Oral History: 40 Years of HIV Activism in Greater Manchester

Anita Binns (interviewed by Sally Cross)

The oral history interview took place on 19th December 2024, in the George House Trust Boardroom at 75-77 Ardwick Green N, Manchester M12 6FX.

SC: So, to start off with Anita, can you just tell me a little bit about where you were born?

AB: Um So I was born in Preston in 1970. Um, I don't really remember much when I was really young. Um, but then we moved back to Northern Ireland. My family are Irish. Um when I was two, my little sister had just been born, my three elder sisters, I know, imagine five of me. Um My three older sisters were born in Northern Ireland. Um So we returned, um there. Um, my father was um known for being involved in the troubles at the time I come from a Protestant family. Um, and so he had been in prison, so we returned back to Northern Ireland. Um and obviously, and my dad came out of prison. Um and we lived in the family home which is like a little village [name of village]. It literally had two streets in it with three pubs, obviously two shops um and a school. Um and we lived there till I was um, nearly eight, and then we returned back to England. Um my parents separated. My dad kept getting into trouble and going back into prison and my mum had had enough. Um. And I think like all children, you've got splintered memories of things. Um and like all divorced people, they all tell different stories [laughs], um, to suit their narrative. So never really quite get the whole picture. Um which is fine. Um, so yeah, we came back to England when I was eight. Um, and it was pretty tough. Um, my mum was, I uh we forget sometimes, I suppose looking at it from a child's point of view, what it must have been like for the adult. But obviously for my mum, she'd had enough. She always felt like she was trapped by her five kids, which she could have given up, um, might've been better for us if she did, but she just chose to have her own life. Um we lived in a sheltered accommodation. Um, we lived with our uncle and auntie at first and then we moved into sheltered accommodation. Um

SC: Whereabouts was this?

AB: In Preston

SC: Mhmm

AB: Um and so, where we lived weirdly enough is like two streets away from where I now live. So, we were brought up in this like um women's shelter. Um and because my mum had five kids, she had the downstairs big room and we all slept in one room. And the gentleman that she was seeing who became my stepfather had white wriggled the wires because there were alarms on it because obviously some women were in difficult situations and coming from abuse. Um so yeah, they just used to climb in and out the window. So, um our, our bedroom was a thoroughfare for people coming and going. So, it wasn't very nice. Um, and then, they got a permanent house and they got married when I was ten. Um, it was a very abusive relationship the whole time. Um, mum didn't really bother much for us. Um, and luckily we were really close so we kind of brought each other up. My job was always to go out in the morning after the milk man to steal the eggs and orange juice. So, we had breakfast, um, and to climb out the window to ring the police when the beatings got too bad.

Um, so that was it. So I was, I didn't really, we went to a junior school nearby. Um, and, um, didn't really like school very much. Um, even though I've got three older sisters and one younger, I was always more of the tomboy of the family. So if someone was picking on my sisters, it was my job to stick up for them. So, uh, funnily enough, we'll talk about this today how reputations stick, even though it was for actually different reasons. Um, so I, um, we got on with my mum quite well. Um, it was always quite, she's quite a narcissistic person. Whereas if she sees the me and my sisters getting on too well, she'll do little whispers in one ear. So she kept everyone quite fragmented, which meant everyone still needed her. Um, and yeah, and finally we all left home and uh then she divorced him because there was no one to stop the beatings and it got just as bad as it always had been. But she started to realize that actually one day I was going to kill her. So she left him. Um, but I, when I went to high school, I kind of realised before I went to high school, I knew it wasn't really my thing. Um, and as much as within our growing up, it had always been quite a caring role or, you know, doing, I'm more of a doer. Um, so it was in the summer before I started high school and there was in Preston, they've got like a shopping centre, St George's and there was a nun there begging, sat on a chair and, you know, when you look at someone and you just go, oh my God, I want your life, you know, because we always perceive things to be differently. Um and I sat there and spoke to her all afternoon. Her name was Sister Frances and she works at Little Sister's, which was an old people's home run by nuns near where I didn't know nearby where I was gonna go for the high school. Um, and she stuck with me. Um and it just so happened when we started high school the school bus, there'd been something wrong on Saint Vincent's Road. Um, and the buses had all been detoured. So we had to go the long way. So, I saw the sign for the Little Sisters of the Poor and I was like, that's where I'm supposed to go today. So, I registered for my first day, um, and then left and I went and knocked on the door and asked for Sister Frances who obviously laughed her head off and I was like, I'm not going back. I want to be here, and I want to be a nun. I mean, obviously we're Protestant Irish not even Catholic. Um, she like wet her pants and told me that I would never be a nun, but I was more than welcome to come any time. So, I started volunteering at night. So, I just used to go straight after school. Obviously, I wasn't missed at home. Um, and would work till eight o'clock 'cause that's when the shift finished. They wouldn't let me stay after then. Um, anyway, um, and I did that every day and I'd be there every weekend eight till eight. I did like, and like just doing teas and coffees. Eventually they let me do like the care side. Um, and school relented because they were like, what's the point? So, I only went to school two mornings a week. Um, because unlike other children, I wasn't running the streets or causing havoc or the police at the door. I was actually going to a job. Um, so no one was really bothered, you know, the bunky-off man. Um, used to come. Um, I know, and they'd go, "yeah she's here" and in the end he stopped coming because he knew I were there. Um, so they gave me a job at weekends cause they couldn't pay me, um, cos obviously it was illegal to employ fourteen-year olds. Um, I know can you imagine doing it now? It's mad, isn't it? Um, I feel old when I say that. Um, so they, gave me a job in the kitchen. So my job was to peel all the vegetables and stuff. Oh, it was covered in rats and all sorts down there in cellar it was disgusting. Um, but at least then they could pay me, and ten pound was a lot of money back then. Um, so I tried to hide it at first so me and my sister could have, sisters could have stuff when my parents were at the pub and stuff. Um, but my mum cottoned onto it. So, then I had to go and hand it over to her. Um, and most of the time they'd already been in the club that was near the house where we lived. So I had to go to the club with the money I'd earned all day to go home to an empty house and probably no gas

and electricity. Mental. Um, so an old people's home opened across the road called Cranhome(??) on Garstang Road. So, Sister Frances unbeknown to me had gone to them and said, “look, this girl's amazing, she does everything, can you not give her a job?”. Obviously under the radar. And they were like, “yeah, of course, we would”. Um, so I started full time at Cranhome(??) when I was fourteen and a half. Um, so I worked there, and I obviously got paid. Um, and then I left there when I was sixteen and one of my friends, um, by the time I was like fifteen, my mum started how I say it, I was working. So I was hanging out with old people and when I was twelve I woke up with a pair of melons on my chest. So, I looked older than what I was anyway. So I was already going to bars and clubs. Um, and then my mum kicked off one day when I was fifteen and was like, you gotta come home. And I was like, are you kidding me? Cause she used to take all my wages off me. I'd get like twenty pound out of my wages. Um, so I thought, I left and my friend's dad had, um, a shop up the road and I knew that his flat was always empty because he used it for his naughty friends. Um, and, um, so I just said to him, can I not live in the flat? And he's like, yeah, so I rented the flat so I then realized it took more to, um, pay the rent and everything else than what I was getting. So I started working in a bar. Um, so I was doing that then I went to work in a restaurant. Um, so, yeah, I was pretty independent from a very early age and then when I was seventeen, um, I met my husband in the February of 88. Um, he was in the army. Um, and my friend’s dad who had the shop who, who had the shop, he had a bit of trouble with one of the girls that worked there because he was due to get married and his wife was coming from India. It was very scandalous. Um, but he'd been a little bit too friendly nod nod, wink, wink with the girl in the baker's shop and she was threatening to tell his mum. So I was like, right, I'll come in and I just really put her off. So we done constructed this whole theatre to get rid of this girl. It was so funny. Um, so I went to work in the shop to get rid of this girl. Um, and, um, his mum loved me because obviously I was like, his, his daughter's like best friend and like, oh, Anita’s so amazing and everyone was like, um, because I went to church, that's all it was for the parents is like, she's so lovely. And I was like, I go to church. You don't. So, that was always a thing that, um, got me away with things with her. Um, so right across the road from where the shop is, was the army barracks. So that's how I met my husband cause the boys all used to come in, um, for the lunch and he was always really shy or pretending to be. And then this one particular day I was just like, oh, you're boring me now. And I was like, “you've been in three times and now Binzy(??). Do you want to go out for a drink?” And he's like, “well, well, I was gonna ask you” and I was like, “see you on Friday then eight o'clock outside shop. Is that alright? Yeah, bye bye. You can stop coming in the shop, now, can't you?” And he just walked out like that. I went, he forgot the milk and he'd literally left the milk on the counter. It was so funny, probably didn't even need milk. Um So that's how we met. So we met in the February of 88 and we got married in the September um of 88 in Preston Parish Church. It was like um because mm mm obviously my, my, well, my family are religious anyway. Um and it was something that I always found peace in. Um, so when we came back to England when I was eight, um I actually went, I heard the church bells ringing. Um, so I just followed the church bells. Um, and it was only like I thought God, aren't these English people really weird, like doing all this crossing stuff and what's with all the water? Because I've never been in a catholic church and um this lady came up to me and started speaking to me. Um, and I said, if I'm doing something wrong, I'm sorry. Um, and she went, no, but do you want to go with the children? I'm like, no because I'm not naughty because you see we're brought up that you go to church. So you do the full two, two-and-a half hour service and then you go to Sunday school after and it's only like babies or really

