

From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Carol Bellfield	Date: 20/01/2020 Age: 69
Key issues: Transgender. Marriage. Being closeted. Coming out. Counselling. The Beaumont Society. Oscillation. Transitioning. Opening Doors London.	
Narrative summary Carol first felt that she was different at around the age of 11/12. She would wear her sisters' clothes and occasionally go out wearing them, after dark. She didn't tell anybody, and she felt like she was the only person like this; she hadn't read or heard about trans people anywhere else. At around 17/18 she began to become aware of other people going through the same experiences as her; spotting things in the press, as well as reading books. She talks about the lack of vocabulary back then; she did not know how to describe herself or her experiences. Carol got married, and didn't come out to her wife until 12 years into their marriage. Her wife found her female clothes that she would wear when nobody else was around, or when she was in a completely different place with work. She found coming out extremely difficult; describing her experience as something completely beyond her wife's comprehension or imagination. After coming out to her wife, they both started attending a gender counsellor in order to give both of them the support they needed in coming to terms with this. Carol talks about The Beaumont Society in Norfolk; they published a magazine which Carol found helpful for finding counselling and support groups and so on. These counselors and support groups helped both Carol and her wife. Her wife found it difficult – not only in trying to understand Carol's identity – but also in struggling with what that meant in terms of her own sexuality. She talks about how Carol consolidated her persona; and how a number of factors led her to 'oscillate' in terms of her identity. The main reason for choosing oscillation was in order to maintain her immensely important relationship with her wife, who has been a huge support, and help her in accepting the situation. She often dresses androgynously, and talks about how her identity changes depending upon the circumstances. Carol talks about the help she and her wife give other people – mainly couples – going through what they went through in terms of coming out and learning how to accept one another. She also talks about her involvement in Opening Doors London as an ambassador. She talks about what this involves; giving examples of training companies, corporations and the general public on LGBTQ+ people, as well as explaining what ODL do.	
	Length of interview: 1hr 5 mins



Evelyn: So this is an interview for From a Whisper to a Roar, an oral history project conducted by Opening Doors London and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Today is 20th January 2020 and I am interviewing the lovely Carol Bellfield. So Carol, if we can start with a little bit about your early life and how you came to an understanding of who you really are.

Carol: Okay. Well [inaudible 00:00:38] I think the first pointer was when I was probably about seven, maybe eight but probably seven and an awareness of, this is pre-puberty of course, an awareness of a girl in the playground who I liked the look of and thinking, I'd really like to be like that. And that was the passing flash of awareness, not something I dwelt on, that's how it was. I didn't have any reference point. It was the first experience that I can remember. Although having said that, I did like wearing my mum's shoes when I was about four, four and a half. No doubt you've heard all that before. I'm tracking around in, because in the 50s it would have been the high heels and all the rest of it so it was just the shoes. And that seemed a

perfectly natural thing. And putting on one of her cardigans and feeling that was... And never being told off. Interesting.

Carol: When I reflect back there wasn't any judgment about that. That's the way it was. So maybe looking back, that was probably, I was lucky because I think the risk of parents being judgmental in those days probably very high. So there were those episodes and then no real sort of sense of, "Wow, I am different," until probably around sort of 11, 12 probably just around puberty time. I'm thinking, "Wow, I am different. I do feel different. I have got feelings of feeling more feminine." And having said that, I was never perceived, as far as I know, and I wasn't challenged in the playground with my peers at 11, 12, 13 for being effeminate. Interesting.

Carol: But my increasingly deep, dark secret was that yes, I was different. I would like to dress when I could. So 11, 12 I was in my sister's clothes occasionally going out after dark, saying, "I'll take the dog out," and it was at a foil. Going out after bedtime just to feel the wind on my legs, all those little things. Can't say I felt desperately guilty about that, although guilt came in later on in terms of thinking, well, the moral judgments within me, shouldn't be doing this, this is all wrong. And inevitably I am the only one. Nobody else is like this.

Evelyn: Yeah, the only one in the whole world.

Carol: Well the only one in the whole world. And of course no internet. The way we communicated was much, much more constrained. To my knowledge I hadn't met anybody like me, certainly wouldn't have felt comfortable talking about it. It was deeply personal. Something I thought would always be a deep dark secret and would go away. And so we go through into my mid later teens and girlfriends and the feeling of identity, feeling very comfortable with girls. Very often platonically. I didn't go around seeking to get into bed, interesting I didn't do that. I wanted relationships. I enjoyed company. I enjoyed it when it was sort of kissing and cuddling, all those things. But I wasn't actually after, it was the bedding or the term was screwing and all the rest of it. That wasn't what I wanted to do even though I was attracted. I didn't have any attraction to boys.

Carol: And I think that it was in the early 20s meeting a girl who's now my wife thinking, well, getting married, this is all going to go away. And I even at that point I hadn't really come across any literature or anything. I still felt it was, gosh, you know, this is me and nobody else is out there. And then of course who do we have? We had Jan Morris, James Morris. And James became Jan and Jan wrote Conundrum. And I got a hold of that book and I read it and I thought, this is interesting. This has been about some years. It probably came out when I was probably 17, 18 and I thought, this is amazing. This woman has written this and it's out there and she's published and no one's said you can't do that. And it was a process. So that was a bit of an eye opener.

Evelyn: Suddenly there was a potential role model.

Carol: There was a potential, yes there was. And then there were various things and I started becoming attuned to spotting things in the press and the daily papers and there might be a snippet. Sometimes it was just a statement of fact about cross dressing transvestism and I thought, well where do I fit on the scale and all this. I didn't have the words. I did not have the words to describe how it was to me. So that was a difficulty. And I think the difference now of course is that we do have those words. We have a like a-

Evelyn: A vocabulary.

