

Una Mullally. *In the Name of Love: The Movement for Marriage Equality in Ireland, An Oral History*. Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2014

Interview with Eoin Collins

Transcript

[on terminology]

Well a long time ago in the 90s we would have talked about it, but it just seems so far away because we'd only recently had decriminalisation and I know I edited a book in 96 called Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland with Ida O'Carroll and it was a great time, it was launched by Mary Robinson, but if you look at the articles, none of them are really talking about relationship recognition at all. It was just so far far away. Even internationally there wasn't much talk I think. Denmark had something. I don't think there was marriage anywhere in the world at that stage. So it was something people wanted, but I think we were just out of decriminalisation, and I think what people were looking at was you know, we were in the AIDS crisis as well. We were organising around that. I think more than anything else, it was looking at kind of community development. Trying to create spaces to come out. It was almost as if relationship recognition was so far ahead, there weren't much spaces for women to meet at all. There still aren't that many I think, but certainly much much better than it was. But all around the country was that sense of the big sense at that time was trying to create spaces for people to meet one and other safely. Then when we first started thinking of it was in the when the EA set up the advisory group. I was on it, Kieran Rose, Patricia Prenderville, a few other people and in that then what we had done.

Well, I'll backtrack a little bit. We had done a study in '95 which was the first big study on lesbian and gay people in Ireland. It was funded by the Combat Poverty Agency and it was called Poverty, Lesbians and Gay Men. Now the poverty focus was partly because it was funded by them. But it really was just a study of people over the life cycle, so looking at people's experience in education, looking at coming out, looking at their experiences in employment, looking at their relationships, all those aspects. So when we went into the EA that time, Niall Crowley was just phenomenal. Great guy. And he was always opening up these spaces, very proactive on the sexual orientation issue and on the transgender one as well. In this one it was gay and lesbian people. So in that group it took two years. They went through 2000-2002 and then when that was finished the national economic and social forum set up a working group I called it. Again I was on that and a few other people were on that and that kind of looked at more implementation issues around stuff. The EA one was the first one where marriage had actually been put in a document. But again, it was just so far out there no one was thinking at that time. And in the NESF document, there was no focus on marriage. Then it just started happening. I think when it happened in the Netherlands, when it happened I think 2002 in Mass. Then when GLEN started getting up and running again around issues engaging with Atlantic Philanthropies, I think it was around 2004, 2005 it really started coming together. FG brought out a small little CP model which would have been open to gay or straight people. Very, very limited, that was 2004. Sheila Terry. And actually myself and my now husband went on the television around that one because it was a good step forward, it wasn't what we wanted but it was the first actual policy on the table where somebody said we should have recognition. I remember the interview, the press conference where Sheila Terry there. And the hostility she got. My god. A lot of journalists, and it was such a limited measure that the hostility being that this was an attack on marriage blah blah blah, it's hard to believe that level of vitriol against such a very minimal legal step forward. Again it was that kind of thing about a silly equality issue that if this was open to gay people it had to be open to heterosexuals even though there wasn't any huge demand by heterosexuals for any alternatives to marriage. As a result anything

offered to us had to be very weak in order to kind of buy into that false in my view equality argument. The issue for us was marriage.

Going back to the EA report which was so progressive for the time. What about the discussions that happened within the creation of the report? NC was saying there were robust discussions about the idea of putting marriage in there.

I think there was, I think Niall deserves great credit for pushing things through, lifting everyone's expectations around it. Like he was very very strong about it, that's my memory of it in terms of pushing it forward. I think it was very important that it was there. As I said at that time most lesbian and gay people were so involved in community development and creating spaces that it just seemed so far out. Because so many things have happened so quickly since but it was great haven this involvement I think because I think Niall kept the bar very high. It's funny to remember now because we had to deal with when we started to strategise about marriage there were different views then. There was a kind of view from a - I don't know if you'd even call it progressive - non-serious progressive side saying 'well why do you want marriage anyway? Marriage is a patriarchal institution, a failed institution', whatever. See this was usually people who were married and had all what it had to offer and just didn't grasp the issue which we were talking about which was an equality argument. So there was an argument like that around that some people had that we didn't want to replicate a heterosexual institution, a patriarchal institution and so forth. I don't think it really grasped the kind of key issue for lesbian any gay people, it really didn't, which was we were in a battle in a sense to have our relationships recognised as equal to others and that was the big issue for us. So I think the issue, I even think it's... at the end of the day it wasn't really a serious argument. I don't think there has been a huge demand from heterosexuals for an alternative to marriage. And sometimes the kind of alternatives proposed were actually around dismantling the really progressive aspects of marriage, which were around taking away some of the huge aspects of marriage which were built around protecting the most vulnerable partner. So leading to a kind of almost making marriage much worse, so anyway, there was that argument around the place and I think it was strong at the time. But I think Niall was really responsible for really keeping the bar high on marriage in that report. I think he deserves great credit for that.

