

LSFS28 30.6.1989**Julia**

Q: Maybe if we could just start, like right at the beginning in terms of your - you're living just with your mother and sister and grandfather?

A: That's right.

Q: And so your dad's somewhere else.

A: Yeah, they got divorced last year, about a year ago, just over a year ago now so ... sad.

Q: Yes. Is that - is your sister younger?

A: Yeah, I'm the eldest of three girls - the youngest is still at home with me and I've got a middle sister in ... with her boyfriend ... younger sister, but then we're very much alike so that's easy. She's ten years younger than me.

Q: So that's quite a gap then.

A: Yeah. And the other one's five years younger than me so there's five years in between...handy...

Q: Do you all get along?

A: Yeah, pretty much. In fact we get along better now since the middle one moved out 'cos that's where the sort of antagonism was between, me and her really, now she's gone ... my little sister get on great, but she's very like me in personality and physically as well... Besides she's not - I mean when she was living there she was forever borrowing clothes and things like that, it used to drive me really up the wall that she's been through my things and taken stuff. I'd go and find something that I'd only just bought in a crumpled heap at the end of the bed or something, that used to really annoy me; 'cos that doesn't happen now so you don't have the arguments.

Q: Did you talk about other sorts of things like boyfriends and those sorts of areas?

A: No, we tended not to, not me and my sort of younger sister, the one that's just ... but I do talk more with my youngest sister, but in a way with me it's a bit in a more sort of a motherly - 'cos she's fifteen and she's just discovered boys, and I'm going I know, you're out hanging round street corners, aren't you, you know, that sort of thing, she says oh shut up, I say I know exactly what you're up to, and that sort of thing; and I was out last Saturday and I phoned up to say I wouldn't be home, she had some friends round, and I said, you behave yourself, you know, I know what you're up to. She says alright. You know, she knows that I'm being fair ... But no, not too much about boyfriends as such. But personal matters we will chat about, and my mum does as well, anything sort of physical or you know, having problems like menstrual problems or contraception and things like that we will talk about, usually in a very joking sort of way, we sit down and have a family conference or something like that. But we're all quite open about what we do and all that sort of thing.

Q: Has it always been like that?

A: Mm, pretty much. But I was lucky in that my mum was a [CARING ROLE] so she sort of knows about things like that and she's quite open and that so - and I had a very good sex education at school and she helped as well by sort of

leaving me books and things around, so it was a sort of thing that I was happy with and familiar with from quite a young age. It wasn't like a big taboo thing.

Q: So there was no kind of summonsed sitting down, I've got something to tell you, just -

A: No -

Q: - or the just getting it in a lesson, all of a sudden at school -

A: No, it wasn't like that at all, it was more of a gradual thing. I mean if I had a question, if I had queries that I didn't understand then I'd ask. Wouldn't always get a straightforward answer but I'd always ask anyway.

Q: And when - when you say it was a good sex education at school, can you say what was particularly good about it?

A: Well we were - it was in secondary school so I would have been about fifteen, 'cos I had a late - between fourteen and fifteen; and it was girls and boys split up, the boys went off with someone and the girls came - we had a local nurse or somebody come in, and we were all sat in a room and it quite easy and, you know, quite relaxed, and they talked about all sort of things like contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion, all sorts of things, and then ... contraception... they handed round the devices and... No you're kidding, the woman is - you know, so everybody knew what these things looked like because before it had all been diagrams... but to actually see what a coil looks like, it's tiny, you know, people would say we were expecting something, you know, like a coat hanger. And it wasn't so that was quite good. And again there'd be, you know, chats - I mean we were quite nervous and quite shy, I think, although we had questions actually during the lesson, when it finished and we went outside we probably swapped more sort of ideas then. But I think I was quite lucky because talking to other people, they never had any sort of sort of like formal sex education like that, and I think it went on for about four or six weeks, sort of every Wednesday afternoon or something for a little while ... I'm glad really, it was good, I just wish everybody had had it, quite lucky. Whereas my littlest sister that I was talking about earlier, she goes to the convent school and it's not discussed, at all. In fact, a while ago she had a letter sent to all parents, saying, we want you to realise that we will not discuss sex education in any form and will leave it to you basically. Don't rely on us, we're not doing it. As I say, because things at home are fairly open I think she's picked up a lot more anyway, she probably knows more than her friends do, I don't know. And she can come and ask me, she does -

Q: She's not nervous about -

A: Not really no, 'cos as I say it's no big deal.

Q: 'Cos when you think of some people who actually can't talk to their mothers and fathers or anyone about anything like that -

A: A shame. It's a shame. I mean I could even talk to my dad about some things... but I mean I know some girls who'd never mention anything like periods in front of their dad, not even in the room, whereas it wouldn't worry me at all, it doesn't bother him. I mean before they split we would go and do the shopping and we'd go past the loo rolls and the sanitary towels and he'd say, do you need

any of this palaver? You know, it wouldn't worry him either, he's quite open-minded, I suppose having three girls you've got to face up to it.

Q: Well, yes, with so many of them.

A: But you know a lot of dads I know wouldn't - they'd just hurry past with their noses down.

Q: Yes. Or say, that's your - you get that ... And did they talk in school about kind of feelings and emotions and things like that, or was it -

A: No, not really, it was more factual, more basic. No, not really... Nothing that I remember anyway.

Q: And presumably it was kind of, in a sense, straight sex -

A: Yeah

Q: - as opposed to discussing anything like oral sex or masturbation or things like that.

A: No, as you say, quite straight and basically, you know, this is all you need to know and anything else, you'll find it out later, sort of thing. We're giving you the facts, a baseline.

Q: Right.

A: As you say, maybe the sort of discussion that would happen afterwards, when we all ganged up afterwards, do you see what I mean?

Q: Right. Because it would start you thinking.

A: But no, it wouldn't be talked about ... it was more clinical, I suppose is the word for it.

Q: What lesson did it come under?

A: ... you're not having gym this Friday or whatever, you're doing this for a couple of weeks, or maybe it was near the end of term when a lot of exams were going on and the timetable wasn't following sort of regular routines so there were free rooms and things like that. As far as I can remember anyhow...

