

LJH4 18.3.89**Paula**

Q. How did you get hold of the questionnaire I left?

A. Through a friend from college, from poly. Yes, it was one of the lecturers that she had on her COURSE and they said, you know, do you know anybody, because most people are over 21, anybody who's just under 21, so she knew I was so.

Q. Oh good. One of the main things we are interested in, in this piece of research is the way young women feel about their relationships, what they think about them and how they feel about them and I was wondering what would you say was the most important relationship to you that you have?

A. At the moment?

Q. Yes.

A. Well it's probably the person that I'm living with. That's my boyfriend, I don't like using that phrase, but boyfriend is the only word, just because I see him all the time and he's the one I spend most of my time with.

Q. Are there other relationships which are important to you?

A. Yes, I've got lots of friends, girlfriends, well mostly girlfriends and boyfriends, and their friendship is very important, very. I think more so because I'm actually living with my boyfriend now.

Q. How long have you been living with your boyfriend now?

A. Not very long, a couple of months, not even that, a month. Just over a month.

Q. How long have you known him before that?

A. Three years.

Q. What made you decide to move in?

A. It just happened really, it was.... Because there was a possibility that he was going to move in a year ago but I said no, I didn't think it would be a good idea because I hadn't got anywhere to live and he said why don't you move in blah, blah, and I said no, I don't think it's a very good idea and, then six months later there was a place in my house and there was a possibility that he would move in and I said no, no I don't think that's a very good idea, and then his lease finished just as somebody was leaving and so it happened that way. But it took a long time. It's still taking a long time to come to terms with it, definitely. It's a very, very, very big step and one that hasn't been very easy as far as I am concerned. As far as our relationship is concerned it's OK but as far as my views on the situation it feels a little bit odd. Very odd.

Q. You would prefer not to be living together?

A. It is just, I don't know. It just seemed a natural progression to be living with each other but at the same time I still have doubts. It's really difficult to explain actually. I mean I'm happy with the situation because it seems a natural progression but when I think of the situation as isolated from anything that went on before, you know the progression to lead up to it, it seems very odd. But I'm happy.

Q. Yes. When I moved in with my boyfriend, moved in with me, it was an accident as well, it was the same sort of event, and I had decided I wasn't going to live with anybody and then he moved in so that things take you on. How do you feel about this relationship, you say you're happy with the situation, is it a satisfactory relationship?

A. Yes, I think so. I think the big reason is because we knew each other very well as friends, you know, we knew each other very, very well for a couple of years because we both went to the SOCIETY and we were very sort of close friends really and it just progressed when I came back to college. Because we were both at the same site. So I think having had that sort of relying on each other and depending on each other at first it helped a lot, definitely as a sort of base for the relationship.

Q. Did it progress to a sexual relationship at that point?

A. It was a sexual relationship when, because when, I don't know, it's really difficult to explain, but we were friends and the sexual relationship was there anyway, on and off. And then when I came back to college that was when we started seeing each other regularly but there has always been a sexual element in the relationship anyway. So the progression has started working from the very beginning really. Three years ago.

Q. So it wasn't like a decision. I was going to ask you, when did you decide to move into a sexual relationship, or did you decide or?

A. It was just another thing that just happened. It was one of those situations where we were both there at the right time. I was just having trouble with somebody I was seeing at the time and it just happened to be him. He's a very comforting person who I trusted so it just happened that way. But it was very irregular. The sexual relationship then and then when I saw him the MONTH just gone, not just gone, the MONTH before when I moved back to college again, we just started seeing each other regularly really.

Q. You said on the questionnaire that you practice safe sex.

A. Yes, well now I do because I'm not on the pill and sexual intercourse or penetration doesn't occur because we get more enjoyment out of other forms of sex.

Q. That's interesting. Other young people I've spoken to, they find it very difficult to think of, when they think of safe sex they just think of condoms, that's about as far as it goes, they don't actually think of. And I find it very difficult to find out whether they actually know of any other forms of sex which can be pleasurable.