naughty kids that go to the back or upstairs while the service is on. So this woman laughed and assured me that I wasn't naughty. And I was like, alright. And then she asked me what we did in our church and I was like, well, what everyone does and then, then she understood. So after the service, she took me up to the parish church, um where I met Reverend Higgins and his wife. Um and um they were laughing because I was like, I thought they were a bit weird, you know, they were choking water everywhere. I can imagine what I must have looked like to them because, you know, we were very unkempt we weren't very well looked after. Um, and as much as I think I've made myself look beautiful that day. I probably looked like a right tramp. Um, and, um, cause I couldn't find socks that had elastic in them. I do remember that. So my socks were down my ankles. Um, so Reverend Higgins sat and had a chat and a coffee with me and then took me back to where my mum, where we were in the accommodation, um, with him, my mum put on all of airs and graces. Um, but after that, Reverend Higgins, his wife used to then come and meet me. Um, and I'd walk up to church with them. Um, so they became like really good friends. I became good friends with them. So when I met my husband Reverand Higgins didn't like him because he didn't believe in God. And he was only getting married in church because I said if I didn't get married in church, I wouldn't cause it, that's the only reason why you get married. It's not for the dress, it's your vows before God. Um, so that was quite funny and every time we had to go to meetings, my husband was like effing and jeffing, I'm going, “don't swear when we're in there just to be nice”. And he’s going, “he hates me”, and I'm going, “yes, he hates you, let's not lie about that, but we're getting married in the church”. So that was quite funny. Um and then, so we got married in the September. I turned eighteen five days later. Um sadly, we because my husband was moving to Germany, so we moved to Germany at the end of September 88. Um my husband went straight the day after we got, not two days after we got married. Um, he went straight to Germany and then I went after him. Um and then, um he had his accident on the fifth of April 1989. Um he was severely injured in the Land Rover. He was paralysed from the neck down and he had a head injury. So, he wasn't able to, he never regained full consciousness to have proper conversations and obviously, we knew he'd never walk again. Um, we just found out we were pregnant four weeks before. Um, so at least he knew we were, we were having a baby. Um, so we were in Germany then for another three months and then they flew us over to Woolwich Hospital to the London Hospital. Um so I. It's not there now, it's, it's an army hospital. Um and um we were there till was it we got there in 89? So Glen was born. So, it would have been 93. No, 92. Yeah, 92, 93. Um so when um my, our son was born in November the 17th 89. Um he was born in Greenwich Hospital. Um and my husband was on the other side of London. Um, and, um, yeah, so that was difficult, obviously. Um, but luckily I'm a little bit stubborn. I know that shocks you really shocks you. Um, so by then the army knew that I wasn't going to take much. There was some horrible situations that happened, like coming into. There's quite a lot of head injuries that happen in the army a lot that they don't talk about, um, because they happen on duty or they happen in situations that shouldn't have happened, like they were on exercise and one of the boys shot each other by mistake. That happened so much. Um, and I just happened to go to the toilet. Oh, I think I was watching a movie actually in the, in the, um, TV room and I went to come back in, um, and I heard one of the nurses say to the other nurse, um, if you finish up there, I'll do the cabbage patch and then it'll be done quicker. What she meant was the people that are unconscious. So, I came behind her and said, I just heard that. Um, so I went in and I unclipped my husband's w- bed and got all his stuff cause he was on a ventilator and, and because he had a trachy as well as a gastrostomy for

feeding. Um, and she's like, you can't do that. And I'm like, “fucking stop me”. I kicked off. It was like one o'clock in the morning. Um, some of the other boys come out and there was a lot of people in that were in the hospital then because at the time we had the Falklands and other things going on. Um, there were people in there who had, had their faces blown off, they'd lost legs. Um, and their families, their wives, girlfriends had just walked away and left them. Um, and, you know, I was eighteen-years old with the baby on the way and he was in a coma and I was being what every wife should be, I believe supportive. Um, so to a lot of the boys, I looked like the little sister. So they were very protective. So obviously, some people walk up and I knew one of the bays, like the big rooms, um, had just been emptied that day and the day before because one of the gentlemen had moved. Um, so they were like, what are you doing here? I said, “help me move him now”. I said, “she just called this the vegetable patch, fucking scouse bitch[says under breath]”. Because she was a scouser. Look at me whispering. So you haven't got it on record. You just recording it [laughs]. I don't know. I just whispered that [laughs]. I was like, ah, I was so hungry. Um, so the next day, Colonel Garnet who's like the most amazing creature, um, obviously came onto the ward is like this is Anita Binns and I'm like, Colonel Fucking Garnet and he went “stop it”. I said, well how rude? He said she's been spoken to but you know you caused a lot I havoc last night. I said “all these boys are very upset”. I said, “they've got to stop talking like that”. I said, “you don't know who can hear it”. I said, “more importantly, the person in the bed”, I said, “I'm sick of saying to people stop”, you know, like the amount of times conversations would be had and their like, Anita why don't you just fuck off and get on with your life, Anita why don't you do this? And I'm like, I'm sat next to my husband who you do not know what he can and can't hear how dare you even have them conversations like the amount of times in them four, um in, well, in the eight years that he was alive that I've had to remind people that there's a human being sat there you go. It's so frustrating. People are so rude and then it doesn't become like um, what's that thing? Like a, a mission? You just get so mad about it. You're just like, so obviously I was quite vocal um which I did some stuff with Headway. Um, so they started a Headway group at the, at Woolwich Hospital across the road. So, I'd started getting involved with some of their things because obviously, and I don't care me, do you know what I mean? I'm like, if it's gonna make people sign checks, I'll do whatever you want me to do. So obviously, because I'm pregnant and his condition, the photographs look good and the story looked good and it makes people heart bleed and it, I know that sounds awful, but we do know the only way we're gonna get money, you're not gonna get money by telling a ‘good’ story. Are you? So, I was used for quite a few posters and campaigns and especially when our son was born because that was even more impressive. Um so, and then it got to um, it was about a year 90, 91 when they said they're not gonna keep him in the hospital any longer. His chances of rehab were getting less and less and to be fair, Colonel Garnet was amazing like he just said, “Anita I'm not gonna argue with you anymore”. And I said, “right, well, I want physio and I want a wheelchair. I want a bigger bed”. So, they had this bed made for us because I slept with him. But I had to have like this tiny little bed next to him. And I'm like, he's my husband and everyone keeps coming in and out. I can empty a bloody urine bag. You know, there's no need for people to keep annonying us. Why should we wear clothes? Other people wouldn't wear them in bed. He’s like, “right Anita that's fine. So I just put private on your door. And that's it”. Some nurses didn't like that because then, which always makes me laugh. They said it was inappropriate. What if he didn't want it? I know. Right. And the mad thing is that they actually had a fucking meeting about her. And I was like, how and Pam Wells, who was my social worker, the most amazing creature, she fought

so hard for people with head injuries. Um she didn't make me laugh. Well, I didn't make her laugh. I was a nightmare. I think when she met me, she was like, oh my God. Um But we did used to have some good times. Um, she come out and she went, “I'm so glad you weren’t in that meeting Anita,” she said, “you'd have wiped the floor with them”. Some of the questions were so inappropriate and I was like, it's not even like we can have sex, we can't do anything. It's not even like his winky is gonna work because anyone who's paralysed would have to have surgery, believe it or not, there's a switch you can have that just turns it on and off. It's mad. I know I shouldn't say this. But so one of my friends had it done and I said to him, let me see, let me see. And you literally just turn your winky on and off. It's mad. I was like that’s the bizarrest thing I've ever seen. So, yeah. It's not even like we're gonna do anything cause obviously once you’re paralysed, but it's all these things that do matter. Do you know what I mean? I was like, you don't know what effect that's gonna have on him if it helps him wake up or to see that he's got every reason to fight. So, um, they let us have the cot in the hospital in like, so we actually, I lived in the hospital for the first eight, nine months and then once, obviously, my son was getting to the crawling stage, I had to relent and stay in. We had an army flat nearby. Um but that was an argument in itself. Um

SC: Whereabouts was the flat, in the hospital?

AB: So yeah, they've got like army quarter cause it's an army hospital. It's actually got like accommodation with it for the staff, for the wives and things. So, they gave me an army flat. Um, and they made it ground floor, they put a ramp in it. So at least my husband could come with us during the day and stuff like that because I made all the excuses of not going because I couldn't get the wheelchair in so they got me a bigger flat on the ground floor and they made it wheelchair accessible and I was like, oh, so I had to give it and relent in the end. But yeah, I made it hard work. I bet you’re shocked. Um you're gonna go home saying I'm never gonna say, I bet you shocks again. Um, so, yeah, that was quite difficult in, in, uh, obviously. Um, so, um, while all that was going on, one of my friends, um, who we were just talking about, I know I met Cindy, um, she, they didn't really bring outside nurses in, um, to the hospital. Um, but, um, because people were doing training because the army hospital was amazing. I, you can imagine it's all regimented and, um, I used to drive them mad because I, if there was something that I knew would get on the nerves, I'd do it. So then they'd just give in so I'd piss off. Um, but that's the way I got my own way. Sometimes, Colonel Garnet would tell me off and say it's not happening, but nine out of ten times, I think he realised that nothing I was doing was inappropriate or it was to ensure that everything was done. You know, my husband was treated the best way possible. So it was quite fun. Um, I also liked getting on his nerves. Um, so she came to work, she was doing some training with occupational therapy and that's how I'd met her. Um, so we'd randomly met, and she just thought that was the funniest person she'd ever met in her life because she was like, are you actually normal? And now she actually said that to me that was her third sentence to me. Are you actually normal? And I'm like, yeah. Um, probably sounding like some petulant teenager. I was like yeah. And she just thought I was so funny. Um, and then, um, afterwards cause I'd gone in to ask for something. I can't remember what I was asking about. I know at the time I was trying to help because people with, oh, who are paralysed, get a lot of bone falsification. And that's why you see people like [makes sound] because their hands twist because they've not had the therapy. So, at the time I was doing stuff with his hands. So that's probably what I was in for. Um and when I left the occupational therapist obviously told her our story and she was like, are you kidding? That's her. And she was like,

yeah, so I didn't see her again. Um for about seven or eight months when she saw me, she went, can we have a coffee? And she's like, you do know you're mentally amazing. You like, how are you even laughing? And I was like, am I? Isn't this normal? This is what everyone? No, it isn't. Um and then we just got talking a bit like me and you are now and she was like, look care's changed, you know, you can't do your job anymore that you, you know what, what you've been doing all your life prepared you for this. But if you go to work now as a nu- like as a n-, not qualified nurse, you've got to have NVQs and stuff and I was like, I didn't even go to school. I don't know what a full stop is. I don't, that's why I don't breathe. I don't know where full stops are. Um, I don't, you know, I, I'm, I'm, I'm, well, I used to say literate. Evidently, we have to say, what's that word? Dyslexic. Yeah. Illiterate, dyslexic. Same thing. I always say I was born in 1970. I'm old. We, we don't talk like, you know, the way we're supposed to. Um, I, I'm not very woke. Sorry. Um, and yet I am, I just don't say it right. Um, but, um, that's an oxymoron, isn't it? Hm. Just heard myself then. Um, so, um, she got me on to how to do my NVQ. So, while all this was going on in 1990 I'd started my NVQ. I know right doing open university and I had to go into a college and do some bits. So…

SC: Whereabouts was the college?

AB: It's in Greenwich. Um, and then I, we, because my husband was being moved, I insisted because Pam Wells at the time in 91 she was the most amazing social worker that said to me, look, you're going to struggle because of, you're so stubborn with your husband and how he should be. We need to find some good care. You're gonna be shocked at this. So, me and her went off looking at care homes, babes they were disgusting. I mean, literally some people didn't even leave the room, they, and they didn't even get them out of bed. They said sometimes we don't always get everyone out of bed and I was like, we're not making appointments, we're just gonna turn up any home should say oh it's all right, we can show you around. We'll give you the information. If they don't let us in, they've got something to hide and she went, I knew this was gonna be hard. Honestly, I left some places lit-, in fact, I had some places I just cried in the middle of it and like, you know, because what does happen eventually and very sadly with a lot of people in long term comas is the family, forget about them. Um and they are literally left to the state who do not give a shit and there's no money in it. Do you know what I mean? Um and the people that are doing the care are the lowest of the low. Um, it tends to be one medically trained staff on every shift the rest. And you know, there's a difference. I always class myself as a carer and I love doing my job. But when you look at other people, they're not doing it for that. They're doing it because it fits in with the school, it fits in with the kids. There's nothing else they can do because they're uneducated. Um, and very sadly they're looking after the most vulnerable adults and young people. Um, it was really sad.

