

Interview 2: Cathal Kerrigan [C] with Anne Byrne [AB].

[0:00]

AB: Good afternoon, Cathal, and thank you very much for talking with me.

C: It's a pleasure.

AB: Thank you. So you have... you've brought an object with you into the interview.

C: I have.

AB: And for the benefit of those listening, can you describe that object in your own words? And I see you have it in an envelope?

C: Yes.

AB: Please.

C: Yes, it's an ordinary photograph. And it has three people in it. In the centre... in the very centre is my mother in a pink coat with her brooch. And on her right, on the left of the photograph, I'm there with, you know, with black hair instead of grey and in a jumper and jacket, with... holding a sweatshirt. And on the other side, on mother's left, on the right of the photograph is Áine Casey, a young woman, black hair, and she is wearing the sweatshirt. And the sweatshirt says the Irish Quilt Tour 1991 AIDS Memorial. And it's... it was taken in the City Hall in Cork, in 19... it is 1991, I think, or possibly, early 1992, at this stage, by time that it started in... the tour started in Dublin in 1991 but I think it was 1992, it was Spring 1992 by the time it got to Cork. And at the back, the photograph has an attribution. It's George A. Healy, photographer, 61 Oliver Plunkett Street, Cork, over Paddy O'Flynn in brackets, and then a handwritten Q305/25 his reference number obviously, so that he could see that from his sheets. So, so that's the object I've brought.

AB: May I have a look?

C: Of course.

AB: You all look very happy.

[2:33]

C: Yes. We are all smiling very well and George Healy photographed a lot of official dos, political dos, and social dos in Cork. And he was very good at a kind of jogging people along to get a photograph. You see, he had to he had this kind of bon ami[?] and this kind of manner, you know, of like, making slight jokes. And so he used to go... my mother and he knew each other well, they were part of the same circle, because my mother, my father was Lord Mayor of Cork in 1973 to 1974, so my mother was Lady Mayoress and during that year, there was a lot of activity, a lot of photographs. So George would have been doing a lot of that photographing and he also, as I say, did that kind of political photographing in Cork for the

City Council, etc. and for the TDs, and Senators. My father was a Labour Party politician but he was initially a trade union official and then he was in the Senate from 1973 to 77. And in 77 he was elected TD of Cork. Then in 79, unfortunately, he died of cancer at the age 51. So the photograph is reminisce... is resonant for me because this... City Hall and my mother being there with George Healy is very significant. It's like bringing her back twenty years to when she was Lady Mayoress, but also those times where my father's... the association with my father's life and the association is added because it's Áine Casey. Áine's father was Sean Casey, who was the previous Labour TD for Cork and he too died tragically young in his 40s as a result of alcoholism, unfortunately. But he was... he was very well known in Cork, very well loved. And he was elected Lord Mayor, in fact, three times, during that time and my father was selected to, when he died, in the by election to try and win... win the seat, continue to win the seat for Labour but what happened is that, at that stage, Sean Casey and Labour Party had built up a solid enough vote, Fianna Fáil decided that, back in those days, the decisions on constituency boundaries were made by politicians not by commission, which is why we now have a commission. But it... back then, it was Boland I think, was the guy.

[5.18]

This was before the arms [?] etc in 69. He was a famous gerrymanderer of the constituencies, so they decided that the way to prevent Labour getting a seat in Cork was to divide it into two constituencies, north and south. And we still have those two constituencies. It took my father six years to build up a vote to get the seat in the north side. And they also then got a vote and got a seat on the south side as well, so they had two seats, the '80s. But so it resonates because of where it is and who's taken it and who's in it. And it has all that, I think, so it's a photograph at an event in City Hall but it has a huge personal resonance. And also, of course, because it's a gay event, but also because, of course, it's an AIDS event. So people will know that AIDS first occurred in New York in 1980/81. By 1985, it had occurred... there were substantial numbers getting sick in England, and there had been a Gay Men's Health Crisis Centre had been set up in New York in '82, '80-81-82 and the Terence Higgins Trust had been set up to fight AIDS in Britain in 1984. And we in the gay movement in Ireland decided that there had been no official public cases of AIDS in Ireland yet, at that stage, but decided it was going to hit and we needed to get... to prevent, by education, by information about getting public policy change, because nobody was doing anything official, the Department of Health, etc, the government, nobody was doing any action. So we set up Gay Health Action in January 1985 and I was one of the people involved in setting it up, with a lot of others, Arthur Leahy, Donal O'Shea etc. who's now dead, and other... Chris Robson and Bill Foley etc. and Chris is also dead now. And we set up in January 1985. And we set about producing leaflets and information, doing workshops on safer sex and it was a major... it began to affect people in Ireland in terms of people getting sick and dying '86 '87. In Ireland, it took a particular form in the sense that it wasn't primarily gay men, it was actually IV drug users, intravenous drug users, that was a major heroin addiction problem in Dublin, particularly in the centre city, in poor areas of Dublin. And the... because it was transmitted by unprotected sex, HIV was transmitted by unprotected sex but also by dirty needles for intravenous drugs. There were a lot of people in Dublin coming down and a lot died, in fact, more died from the IV drug user community and then from the gay community. And we ended up doing information for everybody and working with those communities.

AB: Yes.

