

From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Lisa Power	Date: 31.07.2019 Age: 55
Key issues: Early Pride. Lesbians and feminism. Lesbianline. S&M. Section 28. AIDs. Founding Stonewall UK. 'Thrilling Bits'. Queer Britain Museum.	
Narrative summary <p>Lisa was fortunate to come out at Lancaster University into what was quite a radical scene at the time in a small community with a lot of solidarity amongst groups not welcome in 'mainstream' society. When she moved to London she identified as a lesbian and feminist, but it was a very fractured community: the women were separating from the men and into many different groups. She was one of the first lesbians to sign up for Switchboard after the women left to set up Lesbianline. Her first pride was 1976, which was already attracting complaints about commercialisation and she recalls the riot at the 1980 Pride. She speaks about the separatists and the straight women who felt they should be lesbians for purely political reasons and the impassioned debates surrounding S&M at the Lesbian and Gay Centre (drawing parallels with trans debates today). A period of 'polymorphous perversity' with people exploring their sexuality in the early 80's gave way to clearer identification and solidarity with the LGBT community in the face of hostility arising from AIDs and Section 28.</p> <p>Lisa sets out clearly the political situation of the time – the alliances with the Left and the efforts made towards improving equality, which were largely unsuccessful. She talks about the political landscape of the Thatcher administration and traces the threads leading to the implementation of Section 28. She discusses efforts to drive equality policy and expresses the frustration felt when the prevailing ethos encouraged a level of democracy where peripheral issues could take over the agenda and the main priorities get lost. So when they decided to set up Stonewall UK, they were very clear that it was a 'closed shop' with a clear lobbying purpose and that they would select people for their skills and diversity. She describes how Stonewall was conceived around the table in Ian McKellan's house and how the men said, at this very early stage, that it should be 50/50 men and women. She suggested the name Stonewall as it would mean something to the community, but was not well known beyond it. She talks about how people were recruited and also recounts some of the early debates about the age of consent, but also the plethora of other legislation which affected all members of the community, such as employment rights. Lisa also explains how the AIDs crisis added an imperative to the campaign with long term partners being excluded from both medical decisions and funerals.</p> <p>Whilst helping to found Stonewall UK, Lisa and her partner had also set up 'Thrilling Bits' the UK's first lesbian sex toy mail order business and has some great stories about the products and the risky venture of smuggling them in from San Fransisco!</p> <p>She moved on from Stonewall to work with HIV organisations and is currently also a trustee of Queer Britain, a new queer museum project as she believes passionately that we need to learn the lessons of the past in tackling the current rise in hate crime against the community and particularly our trans members.</p>	
	Length of interview: 1 hr 17 mins



Evelyn: So, today as part of the oral history project From a Whisper to a Roar we're remembering the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riot and considering the impact this had on the UK.

Project is conducted by Opening Doors London and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

So today is the 31st of July 2019 and I'm Evelyn Pittman and I am here with Lori E. Allen, who is together with me interviewing the wonderful Lisa Power.

So, perhaps you could tell us when you first heard about Stonewall and what that meant to you.

Lisa: I actually don't remember exactly when I first heard about Stonewall, but I gained most of my early knowledge about, what I would then have called gay stuff, back in 1976 and thereabouts when I came out in Lancaster, in the north of England.

And I was very lucky that I came out into quite a radical scene there. There were women who were trying to set up a women's refuge, there was a lot of feminism amongst the lesbians, there was also a spirit that we all mucked in together. So we would have one disco a week that the lesbians, the gay men, and everybody else who wasn't welcome anywhere including trans people and Hells Angels, of all people, all used to get together on a Friday night at the Catholic Club for a disco.

But we did a lot of reading as well and I was also studying history at the university; although, medieval history, not a hell of a lot of LGBT history around the medieval stuff in those days certainly. And I would have picked up quite quickly on that. I was doing a lot of reading.

We had a gay bookstall once a week which had gay, lesbian and feminist books. And I seem to remember that I did quite a lot of reading while I was sat on the stall trying to sell things as well as actually buying some of the books, some of which I've still got. We would find out about stuff from only women press. We found out stuff from gay liberation, from publications. It was just the

beginning of gay publishing at that time from things like the Gay Men's Press as well as from feminist publishers.

So I knew there'd been this riot. I knew it was in New York and I knew that it was linked to gay liberation; although, gay liberation was sort of something impossibly glamorous that happened in bigger cities by and large. We got the gay liberation newsletter, but this was 1976 and to be honest, as I now know the gay liberation front was well long over by that time realistically. And actually things were changing quite rapidly at that point and there were lots of arguments about lesbian separatism or whether we should still be working with men and all of that stuff going on.

But as I came to know more about gay history, and I'm going to use correct terminology. Gay for the '70s, lesbian and gay for the '80s and '90s and then LGBT plus for this century, or queer. I would now say we would never have said queer back in the '70s. It was just a deathly insult but now I'm quite happy to use queer again because it's just simpler.

Evelyn: Because in the '70s there was queer bashing.

Lisa: Well absolutely, well there is still queer bashing-

Evelyn: But it was called [crosstalk 00:03:51].

Lisa: But some people still attempt to use it as an insult and for people in my generation we're much more hinky about it than young people for whom it's just a fresh new label.

But I knew that gay liberation was the radical end of things and we were very aware there was both gay liberation and there was the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, which you could tell by the name was massively more respectable and actually thought that us tearaways from Lancaster were a bit of a handful, so we used to wander off to their conferences and be thoroughly unhelpful to them by demanding concessions for unemployed people. I remember having a row about ..the first pamphlet I ever wrote was about the encroaching dangers of fascism. We're talking 1976, '77 here, the era of rock against racism and all that stuff and I was very involved in anti-fascist stuff from a gay perspective at that point and indeed it's something that's always stayed dear to my heart.

But for me the Stonewall Riots were a long way away. I was much more concerned with everyday life in Lancaster, trying to set up a gay helpline, trying to help people come out. And then I moved down to London and all gay life was here. Except that there were so many rules and I was used to a society in which we all clung together because we were very well aware that any of us could be queer bashed. They wouldn't care what sort of queer we were. We would all get it in the neck.

Lori: What sort of rules?

Lisa: In London there was lots of separatism which I actually first came across in Bradford where I'd gone for political reasons I can't really remember much about now but I was told ... I only knew gay men there who'd moved from Lancaster, but I was told I had to go and stay in a lesbian household because I couldn't stay in a gay men's household because it wasn't right. I'm like, but you're the people I know, what's this about? I found that very confusing.

Then I came down to London and not only ... I mean I was very clear I was a lesbian and I was a feminist and that was that. But I would

get a lot of interrogation about what kind of feminist I was. Was I a socialist feminist, was I a radical feminist and some other labels which frankly I've forgotten now. And I would just go, I'm a feminist. I'm sorry I'm not going to pick up the rest of those labels. And people just seemed to want ... And that was the year where a lot of lesbians had walked out of what had started as mixed, or at least theoretically mixed, lesbian and gay organizations. So I applied to join Switchboard in late 1979 and I was only the second lesbian back in after all the women had left to form Lesbian Line with all the women from Icebreakers, which was another similar organization that was more about social stuff than ... It didn't have a phone line and such.

Evelyn: It was a very fractured community at that stage. The men and women had gone very much in different directions over the '70s.

Lisa: Yeah, and I took quite a lot of criticism. Well frankly I took quite a lot of criticism all the way through the '80s for being someone who was much more about bringing the community together than pushing us apart.