Can you tell me about the genesis of Colley?

In 2005 we were up and running and engaging and beginning the process around marriage and we had put in a proposal or a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution strongly saying that marriage was what we wanted. Then in 2005 an opportunity arose where Brian Sheehan who's now in GLEN was head of the film festival and they invited Michael McDowell to open it. And there was a lot of controversy around that because there was the referendum over citizenship. There was a lot of issues going on but anyway the committee stuck to the guns and invited him and he got a very warm reception when he got there. And as a result, we found this out later from civil servants, he came away terribly pleased by his reception. Despite some of the things people say about him, he was supportive of gay rights. He was very supportive of decriminalisation, he was supportive. But he had a view and continued that view, I think it might have changed now, but he had a particular view at that time that gay people didn't want marriage and kept articulating that and re-articulating that. Why replicate this institution. Again it seemed to us to miss the point. Anyway, he was delighted with his reception at that event so we met him then twice after that and we made the case to him each time that marriage was what people were seeking and it didn't really matter that if some people didn't want marriage, that wasn't the point. It was like Niall Crowley's argument: there could be equality of access to any alternatives as well, but the key issue for lesbian and gay people was marriage. So finally in December 2005 he said he would set up a group to look at it. And the terms of reference were actually quite limited. The terms

of reference were specifically something like 'looking at relationships outside of marriage'. It wasn't just same-sex relationships. So he set up the group. It was chaired by Anne Colley, former PD politician. It had a lot of civil servants from the attorney general's office, from Revenue, from Dept of Social Protection, and then they had a few independent people; Eils Barry who is just a really wonderful person, really great and supportive and very strong on the committee. And then there was also Fionnuala Kennedy. Fionnuala had I suppose a reputation for being quite close to the Catholic Church and she was somebody who some people had considered a spoiler or something or was there to you know limit progress, but nothing could have been further than the case, because she turned out to be I think just thoroughly decent and really thoughtful in the true meaning of the word. Really thoughtful, analytical supportive person, she was really good. They were all the people that comprised the group. I think our first meeting was in Jan or Feb, and we had 21 meetings during that. Also during that, GLEN, the EA and the working group we held a conference, a big international conference in 2006, McDowell launched it. And all these guys from the Ancient Order of Hibernians all were throwing copies of the constitution up at us. So it was kind of scary that bit! We went for really top people. We got the former supreme court judge of the Canadian Supreme Court who gave a really strong powerful statement around marriage and then also we had a law lord, the top woman law lord in Britain, Baroness Hale, so really strong people. But the real thing we were trying to do in Colley and through that conference was get marriage on to the agenda. I think the first thing that I did and wanted to make sure happened when I got into Colley was that we separated the relationships because as I said there was all this confusion, there was one side of view of of well we should be going for marriage or heterosexuals want other models, we should be looking at that. Our concern there was that we'd get another model for heterosexuals and then we would be tied into that very minimal model. And on the other side you had this sudden interest in two sisters two brothers living together. That was from the right who wanted to stop any kind of conjugal status being afforded to same-sex couples so they were bringing up the idea that there should be some model that recognised any form of domestic partnership arrangement. So we really wanted to try and say these things have to be separated, otherwise we'll get something that suits absolutely no one. So we were successful in that and so we split up the relationships into three classes; opposite sex, same-sex and then non-conjugal relationships. That was really useful. Interesting then that you could take a non-conjugal relationships, we got no submissions from anyone on what the issue was for non-conjugal, two brothers or two sisters, and in any event, they had a status. If one of them went into hospital, and the other went in, they were already family. And they didn't want a status. I would be almost spooky doing it. They didn't want to be going out getting civil partnership. They didn't want to marry obviously. And that was a very powerful message that Baroness Hale made at the conference that you could get that crazy situation if you were to give like in Britain if you had afford full CP let's say to you know a man and his daughter for example in a state of domestic partnership you'd end up having if the daughter wanted to get married, she'd end up having to divorce her father. Crazy stuff. Once we split them up, our goal then was to get marriage as the equality option. It was an options paper we were charged in preparing. That's what the minister wanted. So that was the first one. That took a long time. People did come around to it. At that time I think the Zappone-Gilligan case helped an awful lot because you had these two women articulating marriage as an equality goal. That was really very powerful at that time. I went on the Late Late Show with them I was a person in the audience agreeing with them. So it was powerful. So we succeeded. What we got through Colley was that marriage was the equality option and that they also looked at two elements of it, that it had a status element and it had the legal consequences and that the status element was really important as I think it would underpin a wider equality for lesbian and gay people. The other thing was I did was I prepared a paper for the group working with LINK in Cork, Angela O'Connell, a paper on children of same-sex parents, so what we were trying to do there was get

some kind of provision for children into it. We succeeded actually in getting a commitment to adoption, joint adoption. Marriage then got in as the equality option.

