

MANDY (REF: MAN99) 16TH AUGUST 1989 RT

INTERVIEWER: Can you just start by telling me where you are from and about your family and what you did before coming here?

INTERVIEWEE: Immediately before I came to Manchester I was at school in [NORTHERN ENGLISH CITY]. It was quite a posh boarding school, assisted place because before that I went to a comprehensive in [WELSH CITY] which is where I spend most of my time. I have lived there from when I was about eight. And I just went to a Catholic comprehensive outside of [WELSH CITY] and then I went away to school for quite a few reasons. Largely because I wasn't getting on with my mum and I really wanted to leave home but wasn't ready for it at all.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you?

INTERVIEWEE: Sixteen. I wasn't ready to take as big a step as that at all. My parents had split up a couple of years before that and it was just a bit heavy and I just wanted to get out so I went to this boarding school which was pretty miserable.

INTERVIEWER: Was it your idea to go to the boarding school?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes, and I chose it. It was a boy's school which took girls in the sixth form. It was a complete nightmare.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like, tell me?

INTERVIEWEE: It was just unbelievably sexist. I suppose in a way most fourteen or fifteen year olds like me get into CND and you think certain things are wrong but you can't articulate them and you don't really why or anything. And I was a bit like that and I was really outraged all the time I was at school but I just couldn't do anything about it at all and just couldn't even express how I felt and wasn't quite sure why I was getting so annoyed. But it was just so sexist, it was awful.

INTERVIEWER: Who was this?

INTERVIEWEE: It was everybody from the Headmaster down basically, sanctioned by him and just carried on by everybody. There were so few girls in the school, I think there were thirty girls and about five hundred and something boys.

INTERVIEWER: You probably at the time thought oh yes, brilliant?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. Oh it was such a mistake because you just in every possible way really stood out. The boy's uniform was green and grey and ours was scarlet. We wore scarlet skirts so you just stand out visually and also the whole school knew who you were, your name and what you were up to, and it was just like a haven of gossip and intrigue. I think I was quite a target for it because I didn't really conform that much. I wasn't particularly rebellious, I had been really rebellious when I lived with my mum but I got a bit sensible when I went to the sixth form. But just because I didn't agree with people and I didn't look like I was supposed to look. And boys are very very critical of the girls and how they look and how they acted and who they spoke to.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds really strange?

INTERVIEWEE: It was so bizarre.

INTERVIEWER: Was it in terms of the boys thinking academically you weren't good and put you down in that way or was it?

INTERVIEWEE: Academically they really had their noses put out of joint because my year was just full of really clever girls who just appeared in school in the sixth form and were just good at things which was really nice.

INTERVIEWER: And better than the boys?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes but I think because there was a mixture of boarders and day people, but boarders had so little contact with women. There were women teachers there, they saw the women teachers and there were always loads of porn magazines being passed around so they would see porn magazines from when they came to school at eleven and they just had a really bizarre idea of women and what they were like and what they were supposed to do which I have never encountered. Although the school I went to was really sexist it was in a really different way, they weren't so harshly critical.

INTERVIEWER: Were you sexual targets as well, obviously I would imagine you were being thirty girls in the middle of five hundred..?

INTERVIEWEE: When you first got there just everybody would ask you out as a matter of course, they would just go through everybody. And I didn't say yes to anybody .. I was a slag.

INTERVIEWER: Because you had said that?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes and then I started going out with someone and I was just even more of a slag. It was just one of those, you just couldn't win. It's really funny now but it was really horrible, there was so much pressure. I mean I don't ever really think about it at all now, it's really strange talking about it.

INTERVIEWER: two years.

INTERVIEWEE: I can't imagine ever being there, it's so weird.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't ever get to the stage where you really wanted to leave?

INTERVIEWEE: Very much so. The first term of my upper sixth I really don't know what happened at all. I think one of the girls who I was really friendly with left because she was a year above me and she was the only person that I was in touch with and we just got on really well and we just thought really similarly about the school and how awful it was. And the bloke I was going out with left as well and he went to live in [NORTHERN ENGLISH CITY 2] and I don't know whether I hit a real low that way but I was really really depressed all the time and just was really ill. I broke out with boils all over my face and just really horrible things like that. So I took quite a lot of time off school after Christmas.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go back to [WELSH CITY]?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I just stayed there for about six weeks and then came back. Things just got better after that. I think I realised that there was just a little time left to go and I think that was the point where I admitted that I didn't like it. I didn't realise that I didn't like it until that point. So it was quite a good thing and then before my 'A' levels I stopped boarding and I lived with my friend's mum, the friend that had moved away to [CITY in SOUTH WEST ENGLAND] because I got on really well with her mum as well. So I lived there for two months which was really nice. It took all the pressure off, it was just like being at home, a second home.

INTERVIEWER: Do you regret it in the long term looking back on it going there, or was it

INTERVIEWEE: I do regret going there but I think if I had to make the decision now I would still choose to go away and go to a school rather than live on my own because I'm really not in to that at all, but I would have chosen somewhere a lot more liberal.

Whatever I think of public schools it was definitely a good thing at the time but there was no-way I would have gone to somewhere like that.

INTERVIEWER: When you say that you were really rebellious when you were at home was this because of your bad relationship with your?

INTERVIEWEE: No I don't think I rebelled against that, I think from when I was about thirteen, fourteen, I had met someone on a skiing holiday with the school and he lived in London and I went to his place in London and all of a sudden I just got really trendy and just thought everything in [WELSH CITY] was just beneath me because I had bought my clothes in London. I saved up for ages and went to London on the train.