A. Yes, I think it was just luckily we both thought that way anyway. Because he doesn't get much out of penetration really and I get more pleasure out of other forms of sex so it's just, it just ended up that way really. Which is why I meant to put, I couldn't really explain it, although it's sort of safe sex it's not safe sex because of everything that's, you know, the AIDS or whatever. But now because we do practice that, it's like oh good, I'm glad because of that but I don't think it was a decision because of that which is why it's a bit questionable really.

Q. But it's still safe sex.

A. Yes that's right, but it's still safe sex.

Q. What you were saying was it's to do with pregnancy really because you are not taking any contraception?

A. No I'm not taking the pill, no. I'm not on the pill.

Q. What made you stop using the pill?

A. Well I didn't, I was on the pill for, I was on the pill then I came off the pill and then I came on it again. When I went off the pill for the first time it was because I wasn't sleeping with anybody anyway and I decided that I didn't really want to, so I came off the pill. Then I went on the pill again and that was when I started seeing my boyfriend and we just didn't need it and when I went, I went away for about a month and I was still on the pill and I started thinking that I hated what it was doing to my body basically and I

decided it wasn't a very good idea and that I didn't need it anyway. So, I thought I'm not going to be on the pill, and I felt a lot better for it, a lot healthier thinking that you know, it wasn't doing whatever it does to my body.

Q. Yes, you've been worried about that?

A. That's right, yes.

Q. I have you heard much about the sorts of dangers about the pill?

A. Well I had, I mean when I was first on the pill when I went to the clinic and, you know, they give you all the information and I read it very carefully and so forth and so forth. And it was always in the back of my mind what could happen, but as it happens, I didn't have any trouble with the pill at all. I think I got a few more spots and lost a bit of weight but that was it you know, that was as far as it went.

Q. But it was just general concern about other things that might be going on that you are not really aware of?

A. Yes that's right, yes. The fact that it can stop pregnancy is just amazing really and it's just, like, I don't like what it's doing to my body, so I stopped it.

Q. With the people that you were having relationships with before your current boyfriend, were you using the pill mostly then, or did you use other forms of contraception as well?

A. I just used the pill because it was the most convenient one.

Q. How long had you been on the pill for?

A. I went on the pill REDACTED I think, that's right.

Q. So you haven't really been on it for a long time overall, it's been really short bursts.

A. Yes that's right. Six months on, six months off, six months off, but I tended to stay off it for a long time. If I do use any kind of contraception, I don't really want to use the pill.

Q. What do you think you might use then?

A. I don't know, I think the condom would probably be the one that I can think of, but I'm not too sure I think I would want to use something for myself as well as the man, I think I would want to use something myself. But I'm not too sure because I don't know much about other contraceptives because I haven't used them. That's the only reason. If I decided to use another contraceptive, then I would read up on them and then find out and choose which one would be best.

Q. How do you feel about suggesting that somebody use a condom. Do you feel confident to do that?

A. I don't think I would have done it a long time ago when I didn't know much about sex or I was a very sort of quiet person as well and I found it difficult to talk, never mind talk about sex. So I think I would have found it very difficult then. But again, I have never really tried it and I think maybe I would be able to do it now. Now that I know more about sex and now that I know more about, now that I feel more confident as well, definitely about sex.

(break)

Q. What made you decide to become vegan?

A. Well I became vegetarian because a friend of mine at college, she was vegetarian as well and she gave me all the blurb, you know, the stuff you get on vegetarianism, anti-vivisection and I read it and it took me about six months to come to terms with it because I had come from a very, very sort of meat eating family, you know, so, a meat and two veg family, so it was very difficult, a very different world and very difficult diet to

come to terms with but in the end I did it. And six months later I thought I might as well go the whole hog after reading loads of other stuff, and I became vegan and it's really difficult when you're not at home most of the time and you need to have enough money as well to get your substitutes and vitamins and so forth and I had so much work that I thought, I'm going to give it up. I'm not going to do it.