One thing we couldn't shift and never shifted thereafter was the view that marriage would require constitutional change. So the Attorney General's office were pretty forthright on that and so rather than get a statement in the report that it was unconstitutional what we agreed and whittled down to was marriage was vulnerable to constitutional challenge and got a statement then however the first case on this issue is currently before the High Court. So that's the statement that we managed to get in. Then the only other option we put under the section on same sex couples was full CP giving everything that marriage had except the constitutional status. That was very important for us that we wouldn't end up if there was going to be some meaningful development, that it wouldn't be something based on domestic partnership or whatever, that it would be based solidly on marriage. It was important to get that in because we felt that it would be terrible if what we ended up with in going for marriage was something tiny, some tiny little dog license as some people might have said, something that wasn't based on marriage at all but was just for people in any sort of domestic interdependent relationship. That's what we got through Colley. I think the conference helped. I think the Zappone-Gilligan case helped in terms of solidifying marriage as a goal. That came out at the end of 2006 and that became the kind of basis for the reform thereafter.

So the next bit of reform based on Colley was the Labour Party then were preparing a Bill on civil unions. They asked us in to talk about it. We said we wanted marriage. And they said 'no' they couldn't get marriage across, it would be unconstitutional, that was their advice, but they were taking Colley and they were at least going for full civil partnership, and they were calling it civil unions. Interestingly they Labour Party then published their CU proposal on the same day as the Zappone Gilligan case was defeated in the HC. Specifically that case that was vulnerable to constitutional challenge but the first case was before the HC it was then much harder to argue for it. It was. And even though looking over it and over the Elizabeth Dunne judgement, it was very hard to get that many positive things out about it. It didn't seem to be saying that the Oireachtas could legislate for marriage. It did seem to say that the Oireachtas could legislate, but it didn't seem to be saying that. So anyway to get bcd on that, however the Labour Party policy was really brilliant. Just to give you the context. What you then had was Michael McDowell suggesting there should be some kind of domestic partnership model, or contract model or something he called it which would have been very limited in scope, really really limited. What he was arguing was that. And what you had was here's Labour then taking Colley then and saying ok marriage is what we want, but the Oireachtas can legislate up to what marriage can provide. And so that's what CU was about. Interestingly at that time there was no division in the lesbian and gay community at that point because the galleries were packed. There was a real sense of getting the Labour Party policy over the line would have been a huge bit of progress. McDowell got a lot of hammering over that and there is a article I can send you by Fintan O'Toole at the time, and I think harmed McDowell quite badly, that the PDs were there supposed to be radical, and there they are and they're redundant. Because they're arguing for something so minimal and the Labour Party are arguing for this very strong, and it really was just marriage in everything but name. People really rallied around that, and really put the issue I think put it up on the table. Pat Rabbitte's speech was phenomenal. He went through McDowell. And I like McDowell! McDowell was, I just have to backtrack a little on that, one of the issues that really came up for us was we were getting just so many people with immigration issues, Irish people with a partner from America or anywhere and they just were facing deportation, facing loads of problems. McDowell was so concerned when he heard that. And any people with problems he kept saying "just contact the Department and I'll make sure I'll help in anyway I can." And he did. He sorted out a lot of the issues. So I think McDowell might have been intellectually arrogant at times, but he was I think on this issue fundamentally decent around it and

really did want to do things, but he just got into a fix around 'gay people don't want marriage.' So anyway,

Just on that point, there is a funny irony that the two main ministers who actually pushed through or facilitated relationship rights are McDowell and Dermot Ahern, who you'd think would be two who would be least likely to do that?

I don't know. Well certainly McDowell comes from a liberal tradition. Dermot wouldn't have as much, but McDowell definitely did. He has lots of gay friends I know and he's on this issue, and I know people have their differences with him, but we just found him so decent to deal with. I remember when he lost his seat and he had people shouting and screaming at him and I just thought it was vile. I disagreed with him on certain things but he was. You would have somebody at your desk, and I'll just give you an example, these two women, and one was Irish and one was from the States. The Irish woman had been in the States with her partner but overstayed her time in the States so she had to leave. Her partner had come back to Ireland and overstayed her time so she had to leave. So one couldn't go to America and then it was looking like the other wouldn't be able to be in Ireland. So this horrible feeling. It's like they say over here [US] in immigration equality, it's the one issue on same-sex recognition where a couple can end up in jail trying to stay together. McDowell took those cases very seriously. He was really very good and you know he said "send any of those over to me." And we did. And he sorted them. I think it's important to put that on the record. But then fast forwarding to the Labour Party, the Labour Party was like a tour de force in terms of re-presenting the marriage argument through Civil Unions in the Dail and it's well worth reading the various speeches from Rabbitte right through. They were just forensic, they were wonderful. Really ripped to shreds that there should be this one kind of single model for people in domestic partnerships, it really put the argument on the agenda. And so we supported them in that and most lesbian and gay people supported it as well and everyone was very disappointed that the government then said they would before the election defer consideration of the CU Bill post-election, which meant it was gone. That was pretty cynical. So people were disappointed. That was 2007.