Q: And as you said, in that time they weren't particularly discussing AIDS -

A: Not at all

Q: - were they, because it wasn't an issue?

A: Not at all. No. No way. No, the only sort of things that they talked about were basically sort of gonorrhea and syphilis and creepy-crawlies of various descriptions, those sorts of things; but no, they didn't talk about AIDS at all. But then as you say they didn't touch on anything like homosexuality or anything like that so it wouldn't have crept in that way even.

Q: So how did you learn about AIDS?

A: I don't really - I remember first sort of hearing about it probably was on the radio actually in the car or TV, just general media, and them saying that homosexuals are getting it, male homosexuals are getting this disease and they die horrible deaths and blah blah blah, and I remember thinking to myself, ah well I'm alright. And then when they started saying girls are catching it too, and this sort of person's getting it and that sort of person's getting it, and babies are getting it, it made me stop and think, you know - I mean you do talk about it, I mean I've talked about it with my best friend, you know - in the sense of you know, it does make you more careful in a way because you've got to take it very very seriously. But I think that's basically how I heard about it as a concept, as it

were, but then, because I was working in pharmacy, I got more of the sort of the clinical stuff and the actual facts as well... things like (?)AZT came out and stuff like that... anyway, so again I was quite lucky, I should think that I got maybe a broader understanding of it in that sense as well.

Q: So do you know how it's caught and passed on and all that sort of -

A: Pretty much, pretty much. Although they keep saying things are changing ... and the incubation time's now just changed to something dreadful like fourteen years, the latest thing. It's the sort of thing I think it's important to be aware of and find out about so ... got the sort of bury your head in the sand and it's not gonna worry me, but it is.

Q: Does it worry you?

A: It worries me 'cos it's a dreadful disease, it's horrible. I don't like the ignorance about things like not using a coffee cup or towel, and things like that, I remember that was the first thing that really hit the scene -

Q: That you shouldn't touch anything -

A: And I notice now you go to public loos and they've got these loo seat covers -

Q: Do they?

A: Mm, I've seen them in ... and I've seen them in hotels, disposable things on the wall, and I thought they weren't around a couple of years ago. You know, obviously somebody's gone - picked up on a basic thing, you know, people are worried about picking things up on loo seats and they stick one of these on the wall. I think it's unnecessary, you can't pick anything up on a loo seat, can you?

Q: No.

A: Unless you want to lick it clean or something like that (laugh) but, you know, you're not going to.

Q: No, that's not the way you -

A: Yeah. Anyway that sort of ignorance, I think, is sad. But I also think it's sad that people maybe are doing practices which are blatantly asking for it and they're not taking it seriously, 'cos it will affect people. I mean I don't know anybody at the moment that's suffering, but I'm sure in a few years' time I will. I mean I've got a few friends, male friends, that are gay and I know it worries them 'cos we've talked about it - and I think with them it's a slightly different attitude, they tend - I know they tend not to worry about it but... in a few years' time they, you know, what the outcome's gonna be...

Q: Do they take precautions?

A: I don't know actually. It doesn't seem to stop them making friends. You know, how far that friendship goes I don't know, that's their business not mine so, you know, I don't know how far it extends with them. It's a shame, you know, I wish - well I know they're sensible and they wouldn't do anything stupid but it's only got to be the once, do you see what I mean?

Q: Yeah. This is what people often don't think.

A: Yeah. I mean I'm just thinking of one person in particular, he's a really nice fella, he's really easy to get on with, I used to work with him, and to think that something like that might happen to him, it just seems such a shame, and a lot of people say, oh gays, they deserve anything they get and that, and it's not - not fair, it really isn't fair. And particularly as they know it affects other people as well,

it's not the gay disease or anything like that... I watched a programme, I watched it a few weeks ago, about the London Lighthouse -

Q: Oh, yes.

A: - and that was really good, it was quite - well, it made me stop and think, it was quite upsetting in a way but it opened your eyes up, it really did. A day in the life of, sort of thing, you know, people died - and it was just sad the way that ... one by one ...

Q: Yeah, people often feel very remote from it, don't they, because they don't actually see what it actually involves.

A: Mm. Yeah, I think people should watch programmes like that, you know, look at this poor fella, he's dying because he's a hemophiliac. People don't think of it as that, but he's still gonna die the same death as somebody who maybe hasn't been quite as ... or something, you know whatever, how you want to put it, do you see what I mean. Like little babies, you know, ... I think maybe people if they see a few ... pictures it would make them realise, you know, it isn't just gays, it's babies in England and children in England and stuff like that.

Q: What, do you think if people, sort of other people get it it's their fault?

A: No, I don't think anyone deserves that. I don't - I really don't think, no matter what they do, that anybody deserves that sort of disease, whether they've committed a crime like killing somebody, you know, or whatever, I still don't think anybody deserves that sort of illness. I mean you think of cancer, I think in a way that's a lot better accepted now, maybe because AIDS ... take the pressure off it, it's not such a taboo now, so -

Q: - as it used to be -

A: Exactly. So -

Q: Do you ever feel at risk yourself?

A: I've stopped and thought about it seriously, and I don't like to think that I've done anything too dreadful in my life but you never know, and, you know, you hear stories that ... you know, it only takes one basically, and they say it's like sleeping with third partners and their partners' partners, and okay, you might be fairly choosy or fairly - but you don't know how far back down the line it goes. And like I was saying earlier, with the incubation period going up and up and, you know, it makes you worry. So yeah, I do take it seriously, definitely, and it certainly would now - I would bear it in mind, put it that way; and I wouldn't modify my behaviour because I don't think I would have done anything much in the first place, but I would certainly bear it in mind.

Q: Are you having a fairly steady relationship now?

A: Yeah.

Q: How long's that been?

A: Nearly two years now. So basically when it hit the scene - it was probably (?)quite a few years ago now, isn't it?

Q: Roughly, yeah.

