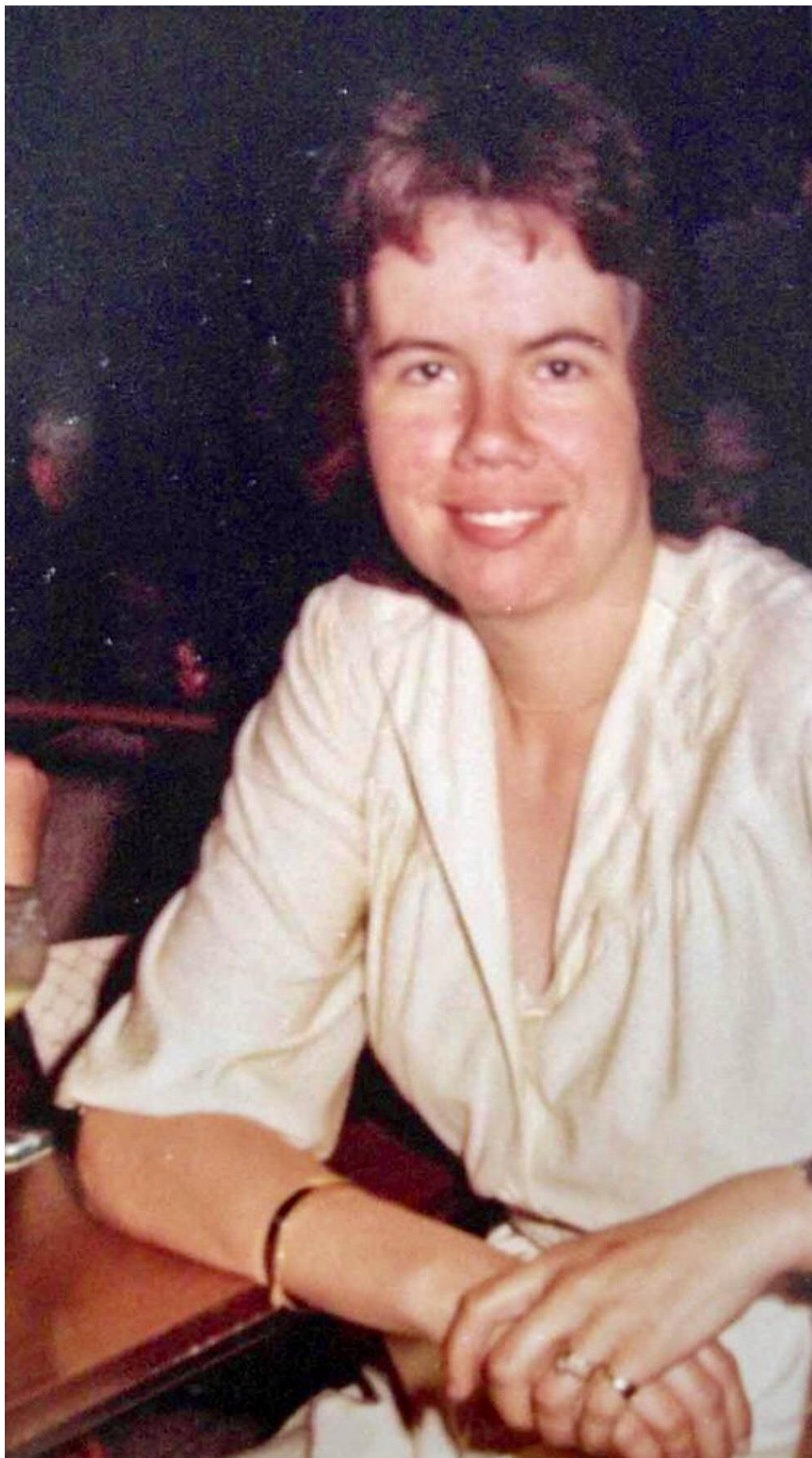


## From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
<b>Name:</b> Maggie Jones	<b>Date:</b> 24/04/2019 <b>Age:</b> 66
<b>Key issues:</b> Working Class. Lesbian. Homophobia. WRAF. Nursing. Diva Magazine. WimWim. Brighton Pride. Older Lesbian Network. Opening Doors London. U3A. Racism. Islamophobia. Xenophobia.	
<b>Narrative summary:</b> Maggie grew up in a working-class family in Oxford; she describes the people around her at the time as very homophobic. She first realized she was 'different' at age 15 when all of her female friends had crushes on male celebrities and she didn't. At age 17 she was fully aware of her sexuality; she was so deeply ashamed, due to the society she grew up in. Maggie wanted to get away from home, so at 17 she joined the RAF. In her first week two women were dishonorably discharged for being lesbians; she describes this as another nail in the door of the closet. She ended up being married to a man, for 23 years, due to the worry of people finding out that she was gay.  She started getting qualifications in order to gain some independence; she ended up training as a nurse. She got her degree and divorced her husband. The month after she left her husband she came out to one of the other nurses.  Maggie talks about meeting a local group of lesbians in Swansea, through an advert in Diva Magazine. She started socializing with them, making friends and having affairs. One of the lesbian couples faced a lot of homophobia from the local people, and Maggie began to think that this was no longer a safe place to live; so, she moved to London. She began to feel free, and nobody was homophobic towards her. She joined WimWim (Wimbledon Women) an apolitical lesbian group of over 400 members, where she met many great women.  She talks about the struggles of retiring and being an older LGBT person – facing homophobia from straight older people, or struggling to find other LGBT groups. She gradually found Opening Doors London, and other LGBT groups for older people. She published an article in U3A talking of her experiences of homophobia within the organization; she felt like she needed to take action and speak out for other older LGBTQ+ people who suffered from the same prejudice. This ultimately led to her helping isolated LGBTQ+ people form communities and friendships. Maggie has also given talks for the U3A; she wants to change the outlook of older white British people; educating them on LGBTQ+ issues.  Maggie talks about the importance of being an out and proud gay person; she will no longer be silenced. We cannot be complacent because our rights can so easily be revoked. She also talks about racism, transphobia and ageism within LGBTQ+ communities, citing that there is still a lot of work to do.	
	<b>Length of interview:</b> 1hr 18 mins





Marguerite: ... got that, and make sure...

Maggie: I could be slurping coffee, too.

Marguerite: ... and check, yep, it's on, it looks like it's recording, and I need to say that this is an interview for the From a Whisper to a Roar, oral history project conducted by Opening Doors London and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Today is Thursday the 25th of April, 2019, and I'm interviewing Maggie.

Marguerite: So, Maggie, could you start out by telling me a little bit about your early life, and how you came to an understanding of who you really are?

Maggie: Yes. I'll try. Born in Oxford in 1953. Grew up in a working class background, council house, parents who worked in a factory. So, in a world that was very homophobic and I mention my working class background, because working class people were very homophobic. I can remember my father making jokes about gay people, those days they weren't called gay, they were just called pan- well he called them pansy's. And I was about 15 when I realised that I was different, because of an incident that happened. We were on a school trip to London, we were going to the theatre, it was to see Zigga Zagga, so it would have been 1968, I think, so I would have been 15. And I think it was the Cambridge Theatre, because it's in my memory, that's how it looks.

Maggie: We're all girls, I don't think there were any boys with us, I don't know why, or I just can't remember them, anyway, we were all outside, we were about 30 of us, about four or five teachers, and the star of the show came out, a young guy, and all the girls started screaming and ran after.. literally chased him down the street, everyone of them, except me. And I remember being completely puzzled as to why they were doing that. And I just thought, "Aren't they weird?" I just didn't get it. And all the teachers are looking at me, and I thought ... I was just completely puzzled. But that's when it dawned on me that I was different.

Maggie: Because I didn't chase after this young man, and I wasn't interested. I never had crushes on famous male film stars, like most teenage girls, or pop stars, I just wasn't interested. I never gravitated to any male, ever, in admiration or having a crush on, it just didn't happen. It never happened. It slowly dawned on me I was different, I didn't know why I was different. I remember my mother saying to me, again when I was about 15, she said, "You don't dislike boys, do you?" And I of course said, "No, no, of course not." But looking back I just think, "What did she see?"

Maggie: She obviously saw something because of my complete disinterest. Anyway, so say 16 it dawned on me that this was sexual. Because I was becoming a young sexual woman and I realized I was getting crushes. I remember one of my first crushes was on the Avengers woman. Emma Peel. Dianna Rigg...

Marguerite: Oh yes.