So after that then what we started doing was really as we continually do, meet up with parties, and whatever, keep putting the pressure on. The new election then in the election we published the positions of all political parties and that was right through from the most supportive which was the Green Party were supportive of marriage, Fianna Fail civil partnership, right through to the worst actually which was the PDs. They continued to hold this domestic partnership thing. And it's funny when you see Colm O'Gorman talking about, because we've had debates on the radio about this, but that's the platform he stood on as a PD candidate in the 2007 election. So that was the worst model. And you know, I think it reminds me that we can all change our opinion as we move forward, and I think a lot of people have. And so we went into the 2007 election and I think what was great was we got to a point where every single party had a position, which was great. And so then the good thing about the election was first and foremost was that the Greens were in power. We had a bit of leeway. And then Fianna Fail were back in but they had a position and Brian Lenihan was the new Minister for Justice and my mother would be very close to Brian Lenihan which was really good for me in terms of access because it was kind of like he would know the family very well, so it could maybe put a human face on the issue for him around what we were looking for. He would have known my partner and stuff. So that was really good. Then they were negotiating the Programme for Government. And that really was a high wire act because that was the Greens, it was the Greens pushed and pushed and pushed to get something in. And even at that point in GLEN, we were still saying, we were hedging our bets, we were still not asking for civil partnership, we were just trying to keep the demand for marriage out there. Still saying what should be in the programme for government should be based on the Colley Report. Now the Colley Report

was options, but it was just kind of leaving it open. And so we actually gave a suggested wording, which is almost identical to the wording that went into the Programme for Government, but in the end what went into the Programme for Government was a commitment to Civil Partnership, Civil Partnership taking account of Colley. So that kind of then, that was it. Civil Partnership got in. We were disappointed in one sense that there wasn't still the kind of freedom maybe to move with marriage, but there it was and that's all the Greens could get. It was so at the end, it was the last item in the Programme for Government. They really pushed it to the end, and they got it in at the end. I remember a board member of GLEN was in touch with Dan Boyle all the time and he knew what was going on, and they really pushed it in. It's so funny if you see the original programme for government, the very last commitment is around this particular one.

So that got in. So then we were kind of to some extent the jig was up around marriage, but we still would keep going for it. It was very important that people would still talk about that marriage was what we wanted as much as we possibly could. But I suppose then the kind of divisions started opening up. [DIVISIONS IN THE COMMUNITY] around it and I remember a group of us went in to meet. A group of people from Marriage Equality, from LGBT Noise I think, just a group to meet with John Gormley in government buildings. And the Greens laid out their position and said they just simply couldn't get marriage. They had five or six TDs and that was it, that was all they could do, it just wasn't going to happen. But this was given that CP would be based on marriage it was going to be a very significant step forward. And so you know we were thinking then ok we'll go for marriage. Some people there I mean I think at this stage the division had opened up where I remember one person at the meeting just saying to John Gormley, actually this guy was a senior public servant, but he was saying, a gay guy, saying to John Gormley 'tell me Minister what can we do to embarrass you sufficiently to get marriage into the programme for government'. And Gormley and just explained everything around the issue of six seats that they has pushed as hard as they could and so there was just not a meeting of minds on that. And so from then on our view was we should try and because we just couldn't get any shift whatsoever on the view that there wasn't a constitutional problem with marriage, we just couldn't get anyone to really strongly come out and say that, like even the ICCL believed that there was a constitutional issue around getting marriage. So we said ok our job here is to get as model of CP as close to marriage as we possibly can and I think we again had, I had the two things in my head: the status and the legal consequences aspect we had in Colley because I think the status was really important, that we wanted at the very least to make sure marriage was the comparison, that it was marriage-identified and in terms of legal consequences, we wanted something quickly, because there were people in severe need. Particularly the immigration one was, it just kept growing and growing and became a huge issue for me because on one hand you're doing policy work, but on the other hand you have these people coming in which we'd never turn away, but a constant stream of people coming in where one or other of the partners were facing either deportation or they'd have to leave or you know all of these problems. So we had these issues. So we thought ok. We need to get something, we need to make sure at least that the model is as close to marriage as we possibly can. And so then what we did was we asked and the Labour Party then were already doing it anyway I think but we pushed them to do it, was two reintroduce the Civil Unions Bill. It was the same Bill. And this time the government didn't go for it either, but in some ways there was a positive shift and this is slightly technical but it came up in Colley as well. Lenihan's view around Civil Unions was a belief that Civil Unions would be unconstitutional, not because of the way it was written. And we had talked about this in Colley, the subtraction method or what they call the enumeration method. In say Denmark they had what they called the subtraction method. It was civil partnership - I know they have marriage now but before that - civil partnership where marriage, read civil partners also. In Britain however what they did was they innumerateD all of the things from scratch - delivered the same thing, but it was in order to get it over the line in their terms constitutionally so what you had in