Q. So you're gone back to being vegetarian?

A. Yes, I'm just vegetarian now.

Q. It's a healthy way to eat.

A. Yes, it is, very good. I'm not a particularly strict vegetarian at the moment because I still eat normal cheese occasionally.

Q. I have got some vegetarian friends that even eat fish. It's not, they're not terribly strict at all.

A. A lot of vegetarians do eat fish. But I'm not really keen on that anyway. So that wasn't the big thing, it was the meat that was the most.

Q. Problem, yes. Sometimes I don't eat very much meat but then I will get stuck into red meat for a while. It's probably just habit. I don't have a lust to eat that kind of stuff. When I was looking at your questionnaire and asking these questions on sex education it looked as if you had quite a bit of sex education?

A. Well I had, but what I found very difficult was to try and work out whether I knew it from home or whether I knew it from school because luckily me and my Mum are really close and she was very good because she told me about my periods and she and also told me about sex, she told me that as well. Which I count myself very lucky really because a lot of friends from school hadn't. And she brought us lots of books about it as well so that anything she felt embarrassed to talk about or maybe she couldn't really explain very well she bought us books to follow it up. I think that was because her Mum didn't, my Nan didn't tell my Mum much anyway and she felt very deprived and it didn't help her much and so she decided that if she had children she would. And I have obviously gained from that, definitely, I think I was very lucky. But at school it was all to do with sexual relationships in terms of man and woman, marriage and children. It was just based on that. There was very little mentioned of you know, abortion, or masturbation or anything like that. Anything outside of that ideal really, a lot of it was to do with that. Homosexuality was mentioned but it wasn't really accepted, the way they produced it, it was like oh, and this happens as well, and that was as far as it went.

Q. That's quite unusual because for a lot of people that's not mentioned at all.

A. No, that's right. But yes, it was at ours. So I suppose compared to a lot of people I wasn't too badly.

Q. Yes, you weren't kept in the dark like some people had. Which sort of lessons did you get your sex education at school in?

A. There was one, I can't remember the name of it, we used to have a course called, in the fourth year of my comprehensive school, we used to have a course called common call, and in that we had music, drama, art and I can't remember the exact name of the course but it was sexual relationships and during the year we would do so much, you know, we would do say, I don't know 4 months, or 2 months of each one and swap round. Which was quite good.

Q. That's quite extensive, really.

A. Yes that's right, it was quite good. It was just that it was so biased. I mean, although it was good in that I learnt a lot about sex and so forth through our mother and through school as well it didn't really, as I mentioned before, there wasn't anything about masturbation, or abortion or homosexuality, it was almost in a, you know in the ideal. It was all very, very biased.

Q. What about your friends at school. Did they feel they were getting adequate information, or?

A. I don't know, at the time it was difficult to, we didn't really talk about it a lot, it was sort of giggly and so you know, whatever, and also we had sex education, we had both the boys and girls in the same class as well. And there were loads of laughs and ha, ha ha's from the boys and little titters from the girls. But no, we didn't really talk about it. I was very close to a few friends who'd talk about oh, what, have you done so and so, and have you done so and so, it was that kind of talk, but I don't know, I haven't really seen them to see what they think. I mean, compared to a lot of people I think my school was quite good as far as that's concerned.

Q. It does sound like it, yes from what other people have told me about their experiences at school.

A. Yes, because after doing this questionnaire I was talking to a few friends, you know, that I hadn't seen for a long time, and it came up and we were comparing like, the sex education we got at school and I still ended up the one who had the best really in comparison anyway.

Q. Were many of your friends sexually active at the time when you were, how old were you, it was your fourth year, right?