[8:26]

C: And working with the haemophiliacs as well and working with women who were concerned as well, because women in the sex trade were exposed etc. and or sex workers. And there was a whole range of issues. And eventually, we ended up in '87, because we were frustrated that the government wouldn't even answer our letters and we were having... we were getting great support from the media, from the liberals of media, etc, and highlighting campaign but there was nothing been done by the government. So they eventually did something. But then they produced a very bad campaign, which was like 'Keep AIDS out of Ireland', which was as if it was some kind of foreign disease and totally wrong approach and not helpful, in our view. So we formed then AIDS Action Alliance, which was a broader group that just scaled[?] action. So I was active in all that and my mother knew that and she was very worried about all that. So she'd be worried about my health and she also worried because there was a neighbour, one of my... my brother is seven years younger, and so his generation so it was almost like seven years younger than me, so I knew them but they weren't my pals, they were his pals. One of his pals down the road, Pat. He left Cork and went to Spain, and then my brother told me, 'oh did you hear, Pat has come out as gay' and I said, 'oh, that's great'. So yes, make your life in some respect. And then when I went back in '89, for this... sorry, I should have said,

AB: Yeah,

[10:04]

C: I had moved to Dublin. While I was born in Cork and went to UCC, etc, was involved... In 1981, I moved to Dublin. So I was based in Dublin working in government for AIB as a librarian and the headquarters, and I came back on a visit to Cork, and my mother said, 'Pat, is... has AIDS'. And then another visit, she sort of said, 'he's been buried, he was brought home to be buried' but it was no publicity, no announcements of a funeral in the papers. So there was this kind of shame and resistance. And so that was the atmosphere. So she would have been able to say to me, 'Look, you know, I hope you're okay' because, I mean, mothers found it difficult, they still find it difficult, I think with sons to sort of talk about sex and health and sexual health and say, you know, 'are you taking care of yourself' or are you... it's a difficult discussion. So back then it was and particularly because I was gay. So she... so I would have said, 'Yes, look, I know what I'm doing, and I'm practicing safer sex, and I've been tested'. At that stage, by '87, we had a test for HIV so you could test, we still have. And we now recommend everybody get tested as soon as possible and as often as needed, because now the medication exists to mean that AIDS is not a fatal disease and is manageable and that, in fact, the sooner you get it, the more manageable it is, and the less intervention is needed, but also, you can have what we call a U=U that undetectable means untransmissible, that with the modern medicine, that will suppress the HIV so much that you won't even, you won't even you know, you don't need to practice safer sex because if you're going without precaution. Anyway, it's a long story but you have to break it down.

AB: No, no.

C: So she would've been worried.

AB: Yeah.

C: So the fact that this AIDS Quilt... this was... it began in America as the quilt as a form of saying people are... these people are invisible, what was happening with a lot of gay man, and it's happened particularly with a lot of gay men in Cork, I thought and in Ireland, is that they were abroad, because they were gay, they left Ireland. They left to London, to New York, to San Francisco, to Amsterdam, to Sydney, to one of the big areas, big gay populations where they could have a life. And then they got AIDS, and then they got sick, they got very sick. So then they came home to die. And they were coming back to tell their family sometimes that they were gay. The family might have guessed, they'd never been out to them, there's never been a discussion, and now they're coming back, not just to say I'm gay, but say I'm also I'm dying with AIDS. And the shame that was associated with all that, and the silence. And then they were, they were buried, and there would be a funeral and the family would have a funeral, and I attended, one or two, you know, outside of Cork, in County Cork, and there would be no mention, you know, 'He died of cancer', you know there would be no mention, it was like such a taboo, and such a shame for the family, etc. So the same happened all over the world in America and Britain, as well. So in America, they came up with this idea of the quilt, and the quilt would be the same size as a grave, three foot by six and the quilts were all like that. And so these became the heads... the graves of these people and they became memorials, they were done by their friends and lovers. And they then brought them together. So it was like a virtual graveyard, if you wish, before... this was before modern virtual technology and computer technology today, so we could do it virtually. That was how we did it back then, because you could bring these quilts and they laid them out. And there was a big fight in America because they wouldn't... President Ron Reagan, etc. wouldn't even mention the words AIDS and homosexual seduction or gay, he would only mention... and he... so the same battles are being fought there. And the great, one of the great successes was when the Clintons were... President Clinton was in power, they had a massive display of AIDS quilts and there's a film available on it, a documentary on YouTube. And it's just so amazing, the whole lawn in front of... the huge lawn in front of the White House is full of quilts. They're set out like a graveyard with, you know, twelve quilts to an area, ten quilts to an area and you can walk around and the Clintons came out of the White House and walked around. It was very powerful. And all of that was the background.

[14:30]

AB: Yeah, I was just going to say, have a drink of water.

C: All that was the background to

AB: Goodness.

C: to AIDS worldwide and in Ireland. So that was the background to the fact that we then started and I can't remember the woman's name who initiated it now, they started the quilts, making quilts in Ireland. And then, you know, people had this... suggested the idea, we should actually, you know, make AIDS visible in Ireland by having all these quilts together and saying to people, 'look, you don't hear about these people because of the silence and the shame. But here they are, these are the people who have died. This is our graveyard, because they're also scattered in different parts of the country and parts of world etc. So here are all the Irish people who have died and they are dead.' And that became the Irish AIDS Quilt Tour and what it then was, at the... it was held in different areas around. And as I say, by that stage, the good news is that we had begun to make headway against the prejudice and the silence of the government and getting them to pay attention to provide health care. Not sufficient, the struggle went on

for much longer and was to continue throughout the '90s. And organizations like GLEN -- Gay and Lesbian Equality Network set up set up HIV... gay HIV strategies to negotiate with that and lobby for that. So it went on right into, you know, 15-20 years ago. Not that everything is perfect now and there's still lobbying to be done. But the... so by then, there was more support. So when it came to looking for locations, by 1991/1992, there was public support from the politicians, etc. So in Cork, we got City Hall, and the same places like Galway, and Limerick, and Dublin. And so that was the significance of having it in City Hall. It was, as I said, 1992 in City Hall, and it was the following year that decriminalization took place. Mary Robinson had been elected President in 1990, so there was a beginning, under the radar, there was a beginning of change in Ireland.

AB: Yes.

[16:49]

C: It wasn't really to fully take place until ten years later but it began then and it was... So with that, by putting it in City Hall that was giving it kind of acknowledgment that these are our children, our dead. This is our issue. And it's part of the community. So that was a huge, so that was the resonance from my mother then and I'm actually... I bought a sweatshirt, like the one that Áine is wearing and, in fact, I've donated that. There was an exhibition about AIDS etc in Dublin two years ago, during Covid. It was managed to put together Judith Finley from the National... Dr Judith Finley from the National Museum here in Collins Barracks and Dr Patrick McDonough and a couple of other colleagues in Queer Culture Ireland, they put it together. And it was displayed in the centre of Dublin in windows.