INTERVIEWER: It was obviously your mind opening.....

INTERVIEWEE: It was really funny. And I didn't really get on that well with school. I had a group of friends but I didn't see them outside school but I think that had a lot to do with because it was a Catholic school and it had a really big catchment area so most of my friends lived about ten to fifteen miles away from the school, so I didn't really see them. But after I met with [GRAHAM], I met some people who lived quite nearby who were trendy and the rest of it and they were all a bit older than me which I thought was really glamorous and so I just started hanging out with them.

INTERVIEWER: And doing things that you probably shouldn't have been doing?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes and staying out really late and taking lots of speed and it's just horrible.

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE: I really liked it and there were so many major rows with my mum about it because I had and I didn't come back and then she tried to keep me in and I just didn't stay in and after that she just let me do what I wanted and didn't put any restrictions on me at all and we got on a lot better.

INTERVIEWER: Have you got any brothers and sisters?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I've got a younger sister, she's sixteen.

INTERVIEWER: So at that time she wasn't in the picture.

INTERVIEWEE: No but I didn't get on with her at all. I do now really really well, but not until she was about thirteen I started getting on with her.

INTERVIEWER: You had to do it all for the first time.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What is your relationship like now?

INTERVIEWEE: Loads and loads better but I think I didn't really realise at the time I had to get away before I could see what our relationship was like. But she is really manipulative. As long as I was on talking terms with her about things from when I was about thirteen, she had just split up with my dad and she was really depressed and so all I have ever known is someone who is really depressed and really manipulative. She hasn't always been like that but I can't remember when she wasn't. I think that has been the root of all the problems in the relationship.

INTERVIEWER: What about you and your dad, did you get dragged into that?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, really bad. I didn't have any inclination that anything was wrong, it was really sudden and he had been having this affair and he left. I continued to see him once or twice a week for about a year afterwards and then I just stopped seeing him because he was just a complete wanker. Because of my mum basically and he didn't pay maintenance for me and my sister. He was doing really underhand things. I just

didn't want to see him anymore, so I just stopped seeing him and he put a lot of pressure on me to see him, emotionally blackmailing me a lot. That brought me a lot closer to my mum. It was quite desperate. But I still don't see him. My sister sees him, she has carried on seeing him since she was nine.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds as if you were around at the wrong time.

INTERVIEWEE: I think if I had been a bit older or a bit younger I wouldn't have reacted in such an extreme way. But it really affected me quite badly. I think that was when I started going out a lot more.

INTERVIEWER: Was that because a less complicated. When you say you were being really really bad one thing we are asking people about is times in their lives when they take a lot of risks. May betaking drugs is one thing but also things like when you first become sexually active and whether you had unprotected sex. At that age were you doing that sort of thing?

INTERVIEWEE: Not until I was just nearly sixteen but before then it was because I had a steady relationship with someone in school.

INTERVIEWER: How long was that?

INTERVIEWEE: That was about a year and a half, two years may be. He wasn't part of the group of people I started going around with. I used to see him separately.

INTERVIEWER: You carried on seeing him?

INTERVIEWEE: It's quite strange when I talk about it. I think I was pretty horrible to him.

INTERVIEWER: But you also were quite independent and in control of it all?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I think I took advantage of him quite a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Did you not let him meet your other friends?

INTERVIEWEE: I didn't not let him but because he didn't ever expressly ask to or want to, we didn't go to the same sort of places, it just never happened and I just did different things on different nights.

INTERVIEWER: He didn't really want to

INTERVIEWEE: No because I thought he was a bit uncooler than them, that was what it was, and he was the same age as me as well.

INTERVIEWER: When you first started being in a different scene or different group was it in terms of being somebody's girlfriend or were you actually being just you?

INTERVIEWEE: No it was just me. I really can't remember how that came about but I was just suddenly involved in a group of people. I don't really know what the links were. I wasn't ever somebody's girlfriend.

INTERVIEWER:girlfriend, getting to move socially and that sort of thing. It must have been quite a big change for you to move to Manchester from being at public school, what is it like?

INTERVIEWEE: Really miserable. I think because I've been somewhere and I can finally admit it to myself about three months before I left that I didn't like it and I just built up a lot of expectations about university because it was just going to solve all my problems and I was finally going to be with the people I liked and accept me a bit more than I had been accepted at school. And it was just awful, I couldn't believe it. Because there was a mix up. I was going to take a year out and then I didn't and I came here and I wasn't really sure whether I was doing the right thing or not but I came anyway and I didn't fill in the accommodation form and I ended up in [STUDENT ACCOMODATION]

which is just a women's hall. It's in [AREA OF MANCHESTER], next toPark and I just got there and it was just like being back at school.

INTERVIEWER: Particularly as you had been boarding school as well.

INTERVIEWEE: It was just awful. There was a real problem there because I had paid a deposit and my mum had actually paid it for me because I had been on holiday and she signed this agreement saying that if I wanted to move out I had to pay for my room until someone else moved in to it, which was impossible because no-one else was going to move in. So I was just stuck there because I couldn't financially afford to leave it.

INTERVIEWER: Was that restrictive

INTERVIEWEE: Very much so, except that I was lucky in one respect. I met a few people in the hall that I got on with and they really didn't like it but they weren't as intense about it as me which I think was really good. They just thought it was shit, it was horrible, but we get on so let's ignore it for a year. So that quite helped me. And I just sort of got used to it but that's another thing I don't really think about. Because at the end of that year I started a new course as well and it just feels like I started college that year.