SC: So this work that you were doing going around care homes, was it employment or?

AB: No, I was looking for a home for my husband.

SC: And ok

AB: So what they had said to us in 90 at the end of 1990 they said we can't keep him here forever in a year you need to find a home. And I was like, what does that look like? Um, so I'd said, can we not? Why can't, you know, because the compensation claim was going through and I'm like, why can't you just give us a house and let him stay at the house? Um And so what had happened? So what had happened was uh, I, I laugh about this. It's not

even funny but I laugh because it would only happen to me. Um, our son was born in November 89 and this was the Summer of 1990. So it was just after which I'm sure most people remember come. Um, what was her name? You remember the little black girl come come. God forgive me not remembering her name. She got admitted to the hospital in Woolwich and there wasn't much that hadn't been done to her. Um, she looked like a ragdoll cause most of her bones were broken cigarette burns. It was, it was, it was terrible. And what her auntie had done to her anyway. Um, as I said, I'd made them make the army flat so we could be together at weekends. Um, and my husband had, um, he couldn't control his head movements and he had like a chest. So, I got us up. Um, and I, but I'd not strapped my husband's chest and I'd not, cause I'd not put his top on because he drools a bit. And, um, I'd just put my son down and I went into the kitchen. He'd obviously crawled. There was like a big glass partition. He crawled onto the wheelchair, which had scared my husband. But because I'd not strapped him, it probably made it even worse for him. So he nudged him out of the way. But of course he couldn't just fall on the floor. No, he fell onto the corner and he caught, he's got a scar on his face still. Obviously, they both start crying. I was like, oh my God picked up the baby. I was like, what have you done? You fucking idiot, kicked him like you would. Um and I went right, don't you move like he was going anywhere. So I knocked on Paula's next door. One of the army wives I made friends went, right, Paula. Are you gonna have to help? She's like, what the bloody hell. But the blood was really coming out because it was like on the cheek. I said, oh Glen knocked him. I said, it's my fault. I went into the kitchen and he wasn't strapped up. She went, you go to the hospital and it's literally like walking from here to there. So I went to the A&E like four or five days after this little girl had been in. It weren't, they weren't long. It literally was like, and they said, and I rang my friend Shirley. I said, meet me at the A&E, I've got, I've gone in with Glen and she said, yeah, of course, of course. Um, so Shirley arrived and went oh, there's a lot of fuss. And I said, I know, do you think something's going on? Well, it was for us. Um and then she went Anita, what did you tell them? And I was like that his bloody dad knocked him playing and we both looked at each other and I was like, oh shit. So anyway, the police came and spoke to us and I said, they stitch my son's face and I went, look, I know how this looks. My husband's literally across the road. I'm going to take you to him now and you can arrest him. Um, so this social worker came, I'd rang Pam but she lived in like about an hour and a half away, but she was driving, she was like I'll come now Anita. So I rang my social worker at home and I said, you better come now, Pam. And she were laughing her head off. She went, you are the funniest. But, this just goes to show how mental like they take some people and how they don't with others. So we walked across the road um and I walked in and by then two of the nurses had came from the hospital so they dressed my husband and um he was alright and he was calm down and I was like, well thick head, they come to arrest you and he couldn't even hold his head up. So he had like a band on here and you could see his trachy and he's like, oh. They've come to arrest you now, haven't they? I said, there you go. That's his dad. I said as I was trying to explain, I'd not put his chest thing on because I'd not put his t-shirt on. It's all just been an accident thinking it would go out the wall and the report was Mum shows more concern and love for the dad than caring for the child who by the way is full and healthy. And I was like, you're joking. So they put an at risk on my son. So we couldn't have a house together. If I got a house for my husband to live with us, then my son couldn't live with us. Isn't that mental? And all because of something as stupid as that? But yeah, so a lesson learned. Um, so when we were looking, it just so happened, they opened a Leonard Cheshire home in Stockport and it was basically for people in the early stages of rehab,

those that sometimes had got to a certain level in the hospital and then had plateaued which happens but doesn't mean things can't get better. And, and it was all like a live-in. So basically you had your own room with a bathroom, toilet. So it was like a self-contained flat, the flats had like kettles in them and stuff and a microwave. Um, so the idea was getting you ready. Obviously, we knew, I, you know, we knew that the chances of, of all that happening. But it was very, very expensive. But what the army couldn't do was say no. Um, and I made that quite plain, you either send him there, and they're like, and I said that's where we're going. So in the end, they agreed and so Glenn moved to Stockport, but for us to stay registered with the health authority in London and down south, if another home opened for permanent, we stayed there. So, I then started working for Southeast Kent Services. Um I was one of the senior care workers in, at the time because I'd done my NVQ two, three and four. Erm, I'd just started doing my management in care. They were closing a lot of the big institutions. So a lot of the poor souls who'd been locked up for nothing. You know, some, some people were locked up because they had epilepsy. But once you've been in a room for that long, banging your head against the wall, watching everybody else. Monkey see, monkey do. Um and they weren't treated very nicely. Um and so Southeast Kent Services was opened by two very rich men. Um, because they could see the money that they were gonna make, but to be fair, they're really good homes, you know, like it had like separate units off it that you could take people to, you know, to do cooking. And for those that became a bit more advanced and that didn't need because a lot of them were violent and there was a lot of violence with them because that's all they'd ever known. Never really been cuddled and, you know, and when they were, it was sexually inappropriate, which showed, especially when someone's been locked up since they were four and five. And as soon as you gave them a cuddle, they got the willy out or they pulled the knickers down. So you knew their behaviour was because of, of learned behaviour. So it was getting them used to that. So I started working there. Um, but when I was doing my level three, um I had to do some work for people that were terminally ill. It was part of the, of one of the, um, what are they called? Sessions, you know. Um, so, um, I went to work at a place just outside London, um, owned by, well, you have to be rich to go over there. Let's put it that way, it's privately run. Um, but it was just for people that were end of life. So I signed a six month contract to work for them. Um, and this was in 1992 and the whole time I was doing my work, I wanted to be a social worker but with people with head injuries because obviously that was something that was close to me. I could understand how they felt. Um, and then I went in and because as I said before, when I was 15, I went to work in a bar. Um, I went to work in a gay bar and one of my friends had trouble because he really wanted a girl behind the bar. But every time he employed a lesbian, it was more trouble than it was worth. No offence lesbians, but we all know what happens. And, um, so he wanted somebody, um, obviously that was female behind the bar and because I'm openly bi, um, he was like, everyone knows you anyway. And I was like, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's fine. So that's, I used to work in his bar. So I've always been around, um, people from the LGBTQ, Q+ whatever. Yeah, I'm not gonna get it right, am I? Cut that bit out though, please? Yeah, so no one knows I got it wrong [laughs]. Um, and, um, and, and it's never been something that's, that's bothered me. Do you know what I mean, it's, I've always been open and, um, so when I, um, went into the home that day, someone had phoned in sick. By that time, I just started seeing a guy called Peter and he was a policeman. Well, he still is. He's a policeman and I met him, um, at the hospital. Um, uh, funny enough it was just before my…, was I 19? Yeah, I must have been, um, and the staff had organized it, that one of the girls was gonna babysit and I was going out with

some of the nurses. Um, but there was, uh, they used to have like bombs, you know, like pretending fire's gone off and stuff anyway. And I'd made my husband's wheelchair. Um, cause my son had got a bit older and I couldn't carry him in his papoose, so I used to have him in one of those little baby walkers. Um, and, um, so I'd lifted him out and he came over and I was like, oh, there you go and gave him the baby. Obviously, I didn't want him to push my husband. Um, and then two weeks later we were in this bar and obviously it's where all the army people go and stuff and, and he just laughed at me like, you're the lady who gave me the bloody baby. And I was like, well, I wasn't gonna let you push my husband were I? And he went, oh, sorry. He was such a nice guy. Um, and then we just sat there laughing and he was like so… And I went it was my birthday, and he was like, alright. Um and then we got chatting um and it just kind of went from there. He was like, oh yeah, my friends say I need to start dating and I'm like, yeah, I think that's what they want for me. Um and it was quite a turmoil time for me of am I still a good wife? Um, or am I betraying my vows? And it's funny, I went back to Reverend Higgins. Um I went up to Preston for the weekend and he was like, laughing his head off. He was like Anita you have come up here crying your eyes out and I'm like he went get a nice dress, get some nice underwear and give Peter a ring, please [laughs]. I was like, Reverend Higgins. That's disgusting. And he's like, God forgives you if that's what you want me to tell you. Is that what you need? And I was like, you're not supposed to say that. And he's like, what did you want me to say? And his wife was in stitches. It was awful. Um and his daughter Gabrielle who like, she was only about four or five then she still laughs about that. Like that's cause her, her dad's sadly passed away. Now. She's like, oh, my Dad always laughs about you. She says it's never often he has to tell a parishioner to go and cheat on her husband. But that's what he told me to do. Um, so, yeah, it's quite funny. Um, so when I was in the home, they'd asked me to pull a double shift. And I said, yeah, so I rang Peter and I said, look, if I do this shift, it's like fifty pound an hour cause like you're on the bank and he's like, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's fine, obviously because he had Glen junior. Um, and um, I walked into this room and I never really read what was wrong with people. No offense. You're dying, you just want someone to be nice. Um, er, so I never really read what was wrong with them and stuff like that. So I went into the room and the tray, like the, his bedside tray was next to the door and there wasn't very much around, like a lot of people would bring a lot of photographs or stuff from the house or there'd be flowers and stuff and there was just a vase there with a photograph of, um, which was him and his partner. And, uh, I was like, oh, I've got a moaner and you only got two clients per shift. Cause obviously it was like one-to-one attention. So, I kind of pulled the tray next to his bed and I sat on the bed and I was like, I can't believe you're not eating this. Obviously, I loved my food um and lifted off the lid to see what it was. And he just like started crying but not like, like proper Marley and Me. Like the, it was from his soul and I was like, oh fuck, I've done it again. Like I've overstepped the mark. He doesn't want people to be friendly. And I was like, I'm really sorry. I said I'm friendly with everybody and that just made him laugh. He like kind of gained his composure and he was like, nobody's spoke to me. He'd only been there for about four days. Basically, his partner brought him in because they needed to get stuff ready in the house. So he'd ordered like a hospital bed and shit like that. Um and he put him in there um because he didn't want him to stay in the hospital any longer. And he's like, you do know what's wrong with me. And I was like, right, you're not gonna believe this, but I didn't need it. And he's like, I, I've got the AIDS and I was like, fuck, I went, nobody's giving you a hug have they, or even been kind? And he said, no, he said that's why my dinner's there. He said I haven't had anything for two fucking days, like Jesus Christ. Anyway, we

shared his lunch, we had a good chat and a cry and then I got him washed and dressed and shaved. I said, I'm gonna ring your husband. Well, pardon me? They weren't married. Um, I'm going to ring your partner now. I said we have no more tears, put our big boy pants on. So I rang his partner. I said, get your tears done. So I rang my friend Cindy. I said, well, we can. So she went to their house. Um, and I said, I, I've told him to wait at the house. So she went to his house, like, made sure he's ok. Um, and then drove him to the hospital. We all went back. Obviously, I lost my job. I wouldn't want to work for them again anyway, bastards. In that time, I knew about this illness and it sounds terrible cos I've been promiscuous since I was like able to make my own choices. Um, but HIV, never ever had anything to do with us. It was a gay thing. It was happening to my gay friends. It was this weird thing. They were getting thin, or they were getting these funny scars and then they were just disappearing and that's it. They were, they were gone. Um, and even among close friends where, um, we knew people, you know, it was like they've got it. Do you know what I mean? Um, we never really talked about it. It was never really, you know, in depth. So, um, that was the first time I'd ever come across, knowingly, knowlingly come across.