AB: Oh, yeah, I did see it.

C: I can't remember the building now but it had lots of windows or they put it the windows. So as part of that, they collected material on it. I gave them that sweatshirt, and they put that on a mannequin. And I said to them, look the material I kept, because outside a couple of t-shirts, etc. and I said, look, you're welcome to keep them for the archives for the museum so. So that is part of the resonance, so it's resonant because of that kind of personal story of my mother. It's also personal, of course, obviously, because you'll say, well, you're there. This is 1992. So you are approaching your 40th birthday. You're now like 37. But I actually had come out eighteen years earlier, I came out when I was 19 in 1994 [1974] Well, I fully came out in 1997 [1977] when I was 20. And I came out as I tell younger gay people, this is not how to do it, this is not...

[19:00]

C: I was... I had... I'd realised that I was gay when I was 16 and it had a profound effect on me. So from 16 to 18 when I wasn't clinically depressed, I went into a withdrawal and I did a bad Leaving Cert. And it was noted but nobody kind of asked me fully why, there were concerns but... And after it, I was kind of frozen. I didn't know what to do. I felt like there was no life for me. I felt like being gay, I had seen this stuff like, *Are You Being Served?* as kind of mockery of gay men. And there was no life for gay men in Ireland. There were no gay men in Ireland. And what I did is I went to, I went to... I had the medical card as a student at that age, at 18. So I went to the GP and insisted on seeing psychiatrist. He referred me luckily to Sarsfieldcourt, which is the more liberal of the two psychiatric hospitals in Cork run by a Dr Dunne and I was

very lucky in my life because without my fully realizing it... while I was in a political household and I had known about... I'd heard of something about it, that there had been this thing called the Stonewall Riots in 1969 in America, that there... I was very into Woodstock and into the hippie thing and alternative music, Crosby, Stills Nash and Young, Bob Dylan etc. and protest. And my family would have been because my father was, as I say, a Labour Party activist and TD and very involved as Senator and he, he was reading a thing called *Hibernia*, which was a fortnightly magazine but it had political, political columns, but also a very good book review columns. And so it was... So I was reading stuff there. And part of the thing was that if you were... if you were gay, the positive view at that time was that you were psychiatrically sick, and you could be helped by psychiatry. Now again, I was very lucky, because Gay Liberation Movement was furious that homosexuality was labelled and this formation, a psychiatric illness, a sickness. So they lobbied and campaigned politically. And I didn't know this at the time but found out afterwards, so that in 1972, the American Psychiatric Association changed their classification in their handbook, and made homosexuality, male and female, no longer a disorder. It was now just a variation of human behaviour. It had lots of social problems, but that was, that was not you know, they weren't, they weren't concerned with psychiatric problems, and it was no longer... So I went to see a psychiatrist at Sarsfieldcourt and they sort of said but you're not sick. And I sort of said, but, but look, you know, there's no life for me, I don't know what I can do. And they said, but tell us about your life. And I told him, 'well, I have nowhere to go. You know, I'm in my bedroom a lot of the time and because I finished leaving cert, it's bad. I don't know what I'm going to do with my life. And I don't feel there's anything...' And they said, look, okay, come here as an outpatient, and I did for three months. And it was actually quite helpful because there was talk therapy and to talk to all these people with serious problems. It was an alcohol restoration sort of clinic was being run there, so you have people coming with serious alcohol problems, who were saying, like, 'I've ruined my life because of alcohol. You know. You're young, and you're gay. So what go out there and enjoy life', you know.

AB: Yeah.

[22:25]

C: and there were other people with other problems, like anorexia etc. So, after three months, then to be honest, my father got me a job [laughs] as a temporary clerical officer with the Southern Health Board. So you might say that was a slightly usage of political influence but he was very correct about doing things and this was just, you know, this was just a casual job kind of thing as a cleric, a temporary cleric at the lowest level. So it... I started doing that. And then I was lucky again, because at the same time, I didn't know it but in 1973, as I was going looking for a psychiatrist, David Norris and Sean Connolly and Edmund Lynch and the others were all forming the Irish Gay Rights Movement, and Margaret McWilliam and Mary Dorcey. They were all getting together to form the Irish Gay Rights Movement in Dublin. And lo and behold, so here I was working this job. My father or mother didn't know, they just knew that I've been in it, you know being in... going to a psychiatric, seeking psychiatric help had a stigma, a big stigma at the time, so they were like... but I was like... strange when you're young when you're back in it, like I just sort of refused to answer any questions. It's none of your business sort of thing. And they, they backed off and they were like worried about me, but didn't say anything. And then I was working. And then lo and behold, in the *Hibernia*, there was a review of a book with a photograph of David and Sean picketing, there's only about twelve of them, picketing the Department of Justice about gay... and I'll always remember the

slogan you know, gays are... 'homosexuals are revolting' exclamation mark, with pun intended. And that set me on the track so that, you know, in 1974, I actually contacted the Irish Gay Rights Movement in Dublin, we set up in 1975 a Cork branch of the Irish Gay Rights Movement. So that transformed my situation. And then I became, as I say, in 1975, there I was 20 years of age and now I was part of a gay movement in Cork, I had made contact with other gay men. I was... actually before we founded a group with the help of people from Dublin and Cork, and then I was very angry, like I was like, I'm not going to stay in the closet. I now no longer see myself sick. I'm seeing myself as discriminated against... I'm getting angry. So I go... I go home, and it's tea time, and I sit down at the table with my three siblings. I'm the eldest.

AB: Okay.

