

From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Ros Hamner	Date: 06.01.2020 Age: 69
Key issues: Domestic violence. Section 28. Youth work. Lesbian punk. Squatting.	
Narrative summary <p>Ros was born into a working class family and her father was in the army. When he left the forces they moved to a part of Liverpool where they struggled to fit in. Ros began to realise she was attracted to women at about 14 and began a relationship with a girl she had been to school with when she was 16.</p> <p>She suffered a very violent attack in her own home by a sister's boyfriend intent on revenge, but its effect upon her was not fully recognised by her family. She left home to live with her girlfriend and became politically involved with the Labour Party.</p> <p>Ros became a youth worker from her early 20's, she was active around Section 28, as she also felt the impact of this at work, and went to the huge march in Manchester. She and her partner made a close connection with some gay men with whom they went to clubs and pubs to look after each other as they would often be beaten up. There was an ever present sense of underlying violence, but they could be proud about who they were together.</p> <p>When Ros met her new partner, who was in the music scene, she became the manager of a punk lesbian band called Chaos. It was hard work and there was a dark side with homophobic attacks, but it also presented great opportunities, like the time she met David Bowie through friends.</p> <p>Ros came to London in the late eighties and went to live in a squat in Islington. She speaks about how they formed a co-operative and how this all worked. She also relates how the women learnt a lot of practical skills, such as plumbing and electrical works to do them up.</p> <p>She remembers the Lesbian and Gay Centre in Farringdon and talks about the debates around S&M with tensions between feminist theory and private consenting relationships.</p> <p>Ros began further education, ultimately completing her doctorate, always focusing on women's issues. She has recently completed a book that she hopes will be published.</p>	
	Length of interview: 1 hr





Evelyn: 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 Heritage Lottery Fund.

Evelyn: Today is the 6th of January, 2020, and I'm interviewing the wonderful Ros Hamner So, Ros, could you start by telling me a little bit about your early life, and how you came to an understanding of who you really are?

Ros: Yes. First of all, I'm a doctor which, I tend not to use. And, I don't know why. I think that's probably growing up and not being confident about the education system at that time.

Evelyn: Well, you should shout it out, loud and proud.

Ros: Well, I am using it more so now than ever.

Evelyn: Well, Dr. Hamner ...

Ros: Thank you. Yeah, so, I always knew that I was different in a way. Although, I was one of six family, four girls and two boys. I was the fifth in line, second youngest. My dad was in the Army, so I was born in Melton Mowbray on the borders of Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire in the back of an ambulance.

Ros: And, my dad was there, and the thing was, I had a strong connection with him, as well.

Evelyn: It wasn't very usual for men to be there, actually, at the birth in those days, at all.

Ros: No, no, absolutely. Well, because he was in the Army ambulance, he was there when I was born, which was quite ... Anyway, he often talked about it, and I had a very good relationship with him and with my mother, basically. And, when he came out the Army, that's when issues started to happen. When I say issues, I mean, I was confronted with a lot of violence around me where we were living, because it was an over spill area in Liverpool. And, we didn't speak with a Liverpool accent. So, we were ostracised at the beginning when we first went to live there, because we lived in, as I say, an over spill area.

Ros: And, I met my first partner there when I was at school.

Evelyn: So, how old were you then?

Ros: Probably, about 14.

Evelyn: So, roughly what year would this put us?

Ros: Yeah, '64, because I left when I was 16, at '66. So yeah, about 14. It was when I was understanding my identity, and I knew this particular woman who I had a relationship with two years after when I was 16. When I left school. But before then, you know, you

were a group of kids, and you didn't go to school. You went to school, and then you bumped and went to somebody's house.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ros: And, you either messed around with boys, or you messed around with girls. But, that situation was quite ... I felt okay about that. I didn't have an issue, because a lot of your men that were around me ... I used to play football with, as well, and they were very protective.

Ros: So, the violence that was there, which was there in terms of sexual violence as well, you know. Girls doing same things, or wanting to do it, or it being even forced sometimes, the situations, and other girls not. But, I felt I didn't have that, really, but I could see it happening around me.

Ros: Anyway ...

Evelyn: Scary.

Ros: Well, it was, yes. And, at 16, 17, then I started to look at my sexuality a bit differently, and knew that I really liked women and young women. And, they got me who I was. There wasn't anything that I needed to express about myself or anything. And, we embarked on a relationship. This woman that I met then, who we were at school together.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ros: And, that wasn't a very good thing because at the beginning of that, it was very clandestine relationship, obviously. It wasn't okay. But, we were truly, madly, deeply at the time, so we endured lots of things to make sure we saw each other and we had time together.

Ros: And anyway, at the age of 17, leading up to the age of 18, because my birthday was just before the Christmas. And, I was coming up on 17 or 18. It could ... No, '68, I was coming up to be 18. And, we'd been seeing each other awhile. And, I was violently attacked in my home, basically, by a family member's boyfriend. Which, was complete shock, and I suffered a fractured, depressed skull. And, I was in the hospital, and the young woman I was seeing then was one of the people who would visit me quite a lot and be okay with me.

Ros: And then, and at the time, I was working with my father where he was working. He got me a job. So, I was able to have time off while I needed to get over it. Because at first, it was touch and go, basically.

Evelyn: Was it ...

Ros: And, I had the last rites and things like that.

Evelyn: Oh, dear, was it related to your ...

Ros: Well, it was related to a family member who had not told my parents that this was going on with this particular young [crosstalk 00:06:12].

