

**Interview with Toney B Clarke for the Haringey Vanguard project**

**Extract: 00:00 – 12:08**

TONEY My name is Toney Barrington Clark. And I live in sunny Catford at the moment.

VERONICA And I can see that you're an art lover.

TONEY Yeah I don't mind a bit of art, but I've just, I've kinda just got into it. I'm kind of understanding it now and I know who I like and who I don't like. So it's worked out that...It's worked out like anything I suppose, the more you know, the more you see about it. The better off you learn. And I know who I like, that's probably just like wine I suppose... you know what you like. Once you know, you can differentiate, that's what it is. I like art and I love seeing other people doing stuff, because I ain't gonna do it. There's no way, you know Chris Ofili, I saw his thing at the Tate eight years ago – it's about ten years ago now and he's famous for his dung and painted stuff but his newer work was fantastic. Absolutely fantastic. So yeah, I don't mind a bit of art.

VERONICA OK. So, um, tell me about yourself, were you born and raised in London?

TONEY Born and raised in south London, born and raised in Catford, Lewisham. But went to school, went to a grammar school because apparently, I was quite bright. Where I went, it was a grammar school and learned Latin and woodwork. And did PE, did loads of cross country running, rugby and cricket and I hated cricket. I hated cricket. Even though my dad tried really hard to get me into cricket, I didn't like it. No, I told him, I kept telling him, dad I was born in south London and we do football in south London football so that was that.

VERONICA Yeah, he's trying to make you into the family cricketer.

TONEY Oh dear, there's three of us and I remember his taking stumps to the park and chucking the ball at us and we were like no dad, we don't want to do it... He'd chuck the ball, and we'd whack it and then someone would have to go and get it and ... we were like no dad, no!

VERONICA Yeah, it's wrong

TONEY – Proper, there are some things that I'll take from my heritage. But cricket isn't one of them... not really.

VERONICA So is your family from the Caribbean then?

TONEY Yeah yeah yeah, my mom's from...my mom's from Spanish Town near Kingston and my dad's from Trelawny in the Hills of Jamaica it's fantastic, yeah. He recently, he died last year and we went out to see... well I have been out there before but it was amazing to go out there and see what was going on. But it's a lovely, lovely community, nice and tight and they are way up in the mountain sides like we had to get up there. It's fascinating, it

fascinates. It's good to know where you come from. It's good enough where you come from. But now I come from here.

VERONICA Yeah yeah yeah, my family is from Spanish Town as well.

TONEY Oh is it?

VERONICA Yeah, yeah, I know Spanish Town yeah.

TONEY Yeah, yeah and it probably works out that my old dear knows your mom or something... You know... it's...

VERONICA Yeah

TONEY: Yeah, it is small like that it is small, but yeah I don't mind Jamaica. I know I sound, I do know I'm a Londoner, definitely a Londoner, a south London with ... yeah, born and raised down here. And then what did I do? I went to work for Pearl Insurance and I hated that, it was horrible. It was horrible, because I did alright in my exams and I went to work at Pearl Insurance in the registry office. And that was like, that was counting parts. It was awful.

And I hated it. I absolutely hated it. And then I left. I remember the boss bloke saying to me I think you're making a mistake Toney; you should be moving... we are moving to Peterborough. I said to mum, they want to go to Peterborough and mum said who'd you know out there? And I said I don't know anyone up there, mum, she goes well you're not going up there son, say your mum don't want you to go up there. So he said you're making a mistake Toney, and I said you're joking. Never look back, no way, no way and I went to I went over...

PHONE RINGS IN BACKGROUND

TONEY: Yeah yeah, yeah I remember him sitting me down in his office and telling me, no, no, no. You should go to Peterborough. I remember looking outside 'cause it was like it was just an office full of like filing cabinets. I remember looking outside and seeing this this - and this is true - looking outside and watching this this courier guy eating a Cornetto. And I thought naw, naw that's what I ought to be doing, so I said no. I'm leaving and that's what I did, I left. And everyone said No, Toney, you shouldn't be doing this, you've got a job for life there and I'm like, no I'm not doing it. And I went to work for my mate's restaurant. And that that and my love for Boy George started it all I suppose so that's how it all went.

VERONICA So how old were you then when you started working in the restaurant.

