

LJH6
Erin

Q. I noticed when you were filling it in that it looked as if you had quite a bit of sex education in school. What did you think of that sex education? I mean, did you think you learned from school the sort of things you wanted to know?

A. Well, I find I learn a lot more from talking to other people and reading up on a certain subject and, you know, I can identify with some of these people because my dad was a bit of a man who liked to have affairs and there was quite a few problems within the family and, um, he didn't really seem to care so when I knew what he was going on doing behind my mum's back, I was reading up, and I find it quite embarrassing, some of it, and ...

Q. Did you know that your dad was having affairs and your mum didn't know?

A. No, we actually did know, we both knew. And, err, quite personally it was very embarrassing. The way my mum saw it, she was only married to the man, but he was doing it more to his kids than he was to her.

Q. Mm. Was that how you felt about it as well?

A. No, I felt that he was doing it to everyone. He was letting down ... I'm not basically a religious person but when you take on these kind of vows, stick to them, other than that forget it. And marriage is between two people, it's a special relationship that you wanted to make permanent. And that's the way that I hope it'll end up with me one day.

Q. Yeah. Have you had any relationships?

A. Not sexual ones, but I've been very close with boys and basically really enjoying their company more than anything else.

Q. What sort of, I mean, have these been long, short?

A. Well, the longest one was four months but then I was still at school and what with exams coming up, a heavy relationship at sixteen isn't my kind of thing.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. I don't want to be pushing a pram round at sixteen - not what I'm looking for.

Q. Thinking about that, you learned about contraception at school?

A. Oh yeah, a lot. Cos I mean, many a time when the relationship was starting to come to three months or whatever, he started asking me, you know, would I go with him and I said, 'No', and he said, 'Well, don't worry about contraception cos I'll always have that if you need it', and I said, 'No, it's not just one person, it's between two people'. The condom is what, only 80% safe in some cases? For me I'd have to be on the pill as well to make sure that it worked.

Q. Yeah. And you worry mainly about pregnancy?

A. Well, yeah, in a way.

Q. Yeah. What about sexually transmitted diseases or anything like that? Would you be worried about that?

A. Yeah, I would, because it would be very degrading to find out that you'd caught VD or something from another boy.

Q. Mm, yeah.

A. It is very embarrassing, having to walk into a clinic and tell someone that you've got VD.

Q. Yeah, yeah, but I suppose they're very confidential. There would be other people there, but they wouldn't know you or anything, would they?

A. Yeah, but even so when you do walk into a VD clinic or something in a hospital, it is still very degrading all the same.

Q. You were saying before when you were talking about what your dad was doing that was embarrassing, I mean, what was it that was ... ?

A. Well, he actually did get lice from sleeping around with another woman and he was bringing it to the house, and he had contraceptive pills and everything there for his girlfriend

and he was very open about what he was doing, he didn't care, it was just all for this other woman. He didn't care about the family.

Q. Are they still together your mother and father or ...?

A. No they're not. They split up - MONTH this year.

Q. Oh dear. And that had been going on for quite a while?

A. Yeah, SEVERAL YEARS but my mum actually needed the money and within the last few months of the marriage they were leading separate lives - so it suited both of them and as soon as their time come ... they knew they'd have to split up sooner or later so she chucked him out and she moved.

Q. Mm. But are you still living with your mum?

A. I still live with my mum.

Q. Have you got any other brothers and sisters?

A. I've just got a younger brother.

Q. Mm. So it was a bit ... very distressing that whole thing for you?

A. Yeah, but seeing as, like, it had gone on for so many years, you come to identify with what's actually going on and you learn to live with it and it makes you much stronger in the end ... a lot stronger person. I mean, I had to grow up fairly quickly cos, like I said, it's been going on for a number of years - it wasn't the first time he had a relationship outside the marriage - so you just learn to live with it and grow up a lot quicker.

Q. It's definitely coloured the way that you think about your own relationships hasn't it?

A. Yeah.

Q. So you'd be very careful that you knew a person before ...?

A. Yeah.

Q. Did any of your friends know? I mean, did you have any support outside the family while all that was going on?

A. Yeah, like I said, he was doing it on his own doorstep - a lot of them knew what was going on and basically you can't expect someone whose other fathers aren't doing it to identify with your problem or to turn round and say, 'Oh, I'd really love to help you'. They can't. It's something that actually goes on within your own four walls. It's down to you at the end of the day to put a smile on your face and say, 'Well, that's his business, not mine'.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. Let him do what he wants. I'm not married to him. He's my father and if he doesn't want to know, if he's wanting to be with this woman all the time, you learn to stick with it until you know he's going to go one day.