INTERVIEWER: What were you doing originally?

INTERVIEWEE: I started off doing Russian and then changed to studies, drama and politics.

INTERVIEWER: That must be quite interesting to do. You were happy then

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. I wasn't unhappy in the first year, it was the very first month was just awful. I just didn't know what was going on at all and after that I just settled down and had a pretty nice time despite leaving in [STUDENT ACCOMODATION]. I would have had a much better time somewhere else.

INTERVIEWER: But you stuck it out so ?

INTERVIEWEE: It wasn't that terrible. In the second year I moved into a house with six other people.

INTERVIEWER: Are you enjoying yourself?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. I have been happier since.

INTERVIEWER: I am very glad for you. The way you look back on the past it doesn't seem that you have got positive memories of a lot of things?

INTERVIEWEE: No, not at all.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel like that about it?

INTERVIEWEE: Very much so but I didn't realise at the time that I wasn't having a very good time. I am like that if I get a bit depressed. I never realise that I am until afterwards.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think getting away to boarding school and getting out of home, do you think that made you more independent a person in a way or affected the type of person you are?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I think so. Because until I moved to [WELSH CITY] we moved around a lot as well. There has been a lot of times when I have moved from somewhere and just made a new start somewhere else which sometimes it's really nice to do and at that point it was really nice to do. Just to go away and meet new people. I think it was quite good for me just to go somewhere different. I think that has been quite a good thing.

INTERVIEWER: Just go back to when you were at school and your family, can you remember what sort of sex education you got at school.

INTERVIEWEE: At school, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Which one was this?

INTERVIEWEE: At the Catholic comprehensive.

INTERVIEWER: Are you Catholic?

INTERVIEWEE: No not now, but my family are Irish Catholic, the worst sort.

INTERVIEWER: Is it, tell me?

INTERVIEWEE: My mum wasn't but my grandparents were pretty religious and quite traditional but they died when I was quite young, but I think my mum rebelled against that a bit because she used to really try really hard to be really liberal about sex which was really nice but it didn't come naturally at all. I really appreciate her effort now but I didn't at the time.

INTERVIEWER: In what way, tell me about it?

INTERVIEWEE: Just in terms of telling me about sex was when I was really little and I can't even remember when it was.

INTERVIEWER: So she was telling you from an early age?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I presume just when I asked questions or if I showed an interest she would answer me and whatever.

INTERVIEWER: So you had things open at home?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, but having said that I never really did.

INTERVIEWER: So it wasn't that open?

INTERVIEWEE: I suppose not. I think my mum would have liked me to talk to her but I just never did. I really don't know why.

INTERVIEWER: What that something to do with

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, even when I was quite young. I can remember being really, her saying something to me about some aspect of sex when I was about eight or nine and me being really embarrassed and not wanting to talk about it. Going shut up, shut up, like that. She bought me a book about sex education and she said, 'well I think you should read this'. And I sneaked out and read it when nobody was there.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it made a difference that your dad wasn't there?

INTERVIEWEE: What in terms of?

INTERVIEWER: What you talked about with your relationship in terms of going out and seeing boys and things like that?

INTERVIEWEE: Maybe yes. He was someone else who always tried very hard to be liberal, but it came even less easily to him. I think both their backgrounds were really different from the way I was brought up; really working class backgrounds and wouldn't talk about anything like that to anyone.

INTERVIEWER: What do they do themselves?

INTERVIEWEE: My mum was a teacher and my dad was a personnel manager but before that he used to work in a [COMPANY], he used to invent [text removed] some really wild job like that. I can't remember, but he lost his job; we lived in Scotland for a bit and he lost his job so we came down to live with my grandparents in Wales, because that's where they both grew up and where they met and both sets of grandparents were still there in [WELSH CITY].

INTERVIEWER: Soobviously not liberal enough for you

INTERVIEWEE: Not liberal enough for me. I think she would have been loads more liberal if I had talked to her, absolutely loads more, but I just didn't.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find it intrusive....

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I did but I don't think looking back on it she was over intrusive at all. I mean I think I would have asked someone a lot more questions. She was pretty OK about things, but I remember when I was about thirteen I came home from seeing a boyfriend and my parents didn't like..... they really didn't like it and there was a really big love bite on my neck and they just went mad. I couldn't believe it because I didn't know it was there. I really didn't know it was there.

INTERVIEWER: You must have a low pain threshold.

INTERVIEWEE: And they just went absolutely mad. I can remember my mum giving me a really long speech, she said, 'you're playing with fire,' and me not really knowing what she was talking about.

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE: No this was when I was about thirteen.

INTERVIEWER: Right so you weren't quite sure what she meant. Well they obviously thought you might be...

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Why didn't they like him.

INTERVIEWEE: I don't know, I think it was just because he was a fairly typical thirteen year old boy. He wasn't particularly charming or graceful or anything like that and my mum has got a real bee in her bonnet about people who don't talk to her and he didn't at all.

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE: Obviously he wasn't good enough for me but none of them ever are so. It's not a new thing.

INTERVIEWER: Is that what she's like about your boyfriends?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes all except for one who she really really liked.

INTERVIEWER: And of course you finished with?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes. She still talks about him and it was about five years ago. I think it was because he was this German bloke that I knew from school and his family were quite sort of posh and she is really into that.

INTERVIEWER: So did

INTERVIEWEE: No, never.