But I was the second lesbian back in at Switchboard and the only other lesbian who was there when I joined actually was on record as saying that feminism gave lesbians a bad name, so I actually had more in common with some of the men on there than I did with her. And I've always felt you take your allies where you can get them.

So I actually started going to Pride shortly after I came out and I was at, I think it was the 1976 Pride, I'm pretty sure it was, where Tom Robinson was booed offstage and my first Pride and there were already people there complaining that it was too commercial. Because Tom Robinson was a sellout because he'd been on Top of the Pops so he joined mainstream-

Evelyn: Mainstream.

Lisa: Society and this was appalling and he wasn't alternative counterculture anymore. This is from a group of people who would've died of happiness if David Bowie had turned up and gone on the stage.

But Pride has always had those rows, always, always. There's always been somebody who wanted to be purer than everybody else. So that was my first Pride.

Evelyn: What was the feel at that Pride for you?

Lisa: Well it was about a thousand people and we all ended up in Hyde Park and it was very exciting for me. All these lesbians and gay men and I went off to a couple of other demonstrations with a gay contingent as it were.

I can't remember, it must have been an anti-abortion one we were all on and people were going, "What's it got to do with your lot?". And there was also a real problem in those days because any demonstration, which was called by the trades unions or by the left in general, if gays turned up we were always sent to the back of the march. We were always stuck at the end because we were a faint embarrassment to them because we were seen as a fringe issue. This is in the era where you had major leftist parties who were writing that ... Come the revolution homosexuality would disappear because it was a bourgeois construct. And the left were our only friends and even they weren't that friendly. People forget these things now.

But I found Pride very exciting. And I find it quite weird now because people go, "It must all have been so terrible! You must've suffered so awfully and it was such a hard time", and I had a whale of a time. I mean yeah I have coped with some fairly mild, to be honest, queer bashing a couple of times. I've certainly faced a fair bit of prejudice. But it was an awful lot of fun fighting it. And I'm one of those people who's happy with a small band of troublemakers. And that's what we were.

Pride was a bit scary. The police could be difficult and the 1980 Pride I think it was, it was either '79 or the '80 Pride and I think it might have been '80, was a riot. People forget that we actually had a riot here at Pride because the police ... There was a group from Brixton called the Brixton Faeries who were very much in the tradition of the Radical Faeries of GLF and one of them was a guy called Frank and for some reason he had a hat with a plastic meat cleaver from Woolies in it. I don't know why. But one policeman went up to him and told him to take the cleaver out of the hat because if it was in public it would cause offense so he put it in his handbag and a few moments later another policeman who'd been watching the whole thing came over and arrested him for carrying a concealed weapon.

And unsurprisingly that caused a riot including Terry Higgins after whom the Terrence Higgins Trust is named who at that point was a leather queen who was a barman at Heaven on top of the more respectable jobs you always hear about and the queens got off the Heaven float and it was leather queens and drag queens, radical drag queens, together fighting the police. And then the lesbians joined in as well, we were always up for a riot, or quite a few of us were. I remember in Lancaster, at the Catholic Club disco, one night when the Hells Angels got a bit too boisterous and decided to start picking on the gay men, they decided to try and fight the gay men. It was the lesbians who stepped in and beat the crap out of the Hells Angels frankly. Somebody went down casualty and counted how many lesbians there were and how many Hells Angels and there were more Hells Angels so we declared it a win for the lesbians.

Evelyn: Absolutely, proper order.

Lisa: And our pub sent down a tray of beers for the lesbians in the casualty department.

Lori: Did the spirit of separatism start to wane in a bit at this point then or ...

Lisa: No, it actually, if anything it got stronger for ... it was very difficult because people tried it on almost. I remember the year that all the straight left at Lancaster, the straight left women all decided that they were radical lesbians. In other words they were sort of theoretical lesbians. Quite a few of them thought they ought to try it out. It drove the straight left men around the bend because they lost their girlfriends for about six months.

And I wasn't short of girlfriends for a bit except that I ended up feeling slightly like a second class citizen because they were all lesbians for purist political reasons and I was a lesbian for lust. Somehow they managed to make that feel second class.

Evelyn: Not quite the same.

Lisa: But yeah, I've spent quite a lot of my life with women telling me how to be a lesbian and how to be a feminist and I seem to stick it out better than them even if I am bad at it.

Evelyn: Done a fine job as far as I can see.

Lisa: So ...

Evelyn: So we're in London.

Lisa: Yeah we're in London, I'm living in short life housing in Islington which was full of people who were frankly at that point polymorphously perverse. I shared the house with two gay men and a lesbian. The lesbian had a boyfriend and they used to have screaming rows about penetrative sex because she didn't want it because she was a lesbian but she was still sleeping with him and it was just like ... And one of the two gay men eventually went off and got married to a woman.

We were all pretty much perverse and I was having girlfriends and boyfriends while defining as a lesbian at that point. All sorts of stuff was going on and then in the end of it all the shutters came down and very strong rules came down and it was you're either gay or you're straight. Pick a side and stick to it. And suddenly all of that polymorphous perversity completely disappeared over the course of a very few years.

Evelyn: What was the reason for that do you think?

Lisa: I think it was a much stronger lesbian and gay community. There genuinely was a lot more of us and I think there was a sense that we were building a community but I think there was also just a whole ... Because we were facing prejudice and we were embattled, pulling up the drawbridge and saying you're either on our side or you're on theirs and that was very much the '80s. And there were quite a lot of rules because as the '80s went on you also had what a friend of mine Emma Healey dubbed "the lesbian sex wars" which came with all the rows that the Lesbian and Gay Centre where S&M was unacceptable.

It's very interesting, in the '80s it was all a row about S&M in the lesbian community and now it's all a row about trans women. But it's very similar in the ideology, the terminology and indeed some of the people who are anti-trans women are exactly the same women who were anti-S&M dykes. And it was really interesting because I didn't like rules so I ended up being very supportive of the S&M dykes even though I had absolutely no interest in it myself. I got denounced in the London Women's Liberation newsletter along with my friend Linda Semple because we had warned what they described as "instruments of torture and fascist regalia" to the opening of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre.

Evelyn: What were you wearing?

Lisa: Linda was in a Muir cap and a biker jacket and I think I was in a pair of high boots and a I'd stuck a toy riding crop in one of them. I mean we're taking the piss, we took the piss relentlessly. We were also involved in something with another woman called Anna Durrell, a couple of other people, a couple of men as well called DAFT, Dykes and Faggots Together who just took the piss out of things. We pinned up a fake dress code list on the women's floor of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre which involved Birkenstock shoes and army fatigues.

I remember a girlfriend of mine who was the chair of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre for a bit and this woman stood up and

attacked her for being part of the mainstream and something about ... It was something to do with the military. I can't think what because I'm sure we wouldn't have let the military into the centre. But my girlfriend had to point out to the woman who was screaming at her that she was the one wearing military fatigues. You know it's like "hello".

Evelyn: They were very passionate debates at the time.

Lisa: Yeah, lots of passionate debates. And again Linda and I got into trouble at one of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre general meetings. They called a special general meeting at Conway Hall to discuss whether they would let S&M people into the centre I think it was. And Linda and I turned up to that one dressed as Victorian ladies with a cucumber sandwich picnic and a bottle of sparkling wine and when we let the cork out of the sparkling wine it made a loud report and people were so completely over the top overwrought that some people had thought someone had let off a gun in the meeting, which was just like "Oh, get over yourselves".

But yeah, we used to get into a lot of trouble for refusing to take things like the lesbian sex wars seriously.

Evelyn: So perhaps if you paint a picture what was the political climate like at this time because the '80s were an interesting decade.