Q. Mm, yeah. That must have been very painful for you though?

A. Oh yeah, it was because it was my dad and it was like I was doing something wrong. Did I do something to make him go away with this other woman? Was I annoying him? Was I doing this, was I doing that? I just wanted him to be a proper father, you know like, you see like this nuclear family with two kids and a mother and father and that's it and everything's going to be perfect for the rest of your life but ... it doesn't always work out like that.

Q. No, I saw ... that you wrote down ... what did you put that you wanted to do? 'A well-paid job, meet the guy who can have a perfect relationship and live happily ever after', but you were smiling as you were writing it.

A. Yeah.

Q. But do you really think that that will happen?

A. Well, maybe not, but I have talked to a lot of people who have had marriages gone wrong and they said it was basically because the two people didn't have enough interests together, whereas if you go to a club and there's a boy that goes there a lot, you know, a boy who likes going to clubs without spending all his money on at least one decent night out. It's the same with a girl. A girl likes to go out and have at least one good night in a week when she can go out and spend £20 on a night out and enjoy herself, and a lot of the youngsters see it that way even more than the older generations do, because I come from an Irish background where you're very old-fashioned and generally we do like going out and we do enjoy meeting people.

Q. Mm. And you are? Have you got a group of friends that you go out with?

A. Yeah, mainly SALLY who was interviewed before. I've got another friend who is leaving this scheme that I've known since I was very, very young - her name is CLARE - I've got

her sister, her sister's boyfriend, erm, the girl that lives next door to me. All these people I've known for years who I get along with very well and we know each other inside-out.

Q. Yeah. And these are important relationships for you?

A. And these are important people to me ... that matter to me more.

Q. More than ...?

A. More than, I suppose, if a dog got run over or something like that. I do like animals, but these people do mean a lot to me and if something was wrong with them, I'd wanna know and I'd wanna help them.

Q. That's good to have a nice close group of friends like that ...

A. Yeah.

Q. Of people that you've known so long. Did you come to get on the course ...? I mean, how is it that you ... that there are friends that you've known a long time that are doing the same YTS course as you?

A. Well, SALLY and me went to the same primary school and then we left and went to separate secondary schools and it wasn't until she started here a couple of months after me and I went up and I said, 'You're SALLY. Don't you remember me, I'm ERIN?'

Q. Oh, you just met accidentally. Gosh.

A. Yeah, we just met up like that. And my friend CLARE who I've known since I was three - we went to separate primary schools, but the same secondary school and she was ... I left school two weeks after my exams and I signed up with TRAINING PROGRAMME straight after the two weeks and CLARE was wondering what she was going to do and I said, 'Well look, down at TRAINING PROGRAMME ... you like nursery work, they can give you nursery work - working experience in the nursery, you get placement in the nursery, you get your money off TRAINING PROGRAMME and you get extra money off that placement'. I said, 'So you'll be alright. You can do your exams there, go to college and you'll be alright.' And so, then she said, 'Well, I'll give it a try then' and she started up and now someone has offered her a better job so she's going for that.

Q. What exactly are you doing?

A. I'm doing painting and decorating.

Q. What made you think of doing that?

A. I wanted to learn a trade. I did actually want to start out being AN ARTIST at school but I thought by the time I'd been four years at college, I'd probably be more bored at college than I would as well doing a part-time job trying to survive in a college and a part-time job. And I thought I'd go and work full-time for the YTS and I'll earn my money and fee and you can learn a lot more by just staying around junior work ...

Q. And picking things up, yeah. Are you doing any exams?

A. Well, I am hoping to start off at college doing my City and Guild. I've got a placement at the moment with A COMPANY who just want general workers round making sure that the paintwork is kept up to scratch and things like that.

Q. How's that - the placement?

A. Well, I've only gone down for the interview today and I'll find out tomorrow if I get it and ...

Q. How did it seem? Did you fancy working there?

A. Yeah. It seemed very very nice, very ... they're more like a family down there, they all stick together and that's what I like. The girls here at TRAINING PROGRAMME tend to stick together more than the boys do, whereas the girls are more interested in saying, 'Well, look, how about we go out one night?' while the boys say, 'Oh right', unless they'd known each other from before.

