Kieran Rose and El Reid Buckley

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The full transcript of Kieran's interview was deposited with the Glucksman Library, University of Limerick.

Q To start off then I was wondering could you tell me a bit about yourself, so, kind of, your age, your sexual identity, your gender identity where you grew up and things like that.

A Well I was born in 1953 in Cork, I was the youngest of five children. And my father died when I was quite young, I was seven. So my mother you know in 1960s Ireland, '70s Ireland she had a difficult time raising five kids you know with very little money, because she was very middle class, had an interesting marriage because he was very working class and came from quite a poor background- my father. And he left school after primary, didn't go into secondary. But he was a, kind of a self-made man, he built up a chain of three shops, so you know we had quite a comfortable existence but when he died the whole business collapsed. So we were, kind of existing-- you know it was a good childhood but it was on low income. And I think that was something that went on to influence me a lot about, you know, in a socialist direction. That sense of… But you know the - very hard life my mother had, having to go out to work for not very much money because women in those days didn't have, usually didn't have degrees or whatever you know. She would have just had kind of basic accountancy skills, bookkeeping skills not even accountancy. Yeah.

Q Yeah so just to ask you there when you said that your dad's background influenced your socialism was that influenced the trade union activism that you got into.

A Yeah, yeah.

Q And would you say that, you know, your activism in the, kind of the, LGBT community was quite linked with your trade union activism or were they quite separate?

A No they were completely linked because you know there's a great labour slogan which is – dig where you stand. So you know as a kind of socialist in the '60s you know you were influenced by all that was happening around the world. You know (laughs) You could take on the socialist struggle in other countries and support them or you know whatever support for the struggles in Ireland. But the one, as a gay man, you know we, I, thought it was hugely important to take on the struggle right in front of our nose which was about being gay.

Q Absolutely.

A That was the socialist struggle. And you could do all your other solidarity struggles but if you didn't take on the one that affected you the most it seemed, it would seem a bit odd. If you couldn't fight for your own equal rights.

Q Yes absolutely, and can I ask you there so you were involved I guess in the trade unions as well as the LGBT community, I was wondering about the LGBT community in particular so when or around what time would you have started getting involved in LGBT activism in Ireland?

A Well I want to UCC and did a BA and that was, I left, I graduated in 1977 and then went up to Dublin to do a Town Planning degree. And, I had put off coming out in UCC because there wasn't much to come out to (laughs) . There was no gay-soc or whatever, there wasn't much in the city either you know, there weren't gay bars or whatever. So when I went to Dublin I phoned Tell a Friend, a switchboard as it was called then and they had a premises up in Parnell St and they had cheese and wine which sounds very '70s which it was. And that was on a kind of Saturday or Sunday afternoon, but they were very enjoyable, they were great fun. And it was actualy there I met Christopher Robson and we went on to work together on all sorts of campaigns and later went on to found GLEN.

Q So would you say that you had started your activism in Dublin and then, kind of, moved back to Cork?

A Yeah, because coming out is a basic political act and so like yeah coming out in Dublin was a big political act, I came out to everybody (laughs), the class in UCD that I was in and all that kind of stuff. But I wasn't politically involved in Dublin, I

don't think I was involved in any of the groups that were there. That happened when I went back down to Cork.

Q **Was it that, kind of, move away from Cork that enabled you to come out, was that, kind of, late '70s, early '80s? or was there something else that spurred that on for you?**

A I think it was because there was something to come out to, you know. I think partly it was because, yeah, partly it was probably something to do with getting away from home, from your home city you know. (Laughs) Because a lot of people do that, to get a sense of freedom, you know. But who knows if there had been a group in Cork like whether I would have gone along to it I don't know.

Q **Yes, can I ask then you said when you were going to UCC that there wasn't really any LGBT community or spaces in Cork. Was that what started your political involvement then was that move back to Cork saying 'we need to have more of these spaces?' Or can you talk a little bit more about what your involvement was in kind of establishing some political groups in Cork?**

A Yeah, because like I came back down for a job basically for a job in Cork County Council as a planner. And there was so little available in Cork, there was just like the Imperial Hotel bar so like you'd go in and some nights and there would be nobody there and then other nights there would be some gay people sitting there and you would join them and that kind of stuff. But it was very minimal, very, very minimal. There was a cruising ground of course but that could be tricky and could be dangerous and blah blah. So a group of us who were kind of left wing progressive whatever you want to say, gay men, began to meet and discuss and we were called Wednesday Night group first and then that evolved into the Cork Gay Collective. Again if the person was political, you know-- it wasn't solely a charitable or a political activism that brought us to try, it was also a social event. You wanted to meet other gay men. So that was a big spur for activism.

Q **So it was that kind of-- it began as quite a social thing and then moved on to being more political is that correct?**

A Well no but, but you know but we began – we began - to meet and to discuss things. But you know, the political and the social, you know, for gay men and lesbians and whatever when there isn't much out there in society they are both

interlinked, you know. A lot of times you would have people coming along to Gay Collective meetings later on you know, 1980s and stuff and they were basically just coming out you know, (laughs) The Gay Collective was a radical political group. But a few of them weren't interested in that at all they were just coming on to meet gay men, which was perfectly fine.

Q Okay brilliant so it was actualy started as a political group the social aspect was just attached on, was that based out of the Quay Coop?

A Was it based in the Quay Coop?

Q Yes, yes.

A No, because at that stage there was IGRM was set up in Cork and so we used to meet in their disco in McCurtain's Street until we got thrown out because of political disagreements and then we met in the upstairs room of a pub. Dicey's pub in Cork and, and then again we saw the need to have a place to meet and a bookshop and a café and you know that kind of stuff, have a place in the city so the Quay Coop came out of that need for a place to meet and to socially and politically…

Q Brilliant and can I, sorry go ahead. I was just going to ask a bit about the political differences between the IGRM in Cork and the Cork gay collective, when you said there that there's a little bit of conflict about political disagreements. Could you talk a little bit about that?

A Well at that time there was this ridiculous split between the National Gay Federation and the Irish Gay Rights movement. We were kind of collateral damage to that. Because they said we couldn't meet in their premises in Cork if we didn't kind of sign up to the IGRM. We weren't going to do that for a whole range of reasons. But the IGRM in Cork and kind of nationally was not that interested in political activism. They were far more interested in providing a disco which you know is a very good thing to have, essential, but they would have been very middle of the road or, you know, establishment oriented and we were like, we considered ourselves as very radical anti-establishment.

