

## CHARLIE KISS

### Extract 1: Track 1: 00.11 – 4.59

#### BEFORE TRANSITIONING. MEMORIES OF GREENHAM COMMON. RACKETS. MARTINAS. SISTERWRITE.

CH: Although I'm considered a transman at the moment, most of my life I've sort of thought I was a lesbian, that was where I thought I was and that was where I fitted in on the scene. I wasn't ... I didn't go to school in London although I was born here and lived here till I was six, so I came back to London when I was seventeen. I actually got involved in an anti-nuclear protest outside Greenham Common and that's what brought me to meet other ... other women in London and so I did go to some of the bars, some of the first bars there were ... um ....

C: I know it's outside London, but would you tell me a bit about your experience at Greenham.

CH: Oh! Er, well, I mean I lived there for about a year and a half.

C: Did you? On site?

CH: Yes.

C: Oh crumbs! Yes. It was um very ... quite a big experience emotionally and on many levels it was very empowering, but on the other side it was quite frightening as well and not a very secure place to live, and I got involved in actions and went to prison, and it was all very big ... big. It just took over my life, and then it was quite difficult to get, to leave it actually, it was difficult to get integrated back into normal society again.

C: What drew you there? Did you know some people who were there?

CH: No. I'd read about it, and I just thought it was amazing what they were doing, and just ... I'd been involved in CND, and I ... and I, you know, was really worried about what ... the likelihood of a limited nuclear war in Europe so I got involved in that. But then ... then I wanted to ... to leave and I sort of, erm, tried to get more involved in the London scene really, you know? Then I managed to get onto the London ... a course at the London College of Printing. That was quite odd though because that was all men, and I'd just come from an environment where it was all women.

C: Oh yeah.

CH: And um it was ... it was quite odd 'cos during the day I'd just be surrounded by men, and male lecturers as well and then in the evenings I'd go off to the bars. I mean I didn't go to a bar every night, you know? Because I suppose I had a delayed teenage years, and I went ... I went to a few, and The Carved Red Lion ... a lot of it was focused in Islington at the time. There was The Carved Red Lion, which was a small cellar bar, which was open every night of the week.

C: The Carved ...?

CH: Carved Red Lion. It's just erm, at the bottom end of Essex Road. There's still a sign on the top of the pub. I forget what it's called now 'cos it's changed names a couple of times since then and it was quite forward thinking for its time 'cos on a Thursday evening they had a non-smoking night, which I thought was pretty amazing. But because I was sort of on the lesbian feminist scene I never went to the famous, or infamous Gateways, and I sort of regret it now 'cos I wish I'd just seen with my own eyes what it was like. But I only went to The Carved Red Lion, and then later, Rackets, and these ... these clubs like Rackets and Martina's were set up to ... as sports ... well, Rackets was specifically set up as like a sports club, to put people off thinking it was a lesbian club, it was like a sports club. So it was just for sports women. The first Rackets one, and um ... at least that's what I understood it to be and ... but Martina's was a bit different later on.

C: Where was Martina's?

CH: Martina's was in The Market Tavern in Vauxhall.

C: Oh, of course, yes.

CH: On a Monday night, and we got ... lesbians, we got the best night! (*Laughs*) But, no Rackets was good. It was on a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. I can't remember if it was on a Saturday. It moved to The Pied Bull, which was just on Liverpool Road as it joins Islington High Street, yeah. But Islington was a very happening place for alternative ... You had Sisterwrite, feminist bookshop and ...

C: Did you used to go there?

CH: Yes. I did, because before the internet the only way you could find out what was going on would be to sign up to local newspapers or look at the notice boards, and also if you were looking to find somewhere to live or ... all those sorts of things, you'd look up on the notice boards ... in these sort of places.

## **Extract 2: Track 1: 25.12 – 30.16**

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH WOMEN BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSITIONING

CH: I was involved with somebody and I was very clear right at the front about how I identified. Not that I was going to transition, because I didn't think I would at ... when I met her I said, I just said I was very male identified and was that a problem and no, it wasn't, and we ... we're still friends now, but it was very difficult when I decided to do it. We sort of ... it was almost like automatic. It was obvious that we'd split up and then three months later she got in touch and we got back together again ... and we tried to ... to carry it on. So I think we had a really strong emotional connection and that was, you know, we're still friends now. We did finally end it after a while, and I've had other relationships since with um, women who don't consider themselves lesbians as well. That was, that was quite nice in a way to have that change. I ... you know, because obviously I can't really go out with a lesbian! It doesn't make sense! (*Chuckles*) If you think about it! Because that was what, what I realised that there's no point ... if I go out with a lesbian, a lesbian ... most lesbians want to go out

with other women. It's sort of obvious when you put it out ... in other words, women who have ... people who have women's bodies, and I didn't have that anymore and so ... I never liked having a women's body in the first place so it ... it, you know, wouldn't really work and I think, thinking about it like that, made me ... erm ... more aware.

C: And back in the old days, but even in the times that we remember like the early 80s, there was more of a butch/femme thing going on. Did that mean you had to identify as ....?