SC: That was the first time you met someone?

AB: I met someone who, who who told me they had, they had AIDS. I'd met some people before or I'd known of friends but, you know, I've not been involved in their care but I knew what was happening in the hospitals. I knew what was happening in treatments. There wasn't any. Um, and I know a lot of my friends, um, were involved in community groups in voluntary groups that were obviously all set up throughout the gay community in helping people at home because that was the only way they were getting care. And um as much as we all know, the pink pound is the best pound because it's not normally invested in children. Um and they've got money to spend.

SC: Can you say a bit more about what you mean by that?

AB: So, well, I- the pink pound, pink pounds at least stronger than a normal pound because most gay people um don't have children. So their money is their own, you know, they can afford better houses, better holidays, they can afford better things. Um because they haven't got bloody kids to pay for. Um, obviously times have changed. I mean, I know people who have children. Well, they were married and they've had children but the pink pound, you know, said a lot, but what it couldn't pay for was care because there was none, it was, there just was none. But what it did do, it enabled people to gather, it enabled people to find a way to make the community help ourselves because there was no help outside it. We all know what happened in the eighties with the horrible adverts, what things were said. Um I remember a horrible comment, my stepdad, made. Um I think I was about fourteen, fifteen when they came out um was, oh, that'll be her, she'll get fucking AIDS because she's a slag. And I was like Jesus Christ. Um and, and it, it was comments like that, that was, it was always a derogatory thing. Um and you know, so I then realise that actually people with head injuries aren't the worst treated in the world when it comes to care, HIV is. So I changed my direction from working with people with head injuries. Um and mental health, which is, that's… head injuries the way they put it in Southeast Kent services weren't necessarily what our clients were. They were more mental health because they had been locked up and treat like animals for years in these awful institutions. Um but obviously it came under head injuries because the way it was showing itself in their behaviour, the way it showed itself in um quite neanderthal, you know, um, when people always say like humans um are like um

monkeys and I know what you're gonna say. Um but when you looked at people who've been treated so diabolically for years, they actually didn't even have the common sense that a monkey would have, you know, to do stuff and we would then have to take them back to basics of, of building things up. And it was a lot harder. Like when someone explained it to me like that, I was like, we can't compare them to animals and they went, we need to, we, I want you to look at this person as you are now going to retrain the brain because it needs retraining, like literally from the like even just to learn how to do a screw top. And I was like, oh my God. And it's mad. But sometimes the simplest way to explain things might not come across as the most ethical way to say it. But sometimes ethics be, be damned. You know, let's just have the conversation without insulting anybody. But we are going back to the basics of, you know, reinventing the wheel for these poor brains and minds that have been damaged. Um so I did love my job, but then I could see this whole thing and also because I know it affected so many of my friend group. So, by then

SC: You mean HIV?

AB: Yeah, HIV had affected so many people and I didn't even realize that when it came to care and that sounds really bad. I didn't even think about it. It's not that I didn't realize it. I didn't even think what was happening to these people when they needed looking after and to find out only from meeting this my first ever person and then talking to my other friends, they were like, Anita. What do you think happens to them? I was like, I don't know. Anita, they are literally on these wards and they're being treated like biohazards. And I was like, are you joking? They went, no, nobody touches them. They are literally like, like living like ET and I was like, my God. That is mental. That is just absolutely mental that no one that, you know, my thing is always, oh, sorry, sorry, I keep doing that, don't I um my thing has always been, you know, you can give people as many tablets as you want, but without love, without care, you might as well just end their life because there is nothing for them. And I saw that so much in their head injury ward. Um, and I saw people in that hospital who yes, you, you know, you've given him a prosthetic leg, but now he's a young man with no legs and half an arm or his face is burned off or his head's been blown off. And the suicide rate was really high amongst all these young soldiers and young men because the partners would walk away and leave them. So, you know, there's, there's, there's another side to every story and we all see these wonderful stories. But actually, if you asked the back story, you might be actually devastated to what happened to some of these poor creatures. It's so sad. Um, so, yeah, so it just so happened as I was finishing my management in care, my, my level four, they said my husband had to go into a permanent home. He had been in that the rehab. You were only supposed to be in it for twelve months. So, but obviously I pushed me luck, as much, the army were paying for it. Um, and luckily there was a Leonard Cheshire home in Garstang, which is near Preston. So I thought, do you know what if we move up there well, I'll be back where my family was, um, because my mum um, was um, living back up there. Um, and I was like, yeah, it'll, it'll, it'll work, it'll work. Um, so I put the application in. Um, but while all that had gone on in, my son was born in 89 and in 1990 he was just, he was about ten or eleven months old. He started getting like swellings on his face. So, um, when I kept taking him to the doctors and they were like, Anita will you pack it in and obviously like, you, you can understand their point of view. You know, I'm a very young mum, my husband's in a coma and being a bit overprotective. Um, so I kept going back and I was like, he's really weird and both of my elder sisters had children when they were very young that lived in our family home and, um, so I'd been around babies and I was like, this isn't normal. Like

sometimes the swelling would appear and then it would just disappear and then sometimes the swelling would stay, but it was rock hard, like you could knock it. It felt like bone almost. It was really odd. Um, anyway, Shirley and Tony who had the flower shop, the had sold fruit as well, had become friends with me. Um so I kept telling her about it. She went the next time it happens Anita. So when it happened.

SC: Is this still in London?

AB: Yeah, this is in the army hospital.

SC: Yeah.

AB: So I rang her on the stall and I said, I'm on my way, you want to see state of his face. So I went straight cause the like the army quarters is right next to the hospital. So it was like you go through two doors and you're in it. So I went into the hospital, me and Shirley went straight to Lewisham. Um They've got a casualty there. Um and um the doctors were running around. They were like my God doing all these tests. Um nd then the next minute they did a lumbar puncture and some other things, then these other doctors come down to see him and then they blue lighted him to Guys because it, that's Guys um A&E. And me and Shirley. Well, Shirley, this is cannot be happening. She went, God, you've got some shit luck haven't you? I went, I know, I know. Um anyway, we got to Guys and, and we were in for about two days. Shirley stayed with me. Um So they did loads of tests and everything and then they came back and said they cause they'd done a lumbar puncture and everything. They diagnosed him as having a rare form of cancer. It's normally found in babies that are born sleeping. Um so they were very excited cause they had a live specimen, and I was like, oh my God, not again. Um so Glen was treated in Guys hospital then um by these doctors come from Canada, one come from Nova Scotia, and one come from America. Um to do all these weird and wonderful tests on him. So, at the same time, um he'd been ill on and off all the time. Um and even though he grew, he walked before he was one, he did all these proper milestones. He kept getting these illnesses and infections and all this and he said that that's what's going to happen and they had him on some treatments. Um but I had said which because of what I've gone through with my husband, I know if you know, if I'd have signed the piece of paper, which I saw happened quite a lot in the army hospital. Um basically allows people to die. But what my argument is only God can make those choices. Don't give my husband all this treatment and then say right we can't do anything more now. But if you sign that and what people don't understand is I believe everyone has the right to a life that's normal, but to do that, they actually starve them to death. So, what they do is they, the trachea and the gastrostomy are then seen as medical. So you remove them so they remove the gastrostomy. So there's no more food. Um and they stopped suctioning. So basically when my husband used to swallow, it would sometimes go in his lungs, which is why we had to suction him to make sure we kept it clear. So that was stopped, not, it didn't happen. It would have been um I don't, it didn't. Um and they would have just put a drip for pain relief. Um and no fluids. Do you know, people can take four to five days to die and you've got to sit there and I've seen family make that choices and I know so many people that have made them awful, awful choices. I couldn't do it. Um I became an advocate for people to make that choice. I did a documentary with heart of the matter um with Joan Bakewell. Um and I did a follow up one with her saying that that right shouldn't be, should be took off us. You made a choice when they were admitted. And I know um a lot of people remember Tony Bland from the Liverpool atrocities in the um stadium. He was one of the

boys that was um suffocated and he was in a coma. And through the documentary that I did, his parents contacted me and I said to her, you need to get out of your head that you, it's because if you don't sign that he's going to live for a very long time as a vegetable. And it's really hard to switch off from that. And I feel so guilty for keeping my husband alive all that time because he survived for eight years like that. Um, because of my religious beliefs, my personal beliefs. But, you know, that's when it should be took off us as families. So, yeah, it's, it is one of those.

SC: Can you explain about what do you mean about that? It should be took off us families.

AB: Well, we should, we shouldn't have to sign their lives away. Um, so when that choice is given to not a choice instead of saying to the family, we're going to turn the, the support off people outside of, don't understand Sally that they're breathing on their own. Um so the only thing that they look at is the gastrostomy and trachy is then seen as what's medically keeping them alive. So, then that's took off so that you're taking away all medical aid and it's up to them to survive. So basically you're letting them die, which would be fantastic if we put them to sleep like we would a dog or a cat, but we don't, we make them suffer for a long, long time. Um you know, and, and it's, it's incredibly painful for the family. It's incredibly hard. Um you know, I know families that have made that choice and have left and they've come back once they were literally at the last moments, you know, they stayed in the army quarters, um, until the last moment because they can't sit there. But, you know, just because I sat in a flat five, ten minutes away, doesn't take away the pain. They know that person's got to and that's what people don't understand about this. Let people die. It would only work if we let them die as human beings, whereas they suffer so badly. And I think because I've seen it happen so much also, you know, it'd be the same if something happened to someone in your family. If it's someone close to and someone you love, you see it so differently than the black and white that people make it out to be. Life isn't like that. You know, because there's too many people that want to stand outside and protest. But if you sat them down and made them watch that person die in pain, they would see it so differently. You know, the allow people to die with dignity. But even if we do pass the law to allow people to die. That is exactly how they're going to die still. They don't die with dignity. There's no dignity in it at all unless you go to Switzerland. And then it's amazing because they just put you to sleep. But we're never going to have that. Are we really? Um, but yeah, soap box, sorry. Um, so we, um, my son, um, with his treatment it got to the stage when he was about eighteen-months old, first, near the end of 91. And they were like, there's not very much we can do. We don't understand why it's the way it is. Um, he seems to respond to treatment and then he doesn't and I was like, just leave him if he's gonna die. Right? I said, well, I've had enough, he's had enough. He was so tired. Um, so funny, actually, actually I think I'm funny. Right. You probably think this is disgusting, Sally. But it was Halloween and he was free. Um, and we dressed him up as Cartman, you know, from South Park because he was on so much treatment. He was so bloated. He was just this big ball of a human with like little legs and arms. So we put a green hat on him and we had him in his pram and he was dressed as Cartman for Halloween. It was so funny. Um, he looks at them pictures now and he laughs his head off and he's like mum, you're terrible. I went I know, by the way, he's 35 Sally just so, you know, um I was like, I always forget to tell people when we do positive speaking. I have to go, he's alive. Um yeah, because my humour is not very good, is it? Sorry. Um so we were also living with that obviously. Um So when we moved back up north in 93 um, we, I then registered at Preston Uni to do my degree. Um my husband's settled into his home and