A: Yeah. So, you know - but there again, you know, you never know what might have gone on with anybody. You know, ... it now, you know, you hear of people who've maybe been married five years and they think, oh, there's no chance but -

Q: Who knows what happened before,...

A: Mm. Yeah, exactly, who can tell? It is quite worrying... take it seriously, but then again not out of proportion, going mad like scrubbing loo seats and not drinking out of people's cups, being sensible about it I think.

Q: So how would you take precautions?

A: Well, that's a very difficult thing because they say - I've heard things like, well cut down on the number of partners. Okay, fair enough. Say you decide that you want ... a bit further, I mean you can't really research their background, it doesn't matter how carefully you've thought about it and how nice a person they are, inverted commas, what can you do? You think okay, well you know, I will sleep with them, and I've thought about it, and everything like that, but it still doesn't alter what might have happened, do you see what I mean? Okay, things like using sheaths and what have you ... I suppose you might do something like that, but it doesn't really - I wouldn't take those sort of precautions myself just now, but I may do, I will bear it in mind, I wouldn't discount the idea.

Q: But you feel you don't need to with your current relationship?

A: It's not that I don't need to but I think - I suppose being quite frank, if the damage is done, it's done, do you see what I mean? It'd be too late to start using that now.

Q: Mm.

A: So, you know, I wouldn't, no. Unless it was for contraceptive purposes but not just for that.

Q: 'Cos you're on the pill?

A: At the moment, yeah. But actually I had a chat with my GP on Monday 'cos I'm ... and I'm not sort of planning on having any children in like the near future, so I had a chat with him about being fitted with a coil instead, and he seemed to sort of agree with that – we'll leave it a little while and come back and see ... because I always thought that you couldn't have one of those until you'd had a pregnancy. And then I was chatting to a friend of mine, and she had one and she hadn't had any children, and she said oh no, there's better ones now, you can; so I went to ask him basically and he said that'll be alright. Which I think would be better, rather than keep taking it all the time.

Q: Yes. Yes. 'Cos how many years have you taken it?

A: Since I was seventeen - eight years... which I think is quite long enough. I mean again I look at it quite - quite sensibly, I mean you can get horror stories about that, and I know that I'm more likely to get knocked down by a bus than I am to suffer any great ill-effects. But why take something if there's another way round it basically, I mean I know....but somehow I think it might be a slightly better idea.

Q: Mm.

A: But again...

Q: Yes, you can sort of alter that...

A: Yes, you know, maybe try it for a while and see. And if it doesn't suit then at least I've tried. Not having used anything else I think it sort of might be an opportunity to try something else now. I was talking to my mum about it, I was talking to her on Monday when I got in, I told her what I'd been to the doctor's for and why, and I said I'm probably not as fertile now as I was at sort of twenty, she

said well twenty-two's your sort of fertile peak so it's downhill all the way now (laugh)....

Q: So when you went on it (the pill) when you were seventeen, was that because you were going out with somebody?

A: Yeah, I went out with a fella when I was seventeen for - until I was just gone twenty-one, quite a long time; but I also had very very bad periods, I was being sick and fainting and, you know, really nasty, and I was at college and I was taking an English exam, and I sat the morning paper and that was fine and then lunchtime it all started and in the end I was sick and had to be taken home and I failed that exam at O-level because, you know, I didn't complete the paper, and I thought, you know, this is getting ridiculous, and not only tummy pains but I had pains sort of all down my thighs and everything as well and I was sort of laying at home moaning, and my mum said well... I said well I'm not going to have any kids am I mum? And she said well, look, do you want me to go to the doctor's and maybe just see about maybe going on the pill, if that would help? I mean I think basically she - it was also a roundabout way of saying, look, I know you're seeing this fella and it's been going on quite a long time and I know you're old enough now, you know, and I'm worrying what you're doing if you're not doing anything. So I think So that was how that came about.

Q: And was she right? Had you been thinking about kind of having a sexual relationship?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Were you having one already?

A: Just sort of bordering, getting a bit heavy.

Q: What, like heavy petting or whatever they call it?

A: Yeah, basically, and you think - again I like to think of myself as being quite sensible and we didn't - I can't do this because I oughtn't to get pregnant basically, you know, I can't have that happen, so either I'm gonna finish and stop this or I'm gonna do something about it; and I'm thinking what can I do, you know - didn't want to go to the doctor's and ask for it without asking my mum. I was glad that she broached the subject ... so that was fine basically, you know, it worked well. But I'd had a scare or two just before.

Q: What, thinking you might be pregnant?

A: Well I suppose again because I was quite irregular anyway -

Q: But could you have been pregnant?

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah. And it was a worry and I was glad that was a worry that was finished. I mean, looking back on it you - it's, like, stupid, having a sexual relationship with absolutely no precautions whatsoever. But at the time you just don't think about it. But I don't know if I would now - well, it's difficult I suppose ... I think you look back and think, god, you know, how did I get away with that?

Q: 'Cos were you actually doing it all the way kind of thing or was -

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Q: - it wasn't like trying to use withdrawal methods or -

A: No, it was withdrawal basically, but again, I mean, that's risky to say the least. It's a step in the right direction I suppose, but that's about it. (laughter) Yes, that

was about it. And that - it had literally sort of been less than half a dozen times, but I mean it only takes once, doesn't it?

Q: Yes. It can be the first time.

A: Yeah, exactly. And of course, after starting a sexual relationship and then thinking - having a period, everything was fine, and then four weeks later it didn't come - oh my god, oh my god, this is it - and then it turned up anyway and you think, oh god, you know, I'm gonna have to do something about it, and ... my mum said it and that was fine after.

Q: And had it been your mutual decision?

A: To - ?

Q: To have a kind of sexual relationship.

A: Oh yeah, definitely. Oh yeah, I wouldn't have done it if I didn't want to. I mean as I say we went out for, what four years basically - I mean, basically I could have done it beforehand, I mean that was the first - first, that boyfriend then when I was seventeen at college, that was like my first sexual relationship, and I could have done it beforehand but I chose not to. I don't know - I don't know, to a certain extent you feel that you ought to wait till you feel ready and I felt I could do that, I was just lucky I suppose.