Q Okay so there was kind of this conflict between kind of being quite, you know, nice and focused on our own kind of things, hidden away and you were very much geared towards political change and legal change and things like that.

A Yeah, yeah.

Q Brilliant, and can you tell me a bit of, kind of, what Cork Gay Collective was doing, so kind of when it was established what were, kind of, the campaigns that you ran and things like that?

A Well one of the first things we did was we organised for a gay sweat shop, the London theatre groups to come down from Dublin like they were going to, probably, the Project Arts centres. So we arranged for them to come down to Cork and that was our first big public event. You know, it went very well, and it got a good lot of publicity and stuff like that. And then after that we did the Cork Gay Manifesto, the Cork Gay Collective Manifesto which kind of, you know, it's a very interesting thing you know it's kind of like what left wing groups did in those days (laughs) was write manifestos and said 'this is what we stand for.' It took a huge amount of debate and argument and all that stuff, but you know we set out our pro-feminist position, our international position, our left position and so on. And then we organised the first National Gay Conference in Cork in Connolly Hall in 1981. That was a huge event, very successful and, you know, set the agenda for the next 10 years and probably longer. And we lobbied the ICTU conference in Cork, they were holding it in the City Hall later that year like June 1981. And so that was the kind of beginning of our trade union activism which, you know, went on throughout the '80s and '90s and right up to -- I mean the trade union movement has been hugely important and laterally in the Yes Equality campaign for equal marriage.

Q Yes, I see so there was a lot of, kind of, you know, kind of, there was gender issues, economic issues, sexuality issues, all kind of tangled up in the Cork Gay Collective.

A Yeah.

Q And that's-- you have done kind of such an amazing, varied things throughout your life and your activism I was wondering could you tell me about like any kind of standout positive moments from those early days of activism because I imagine, you know, when you were doing this work in Cork in the early '80s like it wasn't exactly a hospitable environment for gay people at the time. Were there any kind of particularly strong positive moments for you in your activism at that time?

A Well I suppose there were huge numbers, (laughs) I can't think of a moment because we were moving in barren territory. And so everything we did was for the first time, you know, and strangely I suppose nearly everything we set our hand to was successful. So, you know kind of on a personal note I suppose it was me and Trisha Tracey proposing a lesbian and gay rights motion for my union, the local Government and Public Services Union in Cork in 1982. And, you know, that passed overwhelmingly because that was a very personal thing. But then also there was The National Gay Conference, you know, setting up the Quay Coop, and those were the ones in the early '80s. Kind of later on I suppose, myself especially, but a group of us trade unionists lobbied the campaign very strongly and then ICTU published their 1987 guidelines-- what would you call them?... Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace Guidelines for negotiating. And that was like a phenomenal achievement because a trade union is very powerful, they were the first powerful group in Ireland to support lesbians and gay men and our equal rights. So that was a high point of, you know, up to 1987. But there were so many of them…

Q Oh no I was going to say that's like such a huge thing considering that, you know, it wasn't until much later where the equality acts were coming in, that actually ratified those guidelines as put forward by SIPTU but I was wondering then was it in those moments when you were a gay man working for the first time was that when you were kind of realising that you didn't have the same rights as everyone else. Or was that something that came much earlier for you that you realised that there was kind of a big disparity between being a heterosexual person in Ireland and being an LGBT person in Ireland?

A Well I suppose on a political level, I think it was 1980, the High Court struck down David Norris's case and basically said that it was constitutional to be threatened with imprisonment. And then it was 1983 that, you know, the Supreme Court supported that and then started using terrible language and stuff so that was as a polite middle class well educated man that was kind of so shocking that the state was saying that to you. That you were you know your life wasn't worth much and your freedoms weren't and your human rights was of no concern to them. And of course around that time of, you know, there were

murders of gay men quite unfortunately quite a few of them you know in Cork there was John Roche, in Dublin there was Charles Self, and Declan Flynn. And then of course the terrible judgment that set free the killers of Declan Flynn in 1983. So those were all points where, you know, it was put up to you, you know, that you were going to have to fight, and fight very hard for any kind of life in Ireland, for any kind of quality of life. I suppose the other aspect of it was that we had so few social and community stability, you know. So little visibility in the city, the Cork Examiner were quite, wouldn't publish gay information or telephone on gay information Cork, they wouldn't publish the telephone number in the Cork Examiner newspaper. So there was a whole sense of ostracization and marginalisation and so on.

But it wasn't all doom and gloom (Laughs).

Q (Laughs) Yeah.

A We also had a great time. When you are young, you know, you have all the energy and the enthusiasm and the resilience to cope with all that. Now yes we were having a great time you know going to parties and going to discos and going to the pub and going to dinner parties and going down to West Cork etc. etc. It was incredible, like you know, as a gay man or lesbian or whatever, transgender person, you have to create your own identity. Especially in those days because there was no received identity. We were the first lesbian and gay activists in Ireland, we couldn't look to the past like they could in Germany or something, you know, or the United States. So we were carving out new territory and that was terribly exciting and terribly-- a sense of creativity and a sense of achievement and a sense of self actualisation. Yeah, so just to, sort of, stress (laughing) the positivity of it as well.

Q Yeah, no, absolutely, because I think sometimes when you look back into, kind of, the '80s in Ireland it seems to be quite a particularly dark time across all social life.

A Yeah. Totally, yeah.

Q It's something very hard to see that period in a positive light. So it's really amazing to, I think for us to hear you speak about this and to capture that. I was wondering could you talk a little bit more about those social events, or the political, kind of, events that the Cork gay collective would hold. Was

there anything in particular that you did that you know, were you thinking about visions for the future of lesbian and gay life in Ireland?