I went to work for community AIDS support team, um which looked after people in the home with HIV, um and supported families living with people with HIV. Um and I worked for Body Positive and Heal in Blackpool. Um and as a voluntary worker. Um and the good thing was with me, if people liked kids, I used to say, is it all right if I bring my son with me and they loved it, but because obviously his dad had like a catheter bag and I'd say oh Glen, would you just do the wee for me and they're like I've got a five year old emptying my catheter bag and they loved it because obviously a lot of their families had abandoned them. They wouldn't come in the house like I remember one family. Oh, she was a real bitch, and his mum used to come in. Argh, she made me so angry. Um, if she knew where to a hazmat from, I bet she'd have had one, you know. Um, so she, um, would wear gloves and she'd bring her own cup. I don't know why cause she never used it and it was in a plastic bag, you know, like, like an, er, you know, like you put your stuff in at the airport and she'd have a fricking cup in her bag. Um, and she never really touched anything. She'd, like, knock on the door with like a bag and she never touched anything, and she'd stand in the middle of the room. Um, and this one particular day, uh, the guy that I was looking after wasn't really well. And, um, and his husband was there. Well, I husband, they weren't married, his partner was there. Um, it's because everyone calls themselves my wife, my husband, do you know what I mean? And you know what gay men are like, they always call their wife, you know, because there's always normally one, a little bit more effeminate, which was the gentleman who was ill, which was always really funny to me. Um, and, um, I'm still friends with, with the other guy and we always laugh about times and he's like, because his partner hated women. Like, really didn't like women at all. But strangely enough, like, we got on really, really well. But he's like, oh, she's more manly than me. He used to say that to me all the time because he was like, so effeminate. I'd be like, no, I'm not. Um, he was cute but yeah, people would come in and, like, not touch and this one particular day she came and my son was there and, um, he'd climbed up onto the bed, it was only like five and a hald and, um, he was chit chattering away about whatever had gone on at school or whatever. I wasn't listening and, um, I was getting dinner ready and she was horrified but she couldn't speak, you know, when someone was like, so shocked at a situation. And I was like, what is she staring at? Anyway, when she left he went, she just went mad. She can't believe that you letting your kid she's gonna report it to police. And I said, what for? And he went, Glen went, honestly, she thinks he's got germs Mum [laughs]. Obviously, that was my son's interpretation of it. And I was like, oh, don't worry. Um, so it was really nice. But then, um, in February, March it was 95. Um, my son was five and half then, was he? Yeah, five and half, and I'd gone to the theatre and they had like a blood donor thing there. And because of how I was brought up, I always taught my son to ask questions and sometimes when adults tell you to shush it's because they're embarrassed or they don't quite understand what you're saying. Um, so ask again, um, or just ask a different adult. So, he asked what the blood donor was about. And I was like, I don't know, but we'll go in because I can't be arsed listening to you. So we went in because I didn't know the answer. So we went in and I said he wants to know what blood done-ing is about. So actually it's really cool. So, if you ever take children, I don't know if they still do it. Um they probably don't now, because no one has any money, do they? Um so basically showed him a film and they put a pretend donor thing on him. So it looked like he was donating blood next to me. So he was happy. We both got a biscuit and some juice and I donated blood and that's it. We went to the theatre. Um and a couple of weeks later, I got a letter from the Lancaster blood donation people to say there was a major discrepancy in my blood donation. Um and to contact them and it did actually say in the letter, don't discuss this

with anybody contact us immediately. I was like, oh my gosh, like it's cancer. What could it be? Didn't even enter my head. And then I rang Alan Lynes who was the social worker. I was supposed to be working with him that day in Blackpool HIV stall at the Winter Gardens. Um some health promotion. And I was like Alan, I'm not gonna be able to make it. I've got to go to Lancaster, don't know what it's about. And he said, oh, ring me if there's something wrong. And I was like, yeah yeah, I will do. So off I trot to Lancaster and when I got there, there was obviously he drew the short straw that day and, um, he, er, asked me to take a seat and it was really weird, you know, like that room like in school or the office where every bit of shit gets put that one day someone's gonna sort, it's kind of like all this room was full of shit except for this one table that had like syringes, some information bits like gloves and stuff like that. And I was like, wow. Um and he just like said, you know, we've had it, I said I know what you found and I said, what is it? And he's like, we can't discuss it with you. We need to take another donation and we need to confirm it first and then we'll get you to come back in. And I was like, well that's not happening. He said, right? Well, I need to ask some questions. So, he was just asking me my name where I lived. Da da, da da. Um, and I was like, look, I'm not giving you any blood until you tell me I'm not leaving this room. It was a Friday as well like in the morning. Um, and he said we found your donation to be HIV positive. And I was like, no, and I was like, if we can get it. And he was like, no. And I kind of like for a second. Um, I obviously soaking in what he just said and then obviously I was upset. Um, and I was like, oh my God. And he's like, can you imagine how you got it? And I was like, well, obviously from sex or. And then I'm thinking, well, it couldn't have been Peter because when I met Peter, the policeman, he was a virgin. I knew that anyway. And I was like, oh my God. And then straight away everything that had ever been said about my son. And I was like, oh my God. Um But he'd already asked me some brief history questions. So I started saying all this stuff and he's like, don't worry about it. And I was like, but he's been so ill, they've not been able to do anything. He's like, Mrs Binns, it's fine. He said if your son was HIV positive we'd know he's been treated by the best doctors in the UK. And I was like, you don't even like me, I didn't say it out loud. I said it in my head and I was like, do you know what I'm going. And he went, you can't just leave. I said, yeah, we do. And he went, look, Mrs Binns looking at your information. Don't you find this rather coincidental? I said sorry. He said, so you move back up north, you put your husband in permanent care, you start working with people with HIV and then you go and donate blood. He said, didn't, you know, all along? I was like, what a dickhead I went "Bye" and walked home. I don't know what plasma is, but don't ever give it because it must really hurt because when I got outside, obviously I was crying um and there was a guy in like a hospital car thing and he was like, are you OK? I was like no, he said, oh, have you been donating plasma? I just said, yeah, he said, I'll take you to the train station love. Don't wait for a cab. So he took me, obviously, I got in car with a stranger. He could have been a bloody serial killer, knowing my luck. But he wasn't. Um so I rang Alan Lynes when I got to Lancaster and said you need to come and pick me up at Preston. I rang my son's school and said that his dad was ill. Um and that I was picking him up, I'll be there within the hour. And then I rang the GUM Clinic. So when I worked in the bar, when I was fifteen, how the world works is mental, Les who I worked with is now the clinic manager at the GUM clinic. Ta da.

SC: Where's the, where's the GUM clinic?

AB: In Preston.

SC: In Preston.

AB: So when I came back and I started working at the community AIDS support team.I went in with a client, obviously. Um And I was like, I know you and he was like, I know you. And then he went, excuse me, can I have a word? And he was like, I went, oh my God, we used to dance together. So, yeah, our friendship kicked off again. Um so I rang the GUM clinic and spoke to Les. Um I told him what had happened. I said I'm picking Glen up now. We'll come in. He went Anita, and I said Les we're coming. So just do what you need to do your side. Obviously, by then it was one o'clock on a Friday afternoon and we all know that twelve o'clock the phones go off and they don't go back on normally. Um so they shut the GUM down. Um we picked Glen up. Um, we brought him to the clinic and we tested him. In 95, we didn't, very similar to what they did with the blood donation. We did, you could test same day, but it would have to be redone. Um and especially as mistakes can be made. Obviously, there were not many false positives barely. Um so they, we did his bloods, we sat and chatted um and Glen's blood came back positive. So, we knew that day that obviously the chances are that it was my husband that was positive as well. Um so sorry, it's always hard to say it.

SC: It's OK.

AB: Um Sorry.

SC: It's OK, take your time.

AB: So, um luckily for me, unlike most people in that situation in 95 I had more knowledge, um a lot more support because as hard as it sounds for a lot of heterosexual people, they were so isolated um because, and they didn't know people and their expectations of care were um, a lot higher than what we knew they were ever going to achieve. Um, because people, well, they still can, even though they pretend they don't, um, they opt, they could opt out. So if someone had HIV on a ward, you could say I'm not looking after them. Um, and a lot of nurses did. Hence they had next to the GUM clinic at Preston. They opened ward five. Was it ward five or was it ward six? I can't remember. Um, but that's where patients went when they were ill. Um so the good thing was for us that volunteered. Um, we could then look after them, but we also knew on the other side, you know, you couldn't take away some of, it only takes one, you know, no matter how woke and wonderful this world wants to pretend it's becoming, there's always one bad apple that will infect the ones next to it. Um, and that one bad person will always make such a horrible impact that, that makes that day, not just that day, that moment the whole fucking year has gone for that person because you've devastated them. So to keep the bad apples away was really hard because, you know, you had to catch them being a bad apple because most people that you were looking after with HIV, well, with AIDS as, as, as they were then, um, didn't speak out because they were so ashamed, they were so hidden that they had, the fear was awful because there was no treatment, there was no cure you were dying, that's it. Um, and the devastation to their partners, you know, then obviously they look at themselves um because they, they've led such a promiscuous life. Um How many other people have I hurt? So, you, they're living in this whole cave of horror. They don't fucking need someone to put gloves on just to give them a bloody bed bath. Do you know what I mean? It's like be kind that's, just fucking be kind. It cost nothing to be nice. And um sadly not a lot of people are. Um and they work in care. So, Alan stayed with us that weekend and then on the Monday, we went back to the clinic and um they took loads of bloods and stuff and um the poor guy that was in the bottom. Oh, you know, it's like anything, I'm sure you've done it at uni you know, we all study

