From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Jennifer Wilson	**Date:** 08.2019 **Age:** 59
Key issues: London Lesbian and Gay Centre, Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign, Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action, Labour, 70s, 80s, Greater London Council, Ken Livingstone, Miners' Strike, Margaret Thatcher, Section 28, Stonewall	
Narrative summary Always knew she was a lesbian. Came out at school at 14/15 while living in Australia. School sent a letter home to parents which upset and angered her mother and affected the friends she made at school. At 17 moved to Perth for four years without her parents' permission. Then she moved to the UK around 1980 intending to stay for 9 months, but ended up staying for about 12 years. Worked as a computer programmer. Around a year and a half after coming to the UK, she joined the board of Islington Voluntary Action Council through a friend of her then partner. Discovered her love of organising and activism, and met many activists through the lesbian and gay community. Discusses the tensions and conflicts of the time, and conversations around intersectionality and inclusivity e.g. around race, disability, bisexuality, gender identities, S&M, and prescriptiveness. Also involved in Labour politics. Discusses issues with prescriptiveness, purity of view and the difficulty of finding consensus in both Labour and LGBT movements. Discussed the ways in which the Miners' Strike and Section 28 were rallying points for the LGBT community and broke down boundaries between groups. But also the impact of Section 28 on funding, the arts, education, and the profile of lesbian and women activists. Formed Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action (OLGA) with Eric Presland. Discusses the Section 28 campaigns, marches, and notable events (e.g. the invasion of the six o'clock news). Discusses her involvement with the formation of Stonewall and the Iris Trust. Discusses progress made, and current debates concerning trans rights and inclusion.	
	Length of interview: 1 hr 10 mins

Evelyn: Okay, today we have Jennifer Wilson who is renowned for being a political activist through the late 70s and all through 80s-

Jennifer: 80s, yep.

Evelyn: -involved in the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, Labour Party-

Jennifer: Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights, the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign, OLGA, and then Stonewall and the International Lesbian and Gay Association.

Evelyn: Wonderful.

Jennifer: And then went back to Australia and did some more too.

Evelyn: I would like to start off by backtracking a little bit and thinking about early days and how you came to an understanding of who you were and what ... the roots of your activism, what drove you along to that path?

Jennifer: What made me realize I was a lesbian or what made me move into politics?

Evelyn: Both I think.

Jennifer: Look, I think I was born a lesbian. I think I've always known that I was. I did accept my parents explaining that it was a stage I was going through, and I would grow out of it.

Jennifer: I didn't grow out of it. I think at the age of 13 I announced to everybody I knew that I was a lesbian. That didn't do me very good. I came out actively at school when I was about 14 or 15.

Evelyn: This is in Australia?

Jennifer: This is in Australia. I went to a private girls school. This is relevant because it gives you a bit of a ... when you start to realize that justice is [inaudible 00:01:24]. I went to a private girls school. The headmistress and the vice headmistress had been in a relationship for many, many years. In fact, they were in a relationship until they both died, which was only a few years ago. They were in a relationship for more than 45 years of their life. The person who headed up the maths department was also a fairly well known lesbian. But of course everybody was in the closet in those days.

Jennifer: I came out and the school didn't know what to do with it, because the last thing they wanted was anybody from the board of governors or anything looking at the fact that there was a lesbian at the school, and so more than anything they had to be seen to be coming down on me like a ton of bricks. What they actually did was they didn't suspend me for that, but they did write to the parents of everybody in my year, the year above, and the year below to tell them that there was a predatory lesbian in school and they should be careful about keeping their daughters away.

Jennifer: My mother of course got the letter and had the school approach her about it. My mother I remember being horrified, and she was angry and upset for me about what was ... and I was furious. I thought it was a bit funny, but I did realize that it made me ... it didn't help my becoming friends with people at school, and it was just interesting to see the brave parents who then encouraged their children to be friends with me. It was, to me, quite insightful of them about seeing who it was who did that, and it was on the whole, it was frequently marginalized people. There was a German family who'd come to Australia after the war, and they encouraged their daughter to be friends with me. It was a Methodist school but there were some people who were Catholic and Jewish, and they encouraged their kids to be friends with me. If you

want, it was the people who felt marginalized who recognized what it was.

Jennifer: I think in some ways, that always stayed with me. I came from a fairly left leaning family, and it was all around this time that so much in Australian politics was coming up that just stayed with me. We had the Governor-General sack the Prime Minister, which I was outraged by and these things just sit within you, so I'd always had a political sensibility, but had never really done any particular activism. That gives you the [crosstalk 00:03:16].

Evelyn: Your school days were 50s?

Jennifer: No, my school days were 60s into early 70s. Yeah, I was born in 1960.

Evelyn: Oh, right.

Jennifer: Yeah. Anyway, so I'll jump to the ... I went to Perth, I ran away from home without my parents' blessing, but they knew I was going, and lived in Perth for four years, mainly because I was only 17 at the time, and my parents had told me that if I tried to go overseas they'd have a stop put on my passport. My father at one point had made a comment that Perth was as far as you could get from Sydney without going overseas, so of course I went to Perth.

Jennifer: I lived in Perth for four years, was on the streets for a little bit, worked and got jobs. I was a high school dropout, so it was a bit of a classic case. My mother, who had always said of me that she thought that if I made it into my 20s, she thought I'd be quite nice when I grew up. I think Perth was really the saving of me. I learnt independence, I learnt to live on my own. I also learnt that I was very strong, and I learnt really how to look after myself in so many ways. Got flats, got jobs, had a quite nice thing, and anyway at one point decided just that it was time now, I wanted to come to the UK.

Jennifer: I originally planned on coming to the UK for nine months, and ended up being here for about 12 years. That's really when the story of my political activism starts over here. I'd probably been over in the UK for about, let's say about a year, a year and a half-

Evelyn: What year did you come?

Jennifer: I would have come to the UK in, it would have been probably, what? '77? '77, '78. Around then. No I take it back. It was probably as late as '80. It might have been 1980. Somewhere around there. I'd been here about a year and half and my partner at the time, a friend of hers, I remember this as my first foray into politics, she worked as a illustrator and she had been doing some illustrations for a book for Islington Voluntary Action Council, and I lived in Islington at the time. I didn't know what a voluntary action council was, and so she explained it to me and I thought it was interesting, and I chatted to them about what they did,

and they asked me if I'd join the board, and I joined the board of Islington Voluntary Action Council.

Jennifer: I was with them for, I think for about two or three years, and ended up becoming chair of the organization and really discovered that I had two things. One of them was I liked board meetings and the idea of strategy and what you were doing in those sorts of things. But I also really recognized and relished the idea of a political struggle, of actually working on things that you honestly believed in and putting your time and energy into those things. At this point in my life, I was a computer programmer, what did we call them in those days? Not a software engineer, but a programmer. Which was still fairly new, and I was fairly new as a woman in this field. It was still fairly uncommon. It was an interesting and growing field. I was working in very commercial fields, for a private hospital company doing software, and a transport company doing software.

Jennifer: On the sideline and moonlighting, I have this interest in doing all of these political things. I remember IVAC and the time that I spent with IVAC, and then somehow from that, having been a member of the Labour Party for a long time, I just kept meeting more and more activists and more activists through the lesbian and gay community as well, or mainly at this point the lesbian community. From that there was a whole lot of things, there was, and I will not get these right, but there was the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, there was a Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights that I was a member of for many years.