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE: I would always really hide it from her. I think that really upset her quite a lot because my sister talks to her about everything, but I think a lot of that is because the two of them have been on their own in the house for a long time now. About six years, so she tells her everything and that's what my mum would have liked to have been with me, definitely.

INTERVIEWER: Who did you talk to then?

INTERVIEWEE: Nobody really. It's funny, when I have talked to people before about the sort of relationships they had with friends at school, mine were so much more restrained and we really didn't talk about things like that at all.

INTERVIEWER: So you never had a best friend

INTERVIEWEE: There was a group of four of us who always used to go round, eat our packed lunches together, but we didn't talk about things like that. We might talk about who we fancied but I think that was about as intense as it ever got unless someone was upset for some reason or something had happened and then people would give a lot more for a little bit and then, but we really didn't talk about sex at all.

INTERVIEWER: You must have seen other girls of that sort of age having intense friendships with girls.....

INTERVIEWEE: No I always really wanted to though. I always wanted to but I didn't.

INTERVIEWER: Was that because there wasn't the right person?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I think so. I think I knew that at the time as well, I didn't think everyone hates me because I haven't got a best friend, I just knew that there wasn't that many people around that I had a lot in common with. There was one person I used to talk to more than anyone else. She was a year older than me at school, but she lived round the corner from me and she was about the only person who..... we actually got on really well and then our mum's became friends as well.

INTERVIEWER: You said before that at school that you weren't like everybody else and you felt that you were different?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, but I think everyone feels that though.

INTERVIEWER: I remember at that age desperately wanting to be like everybody else, that's all you wanted was to fit in and feel normal, did you feel like that?

INTERVIEWEE: Definitely until I was about fourteen, until I started getting trendy and then I think it was just a way out.

INTERVIEWER: You just turn round and...

INTERVIEWEE: I'm better, I'm better. But until then just loads of things like the school that I went to, it was quite a rough school and I was just given a really bad time by people because I had lived in Scotland and I had only been in [WELSH CITY] for about a year and a half by the time I went to comprehensive. I didn't have that much of an accent and it was slightly Scottish and quite posh and just really different from theirs and I really suffered because of it. And I also had a basin cut and I really wanted flicks. And my hair just wouldn't flick. I just used to sit there with a comb all the time and it just wouldn't go and I used to wear really unforgiveable things like that. When I first went there as well I was really swotting and I was quite precocious and pretty obnoxious I think, like I knew I was clever and I didn't care who knew it. I just used to show off about it quite a lot. Really horrible.

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE: Yes but I snapped out of that really quickly after about a term.

INTERVIEWER: Were you concerned about

INTERVIEWEE: I can't really remember for the first couple of years and after that it didn't really matter to me that much. Because I thought I was trendier than all of them anyway and that was all that mattered and as long as I was trendier nothing else mattered. And I wasn't deluding myself at all, it was actually what I felt.

INTERVIEWER: You probably were as well, and everybody else....

INTERVIEWEE: That's really what I wanted them to think, I really did.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a set up at school where everybody knew about everybody else's sexual activities, who had done what, who had gone as far as or was that not public knowledge?

INTERVIEWEE: Not at all. Which was really odd compared to most people that I have talked to. There were a few people you knew about, the school slags that you took the piss out of but you didn't really know what they had been doing, just knew from like Chinese whispers, you would have been the twentieth person to hear.

INTERVIEWER: So there wasn't any pressure on you to be like.... in terms ..

INTERVIEWEE: No.

INTERVIEWER: But you still started going out with boys fairly young?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes about twelve or thirteen.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the thing to do, or was it that you liked those boys?

INTERVIEWEE: It was a bit of both really. But the first couple of people I went out with we were just friends really and if it was a similar situation now it would definitely be just friends, but then because it was a boy and I was a girl.

INTERVIEWER: You might as well be girlfriend and boyfriend, get a bit of status out of it as well.

INTERVIEWEE: But there wasn't a serious amount of snogging or anything like that that went on. We just used to go to the pictures and go to town on a Saturday afternoon. It was quite sweet really.

INTERVIEWER: You said you had sex education at school, what was it?

INTERVIEWEE: Well it didn't happen until I was in the fifth form and before then when I was in the fourth form I did biology 'O' level and we had this biology lesson and we had quite a good text book and there was a whole chapter on contraception and sex that had been taken out of the book that we weren't allowed to see. This was when we were about fourteen, fifteen and we learnt in really biological terms then, but that was only for people who had opted to do biology, so we knew about ovaries and all this sort of thing. But we didn't ever really discuss it and the teacher said, 'would anybody like to have a discussion about sex, I'm not really supposed to do this and don't tell anyone, but would anyone like to', and everyone just sort of snickered and said no, so we didn't.

INTERVIEWER: Did you want to, would you have liked to then?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. I would have done because I was just getting into a really sort of bolshy phase then. From being loud when I first started school in a swotty way, I was just one of the girls who used to chew gum at the back of the class all the time. I was really lazy but still quite bright and I could still do things, and in a way I got away with murder. I remember the teacher saying, 'she doesn't deserve it'.

INTERVIEWER:still get A's at the end of the year and make their lives miserable. Was any of it news to you, the stuff that was in the biology text book?

INTERVIEWEE: No.

INTERVIEWER: You already knew?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes and then when I was in the fifth form we had two consecutive Monday mornings and the first Monday morning all the boys went to the library and someone from the Catholic Family Planning Association, some title like that, came along to tell us about the..