A Eh…there are kind of advantages and disadvantages of being in a small town or a small city or whatever like Cork compared to Dublin. And one of the advantages is that you have to work with a lot of other groups who aren't left wing or gay but who were progressive or liberal or whatever. And so that was the case in the anti-amendment campaign in Cork in 1982 and 1983 and, you kno, the Gay Collective effectively disbanded to take part in the campaign. But then you were involved with all the other progressive groups in the city and individuals, people like Catherine Forde who went on to have a major role in various campaigns in Cork and later on when she moved to Dublin. And there was, you know, in the first National Gay Conference we had a gala ball as we used to describe it, in the kind of conference centre of Connolly Hall in Cork which is fantastic. Just a recently constructed trade union ITGW building. But that again was lesbians and gays and their supporters. So it was a great sense of camaraderie and solidarity and stuff like that. And, you know, the IGRN club was a kind of semi-derelict, you know, narrow death trap stairs on McCurtain St whereas this was high quality, a live band, great food and all that kind of stuff. And you could be dancing with your gay partner at it, you know, and everybody there and so that was great. There was dinner parties and we used to, I remember we used to go down to West Cork and Kerry a lot and rent cottages. I've a lot of photographs of all of these these events. Yeah, yeah. So we had a good time.

Q Can I ask Kieran, was this kind of, you know, as you said this was in a trade union building but you also talked a lot there about, kind of, renting cottages in rural Kerry and things like that. Was there a big difference between like being open and out about your identity within those spaces and then within, like, wider public Ireland or was there anything there that was different about how you expressed your identity within, kind of, LGBT events and then in wider public life.

A No, because I came out, I was out at work, you know, in Cork County Council. And then I decided, you know, the Cork Gay Collective went on local radio-myself and Cathal Kerrigan I think or was it Arthur Leahy I forget now. So that was the big public coming out (laughing). And eh, and so then everybody knew,

do you know what I mean because the gossip network went live. Because it was quite an unusual thing to do in those days. No so there was no, I was out in all places and situations.

Q **And how was that for you overall, I know, you know, as someone who came out in, you know, 2015 for me I think it's a different kind of experience altogether probably too far removed even to understand it myself. But having read about people's experiences of coming out and as you said like having quite a public coming out how was that for you?**

A It was perfectly fine. You know (laughs) I remember I went to my mother and said you know that I was going to come out on the radio and one aspect of insecurity was that I was a temporary planner in the Cork County Council so they wouldn't have to fire me, all they needed to do was just not renew my contract. And in good middle class Cork mother response, she said 'what about your good job in the County Council?' That was her only concern. She was very supportive, my family were very supportive, the work force were very supportive. The union was very supportive. Tom Bogue who I worked with was then the President of the LGBSU and I went to him, got his support. Fergus Finlay who – I don't know if you recognise that name, you know he was a fulltime official and he was very supportive as well. So I had got my ducks in a row.

Q **That's brilliant, and can I ask you about, kind of, just to go back to when you started organising in Cork and kind of setting up the Cork Gay Collective. What was the vision of, kind of, LGBT life for you then, like what did you want to achieve as part of, as an outcome of your activism?**

A Well, complete equality basically. And we wanted it now (laughing). Because the Cork Gay Collective banner was 'Gay Rights Now.' So, you know, we wanted rapid progress and we wanted it in every aspect, it wasn't just about decriminalisation, we wanted it in the workplace, we wanted equal status legislation, you know, services. If you look at the range of motions that were down, that were passed, discussed and passed at the first National Gay Conference it includes lesbian and gay history, education, youth you know the whole gamut of a person's life, of society, so we wanted to transform society basically. To provide equality for us and also to provide equality for everyone else.

Q And can I ask you there I can totally empathise as someone who, you know, started activism in college and, you know, the need to have everything now and making, kind of, very swift demands for things. I was wondering as you kind of got into that flow of, like, campaigning and all the amazing campaigns that you talked about, were there any compromises that you had to make to achieve those goals in your activism?

A Em, no, no, I think probably the biggest compromise or the biggest decision that we had to make, GLEN in its later manifestation was around civil marriage and civil partnership. Because when GLEN-- I say there are three phases of GLEN, that, you know, it was founded in 1988, campaigned for gay law reform and equality legislation on unfair dismissals so they were achieved in '93/94 roughly. And so there was a second phase of GLEN, you know, up until we got funding from Atlantic Philanthropy which allowed us to kind of-- it was phenomenal resourcing and we could employ really high skilled people and we had loads of money for printing and publishing and holding, you know, meetings and all that stuff. But anyway when the third phase of GLEN was founded we were developing our policy on civil marriage and we said that was our goal, civil marriage. Then the labour party came to us and said you know that their view, this was about, what, 2005, they said their legal advice was that civil marriage will require a referendum under the constitution. And so at that meeting we had to decide were we going to support the labour civil union bill or say 'no, we are not having any of it we only want marriage. Marriage or nothing.' We decided that, look, progress is progress and we fully supported this labour party civil union bill which they put before the Dáil twice, and then we supported civil partnerships strongly as a steppingstone to marriage. And as a solution to people's immediate needs, you know, because people were dying, people were ill, people were-- couples were being split apart because they couldn't-- they had no legal relationship to one another. So a couple might have no right to live in the country and there were all sorts of practical examples where people were being threatened with expulsion from the country and all that stuff. So that was the biggest one.

We made no concession or compromise at all around the gay law reform, you know we campaigned for equality in every single aspect. So there could be no

difference between the treatment of homosexuality in the criminal law and heterosexuality. And we made that-- we put that very clearly to the government, that we would call for the defeat of any gay law reform that was brought in that put in an equal age of consent say of eighteen instead of seventeen. And there was you know a lot of pressure on the government at the time to, as they say, mark a difference. You know to say that homosexuality is not the same as heterosexuality, it's not equal to heterosexuality. And we are going to make this clear in the legislation, by having different age of consent. But that didn't happen.

Q And can I ask you there when you are talking about GLEN supporting the civil partnerships bill, based on the advice of the labour party I know that that was a very controversial (laughs)--

A Yeah.

Q Kind of position to take at the time. I was wondering, you know, in terms of like, as you were saying, that was the only compromise you had to make, I was wondering, like, how do you feel about that now? As, like, a decision that you had to make as an organisation?

A Em, well everybody now accepts that a referendum was essential. So you know even Marriage Equality who were very, very strongly critical of us, I mean they went into the constitutional convention making the case for a referendum. So – eh – I think even at the time like people like the Irish Council of Civil Liberties and all sorts of opinion, legal opinion and civil rights opinion accepted, they didn't necessarily like it but they just accepted that that was the case. That you did need, you did need a constitutional referendum. And so the thing in front of us then with the Labour Party and later on with Dermot Ahern preparing and the previous minister who died Brian Lenihan was would we say to them – 'no! we don't care we don't want anything to do with civil partnerships, we only want civil marriage.' Because one of the, I think, one of the critical aspects for political activists is you have a huge sense of responsibility, well in GLEN we thought we had anyway. Because we had this considerable Atlantic funding which I suppose we had quite a status at the time, a leadership role. And -- even though we got criticised I thought 'well that goes with the territory.' Like if you are afraid of being criticised for doing something that you think is right, then, get off the pitch,

you know. If you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen.