- Maggie: ... big time. Then it dawned on me that I was gravitating to women. But, when I heard my dad with his homophobic jokes and just society... I remember starting my first job, one of my first jobs, I ended up being a telephonist for the post office, and women making comments, talk about other women saying, she's not natural and the word lesbian was whispered, sotto voce because it was that disgusting.
- Maggie: And I heard the word perverts, in sentences related to gay people. So at the age of 16, 17 I was fully aware of what I was, and I was so deeply ashamed, and I admit, I do mean ashamed.
- Marguerite: Yes.
- Maggie: That's how society made me feel, I thought I'm a pervert and I wanted to get away from home. There was a home situation which was becoming unbearable. Nothing to do with me, it was more to do with my brother. I wanted to get away from home. The only way I could get away from home in those days, because women weren't educated back in the 50s and the 60s. I read somewhere that 1% of working class women went to University, who were born in the 50s, so as much as I wanted to go, I wanted more than anything to go to University, I loved the idea of further education, and growing up in Oxford it almost seemed cruel to know that it wasn't going to happen.
- Maggie: Anyway, I wanted to get away from home. No qualifications, the only way I could get away from home was by joining the forces, so at the age of 17 I joined the RAF, or WRAF as it was then. I wanted to join the army, and I thought, "Only lesbians join the army." And I couldn't bear that thought, I know people will know, if I join the army people will know I'm a lesbian. I was not daft, so I joined the RAF, because my mum had been in the RAF as well. I joined the RAF and did my basic training which, because I'd been a telephonist in civy street, it just stuck me in to be a telephonist. I didn't want to be a telephonist, but you didn't get any choice. If you were a female you just did what you were told.
- Maggie: So, did my basic training, which was just six weeks, and then I was posted to a small camp, a small village in Cambridgeshire, or it was Huntingdonshire then, and I'd been there one week and one evening, there was a lot of commotion going on in the block, the accommodation block, where about 70 young women lived, and two girls were frog marched out of the building, with about six military police, and I didn't know what was going on. I can still, today, see the expressions on their faces, of defiance. They were marched to a taxi, I found out later, were taken to the train station.
- Maggie: Next day I discovered that they'd been dishonourably discharged for being lesbians. So that was another nail, on the door of the closet. I thought, if I want a career, I'm going to have to stay in the closet. And I'm still deeply ashamed, and I remember thinking, if people found out that I was gay, at the age of 17 and 18, I would have committed suicide. It sounds melodramatic, and not silly because people still commit suicide, don't they, over being gay, but that's how ashamed I was. So, I just stayed in the closet.

Maggie: Then people started noticing I wasn't dating boys. Somebody set me up on a blind date. Oh, god, and that was the last thing I wanted to do, was going on a blind date with a boy. So I went with this boy on a date, hated it, and this is why I lied for a month, months and months and then somebody introduced me to this chap, and at that point he was comfortable to be with, I always felt he was like a brother. Anyway, to cut a long boring story short, we ended up getting engaged and got married.

Maggie: All within the space of 8 months, which is very quick, but part of the reasoning for me, was because I had wanted to be in the closet, because I knew people were starting to wonder. I couldn't bear that, so I got married at the age of 19 to a Welshman. And-

Marguerite: Well, lots of other people, of women in your group and work and in your division of the RAF, were they getting married at those sorts of ages?

Maggie: Yeah. That's all people did.

Marguerite: Right.

Maggie: That was the culture.

Marguerite: So it was time.

Maggie: Yes, oh absolutely.

Marguerite: Right.

Maggie: The whole pervasive culture at that time, for every young female was to get to date, get married, have children, careers weren't even on the horizon. In those days women didn't have careers, unless they were very lucky. The only people who had careers would tend to be middle class girls who were lucky enough to go to University, Somebody a few months ago said to me, why didn't you become a teacher? For a working class girl, on the council estate, I may as well have wished for the moon, that wasn't going to happen.

Maggie: My prospects of employment then, were factory or shop or typing pool. Another reason why I went in the RAF. So yeah, so the culture was you get married, and you have babies, which is of course the last thing I wanted to, but I did it, I did get married and do you want me to fast forward to the present day, and just say I've been miserably married for 23 years. Because nothing else happened, I mean I had kids. I hated every minute of that marriage. Every second, of every minute.

Marguerite: That is so sad. But was he a nice man?

Maggie: No. That's the unfortunate part of the equation. He started off being nice, very brotherly, very considerate. But I know now, in hindsight, all he wanted to do was get married because that's what you did. He was Welsh, and the Welsh are very old fashioned back in the 70s, but he changed not long after

we got married. He was posted to Germany and I stayed in the U.K. This was three months after we got married, he paid for a prostitute, and he told me that when he came home, when he was drunk, because he felt guilty.

Maggie: It just went downhill from there on, and then later on I don't think this is part of my story, because it's not about me being gay, I would come out regardless, he was abusive in the marriage. Anyway, so I have two children, and I've been married 23 years to this... one of the nicknames I had for him was, Ayatollah, because he had to be obeyed. I never, even now, refer to him by his name. And I haven't, I've been divorced 24 years, I only ever refer to him, as him. Because if I give him his name, that gives him a dignity he doesn't deserve.

Marguerite: Yes. Right. I understand that.

Maggie: Anyway, so we'd been married... go on-

Marguerite: Can I ask you a little bit more about those 23 years?

Maggie: Of course.

Marguerite: In terms of, because for example you enjoyed Diana Rigg from afar...

Maggie: Yeah. Yeah.

Marguerite: ... in terms of an appeal-

Maggie: Yeah.

Marguerite: ... did you have at least that kind of fantasy life or dream life?

Maggie: Yeah. Yeah .

Marguerite: Tell me a little bit more about how you kept yourself sane in that situation?

Maggie: Yeah. I had lots of fantasies and lots of crushes, and I would admire women from afar, even women I knew in real life. Colleagues or just friends, I always had like crushes on women. But I always knew that I was going to get away. That one day it would happen, I would leave this marriage, and because I had no qualifications I started a process ready for that day. So when I was, I think that was 32, my children were about 13 or 14 I think, 12, 13, so I had got a little part time job. I had no income, and my ex-husband was very tight with money. I remember once I was saying to him, I need more house keeping money, and it took about two weeks or three weeks and eventually he sat down with his calculator out, he said, I can let you have £2.34 a month extra. So this was the kind of man I was married to.

Maggie: So I had my family allowance, which I think in those days, was £50 a month, and I thought I've got to get some qualifications, I didn't know how intelligent I was. I knew I was bright, I just felt I was bright, so to take an O Level was £50 , that was part-time, during the day.



Marguerite: That's quite a lot of money.

Maggie: Yeah. It was. I mean that was a lot of money. But, I thought, well it's 50 pounds, I might not pass, because I didn't know. So I saw an advert for Mensa, and they were advertising the invigilated IQ test for £25. I thought, "Okay, I'll take that." So I took that, found out that I was bright so I then paid for one O Level, I got an O Level in English, because I thought that would be easy, got my O Level and then I got a little part-time job in a warehouse, literally at the bottom of my road, 200 yards away, between the hours of 10 to four, and the kids were in school. And during the school holidays, because they were about 13, 14. The neighbour would just keep an eye on them, so that's only for four hours and that's fine. So with that money, I paid for a few more O Levels, I think I got in the end five, six O Levels.

Maggie: Then, I thought right, I'm going to start studying with the open university, I didn't bother with A levels, and I could pay for the open university, which I paid for with my measly little wage. I remember him saying to me, one day, "You're trying to get away from me, aren't you?"

Marguerite: How interesting.

Maggie: Yeah. Because he did, had to be down there, under his thumb. I just poo poed him. But now I was well into my 30s, 35, 36, started studying with the Open University for a sociology degree. So did two years with them. And I have to say, I take my hat off to the Open University, because they were amazing, because I didn't know how to write an essay. I didn't know about sentence structure, I went to a secondary model school, they didn't teach you anything. So I learnt all about the basics of how to write an essay, how to write! So I'm so grateful to the open university.

Maggie: And then when I was 39, I thought, right I'd always wanted to be a nurse, so I thought I'll try for nurse training. I have been turned down before, and I know, and this was in Oxford, back in the 60s nurses were then frightfully middle class and living in Oxford, I applied for nurse training, I came from the council estate, there was no way you could... I couldn't even get an interview, I got an informal interview they didn't even take any further.

Marguerite: Extraordinary.

Maggie: I know, that's what it used to be like. It was an awful world to live in, never the misogyny and the racism and homophobia, it was just awful. I applied again for nurse training and I got in, because my Open University. So it showed I could study. I remember the interview being the whole day, and they observed you interacting with other people who wanted to be nurses. I got in and I went to university at the age of 39, in Swansea, University of Wales. And I got my degree at 42. So, that was September, and my children were 16 and 18, and I thought right, so from the age of 32 to 42, I'd been aiming for this moment when I could leave him.