Evelyn: It wasn't to do with you being a lesbian, because that wasn't ...

Ros: No, I mean, well, I don't know, because I was just there at the time to go to stop, because I heard the argument. And, I did know of him, because he obviously used to come to the house and take pictures of me and my own brother. And, I never felt easy with him. But anyway, that's another issue.

Ros: But, that was a big shock because my sister told me that she didn't want to stay with him anymore. And, he was violent towards her. And, I said she should have told my parents, and she didn't. And that day, we were together. We were all going up to the town centre and coming back in the night time, because I was getting ready to go to a party in the room next door to the front door. And anyway, I heard him. He came, and he came with the intention to kill her or anybody who got in the way, basically. They'd found the letter and all [inaudible 00:07:04], and the police came.

Ros: But, and I heard her scream, and I thought he'd hit me mum. Because, she shouted out, me mum. But eventually, anyway, I went out and the door was open, and he attacked me. And, he went out in the hallway, a very small hallway, because we lived in a small new council place. But, it was very vicious, and he hit me quite a few times. About three or four, I think. So, it was ... And, he hit me with an axe, so it wasn't like ... He come intentional [inaudible 00:07:41].

Ros: So, all that went on. And then, it was something that was never talked about in the family after the case. And, he went to prison, and it was not discussed after. And, it was talked about as the accident. And, I kept thinking, it wasn't a bloody accident.

Evelyn: No, that was no accident.

Ros: I had a hole in my head, basically, from it. So anyway, my friends and myself, we decided ... I didn't leave home till I was 21, so that was quite ... For them, people were getting flats. Especially in Liverpool. The socialist government, they were good at that time, finding.. and the council giving you hard to let properties or whatever. And, we lived together. So, we were there for a long time. So that's what consolidated my relationship and my identity. Although, there was always the underlying thing of my partner had come from a very violent background parents, and I'd witnessed a lot of stuff. Because I used to stay sometimes in their house, and I knew her family very well. And, they knew my family. And at one time, there was fighting between the two families. That was awful.

Ros: Anyway, but, my identity was formed a lot then. And, even when we were living together, although there was a bit precariousness around that, politically I was very involved. I started to get involved in the local politics, the Labour party. And find out

about the youth part of that, and I went to marches. And, I got involved with Clause 28, all the things there. And it was very weird. I think it was very strange, because we went up to Manchester for a huge big meeting. And, all the whole crowd of people was shouting, because Sheila out of Brookside was there. And, they were shouting for her, and I was like, this is very odd, the people shouting, "Sheila, Sheila," not the whole basis of the political movement of what was going on.

Evelyn: And, this was Section 28.

Ros: Yes. And, it was very interesting.

Evelyn: Yeah, for the benefit of the tape, Section 28 or Clause 28 was a piece of legislation which prevented local councils from in any promoting homosexuality or the idea of pretended family relationships which involved homosexuals.

Ros: Yes, yeah.

Evelyn: And so, it had a big impact on schools in terms of teachers being afraid to discuss any gay issues.

Ros: And also youth workers. And, I was a youth worker, and I used to have to sign when people wanted to speak to me.

Evelyn: So how did it impact, then, your daily life as a youth worker?

Ros: Well, I worked with a lot of, on a housing estate that was quite heavy, and I worked with a number of youths. And, I'd try and arrange outings even to take them down to the local council places, and lots of different things we did together. But, there was a few young men who worked there. And when I say young, they were probably in their 30's, and I was much younger than them. Then, I was in my early 20's, and they were in their 30's. Yeah, probably.

Evelyn: And, we're in the mid '80's here.

Ros: Yes. Yeah, so I was ... Oh, sorry, yes, yes, yes, but I'd been a youth worker from very young, basically. I'd done different jobs with my father for five years till I was 21. And then, I went into the early 20's being a youth worker.

Ros: And while I was there, I'd witnessed quite a lot of violence from the youth workers, as well, with the young people, you know. And, that was quite interesting for me to watch that, how that happened. So, that's why I was a bit distressed about when the Clause 28 thing happened. And, we still had to sign things about when we met with certain people. And, I'd actually brought up about this young man grabbing the guys from underneath.

Evelyn: All right. Grabbing their private parts.

Ros: Right, like [inaudible 00:12:17], yeah. I was told that they couldn't really take that much notice of me because I was a lesbian, basically. And then, it wouldn't be very objective. I was quite shocked about that. And, that happened a lot during my time as a youth worker.

Evelyn: Was that because a lesbian ...

Ros: Well, they thought I was just against him because he was a male.

Evelyn: Right.

Ros: And he was a straight man. He was married, and he was from the estate where I was working. Well, I wasn't actually from that estate. I was living somewhere else. I was living somewhere else and going to that estate to do my work.

Evelyn: Because at the time, there was the feeling that lesbians were man haters.

Ros: Absolutely, and because also they knew, you know, Greenham was on at that time. And, I'd been there once. We got on a bus to go and I went to the wrong place. Because, where me and my friend went to, they were not speaking, because they'd have certain times where they wouldn't speak at different gates. And the gate we went to was like, no one was speaking. So, that was quite interesting!

Ros: Anyway, yeah, so violence seemed to be quite prevalent in my early 20's and then up to my 30's. And, it continued, really. And, being gay was a struggle. Being a lesbian was.. the word lesbian being used was, I was very fearful of, because for me, it meant something that I was to be ashamed of. And, it wasn't something that you would go about professing to be, because the come backs from that would be physical assault, you know. And I knocked about with three guys, there was me and my girlfriend and three young men, gay young men, and we used to go into the club scene in town. And, we were beaten up every other week. It was quite a violent thing.