INTERVIEWER: The rhythm method.

INTERVIEWEE: The rhythm method, yes, except that she didn't, then the next week all the girls went in.

INTERVIEWER: When you say she didn't, what do you mean?

INTERVIEWEE: Well all the girls went into the library, she didn't actually tell us how any method of contraception worked at all she just said, 'right, we are going to talk about contraception, and what the Catholic attitude to it is and let's start with abortion', and she just started to describe abortion and, oh.

INTERVIEWER: In lurid terms?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh just buckets of blood and screaming babies and just really awful and how terrible it is and what..... and by this time two girls in my year had left because they were pregnant as well. So it was quite bizarre having this talk.

INTERVIEWER: What was your reaction to this discussion on abortion, did you think, yes, abortion is disgusting?

INTERVIEWEE: No. I thought she was really wrong because I didn't think abortion was wrong but I didn't know why. I just really felt that what she was saying was wrong but I just didn't know how to argue with her and I felt a lot of things in school, I felt really frustrated that I thought no, no that's wrong, but I didn't really know how to articulate it at all. She went through all these different methods of contraception and she talked about the pill and she said that you could die from being on the pill and that was basically what she said. 'I am a health visitor and there's a woman that I visit in [WELSH CITY] and she is dying because she has been on the pill'. And everyone just thought, woah. And that was it.

INTERVIEWER: And that was it, there was no other forms ..?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes she discussed all the different forms but I can't remember what she said now. She talked about condoms and she said they are really bad, they will really spoil your sex life, and they are really awful for the men, it really spoils it for them. And then she said that you could get pregnant without having sex but she didn't quite say how, but everyone in the room was just like, oh God. She kind of hinted really vaguely what she meant.

INTERVIEWER: So your imaginations ran riot?

INTERVIEWEE: And then she said the only method of contraception that you can use in God's eyes, I can't remember what she called it but it wasn't the rhythm method, so then we thought yes, go on, tell us, and then she said, 'well when you're married come along to the Catholic Family Planning Advisory Service and we will tell you all about it, it's to do with taking your temperature'. And that's what we got, there wasn't any forum for discussion at all. But we did talk when we did religious studies, we took in the fourth form a year earlier and in the fifth form we were supposed to discuss religious matters and so we discussed the catechism, and I was just a really bolshy atheist basically, I just to sit in the back of the class. I started being an atheist I think because it was just another thing I could rebel against, but then I actually found out that I believed it, I believed what I was saying. We had a discussion on abortion and I just got really pissed off, it was with a priest, he had come in and I mentioned something like, 'how do you feel about abortion in the case where a woman has been raped', and he said, 'well what I think is the best thing is to have the child adopted', and I was saying, 'don't tell me that, you will never be raped ...' and just saying a lot of things that I felt really strongly about, but still didn't quite know how to explain. But that got me into an awful lot of trouble at

school, I had to go to the headmaster about it for being disruptive in the lessons and things.

INTERVIEWER: So what you said wasn't addressed, you were just told that you were disruptive?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. And I wasn't allowed to go to those lessons and I had to go the library.

INTERVIEWER: Did that sort of thing

INTERVIEWEE: Yes because I think I was the only person in my class, I don't know about the rest of the year, but definitely in my class who didn't think that abortion was wrong. And there was varying degree of how people felt about it. But I was the only one that said, well, I don't think it's wrong, but there would be loads of butts involved. I would really qualify that all the time. I am sure that I was the only person who thought that. I really don't know what they think now, because I am not in touch with any of them.

INTERVIEWER: You said this wasn't where you learnt about ... this was the way they presented them, you knew about all these things before, can you remember how you found out about them?

INTERVIEWEE: I really can't. I can remember my mum talking about eggs and seeds and things from when I was really young.

INTERVIEWER: So other than.....

INTERVIEWEE: My parents used to have things, like I read the Naked Ape when I was about eleven or twelve and flicked through that. Another book that belonged to my dad was just some sort of novel that had rude bits in it, and I read that. I didn't really discuss things with anyone at all.

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE: So maybe my mum conveyed the impression that it was something that you didn't really talk about.

INTERVIEWER: When did you first become aware, you say you were sixteen when they talked about sex, presumably they didn't mention anything about AIDS, you were too young?

INTERVIEWEE: No. I think AIDS started being publicised when I was in the sixth form, in the upper sixth, that was when I first started hearing about it.

INTERVIEWER: Had you become sexually active before that.....

INTERVIEWEE: Yes just at the end of the fifth form.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a major highlight in your life?

INTERVIEWEE: I just built it up into such a big deal and it just really wasn't, it was a real sort of is this it!

INTERVIEWER: You had expected it to be

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I expected to be and it was just quite painful and messy and I didn't really feel anything at all, it was just neither here nor there.

INTERVIEWER: Did you expect to get pleasure from it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, and I didn't.

INTERVIEWER: You'd been reading Cosmopolitan?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I just thought that was great. I can remember going to meet, and it was a really planned thing as well which was horrible that we planned and we bought some condoms and this kind of stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Was this with the long term boyfriend?

INTERVIEWEE: No, this was one immediately afterwards. Him we just talked about it all the time and never got round to doing it. I think I wanted to more than he did but this was with someone that I had but I met up with him about six years afterwards through a theatre contact we did together and yes, it was really planned. I can remember going on the bus to meet him and he was doing the National Youth Theatre of Wales thing, so it was just a brilliant opportunity that he was staying in a flat with nobody that he knew around him. Just thinking about it, I'm going to feel really different tomorrow.