Britain was like a 280-page Bill and in Denmark you had three pages. Equally with Labour at this time, Labour's Bill was the subtraction method: where marriage read also civil union. And so this gave us a little bit of hope which was that we could then push Lenihan around doing the kind of British method which was to enumerate everything. And to get as much as we possibly could. And this turned out to be possible. At the end of the year we had Lenihan launched our annual report and I had talked to him. I had been at a meeting with Katherine and Ann Louise actually down in Galway just after the election and he had said there at that which I thought was difficult was that they would wait for the outcome of the Zappone-Gilligan case to legislate. And as we know that could mean kicking it into touch forever. And as it turned out, if we had waited for that we'd have nothing. So we were then kind of asking him to launch the annual report and were kind of pushing him forward. And one of the things we were saying to him was well you know there's no point in waiting for the Zappone-Gilligan judgement as the Labour Party said that case was about marriage, and this is about how you can get close to it through enumerating the rights and responsibilities through civil partnership. So he launched our report and he said then that it was no longer his policy to await the outcome of the Zappone-Gilligan judgement. And that to us was crucial. Then he said he will produce a Heads of Bill by the following year. We kept up the pressure to various kinds of things, particularly putting out the pressure of saying this issue has been decided because all organisations like Iona and all that despite what they said recently were vigorously opposed to civil partnership. Strongly opposed to civil partnership, particularly one that was close to marriage, and they knew it. And so we kept putting forward the what was in Colley, Colley said the issue for same-sex couples is marriage and if not marriage because of constitutional issues then at least full CP. And we also wanted the provision in Colley of at least having joint adoption and the issue of children being addressed, children of same-sex couples. We were working on other areas of that. I was doing work with the Law Reform Commission.

He produced the heads of Bill I think it was June 2008 and we thought it was good because it was very close to marriage. Fergus Ryan who's on the Board of GLEN did an analysis of it and the big glaring exception was children which we really highlighted. But it was close to marriage, and to us that was an important step because it meant then that you know relief was being delivered for lesbian and gay people in issues but also in the context of a legal model that was firmly based on marriage. So we supported the heads of bill and again kept trying thereafter to push, have the Bill then reflect as much equivalence to marriage as possibly was the case. That's when a lot of division came in.

How would you characterise that division?

I think the division to me came in two ways. One is I think the quest for marriage suddenly became possible and international and people could see it. There's a huge amount of young people coming out for example, it became a huge rallying point and a very important and empowering thing for younger people. I also think that marriage brought a lot of people out that hadn't been out, older people out, who hadn't been out when we were working in the 90s and early 2000s. It brought out a lot of people who I suppose were new to gay politics in a way and were really, really empowered by marriage as the goal. I think that was very healthy and I think the Zappone-Gilligan case as well kind of you know really brought things together as well on that. These were two older women expressing the equality argument for marriage very strongly. So I think that's what happened. There was an enormous raise in expectations, a huge raise in expectations. It was hard for us to kind of you know come in, because in a way what you're coming in to that environment you're kind of throwing cold water on people's aspirations and on their expectations. So it was a difficult thing. But I think that kind of movement for marriage did help drive a civil partnership model that was close to marriage. I think that was very important.