Marguerite: Fantastic.



Maggie: Yeah, and I left him. So it was Christmas, beginning of December, and it was a Sunday and I said, "I don't want this marriage to go on anymore, this is it, as far as I'm concerned I don't want to spend another day with you." And he, I think he must have known, not that I was gay, but he knew I meant what I said. And he left, he said, "Okay." And there was no big argument.

Marguerite: He left?

Maggie: He left.

Marguerite: So you didn't have to?

Maggie: No.

Marguerite: Right.

Maggie: I was surprised at that, because I was quite prepared to leave. I didn't really want to, with a 16 year old still at home, because my 18 year old was at uni, but I, as I said much earlier, this man was very tight with his money and his brother used to make jokes about his tightness. He went to a flat in The Marina, on the sea front, that day.

Marguerite: Good lord.

Maggie: Yes. And I remember saying to him, "You've got a flat." And he said, oh no, it's a friends flat, anyway, this is a very long story, but during the course of the divorce proceedings I found out that he had ISA accounts. We had separate bank accounts, he wouldn't let me have a joint bank account and all the rest of it. And he had lots of money, scribbled away, and I had not idea. And he obviously had a second home. So, anyway I didn't care. He went. And that day was the happiest day of my life. It still is the happiest day of my life, and I'd given birth to two children, which is pretty phenomenal.

Maggie: That day, I left him, is still the happiest day of my life. Nothing compares to it. It's like the only analogy I can come up with this, it's like spending your whole life in solitary confinement, in prison, and then being let out. Nelson Mandela, obviously I wasn't in his league but I think I know how he felt.

Marguerite: The door swung open.

Maggie: Oh my god, and the world became technicolour. From being oppressed and black on white, and deeply unhappy. And I've never had an affair with a woman, to being free and I just couldn't believe it. It was wonderful. Then in the January, I told my best friend, it was another nurse, she was a straight friend, and she was so cool about it, so matter of fact, she didn't care. Which is quite phenomenal, because this was the mid 1990s, and people were still pretty homophobic. Although you did have people like boy George, and the other one, Marc Bolan, who were wonderful role models to people. Obviously to all of us, all the LGBT people back in the day.

Maggie: So there's still a chink in this awful brick wall. And also the first same sex kiss was on Brookside between two women-

Marguerite: Oh yes. Beth Jordache

Maggie: Yeah. Yep. So all these little things are making an impact on me. So, yeah, I came out to my best friend and she was fine. Then I came out to my boss at work, I don't know why, I've always felt more comfortable if my boss in employment knows about me, I don't know why it's like a form-

Marguerite: Safer.

Maggie: Yeah, safer, like a form of insurance for some reason. So I told her a few months later and she promptly told everybody else. Which is what the people did in those days, they just thought, "Oh it's gossip, I'll tell everybody else." And then I had some problems in work with one woman in particular saying, "Watch out when you're in a room with Maggie, yeah, keep your knees together, don't bend over." These kind of things, and I reported her. I reported her to my boss, I said, "She's saying these things about me." And in fairness to my boss, the same one who blabbed away, but she went straight to HR-

Marguerite: Absolutely.

Maggie: ... made a formal complaint, this nurse was hauled in front of HR and spoken to, I think she had a black mark on her record, employment record, and lo and behold, who has an affair with another woman two years later, yeah, it's same old story. So there were these little incidents coming out, but I was still out. I wasn't going to go back in that closet, I was going to weather the homophobia and this again, still in Wales, and-

Marguerite: Now what year would this be?

Maggie: That was '95. I came-

Marguerite: Okay.

Maggie: ... out in '95. Oh but now we're going into '96, '97 and people know ... I'm not blabbing out to anybody, because of gossip, people tell everybody don't they?

Marguerite: Yeah.

Maggie: Then homophobic comments would come and I remember going to lunch with one colleague, she was a much junior colleague, she's a health care assistant and I was in charge of the ward, and she said, "What you do is disgusting." I don't know why she brought it up, we were sitting there having our lunch. But she brought it up, and, "What you do is unnatural." And so I said, "Well not to me it's not unnatural, it's the most natural thing in the world." By then I had, had an affair.

Maggie: I had started embarking on my other life. I'll talk about that as well, because back in Wales, probably it was Diva magazine, because Diva was launched I think in 95, 96.

Marguerite: Yeah. Yeah.

Maggie: I used to have to drive to London to have to buy it, I used to go to Gay's is the Word to buy Diva magazine...

Marguerite: Oh, my goodness.

Maggie: ... because you couldn't buy it in Wales, you couldn't even buy it in Bristol, so I used to come to London. I used to combine it with trips to the Art Galleries and whatever exhibitions...

Marguerite: [crosstalk 00:20:11].

Maggie: .... so I would just drive up and have a great time. Buy a Diva magazine, saw an advert in Diva magazine, and there was a local little group of lesbian women in Swansea, which is where I was living, and I met them and they were lovely. We met in a, I think it was a friends house, because the Quakers, you know. I'm not religious at all, but thank god for the Quakers.

Marguerite: The Quakers...

Maggie: They are exceptional.

Marguerite: ... have been very supportive, all sorts of places. Certainly in New York as well.

Maggie: Oh yes, I'm sure.

Marguerite: Way back in the day...

Maggie: Really.

Marguerite: ... it was the first place any politicized gay organization, they were allowed to use the Friends Meeting House for free.

Maggie: [crosstalk 00:20:49]. Yeah. Wow.

Marguerite: In order to help.

Maggie: Why were they like that, all the other religions it's still so hateful, but the Quakers they're wonderful people.

Marguerite: I don't know, there is something very deeply respectful of each person.

Maggie: Human beings.

Marguerite: Yeah.

Maggie: Yeah, so we met. We used to meet on a Sunday. It was very informal, just chatting, coffee, we had the papers, it was lovely. So of course I got started to meet women, start to have affairs with women, and I'm afraid I did make up for lost time, I did have quite a lot of fun for quite a few years. But I think it must have been in 2000, 2001 I became particularly friendly with a lesbian couple, and we used to go out for lunch, but things started happening. The local paper printed a letter saying, in fact this was later on, but in 2002, but this letter said that all gay people should be hanged.

Maggie: And I remember-

Marguerite: Oh great.

Maggie: Yeah, thinking, oh, well that's about enough, but the local paper printed it. And my two friends, they were chased down the street by a gang of youths, being screamed out, faggots and all the rest of it, they had, I assume it's dog faeces, pushed through their letter box. And there was this, and I thought this was not a safe place to be, and just as a coincidence, I had a school reunion. And met an old school friend there, but we weren't the best friends at school but we knew each other. She was living in London and she owned a house and she had a mortgage and she always had a lodger. So she was an actress, so she never had a stable income but she needed lodgers with stable incomes. And she was looking for a lodger. For about a year this went on.

Maggie: It took me about nearly a year to make the decision. And we became great friends. Every time I came to London, I would stay with her. She was a straight woman, and so one day I said, 'Well, maybe I can be your lodger?' Because she lived 5 minutes from a major teaching hospital in London, and she, "Yeah, yeah, why not, we'll give a trial." So I only initially moved in, I bought my car up or a parking permit for 3 months, ended up staying for 8 years. But the point is, I left Swansea in 2002 to move to London. My god what a difference that made.

Maggie: The day I moved to London, I felt I had come home. I'd never, ever referred to Wales as home. I didn't refer to Oxford as home for some reason, but London was always home.

Marguerite: Because this was the real you.

Maggie: Oh yeah, and I could be me, and people didn't care, and I was out in work and nobody cared. I never heard another homophobic remark in work, ever. Didn't even hear racist remarks, which I regularly heard down in Wales, xenophobic, Islamophobic, I didn't hear any of them. People are so accepting, because London is of course so multicultural, and the NHS in particular is extremely multi cultural. My patients were from all over the world.

Marguerite: And by then there had been enough people out-

Maggie: Yes.

Marguerite: ... in enough different contexts and...

Maggie: Yes, far more-

Marguerite: ... people were beginning to have met people themselves.

Maggie: Yes, they would. Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Marguerite: Rather than just seeing those stereotypes on TV.

Maggie: Yeah, they were meeting real people. So hearts and minds were being changed. Not back in Wales.

Marguerite: Can I ask you, when you would go to Gay's the Word, and pick up Diva, were you dappling in reading some of the other stuff that was there?

Maggie: Oh yeah, I picked up novels.

Marguerite: Sort of Novels and-

Maggie: Yeah I picked up the women's novels, the romance novels. And I remember reading, famous model, oh god, set in a cabin in the snows, Katherine it's like a seminal piece of work, everybody will know it. It's a bit-

Marguerite: Well, An Emergence of Green.