INTERVIEWER: Were you expecting to be a different type of person?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I thought I would feel really different the next day and I just didn't. And it was also I think I must have been just turned sixteen, it was just before I went to boarding school as well so there was that hanging over like a cloud, but I just thought.

INTERVIEWER: You used contraception, you had planned that, that's unusual. You were quite together, you were quite aware of the risks of getting pregnant?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I was really frightened of getting pregnant out of it.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't.....want a baby?

INTERVIEWEE: No definitely not, I was really scared of it. After the first time I didn't have sex for a really long time, about maybe a year later.

INTERVIEWER: Had you felt that once you had done it once you were supposed to carry on doing it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. But I didn't see JOHN after that really. So I just didn't, and I went out with a couple of people of school, but I think it was circumstance more than anything. If we had been in a situation where we had been on our own a lot we might have got round to it, but we didn't.

INTERVIEWER: So it wasn't anything you desperately wanted to get back to at the time?

INTERVIEWEE: No, not at all. And then I went out with a bloke at school for quite a long time, for about four months before I slept with him and I went to see him in Germany and his parents were away so we had the house to ourselves for ages, and he was just really a nice bloke and that was really different.

INTERVIEWER: It was the first person who you'd really enjoyed?

INTERVIEWEE: And it was really nice. We just spent two weeks in the house but looking back

INTERVIEWER: You discovered it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, this is nice, I like this. And it was just a golden opportunity that neither of us were going to miss. I nice house in Germany with no parents and it was brilliant.

INTERVIEWER: Things like that at that age and where you are can make a huge difference rather than groping in the back seat of a car.... to be able to discover yourself

INTERVIEWEE: I can remember laughing loads as well, just having a really giggly time and being really quite uninhibited. Really very inhibited at the beginning and just got used to walking around the house and making a cup of tea with no clothes on which was really nice.

INTERVIEWER: Probably very....

INTERVIEWEE: And just things like that which was really good.

INTERVIEWER: When was the first time you can remember hearing about AIDS?

INTERVIEWEE: Probably watching the news when I was in the upper sixth, so that would have been 1985.

INTERVIEWER: What was your reaction to it?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh it was just all to do with gay men and nothing at all to do with me. I thought it was quite horrific and all the rest of it. I just thought it was really bad, but it was never anything that was going to touch me at all.

INTERVIEWER: When was the first time that you thought it might have something to do with you or relevant to you?

INTERVIEWEE: Quite shamefully a long time after that. It was when I started seeing this bloke in Manchester about two years ago who was bisexual and that was the first time I thought about it, and then I thought I really wanted to use condoms because before then I had been on the pill for a bit and then I got a diaphragm, but I just couldn't use it and I never got the hang of it at all. So I just stayed on the pill and this bloke I decided I was definitely going to use condoms.

INTERVIEWER: Was it something you talked to him about?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. It wasn't so much the fact that he was bisexual, it was who he'd slept with and I just knew that it was just horrible and he had slept with some really sleazy people and I just didn't, I mean if I met him now I wouldn't consider have sex with him at all.

END OF FIRST TAPE

INTERVIEWER: You said you wouldn't have safe sex..... what was his reaction to that was he offended?

INTERVIEWEE: No not at all, fine. He did mention quite a lot how much more he enjoyed it without.

INTERVIEWER: Was this supposed to make you feel guilty, do you think?

INTERVIEWEE: It's difficult to tell with FRASER, I don't know, maybe.

INTERVIEWER: Did you enjoy it more?

INTERVIEWEE: I didn't notice the difference but I think after I went out with FRASER I lived with a bloke for a year and just enjoyed it loads more and I felt I had absorbed a lot of the responsibility, than just me going down to the Family Planning and sorting out.

INTERVIEWER: What, because you were using condoms?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Were you still on the.....

INTERVIEWEE: I felt loads better after I came off the pill, quite a long time before I started seeing FRASER.

INTERVIEWER: Did you trust the condoms to protect you against pregnancy?

INTERVIEWEE: Not at first, I was really wary but I was very panicky that they were being used properly and I just made sure I found out how they were used properly. But after I used them quite a lot I relaxed a bit, but still not feeling totally happy.

INTERVIEWER: Did the type of sex that you had changed because you were using condoms, that it wasn't so much based on penetration?

INTERVIEWEE: No I don't think it did change, it was quite similar.

INTERVIEWER: I mean they don't hold up to that much and you have to be careful with them, that's the thing. For some people they can't use them, they find them too difficult to use just because of the type of sex they have, if you were just using condoms then they are notenough. Do you still use them as your main form of contraception?

INTERVIEWEE: I haven't had sex since I split up with STEVE and that was just over a year ago. But I don't know, I think if I was to start a relationship with someone now, which I don't particularly want to do, I don't think I would like penetrative sex to be part of that at all.

INTERVIEWER: Why is that?

INTERVIEWEE: Just millions of reasons. I became really dissatisfied when I was living with MIKE, it was loads to do with me as well, but with the ways we were having sex and I basically wasn't enjoying it that much. I think a lot of it was because I didn't actually fancy MIKE which I didn't realise for ages.

INTERVIEWER: That's not really.....

INTERVIEWEE: And I just wasn't very happy generally, I was quite depressed and that was really where it manifested itself. That was the most obvious where I wasn't very happy. And I felt a bit that MICHAEL was getting loads more out of it than I was and he was being quite selfish and I made moves towards having less penetrative sex but it didn't really work that much.