I think it's a pity at the end of the day that people didn't, which they would have if it the Labour Party Bill had gone through because there was such support, it's a pity that people didn't get the benefit of the achievement that CP actually was. I think then that GLEN then I think there came to be these ideas, fixed ideas around what approaches were and was very hard to get people to argue about strategy or what was possible or what was feasible, you know. I remember being down at a debate in Cork on it and you know I was saying I think we should go for CP, it's the best on offer, it's marriage identified, we're just not winning the argument around that there isn't a constitutional issue with it. And the argument against that weren't arguments against that. There was just a reiteration of marriage is full equality. I was thinking, like, I know that, I've been saying that for years! Ironically some of the people I was such a strong advocate for marriage early on when some people were coming at me now who had been actually people who were saying it was patriarchal and blah blah blah. So there was, it was very hard to engage in a debate even with activists around well what should we do. It just strikes me in the States, and I think there are always issues between I suppose the lobbyists and maybe direct activists and it's always going to be some division there. But I think the problem of the Zappone-Gilligan judgement or case was that it was very, very important, very useful at the start, but it became almost it became it almost became into hold up progress at the end. There was a sense that we should do nothing and accept nothing because that would kind of go against what the case was about. And it was very hard even to have a discussion on whether anyone believed that the case could actually win or not. There was a sense that it was almost disloyal to actually ask the question about, well, what is the prognosis for this case? You know. Will it win? Should we not accept progress because this case could actually win? I remember the conference we did in 2006. I remember part of my speech was saying that we had more trust in the Supreme Court than maybe our politicians had. But I'm not sure how valid that actually was when I think about it. So I think it was very hard to have a discussion about that case and I think there had come to be this sense of well, these women are brave, these women are this to take this case, which is true, it was great and they were very good, but it became that it just was unacceptable to criticise it or even ask if it was going to win or not.

So that became an issue for me.

What kind of personal impact did that division and the rhetoric that was going around have on you, not just on your work, but just in general being in that kind of space, which as you say was divisive.

I think it was. I just felt it was so unfair that people seemed to have constructed an argument that there was a choice between marriage and civil partnership, and GLEN were going for CP because they didn't have faith in the argument that marriage was full equality. That was just simply untrue. And I heard that again and again: "if only GLEN would come out for marriage." It was just so exasperating, because you had a sense that we are for marriage, but we are trying to ask questions about well, if we don't accept CP will we get marriage sooner? And our view was that CP was going to be not only delivering something for lesbian and gay people now, that it was substantial, it was marriage-based, but it would actually would increase the momentum for marriage. That's something that we believed. People just didn't listen to that argument. I felt personally as though it was a hard one, because we had been working so much. I suppose a lot of it as well was that our work was behind the scenes and it was hard to talk about, and there's communications issues around that and people can't see what you're doing all the time. But it was definitely very hard, personally, I found it to deal with. I remember when the Bill was torn up at the famous Pride. That was the only time where I felt actually threatened at a lesbian and gay event. I thought that was terribly sad. And my sister and her kids were there and they left because they felt threatened. And I think the sense was then, also I felt really sad for a lot of the people then say people with immigration problems who were really just terribly so hard pressed. People who were

literally crying over my desk and who knew this was going to deliver something for them. And then having people just tear up that in front of you and not have, just wouldn't engage at all with the idea that progress now, there was an argument, a strong, positive argument for progress now.

So I think when it came to the Bill being published, just to get back to that, we met up with Dermot Ahern when he became Minister for Justice and again we'd a whole new relationship to build. He wasn't terribly supportive at the start at all. We had a first meeting with him and it was very frosty. And we felt that the momentum for CP had gone with Lenihan. So that was difficult. Also the economy was starting to collapse as well. But we worked at it and we did turn him around, and he did become a strong advocate for it. So when the Bill was published in 2010, that took a lot of effort. He launched a report of ours and so when it came out, we were delighted because we felt this was a big step forward, it was the enumerating of as many legal consequences as close to marriage in that sense as we thought was possible. I think we could have got more, but it was great that it was very extensive. I remember just on the day it was published, I remember one thing I was kind of horrified considering I had all these people with immigration difficulties at my desk was that there was nothing in it about immigration in the Bill. Then I rang the senior official in Justice and he said 'well, you know, there's no legislative hooks in a way for this because there's so little family reunification in immigration law', so he said 'what we'll do is we'll put out a statement.' This was all done in such a hurry and a panic. He said 'we'll put out a statement'. So the minister put out a statement saying that he would ensure that there was full equality between civil partners and married couples in immigration regulation. So we got that through. I was personally delighted about that because it meant so much to people.

So that got through. Then we had the whole process of once the Bill then was introduced getting it into the Dail and there's so many things, there's so many details here, my God! I could go on for hours and hours, but getting it into the Dail, meeting all the political parties. I remember we got to meet because Tiernan Brady who joined us was Fianna Fail, through him we got to meet to address the Fianna Fail party because remember, I don't know if you recall, Jim Walsh had got a number of senators to sign up to a letter saying they would oppose CP. So we got to meet them. It was funny, David Quinn and Iona were in before us making their pitch. So we were talking to them on the way out. I just laugh at that now when I hear that Iona say they were supportive of civil partnership.

Can you remember what you said to each other?