Carol: ...a vocabulary and we have a legal structure and a framework and it's all out there. But prior to positive documentaries, films that are cast that Present being gay, being trans, prior to those films giving a very positive light, we had nothing. And I began to be aware of headlines that said, the policeman who transitioned and said that's the way it is. Well, the headline was really puriant, and I'm not going to repeat it now but it was sort of a play on losing a penis and all the rest of it. So there were those headlines. And then awareness of the way lesbian were described and always negative. And that tends to push you into the closet. I mean crikey, there's a lot of anger and aggression out there.

Carol: So getting married, I didn't say a word about what was going inside, didn't breathe a word. And it was about 12, 13 years, 12 years before the coming out bit started. And the coming out came started because my wife found my clothing and I had some clothing which allowed me to dress discretely and that's the closet bit. And when she was out or she was teaching at the time. And so she thought right, there's somebody else in this marriage and I said, "Well, this is where it gets a bit difficult so you'll have to bear with me."

Evelyn: I can see it's still an emotional thing.

Carol: Well it still is because the relief of just spilling the beans and saying, "Well, this is how it is." I can't tell you what that feels like because you don't want to be deceitful. The marriage was open, transparent in everything, but that, that was the big secret.

Evelyn: It's a big burden to carry.

Carol: It is. And it's left its scars, I suppose. I always have this problem. Every time I get to this point, I tear up quite a bit and there's still a lot of hurting there, really. It's not resentment but... So I said to her that I am the third person.

Evelyn: Did she think you were having an affair with another woman?

Carol: Absolutely. It was like, "Crikey, all this stuff, what's going on?" So I thought this is it. Just spill the beans. And I said, "Well, I'm going to start from the beginning. I can sit here and just run through it, I could do that. But it would be really good if I could just write this down and say that that's it. Absolutely everything right from my first awarenesses." And that's what I did. And she was very, very understanding.

Carol: I mean, I have to say that I talk about my wife within the context of her upbringing. Her upbringing was Orthodox Anglican. So regular church goes, very straight down the line, respectable. Any deviation from conformity, "Ooh dear." So there's all that. So the reason why so often people in my situation don't come clean and say, look, this is how it is for me, it's about rejection, isn't it. It's about people being judgmental. It's about losing a marriage, losing dear relationships, etc.

Evelyn: Of course this is the woman you love.

Carol: Absolutely. Now clearly, I mean the marriage has been and is strong enough to take all this. That's the thing, the first thing. So coming out was incredibly difficult because I didn't know what I was at. And having said that the children then were sort of 9, 10, 11, three children who are now, well, approaching middle age. So we didn't talk to them at the time. They were at school. And we didn't talk to them because my wife felt this is a lot to take on board. And I think the thing to remember is, of course, what I was describing was completely beyond her imagination, comprehension. So entirely new territory.

Carol: The first thing was about deceit. You kept this from me, why didn't you talk so we work through that? And a lot of women that I've met, gender women, say that's the first thing I feel. I feel betrayed, I feel I've been deceived. And there's a lot of anger and sometimes that takes a lot of time to get rid off. My wife's response was, well maybe we'll go and talk to Relate. Not that the marriage was in difficulties, I need to think about this. So Relate said actually what you really need is a gender counsellor and they referred us on. They said, "You're not in difficulty although you've got challenges ahead of you." So we spent about six, seven, maybe eight sessions over quite a few months from the gender counsellor and that was about me, what was happening to me, how I was, how I was feeling, the impact on Kate, my wife, and a number of exercises we did together.

Evelyn: And roughly what year are we?

Carol: Probably so, '77, '78, '79 about '89, '90. So this is a long process. Now the long process is, is that, so she knows about me but she's like, "I can't meet you. I can't face this. I can't face this right now, but I want to understand more." So there was the understanding, there was the empathy and so we go on, we proceed over quite a number of years, I have to say.

Evelyn: Oh, I'm sure.

Carol: It wasn't instantaneous by any means. So she takes time to consolidate. Didn't talk to me. This is the other thing. She didn't have a peer group to talk to. So it was all within. So I'm just desperate to talk to somebody. She did talk ultimately she talked to a nurse friend. "Oh gosh. I come across this all the time. Nothing to worry about." And was helpful.

Carol: Then I made contact in 2002 with a woman called Barbara Ross. Now Barbara Ross was a social worker in Norfolk Central Services. And around 2000, 1998, I knew about or got to know about the Beaumont Society and they published a magazine. And I got that for a couple of years and then I realized it wasn't really for me. But in the back there were adverts in terms of counselling and all the rest of it, and Barbara Ross put a, it was a very positive ad, saying she was happy to talk to people who felt they have gender dysphoria etc., etc. And she offered a counselling service and there was a group that met every month. And although it was a long way away, it sounded really positive and comfortable. Anyway, I went to see her, I used to go up to their socials. And she said, "You know, if your wife came up with you and you bring some photographs and you clear off for an hour and I'll just run through this with her. And she'll know what we're going to look at photographs of you." And-

Evelyn: Photographs of you...

Carol: As a woman.

Evelyn: As Claire, right.

Carol: As Carol.

Evelyn: Carol. Right.

Carol: So the photographs were, I mean they were good photographs. I mean ones that I... They were selfies or I had taken and they were just me being. I was never flamboyant, tarty, skirt round my waist, all this stuff. I mean I just wanted to be, full stop. That's how it was. I wanted it just to feel coherent. I think that is the word. Just straight. And-

Evelyn: All these years during this time you are dressing as a man and so on [crosstalk 00:14:04].