Jennifer: One of those morphed into the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign, and that was about the idea of trying to come up with really, if you want, a ... what would you call it? Like a statement of ... not a constitution, not a bill of rights, but something along that line to actually just-

Evelyn: Almost like a mission statement.

Jennifer: Yeah, but for the lesbian and gay community to rally around politically. Apart from the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, and that was really, probably I think, I will not remember the years, but that was probably the first thing I stepped into after IVAC. One of the things I noticed was that the more political the organizations were, so the London Lesbian and Gay Centre was very much a community centre set up and funded by the GLC. I'd been doing some work with the GLC before that I remember, and I'd been involved with Islington council from having been involved in that, so I knew Bob Crossman and his partner Martin, we were friends of theirs.

Jennifer: The centre was very much a focus for let's have a space for lesbians and gay men to meet. Now, that in itself was incredibly political at the time because the GLC was fighting with the Tories. The press was full of the loony left and the Lesbian and Gay Centre was seen as that part. Ken Livingston was being reviled for all of these sort of things, and here is

giving a space for lesbian and gay men to meet together at peppercorn rent. That was a political statement in itself, and that meant you couldn't be involved in the centre without actually recognizing the politics of the actions that you were doing at the time.

Jennifer: There's a lot of stories about that, about what happened in the community, about lesbian and gay men really getting together, about how naïve we were as a community and what we had to learn to do. We'd never been given decent sums of money in the past or had these things given to us, we had to learn how to do those things. We really weren't very good at it. And the tensions that arose between, the fights between ... the recognition of black people and where they fitted into it, and the nuances within that, disabled people and where they fitted into it, lesbian only-space and does that mean you have male-only space? Or where do these things draw the line? And of course there were the SM wars that happened there too about the whole thing about how people dress and what they look like.

Jennifer: There was an interesting ongoing fight I remember on the, not a fight but just one of those points of disruption there on the board of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, which was that having come from Australia, I had come from a history of drag, and so the idea of the lesbian and gay community to me automatically included people who were transgender, trannies, because they had always been at our parties and part of our life and they had been there at Stonewall, and they were just there. And bisexuals had always in Australia been one of those, "Yeah, they should make up their mind," and what I found in the UK was completely the opposite, which was that the lesbian and gay community embraced bisexuals, recognizing that they stepped outside of the hetero norm, but really had an issue about trannies and there was really very little acceptance of people who cross-dressed or people whose gender identity was not set, those sorts of things.

Jennifer: It was quite interesting for me, I got over any issues with bisexuals but I had immense trouble trying to get people to see that the broad church that is the, I'll say lesbian and gay community, but I mean the broad church of the lesbian and gay community, to include transgender people, intersex people, queer, that idea of stepping out of the hetero norm in some ways, people who choose that. That was very interesting to go through that.

Evelyn: Give us a flavour of some of those meetings.

Jennifer: Look the SM debates were huge, but the board of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre was fine about that. It was a group of women who didn't have a lot to do with men who saw S&M representing a style of life that discriminated against women, it particularly represented Nazi regalia and fascist issues. Men who had always embraced it to a degree because boys had always had their leather clubs, and at this stage all of the men's bars were male gender only. Women couldn't go there.

Jennifer: This was the first time that we'd actually gone, "Actually you know, there are SM dykes and there are women who enjoy this". The stance very much was we had no issue with SM in the confines of a totally permission based relationship where this was happening, but not anything to do with violence or where people were using it as an excuse. That was our stance, but there were some people, and they were predominantly, I'll say humourless lesbians because they were, who really had an issue with this and who took umbrage with the centre and it was-

Evelyn: Was part of a certain feminist tradition?

Jennifer: Look, it was. It was that interesting thing that exists much less now, which was the old feminist tradition, which is that if you've ever had sex with a man you're not really a lesbian, and if you like sex with a man you're definitely not a lesbian, and if you think you might have sex with a man again in your life, well you're probably heterosexual or bisexual. That was that rigidity of identity definition that was there, and that's why I'll say humourless lesbians, because the rigidity of identity to me tends to be more isolated into that group of people.

Jennifer: Look, they had a place and they had fought for feminist issues and women's issues, and I have no fight with them about that. But it was about a prescription that I found really an issue with. The prescription was many of the people, not just myself and other people, many of had had sex with men or thought we might have sex with men, and it wasn't an issue who we had sex with. I identify as a lesbian because I fall in love with women and I want to spend my life with women, but sex with men can be fun. But that has nothing to do with my identity as a lesbian to me.

Jennifer: Their rigid view of that basically was ... I've met lesbians who don't believe in penetrative sex for women at all because it apes the male patriarchy. You sit there going, "Oh come on, honey. Fun's fun. Why don't you let people do what they wanna do?" That played out, and what was interesting is that I was attacked twice at the Lesbian and Gay Centre, both times over the SM debate, and once by a woman. You sit there going, "Oh hang on, aren't you one of the feminists who's complaining about SM being like violence, but you're the one being violent here?" It was full of those hypocrisies. Very exciting time to live in.

Jennifer: Anyway, it's from that I think I continued to be involved in Labour politics. The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights, like so many things at the time, got taken over by, I'll say the Trots, but it might have been the Socialist Workers Party, or the Trots, or some of the Maoists, one of these fringe groups were, particularly the socialists, the SWP, were very good at pushing their agenda there. While they did a lot of work and nearly all of their, if you went on a march, the SWP and the Trots had more signs out and placards than anybody else because they would provide them there, so anytime you looked at the march it looked like an incredibly left wing march because these Trots and Socialist Worker Party banners were there.

Jennifer: Unfortunately what that meant was for many people it seemed that the whole lesbian and gay movement was a left wing movement, rather than the very broad movement that it was, and their insistence on purity of their issues, and it's funny that you see, if I think about now I'm just seeing some of the prescriptive lesbians in the centre in its politics wanted the centre to represent them, and the idea that it might represent a whole lot of different thems for different people was a problem.

Jennifer: I think it was the same thing that happened in a lot of the political organizations at the time, which was that the Socialist Workers and the Trots wanted their views to be held, and then if you didn't subscribe to their views then you were thrown out. You couldn't agree on 90% of it and disagree on the final 10. If you didn't agree on that final 10, you had no role in it. I think that in many cases is something I've always had an issue with. I figure if we can get 60 or 70% commonality of what we're trying to achieve, we've got something we can fight for and we can worry about the rest later. But in many cases that determinism that you have to be completely pure had happened particularly in the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Jennifer: We went from that, we then tried to replicate what the Campaign for Homosexual Equality had done many years before in coming up with a bill of rights really to try and take to government in the form of a conference called the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign. I think the two chairs of it were Ken Livingstone and I at the time. We were trying to get people to talk about what the uses were and we want to ... but again that, I'll say Trots or SWP, that demand that it has to include all of these things or we can't have it, it becomes really hard.

Jennifer: When you're trying to get people to say, "Lesbians and gay men should be entitled to keep their jobs," when suddenly somebody starts diluting that with listing every job that it is, and listing ever other discrimination that might get their job, and then listing particular people they might be having a go at, such as the churches, the message is getting mixed up from one common easy message, "You shouldn't be sacked for your sexuality," into a whole lot of prescriptive messages that was really hard to coalesce people around, and the whole thing dissolved into a complete and utter mess.