[24:56]

C: I'm twenty. So they're all younger, my brother's only 13. So they... my father and mother are at opposite ends of the table, as I say, we're having dinner then I said, 'I have something to tell you.' And he was like, 'what?' I said, 'Well, I'm... I'm gay.' And my mother was like, 'What are you talking about?' I said, 'I'm homosexual.' 'Right, into the front room' and we'll have no more talk about this in front of the rest of the family. So that began a troubled period in the family relationship, because then he sort of said, 'How do you know, etc.' And, again, he contacted people, and they sort of suggested psychiatric help. So we went to see a private psychiatrist but the psychiatrist that time. I sort of said, I said 'look, I'm not going to sit in the chair here and play the role, when he was talking to me, play the role. I'm here under duress, I don't want to be here. I'm not sick.' He said, 'Well, what do you want then?' And I said, will you show my father that I'm not sick and tell him, I'm okay. And so he said, 'I will.' So, I went out and my father went in and my father came back and we went home and everything seemed fine. We didn't discuss it as you don't, or [laughter] people with their parents don't, or maybe they do now. I hope they do now but back then I was very clammed up. And it was when he was dying four years later, that a... he was in and out of hospital a lot, about 10 months dying, it was quite slow. But he fought it all the way and kept his full political activity as much as he could, as he withered away. And I was in and out of the hospital with him so it gave me a chance to kind of reconcile with him and tell him I love him. And he told me he loved me but then he also told me, 'do you know what that psychiatrist said to me?' And I said, 'I told you, I was fine.' And I think, he said 'no, what he said to me was, look Cathal is in a liminal place at the moment, a place where he could change and think he's changing a lot of things, he needs space to grow but if you put pressure on him now about this, it might force him down the road of being permanently homosexual. So if you give him space to develop, who knows which way he'll go, but give him space.' And so that's what he was doing.

Now, you might say, that's an awful trick. But if he looked back, when I look back on it now, 40 years later, 45 years later, I think that psychiatrist played a very good role of calming down the situation, putting up oil on troubled waters and it allowed that develop, and then... I would.... I then, we did the Leaving Cert and went back to university because my father always wanted that, he had never... he had had to leave secondary school because of financial, because back in the day in the 40s, and 50s, you had to pay for secondary education, and he couldn't, his family couldn't they were working class, so he had to leave, he never got to university. So he was self-taught and always had at the back and he had great respect for learning and he really wanted us to go as far as possible, and he wanted me to go to university. And so I redid the

Leaving and went and left the job and went full-time student and lived at home with being fully fed and clothed, you know, with the house for free. And so when I did that, I had one of my first relationships, with a guy called Tony, who was also in university, a student in university, and we had... it only lasted about nine-ten months but it lasted over the summer as well and I recall that the, you know, one of the things that happened, so we had only a small terraced house, but my sisters were away some night so there was space I could, I had him to stay over a weekend, you know, and I remember we pushed together two single beds, and nothing was said about it. So this was as close as you could come to in an Irish family as... to a kind of acceptance.

AB: Yeah.

[28:41]

C: And, but then, of course, you'd say but that was all lovely. It's all lovely, Cathal. So that's how you got to the next bit. Not quite, because of course, I was an activist and a troublemaker, so I got involved with the Cork Gay Collective in 1979 in Cork, and so then we did... we were radical socialist left so we started activist. So we started... we leafleted the Irish Congress of Trade Unions when it came to the City Hall. Again, the City Hall as I said, a symbol that's so important in Cork. They had the conference there every two years, the conference in Cork, we leafleted about workers, gay workers rights, gay rights of work. And then when the Labour Party came, the following year, 1980, we leafleted them and demanded that they should take up the issue and in fact, the chair of the party came out to meet us. And the chair of the time was Michael D. Higgins. Now he said, 'Look, it was too late to put anything, you know, you know how this system works. It takes a year to put a motion in,' but he said 'I promise you, we on the left of the Labour Party because he was at that stage, he was on the very radical left Labour Party [laughs]. But he was... he said 'we will take it up.' And they did. And there was a motion in subsequent years, which was passed. But this meant my mother and I was like, 'Holy God, you're, you know, you're getting, you're going to be on the paper. You're going to be quoted'. And I was in one of the papers that was mentioned. And then I went with the support of Arthur and the others in the Gay Collective, I ran for Student Union President and I was elected in 19... in July 1980 until June 1981, when I went to Dublin. And during that year, we founded the Gay Soc. at UCC so I was publicly out, it was at the front of the *Echo*, as, you know, student radical founding the Gay Soc. himself being gay. It was on the *Sunday Tribune*, which was national. So people... like the things were like 'will you ever just stay quiet?' You know, it's the trouble like what your mother can't do, just when she thinks she's safe. And then of course, I also had another relationship when I was President of the Students' Union, with Mairtín, who was a radical Trotskyist, who was not at college, but was also a supporter of the H Block/Armagh campaign, and I became involved in that. And so he came around... I was living with him in Cork in Scilly[?] and we became just part of the kind of openness of family, my father was dead at this stage, my mother invited him for Sunday dinner with me, the two of us for Sunday dinner and we came, and I'd warned him to be careful but, of course, [laughter] so before we knew it an argument, a row began about the H Blocks and Armagh, and Republicanism and the armed struggle etc. And of course, my mother, well she would have humanitarian support for the H Blocks but was totally opposed, and my father, would be totally opposed to militant Republicanism.

[31.45]

C: So after... and then, of course, my mother being the gracious woman, she would never say anything at the dinner, so the dinner finished and then we left but then when I called back a few days later, the next Friday, she said, 'You're never to bring him into this house ever again. I will not have somebody who supports murder for political ends.' So that was just... she was a woman of strong principle but also of the... so, so that was another problem. And then I was involved with the H Block/Armagh campaign and then I was being, like, detained by the Guards. So that was another thing and then when we were [inaudible], Mairtín and myself were detained, this was in Dublin. I wrote to Charlie Haughey and to Labour Party politicians in Cork etc. So they all were... I was alerting them and it was all public you know, and issuing a public statement. So my mother was like, this was again, more what was like 'now your son is saying this'.

