

**Sue George:** Identifying as bisexual. Porchester Hall drag balls. The Boltons. The Coleherne. The Gateways. Lesbian prejudice against bisexuals. Political lesbianism. London Bisexual Women's Group.

## **SUE GEORGE**

*Clare (C) interviewing Sue (S)*

### **Extract 1: Track 1: 1:49 – 7:03**

#### **IDENTIFYING AS BISEXUAL. DAVID BOWIE INFLUENCE. PORCHESTER HALL DRAG BALLS. THE BOLTONS. THE COLEHERNE IN THE MID 70s.**

S: When I was sixteen ... so, going back to when I was sixteen, David Bowie was suddenly all over the place and he used the word 'bisexual' and I thought "OK, that's what I am." Because previously I'd heard the word lesbian and I thought "I don't think so." But bisexual seemed to ... seemed to apply to me so I've used that ... well I've used that ever since and so that was ... um I think that was 1973 ish and since and literally ever since then I've considered myself bisexual with maybe a couple of months when I called myself, six months when I called myself a lesbian. But we'll come, we'll come back to that later!

Yeah, so when I was in the ... when I was in the Sixth Form there was a kind of group of boys that I used to hang out with and they also had heard that David Bowie was bisexual, and they were experimenting with each other, and I told my then boyfriend, who was one of them, that um, one of the boys who was experimenting, that I was bisexual and he just, he wouldn't believe me. He said that I was trying to make him jealous which actually never occurred to me, and so ... where am I?

C: You're at school ...

S: Yeah, OK, so I was suddenly thinking back to that, so, yeah so I did nothing about it, in fact I left school, so this was 1976, or possibly the end of 1975. I left school and I joined a ... a social club called London Village which was just a kind of like, a bit like a '70s version of Meet Up, and I met a guy there who was, he was fifteen years older than me, and he um ... he took me to gay clubs in Earls Court. I didn't know when we started going out together that he was bisexual, I mean properly, committedly over many years bisexual, rather than the boys that I knew when I was at school, and he'd been ... he'd been married, so he was 34 I think at that point, he was 34. He was divorced and he'd kind of had relationships with – well, sex probably rather than relationships - with lots and lots of men, and he took me to The Boltons which was a ... now I suppose you'd call it a queer club. At least you would go, as someone reminded me when I was telling them about this recently, you'd go upstairs to a kind of secret place, and there was nothing kind of um ... it wasn't like there was sex happening or anything, but it was just where ... you would only go there if you knew, and you would just kind of like make an entrance and there were all sorts of people there. There were kind of ... drag queens, trans people, butch lesbians and ostensibly heterosexual couples looking for somebody else. It was ... it was completely um ... I mean it absolutely blew my mind. I thought it was the most exciting thing I'd ever seen in my life.

C: Was it in Earls Court?

S: Yes, that's right. It's ... I think it's called The Boltons again now. It was O'Neils for a while, so it hasn't been ... it hasn't been a gay club for, oh, I don't know, since the 1980s maybe? And also I went to The Coleherne which was a leather pub! And I ... oh I ... I was quite innocent, I didn't know what was going on but they were so nice to me, they were really kind, and also they were really flirty, so they were really flirty with me and I could kind of see that um, I don't know, that something was going on but I couldn't ... I didn't really know what.

C: Now, did he take you there as his partner?

S: Oh yeah, I was his girlfriend.

C: Yeah. OK.

S: So this was in the mid ... like '75, '76, '77, and I think at that point you see, everything was very ... everything was a lot more fluid than it was ten years later. I mean this is certainly my memory of it. Because we would ... so, another place that we went to several times was The Porchester Hall Drag Balls and ...

C: I've never heard of them!

S: Yeah, so this was when? Yeah, '76 ish and ...

C: Tell me about those.

S: So, OK it was kind of mainly kind of men not dressed in drag, and men in very flamboyant drag like ball gowns. So I had a 1930s beaded dress that I'd got. It was not ... I mean it was a beautiful dress but it was not in kind of a good nick and I used to wear ... and I wore that, and I got a really warm and friendly reception from the, from the drag queens for being ... I don't know. I don't know what but really I had very happy memories of that. It was really, really good fun and it was so different from what I perceived to be my very stultifyingly suburban life.

**Extract 2: Track 3: 12.53 – 19.47**

GATEWAYS. BEING CUT OFF BY LESBIANS AFTER HAVING A CHILD AND A  
RELATIONSHIP WITH A MAN. POLITICAL LESBIANISM AND SHEILA JEFFREYS.  
LONDON BISEXUAL WOMENS GROUP.

S: I haven't mentioned that I did go to ... that Kate and I did go to Gateways, and also with another women ...

C: Please tell me about that.