Maggie: Yes.

Marguerite: Katherine Forrest.

Maggie: Yeah, Katherine Forrest. And of course the films were coming out, all these wonderful lesbian films. There weren't many, but you just remember them. It was just a wonderful feeling knowing that I was where I belonged. That I was in a world I belonged to and also interestingly, back in Wales before moving up here, looking again in Diva magazine, there was an advert for, it was called WimWim, it was Wimbledon Women, a lesbian group, interestingly started by two transgender ladies.

Marguerite: Oh, okay.

Maggie: So I knew about this group, in Wimbledon, and I was living in Tooting so I was very close. So I joined this group and again it was a wonderful group, something like 400 members, believe it or not, from all over South West London. We'd go to a pub, I think it was once a month we'd have a quiz night, which it was very popular, 70 or 80 of us would be there. So again, I got to know all these wonderful women. Made great friendships. So I was in this world of where I wanted to be. Everything was hunky dory. So that's my life basically.

Marguerite: Now were these predominantly social gatherings?

Maggie: Yes. They were in the pub.

Marguerite: Was there any political aspect to any of them?

Maggie: No, never anything political.

Marguerite: Right.

Maggie: No, that was interesting. That was purely for socialization. Networking. We went on walks together, and I actually went to Lesbos, with a small group of them, so there was that. It was definitely a social thing, I've never, ever been politically involved, ever.

Marguerite: Right.

Maggie: I am now, I'm not really involved in politics directly, but I take a great interest in politics.

Marguerite: Right.

Maggie: But I've never been on a feminist, you know.. doing things with women in that way, politically, never done that.

Marguerite: Gay pride?

Maggie: No, never done-

Marguerite: Not even with WimWom?

Maggie: No, never did gay-

Marguerite: All right. Okay.

Maggie: We didn't have pride in Wales. Cardiff Castle would hold a small private event which I did go to, but there was no pride events, no pride parades, it didn't happen, they were only in London.

Marguerite: But once you came to London?

Maggie: No, yes, sorry, when I came to London, yes, then with the WimWom group, actually yeah, we went to Preston Park in Brighton, that was a yearly event, and I loved it. I know it's different now, I think you have to pay. It was free then, and it was packed, but the camaraderie was wonderful. I remember the very first time I walked into a gay bar, this is off on a slight tangent, back in '96 my sister phoned me, and I could hear, because she lived in Oxford and I was in Wales, and I could hear the trepidation in her voice. She had something to tell me, and I said, "Yeah, hi, what's up?" She said, "Oh I'm dating a woman."

Marguerite: [crosstalk 00:27:38].

Maggie: Now this is my twin sister, but we're not identical, but we are just fraternal twins.

Marguerite: Fascinating.

Maggie: Yeah, I know. And we're 42, and I said, "I'm gay." So we came out to each other on the phone. I thought why couldn't we say this to each other when we were 16, we could have supported each other.

Marguerite: Yeah.

Maggie: Sorry I lost my thread of thought there, because I meant my sister, so I go-

Marguerite: About pride and where you would go with the various social groups and what have you?

Maggie: Yeah, and WimWom was wonderful, so I go into a gay pub, so I went to a gay pub for the very first time with my sister, it was in Oxford, it was-

Marguerite: That's amazing.

Maggie: ... yeah, with her partner, this girl who she was dating, she later married, they've been together now for about 20 odd years, and they live in France.

Marguerite: Extraordinary.

Maggie: But anyway, she took me to a gay pub, it was a women's only night, so there are only about a dozen women in this pub, that was my very first introduction to gay women, so it was less than a year after coming out, And, I remember walking into that pub and seeing all these gay women, and just, I suppose it's like being told you've won the lottery. It was just a wonderful feeling. Finally, I have arrived, I'm in a room with other women who are like me. And it was fantastic.

Maggie: That was before I even found the local group in Swansea, and before coming to London, so that's what it was like.

Marguerite: Now what's happened in terms of the sort of time line to do with your children, during all of this?

Maggie: Right, yeah. Then-

Marguerite: Because the one was at Uni-

Maggie: Yeah.

Marguerite: ... then there was one 16 year old when you were liberated from the husband.

Maggie: Yes.



Marguerite: But, do they know?

Maggie: Yep, they do. And I did tell them.

Marguerite: When?

Maggie: I didn't tell them straight away, because I was too scared. Because I did have friend whose children rejected her when she came out. And we all know parents reject their children. I didn't think they would reject me, but they were Welsh, they were welsh born and welsh raised, although they were raised by me. I have to say, one little thing I'm very proud of, in all those years I was in the closet, I was never homophobic. A lot of people do that. Project-

Marguerite: Over compensate.

Maggie: Yeah, I never was, in fact I always spoke up for gay people, so I'm quite proud of that. But anyway, so as for my kids, it took about a year, and I told them. I didn't tell them together, I told them separately. I told my daughter and she just shrugged and said, "Oh well I notice you only spend time with women, so I'm not surprised." She didn't care, she just didn't think it was anything. Which is a shame in a way because I don't think she has and still to this day, has no idea what it was like, how awful it was for me, because she's still young. They just think everything's hunky dory in the world and gay people are accepted.

Maggie: And my son, he said, "Oh, there's cool." Because being Welsh, he said "There's cool" and said, "Yeah, what's for tea?" He just didn't care. It just wasn't an issue, and now that they've seen what I do in the last couple of years, they're so on my side. They're actually quite proud of me, they told me that, they don't-

Marguerite: That's wonderful.

Maggie: Yeah. And they're fully supportive and even their friends, somebody told my son, "Your mum's awesome." He said, "I can't believe you're her son." And things like that, so that's lovely to have that support because that's all that matters. There is more to the story, because I retired in 2012, just before 60, because I had to retire because of ill health a few months before 60. I didn't want to retire at 60 I wanted to carry on because I knew the state pension had been delayed, financially I needed to carry on, but my health wasn't strong enough. So I left and became a pensioner. I was worried about what what am I going to do all day?

Maggie: So I joined the University of the Third Age, which is of course for retired people, so I entered the world of my demographic, which is old, white, British people, and my god are they a homophobic lot. Within a few weeks of joining them I was on a coffee morning, and I do have to say, I do like U3A I'm on the committee, and I really do like U3A. But, they have some fundamental problems with their membership, with the attitudes. So, right on with the coffee, but then we'd been somewhere, cinema group I think,

and somebody said "Oh, so and so's come out as gay." Some celebrity. And there was about 8 to 10 of us sitting around the table, and the woman sitting next to her said, "Yes, isn't that disgusting?"

Maggie: And then one by one, like sheep, they all tutting and, "Oh yeah, why do we have to know about that? Who cares, they shouldn't come out and tell us all this." And I'm just sitting there, and I think, "Mm." And they didn't know I was gay, because I'd only just joined, and I thought, "Okay, I'm going to have to go back in the closet." For me to be part of this group, it's either this, be part of this group, because I didn't know what else I could do, or sit at home and watch day time soaps all day and just wonder the streets on my own.

Maggie: And I'm a very social person, so I thought okay, so I went back in the closet, until two years ago. So for five years, I'm in U3A, I constantly hear homophobic comments, I also hear racist comments, Islamophobic comments, xenophobic comments and I haven't heard these comments since coming to London.

Maggie: But I hear them all over again, I heard the last one a week ago.

Marguerite: But why, what happened in between you being happily out and with groups like WimWom and all of that, to being in a situation where all you had was U3A? What had happened in that interim?

Maggie: WimWom had disbanded because online there were apps for dating and social things, and I just drifted away from WimWom. Most of them were working women, and I was now a pensioner. And the women tends to be a younger profile, younger demographic, and of course dating apps are aimed at young women and I just thought I'm getting old. And the LGBT world, as I'm sure you're well aware of, is aimed at young people. Especially for men, it's all about being young, all the groups. I don't want to go clubbing at 60. What else am I going to do? I had never heard of ODL. Was ODL around? Yeah. Of course it was.

Marguerite: Yes. Yes.

Maggie: Eight years ago, yeah, I didn't know about ODL until seven years ago, so U3A was all I could find to join. So I joined. But five years in, so this is two years ago-

Marguerite: Well why wasn't Diva telling you more about what might be going on, or was all of that very young too?

Maggie: Yeah, I wasn't buying Diva anymore.

Marguerite: Right.

Maggie: Because it was mainly adverts, and I remember going on a website called, after London's slang for queer, what ever queer-

Marguerite: Gingerbeer .

Maggie: Gingerbeer.

Marguerite: It's Gingerbeer.