Q. Yeah. Is that the girls who are doing the painting and decorating ...?

A. Yeah.

Q. There's not many of you, are there? About six of you doing that?

A. Yeah, about six.

Q. Do you find it ... I mean, it's nice having six of you doing it, but do you think that the boys resent you or feel strange about you doing that kind of work?

A. No, erm, when I first started here, I was like one of three girls and most of the girls were out on placement so they were only coming in one day a week to report back what they had done and, erm, the boys were talking to me and we get along well with them. And I think they're just as wary of you as what you are of them. Like how they're going to accept you. I think you gotta ... you learn to fit in after a while.

Q. And do you think it's going to be OK when you start working, I mean, if you're going to work in that line?

A. Oh yeah, because I went to a mixed comprehensive, so you're with boys all the time, I've got a brother at home, a lot of his friends come round and I get on well with them. So ...

Q. So you think you're going to be able to handle it?

A. Yeah.

Q. I was working before with young women who were thinking of going into carpentry and decorating and things like that and some of them thought they'd be able to cope perfectly OK and others of them were a bit worried about how ... being alone with a plumber or something like that. A plumber's mate ... would they be able to handle it? But it's ... you can get good money and it's also something you can do on your own, as your own person.

A. It's experience for when you're going to have your own house ... to pick up a paintbrush to decorate your own home rather than looking on the instructions on the tin of paint ... and understanding what undercoat is.

Q. I think it's useful. Now I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about the other aspect that we're interested in in this study which is about AIDS - what you've heard about AIDS and when you first started hearing about it. When do you think you heard about AIDS?

A. About a year and a half ago, when it really started coming to light.

Q. Yeah.

A. And I was at school at the time doing my GCSEs and it was English and one of the things that arose was the problems of young people. So I actually done a report on pregnancy and young girls and the age of consent.

Q. Yeah.

A. So I managed to write quite well about that.

Q. Yeah.

A. Unfortunately, I didn't bring up much of the subject of AIDS which I really should have, and I think that was what I flagged in that report. As far as I know, AIDS can be caught from a number of partners, heterosexual, homosexual, but I find the more dangerous type has to be the heterosexuals where they're going with both sexes, I mean, bisexuals, where they're going with both sexes and that's bringing it out more to light.

Q. Mm, when you'd think it was more homosexuals ...

A. Well, I can't really say this, but I don't think homosexuals have anything to worry about, you know, because they keep it among themselves. If they don't fancy a woman and they fancy man and a woman fancies a woman, that's their business. I've nothing against that. I'm heterosexual myself and not anything else. But I just see AIDS as a bigger problem among bisexual people. I find them the more dangerous sex out of all three.

Q. Mm. Because they can ...

A. They're going with both partners.

Q. Yeah. What about drugs ... drug use? Have you ever come across that much?

A. Yeah. I do know about drug abusers and dirty needles. I don't do drugs myself.

Q. Do any of your friends or people that you know?

A. No. Even if they did it wouldn't be needles, you know, it would just be black, spliff, something like that, so I wouldn't find that a major problem with that, but drug users have become so involved in their habit they don't really see to the next day ... they think about the next hour but they can't go without another needle, without injecting themselves with something and they're not really bothered about, you know, that needle being dirty. They're just bothered about the next fix. And I find that ... I feel sorry for them generally, but I had to get into an expensive habit, because it is an expensive habit, and basically they'll do anything to get it if they're really that desperate for the next fix, whether it's thieving, prostitution, cos you do come across that quite common - about girls or younger boys that

have got this kind of problem, going into vice and stuff like that - going with blokes just to get their money. I find that very very sad in a way.

Q. Yeah. But you still think the most dangerous group in terms of spreading AIDS are bisexuals because they're moving ... ?

A. Yeah.

Q. Do you think any of your friends or acquaintances might be in danger of being infected with HIV?

A. Well, as far as I know, none of my close friends have actually been involved in sexual relationships apart from one girl, and she's seventeen but she's been with this boy for a year and they seem to have a very good relationship going. She's on the pill. He uses a condom as well and he's had sexual relationships before that we know of, because we actually went to school with the boy, but I don't think that ...