Q: How long had you been going with him before you actually did anything?

A: Probably about two or three months, something like that, but after sort of knowing him for a month or so, you sort of get the feeling that this is gonna carry on, it's not just a flash in the pan, it's gonna be quite serious, and then I felt safe to sort of commit myself. Maybe if I'd have felt, oh I don't know, it isn't going too well, I reckon it's gonna finish soon, d'you know what I mean? Maybe I wouldn't have. But I felt happy and ... as it turned out it lasted four years anyway, so obviously it was, you know.

Q: Mm. And did it ever feel as though that was like the next thing to do in the relationship?

A: Yeah. And again, I think like age and friends have a lot to do with it, not exactly competing, I think, like that, but - I don't know - it was just the right thing to do at that time. That explains it really. There's a sort of natural progression.

Q: And can you remember what expectations you had of it?

A: Expectations - I don't really know that I had any great expectations but I remember it was pretty much what I expected it to be, put it like that.

Q: Which was what?

A: Let's think. I don't know. You sort of think - ... whatever, dreadful pains and masses of blood everywhere, I didn't get any of that, maybe 'cos I felt relaxed and okay about it, I don't know. And as I say I'd read anything I could get my hands on if it was useful and they would always say, you know, the first time is useless, you know. And I'd read that and had that in the back of my mind. It was okay but, you know, I wasn't like expecting -

Q: - orchestras to -

A: Yeah, exactly, you know, as I say it was what I'd expected, it wasn't dreadfully painful or anything nasty like that, but there again it wasn't ... that's the only way I can think of it, you know, basically, and it's just one of those things that gets better as you go along really.

Q: Has it got better as you went along?

A: It had, yeah, until we got to the point where it was stagnating. But... with my present boyfriend now, definitely has improved, with age, matured or whatever, I don't know. I don't know, maybe it's just - I think age has a lot to do with it, the fact you're more mature, more relaxed ... and I think as you get older it becomes more of an emotional thing than just a physical thing, do you know what I mean, more or a sort of making each other happy and being close than just (?) squalling, if you get what I mean, you know -

Q: Yes, yes.

A: So that changes as well.

Q: Yes, because often when you're younger there's a lot to do with doing it right as well, rather than how you happen to be feeling about it.

A: Yeah, and have you done this yet and have you done that and, you know, you feel you've got to progress along a set path, and, as you say, as you get older - maybe it's because you've sort of done all that or you sort of - well I suppose you're just more experienced generally, that you don't feel the need to do all these certain things, you just do what you want because you want to, and as long as you both want the same things that's alright, you know.

Q: When you say, "do all the things", do you mean sort of do different sorts of kind of sex?

A: Yeah, basically, I mean - I mean some people might be happy with something very straightforward, just get into bed, quickly, get on with it and turn over and go to sleep. I mean I would personally rather have a nice kiss and cuddle and be soppy and that rather than just a straightforward go for it. I'd rather go without but have a nice kiss and cuddle and be soppy, do you see what I mean?

Q: Mm.

A: Whereas when you're younger you don't -

Q: What, you go straight in -

A: Yeah, exactly - I don't know, I'm just talking about myself but ... yeah, really.

Q: And have you found that like there's more concern with kind of giving you pleasure at all or has that remained the same?

A: Um - the other thing, you see the thing is, talking about - to talk about the fella that I'm going out with now ... but then he's always been like, he's always been really sweet to me and he always, as you say, he makes sure that I'm happy as well, so that's fine, and he always has; but as things progress and you get to know each other more, I think it gets better in that sense as well. Oh, yeah and he certainly makes sure I'm happy and everything ... how it goes, it might be different I suppose but -

Q: Yeah, 'cos I talked to somebody who was at school, must have been seventeen, who was saying things like kind of, I've never had an orgasm and nobody my age has had one and ... at sixth form college.

A: Yeah, yeah that's similar.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah, I can imagine that at school, have you had an orgasm? - I don't know, I wouldn't know what it was, and they say, you will when you get it, and a few weeks later saying, yeah, I have now ... you know what I mean? It's not the

sort of thing you discuss now, you don't need to somehow 'cos it's like it's done. I can imagine it's quite interesting from your point of view, to talk to different ages.

Q: Yeah, 'cos there's quite a difference between say sixteen and seventeen ... experience and women in their early twenties.

A: Yeah, but ... at that age. Yeah, as you say, I think with the fellas as well they're not so concerned at that age about how it is for you, they're more interested in how it is for them, and it's another score, and I've done it again, or something like that. I don't know with fellas, I mean like I say, 'cos I went out with my first boyfriend for four years so maybe there wasn't so much of that scoring with friends, but I can imagine that's how it would have been, I mean ... best friends ... meeting and talking and everything, you know. They're quite open and everything.

Q: And what happened after that, between - did you have several between that -

A: Yeah, that finished and then my mum went away for a year, so that basically put the knackers on my social life for a year because -

Q: Why?

A: Well I was working full-time and I also had my pharmacy course so I was like away one day a week and into the evening and not getting back till late, and then having homework and then had all the house to run, like housework, cooking, washing, shopping, all that sort of thing in my spare time, so I really didn't go out very much and I lost touch with a lot of people. And you do as well I think, once you leave college, you either make new friends at work and you lose the old ones

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Q: Right

A: And that's basically what happened, okay I had friends at work but not the sort of friends that I would go out with much of an evening, and because my college course was only one day a week and we'd all come from very big sort of catchment area and none of us were near enough really, to go out -

Q: - as a group -

A: Mm. I mean a couple of us went out that were fairly close, but we're still talking about - well, between me at Staines and Guildford. It's quite a journey, and when you are sort of eighteen, nineteen, perhaps you've only just got your first car, if you're lucky, that sort of thing -

Q: Where did your mum go?

A: She went to COUNTY for a year ..[REDACTED]. So, as I said, that sort of cut that year out. And then when she came back and I started going out again, I felt that I had to make up for lost time to some degree -

Q: How old were you then?