Ros: But in the end, I mean, the struggle for us was that we all started to live together in a particular area on an estate. And, we seemed to be able to be with each other and be proud about who we were, and be okay, and take care of each other. Even to go shopping together on a Saturday, and then go to our family's house or whatever, and we'd all meet back again, and then we'd meet at night time in a pub. And, we'd protect each other. But the violence was still there. The underlying violence was terrible, really.

Evelyn: So, you kind of created a gay family to ...

Ros: Yes, absolutely.

Evelyn: ... to look after each other. And, what was the scene like in Liverpool then? Were there many places to go?

Ros: It was good fun... Yeah, there was a few. And, we worked out which clubs you could go to that were straight first. And then, you could get in there and go through the back of the clubs to get to another one, which would be the gay one at the end.

Evelyn: Oh.

Ros: And then, nobody would see you get in, which was protective of who you were, as well.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ros: And, my first go in to the club scene is while I was taken by two gay men. And, they would knock on the door, and then it would be opened like that. And then, a guy would ask us, the bouncer, and then they would let us in. And that was weird.

Evelyn: It was peephole opening?

Ros: Yeah, a little wooden thing on the door that would pull back.

Evelyn: I saw it, yeah.

Ros: And that was brilliant, actually, because then, we felt really that you were very free once you were inside there and you were protected.

Evelyn: So, paint me a picture of that first time you went with those guys, what did it look like? What did it feel like?

Ros: Well, it was quite incredible because the guys there was, he was an incredible dancer, one of them, and very well known. He had quite a well known name in Liverpool. And, him and there was a young man that we were with, took us and we were a bit nervous, a bit frightened, because when we were in the pub first and they were saying, "Listen, we're going to go to this place," you know, "and you can come." And I was like, oh wow, this is a bit like, we have to be careful about how we're going to be, if we're going to be seen going down there.

Ros: But anyway, we went, and there was a few women, but not many. And then, we started going there quite a lot, meeting lots more people. And then, it just grew and grew and grew. And then, we didn't ... because the clubs were spread about in the middle of straight clubs as well, my sister's family were part of the club scene, as well, so some of it we had to be very careful about. And, some of it, you just mentioned the name and you would get in anyway. So, there was a bit of not okay, but okay.

Ros: We learnt to live in the area and go to the club scene, and enjoy it. And then, we started going up to Manchester as well, back and forth.

Evelyn: So, were you not out to your family at this stage?

Ros: Yes, I was out from when I was really young.

Evelyn: Mm, and how did they ...

Ros: And to my mother, who would not tell my dad, though. Because, she used to say, because I had a habit of when we would sit around the table, when we'd been to a club in the night before, I was very excited about telling them when we had our Sunday dinner, "Oh, I met this guy last night, Mum, and he took us there." And she'd be going ... And then, she'd go, [whispering] "Listen, you can't say this, not now. You mustn't do this." And that was part of it, really. It was, I wasn't allowed to speak or say things like that, and she was quite adamant about that.

Evelyn: [crosstalk 00:18:08]

Ros: He knew, but he never said anything.

Evelyn: It was never an open thing.

Ros: No.

Evelyn: But, you feel he instinctively knew.

Ros: Yes, and I used to go on some of the marches through town and he worked at one of the places around by there. And, he'd get me tickets to go and see different bands in the Empire, and things like that. And he'd see me, and one time he came up to me when I was in the band, when I was in the group with the groups of gay people. And, that was major, really, I thought. It was like, wow.

Evelyn: So, what were the marches that you went on?

Ros: Some of them were political. Some of there were feminists marches. Some of them were gay, as well. So, there was a mixture walking through Liverpool at different times. Pride started around ... I can't remember the years it was, but it was the early years. And, there was a mixture of people, because I remember getting different, a leather jacket, and that was it. And, I'd asked him for money. And when he approached me then, it was like, "Okay, you can go and get one."

Ros: And, that was the major thing. So, but walking through Liverpool as well was quite good. I felt much safer later on, because of when there was a crowd of people. But my family, my younger brother would say, and yet, he was friends with a lot of my gay male mates, he went for drinks with them and everything. But, he did get a bit concerned at stages. He would say, "I don't mind you guys, but I don't like it when there's a group of you." Which, I thought was quite an interesting concept that he would say that, fear, obviously.

Evelyn: Yeah, obviously, it felt a bit overwhelming.

Ros: Yes. And, I think my family did feel a bit like that with me, because I was quite open.

Evelyn: Quite in your face.

Ros: And, I didn't see that there was a problem, really, why there would be a problem. Because, people were different. I didn't understand things like that.

Evelyn: And, was there a look? How did you recognise your folk?

Ros: Oh, yes, I mean, you always had that eye contact anyway. You would know who was who and what was what. And, I think [crosstalk 00:20:27]

Evelyn: What was it that gave you the clue?

Ros: I think it was certain way the way someone would look at you, or how they would be able to talk to you. I mean, things were changing at that time. Things were changing quite a lot, and very fast.

Evelyn: Was it very much a short hair and ...

Ros: Not really, because it was very ... I'm trying to think of the way I used to look in photographs I've got from ... Yeah, that were quite ... It wasn't that short. Not compared to afterwards, it went much shorter than that.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Ros: Like, a Sinead O'Connor look type. It wasn't like that, then. It was quite ... It was still very feminine, but I liked ... When you say feminine, I liked different styles of clothes. I liked to get suits. I got suits made at Burton's. I went to a Jewish man in Scotland Road and got tailored made stuff. I liked all things like that.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative), but not flowy skirts.