Carol: Oh yes. And of course my work took me away, in terms of several roles that required... I was working nationally. And that was all to do with assessment and working for the East Sussex Central Services, visiting our out of County placements all over the place. We have them just hundreds believe it or not. And it was about assessment and saying, look we need to bring you back home. Well when you set up placements, placements that had been set up 10, 15 years ago because it was convenient to do, somewhere up in Nottingham and then the Department says, "Well come on, you got to come back. We can't afford all of this." There's advocacy and you can't do it. You can't do it, they're not packages.

Carol: And because that's where the Department and me sort of clashed bit. And so that meant I was going away on a weekly basis, going away and then I could be somebody else certainly in the evenings. So that's part of how I got through this initial process and how do you survive when you feel increasingly out of kilter with the way you've been born. So Barbara met Kate, they looked at the photographs together and she said, what she said

was, she said... She doesn't swear, Kate. She's very sort of straight. She said, "Bloody hell. You look really good. You're not Dick Emery." If remember Dick Emery, [inaudible 00:15:27]. You are old enough.

Evelyn: I do. I'm afraid, yes I am old enough for Dick Emery.

Carol: Big hair, glasses and over the top.

Evelyn: You are awful sort of thing.

Carol: Yeah. She said, "You're not tottering on your heels are you?" Anyway, so when we got home she said, "Well, the best thing is why don't we meet for a meal. If I'm uncomfortable, I'm going home." So we had two cars and we met about 10 miles from home. We met in a [inaudible 00:15:48] actually. I remember it now. We met in this car park and so I introduced myself and she said, "Well gosh, you look all right." I said, "Well, shall we go have a bite to eat?" So we had a bite to eat. And she watched me like a hawk and she watched the way people interacted with me and she said, "They're taking you seriously, aren't they?" I said, "Well, I don't see why they shouldn't. I've never had a problem with anybody taking the mickey, voice is a bit deep. But no, I haven't." And she said, "Well that's..." So that was reassuring.

Carol: So after a few weeks we talked about perhaps me being addressed as her. You'll see the unfolding process is quite slow and these things do take a lot of time to, I think for someone like a Spouse who has had no previous experience to come to terms with it. But there's also another issue that emerges and that is questioning her sexuality. And that started to emerge in terms of... So we moved quite quickly from me being at home to saying, "Well look, we'll go to London, we'll go to so-and-so." And now this was just her and I, nobody else knew other than her brothers and her father, mother didn't know. We felt that generation was a bit too out of it. One other person who she was talking... My sister didn't know and doesn't know. And we we don't see much of, very little her and she has no... And anyway, she's not a safe pair of hands. That's the way it is.

Carol: So we started doing things together and then there's the issue of, I'm not sure. I'm going out with you. Am I going out with you as your wife? Am I going out with you as a friend. And then these discussions around how she felt and me being over, say several days, she began to feel a bit uncomfortable like that. She said, "This is not quite what I bought into," and-

Evelyn: Because it disturbs her sense of her own sexual orientation?

Carol: Well there is that, there is that. She said, "'How far are you going with this? Are you going to be more attracted to men?" And I said, "Well I'm not, I have no awareness of any change in orientation." And I know a number of people who, having gone through the whole process of transition, that does begin to happen for some. They begin to look differently at men and they begin to look slightly differently at women or they become bi. And I said, "Well, if I wasn't married to you, I'd probably be what would be described as

a gay woman full stop." And that's what I would anticipate. But you don't know, do you?

Carol: And so... Where are we now? We're probably up to about 2004, 2005. I'm just trying to think now, there's a point when we feel we need to talk to children, they're adult children. They're in their early 20s. My daughter had finished school and that was one of the issues about, is this going to be so disturbing it'll upset their studies, etc. So there was all that. We had no model of how to talk to children or what one should say [inaudible 00:00:19:14]. What preparation? Interestingly, so they were... About 2002 I suppose, so you'll see where we're moving on a bit.

Carol: 2002 we, I said we, I was away at an event as Carol and now that would be that the pattern for the preceding years. I'd be away and that's how it was. To be myself and to be completely myself, I would go away from time to time. And I was away and I had a phone call, I had a phone call from my son, and he said, "It's all right." Sorry, I'm finding it so difficult. He said, "It's all right dad. We know all about you and we're happy."

Evelyn: Oh. Now I'm tearing up as well.

Carol: It was just such a relief.

Evelyn: Oh gosh. It must have been the weight of the world lifted up off your shoulders.

Carol: Yeah. I was on the M1 and I had this call and I had an ear piece and I just thought, crikey, driving along. He said, "No, it's all right. Actually we sort of knew anyway. We sort of knew anyway. We'd been talking over the last year or so and a number of things we thought about you, physical aspects to you. And sometimes it's the way you sit. Sometimes it's the way you walk that we rather felt there was something else going on for you." And the expression was one of concern. How the bloody hell did you cope with that lot and why didn't you say something? How has it been for you? And they were like that, all three of them. And I thought, gosh does this represent the upcoming generation? They've had some education, they'd been to films, and you know, they've begun to sort of see the world and they were kind. And there was no sense of, wow, this is... And there are children at that age and younger who can't cope with it for whatever reason. They have reference points, which means it's difficult.

Carol: My kids have been very supportive. And so where that leaves us is, is that, and this is something else I'll move on to, is that the deal, the agreement that my wife and I have ultimately is that, "Are you going to transition?" I said, "Well, within the context of marriage. I'm not going to go through the medical process." She said, "I can't cope with that." So that's not a possibility. She said, "There are going to be times when I want my husband back. I just can't go through with this 100%." So we move into this whole aspect, in terms of me consolidating my persona, we move into what's called oscillation. There's a paper by Professor King, Annie King [crosstalk 00:00:22:26].