Lisa: Well, the '80s again was growing polarization and certainly in the lesbian and gay movement you were assumed to be left. I mean we were all great wearers of double denim and a lot of badges. It was very much a badge wearing movement and I do remember a friend of mine saying to me that it was harder to come out as a Tory at Gay Switchboard than it was to come out as gay in the Tories, which I think was a slight exaggeration but I know what he meant.

People were genuinely shocked to find out that anyone gay was a Tory and I find it funny that LGBT Labour now have a sticker that says "never kissed a Tory". I mean in those days it literally was enough to stop someone from going to bed with someone if they found out that they were a Tory. I remember a gay friend of mine saying that he wished that people would keep their mouth shut till after he had sex with them because he felt constrained to stop if they indicated that they were a Tory.

It was very, very polarized but it was polarized in a lot of ways, not just that way and there was a lot of "holier than thou", but that was also an awful lot of fun and I did ... I think because I was on Switchboard, because I was hanging out with people who were trying to do something constructive all the way through that time whether it was Silver Moon Women's Bookshop or Gay's The Word or DAFT or, you know, all sorts of bits and pieces I think it was good and I had an interesting time.

But you did learn not to say the wrong thing and not to challenge assumptions if you wanted to stay not ostracized from certain places. I didn't mind; although, there was not a formal ban there were some of us who knew that we were not welcome on the women's floor of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre and I didn't really mind that. But I remember being absolutely furious when my friend Jill Posener was given a hard time when she went up to the women's floor because someone had seen me sitting on her ... I was a big girl so I'm inclined to think it was her sitting on my lap but my memory is it was me sitting on her lap. Anyway, one of us sitting on

the others lap down in the bar area of the Centre and she got given a hard time when she went up to the women's floor. Whereas if it'd only been because there weren't enough seats to go around. We weren't girlfriends or anything.

So there was a lot of gate keeping and a very big hierarchy of oppression stuff going on and a lot of forced democracy.

Evelyn: And what did that look like?

Lisa: Well I think the culmination of that was the Organization for Lesbian and Gay Action which came after. One of the things people forget is there was quite a lot of legislative work that went on during the '80s, before Stonewall existed. Everybody acts like Stonewall were the first people to ever go out there and do anything about legislation. We did a lot in the '80s, it just wasn't terribly successful because I think in the '80s we very much thought that if we demonstrated enough and if we had the trade unions and a few leftist allies on our side that we would eventually win all the arguments and everything would move to a socialist nirvana in which lesbians and gay men were completely accepted. Except that was bollocks because it wasn't enough of coalition to win anything.

But there was a legislative conference and the Organization for Lesbian and Gay Action came out of that and the structure was that it was democratic. Well, except that we couldn't reach out to most lesbians or gay men across the country so it was democratic within a very much London activist hegemony. And there were multiple caucuses. There was a women's caucus, a black caucus and a disability caucus that I remember but there were also a couple of others. And if any of those caucuses vetoed anything it couldn't happen.

So, for example the disability caucus consisted of two people and they could veto anything, and they were two quite difficult people frankly. So we would have rows about whether we could have any meeting at all without having a signer, a creche and a whole lot of other things. And we were not allowed to have a meeting without all of those things happening, and yet we didn't have the money to make any of them happen.

There was absolutely no pragmatism in a lot of the politics of the '80s, it was deeply purist and it was very false democratic. It was democratic within a little bubble but it wasn't democratic in the sense of genuinely listening to all the people who didn't have a stake in the game and I think that's why ... When Stonewall came along and it recognized that there were tens of thousands of, at that point we would have said lesbians and gay men, who didn't go on demonstrations in London, who didn't live in Soho, who didn't take part in those tiny activist groups, but who were quite willing to do something to stand up after Section 28 provided they could preferably do it from their armchairs by signing letters and giving a bit of money to someone.

And that opened up a whole load of people who'd been a very silent part of the lesbian and gay community. What I unkindly used to think of as the dog breeders in Eastbourne, you know the lesbian knitting circles in Leeds or whatever; although, Leeds actually was hotbed of radicalism, that's a very bad example. But you know what I mean, all of those women who were living very quiet lives and they might have got the Kenric newsletter or something like that, but they didn't

actually ... They'd found another lesbian and got married very, very quickly in their heads and that was it.

I do remember the '70s and '80s were a bit of a nightmare if you were a solo lesbian and all your friends were in couples because you were seen a potential problem. You might go off with one of them because everybody was in serial monogamy; although, the Gays The Word Lesbian Discussion Group, God bless them, you could absolutely rely on ... The topics that would come around every few months were monogamy and non-monogamy, S&M, polyamory, I don't think we called it that then but it's essentially what it was.

There were certain topics that were all about how to be a lesbian and stuff and it was very funny because the woman who describes herself as the lesbian poet laureate, Trudy, came up to me a couple years ago and was like oh Lisa, blah, blah, blah, and I'm like, I think I do know you but I can't remember where from. And then I suddenly had this blinding memory of her bouncing up and down in the Gays The Word Lesbian Discussion Group which was having a particularly theory heavy discussion about I think S&M and a lot of guilt stuff going on, and she was just bouncing up and down going "But sex should be fun!", and I was like "Yay, thank God for somebody saying it".

Lori: What was the paper that you just mentioned, the Kenric Review?

Lisa: Oh no, there were a couple of newsletters. There was an organization called Sappho in the '60s and '70s and Kenric was a lesbian social group which also had a kind of newsletter which was mostly events in London. You've got to remember this was way before the internet and everything was Roneo'd, there were machines called Roneo machines where you literally, you typed on a piece of transfer paper, it was a special type of paper, and then you attached it to pegs on this machine and you literally rolled the thing round and round like a barrel and it would print off individual copies, very badly, which you would then strain to read. But that was how we printed things.

Lori: How much did it cost for a copy?

Lisa: For the Kenric Newsletter I don't know, I suspect there was an annual subscription but I couldn't tell you.

Lori: No but this machine ...

Lisa: Some people bought machines. I can remember at one point we tried to buy one in Lancaster but the local auctioneers wanted it so they kept overbidding us. We used to borrow one from something called Single Step which was a bookshop, it was a hippie bookshop and organic food store and we would go in there and ... To do our newsletters we would go in there and use theirs sort of once a month or whatever.

But that was how people communicated was in these little ... You don't see many of the gay newsletters from that time but I can still immediately tell if something was Roneo'd by the ...

Lori: By the quality of print.

Lisa: And you could even do it by handwriting. All those, if you go to Bishopsgate Institute, all of the early stuff from people like GLF it's in this stuff and they didn't even have typewriters a lot of the time so a lot of their stuff is handwritten onto those sheets and then Roneo'd.

Evelyn: And then the newsletters were sent out in completely anonymous brown paper envelopes.

Lisa: Oh yes, you absolutely would never put a return address or anything on any of the envelopes that-

Lori: For sure not, yeah.

Lisa: Might give stuff away and people were terrified of getting stuff at home. People were terrified generally of being out and for me that's actually one of the most important things that the Gay Liberation Front did was the absolute insistence on being out and I find myself still being a terrible fundamentalist about that and I remember when we founded Stonewall there was actually some debate because we had ... One of the people who'd been helping to found us had been told basically by his employer that they would sack him if he went public as a founder of Stonewall because we were clear to say that all of our founders were lesbian or gay. And some of the, particularly some of the gay men, felt he should be allowed to join and stay in the closet and I remember some of us, including myself and Jennie Wilson, were absolutely like "Absolutely no, we all have to be out. We cannot be seen to be ashamed of who we are. We cannot be seen to be afraid of letting the world know".