Ros: No, I never had skirts. I didn't have anything like that.

Evelyn: And at that stage, was it still a lingering of a kind of ...

Ros: [inaudible 00:21:47]

Evelyn: Yeah, a kind of butch femme thing? Or was it far more androgynous?

Ros: Yes, but it was becoming much more androgynous, I think. And, there wasn't really many people with tattoos. And, I did on the Manchester scene, I went there quite a few times and actually came to London one time with two guys. And, we went to a club here, and I came again and I'd been once to the Gateways when I was living in Liverpool. And that was a big, that was me and my friend, and that was a big shock, basically.

Evelyn: Why was it a shock at the Gateways, an iconic venue in the ...

Ros: Because it was much ... Well, yeah, and I just think it was because it was very much, very butch and femme was very separate.

Evelyn: Because it was old school

Ros: Yeah, and it was all like this in the mirrors, me and my mate were like, wow.

Evelyn: The girls - Brylcreem in the hair.

Ros: Yes, it was very interesting. I mean, the first book I was ever bought as well from the guy, who took us to the first gay club, and he was a brilliant dancer and quite well known on the scene was the book of, the Well of Loneliness.

Evelyn: Mm

Ros: And, that was heavy book to read at that time. My God, it was like ...

Evelyn: Did it depress you?

Ros: It did, yeah. But, it was still interesting. Obviously, I read it. I read everything I could get hold of at the time.

Evelyn: And, it wasn't easy to get books.

Ros: No, it wasn't. And, when we did have.. I think it was News From Nowhere at the bottom of Bell Street, which was a particular, an independent shop. And, you could get some books from there. But not really, no. You couldn't get ... not many, they didn't come out till later on, I don't think.

Evelyn: Mm, so ...

Ros: I read a lot of books when I came to London, I moved to London.. '88, I think.

Evelyn: Back to the Section 28 protests, were they big in Liverpool?

Ros: Yes, they were. We went from Liverpool ... We were bussed from Liverpool, then, to the Manchester ones. We could, we mixed together. So that was quite major. And, that was the big one where Ian McKellan was there.

Evelyn: The Manchester one where they had the Pink Express.

Ros: Yes, it was huge.

Evelyn: From London.

Ros: I think so. I can't remember.

Evelyn: Yeah, that was the train.

Ros: Right.

Evelyn: That, a lot of gay men hired from London, and they called it the Pink Express, and they thought it would be fun to serve pink champagne.

Ros: Right, right.

Evelyn: So, when they rolled off of the platform in Manchester, they were absolutely legless, I'm told.

Ros: I'm sure, I'm sure.

Evelyn: Could barely talk to the reporters.

Ros: Well, that's what I thought was weird. That, I mean, Ian McKellan I could just remember him having that big coat on, like a big overcoat on. And, Michael Cashman was there. There was quite a lot, and he'd been in one of the soaps.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Ros: That's what I thought it was weird that they would shout for Sheila. When there was Ian McKellan and he was part of the political movement. It was just very weird, but it was a very enjoyable day, anyway. But that used to happen a lot, you know, small little group meetings, and then we'd go, and then we'd go to Manchester to a big one. But, Liverpool has it's own Pride and it's own meetings as well, political ones.

Evelyn: And, what about the engagement with second wave feminism? Did that ...

Ros: Well, yes, that was happening towards the end for me before I moved to London. That was an interesting concept, but because I was living with a particular person still, and we had the flat and that, and then that became more difficult for us.

Evelyn: Why did it become more difficult?

Ros: Because I was heavily involved, and I was getting more involved in the feminist movements as well, and wanted to know more and was interested. It was ... My friend, also ... And, I also think, because I felt more confident in my identity in the clubs and the.. I would be giving people phone numbers or whatever, even though I was in a relationship, which was, you know, when you think back, not okay. But I mean, at the same time, I didn't believe the person I was living with then, even though we were together for all that time was really gay. You know, in the sense of I knew what I wanted, and knew who I wanted to be with. I didn't want to be with any men. Even though I had a lot of gay male friends, and even a lot of straight male friends, who would slot into when it was needed. They would slot in, like family things where I'd have

to go to my family weddings. They're the particular guys who would come with me and pretend they were my boyfriends or whatever.

Evelyn: So, the wider family didn't know.

Ros: So, there was a mixture. No. There was a mixture of that. So, I think I always knew, I think that the woman who I was with there wasn't going to stay, because the change was too much, I think.

Evelyn: The move towards visibility.

Ros: The move and the visibility, and the fear from, I believe, from her family was a bit too much, really.

Evelyn: Mm. So, what decided you to move to London?

Ros: Well, when we split up, we left at ... No, she got off and went somewhere. She went to stay with one of the gay guys, and then she got a place somewhere else herself. And then I decided that ... I met someone else by then. And, they were a part of the music scene, so they were involved in a band. And, they asked me the singer, would I manage them? Which, I did. So at that time, I was doing a lot of gigging with bands and local bands. And, getting venues for them.

Evelyn: All right, so what sort of year are we in, roughly?

Ros: Well, this must have been the '80's. Because, I left, I started gigging ... because, I left in ... My mother died in '81, and I was with the new partner then. I left in '88 to come here. So, it must have been during '81 to '85, I think, '86. Probably a bit longer. I'd have to look, because I've written it down.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Ros: Because I have diaries. I wrote diaries all the time.