[32.41]

C: And then in 1985, as I say, I started Gay Health Action but then in 1988, I got involved with Kieran Rose, Don Donnelly and Chris Robson – Don and Chris are now both dead – they and a couple of... and lots of in setting up Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, which, as I said, successfully got decriminalization in 1993. But in 1989, we were trying to get the subject on the political agenda and we persuaded Gay Byrne to run a platform, a discussion on the *Late Late*. So I was in the audience and had a clip on the *Late Late*, which at that stage in 1989, was... like today it's a major programme, but back then it was a central programme that could influence politics because it had everything – politics and light entertainment, arts and culture, etc. and gossip. But it could put things on the agenda. So... but also people watched it. It was like, particularly outside of Dublin, where you had only two channels and it was like major night. So, going to work on a Monday morning and there will be a discussion about the *Late Late* on the weekend. So for the family, you know, I had warned them that I would be on but, like, for them this was like well, you know, everybody knows, your aunts and uncle know, you know, the people next door and all the people across city, people in the Labour Party all over the country.

And so it was like my political activism was always, was high profile to a certain extent, or public. So that created, you know, tensions from my mother as well. And every time I come home, because I came home about once every three months or so, and then stay in the house and be like 'well what have you done now?' And then she was very committed Catholic daily communicate. But she was also very strong independent. And so for instance, she totally opposed the 37th Amendment, the abortion amendment, she opposed that which was a vicious campaign, two thirds of the country were totally supportive and spitting on people and discriminating against people, boycotting people. So she took a stand on that and in 1986, when divorce referendum took place, she was very publicly in favour of the divorce reform. I remember her saying, you know, she'd go to daily mass with these people and many of the people there, they'd avoid the discussion because they wouldn't have wanted to have division but she knew that they did not think the same as her. And also, even one of my aunts sort of said, I remember my mother coming home sort of saying, 'can you believe it, your aunt, she has two daughters whose marriages are in trouble, very unhappy. And she's voting against divorce, you know, how blind can be.' So she was very strong-minded, with both a very strong faith and so that was the woman who's in the middle there with as... it's a very youthful face

for, you know, that was thirty. So she would have been... she had me when she was 28. So I'm 38. So that would be like 65, she must've been then.

AB: Yeah, yeah.

[35.53]

C: And she, as I say, she looks younger than her years, and she has a wonderful smile. She always had that she was very... so this photograph brings together all of that, it brings together the fact that she was worried about me, that she had all that struggles, the fact that this was also a stressful and worrying time for me. This was like... I had been working for GLEN and we had put together... because I had left the job I had, the good job with the AIB because I was burnt out with life in Ireland. I felt 'what am I going to do? A couple of more relationships had been short term and broken down. I felt that... and at that stage in '92, we just though gay law reform was years away, not 12 months. And I felt I needed to just get a rest after 17 years but during that year, I was on social welfare and I used to... and I was working with GLEN so I put a lot of work together and I'm very proud of it so there's a whole sequence of papers we did because we did a press conference with people like Monica Barnes and sorry...

AB: Take your time, yeah.

C: and the thing is that they... Sylvia Meehan from the Equality Association, two very strong, powerful women and a Green Party member, I can't remember his name now, the leader of the Green Party at the time which was quite a small party.

AB: John Gormley, was it?

C: John Gormley, I think, yeah. They sat on a platform with Chris Robson and Kieran Rose. I did all those kind of paperwork, the presentation papers, but it's summarized all the campaign with the full thing, a full report as well to the community. And so we launched it and it was launched in the European Commission, of course on Molesworth Street, so that was a sign the EU were supporting us. We, or well, not that they were supporting us publicly but they were giving us the facility was a kind of an endorsement in a way, an indirect endorsement. So all that had just taken place around that time. And then I went off to Amsterdam for seven years and then came back to Ireland in 1999. I was in Galway working in Galway [?] for four years. In 2003, I came back to Cork and moved back and we lived there since then for the last 17 years. And my mother died seven years ago in 2016, well six years ago in 2016. She... Yeah, so that just brings a lot to me of the... you know, now that I look back at 67, looking at 67 tomorrow and looking back now with all those years of course I look back and think, God, I was so lucky to have her for a mother or my father that, you know, what they had to put up and I'm so lucky in the times I lived that, you know, between gay liberation and the Irish Gay Rights Movement, the whole thing of free education as well at six or seven so I did get to get a good education, I was able to go to university. And the fact that we came through the 80s, which was a very bleak time when AIDS was a totally fatal disease where anybody who got HIV, got AIDS and anybody who got it was going to die. And we thought die... or eventually, we thought everybody would die eventually. And I left in '92 when still there was only the beginnings of research on retroviral treatment. So it was still a problem. And then a couple years later was the breakthrough with the retrovirals and they began those therapies is that turned the tide. And then I came back to an Ireland that's totally changed in 1999.

[39.50]

C: So I mentioned Mary Robinson, so 10 years later, by the year 2000, there was a real change. There was also a Celtic Tiger, such joy and wealth, [laughter] and possibility when you think back in those years of the early noughties to 2008. So I lived in those and I came back to UCC where I had founded with others the Gay Soc. in 19... November 1980 only to have the door slammed in our face that no way are we going to recognise you from the college. They kept on illegally organizing with support of the Students Union. And then in 1989, they'd been recognized so it took like eight years, nine years to get that recognition. And when I came back to UCC in 2003 and made contact with the students, the Gay Soc., the LGBTQIA+ society now the student society, I started telling them about the history, I discovered that the auditor and the President of the society were two wonderful young male students and they were members of Young Fine Gael, so I thought something has really changed when Young Fine Gael are... And of course, it had because within ten, twelve years we had this first openly gay Taoiseach who was from Fine Gael and of course we had Jerry Buttimer the leader of the Senate, openly gay, and then we had 2015, the Marriage Referendum supported fully by the government, led by the government and with a lot of others, a big community support the Equality campaign, bringing together all those feminist and gay movement and left movement from and liberal movement from. So not just the left but the centre and the right as well. Monica Barnes, all those people. Bring it all together in the success of the Marriage Referendum. And then, for me, you have the great [?] around, you have a photograph in front of the newspaper a year later, I think of Jerry Buttimer marrying his husband with Leo Varadkar, the Taoiseach and his partner next to him. And so what a transformation. So that photograph emotes for me, all of that. So you might say well, it's just a photograph. It is but it symbolises so much.