A: I must have been twenty-two I think ... between twenty-one and twenty-two ... I don't know. Around that sort of age anyway -

Q: Mm

A: But - and I was also discussing this with a mate of mine - because I went out with the same fella from sort of sixteen or seventeen to twenty-one-ish, and, like, seeing him like seven days a week practically, and only ever going out with him ... I missed out on the Saturday nights out with the girls and the mucking around, and now that relationship had finished and then I had a year sort of at

home, and now I felt that I ought - I could now go out and do the things that I would have done normally at eighteen or nineteen, sort of like mad parties and going to clubs and discos and that sort of thing, so I started doing that at that sort of age, sort of a bit delayed I suppose -

Q: Right

A: - and did a couple of daft things and then -

Q: What sort of daft -

A: Well, just like one night stands, but basically - I mean, I remember thinking to myself, I need to prove something to myself, and okay I've done it and that's okay now, you know, finished. I mean, I probably wouldn't do it now because, as you say, the AIDS thing -

Q: What, you'd certainly think about it now -

A: Mm. But then, because that wasn't around so much, basically I had nothing much to lose and that was when I wanted to prove to myself -

Q: What, that you could do it?

A: Yeah, basically. Well I didn't go out with the intention, tonight I'm going to find some fella and drag him off, you know, but I knew I had no attachments and what happened happened, you know, that sort of thing, you know, I wasn't worried about it. That finished - I can't think now; and then I went out with another fella for a week and then that just finished, that was his decision, I would have been quite happy for it to have carried on. I don't know how long for, looking back on it, but that was, you know, I didn't realise that that was only gonna last a week ... He just said this is getting to heavy too quick, I've had enough sort of.

Q: Gosh. Abrupt -

A: Yeah, yeah, well it was fair really, it was fair, so that's how - and then I was working in a bar to help a friend out and I met another fella there and went out with him for about six months or so; and that was getting quite - quite stable, you know, nice, and then I found out he was seeing about ten other girls -

Q: Oh. Great.

A: So ... I'm not having any of that, sunshine, that finished, and then I went out with ... almost straightaway, I think.

Q: And you were on the pill all through -

A: Yeah, as I said earlier, not just for sort of contraceptive purposes but because of the menstrual problems I've got and everything. If it had been for that reason only I may well have stopped it, but I thought, you know, I don't wanna go back to having that, whereas a couple of years on now I'm not so worried, 'cos I think I've got older and that sort of thing would have matured and it shouldn't be so bad as it was when I was ...

Q: - settle down -

A: I'm heading for twenty-five now so yeah, I feel like I can afford to, you know, I can at least give it a try.

Q: Did being on the pill kind of affect your feelings about, you know, well if sex happens it happens?

A: Mm, yeah -

Q: It doesn't - I'm alright, sort of thing -

A: Yes, yes, definitely, yeah, I mean, okay, if it comes to that, at least I don't have to worry about it. Yeah, it definitely did. Maybe I wouldn't have done what I have done if I'd have had to sort of think about doing something positive at the time, like, excuse me but what are we gonna do now; maybe it wouldn't have happened but knowing that I didn't have to worry about it, it did happen, so you know - but I wouldn't say that it makes - that it made me promiscuous or do anything really nasty, it was just literally the odd occasion...

Q: Do you think that made you have sex sooner than you might have done -

A: No.

Q: - within a - the normal course of a relationship?

A: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. It's a bit hard to decide looking back, but no, I don't really think so. Like I said before, I would have taken a risk at first rather than not done it at all 'til I was sorted out, as it were. I don't know.

Q: Do you think you're a person who does take risks at all?

A: Not really, no. I think, really, I like to think that I should know better, if you know what I mean, so you know, I wouldn't really think so. But then again like I said I've done a few risky things, but then that's looking back with hindsight, at the time it didn't seem like a big thing. Looking back I don't know - what could have happened, and it was a risk then but it didn't seem - but no, I wouldn't say, I haven't done loads of things that I've got by with the skin of my teeth or anything like that, no, I like to be fairly sure; I mean there was occasions when - I suffer from thrush quite a lot, quite regularly ... and there was times when I had to take antibiotics and then I got thrush, and when I was taking the antibiotics I remember saying then, the pill might not work properly so no, I'm not doing it - that sort of thing, I wouldn't take that sort of risk then and do it again, maybe it's because I was older, I wasn't prepared to take the risk ... but you know, like we can come to some arrangement, you know, it doesn't mean like separate beds or something, but just bear in mind, you know, not for a week or two till this is sorted, you know, it's not worth it ...

Q: Yes, mm. Do you take risks anywhere else in terms of like smoking or -

A: No, I don't smoke.

Q: - or drinking?

A: In moderation. Sort of a Saturday night drink, that sort of thing. No, I wouldn't say otherwise, no. My driving's a bit risky occasionally ... that's just driving round here, if you don't take risks, you just sat at the side of the road and get out, that sort of thing. No, no, I don't think so. I don't consider myself to be raving mad.

Q: When - I noticed you ticked that you were engaged -

A: Mm.

Q: Was that to the first one or to this one?

A: To the first one... that lasted four years. I mean we hadn't been going out very long,... I was seventeen, and ... I want to get married and I said oh, okay, fine, but in the back of my mind I didn't really want to. Again, it seems the thing to do when you're seventeen, eighteen, you know, you've got to be seen to have been spoken for somehow, otherwise you've been left on the shelf. As you get - as you get older you think, oh I'm glad I got away with that, you know, I don't wanna be like her, pushing a pram round at nineteen or something - well it's alright for her,

but it's not what I wanted and I'm glad I didn't. Well, it's different now ... it's unofficial at the moment, we haven't actually sort of announced anything, and haven't set any dates or anything like that. In a lot of ways, it's more like a promise so -

Q: Yes, 'cos you also put that you had no particular intention of getting married or having children.

A: Not just yet at least but I don't - I don't want the relationship to finish either. We want it to carry on and I hope that's what the end result will be, but I'm not putting a date on it to say, you know, we should get married soon, you know, we will when we're ready. But, you know, it's like saying I do intend on staying with you for the foreseeable future, and that will hopefully be the end result, sort of thing. Although it's not, like, an official engagement when you set a date for the wedding and everything, it's not like that. I mean he has asked me, put it that way.