Evelyn: I haven't seen it.

Carol: I can give you a link and it's a good paper. In fact, I was interviewed around 2004 and oscillation was clearly going to be a way forward for me. That's how the marriage would work and that's the agreement we would have. So that my wife's mental health wasn't going to be interfered with because I could see what going to happen. At the time, she was bottling a lot and coping with a lot. And I thought, well this is one way forwards. And that is the way it is. That is the way it is. There were times when she said, "I want my husband back." And that is actually incredibly stressful. It is. So-

Evelyn: Must be.

Carol: Bloody awful. It really is. And I cope with that because it's worth it. And some people have said, "Why are you doing that? What's going on?" And I said, "Well, the relationship is worth enough to me and it's out of my love and consideration for my wife that that is the way it is." I wouldn't recommend it, but it works.

Evelyn: If you had free choice, would you have considered surgery?

Carol: I would have done. Whether I would now, I'm going to be 69 in a few days time.

Evelyn: Gosh. Don't look it.

Carol: No, well it's probably how I've looked after to my skin. Probably. I don't know. I don't have a lot of the craggyness that a lot of people, a lot of men my age have. So it's a comfortable equilibrium I would say as far as it can be. And that's where it is. But the oscillation is, it's an interesting one because what it means is, is that you... I dress androgynously, that's what happens. And there are some things I'm not prepared to do. If we went to Glyndebourne for example, we had tickets for Glyndebourne, I said, "Well, I can't present," I said, "How would..." And then we turned the table and said, "Right, okay, I'm here and you're going off and I'm going to give you a dinner jacket and you're going to go like that." And she said, "Well, I can do that." I said, "You'll have to present as a man."

Carol: We talked about that whole business of how it feels and I said, "Well it's just not something I can, it would just be such a traumatic experience now, in terms of expression." And then she... because then we had to the discussion, "Well if all women wore boys suits and of course I thought of the skit with the two Ronnie's, remember that? They did a skit, there was a skit where women were in control of the world. The women were wearing sort of fairly androgynous boy suits and were masterful and commanding and the men were forced into... They would use brooms and wear pinnies and do lots of traditional domestic stuff.

Evelyn: Women's work as it was back then.

Carol: Women as it was. Yes, women's work. So picture the whole thing in reverse. She said, "Well how would it be?" And I said, "Well, I guess the reference point would be women wearing boy's suits, whatever the reference point was." So we sort of kicked that around for a bit. I mean, we do talk and the most important thing is, is that communication has remained open throughout. And when she's feeling really pissed off, she will say, "Look, I've had enough, I feel I need to see more of the person I married." So that is an ongoing difficulty, but it's one that we don't allow to become a barrier. So I mean that's, that's where it is.

Evelyn: Must be hard. So-

Carol: So where maybe I differ from a lot of the people you've interviewed, that's the path I've chosen. If the marriage had been in difficulty or it was creaking, it may well have bust it. And it hasn't. And we both value the relationship we have and the interests we share and what we do together and what we do with the children, or they're adults now so there are grandchildren, four of them. And the children's spouses, other halves, partners, they're fine. I mean it's just been amazing.

Carol: Well as these partners or potential wives came on the scene, I introduced myself and said this is how to do that. I mean there was preparation because I don't... It's easy for me because I've been in this for a long time and it's easy to overlook how some people might react, go "Crikey." But it's been good. It's been very positive and it's been, "So what? Come as you are, do as you please, that's fine. We're happy." Children are an interesting dimension. The grandchildren, sorry, interesting dimension.

Evelyn: I was going to ask about that. How do they see you?

Carol: They've grown up with it long enough. I think we got there soon enough for it to be, well that's the way it is.

Evelyn: And do you usually present as Carol to the grandchildren?

Carol: Usually. Sometimes androgynously when it's just sort of very neutral but that's how it is. That's the environment. Now, the other thing because what we got to be aware of is that there will be peer group as they grow older and there will be other parents and this is not, don't keep this within. Once you sort of move into the community, then you can't keep a lid on it. And I don't know I want to keep a lid on it except that children can be quite vulnerable and other children can be really unkind. Parents can be pretty awful if they're particularly bigoted or don't know enough, can't cope, value judgements can be made. And there's still the risk that being gay being bi, being trans, is heaped in with what's called perversion. There's still that around. And I suspect more under the surface than we realize. I mean we live in a fairly liberated environment, don't we? The circles we move in, what we do. the friends we have. But out there it's an unknown quantity.

Evelyn: Because there is a long history of gay men being automatically thought to be paedophile back in the day. And somewhere that's [crosstalk 00:29:15].