And I can still be quite fundamentalist about that. Well though of course in a much more diffuse set of things to be out about now.

Evelyn: Absolutely. So possibly if you'd give us a picture of the larger political climate in terms of Maggie Thatcher's administration and coming up to Section 28 and then we can talk about the drivers of Stonewall.

Lisa: Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister for most of the '80s, if not all of it.

Evelyn: Pretty much.

Lisa: Yeah. She was. But what you've got to remember is by the time you got to Section 28 she was on her third administration and she was beginning to lose popularity and what had been happening over the course of the '80s was a hardening of rhetoric and a drawing up of battle lines and a lot of that was over the Greater London Council in London who had in, I think in 1985 produced a lesbian and gay manifesto, 'Changing the World', which was one of the things that Stonewall used in drawing up its legislative program.

So there was Changing the World, there was the stuff that came out of the Lesbian and Gay Legislative Conference the following year which Ken Livingston and a whole bunch of other people also supported. Germaine Greer was there and we really thought we were making a breakthrough, then it all slid backwards and a lot of what was going on was not just the politicians. And you have to remember there were no "out" gay politicians of their own free will until Chris Smith. I mean there was Maureen Colquhoun who was a lesbian, but she'd been exposed while an MP and then she lost her seat over it. And then Chris was the first one to come out in office and retain his seat and to come out of his own free will.

So we have very few role models there, we have very few role models on television. I mean the EastEnders kiss was a huge deal, Michael Cashman playing Colin. All of this was ... There were these groundbreaking things going on which enabled us to think we were making progress, but at the same time there was huge hatred from the mainstream press and there was an attempt to make us become

an electoral liability. People forget now that Labour backed away from gay rights issues an awful lot during the '80s and it was a fight within Labour and within the trades union movement and all those places because lesbian and gay men were seen an electoral liability because of the way that the media handled us.

It's very analogous to what's happening with trans people now. Very analogous which is why an awful lot of us who were activists then are actually very clear about our support for trans people now. Sadly, not everyone sees the analogy, but it was there. But most of us do.

And so we didn't see the battle lines being drawn up and a lot of people didn't pay much attention when a back bencher tabled a motion at the end of her second term which didn't make it through, but they were clearly given the nod that if the Tories got back in, this would continue and so when the Local Government Bill came it was very easy to stick a clause in it which particularly tried to stop local government from supporting lesbians and gay men because there was a lot of propaganda about lesbian gym mats and funding for the gay youth groups which were corrupting young people and any money whatsoever that was used for lesbians and gay men was blown up out of all proportion.

There were a lot of cartoons that were hateful to us, a lot of hate speech and increasing visibility brought increasing hatred and then Section 28 happened and very naively we thought if we held some huge demonstrations and some stunts, which I have to say were excellent stunts and it was the first time that lesbians had led stunts instead of gay men and I remember quite a few gay men of my acquaintance going "Bloody hell, the lesbians are ahead of us. We'd better get out there and do something". It actually really inspired quite a lot of other people to be more activist.

But we thought that stunts and marching would win the day. We wouldn't talk to the Tories. I remember Mike McCann, who was the chair of the Gay Business Association, being hissed at an organizing meeting quite early on about the resistance to Section 28 because the Gay Business Association had gone into Hendon Police College to try and train young police recruits about the gay community in hopes of ameliorating the shitty things they did at that point and the prejudice that some of them showed. But that was not allowed and the Arts Lobby, which was one of the groups against Section 28, went into parliament and talked with the lords and with the Tories and they also were given a very hard time for that by some of the other activists.

So after Section 28 happened ... And you have to remember that the whole point of Section 28 was that it was there to frighten people. Nobody was ever prosecuted under it. What happened was a vast amount of people started to self censor themselves and particularly in education which wasn't the most obvious target when it was happening, it became something to hold over teachers and schools.

Evelyn: Because they were ... Section 28 specifically said that local authorities were not allowed to promote homosexuality.

Lisa: They were not allowed to promote homosexuality, but-

Evelyn: And particularly not promote as a pretended family relationship which is the thing that resonated so deeply with the community.

Lisa: Yeah, but it was intended to stop local authority funding and I can remember, I was at that point, I was one of the people who'd started the Pink Paper which was the first lesbian and gay newspaper since Gay News had collapsed, or the ones that had happened in between were very strictly gay men. And I remember writing about how this could impact environmental health inspectors, they could close down gay clubs because they had to license them for the local authority and stuff. We were trying to frighten the clubs and people into taking notice and indeed that did work and Mike McCann, for all people were treating him shittily. I remember he paid out of his own pocket for a whole load of posters that went up in clubs like Heaven which said, "This is happening. This is what Section 28 is", and ended with capital letters at the bottom of it saying, "GET OFF YOUR ARSES AND MARCH", trying to get people out for the big London marches.

Evelyn: So the London marches were huge, weren't they?

Lisa: The first one was amazingly huge considering it was mid-January and I remember when Section 28 happened it was November, end of November before we got it clear, and we were all trying to organize for this London march, when all the students have gone home and conventional wisdom was you couldn't hold a decent march without all the students. But we did, we held a really huge one and then there was the Manchester one, and then another London one.

But they were organized by three different groups and what people also don't remember is there was massive infighting within the community over who owned the campaign against Section 28. So OLGA had a march and then the Manchester people had a march and then the Campaign against Section 28 held a march in London and people were not ... People were jockeying for position to own the gay movement which was also unhelpful.

Evelyn: And the stunts that you referred to, the women, invaded the six o'clock news?

Lisa: Yeah, the women ... I mean, they were brilliant and I think along with the example of Queer Nation in New York, in the U.S. they were what contributed to the founding of OutRage! because I think there were a lot of gay men who felt that they'd let their side down because the lesbians had done better than them, which was quite funny.

Evelyn: Abseiling in the House of Lords.

Lisa: Yeah, although everybody also forgets that that all ended in slight disaster because there was a European tour of Stop Section 28 which was those women and there ended up being an appalling incident in Stockholm which involved stealing a bottle of vodka in the Gay Centre because of Swedish prices, but nevertheless, stealing a bottle of vodka, running into the women's loos and then trying to smash it and flush it down the loo which then damaged the-

Evelyn: Plumbing system.

Lisa: And then I was Secretary General of the International Lesbian and Gay Association at the time and I think I probably particularly feel it because I had the women on one side of me going, "They're appalling, they treated us like shit. We were arrested by the police, nobody should ever call the police on their fellow lesbians and gays". And on the other hand I had the official Swedish gay movement going, "Those terrible women. They stole from us, they smashed up

our bathroom". I was like oh God! And none of them spoke to me for decades after that but there you go, they're all speaking to me now.

But, yeah so it's good that we remember the direct action but we also must remember that we didn't actually win. And so what did happen was that some of us who had met each other through the fight against Section 28 just started to draw the different threads together and to have something which wasn't going to be take-over-able because the other thing that used to happen in the '80s was we'd get a new group going and straight left groups would come and try and take it over and bring their agenda in instead. And that had happened ...

We had a real problem at the legislation conference with straight left groups who tried to force their general, socialist agenda on us and I don't think it was even particularly socialist, a lot of it was just jargon. But that happened, and the same thing happened with both Act Up and OutRage!, there was a real fight to stop the straight left people from taking over them because they were just open entry and that's why Stonewall was founded in the way it was as a small dedicated lobbying group of people who were chosen for diversity even though we didn't use the word diversity then, we wanted people from across the gay world, we wanted people with specific skills, and we were very clear that we were a closed shop who were not answerable to anyone because we were going to go into places like parliament and have discussions which could not be repeated in public until we knocked some sense into the politicians.