AB: Yeah, thank you, Cathal. You have answered the next three questions, but I'm just going to refresh you.

C: Okay, just in case.

AB: Well no, just if something else pops up. Okay. But one thing before I do that, you had mentioned your mum's brooch and she looks like she has a book in her hands and she's wearing her gloves and a handbag, but you are wearing a brooch.

[42.44]

C: Yes and that is. Yeah, I should explain. What she's wearing... what she's holding, it's not a book. It's actually a programme.

AB: Okay.

C: And I have one there as well in my hand. So for the Quilt Tour, there was a programme you could buy you know, you go in and there will be a little leaflet explaining about the whole thing. But also there was merchandising, because we will now try to fundraise.

AB: Sure.

C: So they were selling things like the sweatshirt, but the brooch I'm wearing is a badge. And it's just literally a circular black badge with a pink triangle on it and the pink triangle is with the point facing down. And the reason for that was in 19, in the 1970s, when the gay movement, as I mentioned, began to get strong in Ireland and in Britain and in Germany. In Germany, in particular and in America, they brought up the fact that hold on a second, homosexual men and women but predominantly men were persecuted by the Nazis, and were in their extermination camps and their torture camps. But they got no recognition after the Second World War for years. And in the camps, the Nazis were just diabolically efficient in the way they did things. So they had a coding system. So everybody [clears throat] excuse me, I'm going to take a sip of water.

AB: No, take your time.

C: They had a diabolical kind of system because they needed to see visually just immediately by looking at somebody who they were and how they were classified. So they classified the whole human race. So they had Star of David in yellow for Jewish so they put that... anybody who was Jewish only would have to [wear that]. They had a star for... a triangle of different colours for different people and I can't remember them all now but I think they had black, I think, for anarchists, they had for gypsies and Roma they had another one, they had one for religious people. They had people who were part of the religious, the Catholic faith who objected to Nazis and they were imprisoned and killed as well. And there were people... and another one for socialist and communist each two separate ones. So they codified all the people. And then if you were gay and Jewish, you'd have the Star of David with a pink triangle, but the star, the point would be pointing upwards. And what happened was that after the war, the allies who won who said 'Oh, yes, you were imprisoned and you deserve recognition and your relative was killed, so you deserve recognition, compensation. And they gave that. And then when the homosexuals went, they said, 'Oh, no. You were legitimately imprisoned and your friends and relatives were legitimately killed.' It was under paragraph 175, which was in the law already so therefore you're not entitled. And the shame that people, you know, many people didn't even know so they disappeared off the history. From 1945-46 until 1975-76, thirty years later, these people were still alive. And then these young historians, young gay historians started contacting them and saying, 'what's your story' and they started... And there was a book written called *The Men Who Wore The Pink Triangle* and if you Google it, you'll find the information. And there is a new documentary out whose title I can't remember now in 2022 which is supposed to be good, I haven't seen it yet, about it as well. And what happened then there was a big struggle in Germany, particularly, and in Austria, because these German historians contacted the survivors who gave their stories. And then they said you should look for compensation and recognition. And so the gay movement took it up and it wasn't until 10-15 years later in the 1980s, it took a long time, that finally, recognition was given, a compensation payment was paid to those who were who would have been entitled, but there was another struggle. I mentioned that Kieran Rose and I were involved in Gay Lesbian Equality Network. In 1988, we were looking for support internationally. So we went to the International Gay and Lesbian Association, or sorry, International Lesbian and Gay Association – ILGA – which had a conference in Vienna, it held it every two years. It's an international conference and we went there and we lobbied and we got support from people there, from around Europe and around the world. But one of the things that we did is, it was a week long conference, very intensive, lots of debates, very... lots of divisions as well between lesbians and gay men who had different perspectives between people from the richer countries and the poorer countries, people from Africa and Asia and Europe. So there were lots of disagreements, heated debates, and we went on... but on the Wednesday afternoon was an

afternoon off, no conference. And you could just do your own thing or you could go on a tour to the Mauthausen concentration camp, which was on the periphery of Vienna. So we went out there on buses, and in the concentration camp there is a wall of remembrance, and there were remembrances for all the different people so they had Jewish, Polish Jews, Dutch Jews, the Roma, the communists, the socialists etc. the religious. And there was one there, a pink triangle, for the gays who had died and I forgot to clarify and finish off that story.

AB: Yeah.

[48:29]

C: Why the thing... when we took the symbol of the pink triangle to say we must fight oppression, that's fascism and we must fight for the rights of all, the recognition of the struggles of all gays. We inverted the pyramid to say that it is not the symbol of the oppressor but we are reversing it 180 degrees. This is what we're going to do, we're going to overturn everything you did and we're going to make life better and make a change. But the struggle continued even after the 1980s in Germany with that because the Mauthausen prison camp had a pink triangle commemoration there because that concentration camp was run by the Austrian government. So HOSI... HOSI Wien, the Austrian gay group, was able to lobby successfully for that. But when it came to Birkenau, Dachau etc. [clears throat] Excuse me.

AB: [about the water] We have more, pour you more water.

C: I'm okay, I've got some.

AB: Okay.

[49.38]

C: When it came to the other concentration camps and death camps, Birkenau, Dachau, etc. They were run by committees of the former imprisoned and they still carried prejudice because the men who wore the pink triangle were, as I said, the lowest of the low in the prison camps. And so another battle had to be fought. And it wasn't until the 1990s that those camps conceded and allowed it, we got that change, a lot of lobbying to go on. And very difficult obviously because you're dealing with very traumatized people and people have a right to a lot of sensitivity. So we had to be sensitive. It wasn't about picketing, etc. It was about lobbying and talking and persuading, but it took a long while, another decade. But today they exist. So that's why we picked that slogan... that symbol and it's why I'm wearing it. It's an anti-fascist symbol. It's a symbol about just overcoming great odds and remember I'm wearing it at the time, as I say, of the very worst time of AIDS, so for a lot of us the pink triangle... If you look at AIDS... if people look at AIDS history, one of the most famous ones, Keith Haring, who designed a lot of stuff, who died of AIDS himself in New York, an artist but he famously designed for ACT UP. The direct action group that really got movement through political action by direct action in the late 1980s. And that slogan he had was Silence equals Death, and they used the pink triangle. And so that's what is also the huge import of that symbol. It's silence, you know, we need to talk. And I mean, you know, it's about everything, not just for gay men. The big things like the Magdalene Laundries etc. We in Ireland know all of that, the curse of silence and the power of symbols.