and we get ready for an exam and there's always that one question and no matter how prepared you think you are for something, when it actually happens, you're bloody not. Do you know what I mean? You're just gonna melt like a marshmallow in the microwave. It's gone hasn't it. Um, it's, it's just, it's just hard. Um, and I'd, we just had a family that we'd worked with just in, in Preston as well. Um, and the mother was a prostitute and a known drug user. She had a daughter, um, a bit older than Glen. Um, she was seven, seven and a half and gossip had got round because grandma proper, no offense. There's no nice way of saying it. They're just council estate people, with the council estate mentality. Do you know what I mean? Um, but they tell someone that they've, I don't know, pulled the Tampax out the way middle chippy, like someone needs to know that shit. Um, so there was no hiding what was going on in the house. Um, sadly as the gossip spread that morning before police, social work and even the poor school had chance to act. There was a mob at the school and, um, they dragged the little girl, these horrible adults out of the school and literally threw her onto the road outside. By the time the police turned up, she was in tears, that little girl died before she was nineteen. A drug addict. Um, a known prostitute, a thief. I mean, she did some awful things, you know, as time went on looking after her. But at that time we'd just been dealing with them and she was seven and a half. Um, and we'd had to move, getting grandma to shut up was hard and we moved her to another side. But, you know, no sooner telling everyone you're like, shut up. Do you know what I mean? Life is not going to get any better? Um, so I knew the reality also of schools and because of what I'd gone through with my husband and I suppose within my own life as a child, I just believe that sometimes I, well, I know I am a funny person. I think I'm funny, um and I believe, you know, sometimes I could sit and cry but then I think what's the fucking worst that's gonna happen? What is the actual worst thing that could happen today? So, just enjoy it? Do you know what I mean? Unless that happens and, and that's how I get through life. Do you know what I mean? And if it's really bad then just get some sweets. All these kids. Thank you. Um so, um when we went to the hospital on a Monday, they'd done, we didn't used to do, I'm sure you've, you've done all this training on CD4s and all the rest of the malarky now. So the, your CD4 count was how they used to do our testing. So, yeah, your CD4 count will be between seven and 900. So, when people's were below 200 that's when they put them, well, it used to be actually 150 but they put them on treatment [coughs]. Excuse me. Um, so like a normal person's CD4 will be between seven and 900. My son's was zero and mine was three. Um so neither of us had and I'd had no signs I'd had nothing. I was totally normal. Well, Anita normal, that's a new word for you, isn't it? And I know what Anita normal is. Um, I know I have no signs of, of, of having, um, AIDS, but we were both given an AIDS diagnosis that day. Um, they gave my son eight to nine months to live and they gave me about eighteen months. Um, and I'm sure you must have seen it, it, the baby phenomenon, you know, like when your mate says she's pregnant and then two days later you see her and she looks like she's massive because all of a sudden once you admit something in your life, it then becomes real. It's quite a, it's a real phenomenon that like when people know that they're sick, then they live sick because thinking sick. So, um, I don't think like that, that's why I'm alive and also I will never do what I'm told. So, when they said I'm going to die, I'm like, no, I'm not. Um, so um, the test that they did then determined whether you went on medication but there wasn't any but they had something called, um, AZT, which was an old drug. Um, I shouldn't joke about it like this but I always say, I'm sure people walk into an old storage unit and go, oh, let's try these on the AIDS people. Um, this drug hasn't been out for a million years. Um, cause that's basically what was happening. Like there were so many drugs that they were like, let's let's try this,

let's try that and we were guinea pigs like we were taking this medication. Um AZT was awful. It really was bad. Like, um I mean, the biggest joke I always find in life is I thought for once cause I've always been about a size fourteen, twelve, fourteen. I thought I'm gonna be thin now. Not once, not a chuffing hell, fuming. Um It's like God's laughing at me like I'll give you that but I'm not letting you have the bonus. Nope. Um so and it's so annoying, the men always get thin, very frustrating. Um so we then had to prepare, I mean, obviously with my husband being ill. Um if I died first, it would be who would look after our son. So, I had a gay couple who were lovely. Um and I said to them, would you step in? Um, obviously that caused an uproar as it was. And I said it's not because they're gay, well, it is actually because I've got more trust in them than I would a heterosexual man. Um because I'd been abused as a child. So I was like, I never really trusted men. It drove my family mad because like my son was brought up by the gay community. So, like one of the guys took him to rugby. Martin used to take him to the library and teach him how to read proper grown-up books because I couldn't read properly so he didn't want him to be like me. Um and um David took him to football, so he had like a gay dad for all occasions. Um and that was great. Um and um it was preparing things and I think it's at that then you realize like I always laugh and say to people just don't get a bank loan and remortgage your house because that's what I did because I thought I don't want my son to die and never to have seen the world except from, from heaven. Um so I remortgaged the house and then I got a 10,000 pound bank loan. So, we went to Disney um Egypt and we went to Mexico, we did Mount _____(?) and all that rubbish. Um and we flew first class like everyone should do that once in their life. Pretend you're posh um even I had like baby champagne, it was like really cute. Um so I did all that. Um, and it was really hard because then where he'd registered for the paediatrician, it's funny when I get that word wrong, guess what I say instead. When the paediatrician that he'd been referred to here hadn't actually seen my son. So they may have found out what was wrong with him really. Um but because the GUM clinic at Preston on that Monday, I had to sign loads of forms and papers and do stuff. Um and um – in hindsight's a wonderful thing, but what we didn't think was how they would react. So when the GUM clinic applied to guys hospital for my son's notes, a light bulb went on to everybody because when I walked into that room, what they saw was a white middle class married woman with a sick baby instead of looking at a human being that's ill. And the other thing is this could have been picked up so many times like when we came to England from Germany, when I was pregnant, my husband kept getting that he was MRSA positive. So they put him into isolation. I said, well, I'm going with him. I said, look, you're going to have to go in and out of there to empty his urine bag which you know I am capable of doing so put two beds in there and I will be living in isolation with him just give me food. So I lived in isolation four months we were in, no three and a half months, we were in isolation. We probably never had MRSA, we had HIV. And it was showing up because of the way the test was done. But they never tested us for that. So we would have probably found out then, but we didn't. Um, and then, um, they, you know, when we went into the hospital with, with my son, when he was ill, you know, as far as they're concerned, I'm not a known drug user. I'm not a known prostitute. I always say that because no one ever asked me, I could have been. Um, but I wasn't, um, and I was married and I'm white. I wasn't from another country. Why would they even think that? And I was so young, I was, I was eighteen. You know, so what's the possibilities? But the fact is I'd been sexually active since I was eleven. Do you know what I mean? I left home when I was fifteen and you can't, you? That also then comes into with a lot of people of like the who did it to who blame game, which I'm just like, does it, does it matter? And, you know,

when people say, well, I had a conversation with someone who had a needle stick injury and I sit there going yawn. Were you a virgin? So, it could, it could possibly have not been the needle stick injury. Do you know if that person was on treatment? Undetectable? Yeah, I don't believe all that rubbish. And he's been very, very proven that these cases are very, very rare. So, when people say that to me, I go [sniffs] smell bullshit. Um, just admit what you've done in your life. You know, sometimes it could be something hard. You could have been raped. I know women and men that, you know, have contracted this virus through that, you know, and that's that, that I understand why you would lie. I understand the fear. But when it's just a normal every day, you've just been playing hide the sausage then you should be lying. Um so it became pretty clear um that I was going to be a little bit of trouble for them because I think it's really hard for people to understand how I live or maybe how I act or how I speak because they don't know your back story. You know, if you met me in a pub and I was sat on the next table, you'd be like if that woman don't shut up laughing and joking and carrying on. But I live today, you know, and, and that's, and that's why I always say to people don't judge that person. You don't know how hard it might be for them to laugh today because they actually might feel like shite but they're laughing and they're gonna let themselves laugh. So sometimes when people say that to me or like one thing that really grinds my gears is when people go. Oh, we heard you coming. And I'm like, that's not a very nice thing to say, actually, God gave me this voice and he gave it me for a reason. And luckily, you know, when it came to supporting people with head injuries, I used it. Um, and, and I do it now. Um, but for people to know the truth, we have to tell them. And the hard thing is I know that by telling the school because my son um had really bad diarrhoea problems. So he had them Huggy pull, pull down nappies until he was about ten. Um and he could just about control his sphinx a bit that he could get to the toilet. Um so I, they were like, please don't tell them. I said, well, we are. Get ready for the meeting. So, when we told my son's school, they made it. The teachers actually were the two teachers, Mrs Eves and Mrs Gittins(?) um were amazing. He was at a little infant school and they were so lovely. But the headmistress was a total dick who saw it as a way of making money. You know, they could get an extra teacher because there's no funding. We all know this. So, they were like, well, we need a teacher to be with this child 24-7. And you're like, why do we need a teacher to be with this child 24-7? It just sits there. It's not even cause a hassle half the time he's asleep because he's so tired. Um and, and that's how he was. I mean, some days I take him in and because he had like a disabled buggy and I'd be like, he's been asleep since like six o'clock this morning. But if he wakes up, he'll be ever so happy to see you. And they were happy for that. I was happy for that. Do you know what I mean? No one was worried sometimes they literally it would get him out of his pram just to change his nappy and put him back in. But, we all agreed when he woke up, he was like, oh, you know, life goes on, we can't let this illness affect us. And now that the illness has changed from cancer to HIV, why are we not living the same? All of a sudden it was a different story because we weren't poor Anita her kids got cancer. Poor little Glen. He's fighting this illness. It was, they've got HIV and we don't want to touch them. So, um, luckily, um Basil Newby who's well known um, gay man in Blackpool, he owns Flamingos and other gay bars. There was a lot more back in day. There's only a few now. Um, he'd already heard of me because I used to do a lot of the voluntary work and, and stuff. Um, and obviously the gossip went round that someone we know with a kid's got HIV. Um, and Sue Tumor(?) who ran Body Positive in Blackpool. Is really good friends with Basil. And she went, it's that Anita. And he went, you're joking? And they were like, oh my God, he's like anything I can do. She went, well, actually she's had to

pull him out of school. Um, and the school that accepted him, is a private school. It was only a small school. They had like six kids in a class and it was so lovely. He was so happy there. Um, and he said, right, but I had to pay like a term deposit and a term in advance. Um, and obviously buy all the uniform, um which was really expensive cause they had like little baseball caps and not baseball cap, you know, and stuff. Um, so Basil Newby said get the bill and he paid it. So he paid for his like school, like for him to start the school, which I'll be forever grateful. [*closed*] Um, but yeah, um Basil is one of the, one of a many amazing people across the LGBT community that do so much and ask for fuck all, you know, he doesn't ask for nothing and a lot of the things he did, he, he didn't want anyone else to know. I told everybody. Um and, and the other thing that I knew because of what, what I was working in is that there is not many white women or any women that would come and stand and do a talk. I mean, it was hard to get gay men to do it back in day, back in 95. Um, because the stigma was even worse then. Um, even within, I mean, people seem to think just because you're gay that you're gonna get accepted. The gay community, you know, they, they can be just as horrible and mean to, to people with HIV. Um, and not as understanding as everyone thinks. Um, so, you know, it, it, it doesn't always, it's not always an un-rocky boat, let's put it that way. Um, but then, um, I then said, look, you know, we're running these courses because what had happened by 95 was the drug. There was gossip among the drugs that, you know, the, there was things in the pipeline, not a lot. Um, and people were talking more about it and there was money. So there was, there was this whole pot of money to be spent. Um, so they started doing training with nurses in the first year and in the, um, last year, um, we also started doing dentists, doctors, um, and I said I'll do it and do it. And your can't, I went, yeah, I can. It's my life and I'm gonna make a difference if I, if, if there's one reason I've got this is that I don't care what people think. Um, I wasn't out in my everyday life. Um, and, um, obviously I stopped doing my degree because you can't be HIV positive in care. So there was pointless carrying that on. So I went back to what I know, best bars and clubs. Um, and, um, then, um, in like seven months after we got diagnosed, I did my first positive speaking, um, to first-year nurses. It was quite nerve wracking. Um, and, and I started to speak and I was like, if I start sounding a bit angry, somebody have the balls to put your hand up and go Anita wind your neck in because I am angry. But I'm angry that no one ever told us, you know, that this does affect us. But I also realise that because I mean, at the time I was twenty-five years old, I was quite pretty, I was thin. Um, and I always dressed well. I always made sure I looked immaculate. Um, and a lot of the time, the way we we sold, it was, I always wore like, like a business-y type dress but a bit low cut, um, and a jacket. Um, and I would just be one of the facilitators in the morning giving out, you know, piece of paper or assisting and then we'd have a lunch. Um, it was amazing some of the things people said because they don't think you're that person. Um, and then, um, after lunch we always wait cause then they, they were a little bit awake but not quite ready. Um I would always bring a different jacket, and I would walk onto the stage platform, whatever we were, we were doing it in and say hi, my name Anita and I'm HIV positive. You've never seen so many men cross the legs and you've never seen so many people be very ashamed of some of the things they'd said to me. Um, comments they'd made.