And that was very scary because people do forget now that Stonewall was ... Stonewall received more resistance from the rest of the lesbian and gay movement than it did from the straight world and straight politicians which is fascinating.

Lori: How did you recruit?

Lisa: Very haphazardly. What happened was there were five or six gay men who basically were having a slightly drunken lunch at Ian McKellens place bemoaning the fact that Section 28 had gone through and instead of doing the traditional gay male thing and all getting around a piano and having a sing, they got around a typewriter and Duncan Campbell thumped away at Ian's typewriter, and the others dictated a manifesto and said we have to do something about this and they thought about the format and then a couple of them actually had the sense and the grace to go, "We need an equal number of women". And one of the things I find fascinating was people didn't look at that stuff in those days properly.

Evelyn: No they didn't.

Lisa: But Stonewall said we have to be 50/50 men and women, and they were also incredibly clear that they had to be racially diverse and politically diverse. So people came in by word of mouth. I think the first woman they talked to was a woman called Debo Ballard because she was a lawyer. Turned out to be the wrong kind of lawyer for what we wanted to do, but she was known to Ian and the people in the arts lobby. So they asked her and there was this kind of weird thing that they wanted people who had skills and were sparky, but not people who would cling to the way we'd always done things.

So myself and Jennie Wilson very much came out of the movement as it existed, but we were both seen as people who were willing to try things differently. And I only know of, and I'll spare their blushes

by not naming them, but I know of other women and men with whom conversations were held over drinks which weren't blatant recruitment meetings, but they were basically people from the existing group sizing people up. Thinking about whether they would fit into what was happening, the jigsaw puzzle that was being put together. And people who were rejected because when that conversation started to happen they would ... I know in a couple of cases people who literally dived in and said you have to do this and you have to do that and it has to be democratic and you have to be transparent and it was just like, that's not what's happening.

And there are people who I think feel quite sore to this day that they weren't picked.

Evelyn: Who was doing the actual recruiting?

Lisa: Well it was cumulative-

Evelyn: Grew as more people joined up.

Lisa: Cumulative as it went on so initially it was just a couple of people. The people who were there right from the start were Ian, Michael, Duncan, Simon Fanshawe and they just picked up people. There were a couple of people who were always silent. There was a guy called Douglas Slater who was the clerk to the Leader of the House of Lords, no way on Gods earth could he be seen as part of us. But he actually was very much a driving force around all the work done on the early legislative stuff and how to handle politicians because he absolutely had the inside track on that.

And right from the start there were straight allies who were involved in discussions but they were never allowed to become members of the group. And I remember there were discussions about whether trans was part of it or not. And actually at that point there was some very interesting stuff going on in the trans movement, which was very split between the trans activists who were seen as very reformist, if you like, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality of trans issues, which was Christine Burns and the Press for Change people who were doing exactly what Stonewall came to do. They were doing all the legislative stuff, they were wearing suits and looking respectable. And then you had all the radical trans people, most of whom were queer. Many of whom identified as lesbian or gay as well and they were just seen as part of the lesbian and gay movement.

So if we'd come across a trans lesbian at that point who was a lesbian or a gay man we might have considered recruiting them. And at that point Switchboard was going through conniptions about it because we'd recruited our first trans lesbian member and ... But we just didn't actually happen to come across someone, it wasn't excluding trans people, it was seen that there was a parallel track and people like Christine Burns at that point were running parallel to us and of course what happened was over the years the paths came closer and closer together and yet Stonewall clung to not including trans people until far longer than it should have.

But that's how it came about. There was quite a lot of mapping of what was going on, there was a lot of discussion. Just the naming of Stonewall, everything at that point had to have the words lesbian and gay in it so there was OLGA and ILGA and LAGER and GALOP and all these things. And I remember we just threw our hands up and said we're sick to death of this, we're not having it. We're just going to name it something, that's just naming it and there isn't either-

Evelyn: [crosstalk 00:45:58]-

Lisa: As completely obvious or we're not going to be trapped by the need to use certain letters in an acronym.

Evelyn: Representation.

Lisa: And the name Stonewall was actually invented around my kitchen table and it was me backed up by my girlfriend Jennie who said, "Look, Stonewall means something to lesbians and gay men", or it meant something to some of us at least, it meant something to the politicized end of us at that point. But it means absolutely nothing to straight people. You've got to remember there was no education about Stonewall at all at that point.

And so it was kind of ... It was a dog whistle in a good way for anybody who was lesbian or gay if we were called Stonewall, but as I said at the time the average Tory MP would probably just think we were an architectural consultancy until they found out the hard way what we were. So we had ... The lobbying part was called Stonewall and there was a fundraising and charitable arm because you couldn't be a lobbying group and a charity at that point. In the long run it worked out that it's just all one but we called the other part Iris which was the goddess of the rainbow. And that also avoided the fact that there were men in the group who said "it has to be gay and lesbian", whereas others were like "everybody says lesbian and gay now", "well I don't see why".

There was a lot of that kind of very basic ... In my terms, I was trying to explain to people about feminism and how people could not put their foot in it with activists and stuff like that. And on the other hand they were educating me about how to behave with politicians and how to get more by tickling than scratching as my granny would have said. And we had some quite lively discussions. I can remember the age of consent. We were very clear that we were about equality but then when it came to discussing the age of consent there was a real feeling from some of the early members, interestingly some of the early members who were men that if we asked for 16 we'd be laughed out of court, it was pie in the sky so we should only ask for 18. And actually I can remember Jennie and I arguing absolutely furiously, along with some of the men, that it had to be equality and that we might well go for 18 as a tactic, but it had to be only ever seen as a way station.

But what was also good about Stonewall for me was that it tackled all those legislative issues which actually affected lesbians because everybody always went on and on and on about the age of consent. And actually there were more people who were suffering, and gay men as well as lesbians, suffering from lack of employment protections, lack of equality legislation, lack of educational support, all of those things that were happening. Family courts were horrendous. You would almost automatically have your kids taken away from you. If you were a gay man you might be refused even access to your kids.

And people forget that now that there was all this wide swathe of legislation other than the age of consent which did actually hit lesbians, that people didn't think about very much because we were also used to it being there. We were actually, there was more than an element of Stockholm Syndrome about some of the lesbian and gay community at the time and quite a lot of people who kind of felt

that we should just be quiet and be respectable and it's very funny that I see that coming back now.

There's just been a blazing row here in Wales about what Prides should be because one Pride advertised that in order to be family friendly it was banning leather and kink and sexualized costumes which caused an absolute furore but some people are trying to posit that now that we've got equal marriage and families and stuff like that. "Oh, we can't have these unrespectable types" and I find it very funny because in the '80s I was on the Pride in London committee, or London Pride, as it was then, committee very briefly in the '82, '83 sort of time and then we were debating whether you could allow drag at Pride because it was anti-feminist, it was anti-women. Drag was insulting to women and a lot of bad drag was insulting to women and remains so.

But nobody blinks twice at most of the comperes at Prides now being drag queens. But, and this particular Pride was saying oh, drag kings and queens are welcome, but not sexualized costume and not kink and it's like ... But, here in Cardiff, we have the leather queens and the puppies. The puppies are the ones that really upset people. And the kids love them because the kids totally understand about dressing up and playing. They just think this is grown-ups who haven't stopped being kids and this looks like a lot of fun and the Hen Parties adore the leather queens. I've seen the leather queens a couple years ago on the march got literally ambushed by a Hen Party who insist on sitting in their laps and having their photo taken with them and the leather men were actually very patient about the whole thing.