Q. None of your close friends are really at risk. So do you talk about it much with them, about AIDS?

A. Yeah, we do. Like when we ... say we're going through the paper and we see someone with this problem and we actually sit down and talk about, sit down and say it's really sad that they had to end up in that kind of situation that really, if you're more careful ... OK, you can't look at a person and think - well, I wonder if they've got AIDS or not it's a pretty nasty thing to think, but as time goes on and that relationship keeps going and, you never know, he could have it. But it's all down to you having initiative and thinking about these things properly. I mean, condoms save you from catching AIDS cos of it being involved with the bloodstream and the semen.

Q. And you think that knowing about AIDS has changed the way that you would think about a sexual relationship? I mean, do you think if you were to start up a sexual relationship you

would behave differently now knowing about AIDS?

A. Yeah, but in the same way, it's like catching VD or something. You know, VD ... OK, it's not as bad as getting AIDS but it's the same thing and it's like catching cervical cancer which you actually can get that as well - either from having a partner too young in life or because your partner has been messing about. These things are all related in one way or another. It's just that AIDS seems to be more dangerous than anything else.

Q. That's right, yeah. So how did it make you feel that you'll behave?

A. Well, it certainly does make me think differently about actually going to bed with a person. I mean, boys actually do like starting a sexual relationship up earlier than what a girl would probably think of ...

Q. Yeah.

A. A girl would see more to a year ... six months to a year before actually starting one, but boys seem to think after three or four months, 'That's it. The relationship seems to be established now. Don't you think we could go onto the next part of it?' And I think girls are more wary about, um ... the first thing that pops into their head is AIDS and pregnancy. But they've also got to think of VD as well, though it does make me feel differently because it's me who's going into that clinic and it's me actually sitting down and saying, 'Well, I've either caught AIDS or I've caught VD' or 'I think I've got cervical cancer' - something like that.

Q. So what sort of things could be done to help young people realise what the risks are? You seem to realise them pretty clearly and your friends as well, as far as you know. But a lot of young people seem to think there's something irrelevant to them, that they're not in a situation where it would affect them. What kinds of things do you think could be done to help make people see what the situation is?

A. Um, well, for the younger people, myself, I think, OK, girls will be able to talk about it more clearly because they are supposed to mature quicker than boys. Girls will speak their mind clearly whereas boys just do it cos they can say, 'Well, that's another notch up on my bedpost.' Boys aren't really bothered. They don't have to worry about getting pregnant. If they've caught something, I don't think they're really that bothered. They'll just go to the doctor and think, 'Oh, I can get a few pills and it will go away.'

Q. So you think it's the boys who need to be educated?

A. Yeah.

Q. When you talk about that ... do you think there's a double standard going on, like one rule for the boys and one rule for the girls?

A. No, I don't think that there should be any rules. I think that if two people are able to communicate with each other honestly, then there shouldn't be no problem. But I don't think boys should actually force themselves upon girls because they read in the papers about these girls of fourteen, fifteen and they get so infatuated with boys that they'll do anything to keep them. And I think that's where girls go wrong a bit. They become too infatuated by a boy and they are giving themselves totally and the boy could be just using them, and I think that's where the boys are probably getting their really dull attitudes from - just too many girls that throw themselves at boys.

Q. Yeah, yeah. Why do you think they do that? Do you think ... what makes them do that ... girls throwing themselves at boys?

A. Well, when a girl sees a boy that she really likes, I mean, some girls you'll get that are very very shy and some girls you'll get that are very very forward ... like everyone else, we come in all different sizes and packages ... but, I think girls are more likely to say to their friends, 'Well, I really like him. Set me up with him.' And the boy will just say, 'I don't really like her' and they'll say, 'Go on. Just go with her for one night. You don't have to worry about it you can just blank her after that, you don't have to see her again if you don't want to'.

Q. Mm. Do you think that goes on much?

A. Yeah, it does.

Q. Have you ever felt like that about a boy that you really wanted ... to know better or ...?

A. Well, I wouldn't throw myself at a boy. I wouldn't give a boy that satisfaction. Um, I think that would probably happen in your earlier years, say thirteen, fourteen when girls are really starting to discover what boys are like and are getting their periods. And, um, I feel sorry for these girls because they're not thinking ahead. They're trying to fit twenty years into one night with one boy. You know, you can have sex at sixty and still feel good about it, but they don't seem to realise that. They think sex only goes on for about a few years and then you get married, you just have sex a couple of times a week or something, and then that's it, that's it, finito! Once you've had your kids no more sex!