INTERVIEWER: Was it something you talked about or was it difficult to face that?

INTERVIEWEE: We did talk about it but I think MICHAEL saw it as me being not neurotic exactly, but just being a bit weird about things, like I was weird about quite a lot of other things.

INTERVIEWER: A bit uptight about sex?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. And just not quite as into it as he was. He just needed a free hand, that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: So did you think that as well?

INTERVIEWEE: I sort of did and didn't. It depended on the mood I was in. I was quite depressed at the time and if I hadn't been depressed I think things might have been quite different because I would have felt a lot more assertive, but I wasn't particularly confident generally. And that was just reflected there. Towards the end of the relationship we didn't have sex very... at all. I can't remember

INTERVIEWER: Was it something that you would avoid, would you have a strategy of avoiding it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. I think a lot of it was quite simply that I didn't fancy MICHAEL. I was reallyall the time. It is never something that's happened before when I have not been interested in sex for that length of time. And then I realised that it was just that I wasn't interested in sex with MICHAEL because I fancied other people and attracted to quite a few other people.

INTERVIEWER: Where you analysing it in terms of you were having a problem, you being messed up about it?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes, definitely.

INTERVIEWER: A pretty easy conclusion to come to rather than.. I mean that's understandable as well because the other conclusion is that the person you are living with, you should be living with and that's much too difficult. Did you finish the relationship?

INTERVIEWEE: He was going away, he was moving down to [SOUTHERN ENGLISH CITY] to live with his mum and I had a birthday party which was also the night before he left and and I attempted to with one of my friends and he just disappeared and came back about an hour later and I just got really and I was quite drunk as well and I don't normally drink very much at all, and I was really paranoid and sensed that something was wrong and I was really pushing him a bit.

INTERVIEWER: Was this made more difficult because you hadn't been having sex with him, was there an issue of that in it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I think so. But it was really dramatic because he didn't confess thatbut he just disappeared to London and I just felt that something was really wrong and I was really scared and really insecure about things for about two weeks and then it..... I found a letter that KIRSTY, a friend, had written to MICHAEL basically saying get lost, what do you think you are doing, and I just thought my God, what's been going on here, I just didn't know at all, so I just phoned up MICHAEL and said, 'I know about ..' really dramatically, but I didn't. And it was just awful and I saw quite a lot of KIRSTY and I just didn't say anything to her at all.

INTERVIEWER: Why didn't you?

INTERVIEWEE: I just didn't know what to say and I thought this is ridiculous because things were quite tense between us, but she didn't know that I knew. I just couldn't take it any longer so I just marched round one day and said, 'I know, I know everything'. And just had quite a dramatic scene and had a really nice chat which was really good because I didn't feel any animosity towards her at all. I really wanted her to know that.

INTERVIEWER: You were well out of it really.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes and it took me a remarkably short time to get over it because I spent last summer just being really martyred and moping around all over the place and I had a succession of horrible jobs and then I just went on holiday to Spain and I went on my own and had a brilliant time. Met up with people when I was there and had a really nice holiday and just totally forgot all about MICHAEL and came back feeling completely different, loads of energy because I had been really resting and I met some nice people and had a holiday romance with someone and it was just really nice. And after that I was really determined that I was going to stay single, that I really felt that a lot of relationships had been undermining me and I didn't want to get involved with anyone until I was really sure I wouldn't let myself be undermined again. Which is more or less how I feel now, but I still don't want another relationship.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds as if you were practicing safe sex anyway, were you consciously practicing safe sex or was it, just happened that it was the type of sex you were wanting to have?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes it was like that at the beginning, coincidental. But I just started becoming a lot more aware when I was seeing MICHAEL. Just before I started living with MICHAEL my best friend was a gay bloke who I talked to a lot about various things and I was really close to him. Because he awakened my interest in things just talking about sex and power and relationships and the sort of things that go on. And reading a few articles here and there about safer sex and I thought that sounds really sensible, but not really putting it into practice that much with MICHAEL.

INTERVIEWER: But trying to?

INTERVIEWEE: I was more aware of it.

INTERVIEWER: Is it something now that you see as part of the type of person that you are, that you would practice it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes definitely.

INTERVIEWER: You say yourself you see it as a positive thing rather than you can't do this and you can't do that?

INTERVIEWEE: Definitely. I read a book called Safer Sex which is really quite American, but it says some really sensible things and I was reading it and I thought, yes. But I think for me in a lot of ways, not just in terms of AIDS but for me emotionally it is a really good thing. Having said that, I haven't been in a situation where I have said right, I'm not having unsafe sex, so I don't know how deep my conviction is but I think it is pretty deep.

INTERVIEWER: In a way you were saying before it doesn't matter about factual knowledge and you know what safe sex is and from what you are saying it is something that goes quite deep. It is all about your attitude to yourself about your own sexuality and how assertive you can be and your place within that. The fact that you weren't thinking about it just in terms of AIDS, being careful in that way is quite illustrative really of that. It is probably the best way to come around to it rather than saying how you don't get it and be careful which is easily, 'oh woops, oh I didn't, aren't I naughty', in the way that people do about pregnancy and other things. It's much more an attitude and the way you see yourself. It's all This is life, I like these sort of interviews. It's much nicer than the ones where people are being dangerous risking things. Just a few things about the media campaign and the education campaign around AIDS, is what you know about AIDS and the information you have about it and safe sex, has it come from those types of sources?