A. Yes, my fourth year. It went onto the fifth year as well, we had it in fourth and fifth year. Not really no. I can't remember any of my friends in... You see what happens is at our school we were streamed, we had REDACTED. And there were loads of talking, there was a big barrier between the three sections and a lot of the girls who were in the REDACTED, the people who look down on the REDACTED. They made a big thing out of the fact that say, one of the girls had got herself pregnant or something, you know, and they would take the piss out of that. But a lot of my friends I don't remember being sexually active at the time. I mean they might have been, but they didn't say much to really.

Q. As you say they may have been shy and difficult to talk about it. What age were you when you became sexually active yourself?

A. Well, with somebody else I lost my virginity when I was 18. But I don't know, what do you mean by sexually active? Do you mean any kind of?

Q. Yes, that's right.

A. I mean sexually active I see as, I don't know, masturbation comes into it as well and that was probably when I was 16. I would...

Q. What made you decide to start a sexual relationship with somebody else when you were 18?

A. Yes, when I was 18. It was when I first came to London and I had been on the pill a couple of months because I was seeing somebody at home and I came to London and it was just in the fact that I was in London, I was a student and it just happened basically. But that was one of the, sort of, short term relationships. It lasted a few months, 3 or 4 months. It really just happened, it was a decision made in three days basically. It was

one of those, and it was because I was just in total awe of being in London and being a student and being independent and not being at home. Because I was only 18 as well, just turned.

Q. Did you feel that it was a good idea after?

A. I didn't regret it. I have never ever regretted it. Because it was, I had thought about it, but I don't know, it just felt OK, so there you go, that's happened, basically yes. I didn't regret it at all. Not in the slightest.

Q. And did you then continue to have other short-term relationships?

A. After that I had one short relationship after that one, and then I had a number of just one-night stands and then I started seeing MARTIN, that's the person I'm living with. And yes, so basically my sexual relationships are mostly, have been made up of one-night stands.

Q. How do you feel about that?

A. I don't, I didn't like it. It was good at the time, but. I don't know, I don't think I regretted the one night stand because mostly it is to do with, I ended up sleeping with somebody because I was, I don't know, pissed off at the time, or something, or whatever, it was just one of those things that happened. I don't think I really regret them but I'm not sure. Maybe this has got something to do with my education and marriage and you know, whatever, long term relationships, I'm not too sure. I feel a little uneasy about it, but I don't really regret it at all.

Q. How was the decision made that it should be a one-night stand, I mean in a sense you don't know a one-night stand may turn out to be the rest of life sort of thing?

A. No, you don't.

Q. I mean did you decide that you didn't want to see the person, or did he decide? Or was it not an issue at all?

A. I don't know, sometimes it wasn't an issue, it just was one of those things that happened and I didn't really know the person, well a couple of times I didn't really know the person, they were sort of a friend of a friend and, other times yes it could have gone on a little bit longer but I didn't pursue it because, I don't know, it didn't really matter to me whether it did or it didn't really, I don't think. But at the same time, it still feels odd that it didn't, I don't know why, I can't really explain why I couldn't just have enjoyed that one-night stand and not think about it. It wasn't regret, I don't know what it was, but I do feel odd about one-night stands definitely but I can't really say why.

Q. Did you feel, it sounds as if you had a certain amount of control over it, you sort of decided that it would take place and then you decided that you weren't that interested in pursuing it?

A. Yes, I don't know whether it was because I wasn't that interested in pursuing it or I thought there was no point anyway because they're probably won't be interested. Maybe it was that, I think probably it is a lot to do with that and I was, like, maybe trying to hide it, that feeling. I don't know, maybe it was. But I think the actual decision of having sex, I definitely made a decision, definitely. Whether, I don't know, I just made a decision there and then I didn't make any decisions about what was going to happen after. It was just a decision, OK right, this is happening so that's it.

Q. And you were on the pill?

A. I was on the pill yes, definitely.

Q. So you weren't worried about getting pregnant?

A. No I wasn't.

Q. Did you worry about AIDS at all or did you not think about that?

A. At that time no, because this was 3 years ago, and I didn't know much about AIDS anyway. I didn't even know it existed. It's only I don't know about a year and a half ago, something like that I realised that I knew about AIDS. It was only about a year and a half ago. Before then I didn't know anything about it at all.