AB: Thank you. You'll notice, I'm refraining from commenting. No, no, it's fine. Yeah, there's so much to say. But this is what we're doing here today. Recording those histories.

C: Yeah, so we'll have it.

AB: So the three questions were, Cathal, just, you have covered it very well there but we need you to hear them. So it says tell me about the day this object came into your life/was created, so you have that, and what it meant to you then but the third question might not be fully, you know, you mightn't have fully, there might be something more you want to say. Given that we've talked about that for the past while can you tell me what talking about it, means to now, you know, what does it mean to and really, why you chose that particular object? Not only to illustrate what you've talked about, but also your view of family. Does that makes sense?

C: It makes perfect sense.

AB: Okay, and I can ask it again, if you like.

C: No, no, it makes perfect sense. I can tell you, I mean, it's...

AB: Great, thanks.

[52.53]

C: I'm going to be... My birthday is tomorrow. April 22 and I'm going to 67. I've been talking about...you know, in talking about this photograph, what it makes me realise is again, looking back over my life, looking back, you know, my mother died six years ago. So looking back over my relationship with my mother with my... I haven't gone into details, but I mentioned like, obviously, I drew a lot of public attention. And that wasn't popular. So like, one of the things a while back discussing with my brother. He mentioned or I realised, you know, he had gotten homophobic reaction because people said, well, your brother is queer, you're a queer of the brother and you know, these kinds of things. So they took reactions as well, you know. As my sister and myself were discussing it about 10 years ago and she was saying, you know, it was a sense in which you took an out of the energy out of the family because it took a lot of energy from mother and dad... mum and dad to deal with it. It was always like 'what's Cathal doing next?' and whereas the rest of us were like, 'well, you're okay, God you took nothing... you're doing nothing as bad as him'. So it's looking back on that and recognizing that, but also it's thinking about all those people who died, who didn't... who aren't here but also I mentioned that not that the people who died during the AIDS period, like Pat the neighbour, and I can think of Tony, who was in the Gay Men's Collective here in Cork who died in Belfast and a lot of others but they... so I think... and they died young. They didn't have all those years that I've had. And then the so there's that kind of sense of... that it makes me think of all that. It also makes me think, of course, about family because I'm very strong family at the moment because I had grown up and I had felt, as I say, totally alienated.

[54.49]

C: So like I've said in the past to people, like David Bowie, or I'm one of those people that David Bowie saved you know, because he showed me you could have different faces. You could have a different self. You didn't have to be the you that they said you were. So I even changed my name, I was called Charles Kerrigan, I changed it to Cathal Kerrigan and he did that, because I felt like an alien so I sort of said well, I was in Cork in the 70s. I felt like I didn't belong. I had no space. I didn't... And when I returned, in 2003, a friend came to visit from Amsterdam, and after he left, he was like 'thanks very much for the hospitality and showing me Cork' and I said, 'it's a pleasure'. And he said, 'well, it was wonderful. I felt like I was with somebody who really owned their town'. And that's, that's it, you know, four, three and a half, four decades later I've changed but Ireland has changed so much, that I feel it's my place now.

C: And then on a personal level, certainly very much as well because 15 years ago, my mother announced... well, first of all, I should explain that 20 years ago, firstly, one of my sisters died at 44 of cancer. So now there were only three children left, myself and my brother and my sister. And then my sister announced... or my mother, sorry, my mother, I came back and my mother said 'by the way, I'm leaving the family home to you in the will'. And I said well, the others won't think that's very fair and she said, I know, but I'm doing... I've told them, I'm telling you now last, I've told them. Yes, they have objected, but I've told them that I helped them with their mortgages, helped them with their marriages or weddings and I helped them with their children and you're not going to have any of that and I'm going to leave the house to you and I don't want you to be intimidated by I suppose. And I said, no, if you leave it to me, I'd be very happy to live here and I am know living there. She died and she left it in the will and I got probate of the will, and as I say, it's not a wealthy property, it's a small terraced house built 140 years ago, two up, two down kind of thing with a small extension for kitchen and bathroom at the back. And that was my mother's wealth sort of thing there was very little else. So I did the probate myself to save fees because that can... there isn't money but this is value of the house. And when I was probating the will, the registrar gave me an appointment and I came in and it was a bit like talking to you today, she was at one side of the table and I was at the other. And she said right now Cathal we have a couple of procedural things to go through, you provide all this documentation, we've got the revenue commissioners documents here, etc. So we're all ready to go to sign it. So just one small thing, Cathal. Who is Charles? and I said, well, I'm Charles going by my birth cert says Charles. I mean, I've changed it on my passport. And she said, when did you change it and I said away back in the 80s. Oh, yeah? And how did your mother feel about it. Oh, she accepted it. But this will was made 15 years ago or 12 years ago and she still called me Charles in it, so I'm not sure [laughter]. I think she might be sending you a message from the grave, you know. You'll still be Charles to me.

So I inherited the house, I'm living there now. And the history of the house is that my parents got a chance to buy it, and so did all the other tenants, in the 1970s when the landlord, who was English and lived in London, died and left a will saying that sitting tenants should be allowed to purchase. But my great... my paternal great grandparents, Charles Kerrigan and Effey McLean, were married to Newfoundland. He was in the British Army having grown up in a Gaeltacht in Mayo or Sligo, I'm not sure of the exact location and he came to Barracks now Collins Barracks in Cork and they started renting this house.

AB: No way.