INTERVIEWEE: Not at all. I read the first Government leaflet and thought oh God, oh no. I got some leaflets from the Terrence Higgins Trust and that's where I have got my information from.

INTERVIEWER: And also it sounds like individual friends as well?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes through friends and the Terrence Higgins Trust. I have got a friend who has just startedin Manchester, I have learnt quite a bit more through him.

INTERVIEWER: So if it had been that you got it from the media campaign do you think you would know very much.

INTERVIEWEE: Not at all. I definitely wouldn't look on safer sex in the same way at all. I think I would see it, like you say, as things you can't do and can't have as opposed to something that's really positive for completely different reasons. Whilst I was going out with MICHAEL just before we split up I found out that I had abnormal cells in the cervix but I had a positive smear test about a year before that, so I had been really worried and so that as well brought loads of issues about methods of contraception and ways of having sex, yes definitely. Because I was forced to think about it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you resent him for wanting penetrative sex and was there a conflict about that?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes but I didn't really express that.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the way he saw that he had pleasure?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, oh definitely.

INTERVIEWER: He didn't see that it was one of a variety of things that you could be doing together?

INTERVIEWEE: No. As far as he was concerned anything else was nice and alright but it wasn't quite proper sex.

INTERVIEWER: And you yourself weren't getting that much pleasure out of penetrative sex?

INTERVIEWEE: No.

INTERVIEWER: Did you think that was true, that he wasn't getting as much pleasure out of the other parts; that he didn't think he could?

INTERVIEWEE: I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: In terms that the other parts were better, maybe for you?

INTERVIEWEE: For me definitely. I think it was something he wouldn't let himself think that anything else was as good or as serious. That it just wasn't proper sex unless penetration was involved. It was just an extension of snogging really, it was foreplay even if it happened afterwards or during, or whatever, it was still just foreplay.

INTERVIEWER: When you think about the prospect of other partners, of having other relationships do you find it ideal that you should find someone that you are sexually compatible with in terms of the way you feel about it now, do you find that a daunting task?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: It's a bit of a nightmare really.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes definitely. Because the only men that I've met who feel similarly to me about safer sex are all gay because they have had to think about it, they have been forced into the situation where they have to think about it and heterosexual men just don't realise that they have got to think about it too. That they are forced into exactly the same situation. Even the really it's just quite a major stumbling block.

INTERVIEWER: Is it something that you talk to people about?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, a lot.

INTERVIEWER: It's open and something that people can talk about.

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes. My friends now are a complete opposite to the friends I had at school. I can talk about anything with quite a few people. But I think a lot of my friends think that I am a bit extreme about it. They can understand my reasons and think that they really respect them, the reasons why, but it's not really..... it's a bit of an over-reaction. Although my circle of close friends, all of them use condoms.

INTERVIEWER: Having made this decision do you think it circumscribes the type of people you are likely to be able to sleep with?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I think it does but in a positive way. Because it would definitely make me re-evaluate people if they said well, it's not proper sex or I can't accept that. It would make me look a lot harder at relationships and I think it's a good thing that you can scrutinise relationships carefully.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think you are less likely to have sex whereas previously you would have had a quick fling with somebody or whatever, do you think you are less likely to now?

INTERVIEWEE: Definitely. I think when I had this holiday romance in September it was really a couple of days and it was just really nice, it was just a sort of real ego boost for both of us because both of us had had a pretty bad time and we didn't have penetrative sex and I just said I don't want to and it just wasn't a problem at all. But having said that both of us knew that it was a short thing, and if it had been the beginning of a

relationship that I felt was long term I think the other person would have reacted quite differently. And also he was on holiday and it was really nice and hot and relaxed.

INTERVIEWER: And it was perfect for it and you had loads of spare time.

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly.

INTERVIEWER: What else have you got to look for in Spain.

INTERVIEWEE: And I think that made it a lot easier as well.

INTERVIEWER: You don't feel anxious that you would be at risk from catching the virus or anything like that?

INTERVIEWEE: I do really think about FRASER a lot and also about MICHAEL because he has slept with an awful lot of people and also there was a really nasty little, two sets of triangles in fact, just before I was going out with MICHAEL. While I was going out with FRASER, MICHAEL's girlfriend at the time slept with FRASER and had sort of a fleeting affair with him and he was still going out with her when I started going out with him and there were all these sort of overlaps and it was really messy. And both MICHAEL and the woman he went out with before me didn't use condoms with. They have just slept with a lot of people and had very unsafe sex with a lot of people.

INTERVIEWER: Does it make you anxious enough to make you want to have a test?

INTERVIEWEE: I think about it an awful lot and I just don't want to know really.

INTERVIEWER: Well if you are practicing safe sex maybe it doesn't matter.

INTERVIEWEE: I don't want to know, I think it is just too big a step for me to take but I think I will eventually because it will just keep on nagging at me until I really need to know. But at the moment it's just a sort of fear that I think about once a day.

INTERVIEWER: Oh God, that sounds quite serious to me.

INTERVIEWEE: I don't know

INTERVIEWER: There are a number of things associated with knowing and if you are practicing safe sex it really isn't that necessary that you need to know one way or the other, in terms of your own peace of mind. Knowledge about that could do you less good. It just depends how you would react. The thing is the risk at the moment for heterosexuals isn't that high. Obviously in the future it's going to become higher and higher. I am the same sort of person, I would rather not know I think unless there was a particular incident that would really scare me.....

END OF INTERVIEW