Evelyn: These were all the things on the SWP, or the far-left agenda?

Jennifer: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: What were the debates like? Very heated?

Jennifer: Messy, messy, messy. The thing I remember, and to me this was just a beautiful example of ... this was at that meeting and it's the one thing that I've remembered, which is that you can never please everybody. I can remember somebody standing up, a miner, somebody standing up and complaining about the fact that the pavements, the crosswalks in Islington, the pavement had been cut and sloped down to the road so

there wasn't a curb on it, and how were people in wheelchairs meant to know where the curb was and where the road was so that they could cross the road? This was absolutely ridiculous. I'm sitting there thinking, "Don't you understand, the wheelchair is," actually sorry. Not people in wheelchairs, blind people didn't know where it was, and so how were blind people meant to know where the end of the road was where they had these curb gutters, and what was Islington thinking about discriminating against all of its blind people?

Jennifer: This is the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Conference remember, but we're talking about this whole issue between scooped little gutters so that people in wheelchair ... but blind people were going to be [inaudible 00:17:02]. I can remember going into another session where somebody complained about the fact that a council didn't have that, so how are people in wheelchairs meant to get down there. You're sitting there going, "Who do you please?" Clearly you have a scooped gutter and you have lights that go bing, bing, bing, bing when you press the button, but I just felt, it's one of those ones where do put a ramp in so people in wheelchairs are handy or do you leave a curb in so people who are blind are handy, or do you put dots on there.

Jennifer: Do you remember the old analogy of a father and a son are taking a donkey to market? It's an old fable. A father and son are walking a donkey to market. As they're walking to market, two men on the other side of the road go, "Oh, look at that father and a son taking the donkey to market. Donkey's going to be exhausted by the time it gets there and they won't get as much money as they need". Father and son go, "Okay," so they pick up the donkey and decide to carry the donkey to market. Walk past another group of people. "Oh look at that, the father and a son carrying that donkey to market. That man's stupid, he should be letting his son ride to market, that's really dumb," so they go, "Okay". They put the donkey down, put the boy on the back, go off to market. And then some other people walk past and go, "Oh look at that, look at that selfish son riding the donkey when his father should be on the donkey. His father's older than him and she should be riding the donkey," so they put the father on the donkey and something happens and the donkey falls of the bridge and drowns.

Jennifer: Obviously the moral of the story is you can't please people all the time, and I honestly felt like that was what the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Conference was about, that people were arguing minor, minor, minor points about things, and there was no agreement on the broad church we needed. You couldn't say, "We should be entitled to have relationship. We should be entitled to have services. We shouldn't be sacked from job," very simple things like that, we couldn't get agreement on that.

Evelyn: It sounds like they couldn't see the wood for the trees.

Jennifer: That's probably the best expression. My experience with the far left was that they didn't give a damn about the woods. Each individual tree is really critically important, and there’s no agreement there.

Evelyn: Were they truly wedded to the LGBT cause at all?

Jennifer: In some ways I'm not sure about that. I think what they wanted was foot soldiers, and they wanted foot solders for any cause which was very much, we're talking about the Thatcher years, so any time that was anti-government they were interested in that. They were interested in pursuing an agenda. Clearly lesbian and gay rights sat within their agenda that they were pursuing, but so did so many other things too. It was a very broad, libertarian agenda. But its demands of the libertarian agenda were almost restrictive in that you had to have a libertarian life and you couldn't have the life that you wanted. If you chose, if you chose.. It's that level of restriction where the demands of the freedom are such that you must enjoy those freedoms or you are wrong. It did feel like we were a bit hijacked to that.

Jennifer: But it was interesting, there was so much going on at the time. There was the Miners Strike that was coming up as well, and there was a very large lesbian and gay contingent working with the miners and marching with the miners, and that had a massive impact on actually changing, if you want, a community, a very solid working class, middle England community that had had no, never felt that they'd come across lesbians and gay men in their life, suddenly had lesbians and gay men helping them on their cause, funding them, going on marches and rallies with them. In some ways, that had a dramatic change I think on what happened to Britain over that time.

Jennifer: Thatcher did more to support the lesbian and gay men community ultimately than she ever knows. She'd be horrified by that, because in some ways she put in place a whole bunch of things. She rallied us, Section 28 rallied us around, but we'll come to that one in a minute. The Miners Strike in some ways broke down the discrimination between some classic, old, more narrow minded communities and then their relationship with lesbians and gay men when they shared that. There were so many things that actually happened as a result of some of those policies.

Evelyn: Yes, I think for the sake of future generations of young people maybe listening to this tape, you've set out some of the far left politics going on at the time, perhaps just give the broader picture of the Thatcher administration and the, in a sense almost far right background of politics that all of this is playing out against.

Jennifer: It was just funny, there was a discussion on the radio this morning about Thatcher's handbag, which you forget about that she wielded as a weapon. When I moved to the UK, I had no real understanding on English politics, and so in order to understand what was going on I read all the Steve Bell cartoons, which I think is the best way to understand English politics. What you could see was a group of people who clearly wanted to reform Britain, but they wanted to reform it into the model that they had, which was very much a return to a class system. I don't mean a nice working class, middle class, upper class system, but more of a masters and servants-type system, a Serf system, so not the

broadening of a middle class in some ways, but the ensuring that there was a dominant class, and that escalated with the rise of a merchant class, a rich merchant class in Britain at the time.

Jennifer: But Thatcher's policies were things about, if you want, disenfranchising people. The poll tax for example, which we all still continue to pay now, that she brought in, of which there were massive numbers of riots and marches on the street. It was the idea that suddenly you wouldn't be entitled to vote unless you were paying a fee to prove where you lived, so suddenly your entitlement to be a member of a democratic society was linked to you paying a fee for that. That was the first time that had ever really been done, where if you didn't pay your poll tax, you couldn't vote. And the idea-

Evelyn: The poll tax was on a household, wasn't it?

Jennifer: It was on a household, yeah. But everybody in that household had to pay, so you weren't a homeowner. It didn't matter whether you were a homeowner or a renter, or a shared house, if you lived in that house you paid your poll tax, and if you didn't pay your poll tax you had to come so off the system you wouldn't have a chance to have a vote. It was just a way of putting a tax on people for nothing but living, and linking their right to democratic process in that. She had a war with Falklands, I think as a way of galvanizing people. She decided that she would crack the miners union and so had the Miners Strike, amongst other strikes that she had too. In some ways, very much fractured British society in so many ways. The agenda was very much a Britain first agenda in those ways.

Jennifer: Amongst that was, if you want, a trick that they took out of the book of the National Socialist in Germany was the idea that, "Let's find a scapegoat". In the case of Germany of course it was the Jews and then Gypsies and homosexuals and others. But here they often just picked on the lesbian and gay community, and the level of bigotry that existed from the government was just extraordinary. They'd been a private members' bill put forward at some point earlier on in the Lords, which was about effectively banning homosexuality at school, or the teaching of it, or anything to do with it, or in any way representing that it was fine and fair. That bill had not gone up in the upper house.

Jennifer: But Thatcher had made it clear to some of her ministers that she actually supported the bill and was happy for it to go forward again. So when the Local Government Act then came up, some people saw it as an opportunity to put this back on it, which is when they put on what was originally I think section 14, and then section 17, and then section 27, and eventually Clause 28

Evelyn: Section 28.