C: Yeah. And he had only... they had a couple of stillbirths, a daughter died, but they had only two sons surviving Charles -- the eldest was always called Charles -- Charles and Frank. And they both served in the First World War, Charles survived and Frank didn't, he died in 1918

and he died, he was only about 22. So that was my great grand uncle and I never knew him obviously. So I've been doing family research for the family. And then Charles, his son, my grandfather, paternal grandfather, he inherited the house, and he married literally the woman next door, Kathleen Linehan lived in number... I'm living in number 10 and he lived in number 11. He married her and she moved in. I always say, it's a pity they didn't keep the two houses.

AB: The two houses, yeah.

C: So she moved in. And then they had four children. The eldest Charles died unfortunately in child mortality, so then they had three brothers, no girls. The eldest Frank and then John, and then my father, Patrick. Frank and John moved out, they served in the Second World War, my father was too young. They served in the British... because we were trade union, my grandfather Charles was involved in setting up the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in Cork etc. and all involved with the Labour Party so it's all very much in the family. My two uncles and my father were all involved as well and they were trade union activists and Labour Party activists. The two elder moved out and got married and moved into houses and my father then rented the house and he married my mother Margaret Kerrigan who was born a mile out the road in Mayfield, which at that time in the 1950s and 1954, when they married, was a kind of country village with green grass for about a half a mile separating Cork City from Mayfield and it's now all part of the city and it's all built up and it built up during my lifetime. Even when I was young and we would be going out to visit my grandmother.

C: So she moved in, and they reared us in that house in the 1970s. About 1975-76, about the same time I was terrible at stuff they purchased the house, and then I'd heard... so I'm living there now on my own and it's... I really love living there. And I've a feeling... I'll tell you something now because it's for me to tell but we just did the Census 2022 and in it they provided a time capsule thing so I wrote about this, this is my time capsule. I'm telling you part of it now. It's like saying, I look back, I'm the fourth generation to live there in 140 years. When I look back at all the changes in my great grandparents time, my grandparents, my parents, but even in my own lifetime from, as I say, the 70s feeling an alien to the 2010s sort of feeling like it's my town to now with this great transformed world and now of course, at this very moment with all the other instabilities of Covid and war in the Ukraine etc. with the worries about what could happen that the world is becoming unstable again, having... thinking that we've stabilised it so I have no idea what it'll be like in a hundred years' time but I've asked in my living will, I've asked that I be cremated and that my ashes be scattered in the back garden. So maybe in a hundred years' time, there may be a little of the Kerrigan spirits, whatever is there. Anyway, move on.

[1:02:44]

C: So the photograph, so I've been thinking about all this.

AB: Yeah of course.

C: And then you requested the photograph, or no you requested a memento. And well you could say you could've picked the badge, you could've picked all the other... But the thing is I don't have the badge anymore and as I said earlier, I donated the sweatshirt but also

[1:03:02]

C: This photograph, the reason I picked it, is because for me, there are many other photographs that have meaning and significance obviously. But as you can see, for me, this is like a prism on which... and there are all these different, wonderful rainbow analogy, all of these different colours of personal growth, of family history, of root, you know. How many, you know... it's normally the rich and the aristocratic that can say 'oh, this is the family home for four generations, for ten generations. My family have lived there all the way back to when, you know, Cromwell came to Ireland'.

C: Well, I can't go back that far but I can go back to 1880, you know, for 140 years a Kerrigan has lived here and I'm still living here for the moment. And of course, the other that all this brings up is thoughts of mortality because, of course, I am aware, you know as I say, that people my age are dying, and like Chris and Don and lots of others, [] and Kevin, all these people and etc. all these people who have died now who were as young as I or younger and I'm still here, so I'm sort of just enjoying life very much. So what this does is it brings for me a kind of reconciliation to being part... so when you say what does it mean to you to picking it out with relation to family? You know, it's a cliché, I used to read people when I was younger saying 'Oh, well, you know, I'm old now. I know I'm going to die so but I feel lucky looking at the younger generation, I'm part of the continuity. And this photograph brings that kind of continuity for me into focus of 140 years of changing and transformation and believing in the good, believing in the positive even though this is a very troubled time and the future kind of looks so unstable at the moment with various political forces from the right regathering energy, a lot of confusion, and economic confusion still after the collapse ten years ago and with Covid setting a lot of social confusion. We don't know. You know, are we going... is there going to a new version of Covid that we won't be vaccinated for, are we going to be right back where we started? Are we going to see people dying? And then we have Ukraine and the whole thing of political instabilities, it's probably going to let off a nuclear bomb or chemical weapons. So, that even though like they went through two world wars, AIDS at its worst, economic, terrible economic times in the 40s and the 70s as well, and early 80s, were very poor but it's a story of survival. And we survive as a family, but also as a broader family. And the Quilt also brings that to me because I mentioned, we now have the wonderful thing of virtual, that this would be done virtually. So that is the wonderful thing that goes out there into the world, whereas before, you would have only had it in a room where someone could have come and looked at it. Now it's going to go out with the glory of virtual reality. And that means that what we did with the quilt which was a very physical thing to make a kind of graveyard for the invisible that were lost, to make it visible. I'm hoping that, you know, we can... that this photograph makes visible for me that kind of, as I say, that energy and that ultimately we have to believe in the good and believe that things will be good, that the good will triumph, that we will... we've done it before, we've been through bad before. Even if bad does come in the future, it gives me a great sense of cliched hope, that I'll be dead but the spirit of my family, the spirit of my LGBTQIA+ family, but also the spirit of Ireland. We are very changed Ireland, a very different Ireland now and it'll be different in the future. Again, change will continue on and will do good.

AB: Okay, thank you very much, Cathal.

C: Thank you.

AB: Anything else you need to say just before we finish because we've been talking for an hour, which is great. But is there something you wished I'd asked us? Or is there something else?

C: I don't think so. I mean, I thought about it beforehand so I think we've covered everything and you've given me extraordinary time, generous time. I mean, I didn't mean to go over.

AB: No, no, we have all the time in the world right now. So thank you very much. Okay, I'm going to stop the recording. Right. Thank you so much.

[1:08:16]