**Nasreen Memon**

Being outed by her mother, her father attending an all women party and her mother being "butchphobic". The London Lesbian and Gay Centre: attacking a man who pinched her bottom and going to events and planning activities. An amazing relationship.

**Extract 1**

Well, I remember um, when I first came out or rather my mother outed me! She er, she used to drive me home sometimes and we’d have chats in the car before I came into my flat and she asked me one night “Nas, are you a lesbian?” She just came out and said it. (My mum’s Italian) And I was a bit startled by this question and I hadn’t yet … started a relationship with anyone. It was in that period after Alan where I was just going to lots of things and kind of exploring but um, … not meeting anyone yet. And um, and I said to my Mum. “Do you want the straight answer?” Meaning honest, but I didn’t realise I was kind of … so I told her “Yes” and she was fine, and I was really blown away that my mother – I mean there has been quite a lot of homophobia in her part of Italy, especially when she was younger and even you know, it’s continuing on, um, and my father seemed very accepting, he’s from Pakistan. He was from Pakistan. So I felt very grateful, but the first time I took home my first girlfriend to meet my parents there, er, I went to visit them and my mum started crying, and er, and I realised I love Mum so much but I think sometimes she’s a bit – I don’t want to use this word lightly, butchphobic, but she’d love it if all lesbians …. I mean she’s said things to me many times when I used to have my women only parties here in my flat, and my father was the only honorary man who would come and visit, ‘cos the first time I had one, he was sitting in the car outside and I said to Mum, “No, bring him in.” And he loved it. He was in his element charming all the women, but my mum would say horrible things like … you know? “Why are they all so masculine looking?” and “why have they all got short hair?” And that would be really hurtful and um, you know, I love to celebrate the butch and honour that, you know, courage that people have to be themselves, And I feel very upset when that’s, um, not respected.

**Extract 2**

I remember being at The London Lesbian and Gay Centre one night and my friends were at one end of the place. I crossed the dance floor to get some drinks and I was waiting to be served and um, in my head I was thinking “This guy is just serving the guys – he’s not serving me”, and I felt like I’d been waiting there a really long time and then this … this guy standing next to me pinched my bottom! I was so appalled that that could happen in what’s meant to be a safe place, and um, an Asian kind of club, an, Asian friendly club. And … and I felt like he was a white racist person who had come in and was tormenting me. And I was so angry with him that I picked up um, a dreg … a glass with dregs of beer in it, and I’d done this once before, years before, when someone had done something similar, and I threw it in his face, thinking “You are not doing that to me!” And er, the next thing … he did the same to me. I was so shocked. I really didn’t expect that! And then the next thing, even though I was in these little gold stiletto sling back things, um, we were having a little physical fight. I’ve never been in a fight in my life, and I was trying to kick him and push him away, and I didn’t know what he was trying to do and then we were being pulled apart. And, I mean, you know, I’m five foot two. I’m not a big kind of huge thing, er, so I was very shaken by that.

But other than that, it was a fabulous place, and I’ve got so many happy memories of um, tea dances there and I used to go to the Act Up group to kind of plan what our next action would be. Like once we catapulted condoms into Pentonville prison because, in those days, men weren’t allowed condoms even though it was known how dangerous it was to have sex without condoms. I wasn’t very good at getting them over, and I was shocked at how expensive they were to buy! Um, but they feel like really good London memories, and er, I had a lot of fun with one friend. We used to hang out a lot. She lived in a road called Pleasant Place, and she had a very tall house with lots of floors and she used to make me feel like Mrs Madrigal who … ‘cos she’d rent it out to all these different lovely queer people. And um, one day I was sitting having breakfast there and I stayed there so much I had a toothbrush there. We were very close friends and I was always over there, and there at the breakfast table was a school friend of mine from my year, from my school in Streatham. So that was like ‘Wow!’ Er … small world.

And I do love the way that six degrees of separation in the Lesbian London world becomes like one or two, and how we often know people in common. I love that connect – all those connections across different ages and different histories,

**Extract 3**

Then there was one amazing relationship that started in – it was very romantic, in the isle of Lamu. I started chatting to these two women, I thought they were together but they were just best mates, and they were travelling around Africa and er, we got chatting, and there was so much electricity in the air, and we started corresponding and I used to get these amazing letters from her travels and then she came back early, and I remember it was a Saturday night and I’d organised a dinner party. I‘d had no idea she was about to come back to London, and I had six people, which is what my table fits, and I’d been preparing food all night and the night before, to make the perfect everything, and I got a phonecall from her from the airport and she’d just landed and the question was “Can I come straight over?” And it was like, we hadn’t even kissed at that point, you know, we’d just been corresponding and um, and someone had dropped out of the dinner party so that it was funny, she turned up as there was an extra space after all, and erm, she stayed that night *(Laughs)* and I don’t think we parted company for quite a long time, and er, and that was a bit of a whirlwind er, romance.

And I think … yeah, there were lots of really special moments, really happy times, er, and I haven’t ever been able to ride a bike and she tried to teach me how to ride on her old bike that she’d had as a child, um and I remember going all the way around where she lived in her council block er, without falling off, and I hadn’t realised … I thought I was doing it on my own discreetly, ‘cos it is a bit embarrassing being in your twenties as I was then, and falling off a bike when you’re learning, and I’d gone round a whole loop without falling off and the next thing I heard all this cheering and clapping from all these people had been hanging out the window watching me, and as soon as I heard that I got a bit panicky and … and fell off, but I crashed into this car and dented it! It was a BMW with a guy sitting in there not looking very happy and she was amazing, she came running down the steps. I was in tears and she soothed it all down with this guy about his car and she was going to fix it, and she was really good at fixing things, and she got me really brave to handle erm, I sanded my floors because she gave me the confidence to do that, and then my parents got me to do the front of the little restaurant they had at the time and it was really good. I felt like I was getting er, a bit more confident with DIY stuff and other things.

But yes, she’s the only person I think who’s left me and I remember being devastated and a bit shocked um, and … and I don’t really know why because I think, if I traced things back, we’d gone on this trip to India and one time, I came home from work and she announced that she’d invited her nephews to join us and I was a bit taken aback that she’d done that without discussing it first. And one was nine and one was eleven and I was like “Blimy! That’s quite a responsibility.” And she wasn’t even out to her family. They were very homophobic, and one day her dad said “I don’t think God is angry with lesbians, because if that was the case they would be getting AIDS as well.” That was her family and so, we went on this trip to India without being out, and they’d say things like “Aunty … Why … why’s your bed stuck to Nasreen’s bed?” and, ugh, you know, just … it was uncomfortable not being out, you know