Q. You hadn't seen any of the publicity or anything like that?

A. No.

Q. How did you first hear about it. Can you remember how you first heard about it?

A. I think there was an item on the news or was it a documentary. It might have been a documentary. No, I think it was an item on the news about how many people had died in America from this disease. I think the first news was the fact that it was a big disease in America and then it just followed by various little leaflets and posters that were up in various, you know, clinics and so forth. And the poster, the publicity, I mean the way I see it, it happened really really quickly because I didn't know anything about it before and all of a sudden there were loads and loads of information and various documentaries or news items and things that were on the television.

Q. I think they had kind of a week when it was like blanket coverage when they had documentaries practically every night.

A. Yes. There were a lot of sort of late night shows as well where they had lots of people chatting about it and things. I remember that. But I mean this is very recent really. You know, my knowledge about it is very recent.

Q. What do you feel about it. Do you feel comfortable in your knowledge about it?

A. No I don't really. I don't think I know that much about it. Then again, I don't really know anything, I don't really know much about any sexually transmitted disease. I don't really know much about it because it's one of those things that's not really talked about. That's another thing that's not really touched on you know, my sex education, yes it was like, oh this exists but it didn't really go into detail about it really. You know, it was brushed over. And I mean AIDS definitely didn't come into my sex education. I had already left school by then by the time that, you know, it had reached the media and so forth.

Q. So you feel you would like to know more about it?

A. Yes, I think so. I mean I've got a friend who is, she is still on the applied social studies course and she is working with COMMUNITY PROJECT, and it's working with rent boys. And when I've been round to see her, she goes to a lot of seminars and, you know, things to do with AIDS and I have learnt a lot more information through my friend really as well. It is just this odd thing about the fact that sex and death, the two things are not talked about, so it makes it even greater to understand and accept and I find that really interesting. It's a great revelation to me as well because I never really, I don't know much about it at all. But she has given me a lot of information as well, just talking rather than factual information or the statistics that you get on television. Going into it deeper.

Q. Did you sort of feel at first that it was perhaps not relevant to you it was more to do with gays or?

A. Yes. That's because I think that was the way it was presented as well, so that was the way I thought. I went to have an HIV test.

Q. You did?

A. Yes, I had one. But that was, I'm talking about nearly a year ago, it was last summer I had my HIV test.

Q. What made you decide to do that?

A. I think just because of the number of people that I'd slept with and also that there were a couple that I didn't really know so I was sleeping with whoever they had slept with in a way and I just went for a checkup just in case. I just had the test because really, I wanted to know, at the same time I didn't but I took the decision I want to have an HIV test.

Q. Did you get any counselling about that?

A. No I didn't. Because I went at home, you know WEST MIDLANDS where I come from, and I went to the STD clinic there and I had the test and I had heard, because my friend, she lives in London, when she went to a clinic in London to have it done and she had counselling and I didn't get any at all. Well I did get, when I said I want the HIV test and the doctor asked me why and I said well I've slept with a number of people and I have slept with whoever they've slept with and he asked me if I had slept with anybody who's gay and I said no, and bisexual as far as I know I don't think so and he said, and then that's when he asked me why I wanted the test and I told him and that's as far as it went. And he said oh, OK. That was it. He asked me three questions.

Q. Yes, it's not very good really is it?

A. No and that's why I think it was, because it was in a small town in WEST MIDLANDS. It's a small town near Birmingham but I think if it had been in London, I probably would have got that counselling, but it is as if they don't think it's a big problem in small towns. Why, I don't know.

Q. Yes, so they probably thought that.

A. In comparison to London it probably isn't but it's still something that ought to be taken care of and you still should have some counselling because you can't really jump to conclusions at all. I think it is better to have it.