Because we knew, you know, there was the urgency of it, you know the fierce urgency of -- people needed rights now. So there was no commitment to a constitutional referendum, so this thing could have gone on for ten years, fifteen years, and people, couples would have no rights at all. So we thought, you know, something is on the table and this is again I suppose in a sense that there was no compromise within the civil partnership. The civil partnership mimicked the rights and obligations and responsibilities of civil marriage in almost every single aspect. And in fact you know, Alan Shatter in the Dáil said, you know, 'there's a danger that this will be struck down by the Supreme Court because it's too close to marriage.'

And what the drafters – obviously the partnership thing they changed some words you know all of the substance of the rights were there, like the right to the family home. But they changed, that's the family home was what heterosexual marriage was called. That's the term, so they changed it to shared home, which really annoyed some people but I thought for god's sake you know like, (laughing) the right is there. The exact same right is there but it's a different term, to protect the civil partnership act from being struck down in the Supreme Court. As you can see I'm still, worked up about it still.

Q **No, I mean you've had a very, like, you know, your time involved in activism has spanned over several decades and I think that I just actually want to ask you about that. That kind of change from when you said you were younger and starting out and saying you know that you were demanding everything now. To I guess understanding the way that political and legal establishments work as you were working quite closely with the labour party at the time. Can you talk about I guess differences between when you started out in your activism and when you were kind of, you know, the like later stages of GLEN as you said.**

A I think we were-- it wasn't just me it was Christopher Robson and Eoin Collins and you know other people involved in GLEN. (Laughing) Because the ICCL document of 1990 that we worked with, myself and Chris and Tom Cooney wrote that was called 'Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay men' and then I remember when we did the-- with the equality authority when we, you know, in 2002 I

think their report on lesbian and gay issues, bisexual issues, Christopher Robson kind, like, of insisted with Niall Crowley that it would be called 'Implementing Equality for Lesbian and Gay men'. So we were always committed to that idea of immediate progress not just talking about things, but implementing things, like now and implementing, all these phrases. And when GLEN was set up, sorry when GLEN got a first five year tranche of funding from Atlantic Philanthropy I said and I wrote and I spoke at the launch and all that stuff. And said it to Atlantic Philanthropy that we wanted to put GLEN out of existence as soon as possible (laughing). You know that we had no time at all for this notion of handing the struggle on to the next generation or whatever. And of course that became a problem then when we went back to Atlantic to look for a second five year tranche of funding. And so what we said, you know, to them then was look we've made phenomenal progress in the first five years, we had transformed the situation and now the second, sorry the second strategic plan was called 'Finishing the task' or something like that, so (laughing). We were always…we were always always intent on speed and getting, and there are a lot of things around that. There's ambition I think we were always terribly ambitious about change. We always had a huge confidence in ourselves, in our ability to deliver change and we had a huge confidence in our sense of our ability to get the support of the Irish people and the Irish – the Oireachtas and stuff like that. Because that's-- you weren't around in the '80s, you know, political activism but a lot on the left, especially the kind of liberal part of Ireland like used to think we were just a basket case. Ireland was a basket case. And irredeemably reactionary. You know, so well I, certainly, and we never believed that we always believed that if we set our minds to it and latterly in the case with Atlantic funding when you have considerable resources, full time workers- you could achieve phenomenal progress in a very short space of time. That was our aim you know, that was our aim.

Q **Yeah and can I ask you there Kieran just when you were saying about-- I love that you said that your aim was to have GLEN (laughing) not be in existence and not, you know, that there wouldn't be a need to do so much work to get that. I was wondering did you have to work quite hard to be heard. Did you have to shout quite loud to be heard and kind of get a lot of**

people on board with what you were proposing? Particularly I guess, you know, thinking about the Equality Now report, which in 1990 was incredibly radical like to suggest those things even before decriminalisation.

A Em…yes and no. You know, we were able to get the support of the trade union movement and they were hugely important in the gay law reform campaign and in getting equality legislation and getting sexual orientation into the Unfair Dismissals Act. Like, you know GLEN in the first phase like had no money, no office, no filing cabinet, nothing, no full-time worker or part-time worker. But we had the support, Eoin Collins used to work in Nexus research and they were you know a research company so we had their facilities. And we had phenomenally skilled erudite people you know, like Christopher Robson, Cathal Kerrigan, and stuff like that, so we had phenomenal resources in that sense. You know, political experience, we were very analytical, very strategic you know we continuously evaluated what we were doing. So we never – even though we were kind of marginalised – we never particularly felt it. Or we didn't allow our marginalisation to stop us.

Q That's amazing, so like kind of just working against that and I guess kind of it's that idea of like reclaiming that marginalisation and saying, you know, 'we deserve our rightful place in the centre of Irish society.'

A Yeah exactly.

Q I was wondering if you could talk about, I guess, maybe the differences between the community, the LGBT community when you started your activism and the community now, because it seems to me anyway that everything that, you know, GLEN has sought out to do it has achieved. And you said that you were always focusing on implementing change and making sure that these things are going to happen. I was wondering considering you started your activism in the early '80s you know this is you know probably almost forty years since that.

A Yeah.

Q Can you describe any of the differences between the LGBT community then and the LGBT community now?

A Eh…well I suppose the first thing is that Ireland has been transformed you know from being the most reactionary country in the world, well one of them, to being one of the most progressive countries in the world. And you know in historical terms a lot of that change was quite rapid. Kind of for the LGBT community I think it's interesting that it's a matter of numbers of people who are out, than it is about people's sense of themselves or their spirit or their confidence, you know, or their determination. Because again it's kind of really interesting, I've got, you know, photographs of the, both the Fairview march and the early Pride march of '93 and '94 in Dublin and you know lesbian and gay events in Cork and stuff like that. And there, they show the same young confident happy exuberant young people that you would see on Pride parades today or, you know, the celebrations around Yes Equality. So it goes back to that thing I was talking about before, that you were agreeing with, that it's that we were not downtrodden. That didn't define us. Even just the clothes people (laughing), it's really interesting you know that photograph I sent on to you in Fairview, I just noticed now I was wearing blue shoes! So just even in that sense of, of exuberance about your clothes you know what I mean. It's just the same, the people, they kind of look the same. But the biggest, sorry I'm only just wandering now but the biggest thing is the numbers. The numbers of people who are out and confident like that, were much, much smaller in the early '80s. And the numbers now are much greater. If Fairview happened now it wouldn't be four hundred or six hundred or eight hundred it would probably be half a million. That's the big difference.