Evelyn: So, managing the bands, you were doing this at the same time as being a youth worker, presumably.

Ros: Yes, because this is what we did in the night time. And, I met lots of people through that. A bunch of musicians, basically.

Evelyn: And, was it lesbian bands?

Ros: Yes, all girls. And, they were a punk band, basically. Called Chaos, and the women's sign was the part of the name Chaos.

Evelyn: Part of the name, yeah.

Ros: Yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: Cool, cool.

Ros: So, that was a very interesting time for me.

Evelyn: Yeah, what sort of places did they play?

Ros: The local pubs in the city centre. Irish Centre, a few of the places. Mostly in the city centre.

Evelyn: What sort of reception did they get?

Ros: Quite good, because the lead singer wrote a lot of her own songs, as well, and some of them were quite heavy and dark, because of her situation, what happened to her. She's a whole different person, but an incredible person. I still have contact with her, actually. And so, it was an interesting time. And, I enjoyed it. It was hard work, though, doing all that. And, you'd have to travel with a number of .. but that's what I've written in my book as well. People who all had major egos as well, you know.

Evelyn: I'm sure.

Ros: The China crisis, he was one, Eddie was my brother in law, basically. One of the singers out of the band. And the bands were overlapping with people we knew, as well, both straight and gay. So it was a brilliant time to be there.

Evelyn: And so, and just a lot of fizz and energy? I mean, if it was the punk scene, it must have been quite anarchic.

Ros: It was, but there was still a lot of violence involved in that, as well. Because, we went to The Swinging Apple, which was a quite a well known punky club mixture, LBGT, whatever, and there was a clothes shop in the top of Bell Street, as well. And, the guys who owned that were part of the scene and the music scene. But there was a violence around all that.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ros: But it was heavy. There was a violence in the clubs. It's still happening, people would come in and there was a stabbing one time, in front of us

Evelyn: And, was it homophobic?

Ros: I think so, yes. There was still a lot of that... And yeah. Well, that was, yes, absolutely. That stabbing was. The person was all right, thank God.

Evelyn: Do you have a memory of a really fantastic night that worked well?

Ros: Yes, lots of them went well. I mean, there was always the odd little thing, but most of the nights were good and the DJ's were good, and they would move from Manchester back to London, er to Liverpool. And, we would swap as well. Sometimes we would go there and then they would come back here. So, that was really good fun. And seeing David Bowie was very good because we got to meet him after, as well. That was incredible.

Evelyn: So, how did you get to meet him?

Ros: Because one of the friends of the three guys that we knocked about with was the head chef in the hotel where they were staying. Well he was in the Adelphi they were in, he didn't appear there. We saw them in St. George's hotel there. So, and that was an experience. That was amazing.

Evelyn: Tell me all.

Ros: Because we all got dressed up from, there was a shop in Liverpool called Miss Allison's, and we used to go there and hire clothes from there. And, the woman I went with, and she had this sequinned thing on and I remember having like, a tuxedo thing on and pants. And, the two guys, three of them and the young man had got, he knew he was staying there, and he knew his license plate number and all that. So anyway, eventually we got in. And, that was a very interesting night. In fact, I loved that night. I remember, I had a box of Rothman cigarettes that he gave me. The Rothmans cigarettes, and he signed, the Alladin Sane on his legs that went out really long. So, that was incredible, because he was one of my heroes... because, I used to play his music in the house, as well quite a lot.

Evelyn: Mm, so he signed his own trousers?

Ros: No, with the poster, and he just signed his leg out there.

Evelyn: Oh, his rested on his leg, to sign the poster, yeah.

Ros: I gave that away to a young man later, years after when I was a youth worker and he was really [inaudible 00:33:36].

Evelyn: And, was he fabulous close up?

Ros: Yes, he was very ... He seemed a bit preoccupied, obviously, I think. But we spent a bit of time with him, but I was quite nervous of him. I remember having a drink and the ice was like, knocking against the thing and I was like, "Oh my gosh, my oh God." Because he was a big hero, and I never thought I would meet him. But then, the other guy ... What was his name? The other, the guitarist. Oh my God, what was his name? But anyway, we spent a lot of time with him, more or less. Because he, David Bowie was actually, there was people all around him. A huge entourage, so even to get to that stage where we were just in there for that short time was an incredible thing. But I'm trying to remember the guy's name. Who was the guitarist?

Evelyn: It'll come to you.

Ros: He was brilliant, anyway. He was really lovely. He was very nice and made sure we were okay. This was two girls and three guys you know, and he was just like, there was a protection there as well in some ways, which was nice. So, that was wonderful. That was good.

Evelyn: So then, what decided you to move to London?

Ros: My mother had died, which was a big shock. She was only 61, in 1981. And my father was on his own more or less, and my sisters moved away. And my other sister moved away and the brother. So I found, I had to take care of my dad for the first two years, and that was really difficult because he was absolutely devastated. And the religion aspect, the religious aspect of it was very hard for him because he was crying quite a lot when she first died. And he would ask the priests, and they said to him things like, "You'll cry for your wife's sins," which I was furious about.

Evelyn: This is Catholic priests.

Ros: Yes, so anyway, that was very difficult. And I wrote to my sister and said, "Look, I can't do this on my own much more. I need help." I took him away on holiday as well, and I was with my new girlfriend then. And he was very aggressive towards me and aggressive towards her. And he couldn't take care of himself, you know. He couldn't ask for a tin opener or anything like that. He wouldn't do anything like that, and he got ill when we were on holiday. So, it was only in Spain it was Alicante. but he was a bit nervous about all, like, and he didn't want me really speaking to anybody either. And he was very ...