Q: You said it.

A: I did.

Q: And what about children, are they sort of for the future or -

A: Yeah. I want to have children in the future, but there again I have to sort of bear in mind that I have to do it, well, fairly soon, but I can't keep putting it off indefinitely. But I certainly wouldn't have children until I was married 'cos I don't think it's fair. I know lots of other people do but it's not for me...my mum and dad'd go mad, even now.

Q: Cos they've got -

A: They'd go mad.

Q: Would they?

A: Oh yeah, definitely.

Q: What, even though they've got unmarried?

A: Yes. Oh yes. They like to think - I know that I should know better and I wouldn't do that, and I wouldn't 'cos as I say I don't think it's fair - sort of a family background. It's a bit old-fashioned but there you go.

Q: And what about your job or career, does - how does that fit in?

A: I'm a great believer in fate, I'm quite a believer in let's see how it goes, so basically that's how I look at it. At the moment it's fine and I haven't got plans to, like, go for managing director, but I don't intend on staying where I am. But I'll wait until it happens really.

Q: 'Cos what could happen next, would progression be that you become a manager?

A: A manager ... if I wanted to ... I mean they say that I sort of would ... a logical progression, but there's lots of people that are career reps and really that wouldn't worry me, that would be fine by me. At the moment, like in six months or a year's time I might think now I want to be a manager, or I want to go into marketing or I want - but at the moment I haven't got any defined route, as I say, it's - see how it goes really... I think you... things get shattered and you get upset and you set yourself goals and you can't get to them and you start getting sort of demoralised, you know, I wanted to do this by now and I haven't, what have I

done wrong, whereas if you haven't set any great goals and it happens you think, great. That's it.

Q: That's really good.

A: Yeah. Perhaps I have been a bit easy on myself, perhaps I should set myself more goals, I don't know, that's the way it works for me. As I say, basically I just wait and see how it goes.

Q: And what does your boyfriend do?

A: He's an ENGINEER. He's not happy in his job at the moment. He hasn't been doing this particular job very long... so in some senses he's still settling into it as well. And he's basically got the same attitude, he's not like itching to head the company or things like that. Wait to see how it goes.

Q: 'Cos he's about the same age as you?

A: He's just a year younger than me...

Q: A year doesn't usually make much difference.

A: No, it doesn't, no, it doesn't. I don't think about it, you know, I'm not aware or conscious of it. Age doesn't really worry me like that, within a few years, you know.

Q: And how did you come up through - I know you went to sixth form college and got O-levels -

A: Mm. I left at eighteen and I had at the time a Saturday job in a local sort of chemists, and I was about to leave sixth form and I was gonna go into nursing, and so when I was at sixth form college I was making my application to a local school of nursing, and I went for an interview and they said we've got to wait 'til you get your results through, blah blah blah, and then as we got sort of into June and we were only going in for exams I was working at the shop a lot more often, sort of half days, the occasional whole day or an afternoon or whatever, and my boss then sort of said well what are you doing, and I told him, and he said well do you wanna come and work for me? - in the pharmacy, just dispensing, not the shop, and I'll send you to college if you want. So I thought, oh I'll go for it 'til I find out about the nursing sort of thing, so I said okay, so I was really lucky. I didn't actually have to go out and look for a job -

Q: No, didn't have to go to interviews and -

A: Mm. So I went - and then I found I really enjoyed it, and so I said to, you know, the nursing thing, no thank you, I've found another position. And I did that for just over a year - 'cos that was like in the summer and then come September he said, do you want to go to college, and I still said no, not yet, I'm not sure, 'cos I still didn't really know if I wanted to do it, and then by the following September he said do you want to go to college, I said oh yes, I've decided, you know, I've done it for over a year now, I'm happy in it, and so I went to just day release college for three years. It was good.

Q: Was that doing the B.Tech then?

A: Hard work, but it was very good, I'm glad I've done it now, 'cos it's given me a good grounding for this sort of thing as well.

Q: And when you had that year when your mum went away, did she take your sisters with you?

A: No, no.

Q: So did you look after them?

A: Yeah, my sisters and my grandad and my dad, 'cos my dad was still there as well, then.

Q: It was quite a lot of work -

A: It was, yes. Looking back on it I must have been mad, but it happens, you have to get on with it, there's not much you can do. Yeah, I mean - look back on it I think, looking back and I'm thinking I had a full time job and looking after the home as best I could, and also studying as well, I wonder how I managed, but you do manage, it's got to be done sort of thing.

Q: Yeah. It's when you're actually in it it's amazing how much you do.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: But no wonder you couldn't go out and meet people.

A: That's right, 'cos there was just too much to do, the evenings ... and tidying up, vacuuming, ironing, putting some washing on, getting the dinner ready, then thinking about what I'm gonna do for dinner the following day and that sort of thing and try and organise everybody else as well as I could.

Q: 'Cos how did you generally meet boyfriends?

A: The first boyfriend that I had that as I said, that I went out with four years, I met - I actually met at a party that was a friend of my best friend's boyfriend, you know, it was my friend was having a party and she said, you know, my boyfriend's coming, ... can I bring a mate. It was like that. That's how it started. And somebody else I met at a party as well, and then the fella that I just went out for a week, used to work with my sister and I used to see her from work and so I met him there, and then as I said, the other fella I met working in the pub, the bar... and then the present friend, boyfriend that I've got now I knew before, and in fact it was him that told me that the other fella was cheating. And he really was, he wasn't just sort of saying it, because he told me about things, you know, that was just true, I don't - I really hadn't noticed at the time but he'd come round and at half past nine he'd say, I've got to go ... and he was off to see another girl. Or vice versa, he wouldn't come round to me 'til ten o'clock at night and he'd be seeing somebody else in the early evening; and then I actually found out because we used to go to a local health club, there was a sort of sauna and jacuzzi and that sort of thing, and I was working in the club, and the other fella was there and a whole crowd of them, and I knew ... so I went over and spoke, and he introduced me to somebody and said, oh, is this the bird that was down the club last night? Sort of a steely glance and I thought, I wasn't there last night, and there was another girl ... I said to him, you know, what's happening there? He said, basically I think I've got to tell you, it's not fair, you know, you've seen the other girl, and another one and another one, and none of them know about any of the others, it's not fair. And so I confronted him with it basically and I was really down. I didn't mind too much because I wasn't that attached to him but then he was the sort of person who wouldn't let anyone get attached to him.