We were just civil. I suppose our one was never needlessly provoke, in a way. Our view was we engaged with what you might call the big, moveable middle. People who didn't understand maybe gay issues, but weren't hostile to them at all. And so that's the people we sought to win over including through public representatives. We didn't really go and have big debates with the right to be honest even though I must admit it was terribly tempting at times, because we just felt what we should do is really just concentrate on winning over the moveable middle. So we just nodded at them going in and they nodded at us awkwardly. So we went in and made our pitch. The Minister then we met Ahern as well about it, but he was very strong, he just dismissed all the things that they were doing and then when the Bill then was introduced there was, we in a way had a battle with both the right and the left. It was strange, because the night the Bill went in, I think it was December 2009, there was a huge protest that LGBT Noise had outside and there were people screaming at us going in. One woman I remember screaming saying that civil partnership was worse than the Nuremberg Laws. And literally my God. David Norris was up on the platform saying it was child abuse. We were going in there and then on the other hand we had Jim Walsh and Iona and other people tabling a whole series of amendments and that would have been you know exceptions for registrars, exemptions for religious institutions would have meant hospitals and

schools would have excepted themselves from the provisions. This incredible ongoing attack. One thing I thought was interesting as well and I can send you it on, is that when Jim Walsh did try and get that letter signed or whatever that Noel Whelan wrote a very interesting article in the Irish Times saying that why did Jim Walsh only raise this issue now? And the reason was that he thought this thing would be delayed and delayed because that's the way you stop things happening in Ireland. So he never thought it would get to a point where it would actually be on the point of being implemented. That's why we were so strong with Lenihan before about not waiting for any court case or whatever, which wasn't really germane to whether you can do this act or not was to make sure that you know we weren't into the usual Irish one of delay, where everyone is still around and nothing has happened. So we went in that night to the introduction of the Bill. So we were coming from pressure from both of those points. And it was extremely difficult personally to deal with. But you know, there you go. That's what happened and there were lots of reasons for that. As I said a huge part of the rallying for marriage was its paramount feeling of saying we want equality. That was very important.

When it went through the Dail and we were there all the time, just battling away different amendments and really just constantly meeting up with TDs. On one day I think Tiernan and I met 70 TDs and senators walking from office to office. We worked with the ICCL as well doing kind of information sessions in the Dail which were really good as well. We were pretty much entrenched there. And then finally it gets through to the Seanad. That was funny because again there was attacks from left and right if that's the appropriate use of the words. David Norris had gone in, started his speech that day saying it was child abuse and appalling and he'd oppose it. And then by the afternoon he was describing civil partnership as the greatest progress in a generation or something. So he changed his mind in an afternoon.

Do you think he did change his mind or do you think he was laying the argument out at the start always with the intention to go for it. That he wanted to put that more strident voice across to have it on the record, but then at the end of the day go I'm going to vote for this?

Well it didn't sound like it at the time I have to say. And he said he was going to vote against it in the morning. He certainly told us he was going to vote against it. So that's all I can really go on, is what he said to us. It didn't help us because we were under tremendous attack at this stage from people. It was passed and after that then we set about trying to, the government then, didn't it fall again or what happened? What happened was the taxation elements couldn't come in, so when the new government took power in 2011, our huge priority then was working to ensure that we could get the tax elements over the line and make sure it was implemented across State agencies in a way that made us close to marriage as possible. One thing for example, when the Bill was passed, the Finance Bill on taxation, we worked with the Revenue Commissioners to make sure, and we got actually really good traction with them, they ensured for example that the children of civil partnership could be in the top scale for inheritance tax, schedule A or whatever it's called. Again most of the tax elements then were very close.

I'm going very forward in that because when the Act had got through, suddenly lots of things did start happening. Immigration for example brought out their regulations [inaudible] and then suddenly everyone who had these problems all started getting their visas which was to me incredibly moving. I remember this Filipino woman who was a nurse in the Mater. She'd been in Ireland five years and her partner couldn't even visit her because they were afraid it would be considered immigration intent. She hadn't seen her partner for a few years, she couldn't afford to go back. And as a result, her partner could come over to Ireland. The two of them got a civil partnership, we were at it in Capel Street, and the partner could live and work in Ireland.

I suppose if I think of anything that I've achieved, to me, that and other people. I remember this guy this Cuban guy and his boyfriend and they were in such bad straits and suddenly he got his stamp for him. And they were just fantastic, absolutely fantastic. So we pushed on and as I said tried to get as many, State agencies worked really well, the Revenue Commissioners were really good and Social Welfare were good as well at getting things done. And then we worked with the registrar general then to make sure the services were accessible and he had been on the Colley Group so I knew him very well. It was ironic that despite all was said about registrars wanting exemptions, none of them did. They loved doing civil partnerships.