Q Yeah, I was wondering just if you could talk a little bit about being at the Fairview Park march, because those years like early '80s and like I mean even up to after decriminalisation you know there was a huge amount of gay homicides and as well as that you have the AIDs crisis in the middle of it. I'm just wondering, I can only assume that they were quite negative moments for a lot of people within the community as well as activists. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how those things made you feel sorry to, I know you have been so positive (laughing) and I've asked such a negative question.

A Well, Fairview is it?

Q Yes, yeah.

A Yeah, well you know Fairview was horrific. Because of what the judge, said and the fact that the killers were free, freed and you know they had their victory march around their neighbourhood. And it went into Fairview park as far as I know, with their victory parade. So you know that, and you have to put that into the context that the Supreme Court the same year had decided that we could be put into prison. So, you know the Supreme Court is meant to be the defender of the human rights of citizens and here it was going – doing the opposite. And the chief justice in his comments- quite crude and you know just awful, and there were the other murders around that time too. So things were pretty grim and awful. But it's important also to say that the judge got hugely criticised in the Oireachtas and it was debated in the Oireachtas. And so we weren't isolated or alone.

And equally we were very involved in the anti-amendment campaign in Dublin and Cork and other places so we got a lot, people were quite mobilised at that stage. So there was a lot of support from the anti-amendment campaign and from the Rape Crisis centre and civil liberties groups and so on. So we were not isolated, there was a lot of solidarity.

And I suppose the most important thing was that the Dublin Gay and Lesbian Collective and Cathal Kerrigan I think was key in this, was that sense of empowerment that they had, and sense of leadership and sense of confidence. That there had to be a march and the march had to go out to Fairview. Not just around Stephens' Green or going to to the Dáil or whatever which would have been safer or less threatening. So for everybody who took part in that march it was a huge sense of empowerment. It was a huge sense of trepidation, some element of fear but also a sense of elation that we were threatened by that judge and his decision, we were threatened by the Supreme Court, we were threatened by the gards because their harassment during the Charles Self investigation. But again we weren't taking it lying down, we were going out there to stake our claim. To be in Fairview park and to take, in a sense, the battle to the bigots. And to show that we weren't frightened. That's why I would describe it as our Stonewall when we fought back.

So if you were sitting at home with your gay friends or alone or whatever, and nobody was protesting against Fairview that would be demoralising, that

wouldn't describe it, you would be devastated, you would be depressed, and you would probably be getting on the next plane out of Ireland. But the fact that we fought back meant that the sense of horror and the sense of you know about somebody's murder was, that was there but equally you know it was a march for Declan Flynn as well as a march for human rights and equality and civil rights in Ireland.

Q **Yeah, it's kind of amazing to hear you talk about it, I'm just reminded actually there's a David Manovich quote that I have hung up in the kitchen downstairs about, you know, when he gets the diagnosis of his HIV and he says – "I'll let my teeth become knives and I'll no longer be afraid for the rest of my life" or something like that. And it kind of reminds me of the way that you talk about the kind of defiance of your participation in these marches. I know you mentioned Cathal Kerrigan a lot and I know that he was quite involved in gay health action, I was wondering did you have any involvement around the AIDS crisis yourself in terms of, you know, connectivity with other communities about getting information around HIV at that time?**

A I was involved, like, Cork was one of the one of the, kind of, instigators of the gay health action along with Dublin. I was involved in the early days in Cork but then when I moved to Dublin I was living with Donal Sheehan at the time and he got involved in gay health action. But there were – the mid-'80s, the early '80s were a phenomenal flowering of lesbian and gay activism you know. Incredible marches and achievements and sense of confidence. But that declined rapidly and terribly in the mid-'80s and there was all sorts of reasons for that. There was too many defeats, there was huge emigration, huge unemployment, etc. And so Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collective collapsed, didn't meet, so there were very few activists, anyway I made a very conscious decision in Dublin that I would concentrate on trade union activism, and you know, kind of, getting a network of lesbian and gay and trade unions and supporters together to work on that issue. Because otherwise it wouldn't happen, you know. Nearly all of the activists that were left, which is an awful thing to say, got involved in gay health action. So I just thought that they are, they were a phenomenally again talented erudite

experienced group of people and I thought it was strategically more important to put some energy into the trade union.

Q **Absolutely, can I ask you then as you said there's a huge dip in activism did that not pick up again until after decriminalisation when you had those early Pride marches happening in '93 and '94.**

A Yeah there was a kind of a pick-up in things happening you know, I suppose the establishment of GLEN in 1988 and the European court judgement striking down the anti-gay laws. That was a big boost I think and there were very good numbers at the early meetings of GLEN, you know because it began as a response to the European court to make sure they didn't bring in the British style gay law reform which was very oppressive. And around that time GCN was established so there was a kind of beginnings of movement in the later 1980s. There was – yeah, greater confidence in the later '80s and then you know there was-- Cork again a great powerhouse of initiatives and stuff that they were doing, and... Sorry I just lost my train of thought. I think the first Pride parade after the last one, in 1985 or whenever that was, was it 1992 then I think, yes I think so just before gay law reform.

Q **And can I ask you there about the differences that you found in kind of moving back like the differences then between Cork and Dublin, in terms of the way activism was happening because it seems to me that both places were quite a hub of activism at the time. But as you said like Cork was a huge instigator for a lot of political and social change. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that as it's often you know we often get a lot of Dublin centric views of LGBT activism. And I think other places get left behind.**

A Yeah, well I think, the Quay Coop was like a vital resource and played exactly the role that we had wanted it to. So it became a hub because of the café and the bookshop and the meeting place, it became a hub for all sorts of individuals, activists, for, you know environmental activists, for political parties, for trade union activists, lesbians, gay men, blah blah blah. And it was (laughing) it almost provided the role of the internet in days when there wasn't an internet, you know. Because it was, you could rapidly communicate things that you were going on a protest or something like that by putting a poster up in the Quay Coop

because people would be coming in and out of there for their coffee or their food or their book or whatever. And it was – so then it was hugely important as well, I think, a sense of camaraderie so you know you could bump into people there and have chats with them and stuff like that. Which Dublin didn't have, Dublin was much more disparate. There was no, the Dublin resource centre was perhaps a place to meet but not particularly I thought or it didn't seem to play the same role, unifying role as the Quay Coop did in Cork.