Jennifer: Yep, or Clause 28. That was really, it was an active and knowing attempt to demonize the lesbian and gay community. And it took … I think they were aware that they wouldn't be able to pass legislation banning

things, they had enough in place at the time. But I think what was happening was that they saw it as an opportunity to make a stand about showing their stripes, and their stripes were completely anti lesbian and gay at the time.

Jennifer: Section 28 was really about the fact that you can't, and the two things really were that you couldn't in any way reference that a lesbian and gay um. Organisation, sorry ... you couldn't teach homosexuality as an alternate way of life, or an acceptable way of life, and you couldn't teach a lesbian and gay relationship as anything, as a pretend family relationship. It was those words, pretend family relationship. What we had was two things, one of them was that our relationships were automatically not allowed to be recognized because they were pretend family relationships, or they couldn't even pretend to be pretend family relationship. The other thing was that schools and local councils were barred from putting any money towards anything that in any way promoted homosexuality.

Jennifer: The Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign conference had been the unmitigated clusterfuck disaster that it was, and from that, I had two things. I swore that I would never get involved with an organization that had LLGL whatever in it again, because I was sick of those. And secondly that we had to do something different that was never going to be taken over in those ways, and from that [Eric Presland and I formed the organization that become OLGA, the Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action. You could say it, OLGA. You didn't have to, LLGL tongue wrap. It was just after OLGA had been formed, about three months, we formed OLGA in October and the original thing that's now become Section 28 was mooted in December. So, If you want, it gave us immediately a reason to get together.

Jennifer: The thing about it that was quite interesting was that it ... local councils to this date had been the only funding bodies that had really supported the lesbian and gay community. The GLC, by this point is busy being disbanded by the Tories, and local councils, particularly Haringey, Hackney, and Islington are doing what they can to support their lesbian and gay communities. Many of them had rooms that they would rent out to people, they supported the groups in some ways. They even supported things like Lesbian and Gay Switchboard was being supported. They were supporting organizations that they thought were doing good or to assist their local members. And suddenly from a council perspective, you're suddenly being told you can't fund anything that's got this, so council funding dried up, but also to education. Suddenly you're not allowed to teach this.

Jennifer: So what does that mean you do about Oscar Wilde? Does he count as gay because was gay, or does he count as bisexual because he got married? Okay, we can't talk about him. And there's all the other people that you then go with. Who are we going to talk about? Whose plays are we going to show? Which of the ancient Greeks do we know was heterosexual because we better be really careful about which of the ancient Greek philosophers we've got? That became something where I think until

probably until almost recently, there were teachers who not sure of where the line was drawn on what they're allowed to teach, in terms of plays, authors, influencers, people who had ideas, philosophers. What can you teach?

Jennifer: If you're saying for example, Oliver Sacks was a really wonderful psychologist who did amazing research into the way that people's minds are working, you suddenly go, "Oh hang on, he was gay, so we can't talk about him because we can't say good things about him". How do you deal with those issues? It sowed so much doubt and concern and fear on the part of both local councils and education authorities that it was a real concern.

Jennifer: It had partly come up because there was a book that, and it's one of those interesting ones, somebody had asked Haringey council, one of the education [inaudible 00:28:47] asked the education department at Haringey council for a book that would help them explain to a kid who was in a gay relationship that it was okay. In doing that research, Haringey came across a book called Jenny lives with Martin and Eric, which had been published in Sweden and translated into English. They said that they would get a copy of it, and that was about the extent of what they did. They said they would get a copy of it, a copy of it for the school. It was never pushed around the school, it was never shoved in the hands of children.

Jennifer: But it became that thing that the papers got hold of, and it was more proof of the loony left and what the loony left was doing. It was a great way to attack the left wing local councils who were at the point the last little light that we had in the Thatcher darkness. They went to town on it, and so in that environment, when Section 28 came up, it was just grabbed on by the government because it gave them the opportunity to have a go at the councils, wave Jenny Lives with Martin and Eric around the place, talks about the loony left policies, show their stripes as being for family values, which of course had nothing to with lesbian and gay values, find somebody to have a go at and take attention with, and that was Section 28. When you talk to Jeremy Corbyn about it, he says that he didn't think it would ever get up, and I think, "Well, you're a bit stupid because it was pretty obvious to most of us that there was a lot of Tory support for it".

Jennifer: That generated massive amounts of attention. Section 28 really was, I'll say, the making of the modern British lesbian and gay community in some ways. There was a couple of things that happened to it. One of them was that because so many of the known homosexuals, gay men and lesbians, are either writers or playwrights or artists, the arts community suddenly got up in arms, and so for the first time we had people who might have been gay all their lives, Ian McKellen, Michael Cashman, Pam St Clement, Martin Shaw, amongst others, but who had never really come out because there had been no need or no imperative to do, suddenly were galvanized into action that they hadn't done before.

Jennifer: And so suddenly there's this whole swathes of people who are influential, well known, the sort of people who are great at getting attention because they're famous and everybody wants to hang out with them, suddenly it feels as though they're being impacted by this piece of legislation. Section 28 is going to have an impact on their lives and what they're doing, the plays that they can do, or the places that they can perform, or the sorts of material that they can perform. That certainly raised people's eye.

Jennifer: The political ones of us, myself in OLGA and all of us who were involved in that were up in arms about it because it was just so obviously clear discrimination, and at this point what was interesting was that we'd had Lisa Power who was my partner at the time, who worked for the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, and had been quite vocal at this point in the very early part of the AIDS community and doing a lot of work in that area. And there was myself, there was [Chris Black who was one of the black lesbians and who was a feisty little thing who was also involved in OLGA at the time. And there were the boys, Eric and the rest of the boys who were involved in it, who we all came together, and we worked on what can we do about this?

Jennifer: The one thing about OLGA was that we really didn't want to be taken over by the Trots, so we had a little management committee, and we were determined to actually not allow that to be taken over. We did one mistake, but we'll get to that one in a bit. We organized the march in January at very short notice, which of course has squillians more people than the police were expecting and really put us on the radar. In the typical way of the lesbian and gay community, there were then a whole bunch of other splinter organizations. I say splinter but I just mean separate organizations that started. There was the Stop the Clause Group, which was a single purpose group to stop the clause, and they were running some rallies. We did train trips up to Manchester, they'd run rallies up there. We did train trips up to Scotland and spoke up there and did huge rallying up there with all these things to raise-

Evelyn: The trips up to Manchester, that was the famous Pink Express?

Jennifer: That was the famous Pink Express.

Evelyn: Tell me all.

Jennifer: Look, I don't remember much about it. I remember we went up there, we had a great time.

Evelyn: I think a lot of people don't remember much,

Jennifer: There was a reason for that too. There was large amounts of champagne drunk on the Pink Express.

Evelyn: Pink champagne, I hear.

Jennifer: Pink champagne. We were determined to try and make as much noise and be seen as much as we could by then and bear in mind that we've still got the end of the Miners Strike going on at this point, so we're getting support from some interesting areas. And we're trying to rally interest across the country because this is not a front page issue. I think they didn't want it to be a front page issue.