- Carol: Yes there is, and that's still about. That's still about. And when we have a press and we have a legal framework and we have a prevailing view that it just isn't on to be negative towards people who are different. But with a different set of leadership in the country, a slight change of direction, all that will come to the surface very quickly, I'm sure. And I don't think any of us should be complacent.
- Evelyn: Absolutely not.
- Carol: And kids ourselves that it's all fine. It's not, well it is fine. It's finer than it's ever been, which is one of the reasons why a lot of us can feel so relaxed and fulfilled and move freely without fear of censure because it's a really positive society. But underneath the surface it's something that has to be aware of. So getting back to the grandchildren, that's something we feel we just need to keep an ear to the ground and pick up any vibes.
- Carol: And of course the other thing is, is that grandchildren, they've all got their phones, they're utterly savvy. They are just three or four or five. They can press all the right buttons, get information and it's fantastic. So there's nothing that they can't find out for themselves if they want to. I know there's a negative side in terms of there's a lot of dark stuff out there, awful. And of course that was technology that wasn't open to me, which is why it's been, looking back, I think, oh shoot, when I think how it was for me and that's how I was. I didn't know anything different to be so in the closet, so isolated, not able to talk to anybody. There was no one out there, didn't have any groups. Hadn't come across it before. It was just me. Well you wouldn't wish it on anybody. And now there's so much out there.
- Evelyn: I think the internet in particular has being transformative for trans people maybe 15 years, 10, 15 years younger than you connect.
- Carol: Which is why Beaumont, the group structure they offer, that's actually falling away now.
- Evelyn: So perhaps for the, perhaps it's the listeners of the future, if you tell us what Beaumont Society was all about, because it's established for a very long time, isn't it?
- Carol: Yes it was. It was established around 1960s, the late 60s. And it was established as a... It offered two things, principally. It offered a means of meeting others who were described as cross dressing, transvestite. The term transgender I don't think was around as we understand it now.
- Evelyn: Probably not.
- Carol: I don't think it was. And I don't think the options and possibility of transition, I don't think that was anything like, didn't have the profile that we now have. I don't recall gender dysphoria being spoken about in those terms. So Beaumont was set up as an opportunity to meet with others. There was a telephone service called WOBS, Women of the Beaumont Society, for gender women who would speak to the wives of husbands who were found

to be dressing, and what did that mean? So, I don't, having spoken to a number of gender women who in the 70s and 80s would ring women in the Beaumont Society say, "Look, Fred's doing this, Fred's doing that."

Carol: The response they gave was, "Well, what's the problem? You just need to accept this. It's harmless. It won't go away, but it's harmless." You had to... What was it? I forget the term now you just have to step up to the plate and accept it. It was pretty blunt. Today it's a much more, I mean Beaumont has developed enormously and now there's a much more receptive, much more understanding, empathetic response and one which enables women to have an open exchange of views, express just how they feel. And then with an opportunity perhaps they can meet up in neutral surroundings, etc. But for many, many years they offered a national service of groups meeting weekly, monthly, all over the country. And then they set up organizers for each region and they would sort of coordinate.

Carol: So they'd be meeting in village halls, usually not mainstream paces. They were fairly contained, discreet. And then they moved into, well, let's go out to a restaurant and we'll book a table and have a meal together as our female selves. So they started offering that. And then there were weekends and hotels and the hotel would say, right, it's just the Beaumont Society this weekend. But that um, that still happens. But the groups that meet socially quite have the following place they used to. They still have a following but they don't, I think because of the internet, because of the ability to meet with others and connect in different ways.

Carol: So the world has changed a bit and the fact that you can be who you want to be more easily has made a difference as well. Nevertheless, having said that, there are still many, many people living in the closet with families who are very prescriptive about if you want to dress you're out. You have to stop this now. And I've met people, I've met trans women whose marriages, whose relationships have gone and the children have as well because that's what it's meant. Either you conform or you go. So there's a lot of unhappiness out there and of course a lot of mental health issues surrounding transgender and an inability to find the level you want to be on to.

Evelyn: Bound to be. So what groups have you been active in? Have you found support or being able to give support through?

Carol: Well, what I've done is I've given support through, well, the group in Norfolk where I originally received so much support. Barbara Ross. Barbara Ross died about four years ago and she was one of three people who got the... Although she was Republican, but she was offered an OBE and took it. I went up to the palace, thank you very much, and took her OBE thought, yes, I've got to take this, got to do this because it's what it represents. And it was for services to the transgender community. I thought, fantastic. So this is the State acknowledging... There was her and there was a woman whose name escapes me for the moment, but she set up a walking group and service in Brighton. Her name is Alice, it'll come to me in a minute. I can email it to

you, I just can't remember the name, but she got an OBE as well. And she was a trans woman who transitioned within the National Health Service.

Carol: So in terms of the group that supported me, I go back to that group to support others. And some, it's raw stuff. They're men who are desperate just to have some escape from the conformity that they find so difficult, to be their female self, say, it might be one evening a month they're allowed out in some instances by their wives or maybe it's in secret. But they're trying to find a way through. And when they come to the group, of course that opens up doors to other contacts, sources of help. Maybe it's about saying, "Look, would your wife come along and meet with X? Would she come along to this neutral scenario?"

Carol: And so that's going on and it's been positive just... And sometimes just talking. You're just in a group and you talk about your own experience and how it was and perhaps looking at strategies. And there are those who come and you don't see again because they've been banned, you know, there's a whole range of experience. So there's that. And my wife and I have done quite a bit of work privately in terms of people I've met who are in the process of coming to terms with gender dysphoria. The wives are just blanking off and just not coping with it. And we said, "Well look, come to the house, have a meal. We can just talk casually, formally and Kate can say how it was, how it is. And it's not all a bed of roses, but there is a way."

Carol: And we use words like compromise and listening and just allowing some expression and we've worked with three couples and it's been quite helpful. And Kate's very straightforward and upfront about it and has the ability just to be quite reassuring really. "So yes it was difficult, but this is what we do." And of course all personalities are different. Every situation's unique. So we feel we've helped people and these are couples who've been able to move on to a degree and they've reached a level of accommodation that works for them.

Carol: It's not the same for everybody. And currently there's a couple we see from time to time where the wife's approach is, "I can't cope with this. I can't stop it. I will accommodate it, but I'm going to sink my energies." And this is another strategy that in terms of a wife's feeling of self-worth, and feeling challenged by her husband who wishes to transition or to move in that direction. It's about looking at your pastimes, interests and maybe sinking some energy into that. So that's about a distraction and a diversion. And in the instance I'm thinking of the couple that both Kate and I, we go and stay with them. And the wife has been quite bitter and quite negative and saying, "Well since Tony retired," because this is what happened.