TONEY: About 19 yeah. And I was. It was, it was all a bit... there was a lot going on then. There was a lot going on socially and and that's ... as a teenager, I was trying to find myself where I had locks then and Rastafarian and there was a lot of that going on there were loads of marches, anti-Nazi League marches and we would go down to Eltham and there was all manner of stuff going on. And I'd say...socially at that time with Thatcher. There was a load of ...loads of people being marginalized really and we were and then and black people, black

men were having a, well, black people, yeah, but as a black man we were having a nightmare. I was getting picked up all the time, I'd get picked up by... I had a gun pulled on me in King's Cross, where they mistook me, they mistook me for someone that was doing something else and when the van came around the corner, I was going to see my girlfriend at the time. And the van come around the corner and they jumped out and I was like aargh and they said you fit the description, you fit the description of someone. I said what do you mean, you can't jump on me with a gun and say I fit description. I said you have to make sure you got the right guy. Where they said sorry and they shoved off to try and find him. Yeah it was. It was tough like that. Really.

VERONICA That was the police?

TONEY Yeah, that was the police, let alone what was going on... like with jobs, to try and find a job because my name is Toney Barrington Clark when they find out that you were a black guy. Nightmare. Absolute nightmare. I went to, as I said, I went to a good school. And you know, I played cricket in whites and told them about all this in my CV. And you get there, and they'll be like you'd see them visibly... visibly change, visibly change. I mean that has got better in that regard. But it was tough then. It was tough.

VERONICA So do you think of yourself ...back then as an activist?

TONEY Uh huh. Yeah I think so. Yeah, because a lot of the people that I was hanging around with were marginalized so... and I was of the age where... you know everyone knows about Stephen Lawrence but there's Roland Adams and there was Orville Blair I think his name was, that were being, that were murdered as black men and nothing was being done about it so. Yeah, I would like to think we were activists. We were all over marches.

We'd go to marches all time to protest about laws like the Clause 28 march, we'd go all over the place to march for people that were being done wrong, because it was hard, it was hard back then I believe it was hard back then because there was no money going out and in London it wasn't like there was no dereliction. It was, it was tough.

VERONICA And so did you mostly hang around with other black guys? Or was it a mixture?

TONEY: A mixture. It depended what I wanted to do, yeah I'd either go football, I'd go football with me white mates and I'd go to clubs... It depends what you wanted to do really. You'd go soul go dance at Bob Jones and go Lyceum and do them kind of things and go in a group. Then you go down... to Gravesend so like Norman Jay and all them lot would go down to Gravesend and do stuff down there and there was a place called Flicks and you could go and see them down there but you would get grief down there as well. We got run out of a club, where we had to fight our way out of clubs. Yeah, loads of times. Yeah, I remember running over people's gardens being chased by dogs because people were running after me. It was terrible. Terrible. Terrible.

VERONICA: But you still went

TONEY: Yeah of course, because it was always about, it was always, it was always about the dance. It was about going to hear these people playing music. So you know you go down to

hear it, you go down to places that you knew you were gonna get a hard time, you knew we get hard time. But you go there, you go there anyway. So Gravesend was terrible back then. Mid-80s, aarghhh, but you still went there because ... London, you know that's how you do it. No, not running from no-one... and dance... kind of it. Yeah...

VERONICA Do you think of yourself as a very social person?

TONEY: Yeah, I should imagine...actually yeah I think so, yeah. Yeah, then they they are good traits that I have, I can get on with people and yeah, I'm amiable like that, I'm amiable you know. I get on with folk. So I always found my, you know, I was always going out. In the 90s it was... it was...I went out more, you just go out more and then you start hanging about with your gay mates. Being social for want of a better term, you know what I mean, you start hanging about with your gay mates at Trade. And having it and going to DTPM. And then then, then...then that's how it is, that's how it started... It is quite funny.

VERONICA When did you? Do you remember going to your first gay club or gay group?

TONEY Uh, my first... I don't remember going to my first gay club but there was a girl I was seeing who came out... after I stopped seeing her she came out and said she was lesbian and who would take me out, she would take me out because she knew Laurence and loads of people and she would take me out to Trade and that and we would go to all these clubs and it was like... And I was like well I had never gone to places and seeing guys with their tops off. It was funny. (laughs)

But as I say you get used to it.

**END**