Q: Well, he wasn't there long enough.

A: Exactly, exactly. And besides, he wouldn't want to get too attached 'cos then somebody would keep tabs on him. And I said to this other fella, I said I feel really awful, come and take me out, basically, 'cos I'd known him as a friend for

so long, it wasn't - you know, it wasn't - it was just sort of as a friend. If I sit at home I'm gonna mope, take me out; alright then. It turned out that if I hadn't asked him he'd have asked me anyway, but didn't want to give the impression that he was jumping straight in, do you know what I mean?

Q: Right, especially after telling you that.

A: Yeah, exactly. But it was true and other people have confirmed it and I just ... In fact, they were brothers.

Q: What, they are brothers?

A: Yeah. Yeah. I mean that was the eldest brother first and it was his younger brother, that's how I knew him, you know, my boyfriend's brother, and that's how we could chat and just be friendly.

Q: So are you still friendly with the elder brother?

A: No way. I mean they don't - I mean, my boyfriend lives with his mum and the other fella lives wherever he can find somewhere... 'cos they still find out what was happening ... oh, you know such and such girlfriend ... at half past seven this morning trying to find out where he was, and another girl's phoned up. You know, basically he's still at it and I say well, where's he living now, oh I don't know, with some woman somewhere. He's forever shifting about ... I mean I have met him since, when their dad died and we were like first ... 'cos we had a flat for a little while and she phoned us first and we went haring over there and of course then he's got two brothers, and they came over, and that was the first time that I'd seen him since we'd split up and that was like well over a year. And I just was very much off hand, I said do you want a cup of coffee, yes please, and didn't look him in the eye and he didn't look me in the eye, and just - forget it, you know.

Q: No, that's the best way to play it.

A: So ... not being deliberately off but not being ... friendly really, just very unemotional, so -

Q: What do you and your boyfriend do, kind of socialising and spare time and things like that?

A: Well, we live twenty miles apart which makes it a bit difficult, 'cos as I said, we had a flat together and then he lost his job so -

Q: So you lived together for a while?

A: Yeah, oh yeah. About a year altogether. Sort of quite early on in the relationship, again 'cos I felt it - you know like this is, this is the one, I suppose, as it were, and we rented a place... and he lost his job, so money got very tight; coming up to Christmas his dad died, he had TERMINAL ILLNESS so he was expected to die but not quite that quick as it were. So, sort of said, look the best thing is if I move back to mum and, you know - move out the flat and you move back to your mum's so we won't have to worry about rent anymore and I'll be with my mum, but we're twenty miles apart. So tend to see him perhaps a couple of times a week and just sort of watch telly and videos and stuff. We go to the pictures quite a lot, sometimes go to a nightclub, disco, go out for a pizza, take the dogs out for a walk 'cos he's got two dogs ...

Q: And it's alright to stay at each other's houses, is it?

A: I stay at his, but he doesn't stay at mine. My mum doesn't like him.

Q: Doesn't like him?

A: But then she's never liked any boyfriend I have ever had.

Q: Really?

A: ... basically I mean why get worried about it, so you know -as I say, ... I phoned up my sister to say I won't be in till the morning but behave yourself. You know, so -

Q: So your mum sort of was quite good about you going on the pill and that but not very good about who you went out with in order -

A: Yeah, I think it sounds that way actually but basically - it just seems that nobody's ever been good enough, okay, which sounds stupid but that's the only way to explain it. Except for - the only one she liked was this fella that mucked me about.

Q: His brother?

A: Yeah. But that was because he was very tall, very imposing, very sweep you off your feet, very posh accent, EX-SERVICES fellow, and she thought that was great. She's very - well, snobbish and she'll admit it. But he looked good on paper, do you see what I mean? And he sent her birthday cards and that sort of thing, you know, he was terribly nice even though he was a real bum - well course I didn't find that out till the end but that was the only one that she got on with 'cos she thought he was a nice boy, you know, good upbringing, speaks very nicely. I mean it's not important really, it's what they are.

Q: Yes, it's what's underneath that counts.

A: Yeah. So that was the only one that she liked, but - well, came anywhere close to liking, put it that way.

Q: That must make it a bit awkward for you really.

A: I've come to terms with it now really.

Q: Mm.

A: It's all you can do. It's a shame, I mean I wish things were better but they're not and she won't change...my dad's different, I mean my boyfriend used to go and work for my dad, sort of weekends and stuff, ... for him, work on the car together, but my dad's always been like that.

Q: What, he gets on with people?

A: Mm, yeah... (for my mum) nobody's quite good enough...

Q: And had your boyfriend been out with many people before you?

A: Yeah, quite a few, certainly more boyfriends than I'd had, he'd had more girlfriends than I'd had boyfriends... put it that way, but not - I don't really know how many 'cos I've not asked because I'm not interested because that's done and it's past and you're not gonna change it and it just tends to upset people, do you see what I mean?

Q: Mm. I mean I was just thinking, if you met him again now, kind of thinking of the AIDS thing again, I mean would you actually leap into bed with him as it were, or would you actually take precautions?

A: It's a very difficult question actually. I would be more careful, definitely.

Q: But what would more careful mean?

A: Yeah, it's - like I was saying earlier, you might think oh no, I'm not going to do it, you know, wait till I've known him for six months or something, but it still

doesn't detract from the fact that if he's got anything now he's still gonna have it in six months' time, it certainly doesn't come clean ...in six months. I would certainly use a condom or something like that, or make sure he - I wouldn't mind about saying I want you to use one, and if you don't want to then forget it. Yeah, I would be more careful. But it's difficult sort of relating it to him, do you see what I mean, because I know him but - I would, I would. At least I think I would.