Carol: He retired from education, was a headmaster and retired, said, "Well that's it. I can be who I want."

Evelyn: Be who I want to be.

Carol: So he's been quite, what's the word for it? He's been quite down the line, this is how it's going to be. Not, let's talk about. This is how it's going to be. And she's saying, "Well you've really buggered up. The retirement, all the hopes I ever had and you want to embark, you want to be a woman." So we go and stay and we talk about that and we look at the way it could be.

Carol: And it's as much about Kate talking to the wife and just them having time and trying to reach a point where it's not the end of the world. And there are lots of positives. The alternative is that the marriage could split. It would be significant mental health issues for the husband because he's still the husband. So there's quite a lot to work through. So that's something we've done together but I guess it would be the group in Norfolk that's what I return to. Having said that, when I saw the advert for ODL in, it was the Evening Standard, and so I gave Jim a call. I thought this could be an opportunity for me to contribute in another way. So for me, ODL, the work that goes on, the volunteering, all incredibly positive. But for me it's about contributing to the part of knowledge and to contribute to the raising a profile.

Evelyn: So you are an ambassador for Opening Doors London, aren't you?

Carol: Yes I am.

Evelyn: And perhaps for the purposes of listeners, you tell us what that role entails.

Carol: Well the role initially was about participating in the training process. So that would be Jim ringing me up and saying, well emailing me, and saying the social service department have asked us if we can run a morning session with some of their staff who are interested in LGBT, that may well be an LGBT dimension. Want to know more, could be managers, could be social workers. So I've done that on a number of occasions. I've gone along and it's been myself as a trans person, there's been Jim and Louise. So we represent three aspects that being gay, being bi, by being trans.

Carol: And primarily it's about saying, well none of us wake up in the morning and think, what a great idea, let's do that. It's not a lifestyle choice that this is how it is. And each time it's been either Jim or Louise's been talking just this is how it was, this is how I remember coming out to family members. I remember Jim saying, "Well, how gay is gay? Am I gay enough? And he's very good at doing that, very almost in your face. And these people sitting back think, crikey. And then we break up into groups having given our stories, to small groups of us just talking to others and them asking lots of questions. And that in itself, I think... It's always been a very positive response.

Carol: So there's been the training side and you had an open forum in a London borough, which anybody could walk into, so that was booked head. And then again it was about our stories and looking at the background of LGBT. And then latterly there's been the corporate group involvement where currently I've been to two different companies with Maggie, another ambassador, or with Richard, another ambassador, where we've gone

together, we represent different dimensions. And we've just talked about ourselves but we've also talked to ourselves in relation to what is ODL about, this is what we do. And the background to that is more to do with the fundraising side, which would enable ODL to develop and grow and engage in other initiatives.

Carol: So I'm looking forward to the first full year really, because I only joined in the beginning of last year, but I'm looking forward to an interesting year of an interface with the corporate side and talking to others, going to social events and spreading the word. And just that low level casual, talking to people, having conversations can be just as powerful as being on a line, giving a talk to a sea of people. And we've done that.

Evelyn: It's all about that gradual attitudinal change isn't it, really? Of other people having role models.

Carol: Yes.

Evelyn: I suppose your wife Kate is now playing a role that she would never have dreamt of.

Carol: No, she completely, all this is completely beyond anything she'd could have ever anticipated. And consequently, I mean there's still this, she still has that need and I entirely understand that, of saying, "Well, I want..." well, she'd like the whole of me back, but she's not going to get it. And I don't say that, but it's about the compromises we make. So that's her coping. And she's gone far further than I ever thought she would be, frankly. How I would have reacted if she said, "I can't cope with this. It's got to stop." I think it would have probably ended up in a, well, it would have driven me probably into a very dark place. And she may well understand that. And-

Evelyn: But have you a lot of friends who've known you in your past life. Have the friendships remained?

Carol: We've got friends who have... They have. They have by and large. There've been some who they've never said, "Go away," but it's difficult. It's not easy. And I understand that. And there's a bit of sadness there isn't there? There isn't that freedom of interaction. I mean we don't see so much of them now.

Evelyn: And does Kate feel sad too, I suppose?

Carol: Yes. I mean those are changes and challenges. It does change dynamics. And I think we've been incredibly fortunate, actually. We haven't had outright animosity. We've had nothing really negative. We've had people cooling off a bit, understand that. Maybe they'll come round. I mean, maybe they innately is just something they can't cope with them. That's fair enough. We're all different. By and large it's been pretty positive.

Evelyn: That's really good to hear.