Maggie: Gingerbeer.com or whatever it was, and I remember I met some women through Gingerbeer but again, that was a very young demographic. It was all about clubbing, going out for drinks in the evening, I don't drink, I'm a complete teetotaler, I have been since I was a young woman, I don't like alcohol. So the whole clubbing, bar, getting drunk, it doesn't appeal to me. I'd rather go to a library or an art gallery with a group of women.

Marguerite: There's nothing more boring than being the non-drinker amongst people who are really tanking it.

Maggie: No, exactly. Yeah. And getting drunk, it's just not me. So I just didn't have anything really. I did find that as I got older, there was nothing for me as a gay woman. The scene is very much for young people, so that's why I say, "Thank god for Opening Doors." So, the reason I came back out..what gave me the strength to come back out, was watching young you tubers, LGBT you tubers, helping their peers, because still it's difficult to be gay when you're young as we know. But they were saying, "It doesn't matter what other people think." It just dawned on me, that although old people don't like me, they even hate gay people, young people don't. Young people are on my side. I thought, "Sod it, I'm not going to spend the rest of my life in a closet because of a bunch of old bloody people."

Marguerite: Yeah.

Maggie: So I came out to a couple of U3A people, just quietly came out to a couple. Then I found, maybe it was through Diva, I can't remember, I found OLN, Older Lesbian Network, they were having a meeting, so I went along to one meeting. I wasn't really my cup of tea, I found it very formal. But there was a woman there who belonged to a local coffee group in Wandsworth, a Borough I now live in, she said, "We've got a local LGBT group, over 50s." So I went along to that, and I really like that. I still go.

Marguerite: Nice.

Maggie: It's lovely. And then the same woman, she mentioned, Opening Doors London, she said you should join Opening Doors London, I said, "Okay." So I now discovered Opening Doors London, which I'd never heard of. So I joined Opening Doors. Just as a member and I was out. Then I became an ambassador, because again somebody said, "You should be an ambassador." So I thought, oh yeah, that sounds okay. So I became an ambassador, so what I did, and it took me about a week to think about this, I didn't just jump in and do it. I thought, okay, I'm going to write to U3A, they have a quarterly magazine, there are 400,000 members in the whole of the U.K. it's a worldwide organization. I thought, "I've never seen anything about LGBT." So I went to the editor, I said, "Have you ever printed an article or anything about LGBT?" He said, "Oh well we did once do an article about Brighton a few years ago."

Maggie: And that was it. So I said, okay, would you mind putting a little piece in the magazine about me, and how I found it difficult to be an open gay woman and the homophobia I received in U3A?

Marguerite: Good for you. Amazing.

Maggie: And I should also mention, that I'm now an ambassador for a lovely charity in London, for older LGBT people. I wanted to raise the profile. And I will say he was lovely, and he was on board with that. As I said, it took me a week, then I said "Okay, put my photo in the article, put my email in the article." Because I knew if you have this little dry article about a charity, it's going to be ignored. With a photograph of a member of U3A saying, "I'm out and I'm queer and I'm part of the community that's hidden in U3A." And also my reason for my email, I knew that if other LGBT people in U3A saw this, they were not going to write to the magazine.

Maggie: They would need a private email to write to, to reach out to. And had an amazing effect. So the article gets printed, it's half a page, I thought it would be a little small slot, but it wasn't, it was half a page with my photo. Talking about this hostility from members towards LGBT, but hostility, homophobia, whatever. A nice little article, and had quite a response. So, the good and bad, so quite a few people made homophobic comments, wrote letters to the editor, which were published in the following quarterly magazine, which should never have been published.

Marguerite: No, absolutely not.

Maggie: This editor, who was quite naïve, thought it was balance, and my argument was that is-

Marguerite: It's against the law.

Maggie: Yes. And I said to him, I said "There is no counter argument for homosexuality. There isn't one in the law. There isn't one in the law, there isn't one in health, the WHO, psychiatrists no longer class it as a mental illness. The only area left are parts of the church, there is nowhere in society, nothing, that there is no counter argument." I said, "By publishing those letters, that's not balance, that's homophobia."

Marguerite: Yes.

Maggie: And it was a couple of really quite nasty letters, from one woman in particular who said-

Marguerite: I can't believe it.

Maggie: Oh, I can.

Marguerite: In this day and age?

Maggie: It's U3A, old white British.

Marguerite: Extraordinary.

Maggie: British social attitudes, which-

Marguerite: I'm disgusted.

Maggie: ... ODL use, ODL uses statistic in their workshops. 59% of people born in the 1940s think same sex relationships are wrong. I was born in the 50s but it applies to 50s born. That's the demographic of U3A. My last homophobic comment was made last week. I hear them all the time. So, yes, one woman said, "We don't care about Maggie Jones, she should be in the closet. She shouldn't come out. If she wants to be... " I think she actually used the word normal, "She wants to appear normal." I also got personal emails, homophobic, which I expected. I just responded with one line saying, "I'm not justifying myself to you, do not contact me again." I just ignored them.

Marguerite: It takes tremendous strength to do that, Maggie.

Maggie: Somebody else said that, do you know why I think it's coming from a place of anger, because I've been a subject to homophobic comments for 50 years, since the age of 15, 14 even. And I'm sick and tired of it. I'm sick and tired of my generation, I'm sick and tired of old, white, British people. They're judgmental horrible nasty attitude. And they need to be told about it, they need to be hauled across the coals.

Marguerite: Who reached out in a good way?

Maggie: I had well over 100 emails from people all over the U.K. U3A members. Initially within a week I had 103 emails. 97 were in the closet, and why were they in the closet, because of homophobic comments in their U3A. Only 3 people were not in the closet and they were openly gay, and they're the only ones who didn't hear homophobic comments, because they were out.

Marguerite: And were they men?>

Maggie: Yes. I'm sure there would have been homophobic comments, but they're being said behind their backs. It would never have been said to their faces, all those people say homophobic comments that I face. So I started a database for these people, because they all said they were lonely. Some of these letters made me cry, especially the rural people. They were so isolated. So I started a database and I started writing. I said, "There's two more people live in your county, they're not that close, but they're in the county. So do you want me to pass on your email?" So I did this.

Maggie: But it was a very slow laborious method. It was also tiring with GDPR to continually be asking people, do you want me to blah, blah. It was time consuming, and it was bogging me down, so I thought okay, and a couple of people suggest Facebook and I hate Facebook, but I have to concede that Facebook is good for particular groups. So I started a group on Facebook back in December, and told all these 100 people, "Join Facebook, and start talking to each other without me having to be the middle man." So we've

now got 130 members, we initially got something like 70 or 80 people within a month. Somebody joined last night, I think he maybe a trans person, and he said last night, he joined, put a post up and said, "Thank goodness I've found this group. You're going to help me and I'm not losing my own sanity."

Maggie: About a month ago, another person, and again another trans person, a lady wrote and said "This group has saved my life it's so important to me." And I have disproportionately more trans people join then you would expect. Is it 1% within the LGBT community, I'm not sure? But I think it's more like 10% in the group, so I'm so pleased. In fact somebody joined a week ago and said, "This group is amazing." And he said, "Can I have permission to say that I sell ladies wigs, and it would help your trans members and is that okay for me to put this in a post?" So I responded this morning, saying "Yeah, absolutely fine." Because he's a member of the LGBT community, and I said "Yeah, listen, I don't mind that kind of post, I normally wouldn't allow that kind of advertising, but this is different, because he's helping our community."

Marguerite: It's not just... he's not just looking...

Maggie: Oh no. No.

Marguerite: ... to do sales for a business, he's very much more support than-

Maggie: Absolutely. He's part of our community.

Marguerite: Yes.

Maggie: So the group is becoming really important and online people are, I didn't expect this, but people are using it as an online coffee group. Especially the trans people, because they tend to be spread out. But several people, have met for coffee.

Marguerite: That's lovely.

Maggie: Yeah. Yeah.

Marguerite: That's really super cool.

Maggie: Yeah. I love it, that's why the group was set up, so these very isolated people can meet other people of their demographic, and it's not just for U3A, the Facebook group initially started was a U3A group, it's just just opened to everybody. And my pinned tweet is this group saying, "This group is here, for older isolated people." Or even if you're not isolated just join. It's just a safe place. And in the four or five months it's been going I can proudly say there hasn't been a single negative comment. Everybody's very supportive. People leave such lovely comments, supporting people. It's great. It's a lovely little community. I'd like to see it grow. Because there are so many of us out there, so getting back to ODL, as I'm an abassador with the workshops for health and social care professionals, so I've learnt an awful lot about the 2010 equality act.