Q. But you are OK?

A. Yes, it was negative anyway.

Q. So that changed your behaviour after having had the test and knowing what the dangers were?

A. Yes, funnily enough what changed it was I have got a younger sister, she's three years younger, she's 18 and at the time she was 17 and she does dancing and so forth and she did this show they were like, it was a show for collecting money to send to a charity of some kind, I can't remember what it was, and ANGELA's dance was based on AIDS and I was sitting and watched it with my Ma and we were sitting there and it suddenly made me think really, because my sister was involved with it as well, my sister was involved in this thing and actually watching my sister thinking, my god, she's aware of it and as far as I know she's not really sexually active. And that, I think that frightened me. To see my sister do something who's younger than me and I was living at home at the time and that's what made me decided to go and have the test. And I think it did change the way I looked at sex and sexual relationships or whatever. I think it changed my attitudes, but I think it takes a longer time for you to actually practice it. But as it happens I didn't sleep with anybody else anyway, other than the person I'm seeing now,

and I have been sleeping with him for 2 years, the same person, so as it turned out I didn't have to go against what I had changed to anyway.

Q. Yes, that's good, that's interesting as well because some people, other young women have said that to me that they know what it is and what they want to do but they are not too sure when it comes to the crunch they would do it.

A. Yes, because it's totally changing, I suppose. And having to think about it as well and having to make decisions which I hadn't really had to do before. And it would have been a big decision but as I said before, but as it turned out I have to.

Q. You haven't had to make it.

A. No, so again it looks like I've been really lucky.

Q. Have you got any other brothers and sisters?

A. Well, I have a half-brother, but I don't really know him very well. REDACTED.

Q. So that's your father's child?

A. Yes, because he got married again.

Q. And your mother hasn't?

A. No. She's seeing somebody but she didn't get married again, no. I think it would take a long time to get her to marry again.

Q. So it was quite a long time ago when he divorced her?

A. Yes, I was 14 so it's what 7 or 8 years ago. Nearly 8 years ago.

Q. How did it affect you at the time?

A. I think now looking back on it I think it has affected me by the way I look at relationships differently. I mean there is no way I will ever, ever, I won't get married. Not only because of what happened to my Mum and Dad, I think it's because I don't think it is necessary anyway. But whether I came to that decision because my Mum and Dad got divorced in the first place I don't know, but there's no way I would ever get married because I think it's just, you don't really need to. The only way it affected me at the time was because I was doing my exams and therefore I delved straight into my exams and completely shut it off and I just had a reaction in the summer where I just went hysterical. But I don't know, I think in the long term it has affected the way I look at relationships and the short term it just affected, it was something that I couldn't handle at all and I just delved into something that was there at the time which was my exams just to shut it out. It was very difficult to come to terms with.

Q. So you weren't able to talk to your mother much about that?

A. Only because she, well because she nearly had a nervous breakdown anyway because it was very difficult for her to take and she had always been suspicions and now all of a sudden, they were confirmed. And she had to leave her job and she just sat there staring at the floor for a long time. It is only afterwards, after, I don't know, a year or so, that I could actually talk to her properly. Although we would have the odd conversation and it would always end up in tears and, therefore, we couldn't really get any further. But about a year later, I mean we can talk very freely about it now. But my Dad I didn't understand, I could never talk to him anyway and I didn't speak to him when it happened because, really, I wanted to know why and I never spoke to him. But I am completely, completely biased against my Dad definitely, definitely.

Q. Why is that?

A. Because of what he did to my mother, because he was, he did everything, and the person he was seeing who he is now married to, she had the child before you know, my Mum and Dad were divorced and she left, she left CAROL, that's my Dad's wife, for a while before he went back to her with this baby. And to me looking at it overall, it was like marrying people and you know having sex and giving them babies and then going away. And it was like, I don't want to have anything to do with it at all. It was definitely- I think that definitely made me wary of men I think to a certain extent, definitely.