But people are not bothered about that but we're very good at self-censuring ourselves and I think that was ... Although, it's coming back now because of that, it was very much worse in the '80s. It was an awful lot of overly respectabilisation of stuff.

Lori: Do you think that the self-censuring comes from a kind of internalized gay shame?

Lisa: Oh yeah. I don't think there's a generation yet that we've managed to raise that hasn't grown up with at least some idea in our heads that we're second class citizens or bad people or flawed. Flawed is probably the kindest way we think of it. We've all had that upbringing and some people have paid for a lot of therapy to get rid of it. Some people have done other things. I think I did gay activism because I was always quite bolshie about it.

But yes, we have all got it at the back of our heads and for my generation I've got other stuff. I'm still faintly unnerved by gay police officers just from the alternative lifestyle I led when I was young, when we were ... I remember the first time we actually had the nerve to report a queer bashing to the police and the policeman who came around to the house actually saying, "Well we're here for everyone, even the likes of you". And he thought he was being nice to us.

So yes, I do think people take it a bit far with all the sort of velvet revolution or whatever, not velvet revolution but all the stuff which about how our mental health has been ruined by homophobia but I certainly think it affects some people more than others and I think the longer you stay in the closet the worse it is. For people like me who sort of popped out the moment the idea occurred to them I think life has been much easier and I see a parallel with that with all

the years I spent in HIV, the people who didn't conceal their HIV diagnosis any longer than they felt they absolutely had to, or the people who determined to not conceal it even though it cost them something, in general had stronger mental health than people who sat on it for donkeys years. I really think being in the closet is what damages you because you carry more shame for longer. We all grew up thinking there was something wrong with it but the quicker you get rid of it the better off you are.

Evelyn: And throughout the '80s that was the time of the AIDS crisis appearing in this country and growing, so that's another thread against which possibly ... Was that something that fed into Stonewall?

Lisa: For gay men that made ... It kind of made it worse but it also made it more important to do something. Again it made more people into activists because people were dying and being reclaimed by their families, and their lovers who they lived with for donkeys years couldn't go to the funeral. People were losing their right to live in their home because their partner had died and it was in their name. All these things that had happened because of closetry were coming back to hit people in a really blatant way and the injustices were much more obvious and much more painful when it was around death and disease.

And it was doubly difficult if you had to come out to your parents because you were gay, some people found difficult, but coming out to them because you were dying and you were gay and you'd caught this awful thing that everybody was terribly scared of was so much harder. So I think it both complicated things and it devastated large chunks of the community, the gay male community and it gave quite a lot of people long-term post traumatic stress disorder which a lot of us haven't dealt with who were closely involved. But it also brought lesbians and gay men closer together because lesbians stepped, a lot of lesbians stepped up to the post, not everybody. It brought a fighting spirit to things and it strengthened ...

One of the interesting things about the British lesbian and gay movement compared to some of the ones in continental Europe, and by the end of the '80s I was secretary general of the International Lesbian and Gay Association so I had quite a lot of comparative stuff to look at. We had built lesbian and gay social services from the '70s upward. Stuff like Switchboard, stuff like Friend. We had those kinds of groups and when AIDS hit we had stuff to cling to. We also had information conduits which were very effective, much more so than in Spain or France or those countries. And we had an attitude of community activism on the one hand but also community social care which a lot of other countries didn't have and I think that stood us in good stead.

But I think the AIDS crisis fed into our determination to not put up with shit anymore for a lot of us. I lost a thread though, something I was going to say about the earlier '80s and I've lost it now. I've forgotten, what were we talking about just before we got to AIDS?

Lori: Shame.

Lisa: Oh, the other fight that happened where Stonewall became very unpopular in the gay movement, and I find this amazing now, but then I think there are large chunks of my life where something that was a fight earlier on people don't blink a hair at now. There was a huge row over outing people in the early '90s. Massive rows because

OutRage! was outing people willy nilly and Stonewall was very clear that outing people who were ashamed of being lesbian or gay was not a useful tactic because we didn't want publicity for people who were ashamed of themselves. We wanted to see people who were happy.

Lori: Its kind of a double shaming as well.

Lisa: And I was always on the edge of, I could see if somebody was being actively hateful to our community, I could see that the temptation to out them was fairly massive and I've certainly gossiped about people in those circumstances but Stonewalls line was "you bring people to coming out" and also "thank you, we'll use that as a lever behind the scenes".

There were quite a lot of particularly Conservative politicians who didn't want to come out but who were supportive to the aims of Stonewall and the gay movement and were helpful to us and we didn't see that pushing them out of the closet was going to help in the least because it actually made them less able to use their power to help us. And also almost all of them have come out eventually. It's much better if people come out under their own steam.

But also OutRage! went a lot further than I think was sensible or sane. So they were outing people who were utterly mortified and there was some poor bishop who came out when they hadn't even targeted him yet but he heard they were going to target him so he sort of leapt before he could be pushed. But was so upset about the whole thing and it was just utterly negative. I think there are all sorts of things wrong with the Church full stop. But it didn't serve us well.

I also remember a point where OutRage! wanted to have an outing campaign and they wanted to out a Labour, a Tory and a Liberal Democrat person and they sort of slightly got the hang of equality by then, even though there were hardly any women in OutRage!. I think Stonewall really did shame quite a lot of organizations into thinking about proper women's involvement which I think was quite useful. But they felt at least one of the politicians they outed had to be a woman and for some reason, this was Peter led, they picked Ann Widdecombe for the Tories and they had this stuff marked up and somebody actually bothered to ask some of us what we thought of it and we were just like, don't do that!

A- you can't out somebody who doesn't even know they are lesbian or gay. I mean God knows whether she was or is, I find it irrelevant. I don't want to particularly want her on our side. But more to the point, she would've sued the arse off them and won. And it would not have helped anybody about anything. I think we did manage to calm them down and that did not go public that one.

But I think the whole outing people against their will thing was a very big deal in the '90s and we've largely forgotten it now. And I think we are now in a position where we don't generally out people. We might tickle them a bit to come along the way but we don't out people unless they are being very harmful to the community and that's certainly happening in the States now and that seems to be the line that everyone's drawn.

Evelyn: So when Stonewall started did it just take over your life?

Lisa: Well, not take over my life. I was doing Stonewall, and certainly in the planning stages I was also running the first lesbian sex toy mail

order business in the UK, "Thrilling Bits", which my girlfriend and I had started. It was part of the rumbling end of the S&M debates and the lesbian sex wars and stuff and we were pro-sex but we weren't S&M or anything like that. But there were no decent sex toys and we knew ... Everything got taken from the States at that time, we knew that there were lots of lesbian activists in San Francisco actually making women friendly sex toys so we started to do this mail order business which was hilarious because we kept very anonymous who was doing it to start with and we had enough contacts in the lesbian and gay press to be able to get stuff out without it being obviously us. And all these women were ordering stuff from us who were condemning sexual diversity in public, it was just very funny.

Evelyn: So you knew people who were speaking in the sex wars.

Lisa: Yeah, we knew where the hypocrisy was.

Evelyn: And for the sake of people who might not know very much, what were the sex wars all about at the time?

Lisa: It was characterized as what was called "vanilla sex" versus S&M. But S&M got widened to include not only submission and domination, submission and, what is it? I can't even remember what the end, sadism and masochism, or submission and domination are the phrases that got used. It actually widened out to almost anything that was ... Certainly there were discussions about whether lesbians should ever have penetrative sex because it was anti-feminist to penetrate, that was male. And I can even remember a talk about someone being on top of the other person was patriarchal and-

Evelyn: Patriarchal sex, that really conjures an image.