Jennifer: They wanted to pass it, they wanted to be seen to be doing all this stuff. But it was really the London councils that they wanted to have a go at more than anything else, and we trying to make it an issue for all Britons to get to talk to their politicians about, whether it was in Scotland or whether it was in Wales or whether it was in Manchester. Hence we did a lot of work around the country.

Evelyn: But that first rally in the January, that was pulled together very quickly?

Jennifer: Look, it was. That was interesting because the clause had come up in December and we knew that if we were going to run a successful rally we had to get the students involved because that's where the numbers come from and everybody was on their Christmas break. We didn't know where we would together, we didn't know how many people we'd get together, we didn't know who would be there.

Evelyn: The days before social media of course.

Jennifer: Yeah, yes. It was in those days before social media. We were trying to leaflet the boys' bars, and they're not understanding why it's important because it's so early in that nobody is really understood the threat that it is at this point. We were trying to get people agitated and I think we had the rally sometime late in January. We can't remember, I think we found it somewhere between the 20th and 27th of January, it was quite late.

Jennifer: We got the students involved, and I can remember that Chris Black and I went down to see the police because you had to get a police permit for your rally. In those days you had to get a police permit and you had to say where you were going to organize and what the route march was and the police gave you permission to do that. We sent Chris and I because I was the nice, white, middle class lesbian who spoke nicely and looked like they did, and Chris because she didn't and she was very, very involved in the organizing of the march as well.

Jennifer: I remember saying to the police we wanted to get together at Temple, and I think it was something like, I'll get the numbers wrong, but Temple could only take let's say 6,000 people meeting there and we told them there was going to be eight, and they said, "Well, you can't meet at Temple," and I just looked at him, I said, "Look, really we're going to be doing well if we get four, so I think you'll be absolutely fine with Temple," and I said it so nicely with my nice Australian accent.

Jennifer: And they said yes, so we organized at Temple and about 12 or 15,000 people arrived and it was mayhem and the police were horrified. And

then we marched all the way down there and as we got near Downing Street somebody said, "She's home".

Evelyn: Mrs Thatcher of course?

Jennifer: Thatcher was home, and we just turned into Downing Street and had a riot in Downing Street. By the time we got to Downing Street I think we were probably in excess of 25,000, somewhere between 25 and 40, the number vary, but a lot of people. The police were not happy. They dragged me out and made me disperse the crowd. They threatened to bring the horses in, and there had been at that point a couple of incidences where the police had ridden their horses into crowds and people had died. They did it with the Suffragettes, they were threatening to do it with us as well.

Jennifer: We had a good little riot for about 20 minutes and then we moved on to Houses of Parliament and did our thing there. There are most of us who believe that the fact that six weeks later gates went up on Downing Street is nothing to do with IRA bombs but just to do with 20 rampaging lesbians and gay men taking of the place. That was the first one. It was a huge success, and it really, if you want, it surprised everybody with the emotion we had. We had straight people marching with us who could see what was happening, we had people who hadn't come out marching with us, we had people who had only just come out marching with us, and we had people who on the sides when they realized what the rally was joining us from the streets.

Jennifer: It was just an extraordinary thing that I thought we'd be doing nicely to get 5, maybe 7 or 8,000 lesbians and gay men down to Parliament, we had more than 20,000. As I said, between 25 and 40 by the time we got down there, so it was quite extraordinary, and those numbers never went. The Stop the Clause marches had similar numbers when they were running. Several of us did stands when we went to Speaker's Corner every Sunday and ranted from boxes about how important it was to try and get people's attention. It was a very, very big thing, and I think we knew that we would never get it overturned, that it was going to pass inevitably. But the question was about being seen for that.

Jennifer: It really was, it was very much to me, from my position with OLGA from where I was, it was something that I was kind of the lead activist on it, the boys who were on the committee were supportive and doing everything and involved in it. I'm not saying they didn't play a role in it, but it was probably led by myself and Chris and Lisa to a degree in being those front people who were doing that organizing and doing that work. Similarly, Stop the Clause had been really headed by a couple of lesbians who were determined to get that together and get that going. And then when we got to the time of the legislation being passed of course, then we had the, also the abseilers. But we're talking about three specific events, which is the abseiling into Parliament, the taking over of the Home Show and the-

Evelyn: Invasion.

Jennifer: The invasion of the news.

Evelyn: The six o'clock news.

Jennifer: The six o'clock news. Those three really, if you want, let's call them, if I say media events I don't mean they were done for media and I don't mean anything other than the fact they caught the media's attention. That was exactly what we needed. Lesbians and gay men marching down the street, other than a riot outside Downing Street is really not very news making, it doesn't make the front page. You might get a picture on there if there's a huge number of you, but that's it. But somebody abseiling into Parliament makes the front page. Somebody chaining themselves to the desk of the 6PM newsreader makes the front page.

Jennifer: What we had was stunts that really got public attention in a way that hadn't done before and it was the best thing. It was fabulous to actually have the politics and the community engaged. The more sophisticated message about why it was bad out there from particularly Artists Against the Clause, Stop the Clause, OLGA, the work that we were doing there, but then these stunts that caught the public's attention, who was never going to listen to those messages, but suddenly realized that there were people who were very agitated by it. It was a perfect package to be a perfect storm to make a lot of noise. That was really Section 28, and from Section 28 a couple of things happened.

Jennifer: One of them was that the lesbians really were at the fore because the abseilers were lesbians, and the people who chained themselves to the desk at the six o'clock news were lesbians, and the people who took over the Home Show were lesbians, so you've got for the first time an issue with a lesbian and gay community that isn't a 50/50 issue between men and lesbians. Until then, most organizing had been through Campaign for Homosexual Equality or male run organizations, or groups that had men who were much more visible than lesbians. Suddenly, you can't miss the role of lesbians, they're doing 70% of the work or 70% of the visibility. You've also got people like Femi Otitoju and just other people who are on the scene, [inaudible 00:39:57] and Chris Smith who was doing everything that he could as the MP, doing everything they can at this point to support what's going on there.

Jennifer: But the visible people who are making the front page of the paper, who are organizing the marches, who are standing at rallies, who are on stages speaking, were predominantly women. It was the lesbian and gay community, it wasn't the gay community with a couple of lesbians rolled in for gender parity. That made a huge difference, because suddenly you couldn't shut the lesbians up. But you also realized that you didn't want to shut the lesbians up because the lesbians, they were going to do the work, they were going to write the leaflets. They were going to door drop on things, they were going to knock on people's doors. Political parties have known for years that women are often the best street campaigners because they'll go out there and people will talk them and they're not threatening and they'll get somebody's ear.

Jennifer: The lesbian and gay community discovered that too, that women were tireless workers for these causes, and that Section 28, it wasn't about gay men and it wasn't about lesbians, it was about our right to have our lives in the way that we want it. It was very much driven by the lesbians at that point. I think all of us who were involved in it at that point recognized the really important and critical role that women had played. The Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners had had really active lesbians involved in that as well, so we've got at that point a really broad movement.

Jennifer: The Scottish Lesbian and Gay Group had some very active lesbians I remember up there as well, so you've suddenly got this very broad lesbian and gay organizing for the same time, that is never going to go back in the box. If you think about the Second World War for example, women were put in the workforce because the men weren't there. But when the men came back they were taken out of the workforce. But you're never going to do that, you're never going to get the lesbians out of the community now because we're in there and we were very much there.

