and give evidence if necessary. But what we always made sure of was that the judges had sort of had briefings, if you like. Most of it was American research, so it was a bit difficult to rely on. But we did try and change judicial attitudes, and I think once the high court got it, it was matter of time, then, that it would filter down.

Evelyn: So did you have much involvement or understanding of how the children were affected in all of this?

Gill Butler: Well, it was difficult.

Evelyn: Because obviously at slightly at a distance from it.

Gill Butler: Difficult because I couldn't, obviously, meet them or whatever. I think like in all divorce, a lot of the kids wanted their parents to stay- [Recording stopped briefly, second part begun below]

Evelyn: So we were talking about the children. As you say, it's difficult for you to judge. Were there cases where the lesbian mothers lost the children and were you involved in any appeals and potentially getting them back?

Gill: I think we had two cases where a lesbian mother lost custody. Neither of them were appealable. You can't just appeal because you don't like the decision on a specific basis, and so neither of them did.

But one thing that really stands out in my memory is that in two of those cases where the children were sent to live with the father, I got cards a few months later from both of them, although they weren't connected, telling me that the children voted with their feet and had gone back to live with mum.

I've always wondered how many children actually did in the end go back. That would be really interesting to know, but it's not been possible.

Evelyn: As soon as they were old enough?

Gill: Yeah.

Evelyn: In most of the cases were the children very young or the marriages had gone on for quite a while?

Gill: I think probably under 12 or 13. Yeah, younger children. Just the figure 13 sticks in my mind because I ... tragic case where the father was so opposed to the mother he took the 13-year old daughter to the GP to see if she could catch lesbianism. I mean that is true. I'm not making that up.

I mean imagine, and she was so ... the daughter had been so turned against the mother by the father. Sorry, that's not what you asked me. But I don't know, as I think kids can find divorce traumatic at the best of times. But yeah, I think most of them are under ten.

Evelyn: And so you were saying that it changed through the Children's Act?

Gill: Well, it changed certainly when the Children Act came into force, which I think was '91 or something. The not having to go to court and have a custody order I do think made a difference because as I say, I think it just meant that these men didn't have to put up with the fact that their wives had a piece of paper from the court saying that they'd got custody.

It's hard to know. I think it's a combination of things changing attitudes. I think, I don't know, maybe by the '80s, maybe lesbians and gays started to be a bit more visible. Slight, you know, public opinion was changing. Although it is interesting that on the issue of children the courts were well, I think, ahead of public opinion at the time.

Because I think there was still ... and I think gay men suffered from it more than lesbians, but there was a hostility I think in the public mind to anyone sexually deviant having children living with them. And I think that started to change. I think the fact that we were better at presenting the cases possibly. I think the fact that more women were, as I said earlier, prepared to take things on.

The evidence, the psychological evidence, that was important. So you saw a gradual change, which took much longer for gay fathers.

Evelyn: Also in the background over the '80s you've a lot of things happening there with Section 28.

Gill: Yes, yes.

Evelyn: Was in the end where it was more in your face if you like. Had the miners strike and the lesbian community supporting them. But also, as you say in terms of fathers, there was HIV AIDS crisis across the '80s which didn't help with attitudes.

Gill: Oh, I mean I don't know. We haven't touched upon whether you want to talk about men. I mean I did then end up with ... I started to get gay fathers because they had a terrible time. I mean they'd been ... the main case was 1977. It was an adoption case where the court said ... the woman had remarried and she wanted her husband to adopt the child and the father objected. The court said any reasonable father would give his consent to adoption because he wouldn't want his child brought up by a homosexual father.

And I mean it was pretty ... it wasn't even courts not letting the kids live with the gay dad because, again, most of them lived with women anyway. But it was more they weren't allowed to see them. There was no contact, and it was disgraceful what we had to face for gay dads. Got there in the end.

Evelyn: So how did the contact orders look like for the lesbian mothers?

Gill: In what way? If they-

Evelyn: If they lost the custody, did they still have contact?

Gill: They had contact. I think in the early days some of that was subject to conditions that they didn't see ... that the other woman wasn't there. I remember that. Yeah, I think there would have been contact.

Evelyn: Whereas for the men they just were denied contact?

Gill: Yeah. For the gay fathers they had to face the allegations of paedophilia even if they were their own children. I mean I had one gay dad who had a daughter and the courts even there thought the child would be at risk. I mean, for God's sake. I mean it was pretty grim, and we had other needs as well, Can you catch AIDS, that sort of stuff.

Evelyn: There has been a lot of legislation, and it's interesting that you bring up that you feel that attitudes tend to, certainly in some circumstances, tend to lag behind the legislation. What, for you, are the most important pieces of legislation in general that have happened over the last, I don't know, 30 years I suppose?

Gill: Funnily enough, I mean I suppose because there was never a law that said lesbians and gay fathers couldn't have their children living with them, there wasn't any legislation I can point to that says, oh look-

Evelyn: That really helped. Yeah.

Gill: Because it was always every case was dealt with separately. The welfare of the child still is the welfare of the child. It's how you interpret the welfare of the child that was the issue, and that made it a bit difficult to campaign around it as well because you couldn't actually... You could have asked, you could have said, and we did at one point in Rights of Women, try and have the law amended to say sexual orientation will not be an issue, but that was never really going to be a starter.

So I suppose I have to say, it sticks in my throat, but I suppose I have to say that civil partnership and marriage, and then extending it to marriage, has got to be probably the most important legislation in this area because it allowed our relationships to be recognized.