And my experience of going back up to Dublin was that it was very cliquish and quite sectarian, you know. It was big enough for small left wing groups you know ten of them or fifteen of them, or whatever, to be quite sectarian (laughing), spend their time giving out about other left wing groups. But Cork was too small for that. You had to get on with everybody, you know, just I remember doing various demos like the one we did against the South African Ambassador coming into Cork airport. That was organised at the last minute through the Quay Coop and it included everybody like, you know all the disputational left group who otherwise couldn't stand one another in Dublin, couldn't stand one another. But in Cork they would work together because they had to. If you wanted to do a protest you had to work with others.

Q **I think that's very interesting, I see so much similarities between queer activism nowadays with that kind of, you know, petty falling out--**

A Yeah--

Q **Sorry were you going to say something there, Kieran?**

A No, but it was a big culture shock for me to go back to Dublin or to realise that it was kind of a much lonelier form of activism, if you know what I mean.

Q **Yeah.**

A Cork was so small and the Quay Coop it was like a bubble bath. (laughing)

Q **And I think, I lived in Cork for a year back in 2016 and I actualy found that very similar kind of attitude where you would see so many left wing groups you know whether it was protesting against the 8th or for Repeal and things like that when I was in Cork. It seemed like there was a much bigger sense of community there--**

A Yeah.

Q **Than when I'd visit friends in Dublin.**

A Yeah.

Q I do want to ask you one question about Quay Coop because I just used to live around the corner (laughing) from it on Evergreen St. So you know going into the bookshop and sometimes Arthur would be sitting there and you know he's such a huge figure in terms of activism. That kind of, I only heard stories about it but the fact he would sometimes have banned books and things like that brought into the Quay Coop. That you couldn't get because of censorship laws in Ireland and things like that, was it that kind of radical socialist view that underpinned the activism in Cork. Was that not present in Dublin?

A Well I mean in numerical terms like there obviously would have been far more left activists in Dublin than in Cork, you know. Eh…but em… I don't know, I'm from Cork maybe I'm being parochial or chauvinistic. People say Cork people are. But like I always thought Cork activists were far more respective in what they set out to do. The Cork Gay Collective didn't collapse in the mid-'80s you know, you know again I suppose because of the nurturing environment of the Quay Coop I suppose. The lesbian and gay initiative continued right throughout that period, in Cork. I mean, there was a decline in the numbers of people who came along to the collective because of immigration and so on. But, it eh, but it didn't collapse. It collapsed in Dublin, and in Dublin there would have been you know the NGF the Hirschfeld Centre burnt down. So for a while, I don't know when they changed the name to Gay Switchboard Dublin but you know Gay Switchboard Dublin would have been the only significant lesbian stroke gay organisation in the country outside of Cork, yeah.

Q So it's kind of like I guess, I suppose being resourced and space was such a huge important thing and due to a lot of, I guess the tragedies of the Hirschfeld Centre burning down and things like that, that kind of led to a lot of fractures there. And then also political, kind of, differences I guess.

A I think there's a strange thing about the physical problems of meeting up in Dublin. You know, so, it's like, I used to live out in Sutton, in a beautiful house out in Sutton with my sister and her kids. But it took about an hour I think to get into town from there. So it's an interesting thing (laughing) the lack of proper public transport and proper high density housing is – inhibits political activism because

like a lot of those people as you know around Dublin was a kip at that time. It was falling apart. So there was – all of the apartments that you have now in Dublin you know in the inner city they weren't there so people tended to kind of live further out. And I think that made it harder to meet, to come you know in and it kind of in a sense it probably encouraged people in a downturn, in a political downturn to turn inward and focus on the domestic, you know. Whereas in Cork the Quay Coop and you know there was some progressive restaurants or whatever you know, run by progressive people or who were left people. So the, the, social was more interesting than you being at home, you know. Whereas in Dublin like…

Q **Can I ask you--**

A Yeah go on, yeah.

Q **No go ahead you finish up there.**

A …yeah, because there was nothing as attractive in the centre of Dublin that would encourage you to get off your sofa (laughing) and schlep in by bad public transport. Like your experience of living in Cork like you were just around the door from the Quay Coop.

Q **Exactly yeah and I think Cork even though it's a big city it's still very accessible, like to get to all parts of the city.**

A It's very walkable.

Q **Yeah, whereas Dublin I feel can be a maze unless you are from there (laughing). And I can't imagine in a time where there's a lot of dilapidated buildings and you know with I guess at the time no real defined gay spaces, there may have been bars that gay people attended but not necessarily, you know, what we have now. I am aware we are over the hour Kieran so I don't want to keep you for too much longer. But I was just wondering what does your activism look like now. Are you still involved in activism?**

A No, well one of the questions that you had on the list was what was your worst moment. And I thought the worst moment of my political activism was when I was forced to resign from the board of GLEN by the then GLEN board members. To save their own skins because they were under some media, the media were after them or asking them what was all this stuff going on in GLEN at the time. So they figured out that if they got me to resign and pushed me under the bus

(laughing), that it would take the attention off them. Which it worked, the media once I resigned it got huge publicity, frighteningly huge amount of publicity. And that took the attention off them. So as a political ploy that worked but I mean, I felt quite betrayed by that. I felt quite hurt by it. Bruised and all that kind of stuff by their quite crude behaviour. And kind of you know rigging the story to suit their own, rewriting history to suit their own needs and stuff like that. So that was a pretty awful time.

But it was interesting because the media coverage insofar as I read it because I was a bit behind the sofa, didn't watch the television or anything, but I did read the newspaper because they went over my career and stuff like that. I was joking in that it was like attending your funeral, you know where people are saying all these wonderful things about you but you happen to be there yourself.