- Carol: Well it is good. It is good. And then when I think of the background some of these people come from. I mean I'm talking about... you know. I live in a village which is, you'd describe it as pretty privileged bunch to be honest with you. We bought a wreck in 1983 and it was. And it wasn't where we wanted to move initially, but it was a wreck and we could afford to buy the wreck, so we did it up. But that village has become a... It's a place for very wealthy people. It is. And, you know, we sometimes remark on that. We think, well, the people we meet, they've never had a... They don't know what it's like. They haven't.
- Carol: And I was in social work for long enough and I met with and worked with and was with people whose budgets balanced on 25 quid at the end of the week. Are they in the red or the black? You know. And I think, and it does crikey, it brings you up short. So I mean I wasn't brought up in that environment. I was lucky and I realized that and that made me feel quite self conscious because I guess, I always wanted to work with others and move others, move people on and the social work was what really attracted me. So that made me feel quite self-conscious because I can't share entirely your experience because I've not been there. I've come to understand that.
- Carol: And in terms of assistance, whatever role I was in and the role, it was partly initially financial, then it was learning disability and working with families with things where that was a dimension. And then it was about care packages and augmented care packages through an independent living fund scenario. That's all gone now. So yes, lots of variation. But there's nobody, I mean, well, the social circle inevitably would be largely they're well off, comfortable. And some with attitudes who... you know. There are people we know and they're nice people, but they think Boris is great and they're very conservative. And I said to you... So we've had conversations around that, around politics and can you really vote somebody who is duplicitous, not truthful, not entirely truthful, who makes statements about women, makes statements about LGBT.
- Carol: They say, "We couldn't vote for anybody else. Quite impossible. Absolutely impossible." And prepared to accept that maybe they've got a point, but I mean out of the whole village was one Labour. One, just one. And I think he probably went Liberal Democrat anyway. And the Lib Dems, it was, it's a Lewis constituency. So the Lib Dems were, it was Norman Baker for quite some time. Really good guy. He was ousted in 2010 so we've got Maria Caldwell, who's Tory, and she got in again in 2017 and she's got in again now. So different environment.
- Evelyn: So yeah, I think that partly answers a question I had in my mind about given the successive legislation that's been in place, have attitudes really followed along behind it or do you think possibly it's a generational thing?
- Carol: I think it is generational to a degree. I think, to be honest, for people, so the people that I see a lot of where they're comfortable, they've been successful, in a lot of instance they've been very successful. So they've got a really good house and they've got enough money to support themselves and they're in a bit of a bubble. And I think the people that are in the bubble are

the ones that we talk to, we raise issues around quality and we talked About trans side and there's a variation. So as well, I don't need to know, not interested. So it's a range of things. I think those people who are proactive and want to assist and move forward, in terms of the profile of LGBT, they tend to be the ones who have... I suppose they're younger, they're considerably younger. It's my kids' generation and the young ones as well, even younger. So I think, yeah, I think it probably is. I hadn't really thought about that fully, but I think you're right. It is.

Evelyn: So when you were thinking of you had to have this house today being grilled by me, were there any things that you had on your mind that you really wanted to speak about that you felt we haven't touched on?

Carol: No, I didn't anticipate it being a grilling and it hasn't been. It's been very comfortable and I felt-

Evelyn: Not intended to be a grilling either.

Carol: No, no. And I felt very happy chatting and talking about how it is and how it was for me. And I think we probably have covered everything. I think probably in my mind I was thinking, I wonder, every situation's unique and I was thinking, I bet of all the trans women you've interviewed, I suspect you may not have talked to anybody who was in that sort of oscillating dimension where there's still that...

Evelyn: No, probably not.

Carol: No. And having listened to you speak before, I think the women you've met, they're out there. They are themselves. There are no ties, there are no constraints. That's it. Well there are constraints for me for the reasons I explained. And that makes it Different because inevitably one's identity isn't completely, how can I put it?

Evelyn: Static.

Carol: Well it's not, it's not. And it's very jarring to have to sort of try and unscramble, I don't really want to do that. Just feels totally unnatural. So that's how it is. And I live with that and for the moment that's how it is. Now whether that changes, I don't know. Because I think there is that process of evolution and change that takes place that you can't always forecast how it's going to be. There may be a point where I just say I can't, I just can't do this anymore.

Evelyn: It's that, I kind of feel it must be that the more opportunity you have to be Carol, which is considerable now-

Carol: It is considerable.

Evelyn: ... the harder it might be to go back.

Carol: It is. And the corollary of that is that ODL has been a very strong consolidation, a role, because I'm doing something positive. Initially, so Carol wasn't ever involved in social work, not in the professional sense. So she wasn't around. And she wasn't around in my professional life partly because there were sensitivities around vulnerable people and how they might... If I was just to talk to my manager and say, "Look, this is how it is and this is how I need to be." I'm pretty sure I would've had a pretty sympathetic hearing. And they would have said, "Okay, you might need to go away and come back and we'll re-introduce you." And I know where that's happened, there have been lots of occasions in both private companies and social service departments where it's been handled really sensitively, long before human rights and the risk of-

Evelyn: The legislation and so on.

Carol: Oh yeah. And that's been down to individual managers. So it wasn't like that for me. So, you know, it's all come a little bit later.

Evelyn: So in a sense, there's that purposeful part of your life in terms of what replaces a profession once you retire. You have become Carol in a professional light there.

Carol: Yes. Yes I have. And that's been consolidating and very positive and contributing, and giving back feeling, just giving something back generally. But it's also had a very positive impact on my relationship at home. So I'm seen slightly differently now. So whereas before I was involved in formally supporting people, there was a group in Brighton and I used to go to as well, just to be there as an ear and as somebody who's been through part of the process. But to suddenly develop a more professional role, I'm seen differently.

Evelyn: Yeah. It's a validation of who you are as Carol, in Kate's eyes.

Carol: It is. And it's a further validation about at what level I'm accepted. I'm not playing about here. This is no sort of, this is not a joke. It's not just a quasi-social process we're going through. No, it's serious and it's been very positive.

Evelyn: [inaudible 00:56:31].

Carol: Yeah. And Kate's been up, she came to the cafe before Christmas and I said to Maria, "Look, Kate's coming with me." And Maria straight in there said, "Kate, you'd make a really good ambassador." I said, "Really?" So anyway, I said afterwards, I said to Maria, "We might need to think about that. I don't know whether you should both be... She could be." I said, "I'm not sure whether, would that be good?" So she's thinking about it. So I'm not sure whether if we were both involved in different ways, would that be good or not? Need some working out. And I'm not sure. She's got a lot on. I mean, she's a singer and she's involved professionally singing and that's demanding on a semi professional level. So I don't know whether she's got time for that, but she might.