CH: Well, no because I was from the lesbian feminist wing and we didn't have any truck with that and thought of it all as copying heterosexuality which I think was a bit narrow, looking back on it, but I sort of late ... sometimes I said ... I sort of ... having said that, sometimes I identified as butch as well. I was really not very clear. Sometimes I said that I was butch to some women. But the funny thing is that I wasn't really that butch as well, and I didn't really like being butch. It's quite complicated. Sometimes I got into wearing lipstick, and then I became a lipstick lesbian for a little while! (*Laughs*) And so that was quite odd! ... So, yes and like I said ... I was still a feminist, it's just that I went a bit into the separatist direction in the early '80s. I think a lot of people did then.

C: Can you tell me at all about that? Just, you know about that time ...

CH: It's really difficult to say but it's just like when you start looking at things through those glasses, the feminist glasses, you just see how everywhere ... men have it. Well, I say everywhere, because now obviously I've seen it from the other side! In most areas of life, you know, there's ... there's really quite severe oppression.

C: It strikes me that you must just have an amazing perspective ... now, having seen things from so many different angles, it must have given you some ...

CH: Although I haven't been brought up as a boy, I've only sort of seen ... and I think as an adult you sort of get treated very differently. I think as a young man it's really tough, as you're probably aware. Assaults happen more on young men than anybody, than any other category, young women, or older women, young men, they ... they suffer quite badly. So I didn't have to endure that, and I sort of have the respect given to me as an older man. Those sorts of things are interesting. The whole cultural stuff, buying drinks, buying women drinks, that's all a bit old fashioned I think you know, because I'm ... I'm still a feminist and I believe in equality. It's quite difficult because you can't ... now you ... I mean I talked to my brother about this and he says he just always buys it, just ... and ... and I sort of can see that now. It's easier. Like before I would say "No, it's OK, I'll buy my own" and be very firm about it, but now I can't say "You buy your own" because it comes across horrible! (*Laughs*) And it doesn't seem nice at all, so I've started doing what he does which is, you know, say "I'll buy it." Unless they are like what I used to be, I'd say "Oh no I'll buy it." I'll just do it.

### **Extract 3: Track 1: 38.37 – 43.17**

THOUGHTS ON THE TERMS QUEER, GREEN PARTY WORK ON INTERSEX RIGHTS. ASEXUALITY. CHARLIE'S TRANSITIONING PERIOD.

CH: Well I always found the Q, as in Queer, I never related to that. I never ... I still don't really understand what it means. People say it's political and you can be ... but then I hear that you can be straight and queer. Well, if you can be straight and queer and non-trans, you know, and cisgendered then you're just like ... it's everybody! It's everybody, it doesn't make any sense. But on the other hand, I ... the I is very different, intersex people, and they have ... they have really suffered human rights on a big scale and part of me wonders whether they should be like really pushed to the forefront. This is what we're ... we're getting quite involved in the Green Party at the moment, because Intersex people, you know, unlike myself, I purposefully wanted operations, but imagine having operations ... and a lot of people think "Oh, it just happens when you're a baby." But it carries on throughout your adolescence. Against your will! It's really quite horrific.

So I'm very much for the I, and then there's the A. Well, you know, the Asexual people, now or the A gendered people, now I have difficulty getting my head around this because I can't see the same level of oppression for somebody who is Asexual. OK, they may be pressurised into being married, into being married or having a relationship when they don't want one, but is it at the same level as somebody who's lesbian or gay and gets beaten up when they walk down the streets? You know?

C: And what about trans people? How far do you think the trans movement has come?

CH: Well, a long way in some ways. Erm ... you know, I mean we've got the ... we've got legal rights now, but there's are lots of issues with it, because some people feel you shouldn't have to *prove* that you're trans in order to get a certificate and that you should identify as you wish, and I can ... I can see that there's some merit in that, but at the same time I sort of think that having a legal identity's important as well. I was very pleased and as soon as they ... they changed the law, as soon as I could, I got all my documents changed.

C: What ... was there a period then, because I'm just going by other people I talked to, where you had to, during your transition, you had to dress as a man over a certain time?

CH: Oh, the dreaded real life experience?

C: What was that like for you?

CH: Which always makes ... which makes me laugh really, because if you just put it in reverse. You say OK, you transition when you're like say 20, so you've had 20 years of experience in the body you know you definitely don't want that, and so they say you've got to try this other one, whereas you know? Um, so I ... I ... I skipped it basically.

C: How did you do that?

CH: Well, I just went private ... I went privately ... to get the hormones first, and then I went back in the system later to get funding for lower surgery because it's really expensive, there's no way I could afford that. So I ... you know I did it, yeah. I didn't want to do all that.

C: So was it one day? Overnight?

CH: I didn't want to say to people "I'm a man" and you know, I didn't look very much like a man, just wearing mans' clothes, and I think it's all a bit pathetic that you have to try and convince people and I think it's a bit cruel really.

C: So how did you do it?

CH: How did ... how did I do what? I ... I went to see a private psychiatrist who was ... who was more willing to give out hormones earlier, so you didn't have to do one year or two years or anything, you know? I think it was about three months.

C: And was there a time or a day or a month where you said "Now, I'd like to be recognised as a man."?

CH: Oh, yes. I chose the ... I had my first injection at October 200 and ... 2, and I said let's get it organised. We'll tell all the suppliers ... I told all work, you know, round about that time, October, November and they said "Right, we'll tell work and everybody." I mean we'll tell our suppliers and customers on January. So ... so I chose January, 'cos it's a good time as ever, you know ... New ... January 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 it would have been, yeah, and I got all my documents changed then.