Q. A lot of young people think like that, do they?

A. I think they do, and they don't realise that relationships, if you marry someone, yeah, you know, if you've got a good marriage going it can last 'til the day you die. I think they see so many of these problems in The Sun and that's what their lives are going to turn out like.

Q. Yeah, so they're going to cram a bit of ...

A. Yeah, and I think that the thought of being able to do something underhanded, you know, like going to bed at fifteen when you're supposed to do it at sixteen ...

Q. You think that that appeals?

A. Yeah. It's a big kick for them. So they say, 'Well, I flouted the law'.

Q. Yeah. What about pleasure ... do you think there's pleasure for the minute as well?

A. Well, I think some of them abuse the point of going to bed with someone too much. I feel you'd probably enjoy it more if it was someone that you really loved and you had a really good relationship going with someone, and that was it, you know - you liked him, he liked you, you both trusted each other. And these kind of things come natural ... OK, you jump into bed with someone the first time, it probably ... something will go wrong. Um, but I think they do abuse the privilege of understanding what a sexual relationship means. A sexual relationship ... cos OK sex is sex, you can go to bed with someone but it doesn't really mean anything.

Q. Mm, yeah. What about safe sex, I mean, thinking about the AIDS thing again? When you think of safe sex, what do you think?

A. Well, personally, myself, I wouldn't go to bed with someone if I wasn't on the pill or if he didn't have a condom on him but, like I said, it would have to be in a permanent relationship where I felt good about it and I knew that we were solid.

Q. What do you think about ... sometimes people think about sex as just being sexual intercourse or something, that other things don't count or, you know, are only building up to it or whatever. What do you think about that? Other sorts of things which don't include sexual intercourse? Do you think of that as being part of a sexual relationship?

A. Well, yeah, but I think I won't be able to answer that until I actually come across that.

Q. Yeah, right, yeah, I was thinking that. But then sometimes, I was thinking that sometimes when you are young, you might go a certain distance, so to speak, with somebody, but decide that you're not going to have sexual intercourse but do other things but not ... Have you ever done that sort of thing in a relationship?

A. No, basically because I felt ... cos a lot of the boys that I have been out with have been older than me and they haven't really been round the same age as me, and if they had it was when I was about fourteen, fifteen. When I come to fifteen going on sixteen it was boys that were older than me and a lot of them were more responsible than the younger ones.

Q. Mm. It sounds as if you're very responsible yourself as well. You obviously don't take any risks in your sex life, sort of thing. Do you take any risks in other parts of your life? Is there anything slightly risky or dangerous?

A. No, not really, cos I come from a fairly straight family and that's about ... that's it - I wanna be straight, I wanna do everything perfect, I don't wanna ruin anything for anyone. And that's how I feel about everything really.

Q. And that's true of all parts of your life?

A. Yeah.

Q. You don't do anything to hurt anybody else but yourself as well, I mean, you're in there too?

A. Yeah.

Q. Let me think what else about this. Um, is there anything that you would be interested to ask about what we've been talking about? To ask me ... or anything else you want to tell me?

A. No, I think that's about it really, you know. I think I've given you a pretty good account of how I feel on all kinds of things - whether it's AIDS or pregnancy, but I do feel that girls could tone down their image a bit more instead of throwing themselves at boys. I feel that some girls are too gullible.

Q. Yeah, and you think also that boys ought to be ... if there's going to any education about the dangers of AIDS, it ought to be directed at boys rather than girls.

A. Yeah, cos boys don't have to worry about getting pregnant at fourteen and they don't really have to stick by a girl if they don't wanna know her. They can just say, 'I had a nice time with you - that's it, I'm leaving. I don't wanna know about any baby. I'm too young for that kind of responsibility.'

Q. Yeah, so it's the girl who has to take ...

A. It's the girl that takes the wrap for most things.

Q. Mm, yeah. Would you be interested ... one of the things we're thinking of doing with this study is to ask young women to keep a diary for a very short period, maybe for a month or for a couple of months, and just write down what they think and feel about what they are doing and their relationships and stuff. Would you be interested in doing that at a later point?

A. Yeah, I would.

Q. So I might write to you and send you a diary and you could keep it for a couple of months and then send it back to me.

A. Um, yeah.

Q. That would be nice. You've given me your address, haven't you?

A. Yeah.

Q. And you're living with your mum so you're probably there for some time, I should think.

A. Don't know if there's plans to go anywhere else!

Q. OK. Thank you very much. It was very nice to talk to you.

A. Glad I was of help.