So like the media attention was incredible, I was thinking 'Jesus it's just GLEN and it's just me, me resigning' but obviously the name, like Kieran Rose it's an unusual name I suppose and people remember it. And GLEN had a much bigger status than I realised. So you know I thought god this is a small beer, you know a board member resigns from a gay organisation, again it's an organisation but surely it wouldn't be headline news and stuff but it was. It was…but I felt I was treated well by the media. I don't criticise the media. I criticise them for how they have certain lines of inquiry that they didn't follow up on but they didn't have a go at me in particular, you know, so. They were quite kind of, praising of me and my career and my career as a planner and arguing for better apartments and the vacant land levy and criticising the minister for reducing apartment size even though I was employed by DCC, Dublin City Council.

So yeah, but I decided that I wasn't going to get bitter about it or nurse a kind of a grievance and so I didn't. But I've continued my political activism. I was asked to become the independent chair of the south inner city drugs and alcohol task force which I have been involved in now for the past two or three years and that's, I mean that's, drugs in Dublin inner city and alcohol as well are a terrible problem. A frightening, frightening problem, I mean horrific problem, the violence, the deaths, the lives destroyed the families destroyed and neighbourhoods and communities destroyed by it, it's absolutely shocking, which I think Ireland and Dublin mostly isn't aware of or doesn't care that much about

it. So that… And I've come across incredibly committed people in that area you know, very principled people doing fantastic work. So, that has been very eh, I'm delighted with that, that's continuing my political activism in a similar but different sphere, different arena.

And then as a planner I have got involved in actions around my own area and stuff like that in, you know. I live in the liberties of Dublin and it's a great place to live but it needs improvement in it's environmental quality and it has a lot of disadvantage and so on. So I've been involved in those things and that's just a final thing for me to conclude. I think it's interesting that sometimes once you become a gay activist and are maybe publicly known it's almost as if that's your only identity, is as a gay activist and (laughing) you don't have any other interests or achievements or you are not involved in anything else. Whereas, me being a planner and me being a gay activist and me being a trade unionist are all related, in my mind anyway. And all kind of fed into one another, you know, things that I learnt as a planner I fed into being a gay activist and vice versa. And like a lot of my life was spent as a planner activist, getting changes to environmental quality, public transport and again people like Eoin Collins and myself worked on a project about the need for public transport in Dublin circa 1990. And Eoin was a member of GLEN and was in [indiscernible]. And Christopher Robinson was an architect and was an environmental campaigner as well.

Q **I think it goes back to what you were saying earlier on about the personal, it's political and it's really hard to detach the different spheres of your life. Because they all inform your political view in some way. I just want to go back and ask you a bit about the resignation from GLEN if you don't mind talking about the context of that.**

A Sure, it was a very complex story and in some ways very simple. But when Sheehan resigned as executive director, the fulltime person CEO, we didn't call him a CEO but anyway, so we went through the process of hiring a new person and we went through huge processes, interviews and all that stuff. So we hired this person and shortly after the person was appointed and started work as the Executive Director, I started to get complaints of bullying from the other members of staff. And we should have been much quicker, you know, in

responding because one of the things she did was the minute she came into GLEN was she decided that the staff members could not communicate with the board members of GLEN. Because previously we were all friends you know the board members and the fulltime staff and board members would drop in and out of GLEN, blah blah. So it was very fluid but that was the first thing she did was cut off communication. I remember thinking at the time that's an odd thing to do. And also because as a trade unionist and knowing about you know issues of workplace rights and stuff like that, what happens if there is a claim of bullying? Who does the person go to if they can't go to the board? Because that would be your avenue you know if the CEO is bullying you, if a member of staff is bullying you, you can go to the CEO but if the CEO is bullying you who do you go to if you're cut off from contacting a board member? But anyway, so eventually we instigated an external independent investigation of the claims of bullying and stuff like that so that caused the executive director to go into a total tizzy and em she went to the media and went to the charities regulator, commission, whatever they are called making all sorts of claims about money being not used properly and she brought up the thing that I had been supported in my Senate campaign by GLEN. And that got covered by the Sunday Business Post and she was on Morning Ireland but the interesting—which I thought was-- that's my criticism of the media. That they never asked her (laughing) 'was there anything else you'd like to tell us? Is there a reason why you are now coming out with these revelations?' Because you know the reason I think was because she was being investigated for bullying and that was her getting her retaliation in first.
So, you know, the media followed up that story and that's where the Board-- I had offered to resign in early 2017 and the board said no, please stay on. And so I said okay I'll stay on, kind of almost under duress but I said I'd stay on for another year anyway. And then the board felt under pressure from the media a couple of months later and that's when they decided they would force me to resign from GLEN. But in the heel of the hunt SIPO investigated me but cleared me. In the end I had to pay (laughing) thirty euro to GLEN as compensation for-- they spent money on my campaign and then I paid them back after a couple of weeks after the campaign was over. So they worked out that the interest on the money that GLEN had spent and before I repaid it was thirty euro, thirty euro

that GLEN was missing. So that was the end of that, and the charities Commissioner cleared GLEN as well so it was as somebody said in the Irish Times, it was an ignominious end to GLEN and kind of unfortunate end. And especially the behaviour of the board of GLEN, because one of the worst things they did was they took down the GLEN website, all of the reports that we had- huge academic TCD reports on mental health and all sorts of fantastic resources for the community. They took the GLEN website down so those reports are now not available. Unless the organisation that we worked with, I presume some of them, TCD would have them or BeLonGTo would have them. But I think that they did that because they just wanted to close off any connection they had with GLEN. It's terribly, what would you call it, ignoble em and terrible thing to do, terribly irresponsible thing to do. They could have left the GLEN website up and taken down any information about them being on the board of GLEN or whatever. Or they could have just called it you know when they wound up GLEN they could have called it GLEN information website or something, you know, and left that up there just as a way for people to access the various phenomenally useful research that we had paid a fortune, well not a fortune but paid a lot of money for, getting the money from the state and from Atlantic Philanthropy and stuff.