- Maggie: About a year ago, U3A invited me to their head office, they have a London regional meeting. And they invited me to speak up about what I'm doing, because I'm trying to get U3A to be more diverse. It's too white and too middle class, and too British. So I spoke, gave this little talk, gave my own personal story about what it was like growing up being gay and pretending to be straight. And it had quite an impact. There were about 50 people in the room from all the various U3A's of London. One person stood up and made a, I don't know if it's homophobic, make a derogatory remark, she's like, "I don't see why you need your own group."
- Maggie: I didn't have to say anything, they all just leapt on her, and put her in her place. Some people say, "Well, we have a group for grandparents, we have a group for people who only speak French." And even the U3A is set up as a separate group from society for a particular demographic. So they just shot her down. But on the back of that I was also asked to speak to other groups. Smaller sub committees to talk about inclusion and diversity, because I'd become quite knowledgeable, thanks to the workshops I do with Jim. So I spoke to a couple of sub committee groups about how to make U3A more diverse, how to open up and to attract more diverse people?
- Maggie: And about three weeks ago I spoke to the whole of the U3A, in on particular Borough, so 100 people in the room, and I talked about diversity and inclusion, and I used slides, and I showed them the comments, I had them up on slides, the comments that U3A people have made to me, about LGBT people. And they were horrified. I told them again my personal story, I told them about coming out, in the U3A. I told them about being back in the closet in U3A, and they were horrified. They would actually gasp, and I thought, "this always gets me about straight people, that they're all so shocked, really, there's still homophobia?"
- Maggie: But anyway, it was a very, very good meeting and a couple of my U3A members who were, because I've got a London U3A LGBT group set up, set up about a year ago we got 40 members, they were there, because they belonged to that U3A and they said afterwards, "That was great." And they said, "You could hear a pin drop." Because when you talk about your personal story, that just breaks barriers down. One woman came up to me, she had tears in her eyes, she said her son is gay and he'd gone through what I'd gone through, and everybody was very positive. Not a single negative remark.
- Marguerite: Fantastic.
- Maggie: Yeah. So, that's what I'm doing, I'm just chipping away in my own little way, but it comes from a place of anger. It's not because I want to wave the flag for the LGBT world.
- Marguerite: Right.
- Maggie: I want, old white British people to come on board with the idea that we're not perverts, that we're not unnatural, and we're not a threat to anybody, and we're boring like everybody else. As I said to this group, I said look I go



shopping in Tesco's, I catch the bus, I use my local library. I'm just like everybody else. The fact that I'm gay is irrelevant to my character.

Marguerite: Except for the prejudice and...

Maggie: Yeah, absolutely.

Marguerite: ... bias, and the homophobia, and the things that impact on your life.

Maggie: Yes. Yeah.

Marguerite: Like everyone else except for the way certain people treat us.

Maggie: Yes. Absolutely. I did tell them that, I said, "You're not aware of the effect a single comment can have on somebody. You can worry about it for days, you think about it for days on end, and you just come up with these glib comments, which you don't even really believe half the time." I often said, when I was with the group and somebody said, "Oh. Isn't that disgusting." And everybody nodding like donkeys, that's because that's the expected reaction.

Marguerite: Completely unexamined.

Maggie: Yes. But now with-

Marguerite: You're right, it is that herd-

Maggie: Yeah, I mean when I heard that about six, seven years ago, I did say I would, now I would say something, like that coffee group last week, the U3A, one old guy says, "It's not natural." No, what did he say? It's not natural, the usual crap. And I said, "Well, it is if you're gay." And he went um and he started thinking, and he said, "Well, we were put on this earth, man and woman was put on this earth to procreate." I said, "Oh, come on." I said, "Who has sex to procreate?" I said, "did you not..." he was married for 50 odd years, "So every time you had sex with your wife it was to procreate."

Maggie: And you could see him again, "Mm, no, no." You could see his little cogs, come on nobody has sex to procreate, hardly ever, 1% of the time. So, and I was challenging him, and he didn't have an answer. So, I know, he will go away, most of the other people on the table, they will go away, and they will think about that. At the time it's difficult, at the time it can be hostile and people will challenge you and they will be hostile when they're challenging you. But when you come up with the answers, and I've learnt all the answers, they will go away, and they will think.

Maggie: And also, actually, last summer, we have guest lecturers, every U3A has guest lecturers, we have them once a month, they can be absolutely fascinating, we had one man talking about Versailles and he said, so and so, some Prince was gay because his mother dressed him in girls clothes when he was a toddler. So, afterwards, that was a great talk, loved it, went up to him, and I said, "Come on, I said you can't come out with things like that."

I'm very careful who I challenge, because Jim and the workshops in ODL in the workshop say you smile, and you're very low key with the challenges, I said, "Nobody believes that anymore, you can't really say that."

Maggie: Well, he said there are psychiatrists. I said, "No, there not. No psychiatrists will say that." I said, "Being gay is natural, you're born gay. All the evidence seems to point to that." But then he huffed and puffed, but I know he will not make that remark in anymore of his lectures. Well, blow me down, a month later we have another lecturer, guest lecturer, a woman this time, she talks about some aspect of mental health. It was again a fascinating lecture, really interesting, and then she said, she was talking about somebody who's quite high profile in the mental health world. And she said, "Amongst all these oddities, apart from being a gay man..." ah yes, bah, bah, bah.

Maggie: Now, with me on that day was a friend of mine from work who I had kept in touch with, and I was trying to get her to join U3A, she's Sri Lankan. So she's sitting next to me, she's a straight woman, she's sitting next to me, she heard that remark, she looked at me, and she just rolled her eyes. She never, ever came back to a U3A meeting, she didn't join.

Marguerite: Oh, gosh.

Maggie: So again, I challenged the woman, and I said, "You can't say that in a sentence when you're talking about oddities." She said, "Oh, I didn't mean it like that." I said, "but, you did because that's how I took it, so did my friend take it that way." So she was trying to defend herself, but I thought, okay, we'll leave it there. But again, I know that she will not use that sentence in her next lecture. So, that's what I'm doing. Just chipping away and every time I hear a homophobic remark or, and not just that, I have to say, Islamophobic, racist, I challenge them all. I was out last year with a U3A group. We were in Camden, a young woman walked past with a nicab covering her face and the woman next to me said, "Don't you just want to punch her in the eyes, when you see women like that?"

Maggie: So I challenged her, I said, "Well you look-

Marguerite: Shocking.

Maggie: Isn't it. The point is she felt comfortable saying it.

Marguerite: So violent. Yes, exactly so you were going to say, oh yeah.

Maggie: Yeah. I hear this all the time. They think they're with another old white person, so I'm going to agree with them, and I said, "Well, we'll forget about the female on female violence." I said, "Don't even go there with that." I said, "That's her choice it's got nothing to do with you."

Marguerite: So hateful.

Maggie: Isn't that horrible. She's in her 70s, I can't say I hear so many racist remarks but I did have two of my friends who were in ODL, both black, they have joined U3A, they haven't been to any events, and I said, "Why don't you join U3A?" And they said, "Because I heard it's homophobic and I've heard it's racist." In Wandsworth, 25% of the Wandsworth Borough is ethnic minorities, and they are older, because they're the generation that came when Idi Amin kicked them out. So they are the older generation.

Maggie: Only 2% of the demographic is asian minority ethnics, in U3A. I managed to find a woman who gives talks on Indian culture, she came to U3A as our monthly talk, very well received. People enjoyed it so much, they're invited her back to talk about Diwali. So that's me, I got this woman to come and give us a talk. That's me trying to do my bit to get other ethnic people to join, I managed to get a LGBT group started, as I mentioned earlier, with London wide, we meet once a month in China Town. I tried to do the same thing for the black minority ethnic group within U3A, to try to get them to do something, and one of the members, who's an Indian lady, she was keen, took it on, put an email out, but had a poor response.

Maggie: But then there's only a few of them in our U3A. I said, well if you could get the ball rolling we can get it a London wide thing. To try and encourage people from their own ethnicities to come and join, but so far I'm struggling, and she's struggling to get it off the ground. Which is a shame, but anyway, the younger generation, so the people who are 50 are far more open than the people who are in their 60s and 70s. you are starting to see the more open minded older groups. I think that's it. I think we're up to the present day.

Marguerite: What's interesting is, you say that it's from anger.

Maggie: Yeah.

Marguerite: But the anger is a result of injustice.

Maggie: It is, yes.

Marguerite: And therefore it is quite a political thing.

Maggie: Yes, you're right. Yes.

Marguerite: It gives emotion to it, of course there is.

Maggie: Yes. Yes.

Marguerite: And personal aspect, because of course there would be because it's about that very sensitive and important part of oneself.