Then again all the people who were saying that they did support civil partnership on the right. When you think, I'd love to go back over their articles again. I know Breda O'Brien had - I hope I don't get sued for this - but she had a strong article talking about the religious exceptions and the necessity for them. So you know. They weren't supportive of civil partnership. So we got there, and what we did then once, when did the next government come in? 2011? So we put in a proposal to them. Our suggestions for the Programme for Government was that all of the gaps in CP would be addressed particularly those in relation to children, which is what Shatter is doing now. And also that there would be a move towards marriage and that's something we wanted as well. So at that point once it was done then, people just started doing civil partnerships. I think there's more than 1,500 couples now who have it. I think one thing we had said at the time was that and I think it's really born itself out, is that it was better to emphasise how close civil partnership is to marriage in order to get marriage than to emphasise the differences. It was important for us to say that when people were celebrating Civil Partnerships around the country, they didn't feel they were celebrating Civil Partnerships, they considered themselves celebrating marriages. And so there was huge social recognition for marriage for gay people across the country. There was huge support for it. It was there. I can understand the argument but I don't think it worked to say that for example, one thing you should be arguing in a court case is you want to argue that you know the society has moved to embrace this particular thing. And I think it was much better to say, which I think is true, is that the Oireachtas legislated for as close to equality as they could get under the constitution, rather than to say that the Oireachtas deliberately legislated for inequality. I don't see the rationale for arguing the second one. Or I don't know how that would bring us closer to marriage. And I think as a result of all of those Civil Partnerships across the country, I mean I had been at two of them, one of them must have had 800 people at it, older people and whatever. The impact of this it's like when you take just one couple who do this civil partnership, how many people have they invited to take their relationship seriously? Your work, your family, your friends, and in your neighbourhood. It's like all these little bombs going off all over the country. Happy bombs! So I feel it has, it did help move the momentum for marriage.

I think some of the things then that were said about civil partnership would be that and I know some people said it, I know Marriage Equality said it when it came through, was that it would set the quest for marriage back, and I don't think really that the facts would bear that out. And I think it actually increased the momentum for marriage. Then also while we're waiting for this, while we're having this debate on marriage, we also have people with strong rights already, that people do have something that they can avail of and I think that's very, very important as well.

I thought it was very moving at the Convention to see everyone around. I think now the issue is everyone coming together to advocate for marriage. It would be wrong to say there wasn't bitterness. There can be, and there was bitterness I'd say on both sides. That's the nature of things I suppose.

I think we're in a good space around it. I do think though when we go into the referendum that it would be back to engaging with the big moveable middle. We need to do that, and that can be a little more boring for people in a way.

I think it's fine it happened now [argument / Panti] and there was obviously a context for it, but I think we never stood around we didn't really take on the right at all. We didn't want to give that kind of debate traction. Because you could end up being led down an alley towards having a big debate with whoever, John Waters or someone like that, on something and get nowhere. Just get your goat up really, and then lose people. Because one thing is, people are fearful of anger. I think that's an issue. And I think for me there's a need for everything, that there's whole elements of a movement; there's the people on the streets, there's leaders, but there's also a need for the kind of slogger back room boys if you like which maybe I feel I am. I'm glad I played the part.

One abiding memory of all of that work and all of that time, what would that be?

I remember being on the radio arguing with Colm from Amnesty International, and we were arguing about marriage and civil partnership, and I remember the interviewer saying, 'So, are you just saying that you know Civil Partnership is a compromise in order to get you along the road to marriage in the end' and I said 'yeah'. And it kind of did summarise for me what we had been doing. I think the most positive one was getting the immigration cases. I can't describe how much that meant to me. When people came in. I just can't describe it. I find that very moving. And I think it's moving as well because I think their needs were terribly hidden if you like. And you know, they weren't being addressed and they were so awful. Getting that through for them was. But there are so many aspects of it, Una, it was just such a long incredibly intense campaign.

One negative one was the night we were going into the Dail in 2009 with this woman screaming over at us, holding up her child saying 'tell my child he's a second class citizen', and I just remember that being dreadful, but anyway, there you go.

One thing I have to say is despite some bitterness, none of us every really fell out at the end of the day. I think that's a nice thing. There's a sense that people get on and whatever. I think it's great. It's like the Maoist one, let a thousand flowers bloom. I remember the Pride in 1992 and myself and Prionsias De Rossa, Kieran Rose were walking on it and I remember it seemed big at the time, and the one next year where we could all fit in literally into the court yard of the Central Bank plaza. But we felt huge. And now seeing Pride where it's just so ginormous. That's one thing I want to get across: it's just amazing how quickly things changed. Sometimes people don't realise things shifted. It's extraordinary. And I think the quest for marriage has been a really important one in that shift.

ENDS