I mean it's, I try not to get bitter about it. (Laughing)

Q **Yeah, I was going to ask how do you feel about that now, because obviously it was quite an emotional and difficult thing for you to do considering that you had helped establish GLEN in 1988 and then be forced to step down from the board is quite a difficult thing. I wonder how you felt about that now and if you were to go back in time would you do anything differently?**

A Well yeah like I would have just paid-- at the time it seemed like a good idea. Because for my senate campaign I was renting a desk in GLEN so had a laptop and got a separate phone from my work phone and all that kind of stuff. And you know doing various posters and stuff done to put up on the internet and that type of thing. I remember thinking, God it would be simpler if GLEN could pay all of those what do you call them invoices instead of me writing a cheque for each one because you have to make a return to CIPO about what you spent money on. I thought I would have them in one whatever you call it, account. Anyway that

was the wrong decision to make. I should have just signed the cheque for each invoice that came in for me but you know hindsight isn't very useful. I wouldn't really have changed it. It just this incredibly destructive person who we appointed as the executive director. That was the basis of it all. So that came like something like, [indiscernible 1:26:27] you couldn't predict that. I've never come across a person like it, like her before, most people haven't. Most people have never experienced that. And a very peculiar, very peculiar sociopathic person who like, kind of, everybody thought she did brilliant interviews and we had external people, you know, like people with HR experience, there was Margo Slattery who was on the board of GLEN and was a managing director of Sodexo you know which is a big multinational service company. And we were all completely bamboozled by her you know. We were delighted with this person that we were getting, we had no inclination of any kind of, you know, because I thought I was a good interviewer of people you know, for jobs and stuff like that. You know where you get a sense of a person's personality that you know through job interviews, you know, you get a sense that sometimes people have, the way they phrase things you think that doesn't sound too good. You know that doesn't sound, sounds like an authoritarian personality there or something. Or you know if they are challenged on something they can get kind of defensive or aggressive. You get insights into people's behaviour but there wasn't a dickybird of anything like that. We were – and you know, 100% of the people involved in the interview process were bamboozled and of course we did the due diligence of getting the references and we got nothing. So yeah…

Q **Yeah I think sometimes it's just unfortunate when you come into contact with people that are difficult to work with and it's just a pity that it was, that's what started the demise of GLEN. Because I think, I'm particularly, kind of, annoyed like on your behalf that all of the reports are gone and things like thatbecause I think sometimes you know even if things are difficult and if people get things wrong or you know it doesn't mean you have to erase everything from existence. I guess with this project, you know, we are really trying to capture those stories that we don't get to hear because they are not heard from the people themselves. I want to ask you one last question, Kieran, and then I'll give you some space if you want to**

talk about anything I haven't asked you. But I want to ask you what do you think is next for LGBT activism in Ireland. Is there anything that still needs to be done?

A Well one of the things that I would say when I was chair of GLEN is we wanted to create a situation where if you were going to be Taoiseach or president of a country or CEO or whatever, any public figure in Ireland that it would be unremarkable if that was lesbian or LGBT person. And kind of it's fascinating that I was saying that in 2005 on. And certain LGBT people didn't quite like that, (laughing) I think, they were saying that you want LGBT people to be unremarkable and to be ordinary people- didn't fancy that too much, some people. But Varadkar became Taoiseach and him being gay was unremarkable in Ireland. His politics were more the matter for discussion than his being gay, it was more what the foreign media, the international media picked up on. So, I still think that is a goal you know, and I think, it's almost there, perhaps, that goal about, about having a president like that's about all, the only next step or Supreme Court justice or university president maybe or something like that. But anyway, so that it would be unremarkable. But you know that's politics or that's society but probably the day to day one is where LGBT people expressing ordinary affections in public, that that would be unremarkable, I think is the next step. And that would be the next great achievement because that would be a daily achievement, it would be your ordinary daily life. That you know you don't have to hold hands on the street or you don't have to kiss, or you don't have to be lovie-dovie but if you wish to do it you can do it. And that you won't feel brave in doing it or you won't feel 'I'm doing it' (laughing) you know that way. I remember doing it with a boyfriend one time but both of us were very aware we are now holding hands walking down the beach. And we were quite bolshie about it (laughing) but it wasn't being ordinary, we were doing it for the sake of doing it. And of course part of that is that you would feel safe doing it, and so you know that whole issue which is coming up again that people are feeling unsafe on the streets and in public spaces, you know. I don't know whether that's the media picking up on it but it's a terrible thing that the you know the reports in Spain and other countries and to some extent here that there's a pick-up in anti-LGBT violence. It's terrible.

Q **Yeah I think even the recent burning of the Pride flags across the country, like, are very much significant of this kind of rise in far-right politics across the world. I think you said at some point during the interview about how Ireland has become more progressive and in some ways we are far from, you know, a lot of things that we've, kind of, moved past and we've had this kind of upswing in positive legal change. But even as you said those small things like public intimacy are still a reason for people to be violent against LGBT communities. Which is-- to recap what you were saying there is it a representational issue that you want to see improved on in terms of social and political figures and then that kind of increased need for greater public safety. Is that two things that you think are quite important to change or to kind of rally behind?**

A I think the representational one is kind of that's done and dusted. Or the ceiling has been broken anyway, like, you have the head of the IDA is gay and came out in support of marriage equality and stuff like that. It's interesting to read the media and it just comes out that this person is lesbian or gay or whatever. So that – I mean there needs to be far more – but that barrier has been broken I think. You have Gerry Buttimer out in Fianna Gael and Cian O'Callaghan in Social Democrats so I don't think it's a barrier anymore in that political or economic or university or, whatever, that kind of area. But I think, I suppose the really important ones are where people are very vulnerable is in school you know, I think like primary school and secondary school, I think that huge progress needs to be made in those areas. And GLEN prioritised that we had a director of education because we saw that as really critical. And again I'd say things have changed hugely but I don't know, you know, I don't know what the experience of lesbians in young people are in schools. Is there still bullying going on? Do people still hide? Do people still feel afraid, are they isolated? So that kind of- and then the safety one, I presume the employment one is 80% okay maybe that's being too hopeful you know. But that, you know because the protection and the equality legislation the trade unions and social change outside the workplace that that is reflected in the workplace. So I think probably you know school and then the public sphere of safety are, kind of critical ones. Yeah.

Q **Hopefully with the work that Belong To for LGBT and things that will see an improvement around educational things and I think certainly the reaction of the community and the allies to the homophobic acts that happened across the summer, that seems also to reflect a positive change there as well. But it was so great to talk to you Kieran, I was just wondering was there anything that you wanted to add before I stop the recording that you want to flag that I didn't ask you or anything that you want to talk about that you think is important?**

A No that was great, a great opportunity to talk.

Q **Thank you so much are you ~~okay~~ alright so if I stop the recording?**

A Cool yeah perfect.

End