Maggie: I've been rejected by society for a reason I can't help. I didn't choose to be gay, in fact if I could I wouldn't be gay, I would be straight and I-

Marguerite: Really? Still?

Maggie: Yes. Yes. And I know-

Marguerite: Why?

Maggie: Well I know gay people don't like when people say that, but my life even now would be easier. Well first off I'd probably be with somebody, I wouldn't have gone through 50 years of angst. My life would have been so much happier.

Marguerite: Oh, but you're saying retrospectively...

Maggie: Yes. Retrospectively.

Marguerite: ... you wouldn't have from...

Maggie: from when I was 16-

Marguerite: ... when you were a child in the 50s.

Maggie: Yeah. Yeah. Not so much now, because it doesn't bother me any more.

Marguerite: Okay, that I understand.

Maggie: I am completely okay with being a gay woman. That doesn't bother me.

Marguerite: You wouldn't tomorrow. Change.

Maggie: No. No I wouldn't

Marguerite: Right.

Maggie: Actually no I wouldn't, I'm quite happy being who I am. It is important to me and I quite like it. I quite like being part of this community. But no, so as a young woman. 17 contemplating suicide, oh god Jesus Christ would I switch to being straight. The thing is, a few years ago when I started... for all of those 25 years, when I came out I was, up until coming out I was ashamed of being gay. When I came out, I was no longer ashamed, but I was highly anxious. Very, very anxious about it. And that anxiety stayed with me until I became an ambassador with ODL. I've said this before, I say this in the workshops, thank goodness for ODL, because I am no longer ashamed, I am no longer anxious about being gay. I am completely, 100%, totally relaxed about it.

Maggie: I don't use the word proud, because I know proud comes from being ashamed. I'm just what I am, and I don't have a problem with it. I am pleased that I'm now at a place, and it's thanks to ODL making me completely comfortable about who I am, and it doesn't matter to me, at all. I'm completely, I'm very content, and I'm very happy. Which not a lot of people can say.

Marguerite: No, not at all, it's a gift.

Maggie: I can. Yeah, I can. And although I'm single, I'm quite happy with being, actually I like being single, I'm quite happy with that, because I lead my life how I want. I couldn't do half of this if I was with somebody. Because you're constantly taking somebody else into account, but I feel like I've been let loose now to do activism, I suppose, it is a form of activism isn't it?

Marguerite: But you speak personally, when you speak.

Maggie: Oh yeah.

Marguerite: When you go out as an ambassador or to do with things to do with OTM.

Maggie: Yes.

Marguerite: So it's that amazing combination. You're taking a stand, in terms of what's right.

Maggie: Yeah, absolutely. Yes.

Marguerite: But you're also putting your personal self on the line...

Maggie: Yes. Yes.

Marguerite: ... which is tremendous.

Maggie: I think that's important, because it's all very well to talk about LGBT people in the 2010 equality act, but if there's nothing personal there, it's difficult to relate to, if somebody's standing in front of you saying that they were married for 23 years and hated every minute of it, because that's what society made them do. That reaches out to people, because they will think, "Oh my god, I didn't have to do that." Straight people have never had to think about their sexuality. The world is made for them.

Marguerite: Yes.

Maggie: And I also tell them, our demographic is increasing in size, because people are becoming more honest. And UGov have, one of their surveys three years ago, 1,500 young people aged between the ages of 18 and 24, asked them how they define their sexuality? And 49% said they're not straight. I find that astonishing. So the bisexual community's the fastest growing demographic within the LGBT community. I mean I don't know if this is right but it seems to me that bisexuality is almost the default sexuality of human beings. Which, to me makes sense.

Maggie: So the younger generation, there more of us, and a totally straight person, is only going to be, by the looks of it, 50% of the population. So we can't be ignored. They can't keep ignoring us, when we're such a big demographic. Well, we're as big as them. So we're important and politics needs to reflect that.

Marguerite: Absolutely.

- Maggie: Which is why I'm please that the Women's Equality minister, who I think is Penny Mordaunt, has now appointed an LGBT advisor, who I know is Dr Mathew Brady, because I'm following him on Twitter, so I'm so pleased about that and one thing I have to say, apart from ODL, ODL gives me a voice. Twitter has given me a voice, and twitter of course is worldwide. One thing I like about twitter, it informs and educates me, because I follow politic punters, I follow academics, and I've met quite a few academics at conferences held by ODL and workshops, and we follow each other on twitter.
- Maggie: So I learn from them, and I also, as I've said, it gives people like me a voice, old, white, females, don't have a voice I didn't have a voice when I was 18. Back in the 60s, in the early 70s, women were, in this country, were deemed as totally unimportant. You just weren't part of the equation, you weren't listened to, didn't have a voice I now have a voice and twitter has given me that voice. Because I don't want to be a invisible, that's why in my bag I carry a little rainbow badge.
- Maggie: Because I am not going to be invisible. Because there are old gay people. We're not all young, we're not all flamboyant, and as you know, as we all know, all gay women are not all butch. Some of them are like me, very boring to look at, very average, I don't think there's anything about me that says I'm gay. And it's the same for many men. Not all men are flamboyant and effeminate. They're just regular, ordinary, boring looking people like me. That's why I wear a badge. So somebody ordinary looking like me, is part of this community. And I'm proud to be a part of that community.
- Maggie: I'm not proud personally, but I'm proud to be a part of this community, because we're doing so much politically, and we're not being trodden on anymore, and we're speaking up for people who are being trodden on, like Chechnya, and places like that. If it wasn't for us in the U.K. and Brunei, for gods sakes, what the hell is going on with Brunei, thank goodness for people in the U.K. and America and western countries that we can speak up for our poor brothers and sisters in Brunei, who are being trodden on. So I think it's important that we speak out, and ODL does that and now we've got the Women's and Equality minister as well, speaking up for us. So things are looking much better.
- Maggie: We can't be complacent though of course, because you got idiots like Trump.
- Marguerite: Exactly.
- Maggie: He's allowed all these other creeps to crawl out from under the rock and he's given them a voice, and he's given them permission to speak up, we all know this. And Brexit, that's allowed people to speak up. It's allowed all the xenophobes to come out and speak up. So we can never be complacent, so I think it's important and we have a voice and all of us, speak up. And I'm just gobby, I'm lucky enough that I'm a confident person and I can speak, and so I think, yeah, I've got a duty to do and that's-

Marguerite: You've earned that

Maggie: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Marguerite: Earned and learned.

Maggie: Yeah, I did, yeah. Yeah. But you just get fed up with it. Like I said, 50 years of homophobia wears you down, and it just makes me angry and pushes me, propels me to do something.

Marguerite: Is there anything that you feel that you haven't included, that you would want to say in terms of context stuff, that visibility of lesbians in the past half century?

Maggie: Yeah, we've always been invisible and the same for men, but for women, we've had to get married, and we've had to have our kids come along, and there's nothing wrong with having kids, obviously. But we've just been hidden and it's not fair, and I know that there are still women and men who are lesbian or gay, who are still married to a member of the opposite sex, and are as miserable as sin, and they're still out there. I just think that's a legacy of being born in the 40s and 50s. And on top of that, people go on about the 60s being great, yeah, the music was great, nothing else was.

Maggie: Women could get raped and sexually abused and nobody cared. Nobody got punished. The police would laugh at you, they said, "Well, you were wearing a short skirt what did you expect?" And that was the pervading attitude. Racism was rife, you'd have no Blacks, whether it was a B&B or room to let, no Blacks, no Irish, no Dogs. And xenophobia, and the awful sitcoms that used to be out, Love Thy Neighbour, and Alf Garnett, gay men were ridiculed.

Marguerite: Yes.

Maggie: If you saw one on a program, they were always ridiculed, you never saw a gay woman.

Marguerite: No. No. Exactly.

Maggie: Ever, they'd have no profile at all. So it was only gay men who had any kind of profile and they were just held up to ridicule, to be laughed at, you know the carry on films. That was what I grew up in, a hateful, hateful demographic.

Marguerite: Did you ever have a sense that people like Dusty Springfield...

Maggie: Oh yes.

Marguerite: ... might be an icon and a possible-

Maggie: I was aware of Dusty Springfield, and I was aware back in the 70s I think, that her and Madeline Bell were supposed to have been a couple, but I was



never aware of Dusty Springfield saying anything. I know now that she did say something about, she was attracted to men and women, but I wasn't aware of that. I do remember, I think it was Alain Delon, who was French film star, and I think it was him, and I was about 17, maybe a bit younger, I'm reading in the paper that he'd been caught with a man, and he said, "So what, love is love."

Marguerite: Great.

Maggie: And that-

Marguerite: So French.