I used to spend a lot of time trying to draw up as many bits of paper as I could so that when somebody died or whatever that there would be some recognition. But it was just really... But now we do have legal recognition and there is equality in that respect. So, yeah. Politically though I may ... 'why be a wife?'

Evelyn: Yeah. Have you therefore felt kind of personally the impact of the change of attitudes over time?

Gill: Yes, except that for my sins I still cannot use, depending where it is, I will avoid using the pronoun that will identify the fact that I live with another woman. I mean for Christ's sake, it's still embedded in me not, for reasons I never really understood, to not be that out. Which is ironic given how long I've fought for other people. Yeah. I think so. I think, sorry I've lost the thread there.

Evelyn: A change in attitudes over time.

Gill: Yes. But I still think we've got so much further to go. I mean I haven't even touched on class, but race and class. I suppose when it comes down to it, somebody else recently asked me what I thought the most important issue for me personally that I had really determined, and I think it's class. I didn't think it was sexual orientation. It's probably the race. You can tack onto that. So again, I'm sorry.

Evelyn: Yeah, I did pick up when you were talking about the women's movement and things like that because there were a lot of class issues.

Gill: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: Do you feel it's still a thread that runs through the community?

Gill: Yeah, I do very much. Very much so. And race, I think it just determines so much. I suffer, and always have, and I know lots of the women from the same background, I suffer from imposter syndrome. I think I shouldn't be there. Often, in court I would think someone would come along and ask me to leave.

Evelyn: I recognize it well.

Gill: Yeah, it is. You don't think you should be there, do you?

Evelyn: Yeah.

Gill: And yeah, I think it's like to work, if you do a sensible working class job. I don't mean to in any way demean it, but if you're doing an average job and there's two women, I mean your income is going to be probably be what one man might earn. Yeah. I think class is still very important.

Evelyn: And within the LGBT community itself, do you think class still sits as an issue or is it more or less-

Gill: Not sure what the community is anymore to be absolutely Frank with you. I think it's still there. I mean, when I was in Stonewall, of course, we were very elite if you like. Yeah, we were accused of being elitist, which isn't the same obviously as class. But yeah, I think that's the important thing for me. Always will be. I just have to laugh at my own political beliefs because they're never going to happen. But you know, you've got-

Evelyn: No reason to abandon them?

Gill: You've got to believe in something.

Evelyn: You do have to believe in something.

Gill: Even though it's never going to work.

Evelyn: When you were thinking of me coming along for this interview, were there any issues that you had, or thoughts that you had bubbling up?

Gill: Apart from being terrified?

Evelyn: That we haven't looked at?

Gill: No, other than what we've spoken about, which is how important it is that this doesn't get lost about the history of the struggles of parents, lesbian and gay parents, doesn't get lost. And I think there's such a danger that that can happen. And I keep meaning to sit down and start to put it in writing.

Sue Sanders keeps saying will you did it? And I keep thinking of good reasons not to, but I think that's the important thing. That is such an important part of history. And as lesbians we don't really get much of a look in really.

Evelyn: No. Well, I think obviously this project is around drawing out some of those lesbian voices that otherwise might disappear without trace. Because in history per se, women's voices are not prevalent. They're not loud and proud.

Gill: Yeah.

Evelyn: Leave alone lesbians.

Gill: And we were never against the law, so it was very easy for Stonewall to take on the age of consent and all that stuff because it was about the men, and we've never had that. It's all been a bit, you know, it's not that clear. You know attitudes are much harder to change than legislation.

Evelyn: And do you feel that attitudes have changed?

Gill: Yes. I think pretty much. I think that's probably-

Evelyn: Not that there isn't a lot to do.

Gill: Yeah. I think it's, yeah. Well, my own personal experience... Just an anecdote if that's the right expression. When I was working, I did quite a few prenuptial agreements for lesbian couples and gay

couples. And I had to always remind myself when I was talking to a gay man to say, and would you have children? Because it would never have been thought about.

Evelyn: Yeah, unconscionable

Gill: Yeah. That a couple ... and they'd say, yeah. And this idea now that you can have children, and have a family, a nuclear family. You can have a family with children is taken for granted and think that's your right. That's quite extraordinary really.

Evelyn: It is, yeah, in a pretty short space of time really.

Gill: Pardon?

Evelyn: In a in a pretty short space of time.

Gill: Yeah, I think so. So that does show, and that's bound to filter through because then people are seen just as they are, which is all different. I mean when I said, is there a community? It's sometimes hard to think that there is such a thing really. If there ever was. I think there are alliances that happen.

Evelyn: A certain amount of solidarity we hope.

Gill: Yeah. I hope so.

Evelyn: So looking back to little Gill all those years ago in your secondary school or whatever, what would you say to her?

Gill: I'd say that I had had some good fortune. I worked hard, and I had far exceeded the expectations that anyone could have had of me, and I probably would have had it myself at the time. In fact, that's true. Because when I went through for an interview at my secondary school, certainly more than when they asked what you want to do when you're 16. I said I wanted it to work in a chemist. And the teacher there said, well, I think you could do better than that. And she pulled out of one of these old fashioned ... she pulled out, a typewriter came out. Remember those old fashioned typewriters?

Evelyn: Typewriters, yes.

Gill: She said, you could do much better than that. You could probably become a typist. I wanted to work in a chemist, so she'd already got me up a notch.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Gill: I think I've had a very fortunate life really. Not great beginnings, I suppose, and I wouldn't want to criticize my adoptive family, because it was as it was then when you picked a baby. You just picked one and said I'll have that one. But I think I've had such ... things opened. Education just opens the world to you. That's been fantastic.

Evelyn: Yeah. And it's been fantastic hearing your stories. Thank you so much for your time.