Evelyn: Very independent, but not able to manage on his own.

Ros: No, absolutely. So, he didn't want me to ...

Evelyn: Bring anyone in.

Ros: Yes. And that was a bit sad, really. But anyway, so eventually, my sister came. And then I decided I was going to leave and move to London, because my first partner was living here then with her boyfriend. They lived here, and I used to come up every now and then and visit. So I thought I'm going to try and give it a go. And I was at a party once in Liverpool just before I left in '88, October '88, and I asked them for that one of the women I knew was living in [inaudible 00:37:11] and then she said, "If you're ever there, just call in." So I drove up one time and said Look, have you got any places?

Ros: And that's when I first moved. And, they had a house in Islington because it was a co-op housing, and everyone was moving into places that were empty then and squatted and setting up co-ops. And that's what I did up there.

Evelyn: So, there was a big squatting scene at that stage.

Ros: Yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: Unoccupied houses, you could go in and take over.

Ros: That's right, and we went to one, Brougham Road then, and we formed a co-op in Brougham Road. So, I moved from Islington over to Hackney and a couple years in Hackney.

Evelyn: So, how does a co-op work?

Ros: We'd have meetings, and it was a lot of different people. A lot of women. The house I was in was all women. But the one next door was a mixture, and they were all gay and lesbians in the house I was in. And then the other one a few doors down, they were a mixture of people. There was a woman with a few kids, and they were doing juggling and doing all acrobats and all them things that started to come as a very trendy thing to do.

Evelyn: Alternative lifestyle.

Ros: Yes, and we all used to meet. I think once a month we'd have a big meeting. And the house, we'd have house meetings once a week. And then, we'd have the big one with the co-op and the guys would sort out what was needed. And because I was then started to work in a women's education and building, then we did a lot of work through the co-op, like helped to put wiring in and things like that. So, that was good.

Evelyn: So, how many houses were there in the co-op?

Ros: There was a street, I think, out of the street there was probably about five or six houses that were squatted and then taken over. And then, we all got told to leave. Just when we got it all nice.

Evelyn: Because these properties were really in a terrible state of repair when people moved in.

Ros: They were. And then, the co-op did them up because they'd been left. And we did a lot of work, you know put heating in and electrics

Evelyn: And I think it is a time when a lot of women developed skills and [crosstalk 00:39:36].

Ros: Absolutely when I was working with ...

Evelyn: Those traditionally male jobs like electrician and plumbing.

Ros: Yep, bricklaying, plastering. I learned quite a lot from that because I was working as a coordinator in the project there. So that was really good, because we could mix a lot with the people who were doing it together, and it was good fun.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative), and so what happened when they tossed you out?

Ros: We were offered more or less, the people in the street were offered ... You got one offer. If you didn't take it, then you didn't. And a couple of them were on the Penbury Estate, which was quite a heavy estate.

Evelyn: So this was an offer of a council flat.

Ros: Yes. And some of them were just studio. And at that time, I met ... because I'm a Japanese Buddhist. I've been practicing Buddhism for 30 years now, and I just met at the practice there, met one of the women who was there. And, that enabled me to think about where the skills and what I was going to do. And they offered us this place. They offered me, and she was already living in Lewisham in a place there. And so, I chanced about getting this place. I wanted a particular flat that was on the corner so nobody could go past my window. And I wanted a little balcony, and I got it, basically. And it was in Hoxton. And people were going, "Oh, why would you want to live there?"

Ros: And actually, it just reminded me of living in Liverpool. So when I moved, I thought, this is home from home. Because it was diverse place, but it was heavy to live in at first. But then it's changed.

Evelyn: In those days it was rough and now, it's becoming incredibly gentrified.

Ros: It was very rough, you know. Yes.

Evelyn: By 2020.

Ros: Absolutely. But I'm still seeing a lot of violence. I've seen people be shot. I've seen two stabbings of young men recently in the last few years.

Evelyn: Are you still there?

Ros: Yes.

Evelyn: You're still there, yeah. Excellent, and so, did you maintain your involvement in feminism and on your move to London?

Ros: Yes, even more, because it was, there was co-ops there, and there was the S&M stuff, I was involved in stuff in Farringdon Street, the LGB centre. I used to go there quite a lot.

Evelyn: So tell us about Farringdon Street and the S&Ms..

Ros: Well, that was an interesting concept for it's time. I mean, I think the visibility of that and the shows some of them used to put on were a bit like, wow. It was very different.

Evelyn: So, what happened then for this [crosstalk 00:42:13].

Ros: [inaudible 00:42:14] and all, you know, the book and all like, and there was a lot of conflict of interest about that, you know, on the street.

Evelyn: So tell us what they did at Farringdon Street.

Ros: Well, that was the main place where LGBT people just met. And I think there was conflicts of interests going on there anyway, and in terms of feminism and where it was up to at that stage and not accepting S&M dykes that wanted to meet there as well. That was heavy. And so, a lot of people were splitting off. And it was quite sad about that, that friends were not speaking to each other, and relationships were lost through all that, I think in a lot of ways.

Evelyn: So, the different strands of feminist thought were splitting.