Jennifer: Following Section 28, there was a whole series of fundraisers over Section 28 done by the arts group Artists Against the Clause, and that now had Ian McKellen who's come out. There was the Equality Show, and then Before the Clause, which were fundraisers that were done to raise money specifically, in many cases actually directly for OLGA, for that political work that we were doing. OLGA as a political organization had a great relationship with Artists Against the Clause, which was very political. But if you want..But I'll say in a soft political way in that they didn't come from a background in political organizing or any party policy, and OLGA was a very non-party specific group.

Jennifer: But OLGA had a real tradition of street activism, marching, changing the law, legislative change. The actors were just horrified by what was going on, politicized to that degree, but didn't have a political background about how you organized yourself, how you converted into action. So together we were a really quite effective team, in that they were able to do the fundraising and pull together people who would get people going to the theatre, they would get meetings with them. Ian in particular with John Major when he became PM, so people would meet with him because he was a famous man that they wanted to have a chance to meet. That gave us an entrée into things that the activists had never had. They meet with us reluctantly when they had to. But they would meet with Ian or Michael with joy because suddenly here is somebody that they could go and shake hands with.

Jennifer: That made me realize the importance and benefit of having an organization that actually was able to do this. They'd been some issues, I was stepping back from OLGA at that point I think more because I was just a bit tired and needed a little bit of break, and there were some issues with OLGA and artists, in terms of the money being passed over that got really quite fractious at the time. Just a messy little thing, it all got resolved. I can remember, that was just unnecessary. We had a

common cause in there and the money from the Equality Show and the Before the Act was all designed to go to funding lesbian and gay groups, which it had done. OLGA had been complaining about whether the money had gone there or not.

Jennifer: Anyway, it was around this time that a gang of guys, six of them met at Ian McKellen's place and put out what they called the Limehouse Declaration, a second Limehouse Declaration, which was a declaration really that said, "We can't let things like Section 28 ever happen again, and if we're going to stop them happening we need to create an organization that lobbies effectively before these things come up to stop them there. And it needs to be non-party political and effective and targeted". It was very much driven by a guy who was a public servant at the time, who really couldn't come out, wouldn't come out at work, and never got formally involved with Stonewall. But he was the political brain behind some of it. There were other people who were the political brains behind it. And Ian was there, Duncan Campbell, Michael Cashman, Peter Regis a few others.

Evelyn: This would be around '89?

Jennifer: Yeah, this around ... no, we're talking about '87.

Evelyn: '87?

Jennifer: Yeah, because it's the 30th anniversary of Stonewall next year.

Evelyn: Next year.

Jennifer: No, so this would be '88 we're talking now. Anyway that was a group of guys who got together, and then subsequent to that, because they had known me from my involvement with OLGA, I also knew Michael from the Labour Party. I was actually an organizer in Jeremy's constituency at the time, and I knew Micheal from Labour politics as well. They reached out to me and said ... they had had a couple of women that they had spoken to, particularly Jules, I can't remember the surname, and Deborah Ballard, who were partners and Jules ran the Drillhall at the time, and a lot of the artists meeting had been at the Drillhall. They'd approached them and basically said, "We need to get some women involved, or we need to get some policies," or something. Anyway, they'd said," Go and talk to Jen Wilson, you already know her," so they did.

Jennifer: I met with them, we then started having several meetings and it was really from that that a core of us, really Ian McKellen, Michael Cashman, Lisa Power, and myself really came up with what was ultimately became the Stonewall group and the Iris Trust. One of them being the lobby organization that was absolutely designed to change Parliament's view and politics, and we felt that we could never have chance of getting charitable status with that. And then a charitable arm that was designed to allow us to raise money to have donations made from a charitable sector and that was the Iris Trust.

Jennifer: Although I know get that Stonewall apparently is a charity. In Australia you can't become a charity if you're doing any political lobbying. Anyway, but that was why we had the two organizations because we thought Stonewall would not be able to get charitable status because of its lobbying remit and that the Iris Trust would because it was a fundraising, philanthropic, research based organization.

Jennifer: That really was it. We put together a board with the determination then that it would be equally men and women. We worked out who would be the first chair of Stonewall, and we agreed that Ian would be the head of the Iris Trust and Michael would be the head of Stonewall, and that more because we recognized the importance of having high profile people in it. It was around this time that I think Lisa had got involved in the International Lesbian and Gay Association, which I subsequently got involved in. We both did stints as secretary general of the organization. And, really.. I stayed involved in Stonewall. Lisa had an involvement.. Lisa came into Stonewall a little bit after I'd been involved in the founding of it, but the four of us really were the core who go it set up, worked out the name, those things. I can remember, Ian talks about the fact that, "Why would you call it Stonewall? We don't want to stonewall anything, we want to enable it to so on." so we had to explain lesbian and gay history to him and then he understood.

Jennifer: I remained involved in that pretty much until I went back to Australia when I stayed involved in lesbian and gay politics there for years. But yeah, it was a fascinating time. I think what's happened..There are a couple of things in Stonewall that's interesting. Our first director was the lovely Tim Barnard, who's an MP in New Zealand at the moment. Tim was a great organizer, a really good, warm human being and he worked out of a closet for a long time and got a lot of meetings. We really used the people involved in Stonewall to open doors.

Jennifer: We had a very big cocktail party at Parliament where all of us were given a member of Parliament to go and befriend. The girls befriended girls and the boys befriended boys, and just to talk to them to get our views across, and it really changed that because suddenly there are like 12 lesbians and gay men descending on Parliament meeting lords and ministers and members of Parliament and just explaining our life and our concerns and our worries over cocktails and canapes in a very non-threatening environment. It really to me, I remember thinking, how much of my political life would I have given my left arm to be able to be at something like this to be able to have access to these people? It just showed me what Stonewall could become. We'd always said it would be a [inaudible 00:48:59] organization.

Jennifer: Tim was really a fantastic organizer with that. He left after a couple of years to go to New Zealand with his partner, they were relocating over there. We hired Angela, god I know her name, but anyway, worth finding.. Pause for a sec, I'll just find this ... Angela Barnett. Let me just check. Actually, Tim must have, okay-

Evelyn: Okay, so Angela Mason.

Jennifer: Yeah, yeah. Tim must have been with us fairly short because Angela joined us in 1989, so we must have had Tim really only for about a year then. Angela joined us and I remember there had been views that she had been involved in the Angry Brigade around Greenham Common and so there was quite some concern on the part of the boys that she would be seen as too much of an activist.

Jennifer: The best thing that ever happened to Stonewall in so many ways. She was a phenomenal force, she was a brilliant organizer, she was tenacious, she knew what she wanted. She could meet with people, she got meetings into it and she set Stonewall's agenda. She was ambitious and driven and really did such a huge amount for the lesbian and gay community. I know she's got a gong now of some sort. Again, one of those things where ... Tim, I've got a huge amount of respect for Tim and he worked in the very early stage when Stonewall was really new and just being set up. But if you look at Stonewall and go, what was the powerhouse that drove Stonewall to be what it was? It was Angela Mason, and Angela was just really wonderful. Again, you've got a lesbian pushing through the agenda of the lesbian and gay community, and now of course we've got Ruth Hunt in Stonewall these days.