Lisa: We all used to take the piss out of it being that two women lying side by side sighing gently and gently fingering only the external vulva of each other and of course most lesbians have all kinds of sex. I actually was quite a sexual innocent, I'd never seen a double ended dildo till I actually sold one. I'd never used a dildo until I had them sitting around the living room. Mostly I just dusted them then.

But we just felt that it should not be silenced and women shouldn't be shamed for anything they wanted to do sexually that didn't hurt someone else. But it was very funny because women would make any excuse for a dildo not to look like a willy so we sold one that looked like a ballet shoe on point which I thought was frankly quite paedophilic, all the fantasies about little girls in ballet, I was like ... But our most popular one was a dolphin which we called "The Flipper". Anything that was sort of shaped like a willy but didn't look like a willy. We sold a couple that looked like willies and they didn't sell nearly as well as anything that was in disguise, as it were.

But they weren't made for women's anatomy at all. I remember going up to the main place in England that sold wholesale sex toys was this giant warehouse in Colleshill which sold to Ann Summers and everybody else, going up there and trying to explain to them that some of the stuff that they were selling just didn't fit women's anatomy, it fitted what men thought women's anatomy was.

And also the quality of the goods wasn't very good because they sold these things, which you've probably heard of the Rampant Rabbit, but those vibrators which had a little flicky beaver thing that was supposed to fit your clitoris and then a central core which was either a totem pole or something, they were all sorts of odd things, which would have beads inside and plastic and this would whirl around and

it was supposed to give you all sorts of sensations. The only trouble was that they had quite poor motors in them and if you had strong vaginal muscles, when you orgasmed you gripped this thing and the motor couldn't work and it would rev furiously and then break and then smoke would issue from your vagina and we had a number of complaints of this. We had to stop selling them because it was kind of scary.

Evelyn: Those must have been some interesting letters coming in.

Lisa: Yes, it brought a new meaning to smoking after sex.

Evelyn: Yeah, which was a thing in those days.

Lisa: It would break the mechanism if you had a strong enough orgasm. It was like, make something that you can use more than once if you're charging 20 odd quid for it which in those days was a fortune.

Lori: Did you say your supplier was someone out of San Francisco?

Lisa: Well we used to smuggle them in from San Francisco and that was one of the most frightening moments of my life was when I was stopped coming back from San Francisco with two large suitcases. One of which was completely full of dildos, mostly in the shape of dolphins and ballet shoes and things like that. I can't remember the others now. And a whole load of porn, a magazine called "On Our Backs" which was lesbian porn which was, my old friend Jill Posener was the photographer for, and we knew that that was banned because this was when Gays The Word had been done for copies of "On Our Backs" and other copies have been seized at customs and I was stopped coming back in at customs.

And a customs officer started to question me and it was almost like I went into another world inside my head, I'm just like, oh officer, what can I do for you?, and he got me to open my hand luggage which was mercifully free of anything even vaguely incriminating and then said, "These your bags?", "Yes they are officer", "Have you got goods worth more than blah in them", and I looked at them and I went, "It might be a little bit over", just serious minimization, it might be a little bit over but I've forgot the amount officer and he went, "Well just remember it in the future", and took my bags and let me through because I obviously looked so respectable he couldn't be arsed to check my luggage and I was so terrified that my back went into spasm on the tube because we went from Heathrow on the tube and my back literally went into spasm on the tube and I had to lay down for about a week.

Because if he'd opened it up it would have been just like, Oh my God!

Lori: Well you had all those implements to lay down with I suppose.

Evelyn: [crosstalk 01:07:59].

Lisa: Maybe I think my back would not have appreciated anything like that.

Evelyn: So getting back to Stonewall ...

Lisa: Yeah, sorry about that. We were doing this, when we were planning Stonewall and I remember when we had our first batch of dental dams and the other people who were helping to start Stonewall would talk about it occasionally and I think this was after Stonewall had started and we were having a meeting in my living room about

something. And we brought these dental dams out to show these guys. Dental dams were a load of old rubbish frankly.

Evelyn: I think young people definitely don't know what dental dams are.

Lisa: It was a square of-

Evelyn: Stretchy.

Lisa: Latex and the idea was that you held it over a woman's vulva and licked, it was basically supposed to be condoms for lesbians except they were thicker than a condom and frankly if sex was any good at all you forget which side was which within five minutes. So they didn't actually bear the slightest use at all. But they sold terribly well.

Evelyn: It was supposed to prevent infection.

Lisa: Yeah, HIV transmissions what we thought.

Evelyn: HIV transmissions, people were very ignorant.

Lisa: But it was absolutely useless. But they sold quite well.

But I remember bringing these things out and lifting one and it sort of went round the group of people who sat on the sofas and chairs and holding it by one corner and handing it to another man who'd hold it by one corner who'd hand it to someone else who'd hold it by one corner. It got to Ian McKellen and Ian seized it by both hands and went "What are you meant to do with it? Is it this" and shoved it over his face and stuck his tongue through ... "Is that what it was meant to do?". Love you Ian. No issues about oh look, it's meant for lady parts. What are you meant to do with it, this?

It was a happy moment. But it became completely boring, sitting all day packing sex toys and answering complaints from women who wanted to know what e-additives were in your edible knickers. Seriously. Stuff like that. And why were our harnesses leather, it was cruelty to animals. Couldn't we have cloth harnesses? Like no, because cloth stretches and you don't want it dropping off halfway through a hot sex scene.

But obviously things have moved on quite a lot since then and there are now some perfectly acceptable vegan harnesses I understand. But they weren't in those days. I got very fed up with it in the end. Passed it onto someone else who ran it into the ground, it didn't last much longer.

So yeah, Stonewall. And I was with Stonewall for a bit but I've always been quite good at founding things and then moving on. I'm quite good at knowing when my time is done with an organization so I did move on and I was getting more and more involved in HIV stuff as well by then. Working within HIV, doing stuff around that and I kind of moved away from what was becoming LGB and then LGBT activism for a bit and then as I've given up full-time work in HIV I've become much more involved again. But I'm now doing much more stuff around history so I'm a trustee of Queer Britain, the museum project. And I'm a historical artefact in my own right and I just think it's fascinating the way that people are starting to value queer history in a way that they really haven't done before.

And there's so much out there. I think it's fascinating because it's a wild west frontier of history. There's only so many books you can write about Henry VIII and his wives; although, there's some excellent recent stuff done on Thomas Cromwell because everybody

ignored him. But there aren't that many frontiers and LGBT history and particularly the histories of minorities within LGBT stuff. So I've been talking to some people about the history of the South Asian LGBT movement in the UK and stuff like that. This is all ... And we've still got, a lot of people have got the artefacts in their attics. We can preserve this stuff now.

And the other reason I got back into LGBT history activism specifically was that I started to notice people quoting things like GLF and Stonewall inaccurately as a way of shoring up their own personal politics. So for example, everybody says the first Pride was a riot, the first Pride was a protest! Well it was a protest, but it also billed itself, and GLF billed it as a Carnival Parade. It's always been both those things but people forget that and I also caught modern Act Up activists talking about GLF as if it was all about legislative change when it was actually about much wider stuff.

So I was working in the '90s to do a GLF book because people were dying and we need to collect this stuff before people go. There's an awful lot we can learn and for me one of the proofs of that is that all of what we learned in the '80s about Section 28 and the build-up to it we can now bring to bear on the hate campaigns against trans people because it's a very direct echo. And that has brought a lot of younger gay men for example, who might otherwise have just gone "nothing to do with me squire". Once they see the parallels they're engaged.