Ros: Yes, well, yes. And I think they were being challenged. And they weren't embracing the different changes that were happening and thinking, you know, whatever went on in people's privacy ... probably always happened and will always continue to happen. And nobody knows, you only know the two people who are involved in that. And okay, this was for the first time, I think a lot of it was going as a show. It was getting performed in front of a crowd of people.

Evelyn: So, what happened at the shows?

Ros: People that would ... Well, there was a lot of bondage happening. And sexual acts were actually happening on the stage. And I think there was that whole issue, the violence behind that, people did not like that or didn't like it being so open. And it also involved a lot of, there was a racial thing around the issues there as well, because if there was a black woman and white woman, then that would cause controversy as well. And although I was never involved in that scene, I was interested as an academic, because I'd started my degree then when I'd come here in the '90's it was, actually.

Ros: And just before then, before when I was in women's education & building, it was interesting for me how that was divisive in lot of ways, and how people couldn't just allow people to live, as long as what they weren't sort of infiltrating on them in particular. I think in a similar way it happens now. I think there's a lot more openness and, but I think sometimes, there could be a bit of privacy you know, with new technology now. I find that a bit hard to accept.

Evelyn: When people are too open about their intimate details of their lives.

Ros: I do mind about ... Yes, yeah. If it involves other people and you want to protect them, I think you've got less of a chance of that happening now. With these new laws that have come out as well, and anybody can get anyone's information about anybody. But I think, I mean, it was interesting. Because even though I was living in London, the knock on effect from Liverpool and Manchester, it was still happening here. Because a friend I knew in Liverpool, I've known for a long long time, we go back a long way, I just saw her when I was up in Liverpool recently. She and her partner were heavily involved in S&M, and that was a confrontation of a lot of people. But I also knew them as people, and it was up to them, really, what they wanted to do. But I can understand the other side of people seeing it as being not okay, really.

Evelyn: Mm, so especially in terms of feminist theory, there were difficulties around it resonating with the patriarchal approach of men towards women.

Ros: Well, I think so. And they thought it was just not helping the cause, you know, because of all, a lot of women who were suffering still from domestic violence. Yeah, in you know, different areas. And then, them portraying violence in terms of a sexual act. And, I think that was a bit, a lot for a lot of people to take on board, I think. And I think that still is the case now with domestic violence. Even though we know most of it is done by men, you will always get someone who goes, "Yep, but women do this as well." And it's like, but that's a minority, and the stats will always prove that.

Ros: But, it was an interesting time, and I was very sad when it closed. Quite sad about that.

Evelyn: And that's the lesbian and gay centre.

Ros: [crosstalk 00:47:17] yeah, that was really really sad. That was a bit of a loss, because you couldn't go to many places. And then all the pubs started to close down. And now, I think people meet online or if they do, I don't know, even, because now there's not many places to go to.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Ros: And there's no women only events, really.

Evelyn: Very few, very few.

Ros: Mm. So I don't know, I mean, how young women meet, I think, is through academia, a lot of them. And I think the odd nights that are held every now and then, but they seem to be less and less.

Evelyn: So, you started, you took up studying in a serious way when you came to London.

Ros: I did, I did. That's when I started to do my first degree at North London. And then, I went on to do my master's at the Institute of Education. And then, I went on to do my PhD at London Metropolitan. And I then I left there and finished it in Birmingham and came back. But I didn't move from London. I left here and did it. But my supervisor was based in Birmingham and I finished it there.

Evelyn: And, did you focus on LGBT issues, or women's issues?

Ros: I did, and the master's I was doing at the Institute. I was doing Boys from the Black Stuff, and people like Shirley Valentine. That was domestic violence, because domestic violence was around me quite a lot, as my sister was beaten by her husband quite a lot. And what had happened to me domestically, so that interested me. And then, I moved from then to do my PhD, which was all about online digital narratives that were done online through Xena Warrior Princess. And how people would meet people. And, I sort of was part of the academic side that set up to protect people like myself, who was

doing the PhD on particular areas. And the women I interviewed were from Europe and from America. And statistics, I had to keep a lot of statistics around that. . Xena, Warrior Princess was an ongoing thing, and some of the stuff that went on there, it was very violent. But women met women through talking about the shows, and they were taken to safe houses.

Ros: One woman in particular was beaten very badly, and then she came, they took her to a safe house and there was some people who moved from America to the U.K. to the Yorkshire area. And, moved around with four children. So there was a lot of very interesting stuff happening.

Evelyn: Fascinating and have you maintained your interest in left wing politics through all this time? ...

Ros: Yes.

Evelyn: So, what have you been up to?

Ros: Yes, well, I'm very sad what's going on, really, I think. And what's happened recently. But I'm still a Labour supporter, and I'm still ... You know, I wrote an article about, I think two years ago was the last one I'd written. And the book I finished now is about a version, very briefly, about the death of my father. It starts from when he actually died, but it jumps back and forth till now, really, and when I met my Buddhist practice, and how I dealt with that. About relationships, I think, and love, and whatever.

Evelyn: And from within the Buddhist practice, what's the perspective on LGBT?

Ros: Well, it's very diverse. I mean, I was in Tapo Court at Christmas, and just looking around at all the different people there is quite amazing. There's no, they don't have, actually, LGBT groups as such. They have four divisions, and that would be the youth division, men's division, women's division, young women, young men. Within there, you can meet and do whatever in that context. There's no hard and fast rules. We chant together. We have four places all around London. And we have, we're in 192 countries. I've been to lots of different countries and travelled to Mexico, Jamaica, Iceland, chanced it with people I've never met, but went to meet them and chanted with them.