S: Yes, another woman from Brighton. Well, we only went once, so it was right at the end. and, yeah, so we'd written to them. We'd heard they were a club, which was kind of made it sort of, I don't know, so it was kind of like both inaccessible elitist and also kind of ... obviously some kind of glamorous excitement was happening there that we wanted in on! So we ... so we wrote to them. I think I wrote to them. I think I've still got the letter somewhere actually, asking if we could ... we were coming up from Brighton for the weekend, could we go to Gateways? And they said, you know, yes ... I can't ... anyway the upshot was yes and we ... so we went there and I remember some kind of steep staircase. My memory's not ... it was only the once. I remember the women being very glamorous, so I think this ... I was definitely looking for kind of glamour and also because I perceived that a lot of the lesbians that I knew, they were very kind of ... they weren't dressed up at all and this was a very kind of, very dressy, yeah ... Yeah. So you did feel you'd kind of got in on some kind of secret society and this was all very kind of good. But anyway, that was that and it closed a little time afterwards.

C: And that's why you didn't go again?

S: Yes, it was that. Exactly. So it was really right at the end so that would have been ... I don't know when that was, '80, '81, '82, I don't know.

C: A little later maybe, about '84 ...?

S: OK. OK. So ... but then you see ... then at that point I had no-one to go with because I split up with Kate. And I was still going out with my son's father, now then of course I was dead to the lesbian world.

C: Oh ...

S: I mean really. It was really ... they would, they would just cut me. They would cut me. So this wasn't the women that I was um politically working with who ... yeah, it wasn't them at all, it was ... kind of like the friends that I'd had from Brighton.

C: Ow!

S: Yeah. So that was ... that was kind of not nice.

C: Was there a debate or just a cutting off? I mean, did they want to talk to you about why?

S: No. No. It was obvious, you know, I'd kind of gone back to men – sorry, I'm doing inverted kind of commas with my hands, I'd gone back to men. This wasn't how I saw it of course ... but ...

C: How did you see it?

S: How did I see it? Erm ... well, that's very interesting. I'm not sure how I did see it. I'm not sure ... I mean I felt that kind of my relationship with Kate had kind of run its course, which was true, and he just happened to be around. But I did also want to have a baby. But then you know, I was ... I was only 26, you know? Really it's too young ... anyway ... but I did want to have a baby and I just thought that was an easy way to have a baby and he thought he would like to have a baby

with me. I mean in retrospect it's kind of really ... I mean we ... we did have a relationship for some years, but it was not ... there was no kind of, I would say, we weren't particularly emotionally committed to each other. I don't know ... It's really hard to ... it's really hard to know kind of looking back at it. He's a very ... he's a good father, I mean I would not want say anything against him. He's been a great father.

C: But it took you away from the lesbians?

S: It did. It did, and kind of um, sadly to my ... yeah, sadly. And I ... at that point ... yeah so, that was in actual fact, I think it was '83? It was around about that, maybe '81, that time when that Leeds Revolutionary Feminist pamphlet came out. Oh, I can't remember what it's called. It's purple. The one which said that all women should be lesbians. It's very famous. So, it was written by ... Sheila Jeffreys was one of the writers, and also Al Garthwaite, because I knew Al Garthwaite later. So it's Leeds ... it was written by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, yeah. Damn, I can't remember what it's called. Anyway that did say all feminists should be lesbians. That's it. You should kind of get men out of your life and your body. It doesn't really matter whether you want to have sex with these women, you know? It's the withdrawing from men that's the ... the important thing.

C: Political feminism? Political Lesbianism?

S: Political lesbianism, yes.

C: They called it.

S: Yes, political lesbianism.

C: But you were with a man by then so how did you feel when you saw that?

S: Er, I didn't see that until after ... I didn't read it till afterwards, but I knew that those ... ideas were kind of in the public domain, yup, and oh I just didn't agree with it. I just thought it was wrong, you know? Like when you're kind of politically involved you see lots of kind of ideas that you think "I can't ... no ... just no!" But still I think that those attitudes had a big impact on many women who were around at that time who felt like they'd failed. So women who were not lesbians, not just bisexual women, but heterosexual women as well, felt that they'd failed because they were unable to do this, or ... yeah, and then so although I thought it was wrong, I can't say it didn't have any impact on me. Yeah. But ... so I used to get the London Women's Liberation newsletter, and in March 1984 I saw that a woman had ... um, was putting in a notice saying that she wanted to have ... she wanted to set up a bisexual women's group. And that was that really. So I ... I rung her up. I suppose that's ... maybe I wrote to her. I can't remember what you did in those days! Yeah, so I got in touch with her and I was ... and I went to that and that was ... that was the second London Bisexual Women's Group. There had been another one but I think it had shut and I only found out about this afterwards, but, yeah there was a London ... so we met at the Women's Centre in was it Marchmont ...? Maybe Judd Street? It was ... it was the ... it was in Kings Cross anyway. Or Kings Cross kind of like that area, back. I think it was Judd Street. I can't remember. So we would meet, we met there maybe once a month ...