SC: Can you remember anything? The sort of thing they'd say.

AB: Oh my God. Yeah. One nurse got up and walked out on the, not on my first one though. That was my second talk and it was like the day after cause we, we did like, it was done like in, in, in blocks and um this nurse got up and I was like, oh, this is a bit close to home for her.

And when I say, you know, like, you know, sometimes when you're really upset and you cry because you're angry or you're upset about something and then you're mad at yourself for crying because really you want to punch that person or you think I'm not crying because I'm sad. I'm crying because I fucking [inaudible]. Um, she looked like that, right? Like, and I just, and my heart went out to her at first and I was like, are you OK? Yeah, cause she was, there was like hundred people in this auditorium. It was at the, um, at the university in Preston, like in the teaching bit and she went, I am absolutely fine. But it should have been made very clear to everyone that we had to be in the same room as you. And I went fucking hell and you, you wanna be a nurse? I said, oh fuck off. And I got told off for that by the way and um started clapping and other people looked at me and then they started clapping and then I went right now, if you want to leave this room, you can leave this room. I said, if you, that's how you feel. I said, but what I want you all to do, I said he stand up and, Mark and what was his name? Oh God, they used to run it. So um Mark was my um was a friend of mine. Um One of the, he was a, a gay guy and when he found out I was prepared to do these. He's like, oh my God, can I have her. Can I have her for my lecturing? Um so, um, he signed me up for all like his things and I looked at Mark went, don't interfere. So everyone stand up, I've said, right, if you're a virgin sit down, if you can honestly say to me, you have never had an argument about a situation, coming home late, somebody at work or anything in your relationship, past or present. Sit down. Now, the problem with that is the thinking and what your brain won't allow you to do is lie because you could, you could not like, you know, sometimes people are hesitant because they're bullshitting because they're like going like, I'm like, yeah, you're lying. But if you do it straight away, it's because you can, without 100% doubt, no one in that room could sit down and then I said, right. No, everyone sit down. So let's all be clear. You don't know whether you have HIV or not. I do. And let me tell you how I found out. And then I did my, oh, it's only like fifteen, twenty minutes. Caise we, we got convulse it to get questions. Cause you only used to be an hour and a not, it used to be an hour, then they made it an hour and a half. Um, cause students said they didn't have enough time and I used to say, look, we'll do it before breaks and I don't mind staying. So people they used to say if you want to stay, you're more than welcome because some people genuinely had questions. Um and especially when we started to do qualified members of staff. Um because obviously with me, there's so much condensing to my life that matters when it comes to care work and it matters to how you treat a human being. Um, and a lot of it is very controversial. Should you allow someone to die or not? Do you know what I mean? Choices that you're making, giving your child medical help? How do you make them choices? Will you make a choice from what's happened in the past, so I'm not going to make the same mistake again. I'm like let him die but let him die with dignity. So we'll stop all this malarkey. I mean, thank God we did because they'd have carried on giving him treatment he didn't even need. So, let's be glad that that choice was made. Um, and, and the way I look at it is, you know, if we can say to each other without, I think I missed a bit there. Sorry if we, but if we can say to each other without a doubt that we are going to move forward within our care and within what we're doing with people with HIV, then we've got to start treating people with respect and that's what we don't get. There is no money anymore. Well, what I can say to you is I went in to have eye surgery. So, before you think someone punched me, they didn't and just for the record, I've got a black eye. Um I went in for eye surgery two weeks ago and this is a true story. I'll show you the picture of the girl when we finished. She was so lovely. We both cried. Um and when I went for my eye surgery, I mean, were 2024 now, you know, in 1995 I was writing out my will and getting a memory box ready for my child because

I was about to die. Um, when we came to George House, um Barnardo's was um helping George House because Glen wasn't the only child around and there was so much love that was given them children and understanding. Um, I mean, my son knew the truth. A lot of children didn't. So some parents were a bit scared around me because they were, my son would go well, you know, with our HIV and their kids are like, what's HIV? Do you know what I mean? Not here because, um, even then people didn't always bring the children into the building. We would meet outside or we'd meet at Barnardos or we'd meet on days out. Um, but, you know, you know, we spent a whole day here on a session at George House when Glen was six, doing at six and doing memory boxes for each other, you know, what would be important. So you've gone through all these awfulness of preparing to die and then you don't, but then you could, but then you might not. But then you get ill again. So in all these years, there's been a, well, you might die or, you know, like my son and by the time he was twelve, had literally been on end of life care five times, you know, literally waiting to go and then he'd wake up. One day, it was really funny because it was Halloween and we decorated his room and he'd been unconscious for about three days and then his, his vitals started to get a bit like and my friend Johnny was there and we had some pizza takeaway and we were sat like on the sofa in the room eating this pizza and cause I tried to keep life as normal as possible. But because it was Meningitis that time, we had the lights off and it was just like little dim light and the nurses would come in with like cause the nurses on children's we're good fun. Used to think I was a lunatic. Um but once again, what I learned from looking after my husband, I brought into looking after my son. Just keep it normal. Don't make it a big deal. It's just normal and all of a sudden, he just sat up. So, it was Halloween and he's like, why is it dark? Honestly? Mental? And I was like, are you kidding me, Johnny just burst out crying and left the room. The nurses all come running in. Yeah, two days later he was running around doing me head in.

SC: Wow, that's amazing

AB: Honestly. You've been unconscious for ages. Um so yeah, it's, it's, it's weird. Um, you know, but when you've been through all them times and then someone literally treats you like they don't wanna touch you or they don't want to be in the same room as you or they can't understand how, how you act or why you behave in a certain way. And I'm like, can you even imagine what all that's been like? And then all that without the gay community, we wouldn't be here. You know, I know so many people in my position that have not lasted and it isn't because of the medication because in 1997 when the medication came, that was amazing. You know, it was kind of a breakthrough. Well, I suppose it is to the scientist people. Um but to us, it wasn't that fucking great. Do you know what I mean? Because honestly, the medication was so dire like you literally, I remember like when we started the DDI, which was like this big chunky tablet, you had to dissolve it in a bit of water. And um so I was on the toilet and my son had like a commode and we were lent over the back literally shitting and puking. And the, it was the third time we tried it and then you had to have a break and eat, but you had to keep the tablet in. And my son said I'm not going to school today. I went Glen can we just give up and go back to bed? I really can't do this again. He's like, yeah, let's give up mum. So we both just put our nappy on and went back to bed and watched telly. And that wasn't a good day, but that was a normal day, you know, having to get up at about half four in the morning to keep this medication in and food before he goes to school. And that was a normal day for a six-year-old. That's not normal, you know, and yes, it's a medical breakthrough. But the only reason why we survived and I say this to everyone

all the time is because we were literally covered in a massive blanket by the gay community and so protected and loved and made sure that we were ok. Um like my friend, um I started working at his gay club. Um and he lived upstairs so my son would come down at like one in the morning, like seven years old DJing. It was so great, but in our eyes, he was, he was gonna die who cared. You know, he's DJ'd in a nightclub. How many seven, eight year olds can say that. And then, you know, like millennium, you know, he was collecting bottles behind the bar. He was like eleven. He worked. Do you know what I mean? He, when people say, oh, did you have a party at millennium? He says, I was working in my Mum's club doing bottle collecting. No, you went. Yeah, I was. No. Really was. Yeah. Um because we weren't gonna live but I wasn't prepared to die and not live life. And, and I think that's the most important thing that things like George House, a Body Positive, Heal, Terrance Higgins Trust, you know, um, Pos UK and places like that give us, it's, it's the love that. The medicines can give you anything. But if you haven't got a family, if you haven't got a safe place, if there isn't something that's going to save you at the end of the day, then it's all pointless. Ok.

SC: That's very well put. Do you want to say a little bit about your relationship to George House?

AB: So, yeah, I came to George House in the first time we came, was in 90- it was the end of 95 because a lot went on when we were first diagnosed. Um, and I suppose because people knew me because I was known in the gay community. Um, and someone said you need to go to George House, they've got more for children there, um, than what we did at Heal and BP in Blackpool. So I came here and it was funny cause there was only one building then, um, but it was more open planned. There was no walls. Um, that's a going joke for the walls. Um and, um, so we came in and there was like, there wasn't many women's groups and stuff and I was like, what's that? And all I could hear were these bloody women laughing their heads off. Anyway, there was an African women group meeting downstairs. So I just went in and started chatting to these ladies and they were so amazing. There were such good fun. Um my kind girls um and so welcoming and I was telling them and Glen was sat with Glen. No, Glenn didn't come with you the first time and then the next time I came, I brought my son and he met the people at Barnardos and you just knew you were safe. You know, it was like, and I think because I already had more knowledge about HIV, I knew what the outcome was gonna be. Um and maybe because of what's happened to me previously, I wasn't frightened of dying. I just knew that it wasn't gonna be easy and there was, you know, where am I gonna get help? And with that, I never felt or felt failed. I never thought any, and it became quite obvious that I was gonna be outspoken. Um so doing positive speaking, going to schools, stuff like that. Um, absolutely, didn't, didn't doubt it, didn't question it. Um, going into the schools. I love more than anything. Um, I think we underestimate the knowledge that young people have just because they've got this smart phone in their hand. The knowledge isn't always there, and they don't always understand how hard the gay community have fought to be, just to be gay. Um, you know, um, you know, it's perfectly normal now to go into school and be a cat, you know, but you're doing that off the graves of a lot of great people. Um, and you should have that knowledge and it's amazing. I talk with an amazing guy Paul Fairweather I work with and I say to him, you need to tell them your story because he's been an amazing activist within the gay community and when he talks, you can see them really going. Oh my God. And like, what do you mean it was illegal, sir? What's Section 28 sir? And these young people don't know what's happened in history that's made this and it was all them things. Section 28 that made the tombstone adverts worse, that made all this. Do you