Ros: So LGBT people and straight people. And transgendered people. So, that's quite a major part of my life now. And, [inaudible 00:52:14], and it enabled me to be more confident in my writing. It made me as well, understand that it took me nine years part time to do my PhD. And working, as well. And having lots of jobs to pay for it. And along the way, meeting a woman who, we had a son together. And, but anyway, that went terribly wrong, but it's an amicable relationship now. I was 55 then, and now he's 14, and that's good. I saw him when I was in Liverpool at Christmas, and he's good. Lovely boy. Lovely young man.

Ros: So, my practice has enabled me to deal with all issues of violence throughout my life, about my identity and even right up to the secrets and lies for want of a better word.

And [inaudible 00:53:12] and all them things that went on are still happening, I think, now within the LGBT community, as well. So, I think there's problems.

Evelyn: Yeah, so I was ... It leads me onto my next thoughts in terms of that period of time of the last 50 years. It's been a huge amount of legislation and opening up of equality for the LGBT community. Do you really feel that there's been changes in attitudes? Do you feel that there's been an impact of all of that on you personally?

Ros: No, not really. And I mean, I think young people have got a completely different attitude, which is good. But, they're much more open. But I think they're still, it's still not equal in a lot of ways. If you think recently about in the last few months about them two young women who got beaten up on the bus in the night, you know, and I know they're one offs, but that shouldn't be happening. This is the 21st century. We've done a lot of going through things, and argued for equal rights. But, I don't see that happening to where we are now. I think it's good that they can speak out a bit more, and they're a lot more, they'll come together a lot more, I think. And they don't need to be in the closet that much. But I still don't think that they're free, and I still don't think ... And, that there's more issues around transitioning in young people and what's going on for them, and how they are dealt with, and how people are dealing with it in the medical profession. And how parents have become involved in it. And it's a hard place to be still, I think.

Ros: It hasn't eased that much. Although, I would never want to change my life, because I think leading up to my political involvements and my academia and how I learned to live my life, through meeting LGBT people, or LGBTQ people, and I think they're the ones who taught me about life. Politically, I don't think we've won that much at all, really.

Evelyn: What would you say the biggest issues for the community are at the present?

Ros: Learning about diversity, and also understanding a bit about people don't really want to discuss everything about what's happened to them. Or if they do, they want to protect certain people from that. Because it doesn't mean because these things happened to me and other people when we were younger, it doesn't necessarily need to happen to young people now. And for that, I think privacy is important for them, as well, till they come of an age when they decide themselves.

Ros: And, I don't know the way forward. Especially now with diversity. I don't think that is not going to happen in the next five years. Austerity, what's happened now is unreal. We've gone backwards, you know. It's like we're living in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Evelyn: Because of austerity.

Ros: Yes, and about how people are dealt with who have problems, who are not all the same, or don't see eye to eye with how the world is run. And I find it's quite difficult. And especially for older people. I mean, I'm 69, 70, next year. But older than me, who've come before me who've argued the case for LGBTQ. And, I don't think they have been

protected in a lot of ways in terms of how digital media has gone forward without any knowledge of how people can be incorporated into it and not enough surveys have been done to say what do they think of this? What do they think of that? And, I don't think that's beneficial to the country. It's just about CEO's of big companies now, isn't it?

Evelyn: Mm, so you don't think there's enough consultation, particularly with older people who've been there and gone through it all in the past.

Ros: Yeah, yes.

Evelyn: So, when you were thinking of coming to have a chat with me today, are there any issues that were bubbling up in your mind that you feel we haven't touched on?

Ros: No. I mean, I think I've covered quite a bit in a condensed way.

Evelyn: Is there anything you'd like to expand on?

Ros: Well, only the fact I would like to get support about getting my book published. And I'm not sure about how to go about that, because I have asked certain people in certain groups about whether they would be able to help. But, I'm not clear about ... I mean, I've done a few things at City Lit], and some of the people there are very helpful and very useful. And I've gone on lots of courses, but I continue and continue this, and I could end up doing like my PhD, take nine years part time, and then you just keep changing it. And I just think now, I would like this to get out there. But there's a nervousness about it, because I don't know if people would be okay about it, really.

Evelyn: Some of the people who are in the book, you mean?

Ros: Yes.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ros: Well, obviously, names would be changed, but they might ... Well, I'm sure they will know who they are. But then ...

Evelyn: So, well, good luck with that.

Ros: Yes, I mean, it's been an interesting journey, and thank you for interviewing me.

Evelyn: Hopefully it will ... Hopefully the word will get out there. So, I just finally tend to ask people... thinking back to the little Ros on the tough old estate in Liverpool, as a youngster, with all your experience now, what would you say to her?

Ros: Well done. Absolutely well done, given that you've done what you've done.

Evelyn: Did you ever know you'd be a doctor, Ros?

Ros: Never. And I never knew that I would be able to stand up in front of a class of people, because I've taught, lectured. I used to pinch myself and go, "Oh my God, wow, is this real?" And it was brilliant, because I have experiences from a lot of different areas to be able to contribute. And still have, I think.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ros: Hence, me working at SIG. And then, LMA – London Metropolitan Archives doing stuff there.

Evelyn: And SIG?

Ros: And, yeah, Single Interest Group, which is LGBTQ.

Evelyn: Of .. the oral history society.

Ros: Yes.

Evelyn: Well, I do think you have a huge amount to offer, Ros, and thank you so much for sharing some of your experiences with us today. Thank you.

Ros: Thank you. Thank you for asking me.