Evelyn: So what do you feel are the greatest successes of Stonewall?

Lisa: Stonewall the riot or Stonewall UK?

Evelyn: UK, Stonewall UK.

Lisa: I keep having to try and get people to remember the differences.

Evelyn: Yes, of course.

Lisa: I did actually come across someone recently who'd written a thing about me, a blurb about me said Lisa founded the Stonewall riots 50 years ago and I'm like, I'm not quite that old, thank you very much. Neither did I ever live in the U.S.

I think the biggest achievement of Stonewall UK has been something which isn't very popular with old radical activists and that is that they have made LGBT stuff mainstream and they have made lots of people, like big companies, care about having LGBT employees and looking after them. And they have made politicians be pro LGBT who wouldn't have given us a second thought before. They have had an amazing set of legislative changes but they had to wait for a Labour government for those to happen and indeed even when a Labour government came in they frequently had to wait for Europe to beat Labour over the head because that way Tony Blair could maintain popularity with everyone, not just with us.

I think that it's going to be very interesting now that the tide is turning and people are ... Hate crime is rising against us, all sorts of other things are going on, we are facing a neo fascist set of movements and we are one of the obvious targets again. I think that, for me, it's going to be more difficult to destroy the LGBT movement in the UK because Stonewall and people like Stonewall have made us part of the fabric of society and for all of the getting angry with phrases like "family friendly", the fact that we are families, the fact that when people now try and say you can't teach our children about LGBT issues, we can turn around and say "but

they're our children too, we're part of families and some of those kids are growing up to be gay too and don't you dare make any more of us second class citizens".

We've got woven into the fabric of society here in a way that hasn't happened in the U.S. and that hasn't happened in some other countries. There are other countries where it's happened, particularly in Northern Europe. Those countries were ahead of us to start with in fact and I can remember talking to some Danish activists who were quite worried about Britain being in the EU because they felt that our politicians would hold them back in terms of equal rights for LGBT people. So we've been considered a bit of a nuisance in Europe for quite a long time and holding other countries back.

So I think it's almost intangible that stuff and it's also something that people dislike Stonewall for. But if we want to get change in countries where we're still illegal, we'll do that with the economic power of those big multi-nationals. We won't do it because we have a demonstration outside the embassy gates in London, we'll do it because a big multi-national will say to a Minister that they have access to and we don't in that country, "I can't bring my best talent here because you'd prosecute them. I want to make money in this country and make money for you and make your economy better and I can't do that with you unless you stop being prejudiced".

And actually that's how some change is coming about and also working through politicians, working through international politicians, working through places like the UN, weak though they are. We are still seeing countries that have seen positive change as well as the rowing back in places like the U.S.

Lori: Do you find it disheartening at all that cultural change like this you can follow a trail back to it being motivated by money?

Lisa: It would be lovely if people did it out of the goodness of their heart but the fact is that change comes in a variety of ways and I'll take what I can get. I don't like late stage capitalism, I think things are getting much worse and rich people do not understand anymore why they should be taxed when they did actually used to and people now are horrified at being taxed at the rate that we taxed people in the '50s and '60s and that's wrong and that gap is growing. But if that's what it takes to stop people from being executed somewhere I'll take it and I think that's probably the attitude that Stonewall gave me is I'll win those battles by whatever weapons are to hand. That doesn't mean I can't then have battles about what I think politically about other things as well. But I'm not going to cut my lesbian nose off to spite my socialist face.

Lori: Use the tools that are in the toolkit.

Lisa: Yeah. Do whatever you need to.

I want LGBT people to be able to go and work in Tesco and be themselves. I want people who are lawyers in the city to give us some of their hard won dosh and their expertise in the fights that we need to have.

Evelyn: What do you feel the biggest fights are? The biggest issues for the moment?

Lisa: Well one big issue is to make sure that we don't go culturally backwards because I've been saying for 30 years rights can go down as well as up and I think quite a lot of people didn't believe me.

They think there's this lovely linear progression and we're now seeing that that's not so. So I think there's a big fight here about that and we all need to stand up and be represented and being out is a really central part of that.

And that's why I think that Prides are central. People think of Prides as a bit of fluff. They're not. Every Pride I go to, even the ones that I think of as closety, you've got people who are coming out there. I went to one in Monmouth at the weekend and it made me itch because it was called Diversity Pride and they didn't overtly say we don't want anybody being too queer but there was a kind of ... This is a family event thing. But I got up on stage and I said hello, I'm Lisa Power, I'm a dyke who's been around for donkeys years and I got a cheer. And people came over and talked and the families who were there were mostly fine and then a bit later an eight year old girl got up with a rainbow ribbon in her hair and sang This is Me from The Greatest Showman and the place just melted. And she was there with her gay family.

And we have to recognize that simply coming out is a massive political act and that's also coming out as an ally and we need those allies. We can't win without all the allies. Whether they're families, whether they're our bosses or our work mates and unions are not enough to get us through workplaces. There are too many workplaces that don't have unions anymore. We have to reach out to all those other workplaces as well and all those other industries that are taking place.

And seeing Uber or Deliveroo on a Pride march won't stop me from criticizing their employment model and I won't use Uber. But I want Uber to be there because I want them to act against their drivers who are homophobic to their customers and stuff like that and I want them to ban customers who are homophobic to their drivers.

That doesn't mean I have to buy their business model but I still want people protected wherever they are in whatever we're doing.

Evelyn: So over the years, 50 years since the riot, 30 years since Stonewall UK, there's been huge tranche of equality legislation and changes in attitudes. Do you feel that impact on your life of the change and attitudes now in comparison to back in those days. Do you feel that you're really heard more as a lesbian now than you were then?

Lisa: Oh I'm definitely heard more now as a lesbian than I was then but I think there are also a lot of other lesbians who are still not heard. I see ... Just as "gay" was hijacked to only mean men and then we had to be gay and lesbian, I now see LGBT being hijacked for groups of only gay men who don't self describe accurately and don't see why, if they're going to be calling themselves LGBT, they actually need the L, the B and the T in there. I think you should describe yourself accurately.

I think I'm heard more because I've had 50 plus years of being stropic and I've honed my axe to a fine degree to not be silenced. But I think that I see everywhere young women who need confidence boosting, lesbian or straight, who need good strong role models of standing up for yourself. I don't think that changes because I think sexism permeates just as badly as homophobia ever did.

I was long a token lesbian in a mixed gay movement and I've learned how to use tokenism and I watched people use tokenism from other ... When people are being euphemistic they say "protected

characteristics" but other oppressed groups is what it boils down to. And I don't blame anyone who wants to use tokenism to get a leg up as long as they bring other people with them.

I don't want the Thatchers and the Mays who exclude other women. I want to see women, including lesbian women, who bring other women with them. And that happened with Stonewall. We've widened out to a whole lot of lesbians who had nothing to do with politics and with political stuff before. We even managed to find where the rich lesbians were. I remember that was a big discussion in early Stonewall was how do we find what we would refer to in those days as the "dowry dykes". The women who had inherited wealth or that kind of thing, who were lesbians, but who were incredibly discreet and private because they could afford to be, they had the money to be and we needed them as much as we needed the rich gay men. And we found them.

Evelyn: Good, so. Thank you so much Lisa.

Lisa: Sorry, it's been very ramblly.

Evelyn: No, it's been wonderfully gobby. Thank you for that. And you've really demonstrated how you've embraced all women and brought them along, even the dowry dykes. And it's just been a privilege to hear your story. So thank you so much.

Lori: Yeah, thank you.