know what I mean? And, and this is what's made HIV even worse. So once you become involved, I always say I'm not political and Paul always laughs and goes, you are, you just don't know it. Um, but I, I'm not political. Um I always think you've got to be educated to be political, which isn't true. Um and um so I was involved and I remember, you know, we in, back in, back in day, the float used to leave from George House for World AIDS Day, um for um the gay pride. And we were all getting on the float and there were like my son and two other children who were positive on a float that year. Um and you could see the staff were dead moved by it and my son was dead excited. Um and our friend had come with us and he's like, look at me, I'm proper gay today cause I'm on the float. That's all he cared about that he looked proper gay today. Um and um and we were laughing, I was like, well, but it was very poignant to a lot of people because it showed that this was not just a gay thing, this was a heterosexual thing that was because we had women on the float as well. Um and of course, we all know prides change now and things change. But the people that walk every year are them people, you know, and I know there's a lot of people that fight and say, you know, women should be seen and da, da, da, da da and they should, you know, I'm not saying they shouldn't. Um I'm, I'm, I'm totally agreeing in that, but they've always been seen the hard thing is you can't make people that are too frightened talk and, you know, just because you're gay doesn't mean you're gonna be accepted in the gay community when you've got HIV. And in the heterosexual community it's even worse. And in the African community and like my Muslim friends and, and Hindu friends, I've got a wonderful, um, um, um, Hindu friend who's, who's positive and, and, and it's awful that her family don't like her coming here because they don't want people to know she comes here and they don't want people to find out and the shame and the stigma. And so because of her religion and, and, and, and, and where she's from. Um, so, you know, we can all go on, women are always, you know, gonna get the worst of it and they are. Um, but George House and other charities have never ignored women. I've, I've, you know, I've been here from, since 95 and I've never not felt seen. Um, obviously I'm, I'm heard. Um, and, and, and I think people take notice and I am a bit of a joker all the time and I know that, but I also, if I say it, it's because I really mean it, you know, I'm not just going to, to say it. Um, and my life has, has continued, um, I came back in 2020 to George House even though a lot of things changed in the sense that there was no money, there was no funding. Um and I didn't charge obviously to do positive speaking and I will go anywhere that I'm asked. Um, but because there was no funding, it's now not taught to nurses, it's not taught to doctors. Um, but before when I was talking about my eye surgery, that's where I started. Sorry. Um, you're going to listen to this back and go, wow, that was a big circle. Anyway, so what happened when I went in for my eye surgery was, my first one, um, the nurse, um I said to her cause I knew it was going to hurt. And as long as you have your painkillers for the first forty-eight hours, you normally don't really need much after you. You just need to get over that first bit. I said to her, have I got some painkillers? You? I was like, [inaudible]. She was like, you have actually I said, right? I said, can I have the extras as well? Is there any morphine available? She went I said, go and tell her I want everything possible, please. Um, and she were laughing her head off. Um, and um, it just so happened that the drugs trolley was at the entrance to the ward and um, I was here and there were three ladies there and I'd had this eye done. So obviously I can't see here and all I heard was, oh, the lady with HIV in the corner wants you to make sure she gets some extra pain relief. Now, I'm not being funny. Right. You've only just met me. You could describe me in lots of ways. Big boobs, loud, funny. You know what I mean? Her with black eye, anything. Right. Cause I had a big black eye outside but except for my HIV status,

I was so angry so I had like a brain drain in because they go quite far back anyway. So I unhooked my brain drain, shuffled off, strolling over, told the nurse. I said now, when I'm going to the toilet, I'm going to be fifteen to twenty minutes. I said when I come back, there better be some jelly sweets chocolates and fizzy pop by my bed. Stumbled to toilet. Anyway, when I came out, there was chocolates, fizzy pop, crisps and jelly sweets behind my bed. And I said, should we all have a chat? And this nurse was shitting her pants. So I went to, I said, look, I'm not writing a complaint. I said just all fucking learn a lesson. You could have ruined me today. I could have gone in that toilet and killed myself. You have no idea what frame of mind I'm in. Now, it just so happens I'm a lunatic and I'm actually fine. I said, but what if I wasn't? What if I was having a bad day? What if something had happened that you didn't even know about? Well, you don't know. I said I've got hyperthyroidism, which means I've no thyroid. So my, my mood can go from zero to a hundred and I don't even know and I could, I could commit murder and actually get away with it. Somebody has once. I think well already tried. Um, so, you know, because that's what comes with hypothyroid. I said, why are you doing that? Anyway? They all apologized. I said, right. Thank you for my sweeties. I will, I will return to my bed. But I always say there's a reason for everything in life. So, about an hour later, the lady in the middle said something to me. Um she said, you're so funny you, I can't believe you're up and walking. I said, they said same thing. I said they did my um thyroid. I said, I said I had it took out last year and they said you won't be able to talk for two days. You'll probably find it hard to swallow. I said I had two slices of toast and I was chatting shit at nurse when I woke up, she were laughing her head off and I said, I think it's, you know, if you can live with HIV, as I've done since 1988 I said you can live with anything. And the lady there nearly dropped a cup. I thought, oh, cause I thought I've already been outed. I'm just gonna own it, I'm gonna own it. I'm not bothered. Anyway. Um about an hour later, the lady though, she like she just had half her leg removed. She had cancer and um she said come here, she pulled curtains, you know that magic curtain that stops everyone hearing you. Fucking mad when people do that, I always laugh when I go, they're still gonna hear me. Anyway, she burst out crying. She said can I hug you? She said, I want to say thank you. I can't believe you're just out. You know, you spoke about your HIV like that. So I told her what had happened. I didn't even hear it. I said, well, I did, I said the bitch, I said anyway I got some free sweets. And um, well, the reason why I'm saying it, she went, my husband, I told my husband to bring us a curry and she went, she's saying you love a curry, she said what do you want? And I said, you don’t have to, and she said I do. So then she told me her story. She’d just moved from Ireland. She's got hepatitis from her husband. And that's why she left her husband. Her son didn't speak to her for three years for leaving his dad and she didn't tell him why, Irish, you know, and um she moved to England and she just met this guy. Um and they'd only been together eighteen months, but she told him the truth when she met him and she just moved in with him and then got cancer. But she's never told anyone in her whole life about the hepatitis and she'd been living in shame all that time and then I just blurt out for HIV. Like a, do you want a sweet? We are now friends. She gets married in four weeks. I'm so excited. Um, so I met her like a few months ago. So something goods come out of it because what she then did was told her son the truth and she's now told her family no one gives a shit, in’t that mad? Um so when I went in for this eye surgery, I thought, right, I'm gonna go armed. So, I took loads of information in. So when I was, they were checking me in, I said, I hope you don't mind. I said, I brought some up-to-date information. I said for nurses station and for your, your coffee booth. I said because not everyone gets HIV. I said, and I don't want the same thing happening. Just told them what happened with the nurse

when I had my other eye done. She, I'm so sorry that happened. I said it's all right. And the nurse that was stood there, she had only been working there two days and she said, oh, I'm really strict on that. She said, um, we had really good training and I said, well, I'm really glad you did sweetheart. I said you came from a generation I said, but the young people aren't getting trained anymore anyway. So, they just did all me shit. And then I had to go sit in the waiting room and then the two nurses come and got me and took me to put me on the trolley. And um it's a really posh eye clinic actually in Chorley. Um, so they put me onto the trolley and got me into my gown. Um, and I saw, and the nurse was the, the new girl was talking to me. She's not a new nurse, do you know what I mean? She's been a nurse for years. She said, yeah, she said um it's funny actually she, she, me and my friend always say, I wonder what happened to her. She went, we met this woman, her husband was in the army and she had a little baby and I, my neck nearly broke and I went fuck off. She went, do you know her? I went, it's me. She went. No, it's not. I went, yeah, I'm Anita, my son's Glen Junior. My husband was in the army. We moved from Germany. She went, oh my God. And then she had tears in her eyes and she was like, can I hug you? And I was like, of course you can, I was oh my God. So I can't believe she went, yeah, 2005 when I was doing my training. So if you think about it, it's 2024 now. So, nineteen years ago, that made a massive impact on her. And I was like, fucking hell. There is a reason why we do what we do. And to think like when I said about the HIV and stuff, she said, and she said in the room before she went, I always make sure cause and she went honestly I tell people your story all the time. And then she went, can I ring my friend? And I said, yes. So she facetimed her friend and we were chatting and that and they were both so excited. She went, oh, do you know we thought you died because we don't know what happens to people. And I was like, no, no. Anyway, so then she messaged me, she said, she said to me, she said, I said I do, I do. Insta so her friend's on Insta now. Um so I'm meeting you up for a coffee in a couple of weeks um because I might be able to go out. Um so yes, so there is an amazing positive to what we do. Do you know what I mean? And that just shows that if that impact is there nineteen years later, then it was worth doing it. So, I'm really proud to, to carry on um with George House, I mean, when I came back in 2020, I was outed in my workplace and treated really, really badly. Um and I left my job and came back, very broken and very, very hurt and once again was wrapped back up in happy blanket and started back positive speaking and doing what I do. And now I realize that I know that I struggle with the thought of going back into employment because the fear that it will happen again and people will be that mean. And I know that as cheery and as strong as I am, I don't think I could take it again. I mean, it really did break me last time. So, I'm happy to volunteer on reception and fundraising and doing the positive speaking

SC: Just to clarify, that's at George House, all those isn't it.

AB: So, um that's at George House. Um so I'm lucky to work with Paul and Suzie, who's the Fund's Manager here. Um they're so great to work with like such good fun. Um so doing the fundraising and, you know, it's hard sometimes when you're doing like the candlelit vigils and you see people that are on their own or they just say, can I come and stand with you and you know why, you know, they've probably not told anybody. Um and that's the most amazing thing to do, you know, like I do telephone buddying as well and that's really nice because sometimes it isn't just the older generation, but it could be younger people or people that are just really just struggling they just need. So, we just do a phone call once a week. Um and that's really great one lady who I've only just started chatting to. She's really funny though.

Um, and she's a lovely lady and within two weeks I just said to her just come to one of the groups. You will be fine. Um, so just so happened, I was doing something upstairs when the women's group was on. So, um, her husband came upstairs and sat with us, and she went downstairs and had the time of her life and now will quite happily come back. And that's the hardest thing is getting people through the door because the stigma that and the self stigma you live with is really hard. Um, and I can relate to it, you know, as much as I'm not saying life is perfect for me. You know, I don't go home like a little house on prairie. Do you know what I mean? Um, so yeah, I can relate to it, but I can also put my finger down and say, but if you don't go through the door, then you're never gonna know what's on the other side. And that's, that's what's important.

SC: Thank you so much.

AB: You're welcome

SC: For sharing your story with me and, and with the archive. Um Is there anything else you want to share?

AB: No. Well, just so that, you know, my son is now 35 he's actually still with us. Um so yeah, I just spent years paying off my mortgage and my bank loans because we didn't die [laughs]. But, yes, that's the good side of it really, isn't it? Yeah. We've got to pay the debts off.

SC: Should we stop the recording?

AB: Yes.