Q: Yes, 'cos it's awkward too thinking well, does this mean that, as you say, nothing changes, so does this mean that you use a condom for life or do you say, you know, after six months, you know, obviously this is nice but I'll stop using it. So what does that mean? I mean it's -

A: Yeah, it's silly really. I mean as you say, you'd have to use them for life, that would be the only way, or until they got a definite incubation period and they've gone through that and you've both come out without developing anything and knew you were okay, and you'd both had blood tests that proved you weren't carriers of anything. Then again they find, you know, you hear the latest blood tests coming out and it's not even showing, ... or something like that, there's no antibodies, things like that - so, you know, it's very very difficult, I mean I think you'd have to know somebody about twenty years at the moment before you can - I mean -

Q: Mm, unless you both troop off and have AIDS tests every time you meet someone new -

A: But as I say, yeah, and even the AIDS tests now aren't showing if you've just contracted it but you haven't got any antibodies yet. So you might say, it's okay, I haven't got it, but you've just have just got it. It's too late then and then you think you're okay. It's very very difficult...

Q: Mm. 'Cos when - do you think when people talk about safe sex in terms of, not just condoms but kind of if you think of it in terms of other sorts of -

A: No, if they say safe sex I think of like normal sex but with a condom, that's how I would class it, that's what they mean, or how I would take it, put it that way.

Q: I mean sometimes it's been also used to mean kind of non-penetrative sex.

A: Oh, yeah, yeah, thinking of that as well. But then I think -I think if they say sex, they mean going the whole way, do you see what I mean?

Q: Mm.

A: That's what I would sort of think of it as.

Q: Mm, yeah. So sex actually means penetration -

A: Mm. I think that's basically what it means now.

Q: Yes, 'cos that's what most people think of if you ask them a question.

A: Yeah. Which maybe isn't quite fair because there's lots of other things that go on before you get there, sort of part of the same game as it were, but at the end of the line that's what you're talking about. So that's how I would see it anyway...

Q: Unless you can think of anything that we haven't talked about in relation - relationships -

A: Well it was interesting what you said in the beginning about when I had sex education at school and did they go into the emotional side of it, 'cos that wasn't something that I'd really thought about, that's the sort of thing that you'd have to find out for yourself basically, you get battered and bruised and you pick yourself

up - I suppose it's the sort of thing that you can't really cover 'cos you can't tell -

Q: Yes, it's hard for them to actually empathise with what somebody's telling you.

A: Mm. I think that's the sort of thing you get from like teenage magazines really, reading the problem pages and stuff. That's probably quite a good education, that way, to find out what actually happens to other people ...

Q: Yes, 'cos those other - like I was saying, different sorts of like oral sex and things like that, and masturbation is another thing that we've found talking to people that - well, girls think of it in terms of boys a lot, which -

A: Well, that's a bit - well, I suppose - I can see why but it's a bit daft really because we're all human beings. Again, that wasn't something that was actually discussed as far as I can remember, in sex education, again it was something else that you find out for yourself, that sort of thing.

Q: Did you ever discuss it or was it kind of taboo amongst girls?

A: It just wasn't mentioned and it wasn't mentioned amongst ourselves either,... but it might be the sort of thing that I would talk about now with mates, like my best mates. But I wouldn't have talked about it with other girls at that age; but I think it's all to do with maturity and that sort of thing, if it is your best mate, we talk about anything ... anything, you know, so it's not just that particular subject, it's just anything that's quite personal I suppose, which can be talked about.

Q: 'Cos did you and your (?) black female friends talk about sex or was that something you didn't talk about much?

A: When I was at sort of sixth form and younger - yes, but only in the sense of have you done it yet really and - ooh, err, somebody'd say, ooh err, what was it like, you know, that sort of thing; but no real detail and not really anything to a sort of a personal degree, whereas now me and my best mate might - I wouldn't say compare stories, but, I don't know, exchange experiences, put it that way ... but without - in a general sense. You know, like do you do that, or do you find this happens, or have you ever - that sort of thing. And it's like more general, which you wouldn't have done then - but then when you were younger you couldn't 'cos you didn't have enough experience yourself to know, I think. You do as you get older.

Q: Mm.

A: And you do - you stop and think about it more as you get older, and you think is this normal, do other people do this, should I feel this, or - you know, that sort of thing...

Q: And can you talk about it with your boyfriend as well?

A: Yeah, happily. I can talk about anything, really anything at all. I can't really think of anything I haven't talked to him about. But then that's just 'cos he's like that, but the boyfriend before, the one that was his brother, that was very non-committal and very cold, you know, I wouldn't, just - you couldn't open up to him, put it that way, whereas my boyfriend now you can. He's really like my best friend as well... which is the way it should be really, 'cos if you're going to have that sort of relationship then it's got to be everything... everything about you, not just the physical thing.

Q: ...much more than that.

A: But that's not the sort of thing you find out till you're older, I don't think so anyway...

Q: Can you actually pinpoint the rough age where it changed or do you think it's just .. progression.

A: When you say it changed, you mean what exactly?

Q: I suppose it's just feeling more maybe sexually confident, or being able to kind of talk about things or -

A: I feel I've always been able to talk about things, but as I've got older I've been able to talk about more things 'cos I've known about more things, if you see what I mean. But as about feeling sort of confident and fairly well-educated generally, put it in that sense, was probably about sort of twenty-three, twenty- - about nowish really, not, you know, ages ago, put it that way, early twenties. Whereas when you're about nineteen you think you know it all, then you get to this age you ... put it that way.

Q: But you thought you did then -

A: Yeah, but it's not until you get older that you realise there's that much more to everything, particularly a more sort of emotional side of life ... But I don't know, maybe not everybody gets that sort of freedom or they might not get it till later, or they might when they're younger, it's just a personal thing, it's just how I feel.

Q: And do you think that goes for men as well?

A: That's a tricky one. I don't really know. They say men mature slower, don't they?

Q: Mm.

A: I - no, I couldn't say really.