Jennifer: What was interesting was that, it was that at the time the issues that Stonewall were dealing with were things like male age of consent. It didn't matter that it was male age of consent we were talking about, we're still talking about right for our community and what they are. You're then talking about the whole decriminalization of homosexuality, which women hadn't been specifically criminalized, but you're still talking about something about our community. That to me was the big thing. This was where lesbians became very good at the idea that an issue that affects the lesbian and gay community affects the lesbian and gay community, it doesn't matter if a portion of the community is being disenfranchised or damaged in some way. You come together on that.

Jennifer: I think it was shown by the huge number of lesbians who were involved in the early days of the HIV crisis, and what was happening with the Switchboard, and the role that they took. And the women who really pushed through a lot of that, which was very much Femi, Lisa, Linda, and Vanda. The four of them really pushed through on Switchboard, the idea that AIDS was a lesbian and gay issue and that the Switchboard had to deal it in those ways. I think that's been really important in that that women have been good at standing up for, I'll say gay men's issues, but they're just-

Evelyn: The whole community's issues.

Jennifer: The whole community's issues.

Evelyn: Yeah, solidarity.

Jennifer: Solidarity issues. It is just interesting. You did notice at some point during the HIV crisis that this was one of the things I always thought was a bit odd was that there were lesbians jumping up and down going, "But

lesbians get breast cancer, and we want you to support breast cancer". I'm not saying it's not an issue, but you're not being targeted based on your sexuality with breast cancer, whereas gay men were being targeted on the basis of their sexuality around AIDS and HIV.

Jennifer: We have become a much more sophisticated community now, and I think what, 30 years after Stonewall, I think we're at the point now where there is that broad church about where we're now, our relationships are recognized. We can get married, you can't get sacked for being gay. There's a whole lot of things that we've now got those protections, and they are those broad things where we don't divide them into what men get and what women get. We see them as the issues that the community has.

Evelyn: And also now a lot of the issues of the trans community are coming back [crosstalk 00:53:01].

Jennifer: Yeah. I can't get how you can go, "Here's a line in the sand and I'm on this side and that's okay, and you're on the other side and that okay". You talk to some people, on the whole prescriptive lesbian feminists, and you go, "Well, where are trans people going?" And they're going, "Well, a man who dresses as a woman or lives his life as a woman is still a man," and you go, "Okay, what about a woman who lives their life as a man? Is she still really a woman?" "Oh no, she's a man too". It's so easy to break the rules and get thrown out, which is that if you're a man who becomes a woman, you're still a man so you get thrown out. And if you're a woman who becomes a man, well you're now a man so you get thrown out. There's no way to win in this case.

Jennifer: I just think we have to accept that the biggest thing we're dealing with is discrimination. That says that if people are being discriminated based on their gender, men versus women, we have a real issue with that. If people are being discriminated based on their sexual orientation, we have a real issue with that. When you put the two of those together, you go, if people are being discriminated because they feel the gender that they want to live is not the gender that they were born in, their sexual orientation changes as a result of that, that's got to be part of our community.

Evelyn: I'm seeing the picture of the 80s as increasingly growing into a strong community, and I think right at the beginning of the 80s, the fractures that were there, it might be useful if you elucidate on some of the ... how fractured the community was at that stage because I think maybe people listening to this in the future might not realize quite how difficult it was.

Jennifer: In the early 80s there was the London Apprentice and there was Heaven and there were a couple of other things. There were probably two or three permanent gay men's nightclubs, which were gay men only. Women were not welcome. There was probably another, let's say five are six nights a week that were gay men only nights in other venues. There was probably one or two a month for lesbians. There were a

couple of mixed things that you could go to, but not a lot. You would go to some bars that weren't known as gay men's bars, but were gay friendly if you wanted to hang out with men and women together.

Jennifer: But the idea of a nightclub, as in a dark space where you could dance and pick up people, it was a boy's world at that point. Women did not exist in those ways and how we met each other was just extraordinary. We all walked our dogs and [inaudible 00:55:40]. It was just really difficult to meet people. There were a couple of things which were the breaks against this, and that particularly was Switchboard, originally Gay Switchboard that became London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard. There was Gay's the Word, which had a whole lot of book sessions and reading sessions. They had a very strong woman there called Linda who was the one I mentioned who was on Switchboard, and she'd been always front of house and representing so many things, and so there was a sense in which this was also a shared space that you go to.

Jennifer: It was just a community where there were gay men and there were lesbians. You had friends in either side but you didn't get a chance to socialize with them that much, certainly not publicly. There were restaurants and cafes and bars that you could go to, pubs that were friendly. They would let you, you'd go there, you'd be fine. There were some of them that were really quite good. I'm thinking of the difference between nightclubs where you go and pick up people and bars where you go and drink, let's say pubs where you go and drink. There were pubs that were friendly to lesbians and gay men, or we knew that they were lesbian or gay owned and they would always be pretty relaxed. But that was about it.

Jennifer: It was a time when it was not uncommon for people to be bashed on the street if they were lesbian or gay, or picked on. It was just amazing how people could somehow walk past you and tell that you were a lesbian and yell at you. It was also a time when you would not come out at work because it was completely valid for an organization to sack you because you were a lesbian or gay man, valid reasons for that. People were very, very careful with their sexuality. I spent most of my late teens and most of my twenties being a completely out outrageous lesbian in the community, and towing a very careful in the places that I worked about how out I would be.

Jennifer: It was one of those ones where you had to be exceptionally good at your job to be able to come out and stay there. If you weren't good at your job then your sexuality was good enough to get you, you're out. That was really the environment. There was not a lot that was happening between men and women at the time. I think partly, and I will say partly because the Trots in the SWP were very, they were very combined. They had none of that separation between men and women because they were on the whole predominantly straight, but they had always had this organizing because they'd always been much better on gender politics in some way. And politics hadn't hit the lesbian and gay community, we were just living our lives and trying to keep our heads down and keep out of the way of things.

Jennifer: The Trots had always been dealing with gender issues, and so they'd been really big on trying to make sure that women in particular were represented and black people and disabled people. And that the more representative organizations were often, they weren't terribly good at it because they tended to be run by white men, but they paid a lot of lip service to this. I think their involvement in the political organizations particularly had an influence on the lesbian and gay community. There were some very strong women in the greater London council with Ken Livingstone, particularly Janet Parker, who were very I think influential in getting Ken to understand the needs of the lesbian and gay community and help the funding for the London Lesbian and Gay Centre.

Jennifer: I think that was really the start of, there were women starting to go, "Let's start moving for some of these things". There were the Trotskyists who were going, "If you're a community being discriminated against, I.e. lesbian and gay community or even just a gay male community, you need to accept that to get rid of discrimination, you need to get rid of your own discrimination. If you don't want to be discriminated against as a gay man, you need to not discriminate against lesbians or black people," all of those areas. And so there started to be this awareness at just about, I'd say a bit of a rise of human rights, and Thatcher in some ways helped with that, because people felt so, they felt that human rights were so endangered.

Jennifer: We'd seen the black organizing coming out of America that had done some work in those areas as well. There was the whole history of the Suffragettes to lean back on, that that was very much about women's issues. I think it was really.. It was really in the early 80s that you started to get the idea that as local councils put together, particularly education departments where they actively lesbians and gay men in there to make sure that they could deal with those issues. They put lesbians and gay men in there, they didn't put in a homosexual and call them representative of the community. When they funded lesbian and gay groups, they often required that those groups be mixed, so councils who had been dealing with discrimination issues for a lot longer, and London councils I always thought were really very early into this, they also started I think to put pressure on the lesbian or gay groups that met there to become lesbian and gay groups.