- Evelyn: But she now has reasons to be proud of you for your professional role in Opening Doors London.
- Carol: Yes, she has. She has and it's changed perspectives. So there's a lot I could say about Opening Doors to her and I have done. And a little bit is reflected in the spiel I gave to Maria or sent to Maria, which is alongside being an ambassador there's that because that's for the brochure, she'll take what information she needs out of that. But I suppose I'm also feeling just more, there's more balance. It feels like over the last year it's less of a battle for me now. That there's much more she's more ready to accept. This is how it is. Because meeting transgender face to face, looking it straight in the eye is very difficult for spouses or partners, however they describe themselves. It's very difficult coming to terms of that and the whole issue of your own sexuality. I mean, crikey. Am I-
- Evelyn: Does this mean I'm a lesbian now?
- Carol: Well it does, exactly that. Am I married to a woman? Are you going to change? Are you going to be attracted to men? I said, well anyway, we've talked about that at length and in different ways and I think she's feeling more secure. I think she feels she's really got a measure of the direction things are moving in. But you can see it's taken a long time. For some women and some gender women I've met, they've moved very quickly. Now how that is, I never quite know. No one gender woman reacts in exactly the same way in terms of the amount of time taken, the processes they go through, the grief, they might go through.
- Carol: One man I met some years ago, early 2000s, I'll never forget this gray suit, little gold specks and I was at a conference to do with transgender. I thought, oh this guy must be a consultant, he's going to give a talk. He said, "I'm one of Barbara's girls." I said, "I'm sorry." I said, "What do you mean you're one of Barbara's girls?" And he said... Well Barbara being the person I used to go to. "Oh," he said, "No, I've been seeing Barbara for some years now and I'm self-medicating. I know what to do."
- Carol: And he said, "Next year," he said, he's a consultant gynecologist in a hospital near Sandringham, garden parties at Sandringham and all the rest of it. He said, "No, no," he said, "The trust has agreed, I should go off, I'm going to America. I will have all the surgery done. I will have my lip, brow, hairline, all those things. It's going to cost me 70,000. But that's why, and I'm going to do it in one hit. And they've given me eight weeks to go through that process and they're going to reintroduce me and I'll be introduced as Celia and we've got the press lined up, we've got the papers lined up, telly, they got them all. In the morning and the lunch time bugger off. That's what they're going to do.
- Carol: And that's what happened. And I'll never forget it. So I knew Colin and then Colin disappears and he comes back, Celia appears ultimately, reintroduced back into the trust as the consultant gynae. We have dinner together and he said, "You won't believe this," but he said, "Over the hundred letters I had in the first traunch, 98 were saying, wow, well done. Really super, really

respect what you've done. Patients, other doctors, theater porters, you name it. There were two people just two, and both were clients and they said can't cope with this. Okay, being a gynaecologist quite sensitive stuff."

Carol: So yes, it was a very positive story and I'll never forget that. Crikey, that's quite something. Well that was a trust being very sensitive and sympathetic towards an individual's need and situation. And that was written up and it got the national press and it got the local press. It was a really positive account of this person's transition and what happened afterwards.

Evelyn: So it's great to have some positive stories like that.

Carol: It's good stuff. They are positive. And it's remained positive. The interesting thing is, is that the... So there was a whole issue about, he was married and his wife said, "I'm really going to miss the person I was married to, but it's something we'll work on." And she has. And she stayed with him. And I think that's just... Stayed with her. But for her, the spouse is always a him. That's who she married. But she accepts the female, although there's been full transition. Interesting, isn't it?

Evelyn: So finally, thinking of that little seven year old chappy, admiring those girls. What would the grown-up Carol say to him?

Carol: I think with hindsight and given... So that little seven year old chap looking at the girls and thinking I'd like to be like them. Are we looking at that chap in 1958, '59 or are we saying to that seven year old now?

Evelyn: Poor little lad in '58, '59.

Carol: I think what I'd say is, "You're not on your own. It's all right."

Evelyn: Because he spent so many years feeling he was.

Carol: Yeah. Because nobody was able to say that to me. And I think that's what I'd want to be saying. It's all right. And I suppose, importantly, I would offer myself as somebody who would just to be in touch with. You know, it's that whole business of reaching out, isn't it? And saying you're not on your own. That's what I'd say, it's the first thing really. It's about wanting to draw somebody in and keep them safe and feeling okay with themselves. It's all right.

Evelyn: And today you've been reaching out to people who might listen to this in 10 years time, 20 years time to tell them how it was and hopefully for them to still be reaching out to the community.

Carol: Yes, indeed. That would be wonderful. And hopefully a world where the reaching out doesn't have to be quite so far. Where they're starting off from a higher standpoint than I did, and a lot of us did. We started off right from the bottom in terms of the depths of loneliness and isolation. I would hope that they would start off thinking, well, I know I'm not on my own. I know there are people out there, organizations out there and I know which

buttons to press. So the launching off, hopefully will be easier as the years go by to the point when we stop pigeonholing. That's the aim I always think is society still pigeonholes by dress, hairstyle, the way you sound, all sorts of things. Value judgments all the time. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we get to the point when you are who you are. It's your personality and your brain that matters first and foremost. That would be wonderful.

Evelyn: Absolutely. So on that lovely note, I'll say thank you so much Carol.

Carol: Thank you. Thank you very much.