Maggie: Yes. Yes. I've never forgotten that. So that spoke to me, and that gave me strength. Though that, and I've always used the analogy, as a young person, back in those days, there was a massive banquet going on, lots of people sitting at the banquet, all straight. Straight peoples banquet, straight people sitting there, and me, and I'd be a tiny little speck in the carpet and 100 yards away, there'd be another gay person, and every now and again, a little speck, a little piece of food, a crumb of food would fall off the table, I think it's probably the foxes, remember the foxes children's house, you'd get these little crumbs falling down, a taste of honey, and you'd run over, grab it, and you'd hold onto it, while all these people feasted on their wonderful heterosexual smug world.

Maggie: And that's the analogy, I've always had that analogy in my head, all my life.

Marguerite: That's very powerful.

Maggie: Yeah. But it's not like that now, because we're now at the banqueting table. We might only be one person, but we're at the banqueting table and we're eating with all the smug straight people. Yeah, it's about time. But we still have to do it. I think complacency is our enemy. And I've seen complacency within LGBT people. Especially young people, and I remember speaking to two, the young you tubers I ended up meeting who propelled me to come out, back out the closet, and they'd never heard of Section 28. I thought, "My god, they're in their 20s and they've never heard of Section 28."

Maggie: A Tory MP, a woman, said about two weeks ago, she wanted to bring Section 28 back. So-

Marguerite: Yes. Yeah.

Maggie: So we've-

Marguerite: Absolutely.

Maggie: And young people can be a bit complacent. They can take it all a bit for granted.

Marguerite: And things are only based on legislation.

Maggie: Absolutely.

Marguerite: [crosstalk 01:09:09].

Maggie: Depends which government we have here. And the EU protects that legislation. Rape in marriage was in EU, not being sacked for being LGBT that's an EU directive. I'm very well aware that young people don't all have it easy. And I was at an ODL workshop a few months ago, somewhere in South East London, in a theatre pub, and the bar staff were there, so we're doing our own thing, and I stood up and did my little piece, and when we were clearing up, one of bar staff came over to me, a young man, he put his arms around me, he had tears in his eyes, and he said, oh I heard what you said, he said I'm 22, and I'm in the closet. Nobody knows I'm gay.

Maggie: A young Muslim man. I just felt so sorry for him, but what I managed to do was, I spoke to one of the other guys, who lived locally, who did the workshop with us, he went back a few days later, spoke to this young man, and he's brought him into a network of support.

Marguerite: Fantastic. Yeah. Because they do exist. But you need to find them.

Maggie: Yeah. Yeah. They do. He probably wasn't aware, but I know there are Muslim LGBT groups, well we march for pride, I think they're the bravest. I look at them, because I always watch pride, and I just think, "My god, you're so brave to be high profile and say I'm Muslim and I'm gay. Good for you." Because it's still tough, it's still tough for young people. Even for Muslim people, even for white, British people who are living in a... They still find it tough because-

Marguerite: You risk having your family reject you.

Maggie: Absolutely.

Marguerite: That's a very high price.

Maggie: Yeah, and school kids, they still use gay as a slur.

Marguerite: [crosstalk 01:10:47].

Maggie: "Oh that's so gay." School kids do that even today. So for a young 14, 15-

Marguerite: Meaning it's broken or rubbish or-

Maggie: That's derogatory. I think, "Oh my god." Mind you I did have a workshop a few weeks ago, a ODL workshop and two teachers there, who were both gay, who do have a network. They're doing workshops in school to help young gay people in school, so I thought, "Well that's good." So the education system are doing something about it. Because that's a hostile place to come out as gay. School, crikey. Imagine some young trans kid, and Mermaids, I've had a lot of flack from lesbians about Mermaids. But I think,

"No, I'm okay with mermaids." And I'm so pleased because Prince Harry has spoken up in favour of mermaids, last week.

Maggie: So I thought, "Well done." Because I do think the trans community, followed by the bisexual community, still have a lot of animosity thrown at them, as well. From within the LGBT community and I think, "God what's wrong with us? We should be supporting people like that."

Marguerite: Misogamy from gay men.

Maggie: Yeah. Absolutely. But I'm-

Marguerite: Racism.

Maggie: Yes, and gay and lesbians.

Marguerite: Ageism.

Maggie: Age or ageism, yeah.

Marguerite: All those things are within our community and are taboo very often.

Maggie: Yeah, they are.

Marguerite: To talk about.

Maggie: I know of, is it Tinder or where gay men say no Asians to respond. Goodness me, you know. How can you feel comfortable even putting that in your bio? So there's still a lot of work to do.

Marguerite: Huge.

Maggie: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We're another generation away from getting our goals achieved, and that is, as you say, is also political. We have to have the right people in power, we have to vote the correct people into power.

Marguerite: I think there was a time when, in terms of the early gay liberation movement, where people were very aware of needing to know their history.

Maggie: Yes.

Marguerite: Because of the old saying about, you might be inclined to-

Maggie: Yeah.

Marguerite: ... to repeat it, if you don't know it.

Maggie: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

Marguerite: Your history. But it strikes me now that a lot of people learn about things in a quite random way.

Maggie: Yes. Yes.

Marguerite: It's a huge amount of information. But if you don't know to ask the question, you're not going to find the answer.

Maggie: No. No. No.

Marguerite: And there really isn't much in the way if you wanted to quickly teach yourself about gay history. It really... I'm shocked how, not easy, it is.

Maggie: On LMA, London Metropolis Archives, on the Bishopsgate Institute, have got two wonderful archives, gay history archives. On gay history. But then again, people don't know about them. If you don't know about it, you're without power, because that's power. Knowledge is power. History is knowledge, and as a young woman I didn't know that there was a Headway's club in London. I didn't know there was an under world for gay people. No Polari and all the rest, living down in Wales, I didn't know anything about that.

Marguerite: No. Exactly.

Maggie: And it's still the same today. People still don't know that there are groups for young trans people, Mermaids, yes. I didn't know about Mermaids until I went onto twitter. Is the school going to teach about Mermaids? I know, I read this morning on twitter as usual, that the government, it went through the House of Lords, they've now passed a law where RSC, some sex education...

Marguerite: Yeah, Relationship and-

Maggie: Relationship and sex education is going to be taught in schools and it's going to include LGBT relationships. And that's coming into law. So hopefully that will help with young people. Young people need to know that we're out there.

Marguerite: Yes.

Maggie: There are people out there, there are allies out there who can help and will be supportive and they might be in an environment which is anything but supportive. So yes, we need to raise the profile.

Marguerite: And the fact that not everyone, as you say, is young, white, able bodies-

Maggie: Yes absolutely. Disabled.

Marguerite: ... gay, nightclubbing.

Maggie: Yeah, of course, no. I wouldn't even say that was the typical gay person. The disabled community, how do they meet other people, if they're part of an LGBT community? They've got a battle on their hands with their disability, never mind-

Marguerite: Exactly, they might have carers who have to help them.

Maggie: Oh, absolutely, yeah. And we know that there's a problem with carers and homophobia.

Marguerite: <. It's a very big-

Maggie: Yeah.

Marguerite: ... obstacle.

Maggie: Yeah.

Marguerite: What would you say, sitting here, what would you say to the young Maggie? Now.

Maggie: Grow a back bone. Yeah. Yeah. I am quite angry with her, I just think you should... I wish she could have gone to London and just get some strength, and don't care about what people think. Which would have been impossible for me as a 16 year old, because I did care what people think. Grow a back bone. I know that's harsh, but I just think I should have gone to London. I did almost, I got a job, I didn't take it up, with Bourne and Hollingsworth, and they also gave accommodation to their young female staff. I was too scared to go to London on my own. Joining the RAF was different, because you're joining a family and they look after you, and they feed you and clothe you.

Marguerite: Yes, and it's so structured.

Maggie: Yeah. Completely structured. So I didn't have to think. Going to London was a bit... and I wished I had gone to London. And I think I would have found the strength, or the backbone, to come out. I didn't know any gay people when I was young. I never met another gay person.

Marguerite: Well, not one that you knew.

Maggie: No, exactly. I thought.. I did think I was the only gay person on the planet. And then the two people I do meet are being frog marched out with a dishonourable discharge. So, I didn't know anybody. Every rule in the closet, so I just think, if I could have come to London, because most gay people came to London, and I heard stories where people say, "It wasn't too bad for me, I was okay, I was open." They all lived in London. I don't think they realise how hard it was to live in a rural community, or even a town. I lived in Swansea, which is a city. With very, very, backward attitudes. I grew up in a rural environment. I'd just say, "Find a backbone and find some guts and be strong. Go to London." Because London's great. I just love London.

Marguerite: Thank you Maggie.

Maggie: Thank you. Thank you Marguerite.