Jennifer: There was this societal I think increase of interest in, women have a role, we had a female Prime Minister, that definitely says something. I think that you then started to see lesbians and gay men coming together, and certainly on Islington Voluntary Action Council, we had women and men together. And then when I got involved in the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, the commitment there was the board would be 50/50, and we had lesbian-only space but we never had male-only space because we recognized that there was a lot of male-only space that existed, but there wasn't a lot of lesbian-only space that existed, and so we were trying to redress the balance in those ways. I think in the early 80s is when you start to get this idea that we can't play to just what we want, we need to actually broaden ourselves out a bit more and give a

bit more space for people whose voices haven't been heard and who haven't been entitled to have space of their own before.

Evelyn: And so over the period of the 80s, in a sense the Tory, Margaret Thatcher agenda helped to pull everyone together?

Jennifer: Yeah, it did. It's certainly not what they intended but it's that thing where ... it is very much the enemy of my enemy is my friend, and it was very much that, that Thatcher became such a rallying thing for people, such a polarizer. It's just funny. I had a very dear friend of mine who died a few years ago, and he said to me once, he said, "In some ways Thatcher was one of the best things that happened to Britain and one of the worst things that happened to Britain". He feels that modern Britain owes her a great debt, but feels that she diminished so much of what we could have been. She pulled us up, but she pulled us in a direction we didn't have to go. The pullup what necessarily, but we could have gone in a different direction. He never voted for her, he never like her, but recognized the impact that she had.

Jennifer: My sense is that she became such a polarizing figure for many of us, certainly she won election after election, so you can't say she wasn't popular with the people. But within almost any disenfranchised community of any kind, whether they were immigrants or whether they were unemployed, or whether they were homeless people, or whether they were lesbians and gay men, there was just a sense in which her agenda and our agenda were at complete odds with each other. That meant then that there is a broader church when you, I don't really mean that...there's a broader, um kind of alliance that can happen between these disenfranchised groups. I think you recognize that the miners and that's why the lesbians and gay men got together, and so what was the issue there was that both of us were having our lives impacted by what was happening with Thatcher. You've also got black organizers and women working together really, really actively, because they're recognizing that discrimination is discrimination.

Jennifer: So in some ways because we were pushed to the fringes, we huddled in the centre, if you want. We coalesced into alliances and allegiances that meant that you would be more likely to run into people that were a different type from you within these marginalized communities, and that also then started to broaden this idea of a broad fight against Thatcher's view of Britain, which was an incredibly narrow, restrictive view of Britain.

Evelyn: It galvanized-

Jennifer: It galvanized us, yeah.

Evelyn: -in the face of adversity.

Jennifer: Yeah, I think so. You don't know it at the time. But as somebody said, if we hadn't had Section 28 in Britain, we probably wouldn't have marriage now. Maybe we would have done, you don't know.

Jennifer: But there's a big chance that if we hadn't had Section 28, the community would have not got together, people wouldn't have been outraged about what it meant, we wouldn't have had Stonewall group. And I'm not saying Stonewall's solely responsible for this, but you wonder about whether we would have achieved what we've achieved.

Evelyn: Because Section 28 did go into law for [crosstalk 01:04:15] and it lasted for a long time.

Jennifer: I think it was actually about 13 years or something. But yeah, a long time [crosstalk 01:04:21].

Evelyn: It was repealed 2003, I think-

Jennifer: 2003.

Evelyn: -it lasted a long time [crosstalk 01:04:27] so there was still something to fight against for all that time.

Jennifer: Yes for a long time.

Evelyn: And to coalesce and to develop.

Jennifer: And there's still teachers who had taught during the time that Section 28 existed, continue to not be sure about where the lines are these days.

Evelyn: Today, what do you think are some of the biggest issues facing women in particular in the community?

Jennifer: I think the income divide, this is women, not just lesbians, but I certainly think the income divide is a big one. I think society still accepts gay men in some ways easier than it does women. That said, I think it's got a lot more structured clichés about gay men than it does about lesbians. It's got a butch cliché about lesbians, but it's got a whole lot of clichés about gay men, between the closeted, good looking gay man, the gay man who's your best friend, the gay man who's queenie, the gay man who dresses up. There's a lot more clichés about that. But I think income disparity is one of those things.

Jennifer: Women's porn doesn't play out with two men together, but men's porn plays out with two women together. At what point do we get past all this stuff? There's been some really interesting articles I've been reading about the portrayal of lesbian sex in movies and how most of the time it's designed by men, done by men. When do lesbians get to start defining their own sexual identities in some ways?

Jennifer: I think the issues that affect lesbians in the community are very much the issues that affect gay men – sorry- women in the broader community, so access to opportunities, the amount of money that you have when you retire, whether you've got equality in the salary that you're being given, the threats of violence that exist when you simply

walk the streets. I think women live in a lot more fear than men do. The whole Me Too movement, I think has highlighted that in some ways. I think those remain the issues.

Jennifer: And I think within the lesbian and gay community we have to address where does the transgender or the broader tranny, transvestite, transgender community sit within us, do we embrace them? I think we have to embrace them. I think it will take us a while, it's an extra level of sophistication to that. I think it's that. The lesbian and gay community has got to address bisexuals and transgender, intersex people as part of our community, and I think that's something that we will grapple with. And I think that as a society we continue to need to look at levels of discrimination and really the equality that women have more generally.

Evelyn: Finally, from all your experience, your life experience, your experience of activism, what would be the lesson, the piece of advice you might give to a young person who needs to look at human rights, gay rights?

Jennifer: I think they're the foundation. I think that the scariest thing that is happening right now is the very subtle erosion of our human rights through things like the rise of the right wing, but the rise of the ...it's not necessarily the right wing- sorry – it"s not always the right wing. Things like Trump, yes he's right wing. But it's the rise of those things which make it fair to discriminate and see difference, and so I think things that happen around Brexit is to me a lot about issues about immigration and fear of the other. Trump is a lot about fear of the other and sometimes that other is just the people in Washington or sometimes with the people with power or it's globalization. In Australia I see our policy on refugees as disgusting and is very much the fear of the other.

Jennifer: I see that we have a world which is less open and less advanced than it was in so many ways. Yes, we've got more rights legally than we had before. But I think that there's a more acceptance of people's entitlement to be bigoted. People are starting to get a bit more afraid about standing up against things. I dunno, I suppose I just think we've come up off the peak of it. It doesn't mean it's disastrous, it doesn't mean it's terrible, but I just think that right now I would say that there is an obligation on all of us to live the life that we wish the world lived.

Jennifer: If I see somebody pick on somebody on a bus for their race or their disability or their gender or their dress, and I keep quiet, then is that what I really want, is this the world that I want to live in? Human rights isn't something you get involved in an organization to do, it's the way that you live your life. It's the stances you make on a day-to-day basis. It's how you talk to people.

Evelyn: Wow, I think that's a profound thought to finish on, and an inspiring one, so thank you so much Jenny.

Jennifer: Thank you.

Evelyn: It's been really, really fascinating listening to your life.

Jennifer: Thank you.